

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Towards a Dialectical Understanding of  
Human Embodiment

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the requirements for the degree of  
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by

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This is the point that permits no escape  
From sitting in silence and getting it done,  
Or sitting and screaming and fucking off out.  
And this is the letter, and this is the gun.

★ ★ ★

To whom it concerns, I'm sorry I failed.  
It seems I was utterly wrong to suppose  
That by having the time I would finish the job,  
Although I have put in the hours, God knows.

★ ★ ★

Hours of carryouts, hours of rain,  
Hours of indolence mired in gloom -  
I've tried and I've tried. I've even tried prose,  
But the money's no good and I don't like the room.

Sean O'Brien *In Residence: A Worst Case View*.

Keep back your work for nine years.  
(Cited by Mersenne as advice for Descartes.)

Horace *The Art of Poetry*.

Der Gruß der Philosophen unter einander sollte sein: «Laß Dir Zeit!»  
This is how philosophers should salute each other: "Take your time!"

Ludwig Wittgenstein *Vermischte Bemerkungen/Culture & Value*.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge many debts of gratitude. Firstly, I would like to thank the University of Hull for inexplicably granting me a *Feren's Scholarship* for two years, which enabled me to break the back of several sections in this thesis without unduly breaking mine. Given the present parsimony of the central funding councils, one can only hope that such postgraduate support continues to be provided by the university - especially for research in the Arts and Humanities. More importantly, however, I would like to thank the staff of the Department of Philosophy for their encouragement, patience, advice, and, not least, their trust in providing me with the opportunity to teach over many years. I can only say that I have found

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*for my parents*

# Introduction and Synopsis

This thesis is essentially programmatic. This is not to say that it should be seen as a prolegomenon to any future metaphysics of body and mind; I can hardly claim such an exalted status for what I have to say. Rather, I am content to raise certain questions and indicate certain directions in which I believe a more systematic investigation of these issues should take us. Equally, I also hope that enough of a case can be made out here for the claim that such an investigation, if not a full-fledged prolegomenon, is essential if we are to free ourselves from a fundamental impasse in contemporary philosophy of mind. It is no exaggeration to say that Cartesianism continues to stride our thought like a colossus, informing and shaping our conceptualisations of what it is to be a subject of thought and experience, as well as our more general conceptualisations of what we take the world to be and what our relationship with it actually is. The Cartesian turn in philosophy has generally left us with a framework of binary categories in which only a divisive account of these conceptualisations is possible. This is because these Cartesian binaries are not simply oppositional but are oppositional in ways such that their terms are construed as being intrinsically autonomous and exclusionary, with a privileging of one of the terms in each case.

Nowhere is this historical legacy more apparent than in our understanding of body and mind. Thus far, what I have said is generally recognised. What is generally less recognised is that, in order to overcome the sterile and divisive Cartesian opposition between these terms and arrive at a more adequate understanding of the relation of body and mind, we have to rethink the categories on both sides of this opposition. This means having to get to grips with our inherited understanding of the human body as much as with the notion of the mind. It has always struck me as a surprising fact about our philosophical tradition that virtually no author has seen fit to question our conceptualisation of the human body.<sup>1</sup> Whenever there has been a consideration of the mind-body problem the best philosophical thinkers for generations have concentrated their intellectual efforts on providing a clarification of the mind. The human body as a subject for philosophical

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1. With a few notable exceptions, this has been more generally true of the so-called Anglo-Saxon, analytic tradition than its continental counterpart. Although my own philosophical heritage has been largely analytic, it is no wonder, therefore, that I have had to look to writers such as Merleau-Ponty for a possible lead. Despite important differences in style and concerns, there are enough common interests, I believe, to make a fruitful dialogue between the two traditions possible.

investigation simply dropped out of the picture. Thus it became an invisible or ill-defined background term against which systematic investigations of the mind took place.

Now, this is an exceedingly odd state of affairs. It is odd not least because the Cartesian conception of the mind was initiated in a way which assumed a definite picture of the human body. What has happened as a result is that we have naïvely inherited this picture of the body as if it were an unproblematic notion - thus guaranteeing the failure from the start of any of our attempts to arrive at coherent understanding of the relation of body and mind. A systematic philosophy of the body is therefore indispensable to a complete philosophy of mind. However, I do not pretend that I can here offer this systematic philosophy of the body as this would be an enormous undertaking. What I wish to do in this thesis is to contribute to the process of rethinking our inherited conception of the body by exploring anti-Cartesian conceptions of human embodiment. My aim is to progress towards a less divisive and more dialectical or integrative understanding of the relation between body and mind by presenting a conception of human embodiment in which these appear as terms of mutual implication. In order to achieve this, we have to strike a balance. A central theme of the thesis is that we can only make sense of our experiences, be they experiences of the body itself or perceptual experiences, if we are embodied agents. A recurrent concern is therefore to stress how the body is the site of sensory and volitional capacities; the subject which perceives and acts is the whole embodied human being. However, in emphasising the body as a set of capacities we must also not lose sight of the body as a materiality in a material world; this provides a context which informs and constrains those capacities. But, more importantly, the subject is anchored in the world in virtue of the body being both a materiality and a set of capacities; these conceptions are interdependent.

First of all we have to become clear about exactly what conception of the human body the Cartesian turn in philosophy has bequeathed us and how this continues to manifest itself in our thought. In Chapter 1, therefore, I explore the Cartesian conception of the body and argue that this still figures as a background assumption even in contemporary philosophical positions which see themselves as being diametrically opposed to Descartes' dualist conclusions. Descartes was the progenitor of two sub-traditions in recent philosophy, what Merleau-Ponty termed Classical Psychology and Mechanistic Physiology, and these continue to inform and sustain each other. Thus contemporary materialist philosophers, by also owing their genesis largely to the Cartesian turn in philosophy, partake in the fallacy of an 'essential person' by sharing a view of the body in common with their immaterialist, Cartesian siblings. This view construes the body as something Other; *simply* a material reality, an object in the world amongst other

objects, to be explored in a way consistent with any exploration we make of a worldly object. This assumption is so pervasive that it is thought to be unproblematic, perhaps even commonsensical, to speak of the body in a way consonant with this. This fact largely explains why the body has been relegated to an 'underground history' in Western thought; its conceptual invisibility is the invisibility of the 'normal' and unproblematic. But a cursory reflection on this conception of the body reveals this body to be one that cannot be united with consciousness. It is therefore unsurprising that explicitly dualist positions are still widely held outside faculty and still receive professional philosophical defences.

In Chapter 2 I continue to elucidate Descartes' philosophy of body and mind, here by spelling out the arguments in which Descartes attempts to establish a separation of these realities. His specific arguments for the separation of mind and body are not, in themselves, persuasive. However, Descartes also encounters a more comprehensive problem in attempting this exclusionary bifurcation; he has trouble reconciling his theoretical view of their relation with the experience of the body as it is lived. In Aristotelian thought sensory attributes were closely tied to the body; but Descartes' conception of mind includes both cognitive and sensory attributes and this runs counter to his claim that our conception of ourselves as thinking things is a conception of ourselves as 'complete' things. Reason and experience pull him in two different directions at once; but, although he says that the testimony of experience (that we are an intimate union of body and mind) is not to be gainsaid, he continues to assert that we are essentially incorporeal, thinking things which can conceive of a life without the body. In this respect Descartes' philosophy proved to be the triumph of reason over experience, though this was not a conclusion that Descartes himself was entirely happy with or with which he was wholly consistent. In the end Descartes could only suggest that the fact of the union is something we can only grasp through living it and not something we can understand in reflection.

The Descartes revealed here is therefore not a straightforward dualist. In experience Descartes discovered another body, the body as it is lived; but he was unable to accommodate this in his overall philosophical project and so he leaves us with something of an *aporia*. In the remainder of Chapter 2 I begin to explore ways in which this body could be accommodated into a coherent account of human embodiment. To this end I shall introduce Sidney Shoemaker's concept of 'paradigmatic embodiment'. The value of this conception is that, while it recognises the body as an item in the objective order, it emphasises our embodiment through our capacity to be sensorily and volitionally involved in the world. In this respect it opens a space for our experience of the body as it is lived and therefore the notion of the body required of paradigmatic embodiment

shares much in common with the phenomenological notion of the lived body - a notion which surfaces in the work of Edmund Husserl. Finally, therefore, I shall explore of Husserl's own treatment of embodiment. However, despite his penetrating observations of the body as it is lived and experienced, we will find that Husserl's philosophy was nonetheless still a philosophy largely in the Cartesian mould and so, ultimately, Husserl was really in no better position than Descartes to make use of these insights.

This then leads us to consider the position of Merleau-Ponty, a philosopher who tried to work Husserl's insights into a coherent account of embodiment whilst avoiding the lure of Husserl's transcendentalism. The positive lesson he learns from the later Husserl is that we simply cannot ignore the rôle of the body. For Merleau-Ponty, however, as long as we cling to a theoretical position which centres on an immaterial or transcendental ego we render ourselves incapable of accounting for the body or our actual experiences. In Chapter 3, therefore, I shall explore the way Merleau-Ponty develops this insight into an incarnational subjectivity primarily through his notion of the body-subject. What experience reveals to us is a mode of being which is not simply a pure subjective being-for-itself or a pure objective being-in-itself but is an ambiguous mixture of the two. Merleau-Ponty therefore attempts to elucidate a genuinely dialectical account of human embodiment; but the moves he makes in order to achieve this are not without their difficulties. Perhaps the single most important insight contained in Merleau-Ponty's approach is that the body itself partakes in the intentionality of the subject: the body exists towards the world as *être-au-monde*, a world which presents itself as a world of possibilities and meaning. This leads him to regard the body as, before anything else, a subject.

But herein lies the difficulties. In the *Phenomenology of Perception* the world's structure is still structure for consciousness and the question Merleau-Ponty really addresses is "What *kind* of consciousness is this?" As Merleau-Ponty himself later came to realise, he was still working within the framework of a philosophy of the *cogito*; albeit what he called a 'tacit *cogito*'. Hence his dialectical study was threatened by a privileging of the body as subject, a threat it seems he had avoided by insisting that the dialogue between the body and the world takes place on a pre-personal level. However, this manoeuvre brings its own problems. In answer to the question "Who is it that perceives?" he suggests that it is a 'natural subject' or a 'natural "I"'; i.e. the body as an anonymous body-subject. But this succeeds only in problematising the phenomenon of the 'body *qua* mine' and perhaps even substitutes an equally divisive body-body problem for the traditional mind-body problem. Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that perhaps Merleau-Ponty focuses too narrowly on the subjective nature of our embodiment and generally ignores the way the architecture of the body-itself

shapes our experiences and informs our conceptualisations. According to Richard Zaner, this renders him unable to account for a fundamental characteristic of our concrete experience: that the 'mineness' of the body is also occasionally mirrored by a radical 'otherness'; what Zaner calls an 'alien presence'. In working towards a dialectical account of human embodiment we therefore have to take care and give due consideration to both the body's subjective and objective aspects. We must not forget, in combating Cartesianism, that a complete account of embodiment needs to be able to deal with the body-itself; *i.e.* , as I have said before, as a materiality and an item in the world. A dialectical account of human embodiment therefore requires an understanding of the body, not as a pure for-itself subjectivity or as a pure in-itself objectivity, but as something in which these are genuinely terms of mutual implication.

In Chapter 4 I proceed to give a detailed phenomenological analysis of our concrete experiences of embodiment. In doing so I shall first flesh out Merleau-Ponty's insight, addressed in the preceding chapter, that the body itself, even if not as a for-itself, embodies a form of intentionality. When the body is utilised in its perceptual mode it becomes the subject's vehicle of being-to-the-world and, as such, participates in the intentionality of its sensori-motor activities and projects. A condition of this is that the body has a natural tendency for self-concealment: the body becomes invisible to experience, the 'hidden form of self being', and is subject to what Drew Leder terms 'disappearance'. Hand in hand with this I shall also develop the criticism, raised towards the end of the last chapter, that this does not necessarily mean we can postulate the body as a subject but also have to consider its nature as an item of the world itself as such experiences are shaped by the architecture of the body-itself. My body, as experienced by me, is both an extension of my intentional relation to the world and is an object in the world in its own right. This latter fact is also partly revealed by a set of complementary experiences, normally - or rather, especially - due to affliction and dysfunction. In such experiences we encounter the body as a radical 'otherness' (as suggested above); the body, as Leder says, is marked by a mode of 'dys-appearance'.

Nevertheless, although subtle and perhaps deceptive, these experiences of dysfunction also arise from our nature as subjects who are essentially embodied and further point to, albeit paradoxically, our character as embodied agents. Despite the fact that the body is presented as an 'alien presence', this does not indicate an opposition between genuinely separate realities (self and body); if it did, we would simply not be able to account for all the richness and subtleties of these experiences. The fact is, and I wish to emphasise this, such experiential states are 'existential' as they are marked by a disturbance in our intentional relation to the world. Such states therefore have what I call a 'negative heuristic':

by examining the normal by means of the abnormal, the importance of our sensori-volitional involvement in the world through our bodies is revealed; again emphasising the significance of 'paradigmatic embodiment' and the fact that the body is at once an object in the world and a set of intentional capacities.

Lastly, in the light of this phenomenological analysis, in Chapter 4 I shall again return to the question of Cartesianism's continued attraction; something I addressed in detail in Chapter 1. Here I shall explore the Merleau-Pontian suggestion, taken up by Leder, that our concrete experiences of embodiment themselves provide some explanation for our continued cultural flirtation with Cartesian metaphysics and its inherent somatophobia - and thus that Cartesianism is not simply a theoretical construct made at the expense of what experience teaches about our natures. However, I argue, such experiences can only be seen to support a Cartesian position if they are grossly misinterpreted. This conclusion is already implicit in what I have said above about their 'negative heuristic': only an *apparent truth* of dualism is revealed here. Furthermore, if we are not careful we could end up being extremely naïve about the status of these experiences; positing a set of 'pure', 'theory-neutral' or 'natural' experiences as the ground of our analysis. To counteract this we have to be sensitive to the historical, the social and, not least, the political contexts in which one experiences one's body and which can discursively inscribe the body. This notwithstanding, I shall argue against a purely 'constructivist' conception of the body, in favour of a more 'demiurgic' account of inscription, and suggest that a dialectical account of embodiment recognises how the body which is shaped by these historical, social and political discourses is also one which helps shape such discourses; it is not a *tabula rasa* but a body which can talk back to history. I believe, therefore, that a *rapprochement*, of sorts, between these views of the body is possible. In so far as this *rapprochement* requires the positing of a pre-discursive body as the site of such discourses, this is concomitant with my insistence throughout this thesis that the body-itself is a significant term in the dialectic.

The philosophical motivation for dualism has been largely theoretical and not experiential. Where experiences have been appealed to in support of dualism, it has not been those revealed through phenomenological analysis. One experiential motivation, which has received increasing contemporary consideration (both inside and outside faculty), has concerned the possibility of adopting a perspective on the world not centred on one's body - a perspective in which the body itself does indeed appear as simply one object amongst others in the world. Again, these are experiences which usually occur in deleterious circumstances and which go under the catch-all title of 'out-of-body' experiences. Apologists for dualism suggest that these experiences, while they may not

actually prove dualism or even render dualism probable, they at least show that the separation of mind and body is intelligible. In Chapter 5, therefore, I shall tackle intellectualism head-on and engage directly with Descartes' assertion that we can conceive of ourselves without a body. In doing this I shall make extensive use of Terence Penelhum's analysis of disembodied existence and his claim that this notion has *prima facie* intelligibility. Specifically, I shall examine the claim, common to what I call folk-eschatology and also widely held in philosophical circles, that the perceptual experiences of a disembodied subject could be exactly the same as for a normal embodied subject.

Two interpretations of 'disembodiment' will be considered. Firstly, that of a completely transcendent consciousness not locatable within the spatial framework of the world and, secondly, that where the subject, though disembodied, is said to view the world from a particular location within the world. In response to the first I shall introduce the notion of 'real relations', relations between the percipient and the perceived which are causal and spatial, and argue that these presume, at least, the location of the percipient in the world of which their experiences are said to be of. If the subject's experiences are said to be perceptions of a particular world, it must have a perspective on that world and this, in turn, means that it must be locatable within the spatial framework of that world. This minimum requirement is enough to rule out the possibility of the first case. With regard to the second, we have to elucidate what it is for a subject to have a spatial location within the world. Obviously, in the case of a disembodied subject, this cannot be done with reference to our normal criteria of spatial occupancy as these are framed in terms of the body. Therefore, Terence Penelhum suggests that this can be explained in terms of the subject's experiences and hence accounts for spatiality in terms of a phenomenal reduction.

I shall argue that this is simply inadequate; neither the subject's spatial position or its spatial trajectory can be accounted for in this way. Implicit in Penelhum's suggestion is that the disembodied subject can locate itself inferentially - a manoeuvre I shall show to be illegitimate. Furthermore, the attempted solution requires the subject to have a grasp on the significance of orientation and the spatial ordering of its experiences. If the disembodied subject's perceptual experience is supposed to be anything like ours, then it must be characterised by the egocentric spatial ordering characteristic of our perceptual experience as well as by the way objects in this field offer possibilities for behaviour and action. However, it is clear that neither this spatial ordering, or the affordances offered by perceived particulars, can mean anything to a disembodied subject. What is required, therefore, is a grasp on having a perspective on the world over and above the nature of these experiences



themselves. This involves understanding the subject to be both an embodied agent and a spatial entity in itself.

As stated previously, intellectualism does not have a monopoly on the Cartesian conception of the body and so I shall turn from considering immaterialist conceptions of the self to an examination of how it informs a particular position in contemporary materialist philosophy of mind. Therefore, having examined the immaterialist support for disembodiment, and found it wanting, in Chapter 6 I then proceed to examine its Cartesian sibling, materialism. As I have argued above, this also partakes in the fallacy of the essential person and its concomitant view of the human body as something Other; an impervious, inert, or dead thing relegated to a second order of being. Thus the conception of human embodiment offered by most materialist philosophies is equally divisive. Specifically, I shall argue against a materialist position which sees the essential human subject as being nothing more than his or her brain. On this view, all we require is an extremely austere form of embodiment, to be embodied simply means to be 'embrained', the rest of the human frame dropping out of the picture as a relevant consideration. Thus, in exactly the same way as intellectualism or immaterialism, it tries to force us to view the subject in isolation; as if an account of the subject's psychology, or the possibility of subjective experience and cognition, could be given without reference to the body or the world which forms the subject's perceptual environment and the context for its agency.

In many ways this is not surprising as the materialist philosopher, as we have remarked before, is working with an inherited and impoverished conception of the human body as something dead. The generally agree with the Cartesian thesis that we are our minds and also, given the above conception of the body, that we are not our bodies. However, they part company with Descartes over the nature of the mind and so cannot bring themselves to endorse the immaterialist side of his philosophy. Consequently they cast around for some other material entity which they regard as alive and capable of grounding the psychological life of the subject. In doing so they alight on the brain: something Nagel regards as being not simply a physical system. Given this, the brain is considered by such philosophers as "a serious candidate for being the self."<sup>2</sup> However, despite all this, this view does not so much offer us an account of embodiment, however austere, but an alternative, materialist account of disembodiment. Many of the arguments offered in support of this view therefore correspond to Descartes' own arguments. Consequently, the critique I give of this position often mirrors the critique given of his arguments in Chapter

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2. T. Nagel [1986]; *The View From Nowhere* (Oxford University Press), p.41.

2 as well as that given of disembodiment in the previous chapter.

However, in Chapter 6, I also wish to develop a line of investigation into the nature of embodiment which approaches the issue from a different angle but which is complementary to the investigations in previous chapters. In those chapters my criticisms of divisive accounts of human embodiment have mainly focused on first-person, phenomenological considerations; here I also wish to emphasise the rôle played by the body in our third-person ascriptions of thought and experience. Furthermore, I have previously tended to focus on the body as the organ of perception and agency and have generally neglected another factor which is of vital importance in our attempt to arrive at a less divisive account of embodiment; the fact that the human body is also *expressive*. I therefore wish to re-address that imbalance here. In both respects I shall draw heavily upon the later work of Ludwig Wittgenstein as another twentieth century philosopher who, I believe, offers a reappraisal of the way we conceptualise both the human subject and the human body. People are embodied entities who express their 'inner' lives (thought and experience) through bodily expression. But this relation is non-contingent: these bodily expressions, in conjunction with considerations of bodily architecture and form, are part of our very concepts of thought and experience. In short; I take Wittgenstein's arguments to be a critique of divisive models of embodiment and the advocacy of a more dialectical and integrative model.

In conclusion: this study attempts to deal with two interrelated questions; is it necessary for the subject of thought and experience to be embodied and, if so, what type of embodiment is necessary? The answers I shall give are that embodiment is necessary and that it is of a kind in which the human body is understood neither as simply a pure objective being-in-itself or simply a pure subjective being-for-itself but is an ambiguous mixture of both. The human body is both a materiality in the world and a set of capacities and due consideration has to be given to both these aspects of the body. To be embodied is therefore to be 'paradigmatically embodied'. Because the body is the locus of the human subject's involvement with the world and with others, it is also recognised that the body is not, and cannot be, impervious to historical, social, and political discourses; but it is also argued that it is not simply a passive victim of such discourses but is something which itself contributes and constrains such discourses and the constructions we make of the body itself. Finally, I argue that the human body is also an expressive body - a body which grounds our practices for the ascription of thought and experience. The form and behaviour of the living human body are part of our psychological concepts and so the living human body forms a paradigm for the ascription of these attributes.

All these considerations unite in pointing to the fact that the human body is both a materiality in a material world and a set of capacities; an intimate combination of form and function where neither has conceptual priority. Body and psyche are mutual terms in a dialectical way of conceptualising the human subject and thus not exclusionary or absolute notions. Consequently, the human body is necessary for our understanding of mind and mind is necessary for our understanding of the human body. It might be objected that my whole approach engenders something of an obscurity. I reject the suggestion but agree with Merleau-Ponty when he says; "Any dialectical philosophy will always resist being labelled, since, according to Plato, it sacrifices nothing willingly and always wants 'both'. And so the philosophical effort to get past abstractions is sometimes challenged in the name of matter and sometimes in the name of Spirit. Everyone keeps the bee in his bonnet."<sup>3</sup>

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3. Merleau-Ponty [1964b]; *Sense and Non-sense* (trans. H. L. Dreyfus & Patricia A. Dreyfus) (Northwestern University Press), p.134.

# Towards a Dialectical Understanding of Human Embodiment

Stephen Anthony Burwood, BSc (Hons.)

# 1. Descartes' Anonymous Tradition

A number of years ago Sydney Shoemaker remarked; "it is a striking fact about contemporary philosophy of mind that, while scarcely anyone thinks that it is a live possibility that a mind-body dualism anything like Descartes' is true, considerable effort continues to be spent on the construction, consideration, analysis and refutation of arguments in favour of such dualistic positions."<sup>1</sup> This expenditure of effort has not yet subsided and one can almost hear Shoemaker paraphrasing Kant and claiming that it is a scandal of philosophy that such arguments have not yet been put to rest. Similarly, Richard Zaner has also noted how "the Cartesian dichotomy of mind and brain [ran] through most of the recent symposium of the 'Philosophical Dimensions of the Neuro-Medical Sciences'." Zaner resists the temptation to try and account for this phenomenon and instead suggests that "one cannot but marvel at the insistent way it [the 'Cartesian Problem'] keeps popping up."<sup>2</sup>

However, whilst it is generally true that it is an unfashionable thesis within philosophy departments, the Cartesian view of human nature is no straw-man to be set up only to be kicked down at the convenience of yet another postgraduate dissertation. This is a sprightly tri-centenarian which occasionally receives spirited professional defences.<sup>3</sup> Apart from this we also have to recognise that, for the most part, it also leads a full and invigorating life outside the narrow confines of faculty. But perhaps more significantly than both of these considerations, it is not as widely recognised as it should be, even within the discipline, that many positions seemingly antithetical to Cartesian metaphysics owe their parentage to Descartes and continue to work within a framework of

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1. S. Shoemaker [1984]; "On an Argument for Dualism", reprinted in *Identity, Cause and Mind: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge University Press), p.287.

2. R. M. Zaner [1981b]; "The Other Descartes and Medicine", S. Skousgaard [ed.] *Phenomenology and the Understanding of Human Destiny* (University Press of America), pp.93-119.

3. Not always, of course, in exactly Descartes' sense. However, one thinks of K. Popper & J. C. Eccles [1977]; *The Self and Its Brain* (Springer International). More recently see also G. Madell [1988]; *Mind and Materialism* (Edinburgh University Press), J. Harrison [1990]; *A Philosopher's Nightmare or the Ghost not Laid* (University of Nottingham Press), J. Foster [1991]; *The Immaterial Self* (Routledge), and again K. Popper [1994]; *Knowledge and the Body-Mind Problem: In Defence of Interaction* (Routledge).

Cartesian categories. I would characterise this thesis as being broadly anti-Cartesian; perhaps, therefore, I should position myself both historically and with respect to these other positions and say something, here in the first chapter of the thesis, as to why I think such a thesis is still relevant.

Shoemaker's own explanation for this continued flirtation is that we perhaps do not have as clear an idea of what dualism is as professional conceit would allow us to admit. Much of the following discussion might indicate that there is at least some truth in this. However, if it is true, it is partly due to the fact that we philosophers are often forgetful of the double-edged nature of Descartes' dualism and how much our own positions rest upon one if not the other of those edges; and this itself may be because of Cartesianism's ability to adapt and change or to synthesise itself into new forms. Consequently Cartesian assumptions manifest themselves in all sorts of surprising places. Therefore, like Shoemaker, I think it is possible to construe the epithet 'Cartesian' quite broadly - taking in not only explicitly immaterialist or dualistic theories but also those which rest upon implicit Cartesian assumptions. Of course there are dangers in over-emphasising similarities and implicit assumptions; the most obvious being that it gives Descartes some pretty odd drinking partners and encourages us to overlook important differences that need to be noticed. A second danger is that the use of such an epithet tends to imply a monolithic coherence to Descartes' philosophical views which they actually lack.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, by teasing out implicit assumptions in his philosophy, and drawing our attention to similarities between seemingly disparate positions, the hope is that, if we take ourselves to be anti-Cartesians, we will be better able to guard against implicitly making those assumptions ourselves.

Any account of why a Cartesian philosophy of mind continues to find favour at this late stage will therefore be complex and multi-faceted. Given its sheer pervasiveness, I do not think any one explanation alone can do justice to this phenomenon; this would probably be a thesis in itself. In the space I have available here I can only really gesture at what sort of considerations a complete account should address. Nevertheless, I do wish to indicate that there is one I feel to be of central importance. One of the most central and widespread of the implicit assumptions I have referred to above concerns our understanding of the human body. I believe that the continued attractiveness of dualistic positions rests primarily on the inadequate conception of the human body we have inherited from the Cartesian turn in philosophy; a conception which renders problematic any attempt to come to a satisfactory understanding of human embodiment. This is when the body is thought of at all! Because the dominance

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4. I hope that the exegesis of his arguments in Chapter 2 will do more justice to the actual complexity of his views. Cf. J. Rée [1974]; *Descartes* (Allen Lane), p.106 and Chapter 16.

of this conception has been so complete, the accompanying legacy of the Cartesianism, at least until the twentieth century, has been to ensure that the human body hardly features at all in our philosophical tradition. The concentrated intellectual effort of centuries has been focused almost exclusively on consciousness and the mind and attempts to provide adequate accounts of these; as if such questions could be satisfactorily addressed without some reference to the body. I cannot help finding this aspect of our philosophical tradition deeply paradoxical given that nearly all of our difficulties in the philosophy of mind originate with Descartes' hyper-separation of body and mind. With typical *aperçu* Sartre comments that the body is that which is continually 'forgotten' or 'surpassed';<sup>5</sup> but not only in experience, with which he was explicitly concerned, but also in our thinking.

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5. J. P. Sartre [1956]; *Being and Nothingness* (trans. H. E. Barnes) (Washington Square Press), pp.401-402 and 427-434.

## 1.1 The Secret Life of the Body

The central Cartesian thesis that I am therefore primarily concerned with is the marginalisation of the human body in experience and cognition and the consequential disengagement of the self from the world. Descartes' overall project into which this fits was, of course, to provide the foundations of a universal science based on reason. This required him to initiate a radical break with the largely Aristotelian past and establish a new starting point in philosophy by laying bare a self-evident truth which would form the axiom of his epistemological enterprise. By the systematic application of doubt he believed he had discovered this axiom in the surety of his own existence. Thus the *cogito*, his intuitively apprehended existence of self, became the foundation for Descartes' epistemic edifice, the security of which was further guaranteed by being cemented together by the assurance of God's existence and beneficence. But the self of the *cogito* was notoriously not the embodied self we take to be evident in common experience, but rather a self shorn of all corporeal characteristics and recognisably human attributes. Thus his epistemological project quickly turned into a metaphysical treatise which succeeded in fundamentally changing our understanding of both ourselves and the world. Cartesian dualism therefore stands upon two interrelated epistemic and metaphysical doctrines;

- 1). *The Primacy of the Mental* (his epistemic doctrine). We can only be epistemically secure about our minds and not about the physical world in general or, indeed, our bodies; "there is very little about corporeal things that is truly perceived, whereas much more is known about the human mind."<sup>6</sup> Therefore the mind is what really counts.

- 2). *The Autonomy of the Mental* (his metaphysical doctrine). There is no dependency between the mental and the physical. Thus bodies can exist independently of minds and, perhaps more importantly given 1)., minds can exist independently of bodies: not only of a particular body, but of any body whatever. At best, the relationship between the two is contingent.

Thus his dualism was not simply the positing of a dichotomy between the mental and the physical but involved the notions of exclusion, autonomy and privilege. It is fashionable nowadays to list a set of dichotomies which are seen as being central to the history of Western thought; self/other, subject/object, universal/particular, mind/body, private/public, male/female, master/slave,

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6. Descartes; AT VII p.53, CSMK I p.37. References throughout are to the standard twelve volume edition (AT) *Oeuvres de Descartes* [eds. C. Adam & P. Tannery] (Vrin) and the new three volume English translation (CSMK) *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* [trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch & A. Kenny] (Cambridge University Press). All quotes from Descartes' philosophical works or letters are taken from this translation.



reason/emotion, culture/nature, and so on - the list is almost endless. It also sometimes seems that the mere mention of a presupposed binary opposition is enough to condemn a theory as being dualistic; but an opposition between two terms does not, by itself, constitute dualism. Therefore, in order to abandon dualism we need not abandon dichotomy or difference but simply dispense with the way it construes difference in terms of an agonistic opposition.<sup>7</sup> What is noticeable about the rôle the above dichotomies have played in our thought is that they have been seen as exclusionary (that things are one or other but not both), autonomous (each existing separably without the implication of the opposed term), and that the left-hand term in each case is in some sense privileged (that it is of primary importance and to which the second term plays a secondary and oppositional rôle). If a theory can be explicated in terms of these particular notions then I believe it can be properly construed as dualistic; and Descartes' position is clearly dualistic in this sense.

Because Descartes thought that he had established that it is the mind that is really important, and that it is completely autonomous, he concluded that persons are essentially minds. Two consequences follow from this; firstly, that minds, and by definition persons, could exist completely detached from any corporeal existence whatever and, secondly, that even if they do exist in conjunction with a body, this relation is merely a contingent union between two separate existents - the one somehow housed within the other. Despite certain qualifications we will come to in exegesis, Descartes' philosophy therefore exemplifies a persistent homuncular tendency in the history of ideas; a tendency to identify the subject of experience and cognition, or the self, not with the whole embodied person or human being, but with only a small or abstracted part; typically the brain, the soul or the rational mind. This homuncular tendency has proved itself to be exceptionally resilient and is still remarkably widespread. Anyone in doubt of this need only visit the Natural History Museum's Hall of Human Biology to be persuaded of its pervasive influence. In a section entitled *Controlling Your Actions*, there is a large model of a human head with a clear perspex forehead. Behind this window is the cockpit of a modern jet aircraft resplendent with all the necessary dials, lights and flight controls. The pilot, however, is invisible - the ghost in the machine? This model of the human subject is barely more sophisticated, and only slightly less ludicrous, than that presented in the children's comic strip *The Numskulls* where what they call 'our man' is navigated through life by a number of little pilots in his head.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, both images powerfully convey the same message: that the inert

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7. V. Plumwood [1993]; *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (Routledge), Chapter 2.

8. Perhaps now only familiar to 'baby-boomers' raised on a diet of comics such as *The Beezer*, published by E. P. Thomson & Sons Ltd. The contemporary equivalent would be the late night television show *Herman's Head* on Channel 4.

machinery of the body needs to be controlled by an living homuncular self, either in the literal form of little men or a disembodied intelligence contingently associated with the body.

Of course Descartes was not the first to espouse a separation of the self from its body, nor was he the first or only psycho-physical dualist; this is evident across a broad spectrum of philosophical traditions. Yet what makes Descartes still a particular focus of interest is that his work has set the framework in which this debate still takes place. Erwin Straus exaggerates only a little when he says that;

The ideas of Descartes have become so much a part of everybody's thought in Europe that later centuries took credit for the discoveries prepared or made by Descartes. Just because European thought was so deeply suffused with Cartesianism, those who came later were unaware of repeating the great thinker; they were ignorant of the sources on which they depended.<sup>9</sup>

For my purposes he is of interest because of the explicit denial in his theoretical stance of a rôle for the human body. More than any other writer, Descartes' dualism stands upon the important methodological assumption that the human body plays no rôle in acts of conceptualisation and reasoning, and perhaps even in the sensory life of the subject, and can therefore be treated by the human subject merely as 'Other'; just another part of *res extensa*. He has bequeathed this assumption to successive generations of philosophers, even to some of those who today would take themselves to be diametrically opposed to his dualist conclusions. As a result the human body appears to have simply dropped out of our philosophical considerations and our culture has developed a deeply ingrained somatophobia. I believe it is this that led Adorno and Horkheimer to comment that;

Europe has two histories: a well-known, written history and an underground history. The latter consists in the fate of the human instincts and passions which are displaced and distorted by civilisation. [...] The relationship with the human body is maimed from the outset. [...] The body is scorned and rejected as something inferior, and at the same time desired as something forbidden, objectified and alienated.<sup>10</sup>

This 'underground history' seems to be almost synonymous with what Straus calls the 'anonymous Cartesian tradition';<sup>11</sup> a tradition which permeates our thinking either in a pure subjectivist or immaterialist mode or, perhaps more typically, as a mechanistic or materialist consensus. These two apparent opposites are both part of that same tradition, subtly intertwining and sustaining each other. Both are Cartesian progeny and both offer an incomplete picture of the human subject, in part by sharing a common view of the human body. Because of this secret heritage, and its insidious influence, it is almost impossible

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9. E. W. Straus [1966]; *Phenomenological Psychology* (Basic Books), p.191.

10. T. Adorno & M. Horkheimer [1979]; *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Verso), pp.231-232.

11. E. W. Straus [1966]; *op. cit.*, p.191.

to answer the question "Is this author or position Cartesian or not?" Merleau-Ponty suggests that, put directly like this, this type of question is all but meaningless. We all stand upon the shoulders of our predecessors (what he calls the 'sedimentation of history') so that those who reject one or more of Descartes' views usually do so from a stand-point which owes much to one of Descartes' other views.<sup>12</sup> On this view one might say that, in one form or another, we are all Cartesians now. Therefore, even to challenge Descartes' philosophy of mind by asserting an identity between the mental and the material may be regarded as reading from a script with Cartesian stage directions. Because of the unrecognised pervasiveness of this tradition many straightforward materialist rebuttals of Descartes' philosophy of mind consequently have all the appearance of patricide. Old wine in old bottles but with a new marketing strategy.

It is therefore extremely important to recognise the intertwining of these two strands in Descartes' philosophy and how, contrary to first impressions, they can and do complement each other. It is also important that we recognise the continued interplay between the two in our thinking. Although Descartes' own view of human nature tended towards immaterialism, he was not only the modern originator of dualist, subjectivist psychology; in many ways he was also, along with his near contemporaries Galileo and Bacon, the originator of modern mechanistic science. The departure from the Aristotelian conception of Man as a composite of form and matter was accompanied by explanations of natural phenomena in non-animistic and non-teleological terms; the other side of Descartes' dualism was a material world governed entirely and exhaustively by strict mechanical laws. The importance of this development in the history of ideas is hard to exaggerate. It was the strict separation of mind and matter into two autonomous realms by Cartesian philosophy that provided the theoretical space in which the shoots of mechanistic science could flourish unencumbered by teleology. This has proved to be a remarkably successful and fruitful turn; yet one that is ultimately premised upon a problematic and unstable division. Inherent in this division is a natural inclination for one side to try and become dominant to the exclusion of the other; we see this inclination manifesting itself in both immaterialism and materialism or physicalism.

Paradoxically, by denying an intimate relation between body and thought, Descartes also made space for attempts at eliminating the category of the mental and so opened the way for materialist conceptions not only of the world but also of Man: as the human body is just another object in this mechanistic world it too

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12. Merleau-Ponty [1964a]; *Signs* (trans. R. C. McCleary) (Northwestern University Press), p.11. No doubt this is just as true of myself as those I criticise. Perhaps Pascal was therefore right when he says "No one but a Cartesian accuses others of Cartesianism": quoted in J. Rée [1974]; *Descartes* (Allen Lane), p.155.

is understandable simply in terms of these laws, and with it human nature. The recent history of Western thought can be seen as one side of Descartes' divide attempting to swallow up the other: counteracting Descartes' own preference for immaterialism by privileging the physical and the objective. While we may have lost much of the strictly mechanistic in our thinking about the world we have retained a disposition to materialism and reductionism. The Cartesian legacy has therefore been to furnish contemporary thinking with two seemingly incompatible traditions which share an erroneous view of the nature and rôle of the human body. In the first we have a purely subjectivist and immaterialist philosophy in which the human body is completely ignored in cognitive and sensitive acts (on this view it is extraneous to and has no part in the operations of the mind), whilst in the second it is relegated to the simple position of material organism as part of a strident objectivist programme (so that, again, its status is just as another object amongst other objects in the mechanistic world at large). Both views have pervaded philosophy on both sides of the English Channel and correspond roughly to what Merleau-Ponty coined Classical Psychology and Mechanistic Physiology.<sup>13</sup> Of course Descartes himself tried unsuccessfully to hold the two philosophies together in an unholy union. One cannot help feeling that, although unsuccessful and somewhat implausibly heroic, to attempt this is nevertheless preferable to the epistemic or metaphysical ascendancy of one or other on their own.

The interplay between epistemological and metaphysical concerns characteristic of the Cartesian enterprise, and the somatophobia this ultimately entailed, is a persistent feature of our philosophical tradition since Descartes. Successive epistemologies have either completely ignored, or assumed as unimportant, the interaction of the body and the world. As a consequence they generally ignore the *process* whereby knowledge is gained and focus instead upon the objects of knowledge, the *cogitatio*, that are seen as the exclusively mental *products* of this process; either in cognitive terms (ideas, beliefs, opinions *etc.*) or in perceptual terms (sensations, sense-perceptions, sense-data *etc.*). Curiously, by focusing on these abstracted objects, they have also failed to pay much attention to the lessons yielded by experience itself. Therefore, knowledge has been construed as being asomatic and conceived exclusively in terms of the mind alone; as if people who engage in cognitive and perceptual activities do so completely divorced from any bodily activity or bodily experience. These abstracted *cogitatio* are themselves construed as an autonomous mental residue left over after disengagement from bodily activity and concerns. Their veracity is judged according to criteria which arise from the functions of a logically

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13. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *Phenomenology of Perception* (trans. Colin Smith) (Routledge & Kegan Paul), Part 1, Chapters 1 & 2.

independent mind so that truth can be arrived at without any reference to bodily existence. Where truth is deemed to depend on something external to the mind this has often been understood as a non-corporeal dependence on a principle of epistemic guarantee: in Descartes, for example, a dependence on the innate goodness and truthfulness of God. The knowing subject is therefore synonymous with the essential subject and this cannot be, because of its own problematic nature, the bodily subject but a subject disengaged from the world.

The marginalisation of the human body in this way is an aspect of Western European thought which firmly embraces rationalism and its traditional rival empiricism. As Thomas Reid has said, empiricism shared a common 'system of human understanding' with Descartes; a system originating with Descartes and which Reid called an 'Ideal System'.<sup>14</sup> The characteristic starting point of this system, according to Reid, was to take peculiar mental entities called 'ideas' as the immediate objects of the human mind in thought and perception. In starting by concentrating on the furniture of the mind in this way the empiricists, just like the rationalists, were not too interested with the process of knowledge acquisition and guaranteed a place for the body only on the periphery of their concerns. Of course this once more led to an epistemic hiatus which ultimately resulted in the immaterialism and nascent phenomenalism of Berkeley and the deeply sceptical philosophy of Hume. The impasse was partly in response to the dominant metaphysics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which, following the Cartesian-Galilean lead, conceived of the world as no more than a physical mechanism. Locke, for example, viewed the world as consisting of an indefinite number of material bodies composed of microscopic 'corpuscles' or 'insensible particles' and suggested that the only way we can conceive of bodies operating in relation is by a causal process of 'impulse' or 'impact'. Locke had a fascination for 'artifice' typical of the seventeenth century: he delighted in metaphors of clocks and engines, wheels and springs, and often referred to objects as 'machines'.<sup>15</sup> As with Descartes, however, the human body was simply another machine within this system. The only distinguishing feature of the human body was that it had mechanically operated sense-organs in virtue of which, though by a means that remained completely inexplicable, certain immaterial substances (that is, souls or minds) are associated with it. Yet given his mentalistic starting point he cannot legitimately say anything about the world or the body; a point which Berkeley saw clearly and from which he concluded that bodily reality was no more than a fiction. Berkeley's position represents the

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14. T. Reid [1764]; *Inquiry into the Human Mind* (ed. W. Hamilton), [reprinted 1895] *The Philosophical Works of Thomas Reid* (James Thin), Volume 1, Chapter 7, §7.

15. The fascination for 'artifice' and mechanical ingenuity seems to have been a general feature of the Baroque. See J. A. Maravall [1986]; *Culture of the Baroque* (trans. T. Cochran) (University of Minnesota Press), especially Chapter 9.

logical conclusion of the empiricist and rationalist tradition and, like most logical conclusions, is something of a *reductio ad absurdum*. Disengage the human subject from the world and you disembody human knowledge; it becomes something passive rather than a result of the subject's active engagement in the world and is prone to all sorts of solipsistic and sceptical conclusions. Once the body is assumed to be part of an autonomous but uncertain *res extensa*, all else naturally follows.

Perhaps the apotheosis of the Cartesian project, and the working through of Classical Psychology to its conclusion, came earlier this century with the neo-Cartesianism of Edmund Husserl's early work. Like Descartes, Husserl also wanted to provide the true foundation of the sciences and considered the Cartesian reflection as the best way to those foundations. As we shall see later, Husserl provided important insights which tell against the general thrust of this project; but, despite his later renunciation of the Cartesian way in philosophy, it is fair to say that Husserl himself throughout perpetuated a "philosophy of the cogito."<sup>16</sup> For Husserl, however, Descartes' method yielded a disengagement that was not radical enough. Classical phenomenology in the Husserlian mode consisted of a radicalising of the Cartesian method by instantiating a process of *epoché* [ἐποχή] or 'bracketing' of the world and the suspension of what he calls the 'natural attitude' in order to achieve a phenomenological reduction and true disengagement with the world. Thus what is required is the complete suspension of all empirical, existential considerations and all *a priori* assumptions about entities external to experiences and for one to concentrate solely on what is immanently given in one's own 'stream of experiences'. According to Husserl we need to go right back to what is essential, basic and irreducible in our experiences. The effect of this would be, he thought, to transform consciousness into a Transcendental Consciousness (that is; a stream of transcendently purified experiences) in which the structure of intentional phenomena would be revealed. Descartes essential error was in not also bracketing the 'I' of the *cogito*, thus dispensing with any psychic entity, and so opening up this realm of universal meanings or 'essences'. In Husserl's picture the self, completely divorced from its world, is disembodied, contentless and transcendent.

In more contemporary philosophical examples the picture is often less

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16. In the *Paris Lectures* (p.3) Husserl dignifies Descartes with the title of the 'Patriarch of Phenomenology' and claims phenomenology is a form of '20th century Cartesianism'. Although he was at great pains later in his career to distinguish his philosophy from that of Descartes (see the *Cartesian Meditations* pp.1-26), and while it is true that there are profound differences, I think it is fair to say he remained throughout a philosopher in the Cartesian mold. Husserl [1960]; *The Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (trans. D. Cairns) (Martinus Nijhoff) and [1964]; *The Paris Lectures* (trans. P. Koestenbaum) (Martinus Nijhoff).

straightforward and Descartes' influence is much harder to discern. Nevertheless they can be found and one can see that classical subjectivist philosophies do not have a monopoly on the Cartesian legacy. Current philosophy of mind is resplendent with 'Cartesian' positions in this limited sense. Take, for example, computational psychology and cognitive science. Although perhaps more explicitly Lockean than Cartesian, both of these respectably materialist positions are premised upon the assumption that the body plays no part in determining the functioning of the mind. Thinking is regarded simply as the abstract rule governed manipulation of meaningless symbols. This culminates in the syntactic psychology of the 'language of thought' hypothesis, computational and computer program models of cognition and the hyperbolic claims of artificial intelligence research.<sup>17</sup> If the human body is considered at all it is merely as the 'wetware' on which the 'program' of the mind is run or merely as the mechanism by which the 'system' is supplied with perceptual and other 'input'. Running alongside are the so-called 'internalist' or 'individualist' theories of mind which ignore the interplay of the embodied subject with its environment in determining the content of the subject's thoughts and experiences. If embodiment means anything to these materialist theorists it usually means 'embrained' - that is; embodied in a brain. This naturally then leads to the more explicitly Cartesian nightmare of the brain-in-the-vat. Here again, in this fashionable horror, the subject is disengaged from its world and identified only with a specific part of the whole embodied person. The body is merely seen as an appendage, a sort of naturally provided life support system to the brain, but no more than this.

So as Shoemaker says, Cartesianism is not a dead issue in the philosophy of mind, though, if I am right, it may be more alive than even he realises. As I say, Descartes' mentalism still has both its professional and lay apologists and its implicit assumptions about the human body persist in the assumptions of many apparently antithetical theories. It is an astonishing fact about the contemporary scene in the philosophy of mind that practically no author sees fit to question our conception of the body. All their intellectual resources are concentrated on considering questions relating to 'consciousness' or 'mental content', virtually in isolation; even though such questions arise partly because of our conception of the body and its relationship to the world. Consequently, we are still unable to come to an adequate understanding of either the mind or human embodiment. But why should this be so? Why should the body be invisible to our thought, and consideration of it relegated to an 'underground history'? And why should an anachronistic theory such as Descartes' still be so resistant and its assumptions

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17. The literature surrounding these issues is now vast. For a refreshingly different approach, see the work of H. L. Dreyfus - [1967, 1968, 1972, & 1974].

be so insidiously ubiquitous across a range of philosophical positions?

A Cartesian may feel that there is an onus on the anti-Cartesian to answer this question and, indeed, I do feel that it is incumbent upon me to say something about this remarkable fact; though doing so may prove to be illuminating for the anti-Cartesian position I wish to defend. The reason why attempted refutations still take place cannot be simply because contemporary philosophers lack magnanimity towards a once great argument which has fallen on hard times and therefore obsessively continue to berate it long after it has lost any cogency or persuasiveness. Nor can it be simply because other philosophers - born-again dualists - are nostalgic for the days of rationalistic system building and so continue to peddle it long after its sell-by-date. Nor, I believe, can its general popularity be simply attributed to the continued lure of religion and superstition (however powerful these are); for this ignores the double-headed nature of the Cartesian animal. Could the uncomfortable truth be because there is some basis in fact for such a thesis? If we reject this we must come up with an alternative, and plausible, explanation as to why the Cartesian picture of the human subject proves to be so persistent and resilient to philosophical rebuttal.

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## 1.2 The Persistence of Cartesianism

Why then does the Cartesian view of the self and its concomitant view of the human body prove to be such a persistent feature of Western metaphysics? I do not wish to pretend that the answer to this is a simple matter; how could it be? No doubt an adequate and full explanation of this phenomenon would have to take into account diverse considerations and approach the topic from both direct and oblique angles. It is also probably true that, in doing this, it would have to form a synthesis between apparently opposing positions. Each sub-tradition in the subsequent history of ideas has its own favoured type of explanation and these are not always immediately compatible with each other. Nevertheless, even if each does not provide a full account by itself, one can see how they each possess, in their own ways, an aspect of the truth. In the twentieth century the metaphysics of the Cartesian position, and its implicit assumptions, has come under increasing attack from a number of quarters - analytico-linguistic, socio-political or historical, phenomenological, and, more recently, psycho-analytical - though it is perhaps only now that their combined weight is finally being felt. Despite profound differences in their overall conceptions of philosophical method, what each of these share in common is an attempt to 'situate' the Cartesian position in terms of a larger framework.

The analytico-linguistic sub-tradition, for example, would probably wish to stress the contingency of our linguistic practices and how, if we are not careful or are unclear about the details of these practices, we can be misled by these practices into positing false epistemologies and ontologies. Thus, to paraphrase Wittgenstein, it is often true that "A whole cloud of philosophy [is] condensed into a drop of grammar."<sup>18</sup> One common way we might be misled is to reify psychological states or even consciousness itself; and it is certainly true that both of these errors are characteristic of the Cartesian philosophy of mind. Utterances of first-person psychological statements are thus construed as *reports* or *descriptions* of 'inner' states of affairs, or perhaps even objects, observed through introspection; a faculty of sense modelled on 'outer' perception. Furthermore, in moving from *cogito ergo sum* to postulating *sum res cogitans*, there seems to be the supposition that the first-person pronoun used in statements such as "I think  $\Phi$ ", "I feel  $\Theta$ ", and so on, *refers* to a self which is constitutive of our essence; *i.e.* the real ego, the *res cogitans* separate from the anonymous bodily self. Therefore, when I use such linguistic constructions it seems that I am referring to a self

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18. L. Wittgenstein [1953]; *Philosophical Investigations* (translated G. E. M. Anscombe) (Basil Blackwell), IIxi, p.222.

which, although perhaps has its seat within my body, is not identical with my body. Thus Wittgenstein argues in *The Blue and Brown Books*;

[T]hat this body is now the seat of that which really lives - is senseless. [...] Now the idea that the real I lives in my body is connected with the peculiar grammar of the word 'I', and the misunderstandings this grammar is liable to give rise to.<sup>19</sup>

Philosophers such as Schlick and Wittgenstein want to strongly repudiate the picture of first-person pronoun usage as reference to an essential self and both seem to be in complete agreement with Lichtenberg when he says that Descartes had no right to say "I think" but instead ought to have said "There is a thought."<sup>20</sup> Of course, by saying something like "I am in pain", one would normally think that I wish to draw attention to myself or distinguish myself from other people. However, on their view, this does not entail that 'I' is a proper name; nor is it equivalent to a description such as "the person now speaking..."; nor yet a demonstrative such as 'here' or 'this' for demonstratives, unlike 'I', permit the possibility of referential failure.<sup>21</sup> On Wittgenstein's account 'I' *itself* is not, for me, "a signal calling attention to a place or a person."<sup>22</sup> I no more *refer* to someone by saying "I am in pain" than I do by groaning; the idea that 'I' refers to a *possessor* is a metaphysical illusion.

I do not wish to address the adequacy of these claims or the so-called 'no ownership' view of the self the positions of Schlick and Wittgenstein appear to entail; despite the fact that there is plenty enough to say both for and against.<sup>23</sup> In any case, the point could be expressed in a slightly different way, without 'behaviourist' implications; that Descartes misinterprets a purely formal requirement (the fact that "I think" must be capable of accompanying any of my judgements or representations) for a substantive metaphysical truth.<sup>24</sup> Instead I want to consider whether this kind of view provides an adequate account of Cartesianism's continued lure. On this question I am not clear that it does. No doubt we should be clear about the peculiarities of linguistic usage, and the grammar underlying such usage, and no doubt such accounts can play an important rôle in countering the Cartesian understanding of the self and mind. However, it remains doubtful that misconstruing the function of the first-person

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19. L. Wittgenstein [1958]; *The Blue and Brown Books* (Basil Blackwell), p.66.

20. M. Schlick [1936]; "Meaning and Verification", *The Philosophical Review* 45, p.365. G. E. Moore [1955]; "Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930-33", *Mind* 64, pp.13-14.

21. L. Wittgenstein [1958]; *op. cit.*, p.68. This is the point of the geometrical example.

22. L. Wittgenstein [1968]; "Notes for Lectures on 'Private Experience' and 'Sense-Data'", *Philosophical Review* 77, p.307.

23. For example, see P. F. Strawson [1959]; *Individuals* (Methuen), Chapter 3 and P. M. S. Hacker [1972]; *Insight and Illusion* (revised 1986) (Oxford University Press), Chapter 8.

24. Kant refers to this as a 'transcendental condition' and the Cartesian misinterpretation as the 'Psychological Paralogism'. Kant [1929]; *Critique of Pure Reason* (trans. N. K. Smith) (The Macmillan Press), A106-108 and, especially, B427-428. See also N. K. Smith [1918]; *A Commentary to Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason'* (Macmillan), p.251.

pronoun is now a motivating factor for an adherence to Cartesian metaphysics. No one would want to suggest that there is something about our linguistic practices in themselves which generate Cartesian inclinations: there is nothing necessary about construing these in a way compatible with dualism. On the contrary, it is far more likely that the reverse is true; that someone interprets its usage in this erroneous manner because there is already a prior commitment to that view, grounded in other, non-linguistic considerations. This highlights a persistent difficulty encountered in dealing with this question: given that we are trying to address the issue from a perspective within a culture thoroughly imbued with Cartesian metaphysics, it is extremely difficult to establish a relationship of priority between the putative motivation and the apparently ensuing theory. In other words, because of the 'sedimentation of history', as Merleau-Ponty puts it, there is always the danger of retrospective analysis.

Curiously, despite his own warning, Merleau-Ponty is the source of an alternative explanation which also runs into this difficulty. What he suggests is that the Cartesian conception of the self may be partly fashioned out of certain fundamental truths pertaining to our experience of embodiment; *i.e.* that there may be specific phenomenological grounds for the attractiveness of Cartesian metaphysics. This may occur in two ways; firstly, by an absence of the body in experience and secondly, by the way the body is presented to us in certain specific experiences. In the first instance it has been noted how the body often appears to us to be 'absent' in our common, everyday lived experiences of embodiment. This corresponds to the Sartrean insight that my body, as that which is lived (my lived-body), is not something experienced by me as a physiological organism as such but rather as that which is 'perpetually surpassed' or 'neglected' as I pursue my projects in the world.<sup>25</sup> When I am engaged in a particular task, I am less concerned with my body than with the product of the action. As my body itself is directed towards this particular goal, in order to ensure its attainment, it has a natural inclination to recede from experience. The body itself therefore partakes in the transparency of the intentional; *i.e.* the fact that intentionality tends to lose sight of itself in favour of its objects. Thus the absence of the body from philosophical reflection may be a natural error, a product of its absence in embodied experience. The second way in which this may occur is with respect to what Merleau-Ponty calls 'cases of disintegration', where body and soul are experienced as apparently distinct.<sup>26</sup> More often than not, this is the result of physical morbidity and dysfunction. The body resurfaces in experience and produces a disruption in the normally smooth intentional dialogue between the subject and the world. I am no longer able to act through my body in the way I

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25. J. P. Sartre [1956]; *op. cit.*, pp.401-402 and 427-434.

26. Merleau-Ponty [1965]; *The Structure of Behaviour* (trans. A. L. Fisher) (Methuen), p.209.

normally take for granted. No longer intentionally transparent, the body manifests itself in experience and, in doing so, often appears as Other; as a recalcitrant and contingent materiality, something almost alien to myself and my projects. It is this, Merleau-Ponty suggests, that is the truth of dualism.

I shall return to explore and discuss these phenomena in more detail in subsequent chapters; for the moment I shall confine myself to making a number of specific points. Of course, the truth of dualism revealed here is only an *apparent truth*. Again, nobody would wish to suggest that there is anything intrinsic to the experiences in which the body resurfaces which would necessitate a Cartesian interpretation of those experiences, even less that such interpretations are true. Merleau-Ponty himself wishes to stress that when we return to these seemingly ambiguous experiences we discover that what they really disclose is our embodied natures. Indeed, we may even wish to go further (as I shall do myself) and argue that we can only make sense of these experiences, and do justice to their rich complexity, by reading them as the experiences of an essentially embodied subject. What troubles me about Merleau-Ponty's suggestion that these experiences could be seen to provide *prima facie* grounds for dualism is that, given we agree that they properly disclose our embodied natures, why should we think that these experiences reveal even an apparent truth of dualism? Either this is false magnanimity or he has not been paying sufficient attention to his own arguments. The problem here is that, once again, such interpretations have a distinctly *post hoc* air about them. If we believe such experiences lend credence to the dualist's position, it is more likely that this is probably because we retrospectively attribute this quality to them from a position in which the Cartesian notion of the self is a familiar and independently established doctrine.

It also has to be noted that such experiential considerations have not generally formed part of the dualist arsenal of arguments or its explicit strategy. For the most part the dualist's explicit motivations have been theoretical and conceptual, not experiential. Where the evidence of experience is appealed to in support of a dualist's conception of the self, it is usually with reference to something far more esoteric and dramatic (raising issues I shall address in Chapter 5). With respect to the intentional transparency of the body, one would not regard this experiential fact as itself supporting a Cartesian view but perhaps it does buttress a commonplace inclination to pass over consideration of the body. By their very nature they are susceptible to be overlooked and they may thereby play a more subversive rôle in our thinking. Thus, there maybe some truth in this suggestion, though it is extremely difficult to assess. However, there is no reason to think that there is anything about this fact of embodiment, taken in itself, that would invariably lead to the body being devalued or disregarded.

There is certainly nothing about it that would support a Cartesian conception of the body or self. I suspect, therefore, that the general invisibility of the body in our thought is more likely to be due to other, more culturally bound considerations.

Consequently, it might be more profitable to cast our net a little wider and take into account broader, cultural and historical considerations. One major twentieth century philosopher who has directly addressed this question is Martin Heidegger. Put very simply, according to Heidegger it is the Christian theological tradition, with its inadequate ontological foundations, which is to blame for persistently leading us up the Cartesian cul-de-sac. Even though philosophy is no longer the 'handmaiden' to theology, there is still a resistant residue of Christian theology in contemporary philosophical thought. Heidegger thought that this theological tradition has principally left us with the two central notions; that of 'eternal truths' and that of the 'idealised absolute subject'. The first notion leads us to believe that philosophical reflection reveals, or perhaps discovers, truths which are context transcendent and can be cut loose from the historical and cultural *milieu* in which they were formulated. The second of these notions is the product of a fusion between the Greek idea of the *animal rationale* [ζῷον λόγον ἔχον], i.e. Man as a living thing which has reason, and the Hebrew, biblical idea of Man made in the image of God and therefore in direct, unmediated communion with God (both Man and God being transcendent and unsituated). "The idea of 'transcendence'", he insists, "is rooted in Christian dogmatics" and the above two notions which are nurtured by it "belong to those residues of Christian theology within philosophical problematics which have not yet been radically extruded."<sup>27</sup> Thus the theological myths of an absolute truth and a 'worldless I' have been bequeathed to philosophy by Christianity and have continued to contaminate our philosophical thought at a fundamental level, faithfully and consistently encouraging a Cartesian view of the self.

I think Heidegger is right to point to the centrality of these two notions in the history of ideas and he is also probably right to insist that there has been an encoding of these beliefs in secular thought; but I am not convinced that, by itself, this offers a complete explanation of the lure of Cartesianism. No doubt in many ways religious ideas do continue to hold sway in our thinking and no doubt they also provide something of a motive for the continued belief in an immaterial and unsituated self; but this cannot be the whole picture nor perhaps even the most important part. Apart from the minor doctrinal point that an unmediated

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27. Heidegger [1962]; *Being and Time* (trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson) (Basil Blackwell) pp.48-49 & 229 (original pagination). See also F.Kerr [1991]; "Getting the Subject back into the World: Heidegger's Version", D. Cockburn (ed.) *Human Beings - Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 29, pp.173-190.

relationship with God is a very Protestant notion and certainly not one shared by all Christian traditions,<sup>28</sup> there are several reasons why an appeal to our religious heritage does not seem adequate as an account of what generates Cartesian inclinations. Firstly Christian doctrine does not necessarily lead to Cartesian dualism (and in practice often does not) so, even if there is a Christian theological residue in our philosophical thought, this does not mean it is the source of our continued flirtation with Cartesianism. If this doctrine does not commonly lead believers to assent to Cartesianism why should we think it plays a rôle - even a tacit rôle - in the thinking of critical philosophers and non-believers?<sup>29</sup> Secondly, even if we admit that the Christian self is a Cartesian self, this analysis ignores the broader question of what motivates the theological conception of the subject and it does not really explain why this supposedly inherited conception of the self should continue to exert such a grip on us in the absence of the wider tradition in which it was originally embedded. And lastly, as I have suggested above, it seems to focus too narrowly on one aspect of Cartesianism, the positing of an immaterial self, and ignores how this relates to the mechanistic side of Cartesian dualism.

With regard to our direct concern, the Cartesian conception of the human body, it is even less clear how our religious heritage has played a rôle. One must not forget that Christianity is an essentially incarnational philosophy in which the body (and not necessarily anything like the Cartesian body) has often featured as a central symbolic and ritualistic totem.<sup>30</sup> However, the value of Heidegger's approach is that it reminds us that our acts of conceptualisation are historically and culturally situated and do not necessarily reveal eternal truths. More recently other philosophers have followed Heidegger's lead and there has been much criticism of a perceived tendency in philosophy to present its problems in an ahistorical fashion; that is to say, that such problems have always existed in some form, that they will probably continue to do so and that each new philosophical generation merely finds their own way of approaching them afresh. The approaches may change but the problems, being *conceptual* and the

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28. Christianity, like all religions, is not a monolithic homogeneity. Therefore, one cannot simply point to 'its' influence as if the doctrines and beliefs of Christian theology have formed a uniform whole throughout its history.

29. The relationship between general religious beliefs (including a belief in some form of God), eschatological beliefs and beliefs about the nature of the human subject is clearly complex. For example, the most recent survey of religious attitudes in Britain revealed that, although 71% of Britons professed a belief in a God, only 64% believed in the existence of a soul and even fewer (44%) believed in a life after death. The survey also showed that 30% of Britons still believed in the Devil; so Old Nick did considerably better than the Prime Minister as another recent survey suggested only 21% still believed in John Major (source: Gallup 1990 & 1993).

30. The history of Christianity has been the history of a love-hate relationship with the body. I feel that it is too easy to focus on the negative side of this relationship. One also has to recognise that Christian theology has often valorised the body; for example, it is by the washing of the flesh in baptism, according to Tertullian, that the soul is cleansed. See F. Bottomley [1979]; *Attitudes to the Body in Western Christendom* (Lepus Books).

product of unchanging *reason*, remain essentially the same, thus giving philosophy a timeless, universal theme and an ideal audience untainted by considerations of history and culture. Many now find a view such as this hopelessly naïve and an attempt by philosophy to escape from history. In contrast, they suggest that the history of philosophy should be viewed as a catalogue of culturally situated 'accidents'; conceptual confusions and misconceptions contingent upon specific conditions obtaining at the place and time of their conception.

Richard Rorty, particularly in his book *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, represents the epitome of this historicist position.<sup>31</sup> According to Rorty philosophy is not a discipline in which we discuss perennial or eternal problems; that is, problems which arise as soon as one begins to reflect. In contrast philosophical problems are contingent and particular to a certain age and should be seen as such. In reading Rorty one almost gets the impression that Descartes woke up one morning and invented the mind as a separate entity, that by now we should have outgrown this mistaken idea and its associated problems and that we should 'set aside' these concerns as worthy of address. After all, it is possible, on Rorty's view, that the mind may never have been 'invented'; so what of substance do we have to lose? Rorty's new eliminativist position (what he calls materialism without identities) suggests we can renounce our attachment to the mind and mental categories without loss and without standing on Descartes' shoulders. But our question still stands: if this is so, why is the Cartesian picture so recalcitrant? Rorty's answer to this strikes me as simply implausible, though it adds an interesting, but desperate, twist on Heidegger's original insight. On his view the persistence of Cartesian categories in our thinking can be largely explained by how these philosophical concerns have become a *substitute* for religion in the lives of the secularised intellectual, a person who continued to hawk these concerns even when no one else was listening.

This is Philosophy as a self-perpetuating conspiracy of the cogitating classes; but does not this make Cartesianism's continued lure even more mysterious?<sup>32</sup> On Rorty's account the intellectual is an absurd and anachronistic figure who wishes to continue as before, even when this is manifestly not possible. As a

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31. R. Rorty [1980]; *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton University Press).

32. Referring to the 'Ghost in the Machine' and Stuart Hampshire's review of Ryle's book, John Wisdom remarked "Stuart Hampshire [...] says that Ryle has given the impression that philosophers have foisted this myth, these myths, on the masses and that this impression is a false one. He is right, surely? Philosophers have made us aware of the myth and in such a way as to increase its power, not free us from it. But it was not they who impregnated our talk and thought with this myth. And this is important to the explanation of its merits and demerits." Wisdom is surely right also - yet Rorty is up to Ryle's old tricks. J. Wisdom [1950]; "The Concept of Mind", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 50, pp.189-190.

result philosophy becomes an internalised dialogue, carried on between professionals solely within their ivory towers. The problem with this is that it simply does not even try to account for why such concerns continue to hold such a fascination for people both inside and, as equally as important, outside faculty classrooms. Moreover, it is remarkably unsubtle in the way it attempts to position philosophy within a broader cultural context. Rorty notes how philosophers such as Descartes, Locke, and Kant “had written in a period in which the secularization of culture was being made possible by the success of natural science.”<sup>33</sup> However, he seems insensitive to the fact that the philosophy of someone like Descartes actually provided the theoretical space in which this success was possible; and even less to the fact that the science he refers to with approval progressed on the basis of assumptions formulated by that philosophy. Rather curiously, therefore, Rorty seems to present the new science that developed in the seventeenth century as something whose history is itself autonomous and distinct. In other words, Rorty tries to thoroughly historicise philosophy; but he does not do the same for science and so fails to recognise the symbiotic relationship of the two - each discourse *mutually* informing the other. In any case, a principle of charity operating on the assumption that people, let alone cogitating intellectuals, are not *such* dupes demands a better account than this.

Perhaps what is missing from Rorty's picture is an account of how these ideas feed into a project of mastery; in other words, how they relate to socio-political structures of power. This was certainly a concern of Marxists in the Frankfurt School such as Adorno and Horkheimer. We have already noted how, in their book the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, they recognise our culture's ingrained somatophobia. Subsequently they then go on to suggest how this is the product of an alliance between Christian asceticism and the production requirements of bourgeois capitalism, the body being the source of evil and work the source of virtue; “Christianity extolled the virtues of work but declared the flesh to be the root of all evil. It ushered in the modern bourgeois order, joining forces here with the pagan Machiavelli, by praising work which was still accursed in the Old Testament.”<sup>34</sup> Subtler and pervasive structures of power replaced more traditional and somewhat cruder methods of subjugating and controlling people; “Man is no longer enslaved by the sword but by the gigantic apparatus which ultimately again forges the sword.”<sup>35</sup> I have already given enough warnings about oversimplified or tendentious readings of Christian attitudes towards the body; nonetheless, the suggestion that the ideas of philosophy can become encoded and promoted through receptive structures of power is not

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33. R. Rorty [1980]; *op. cit.*, pp.4-5.

34. T. Adorno & M. Horkheimer [1979]; *op. cit.*, p.232.

35. T. Adorno & M. Horkheimer [1979]; *op. cit.*, p.233.



something that can be lightly dismissed. There is a good deal of truth in their criticism that "Animism spritualized the object, whereas industrialism objectifies the spirits of men."<sup>36</sup> Needless to say, this theme has been taken up and developed with great insight by Michel Foucault. Thus he has written;

The great book of Man-the-Machine was written simultaneously on two registers: the anatomico-metaphysical register, of which Descartes wrote the first pages and which the physicians and philosophers continued, and the techno-political register, which was continued by a whole set of regulations and by empirical and calculated methods relating to the army, the school and the hospital, for controlling or correcting the operations of the body.<sup>37</sup>

Our conception of the body as a mechanism is therefore not simply a notion that has been handed down as a theoretical construct which barely touches our everyday lives; it is a metaphysical position which underpins and legitimates various means for the political control of human beings. The body has thus become the site where culturally regulated 'regimes of discourse' inscribe themselves. Conceived of as a machine the human body can be disciplined and drilled in specific socio-political contexts and a general matrix of power. For example, the soldier is not given as such but is something to be constructed from the raw materials of an 'inapt body'; by drilling and having his posture corrected he is turned into an 'automaton of habit'. What is true of the military is also true of medicine, industry and all other social situations. For Foucault, it has always been the case that the body was in the grip of such forces, however in the eighteenth century, he argues, there was developed "a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores, breaks it down, and rearranges it."<sup>38</sup>

Thus a 'political anatomy', which was also a 'mechanics of power', was born - allowing one the means whereby one could have a hold over another's body, to do what one wishes, as one wishes with the speed and efficiency one wishes. At one point Foucault argues that these two registers are "quite distinct"; one operating at the level of functioning and explanation and the other at the level of submission and use. We are thus provided with a duality of an intelligible body and a useful body. However, it seems that he does not wish this to be taken to mean that they are completely autonomous as he also suggests that there are points of overlap. In fact I would have thought he would have wanted to go further and argue that these registers do not simply run in parallel, even if they occasionally overlap, but mutually inform and interpenetrate each other. This is because the Cartesian turn in philosophy provided the theoretical space for the

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36. T. Adorno & M. Horkheimer [1979]; *op. cit.*, p.28.

37. M. Foucault [1979]; *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Peregrine), p.136.

38. M. Foucault [1979]; *op. cit.*, p.138.

second register; Descartes, if you like, also penned the first lines here. The metaphor of Man-the Machine is ultimately a product of Descartes' hyper-separation of self and body; the body becoming a mechanistic organism that can be controlled and corrected. In this context perhaps one could interpret the continued lure of dualism at a cultural level as a rejection of the increased mechanism of our lives and the expression of a desire for freedom. But, even if this is a plausible suggestion, is this what accounts for its continued philosophical attraction?

It could be argued that, in general, we should prefer the simpler rule that the power of an idea lies not in the institutions that promulgate it but in the idea itself. The danger with this simple rule is that it may be far too simple. By ignoring historical and political influences certain philosophical traditions have an unedifying tendency to hide behind the genetic fallacy and the charge of *ad hominem* argumentation; but to over-emphasise origins or motives, at the expense of argument, is a fallacy nevertheless. I accept that we require a sensitivity to history and the broad context within which our concepts are formed (that is precisely the position I have tried to adopt in this chapter). We should also be sensitive to the interplay between our conceptual discourse and other forms of discourse (*e.g.* the empirical discourse of science); our forms of discourse themselves are neither autonomous or exclusionary. Thus I have no doubt that this sensitivity should include an awareness of the situatedness of many of our concerns; but, I wish to argue, this should not be at the expense of a different kind of sensitivity, a sensitivity to genuinely common concerns and the power of an argument to ground those concerns.

What is required is thus a balance between these sensitivities. Nonetheless, Sartre is right, for example, when he says that in order to understand the continued grasp religion has on us we have to examine the 'God-shaped hole' left in our consciousness after the demise of orthodox theism: it is not good enough simply to attribute this to a clerical conspiracy. What we need to do as philosophers, therefore, is to explore the persisting hole left by classical Cartesian psychology by interrogating both its not fully cognisant, underground history and the arguments that surround and sustain it. If we do I submit that we will find the hole to be 'body-shaped'. It could be argued that in ignoring the shape of this hole a thorough-going, and somewhat naïve, historicist such as Rorty is still firmly entrenched within the way of thinking from which he believes he has freed himself; and that this ultimately accounts for his reductionism.

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### 1.3 'Exactly as a Corpse'

There is a further consideration that has not been made manifest in the discussion so far. Despite each of their limitations in separately accounting for the persistence of Cartesianism these critiques of the Cartesian position have, in their own ways, tried to obliquely problematise the Cartesian conception of the self as an absolute and autonomous interiority. However, both the phenomenological and the socio-political critiques have attempted to do this specifically by problematising its concomitant conception of the body as an absolute and autonomous exteriority. This seems to me to be an important conceptual manoeuvre; a manoeuvre which points at once both to the source as well as to the possible solution to the problem of human embodiment. This is because I believe there is still an unquestioning acceptance of the machine metaphor of the body in both our philosophical thought and our general culture, and that this metaphor, itself being born of the Cartesian dichotomy, continues to provide fertile ground for our dualist inclinations. This was the truth embedded in Foucault's analysis. However, a consideration that is not always made clear is that the reason for our culture's unquestioning acceptance of this metaphor is not simply because of its being channelled through receptive structures of power but also partly because of its perceived success; or, perhaps more accurately, because of its association with the perceived success of mechanistic science and medicine. Faith in science and modern medicine, born of its unquestionable successes, is a deeply ingrained cultural attitude; but this has led us to overlook, or at least be uncritical of, the model of the human subject it has presupposed. Therefore, I submit that the invisibility of the body in our thought has been, at least partly, due to the fact that what the human body is has been considered to be something essentially unproblematic; so that its invisibility is the invisibility of the normal and the unproblematic.

The anonymity of Descartes' heritage therefore seems to rest upon the continued intertwining of the two traditions he initiated, even though each has now taken on a life of its own. This anonymity rests upon the widely held assumption, in which both these traditions partake, that the nature of the human body and our consequent embodiment is simply something commonsensical and obvious. Speaking of Descartes' significance for modern psychology Erwin Straus puts it in the following way;

In keeping with this anonymous Cartesian tradition, system-bound, problem-laden theories have been presented as truths of common sense. While this anonymous tradition links modern psychology with the philosophy of Descartes, it also stands between the two. It has prevented the thought of Descartes from being transmitted as

a meaningful yet imperfect whole but has caused it to be disintegrated into its parts. By themselves, however, the parts are no longer the same as when fitted into the whole.<sup>39</sup>

Yet often these 'truths' are really only the product of a specifically philosophical discourse; that is to say, they are a consequence of a peculiarly philosophical way of talking about the issues concerned. It is a remarkable achievement when a particular philosophical theory or position can become detached from its base and convince us that it has the endorsement of common sense. The danger in all of this is that we can begin to lose any sensitivity for the peculiarities of the way we, *qua* philosophers, speak. Thus when the body is referred to, this is done in the strangest of fashions. For example, Moritz Schlick, in order (he says) to "restate the facts clearly", prefers to talk of perception in the following terms;

It is a fact of experience that all data depend in some way or other upon the state of a certain body which has the peculiarity that its eyes and its back are never seen (except by means of a mirror). It is usually called 'my' body; but here, in order to avoid mistakes, I shall take the liberty of calling the body 'M'.<sup>40</sup>

As he promises, he then continues to speak of his body in this abstracted and lifeless way, as being body 'M', as if this is a perfectly normal thing for anyone to do. What exactly the mistakes are, which he is supposed to avoid by not calling his body (*i.e.* 'it', 'a certain', or 'the' body) 'my body,' are not entirely clear to me. Similar oddities in the work of G. E. Moore, the paradigm of the common sense philosopher, have been pointed out by Colwyn Williamson.<sup>41</sup> Famously, Moore thought he could know (in his 'opinion') of the existence of an 'external' world because he knew of the existence of certain 'external' objects, his hands.<sup>42</sup> Of course, Moore thought he knew of much more than simply the existence of his hands; he also knew that there existed a living human body, which was *his* body, that 'this body' was born at a certain time and existed continuously ever since, that it was smaller when it was born and became gradually larger, that it was always in contact with, or never far from, the surface of the earth, and that it existed at various distances from, and in contact with, other objects making up the world.<sup>43</sup> What is so troubling about this odd, third-person way Moore has of speaking of himself in terms of his body, and the peculiar way he refers to his body almost as if it is a separate existent with a biography of its own, is that he insists that he is using language in an entirely familiar and unproblematic way.

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39. E. W. Straus [1966]; *op. cit.*, p.191.

40. M. Schlick [1936]; *op. cit.*, p.361.

41. C. Williamson [1990]; "Attitudes Towards the Body: Philosophy and Common Sense", *The Philosophical Quarterly* 40, pp.466-488.

42. See G. E. Moore [1959b]; "Proof of an External World", reprinted in *Philosophical Papers* (Allen & Unwin), pp.127-150.

43. See G. E. Moore [1959a]; "A Defence of Common Sense", reprinted in *Philosophical Papers* (Allen & Unwin), pp.32-59.

Of course, I wish to argue that this way of speaking, and the view of the body it presupposes, is something which is far from being commonsensical or unproblematic. First of all, in presenting these 'obvious truisms' Moore makes widespread use of generally unfamiliar, philosophical terms of art and phrases such as 'external world', 'external object' and 'external to the mind'; not exactly terms which trip off the tongue of the philosophically uninitiated. Moore appears to be unaware that such terms assume a specifically philosophical context and, moreover, a specific metaphysical view. He defines an 'external object' as something which is 'met with in space', as opposed to something merely 'presented in space'; a definition which seems initially attractive until one realises that this also appears to apply to one's hands and presumably to one's whole body. But *my* body is manifestly not something that I can meet with in space; rather it is that through which I engage with the world and meet with other objects. Although by no means actually a dualist, the attitude Moore adopts towards his body, and which he presents as merely conforming to common sense, therefore seems to presuppose a distinctly Cartesian conception of the body; a body construed as an externalised Other. As Williamson puts it; "Were we to take Moore's words at their face value, we would be obliged to conclude that he has a most peculiar attitude, that he [has] the sense of inhabiting a body, and that he is under the false impression that it is mere common sense to regard things so."<sup>44</sup>

Despite its general acceptance, this Cartesian conception of the body as something entirely objectified and 'external' itself continues to encourage an immaterialist and/or homuncular view of the self because, if we are asked to think of ourselves as nothing more than our bodies, so conceived, we are simply unable to think of ourselves in the way required. As I suggested before, one of the paradoxes of the Cartesian turn in philosophy is that it has also unleashed a trenchant materialism which seems to require the elimination of the category of the mental and the reduction of human nature to Foucault's metaphor of 'Man-the-Machine'. Because of the strident objectivist nature of materialist explanations these explanations always seem to leave out what we often consider to be the most important part of our nature: our intentional lives. Either this, or they naturalise intentionality by enacting some form of reduction. If, on the one hand, the failure of Cartesian immaterialism is the failure to take account of the implication in our subjectivity of our corporeal nature, on the other hand, the universal failure of materialism is a failure to take account of the implication in our corporeal nature of intentionality. Descartes has left us with a view of the material body as something lifeless and inert; a view inherited without question by contemporary materialism. Thus Keith Campbell writes;

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44. C. Williamson [1990]; *op. cit.*, p.470.



Provided you know who *you* are, it is easy to say what your body is: it is what the undertakers bury when they bury you. It is your head, trunk, and limbs. It is the collection of cells consisting of your skin and all the cells inside it. It is the assemblage of flesh, bones, and organs which the anatomist anatomizes. It is the mass of matter whose weight is your weight.<sup>45</sup>

If this is so obviously and simply the case, are you content to see yourself as your body? Taking my body to be the lifeless and inert mechanism of contemporary materialism, as expressed here, I simply cannot forge an identity between myself and my body. As Merleau-Ponty says; "How significance and intentionality could come to dwell in molecular edifices or masses of cells is a thing that can never be made comprehensible, and here Cartesianism is right."<sup>46</sup> But of course it is right, in these terms, for it was Cartesianism which set up the dichotomy in the first place. Divesting the body of meaning and wealth of being makes it easier, perhaps even necessary, for me to argue that I am not identical with my body and, as we will see in the next chapter, this is precisely the strategy adopted by Descartes. The current impasse in philosophy of mind is thus due to the repetition by both sides of the debate of the same problems and their inadequate solutions, based upon a shared assumption about the nature of the human body.

However, perhaps it would be a little unfair to lay all our problems at Descartes' door. In the occidental philosophical tradition, for example, the view of the body as something lifeless and inert owes much of its origins to Greek thought. It seems that the morbidity of the body has always had a motivating presence in dualist thought. As Ortega y Gasset notes, the Ancient Greeks were much taken with the less than jocular pun *sôma-sêma* (body-tomb), the constant repetition of which (almost to the point of a mantra) emphasised a deep conviction that we are something imprisoned within the mortal sphere, with the body, considered in itself, a thing inert and dead.<sup>47</sup> The pun thus neatly combines two views of the body that have been central to psycho-physical dualism; as an objectified, lifeless thing which forms a house or prison containing that which I consider to be my essential self. To some extent this view of the body seems to have its ancestry in the pre-Socratic folk beliefs of the Greeks. Nonetheless, a similar view was subsequently elevated almost to the position of a dogmatic truth in the work of Plato.<sup>48</sup> This view is perhaps most

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45. K. Campbell [1970]; *Body and Mind* (University of Notre Dame Press), p.2.

46. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.351.

47. J. Ortega y Gasset [1957]; *El Hombre y La Gente*, reprinted in *Obras Completas* (Revista de Occidente), Volume VII, pp.71-269.

48. It is true that Plato's later treatment of these issues offers a more sophisticated view of the self; here the conflict being between qualities of the soul rather than simply between the soul and the physical body. However, he does not quite rid himself of his somatophobia as the conflict is now between higher qualities such as reason and the more base qualities associated with the body. See the analogy of the charioteer; *Phaedrus* 246a-b & 253c-e.

fully expressed by Plato in the *Phaedo*. At one point in this dialogue, for example, Plato has Socrates characterise his own thought as a 'philosophy of death'; a characterisation later picked up on by Nietzsche. This philosophy was essentially life-denying and death-affirming in that this world, the living world, was seen to be 'disorderly', a source of 'contamination' and 'error'. The living world is an inferior and corrupt world of change and decay, and life itself a corrupting disease for which death is the only cure.<sup>49</sup> To study philosophy is therefore to prepare oneself for death, so that the true philosopher embraces death and, indeed, should strive by all means short of suicide to attain the freedom and knowledge it brings. So long as we are tied to this world by our bodies, he suggests, we will never attain pure knowledge of absolute truth, or absolute goodness, or absolute beauty *etc.*, for these things are not to be found in this world but only in the next. Thus he argues;

So long as we keep to the body and our soul is contaminated with this imperfection, there is no chance of our ever attaining satisfactorily to our object, which we assert to be truth. [...] We are in fact convinced that if we are ever to have pure knowledge of anything, we must get rid of the body and contemplate things by themselves with the soul by itself. It seems, to judge from the argument, that the wisdom which we desire and upon which we profess to have set our hearts will be attainable only when we are dead, and not in our lifetime. If no pure knowledge is possible in the company of the body, then either it is totally impossible to acquire knowledge, or it is only possible after death, because it is only then that the soul will be separate and independent of the body.<sup>50</sup>

Thus for Plato, our bodies, by tying us to this world, are a cause of epistemic limitation and error - ensuring that we never proceed beyond worldly *doxa* to grasp super-worldly *episteme*. Whenever we are engaged in abstract enquiry, the body is forever distracting us and breaking in upon our meditations with innumerable distractions; "the body fills us with loves and desires and fears and all sorts of fancies and a great deal of nonsense, with the result that we literally never get an opportunity to think at all about anything."<sup>51</sup> To be a lover of the body is not to be a lover of wisdom but of health and reputation. As philosophers, if we wish to attain knowledge whilst alive, the most we can do is to distance ourselves as much as possible from our bodies, their follies and exigencies, until such time that "God himself gives us deliverance."<sup>52</sup> Plato's philosophy was a philosophy of death, then, because its epistemic aspirations were partly dependent upon an otherworldly eschatology of disembodied survival. Death provided a Pythagorean purification (catharsis) from involvement with the body and its demands, and so opened up the possibility of

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49. Socrates' last words were an instruction to one of his followers to give a votive offering to the god of health. "Crito, we ought to offer a cock to Asclepius. See to it, and don't forget." Plato; *Phaedo* 118a. Throughout translations are taken from Plato [1961]; *Plato: The Collected Dialogues* (eds. E. Hamilton & H. Cairns) (Princeton University Press).

50. Plato; *Phaedo* 66b-67a.

51. Plato; *Phaedo* 66c.

52. Plato; *Phaedo* 67a.

the human subject acquiring pure knowledge for the first time.

However, it is clear that Plato's philosophy was also a philosophy of death in quite another way as well. In his early work this view of the body as an obstacle to the attainment of truth is accompanied by a view of the body as the source of all that is evil. Its desires and exigencies not only distract us from the path of enlightenment, but also constantly lands us in all sorts of trouble. It is the body that is the cause of wars, insurrections and battles, it is the locus of illness, disease and corruption, and only in another life can God's justice be shown. Death and disintegration are not necessarily something visited on the body from outside but part of the very nature of the body.<sup>53</sup> Plato's psycho-physical dualism was thus premised upon a view of the human body as something Other; something essentially inert and dead, animated for a brief period by a separable, self-moving life force, the *psyche*, which is housed only temporarily within it. Without its relationship to this separable life force the body remains something insensate; hence he argues in the *Cratylus*, "What is that which holds and carries and gives life and motion to the entire nature of the body? What else but the soul?"<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the homuncular aspect of the pun *sôma-sêma* was not lost on Plato. Thus he subsequently notes with approval that the Orphic poets considered embodiment as a punishment for sin, and how the word *sôma* [σῶμα] not only implies incarceration, where the soul is kept safe or secure [σώζεται], but also implies punishment without, he says, even a letter of the word needing to be changed.<sup>55</sup> To some extent this may be a fanciful and *post hoc* etymology, but the actual etymology of the word *sôma* does seem to suggest a connection with the word *sêma* [σῆμα], as in the pun. In later Greek *sôma* was a general term for the body, and was often used to denote the bodies of both human beings and beasts. However, in Homer it was used exclusively to designate a corpse or carcass rather than the living or animated frame; the word reserved for this being the much rarer *demas* [δέμας].<sup>56</sup>

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53. The neo-Platonists were often more gung-ho death-affirmers than Plato himself. For a particularly ghoulish affirmation of the philosophy of death see Sir Thomas More's sermon "The Four Last Things" - More seems to have viewed life itself as a continual illness, with sickness and death the natural state of the body; a condition we only avoid by continually caring for the body and supplying it with 'medicines' (i.e. food and drink). More [1931]; *The English Works of Thomas More* [ed. W. E. Campbell] (Eyre & Spottiswoode), Volume 1, pp.467-476. However, Adorno and Horkheimer seem dispondent and correctly claim that no amount of care can alter the underlying reality of the body this type of view presupposes. Thus they say, "The body cannot be remade into a noble object: it remains the corpse however rigorously it is trained and kept fit." T. Adorno & M. Horkheimer [1979]; *op. cit.*, p.233.

54. Plato; *Cratylus* 400a.

55. Plato; *Cratylus* 400b-c.

56. Examples of Homer's usage of σῶμα include the following; ὥς τε λέων ἐχάρη μεγάλῳ ἐπὶ σώματι κύρσας - "Like a lion lighting upon a handsome carcass" (*Iliad*, Book 3, line 23), and σῶμα κατελείπομεν ἄθαπτον - "We had left the body behind unburied" (*Odyssey*, Book 11, line 53). H. G. Liddell & R. Scott [1940]; *A Greek-English Lexicon* (New Edition - revised H. S. Jones) (Oxford University Press).



Greek thought was well aware of this change in meaning and the later psycho-physical dualists made much of it. By pointing to this etymology they wished to invert the significance of the human body; no longer part of our subjective being as something dynamic and alive but something simply objectified and dead. Of course, as I have already said, the more a dualist can succeed in achieving this, the easier it becomes to maintain that there is no identity between the human subject and the human body. The more I am persuaded that my body can be divested of meaning, and has a dead or mere thing-like existence, the more willing I am to be convinced that I am not identical with my body. The body thus becomes relegated to a lower realm of being, a realm defined by exclusion and non-meaning. Thus by means of a perverse reversal it is as if the corpse became the paradigm in our thinking for the human body in general; the corpse then becoming the conceptual root of corporeal. In the face of this one can only respond by declaring that experience attests that we are much more; and so a transcendental esotericism is born.

Aristotle's more integrative model of body and soul of course rejected the homuncular, container account and this concomitant reversal. Although the Aristotelian model depended upon a duality, it was one which was construed dialectically and without exclusion. Aristotle's integrative model actually points to a truth which Plato's divisive model distorts; viz. that, if I may put it in this way without a commitment to a dualist ontology, the soul is necessary for the very understanding of the human body. Whereas Plato's dualism understood the living soul to be trapped inside the prison of an inert body, Aristotle understood the human body to be, in a sense, in the soul and therefore to be a living body. Unfortunately the Aristotelian integrative model of the body and soul dropped out of our tradition during the renaissance when there was a development of interest in the naturalism of the body and a corresponding increase in its investigation in non-teleological terms. Both artists and scientists began to see Man as occupying a natural place in the scheme of things and so the body increasingly became a site of empirical exploration, as the nascent science of forensic autopsy and dissection became much more systematic and academic. However, the *coup-de-grâce* for Aristotelianism arrived in the first half of the seventeenth century with the Baroque's combined obsession with death and the soul, re-establishing the above reversal of somatic significance.

The combined effects of incessant plague, hunger, war, and general instability seems to have produced a culture whose state of mind was marked by pessimism and *chagrin*. The Baroque was truly a *fin de siècle* culture; a culture which saw the world as 'upside down' and as a 'confused labyrinth' in which the human subject is an agonistic being, struggling against itself in an internal and

eternal combat.<sup>57</sup> This was a cultural epoch which was marked by a fascination with corporeality, death, decay, decadence, and the general contingency of phenomena; Baroque art is famous, or perhaps notorious (depending on taste), for its abundant representations of flesh and its iconic images of death. Equally significantly, despite its *prima facie* conservatism, it was also the first period in which people judged themselves and their cultural epoch to be 'modern'.<sup>58</sup> This is where we return to Descartes for it was into the context of this general world-view that his philosophy was born and, in terms of his understanding of the human subject, Descartes was one of the foremost, if not the foremost, Baroque philosophers. In many respects Descartes' philosophy of mind was premised upon the two Platonic views of the body rehearsed above, being both an obstruction to epistemic clarity and something essentially insensate and inanimate; this leading, as it did in Plato, to the complementary development of a transcendental view of the self. In rejecting the speculative, and largely Aristotelian, teachings of the Schools, Descartes took the general Baroque view of the human subject as an agonistic being and theorised it in terms of the relationship of the subject and its body.

Consequently we are once again presented with a divisive conception of this relationship, where the essential subject (as a separable living entity) is, at best, only contingently related to a body which is seen, not only as insensate and inanimate, but almost as something inhuman. I have noted how for Plato, the mind was a living existence which could endure without the body and how the body itself was little more than an animated cadaver. This picture emerges again in Descartes, albeit in a slightly repressed form. Descartes' philosophy dispenses with notions such as a 'vegetative' or 'sensitive soul', or a 'principle of movement', as a *causa vitae* and he occasionally indicates that the human body could be thought of in analogous terms to watches or other automata; *i.e.* machines that are able to move themselves by the mere arrangement of their organs, as watches move themselves simply by the arrangement of their counter-weights and wheels.<sup>59</sup> However, in the same breath he argues that the body is animated in virtue of a mysterious fire which burns continuously in the heart and which agitates the blood and the spirits. Death is not, he argues, due to the

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57. J. A. Maravall [1986]; *op. cit.*, pp.149-172. Maravall quotes Quevedo and Suárez de Figueroa as saying, respectively, that "The life of man is war with himself" and "Our life goes on being nothing more than a continuous and perpetual war."

58. J. A. Maravall [1986]; *op. cit.*, p.145.

59. This analogy appears in the *Passions of the Soul*, Articles 5 & 6 (Descartes; AT XI pp.330-331, CSMK II pp.329-320) and at the end of the *Treatise of Man* (Descartes; AT XI p.202, CSMK II p.108). His soulless physiology is defended at the beginning of the *Description of the Body* (Descartes; AT XI pp.223-227, CSMK I pp.314-316). Descartes thought that there were two principles causing movement; one was purely mechanical and corporeal and the other was the soul defined as a thinking substance. In his letter to More of the 5th February 1649 he suggests that it is the mistaken view that there is only one principle, an admixture of the other two, that leads to the false belief that animals have souls (Descartes; AT V p.276, CSMK III p.365).

departure of the soul; but the departure of the soul is due to this heat ceasing and the body's organs subsequently disintegrating. Nevertheless, despite the fact that he sometimes treats this merely as a useful or heuristic fiction (its 'nature', so construed, being "simply a label which depends on my thought"),<sup>60</sup> the analogy speaks volumes. The living human body is generally conceived by Descartes to be of essentially the same order as the rest of the inhuman world; that mechanistic, passive, and insensate realm of *res extensa*. The growth of Descartes' new science of the mind therefore progressed hand in hand with the new materialistic and mechanistic science, and specifically the new science of human anatomy and dissection, which developed along side it; each of these informing and legitimating the other.

As is well known, Descartes himself held a lifelong interest in human physiology and was also something of an accomplished anatomist. Indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, a grasp of his understanding of human physiology often provides a key to his philosophy. Descartes himself thought the connection between the two to be so closely joined (and intermingled?) that in correspondence to Mersenne he declares that if his anatomical studies are proved false then "the rest of my philosophy is entirely worthless."<sup>61</sup> Perhaps this is false modesty; but, nonetheless, it clearly shows the significance in which anatomical investigation was held in Descartes' own mind and suggests that he saw his philosophy of mind and body to be closely associated with it. There may be a general lesson in this. Richard Zaner suggests that "the very possibility of considering the body 'in and by itself' is closely connected with the practice and findings of cadaverial anatomy" and he goes on to note how the texts of earlier anatomists, especially Vesalius, reveal what he describes as a haunting consequence: "the anatomist finds [...] in dissecting the human body merely more body, never the soul (and, despite all efforts, not even the bodily place of the soul)."<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless, far from undermining an immaterialist view of the self, this haunting consequence may yet provide sustenance for it; if one is so inclined. For example, in her reading of his painting *Der Anatom*, Elisabeth Bronfen relates how Gabriel von Max was a student of both the naturalism of Darwin and the parapsychology of Carl du Prel and how these interests converged because "he was intrigued both with the anatomical constitution of the human body and its connection [...] with that part of the human organism which could not be discovered after dissection: the immaterial kernel, the psyche."<sup>63</sup> Consequently, the corpse served as the nodal point for von Max's studies in natural history and the parapsychic aspects of human existence. Given

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60. Descartes; AT VII p.85, CSMK II p.59.

61. Descartes; AT II p.501, CSMK III p.134. Also cited in R. M. Zaner [1981b]; *op. cit.*, p.110.

62. R. M. Zaner [1981b]; *op. cit.*, p.113.

63. E. Bronfen [1992]; *Over Her Dead Body* (Manchester University Press), pp.3-4.

the centrality of death and dead bodies to Platonic-Cartesian immaterialism, perhaps its attitude to the human body can be best summed up in Ignatius Loyola's dictum '*perinde ac cadaver*' ('exactly as a corpse').<sup>64</sup>

The corpse is therefore a striking emblem of our bodies' implication in the inert mechanistic passivity of *res extensa* and perhaps even a metaphor for the thanatoid nature of this realm as a whole. As Adorno and Horkheimer write; "The metamorphosis into death was simply a part of that perennial process which turned nature into substance and matter."<sup>65</sup> It has also been noted how this new philosophy construes the world as a '*terra nullius*'; that is, as something defined as lack, something empty and without value or direction of its own.<sup>66</sup> This world consists of mere mechanical matter, devoid of any intrinsically intentional characteristics. Goals, value or agency are imposed, or projected onto the world, from without by an unsituated human consciousness. In essence this view presaged the 'death' or 'end' of nature we find as a common feature of Western thought.<sup>67</sup> Maravall notes how the ascetic view of many Baroque writers, based on the understanding of the human subject as an agonistic being, "became displaced toward an affirmation of domination over the world."<sup>68</sup> We see this attitude surfacing in Descartes' work when he claims in the *Discourse on Method* that we can develop a 'practical philosophy', in contrast to the 'speculative philosophy' taught in the Schools. He says that this new philosophy can "facilitate our enjoyment of the fruits of the earth" and can help promote the maintenance of health. But this benign characterisation of this new philosophy is counterbalanced by Descartes' statement of its ulterior motive.

Through this Philosophy we could know the power and action of fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens and all the other bodies in our environment, as distinctly as we know the various crafts of our artisans; and we could use this knowledge - as the artisans use theirs - for all the purposes for which it is appropriate, and thus make ourselves, as it were, the lords and masters of nature.<sup>69</sup>

Insensate nature can therefore be bent to our will and treated as a raw material for human use with virtually no prohibition. The ecological consequences of the Cartesian turn in philosophy are clearly obvious. As Val Plumwood puts it, "There is a close connection between giving such an account of nature as empty and viewing it in instrumentalist terms as available without constraint for annexation and normalisation to fit human needs, as a mere thing

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64. On entering the order Jesuit novices were taught to live by this maxim.

65. T. Adorno & M. Horkheimer [1979]; *op. cit.*, p.233.

66. V. Plumwood [1993]; *op. cit.*, pp.110-111.

67. See, for example, C. Merchant [1980]; *The Death of Nature* (Harper & Row), B. McKibben [1989]; *The End of Nature* (Random House), J. Baird Callicott [1992]; "La Nature est morte, vive la nature!", *Hastings Centre Report* 22, pp.16-23, and V. Plumwood [1993]; *op. cit.*, especially Chapters 3 & 4.

68. J. A. Maravall [1986]; *op. cit.*, p.159.

69. Descartes; AT VI p. 62, CSMK I pp.142-143.

for human use.”<sup>70</sup> Cartesian dualism therefore has, in her terms, an inherent ‘logic of colonisation’. However, as Foucault would no doubt have wanted to insist, because this wider ontology dovetails with a particular view of the human body as itself something inert, Descartes’ philosophy has also made space for the analogous annexation and mastery of the human body and all the institutions and practices this project of mastery entails; perhaps, most typically, in the institutions and practices of modern medical science.

Dualism therefore plays upon a death anxiety in a particularly striking way; positing the body as a threat and an object of fear.<sup>71</sup> Of course, I cannot experience my own death; this is an horizon to my life and not an event in my life. Nevertheless, I recognise that it is an inevitable temporal outcome and that I shall therefore ultimately become simply an object amongst objects in the world, *partes extra partes*. The corpse therefore has something of the quality of the ‘uncanny’, to use Freud’s term; that is, something which provokes fear by recognition of its strange familiarity.<sup>72</sup> As is implicit in Bronfen’s treatment of the issues, cadaverial remains are ‘borderline’: they stand at the boundary of the human and the inhuman. Hence although the corpse is the human body dehumanised, before complete decomposition it retains enough humanity to externalise our anxieties, especially concerning alterity, and raise questions concerning our pre-mortem condition. In other words, it is something almost inhuman rather than something completely alien and non-human and so there is enough recognisable humanity left in the corpse to make the above reversal of somatic significance almost plausible. However, the familiarity the corpse engenders is a recognition of my own corporeality; but this does not mean that I can, even less that I must, view my embodiment in Cartesian terms.

It is now time to summarise and draw together the arguments in this section. Cartesian metaphysics are deeply rooted in a Baroque revival of a philosophy of death. Both his model of the material world and particularly his model of the living human body owe something of their origins to this heritage. In death it appears we have a vindication of the Cartesian view of the body; for at

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70. V. Plumwood [1993]; *op. cit.*, p.110. Cf. R. Kennington [1978]; “Descartes and Mastery of Nature”, S. F. Spicker [ed.] *Organism, Medicine, and Metaphysics* (D. Reidel Publishing Co.), pp. 201-223. Again, also see T. Adorno & M. Horkheimer [1979]; *op. cit.*, p.233. “Man,” they say, “reduced nature to an object for domination.”

71. One striking way in which the notion of the ‘body as threat’ surfaces in contemporary culture concerns the morbid anxiety prevalent in popular science articles and documentaries about a ‘death gene’. The body, we are repeatedly told, is genetically programmed to die and so the race is on to discover (and neutralise?) the gene responsible for this programming. Again death is not necessarily seen as something visited on the body but as integral to the body itself.

72. S. Freud [1955]; “The ‘Uncanny’”, reprinted in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XVII [ed. J. Strachey] (The Hogarth Press). I shall refer to the ‘uncanniness’ of the body again in subsequent chapters, albeit with regard to less extreme examples of its morbidity.

the point of death the body finally becomes simply one object amongst others in the world. The importance of this for the hold the Cartesian view currently has in our thinking about body and self cannot be overstated. Following the Cartesian turn in philosophy, it seems again that, by means of a perverse reversal, the corpse has become the paradigm in our thinking for the human body. The practice of anatomical science has often been seen to legitimate this view whilst at the same time it has been seen to be legitimated by it. In turn contemporary conceptions of the material world and the human body have uncritically inherited this view from Descartes. Consequently, it is no real wonder that people have extreme difficulties in reconciling their view of themselves with the accounts of the human subject presented by contemporary materialist or mechanistic philosophies; one simply cannot identify oneself with one's body if one's living body is modelled on the corpse.<sup>73</sup> Perhaps it is this, I suggest, which accounts for the insistent way these issues keep popping up in our journals and symposiums. Confronted with what is in essence a philosophy of death the lure of some form of dualism or Cartesian immaterialism can be explained by the fact that, in comparison, it seems a most attractive alternative. Hence, Cartesianism is, in a sense, self-perpetuating: in virtue of the continued interplay between the two halves of Descartes' original dichotomy. In order to circumvent the current impasse in the philosophy of mind, and to formulate a non-dualistic alternative to contemporary materialism, we therefore have to refocus our interest on the body. This does not simply mean re-establishing a balance between the philosophical attention given to the mind on the one hand and to the body on the other but requires us to rethink our inherited conceptions and construct anew a more dialectical understanding of their relationship.<sup>74</sup>

Finally, I should make clear that I do not want to over-psychologise this question any more than I want to over-emphasise its socio-political or historical aspects. I have tried here to uncover the 'underground history' of an idea and spell out the 'unthought-thoughts' of our philosophical tradition. Nonetheless, to effectively combat this history, we need to do more. The giving of such accounts may be of interest, and making manifest certain unspoken assumptions may even be therapeutic, but it does not tackle the issue in its entirety. This is because we have been addressing a particular *conception* of the human body which goes beyond these immediate concerns and which is something often supported with reasoned argument. The fact that certain assumptions or practices have been inherited does not preclude people from having reasons, or

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73. Since completing this section I have discovered that Drew Leder has anticipated many of the points I have made - though not quite in the way I have or for the same purposes. Cf. D. Leder [1992a]; "A Tale of Two Bodies: The Cartesian Corpse and the Lived Body", D. Leder [ed.] *The Body in Medical Thought and Practice* (Kluwer Academic Publishing), pp.17-35.

74. Cf. R. Harré [1991]; *Physical Being* (Basil Blackwell), p.15.

reasoned preferences, for the positions they adopt. So, even if my account of what originates or currently motivates a Cartesian conception of the self is correct, once the Cartesian Genius is out of its bottle it takes more than such accounts to successfully exorcise it or put it back in. We must therefore begin to address how this view has been rationalised and our opposition must start from there.

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## 2. The Problem of Embodiment

So far I have made extensive reference to Descartes' philosophical position and the assumptions which underlie it without providing a detailed account of exactly what that position is. Therefore, before we proceed further, we now need to get clear exactly what Descartes' arguments were and how they led to a problem of embodiment. Descartes' ultimately unsuccessful struggle to forge a union between the human body and the human soul (or mind) remains perhaps the most famous of attempts to marry a translucent and immaterial self to mechanistic material being. His position is still the clearest example of how it is possible to marginalise the body and relegate it so it is seen as Other. However, in many ways, his work displays a recurrent concern to avoid the very conclusions towards which his theoretical position relentlessly pushes him. In many ways it is fair to say that contemporary Cartesianism is much more Cartesian than Descartes himself. Despite the fact that Descartes' philosophy is often held up a paradigm of the psycho-physical dualist position, close scrutiny of his work clearly reveals that he was not a straightforward dualist. Psycho-physical separation was never an outcome he was entirely happy with; yet it was an outcome he found impossible to avoid. What process of reasoning brought him to this impasse? How did he arrive at the point where the self has been disembodied from its world; the point at which, having undone the bonds of dependency between the human subject and the world, he is at a complete loss at how to retie them?

In this chapter I wish to look at Descartes' own arguments more closely and examine the Cartesian flight from the body and the ensuing impasse. By doing so I hope we can throw some more light on the nature of our embodied experience. Descartes work displays an interesting tension which he never adequately resolved. His theoretical position regarding the human subject, guided by reason, was thoroughly immaterialist and mentalistic, as well as being clearly homuncular. Any meaning manifested in the body does not, and could not, arise from the body itself (considered simply as part of the insensate world) but only from some principle of meaning residing within the body. On the other



hand, he recognised that experience guides us to a completely different conclusion; that there is an intimate and close union between mind and body, so close, perhaps, that there is an 'intermingling' of the two. Descartes could have dismissed or problematised the testimony of experience and this would have been consistent with his method and the general thrust of his philosophy; but he chose not to. Alternatively, he could have decided that this lack of experiential corroboration undermined his theoretical project and its contemplative starting point; but he could not bring himself to allow this. Thus, though Descartes acknowledges the importance of the experiences of the body as it is lived, this insight remained *sui generis* and so we are left with the issue ultimately unresolved.

It is extremely difficult to see how the problem could be resolved given the conceptual materials Descartes has at his disposal. The human body, as Descartes understands it, is not something that can be easily united with consciousness. In the last section of this chapter I wish to do two things. Firstly I shall begin to explore the possibilities of an alternative approach and to this end I shall introduce Shoemaker's concept of 'paradigmatic embodiment'. The value of Shoemaker's conception is that, while it recognises the body as an item in the objective order, it emphasises our embodiment through our capacity to be sensorily and volitionally involved in the world. In this respect it opens a space for our experience of the body as it is lived and therefore the notion of the body required of paradigmatic embodiment shares much in common with the phenomenological notion of the lived body - a notion which surfaces in the work of Edmund Husserl. This therefore brings us, secondly, to an exploration of Husserl's own treatment of embodiment to which I devote the remainder of the chapter. However, despite his penetrating observations of the body as it is lived and experienced, Husserl's philosophy, as I have said before, remained a philosophy largely in the Cartesian mold. At the end of the day Husserl was in no better position than Descartes to make use of these insights.

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## 2.1 Descartes' Theory of Body and Mind 1: The Separation of Self and Body

Descartes begins by observing differences between the mind and the body as a result of applying his revolutionary and systematic method of philosophical doubt. With this he proceeds to examine all the beliefs and opinions he had subsequently assented to as a matter of course. Among these may be things apparently taught by nature but which in actual fact merely result from bad or uncritical judgement. So in the *First Meditation* he stresses that the guiding rubric of his method is "to withhold judgement on any occasion when the truth of the matter is not clear" so that "whenever I have to make a judgement, I restrain my will so that it extends to what the intellect clearly and distinctly reveals, and no further, then it is quite impossible for me to go wrong".<sup>1</sup> What the intellect clearly and distinctly reveals are truths not subject to the withering attack of his philosophical doubt. Needless to say, beliefs about the physical world, subject as they are to the fickleness of the senses, come out of the examination quite badly. Applying his method he notices that it is quite impossible for the mind to consider itself nonexistent: during the time that it is engaged in the process of doubting, the mind cannot doubt that it itself exists. However, the existence of his body (like all other objects in the world) is subject to the vagaries of doubt. Therefore a distinction is opened up between the human mind on the one hand and all corporeal things (including the human body) on the other: "there is very little about corporeal things that is truly perceived, whereas much more is known about the human mind."<sup>2</sup> The human body has thus become part of the Other and relegated to a mere secondary, oppositional rôle to the mind.

So the body is not excepted from the objections of unreliable perceptions and doubt; indeed, the body becomes almost a paradigm of an object independent of one's consciousness and inner sense. In the *Discourse on Method* Descartes presented the argument in the following way, clearly revealing the epistemological basis of his project and the subsequent metaphysical distinction made therein between mind and body;

Next I examined attentively what I was. I saw that while I could pretend that I had no body and that there was no world and no place for me to be in, I could not for all that pretend that I did not exist. I saw on the contrary that from the mere fact that I thought of doubting the truth of other things it followed quite evidently and certainly that I existed; whereas, if I had merely ceased thinking, even if everything else I had

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1. Descartes; AT VII p.62, CSMK II p.43.

2. Descartes; AT VII p.53, CSMK II p.37.

ever imagined had been true, I should have had no reason to believe that I existed. From this I knew I was a substance whose whole essence or nature is simply to think, and which does not require any place, or depend on any material thing in order to exist. Accordingly this 'I' - that is, the soul by which I am what I am - is entirely distinct from the body, and indeed is easier to know than the body, and would not fail to be whatever it is, even if the body did not exist.<sup>3</sup>

As the argument stands in this passage it is obviously unconvincing and moves far too quickly in establishing the nature of his being; in fact the argument is simply invalid. He has not shown here that this epistemic difference amounts to a metaphysical distinction and thus he could not possibly know on the basis of this that he is a substance whose essence it is to think or that his existence does not depend on any material thing. In order to arrive at that dubious conclusion he has to make the notorious Cartesian leap from supposedly clearly conceiving of a distinction to asserting that the mind is in actual fact distinct from the body. Descartes' Argument from Doubt, as laid out here, relies on an application of what later became to be known as *Leibniz's Law* (if two things are identical then they have exactly the same properties in common).<sup>4</sup> Descartes' above argument could thus be restated as follows;

- 1). My body has the property of being such that I can doubt its existence.
- 2). I do not have this property.
- 3). If two things are identical then they have exactly the same properties.
- 4). My body and I do not have exactly the same properties.
- 5). *Ergo*; I am not identical with my body.

Of course, even if this argument is successful in its own terms, it does not establish that he is his mind, only that he is not his body. However, even as it stands the argument is invalid. *Leibniz's Law* admits of certain exceptions and here we have a case in point. The law only applies in 'extensional contexts' and not in 'intensional contexts' (e.g. where certain psychological verbs such as 'desire', 'fear' 'believe', 'imagine', 'doubt', etc. are used). The problem is that words in such contexts do not have their normal reference: to be an object of 'desire' or 'doubt' etc. is to be an object under a certain description; it is not to be predicated with a real property.<sup>5</sup> The properties referred to in 1). and 2). are

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3. Descartes; AT VI p.33, CSMK I p.127.

4. In fact, this law is a conjunction of two logically distinct propositions; A). *The Indiscernability of Identicals* (if  $\alpha$  &  $\beta$  are identical then they have exactly the same properties in common); and B). *The Identity of Indiscernibles* (if  $\alpha$  &  $\beta$  have exactly the same properties in common then they are identical). Although the structure of the first principle is  $(x) (y) (Fx \cdot x = y \supset Fy)$ , in practice, as we see with Descartes' argument, it is often its contrapositive  $(x) (y) (Fx \cdot \sim Fy \supset \sim x = y)$ . The first principle is a widely accepted truth about numerically identical things, the second is a contentious metaphysical doctrine which requires a quantification over properties  $(F) (x) (y) (Fx \equiv Fy \supset x = y)$ . We need not concern ourselves with the second for Descartes' argument that he is not identical with his body only needs and makes use of the first.

5. Consider the following example; if  $\Phi$  is believed by Holmes to be identical with the world's most brilliant criminal mind, and  $\Phi$  is believed by Holmes to be Professor Moriarty, then the world's most brilliant criminal mind is thus Professor Moriarty. QED? Clearly not! What determines the truth of this conclusion are facts about Moriarty, but that is not what I have provided. Instead

therefore bogus properties. It seems that Descartes was not entirely unaware of this sort of difficulty for in the *Meditations on First Philosophy* his overall argument is more circumspect. Early on in the *Meditations* he lays the groundwork on which the distinction is made but, as he insisted in reply to Mersenne, the fact that there is a 'real distinction' is actually demonstrated only when we get to the *Sixth Meditation*. His first task is to demonstrate that an 'I' certainly exists after which he can proceed to ask what this 'I' consists in.

Having produced arguments, in the *Second Meditation*, which purport to show that an 'I' does certainly exist, he then turns his thoughts to what this 'I' could be.<sup>6</sup> He must be careful not to unwittingly take something else to be the 'I' and so be mistaken in the very bedrock of his epistemological foundations. Of course he is a man, but what is this? He considers the options. Firstly, he rejects the Aristotelian and scholastic definition of man as a rational animal on the grounds that these terms only offer an explanation of the problematic and obscure by the more problematic and obscure. Naturally also amongst his first thoughts were alternative definitions in terms of his corporeal attributes or the properties of the soul (nutrition, locomotion, sense perception and thought). Needless to say he rules out a definition in terms of the body, because of considerations like those which arise in the above argument: "I am not that structure of limbs which is called the human body" as it is always possible that "everything relating to the nature of the body could be mere dreams and chimeras."<sup>7</sup> Even the most careful consideration, he claims, does not reveal anything in the existence disclosed by the *cogito* that implies that he must have a body. He also rules out the 'appetitive' properties of the soul (the attributes of sensibility), tainted as they are by too close an association with the body. Thus by a process of elimination he arrives at the one attribute that is truly inseparable from his essence - thought - the intellectual attribute of the soul. Only of this can he not be deprived by the systematic use of his method. This, of course, is a version of the Argument from Doubt that appeared in the *Discourse on Method*; and it fails to establish the conclusion that he is simply a thinking thing for precisely the same reasons; to do this would require a misapplication of *Leibniz's Law*. However, as I noted above, in terms of the overall structure of the

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what I have provided are facts about Holmes; the fact that *he believes*  $\Phi$  to be identical with the world's most brilliant criminal mind, and the fact that *he believes*  $\Phi$  to be Professor Moriarty. Moriarty and  $\Phi$  are simply considered under certain descriptions.

6. It is not clear that Descartes thinks that he has *conclusively* demonstrated his own existence at this point. It seems that he is not fully confident that the application of his radical new method alone can achieve this. It is certainly true (he thinks) that he cannot entertain any doubt about this conclusion or even consider its contrary, for this would involve a manifest contradiction. Yet in the *Third Meditation* he allows the possibility of a residual 'metaphysical doubt' even here, a doubt that can only be ultimately assuaged by the demonstration that there is a benevolent God who acts as the guarantor of truth.

7. Descartes; AT VII pp.27 & 28, CSMK II pp.18 & 19.

*Meditations* Descartes does not rely solely on this argument and seems well aware of its limitations.

In Descartes we have something of a reflection of Aristotle's distinction between the soul in general [ψυχή] and the rational mind, especially the pure contemplative intellect [νοῦς]. This controversial distinction must have been known to Descartes, as must the strain Aristotle's elucidation of this put on the 'official' Aristotelian view of the relationship between mind and body. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle says that the soul consists broadly of two parts; the rational and the irrational elements. The irrational soul itself is characterised by a division between its vegetative and appetitive attributes (elements which make up our animal natures and are closely tied to the body) and these elements can be distinguished in part by the fact that although the vegetative element "never shares in a rational principle" the appetitive element can, at least in as much as it "listens and obeys" the faculty of reason. He assures us that he is not concerned with the question whether these various elements are by nature separable or only distinct by definition. Nonetheless, this question and the connected questions whether or how far the rational mind is tied to *psuche* and so to the body do naturally suggest themselves. Unfortunately Aristotle, like Descartes, does not provide us with a clear and consistent account by which we could attempt a conclusive answer to them. So far we have nothing which would conflict with the official view: the reasoning mind, whether engaged in practical or theoretical reasoning, is not *really* distinct from other parts of the soul and therefore not something separable from the whole human being. The tension arises when he considers pure abstract thought which he seems to regard as a special case of reasoning requiring its own autonomous faculty, a faculty he sometimes regards as 'divine' and less bound to the physical human body.

Aristotle's mature position on the relation of soul to body (what I call the official view) is what is generally known as hylemorphism (*hyle* translating as matter and *morphe* as form). Body and soul, he says in *De Anima*, are related as matter and form as the soul is the first actuality of the body (412a). Very briefly; what does he mean by this? Aristotle considered substance [οὐσία] to consist of 1). matter (e.g. wood), 2). form (e.g. a table) and 3). a compound of these two (e.g. a wooden table). However he says that matter alone can only have mere potentiality [δύναμις], and only when it is accompanied by form [εἶδος] can it possess actuality [ἐντελέχεια]. The actuality may be one of two types; in the form of a state or capacity [ἐξις] or exercised as an activity [ἐνεργεια]. To use two common examples; timber is only potentially a table but when given shape and structure it achieves its first actuality. Yet it is only when it is put to use that it is fully actualising its potentiality as a table. Similarly; an undergraduate student may be regarded as potentially a philosopher but after adequate training, when

hopefully certain skills are developed and a degree of knowledge is acquired, the student becomes capable of being a practising philosopher. However, it is only when these skills are actually employed and the knowledge put to use that this potentiality is properly realized. In both examples there is a progression from potentiality to actuality as *hexis* and from this to its full realization in actuality as *energeia*. Though matter and form are not identical, one cannot ask how the shape is conjoined with the timber or the knowledge conjoined with the philosopher for the table just is shaped timber and the philosopher someone possessing certain knowledge and skills.<sup>8</sup>

Thus Aristotle's official view defines soul as substance in the sense of 2), form, its form being actuality as *hexis*. It therefore follows from this that the soul is inseparable from the body (413a): it can no more exist apart from the body than the shape can exist apart from the table and it would therefore appear to follow that the soul must perish along with the body. The opacity of Aristotelian psychology results from the fact that he does, on the other hand, also suggest that if there is a property of the soul [ἰδίον τῆς ψυχῆς] which is not also common to the body, but is peculiar [ἰδίον] to the soul, then this may after all be separable. He believes the best candidate for such a property is thinking [νοεῖν], though this will still depend on the body if it involves imagination [φαντασία]. Aristotle deemed the pure contemplative intellect to be different to the *psuche*, even to the extent that perhaps it is not co-extensive with the general reasoning faculty of the soul. This specific intellect [νοῦς ποιητικός] is active, or creative, in that it has a productive noetic function (*ie.* it produces its object of thought), is not capable of being affected [ἄπαθής], is separable [χωριστός] and unmixed [ἀμιγῆς] with the body or the reasoning mind which employs images - the receptive intellect [νοῦς παθητικός]. In *De Anima* III5 Aristotle claims that this pure contemplative intellect is 'higher' than the other parts of the soul and is consequently less bound to the body. Pure abstract thought (thought that does not rely on the use of images) requires no physical organ or physiological correlate. This faculty of pure thought, the pure intellect *noûs*, is therefore a living power that is not a power of any living body - it is not the actualization of any set of physical structures. Should we therefore accord it some ontological independence? This would seem a reasonable conclusion as it appears from this account to be an autonomous substance inherent within the soul but nevertheless to be incapable of being destroyed; as he says "the intellect would seem to be developed in us as a self-existing substance and to be imperishable" (408b).

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8. It has been suggested to me that, although it is a common example, a purist may question whether we can speak of actuality in the case of a table. This is because actuality tends to be used in connection with things whose form is some kind of activity and since tables do not exactly *do* anything but rather are used *by* us it is not clear we can legitimately talk of actuality in their case. I should also like point out that I am acutely aware of the deficiencies inherent in such a condensed treatment of Aristotle's views as I present here.

However, whether Aristotle would have wanted to go as far as this or not, in Descartes this distinction forms the basis of a view of human nature that is much more radical than any to be found in Aristotle. It is true that Aristotle did see rationality as the only uniquely human characteristic and the mark of what we are, yet Descartes does not want to merely claim that thought is the only attribute that is inseparable from his being but also that it is exhaustively constitutive of his essence.<sup>9</sup> His conception of a thinking thing does not, he insists, presuppose any bodily thing in order to exist and is therefore a conception of a *complete* thing. Although the Aristotelian distinction was a source of controversy amongst mediæval scholastics over whether it endorses a doctrine of survival and immortality, it was clearly never intended to bear the weight of a conclusion such as Descartes'. Perhaps in consequence it is never consistently held to by Descartes and so it remained unclear throughout his work exactly what this thing consists of. Does it, for example, consist solely in the contemplative *noûs* or has it non-contemplative attributes as well? Descartes prevaricates: on the one hand he claims he is a purely thinking thing and repeatedly insists "my essence consists *only* in my being a thinking thing."<sup>10</sup> On the other he constantly uses the terms soul and mind ambiguously and interchangeably and repeatedly requires the essential self to be more than just a thinking thing. In whatever way Aristotle wanted to divide up *psuche* it was clearly always such that non-contemplative attributes such as perception, sensation and feeling were associated with the body and not the pure *noûs*. He would have been bewildered by Descartes' account because Descartes' essential, separable, incorporeal thinking thing was also supposed to be a perceiving, feeling thing. Descartes constantly finds himself in real trouble when trying to fit these attributes together into his picture. Often he wants to have his cake and eat it by reducing them to acts of cognition - thus simultaneously endorsing the Aristotelian distinction whilst running its two halves together. As we shall see, this strategy unravels when he tries to take account of, and do justice to, our lived experience as subjects of these states.

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9. It is also true that in the *Nicomachean Ethics* X7 Aristotle says "we must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things, and, being mortal, of mortal things, but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us; for even if it be small in bulk, much more does it in power and worth surpass everything. And this would seem actually to *be* each man, since it is the authoritative and better part of him." Nevertheless, Descartes' epistemic and ontic project is not Aristotle's and while the latter does say that "reason more than anything else *is* man" we should be wary of straightforward comparisons on this point. His call for us to immortalize [ἁθανατίξειν] ourselves is best seen as a moral solicitation and the nature of divine properties in us a relative question. He does not seem to maintain here that reason *alone* is what we are, or that it is actually separable, or that it is absolutely divine, simply that it is the most divine *part* of the human being; this is a long way from Descartes or from ascribing a transcendent property to νοῦς.

10. Descartes; AT VII p.78, CSMK II p.54.

Descartes' problem is that, despite repeated attempts to the contrary, he is unable to reconcile his ordinary lived experience with his philosophical view of the relation of mind/soul and body. Reason and experience seem to pull him in two opposite directions and, despite his often asserted insistence on the primacy of reason, he is loth to subordinate one to the other. Although he tries to accustom himself to leading the mind away from the bodily senses all the evidence of his own lived experience forces him to admit of a close and intimate union between the two. Nevertheless his theoretical position relentlessly pushes him towards a complete divorce. Thus in his meditative reasoning he is led to consider the human body solely as a machine of flesh and blood; part of the external, mechanical world; opposed to the conscious being that is a soul or mind and forming an object of its deliberations just like all other external, mechanical objects. As Descartes' philosophy only recognised two types of existence, a pure for-itself *res cogitans* and a pure in-itself *res extensa*, and as these two form autonomous *summa genera* of realities, attempting a close union of mind and mechanistic object seems a futile enterprise. The human body can not be *res cogitans* as this pertains solely to mind or conscious substance so it must therefore be *res extensa* and belong entirely to the world of material realities.

As I have said, the groundwork for this divorce has been laid in the *Second Meditation*. Here he believes he has shown that he certainly exists and is a thing that thinks. However, despite observing that he can doubt the existence of his body and that, as he says, he can clearly and distinctly conceive of himself existing without a body, he has not yet shown that being a thinking thing excludes corporeality, or that corporeality is not necessary for thinking, or that he is only a thing that thinks, or that what he clearly conceives of is in fact true. As I noted before, his arguments there are simply not strong enough to demonstrate any of these conclusions. Thus far we have a purely formal distinction based upon an ontological uncertainty about the body and an epistemological certainty about his existence as a being who thinks.

In the *Sixth Meditation*, making use of a more refined conception of body as being spatially extended, Descartes attempts to convert this formal distinction into an objectively real distinction and thus attain a divorce absolute. Here Descartes claims that he clearly and distinctly conceives of himself to be a thinking and unextended thing whereas the body he clearly and distinctly conceives as being unthinking and extended. He supports this argument by a further argument in which he claims that we cannot understand a body except as divisible while the mind is always indivisible (as, for example, when a part of the body is removed the mind is always left intact). These two arguments, the Argument from Conceivability and the Argument from Divisibility, each have difficulties peculiar to themselves; yet the success of both ultimately depends



upon Descartes' central epistemic argument and its assurance in God's existence. We can reformulate the Argument from Conceivability in the following way;

- 1). I can clearly and distinctly conceive that I exist without my body.
- 2). Anything of which I can clearly and distinctly conceive is possible.
- 3). If  $\alpha$  can exist without  $\beta$ , then  $\alpha$  is not identical with  $\beta$ .
- 4). *Ergo*; I am not identical with my body.

We might object to this argument in a number of ways. Firstly, if construed in the appropriate way, this seems to be another misapplication of *Leibniz's Law*: that I (my mind) has the property 'can be conceived to exist without my body' whereas my body obviously cannot have that property. As such, the argument is thereby invalid. It might be thought that this treatment of the argument is over expeditious; but, even if we let my first criticism pass, there is another problem. It is not clear how we are intended to understand 'conceive'. Can I clearly and distinctly 'conceive' this? Certainly, it does not seem to involve a contradiction.

In a very loose sense we can conceive or imagine of all sorts of things which do not involve a contradiction but which we would not normally accept were possible, let alone intelligible; that there are talking trees, creatures which are half human and half horse, human beings 30m tall, cartoon characters which have come to life, England winning the ashes, and so on. Contradiction is not the only test of intelligibility; but imagination seems to be no test at all. Now, if I ask you to conceive of such things as *real possibilities*, by which I mean that you must provide detailed, coherent and plausible accounts of their possibility, are you sure you could do this? As Bernard Williams says; "At least with regard to the self, the imagination is too tricky a thing to provide a reliable road to the comprehension of what is logically possible."<sup>11</sup> In fact imaginability, or conceivability in this loose sense, is not a very reliable test of either empirical or logical possibility or intelligibility; "Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas - only I don't know exactly what they are!"<sup>12</sup> The fact that I have a vivid imagination does not guarantee that what I conceive is real or even that it could be possible. Therefore, premise 1). may be extremely problematic and 2). simply false. The Argument from Divisibility fares little better.

- 1). All extended things are divisible (my body is divisible).
- 2). No minds are divisible (my mind is indivisible).
- 3). *Ergo*; no minds are extended (my mind and body are different things).

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11. B. A. O. Williams [1966]; "Imagination and the Self", *Proceedings of the British Academy* 52, p.124. Nor, one might add, with regard to anything else. Cf. M. Smithurst [1980]; "Hume on Existence and Possibility", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 81, pp.17-37.

12. L. Carroll [1872]; *Through the Looking-Glass* (reprinted 1971, ed. R. Lancelyn Green) (Oxford University Press), p.136.

This argument also uses *Leibniz's Law* but, when stated in this way, does so in a legitimate (extensional) context; it is therefore a valid argument. However, premise 2). appears to be vulnerable for a number of reasons. Firstly, someone might claim that it is simply false and that we now know that surgery on any part of the brain does not leave the mind intact (the most extreme examples being split-brain cases resulting from lesions in the *corpus callosum*). Perhaps more seriously, however, it seems to presuppose Descartes' own account of the mind as a unitary, non-spatial and non-physical entity; he thought it to be non-divisible because he thought it to be an autonomous and non-physical existent. Thus the argument is open to the charge of begging the question. In both cases, however, the fact that we can be sure that the distinction is a *real* distinction rests upon his general epistemological trump that God, as the Cartesian guarantor of knowledge, would not make us go wrong when we clearly and distinctly perceive something to be the case. Thus we can only safely infer that what are clearly and distinctly conceived of, or understood, as different substances (as with mind and body) really are different substances because we are sure of God's beneficence.

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## 2.2 Descartes' Theory of Body and Mind 2: The Triumph of Reason over Experience

Descartes' epistemological manoeuvre, typified in the arguments rehearsed above, notoriously leaves obscure the exact relationship between corporeality and thought. Addressing this requires Descartes to resolve a tension in his thought between two conflicting considerations; reason and experience. In the *Sixth Meditation* Descartes constantly speaks of the "dictates of nature", how "nature teaches me", or how "nature seems to incline me", and how there are lessons that he is "taught by nature."<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately he is not as clear as he could be what the nature of this 'nature' is: sometimes he speaks of it as the voice of *reason* whilst on other occasions he tells us he must rationalise and "accurately define" what nature, as the voice of *experience*, has taught him. Jumping between these two conceptions, he never manages to resolve the tension and so, although the conclusion of the *Sixth Meditation* proved to be the triumph of reason over experience, it appears it was a triumph that even Descartes himself was not entirely happy with, nor with which he was wholly consistent. In the course of his meditations the voice of nature as reason led him to the clear conclusion, he believed, that he is an essentially incorporeal thinking thing independent of his body, and yet he also thought the voice of nature as experience undeniably leads to the opposite conclusion that he is an embodied subject.<sup>14</sup> The turning point in the success of the processes of reasoning over the testimony of experience came, in the first instance, in applying his method to his own corporeal characteristics and then in insisting that thinking alone was essential to his nature. But if this was the case, how was it that we have bodily feeling and sense experience in the way that we do? As I have said above, central to the confusion in Descartes' account was his inability to adequately account for the nature of sensible experience. This muddle resulted directly from his radical application of the Aristotelian distinction based on theoretical considerations alone and suppressing what he took to be the lessons of nature as experience.

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13. Descartes; AT VII pp.80-82, CSMK II pp.56-57.

14. Cf. J. Cottingham [1986]; "Descartes' Sixth Meditation: The External World, 'Nature', and Human Experience", *Philosophy* 20, pp.73-89. For more on Descartes' inability to adequately deal with sensations and feelings see Cottingham [1978]; "'A Brute to the Brutes?': Descartes' Treatment of Animals", *Philosophy* 53, pp.551-559. Descartes' ambivalent attitude to the body has been well covered in the literature. As well as Cottingham's own contributions see R. M. Zaner [1988b]; *Ethics and the Clinical Encounter* (Englewood Cliffs Prentice-Hall), pp.106-109, S. Spicker [1970] [ed.]; *The Philosophy of the Body* (Quadrangle Books), pp.3-18, and C. A. van Peursen [1966]; *Body, Soul, Spirit: A Survey of the Body-Mind Problem* (Oxford University Press), pp.18-33.

The logical outcome of Descartes' reasoning is the human subject as disembodied and existing as an estranged spectator consciousness - an homuncular 'I' divorced from the world and only operating and aware of the body as if it were a machine or a tool distinct from itself. And yet Descartes constantly acknowledges that experience teaches us a very different lesson:

There is nothing that my own nature teaches me more vividly than that I have a body, and that when I feel pain there is something wrong with the body, and that when I am hungry or thirsty the body needs food and drink, and so on. [...] Nature also teaches me, by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst, and so on, that I am not merely present in my body as a sailor in his ship, but that I am very closely joined and, as it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit.<sup>15</sup>

But, as Descartes concedes, if it were the case that he was merely a thinking thing then he should not feel pain when his body is hurt but perceive the wound by understanding alone; "just as a sailor perceives by sight if anything in his ship is broken."<sup>16</sup> Damage to his body, being part of the *res extensa* and therefore external to him, should not result in damage to *him* (as pain) but should be something of which he is aware with his intellectual faculties. Yet Descartes is all too aware that experience teaches us that we are intimately united with the body and that these natural and very real sensations of pain, hunger and thirst are the result of a compound of mind and body rather than as a result of a strange sort of perceptual experience by the mind.

After all, when I speak of 'my' body this is not quite the same as when a sailor speaks of 'my' ship. Despite Locke's dictum that "every man has a property in his own person",<sup>17</sup> one does not simply *own* one's body, for the dominion I exercise over my body is not the dominion I exercise over my possessions. For one, I cannot use or dispose of my body at will in the manner I may use or dispose of my property and secondly, my relationship to my body permits of the body's needs and exigencies having unmediated dominion over me. The temptation to apply the *laissez-faire* dogmas of the market to the human body, such that we treat it merely as property, seems like the ultimate expression of the view which sees the body simply as an object, and the ultimate absurdity.<sup>18</sup> It might be argued that there is a possible distinction, in this respect, between parts of the body and the organically unified, embodied self and that these alienable bodily parts or tissues might be viewed as property; but this does not imply that the body as a whole can be viewed in this way.<sup>19</sup>

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15. Descartes; AT VII p.81, CSMK II p.56.

16. Descartes; AT VII p.81, CSMK II p.56.

17. J. Locke [1960]; *The Two Treatise on Government* (ed. P. Laslett) (Cambridge University Press), Book II, Chapter 5, §27.

18. See C. S. Campbell [1992]; "Body, Self, and the Property Paradigm", *Hastings Centre Report* 22, pp.34-42.

19. When a pianist insures her hands for a million pounds, is she insuring part of her property? What if a model insures the whole of his body? I could envisage circumstances where it might

For Descartes the fact that we *feel* bodily experiences such as pain, hunger and thirst therefore clearly testifies that there is a conjunction of body and mind and, strangely enough (given his general epistemological position), this testimony is not something he seems willing to contemplate as possibly false. Despite what he says in the *Meditations* and elsewhere about the deceptive nature of internal as well as external sense, he does not consider the truth of these experiences to be among those "other things which I may appear to have been taught by nature, but which in reality I acquire not from nature but from a habit of making ill-considered judgements."<sup>20</sup> The experience of embodiment was, for Descartes, a genuine lesson of nature which could not be denied and was not to be gainsaid. Indeed he considered that the testimony of this experience alone was sufficient to establish that there was a union of mind and body.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, to dogmatically reiterate that the two *are* conjoined is not, of course, to say *how* two supposedly incompatible substances are so conjoined. Given the direction of his theoretical position it is urgent for him to say something about this for, as Aquinas says, one feels that such a conjunction cannot be made without embarrassment. A union of this sort could only ever be an accidental whole (a combination rather than a genuine unity) and yet, as Descartes acknowledges, feeling and sense experience attest to a real unity. But what Descartes' philosophical thesis does not allow him to concede is the natural conclusion, drawn by Aquinas, that "men are natural and sensible things, which would not be the case were bodies and bodily organs not part of their essence, in other words, were they wholly souls."<sup>22</sup>

As with sensation and feeling, so too with sense perception. Descartes' constant struggle is with the homuncular image of the mind as a sailor in a ship, as again reason and experience pull him in two different directions at once. Although he is sometimes led by experience to say that perception (in its 'full reality') is something which should not be attributed to the mind or body alone but to the union of the two, more often than not he argues that it should be

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make sense to refer to *parts* of my body as my property; *i.e.* where the respective parts have been *removed*. After an appendectomy, for example, I could imagine keeping my preserved appendix at home in a jar. But it does not follow from this that it makes sense to think of my pre-operative appendix as my property. In fact, I suspect that even 'my (surgically removed) appendix' has more in common with 'my birth-certificate' than 'my shoes'.

20. Descartes; AT VII p.82, CSMK II p.56. In the *Sixth Meditation* Descartes introduces the example of phantom limb experiences to illustrate how internal sense can be just as misleading as our external senses (Descartes; AT VII p.77, CSMK II p.53). Indeed, as he modelled internal sense on perceptual experience it was natural to think that it was prone to the same type of sceptical doubts that plagues external sense and that therefore beliefs arising from introspective awareness require the same justification as perceptual beliefs. However, as I show, Descartes was never fully committed to this account of inner sense and was consequently much less willing to take these doubts seriously.

21. See, for example, Descartes' reply to Burman [44]. J. Cottingham [1976] (trans.); *Descartes' Conversation with Burman* (Clarendon Press), p.28.

22. Aquinas; *Summa contra Gentes* [trans. T.Gilby] [1951], p.198.

regarded simply as a mode of thought. Therefore, in spite of his willingness to concede to the lessons of experience and propose an intimate unity of mind and body, it is not an image that he manages to lay to rest. As I have said, the consummation of the reasoning process which leads to the cleaving of the self (as mind) from the body would be the positing of a homuncular 'I' - a mind, for example, behind the objectified eyes of the body consigned to *res extensa*, which is able to reflect on what is seen. Descartes desperately argues against this but the success of his argument is more apparent than real for a good deal of what he writes himself implicitly tends towards this homuncular conclusion.

In Discourse VI of the *Optics*, for example, he warns us against thinking that there are other eyes (in our brains) situated behind our eyes with which we study the image as it forms on the retinas of our objective, embodied eyes. This warning is well taken for such an understanding of vision can only lead to an infinite regress: do these secondary eyes have, in the chamber behind them, more and even smaller eyes, and so on? But here, as elsewhere, Descartes does much himself to sustain the error. Throughout the *Optics* he makes use of an elaborate diagram of the paths traced by light rays leaving a set of geometrical objects and travelling into the chamber of the eye (Figure 1, overleaf). At the bottom of the diagram - though not explicitly referred to in the text - there is the rather Socratic figure of a man (labelled P) who appears to be studying the image on the back of the eye. Who is this? Is it merely the experimenter? Descartes himself? Or does it have some other significance? The diagram is highly suggestive, as they so often are with Descartes;<sup>23</sup> but the homuncular impression is not determined by this alone for Descartes does much to compound the impression in the text. After all, Descartes insists that vision (and, *mutatis mutandis*, presumably all other modes of sensory perception) is an activity proper to the mind alone and not to the eye, the organ of sight of the embodied human subject. As he says; "it is the soul which sees, and not the eye, and it does not see directly, but only by means of the brain. [...] because the impressions which come from outside pass to the 'common' sense by way of the nerves."<sup>24</sup> Furthermore; "bodies are not strictly perceived by the senses or the faculty of the imagination but by the intellect alone, and that this perception derives not from their being touched or seen but from their being understood."<sup>25</sup> As Merleau-Ponty recognised, on this view, seeing becomes "the *thought of seeing*" and therefore not part of a lived activity of an embodied subject but an act of interpretation (dependent upon

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23. Rorty states that "It is pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions." I believe this is a slight exaggeration, but it is undeniable that pictures and metaphors do have a powerful motivating influence. See R. Rorty [1980]; *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton University Press), p.12. I refer again to Descartes' suggestive use of diagrams in Chapter 3, §3.2.

24. Descartes; AT VI p.141, CSMK I pp.172-173.

25. Descartes; AT VII p.34, CSMK II p.22.

reflection and judgement) by a disembodied, intellectual *kosmotheoros*: the unsituated seer who is able to survey the entire universe.<sup>26</sup> Descartes' thought implicitly requires such a subject and it is hard to escape the impression that this leads to an homuncular conception of embodiment: for such a subject can only be contingently fused to a particular body, perhaps by being temporally housed somewhere in its brain.

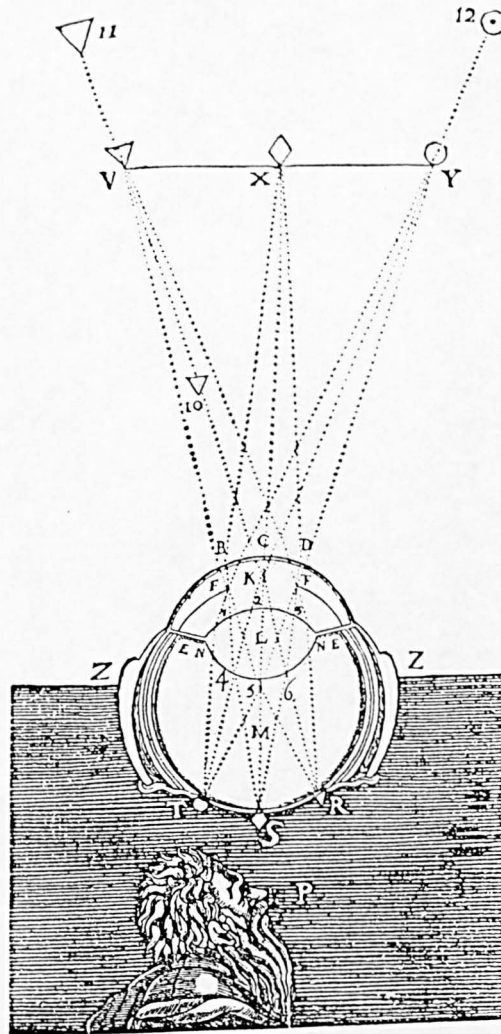


Figure 1: Descartes' diagram from *La Dioptrique - Oeuvres de Descartes*, volume VI.

The process of perception is elaborated more fully in *The Passions of the Soul* but does little to dispel the image of a disembodied dwarf within. In *The Passions*, Descartes last philosophical work, we also have perhaps the fullest treatment of the relation between mind and body in any of the texts. Given that

26. See Merleau-Ponty [1968]; *The Visible and the Invisible* (trans. A. Lingis) (Northwestern University Press), p.210, and also his discussion of Descartes' *Optics* in §3 of the essay "Eye and Mind", reprinted in Merleau-Ponty [1964c]; *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics* (ed. J. M. Edie) (Northwestern University Press), pp.159-190.

he has been forced into positing two independent realities, *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, he must give some account of their relation in order to make sense of our concrete experiences of their unity in perception and action. But explaining how they relate, what has become known as Descartes' Problem, is the issue he is least comfortable addressing. In fact, in general he had to be encouraged, through correspondence, into providing an attempted solution. We have the Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia to thank for this, although her persistent questioning and insistence on an elucidation of how mind and body are related was ultimately rewarded with Cartesian evasion and philosophical sleight of hand. He achieves this sleight of hand by wrapping up an essentially philosophical problem in the cloak of physiological sophistication.

We need to recognise also that although the soul is joined to the whole body, nevertheless there is a certain part of the body where it exercises its functions more particularly than in all the others. It is commonly held that this part is the brain, or perhaps the heart [...] But [...] I think I have clearly established that the part of the body in which the soul directly exercises its functions is not the heart at all, or the whole of the brain. It is rather the innermost part of the brain, which is a certain small gland situated in the middle of the brain's substance and suspended above the passage through which the spirits in the brain's anterior cavities communicate with those in the posterior cavities.<sup>27</sup>

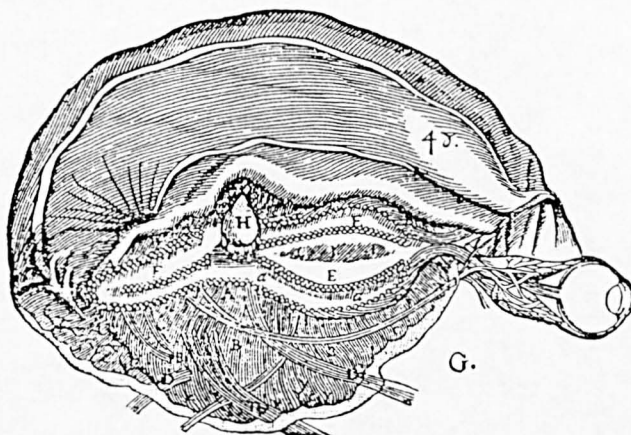


Figure 2: The location of the *conarion* - from the *Traite de l'Homme*.

The soul, we are told, exercises its functions by slight movements on the part of this gland, the *conarion* or pineal gland (labelled H in Figure 2, above), which in turn affects the course of the spirits through the cavities, driving the spirits towards the pores of the brain which then direct them through the nerves to the muscles in various ways and so makes the limbs move in the manner required.<sup>28</sup> And conversely, the gland can be moved by these spirits in as many

27. Descartes; AT XI p.352, CSMK I p.340.

28. It has been suggested how a youthful Descartes was greatly influenced in his thinking by seeing the Francinis' hydraulically operated statues in the grotto of the royal gardens at Saint Germain on the outskirts of Paris (a sort of seventeenth century Euro-Disney). If this was so then perhaps it is



different ways as there are perceptible differences in the objects of perception. Although it completely avoids the problem of explaining how mind and body are related, a grasp of this Galenesque hydraulic physiology is nevertheless helpful to understanding the Cartesian philosophies of mind and perception, for as it is centred around the operations of the *conarion* it clearly shows the homuncular proclivity in his thinking.

In the *Principles of Philosophy* he is led by consideration of examples of brain pathology and phantom limbs to reiterate this general account of perception. He says; "the soul's sensory awareness [...] of what happens to the individual limbs of the body does not come about in virtue of the soul's presence in the limbs, but simply in virtue of its presence in the brain."<sup>29</sup> If we must recognise that the soul exercises its functions 'more particularly' in the pineal gland, does this mean that it is only with respect to sensory awareness that its presence is limited to the gland or is it so limited in other respects as well? But in either case where does this leave the much vaunted lessons of nature as experience that the union of mind and body consists in an intimate intermingling of the two such that the soul is present throughout the body? Is it Descartes' contention that causal interactions between the two are exclusively, or only chiefly, enacted in the pineal gland?

We are not given any real clues as to how we should construe that opaque phrase 'more particularly' so it seems that he could be leaving it open that causal interactions are not restricted to one particular locality in the brain but could occur in some form elsewhere in the body. Descartes is in an obvious quandary here (one recognized by virtually every commentator including his contemporaries): on the one hand how can mind, which is essentially unextended, be extended throughout the human body? And if it is unextended, how can even a limited number or type of causal interactions take place throughout the body? He can try and avoid the quandary by limiting all the soul's operations (and, I think, thereby its presence) to a 'principal seat' in the brain; but doesn't any homuncular move like this straightforwardly compromise what he repeatedly assures us are the lessons of nature as experience?<sup>30</sup> What makes this problem so intractable is Descartes frequent insistence that the soul is

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shown most clearly in his erroneous understanding of human physiology. In this respect we should also not overlook how he was immensely impressed as an adult by his reading of William Harvey's *De Motu Cordis* on the circulation of the blood; consideration of which takes up nearly one entire section of the *Discourse on Method*. See J. Jaynes [1970]; "The Problem of Animate Motion in the Seventeenth Century", *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 31, pp.219-234.

29. Descartes; AT VIII A p.319, CSMK I p.283.

30. Cf. C. A. J. Coady [1983]; "Descartes' Other Myth", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 83, pp.121-142. Coady includes a discussion of the Co-extension *vs.* No-extension theories and the various possible ways out of the quandary for Descartes. One possible solution Coady does not consider is that the unextended soul travels infinitely quickly around the body!

really joined to the whole body. This is the point behind his introduction of the 'lame analogy' of gravity in reply to the Princess Elizabeth: gravity was mistakenly thought by Descartes, like many other pre-Newtonian, seventeenth century thinkers, to consist in a real quality present throughout a body. I shall pass over, for the moment, a related problem; how can an essentially unextended thing be located anywhere at all - either throughout the body or at only one point?

The reason why Descartes nominates the pineal gland in particular as the principal seat of the soul and 'common' sense is because he is concerned that, though our main sensory modes are binary (we have two eyes, two ears and two hands), in perceptual experience we only ever have one simple thought about any given object at any one time. He concludes that it must be because the impressions unite somewhere, and the only possible place that this could occur is in the small, unitary gland in the middle of the brain.

Thus, for example, if we see some animal approaching us, the light reflected from its body forms two images, one in each of our eyes; and these images form two others, by means of the optic nerves, on the internal surface of the brain facing its cavities. Then, by means of the spirits that fill these cavities, the image radiates towards the little gland which the spirits surround. [...] In this way, the two images in the brain form only one image on the gland, which acts directly upon the soul and makes it see the shape of the animal.<sup>31</sup>

Although scientifically fanciful this passage from *The Passions of the Soul* is nevertheless philosophically illuminating, as are others like it, for although Descartes wishes to uphold the authenticity of our experience as embodied subjects we can clearly see here how his theoretical position has relentlessly pushed him towards a homuncular picture. It is as if Descartes views the pineal gland, and perhaps the soul itself, as a *camera obscura*, a darkened and head-like box into which images of the world outside are projected. This metaphor may well have been suggested to him by the experiment with the eye of an ox that he recounts in Discourse V of the *Optics*; it was certainly taken up by other seventeenth century thinkers, most notably Locke, as a model for the mind and fitted well with their mechanistic philosophy and their general view of perception as a channel of sense.<sup>32</sup> The barely hidden agenda in these passages is that it is in the pineal gland that perception really occurs and where the relevant causal interactions between mind and body take place. In Descartes' theory the

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31. Descartes; AT XI pp.355-356, CSMK I pp.341-342.

32. Descartes; AT VI pp.115-116, CSMK I pp.166-167, and J. Locke [1975]; *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [ed. P. H. Nidditch] (Oxford University Press), Book II, Chapter XI, §17. See also L. W. Bailey [1989]; "Skull's Darkroom: The *Camera Obscura* and Subjectivity", P. T. Durbin [ed.] *Philosophy of Technology: Practical, Historical and Other Dimensions* (Kluwer Academic Publishers), pp.63-79. One could easily draw contemporary comparisons with the television and computer. Technology may not only provide philosophy with determining metaphors but may also directly aid in the repression of the subject's full participation in the world. See Chapter 4, the beginning of §4.1.

real subject and agent of perception is the soul and not the whole embodied human being; for the main corollary of the way the process of visual perception has been elucidated here is that what is perceived is not an object or state of affairs in the world beyond the human body but a representation in the form of a pattern or image on the pineal gland itself. We can therefore see how an apparently modern epistemological conundrum like the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis, of which I spoke earlier, would have been perfectly at home with Cartesian physiology and perceptual theory.

Thus Descartes draws the wrong conclusion from the right premise. He is right to say that it is not the eye that sees (we see *with* the eye, the eye being merely the organ of sight), but then nor is it the soul that sees either. The human eye is not the organ of sight for the brain, nor the pineal gland, nor yet the soul; it is the organ of sight for the whole embodied human subject. The eyes are positioned in the face and look out from the head. The head itself is positioned on the neck which joins it to the main body and this in turn is supported on the feet and legs, maintaining the posture of the rest. The complete physical structure of the body (the human frame, so to speak) is an important and necessary 'ground' for the process of visual perception. Visual perception actually consists in the engagement of the whole of this structure and it is therefore quite mistaken to consider the operation of one part of the structure in isolation from all the rest. As James Gibson put it; "vision is a whole perceptual system, not a channel of sense. One sees the environment not with the eyes but with the eyes-in-the-head-on-the-body-resting-on-the-ground."<sup>33</sup> Because vision is not a channel of sense there is no seat, as such, of vision in the body or brain, nor is there a seat of any other sense modality. The proper subject and agent of perception is therefore not an isolated homuncular part but the whole embodied human being.

To summarise: there is a manifest tension in Descartes' work which he never adequately resolved; the tension between the stringent requirements of his theoretical stance and what he considered to be the undeniable testimony of experience. In his search for an indubitable foundation for the edifice of empirical knowledge he intuitively grasps the basic certainty of the *cogito*. But because of its nature as a self-justifying epistemological axiom, arrived at solely through reflective contemplation, the *cogito* could only posit a purely contemplative disembodied ego shorn of all corporeal characteristics. The disembodiment of this ego was completed when Descartes took self-justification not only as the test of inseparability but also as the mark of essentiality and quickly moved to conclude that in essence he was nothing but a thinking thing. The process of

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33. J. J. Gibson [1979]; *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Houghton Mifflin), p.205.

liberating the ego from its mundane coil consisted in the body itself being shorn of any intentional characteristics and thus becoming merely part of the mechanistic material world, an object for the ego like all other objects in the world. Of course, the more Descartes divests the body of any certainty and content, the easier it becomes for him to persuasively argue that the human subject must essentially be something *other* than the body and that any intentional characteristics manifest in the body do not arise from the body itself but from some principle of meaning residing within the body. In this way we can clearly see how the two sides of his dualism, the immaterialism of Classical Psychology and the materialism of Mechanistic Physiology, inform and sustain each other.

This manoeuvre required a model of perception which treats our various sense modalities as channels of sense for a disembodied and essentially separable intellect. However Descartes, never truly consistent to his dualism, was not content with the homuncular consequences his theoretical conclusion entailed, nor was he content with the way in which the argument successfully excluded a satisfactory account of how we are also subjects of bodily experience. The testimony of these experiences had to be admitted, he thought, and this testimony clearly asserted a close union between the mind and the body and not a relationship as though between subject and object. Nevertheless, although he was clearly persuaded by the force of this testimony, this persuasion did not extend so far as to lead to the abandonment of his theoretical position: however close the union was it was not a union of inseparability and mind and body remained for Descartes two autonomous realms of existence. But just how the union between the two is therefore supposed to be achieved is never clearly elucidated and Descartes' Problem remained without an adequate solution. Descartes can only suggest that while this union can only be imperfectly grasped by the intellect it is nevertheless immediately available to ordinary experience. Through nature as experience, Descartes discovered a different body to that which appears in his theoretical deliberations; the body as it is lived. However, he despaired at the possibility of this body being thought. As he says in reply to the Princess Elizabeth; "it is the ordinary course of life and conversation, and abstention from meditation and the study of things which exercise the imagination, that teaches us how to conceive the union of the soul and the body."<sup>34</sup> It is tempting to see this as simply disingenuousness on his part but, in fairness to Descartes, it actually emanates from his unwavering conviction as to what nature as experience teaches us.<sup>35</sup> He could only support this conviction in

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34. Descartes; AT III p.692, CSMK III p.227.

35. Cf. R. M. Zaner [1981b]; "The Other Descartes and Medicine", S. Skousgaard [ed.] *Phenomenology and the Understanding of Human Destiny* (University Press of America), especially pp.104-105.

the testimony of experience by continuing to assert dogmatically that such a union must be so or no account can be given of our ordinary bodily or perceptual experiences.

In the unlikely event of a Cartesian account being given, could it, in any case, fully capture the nature of these bodily experiences? I think not; for, despite their subtle and sometimes paradoxical nature (which we will address in Chapter 4), at the end of the day these experiences testify, not to an accidental combination of two autonomous substances, but to a complete unity. Descartes can therefore only consistently sustain his dualism at the expense of marginalising the true impact of this testimony, and this is precisely what his insistence on the primacy of the theoretical achieves. The Cartesian way in philosophy attempts to cover over and mask the origins of reflective contemplation and the theoretical by asserting their independent and self-justificatory natures. Yet both spring from a pre-reflective, pre-theoretical ground which constantly manifests itself, as do the bonds of dependency which anchor the reflective ego to it. It is simply not possible to undo these bonds and then remake them. What Descartes failed to see was that it is not a question of trying to join the exclusionary categories of mind and body but of recognising the essentially dialectical nature of our existence.

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## 2.3 Paradigmatic Embodiment and the Lived Body

Descartes' theoretical position has therefore left us with something of an *aporia*; a metaphysical paralogism which goes to the heart of the problem of embodiment. His epistemological project opened up a metaphysical opposition between mind and body such that, subsequently, these terms could only be conceived as polar opposites, each excluding the other. The body is to be understood simply as a material object like any other; extended, divisible, situated in a common space, and relating to other objects in the realm of *res extensa* merely in the way characteristic of such relations - by means of mechanical interaction. The mind, on the other hand, is unextended, indivisible, temporal but not spatial, and consists of meaningful events located in the logically discrete and separable realm of *res cogitans*. The relationship between these two realms of being could only be contingent and perhaps not even fully explicable. Nevertheless, Descartes himself also insisted on the corroborative nature of experience; yet this attests, not to the absolute separation posited by his theoretical deliberations, but to a close and intimate unity between the two. This experience, he asserts, is not to be gainsaid; but, for all that, he could not accommodate its testimony within his philosophical position. Indeed, Descartes himself did not think that the relationship of mind and body could ever be made fully intelligible to thought; we simply have to except it as a brute fact of experience.

Now, this corollary is true only if we cling to the understanding of these categories provided by his bifurcation. If we accept the Cartesian picture of mind and body, as presented in his theoretical deliberations, then it seems that we have no alternative but to accept his *aporia* for how can we think ourselves, as conscious, rational and free agents, into a body which apparently consists of no more than mindless physical particles in motion? How is it that this anonymous body, construed entirely as something Other, is *my* body - let alone *me*? As Merleau-Ponty puts it so eruditely, "How significance and intentionality could come to dwell in molecular edifices or masses of cells is a thing that can never be made comprehensible, and here Cartesianism is right."<sup>36</sup> So, given the exclusionary and autonomous nature of Descartes' categories, their combination can therefore only appear to us to be something miraculous. The contemporary scene in philosophy of mind seems to largely provide for only two alternatives:

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36. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *Phenomenology of Perception* (Routledge & Kegan Paul), p.351.

either we can simply ignore the radicalism of Descartes' Problem and its concomitant mystery, take a leap of faith and continue to strive for a coherent (and largely reductive) account of how significance and intentionality arises out of insensate matter, or we can succumb to the siren voice of the enigma and assert with Descartes that it is all beyond our capacities to conceptualise.<sup>37</sup> But is scientism or a pervasive air of mystery and paradox all that we are left with when we consider providing a coherent account of human embodiment? Is the very idea of it being possible to give a plausible and genuinely alternative account dead in the water?

The answer to this question, I believe, is no. We do not have to accept scientism or this intellectual pessimism, at least, not without some attempt being made at providing an alternative. What this requires, as Merleau-Ponty foresaw, is a revision of the categories we have inherited from Descartes; "a profound transformation of the notions of body and consciousness. As far as the body is concerned, even the body of another, we must learn to distinguish it from the objective body as set forth in works on physiology. This is not the body capable of being inhabited by a consciousness."<sup>38</sup> The problem with both of the orthodox options is they still operate from within Descartes' anonymous tradition and thus with categories which already guarantee the failure of any enterprise engaged in bringing the two together in a single explanation. This is why, in my above characterisation, I denied that either were *genuine* alternatives. In many ways, therefore, it is to Descartes' credit that he recognised a truth about his own position that seems to have been lost to subsequent generations. One can have considerable sympathy with his pessimism and that of contemporary philosophers like Colin McGinn for at least they are aware of the seriousness, if not hopelessness, of the problem confronting any account of mind and body that makes use of materials contrived in Descartes' forge. As Merleau-Ponty says, any such enterprise seems at the outset to be nothing less than an absurd undertaking.

What, then, are the possible alternatives? It seems undeniable that the human body is a thing; a material entity which can be spatio-temporally individuated and re-identified in precisely the same way as any other material entity and, like these other entities, is subject to the laws of causality. It is also clearly a particular biological organism with distinctive characteristics in terms of both its form and its functions. The human body is something which has shape,

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37. According to the tendentious report in *Scientific American* these alternatives seemed to be almost the only ones on offer at last year's interdisciplinary conference on consciousness at the University of Arizona. The first position is fairly represented by Francis Crick and the second, of course, by Colin McGinn. J. Horgan [1994]; "Can Science Explain Consciousness?", *Scientific American* 271 (July 1994), pp. 72-78.

38. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.351.

size, mass, texture, colour, and weight, all things of which we are well aware from our everyday lives. These facts about the materiality of the body are not always things to which we normally pay detailed attention in the course of fulfilling our day to day tasks; but they remain in the background and can be revealed by even a cursory reflection upon a particular situation; the box is on a shelf out of reach, the floor is not strong enough to take my weight, I will get burnt by staying too long out in the sun, if only God had provided us with another arm and a hand then I would be able to complete this task, and so on. The systematic investigations of the medical sciences, especially anatomy and physiology, have also helped us to become much clearer about the workings of the human body and with conspicuous success have enabled us to combat disease and disability. But can it be understood in biological or physical terms alone? The fact is that human bodies, either potentially, actually, or formerly, are also the bodies of people;<sup>39</sup> a fact, or so goes a common and largely legitimate contemporary complaint, often forgotten by medical practitioners who have a tendency to treat people as rather interesting pieces of meat.

Nevertheless, as Rom Harré correctly observes, while the human body is a thing, "typical human bodies are not typical things."<sup>40</sup> In this respect the identity conditions for human bodies are not, therefore, exhausted by their identity conditions *qua* material entities for it is partly constitutive of what makes a human body the same body that it is the body of the same person. Descartes himself belatedly recognised this, though he expresses it in terms of a particular body being united with a particular soul.<sup>41</sup> In the case of my own body I may have more to say than this. To say *I have* a body is an extremely misleading way to express my relationship to my own body. If asked "Do you have a body?", the only safe answer is probably to say nothing and ask to see a lawyer.<sup>42</sup> Harré speaks of a 'metaphysical ownership' which is 'internal', by which he means that it is a condition of us being the persons we are that we are embodied in just the bodies we are.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, as we briefly touched upon in the last section, to speak of ownership (however we qualify this) is a very problematic notion with regard to our own bodies. I do not own my body as I own items of property - however dear or precious they are to me. My body is not simply a material object amongst other material objects, it is that material object at the very centre of my experience. Indeed, it is certainly the only object that I know, as Harré says, from within; *i.e.* unlike other objects it is uniquely singled out for me as mine by the way it presents itself as a field of localised sensations. This much Descartes

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39. R. Harré [1991]; *Physical Being* (Basil Blackwell), p.13.

40. R. Harré [1991]; *op. cit.*, p.13.

41. Descartes; ATIV p.166, CSMK III pp.242-243. See also Chapter 4, the beginning of §4.2.

42. W. Charlton [1990]; "Do We Have Bodies?", *Argument*, pp.41-43.

43. R. Harré [1991]; *op. cit.*, p.19.



himself was also well aware of. But, furthermore, one could also argue that it is that object without which there would not be, for me, other material objects or even a world at all.

This body at the centre of my experience is the body as it is lived by me, the 'lived body'. Merleau-Ponty argues that "It is simply a question of recognizing that the body, as a chemical structure or an agglomeration of tissues, is formed, by a process of impoverishment, from a primordial phenomenon of the body-for-us, the body of human experience or the perceived body, round which objective thought works, but without being called upon to postulate its complete analysis."<sup>44</sup> In other words, he is arguing that the objectified body of anatomy and physiology is a secondary construct derived from the phenomenal body; a depersonalised abstraction divested of the sensory and cognitive powers of the human subject. Objectivist thought tries to establish this abstraction as the 'real', or perhaps the only, body when in fact it is the lived body which has experiential and conceptual priority. Objectivist thought thus leaves us with a body in what Charlton calls the 'mortician's sense' - the body of what was formerly a person and not the body of what actually is a person. In this sense it is not even clear that it is identical to the living body of the person previously alive; it is the remains of that person and not what remains after the person has departed.<sup>45</sup> The body of objectivist thought is therefore modelled exclusively on the corpse and, as Merleau-Ponty says, this is not a body we can conceive of being united with consciousness. But this was not the only body we found in Descartes' thought: in our everyday experiences, especially in those of affliction, Descartes also discovered the body as it is lived. In his own way, though it seems incompatible with the general thrust of his philosophy, Descartes himself was also concerned with the lived body.

What we need is a notion of embodiment in which there are the required conceptual connections between the human subject and states of his or her body. Sidney Shoemaker has identified several ways in which we might say that a person is embodied.<sup>46</sup> Firstly there is a sense in which we can be said to be 'biologically embodied'; a criterion of embodiment "which assigns a body to a person if his brain is inside the skull of that body and stands to it in certain biological relationships that do not exclude paralysis, blindness, deafness, and so forth."<sup>47</sup> That is to say, biological relationships which do not necessarily exclude sensori-motor involvement with the world. This qualification seems to be largely causal; there must not be any physiological impediment to the embodied

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44. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.351.

45. W. Charlton [1990]; *op. cit.*, pp.42-43.

46. S. Shoemaker [1984]; "Embodiment and Behavior", *Identity, Cause and Mind: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge University Press), pp.113-138.

47. S. Shoemaker [1984]; *op. cit.*, p.119.

brain fulfilling its normal function as the locus of this body's sensori-motor activity. Now, as it stands, this will hardly do as an alternative conception of embodiment on two, interrelated counts. Firstly it construes embodiment simply as an identity between the subject and a biological organism, a 'thing' (the brain), and, secondly, as it assumes that we can identify the brain as the seat of consciousness or 'physiological core' of the person, it thus persists in advancing a straightforwardly homuncular picture of the human subject. We might be tempted to ascribe this special status to the brain on the grounds that it plays a singular causal rôle in underlying our subjective lives; but we must be careful not to confuse causal and conceptual considerations. In any case, even if we could identify a particular anatomical part as the physiological core of a person this would be, as Shoemaker recognises, subordinate and subject to a more fundamental conception of embodiment connected directly with our sensori-motor involvement with the world.<sup>48</sup>

Shoemaker therefore also introduces two other notions in which a person is embodied; 'sensorily embodied' and 'volitionally embodied'. To be sensorily embodied in a certain body is for there to be interactions between that body and the world such that one has sense experiences, constituting veridical perceptions, of the world. To be volitionally embodied in a certain body is for one's volitions to produce in that body movements which are appropriate to the movements one is trying to produce. Shoemaker then goes on to argue that these two forms of embodiment "are together the primary criteria of, or constitutive factors in, embodiment *simpliciter*."<sup>49</sup> In other words the extent or degree of a person's sensori-motor involvement with the world through a particular body is the primary consideration in determining their embodiment. If this is significant, then the person can be said to be what he calls 'paradigmatically embodied' or 'normally embodied'.<sup>50</sup> Paradigmatic embodiment, he argues, "is paradigmatic not only of the *embodiment* of persons but of their very *existence*."<sup>51</sup> Normal, healthy human beings are paradigmatically embodied and, as it turns out, biologically embodied as well. However, we can easily think of limiting cases where someone (for example, someone who is in a comatose state or is completely paralysed and deaf and blind) who is considered to be biologically embodied but is manifestly not paradigmatically embodied. But such cases (not even fictional cases of a disembodied brains), he argues, do not show that there is

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48. Cf. Chapter 4, the end of §4.1 and Chapter 6.

49. S. Shoemaker [1984]; *op. cit.*, p.117. Shoemaker rules out as constitutive of embodiment *simpliciter* what he calls 'X-embodiment' where there is no systematic correlation between what one tries to do and what one actually does.

50. S. Shoemaker [1984]; *op. cit.*, p.120. In order to be absolutely clear, he indicates that he is arguing that this type of embodiment is conceptually central and not simply statistically predominant.

51. S. Shoemaker [1984]; *op. cit.*, p.124.

no essential connection between the having of mental states and being appropriately embodied for we might have some idea of what it would be for the person concerned to be *restored* to a state of paradigmatic embodiment even if, in actual fact, we know that this is not medically possible.

There is much here with which I am in agreement. Shoemaker has given us a lead in understanding what type of embodiment is required and thereby also an answer, in part, to the question of what type of body the human body is. To be paradigmatically embodied is also to be biologically embodied, so paradigmatic embodiment necessarily makes reference to a particular body as a material organism. The body as the body of the human subject is therefore part of the material world. Although this sounds like a defence of the obvious, it is not without significance. Although we should resist the objectivist conception of the body, as modelled on the corpse, we can recognise that the body has an objective aspect. My identity as a person is tied up with my having a particular (unitary) perspective on the world and to have this perspective, as I shall later argue, is to be anchored in the world in virtue of being intimately tied to a particular material object - my body. But the story does not end there as the body is also much more than simply this and, indeed, my having this perspective does not solely depend upon my identity with a 'thing'.

It is also the case, as I shall again argue in later chapters, that the nature of this material organism (e.g. facts about its architecture and function) play an important rôle in shaping this perspective and our concomitant conception of self; so, already, the human body, even as a materiality, can not be considered an inert Other which plays no rôle in our sense of self. However, the perspective I have is the point of view from which I perceive and act in the world and it is not clear that I could have a perspective, or an adequate notion of self, without either one of these sensori-volitional capacities. It seems unclear how I could think of an item in the objective order as my body unless I think of it as the perspective from which I perceive and act in the world.<sup>52</sup> As Rom Harré says; "Our sense of ourselves as particular individuals is based in part on our sense of the continuous spatio-temporal trajectories of our bodies through which we are located in the material world."<sup>53</sup> Our spatial trajectories, unlike the their temporal counterparts, are the product of our free choice as agents and not something which simply happens to us. The body is therefore not simply an item in the objective order but thus also lies at the very centre of my experience by being the locus of my sensori-motor involvement with the world.

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52. Cf. T. Baldwin [1988]; "Phenomenology, Solipsism and Egocentric Thought", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 62, pp.27-43.

53. R. Harré [1991]; *op. cit.*, p.14.

In many respects, therefore, the notion of the body required of paradigmatic embodiment shares much in common with the phenomenological notion of the lived body. This notion is one that emerges from the work of Husserl. Despite his Cartesian credentials, Husserl made an important contribution to the process of rethinking the body and human embodiment. However, because of his Cartesian credentials, his overall philosophical position succeeds in undermining the good work he performed in this respect and we are once again left with something like Descartes' *aporia*. Nevertheless, Husserl's phenomenological analysis of the body is worth some consideration and I intend to devote the remainder of this section at looking at his contribution.

Husserl's phenomenological philosophy provides two ways of understanding the world and thus any object in the world such as the human body. On the one hand the body, as a worldly item, can be conceived as a natural object or, on the other, as a phenomenologically conceived phenomenon. The body conceived as a natural object, when we adopt what he calls the thesis of the 'natural standpoint', the pre-reflective way in which we take the existence of the world for granted ("the view of the 'man in the street'"), is where consciousness becomes mundane through bodily incarnation ; *"here consciousness and thinghood form a connected whole. Connected within the particular psychological unities we call animalia, and in the last resort within the real unity of the world as a whole."*<sup>54</sup> Alternatively it can be conceived through the process of the phenomenological reduction or *epoché* [ἐποχή] as a constituted phenomenon; an object amongst other objects in the world, constituted in the acts of a pure consciousness for a pure consciousness. According to Husserl this pure consciousness is absolute and immanent; it is not part of the world, nor is the transcendent world (outside the sphere of consciousness) an inherent part of it.

Two complementary questions, which stand back to back, thus arise for Husserl. In the first instance, how can consciousness, which in itself is absolute and immanent, become incarnate and take on the character of transcendence? His analysis of this turns on the rôle perception plays in determining incarnation. Secondly, how can consciousness itself separate out as a concrete thing in itself from that of which we are conscious, the perceived being, 'standing over against' consciousness 'in and for itself'? The answer to this lies in the phenomenological reduction. As for the first, Husserl argues that "The natural waking life of our Ego is a continuous perceiving, actual or potential. The world of things and our body within it are continuously present to our perception," and, furthermore, that "Every perceiving consciousness has this peculiarity, that

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54. Husserl [1958]; *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson) (George Allen & Unwin), p.126.

it is the consciousness of *the embodied (liebhaftigen) self-presence of an individual object*."<sup>55</sup> In other words, in order to discover over against me an existing world of things in perception, and to find for myself within this world a proper place, I must ascribe to myself in this world a body: consciousness thus becomes incarnate by *ascribing to itself a body*. Thus, as he later says;

Let us make clear to ourselves how consciousness, so to speak, enters into the real world, how that which is absolute in itself can abandon its immanence and put on the character of transcendence. We see at once that it can do this only in virtue of a certain participation in transcendence in its first and primordial sense, and that is obviously the transcendence of material Nature. Only through the empirical relation to the body does consciousness become real in a human and animal sense, and only thereby does it win a place in Nature's space and time - the time which is physically measured.<sup>56</sup>

The natural body is thus a 'real' transcendent object, limited by space and time and subject to the laws of nature.<sup>57</sup> Consciousness can become involved in the world in virtue of its incarnation in this body and this body becomes the organ of perception and agency for consciousness. Being a member of a world which is continually present for me, "this world is not there for me as a mere *world of facts and affairs*, but, with the same immediacy, as a *world of values*, a *world of goods*, a *practical world*."<sup>58</sup> In this way, and without further effort, the world has value for consciousness. However, in so far as consciousness is incarnate in this way, it too is determined by the world.

This is unfortunate in terms of Husserl's overall project of establishing an Eidetic Science of essences (*Wesenwissenschaft*). Husserl proposed to uncover the noetic-noematic (act and object) structures of intentional experience, study things *as they appear* to consciousness, and thereby reveal their essence (*Wesenserschauung*). The noematic content is how something appears 'as such' so that what is important is how it is presented to consciousness; in perception the book is perceived *as a book*, in memory the dream is remembered *as a dream*, and so on. This requires a reduction; not a phenomenalist reduction where all statements about objects are reduced to statements about sense-data but a

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55. Husserl [1958]; *op. cit.*, p.127.

56. Husserl [1958]; *op. cit.*, p.164.

57. Husserl divided objects into those which are 'real' and those which are 'ideal'. These categories do not mark the traditional division between those which are mind-dependent and those which are not as Husserl uses the term 'object' to refer to anything that is intended by consciousness. What determines whether an object is 'real', in Husserl's terms, is whether it is spatially or temporally limited. In this sense the category 'real' objects covers some that are transcendent, such as this book, and some which are immanent and mind-dependent, such as the memory of the book. The book is spatially and temporally limited, the memory only temporally limited. In contrast 'ideal' objects are non-spatial and a-temporal, such as universals or the truths of geometry. See Husserl [1970]; *Logical Investigations* (trans. J. N. Findlay) (Routledge & Kegan Paul), Volume II, pp.351-352.

58. Husserl [1958]; *op. cit.*, p.103.

reduction to what constitutes the essential features of intentional experience.<sup>59</sup> To explain the ultimate presuppositions of human knowledge, the meaning of experience, and to achieve an adequate philosophical understanding of the noetic conditions of knowledge therefore demands, he thought, a far more radical reduction: a 'bracketing' of all empirical-existential considerations. Husserl's aims and methods were self-consciously reminiscent of Descartes' project and his method of doubt. In the *Meditations* Descartes' doubt consisted firstly of calling his former beliefs into question and then pretending to himself that they were actually false - this further stage being required to counter his natural inclination to nevertheless regard them as highly probable, if not true.<sup>60</sup> However, there are significant differences. As Husserl says himself;

I do not then *deny* this 'world', as though I were a sophist, *I do not doubt that it is there* as though I were a sceptic; but I use the 'phenomenological' ἐποχή, which *completely bars me from using any judgement that concerns spatio-temporal existence (Dasein)*.<sup>61</sup>

Therefore Husserl does not doubt the existence of the world, still less does he deny its existence or at any time regard his belief in its existence as false - he simply refrains from making judgements concerning things in their spatio-temporal existence.<sup>62</sup> He claims that he does not provisionally eliminate the world, as does Cartesian doubt, but, by suspending judgement about it, changes our viewpoint on it. The natural world is always 'there for us' and 'present to our hand' and will always remain so "even though it pleases us to put it in brackets." Thus Husserl's reduction simply intends to render inoperative the thesis of the 'natural standpoint' and so allow us to explain the meaning of the world by concentrating on analysing what is involved in intentional experience.

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59. For Husserl, phenomenism is unable to discover the 'essentially given' in experience because it misinterprets the meaning of experience. It attempts to explain the meaning of what we say about the world by referring to sense-contents - the apparent constituents out of which the world is constructed. This is like trying to explain the meaning of a word by reference to the letters of which it is composed or the noises made in uttering it.

60. See A. Kenny [1968]; *Descartes: A Study of His Philosophy* (Random House), pp.22-23.

61. Husserl [1958]; *op. cit.*, pp.110-111.

62. Although Husserl refers to his position as being a 'transcendental-phenomenological idealism', he also often expressed a concern for the 'concrete'. A belief in the existence of the world, Husserl argues, is definitive of the thesis of the natural standpoint, so we cannot treat this as one belief amongst others to be examined on its merits: it is a fundamental belief which must remain unquestioned and presupposed in every natural examination of our beliefs. It could be questioned philosophically; but as philosophy, according to Husserl, only deals in meaning its metaphysical existence cannot be affirmed or denied by philosophy. Thus Harrison Hall argues that Husserl was a pre-philosophical realist; his idealism being purely philosophical and un-metaphysical. H. Hall [1982]; "Was Husserl a Realist or an Idealist?", H. L. Dreyfus & H. Hall (eds.); *Husserl, Intentionality and Cognitive Science* (Bradford Books), pp.169-190. Nevertheless, it seems fairly clear to me that his philosophy was unquestionably idealist as he insists in *Ideas* that the *de facto* world can only exist for consciousness. See Husserl [1958]; *op. cit.*, p.153. It would be interesting to do a comparative study between Husserl and Wittgenstein on the specific issue of the world's unquestioned status; cf. L. Wittgenstein [1969]; *On Certainty* (ed. G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. G. H. von Wright) (Basil Blackwell).

"Unlike Descartes, we shall plunge into *the task of laying open the infinite field of transcendental experience*."<sup>63</sup>

The *epoché* consisted in three interrelated moments or themes; the suspension of the natural standpoint, the positing of a subjective pole of consciousness, and, finally, the intuition of essences. This is not necessarily intended to indicate a chronological ordering nor is it really a logical distinction: there are not three reductions as such but one with three aims. To see how this works it is probably best to take a particular example; the perceptual experience of seeing a book. Normally, from the point of view of the natural standpoint, I assume there is something 'out there'; a physical object we call a book. Firstly, therefore, Husserl invites us to disregard the transcendent real object, the book 'out there', and concentrate on what is immediately given in experience. Thus the first stage of the *epoché* is a reducing of the transcendent real object to an immanent real object by bracketing out consideration of its spatial existence.<sup>64</sup> Once I do this my attitude changes and I become aware of perceiving an object which I recognise as a book: I become aware, in reflection, that I perceive the book as such. Of course, Husserl's concern is not with the objects of consciousness but with the structures of conscious experience, so what is important is that I do not merely have a book-percept or a sense-datum of a book but that I become aware of what the percept means. Thus far the reduction has been purely negative; but it also has a positive side - to uncover the realm of transcendental subjectivity. If my reflection so far has been successful I am now free to posit this noematic-content as an ideal object and by the same token I am free to posit an ego as an ideal projection of myself.

This transcendental ego is not merely an expansion of my own substantial ego for, if it is simply an empirical or psychological consciousness, it would be impossible to assert any universal or objective truth on its basis: what is self-evident to me may not be self-evident to anyone else. Instead it is something, Husserl suggests, for which the term 'ego' may be entirely inappropriate. Consequently he prefers to designate this ego as the 'subjective pole' of consciousness, the necessary correlate of the other 'objective pole' in every conscious act. But it is not simply a logical condition either for this 'subjective pole' is the meaning-giver for the entire universe of consciousness: it is an active, meaning-giving, object-constituting subjectivity which gives unity and

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63. Husserl [1960]; *The Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (trans. D. Cairns) (Martinus Nijhoff), p.31.

64. This is accomplished partly by placing a restriction on what we take to be acceptable as true to what is immediately self-evident and relies on the fewest possible assumptions. Only immanent objects are characterised by self-evidence and clarity so transcendent objects can be bracketed out by the fact that they do not meet these criteria and with them we can eliminate certain metaphysical assumptions.

direction to the various acts of consciousness and which designates the objects of consciousness as being and being thus and so. Husserl's intention was to move consciousness towards a greater generality, both in terms of acts and objects, by introducing it to the non-spatial, a-temporal realm of ideal objects, the eidetic world. This is a world of transcendently purified experiences reflected on by a transcendental consciousness. The ideal objects of this world, the *cogitata* for the reflecting ego, are those things which are indubitable and require no inference. Husserl's intuition of essences is therefore the awareness of what presents itself to consciousness as universally valid; the source of apodeictic certainty which provides the foundations for all knowledge and the genuine attainment of the Cartesian goal.

We are now in a position to see the importance of the phenomenological reduction in relation to the body. Through the reduction the thesis of the natural standpoint is put out of action; but then so too is incarnation. Consciousness is freed from its involvement with the body and so the world ceases to act on consciousness; it becomes something pure and non-worldly. On the other hand, from this point of view, the body, like the world, is a constituted phenomenon for consciousness. However, although the body is a part of the constituted world, Husserl recognises that there is something peculiar about the body and so he argues that it is not merely intended as one object amongst others in the world. It is experienced by consciousness as its 'animate organism'; at once both an object and an organism. This body belongs to the 'primary' or 'solipsistic' level of sense; the level of sense achieved by cancelling reference to what is alien to me from the phenomena retained after the completion of the *epoché*. This leaves us with "a Nature reduced to what is included in our ownness."<sup>65</sup>

The body has the status of being a unique phenomenon to be found in this sphere; it is one's 'owned body' or *Leibkörper*. It is here that Husserl has some very suggestive things to say about our experiences of embodiment. Firstly, with regard to the spatiality of the body, he argues that my body is not located in objective space but is experienced as the centre of orientation from which the perceptual field radiates outwards; the null-point (Nullpunkt) which gives a determinate orientation to my experiences, the original 'here' corresponding to every 'there'. Secondly, consciousness intends this animate organism as that by means of which the world can be sensuously perceived; the body is thus constituted as the organ of perception or, more correctly, a system of perceptual organs, each with their own centre of orientation synthetically unified in one synergic system. Thirdly, like Descartes, Husserl recognised that the body is experienced as a field of localised sensations; both sensations of objects perceived

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65. Husserl [1960]; *op. cit.*, p.98.



and kinæsthetic sensations of the body itself - the second kind making my embodiment manifest to me. Lastly, but by no means least, the body is also that thing, and only that thing, which immediately and directly responds to and is obedient to my will. Thus, although the body is constituted as a part of corporeal nature, it is constituted in such a way that it is uniquely singled out for me as my animate organism in which I can live and through which I perceive and act in the world.

Unfortunately, none of this disguises the fact that Husserl's explication of human embodiment is ultimately an extremely paradoxical account. We began this section by looking at the conception of the body we have inherited from Descartes and concluded that it was not a body that could be united with consciousness. After examining Husserl we have something of a re-evaluation of this along the desired lines but we are also left with a conception of consciousness which makes a unity with any body impossible. Notwithstanding the apparent integration of consciousness with the natural body, these are manifestly still fundamentally opposed and exclusionary types of being with consciousness holding a privileged position in his system. Despite the fact that we experience our bodies in a unique way, for Husserl the body, like any worldly object, is ultimately a transcendent object constituted 'in' and 'for' consciousness. In *Ideas* he sets up the opposition clearly when he argues;

Consciousness, considered in its 'purity', must be reckoned as a *self-contained system of Being*, as a system of *Absolute Being*, into which nothing can penetrate, and from which nothing can escape; which has no spatio-temporal exterior, and can be inside no spatio-temporal system; which cannot experience causality from anything nor exert causality upon anything. [...] On the other side, the whole *spatio-temporal world*, to which man and the human Ego claim to belong as subordinate singular realities, is according to its own meaning mere *intentional Being*, a Being, therefore, which has merely secondary, relative sense of a Being for a consciousness. It is a Being which consciousness in its own experiences (*Erfahrungen*) posits, and is, in principle, intuitable and determinable only as the element common to the [harmoniously] motivated appearance-manifolds, but *over and beyond* this, is just nothing at all.<sup>66</sup>

Even when incarnate consciousness "forfeits nothing of its own essential nature, and can assimilate nothing that is foreign to its own essence."<sup>67</sup> It belongs to the realm of pure subjectivity and is therefore something completely discrete and self-contained. It is an absolute because, although the world depends on it, its experiences do not necessarily depend for their existence on anything external to themselves. Nonetheless, through incarnation, "it has become something other than it was: a very part of Nature. In itself it is what it is, its essential nature is absolute. But it is not grasped in its absolute essence, in its flowing thisness, but 'as something apprehended' [...] a *state* of consciousness

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66. Husserl [1958]; *op. cit.*, p.153.

67. Husserl [1958]; *op. cit.*, p.165.

appears which is the state of a self-identical *real* ego-subject.”<sup>68</sup> The realisation of consciousness in incarnation results, he says, from a peculiar type of apprehending, experience or ‘apperception’; a ‘linking-on’ which seems to be a ‘pact’ made with the body in order to bring about a unity of consciousness and the body. But, given his overall position, he has no real way of articulating this unity and the ‘linking-on’ is not a genuine or dialectical pact. It is true that Husserl is not attempting Descartes’ trick of marrying together a translucent, immaterial self to a mechanistic, material being; the body in incarnation is not merely a machine but something which is lived. However, on the other hand, it seems to be little more than an ersatz body, a body constituted by consciousness for itself and ascribed to itself. Exactly how a consciousness so dominant and absolute as this could become mundane and part of nature is an *aporia* as complete as that we inherited from Descartes.

Husserl’s position is thus, in many ways, the ultimate issue of the Cartesian tradition. The act of *epoché* had the result of instantiating the consciousness it revealed as a metaphysical absolute, a transcendently purified version of Descartes’ *cogito*. The reduction gives rise to three familiar Cartesian problems which Husserl’s position lacks the resources to adequately answer. Firstly, once the reduction is complete, how are we to rediscover the concrete surrounding life-world? He insists that the existence of the world can no longer be accepted as a primitive fact of experience but merely as a ‘possibility’ to be explained in transcendental terms. But how can we maintain a link between what is revealed in the reduction and the historical life-world from which we disengaged in the process of reduction? Indeed, can we be sure there is any link? The world of the ‘natural standpoint’ now seems as remote and inaccessible as a world of Kantian ‘noumena’ or its positing as illegitimate and unfounded as a world of Lockean ‘substance’. This is a terrible predicament for a philosophy which sees itself as foundational. Connected with this is the charge that his philosophy merely originates a new form of idealism and in fact there is no real question of rediscovering a ‘natural’ world at all. This accusation is one that is difficult for Husserl to throw off - especially after one has read passages like the one I have quoted above where he clearly asserts that the *de facto* world has only a secondary and relative existence for a consciousness.

Secondly, we have the spectre of the reduction collapsing into transcendental solipsism. If it is hard to see how we can rediscover the natural world from the austere starting point of the transcendental ego, it is even harder to understand how it allows for the possibility for genuinely other

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68. Husserl [1958]; *op. cit.*, p.165.

consciousnesses.<sup>69</sup> Of course, we must be careful not to hypostatise the transcendental ego; it is a subjective pole of consciousness without a metaphysical status. Nevertheless, it is legitimate to ask is there only one or are there many poles of consciousness? He does suggest that perhaps the reduction only *seems* to lead to a permanent solipsism where, in fact, this is only a 'philosophically subordinate stage'; but this depends upon our success at rediscovering the world and, as I have just suggested, this is equally problematic. In fact this problem points to major theoretical difficulties with his endeavour rather than a lacuna and cannot be overcome simply by tinkering with the system.

This brings us to the third, and in many ways the most revealing, of the three interrelated problems provoked by the *epoché*. It can be summed up picturesquely by the question "Was the author of the *Ideas* and the *Cartesian Meditations* also the author of the *epoché*?" The decision to initiate the reduction is a historical decision taken by a concretely situated human being, yet once undertaken it apparently reveals an a-historical, a-social, disembodied subject; a subject for whom even the term 'ego' ceases to be appropriate. How do we then rediscover the historical, social, embodied self who was the author of the reduction in the first place? The paradoxical conclusion seems to be that it cannot be Husserl the author who enacts the *epoché* for anything and everything about Husserl the author has been put into suspension by the reduction. Alternatively, if this empirical self (Husserl the author) is, at least, the originator of the *epoché*, how do we explain the meaning of this decision in transcendental terms (from the standpoint of the transcendental ego-pole) for, presumably, all its surrounding context has been dissolved in the reduction?

Nevertheless, in presenting us with these difficulties, Husserl has done us an invaluable service for they expose in a very clear way a fundamental problem at the heart of the Cartesian way in philosophy. It is not just a problem for transcendental phenomenology but also for phenomenism, rationalism, empiricism and their successors. By disembodiment the subject and making its anchorage in the world problematic or optional, are we sure we have enough resources left with which its identity as a subject can be guaranteed? In other words, is this anchorage something I can doubt or put into suspension? There is some truth in the Husserlian insight that when one brackets, by whatever means, the spatio-temporal world and my body as part of that world, this leads to a loss of identity for the self. All we are left with, at best, is an obscure and

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69. Hence he states "As yet it is quite impossible to foresee how, for me in the attitude of reduction, other egos - not merely as worldly phenomena but as other transcendental egos - can become positable as existing and thus become equally legitimate themes of a phenomenological ecology." Husserl [1960]; *op. cit.*, p.30. (This passage was marked emphatically for deletion.)

impersonal 'subjective pole' or 'principle of unity'. Of course, Husserl presents the dissolution of the self as a methodological step in the reduction, a decision the author of the *epoché* must take; but, alternatively, we may see it as a necessary, and problematic, consequence of the suspension of the concrete relations the subject has with its world. This is a problem we shall encounter again in later chapters. More immediately, I now wish to move on and examine one subsequent way Husserl's insights have been made use of without a commitment to his transcendentalism; Merleau-Ponty's attempt to explicate a body-world dialectic and a genuine incarnational subjectivity.

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### 3. Merleau-Ponty's Theory of Incarnate Subjectivity

Merleau-Ponty was greatly influenced by Husserl's thought, different elements of which proved to be both an inspiration and a focus of opposition. He was certainly impressed with phenomenology as a method and style of doing philosophy and, although in later years he came to have serious doubts about several aspects of this approach, he continued to speak the language of a phenomenologist. Nevertheless, however much his philosophy owes to Husserl, his phenomenology was never the transcendental phenomenology we have encountered in Husserl. Indeed it is extremely difficult to classify him as belonging to any particular school of thought. If a convenient pigeon-hole is required, there is some justification for placing him amongst the so-called "existential phenomenologists", a broad category encompassing thinkers as diverse as Marcel, Heidegger and Sartre - obviously a movement without a unified doctrine.<sup>1</sup> Such comparisons are no doubt invidious and should not be allowed to conceal the divergent goals and styles of these philosophers. This said, Merleau-Ponty clearly shared certain concerns and attitudes in common with the others. Principal among these is the view that the starting place for 'authentic' philosophy is the actual concrete human situation and that consciousness should not be seen as enclosed within itself, but as consisting in a relationship with an Other. It is because of this emphasis on this relationship that these philosophers are almost exclusively preoccupied with the problems of perception and embodiment. In this respect Merleau-Ponty was no different.

Another important defining characteristic of this thought is that existence has no transcendent element but is fundamentally framed by the world: it is nothing more than a "project of the world", the world being the horizon of

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1. Although regarded by Paul Ricoeur as the "greatest of the French phenomenologists", it has been argued that Merleau-Ponty was really an existentialist philosopher who made use of the phenomenological method and whose philosophy thus "begins and ends with existentialism". See R. M. Zaner [1964]; *The Problem of Embodiment* (Martinus Nijhoff), pp.237-238. Zaner also suggests that Merleau-Ponty's thought owes as much, if not more, to the works of Bergson and Marcel, even though neither is explicitly acknowledged. R. M. Zaner [1965]; "Merleau-Ponty's Theory of the Body-Proprio as *Être-au-monde*", *Journal of Existentialism* 6, pp.31-40.

possible existence. This principle permeates Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the difficult concept of intentionality. This was central to his attempt to overthrow dualism, for if consciousness is characterised by a relation to its objects, it cannot be understood apart from that relation. However, we should not, on his understanding, conceive this simply as a relation to a *transcendent thing* such as God or an absolute 'noema', but as a *dialectical relationship* with the world itself. Intentionality therefore has an ontological dimension in Merleau-Ponty's thought. However deep we delve into our own being, however closely we examine ourselves, we will always find (what would nowadays be termed) a trace of the Other. This Other, the objective and social world, thus enters into the very heart of the subjective self. In *Sense and Non-Sense* he says:

Shall we then define man as consciousness? This would still be a chimerical realisation of human essence, for once man is defined as consciousness, he becomes cut off from all things, from his body and his effective existence. He must therefore be defined as a relation to instruments and objects - a relation which is not simply one of thought but which involves him in the world in such a way as to give him an external aspect, an outside, to make him 'objective' at the same time that he is 'subjective'.<sup>2</sup>

Here we have the essence of a philosophical approach to the question of the self which parts company not just with Husserl but with the whole philosophical tradition we have surveyed so far. The raw mentalistic focus of this tradition, at least in its origins, with its emphasis on a purely cognitive relationship of one form or another, will always lead to an isolation of the subject and all the epistemic problems this entails. What is needed is a reappraisal in terms of a full-blooded somatic relationship of the subject and its world, and the way we inhabit the spatial-temporal world in and through our bodies. This tradition is premised upon the idea of the subject as a *kosmotheoros*: the seer who is able to survey the entire world; what Heidegger refers to as the 'idealised absolute subject' or 'worldless I'. Thus, we have tended to lose sight of the fact that we view the world from within its midst: "He who sees is of it and in it."<sup>3</sup>

Thus he goes on to say; "Unlike what classical idealism thought, the relationship of subject and object is no longer that *cognitive relationship* in which the object appears as constructed by the subject, but is a *relationship of being*, through which, to use a paradox, the subject *is* his body, his world, his situation, and in a certain sense enters into *interaction* with it." Merleau-Ponty therefore attempts to provide such a reappraisal; but, as we will see, such a project is not without its difficulties. The main difficulty with the approach he adopts is that it is not clear that he succeeds in involving man in the world "in such a way as to give him an external aspect, an outside, to make him 'objective'

2. Merleau-Ponty [1964b]; *Sense and Non-Sense* (trans. H. L. Dreyfus & Patricia A. Dreyfus) (Northwestern University Press), p.129-130.

3. Merleau-Ponty [1968]; *The Visible and the Invisible* (trans. A. Lingis) (Northwestern University Press), pp.100-113.

at the same time that he is 'subjective'." To do this, and thus arrive at a genuinely dialectical account of our involvement in the world, we need perform a balancing act between stressing the unique status of the human body and maintaining a notion of it as a materiality in the world. In accentuating the primacy and self-sufficiency of the phenomenal, and thereby relegating the objective to a derivative way of thinking, Merleau-Ponty occasionally comes close to merely instantiating a novel philosophy of the *cogito*.

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### 3.1 Merleau-Ponty's Insight: The Body-Subject

Merleau-Ponty gave expression to this reappraisal through the notion of the *body-subject*.<sup>4</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, the human subject is not a disengaged, translucent consciousness divorced from the real world, but rather an *incarnate subjectivity*, an embodied subject which stands in real relations to the world which it compenetrates. One of the positive lessons he learns from the later Husserl is that we cannot simply ignore the rôle of the body. The body is the "object at the very centre of our experience" and we must therefore pay it particular attention if we are to come to an understanding of how meaning emerges from our perceptual involvement with the world. But we cannot do this if we see the subject merely as a passive receptor of information, or the body simply as one mechanistic object amongst others in the experience of an absolute subject which is no more than a "surveying glance". Merleau-Ponty's contention is that if we, implicitly or explicitly, start from here, as must all philosophers in the Cartesian tradition, we will never reach an adequate understanding of our actual experience as it is lived.

This is something I argued for in Chapter 2 and, as I said there, to combat this we need to re-centre the body in our thinking and re-think the relationship of the body to both our 'subjectivity' and the 'world'.<sup>5</sup> After all, my body is where my subjectivity and the world meet. There is no more radical way to re-centre the body than to adopt Merleau-Ponty's approach of denying its status as simply an object and affirming its status as a subject. In this chapter I wish to examine this important contribution to the debate on embodiment. As we shall see, this manoeuvre is not without substantial difficulties: while the negative side of this thesis holds great intuitive appeal, the positive side, *i.e.* affirming its status as a subject, poses many problems which are ultimately irresolvable. Nonetheless, despite these reservations, in explicating this thesis Merleau-Ponty furnishes us with several fundamental insights which remain of considerable value.

From the standpoint of our philosophical heritage, the term 'body-subject' seems a somewhat unnatural linguistic construction. It is quite difficult to clarify completely what he means by this epithet as philosophical terminology is riddled

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4. In this respect Merleau-Ponty himself refers to the body variously as a 'natural subject', a 'natural "I"', or the 'subject of perception' rather than as a 'body-subject'. Nevertheless, although not a term he used himself, it does capture the essence of his thought. S. Kruks [1981]; *The Political Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty* (Harvester Press), p.23.

5. Many philosophers nowadays would be uncomfortable with the call to 'centre' or 're-centre' anything; but I see this as a perfectly legitimate *strategic* manoeuvre in response to the tradition we are challenging.



with dualistic assumptions. Erwin Straus' "anonymous Cartesian tradition" has left us with a general idea of body as something essentially extended and reified, the very opposite of what we normally take to be characteristic of subjectivity. Some may even go further than this and argue that our difficulty in gaining a firm grip on the notion reflects the fact that the conceptual truth of dualism is mirrored in the assumptions that permeate our general linguistic practices, and that we cannot simply legislate against them by introducing *ad hoc* new practices in some eliminativist fashion. I do not accept that it is rooted in our language in this naïve way, and, in any case, Merleau-Ponty is not a Russell or a Husserl, both of whom held the view at one time or other that ordinary language was hopelessly ambiguous and in need of purification by logical analysis. Nonetheless, it is true that in not finding the linguistic tools to hand he was forced to make his own.<sup>6</sup>

The human subject was seen by Merleau-Ponty to be something which stands above the simplistic dualistic opposition between an objectified mechanistic body and an immaterial soul, however this opposition arises. In its case we can no longer speak of an 'either/or'. The human subject is first and foremost a bodily subject, so that the human body, whilst obviously not something spiritual, does not simply belong to the material order of things. So the body is not an Husserlian 'idea', or a representation, or a bodiless thought, but then neither is it a thing in the Cartesian sense; *i.e.* simply part of *res extensa*. In fact it has its own, albeit ambiguous, mode of existence which Cartesian categories cannot capture. Merleau-Ponty repeatedly denies that the subjectivity of the body, which he is trying to emphasise, arises out of a union of mind and matter. As Aquinas said, such a union could only ever be an accidental whole and not a true unity. For Merleau-Ponty the body was a single reality, therefore its subjective character is intrinsic and not owed to a principle standing beyond itself, however intimate the relationship of this principle with the body. The body itself is a subject.

In claiming this he is obviously using the term 'subject' in a way that is completely different to the way it is used by Descartes and most subsequent philosophy. Some clarification is therefore needed here. The key to understanding his use of 'subject' lies in his idea of a dialectical relationship, something he also occasionally calls "circular causality". In the Cartesian tradition the subject was defined solely in terms of the reflective consciousness. While he did not wish to deny any connection between consciousness and

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6. Much of Merleau-Ponty's terminology is familiar enough in philosophical discourse. However, when he refers to terms such as 'body', 'soul', 'spirit', 'matter' *etc.* it is not always clear what he means. He is content to leave such terms with a degree of vagueness, because he thinks there is little point in trying to clarify that which, by its very nature, "is ambiguous." This ambiguity is central to his account of both the body and the world.

subjectivity, Merleau-Ponty was more concerned to focus attention on the subject as the *giver of meaning for itself*. When seen in this way, the subject need not be framed exclusively in terms of an immaterial consciousness, nor, indeed, in terms of certain characteristics that may be used as a general mark of subjectivity (eg. a point of view construed as 'what it is like to be  $\Phi$ '),<sup>7</sup> for the corporeal body may be seen as a giver of meaning for itself. He contrasts the dialectical relationship involved in this giving of meaning with a straightforward causal process. In the latter there is an asymmetrical interaction between the two related elements, cause and effect, such that one is not the co-cause of the other's influence. In the dialectical relationship there is also an interaction between two elements, but here the two are mutually influential: there exists a balance of influences between the two.

However, it only becomes appropriate to speak of a subject when one of these two elements is privileged as a meaning giving existence. Consider the following example: I am suffering from a mild infection for which my doctor prescribes a course of anti-biotics. The anti-biotics causally influence my body pathology and in time cure the infection. There seems to be a straightforwardly causal relationship between myself, as suffering patient, and the anti-biotics as medicine and cure. Nonetheless we can look at this from a slightly different perspective: they are allowed to work because I submit myself to treatment and take them up as a cure. While it is obviously true that the anti-biotics, as physico-chemical compounds, have an existence apart from this interaction, it is only possible to refer to them as 'medicine' or 'cure' in the context of my illness and the structure of my organism. Thus there is a reciprocal relationship in which I influence the object and give it meaning as a cure. There is a subject in this net of relationships that gives meaning and centres everything around itself as meaning-for-itself. But, and this needs to be stressed vigorously, its privileged position is not the privileged position of a Cartesian subject, for it is never outside the *milieu* of meaning and is certainly not an absolute. Rather it has an ambiguous existence, for it is at the same time both the centre and part of the whole dialectic relationship.

In the idea of a meaning giving existence we can again see the influence of Husserl on Merleau-Ponty's thought. Although he took up several of the ideas in Husserl's earlier work (such as this one), it was mainly in Husserl's later writings that Merleau-Ponty found the inspiration for his own philosophy. This was the Husserl of the *Crisis*, the second book of the *Ideas*, and several, as then, unpublished texts in the Louvain archives. This Husserl claimed that he had

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7. T. Nagel [1974]; "What It Is Like to Be a Bat", *Philosophical Review* 83, pp.435-450, reprinted in T. Nagel [1979]; *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge University Press), pp.165-180. See also the relevant entries in T. Nagel [1986]; *The View From Nowhere* (Oxford University Press).

given up the "Cartesian way in philosophy" and had shifted his focus of attention from the question of meaning and signification onto the problems of perception, embodiment and the life-world: in short, what Merleau-Ponty took to be the 'existential' Husserl.<sup>8</sup> However, even in these works, Husserl never really abandoned the objectives of transcendental phenomenology and only questioned the means by which they could best be achieved. The goal remained the same: to use the reduction in order to return to the ultimate and irreducible, to seek out fundamental constituent phenomena, and thereby provide an absolute permanent basis for all human projects. Therefore, despite all the disclaimers, the Cartesian project was up and running in Husserl's later writings as much as it was in his earlier work.

It is important to keep this in mind when reading Merleau-Ponty, if only to remind oneself of the radicalism of his general philosophical position. Husserl continued to operate according to the most basic assumption that the totality of reality was ultimately intelligible to consciousness, and thus, by means of the reduction, it could be made completely transparent and knowable to consciousness. This ideal formed the framework in which most philosophical thinking took place, and largely still does. Merleau-Ponty argued that, by necessity, this ideal requires the positing of a transcendent ego, a spectator consciousness outside the reality, and to which this reality appears. Therefore, even in his later work, Husserl never really escapes the need to return to an unsituated subject. The radicalism of Merleau-Ponty's thought arises from his rejection of this assumption and its corollary. We need not dwell upon this difficult aspect of his thought here, but we do need to make note of it, for it motivates, and is motivated by, his concern with a *situated subject* in preconscious dialogue with the world.

In the *Phenomenology of Perception* and *Sense and Non-Sense* Merleau-Ponty argues that we should not think of the world as a facticity for a subject which itself transcends facticity. The intellectual, comprehending subject is also characterised by facticity and thus the very intelligibility of reality is itself also part of the factual order. It too is a fact. As I understand it Merleau-Ponty is presenting a radical incompleteness theory of understanding. The world is accessible to our understanding because we are situated body-subjects in preconscious dialogue with it, but all is not openness and light. Due to our

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8. This Husserl was one of Merleau-Ponty's own reading. Merleau-Ponty saw himself as trying to uncover Husserl's 'unthought thought' in these writings, especially concerning a pre-theoretical ground, and thus extrapolated an existentialist line of argument for himself. Using the works of others as a spring-board in this way seems to me to be a common, and legitimate, form of philosophical *modus operandi*. The danger is in confusing it with straightforward exegesis and interpretation. See his commemorative essay to Husserl, "The Philosopher and His Shadow", reprinted in Merleau-Ponty [1964a]; *Signs* (trans. R. C. McCleary) (Northwestern University Press) pp.159-181.

situatedness, our understanding is bounded by horizons in the same way as our perceptual field, which itself recedes into regions of indistinctness. But unlike the perceptual field, which is open to an exhaustive exploration, it may be argued that certain of the boundaries of understanding are absolute. Reference to Michael Polanyi's 'from-to' vocabulary may help us to elucidate the point.<sup>9</sup> Polanyi argued that, in any act of attention, the recognition of an object or meaning was always dependent on the use of 'subliminal' or 'marginal' clues, themselves not explicit in the act itself. Consequently, I attend 'to' the object or meaning 'from' these clues. Thus we might say that these boundaries exist because we, in Polanyi's terms, *always* form part of the 'from' structure of understanding: we cannot transcend our comprehension in order to comprehend our comprehension. Therefore, as we are the ever present locus of understanding, certain things may completely elude our gaze and resist the penetration of our understanding: intelligibility and comprehension, by being rooted in this preconscious dialogue, arise from an area of darkness.<sup>10</sup>

But even where Merleau-Ponty does adopt one of Husserl's central ideas, it is rarely, if ever, simply a reiteration of Husserl's thought, but takes on a radically different aspect. Perhaps the clearest, and most dramatic, example of this is with regard to the reduction itself. He accepts the value of attempting a transcendental reduction, but says that its value lies in the fact that it does not and cannot work! In Merleau-Ponty's hands the reduction does not become a *reductio ad absurdum*, but what would nowadays be called a 'deconstruction' of the transcendental enterprise. Thus he says in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception*: "The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction."<sup>11</sup> Our disengagement from the world can never be completed and so, if understood properly, an attempted reduction does not lead us into a realm of transcendental subjectivity, but instead restores our "wonder" at the "unmotivated upsurge of the world" and the grasp this has on us. Therefore, we can use the reduction *strategically* and, by attempting to break with our familiar acceptance of things, we can bring our attention back to that which we have taken for granted. Similarly, we could say that the value of Descartes' ultimately unsuccessful divorce between consciousness and the body is

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9. For example, see M. Polanyi [1966a]; "The Logic of Tacit Inference", *Philosophy* 41, pp.1-18, and also M. Grene [1977]; "Tacit Knowing: Grounds for a Revolution in Philosophy", *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 8, pp.164-177. Grene notes the general similarity of Polanyi's and Merleau-Ponty's positions; a fact not surprising given their shared interest in gestalt psychology. Apparently it was not something that Polanyi could bring himself to notice.

10. Merleau-Ponty's 'philosophy of ambiguity' therefore does not shy away from saying that certain facts may be beyond our ken. It would be interesting to compare what he has to say on this with Colin McGinn's claims about the 'mysteriousness' of mind; though, no doubt, Merleau-Ponty would reject the specific claim that lack of understanding results from the way the world contains noumenal facts. C. McGinn [1989]; "Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem?", *Mind* 98, pp.349-366.

11. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *Phenomenology of Perception* [trans. C. Smith] (Routledge & Kegan Paul), p.xiv.

its strategic value, in that it serves merely to highlight the intimate connectedness of these two realities, their combined connectedness to the world, and ultimately to other subjects.

Merleau-Ponty explores these forms of connectedness primarily through his treatment of the problems of perception and, more specifically, the problem of the nature of the perceiving subject. As we saw in our earlier examination of Descartes' ideas, a question naturally arises as to who it is that perceives. Whilst Descartes admitted that the process of perception was in some way reliant on the sense organs of the body, he nevertheless tried to construe perception as an essentially intellectual activity. Hence, despite the problems this inevitably raises for an adequate understanding of the relationship of consciousness and the body, and consequently the relationship of the human subject and the world, he was theoretically committed to the view of the perceiving subject as an homuncular, intellectual *cogito*: a subject not intrinsically tied to the body or directly engaged with the world.

Merleau-Ponty wished to reject this view of perception and the perceiving subject, as well as the, apparently opposite, mechanistic-physiological view (the 'empiricist' view) which is also premised on a separation of consciousness and the body. On this later view, perception arises through the causal action of perceived objects on a perceiving body-object; the body being simply the last link in the causal chain and itself no more than a conduit of causal relations. Thus, on the one hand Cartesian intellectualism sees perception as an *activity*, but as the intellectual activity of a purely intellectual subject, whilst on the other hand what Merleau-Ponty calls empiricism sees perception in terms of a complete *passivity*. Nevertheless, as I have stressed before, despite this difference, both views have their origin in the marginalisation of the body, which they conceive as be just one object amongst other objects in the world. Furthermore, both are examples of the 'God-like survey': the view, addressed above, in which the world is entirely fathomable to some form of spectator consciousness and which he calls "*la pensée objective*" and "*la pensée de survol*". "In fact," he says, "the image of a constituted world where, with my body, I should be only one object among others, and the idea of an absolute constituting consciousness are only apparently antithetical; they are a dual expression of a universe perfectly explicit in itself."<sup>12</sup> Their inadequacies arise directly from these shared fundamental assumptions, so it is these that need to be addressed.

In fact, as we have already seen, Descartes himself made observations which at least moderate the idea that the body is no more than a contingently associated perceptual apparatus, somehow attached to an intellectual self as an absolute

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12. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.41.

interiority. In the *Sixth Meditation* he acknowledges that his body has a permanence in perception which other bodies do not, and he suggests that it is this constant presence which inclines him to think that it is his. Thus he says; "As for the body which by some special right I called 'mine', my belief that this body, more than any other, belonged to me had some justification. For I could never be separated from it, as I could from other bodies."<sup>13</sup> However, he then goes on to admit that this body was also the site of his appetites and emotions, pleasures and pains. The living body therefore has a presence which is qualitatively, and not just quantitatively, different to the presence of perceived objects in the world, for not only is it permanent in a way that perceived objects are not but it presents itself as a field of unmediated sensations. Nevertheless, as I have argued previously, Descartes was unable to theoretically accommodate either observation, and so in correspondence to the Princess Elizabeth, and almost in philosophical exasperation, he draws a distinction between the living body, as known in experience, and the body grasped abstractly in the understanding.<sup>14</sup> The failure of the Cartesian position is the failure to follow through the lessons, if I may make the pun, embodied in these considerations.

As Merleau-Ponty asserts, the permanence of a perceived object is compatible with its total absence from the perceptual field, but this is not true of the body. My body is not simply that object which I perceive more than any other, or that object which just happens to accompany all my perceptions, both of which seem implied by Descartes. It cannot be either of these things, for its total absence, or even a radical variability in its perspective, is actually inconceivable. Perceptual objects present themselves as *before me* and open to exhaustive exploration, but the body presents itself as *with me* and, as we have seen earlier, our ability to explore it is severely curtailed. The most important of these limitations stem from the fact that the body itself is the focal point of action and perception: it is itself a perspective, a point of view, and moreover a point of view upon which I cannot take a point of view. Its total absence and variability in its perspective are inconceivable, Merleau-Ponty argues, because its permanence and invariability in perspective are the conditions for perceptual objects presenting themselves perspectivally or, indeed, at all. In fact, if the force of this insight is embraced, one may go further and question whether the body can be said to 'accompany' all my actions or perceptions, or even whether, as Merleau-Ponty says, it is 'with me'. My old coat and devoted dog accompany me everywhere and are constantly with me, but this is hardly true (let alone *more true*) of my body, precisely because I cannot leave it behind or shake it off.

Descartes, of course, wanted to argue that the relationship between the

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13. Descartes; AT VII p.76, CSMK II p.52.

14. Descartes; AT III p.690, CSMK III p.225. See also Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.199.

human subject (narrowly construed) and its body was an intimate, inner relationship of some sort. This desire notwithstanding, his general philosophical approach to this question, implicated in his epistemological programme and its assumptions, constantly pulled him in the opposite direction: my body, in common with all *res extensa*, can be only indistinctly understood and must therefore be something Other than me. For his part Husserl also recognised the importance of these observations, as witnessed by his concept of the body as *Leib*, but once again theoretical considerations stood in the way of their full utilisation in his thought.

The lesson seems to be that as long as we cling to the theoretical position which incorporates an idea of an immaterial or transcendental ego we simply render ourselves incapable of accounting for our actual experiences. Merleau-Ponty took such observations to testify to the centrality of the body, and, in contrast to Descartes, he tried to work these into a coherent philosophical position. Before anything else, he argued, the body is a dimension of the subject's existence. This is to say, the body-as-object, the primary, and indeed only, mode of bodily being for Descartes and our subsequent philosophical traditions, is a derivative and impoverished abstraction, and that what these observations show is that the human body in the first instance is a lived body (*le corps propre*). Thus he argues that the naturalistic picture of the body "as a chemical structure or an agglomeration of tissues, is formed, by a process of impoverishment, from a primordial phenomenon of the body-for-us, the body of human experience or the perceived body."<sup>15</sup> For Merleau-Ponty this lived body is therefore a phenomenon that is prior to, and acts as a ground for, any conceptualisation we make of the body as a physiological thing. By losing sight of this fact, the intellectualist and empiricist traditions, both born of Descartes' mutually exclusive two-part division of the world into *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, cannot account for our actual experience or the nature of perception.

The error they fall into may be a natural one, according to Merleau-Ponty, because the intentional nature of consciousness tends to make it lose sight of itself in favour of its objects. However, where traditional philosophical accounts retain intentional structures as the preserve of pure consciousness, Merleau-Ponty argues that they are characteristic of the human body itself. Intentionality, therefore, may not simply be the 'mark of the mental', to cite Brentano, but a characteristic of subjectivity in whatever form this is presented.<sup>16</sup> If subjectivity

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15. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p351. What I refer to here as the 'lived body', Merleau-Ponty also occasionally calls the 'phenomenal body' and the 'habitual body'.

16. F. Brentano [1874]; *Psychology From an Empirical Standpoint* [ed. O. Kraus, trans. A. C. Rancurello, D. B. Terrell & L. L. McAlister 1973] (Routledge & Kegan Paul), pp.88-89. This is one of the crucial areas where Merleau-Ponty's thought diverges from that of Sartre. Cf. J. P. Sartre [1966]; *Being and Nothingness* [trans. H. E. Barnes] (Washington Square Press). For a comparison

or consciousness can be manifest in the intentional nature of a lived body, as the focus of action and perception, then this self-effacement could be carried over into the realm of the corporeal. This is precisely what Merleau-Ponty wishes to argue. For there even to be objects for a consciousness, there must be a transparency about its own operations. The intentional self-effacement, or transparency of the body for reflective awareness, is thus a necessary feature of the body, considered as the locus of sensorimotor activity for an essentially embodied consciousness. It may often be the case that the intrusion of reflective awareness, by rendering the body opaque, actually disrupts the harmony of the body engaged in the act. That the body-as-lived does indeed partake in this transparency seems to persuasively argue in favour of the view that it is not simply an object in perception but may be itself a perceiving subjectivity with its own peculiar form of bodily intentionality, what Merleau-Ponty designated an 'operative intentionality' (*intentionnalité opérante*); that is, what Husserl referred to as a *fungierende Intentionalität*.<sup>17</sup> Intellectualist and empiricist philosophers are therefore simply following the line of least resistance in their thinking, by conforming to a natural inclination in the intentional. As we saw in Chapter 1, the suggestion is that this phenomenon may account, at least to some extent, for the continued absence of the body in their theoretical considerations.

My experience of my own body therefore teaches me a new mode of existence which is neither simply a pure subjective being-for-itself, or a pure objective being-in-itself, but is a mixture of the two. It is an "ambiguous mode of existing" which calls into question the traditional subject/object dichotomy on which Cartesian philosophies are based. In something of a reflection of Descartes' conclusion that the unity of body and soul can only be known through experience and is not fully capturable in the understanding, Merleau-Ponty argues that our awareness of this mode of existence is "not a thought" but something we have to live. He says:

If I try to think of it as a cluster of third person processes - 'sight', 'motility', 'sexuality' - I observe that these 'functions' cannot be interrelated, and related to the external world, by causal connections, they are all obscurely drawn together and implied in a unique drama. Therefore the body is not an object. For the same reason, my awareness of it is not a thought, that is to say, I cannot take it to pieces and reform it to make a clear idea. Its unity is always implicit and vague. [...] I have no means of knowing the human body other than that of living it, which means taking up on my own account the drama which is being played out in it, and losing myself in it. [...] Thus the experience of one's body runs counter to the reflective procedure which detaches subject and object from each other, and which gives us only the thought about the body, or the body as an idea, and not the experience of the body or the body in reality.<sup>18</sup>

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see also M. Whitford [1982]; *Merleau-Ponty's Critique of Sartre's Philosophy* (French Forum).

17. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.xviii.

18. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, pp.198-199.



The difference between Merleau-Ponty and Descartes is that the former embraces this awareness of the body as primary, whereas for Descartes it always “remains subordinated to our knowledge of it through the medium of ideas.” Embracing the primacy of this experience compels us to give up a dogmatic adherence to the above dichotomy and acknowledge a third mode of existence which unites its two terms. But here Merleau-Ponty invites us to do much more than this: in rediscovering the lived body, we must also revise our understanding of the relation between the body's various functions, and the relation between the body itself and the world. Our orthodox understanding, based simply on an empirical analysis of causal connections, must be supplanted by an understanding based on a phenomenological analysis of a primordial dialogue of mutual implication. In order to achieve this, he argues, it is necessary not only to amend our understanding of the body, but also of the perceived world.

Merleau-Ponty's revision focuses upon the dialogue between the lived body and its correlate, or ‘perceptual pole’, the lived world, and he takes this dialogue to be the primordial ground from which all else springs. Of course the body can take on a thing-like existence and, as such, can become an object of investigation for the empirical sciences, but this mode of existence is only secondary and arises from reflection or a dysfunction of the lived body. If it were primary we would have to admit with the Cartesian that the human subject is something other than the body, but our investigation shows us that consciousness is not a pure being-for-itself. Nevertheless the human subject is something *more* than just this conceptualised anonymous body as an in-itself, a body which properly belongs to no one: the human subject is a lived body, a body-subject and not a body-object. Similarly the world can also be objectified and become the world of which the empirical sciences treat, but, again, this mode of existence is merely secondary, an abstraction from the phenomenal, perceived world as it is presented to us. This world is the world we first encounter and is the world as it is lived. Therefore, just as the body is in the first instance not a conceptualised body but a lived body, then also in the first instance “the world is not what I think, but what I live through.”<sup>19</sup> Together these form a system of circular causality we may call ‘being-in-the-world’, each implying the other and each seen as correlates of the other. This is why Merleau-Ponty emphasises that perception is a dialogue, a form of “communication”, between the lived body and the lived world: it is a “co-existence”, even “literally a form of communion.”<sup>20</sup>

It is quite clear then that Merleau-Ponty's line of thought develops an innovative discourse which challenges traditional philosophical categories, and

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19. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, pp.xvi-xvii.

20. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, pp.212-213.

he is at pains to distinguish his views from those that have previously advanced in this field. Firstly, he does not even address the question of the world as a cause of my having such and such a perceptual belief. For Merleau-Ponty perception is never an imposition, certainly not an imposition of a raw perceptual datum upon a receptive but passive subject. His position rests upon a dissolution of any absolute distinction between the perceiving subject and the object perceived, and between percepts and concepts. He rejects the empiricist account of discrete ideas or impressions which "gently force" a meaningful association by recognition of their similarity. Such a Humean association could not occur unless they were already pregnant with significance: "Now the sensations and images which should be the beginning and end of all knowledge never make their appearance anywhere other than within a horizon of meaning, and the significance of the percept, far from resulting from an association, is in fact presupposed in all association."<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand he also rejects a Kantian account of the significance in terms of a pre-conscious imposition of a subjective structure on given phenomena by a pre-existing reason: "It is not *because* the 'form' produces a certain state of equilibrium, solving a problem of maximum coherence and, in the Kantian sense, making a world possible, that it enjoys a privileged place in our perception; it is the very appearance of the world and not the condition of its possibility; it is the birth of a norm and is not realised according to a norm; it is the identity of the external and the internal and not the projection of the internal in the external."<sup>22</sup> The perceived world is imbued with meaning and significance, not because perception is either of these two forms of imposition, but because it is an act of communication between the two terms of the above dialogue.

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21. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.15.

22. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, pp.60-61.

### 3.2 Spatiality and the Body-Subject

Having given this general account of his philosophical position, let us now look at a specific example of this dialogue. Before we do this, however, we should remind ourselves that the lived body is a *body-subject*, a subject in the sense I describe above as a giver of meaning for itself. Consequently, although the human subject is fully implicated in the world, and forms part of the circular causality which is the dialogue with the world, it nonetheless occupies a privileged position within this system, for it is at the heart of meaning and centres everything else around itself as meaning for itself. There is, therefore, a degree of similarity between Merleau-Ponty's position and the Kantian position he addresses, for it follows that the human subject is a meaning giving existence on a pre-conscious level. The difference is that instead of this being in virtue of a pre-existing reason, it is in virtue of our bodily existence and "the hold that our body takes upon the world."<sup>23</sup> Merleau-Ponty explores this idea in various ways and gives a broad range of examples of meaning which is freely given yet is not truly independent of us. I wish to focus on just one of these, on spatiality and spatial orientation.

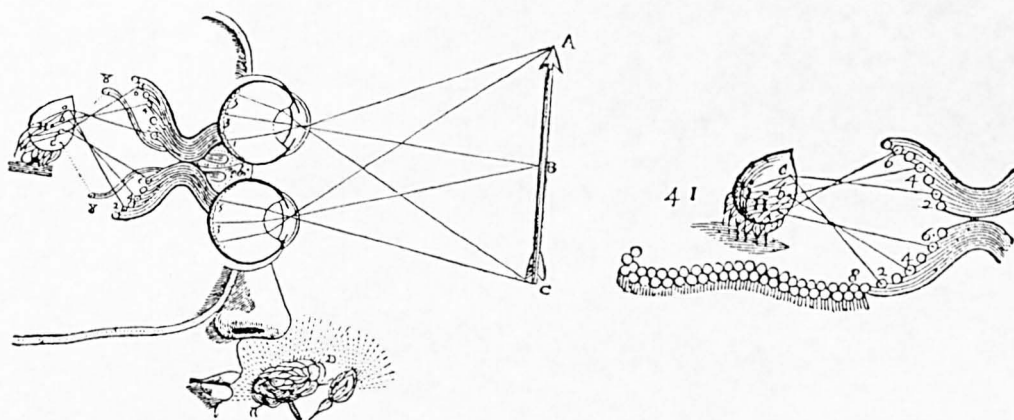
In order to provide a context for Merleau-Ponty's remarks, let us return once more to Descartes. In Discourse V of the *Optics* he relates a simple experiment conducted with the eye of an ox. Cutting away the outer membrane, so as to expose the vitreous humour, he covered the hole with a translucent material and then placed the eye in a specially made shutter. The eye then acted as the lens of a *camera obscura*, providing the only source of light in a darkened room.<sup>24</sup> Looking at the covering over the back of the eye Descartes observed all the objects lit by sunlight in front of the eye clearly and in their 'natural perspectives', except for one feature: they were all upside down. The discovery of the inverting property of lenses and that the eye, with its simple lens arrangement, is like an inverting *camera obscura* naturally prompts the question "Why are things seen upright when their image is inverted on the retina of the eye?" Yet this is not a question, it seems, that Descartes explicitly asks or answers. Although clearly impressed by this discovery, he remained uncharacteristically silent on it: nothing in the text of the *Optics* suggests that he ever considered the problem; nor does it receive treatment in the *Treatise on Man*. However, in the *Treatise on Man* Descartes' accompanying diagrams speak volumes where the

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23. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.275.

24. I have already suggested that this experiment may have had some significance for Descartes' philosophy of mind and understanding of perception. See Chapter 2, §2.2.

text is uncommunicative (Figures 3 & 4, below). A solution, of sorts, is presented in these diagrams: somewhere unspecified, but between the end of the optic nerve and the pineal gland, the image magically re-inverts itself to appear upright in the seat of the soul. What the mechanism is for this re-inversion remains unclear, but perhaps Descartes does not give this question detailed treatment because he considered it obvious that this must happen, in order for the soul to perceive the world in *all* its natural perspectives.<sup>25</sup>



Figures 3 & 4: The re-inversion of the retinal image - from the *Traite de l'Homme* .

The early history of empirical psychology is strewn with the remains of theories which have attempted to explain this apparent anomaly. Apart from re-inversion theories, there has been the strange solution of Molyneux and his contemporaries, rightly criticised by Berkeley, in which the mind is somehow already aware of the inverting property of lenses and takes account of this in visual perception. More recently there has been the ocular movement theory, the projection theory and theories which explain the anomaly in terms of a correction by reference to touch: more sophisticated versions of Berkeley's own difficult and ambiguous solutions.<sup>26</sup> However, one assumption common to all of these different theories is that inversion of the retinal image is in fact necessary for upright vision: if the image on the retina is always, naturally, inverted this must be because this is a requirement of seeing things in their natural perspective. The challenge to this orthodoxy only came at the end of the last century with the pioneering work of George M. Stratton at the University of California.

25. If so, he would be in good, if not illustrious, company. I remember my school biology teacher giving me exactly this type of answer: the brain re-inverts the image. At the time this answer seemed so natural, and so obviously commonsensical, that I was left perfectly content. Perhaps it was consideration of this apparent problem which led the early anatomists, such as Galen, to conjecture that it was the lens which was the recipient of vision.

26. *An Essay Towards A New Theory of Vision* (§§88-120) and *The New Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained* (§§49-53), reprinted in M. R. Ayers [ed.] [1980]; Berkeley: *Philosophical Works* (J. M. Dent & Sons). See also E. J. Furlong [1963]; "Berkeley and the 'Knot about Inverted Images'", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 41, pp.306-316.

Stratton took himself to be judging the correctness or otherwise of this assumption. If he could show that the assumption was unwarranted, and that an inverted retinal image was not a necessary condition for our seeing things in an upright position, he would have shown at a stroke that all these previous theories were attempts to account for a problem that was itself no more than a fiction.<sup>27</sup> Merleau-Ponty was greatly impressed by Stratton's experiments, but thought that they showed much more than Stratton's own limited conclusion: they also showed the sterility of the intellectualist and empiricist traditions in psychology, particularly with respect to their attempts to provide satisfactory accounts of our experience of orientated space. Focusing on Stratton's experiments is in line with his general phenomenological method of drawing our attention back to what we take for granted by examining the abnormal case.

Stratton's method consisted of wearing field-inverting glasses, thereby substituting an upright retinal image for the normal inverted one, and simply noting the results. These were startling. Wearing the glasses, in the first instance for twenty one and a half hours over a period of three days, and subsequently for eighty seven hours over eight days, Stratton initially experienced great confusion, and co-ordination of bodily movements was difficult: "parts of my body were *felt* to lie where they would have appeared had the instrument been removed: they were *seen* to be in another position."<sup>28</sup> This is no more than one would expect, but Stratton was surprised at how quickly he adapted and this situation remedied. At first, he reports, "things were thus *seen* in one way and thought of in a far different way", things appeared inverted and unreal, "illusory images between the observer and the objects or things themselves."<sup>29</sup> There was a complete dislocation between visual and tactile experience with visual experience appearing new and alien and tactile experience having the feel of the familiar and real. Subsequently, however, objects began to appear "real things" again and no longer seemed inverted; instead it was the body which did not feel normal. In part this depended upon the attitude adopted by the observer:

If the attention was directed mainly inward, and things were viewed only in indirect attention, they seemed clearly to be inverted. But when, on the other hand, full attention was given to the outer objects, these frequently seemed to be in normal position, and whatever there was of abnormality seemed to lie in myself, as if head and shoulders were inverted and I was viewing objects from that position, as boys

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27. Although Stratton's experiments could not show this, in fact the retinal image is not necessary for visual perception. J. J. Gibson points out that we are apt to forget that the eye is not necessarily structured as the human eye is: an arthropod's compound eye (with no chamber, no lens, and no sensory surface) makes no use of a retinal image at all. J. J. Gibson [1979]; *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Houghton Mifflin), pp.61-62. For an alternative treatment of the issue by a contemporary of Stratton's, see J. H. Hyslop [1897]; "Upright Vision", Parts 1 & 2, *The Psychological Review* 4, pp.71-73 & 142-163.

28. G. M. Stratton [1896]; "Some Preliminary Experiments on Vision Without Inversion of the Retinal Image", *The Psychological Review* 3, p.614.

29. G. M. Stratton [1896]; *op. cit.*, p.613.

sometimes do from between their legs.<sup>30</sup>

Nonetheless, during succeeding days the experience of his body and the experience of the perceived objects began to come together and his body started to feel normal in its inverted world. Stratton then started to experience, especially when active, both his body and objects as real and right-side up. A new visual space was gradually built up and Stratton observed that what "had been the old 'upper' position in the field was beginning to have much of the feeling formerly connected with the old 'lower' position, and *vice versa*."<sup>31</sup> The switch, it must be emphasised, was not purely visual but tactile as well, and involved a growing kinaesthetic familiarity. At the end of each experiment the lenses of the glasses were removed carefully and Stratton says:

On opening my eyes, the scene had a strange familiarity. The visual arrangement was immediately recognised as the old one of pre-experimental days; yet the reversal of everything from the order to which I had grown accustomed during the past week, gave the scene a surprising, bewildering air which lasted several hours. It was hardly the feeling, though, that things were upside-down.<sup>32</sup>

Others since Stratton have repeated his experiments, or have performed a bewildering array of similar experiments: with, for example, the visual field inclined by 45°, or with left/right reversal, or with 180° inversion plus left/right reversal, and all have found similar results.<sup>33</sup>

What, then, are we to make of all this? Stratton drew the conclusion that we have no reason to suppose something like a Cartesian re-inversion in the visual process. In response to the question "Why don't we see everything upside-down?" we could give the facetious answer that, in fact, we do, but as we consistently see *everything* this way it makes no difference to what we experience.<sup>34</sup> More correctly, we could say that it is a very misleading question, for there is no such thing as 'upright vision' as such. As Stratton says: "Vision as

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30. G. M. Stratton [1896]; *op. cit.*, p.616.

31. G. M. Stratton [1897b]; "Vision Without Inversion of the Retinal Image", *The Psychological Review* 4, p.350.

32. G. M. Stratton [1897b] *op. cit.*, p.470.

33. See, for example, F. W. Snyder & N. H. Pronko [1952]; *Vision With Spatial Inversion* (University of Wichita Press), and H. Kotenhoff [1957]; "Situational and Personal Influences on Space Perception with Experimental Spectacles", Parts 1 & 2, *Acta Psychologica* 13, pp.79-97 & 151-161.

34. In arguing for his relativistic thesis of incommensurability Quine ponders "whether our neighbour may not systematically see everything upside-down", and implies that, as neither we or the person concerned could tell, the problem of spatial inversion is analogous to the problem of spectral inversion. Both riddles, he says, should be taken seriously and their moral widely applied. However, the riddle of spectral inversion rests upon the assumption that the subjective characters of my and my neighbour's experiences may be different; as this assumption can gain no foothold with respect to spatial inversion, not only are the two not analogous, but there cannot be a 'riddle' of spatial inversion in the way Quine believes. W. V. O. Quine [1968]; "Ontological Relativity", *Journal of Philosophy* 65, pp.185-212, especially pp.201-202. See also N. G. E. Harris [1972]; "On Seeing Everything Upside-Down", *Analysis* 33, pp.28-31, and L. Browning [1973]; "On Seeing 'Everything' Upside-Down", *Analysis* 34, pp.48-49.

a whole and by itself is indeed neither inverted nor upright. Objects within the visual system may be inverted or upright but the whole cannot by itself have either of these characteristics."<sup>35</sup> 'Upright vision', if this means anything at all, means vision which is in harmony with motor and tactile experience. A problem only exists when there is disharmony between these elements, and generally there is not. But nor can we really speak sensibly about the orientation of a particular mode of perception in relation to others. Contrary to a Berkelean type view, tactile or other sensations cannot form an external frame of reference for visual perception, for while they are ancillary to the visual field they are not in fact independent of it. The 'problem' of orientation is never an exclusively visual one; after all, this is why a particular type of fairground amusement works so well - we feel the ground moving away from us because we see the scenery moving.<sup>36</sup> These raw tactile or kinæsthetic sensations themselves cannot determine what 'up' and 'down' are, for they, too, stand in need of a frame of reference. Therefore, the orientation of space is a feature of perception as a whole, we can only talk of 'up' and 'down' as within perception, so it makes no sense to question whether perception itself is upside-down, for there is no frame of reference for the whole to which we can appeal.

Some caution is required here as experiments of this duration cannot be conclusive. For example, if inversion of the retinal image is not necessary, why is a period of adaptation required? Furthermore, why, once the field inverting glasses are removed, does everything not appear to be upside-down? Perhaps the answer to both is that a lifetime of seeing with an inverted retinal image cannot be overcome so quickly, or perhaps the reason is pathological or neurological. These experiments by themselves cannot settle the issue. Nevertheless Merleau-Ponty thought that there was enough here to challenge accounts based upon empiricist and intellectualist assumptions. Stratton's experiments raise a crucial question regarding the meaning of inversion and orientation: with respect to what does the subject experience the visual field to be either inverted or upright? In an important sense, he says, both empiricism and intellectualism remain anterior to the problem of orientated space because neither can begin to ask the question.

The most obvious problem for the empiricist, he says, is to explain how any such adaptation is possible. Why is it that during the experiment everything

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35. G. M. Stratton [1897a]; "Upright Vision and the Retinal Image", *The Psychological Review* 4, p.184.

36. In fact, if anything, there seems to be a dominance of visual information over other forms of information in perceiving the orientation of one's body. For example, observers inside a tilted room, who were asked to set the adjustable chair in which they were sitting to an upright position, invariably set it in the direction of the room's tilt. H. A. Wilkin [1959]; "Perception of the Upright", *Scientific American* 200, pp.50-56. See also I. Rock [1984]; *Perception* (Scientific American Books), especially Chapter 8.

gradually rights itself? This is extremely curious for while the subject continues to wear the field-inverting glasses, the image on the retina remains inverted from its natural position. According to empiricism, everything should remain upside-down, since spatial orientation is an inherent property of the external world and, as such, causally impinges on the subject for the duration of the experiment. Empiricist psychology therefore treats "the perception of space as the perception, within ourselves, of a real space, and the phenomenological orientation of objects as reflecting their orientation in the world."<sup>37</sup> The empiricist may answer that the body, as a mass of tactile and kinæsthetic sensations, gradually rejoins the up and the down, high and low co-ordinates established by vision. These up and down, high and low co-ordinates are dictated by the position of the head and feet respectively, and when bodily sensation adjusts to the reversed position of these the confusion disappears. But the inadequacy of supposing that it is the objectified body which provides the stable point of orientation is revealed by the fact that this body itself is also, at times, experienced as inverted. The thematised head and feet are part of the experienced field as well, so the objectified body (and what other body is available to empiricism?) is perceived as inverted with all the rest. In fact there is nothing in the subject's visual or tactile content which is orientated absolutely in itself, so no part of this content can act as a fulcrum, dictating the orientation of all the rest. If 'up' was simply dictated by the position of the head then even the initial inversion would be incomprehensible.

But if empiricism is in trouble explaining these experiences, then intellectualism is in a far worse predicament. If the intellectualist holds that spatial orientation is the result of the activity of an homuncular constituting ego, then it is at a complete loss how to explain the subject's actual experience of inversion. The observing subject, knowing that he or she is wearing field-inverting glasses, should make an allowance for this, *à la* Molyneux, when constituting the form of the visual field. Thus both perceived objects and the subject's body should continue to be experienced as real and right-side up. Therefore, he argues, intellectualism cannot even consistently concede that the world *is* inverted after the field inverting glasses are put on. As all objective relations between the thematised body and the perceived world are preserved during the course of the experiment, there is nothing in the content of experience by which a constituting ego could distinguish between the pre-experimental experience with the experience concurrent with the experiment. Furthermore, there is nothing which could make the visual experience of the 'inverted' body incompatible with the tactile experience of the 'upright' body: since an incorporeal ego does not, strictly speaking, view the world from

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37. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.247.



anywhere, spatial co-ordinates such as up and down, high and low cannot *mean* anything to such an unlocated subject. Because the immaterial self of intellectualism has no concrete perspective, what significance could 'upright' or 'inverted' have for it? Thus Merleau-Ponty says; "a constituting mind is eminently able to trace out all directions in space, but has at any moment no direction, and consequently no space, without an actual starting point, an absolute 'here' which can gradually confer a significance on all spatial determinations."<sup>38</sup>

Traditionally, then, spatiality has been regarded in one of two ways; 1). as a factual datum given together with the general contents of experience, an objective relationship registered passively on the retina, and 2). the form which makes external experience possible, constituted by a non-spatial, non-locatable, transcendental subject. Merleau-Ponty wants to argue that Stratton's, albeit limited, results show that these traditional notions of spatiality need to be rethought and that spatial orientation, and even the unity of experience, can no longer be thought to lie 'out there' or 'in here'. The content of experience is not orientated in itself, yet if 'up' and 'down' are relative, the questions still arise; "To what are they relative?", and "How is it that we can experience directions like these?" Merleau-Ponty's answer is that we must discover the "absolute within the sphere of the relative": that meaning-giving existence that confers a significance and which enables the subject to characterise his or her own body as either upright or inverted. He argues that this absolute must be a third kind of spatiality, distinct from the traditional understandings of spatiality as content or form. In fact what is important is not a thematised, perceived, or objectified body, occupying objective space as a sign of orientation, rather it is the lived body as the potentiality of actions and the vehicle of one's being-in-the-world. Objects are not perceived in an anonymous, objectified space (the space described by physical science), but are presented in a space orientated around me as subject. It is only as a lived body, and as a bodily agent functioning in the world, that this spatial orientation has any meaning for me and that directions such as 'up' and 'down', 'high' and 'low' have any significance.

Merleau-Ponty's arguments therefore stress that perception is not a channel of sense for an homuncular self but consists of the engagement of the whole embodied subject. Consequently, perception and spatiality need to be viewed ecologically, as a relation between the perceiving subject and its environment; that is, a world of which it is an integral part. The world presents itself as a possible habitat for an embodied subject and is structured as a field of potential action for such a subject. This is why Merleau-Ponty insists in the

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38. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.247.

*Phenomenology of Perception* that “my body is wherever there is something to be done”, and that “Consciousness is in the first place not a matter of ‘I think that’ but of ‘I can’.”<sup>39</sup> Such remarks show just how far he has moved away from thinking as a philosopher in the tradition we have reviewed, *i.e.* as a philosopher for whom the self is always, above all else, a knowing self. Thus Merleau-Ponty’s thought perhaps shares something, at least *prima facie*, in common with one of the few pre-twentieth century philosophers in this tradition who tried to think their way through the subject-object dichotomy from a genuinely new perspective: Arthur Schopenhauer.

For Schopenhauer, the human subject is not simply a knowing subject, as he says “a winged cherub’s head without a body”, but a living bodily thing, an individual item in the world, a materiality which is distinguished by its capacity for self-conscious thought and action. A knowing subject can only be aware of representations and so, he argues, following the lead of Hume and Kant, it cannot be aware of itself as such. And yet, he continues, whilst investigating the problem we find ourselves rooted in the world, by virtue of the individuating rôle of the body, and thus able to acquire knowledge of the world.<sup>40</sup> The degree of contiguity between the standpoints of the two philosophers is perhaps best brought out in the following explanation of Schopenhauer’s overall strategy:

All previous philosophers who have theorised about the self [...] have made two great mistakes: (i) that of thinking that an account of the human subject could be given solely in terms of the capacities to think, acquire knowledge, and passively observe an ‘outside’ world of objects, and (ii) that of radically divorcing the subject from the body. The two mistakes are closely connected [...] and we can rectify the second mistake by rectifying the first.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, in order to try and emphasise the human subject’s implication in the world, Schopenhauer anticipates Merleau-Ponty’s procedure of focusing on the nature of the subject as an embodied agent. However, there is a debilitating flaw at the heart of Schopenhauer’s treatment of these issues which seriously undermines his attempt at rectifying those mistakes. He argues, as I say, that we are rooted in the world as bodily things, but only *qua* subjects of will and action: *qua* subjects of thinking, perceiving and knowing we are not part of the world at all. As a subject of thought and experience I am distinct from all the objects of which I am conscious, including my body which, once again, is reduced to the

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39. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.250 and p.137 respectively.

40. A. Schopenhauer [1819]; *The World as Will and Representation*, 2 volumes (trans. E. F. J. Payne 1969) (Dover), Volume 1, §18, p.99.

41. C. Janaway [1984]; “The Subject and the Objective Order”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 84, p.149. For more detailed elucidation of Schopenhauer’s philosophy, see D. W. Hamlyn [1980]; *Schopenhauer* (Routledge & Kegan Paul), C. Janaway [1989]; *Self and World in Schopenhauer’s Philosophy* (Clarendon Press), and C. Janaway [1994]; *Schopenhauer* (Oxford University Press).

status of "an object among objects."<sup>42</sup> For this subject, which 'hovers' somewhere outside the world of objects, the body simply appears as an 'outer' object of that world; yet, as acts of will are identical with bodily movements, the body's movements are given directly to the subject of will and action, and so from this viewpoint it cannot be conceived of in this way.

In Schopenhauer we therefore seem to have a bifurcation of the human subject, or at least two competing views of the subject; on the one hand it is a subject which is active and embodied, and on the other passive and disembodied. What Schopenhauer calls "the knot of the world" and "a miracle κατ' ἐξοχήν" (miracle *par excellence*) is the fact that we think that these two in some way coincide; that is to say, the 'I' of thought and experience and the 'I' of will and action are the same 'I'.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, it is not clear in Schopenhauer that this is a coincidence between equals, for he does also say that the body is given in two different ways *to the subject of knowing*, and that this difference is not to be explained by a difference between the body and other objects of representation, but that the subject's knowledge "stands in this double reference only to that one representation."<sup>44</sup> The subject of knowing therefore seems to occupy a privileged position in Schopenhauer's scheme, despite his insight into our worldly implication, a view which owes its parentage to Kant and Schopenhauer's commitment to transcendental idealism. Consequently, exactly how this coincidence is possible is something which Schopenhauer's philosophy was unable to explicate, and why he regarded it as miraculous and inexplicable; a Gordian knot that defies unravelling. Schopenhauer, as much as Descartes or Husserl, leaves us with a *de facto* union whose *de jure* possibility escapes us. We will have recourse to return to this problem shortly.

For Merleau-Ponty, as the subject is essentially an embodied agent, spatial orientation must thus be understood as a behavioural optimum, achieved when the subject's corporeal possession of the scene, through sharpness in perception and effectiveness in action, is at a maximum. Accordingly the new spectacle, due to wearing the field-inverting glasses, elicits from the subject a new phenomenal body, required to perceive the spectacle and, more importantly, to inhabit it. This new body makes its appearance:

[W]here my motor intentions and my perceptual field join forces, when my actual body is at one with the virtual body required by the spectacle, and the actual spectacle with the setting which my body throws around it. It comes to rest when, between my body as the potentiality for certain movements [...] and the spectacle perceived as an invitation to the same movements and the scene of the same actions, a pact is concluded which gives me the enjoyment of space and gives to things their direct

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42. A. Schopenhauer [1819]; *op. cit.*, Volume 1, §18, p.100.

43. A. Schopenhauer [1819]; *op. cit.*, Volume 1, §18, p.102.

44. A. Schopenhauer [1819]; *op. cit.*, Volume 1, §19, p.104.

power over my body.<sup>45</sup>

So the body is determined as the potentiality of action, and the perceptual field as an invitation to action; it is by responding to this invitation and sealing the pact that the incarnate subject receives the "enjoyment of space". This reciprocal hold of the body on the world and the world on the body is the perceptual ground, "the absolute within the sphere of the relative", from which particular directions like up and down ultimately emerge. It forms a pre-personal horizon (such as my own birth) and is something I can only reflectively apprehend as already being. The pact is thus concluded on a pre-conscious level; not between the world and my reflective self, but between the world and "another subject beneath me, for whom a world exists before I am here, and who marks out my place in it." Who, then, is this other subject? Merleau-Ponty answers, "This captive or natural spirit is my body."<sup>46</sup>

The world is imbued with meaning because it is already a world for a body-subject. These two terms, body and world, form two poles of a system in a circular structure: the body, if you like, being the 'noesis' and the world its 'noema', except that here the structure is a living relation and not a Husserlian ideal relation. Nonetheless, one of the terms, the body-as-subject, is a privileged point in the structure: it is itself permeated with meaning and intentions, and is the giver of meaning for itself. In this way there is a relation between the orientated spatiality of the world and the spatiality of the body itself. As Madison has succinctly put it; "The perceived world is structured according to the hold the body has or can have on it. The spatiality of the perceived world is thus a *reply* to the body's dimensions and its possibilities for action."<sup>47</sup> The gestalt nature of our perception of the world seemed to be a reflection of the fact that the parts and functions of the body are not simply related together in objective space, *partes extra partes* (as between physical things), but are themselves integrated into a bodily gestalt, as the focus of perception and action.<sup>48</sup> The moral here is that the body is not simply an assemblage of parts, whose aspects just happen to be coordinated, but is a single organic unity, wherein each part implies the others, knowing them dynamically, and becomes accessible by a refocusing of intentions. Similarly, spatiality seems intrinsically bound up with the nature of bodily organisation and structure, and the possibility of the motility of the body-subject.

Merleau-Ponty insists that perception is always perspectival, of the form of figure-ground structure, and that the body is the condition for both of these. Accordingly, he says; "One's own body is the third term, always tacitly

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45. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.250.

46. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.254.

47. G. B. Madison [1981]; *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty* (Ohio University Press), p.29.

48. I shall return to this question in the next chapter.

understood, in the figure background structure, and every figure stands out against the double horizon of external and bodily space."<sup>49</sup> The body itself, he argues, is not in the first instance an object, but is the very condition of there being objects. Things are perceived in reference to the body and stand out from the ground because they are "polarised by its tasks, of its *existence towards* them, of its collecting together of itself in its pursuit of its aims."<sup>50</sup> The human body itself is thus directed and is consequently intentional: existing as *être-au-monde*. The spatiality of the body is therefore unlike that of external objects, it is a spatiality of *situation* rather than a spatiality of *position*. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty wants to argue that the body is not itself *in* space as such, but is in fact the author of space. Hence, he says:

The word 'here' applied to my body does not refer to a determinate position in relation to other positions or to external co-ordinates, but the laying down of the first co-ordinates, the anchoring of the active body in an object, the situation of the body in face of its tasks. Bodily space can be distinguished from external space and envelop its parts instead of spreading them out, because it is the darkness needed in the theatre to show up the performance, the background of somnolence or reserve of vague power against which the gesture and its aim stand out, the zone of not being *in front of* which precise beings, figures and points can come to light.<sup>51</sup>

So 'here' literally expresses the body's presence in the world and determines this presence as being-to-the-world. But if 'here' does not refer to a position in space as such, is the bodily subject a "hole in being", as Hegel would say, or a "nullpoint", as would Husserl? Merleau-Ponty's answer is no: the subject of sensation, he says, is not a "pure nothingness with no terrestrial weight", but a "hollow" or "fold" in the world where the dialogue takes place.<sup>52</sup> All in all then, spatiality and spatial orientation are not dependent upon a subjective, constituting intellect or upon the structure of the world as it is in itself. Nor, indeed, is it dependent upon "my body as it in fact is, as a thing in objective space, but as a system of possible actions, a virtual body with its phenomenal 'place' defined by its task and situation."<sup>53</sup> Space radiates meaningfully out from this hollow or fold because I am essentially a body-subject living and acting in the world.

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49. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.101.

50. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.101.

51. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, pp.100-101. Cf. Moore's 'common sense' attitude to his body, as discussed in Chapter 1.

52. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.215. Merleau-Ponty suggests that we compare this point to his position in *The Structure of Behaviour*. Consciousness, whether seen from the outside or inside, cannot be a pure *for itself*. Cf. M. Merleau-Ponty [1965]; *The Structure of Behaviour* (trans. A. L. Fisher) (Methuen), pp.168 ff..

53. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.250.

### 3.3 The Primacy of the Body as Subject?

The structure of this chapter so far has been a movement towards an idea. Philosophy since Descartes, or so I have argued, has largely adopted the prejudice against the body implicit in his thought, albeit often without his own self-conscious realisation of this as source of difficulties and uncertainty. Indeed, one of the uncertainties it reinforces is the very debilitating epistemic insecurity about the world with which Descartes started his meditations, and from which sprang his philosophy of body and mind. The subject was thought of primarily as a knowing subject; though, because the marginalisation of the body effectively quarantined the self, it consequently became even more problematic as to what, if anything, the knowing subject could know. What is valuable in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body is that he offers us a way of breaking with the absoluteness of the Cartesian dichotomy, without falling prey to an over-zealous objectivism, by showing us how subjectivity is intrinsically related to the world. I can say with Marcel "*I am my body*" and not feel that this identification necessarily forces a reduction to the realm of objectified materiality. I am a thinking, feeling subject; but I am also in and of the world, in virtue of the fact that I am my body. My body is not Other, simply an objective thing among things, but a fundamental dimension of my being and a subject in its own right; one which structures and sustains my reflective subjectivity from below.

It is also valuable because it encourages us to view the subject and its environment ecologically: in a way in which the absolute duality of 'subjective' and 'objective' can be transcended.<sup>54</sup> The subject is no longer thought of as an autonomous subjective for-itself or an isolated, passive, recipient of data, but an existence whose very essence is to be towards a world of which it is a part. And that world is no longer an inert system of relationships but is once more imbued with meaning for the subject: it is a world of possibilities and affordances. For Merleau-Ponty the body is therefore an ambiguous existence, hardly pure consciousness but not merely mechanical matter either: rather an enigmatic unity of both. It follows that his is a "philosophy of ambiguity": not necessarily because his explanation of the phenomenon of the body-subject is unclear, but because the very nature of the phenomenon itself is an ambiguity.

But is this position ambiguous in a less appealing way also? Despite the fact

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54. I mean ecologically in the sense understood by Gibson. Others, however, have taken this ecological tendency in his thought quite literally - M. Langer [1990]; "Merleau-Ponty and Deep Ecology", G. A. Johnson & M. B. Smith [eds.], *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty* (Northwestern University Press) pp.115-129.

that Merleau-Ponty declared his philosophy to be a “triumph over dualism”, the question remains whether he does succeed in breaking free from the thought patterns of the tradition of which he is so critical. There is no doubt that his is a this-worldly philosophy and he never doubts, or even allows the bracketing of, the reality of the world. It is true that we may never be absolutely certain about a particular thing, as we are perspectival, situated existences and as such nothing is ever fully given to us; but it is implicit in what he says that the reality of the world is a fundamental certainty given together with the nature of our own being. Nevertheless, at times he can sound too Husserlian for comfort and, as we have seen, Husserl always protested his own robust sense of the concrete. What are we to make of Merleau-Ponty, for example, when he says that there is no other being other than being-for-us? The world is also an ambiguous existence, as it is an in-itself for us, but what kind of status is this? Is it something less than ‘real’? Merleau-Ponty is not always as clear as he could be on this point: “the ‘bête noire’ of phenomenology”.<sup>55</sup> In his earlier work, *i.e.* those up to and including the *Phenomenology of Perception*, he was not overly preoccupied with issues of ontology and being *per se*, and so did not address the question of the world's status. It is certainly true that he constantly vies against any form of idealism and rejects the collapse of the being/appearance distinction on which it rests, on the grounds that it makes appearance as appearance unintelligible. Despite this, one cannot help being left with the feeling that his radicalism is often compromised by the regard he held for Husserl's phenomenological project, this leading to an unwelcome dark side to his own philosophy.

When Merleau-Ponty gave his 1946 address to the *Société française de philosophie* (the presentation and defence of his ideas in the *Phenomenology of Perception*), Jean Beaufret argued that, not only had Merleau-Ponty not been too radical, but he had not nearly been radical enough.<sup>56</sup> The criticism was that Merleau-Ponty, in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, was still working within a framework of consciousness and spoke the vocabulary of subjective idealism. It has to be said that there is some mileage in this reproach, and it has been echoed by other commentators since. In the *Phenomenology of Perception* the world's structure is still a structure for consciousness and the question Merleau-Ponty really addresses here is “What *kind* of consciousness is this?” The answer he gives is that it is not a disembodied consciousness as artificer or passivity, but an incarnate consciousness as giver of meaning for itself: a pre-reflective or ‘tacit *cogito*’, as he calls it, but a *cogito* nonetheless.<sup>57</sup>

55. See G. B. Madison [1981]; *op. cit.*, p.32, also pp.270-272.

56. See the discussion following “The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences”, reprinted in Merleau-Ponty [1964c]; *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics* [ed. J. M. Edie] (Northwestern University Press), pp.12-42.

57. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.403.

Madison points out how Merleau-Ponty refers to subjectivity in two ways; 1). that of a personal subject, in the last analysis the intellectual and reflective self, and 2). that of the lived body underlying the personal.<sup>58</sup> We do not, of course, constitute the world on the level of the former, but this does not mean the world retains a status of full independence, for we are active in constituting, or instituting, the world on the level of the latter. Merleau-Ponty was well aware of these difficulties and, as Madison goes on to say, tries to circumvent them by suggesting that the constituted lived world emerges from a pre-existing world by means of the body-world dialogue. It is our bodily presence in this 'pre-world' which calls into being the world proper, *i.e.* the meaningful, phenomenological world in which we live. If this is the case, and Madison concedes that the textual evidence admits of a certain vagueness on this point, it is hard to see how this is squared with the claim that the world *in the first instance* is the lived world, or that the only being is being-for-us.

These are very muddy waters indeed! On this account we now seem to have three worlds; the primordial pre-world, the lived world, and the idealised and objectified world of the physical scientist.<sup>59</sup> Merleau-Ponty always made it clear that the last of these, in which the subject is no longer a participant but a spectator, is an abstraction by impoverishment from the lived world (in precisely the same way as the naturalised body); however, the relation of the two former worlds is not always dealt with so perspicuously. No doubt part of the difficulty is the style of his philosophy which is, by the necessity of self-consistency, almost purely negative.<sup>60</sup> Yet, this notwithstanding, something does need to be said here for we seem to have several crucial claims which could be interpreted in a number of ways, and which sit very uneasily together. In the first instance, when he says that there is no other being other than being-for-us, or that the world is the horizon of possible existence, Merleau-Ponty is presenting us with a rejection of the metaphysical idea of 'pure being'; the charitable interpretation of this being that it is a robust rejection of the noumenal. Existence has no transcendent element. This is both consistent with the phenomenological method he has adopted and with the claim that our world is primarily the lived world: it is the concrete world we experience, the world we first encounter and to which we always have to return, and it is the world upon which all subsequent reflection is parasitic.

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58. G. B. Madison [1981]; *op. cit.*, p.35. This, I presume, is the body as giver of meaning for itself.

59. See H. L. Dreyfus & S. J. Todes [1961]; "The Three Worlds of Merleau-Ponty", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 22, pp.559-565.

60. We must not forget that his is a philosophy of ambiguity and this severely limits what positive explications he can give of its central arguments. See G. B. Madison [1991]; "Merleau-Ponty's Deconstruction of Logocentrism", M. C. Dillon (ed.), *Merleau-Ponty Vivant* (State University of New York Press), pp.117-152, and G. B. Madison [1992]; "Did Merleau-Ponty have a Theory of Perception?", T. W. Busch & S. Gallagher (eds.), *Merleau-Ponty: Hermeneutics and Post-Modernism* (State University of New York Press), pp.83-106.



Thus perhaps we *can* say that phenomenologically, chronologically, and even conceptually, the world in the first instance is the lived world. However, despite his lack of concern with ontology, there does seem to be an ontological claim being made here and, in these terms, it is not clear that the lived world is basic, but rather seems to spring forth from a pre-existing order of being that subsumes it. Yet in saying this, it appears that he is reaching back beyond the origins of what is given in concrete experience and is positing a noumenal world, in contravention of his own rejection of the noumenal. This worry persists even if we do not interpret this pre-world as an absolute, in-itself noumenal world, in the mould given to us by Kant, but instead as a primordial and pre-personal world of perceptual encounter, in which individual things present themselves indeterminately and which, as a whole, is something which exists only as an undifferentiated 'vague beckoning' before the body synchronises with it.

Furthermore, and equally troubling, these difficulties seem to be mirrored in his treatment of the body and the human subject. If the lived world emerges from the primordial dialogue the body has with the pre-world, which body is this? If the lived body is the correlate of the lived world, it is not clear it can be this. Do we then need to posit a 'pre-body'? To address this we need to return to the question "Who is it that perceives?" Descartes' model answer to this, it will be remembered, was that "it is the soul which sees, and not the eye, and it does not see directly, but only by means of the brain."<sup>61</sup> This homuncular and intellectualist position is, of course, rejected by Merleau-Ponty, who says in contrast; "Through phenomenological reflection I discover vision, not as a 'thinking about seeing', to use Descartes' expression, but as a gaze at grips with a visible world."<sup>62</sup> However, he goes on to explicate this in such a way that one wonders if he has not overstated the case against the Cartesian position. For Merleau-Ponty perception seems to take place on the pre-personal level. This is how, he claims, perceptual consciousness happens to be saturated with its object and how we escape the dilemma of the for-itself and the in-itself. The subject of perception (sensible consciousness) is therefore not an intellectual subject but the body-subject, *i.e.* that 'natural spirit' who concludes a pact with the world before I am here. This body, like the world, is an 'always-already-there' which subsumes my personal existence and is "my organism, as a pre-personal cleaving to the general form of the world, as an anonymous and general existence, [which] plays, beneath my personal life, the part of an *inborn complex*."<sup>63</sup> Thus it would seem to follow that:

Every perception takes place in an atmosphere of generality and is presented to us anonymously. I cannot say *I* see the blue of the sky in the sense in which I say that I

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61. Descartes; AT VI p.141, CSMK I pp.172. See Chapter 2, §2.2.

62. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.351.

63. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.84.

understand a book or again in which I decide to devote my life to mathematics. My perception [...] expresses a given situation: I can see blue because I am *sensitive* to colours, whereas personal acts create a situation: I am a mathematician because I have decided to be one. So, if I wanted to render precisely the perceptual experience, I ought to say that *one* perceives in me, and not that I perceive.<sup>64</sup>

Again the question must be asked, "Who is it that perceives?" His overall answer to this seems quite unacceptable: for Merleau-Ponty it appears that the true subject of perception is the body understood as a 'natural subject' or a 'natural "I"'; that is, the body as an anonymous body subject. Moreover, this body is doubly anonymous for, as he goes on to argue, not only does perception take place in a "*milieu de généralité*", but as each perceptual act is unique and non-repeatable so its subject is born and dies with it. Thus, in the case of visual perception, we should say that it is the eyes which see, not *my* eyes, but the eyes of *le corps propre*. There is a 'life' of the eyes such that they too are a 'natural "I"', and so on for each sense modality. Surely this cannot be regarded as satisfactory. In wishing to repudiate the Cartesian picture of an incorporeal, homuncular subject of perception, have we here not gone too far in the opposite direction? The inadequacies of the Cartesian picture, as discussed previously, are that it does not account for significant aspects of our experience in perception and how such an account requires the subject of perception to be the *whole* embodied human being and not an isolated ego. But cannot a similar criticism be made here of Merleau-Ponty's account? Once again it is not the whole embodied human being who is the subject of perception but a part or parts, all of which pre-date and subsume the whole. Why can I not say "*I see the blue of the sky*" while it is legitimate to use the first-person pronoun in connection with cognitive episodes? Is perceptual consciousness, in the first place, no longer a matter of 'I can', this being reserved for acts of intellection, but only of 'it can'? When I say "*I see the blue of the sky*" I am not expressing something *reflectively* apprehended but an immediate fact of my experience as I see it. Nevertheless, I can reflect upon the fact, and when I do, I do not regard it as a fact about some other existent but as a fact about *myself*.

What is uncomfortable about the position outlined here is that we are in danger of repeating of Schopenhauer's divorce between the intellectual, representing subject and the embodied subject of sensorimotor activity; albeit from the opposite direction, now privileging the dichotomy's second term. So instead of positing an autonomous, incorporeal, and transcendent knowing subject, separate from my embodied willing self, it seems at times that Merleau-Ponty wishes to posit an autonomous, corporeal, perceiving, and acting subject, one which has its own existence outside my reflective experience. Has he not delivered us the very thing we were trying to avoid, an anonymous 'in-itself'?

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64. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.215.

body that properly belongs to no one - even if it also happens to be an existence 'for-itself'? At best we can say that we have replicated the puzzle in a novel form and that the difficulty is in reconciling a relation between the body I am aware of in my experience and this anonymous body. Schopenhauer's knot therefore seems to remain securely tied.

Any comparison between the two philosophers is obviously subject to severe limitations, but it is disconcerting to read in Merleau-Ponty comments such as the following: "The relationships between my decision and my body are, in movement, *magic* ones."<sup>65</sup> The fact that similarities on this point are discernible between the two is perhaps circumstantial evidence for how Merleau-Ponty has not been able to eradicate the lure of transcendentalism completely from his thought at this stage. This anonymous and generalised body sounds very much like a pre-body, a body fit to accompany and act as a correlate for the pre-world. If this supposition is justified, and my limited comparison with Schopenhauer deserved, how can Merleau-Ponty unravel Schopenhauer's knot and account for the miracle *par excellence*? Can he, himself, account for the *de jure* possibility of this *de facto* union?

According to R. M. Zaner, in *The Problem of Embodiment*, he cannot, and the root of the problem is the central idea of operative intentionality.<sup>66</sup> By assuming that the body has its own form of intentionality, Zaner contends, Merleau-Ponty is led of necessity to posit the body itself as a 'subject' or a 'self' (or, seemingly, a whole series of 'selves'). Apart from the difficulty of explaining how the body can *experience* anything, presuming this to be a characteristic of a subject or self, Merleau-Ponty has to account for a whole series of syntheses: the syntheses of the perceiving selves into the one corporeal 'self', and, of course, the synthesis of this unified but anonymous perceiving 'self' with the reflectively conscious self. Merleau-Ponty thinks that these syntheses of the senses, of intelligence, and of sensibility and motility, are brought about through what he calls the 'intentional arc' which subtends the life of consciousness and "projects around us our past, our future, our human setting, our physical, ideological and moral situation."<sup>67</sup> This notion remains only a vague presence in the text but, using the available evidence, Zaner interprets the intentional arc as a 'once and for all' temporal synthesis at the level of *le corps propre*. However, he also argues that Merleau-Ponty has little more to say on the subject than that, and so exactly how this is possible continues to be somewhat obscure. Given that there is this obscurity, Zaner criticises Merleau-Ponty for failing to account for the phenomenon of the 'body *qua* mine': where my body is experienced by me

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65. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.94 (my emphasis).

66. R. M. Zaner [1964]; *op. cit.*, especially pp.219-221.

67. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.136.

precisely as *my* body. If the existence of the body at this level is characterised by generality and anonymity, why is my body experienced by me as mine? Why is it not experienced by me as yours, and yours as mine? What singles out this particular body in experience as the one with which I am in intimate union, or with which I am identified? How am I able to say with Marcel "*I am my body*"?

After all, it was the recognition of the 'special right' I have to call this body mine which exercised Descartes so singularly, and which formed the centre-piece of Husserl's later reflections on the body as *Leib*. It may be that the body construed simply as a material object in the material world partakes in a degree of anonymity; but how is it that the *lived* body is 'anonymous'? One is hard pushed to think of anything more *specifically* personal; phenomenologically, culturally, politically *etc.*, when one might justifiably say that one's body is one's world. Indeed, as Zaner says elsewhere; "So profound is the experiential connection to my body that it is necessary to say that there *are* no other things in the world, no experienced world at all, except on condition of my having this body experienced by me as mine."<sup>68</sup> Zaner's argument is that Merleau-Ponty has rendered himself incapable of accounting for this personal connection through impaling himself on a fork of his own making: if the body partakes of its own intentionality, and therefore of a particular form of self-reflexiveness, it is difficult to see how it could be 'anonymous'. On the other hand, if it is anonymous, there are no grounds for arguing that my body is mine, for it might as well be yours or anyone's. An anonymous body, he continues, cannot be understood as *le corps propre* (the 'owned body') for this is a lived body and such a body is one that "places me 'at' the world" and is thus "experienced by me as mine". Yet Merleau-Ponty argues that "The body is anonymous for *me*, this person who chooses, decides and the like; *I* experience my body as anonymous."<sup>69</sup>

In other words, we are left with something similar to Schopenhauer's divorce between the embodied self and the intellectual, representing self: given the scope of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical ambitions, this is a very serious charge. In this section my critical remarks have focused on two interrelated difficulties: 1). that his thought, perhaps because of the debt it owes to Husserl, still manifests a worrying predilection to some form of idealism and so has not overcome the ontological problems associated with the dualist dichotomy of the subject and object, and 2). that, paradoxically, by introducing intentionality into

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68. R. M. Zaner[1973]; "The Subjectivity of the Human Body", *Main Currents in American Thought* 29, p.119. In this article Zaner then goes stratospheric and suggests that the sense in which I take the body as 'belonging to me' grounds the sense in which things 'belong' to me. I can make no sense of a connection between the way 'my', 'mine' *etc.* are used with regard to the body and the way they are used when referring to property. See the brief discussion in Chapter 2, §2.2.

69. R. M. Zaner [1964]; *op. cit.*, p.221.

the realm of the corporeal and, more importantly, by stressing the primacy of the body as a subject itself, the manoeuvre Merleau-Ponty makes in order to tie human consciousness back into the world in a concrete sense, it seems he has very nearly achieved the opposite result. Although Merleau-Ponty presents the body-world dialogue as a circular, and therefore dialectical system, it is nevertheless a system in which one of the terms, the body subject, has a unique and privileged position. As this is the case, the balance of the dialogue has thus been disrupted in favour of the body as subject. In fact one might say that this body is doubly privileged in that its status in the system is not only due to the fact that it is a body subject, but that *before anything else* it is a body subject. It is because of this privileging that there is some justification in Madison's accusation that, at this stage, his thought largely operates with the same presuppositions as a more traditional philosophy of consciousness and that "Cartesian dualism continues to have free reign in the *Phenomenology of Perception*."<sup>70</sup>

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70. G. B. Madison [1981]; *op. cit.*, p.272.

### 3.4 Identity-in-Difference

Despite these criticisms there is much in Merleau-Ponty's overall position which is both insightful and suggestive. The criticism has been puissant, if not biting, precisely because I think that in explicating his theory of the body subject he has shown us a possible way of rethinking the Cartesian dichotomies. His general approach here has been on the right track, but perhaps he has just gone too far. The error (if indeed this is the right word) is that, in trying to demonstrate the inadequacies of the intellectualist/empiricist tradition, Merleau-Ponty adopts too extreme a position, one diametrically opposed to that tradition: a strategic foible common to most genuinely innovative and revolutionary thinkers. This is not to exonerate, nor to say that there are not very real difficulties with Merleau-Ponty's account, especially with regard to the anonymity of perceptual experience and its relation to operative intentionality and the body as subject.

It may be argued, however, that these criticisms are unjust as they stem from the very tradition of philosophical thought that Merleau-Ponty wishes to call into question. We must therefore resist the temptation to resort to the established conceptual framework, its entrenched assumptions, or our habitual categories and criteria. Rather, we must be prepared to approach the text with an open mind and assess it strictly on its own terms.<sup>71</sup> Whilst the point is well taken I think, nevertheless, this reproach is a little too easy. Any new philosophical perspective must provide us with a way of looking at given concerns which is both a workable and persuasive alternative to the perspective we are being asked to abandon. This does not mean therefore, that it must just be internally consistent but must also be able, as a Quaker might put it, to speak to us in our condition. Although it is the ordeal of the innovative to be misunderstood, benign *ad hominem* arguments are not the only legitimate form of philosophical argumentation.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, I think that to argue this too vigorously is to violate Merleau-Ponty's own understanding of our historical position and of his own philosophical method. Historical sedimentation ensures we are never able to make such a free assessment; but fortunately, in Merleau-Ponty's case, we do not have to try for he saw himself as trying to call this

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71. For example, see M. Langer [1989]; *Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception* (Macmillan Press), pp.156-157.

72. This is a question which Henry Johnstone Jr. struggled with for many years and was a position he actually held at one time. See H. W. Johnstone Jr. [1978]; *Validity and Rhetoric in Philosophical Arguments: An Outlook in Transition* (Dialogue Press).

tradition into question from within.<sup>73</sup>

Having said this the label 'idealist' is one which does not sit comfortably on his shoulders, and not simply because he repudiated it; the accusation goes against the spirit, if not the letter, of his system. If one is inclined to view intentionality as being simply mentalistic then it is easy to see how one could view his work as being idealist, but the point of the above reproach is that we must not fall prey to the temptation to slot Merleau-Ponty into an either/or, dualistic framework; a framework he saw himself as trying to transcend. We must not lose sight of the fact that the body, however much it is a 'subject', is nevertheless a corporeality engaged with the world which is itself a world of things and not just ideas or sense data. It is not 'objects' Merleau-Ponty is opposed to but 'objectivism'. He is trying to present a complex alternative to the simple subjective/objective dichotomy at the basis of objectivism and to show how our concrete, pre-theoretical reality is not exclusively one or other of these but is a combination of both or is neither of them. It is an ambitious project, and one not without its risks. Nevertheless, I believe there are two just criticisms that can be made: 1). it is not a project that he appears to have fulfilled in the *Phenomenology of Perception* and 2). he could have articulated more explicitly there how his theory tries to avoid falling into the idealist camp.

As he himself later came to realise, by starting with a *cogito*, however 'tacit' or corporeal, he has been pushed into using the language of idealism and this has resulted in a philosophy which is a "bad ambiguity". On the one hand objects are not phenomenalist constructions out of more basic sense data or sense impressions, they are "things to be encountered and discovered"<sup>74</sup>, yet on the other hand they are not the fully independent entities of the natural attitude but rather objects-for-us, inseparable from the perceiver.<sup>75</sup> Kant had similar difficulties and while he tried to avoid talking of 'things-in-themselves', it seems that for him this was the only alternative to his system collapsing into a fairly orthodox idealism. But this procedure does not seem to be one that is open for Merleau-Ponty, for speaking of things outside any cognitive framework equally goes against the spirit of his system.<sup>76</sup> Instead he construes 'objectivity' as

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73. See G. B. Madison [1978]; "Merleau-Ponty et la Contre-Tradition", *Dialogue* 17, pp.456-479, reprinted in G. B. Madison [1981]; *op. cit.*, pp.291-312.

74. M. Langer [1989]; *op. cit.*, p.23.

75. One can be forgiven for thinking that Merleau-Ponty does not succeed in avoiding the lure of idealism for he occasionally says things which make one suspect him of holding idealist leanings of a fairly straightforward and unsophisticated sort. For example, in his address to the *Société française de philosophie* he naively endorses Berkeley's view that in order for me to imagine a place in the world which has never been seen requires me to imagine myself present at that place. See A. R. White [1990]; *The Language of Imagination* (Basil Blackwell), especially pp.125-134.

76. This is indicative of a tension between theory and praxis that runs throughout his work. On the one hand he rejects as impossible any notion of unsituated or absolute truth, yet on the other his work is characterised by the search for unqualified truths such that perception is anonymous, or

'intersubjectivity': truth and falsity are thus never absolute but negotiable, subject to the intersubjective confirmation of others who have different perspectives onto the 'same' world.<sup>77</sup> The problem with this relativising approach is that, if this is indeed a *genuine* interrelation of different subjective perspectives, it seems to already posit a more fundamental objectivity as a ground for intersubjectivity. If I am to recognise the Other genuinely as Other, I cannot view its status as a product of intersubjective agreement, any more than I can view its status as a product of my own individual judgement.<sup>78</sup> In other words, it is not clear how far we can compromise our notion of the objective before we run directly into these traditional epistemic and metaphysical difficulties. Merleau-Ponty is well aware of this problem and does try to take late evasive action towards the end of the *Phenomenology of Perception*. The question is, does he succeed in avoiding the other classical dilemma of phenomenology, the problematic status of other people?

At first glance the move he makes here appears to be essentially the same as Husserl. In so far as he says, "The possibility of another person's being self-evident is owed to the fact that I am not transparent for myself, and that my subjectivity draws its body in its wake," he seems to be following Husserl's lead.<sup>79</sup> However, he then turns Husserl's argument around and argues that "In order to think of [another] as a genuine *I*, I ought to think of myself as a mere object for him, which I am prevented from doing by the knowledge which I have of myself."<sup>80</sup> In fact, Merleau-Ponty argues, I am not an object for another (nor can I think of myself as such), but then nor is he or she an object for me; rather we are two perspectives which coexist together to form a single, circular system (as with the lived body and the world) - both are manifestations of behaviour. Consequently he denies that another can be established by 'reasoning by analogy' as this manoeuvre presupposes what it is called on to explain. I cannot deduce another consciousness by observing the expressions of others and identifying them with mine, on the basis of observed correlations between physical behaviour and 'psychic events' in my own case, as "the perception of others is anterior to, and the condition of, such observations."<sup>81</sup> A relationship of

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that the body is itself a subject of perception. See R. C. Kwant [1963]; *The Phenomenological Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty* (Duquesne University Press), pp.240-241.

77. See S. Kruks [1981]; *op. cit.*, p.12.

78. This point is closely related to an insight of Husserl's which I refer to in Chapters 5 and 6; namely, that the recognition of other people as co-subjectivities is partially dependent on my capacity to view myself as an objective item in the world. However, Husserl goes on to undermine his own insight; firstly by suggesting that I am aware of another *mediately* (requiring a sort of reasoning by analogy), and secondly by insisting that, ultimately, the Other is constituted *in me* as Other. See Husserl [1960]; *The Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (trans. D. Cairns) (Martinus Nijhoff), pp.53-55.

79. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.352.

80. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.352.

81. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.352.



'intersubjective significance' with another consciousness is thus established at pre-personal level and not at the level of thought.

There is much here to be commended. Nonetheless, his approach does present two difficulties. Firstly, despite his disavowal of reasoning by analogy, Merleau-Ponty seems to suggest that the presence of another can be divined from the resources presented in one's own sphere. For Merleau-Ponty it is the discovery of the lived body which enables the breakdown of the absolute dichotomy between self and Other; they are "not *cogitationes* shut up in their own immanence."<sup>82</sup> We experience our own bodies immediately and pre-reflectively as imbued with certain capacities and, equally immediately and pre-reflectively, that the bodies of others are capable of the same intentions. Thus the human infant, he argues, "perceives its intentions in its body, and my body with its own, and thereby my intentions in its own body."<sup>83</sup> An 'internal relation' therefore exists between self and Other in which the Other appears as the completion of the system. However, what this seems to suggest is that my perception of my own body plays a key rôle in my understanding of another; hence he says, "It is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body that I perceive 'things'."<sup>84</sup> Now, this does not amount to reasoning by analogy but it does seem to endorse a privileging of a first-person perspective compatible with classical phenomenology and a philosophy of the *cogito*.

Secondly, and perhaps more problematically, Merleau-Ponty's account of the Other again posits a fundamental anonymity in which the Other and I partake; "both are brought together in the one single world in which we all participate as anonymous subjects of perception."<sup>85</sup> This recalls the criticisms made by Zaner and discussed at the end of the last section. Again, my relationship with another takes place in a "*milieu de généralité*", in this case an 'interworld' in which, although there is some form of communion, there are not yet any subjectivities. The problem with this, as Madison correctly points out, is that it simply avoids accounting for intersubjectivity; "For if indeed subjectivity is conceived of as being primordially an *anonymous* intersubjectivity, this would seem to deny precisely that which must be clarified, namely, the community of

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82. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.353.

83. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.352.

84. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.186. See also pp.353-354 where he says "Someone is making use of my familiar objects. But who can it be? I say that it is another person, a second self, and this I know in the first place because this living body has the same structure as mine. I experience my own body as the power of adopting certain forms of behaviour and a certain world, and I am given to myself as a certain hold upon the world: now, it is precisely my body which perceives the body of another person, and discovers in that body a miraculous prolongation of my own intentions, a familiar way of dealing with the world."

85. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.353.

subjectivities.”<sup>86</sup> Merleau-Ponty is well aware of the difficulties but seems forced into this position as he sees the only alternative to be the positing of an ego and alter ego which are mutually exclusive; resulting in “the absurdity of a multiple solipsism.” But there is a sense in which the body is anonymous (though perhaps never completely so); not as an anonymous perceiving subject but in virtue of being an item in the objective order. It is the body as anonymous in this sense to which Merleau-Ponty does not give due consideration. One of the central challenges of a complete account of embodiment is to marry this anonymous body with the lived body experienced by the subject.

It seems to me that Merleau-Ponty largely succeeds in circumventing this question in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. In trying to give a reappraisal of the subjective/objective dichotomy, Merleau-Ponty appears to have fallen into the trap of attempting its dissolution. The danger with this is that it invariably takes place on terms dictated by one half of the dichotomy: either by a privileged subject in idealism, or by a privileged objectivity in materialism. By emphasising the primacy as the body as subject, Merleau-Ponty is thus on the threshold of instantiating an idealism of the body subject. Yet we started this chapter by wanting to deny the autonomy of the subjective by showing how the world reaches in to the very heart of the subject. Unfortunately, we have not been able to achieve this because the world we have been presented with here is little more than a subjectivised ersatz world and not in fact the world we encounter in our actual concrete experience. This world, the lived world, is not purely anthropocentric but is an ambiguous mixture of subjective and objective features. What we need to give due consideration to is the objective features of this world and my body and how these are also complicit in constructing a meaningful dialogue between myself and the world. Merleau-Ponty does argue that such constructions are always constrained and not freely given but perhaps this needs to be emphasised more; the possibilities presented by my intentional relation to the world invariably take place within a context pre-determined by socio-historical factors and, what I wish to stress here, the physical architecture of the body as it is in-itself.

It has been remarked that “Reading Merleau-Ponty one would never know that the body has a front and a back and can only cope with what is in front of it, that bodies can move forward more easily than backwards, that normally there is a right/left asymmetry, and so on”, yet these are crucial considerations.<sup>87</sup> Indeed they are, yet Merleau-Ponty denies that the nature of our subjectivity and our humanity results from a ‘simple summation’ of the material arrangement of the

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86. G. B. Madison [1981]; *op. cit.*, p.41.

87. H. L. Dreyfus & P. Rabinow [1982]; *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Harvester Press), p.112.

human body. This is right; but this does not mean that such considerations are irrelevant.<sup>88</sup> For example, our grasp on the spatial directions of up and down depends on two interrelated facts, *viz.* that we are asymmetrical bodies operating in a gravitational field. We simply cannot ignore the fact of our upright posture and the effect this has on our mode of being-in-the-world.<sup>89</sup> Unlike beach-balls or dice, we have a top and a bottom and in order to achieve a 'behavioural optimum' we must align our asymmetrical structures to gravity. Up and down are not perceiver dependent in the way that left and right are for on Earth the up and down axis concords with this gravitational field. Of course he is right to insist, against a tendency in objectivist thought, that these directions are not determined by reference to any paradigm object in the content of perception; up is not simply where the sky is and down where the ground is. It is also true that the objective or anonymous body cannot provide us with a paradigm object as up and down are not determined simply in relation to the position of my objective body. Our determinations of up and down clearly have something to do with our ability as asymmetrical bodies to move and act in a gravitational field and these orientations can only have the meanings for me that they do have in this broader context.

Merleau-Ponty says "one might be tempted to say that the vertical is the direction represented by the symmetry axis of our body as a synergic system",<sup>90</sup> but he resists the temptation because, as we have seen, he thinks that spatial orientations are not determined by the body as it in fact is. Indeed this is right. The asymmetrical nature of our bodies do not *determine* the perceptual structure as this is still in essence a field of potential action: we perceive our world through our capacity to act in it. Nonetheless, we might legitimately succumb to the temptation to say that they underlie and meaningfully inform it. Merleau-Ponty overstates the case when he says, "What counts for the orientation of the spectacle is not my body as it in fact is, as a thing in objective space, but as a system of possible actions, a virtual body with its phenomenal 'place' defined by its task and situation."<sup>91</sup> In fact it is both. In response it may be argued that these considerations about the asymmetrical natures of our bodies are only important because we are embodied subjects acting in the world and that if it were not for

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88. See, for example, his essay "Eye and Mind", Merleau-Ponty [1964c]; *op. cit.*, p.163.

89. Cf. E. W. Straus [1963b]; "Born to See, Bound to Behold: Reflections on the Function of Upright Posture in the Esthetic Attitude", S. F. Spicker [1970] (ed.) *The Philosophy of the Body* (Quadrangle Books), pp.334-361. Straus writes; "Everything in the structural plan of the human body is organized for and by the upright posture. Upright posture enables the development of the fore extremities into the human shoulder, arm, and hand, and the development of the head into the human skull and face. Moreover, to the modification of structure correspond not only the variations of functions and accomplishments; with the upright posture a particular mode of being-in-the-world is simultaneously given."

90. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.249.

91. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, pp.249-250.

this such considerations would be irrelevant. Again I would concur, but this does not show that they are relevant only because, in the first instance, my body is a body subject.

If the spatiality of the perceived world is a reply to the body's dimensions and its potential for action then, at best, it is an overstatement to say that orientation has nothing to do with the body as it in fact is. These facts about the very corporeality of my body and the material world do have a meaningful import into my understanding of spatial orientations at a primordial level and this shows, I believe, that the body as a material object, a thing amongst things, must also be taken as a primordial datum in our deliberations. Despite the undoubted value of his analysis to the project of reappraising our inherited conception of the body, the problem with Merleau-Ponty's treatment of the issue is that, by focusing narrowly on the body's intentional characteristics, he was led to posit the body itself as a 'natural self'. But this body was understood by him to be simply a 'phenomenal body', an anonymous subject revealed in perception and action; this body being conceived as fundamental, the objective body being conceived of as something derivative and standing in opposition to this. The danger here is that we are on the threshold of substituting the mind-body problem for a body-body problem and thus undermining our attempt to arrive at a non-divisive account of human embodiment.

Furthermore, as Zaner argues, by overplaying his hand and focusing on the subjective nature of our embodiment, he renders himself unable to account for a fundamental characteristic of our concrete experience: that the 'mineness' of the body is also occasionally mirrored by a radical 'otherness'. Merleau-Ponty has persuasively argued that we cannot experience or understand the body *simply* as an in-itself object. What he has not successfully argued is that we can never experience or understand the body as an in-itself object. As Zaner says; "*I am my body: but I am as well not my body. Indeed this otherness is so profound that we inevitably feel forced to qualify the 'am': it is not identity, equality, inclusion.*"<sup>92</sup> At times I can feel quite alienated from my body and it can feel "strange and uncanny". This uncanniness may be at a prime during moments of bodily dysfunction or illness but it is not exclusive to them; it may also stem from a recognition that my body has its own existence and agenda, apart from my projects, and that this agenda is not one of an anonymous body subject but one of a body object fulfilling the projects of the world. This recognition is not, it must be stressed, the product of some second order reflection (it is not an abstraction through impoverishment) but a fundamental aspect of our experience of embodiment. For Zaner the coming together of this 'mineness' and 'otherness' is

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92. R. M. Zaner [1973]; *op. cit.*, p.119.

an *aporia*, but is nevertheless the very sum and substance of our embodiment and our humanity.

There is, then, in the normal course of events, a see-sawing in my experience of my body between what Zaner calls, using Freud's terminology of the uncanny, the *Heimlich* (homely or familiar) and the *Unheimlich* (unhomely or unfamiliar). This recognition is not an endorsement of the absolute separation of the human subject from its body, or that the body is no more than an object in the world (merely a representation among other representations), for while it may not be the case that I am a body which is itself a subject, nonetheless I am essentially a bodily subject. It might be tempting to argue that what such experiences show is that, while I am not my body *qua* body object, I am my body *qua* body subject; but this is not quite right for, in an important respect, I am both. Thus it might be better to say, not that "I am my body", but that, as Zaner suggests, "I am not something other than my body." What these experiences actually indicate is what Merleau-Ponty later came to see as the 'chiasmatic' nature of our embodiment, the fact that we are a 'sensing-sensible'; an existence whose very nature is an identity-in-difference. One could therefore argue that, during moments of bodily dysfunction, the body is 'uncanny' in precisely Freud's sense as he defined this as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar."<sup>93</sup> In other words, the feeling of unfamiliarity during these moments is rooted in the body's neglected familiarity; so, even if felt to be strange and uncanny, one's body is never quite something completely alien as Zaner seems to suggest. If this is so then perhaps there is room for an account of embodiment which does justice to an opposition but does not result in an *aporia*.

As stated previously, Merleau-Ponty himself acknowledged the shortcomings of his position in his earlier work and this led him, towards the end of his life, to undertake a full but incomplete reassessment of his philosophy and an examination of this paradox.<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately a detailed examination of this reassessment is outside the scope of this study. It will have to suffice to say that in it he attempts "an ontological rehabilitation of the sensible" by recognising "that the body is a 'perceiving-thing', a 'subject-object'."<sup>95</sup> The bodily subject which perceives is itself a perceivable thing, thus the body by which I am in the world is understood to be a part of the world. Instead of the dialectical relation between

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93. S. Freud [1955]; "The 'Uncanny'", reprinted in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XVII [ed. J. Strachey] (The Hogarth Press), p.220. Zaner seems to have overlooked this aspect in his borrowing of Freud's terminology.

94. The main sources for this new approach are the essay "Eye and Mind", reprinted in Merleau-Ponty [1964c]; *op. cit.*, pp.159-190, the introduction to *Signs*, Merleau-Ponty [1964a]; *op. cit.*, pp.3-35, and the unfinished work *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty [1968]; *The Visible and the Invisible* [trans. A. Lingis] (Northwestern University Press).

95. Merleau-Ponty [1964a]; *op. cit.*, pp.166-167.

myself and the world being understood in terms of a 'circularity', with the world as the correlate of the body subject, it now becomes a moment of 'reversibility', together forming a single reality: "Visible and mobile, my body is a thing among things; it is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing. But because it moves itself and sees, it holds things in a circle around itself. [...] the world is made of the same stuff as the body."<sup>96</sup> Although the germ of this new approach can be found in his previous writings, in this later work Merleau-Ponty moves from phenomenology to a 'new ontology' and offers us what, in essence, is a double-aspect theory: the difference between the subjective and the objective is blurred in the body and thus throughout being, both are different and intertwining terms of the one underlying reality, the 'flesh' (*la chair*) of the world.<sup>97</sup> On this understanding the body is "a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them."<sup>98</sup> This is more like the conception of the body towards which I hope to progress.

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96. Merleau-Ponty [1964c]; *op. cit.*, pp.163.

97. This term, 'flesh', is not meant to be taken to indicate something like 'substance' [οὐσία] - at least not as this has been traditionally conceived. Rather it has been suggested that it should be understood as something like 'element' [ἔζώματα], a sub-phenomenal reality as the root of all things. See G. B. Madison [1981]; *op. cit.*, p.176.

98. Merleau-Ponty [1968]; *op. cit.*, p.137.

## 4. Experiences of Embodiment

The exegesis of Descartes' arguments in Chapter 2 rehearses a commonly held view that Cartesian dualism is primarily an intellectual construction; a product of theoretical considerations in conflict with what common experience teaches us about our natures. I also argued there that this conflict, recognised by Descartes himself, accounts for why he was unable to provide a consistent and satisfactory explanation of the mind/body union. But could not Descartes have drawn at least some comfort and encouragement from attending to our concrete experience of the body or is its testimony universally hostile to dualistic construals? Does the testimony of experience, in other words, so unambiguously point to our nature as embodied subjects? Perhaps he was too quick in concluding exactly what the lessons of nature as experience are. In fact those lessons are more subtle than we have so far determined. If Descartes had attended more carefully to the lessons of nature as experience might he have concluded that the education it provides was not so discouraging as he first thought?

A challenge to the received view of Cartesianism adumbrated above has recently been offered by Drew Leder, principally in his book *The Absent Body*. Picking up on certain suggestions made by Merleau-Ponty, Leder argues that an explanation of the persistence of Cartesian dualism cannot be found simply by reference to a theoretical commitment to dualist ontology, a commitment made at the expense of carefully attending to lived experience. What has to be recognised, he believes, is the crucial rôle this experience itself has in encouraging and supporting Cartesian-like conclusions: the idea that I am a translucent, immaterial ego trapped inside an alien, material body often seems to be supported by those experiences rather than contradicted by them. Specifically, the types of episodes to which Leder refers are the modes of bodily absence and manifestation that typically characterise our common experiences. These are not strange or esoteric experiences uncommonly had but the everyday ways in which the body is naturally absent or recedes from, and resurfaces in, our awareness. But we should be clear, Leder's project is not a Cartesian one - far from it! He

does not think that these modes of bodily absence and bodily reappearance endorse a Cartesian understanding of mind and body. On the contrary, he thinks that only by recognising the ways the body has a natural inclination for self-concealment, and a tendency to manifest itself as an alienating presence, can we grasp its presence in all aspects of cognition and thereby simultaneously break the Cartesian hegemony whilst reclaiming its experiential truths.

In this chapter I therefore wish to do several things at once. Firstly, and most importantly, I wish to explore these concrete experiences of embodiment. In doing this I shall, so to speak, put some flesh on the bones of an insight of Merleau-Ponty's that we addressed in the last chapter; namely that the body itself, even if not as a for-itself, embodies a form of intentionality. Along side this I shall also develop the criticism raised towards the end of that chapter that this does not necessarily mean we can postulate the body to be a subject but also have to consider its nature as an item of the world itself. The value of such an explanation therefore has a two-fold aspect: general and specific. In general terms I think that, although subtle and perhaps deceptive, these truths can only be seen to support a Cartesian position if they are grossly misinterpreted for they arise from our nature as subjects who are essentially embodied and further point to, albeit paradoxically, our character as embodied agents. In more specific terms I believe that they also reinforce my point that we cannot treat human embodiment either in terms of a pure for-itself subjectivity or a pure in-itself objectivity and that both of these are terms of mutual implication. My body, as experienced by me, is both an extension of my intentional relation to the world and is an object in the world in its own right. Lastly, I shall again address the Merleau-Pontian suggestion, taken up by Leder, that our concrete experiences of embodiment themselves provide some explanation for our continued cultural flirtation with Cartesian metaphysics and its inherent somatophobia, as I believe an examination of this also yields an insight into the dual, but not dualistic, nature of human embodiment.

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## 4.1 Bodily Absence and the Invisibility of the Body

According to James Gibson, culturally and historically we have lost our sense of being surrounded by the environment - what Gibson calls the ambient array of light. The experience of tunnel perception, increasingly recognised as a source of motorway accidents, is only an extreme example of a mode of perception that pervades all aspects of our lives; in reading or writing, watching television, the cinema, and, not least, working at word-processors - whatever the activity, our attention is commonly focussed unidirectionally. Gibson claims that as modern, civilized, indoor adults we live "boxed-up lives" and, unlike children and our remote ancestors, spend more time *looking-at* instead of *looking-around*.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Leder notices how technology and affluence has robbed us of a direct corporeal engagement with the world and remarks how often it is noted that Western society is typified by a 'disembodied' lifestyle. Indeed, almost from cradle to grave we now lead such sedentary lives, staring straight ahead at small screens, that the British Medical Association has begun to worry for the nation's health. But this sort of social development is not the whole or even the most significant part of the story. As Leder says; "cultural variations are always played out upon the keyboard of possibilities presented by our corporeal structures."<sup>2</sup> These corporeal structures may partly underlie such social developments (or at least naturally lend themselves to them) in the same way that it is claimed that they also form the basis of those misinterpreted experiences which seemingly support dualist conclusions. Once again, following our brief discussion in the last chapter on bodily asymmetry, the configuration and physical construction of the body as it is in itself seems to be an important consideration.

For example; in common with many predatory animals our eyes are set in the front of our skulls and look forward, limiting our field of view to a sample of the whole array. Thus in order to look around we must turn our heads and move about. Perhaps this feature of our corporeal structure naturally contributes to the above tendency noted by Gibson to look-at instead of to look-around. In comparison, the corporeal structures of other animals, especially those preyed upon, allow a much wider field of view of the ambient array: compare the horse with its laterally set eyes (Figure 5, overleaf).<sup>3</sup> But, as Gibson also points out,

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1. J. J. Gibson [1979]; *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Houghton Mifflin), p.203.

2. D. Leder [1990a]; *The Absent Body* (University of Chicago Press), p.3.

3. J. J. Gibson [1979]; *op. cit.*, p.204. Cf. Merleau-Ponty [1964c]; "Eye and Mind", *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics* (ed. J. M. Edie) (Northwestern University Press), p.163.

however wide the field of view is, complete *simultaneous* ambient perception by any animal is impossible. There will always be a gap in the field of view so that complete ambient perception can only be achieved sequentially; by the turning of the animal's head, successively bringing into view areas of the ambient array previously hidden from view. But while this gap, *qua* gap, is obviously not a phenomenological something, it is not quite a nothing either, for it is that portion of the field filled by the head and to a lesser degree the body of the animal itself. Therefore the gap itself has significance as it is "*a closed boundary in the array that specifies the body*. It has a meaning and it carries information."<sup>4</sup> Our visual experience and the field of view is always bounded; to what degree will depend upon the precise nature of the percipient's corporeal structure (particularly the structure of the eyes and their placement in the head), but nevertheless bounded it will be.

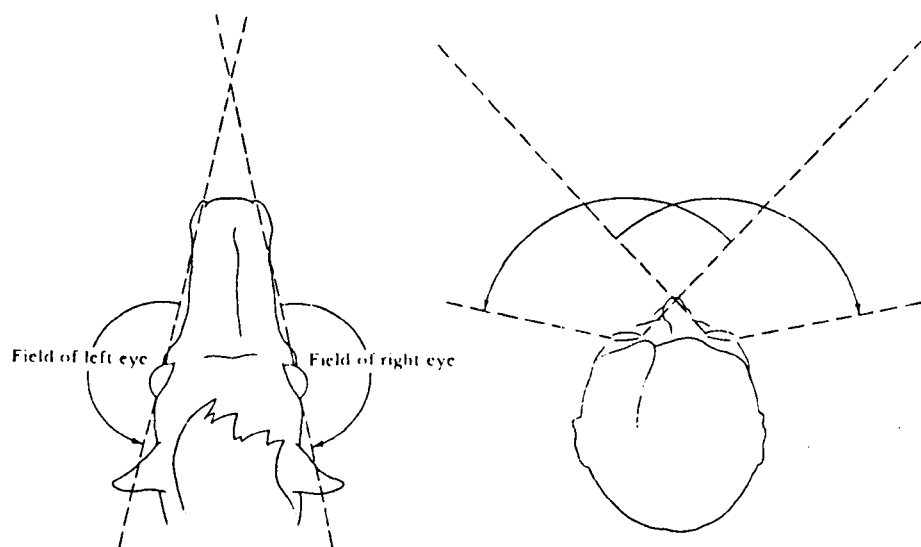


Figure 5: Gibson's comparison between the fields of view of a horse and a human being.

A particularly striking example of how it is possible to go wrong in interpreting this is provided by D. E. Harding. On what he calls his "rebirthday" Harding discovered that he has no head. There is actually much more of interest in what Harding has to say than this, but nevertheless he assures us that when he makes this startling claim he makes it in all seriousness. The revelation apparently occurred whilst he was walking in the Himalayas, absorbed by the question "What am I?" Harding stopped to admire the magnificent view and then it forcefully struck him that he was, in fact, headless. He says:

What actually happened was something absurdly simple and unspectacular: I stopped thinking. [...] Reason and imagination and all mental chatter died down. [...] To look was enough. And what I found was khaki trouserlegs terminating downwards in a pair of brown shoes, khaki sleeves terminating sideways in a pair of pink hands, and a

4. J. J. Gibson [1979]; *op. cit.*, p.204.

khaki shirtfront terminating upwards in - absolutely nothing whatever! Certainly not a head.<sup>5</sup>

Harding's discovery was that he had no head 'here'; he still recognises that he has a head where he calls 'over there': in bathroom mirrors, photographs and the like. In fact, 'there' he has any number of heads, all shrunken and distorted in some way. For Harding what was left 'here' was a 'Central Void', not a vacant space as such but "a vast emptiness vastly filled" which he claims is his very life source. In realising that he has no head, but simply a "wrong headed idea", he claims he was released from the homuncular prison he had always previously thought he was assigned to. But in the process of release he seems to have lost any differentiation between himself and the world. Formerly he had always seen himself as inside his head looking out through the windows of his eyes: like a man, I suppose, looking through a keyhole into another world. As he says; "I had lost a head and gained a world." But surely the choice is not as stark as this. Hofstadter comments that this meditation is a "charmingly childish and solipsistic view of the human condition. [...] something that, at an intellectual level, offends and appalls us."<sup>6</sup> I think we can afford to be a little more charitable than this: taken literally I believe it is a misguided attempt to state how we generally perceive from the head (the place where our main sensory organs are situated),<sup>7</sup> and that our lived experience is not in the form of an internal mirroring of something external to the body but is nonetheless bounded by the architecture of the body.

As was observed in a famous analogy by Wittgenstein, the eye itself is never part of its own visual field and nothing in the field of view allows us to conclude that it is seen by an eye.<sup>8</sup> My eyes, as it were, form one limit of my visual experience. It is therefore understandably tempting to conclude with Harding that the eyes (and by extension the head) form what Husserl termed a 'null-point' or 'null-thing' in the world - a focal point from which the perceptual field radiates outwards but which itself remains a nothing at the heart of the perceived.<sup>9</sup> The perceptual organ in its subjective mode of perceiving is never objectively capturable as a thematised entity within perception (*i.e.* one that is the subject/theme of our perceptual experiences). This is a manifestation of what is often called the 'chiasmic' nature of the human body and human embodiment.

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5. D. E. Harding [1972]; *On Having No Head* (Harper & Row), edited selections reprinted in D. C. Dennett & D. R. Hofstadter [1981]; *The Mind's I: Fantasies and Reflections on Self and Soul* (Basic Books), pp.23-30.

6. D. C. Dennett & D. R. Hofstadter [1981]; *op. cit.*, p.30.

7. Cf. Chapter 6, §6.1.

8. L. Wittgenstein [1922]; *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (trans. D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuinness 1961) (Routledge & Kegan Paul), §§5.633-5.6331.

9. Husserl says "All orientation is thereby related to a null-point of orientation, or null-thing, a function which my own body has, the body of the perceiver." Husserl [1977]; *Phenomenological Psychology* (trans. J. Scanlon) (Martinus Nijhoff), p.121. See Chapter 2, §2.3.

As was noted in the last chapter, the body exists as both a perceiver and a perceived. It is what the later Merleau-Ponty calls the 'enigma' which is a sensing-sensible; in other words, that which "simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things [and] can also look at itself and recognise, in what it sees, the 'other side' of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for itself."<sup>10</sup> Of course, as was also famously noted by both Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, although the seeing eye can also be seen and the touching hand can also be touched, one cannot "see the seeing" or "touch the touching" themselves. That is to say, the act of perception is invisible to itself, losing sight of itself in favour of its objects; this invisibility of the intentional being carried over into the realm of the corporeal by means of the perceiving and acting body. In this way there does exist an unbridgible chasm in this chiasmatic structure of the body. Insofar as I am aware of the eye or hand disclosed as a material object, it ceases to be experienced as that which discloses. This elemental divergence (*écart*) between the experiencing, phenomenological body and the experienced, objective body never quite allows a complete merger of the two. I can attend to the eye or hand as thematised objects in the world but cannot *at that same moment* experience them in their subjective modes of operation. As soon as I do that they 'disappear' as fully thematised objects from my awareness and the null-point phenomenon reoccurs.

The body, when utilised in its perceptual mode, is thus the vehicle of the subject's being-to-the-world and as such participates in the intentionality of its sensorimotor activities and projects; and in this limited respect it does seem correct to speak of a corporeal intentionality. It is just in the nature of perceptual organs that they recede or disappear in this manner from the perceptual field they are disclosing. The Cartesian error is to take this chasm in the chiasmatic structure as a chasm between two modes of being, with the human subject epistemically and metaphysically stranded on one side. But, as we shall increasingly see, such phenomena do not divulge our essentially esoteric natures rather they accent our essentially embodied constitution for they are intrinsically linked to the perspectival nature of embodied experience. The chasm is not between two disparate and autonomous realms of being but rather between myself *qua* object and myself *qua* subject: a symbiotic, relational duality which does not necessarily imply a dualism of mind and body. I am a physical thing but I am also a point of view - but this point of view is not an immaterial, absolute subject contingently attached to a physical object, because I am a point of view *in virtue of* my physicality. A convergence (of sorts) is therefore achieved by recognising their common ground in our embodiment.

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10. Merleau-Ponty [1964c]; *op. cit.*, p.162.

Tempting as the Husserlian metaphor of the null-point is (and one can see why it is tempting) it is at best incomplete for, as Leder notes; "while I do not directly see these eyes, they maintain a prevailing presence in the experienced world. The objects I do see refer back to my eyes in a series of implicit modes. [...] My eyes themselves are [...] an implicit omnipresence nowhere to be seen."<sup>11</sup> The presence of the perceptual organs is therefore similar to the presence of the photographer and his or her camera - someone never actually in the picture but nevertheless a presence always implicitly there. However, reference to our corporeal organs of perception is not simply indirect in this manner, mediated via their objects in the world. The Husserlian model only really becomes tempting when we focus solely on the operation of individual perceptual organs such as the eyes in isolation and, as we saw earlier, this is a profound mistake. The eyes or hands do not operate alone as a perceptual system but in concert with the larger structure of the body-as-a-whole, the presence of which is ineradicable and fleshed out, as Leder says, by a continuous stream of kinaesthetic, cutaneous and visceral sensations. The human body is never therefore a complete nullity nor yet a subjective Cartesian point and so a full understanding of bodily self-effacement requires a more sophisticated model of embodiment than that of the Husserlian null-point.

Leder's central concern then is how the body, which he takes to be the ground of all experience, has this tendency to self-concealment (the tendency to disappear and recede from - or never enter into - direct experience) and how this might encourage and support Cartesian-like theories of human nature. Leder investigates this tendency to self-concealment under the general notion of *bodily absence*, which he defines as the various ways the body can *be away* from itself. The body however, as Leder emphasises, is not one homogenous entity but "a complex harmony of different regions, each operating according to indigenous principles and incorporating different parts of the world into its space."<sup>12</sup> As a result of the body being a complex harmony in this way, there is more than one manner in which the body can be said to be absent or away from itself. Therefore, when we speak of the body's disappearance from self awareness, we are referring only to one specific mode of bodily absence and what that particular form of disappearance will be will further depend on what part of the body or activity is being examined. More broadly speaking, what Leder identifies as absence can be a very paradoxical phenomenon for it can also characterise many of those contrary situations where the body 'surfaces' or 'appears' and makes itself manifest in experience. It is just in the nature of this type of experience (*e.g.* of pain, disease and bodily dysfunction) that it evidences our essential embodiment in a

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11. D. Leder [1990a]; *op. cit.*, p.12.

12. D. Leder [1990a]; *op. cit.*, p.2.

peculiarly alienating way; providing the complementary 'otherness' to accompany the body's 'mineness'. Zaner notes that both are enduring features of our embodied experience. So to say that the body is 'absent' can therefore have both negative and positive implications simultaneously. Negative because it can refer to the 'hiddenness' of the body in experience (thus apparently endorsing the Cartesian picture of the human subject as a non-corporeality) as well as the way it can often be the locus of suffering, and so is experienced as *Unheimlich* or outside of myself as a radical 'otherness'. Positive because, in its paradoxical manner, it also affirms the central place, in the human subject, of the body and its ceaseless relation to the world, and confirms its essential 'mineness'.

Leder distinguishes between two main types of bodily being which he terms the Ecstatic Body (and also at times the Surface Body) and the Visceral Body (also the Recessive Body). The Ecstatic Body is the centre of our perceptual and motor activities, it is where we interact with our environment and where, as Leder says, self meets with non-self. Hence his choice of Heidegger's terminology 'ecstatic'. The ecstatic is understood as 'that which stands out' and so the body as *ek-stasis* is that by which we are located and defined, by which we encounter and manifest ourselves to the world and also by which temporality and spatiality have meaning for us. It is what Marcel and Merleau-Ponty termed the body as *être-au-monde* (being-to-the-world), the articulation of the body's implication in the texture of the world. The Visceral Body on the other hand, as the name suggests, is the normally hidden inner body, the centre of the deep, autonomous functions of the body, over which we have little or no control yet without which we could not live; metabolism, sleep, visceral feelings, birth and death.<sup>13</sup>

As one would expect, given their substantially different natures, each of these types of bodily being are characterised by their own particular forms of absence and disappearance. Beginning with the Ecstatic Body, Leder identifies two primary, and complementary, ways in which the body tends to invisibility and self-concealment. The first he calls *focal disappearance* which refers to the way in which the perceptual organ is unable to become its own object of perception precisely because it is itself the focal origin of that perception. We have already discussed this aspect of embodiment to some degree above. The second he terms *background disappearance*. This is a phenomenon which arises directly out of the fact that the body manifests itself as a 'synergic system'. As such, the body is actually a 'complex harmony' of bodily regions; this harmony requiring certain bodily regions to play a supporting rôle in sensorimotor activity

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13. We here have something akin to the important distinction drawn previously by Sidney Shoemaker between 'the volitional-sensory body' and the 'biological body.' S. Shoemaker [1984]; "Embodiment and Behaviour", reprinted in *Identity, Cause and Mind: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge University Press), pp.113-138.

and for others to switch between playing active and supporting rôles, or, at other times, for them to be simply 'out of play' in what he calls the corporeal gestalt.

1. *Focal Disappearance.* The Ecstatic Body is the body as that which is engaged in the process of revealing or disclosing what is Other. We have already noted above, with reference to the phenomenon of the null-point, how the perceptual organs have the tendency to become experientially transparent as we are directed towards and focus on the objects disclosed in perception. This transparency is a concrete feature of the lived body and is partly grounded in the dynamic relationship between ourselves as physical organisms and our environment and partly in the nature of the physical architecture of the body itself. There are restrictions on how far it is possible for my own body to be disclosed to me as an object in perception. It may be nearly impossible for me to perceive certain of my bodily surfaces; either because it is itself central to the act of disclosure or because of its propinquity to organs which are central to the act. It is simply this which Harding discovers on his rebirthday, though he focuses his attention too narrowly on vision alone. The reason I cannot see my own head, apart from the fuzzy pink cloud which is my nose and the hairy protuberance which is my top lip, is because this is where my organs of sight are located. This is equally true of the other sense modalities. I can feel my head with one of my hands, of course, but my hand can only feel itself to a very limited extent. However, the severity of these restrictions does vary in degree and some may be surmounted. For example, my inability to see my own eyes or the back of my head can be rectified to a certain extent by looking in a mirror or by the use of more indirect technology such as short-circuit television. My inability to touch the small of my back can be overcome with practice or a backscratcher. Nevertheless more severe restrictions remain: for example, short of deliberate surgery I will never be able to see the back of my eye-ball or the image formed thereon, nor will my right hand ever be able to touch itself on its back (the single hand cannot grasp itself).

Many of the restrictions which manifest themselves as focal disappearance may be even more pressing than these. No amount of technology or physical dexterity will be able to help me as the concomitant transparency is absolute. Even if by some grisly technical trick I did become able to see the image as it forms on my own retina (so forming a continuous perceptual loop), the image as *that which discloses what is Other* is patently never something itself seen in perception. It is not just that the image (in its act of disclosure) is not something *normally* seen in perception, it is that it can never be seen: the image, so to speak, has total focal disappearance. Though this is obviously true for the retinal image it can also be true for the eye itself, the hand, any perceptual organ and even my body in general. Here there is no coincidence between the objectified or

thematized body and the body as the subject's mode of being in the world. One simply cannot experience the body as a thing and at the same time experience it as a capacity.

I have already noticed the similarity between the work of Merleau-Ponty and Michael Polanyi in this respect. Leder's analysis of the focal disappearance of the body draws heavily on the work of both. In terms of Polanyi's 'from-to' structure we may say that, in any act of attention, we do not only attend *to* an 'explicit' (Polanyi) or 'thematic' (Leder) object but also always *from* a 'tacit' set of clues and conditions. As mentioned previously, in general Polanyi argued that there was always tacit or implicit knowledge presupposed in any so-called explicit knowledge; indeed that tacit knowledge is fundamental and is what lends meaning to explicit knowledge and what controls its use. Specifically he thought that the recognition of any object or meaning at the centre of my primary attention (my 'focal awareness') is always dependent upon our use of a myriad of perceptual particulars or clues to which I am not directly attending. These clues may be *subliminal* (never observable in themselves) or *marginal* (open to possible observation though normally absent from awareness) but as clues they are always subsumed in the primary act of attention which focuses on the meaning or the object in perception. As Polanyi himself puts it; "*We may say that my awareness of both kind of clues is subsidiary to my focal awareness of that object.*"<sup>14</sup>

The relationship between these marginal clues and the primary meaning or object is thus seen by Merleau-Ponty, Polanyi, and subsequently by Leder, in terms of the relation between figure and ground explored by Gestalt Psychology. Just as we may switch between seeing human profiles and a cup in Edgar Rubins's famous reversible figure, the 'Peter-Paul Goblet' (Figure 6, overleaf), we may also switch the focus of our awareness between explicit object and the marginal clues so that the clues themselves become thematized. Of course, if we do refocus our attention onto these elements of the tacit structure then the recognition of the explicit object will be disrupted or the meaning lost and the status of the clue itself radically altered. This is because in attending to the marginal clue  $\Phi$  we are not thereby attending from  $\Phi$  to something else and so  $\Phi$  no longer belongs to the tacit 'from' structure, permitting the attending 'to' that something else, but simply becomes that to which we attend. Both Polanyi and Leder use the example of reading. In reading this thesis the physical shape of the words on the page is subsidiary to your grasp of the meanings they reveal and so

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14. M. Polanyi [1966a]; "The Logic of Tacit Inference", *Philosophy* 41, p.3. See also M. Polanyi [1969]; "On Body and Mind", *The New Scholasticism* 43, pp.195-204, and M. Grene [1977]; "Tacit Knowing: Grounds for a Revolution in Philosophy", *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 8, pp.164-177.



their appearance and form will recede from focal awareness: you attend *to* the meaning *from* these physical symbols. However, if by some means I succeed in *drawing your attention directly onto the shape of the symbols themselves*, this only results in my undermining their function as symbols to convey meaning.<sup>15</sup> You are unable to attend any longer to what is being said and become similar to the speaker, in another example of Polanyi's, who is paralysed by attending to his lips and tongue and the sound of his own voice.

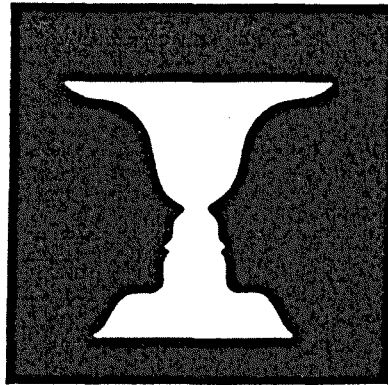


Figure 6: Edgar Rubin's reversible figure, the 'Peter-Paul Goblet'.

This basic figure-ground phenomenon pervades our perception of our environment, indeed it is deemed by Merleau-Ponty to be necessary if there is to be any perception at all: "When Gestalt theory informs us that a figure on a background is the simplest sense-given available to us, we reply that this is not a contingent characteristic of factual perception. [...] It is the very definition of the phenomenon of perception, that without which a phenomenon cannot be said to be a perception at all. The perceptual 'something' is always in the middle of something else; it always forms part of a 'field'."<sup>16</sup> My perceiving a coffee cup relies on the fact that most of what I experience is indeterminate and remains in the background of the perceptual act. But though neglected it is not a nothing or irrelevant to the act for it is implicated in the appearance of the determinate object, in this case the coffee cup, by letting it appear as a unified, bounded figure. Thus, in precisely the same way, the white goblet in Rubin's diagram is only a goblet with respect to the black field from which it emerges. In Polanyi's terminology we might say that, to some extent, we perceive 'to' the cup or goblet 'from' this indeterminate field.

15. Anyone who has ever proof-read a document will be familiar with this phenomenon. Concentrating on spelling and grammar completely disrupts one's ability to follow the meaning of what is said in the document. The reverse is equally true, which is why it is not a good idea to proof-read your own work - one is too wrapped up in what one is saying to pay proper attention to the technicalities of the language.

16. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *Phenomenology of Perception* (trans. Colin Smith) (Routledge & Kegan Paul), p.4.

Leder stresses just how pervasive this phenomenon is by suggesting that the body is utilised in a similar subsidiary fashion and that this 'from-to' structure clearly manifests itself at a fundamental level in all our sensorimotor interactions with the world. In perceiving my coffee cup I am unaware of the many visual clues I exploit which allow this simple act of recognition to take place. But it is not simply the 'exterior' visual clues of the field which may form part of the tacit 'from' structure. When I reach out and grasp the cup my focal awareness is directed onto the cup itself: all motor activities, posture, tactile and kinaesthetic sensations are focused towards one goal and are subsumed in the intentional act of grasping the cup. These 'interior' bodily clues all constitute elements of that structure as well. This coincides with a claim of Husserl's to the effect that in any act of perception of an 'external' object the subject's organism is always co-perceived.<sup>17</sup> Of course, this co-perception normally remains unconscious and hidden to my gaze; indeed I may never be aware of certain bodily clues such as the adjustments of my pupils or the contraction of determinate muscles (they will remain 'subliminal' in Polanyi's terminology) but it is certainly possible for me to refocus my attention and direct it to those with 'marginal presence'. For example, though I am normally unaware of such things, I can, if I so choose, concentrate on the position of my arm or on the sensations in my grasping hand. Ordinarily I am unaware of them because they form part of the tacit 'from' structure of the perceptual or intentional act.

In just the same way as with our example of reading, the switching of attention to elements of the 'from' structure disrupts the primary perception or action: the cup *qua* cup is lost to awareness, we become clumsy and are unable to fulfil our set task of grasping the cup. In his book *The Inner Game of Tennis*, William Gallwey laments the fact that the statement "I can never do anything I try to!" comes close to expressing an important truth. In tennis, as in any sport, we can simply try too hard to improve our game. The reason is because this trying often takes the form of the conscious appraisal of our actions which merely succeeds in interfering with the natural flow of the game. Gallwey suggests that the key to better tennis is therefore the subjugation of the conscious deliberations of the thinking self which constantly tries to tell the unthinking, spontaneous player (who he deems to be the real expert) what to do. As mentioned earlier, this type of experience may lend support to view that the body has its own form of operative intentionality, and that the human body knows its way around its world better than the reflective self: fluid play is, if you like, a 'technique of the body'.<sup>18</sup> It also displays the essential divergence and non-

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17. See R. M. Zaner [1964]; *The Problem of Embodiment; Some Contributions to a Phenomenology of the Body* (Nijhoff), pp.55-56.

18. See Chapter 3, §3.1. It was noted there how the intrusion of reflective awareness, by rendering the body opaque, disrupts the harmony of the body engaged in the act.

coincidence of the 'from' and the 'to' structures of experience - captured neatly in Leder's metaphor of the 'uncertainty principle of embodiment'. The application of this principle can offer something of an explanation of the null-point phenomenon and why it is that we cannot "see the seeing" or "touch the touching". One can attend to the clues or to the primary object but not to both simultaneously. Furthermore, the switch of attention from one to the other radically alters their status: the observed clue can no longer operate as a clue in the 'from' structure but appears as a thematised object in the 'to' structure. Thus it is necessary for the 'from' structures, in order to properly fulfil their function to disclose what is Other, that they have this self-effacing tendency and remain invisible to direct awareness.

2. *Background Disappearance.* We have seen already how James Gibson warned us not to view vision, or any sense modality, as a channel of sense (a warning I have not failed to repeat). He emphasises how the anatomical parts of the visual system do not consist merely in the eyes but, approximately, in the body, the head, the eyes, the appurtenances of the eye and the retina of the eye (he does not mention the optic nerve, the visual cortex or other parts of the nervous system but presumably this was an oversight). All these are active in vision and all are characterised to varying degrees by focal disappearance. However, we possess other perceptual systems and while the essential components of these differ from those of vision they may actually utilise many bodily parts in common with vision. In other words, certain physical structures may be incorporated into several different perceptual or motor systems while others may only function when a particular perceptual system is being utilised, or when a certain range of tasks are being engaged in. In this way specific parts of the bodily architecture may disappear from direct awareness precisely because they are *not* the focal origin of perceptual or motor activity. Some may be put "out of play" by simply being surplus to sensorimotor requirements while others are relegated to playing a supporting rôle. These particular bodily structures may not be directly involved in the perceptual system employed (or in the task at hand), or even indirectly involved, but nevertheless they may continue to form part of the 'from' structure by being enlisted as background support. Thus the body is a complex harmony of different, though complementary, capacities exhibiting something of a gestalt structure and which play together in a medley of sensori-motor activity.

The complementary interplay of these structures, and the attendant surfacing and disappearance from experiential awareness, has also been addressed by R. M. Zaner. In the *Context of Self* Zaner refers to the body as a 'contexture' - a system whose constituent parts are organized by a unifying

principle beyond the parts themselves.<sup>19</sup> Each part only achieves functional significance in virtue of its place in the structure as a whole and its operations can only be seen in the context of the complete structure. Thus Zaner insists that the employment of one of the body's perceptual organs must be viewed in the context of the engagement of the whole body as a ground or support; in exactly the same way as Gibson does above. But whereas Gibson speaks in terms of the whole body forming part of the particular perceptual system, Zaner refers to the body as forming a 'background attitude'. The precise nature of this attitude will depend upon which parts are being directly utilised, which are playing a supporting rôle and which are doing no job at all. For example, whilst sitting and reading this text your eyes obviously play a primary rôle and are thus clearly characterised by focal disappearance but, as Gibson has said, you actually see not just with the eyes alone but with the eyes-in-the-head-on-the-body-resting-on-the-ground. Much of the body therefore continues to perform a secondary but nevertheless necessary supporting rôle; the trunk maintains an upright posture, the neck muscles adjust the head's position, the hand and forearm buttress the chin. Given the specific requirements of the task at hand obviously other elements may not be put to use at all: in a sitting position this would probably be true of your lower legs and feet. Both sets of constituent elements are thus characterised by background disappearance but each in its own way.

It is important to recognise the highly fluid nature of this phenomenon. Different parts of the body may be governed by different forms of disappearance but which form they are subject to can quickly alternate, just as any given part of the body can rapidly switch between being an element in the 'from' structure and being thematised as an object in the 'to' structure. The eyes may be put out of play by being closed, in order to concentrate on what is being said, the hand may reach out to turn the page (or to scratch the head in puzzled disbelief!), the legs and feet may be engaged in walking to the kitchen or in kicking the dog. Bodily presence becomes bodily absence, absence becomes presence, focal disappearance becomes background disappearance and *vice versa*. This medley of transformations is continually played out as the actualisation of one of the body's capacities or one of its regions, in response to the exigencies of the human subject, requires an associated disappearance of other capacities and regions. For Zaner then, as for Leder, the body does not manifest itself in experience as a point (let alone a null-point) but as a complex gestalt structure, a corporeal field of complementary capacities and regions involved in a subtle interplay as we continuously refocus attention and formulate new goals of action.

Although usually possessing only marginal presence, the perceptual organs

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19. See R. M. Zaner [1981]; *Context of Self* (Ohio University Press), p.22 ff.

of the Ecstatic Body, being by necessity at the surface of the body, remain as part of what Leder calls the 'experiential arc' and can be therefore thematised relatively easily. This is not true, of course, of the constituent parts of the Visceral Body which resist the reflective gaze and physical manipulation and are only ever beheld in acutely distressing circumstances. Nevertheless, Leder argues, though often overlooked and neglected in philosophical studies of the body, including the Merleau-Pontian tradition in which his own work is situated, our visceral dimension is no less an important aspect of our embodiment. As he says:

[T]he sensible/sentient surface cannot be equated with the body as a whole. It rests upon a deeper and visceral foundation. My inner organs are, for the most part, neither the agents nor objects of sensibility. ...They are not the conduit by which I immediately know the world, or by which the world knows me. They constitute their own circuitry of vibrant, pulsing life which precedes the perceptual in fetal life, outruns it in sleep, sustains it from beneath at all moments.<sup>20</sup>

Buried deep within the structure of the body the visceral organs remain perceptually vague and elusive. Despite this they are important because, when they do appear in conscious awareness, they appear as the locus of many of the sensations such as hunger which Descartes found illustrative of embodied experience. Yet compared to the richly textured 'exteroception' of the ecstatic organs, the 'interoception' of the viscera is limited in range, spatially ambiguous and marked by a large degree of discontinuity.

Thus the absence of the Visceral Body from conscious awareness and the actional field (we cannot control or command most of our vital functions) forms an idiosyncratic mode of disappearance which functions in a completely different way to either focal disappearance or background disappearance. Leder designates it *depth disappearance* in order to distinguish it from those characteristic of the ecstatic body. I have mentioned how I cannot easily act or experience 'to' the viscera: well, this is complemented by a complete lack of ability to act or experience 'from' them either. Their absence is not due to ecstasis, rather it is strictly because they *cannot* participate in any 'from' structure of the experiential arc that they cannot be subject to focal or background disappearance. Their functions are simply automatic and can only be controlled through considerable exercise of the will (and even then only to a severely limited degree). The logic of the visceral realm is, as Leder says, one of an impersonal, or dare one say anonymous, 'it can' rather than the 'I can' of the ecstatic body. Therefore their disappearance "is not simply the function of a current gestalt but of an innate resistance. [...] Surface organs are forgotten via their structural rôle, focal or

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20. D. Leder [1990b]; "Flesh and Blood: A Proposed Supplement to Merleau-Ponty", *Human Studies* 13, p.212. Merleau-Ponty says virtually nothing about the visceral dimension of the body: the only reference I am aware of is in *The Visible and the Invisible* where he speaks of finding within the body only 'shadows stuffed with organs'. Merleau-Ponty [1968]; *The Visible and the Invisible* [translated A. Lingus] (Northwestern University Press), p.138.

background, in the ecstatic arc, while the viscera recede beneath the reach of this arc."<sup>21</sup>

All this brings us smartly to the unique case of the brain. Bertrand Russell once made the extraordinary and notorious claim that what one perceives is always one's own brain (although, obviously, not *as* a brain).<sup>22</sup> In fact what one might regard as extraordinary is the fact Russell overlooks; *i.e.* that, although the brain is intimately linked with conscious awareness, one is never actually aware of one's brain in experience. The brain is subject to a unique degree of disappearance. Its circumstance is both quantitatively and qualitatively different to any other bodily organ in that it partakes in both of the two main modes of bodily disappearance simultaneously and both to a heightened degree. As the subject of both depth disappearance and focal disappearance its position is therefore somewhat singular. In common with the visceral organs the brain is encased within the protective structures afforded by the body so that it is only in exceptional and deleterious circumstances that the brain becomes an object of experience, an object of direct perception or motor control. Normally it is unavailable to be thematised by any of the so-called exteroceptive powers such as sight or touch as it remains well hidden, encased within its skull. Furthermore, like many of the more retiring and shy visceral organs, the brain is also conspicuously absent in interoception as well and is remarkably insensitive to touch or other contact (headaches and other ailments and maladies of the head have little to do with the tissue of the brain itself but usually something to do with surrounding tissues such as the meninges). On top of this complete absence of sensory experience there is also its evident motor disappearance. I cannot exercise any direct control over the operations of the brain and although it is responsible for regulating the automatic functions of the viscera this regulation is itself automatic and beyond my ability to command. The logic of the brain therefore seems to fall in line with the anonymous 'it can' logic of the viscera in general.

But this is by no means all of the picture. Although it is itself usually inaccessible to conscious apprehension it does occupy a fundamentally crucial position in the structures which permit conscious apprehension to take place. Admitting this is not necessarily to follow Descartes in conceiving of the brain as the *seat* of consciousness, or more materialist minded modern philosophers in identifying the brain with the conscious subject, but it does recognise the brain's principal situation in the architecture which empowers us to respond and behave as conscious creatures. To use this recognition as a springboard from

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21. D. Leder [1990a]; *op. cit.*, p.55.

22. B. A. W. Russell [1927]; *Analysis of Matter* (George Allen & Unwin), pp.382-383. Cf. D. M. Armstrong [1961]; *Perception and the Physical World* (Routledge & Kegan Paul), pp.141-142.

which to jump to the dizzy heights of either of these other claims is merely to commit an elementary fallacy by mixing up all sorts of causal and conceptual questions which are best considered separately.

Nevertheless, with this borne in mind, it would still be fair to say that, although not necessarily the seat of consciousness nor itself the conscious subject, the brain lies at the heart of embodied thought, sensory experience and voluntary movement. Its rôle is not simply to regulate the functions of the viscera but to act as a 'node of synthesis' for the different sensory structures and to successfully incorporate the information received into the co-ordinated motor structures. Therefore, while it is true that the brain's disappearance is in part due the way it stubbornly resists thematisation, it is also a consequence of a radicalisation of the same principle which we earlier saw underlying focal disappearance. Although it plays an absolutely central rôle it is nevertheless still part of the tacit 'from' structure of sensory experience and motor performance. Indeed its central rôle actually results in a much more thorough form of focal disappearance than we have seen hitherto. Earlier we saw how the organs of the ecstatic body could be marked by absence by becoming functionally tacit with respect to a certain range of experiences in which they play a focal rôle. This absence therefore depends on the particular experience involved and on which corporeal gestalt is employed. With the employment, at other times, of an alternative gestalt these organs may themselves become available for thematisation. However with the brain this is simply impossible. Because of its cardinal position as the central clearing house of all sensorimotor information and activity the brain plays a tacit rôle in all the body's gestalt 'from' structures and therefore radically resists direct objectification as part of any 'to' structure.

When this radical focal disappearance is combined with the depth disappearance of the brain as a visceral organ one can easily understand its complete absence from experiential awareness. Of course Leder was not the first to notice this fact about the brain, nor the first to suggest something along the above lines in explanation of the fact. As Richard de Mille remarks:

Aware of its thoughts, the brain is not aware of itself. Within its bony shell, it has no need to feel pain, heat, cold, or any other sensation; and it feels none. Vicariously suffering and enjoying the sensibilities of the other organs, it needs none of its own. Thus constructed, the brain cannot learn to perceive itself as an object.<sup>23</sup>

In this rather confused way de Mille explains why it is that the brain remains a "perceptual nothing" in experience, despite what we now know is its central rôle. De Mille wants to say that, as the locus of all our sensorimotor experience, there has been no evolutionary need for us to be aware of the brain's

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23. R. De Mille [1976]; "The Perfect Mirror is Invisible", *Zygon* 11, p.27.

functioning and thus no reason why this should feature in our experience. But, in fact, it is more than this - there has been every reason why it should not. Obviously its depth disappearance (*i.e.* its absence from exteroceptive awareness) can be largely explained by the need to afford protection to an organ of such importance and sensitivity. But while it has been *best* that it not feature as an object of perception and motor control it is also true that, given its centrality to sensorimotor awareness, its functioning *must* not feature in interoceptive awareness.

It is essential that its focal disappearance be complete simply because it *always* features in *all* the body's tacit 'from' structures. It is not easy to make much sense of this, but if it were the case that the brain's functioning was available to be thematised it could clearly lead to a total breakdown in our ability to perform the simplest task or to be in any way aware of our environment. It could lead to a completely debilitating, self referential, infinite regress. For us to function at all the brain has to be a perceptual nothing or we would be like Polanyi's paralysed speaker writ large. Of course this does not mean that the brain can be identified as the irreducible subject of experience as de Mille thinks it does (hence his confusingly worded account) - but this is a different question to which I will return later.<sup>24</sup>

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24. See the discussion in Chapter 6, below.



## 4.2 The Resurfacing of the Body in Experience

In correspondence with Mesland on transubstantiation Descartes recognises that there is, after all, something significantly different about the human body and that it does have a special conceptual status; this being in virtue of its unique identity conditions. There is an ambiguity in the term 'body', he concedes, and that the human body is not simply one object amongst other objects but differs to other bodies in *res extensa*. In general, Descartes argues, what makes an object the same object is that it is the same parcel of matter, but in the case of the human body identity is wholly given by it being coupled to a particular soul: "When we speak of the body of a man, we do not mean a determinate part of matter [...] we mean simply the whole of the matter which is united with the soul of that man."<sup>25</sup> So Descartes thought that, although an object amongst other objects the body is nevertheless an object with special significance: *my* body is that object united with *my* soul. Despite this late concession, Descartes judgement continues to display an impoverished view of embodiment: even here the body is really nothing more than a contingent sign of the self residing within it and, moreover, is still secondary and subordinate to the soul.

In response to this one cannot help agreeing with Gabriel Marcel when he objects that "My body is *my* body just in so far as I do *not* consider it in this detached fashion, do not put a gap between myself and it. To put this point in another way" he continues "my body is mine in so far as for me the body is not an object but, rather, I *am* my body."<sup>26</sup> Descartes' suggestion requires a good deal of unpacking, though ultimately with little reward, for his imperfect account of embodiment suggests that to *have* a body is merely to possess a contingently associated apparatus or instrument through which I can receive information about, act upon and, in Marcel's terms, "intrude myself into" the world. Yet as Descartes himself was well aware, experience seems to attest to a relation which is something much more than this. I am not present in my body as a sailor in a ship; nature as experience teaches me clearly that I am embodied in a more subtle way in virtue of being the subject of inner sense - despite its occasionally deceptive nature. So Descartes himself may well have agreed with Marcel, to some extent, when the latter also said "My body, in so far as it is properly mine, presents itself to me in the first instance as something felt; I am my body only in so far as I am a being that has feelings (*un être sentant*)."<sup>27</sup>

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25. Descartes; AT IV p.166, CSMK III pp.242-243.

26. G. Marcel [1950]; *Reflections and Mystery*, Volume 1 of *The Mystery of Being* - Gifford Lectures 1949-50 [trans. René Hague] (The Harvill Press), p.100.

27. G. Marcel [1950]; *op. cit.*, p.101.

What I am emphasising here is that my embodiment, to a significant extent, makes itself manifest as a felt phenomenon, a phenomenon which actually subsumes reflective awareness. Subject to various forms of disappearance the body is nonetheless a presence which is always there, continuously fed by a mode of *sentir* Marcel calls coenesthesia (*coenesthésique*) and what we would recognise as interoceptive and proprioceptive sensations; *i.e.* those sensations of visceral, cutaneous and kinaesthetic origin. This 'fleshing out' by the internal sense modalities means that each of us experiences their own body in a way essentially different to their experience of any other object or indeed to the way anyone else can experience that particular body. It is in my body alone that I experience coenesthetic sensations, and these experiences, unlike other experiences of my body, are not available to others. It is primarily this, Marcel thinks, which sets my body apart as the body which belongs to me from all other bodies in experience which do not belong to me: "The radical abolition of coenesthesia, supposing it were possible, would mean the destruction of the body in so far as it is mine."<sup>28</sup> The fact that the body is an *être sentant* was therefore crucial for his understanding of 'the body *qua* mine': for Marcel, it is mine because it is 'felt as mine'.

In a similar manner, when we consciously apprehend our own body in this way, according to G. F. Stout, we "enter into the being" of ourselves and what is apprehended is the unity of mind and body; the unity of the embodied self. There are, he says, two types of experience in which this unity may be apprehended: there are those feelings which we commonly locate in the body (like as aches, tickles and pains *etc.*), and are associated with states such as thirst, hunger, fatigue and sexual excitement, and there are the less obvious motor sensations associated with looking, listening, handling objects, walking, eating - even with thinking strenuously. Taken all together these feelings go to make up the peculiar experience each of us has of our own body, yet they are necessarily left out of a scientific account of the body which, perforce, must concern itself only with publicly observable data. Notwithstanding this, Stout insists, they "ought to be shown to be illusory, or to be taken as a fundamental datum in any attempt to determine the relation of body and mind."<sup>29</sup>

However, such observations do not conflict with important details of Descartes' own ambiguous position, nor with that of Husserl. Descartes, as I noted in the discussion of his philosophy of body and mind, did not attempt to show such experiences were illusory and would, in fact, be in general agreement with both Marcel and Stout as to the significance of the experiences of 'inner'

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28. G. Marcel [1952]; *Metaphysical Journal* (trans. B. Wall) (H. Regnery), p.243.

29. G. F. Stout [1931]; *Mind and Matter*, Gifford Lectures 1919 & 1921 (Cambridge University Press), Book 2, Chapter 1, pp.67-68.

sense. The recognition of my embodiment through attending to the nature of bodily sense was one of Descartes' own insights and why, in the *Sixth Meditation* he maintains, against his own theoretical position, that I am not like a sailor in a ship. However, as I also noted, the fact that he did not attempt to prove their illusory nature is one of the puzzles inherent in his system: given the epistemic origin of Descartes' philosophy of mind, and the general thrust of his epistemological project, there seems no reason why he could not consistently apply his method of doubt in this respect, in the same way he applied it to 'external' sense experience. Nevertheless, he did not and was forced into thinking of the relation of body and mind as a brute fact; that is, as something graspable only through living these experiences. But as I have said at the start of this chapter, these experiences are not straightforwardly unfavourable to his theoretical position, at least, not as straightforwardly unfavourable as Stout cares to think.

Equally, for Husserl, the fact that the body is a field of localised sensations is one of the ways in which he argues consciousness becomes human and animal. Indeed he sometimes argues that this one particular body, as *Körper*, is primarily singled out for me as mine and becomes *Leibkörper* in virtue of the fact that it is the only one in which I experience, in an absolutely immediate manner, the embodiment of a psychic life. Nevertheless, as I argued previously, these lived experiences of the body do not necessarily attest to a complete rootedness of a corporeal self for, in Husserl, they do not appear to be attributes of a bodily subject but attributes of a bodily thing which appears under certain modes of presentation, and in certain circumstances, for a subject. Thus if we are to treat these experiences as fundamental data, they are certainly fundamental data that require close examination. In fact, as we shall see as we progress further, I am not sure that, *contra* the positions outlined above, the unity of mind and body can be found by primarily attending to these experiences, however significant they are in that regard. Nonetheless, to show this we first have to do just that.

So far in this chapter I have outlined an interrelated series of commonplace experiences in which the body is invisible to the subject whose body it is. These experiences present themselves as something of a paradox: how is it that these eyes are mine yet they are never, or only rarely, present to me in experience? How is it that my brain is the very node of synthesis of all my perceptions and yet itself remains a perceptual nothing? Consequently when I do attend to the concrete experience of the body as it is lived I discover that for the most part it simply is not there! My body experienced from the first person perspective, that is my body as lived, is not experienced by me as a physiological organism but as that, to use Sartre's terminology, which is continually 'forgotten' or 'surpassed' as I pursue my projects in the world. The body, he concludes, is thus not the

foundation of one's being but the foundation of one's own 'nothingness'.<sup>30</sup> At first blush, therefore, such experiences may seem to support a Cartesian interpretation of the self and perhaps even suggest the viability Husserl's project of 'bracketing' the body off with the world. This is why Leder suggests that a phenomenological exploration of embodiment can, to some degree, account for our cultural and philosophical neglect of the body and our tendency to identify the self with a homuncular and incorporeal mind: as I remarked at the start of this thesis, the body is not only surpassed in experience but also in thought.

Nevertheless, two considerations stand against taking this bodily self-effacement as a foundation for dualism. Firstly; as was perfectly understood by Merleau-Ponty, however paradoxical, this invisibility actually testifies to the centrality of my body for it shows how the body partakes in the subject's intentional relation to the world. And secondly, as we have seen, this invisibility is only one half of a chiasmus in which my body constantly disappears and resurfaces in experience. Another fundamental characteristic of my lived experience, perhaps not emphasised with as much vigour as it could have been in the early Merleau-Ponty, is that I am often an object for myself. Not only am I a perceiver, I am also, *qua* bodily subject, a perceived. In some ways I can take up a third person perspective on my own body: my hand which now grasps the cup can be grasped by my other hand, the eye which sees can be seen in the bathroom mirror, and so on. Nevertheless an ambiguity still remains. Thus Sartre also says:

My body as it is *for me* does not appear to me in the midst of the world. Of course during a radioscopy I was able to see the picture of my vertebrae on a screen, but I was outside in the midst of the world. I was apprehending a wholly constituted object as a *this* among *thises*, and it was only by a reasoning process that I referred it back to being *mine*: it was much more my *property* than my being.<sup>31</sup>

Reflection therefore seems to reveal in these experiences the radical 'otherness' of the body Zaner spoke of at the end of the last chapter and why he felt compelled to qualify the subject's relation to the body by insisting "I am as well *not* my body."<sup>32</sup> It is perhaps significant that Sartre's example is a medical one because, as I noted before, these experiences are often at a premium in dysfunctional and deleterious circumstances such as illness: circumstances in which, as Merleau-Ponty says, the intentional arc "goes limp".<sup>33</sup> Thus standing back to back with experiences of embodiment characterised by invisibility and

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30. J. P. Sartre [1956]; *Being and Nothingness* [trans. H. E. Barnes] (Washington Square Press), pp.427-434.

31. J. P. Sartre [1956]; *op. cit.*, p.402.

32. R. M. Zaner [1973]; "The Subjectivity of the Human Body", *Main Currents in American Thought* 29, p.119. See also R. M. Zaner [1966]; "The Radical Reality of the Human Body", *Humanitas* 2, pp.73-87.

33. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.136.

modes of disappearance are other experiences in which the body resurfaces and imposes itself on us in all its contingency and materiality. But these too are marked by an inherent paradox: one might be tempted to see them as a naturally occurring palliative to the intentional body's inclination for self-effacement, but caution is required as they are often distinguished by a tendency to alienation. These moments of resurfacing, or reappearance, of the body are also, according to Leder, characteristic of the way the body can be 'away from itself' and are what he terms modes of 'dys-appearance'; a term he employs to deliberately emphasise their often disagreeable and alienating nature as well as their correlative function to modes of disappearance. Such states as these, he suggests, have a particular phenomenological power and quality of their own, and so may also serve as a possible basis for a dualist metaphysics.

The mode of bodily dys-appearance *par excellence* is, of course, that which occurs as the result of experiencing pain. For Descartes pain was one of the sensations by which nature teaches me, as a subject of inner sense, that I have a body and that "I am not present in my body as a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am very closely joined and, as it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit."<sup>34</sup> If this were not the case, he observes, I should only be able to perceive bodily damage by means of the intellect, as the sailor perceives damage to the ship by sight. Except in very specific and exceptional circumstances, when I experience pain the body can no longer be forgotten or surpassed.<sup>35</sup> Through the intensity of the sensation it seems that pain exercises a control over me which is not manifested other forms of bodily awareness: I can choose to look at myself in the mirror, touch one hand with the other, to focus my attention on the subtle and elusive proprioceptive sensations. Through the experience of pain, bodily damage directly results in damage to me and I can no longer take my body's constitutive presence for granted: its exigencies suddenly manifest themselves in a temporal urgency and my body demands my immediate and full attention.

The most striking example of this resurfacing of the body in pain, if also the most harrowing, is provided by Jean Améry's autobiographical account of torture at the hands of the Gestapo. Améry was an Austrian born Jew who spent the early years of the Second World War working for the Belgian Resistance. After his arrest in July 1943 he was taken to the Fort Breendonk 'reception camp' and tortured before being shipped to Auschwitz. The Gestapo shackled his hands

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34. Descartes; AT VII pp.80-81, CSMK II p.56.

35. The most commonly cited example of such an exceptional circumstance is that of a wounded soldier who, in the heat of battle, is unaware of being wounded. Exploring the philosophical implications of this example, and whether or not the soldier can be said to be in pain before being explicitly aware of the pain, would take us far from our present concerns without adding or subtracting anything from the argument.

behind his back and then raised him by a chain until he was suspended by his hands a meter above the floor. Améry describes in detail his desperate but ultimately futile attempt to prevent the inevitable, the shattering dislocation of his arms from his shoulder joints. His arms were torn from behind and were twisted back over his head. As he remarks dryly: "Torture, from Latin *torquere*, to twist."<sup>36</sup> As if this were not enough, during all of this the Gestapo officer present horsewhipped him with incredible brutality. Améry then observes:

Whoever is overcome by pain through torture experiences his body as never before. In self negation, his flesh becomes a total reality. Partially, torture is one of those life experiences that in a milder form present themselves also to the consciousness of the patient who is awaiting help, and the popular saying according to which we feel well as long as we do not feel our body does indeed express an undeniable truth. But only in torture does the transformation of the person into flesh become complete. Frail in the face of violence, yelling out in pain, awaiting no help, capable of no resistance, the tortured person is only a body, and nothing else beside that.<sup>37</sup>

Améry presents us with the process in the extreme, a process heightened, he remarks, by the fact that in torture we are turned into body by the other and that it presents us with the unavoidable equation "Body = Pain = Death."<sup>38</sup> But, as he himself admits, it is not a process exclusive to circumstances of such extremes. In many important respects, fortunately not least in its origin, his experience is not typical of the phenomenon we are describing; it is, as he implicitly suggests, one of a more general species of experience encountered by anyone suffering illness, disease, disability or bodily damage. Suffering from food poisoning or a badly twisted ankle I find, similarly to Améry, my "life is gathered in a single, limited area of the body": desperately trying to, or trying not to, vomit, or trying to relieve the pressure on my foot whilst I walk, my attention is almost exclusively directed onto processes occurring in my body. One may also add that such experiences can result from physical exhaustion or fatigue: the distress of the hypothermic long-distance runner is no less representative or typical of this phenomenon. Furthermore, one important characteristic all these 'milder' experiences share with his is the paradoxical self negation and self alienation they can induce. On the one hand they transform me into flesh and the body's unique 'mineness' seems undeniable, while on the other the body can take on a radical 'otherness' of its own: seemingly something alien and outside my control or being, something disruptive of my projects, something ultimately equatable with suffering, pain and death.

Herein lies a phenomenon, not fully explored in the Améry example, but which nevertheless seems to me to go the heart of the question concerning our

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36. J. Améry [1980]; *At the Mind's Limit: Contemplations By A Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities* (trans. S. Rosenfeld & S. P. Rosenfeld) (Indiana University Press), p.32.

37. J. Améry [1980]; *op. cit.*, p.33.

38. J. Améry [1980]; *op. cit.*, p.34.

embodiment and essential involvement with the world; a phenomenon, as Zaner suggests, which is "essential to the meaning of the human body as human."<sup>39</sup> Not only is there a considerable degree of truth in the saying "We feel well as long as we do not feel our body", an important truth is equally revealed when I say of myself, when ill, "I do not quite feel myself." At such times it can seem that my normally pliant and domesticated body has risen in revolt against me and instead of being responsive to my needs is treacherously fulfilling the project of an outside agency. Yet this experience is not simply characterised by a quantitative increase in baneful and insalubrious somatic sensations, it is also distinguished, perhaps more fully distinguished, by what Zaner describes as the body's "hateful refusal to obey my desperate desire to do something."<sup>40</sup> Simple or habitual tasks suddenly become extremely difficult or impossible to fulfil, my body can seem to be 'in the way' and to frustrate the achievement of my goals, and the body itself, or parts thereof, take on a thing-like existence apart from my being - what Zaner elsewhere refers to as an 'alien presence'.<sup>41</sup>

This refusal can result from an overpowering episodic sensation, such as intense pain, but it need not. By demanding that my attention be drawn fully to itself, such a sensation disrupts my ability to act effectively 'from' my body. The body resurfaces from its normal state of self-effacement and invisibility to become a thematised entity which my attention is directed 'to': it loses its synergic unity and is no longer fully experienced as a capacity but as a thing. But essentially the same tension and opposition can manifest itself in circumstances where the catalyst is not necessarily deleterious sensations nor particularly episodic. For example, it may occur simply because of a dysfunction of the body or a specific organ, so that it merely refuses to perform in the way I habitually expect or desire; or it may result from sheer timidity or nervousness on my part: a phenomenon which is well known in sport and which in golf is termed the 'yips'.<sup>42</sup> Longer term biological processes, such as those connected with ageing or pregnancy, may also lead to a heightened body awareness. Such processes are not necessarily dysfunctional or alienating in themselves and are, in any case, part of the regular cycle of normal bodily functioning. Nonetheless, depending on specific circumstances, such processes can be viewed either with dread or wonder, and sometimes with an ambiguous mixture of both.<sup>43</sup> In such cases the body

39. R. M. Zaner [1973]; *op. cit.*, p.119.

40. R. M. Zaner [1973]; *op. cit.*, p.119.

41. See R. M. Zaner [1981]; *op. cit.*, pp.54-55. Cf. D. Leder [1990a]; *op. cit.*, pp.69-99, and H. Plügge [1970]; "Man and His Body", S. F. Spicker (ed.) *The Philosophy of the Body* (Quadrangle Books), pp.293-311.

42. See S. K. Wertz [1991]; *Talking a Good Game: Inquiries into the Principles of Sport* (Southern Methodist University Press), p.143-157.

43. See B. Macdonald & C. Rich [1983]; *Look Me In The Eye: Old Women, Aging and Ageism* (The Women's Press), pp.13-24, S. Gadow [1982]; "Body and Self: A Dialectic", *Journal of Medicine and*

may either become a site of opposition or something of which a new and more intimate understanding is developed; nonetheless, there is usually a concomitant modification of the body-world dialectic in response to the developing set of new conditions in which the person must operate.

In fact it could be the case that the body resurfaces in experience precisely because of a lack of any sensation. Marcel, as I indicated above, pondered on the possibility of a radical abolition of coenesthesia, and argued that this would lead to the 'destruction' of the body in so far as it is mine. Not only is this possible, there have been extremely rare cases where it has become an actuality. Oliver Sacks describes the case of Christina, at the time a normally healthy young woman of twenty seven who entered hospital in order to undergo a routine operation for the removal of her gallbladder. Prior to the operation she was prescribed a precautionary course of antibiotics; no complications were expected. However, for some reason not fully understood, Christina developed an acute polyneuritis which left her bereft of all proprioception and most other sensations of 'inner sense'. She could no longer feel her body. With this loss she was no longer able to unconsciously control her facial expression, bodily comportment or movement:

She could scarcely even sit up - her body 'gave way'. Her face was oddly expressionless and slack, her jaw fell open, even her vocal posture was gone. 'Something awful's happened,' she mouthed, in a ghostly flat voice. 'I can't feel my body. I feel weird - disembodied.' [...] The collapse of tone and muscle posture, from top to toe; the wandering of her hands, which she seemed unaware of; the flailing and overshooting, as if she were receiving no information from the periphery, as if the control loops for tone and movement had catastrophically broken down. [...] There seemed to be a profound, almost total, proprioceptive deficit, [...] the parietal lobes were working, *but had nothing to work with.*<sup>44</sup>

At first glance the case of Christina, who Sacks describes as the world's first 'disembodied' human being, seems to support the view that my embodiment in this particular body is in virtue of the fact that it is 'felt as mine'. Christina certainly experiences a profound alienation from her body, but the lessons of this example are not so straightforward. With time Christina learnt to reassert control over her posture and actions by consciously attending to the relevant parts of her body so that "week by week, the normal, unconscious feedback of proprioception was [...] replaced by an equally unconscious feedback by vision, by visual automatism and reflexes increasingly integrated and fluent."<sup>45</sup> Firstly, therefore, it clearly shows the importance of coenesthesia as a resource of 'tacit' clues on which I can draw, or 'from' which I can act: without these clues I must make a special effort to perform what was once merely habitual. But secondly,

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*Philosophy* 5, pp.172-185, and I. M. Young [1984]; "Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation", *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 9, pp.45-62.

44. O. Sacks [1985]; *The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat* (Duckworths), pp.44-45.

45. O. Sacks [1985]; *op. cit.*, p.47.



however strange and *Unheimlich* she considered her body, at no time was it considered by her to be an 'alien thing': there was no destruction of the body as *hers*. She simply had to learn to control her body in a new way and, indeed, her body manifested its inalienable presence to her because of this fact. In other words, she manages to effect what Sally Gadow has called a 'cultivated immediacy' where self and body are gradually united in transcending the struggle of her disability.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, although her mode of existence as an *être au monde* is severely restricted (self and body to some degree appear to remain distinct), it is not completely undermined by her radical dispossession as an *être sentant* (self and body are not completely opposed) and she was still able to experienced her body as hers in virtue of the first of these modes of existence.<sup>47</sup>

The body, especially the dysfunctional or the non-functioning body, may therefore often appear to stand between me and the world; I no longer feel that I fully 'am' my body but that I 'have' a body, a recalcitrant existence which has its own agenda apart from my intentional projects and goals. This notwithstanding, this divergence is again a double-edged paradox which attests to a more basic truth for, given the above account, the self alienation and 'otherness' that such states produce therefore seem to be closely linked to, and are further indicative of, the fact that I am an essentially embodied agent acting in the world. If this were not the case, and they indicated an ontological opposition between two genuinely separate realities (self and body), there would be no *alienation* as such and we would be unable to account for the richness and subtlety of the experience. Although my body seems to take on an 'alien presence', as a *whole* it never quite manages to become an 'alien thing', even in the most extreme cases described by Sacks. To put this another way, it is not just that the body still remains *my* body, but that this alienation itself attests to the intimacy of my relationship with my body. This feeling of alienation can therefore be read in precisely the same way as I previously read 'uncanny'; it is the body's essential familiarity that underlies, or grounds, such experiences.<sup>48</sup> To put this in another way, it is the very fact that, in an important and fundamental sense, I *am* my body that these states, or their total absence, can have such a hold over my entire being; and it is the very fact that the body continues to be *mine* that states of the body 'opposed to me' are infused with meaning for me.<sup>49</sup> Marked by disturbances in my intentional relation to the world and a concomitant loss of freedom, such states as illness, disease, disability and bodily damage are therefore

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46. S. Gadow [1982]; *op. cit.*, p.177.

47. This point is worth emphasising because it seems that for Marcel my existence as an *être sentant* was crucial for my existence as an *être au monde*. Accordingly the body's potencies are felt as kinaesthetic flow patterns which place me in a world of objects: that is, it is these feelings which "embody me 'at' the world by actualising my strivings." See R. M. Zaner [1964]; *op. cit.*, p.55.

48. Cf. the brief discussion of Freud's 'uncanny' at the end of Chapter 3.

49. Cf. S. Gadow [1982]; *op. cit.*, p.175.

not simply physiological conditions, either reducible to their respective immediate sensory experiences or, in Christina's case, to their complete absence, but are, as Leder refers to them, 'existential'; that is, they are also modes of 'being-to-the-world'.<sup>50</sup>

In the normal course of events the dialogue between myself as embodied agent and the world in which I act runs its smooth course undisturbed and we take its results for granted. Setting about my daily tasks my body, as the locus of sensorimotor activity and perception, retains a experiential transparency essential to the successful fulfilment of those tasks. But during periods of hesitancy, and especially during periods of physical distress, this dialogue effectively breaks down and my body resurfaces, declaring its infrangible and non-negotiable presence. But the self reflection on the body this induces also leads to a disruption in the way the world is perceived: the limited possibilities of movement are mirrored by a contraction in the number and type of possibilities and affordances the world now permits. My phenomenal or lived world becomes spatially and temporarily constricted, the possibilities it once afforded me no longer seem present at hand and, as Améry partially suggests, I find myself congealed in the 'here' and 'now'.<sup>51</sup> In the extreme I become unable to effectively formulate goals and project myself into the world as I once did. Thus in his analysis of the famous Schneider case, Merleau-Ponty notes how the disabled soldier "is 'tied' to actuality" and no longer enjoys the liberty of "putting oneself into a situation."<sup>52</sup> He lacks the creative power to transcend his actual situation as both body and world are restricted to the realm of the given. What is true for Schneider, in his extreme condition, is equally true, to a lesser degree, for anyone encumbered by the incapacity of illness, fatigue and so on.

The fact that physical distress, tiredness, and malfunction, or psychological hesitancy and deviation, lead to an experiential manifestation of the body, usually as an alien presence, has occurred to many philosophers; but Merleau-

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50. D. Leder [1990a]; *op. cit.*, p.73. Cf. V. Kestenbaum [ed.] [1982]; *The Humanity of the Ill* (University of Tennessee Press) p.viii, and E. D. Pellegrino [1979]; *Humanism and the Physician* (University of Tennessee Press). Pellegrino emphasises the compromising loss of freedom in which illness and bodily impairment can result: both as a loss of one's freedom of action (with an attendant lack of knowledge as to how to recover this) and one's freedom from the power of others (with an increased vulnerability and threat to self-image). He refers to the combination of these as the "existential situation of the patient."

51. D. Leder [1990a]; *op. cit.*, p.75-76. Leder refers to pain as exerting a "phenomenologically 'centripetal' force, gathering space and time inward to the centre." Cf. J. H. van den Berg [1972]; *The Psychology of the Sickbed* (Humanities Press). Van den Berg speaks of illness bringing about a constriction of the "horizon of my existence" by changing my experience of space, time and my own body (from that of an 'instrument' to that of a 'problem').

52. Schneider, a German soldier, was injured by a shrapnel wound to the back of his head and consequently experienced a variety sensorimotor and cognitive disturbances. Merleau-Ponty makes an extensive analysis of this case in relation to sense perception, the experience of space, language and sexuality. See Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, pp.103ff.

Ponty largely made this insight his own, emphasising how they are typified, as in the Schneider case that he discusses at length, by the fact that the intentional arc goes limp. The value of examining such phenomena, he thought, is that it allows us to penetrate into the dialogue between the body and the world, something not normally accessible to our gaze. They therefore provide us with a certain 'negative heuristic', in precisely the same way as attempting the phenomenological reduction. In normal circumstances we use the body without realising its importance; it is the 'hidden form of self being'. But it is in virtue of this that it is our means of entry into the world - without its invisibility, as we saw in the previous section, we would not be able to function. However, we can examine the normal by means of the abnormal as it is precisely in the disturbance of the normal conditions that the function of the body discloses itself and light arises out of darkness.<sup>53</sup> It was also Merleau-Ponty who suggested that in our experiences of the body an apparent truth of dualism is revealed. He argues, as I have noted before, that intellectualist and empiricist philosophers follow the natural inclination in the intentional to lose sight of itself in favour of its objects and as this inclination manifests itself in our bodily relation to the world (as we have just explored), then there is an understandable tendency for them to overlook the rôle of the body. However, he also draws our attention to circumstances where this relation breaks down and an apparent divergence between self and body emerges. Thus he says that:

[S]ometimes, by a play of mechanisms which [the body's] past life has built up, it limits itself to mimicking intentions which it *does not have* any longer, as do the movements of a dying person for example; from one case to the other the relation of the soul and the body and even the terms themselves are modified depending on whether the formation succeeds or fails and whether the inertia of the subordinate dialectics allows itself to be surmounted or not. Our body does not always have meaning, and our thoughts [...] do not always find in it the plenitude of their vital expression. In the cases of disintegration, the soul and the body are apparently distinct; and this is the truth of dualism.<sup>54</sup>

Although more often occurring in disagreeable circumstances, not all cases of bodily resurfacing occur as a result of morbidity or dysfunction and so lead to the disintegration Merleau-Ponty speaks of here. There are many circumstances in which I notice my body as a material existence which may be disagreeable but are non-biological in origin and there are others, whatever their origins, which are either neutral, pleasurable, or at least have a positive aspect. I have already mentioned ageing and pregnancy where it has been argued that both, and of course especially the later, can be viewed as life enhancing.<sup>55</sup> Other examples of

53. See R. C. Kwant [1963]; *The Phenomenological Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty* (Duquesne University Press), pp.37ff.

54. Merleau-Ponty [1965]; *The Structure of Behaviour* (trans. A. L. Fisher) (Methuen), p.209. Cf. F. J. J. Buytendijk [1961]; *Pain* (trans. E. O'Shiel) (University of Chicago Press), especially pp.36 & 171.

55. See footnote 43 above. It may sound a little odd to say that pregnancy *can be viewed* as life enhancing but we must not forget that for many women it can come as an unwelcome burden.

the neutral and the pleasurable could include: checking myself in the mirror, deliberately regulating my breathing, feeling for my pulse, revelling in the caress of a partner's hand, feeling the physical glow of my body after vigorous exercise, the arousal of sex and its culmination; a myriad of possibilities suggest themselves. Then there is the undeniably important rôle of the Other, as stressed by Sartre, where my very ability to thematise my body as an explicit object, perhaps as a result of pleasure and pain, is dependent a social world in which I encounter other points of view.<sup>56</sup> If it were not for such encounters, he argues, things such as pain and illness would be experienced through the world, suffered rather than known.

Without denying any of this we can, like Merleau-Ponty, emphasise the special heuristic value of the experiences resulting from the dysfunctional body. Thus Leder argues that modes of bodily dys-appearance have a special character, which he terms their character of 'demand', which sets them apart from other forms of bodily thematisations.<sup>57</sup> In many of the neutral circumstances where the body resurfaces there is a degree of licence about whether or not I adopt the relevant stance towards my body. This is partially true of the pleasurable as well, although it is often the case that these experiences take us beyond ourselves and the confines of our bodies into the company of others: they are experiences Buytendijk describes as being the release of "an inner expansive movement, in which the personality reaches outside itself, oblivious of self."<sup>58</sup> Only the narcissistic or those excessively prone to navel gazing are likely to pay any attention their bodies in such circumstances. On the other hand, as Buttendijk also notes, "suffering in all its forms is conducive to recollection. It isolates a man from the rest of the world and from all that is without some connexion with suffering."<sup>59</sup> It is the power of these experiences to isolate and concentrate one's attention, to gather one's life into the area of the body, which singles them out. Thus as Leder argues, modes of bodily dys-appearance, being rooted in experiences of pain and dysfunction, demand our attention. However, and this is the point I wish to bring out here, this demand *cannot* be seen solely in terms of the intensity of the sensory experiences involved, or in terms of their relief, or indeed (in special cases such as Christina's) in terms of the absence of sensory experience. Seeing their demand simply in terms of their place at either end of some sensory scale does not do justice to the rich complexity of these experiences and inhibits us from drawing the correct lesson from reflection upon them. They can and must be understood also, perhaps even primarily understood, with reference to the disruption of the bodily subject-world dialogue. It is in this, as

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56. J. P. Sartre [1956]; *op. cit.*, p.434-462.

57. D. Leder [1990a]; *op. cit.*, p.91.

58. F. J. J. Buytendijk [1961]; *op. cit.*, p.25. See also D. Leder [1990a]; *op. cit.*, p.75.

59. F. J. J. Buytendijk [1961]; *op. cit.*, p.25.

Merleau-Ponty suggests, that their real heuristic value lies for they strongly indicate to us the degree of our implication in the world and how this is established through our ability to engage with the world as embodied agents.

In this chapter we have explored two broad and complementary categories of bodily experience and it would now be sensible to take stock and see where this exploration has taken us. In the first section we investigated the various ways the body is largely invisible in experience, what Leder terms modes of bodily disappearance, and indicated how these have a two-fold root: 1). in the architecture of the body itself (*i.e.* the physical structure of the body itself contributes to this invisibility) and 2). in the fact that the lived body, as the locus of perception and sensorimotor activity, is itself a gestalt structure which partakes of the subject's intentional relation to the world. In this second section we have examined how these modes of disappearance are complemented by other experiences in which the body resurfaces and presents itself as a not quite fully thematised object. In doing this we have concentrated on those experiences which result from forms of bodily dysfunctioning, what Leder terms modes of bodily dys-appearance; mainly because of their paradigmatic heuristic value. These experiences are themselves characterised by two intertwining aspects: 1). a form of self alienation in which the body reveals itself in its contingency and materiality as a worldly object and 2). a disruption in the dialogue between myself and the world, once again emphasising the body as the locus of perception and sensorimotor activity.

Therefore, when we attend to our concrete experience of embodiment what we discover is that this experience reflects the fact that the body is both an object in the world and a set of capacities, and that both of these are inseparable terms in a single reversible existence. What I have also been arguing my way towards in this second section is that these terms come together in the fact that I am an embodied agent and that it is primarily in this that I am, *qua* subject, rooted in the world. After all, as Merleau-Ponty points out, the sensations in my hand at rest upon my knee stand undifferentiated from the sensations in my knee; subject and object dissolve into one. The perceiving hand is the hand that moves.<sup>60</sup> What remained for Christina, after inner sense had deserted her, was that her body was still the point from which she perceived the world and through which she acted in the world. In order to make sense of these subtle experiences of embodiment we must therefore understand human embodiment along the lines of what I have earlier called 'material' embodiment and what Shoemaker calls 'paradigmatic embodiment': that is, embodiment *both* in terms of our materiality and in terms of our sensory and intentional capacities. My

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60. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.315.

body is experienced by me as 'mine' in the first instance, I suggest, not simply because it is 'felt as mine' through coenesthesia (however important this is), but because it is primarily my perspective on the world: the point of view from which I perceive and act in the world. My body is therefore the vehicle by which I am to-the-world, by which I am an *être-au-monde*.

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### 4.3 The Persistence of Cartesianism Revisited

What remains to be discussed is the suggestion that these experiences of embodiment provide something of a phenomenological ground for dualist metaphysics and so go some way to explaining our continued cultural predilection for Cartesian categories and the general somatophobia which pervades our thought. This is a large topic in its own right which I can only really touch upon here. Nevertheless a brief excursion will repay the effort for, as I indicated at the outset of this chapter, an examination of this question provides further support for the essentially dialectical character of the body for which I am arguing in this thesis. Following Merleau-Ponty's lead, the specific nature of the claim is that the invisibility of the body, as it pursues the subject's projects in the world, naturally reinforces a tendency in the philosophical community to overlook its central place in the life of the human subject and so ignore the truth behind Marcel's maxim "*I am my body*". The body is the human subject's vehicle for its intentional relation to the world which it perceives and in which it acts and, because of this, is a gestalt structure distinguished by a form of bodily intentionality. Like any form of intentionality, this bodily intentionality loses sight of itself in favour of its objects. This thesis is supplemented by one which claims that when the body does resurface in experience, this resurfacing is often characterised by an 'otherness' in which the body, in its corporeality, takes on an 'alien presence' separate from the subject. Thus Zaner insists "*I am as well not my body*." Although, as I have argued, this paradoxically points to our essentially embodied nature, the suggestion is that this also may have led to the continuation of the above tendency in our thought.

The marginalisation of the body characteristic of Occidental Philosophy is thus thought to be directly connected with its phenomenological invisibility and its material otherness. Both phenomena are obviously central to the problem of embodiment, yet this further claim is not uncontentious and two interconnected criticisms immediately suggest themselves. Firstly, it could be objected that in the call to attend closely to a phenomenon called 'lived experience' the claim exhibits a certain *naïveté* as it posits a set of 'pure', 'theory neutral' or 'natural' experiences as a ground for its analysis. What is problematic about this supposition is that, in many ways, it has been characteristic of the very philosophical tradition which it is being used to explain: for example, in the twentieth century, it is common to both Classical Phenomenology and its bitter rival Logical Positivism. Nevertheless, it also gives rise to a tension between theory and praxis in Existential Phenomenology for, although writers such as

Merleau-Ponty emphasise our essential situatedness and reject any notion of an absolute, this supposition continues to underlie many of their more fundamental insights.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, this position is one that has now largely been abandoned even within the 'classical tradition' of Western philosophy itself.<sup>62</sup>

It matters little whether the theory-ladenness is at the level of the experiences themselves or their description, the counter claim is that it is impossible for them to do any philosophical useful work in the manner required. Even if we do not accept a thorough-going historicism or relativism, which I do not, and continue to hold to the idea of there being some natural, context-transcendent experiences, a residual but pernicious problem still remains: once these experiences are attended to *in a philosophical context* and are taken up as data to be used in a philosophical argument, they do become infused with historical and cultural references. The question, as I previously argued in Chapter 1, then becomes one of interpretation and the danger one of retrospective analysis. Why do we interpret these experiences as a possible motivation in arguments for psycho-physical dualism? The answer to this may simply be that we stand in a tradition in which such arguments have had a pervasive and pernicious influence and that such interpretations only make sense in the retrospective light of that very tradition. We would all do well to remember the reference Merleau-Ponty himself made in *Signs* to the 'sedimentation of history' and the recognition inherent in this that we stand upon the shoulders of our philosophical forbears: as I have said before, in a sense we are all Cartesians now.

The second criticism is really a working through of the first: that is, that this analysis tends to ignore, not only the historical and the cultural, but also the political context in which such arguments are constructed and the subsequently political agendas which inform them and which they are enlisted to serve.<sup>63</sup> The invisibility of the body, for example, may be due to an insidious invisibility of power as much as to the transparency of the intentional. Thus Naomi Scheman

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61. Cf. Chapter 3, footnote 76.

62. This point is often overlooked in contemporary criticisms of that tradition. Historicism and the emphasising of the influence of social and cultural contexts are not the preserve of something we might call postmodernism. The general impossibility of providing theory-neutral observations of experiences or other phenomena is a persistent theme in the work of philosophers such as Quine, Kuhn, and Lakatos; and the later work of Wittgenstein is premised upon the constitutive rôle played by social contexts and practices. Despite this veritable stampede away from objectivism, Elizabeth Grosz refers dismissively to "an occasionally recognised limit to the value of objectivity." E. Grosz [1993]; "Bodies and Knowledges: Feminism and the Crisis of Reason", L. Alcoff & E. Potter (eds.); *Feminist Epistemologies* (Routledge), p.192.

63. 'Political' should, of course, be broadly interpreted. In fairness to Leder I should point out that he does not ignore socio-political influences on the way the body is experienced, although he only gives it cursory treatment. See D. Leder [1990a]; *op. cit.*, p.92-99.



argues that the problems of philosophy, most notably those inherited from Descartes, do not emerge from the human condition but from the conditions of authority and privilege in which these problems have been formulated and in which they are analysed.<sup>64</sup> Consequently there is nothing either natural or inevitable about the ensuing philosophical reflection and practices or the experiential data upon which they may be taken to be grounded. In fact, what writers such as Scheman point to is a political rather than a phenomenological divergence between the invisible body and the marginalised body. By and large the invisible body has not just been healthy and able-bodied, it has also been white, male, middle-class, Christian and of European extraction or origin. The marginalised body, by contrast, has generally been one that does not fit neatly into these privileged and comforting categories. It is perhaps too easy for philosophers who do come from a background of privilege in our culture to argue that the body has a 'natural' tendency for self-concealment for they are not constantly marked out and systematically excluded in virtue of the nature of their embodiment. They might feel very differently if they viewed the issue from the other side of the hill: for many people, the fact of their embodiment is constantly made manifest by the structures of power which operate within Western society with the result that, as Leder says, "[they] are not full cosubjectivities, free to experience from a tacit body."<sup>65</sup> The experience one has of one's body depends upon who one is and how one fits into these hierarchical structures of power. It is because of this that the problem of embodiment is inseparately linked to questions of identity.

Améry's phenomenological meditations on torture, for example, fit into a gradual process of self-identification as a Jew. As I noted earlier, that experience itself was rendered especially extreme for Améry by the fact that he was transformed into flesh by another, someone who was much more than simply a sadist or a 'bureaucrat of torture': "For is not the one who can reduce a person so entirely to a body and a whimpering prey of death a god or, at least, a demigod?"<sup>66</sup> The Gestapo men at Breendonk were representatives of a system of power intent on both establishing and exercising its sovereignty over excluded categories of people. Prior to his experiences at the hands of National Socialism, including its more mundane methods of exclusion, Améry never considered himself to be a Jew; that was an inevitable outcome of his being turned into body.

Sadly Améry's experience is one aspect of a historical pattern. The marginalisation of Jewish people reaches back beyond the terrible apotheosis of

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64. N. Scheman [1993]; *Engenderings: Constructions of Knowledge, Authority and Privilege* (Routledge).

65. D. Leder [1990a]; *op. cit.*, p.99.

66. J. Améry [1980]; *op. cit.*, p.36.

the Final Solution, yet it is a history of exclusion which has consistently centred on the idea of the Jewish body: throughout history Jews have been transformed into flesh by another. This has been brought out in a recent book by Sander Gilman.<sup>67</sup> Gilman sketches the multifarious ways in which the bodies of Jewish people have been the site of pathologising discourses designed to ostracise them from the majority communities in which they have lived and thus from participating in the structures of power governing those communities. The Jewish body has been systematically constructed and represented as 'different', 'diseased' and 'threatening' and pathological evidence sought of Jewish otherness, both as a means of establishing racial markers and of denying them full citizenship. For example, weak flat feet were often taken to be constitutive of Jewishness and proof of Jewish cowardice. Jews, or so the argument went, could not be trusted as fully integrated citizens, nor could they, therefore, expect to enjoy the fruits of citizenship, as they were biologically unfit to fight in the nation's wars. Gilman also shows how the popular stereotypes associated with the Jewish body have been a convergence of white, male Christian prejudices: not only do Jews walk differently, Jewish men are 'feminine' and the blackness of the Jewish skin tone a sign of disease and corruption - blackness being specifically associated with the spread of sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis. Faced with this systematic assault on their character it is not surprising that a desire for 'invisibility' has grown within the Jewish community; a desire Gilman equates with a "flight from the body", a process whereby the Jew becomes 'white'.<sup>68</sup>

In general the invisibility of the body, it can be argued, is therefore the invisibility of the 'normal': that is, something in which the majority partake or, more specifically, those empowered to set the political and cultural agenda.<sup>69</sup> One could equally provide examples of pathologising discourses, similar to Gilman's analysis of the anti-Semitic 'rhetoric of race', applied to other minority racial and cultural groups and, of course, to women. Feminist writers have a long-standing complaint about how women's bodies have been subjected to such discourses and how they have been systematically eroticised and objectified, thereby being constructed as Other, in opposition to what is presented as the non-corporeal and essentially male categories such as reason and authoritative

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67. S. Gilman [1993]; *The Jew's Body* (Routledge).

68. Central to this process are forms of plastic surgery such as the 'nose-job'. Exactly where the process leaves Jewish people is equally unclear and how the Jews 'fit in' is still a burning question in post-civil rights America. As Gilman notes, Jews in the U. S. A. are seen as both white *and* black, a situation which has led to a particularly vicious hostility between elements of American Jewish and black communities.

69. It has been noted how white people in our culture "colonise the definition of the normal" and, as a result, generally fail to regard themselves as either coloured or as having any ethnicity. See the contributions made to the video *Being White* by T. Dowmunt, M. Clark, R. Martin & K. Mercer (Albany Video) and H. (Charles) [1992]; "Whiteness - The Relevance of Politically Colouring the 'Non'", H. Hinds, A. Phoenix & J. Stacy (eds.) *Working Out: New Directions for Women's Studies* (Falmer Press), pp.29-35. Cf. the discussion of the Cartesian body in Chapter 1.

knowledge. These critiques have challenged the view that the body is a self-evident fact inscribed in nature. In contrast they suggest that it is not a constant, context transcendent reality but a problematic notion shaped by structures of power within specific contexts; a historical category whose function within particular cultural contexts requires unravelling by examining those structures of power which give it its meaning and form. I have already indicated in Chapter 1 that I have some sympathy with this position, although I wish to argue here that we need not be forced into making a simple choice between these seemingly incommensurable alternatives.

The view that the body is constructed or shaped by culturally regulated 'regimes of discourse' is one which owes much of its origin to the work of Michel Foucault. Nevertheless, the Foucauldian body is something which is notoriously ambiguous and our understanding of epithets such as 'constructed' or 'shaped', or the choice one makes between them, is central to an explication of his thinking on this issue: are these discourses 'creative' or simply 'demiurgic', by which I mean that they work on something already there? Thus at the heart of his analysis there seems to be an unresolved tension between the requirements of a thorough-going archæological or genealogical account and the positing of a body which is a pre-existing site upon which such discourses are at play.<sup>70</sup> In his essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy and History" Foucault argues that the body is not a unitary or unchanging existence but an "inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration."<sup>71</sup> The body, on this account, is not so much a material reality in its own right but something "totally imprinted by history" such that "nothing in man - not even his body - is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men."<sup>72</sup> Thus he continues:

We believe, in any event, that the body obeys the exclusive laws of physiology and that it escapes the influence of history, but this too is false. The body is broken down by a great many distinct regimes; it is broken down by rhythms of work, rest and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating, habits or moral laws; it constructs resistances.<sup>73</sup>

In these passages Foucault seems to be arguing for a thesis, developed in subsequent works, that the body is simply a product of these regimes of

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70. Cf. the positions adopted by Judith Butler and Ladelle McWhorter in their symposium addressing this issue. J. Butler [1989]; "Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions", *The Journal of Philosophy* 86, pp.601-607, and L. McWhorter [1989]; "Culture or Nature? The Function of the Term 'Body' in the Work of Michel Foucault", *The Journal of Philosophy* 86, pp.608-614.

71. M. Foucault [1977]; "Nietzsche, Genealogy and History", D. F. Bouchard [ed.], S. Simon & D. F. Bouchard [trans.] *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault* (Cornell University Press), pp.148.

72. M. Foucault [1977]; *op. cit.*, pp.148 & 153 respectively.

73. M. Foucault [1977]; *op. cit.*, p.153.

signification and consequently a notion, like any other, historical to its core; hence the requirement for a thorough-going archæological or genealogical method in order to expose it as such. We cannot speak of a natural, pre-discursive body, anterior to culturally and historically situated practices, because the idea of what is 'natural' and 'pre-discursive', as well as the very idea of the 'body', are historical and discursive artefacts. It appears, therefore, that Foucault's strategy is to deny the dichotomy between nature and culture rather than to be simply content giving a reappraisal of this binary opposition: the natural is not an autonomous realm but, on analysis, collapses back into a network of cultural significations. But perhaps things are not quite this straightforward. To speak of the body, or bodies, as being an 'inscribed surface', "moulded by a great many regimes",<sup>74</sup> or as 'docile', as he does in *Discipline and Punish*,<sup>75</sup> suggests that a slightly less radical alternative reading is possible, perhaps one in which there is still a binary opposition operating - here between body and discourse. The choice of these epithets and phrases seem to indicate that the body is demiurgically shaped rather than thoroughly constructed by discourse, a reading which is lent further support by the suggestion that the body itself can be a site of resistance to these regimes, that *it* constructs resistances. I have neither the space or the inclination to examine which of these is the *correct* reading of Foucault, even if such an idea makes sense, or whether such cursory readings are fair renditions of his complex arguments. Suffice it to say that here are two possible positions; positions that different commentators have sometimes seen Foucault's work as representing.

On either reading, what we seem to have is an understanding of the body radically opposed to the one presented in analyses such as the foregoing, which look to Existentialist Phenomenology for insights upon which to draw. Of course, his attack on the idea of the natural body is not directed against a concept such as the 'lived body', but the concept of the body as a 'for-itself' physiological system, impervious to these historical discourses: the concept of the body which has been dominant in our thought ever since Descartes. Despite this, whichever way we interpret his arguments, they are applicable to *any* philosophical conception of the body and so have important implications for the position I have outlined above. One important difference is that both interpretations once again appear to characterise the body as an inert passivity: thus David Levin argues that Foucault's position requires the body to be a passive receptacle of these historical and political forces, its functioning determined by the social context in which it is situated, and this stands in contrast to the analysis of the lived body provided by Merleau-Ponty. Foucault's conception of the body, Levin

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74. M. Foucault [1977]; *op. cit.*, p.153.

75. M. Foucault [1979]; *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Peregrine), p.184.

argues, “makes it impossible for us to *empower* the body with any capacity to *talk back* to history, drawing not only on its pain and suffering, but also on its depth of needs, desires, and utopian dreams, to call for an end of domination and alienation.”<sup>76</sup> Others have also claimed that the Foucauldian body is essentially passive: for example, Scott Lash argues that it is “a body largely deprived of causal powers” and therefore incapable of resistance; Elizabeth Grosz speaks of the “passivity of the inscribed body”, an approach to the body, she suggests, which is neither “compatible or capable of synthesis” with the lived body of phenomenological reflection; and Lois McNay argues that it is “a passive vector upon which power inexorably ‘inscribes’ itself”, its passivity resulting in a limited account being given of identity and agency.<sup>77</sup> So instead of a passive Cartesian body standing in opposition to an internal controlling ego, it seems we have, on those views expressed here, a passive Foucauldian body standing in opposition to external controlling discourses. Nevertheless, perhaps the contrast is not as stark as it might appear and, with a spirit of compromise, a *rapprochement* between these positions is possible, each beneficially informing the other.

First of all, on the more radical interpretation, Foucault is simply saying that there is no body outside our historically situated acts of conceptualising the body: there is no body except body-for-us. This is perfectly in line with the general thrust of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, with its rejection of any absolute truth and attendant positing of things outside any cognitive framework. Merleau-Ponty was equally keen to emphasise the historicity of our conceptualisations, how these are infused or sedimented by prior acts of conceptualisation and how these are always open to historical change and development. It may also be argued that on this question of change and stability the two philosophers are simply working according to different timescales and that whereas Foucault emphasises the longer-term instability of the body, Merleau-Ponty emphasises the body-subject’s short-term stability as a platform for free agency.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, a more sympathetic reading of Foucault suggests that in explicating how power is exercised he later developed a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship of power and agency and the rôle of the body within this relationship. Thus he argues:

In effect, what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does

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76. D. Levin [1989]; “The Body Politic: The Embodiment of Praxis in Foucault and Habermas”, *Praxis International* 9, p.114.

77. S. Lash [1991]; “Genealogy and the Body: Foucault/Deleuze/Nietzsche”, M. Featherstone, M. Hepworth & B. S. Turner (eds.) *The Body* (Sage), p.261, E. Grosz [1993]; *op. cit.*, p.199, and L. McNay [1991]; “The Foucauldian Body and the Exclusion of Experience”, *Hypatia* 6, p.134.

78. N. Crossley [1993]; “Body Subject/Body Power: Inscription, Agency and Control in Foucault and Merleau-Ponty”, unpublished working paper, Centre for Psychotherapeutic Studies, University of Sheffield. Nick Crossley’s paper is an attempt to outline the type of *rapprochement* I suggest.

not act directly and immediately on others. [...] Its opposite pole can only be passivity, and if it comes up against any resistance it has no other option but to try and minimize it. On the other hand a power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements which are each indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that the 'other' (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognised and maintained to the very end as a person who acts.<sup>79</sup>

In other words, in this later view he argues that a necessary condition of power being power is that it is exercised by one agent over the behaviour of another recognised as a co-agent and not simply an inert passivity. Architectonic constraints on the body therefore only make sense in the context of a body which is the vehicle of an intentional agent which has mastery over its body and which itself makes use of functional space. Therefore, it could be maintained justifiably that here the Foucauldian body is not simply a passive receptacle of regimes of power but is one which is both "active *and* acted upon."<sup>80</sup> One could also argue that an explication of how this power relationship is articulated also requires an account of how the body itself relates to its functional space and, to some extent, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of embodied agency can go some way to inform this account. However, as I noted in the last chapter, when reading Merleau-Ponty one is liable to be unaware that the body itself has certain architectural configurations and limitations;<sup>81</sup> yet, as Dreyfus and Rabinow point out, these configurations and limitations are central to Foucault's account of the disciplined body. The modes of incarceration and architectonic constraint investigated by Foucault also only make sense in the context of a body which has a particular physical structure. Therefore, in order for these discourses of power to be effective they must operate with bodies which are both bodies of intentional agents and which have a distinctive physical form; that is to say, with human bodies.

As the body is a set of capacities, as emphasised by Merleau-Ponty, it could be argued, in line with Foucault's insight, that it cannot be impervious to historical, social, and political discourses. These capacities do not exist as features of the body in isolation; they are always exercised within a context informed or shaped by these discourses. These broader contexts have an important rôle to play in determining the nature and degree of our involvement in the world, as well as how we identify ourselves and conceptualise our bodies. What Drew Leder terms "the alienating projects of the Other" may be especially significant in this respect - leading to a mode of bodily existence he terms 'social dys-appearance'.<sup>82</sup> However, what the above argument also suggests, I believe, is that body-for-us is

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79. M. Foucault [1982]; "Afterword: The Subject and Power", H. L. Dreyfus & P. Rabinow *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Harvester Press), p.220.

80. N. Crossley [1993]; *op. cit.*, p.13.

81. See Chapter 3, §3.4.

82. D. Leder [1990a]; *op. cit.*, p.98.

not simply a product of these socially constructed discourses and that the body should not be understood as a *tabula rasa* but as something which itself contributes to and constrains the constructions we make of it. This is also precisely the lesson to be drawn from the phenomenological investigation of the previous two sections of this chapter: as Leder also says “cultural variations are always played out upon the keyboard of possibilities presented by our corporeal structures.”<sup>83</sup> On this dialectical account of embodiment, the body which is shaped by these discourses is also one which helps shape such discourses: it is a body which can talk back to history.

It may be that such an understanding sits uncomfortably with a purely constructivist view of the body, and instead favours what I call a demiurgic account of inscription, but this is not to say that it ignores historical or political factors which motivate and inform our conceptualisations or that the body is impervious to these; indeed it can admit such factors as part of the dialectic. In any case, to my mind, the constructivist view itself inclines to the intellectualism and somatophobia which we are at pains to confront: positing a sublimated and marginalised body as a product of these sovereign discourses; truly a ‘body-without-organs’.<sup>84</sup> It would be going too far to say that this view itself is a carrying on of Cartesianism by other means, but it is fair to say that, in its eagerness to thoroughly situate the self, it seems to have forgotten that the primary move in denying the autonomy of the subject and emphasising its facticity is taken when we re-embodiment the self in its world; and thus that some understanding is required of the embodied self as an object and a materiality which is not a construction. In the previous chapter I argued that the danger with the dissolution of a binary opposition, rather than its reappraisal, is that the dissolution invariably ends up as a privileging of one half of the binary. Constructivism, with its latent tendency towards some form of naïve linguistic idealism, once again seems to lead us up that familiar cul-de-sac.

Where does this leave the claim that there is a phenomenological ground for dualist metaphysics? What I have argued is that when we attend to our experience of embodiment the body is revealed as both an object in the world and a set of capacities, both of these being inseparable terms in the single reversible existence we know as the human body. I have therefore already ruled out the possibility that these experiences could be used as an argument for dualism; as I have said before, there is only an *apparent truth* of dualism revealed here. But then do they, even on this basis, provide a motivation for dualism? Historically,

83. D. Leder [1990a]; *op. cit.*, p.3.

84. The phrase is from Deleuze and Guattari; it is a body which is not the body of medical and anatomical discourse. G. Deleuze & F. Guattari [1984]; *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Athlone). See also N. J. Fox [1993]; *Postmodernism, Sociology and Health* (Open University Press).

at the level of conscious debate, they have not done so for when we look at the arguments it is clear that the motivation has been primarily theoretical and not experiential. The most that can be said is that they provide a receptive soil in which the seeds of dualism have been sown. But even in this limited respect these experiences are not privileged, for the same could be argued for linguistic, cultural, and other socio-political practices and agendas; the position I presented in Chapter 1.

Perhaps what is distinctive and remarkable about the phenomenological experience of embodiment is that, where the evidence of experience has been appealed to, such as in Descartes, it has been invariably used as a counter to, rather than in support of, theoretically inspired dualism. Nevertheless, if successful, the historicist critique of the body adumbrated above undermines a naïve return to the 'concrete' or 'natural' experience of embodiment as a response to dualism as much as a source of support. But the phenomenologist may retort that the charge of *naïveté* could equally be levelled against the historicist as any genealogical account we give of an idea is likewise subject to the problem of retrospective analysis; for it could be said that it too is infused with our present conceptualisations. The historicist would probably accept the charge but point out that they are not proposing a 'true' account of things but initiating a strategic manoeuvre in order to free us of a particular picture and way of looking at the issue. Contrary to this critique I still feel that such a return to a 'given' itself has much strategic value for, historically motivated as such a manoeuvre is, its analysis does highlight features which are themselves not exhaustively bound by historical discourses and therefore offers a more robust reappraisal of the issue.

Does this mean that I must posit an invariant, pre-discursive body as a site of culturally and historically variant discourses? Perhaps it does; but this does not necessarily conflict with the view that, however we approach the body, it is always-already engaged in cultural and historical contexts. We must be careful to focus on our target: I am not opposed to the objective but objectivism and its concomitant view of the body as *simply* a biological object impervious to these discourses. In many ways, despite their theoretical commitment to historicism, the same could also be said for both Merleau-Ponty and Foucault: in practice not every feature of the human subject and human body in their analyses are historically bound. I am tempted to put it this way; many of our discourses concerning the body are thoroughly contextual, and thus subject to historical and cultural variation, but there are limits to any pluralism this may encourage. In other words, one could say that there is a point in the archæological process at which the spade turns. These variant discourses are at play against a backdrop of others which we hold to be invariant across cultural and historical divides;



discourses which could be said to be 'methodological' and in the absence of which we could not be said to be talking about a body (such discourses providing a framework around which there can be a degree of free play).

It may be a feature of these discourses, and the rôle they play in our conceptualisations, that they posit something external to themselves; a material reality of which my body, and therefore myself, is a part.<sup>85</sup> To my knowledge, the possibility of such discourses has received no attention in current debates on the body; but they are an important consideration, for a constructivist and thoroughly relativist thesis could only be maintained if supported by an 'error theory' of such discourses. Yet it is not clear to me what the basis for such an error theory would be. If they are a 'fiction' then perhaps, as Wittgenstein would have said, they are a 'grammatical fiction'; but this brings little comfort to the constructivist for they are no less mandatory for all that.<sup>86</sup> And if they are in some sense mandatory, rather than optional, then it seems that constructivism and relativism are trying to say the same thing as realism: at this point this particular dichotomy seems to collapse. This is not to say they could not be interrogated; in order to do this we need to turn from a phenomenological to a more straightforwardly transcendental approach to the question of embodiment, and this is what I plan to do in the next chapter.

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85. Nothing I say here supports what I call a 'hyper-realist' position which argues that there are discourses which posit the existence of states of affairs of which we cannot even conceive or, in principle, make judgements about. Nagel mistakenly identifies realism with hyper-realism and thus, in my view, erroneously interprets Wittgenstein as "one of the most important sources of contemporary idealism." T. Nagel [1986]; *The View From Nowhere* (Oxford University Press), p.105. It is this sort of hyper-realism which underlies Colin McGinn's scepticism concerning a solution to the mind-body problem. See C. McGinn [1989]; "Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem?", *Mind* 98, pp.349-366.

86. L. Wittgenstein [1967]; *Philosophical Investigations* (Basil Blackwell), §307. As Sabina Lovibond correctly points out, the point of calling these *grammatical* fictions is to indicate that they express something to which we are committed (that is, something to which we cannot help but be committed) by our forms of expression. See S. Lovibond [1994]; "Feminism and the 'Crisis of Reason'", *New Left Review* 207, p.80.

## 5. Experiences of Disembodiment?

As long as the smooth form of the body-world dialogue runs its course undisturbed we take its results for granted as these, by their very nature, conceal themselves and remain hidden from our gaze. The lived body, as the human subject's sensorimotor mechanism for engaging with the world, is thus, as Sartre pithily put it, that which is continually 'forgotten' or 'surpassed' as the human subject ek-statically pursues its projects in the world. In the normal course of events it is therefore characterised by the invisibility of the intentional. However, as we have seen, occasionally this body-world dialogue can disintegrate in fatigue, illness and forms of psychical deviation. Tension and opposition manifest themselves and the body loses its customary synergic unity. In such cases my normally domesticated body can seem to be fulfilling the projects of an outside agency, to be in the way and to frustrate the achievement of my goals, or parts of my body may take on a thing-like existence apart from my being. The debilitated body is thus not easily 'forgotten' or 'surpassed' but manifests itself by the urgency of its demands and its refusal to respond to my desires and intentions. In such circumstances it seems clear that my body is a material reality in its own right, with its own agenda, and that, whatever I am, I am not simply my body. But despite this, even in extreme cases such as Christina, Oliver Sack's 'disembodied' woman, the body as a whole is never *completely* a thing, simply a biological materiality or an objectified Other 'out there' in the world.

At the end of the last chapter we examined the Merleau-Pontian suggestion that these experiential modes of bodily absence revealed an apparent truth of dualism and the possibility that together these experiences therefore provided something of a motive and a ground for dualist metaphysics and the intellectualist project. Ultimately, this conclusion was rejected for three reasons. Firstly, that close scrutiny of the arguments of dualist philosophers supports the general view that their motives have invariably been theoretical and not experiential. Secondly, because, far from being a ground for such metaphysics, it is not clear that construing them in this way does not itself result from experiencing them within a historical context already thoroughly imbued with

the metaphysical position they are supposed to ground. And thirdly, that, however ambiguous these experiences are, they actually attest to our nature as essentially embodied subjects. Does this mean that there are no experientially grounded motives for dualism? In fact there are but, where experiences are consciously appealed to in support of psycho-physical dualism, they have tended to be ones which are strange and esoteric or, at least, not ones we encounter in the course of our everyday lives. Once again these experiences most often occur in deleterious circumstances; but here the circumstances are often so traumatic that we are not simply dealing with a debilitated body but a dying body. Because of this these experiences have generally become to be known as 'near death' experiences. However, for our purposes I shall concentrate on a sub-group of these more precisely known as 'out-of-body' experiences: experiences perhaps best characterised as modes of absence from the body rather than modes of bodily absence.

What is of interest in these experiences is the claim that one can adopt a perspective on the world not centred on one's body - a perspective in which the body itself may indeed appear as simply one object amongst others in the world. In opposition to the arguments presented by Merleau-Ponty, it seems that we here have a phenomenon which shows that the total absence of the body and a variability in its perspective are conceivable. Thus apologists for dualism suggest that these experiences, while they may not actually prove dualism or even render dualism probable, at least show that the separation of mind and body is intelligible. I must admit that an appeal to these experiences has not usually formed the basis of mainstream philosophical arguments in favour of dualist metaphysics. Having said this there is a long history of these experiences hovering on the fringes of such arguments and there is a growing contemporary interest in such phenomena: nowadays they are often appealed to as 'evidence' for the separation of self and body in arguments outside faculty classrooms. Despite professional scruples, there is an argument here that needs to be addressed by anyone, like myself, who wishes to argue for a reappraisal of the body and the recognition of its central rôle in all aspects of the life of the human subject. What I therefore aim to do in this chapter is to take on intellectualism head-on and, by doing so, engage directly with Descartes' assertion in the *Discourse on Method* that "I could pretend that I had no body, that there was no world and no place existed for me to be in."<sup>1</sup>

To do this I shall lay out what these experiences of disembodiment are after which I shall go on to critically examine the very idea of disembodied perceptual experience. At this point I should offer a second admission: although I start this

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1. Descartes; AT VI p.33, CSMK I p.127.

discussion in the context of post-mortem disembodied survival, my interest is not in the possibility of an afterlife as such. Again my strategy is simply to adopt the method of investigating the normal by means of the abnormal and hope that by attempting to tell a credible story of disembodied experience we can provide a forum in which to delve deeper into the relationship between body and self.

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## 5.1 Death, Disembodiment and Folk-Eschatology

Whatever our philosophical views of embodiment and the body we all recognize that there is an inevitable temporal point at which our bodies as a whole take on a thing-like existence and the black humour of the Greek pun *sôma-sêma* becomes a reality. At death a new type of object emerges in the world, the corpse: the body of the living person which Merleau-Ponty says has lost its meaning and has fallen back into a state of physico-chemical mass. Thus, or so I would argue, only at death does the body arrive at complete non-meaning. Yet my own death never reveals this non-meaning for me for, as Wittgenstein remarks, my own death is a horizon of my life and not an event in my life. For me my life is finite but unbounded, as in neither direction does it have a visible edge. In Drew Leder's terms death, like birth and sleep, is a temporal mode of depth disappearance, something I can only anticipate and not something I can experience. The body as corpse is therefore the ultimate, and indeed only, expression of the human body as objectified Other and the anxiety I feel at its anticipated approach is a response to its paradigmatic frustration of my goals. Yet, paradoxically, this frustration is not achieved by its intruding itself into the body-world dialogue in the way of the debilitated body but by its complete and total absence. The dynamic unity of the lived body ek-statically in pursuit of its goals gives way absolutely at death to the dismembered and inert pathology of the biological and medical sciences; parts of the body finally do become simply related together in objective space *partes extra partes*. It is almost impossible for me to conceive myself becoming simply an objectified and alien collection of these constituent bodily parts. Of course I can conceive of this but, because I cannot experience it, I cannot help but see the corpse in terms of the Other. A corpse is always what was someone else, the dead are always what were other people; yet in experiencing the death of the Other there is also, as a socially situated being, a recognition of my own mortality.

As I have argued before, in death it thus appears we have a vindication of the Cartesian view of the body; for at the point of death the body finally does become simply one object amongst others in the world, gradually disintegrating and decomposing into its atomic parts. The importance of this for the hold the Cartesian view has in our thinking about body and self cannot be overstated. The growth of Descartes' new science of the mind progressed hand in hand with the new science of human anatomy developing along side it, each informing and legitimating the other. For Descartes the mind was a living existence which could endure without the body and the body itself was little more than an

animated cadaver, animated only in virtue of the other abiding within it. The human corpse therefore represents our bodies' involvement in the inert mechanistic passivity of *res extensa* and establishes itself as a striking metaphor for the thanatoid nature of this realm as a whole. I argued earlier that by means of a perverse reversal it is as if the corpse has become the paradigm in our thinking for the human body in general. In face of this one can only protest that we know ourselves to be something more.

The difficulty I have in reconciling an identity between my lived-body now and its anticipated future state may therefore lead one to conclude that human nature consists in a radical disidentification of self and body or that such an identification is simply contingent. It may also foster a feeling that what is missing in this future state is something that is present now, something that enshrines in itself essentially what I am, something that may even live on in some non-bodily form. Rationalistic science and a broad materialistic consensus congratulate themselves on relegating such a belief from the position of respectability it once had to one of superstition, but in fact they have done nothing to oust it from a prominent position in 'folk-eschatology'. This should perhaps be of no surprise since, as I have remarked before, materialist theories also think in Cartesian categories and partake in the fallacy of the essential person as an isolatable homuncular, albeit in different guises, as well as subscribing to the Cartesian view of the world as an inert, closed system. To a large degree our philosophical outlook continues to be largely Cartesian in this respect. It is also true that outside faculty classrooms Everyman remains a dualist and is inclined to believe the Platonic-Cartesian myth that at least we, of all creation, are two things and not one. But while Cartesian dualism does not guarantee survival in some non-corporeal form, because what is supposed to be essentially me may well just die with the body, it is a prerequisite for it.

For many people, both materialists and dualists, it is still their 'inner' mental life which they consider to be most intimately connected with what they regard as themselves; their bodies being at most the contingent companion to their thoughts, memories, feelings and sense of self-awareness. If this mental life is what we essentially are and, as the dualist would maintain, can exist as a non-material and separable part of our pre-mortem selves, as *nôus* or *psyche* or soul, then perhaps, they may reason, it can endure the death and disintegration of its physical ark and continue a non-material existence entirely in the absence of a body. Thus despite the hegemony often claimed for Descartes' materialist legacy in our society, his doctrine of the Autonomy of the Mental continues to exercise a firm grip on our thinking. If one were to ask people if they held particular views on death and what-comes-after, of those who expressed a preference many would still opt for something along these immaterialist folk-eschatological lines.

There has, it is commonly said, to be something more. I am therefore well aware that many people would simply deny the assertion that I have just made, that death is an absolute horizon to life, and would probably go on to claim that the exoteric non-meaning of the corpse is accompanied by a continuation of meaning in a more esoteric and fundamental form. Although perhaps different in kind from other events in my life, they claim, death is nevertheless another event in my continuing personal life history. Death, on this view, proves the validity of the Cartesian view of the body as Other and may even prove the validity of its complementary view of the self as a non-corporeal existence. To deny this, they may continue, is not only to abjure the strong lure of dualist theoretical considerations but also to fly in the face of human experience and the accumulation over centuries of evidence to the contrary. As I have previously argued for close attention to be paid to experience, they would no doubt insist, I should therefore concur with their conclusion that self and body are indeed separate existences. Reports of the dying have long shown the ambiguous nature of our existence and reveal that it may indeed be possible to have a perspective on my body as complete Other, in virtue of a non-bodily post-mortem awareness of my own corpse. Thus the testimony of experience apparently shows that we are a composite of two things and not a simple unity.

This begs several questions. What would it be like to take up such a disembodied perspective? Can we find such a notion even intelligible? Both of these questions amount to asking the following: can we construct a coherent and credible narrative about such a phenomenon? Despite its ubiquity and popularity, the dualist belief in the possibility of disembodied survival remains remarkably unexplicated and ill-defined, existing mostly on the fringes of Western theology and philosophy. However, an extremely rough folk-eschatological portrait of a disembodied person may consist of four main elements, the concatenation of which, I argue, will prove to be elusive:

- 1). The disembodied person is a sentient, self-conscious being still capable in its post-mortem state of all the cognitive and sensual capacities it enjoyed in its pre-mortem condition.
- 2). It is, of course, non-corporeal, from which it follows that it is either: a). non-locatable in the spatial framework of the world (it is literally not of this world) or b). it is locatable in virtue of some criterion other than embodiment.
- 3). That its sensual capacities may involve veridical and meaningful sense experience about this world and the structure and content of these remain unchanged.
- 4). It is also capable of effecting change in the world through some form of disembodied agency.

As I have said, this is only a rough portrait and not one I would expect there to be universal consent to, nonetheless it is at least tolerably representative of a fairly widespread and commonly held set of beliefs. I recognise it is a limited portrait, but it is limited to those features which bear upon my main concerns; non-corporeality, the question of spatiality, the possibility of meaningful, veridical perception, and the possibility of non-corporeal agency. My concern, therefore, is quite specific. It is not in the intelligibility of certain specific forms of non-corporeal intelligence such as a Kantian God or Aquinian angels.<sup>2</sup> Nor is my interest in disembodied survival *per se*. Consequently, I shall not attend to all the details of its possibility or discuss the intelligibility of possible Aristotelian eschatologies that propose the existence of disembodied intellectual subjects who enjoy no sensuous experience. Neither shall I address more closely related eschatologies such as H. H. Price's portrait of disembodied survival in a mind dependent dream world.<sup>3</sup> I believe that what I have to say does have implications for all these but I shall leave them largely unspecified for our interest here is specifically with disembodied and non-corporeal sensuous experience and its relation to *this* world.<sup>4</sup>

This alone should be enough to give us pause for thought. How does the disembodied person continue to have cognitive capacities in the absence of a brain? How can it have sense experience without sense organs? How can it move about without the means of propulsion? Apart from these obvious problems, all of which, I might add, are far too quickly dismissed in the literature, there are also more perplexing, deep-seated problems which simply cannot be dealt with expeditiously. These problems exist from both a third-person and first-person perspective. From the third-person perspective, for example, if we accept the thrust of a Wittgensteinian argument (which we will examine in another context in Chapter 6) that we can only ascribe cognitive and sensual capacities to something which has the appropriate form and is capable of the

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2. Kant suggests that God, what he calls "the primordial being", has knowledge of the world through the exercise of a peculiar intuition which is intellectual and not sensible. Consequently it seems that for God there is no difference between thinking a thing and perceiving it. See Kant [1929]; *Critique of Pure Reason* (trans. N. K. Smith) (The Macmillan Press), B72 and B145. Aquinas argues that angels are unable to gain knowledge of objects through the senses as these are powers of the soul whose operations are exercised by corporeal organs. As angels have no bodies they are restricted to using powers of the soul such as the intellect and will. See Aquinas [1922]; *Summa Theologica*, 22 volumes, (trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province) (Burns, Oates & Washbourne), Volume Ia, Question 54, Article 5.

3. For those who are interested, see H. H. Price [1953]; "Survival and the Idea of 'Another World'", *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 50, pp.1-25, discussed in J. Hick [1976]; *Death and Eternal Life* (Collins; Harper & Row), Chapter 14.

4. It might be objected that my argument moves far too freely between two concerns which are not obviously the same, *viz.* disembodiment and non-corporeality. This is quite deliberate on my part as I regard disembodiment simply as a special case of non-corporeality and the criticisms I go on to make of one apply equally to the other. For the present I beg the reader's indulgence as I shall return to this issue at the end of the next section.



appropriate behaviour, how do we make sense of a disembodied sentient being; for what could count as the form or behaviour in this case? From the first-person perspective we may want to ask whether the spatial structuring of perceptual experience and certain important aspects of its content, which we all take for granted, could have any meaning in the context of a non-corporeal sentience? If the answer to this is "No", are we sure we have anything here that we would recognise as sentience at all? If we deny that a non-corporeal person can have location in, and therefore a perspective on, the world, have we thereby removed a fundamental conceptual resource underpinning agency and having thoughts and experiences concerning the world? And if it does have location, what can this mean if not that it is embodied? Thus it seems that the most beguiling aspect of the eschatology of disembodiment, that we shuffle off this mortal coil with all its attendant limitations and suffering, may render the whole idea problematic and obscure. And yet, it is argued, there is abundant experiential evidence that it is true. What then is this apparent thanatic evidence for folk-eschatology and dualism?

Exactly what constitutes the barrier between life and death has long been blurred and continues to be so. Perhaps our present generation's medical knowledge recognizes more than any of its predecessors just how difficult it is to draw a line between the two. Through necessity doctors have had to 'redefine' what death is. Not long ago death was pronounced in the absence of respiratory activity and when the heart had stopped. It was not uncommon, however, for an individual to recover from this state and thus create newspaper headlines as having "Come Back From The Dead." Advances in surgical techniques, and especially the introduction of life-support systems, have rendered this test insufficient on its own. But although additional guides, such as the electroencephalograph for measuring brain activity, have allowed a tighter criterion of death to be drawn, it is not unknown for a patient to register a 'flat' reading on such an instrument and yet go on to make a full recovery. Essentially medicine now acknowledges two broad categories of death. Firstly there is *biological* death where all signs of life in the body are absent and when irreversible degradation of the body begins to occur. This is what we might call death proper. The second is what is known as *clinical* death and is where, although all signs of life are absent, prompt resuscitation may enable the patient to make a recovery. Those that do sometimes have interesting tales to tell.

Towards the end of the *Republic* Plato famously recounts the story of a Pamphylian soldier called Er who had been slain in battle and whose strangely undecayed body had been tossed, along with other fatalities, onto a funeral pyre only to recover at the last moment describing a journey to a world beyond. According to Plato he had said that "when his soul went forth from his body he

journeyed with a great company and they came to a mysterious region where there were two openings side by side in the earth and above and over against them in the heaven two others.”<sup>5</sup> Here the righteous and unjust were judged and separated. Since Plato related this story there has been numerous similar accounts of people, who I suppose we would now call clinically dead, that have survived to tell the tale of their apparent separation from their bodies and of a journey to a place beyond the bounds of this world, only to be brought back, or sometimes ‘sent back’, at the last moment. Thus St. Paul also narrates such a tale, albeit more ambivalently: “I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth) such a one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth) how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”<sup>6</sup> It is because such fortunates are now deemed to have been only clinically dead that their experiences are generally known as *near-death* experiences.

It is tempting, and not a little patronizing, to just dismiss such talk of out-of-body ‘journeys’ and concomitant experiences of ‘tunnels’, ‘other worlds’ and ‘beings of light’ as mere fancies or the hoary tales of an over-gullible past. They may well be hallucinatory but there is now considerable evidence to show that these experiences form an almost invariant pattern in near-death experiences. Visions of tunnels and other worlds are quite rare but this seems to be because they occur later in a sequence of experiences and so are nearer actual death. What are far more common, and also far more interesting from our point of view, are the out-of-body experiences which occur earlier than the others and in which the person does not claim to have gained some special knowledge of a world beyond but rather that during the experience he or she had veridical perceptions of this world from a point not centred on the body. In view of the understandable scepticism that such claims give rise to, it is worth emphasizing just how real (in the sense of veridical) these experiences seem to those to whom they occur. Of course, by itself this does not mean that they are genuine perceptual experiences but, whatever their explanation, the fact is that many are convinced that their ‘centres of consciousness’ left their bodies so that they were

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5. The so-called Myth of Er is recounted by Plato in its entirety in Book X, §§614b-618b of the *Republic*. Plato [1961]; *Plato: The Collected Dialogues* (eds. E. Hamilton & H. Cairns) (Princeton University Press), p.839.

6. II Corinthians, Chapter 12, Verses 2-4 (Authorised King James Version). St. Paul's ambivalence may be due to the fact that the Hellenic idea of a separable soul does not lie down easily with strands of Hebrew eschatology. St. Paul is also the main New Testament source of the doctrine of bodily resurrection and although, according to the doctrine, what is resurrected is not necessarily the pre-mortem physical body of the deceased but a *soma pneumatikon* or ‘spiritual’ body, it is hardly an eschatology which straightforwardly posits a dualist ontology (I Corinthians, Chapter 15, Verses 35-54).

able to perceive the world from a different perspective.<sup>7</sup> From this new point of view their old point of view, the body, also appears to them in a new way, as just another object in the visual field. A consequence of the scepticism which greets such tales has been that when patients have recounted their experiences to their doctors or families they have not been taken seriously and generally ignored. But perhaps when a philosopher of the calibre, and as famously hard-headed, as the late A. J. Ayer reports such an experience we should be prepared to sit up and listen.<sup>8</sup>

Raymond Moody, a Georgian psychiatrist, did listen and in 1975 published the first serious account of near-death experiences.<sup>9</sup> Although fascinating, there are serious limitations to his research, but since Moody others have been spurred to take up the subject in a more rigorous way. Kenneth Ring interviewed over a hundred severely ill patients, accident victims and suicide attempts, of which almost half said that they had had Moody-type experiences when near death.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the cardiologist Michael Sabom decided to conduct a survey of his own patients who had been close to death, partly in an attempt to discredit Moody's findings, and to his astonishment a sizeable proportion confided to having some such experience.<sup>11</sup> Sabom has not been the only interested medic to find themselves surprised. A typical example of the out-of-body experience reported by these people concerns the case of a young Florida saleswoman knocked down in a hit-and-run accident in July 1964;

I was struck from behind... That's the last thing I remember until I was above the whole scene viewing the accident. I was very detached. This was the amazing thing about it to me... I don't remember hearing anything. I don't remember saying anything. I was just viewing things... It was just like I floated up there... [up to the] roof-top or maybe a little higher... very detached... It was as though I was pure intellect. My attention was called to my body when the attendants put it on the stretcher... I saw myself in profile... I was viewing my body as they picked it up and put it on the stretcher.<sup>12</sup>

This one example will suffice as it is an almost paradigmatic account of this type of experience: it seems that the body no longer acts as the person's perspective on the world, instead it becomes a thematised and alien object, an 'it'

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7. Whatever the nature of these experiences, it is clear that they invariably represent an epiphanic moment in the lives of those who have them after which their attitudes change towards a range of issues such as life and death, religion, acquisitiveness, and concern for others. See C. P. Flynn [1984]; "Meanings and Implications of Near-Death Experiencer Transformations", B. Greyson & C. P. Flynn [1984] (eds.); *The Near-Death Experience: Problems, Prospects, Perspectives* (Charles C. Thomas), pp.278-289.

8. Ayer's own account of his experiences appeared under the title "What I saw when I was dead...", *The Sunday Telegraph*, 28th August 1988, p.5.

9. R. Moody [1975]; *Life After Life* (Mockingbird Books).

10. K. Ring [1980]; *Life at Death: A Scientific Investigation of the Near-Death Experience* (Coward, McCann & Geoghegan).

11. M. B. Sabom [1982]; *Recollections of Death: A Medical Investigation* (Harper & Row).

12. Quoted in M. B. Sabom [1982]; *op. cit.*, p.116.

which they are able to view from a new perspective somewhere outside and above the scene encompassing the body. It is interesting to note how this disembodied viewing of one's own body is a recurrent and central theme in the descriptions of these experiences. Apart from the cases of accident victims, such experiences seem almost commonplace in cases of patients undergoing life-saving surgery: it appears to them as if they are looking down on the operating theatre as the crash team struggle to induce signs of life in an inert body, almost as if it were the body of someone else.

The traditional occult explanation for these experiences would be in terms of an 'astral projection'. In occult lore the vehicle for consciousness is the astral body which separates permanently from the physical body at death but may temporally separate from it by projection during life. I think that we can afford to be dismissive of such explanations as they only tend to mystify rather than enlighten. In what way is this sublimated body, the astral body, significantly different from a physical body and yet still a 'body'? Is this extra sort of body supposed to have some sort of 'materiality'? Is it supposed to be some sort of soul-stuff, similar to the Ionian Pre-Socratic idea of vaporous 'substance', which has properties in common with, or at least analogous to, actual physical bodies?<sup>13</sup> Or is it like the *soma pneumatikon* of which St. Paul speaks: divine or spiritual bodies resurrected to inhabit and to be continuous with a spiritual world? Either way one can be forgiven for feeling that a rather unsubtle sleight of hand is being played in all of this: by speaking of 'astral' or 'spiritual' *bodies* it seems to me that their proponents wish to smuggle in the conceptual advantages of corporeality by the back door at the same time as denying its limitations. It is generally called having one's cake and eating it. To speak of astral bodies is simply evocative, with little or no content, let alone substance. In any case this type of occult explanation of out-of-body experiences simply does not fit the testimonies of those who have had these experiences, the vast majority of whom feel the absence of any sort of body including an ersatz body. Nor do they fit with characteristic folk-eschatological beliefs which do not necessarily view the separation as a separation of substances. Furthermore, other more prosaic explanations are still in the offing.

These strange experiences witnessed by those close to death share many features in common with other experiences such that it may be possible to group all under the general heading 'metachoric experiences'.<sup>14</sup> Such things as tunnel-

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13. The Ionians thought of the soul as variously analogous to vaporous breath, air, water, and the substance of stars. See W. K. C. Guthrie [1962]; *A History of Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press), Volume 1.

14. For a comparison see C. E. Green [1968]; *Lucid Dreams* (Institute of Psychophysical Research). Michael Grosso has also argued that these ostensibly different experiences may in fact be different varieties of a single type of experience. See M Grosso [1976]; "Some Varieties of Out-of-Body

motifs, sensations of flying and floating and displacements in space are experienced not only by the dying but may arise in a wide variety of circumstances. All the various features of near-death experiences also occur, individually or in combination, in 'normal' circumstances which are not life-threatening. For example, they are very similar to so-called 'lucid dreams', where the subject is aware that he or she is in an altered state, as well as the disorders of thinking, hallucinations and body-image distortions suffered by the victims of sensory deprivation. These latter type of experience may give rise to acute anxiety which in turn leads to more bizarre experiences, panic attacks and ultimately full-blown acute psychotic states. Such states can also be due to emotional and psychical distress, occur in hypnogogic sleep, or can be artificially induced by the use of drugs, or even by the relatively mild sensory deprivation endured by prisoners in long-term solitary confinement. An example of the latter is that of the anti-Apartheid campaigner Albie Sachs, at the time a young Capetown lawyer, who was placed in isolation for 168 days in a South African prison in the early 1960s. The similarity of his symptoms to those of a near-death experience are obvious. He writes;

Often when I lie on my bed I feel as if my soul is separating from my body... My limbs, my trunk and my head lie in an inert vegetable mass on the mattress while my soul floats gently to the ceiling, where it coalesces and embodies itself into a shape which lodges in the corner and looks down at my body.<sup>15</sup>

As the symptomatic experiences are sufficiently similar it would be natural to assume that their explanations may be also without the necessity of invoking mysterious occult theories. Recent work in the field suggests this is so. Susan Blackmore argues that the explanation of many of the characteristic features of these experiences may be found in a combination of the organizational structures of the brain and its need to be active, constantly processing sensory information in order to form what she calls 'stable models' of what is real. In the absence of novel sensory input, due to natural or artificial conditions, the brain begins to fall back on and substitute internally generated information. The structures of the processing systems, such as the visual cortex, then determines how this is 'seen'.<sup>16</sup> Despite cultural differences in the way they are interpreted there is, as I have said, a large degree of invariance between reported experiences. This invariance can either be put down to the fact that the experience is veridical or it

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Experience", *The Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 70, pp.179-193.

15. Quoted in C. Ackroyd [1980]; *The Technology of Political Control* (Pluto Press), p.238.

16. S. J. Blackmore [1988]; "Visions from the Dying Brain", *New Scientist* 118 (5/5/88), p.44. Other authors suggest that the phenomenon is linked to limbic lobe dysfunction. The fact that such experiences require an intact limbic lobe suggests the plausibility of this theory. Near-death experiences are much less likely to occur in circumstances involving damage to specific brain structures such as strokes. See D. B. Carr [1984]; "Pathophysiology of Stress-Induced Limbic Lobe Dysfunction: A Hypothesis Relevant to Near-Death Experiences", B. Greyson & C. P. Flynn [1984] (eds.); *The Near-Death Experience: Problems, Prospects, Perspectives* (Charles C. Thomas), pp.125-139.

can be accounted for by reference to objective, physiological causal factors. Notwithstanding a certain degree of philosophical *naïveté* in her treatment of surrounding issues,<sup>17</sup> the benefit of the Blackmore-type approach is that it does provide grounds for a plausible pathophysiological alternative to the claim that they are veridical perceptions.

A considerable measure of care and sympathy is required when interpreting the reports of the dying and these cannot always be taken on face value.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless many people who have had near-death experiences are perfectly clear about what has happened to them and there remains one fly in the ointment of the suggestion that these experiences may be explicated purely in psychological or physiological terms. What such explanations cannot determine is those cases where people have claimed to have gained information which would have been impossible for them to have obtained with their normal physical senses located in their bodies. Perhaps the most famous of these cases concerns a patient called Maria who suffered cardiac arrest while in a Seattle hospital. She claimed that during the arrest she saw a tennis shoe on an inaccessible ledge high up on the outside of the building. This was reported to and the existence of the shoe was apparently verified by the hospital social worker Kimberly Clark.<sup>19</sup> Such a case is problematic because the claim is that Maria had a veridical perceptual experience of the shoe; or at least an experience which cannot be readily explained away as a reconstruction from previous perceptual experiences or subconsciously assimilated facts, or as a construction of an oxygen starved and dying brain.

Such cases as this are extremely rare, much rarer than occultists like to think, and almost impossible to verify conclusively, being by nature anecdotal and resistant to the strict conditions under which they could be tested. But even if we allow that there are such recalcitrant phenomena what conclusions do we draw? Specifically, should we conclude that there is a disidentity between the

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17. For example, Blackmore's explanation of why such experiences appear so 'real' to those that have them is that they "are real in exactly the same sense as anything ever is real - because it is the best model at the time." It seems that for Blackmore, like many brain scientists, reality is simply 'a model constructed by the brain' from sensory input in the form of electrical impulses. They often appear oblivious of the questions this begs (for example, by what are the brain and the electrical impulses themselves constructed?) let alone the very serious philosophical difficulties such a thesis carries in its wake. S. J. Blackmore [1988]; *op. cit.*, p.44. See also P. Fenwick & D. Lorimer [1989]; "Can Brains Be Conscious?", *New Scientist* 123 (5/8/89), pp.54-56. The concept of a model is invested with so much explanatory power that elsewhere Blackmore suggests that consciousness itself is "what it is like to be" one's model of oneself. S. J. Blackmore [1989]; "Consciousness: Science Tackles the Self", *New Scientist* 122 (1/4/89), p.40.

18. For a sympathetic study see M. Callanan & P. Kelly [1992]; *Final Gifts: Understanding and Helping the Dying* (Hodder & Stoughton).

19. See K. Clark [1984]; "Clinical Interventions with Near-Death Experiences", B. Greyson & C. P. Flynn (eds.) *The Near-Death Experience: Problems, Prospects, Perspectives* (Charles C. Thomas), pp.242-255. Such cases have also been widely reported but inconclusively investigated in the secondary literature.

human subject and the human body? A proponent of dualism and folk-eschatology might make three different claims in answer to this: 1). that such phenomena prove a disidentity, 2). that such phenomena are good evidence for a disidentity and so suggest that this is probable, or 3). that they at least show the intelligibility of such a notion and that perhaps it is possible. These three claims are in descending order of strength but in ascending order of cogency and plausibility. Only the very rash would claim that reports of such experiences offer a proof of post-mortem survival or dualism as neither the quantity or the quality of the accounts come anywhere near meriting such a hyperbolic asseveration.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless many would argue that such cases show that genuine out-of-body experience is at least intelligible and if satisfactorily tested would offer the best possible evidence against the anti-immaterialist and anti-Cartesian movement of my thesis.

However, a good deal of caution is required. Firstly, the sceptically minded may legitimately ask why these experiences should be automatically assumed to be evidence for a separation and disidentity of self and body. If this esoteric hypothesis is to be entertained, why not any number of others? Why, for example, is it not evidence for some special, clairvoyant perceptual capacity that we have but which we do not normally exercise? Perhaps this, like others, might be an explanation which could be invoked without any reference to dualist metaphysics. In response it may be suggested that the claim of a separation of self and body most naturally fits the experiences and that we should simply take these at face value. But we have to ask what lies behind the claim that *this* is the most natural explanation and that these experiences should be interpreted in *this* way. Once again, as with experiences of embodiment, the uncritical may be in danger of falling victim to the lure of retrospective analysis: perhaps this seems the most natural explanation because we are trying to offer an explanation from our standpoint within a culture historically imbued with dualist metaphysics. What this criticism indicates is that, despite the oft referred to sedimentation of conceptualisations, there is no inevitability about our adoption of this type of explanation. Nevertheless I wish to let this lie and, for the purposes of this thesis, concentrate on a different line of investigation.

Furthermore, caution is required not only in terms of the nature of any putative explanation but also in terms of what intellectual stage-setting is necessary before any phenomena can be regarded as *evidence* for something. Before we can talk of something being 'evidence', let alone 'proof', for something

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20. C. J. Ducasse proposed a set of three criteria in assessing evidence for survival: 1). the abundance or scantiness of the evidence, 2). the quality of the evidence, and 3). the diversity of the evidence. Reports of out-of-body experiences invariably meet one or other but never all three criteria. C. J. Ducasse [1961]; *A Critical Examination of the Belief in Life after Death* (Charles. C. Thomas).

else we have to be clear about what it is supposed to be counted as evidence for. Any putative hypothesis, which is even to be given as an explanation of some given phenomenon, must first satisfy (consciously or not) a test of intelligibility. If it fails the test then the collecting of evidence in its support is thereby rendered irrelevant. To be considered relevant the collecting of evidence needs to be undertaken within a broad and acceptable theoretical framework, otherwise it becomes simply *ad hoc* and, as Lord Rutherford once put it, “mere stamp collecting”: the idle assimilation of data without direction or purpose.

As I stated when elaborating the brief folk-eschatological portrait of a disembodied person, a common and often central element is the belief that sensuous and perceptual experience, identical to ours, can continue in the absence of the body. In the following investigation I wish to address the weakest of the above claims in this connection; that this belief, even if it is not shown to be probable or proven by out-of-body experiences, is at least an intelligible notion. We therefore now have to ask whether it meets our Criterion of Intelligibility: this being, in the present circumstances, that the conditions for the possibility of these obtain. My answer to this presupposes much of what I have already said elsewhere on intelligibility and imagination.<sup>21</sup> I shall argue that it may be imaginable (in a narrow sense) but this does not mean it is intelligible. It is unintelligible, I argue; not because it is strictly contradictory but because no meaningful explication can be given of the phenomenon of sensuous or perceptual experience in this context. Much of the discussion will turn on the interrelatedness of the notions of spatiality, perception and agency. I shall argue that non-corporeality simply lacks the conceptual resources to act as a condition of possibility for any of these and no meaningful conceptual relation can be established between the non-corporeal subject and the experience. Therefore, it is an important *conceptual* enquiry to consider whether disembodied sensuous and perceptual experience is really intelligible in the way it is commonly thought to be by folk-eschatology.

But what of Maria? Am I to say that she, and others like her, did not actually experience what they claim to have experienced? How do I explain the apparent fact that she acquired knowledge of her environment which she simply could not have acquired in any other way than the way suggested? I have no explanation. It may be that the human mind abhors a vacuum of explanation but occasionally I think we do well to abide by the principle better no explanation at all than nonsense. Fortunately I am not in the business of suggesting explanations for such phenomena but of examining the intelligibility of a general claim. Before accepting disembodiment as an explanation I want to be convinced

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21. See Chapter 2, §2.1.



that a coherent narrative can indeed be given of non-corporeal sensuous and perceptual experience. It may be just an unexciting and rather platitudinous consequence of my analysis that as near-death experiences can, by definition, only be had by the living so out-of-body experiences, whatever the exact nature and final explanation of these, can only be had by the embodied and that they do not constitute support for Cartesian metaphysics.

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## 5.2 Disembodied Experience Defended

Descartes' assertion that "I could pretend that I had no body" has produced echoes in unexpected places. Thus in *Individuals* Strawson argues that the resources of our conceptual scheme provide for the intelligibility of a pure individual consciousness existing apart from a body. This can be seen, he suggests in the way characteristic of such suppositions, by our conceiving of our individual survival of our bodily death. He says:

[E]ach of us can quite intelligibly conceive of his or her individual survival of bodily death. The effort of imagination is not even great. One has simply to think of oneself as having thoughts and memories as at present, visual and auditory experiences largely as at present, even, perhaps - though this involves certain complications - some quasi-tactual and organic sensations as at present, whilst (a) having no perceptions of a body related to one's experiences as one's own body is, and (b) having no power of initiating changes in the physical condition of the world, such as one at present does with one's hands, shoulders, feet and vocal chords.<sup>22</sup>

Of course Strawson is no Cartesian and his general position is not quite as supportive of the Cartesian claim as this isolated quotation suggests. He tempers this argument with the prior assertion that the concept of a pure individual consciousness, although intelligible, could only have a logically secondary existence. This is to say that, on Strawson's view, what is logically primitive is the concept of a 'person', understood as a compound subject of both states of consciousness and corporeal characteristics: a person is not a pure consciousness, nor simply a material body, it is both mind and body. It therefore follows, contrary to Descartes' view of human nature, that the idea of an pure individual consciousness "could not exist as a primary concept to be used in the explanation of the concept of a person."<sup>23</sup> One should also note how Strawson subsequently rules out the idea of disembodied agency as a "rather vulgar fancy", though he does maintain that one could imagine condition (a) being fulfilled without the fulfilment of condition (b). Despite these necessary qualifications it is still remarkable how his position coheres with that of the folk-eschatologist in claiming that one could continue to have experiences of the world just as one now does in an embodied state.<sup>24</sup>

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22. P. F. Strawson [1959]; *Individuals* (Methuen), p.115.

23. P. F. Strawson [1959]; *op. cit.*, p.115.

24. In fact one wonders just how far Strawson's concept of a 'person' takes us beyond Descartes' substantive union of body and mind. Although Strawson conceives of this as a 'primitive' concept he actually has no way of articulating this logical primordality as a person seems to be simply an amalgam of the attributes of body and mind. Furthermore, although he is not a substance dualist, he still appears to be working within a framework of largely Cartesian categories. In other words, although Strawson undermines the Cartesian privileging of the mental, he does not really address the exclusionary and autonomous natures of these terms. Cf. B. A. O. Williams [1969]; "Are Persons Bodies?", S. F. Spicker [1970] (ed.); *The Philosophy of the Body* (Quadrangle Books), pp.137-156.

An endorsement of the Cartesian claim can also be found in the work of those whose general view of philosophy differs markedly from Strawson's. Earlier this century, for example, we find Moritz Schlick of all people defending what, at first glance, sounds like a surprisingly similar view. He says; "I can easily imagine [...] witnessing the funeral of my own body and continuing to exist without a body, for nothing is easier than to describe a world which differs from our ordinary world only in the complete absence of all data which I call parts of my own body."<sup>25</sup> The conclusion Schlick draws from this exercise of the imagination is that immortality, understood as survival after 'death', should not be regarded as a metaphysical problem but as an empirical hypothesis; *i.e.* a conjecture subject to some form of verification. I am not, as I say, directly concerned with the question of survival; but what Schlick says reaches beyond the confines of that particular problem for he goes on to argue "it is easy to describe experiences such that the hypothesis of an invisible existence of human beings after their bodily death would be the most acceptable explanation of the phenomena observed."<sup>26</sup> What Schlick finds easy to describe is not therefore what any sane person readily accepts, that our ordinary world continues to exist in our absence, but that we could have post-mortem disembodied experiences of it. This is not to say that Schlick believes that there are such invisible human beings, only that there could be. This is to say, that such questions are factual and are determined by the laws of nature and, as such, their denial should be framed in terms of their falsity rather than their unintelligibility. I do not believe that my powers of imagination and description are any less than Strawson's or Schlick's but they both, in their own ways, express precisely the position I wish to question.

Schlick's position rests squarely upon a central 'dogma' of empiricism: the strict separation of what are said to be questions logically possibility and what are said to be questions of empirical possibility. Whatever their ultimate conclusions regarding the intelligibility of non-corporeal experience, this dichotomy underlies an 'orthodox' view of intelligibility and unintelligibility as well as the work of nearly all philosophers who have something to say in this field.<sup>27</sup> The view adopted by the proponents of its intelligibility is generally this: that, at least *prima facie*, the claim that there could be disembodied persons seems to make sense and that, furthermore, such a claim involves no obvious

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25. M. Schlick [1936]; "Meaning and Verification", *The Philosophical Review* 45, p.356. I have already commented, in Chapter 1, on the strange, but not untypical, view of the body Schlick expresses in this paper.

26. M. Schlick [1936]; *op. cit.*, p.357.

27. This generally applies equally well to those whose position is antithetical to the claim. See, for example, the various publications on this issue by of Anthony Flew. A. Flew [1956]; "Can A Man Witness His Own Funeral?", *The Hibbert Journal* 54, pp.242-250; [1960a]; "Single Faith and Doublethink", *The Humanist* 75, pp.19-20; and [1960b]; "Does Survival Make Sense?", *The Humanist* 75, pp.166-168.

self-contradictory elements. Therefore, as the claim has the appearance of sense and, strictly speaking, involves no logical difficulties, the existence of disembodied persons is logically possible.<sup>28</sup> It seems to follow from this, as Schlick asserts, that the nature of such claims is empirical. If, on the one hand, no conclusive or absolute confirmation can be found for them this is a fate that they share with all other empirical hypotheses. If, on the other hand, we have to admit that science could make no investigation or experiment to disprove it "this is true only in the same sense in which it is true for many other hypotheses of similar structure."<sup>29</sup>

However, even if we accept the fact that the claim has *prima facie* sense, there may be hidden difficulties nonetheless so that a more extensive examination may be required. For this reason Terence Penelhum, in *Survival and Disembodied Existence*, offers a much more cautious approach to the question. In this book Penelhum offers us an account of non-corporeal sentient existence which, he believes, should satisfy us that it is at least reasonable for us to speak of the possibility of there being disembodied persons; persons who he considers capable of having, in their non-corporeal state, sensuous experiences or perceptual experiences and beliefs concerning an objective world (to be precise, *this* world: the world of which we have perceptual experiences and about which we entertain beliefs). I take Penelhum's project to be an enquiry to see whether the notion of disembodied personal existence passes the Intelligibility Criterion as he admits that such an investigation is prior to an assessment of any putative empirical evidence offered in the literature of psychical research or elsewhere.

Ultimately his conclusion is that it does not. He suggests that there are two areas of difficulty into which such a notion may run. Firstly, there is the difficulty in coherently describing what such an existence would be like, and secondly, even if we succeeded in the first task, there is still the question of whether the post-mortem disembodied subject can be identified with itself through time or with any pre-mortem individual. In the end those everyday, folk-eschatological beliefs I outlined earlier concerning our survival in some non-corporeal form founder, he argues, upon the second of these difficulties, the question of personal identity and the continuance of the disembodied personality through time. The persistence through time of a pure consciousness does not seem, in the end, to be intelligible simply because in the absence of a body there is nothing left capable of sustaining the identity. Although he considers a psychological criterion such as 'real' memory, for example, to be a sufficient condition of identity it cannot provide an independent criterion of identity: "the

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28. The view, as I have laid it out here, is succinctly put by Armstrong. See D. M. Armstrong [1968]; *A Materialist Theory of Mind* (Routledge & Kegan Paul), p.19.

29. M. Schlick [1936]; *op. cit.*, p.357.

notion that memory would be sufficient if bodily identity were not sufficient also is absurd. Bodily identity is a necessary, as well as a sufficient, condition for the identity of persons.”<sup>30</sup> I shall not discuss the question of personal identity, though I accept that the problems encountered in this area present an insurmountable hurdle to the belief in disembodied existence. What is of interest, I believe, is the fact that, prior to delivering this negative conclusion, he readily concedes that the notions of disembodied person perceiving and thinking about the world, and of a disembodied person acting in the world, are *in themselves* quite intelligible. In other words, despite his final scepticism, Penelhum travels a good distance towards accepting the general folk-eschatological thesis by accepting one of its central tenets: that disembodied perceptual experience and agency *per se* are perfectly possible.

The reason that he thinks this is largely because he assumes a criterion of intelligibility similar to Schlick and the others. Firstly, he draws a distinction between those occasions where someone claims something lacks sense and others where they claim something is unintelligible. According to Penelhum, with regards to the first the person is simply making an autobiographical remark similar to “I am unable to understand what it means”; that is, they are simply referring to a personal, and perhaps individual, difficulty in comprehending what is said. In contrast to this, a belief is unintelligible for Penelhum only if it can be *demonstrated* to be incoherent by argument. On this understanding a belief in ‘round squares’ or ‘married bachelors’ is ruled out as being unintelligible because its failure is too obvious. In contrast Penelhum suggests three ways in which a belief may be unintelligible: 1). when it contains concealed contradictions, 2). if it can only be expressed by the use of discarded notions, and 3). if it is expressed by the use of notions which, although not themselves overtly discarded, are ruled out by restrictions which have been made.

What these three share in common, both with each other and with the orthodox understanding of unintelligibility mentioned above, is that there is a contradiction to be revealed and it is something internal to the belief itself or arises from the way the belief is expressed. I prefer to take a different, and much broader, approach to questions of intelligibility. My Criterion of Intelligibility is whether we can conceive of something as a *real possibility* and this amounts to being able to provide a detailed, coherent and plausible story about its possibility.<sup>31</sup> In other words, we have to examine the resources of our conceptual scheme, to use Strawson's terminology, in order to see if it does provide for the intelligibility our putative hypothesis. Expressing an explicit or implicit contradiction as such is therefore only one way in which something might be

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30. T. Penelhum [1970]; *Survival and Disembodied Existence* (Routledge & Kegan Paul), p.67.

31. See also Chapter 2, the end of §2.1.

unintelligible. What is important for the present discussion is that Penelhum believes that there is a concealed difficulty at the level of identity which renders the whole notion unintelligible; but also that because there are no definable contradictions involved "there seems no decisive reason to insist that a disembodied person could not perceive our world" or "any reasons for saying that such a person could not act in it."<sup>32</sup> I now intend to turn to the details of his arguments in support of these positive claims.

As Penelhum himself says, the transition from pre-mortem bodily existence to post-mortem disembodied existence consists almost exclusively in a process of subtraction from the range of possible abilities we can ascribe to someone making the transition. This needs the qualification "almost exclusively" because we cannot rule out at this stage the acquisition of occult powers that the new state may bestow upon the individual concerned. However, no account can afford to rely too heavily on such an unexplicated transformation without divesting itself of any plausibility: to evoke such powers too readily invites a justifiable scepticism that views them simply as an incantation to deliver us from philosophical difficulties. Furthermore, if the experiences of the disembodied subject are, as Strawson puts it, "experiences largely as at present" then to resort to such mysterious powers clearly lacks any explicatory potency for they tell us nothing of our experiences at present. If the experiences are largely identical one would hope that there would be some commonality between their conditions of possibility: after all, we are actually examining one common concept in both cases, the concept of sensuous experience. Therefore, the main difficulty in making sense of disembodied experience still lies in deciding what abilities, if any, are carried over from one state to the other.

Initially one would think this a simple matter. Those abilities that follow the body into the grave will be those specifically physical abilities such as; being able to dance, smile, walk, eat, or clean one's teeth, while those that are retained will be residual psychological and cognitive abilities such as; being able to think, feel joy or regret, or entertain beliefs about the world. Nonetheless, disembodied people are also commonly said to partake in Strawson's "vulgar fancy" and lift things, write on walls, or knock on tables - all very physical things, seemingly. Apart from this source of confusion I believe a moment's reflection will yield the realisation that this distinction between the physical and these other abilities is really an artificial distinction. There is something not quite right when we try and contemplate anger, for example, in the absence of eyebrows knotting, teeth clenching, voices and blood pressure rising *etc.* If we try to imagine the total absence of these bodily facts are we thereby abolishing the sensation itself?<sup>33</sup> This

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32. T. Penelhum [1970]; *op. cit.*, pp.35 & 43.

33. Cf. L. Wittgenstein [1980]; *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* (Basil Blackwell), Volume

is a problem which confronts us with equal force when we consider perceptual states as well as emotional states. What exactly is it to 'see' without having the normally concomitant ability to 'look', 'peer at', 'stare' *etc.*; states clearly involving complex motor functions? Yet the dualist maintains that there are residual experiential cores that lie at the heart of all these states and that these, by partaking in the Autonomy of the Mental, can exist independently of the physical states with which they are only contingently associated.

Penelhum believes he can answer this puzzle, at least with respect to perception, thereby supporting the view that a disembodied person can have genuine perceptual experiences of the world. The only avenue open, he argues, is for us to adopt a manoeuvre of what he calls 'post-Cartesian epistemology' and define what it is to see in such circumstances as the having of *visual experiences*. Therefore, while lacking the physical apparatus of perception means that the disembodied subject cannot perform the motor operations required in cases of 'looking' *etc.*, this does not exclude them from being able to 'see' in the sense that they may nevertheless have these visual experiences. In other words, Penelhum enacts a fairly straightforward phenomenal reduction in order to explicate what it is for the disembodied subject to see. But why should the having of these visual experiences count as a *genuine* case of 'seeing'? Has not Penelhum simply provided us with a notion of seeing that is completely out of the ordinary? At the very least, one might be forgiven for thinking that we have been offered a somewhat impoverished account of visual perception.

Perhaps we should now speak in terms of 'seeing<sup>1</sup>' (what we ordinarily mean) and 'seeing<sup>2</sup>' (Penelhum's sense of seeing as the having of visual experiences). Penelhum assumes what the dualist assumes; that motor functions and other corporeal states form no part of the phenomenology of visual experience and so their absence is of no material consequence. What is of consequence, on this account, is some residual core experience which can stand apart from the physical processes normally involved and that this alone is what is constitutive of 'seeing'. If we accept this it appears we must grant Penelhum his conclusion, that the disembodied subject may therefore be said to have a *complete* visual experience: one which, in terms of its phenomenology, is identical in all important respects with that of an embodied person. Thus the visual experiences of the disembodied subject may contain elements, or discernible particulars, spatially arranged exactly as they would be for a normal embodied observer looking at a certain set of objects, in ideal conditions and from a particular point of view. He suggests that we can more correctly put this in the following way:

[T]here seems no difficulty in saying of a disembodied person that it might look to him as though there were objects before him which looked to him as they would look to a normal observer under optimum circumstances from a certain position in space.<sup>34</sup>

But surely, one might object, there is more to 'seeing', or at least more to 'seeing<sup>1</sup>', than this. Nothing has been said here to indicate whether these visual experiences are veridical or non-veridical. A basic feature of ordinary, or genuine, perceptual experience is that it is 'of' something and that this 'of' relation amounts to more than an intentional relation of 'aboutness' to some narrowly construed core content of the experience. This is to say, that there exists a 'real relation' between the perceiving subject itself and some object or state of affairs in the world and that the experience is of this object or state of affairs partly in virtue of this relation obtaining.<sup>35</sup> Any account of perceptual experience, embodied or disembodied, has to give an account of this particular 'of' relation. The absence of an account here might leave us wondering whether the disembodied subject has not been left stranded by Penelhum upon the rocks of post-Cartesian epistemology, unable to move beyond its own immediate and solipsistic states to the world outside. Fortunately for the disembodied subject, the having of visual experiences in this manner does not constitute the entirety of what 'seeing<sup>2</sup>' is on Penelhum's account. Penelhum argues that the disembodied subject is not epistemically stranded in this way because:

[W]e are in a position to assume what the classical epistemologist could not assume but was often trying subsequently to demonstrate - that there is a physical world to be seen, that there are many observers with eyes in that world to see it, and that they do see parts of it frequently.<sup>36</sup>

So given that a disembodied subject has a certain visual experience in which there is observed an array of discernible particulars arranged in a given way (*i.e.* spatially to one another, plus other details of hue, shade *etc.*), and given that we (in our happy position of impartial observers) can confirm that there is in fact such an array of particulars in the world, such that any normal embodied observer with eyes to see would have exactly the same visual experience as the disembodied subject, Penelhum concludes that it would be "quite pedantic" to deny that the disembodied subject does see them - so we can legitimately say that it does. In other words, Penelhum is arguing that the experiences of the disembodied subject are veridical, that is to say that the required 'of' relation obtains, because there are objects and states of affairs in the world that correspond to the experiences the subject is having. Presumably one could give a similar explanation of disembodied tactual experience and maintain that this is also a

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34. T. Penelhum [1970]; *op. cit.*, p.25.

35. What I refer to as a 'real relation' has often been referred to by others as a 'normal relation'; *e.g.* T. Burge [1986]; "Cartesian Error and the Objectivity of Perception", P. Pettit & J. McDowell (eds.) *Subject, Thought, and Context* (Clarendon Press), pp.117-136.

36. T. Penelhum [1970]; *op. cit.*, p.24.



veridical perceptual experience; *viz.* that the disembodied subject has certain tactual experiences which correspond to states of affairs in the world which would give rise to exactly the same experiences in the case of a normal embodied subject. Thus, the test of the correspondence in both cases is that an embodied subject, appropriately situated, would have exactly the same experience.

Because of the way Penelhum construes this relation it seems that it is possible to have two ways of interpreting 'disembodiment' in terms of a varying degree of radical disengagement of the subject from the world. On one interpretation we could take the spiritualist's description "not of this world" as a literal description of the disembodied subject's condition, such that it is considered to be a completely transcendent consciousness. On this version, he argues, we need not address ourselves to the problem of where the disembodied subject is located for it is not assumed to be locatable at all within the unitary spatial framework of the world. All we need to know is that it stands, presumably God-like, beyond the limits of this spatio-temporal continuum and that there is no one place from which it looks out on the world. As such the disembodied subject is an example of a pure individual consciousness in radical disengagement with the world. On the second interpretation the disengagement is slightly less radical than this and that, although disembodied, the subject is nevertheless said to view the world from a particular position within the world. In this case we do have to address the question of which particular position this might be. In fact, because of the interrelatedness of spatiality, perception and agency, I believe that the difficulties involved with both interpretations are largely continuous; but more on this in the next section.

One could, of course, take the idea of radical disengagement to be suggesting an eschatology along the lines of that argued for by H. H. Price; where the world the subject is said to have experiences of is some sort of non-physical spirit world or dream world. It may be that in this case analogous difficulties arise; for example, whatever the exact nature of this world, if this picture of disembodiment is not to collapse fairly quickly into a crude form of idealism and a thorough-going solipsism, some convincing account of the relation between the subject and its new world must be provided. However, as I have said, this is not our direct concern and Penelhum's understanding of radical disengagement is different to this. For Penelhum it means that, although outside the spatial framework of our physical world, the disembodied subject is still able to have perceptual experiences of *this* world. How might this be possible? On this interpretation disembodied perceptual experience seems to require the introduction of a special power. Penelhum suggests that we could say of the disembodied subject that it is able to see the world *clairvoyantly*; that is, to see-at-a-distance or to see without being in a position to see. Given this the subject

could nevertheless still be said to be perceiving objects and states of affairs in the world.

One might also argue, though Penelhum does not address this question in the present context, that an explanation could be given of God-like disembodied subjects effecting change in the world simply in terms of their forming the required intention to bring about the said change; an explanation without any reference to physical conditions which we might normally assume to be necessary for agents to possess this ability. Richard Swinburne, for example, argues that an agent having the intention to do something and its having the power to do it, even if we do not know what this power depended on, are sufficient for an explanation of why the thing came about. He therefore thinks that an explanation in terms of some special telekinetic power that the disembodied subject has would at least be a "logically possible explanation."<sup>37</sup> Seeing clairvoyantly would obviously be an additional occult ability (manifestly not one enjoyed by those, like myself, who, still in our embodied condition, often have trouble seeing beyond the end of our noses) and the same would be true of any telekinetic ability the disembodied subject had to effect change in the world. As such, given our earlier restriction on the introduction of special powers, we need to be sure that these are intelligible notions in themselves and I think it is far from clear that they are.

On the second interpretation, that of a less radical disengagement, the disembodied subject is said, despite its non-corporeality, to be perceiving the world from a position somewhere within the spatial framework of the world. What Penelhum says suggests that he believes this to be the more natural, or least problematic, interpretation for he argues that, although the disembodied subject cannot be in space in the sense that a material object is in space (by excluding other objects from occupying a position at the same time it does), "there is some temptation to say nevertheless that he [the disembodied subject] is in it, just because he sees things that are in it."<sup>38</sup> But if we argue that the disembodied subject could be said to be in space, we must perforce address the question of where in space it might be. Obviously we cannot answer this by employing our normal criteria for these are framed in terms of the possession of a body: normally one is locatable at a place in virtue of being physically embodied at that place. Therefore, as such criteria cannot be used in the present circumstances, Penelhum argues:

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37. Swinburne, it seems, is even prepared to go as far as accepting such a power as a brute fact. Thus he argues that "we may accept a man's having the intention to bend a fork and his power so to do as explaining why a fork at some distance from himself bent, without our having any idea of what his power depended on, and indeed even if we deny that it depends on anything." See R. Swinburne [1979]; *The Existence of God* (Clarendon Press), p.47.

38. T. Penelhum [1970]; *op. cit.*, p.25.

The only non-arbitrary way of answering this question is this: we have to say that the disembodied person is at the place from which, when a normal observer sees the objects which our survivor now sees, they look to that observer the way they look to our survivor. Roughly, he has to be at the centre of his visual field.<sup>39</sup>

In other words Penelhum explicates what it is for a disembodied subject to have spatial location by again enacting a phenomenal reduction: it has a certain spatial location in virtue of having a certain visual field. As he notes, two things follow immediately from this; 1). what the disembodied subject sees is not a consequence of its occupying a particular spatial location but rather being at a particular place is exhaustively constituted by it perceiving what it is said to perceive, and 2). that we have to say that nothing the disembodied subject sees can look to it different from the way it really looks. The second of these raises questions concerning a second basic feature of ordinary perceptual experience and its relation to an independently existing reality. Central to the notion of an experience being a *veridical* perceptual experience is the distinction between how things appear and how they really are; a distinction which allows for the possibility of error.<sup>40</sup> Has enough been given here for such a distinction to gain a foothold? Penelhum argues that the subject, being *disembodied*, could make use of an inherited distinction by comparing its present experiences with beliefs about how things are acquired in its former embodied state. Given that the disembodied subject could discount its present experiences in favour of these inherited beliefs, he suggests that it seems "pedantic to deny" that the distinction could be used in this context.

Despite this, he is not fully convinced himself that this is enough for he goes on to rightly object that, even if correct, such beliefs could only be *fortuitously* correct. Memory, of course, is notoriously fallible and so it alone cannot form the basis upon which such discriminations are made. The extra that is needed is for the subject to be able to employ independent test procedures. I would argue that understanding the distinction has no logical priority over being able to make use of it; the two walk hand in hand. In the absence of the subject being able to make use of such test procedures there is no residue of understanding left. Penelhum argues that something like my test procedures could be employed by the disembodied subject if we attribute to it the capacity for correcting misleading perceptions by seeking out less misleading ones. This in turn requires us to attribute to it a capacity to find a route through the world and to move along it; *i.e.* a capacity to change its perspective on the world. Thus, this particular perceptual capacity, to employ the above distinction, seems to require

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39. T. Penelhum [1970]; *op. cit.*, p.25.

40. Colin McGinn suggests that this distinction should be seen as a 'criterion of adequacy' of any realist theory. This is correct and it shows, of course, why traditional scepticism about an 'external' world is entirely parasitic upon realism.

that we make some sense of the notion of disembodied agency.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, could the disembodied subject be said to move or, more specifically, to *move itself*? Penelhum's answer is "Yes"; if we are prepared to define movement austere as first being in one position (as defined above) and subsequently in another. The disembodied subject can then be said to move itself through the world, in this sense, through the ascription of yet another special power that embodied people do not possess. In our case a change of position requires the movement of limbs or some other bodily motor activity. This is obviously ruled out in the case of a disembodied subject. In its case, Penelhum argues, we could say that it is able to change its position (that is, change its visual field for another visual field) simply by willing or trying to do so. It is also this special power which underpins Penelhum's account of disembodied agency in general.

Penelhum's account of disembodied agency draws on the distinction drawn by Arthur Danto between 'basic' and 'non-basic' actions.<sup>42</sup> Danto defines a basic action as an action not caused by another action of the agent who does it and defines a non-basic action as an effect of causal chains originating with a basic action. Therefore, if there are actions, there must be basic actions. Penelhum adapts Danto's definition so as to take account of certain criticisms made of Danto's causal model.<sup>43</sup> Penelhum's preferred definition is this: "An action is a basic action for someone if there is no other action which he has to do in order to do that action."<sup>44</sup> Penelhum's discussion of this issue is deficient in many respects; not least because he fails to distinguish between actions which are supposed to be causally basic and those which are supposed to be intentionally basic. However, it seems that he simply wishes to use the notion of an intentionally basic action. For us, as embodied subjects, an example of a basic action as understood by Penelhum would be the intentional moving of a limb and an example of a non-basic action would be the lifting of a table. In order to lift the table we first have to use our arms and hands. In the case of a disembodied subject lifting the table he suggests that what counts as a basic action is simply the mental act of willing the table to rise or the mental recitation of some formula. What is important in Penelhum's discussion is that it seems that we again have to ascribe an occult psychokinetic power or ability to the disembodied subject.

Penelhum's argument for the *prima facie* intelligibility of disembodied

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41. This shows, in part, that there is a relation between perception and agency contrary to the supposition outlined by Strawson at the beginning of this section.

42. A. Danto [1965]; "Basic Actions", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 2, pp.141-148.

43. He cites Myles Brand's counter-example of the knotting of a tie; an action we would intuitively class as non-basic yet which, on reflection, seems to be the sum-total of basic actions and not something distinct from them which they cause. See M. Brand [1968]; "Danto on Basic Actions", *Noûs* 2, pp.187-190. T. Penelhum [1970]; *op. cit.*, p.41.

44. T. Penelhum [1970]; *op. cit.*, p.41.

perceptual experience therefore largely turns on two considerations; the introduction of special powers and the notion of inherited capacities. Both notions contribute to his preliminary conclusion but both, I contend, allow him to manœuvre out of some pretty tight corners. Yet it is precisely in these corners that the investigation becomes most interesting. I have already indicated some dissatisfaction with the first of these; and I shall return to discuss the details of this dissatisfaction shortly. However, I wish to end this section by briefly addressing the second. Penelhum suggests that the disembodied subject could make use of an inherited distinction between how things appear and how they really are. Similarly, though contrary to Penelhum's final view, Strawson argues that "A person is not an embodied ego (consciousness), but an ego might be a disembodied person, retaining the logical benefit of individuality from having been a person."<sup>45</sup> But exactly how the benefits, in either case, of once being embodied are carried over into a non-corporeal state is never fully articulated.

It is not good enough to say that a disembodied subject inherits a capacity or a condition in the same way we say children inherit their parents' property, good-looks or dispositions. Indeed, what is at issue here is something quite different. In investigating the conditions of possibility for disembodied perception, or survival in general, we are not concerned with how the disembodied subject *acquired* the said capacity or condition (this is quite irrelevant) but how these are *sustained* in the absence of other resources which may provide them with a conceptual ground. If no sense can be given to the idea that these can be sustained then the question of inheritance simply drops out of the picture. Penelhum tacitly accepts this when he goes on to suggest that the capacity to apply the appearance/reality distinction requires the disembodied subject to have the further ability to move and seek out better perceptions; in other words, this can only be sustained in the context of this extra capacity. What we need to investigate then is what grounds this extra capacity itself. It is for these reasons I would argue that the case of a disembodied subject simply raises questions of a more general kind; questions which equally pertain to the case of a non-corporeal subject. Thus, much of the relevant discussion concerning disembodied subjects applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to non-corporeal subjects in general; that is, not just to human beings which are said to survive death in some non-material form but also to all imagined non-material beings, regardless of whether or not they had been previously owners of a body.<sup>46</sup>

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45. P. F. Strawson [1959]; *op. cit.*, p.103. This notion also seems to lie behind Strawson's further contention that in order for a pure individual consciousness to think of itself as an individual, it must always think of itself as *disembodied*. P. F. Strawson [1959]; *op. cit.*, p.116.

46. Nevertheless, for purely stylistic reasons I shall continue to speak of disembodied subjects.

### 5.3 Embodiment and Real Relations

As I have suggested previously, defenders of the intelligibility of disembodied perception might be dismissive of mundane objections such as "How can a disembodied subject be said to see without having eyes with which to see?" or "How can a disembodied subject be said to feel without having hands with which to feel?" Such questions might be thought to simply beg the question against the notion of disembodied sensuous or perceptual experience. The counter argument from such apologists is that, while it may be true that sensuous experiences are normally dependent upon physiological processes in a living organism, they are nevertheless not identifiable with any such processes. Any connection established between these experiences and such processes is empirically determined; there are no necessary or conceptual connections between sensuous experience and the normal physiological means by which these take place. Therefore, it is perfectly intelligible that post-mortem sensuous experience, of some sort, could continue after the destruction of the physiological systems with which they are associated pre-mortem.

However, proponents of its intelligibility should not be so dismissive as such objections do indeed raise several pertinent questions regarding our current investigation; that is, they raise questions of a *conceptual* nature which cannot be dealt with as expeditiously as the dualist or folk-eschatologist would care to believe. For example, Strawson admits that the idea of disembodied tactual experience "involves certain complications", a remark which qualifies as something of an understatement.<sup>47</sup> Obviously a disembodied subject could not be said to have bodily sensations, what Descartes termed experiences of 'inner' sense, if these are understood as perceptions of its own bodily states for it does not possess a body of which these could be perceptions. Nevertheless, bodily sensations not only provide one with information concerning the states of one's own body, they may also provide one with information about one's immediate environment. For example, heat and cold, even the sensation of pain, not only inform one about the condition of one's body, they may also reveal something about states of affairs in the world. Could the disembodied subject have a certain kind of 'bodily' sensuous experience which only provided perceptual information about the world? It is far from clear that it could for, with sense-modalities such as the sense of touch, information about one's environment is mediated by sensuous experiences of the body; the two are far too closely conjoined to be separated in this manner. For this reason tactual experience

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47. See the quotation at the beginning of the last section.

perhaps comes closest to complying with Husserl's observation that when we perceive we co-perceive our bodies. If we say that the disembodied subject has some sensuous experience of this kind, it seems we have gone a good way to giving back the disembodied subject its body; either as some form of 'subtle' body or maybe as an invisible but 'gross' body.

It is perhaps for considerations such as the foregoing that the vast majority of authors in this field tend to concentrate on the question of visual experience; this being favoured in such discussions because there are no obvious or troubling kinæsthetic and bodily sensations central to the experience itself that need to be explained away. But even if we concentrate on this sense-modality alone there are enough difficulties to preoccupy us. Put in extremely crude terms, we normally receive visual information from our environment by means of our eyes collecting light rays reflected from the surfaces of objects within that environment. They are able to do this not only because they have a certain physiological structure but also, and much more basically, because they are opaque and impenetrable by those light rays. Therefore, we would normally have difficulty in understanding how a invisible material entity was able to see; how much more so for a invisible immaterial entity.<sup>48</sup>

I can imagine three possible objections being raised to my line of argument here; that it is far too parochial, reductive, or mechanistic. The charge of parochialism rests upon the claim that the account given of visual perception is couched in terms of normal perception and the means by which this is achieved. My response to this is simply to plead guilty; but also to stress that our grasp on the concept is primarily, perhaps only, achieved in this context. The accusation of reductionism is linked to the first criticism and argues that the explanation reduces visual perception specifically to the physiological processes of human perception. This is nothing more than a *petitio principii* as nothing in this austere statement of normal visual perception rules out vision for organisms with functionally similar organs and it says nothing about visual perception being simply the operation of such organs. I would admit that the last criticism is one with some teeth; but I believe these can be pulled. In fact the charge of mechanism, like the charge of reductionism, ignores the general view of perception I have presented throughout this thesis.

In order to explicate this I must now fulfil my earlier promise of unpacking the claim that the 'of' relation of perception is a real relation. The so-called mechanism of the argument above is simply reminding us that perception is

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48. This is not a difficulty H. G. Wells seems to have considered in his novel *The Invisible Man*. Any advantages Wells' character would have gained through his invisibility would have been counter-balanced by the fact that he would have been blind.

partly a causal concept. In order for the subject to be said to perceive something there must obtain a sensory information link between the subject and what it is said to perceive. This sensory information link is, in part, a causal relation. This is not to argue that perception can be explicated purely in causal terms; nor is it to endorse a general Causal Theory of Perception in which the content of a given perceptual experience is simply fixed or conferred by its distal cause: a causal explanation by itself cannot account for all the phenomenological features of an experience. The problem with purely causal accounts of perception is that they, once again, construe perception as an essentially passive phenomenon. Consequently, I think there is more to a real relation than just causal interaction. However, it is to argue that causal relations will play their part in any adequate account of perceptual experience. Part of the difficulty with the notion of disembodied perceptual experience is providing a convincing causal story of how the subject has the experiences it is said to enjoy. If it is claimed that the disembodied subject has a particular sensory experience, and that this constitutes a genuine veridical perception, then it should be at least possible to spell out, in very general terms, the causal conditions which underlie this perception.

Let us return to consider the case of the radically disengaged subject. This subject, it will be remembered, is said to lie outside the spatial framework of the world. In other words, it is said to have a perspective on the world from a point of view not located within the world; there is nowhere in the world which counts as 'here' for the radically disengaged subject - every point in the world's spatial framework is simply a 'there'. As a result, Penelhum argues, visual perception for such a subject is due to the fact that the subject makes use of special clairvoyant powers. It may be said to see even though it is not in a position to see. But in such a case what would distinguish between a genuine veridical perception and a particularly convincing hallucination which just happened to correspond to some object or state of affairs in the world? The problem is that a phenomenal description of the subject's experience, however detailed that description, cannot determine whether the experience is a veridical perception or not for it is always possible that the truth conditions governing this will run counter to what the experience suggests. But even where there is a fortuitous correspondence between the two, this does not amount to an act of perception. Part of the way we would normally distinguish between the two would be by pointing to some causal mechanism, however rudimentary, whereby the object or state of affairs itself is said to give rise to the experience by affecting the senses in an appropriate way. Is something like this conceivable in the case of the radically disengaged subject? A possible answer to this might be that clairvoyance is also a causal concept but that it just happens that the actual details of the 'mechanism' involved are as yet unknown.



For example, Karl Popper, who famously favoured a dualist and interactionist view of the relation of mind and brain, argued that what is sometimes known as Descartes' Problem (explaining how two radically distinct types of reality - mind and matter - interact with each other) is really no problem at all. If there is a problem, he argued, then it lies with us for since Descartes we have come to understand causal interaction too mechanically, in terms of the 'push' of one physical thing on another, and that this understanding is simply now outmoded. He says: "There is no reason [...] why mental states and physical states should not interact. (The old argument that things so different could not interact was based on a theory of causation which has long been superseded.)"<sup>49</sup> Popper states baldly, in a manner reminiscent of Descartes conclusion, that we do in fact know that mind and matter interact and that we know this from the experience of our everyday lives; the trouble is that we just do not know *how* they interact. However, this should be of no real surprise to us, he continues, since we do not know definitively how physical things causally interact with each other. If we accept his argument, the corollary of this for our present concerns is that we may not be able to say exactly how a disembodied subject comes to perceive things in the world but this inability only becomes critical if we adopt a specifically mechanical interpretation of the causal conditions required. This inability alone, it may be argued, should not stop us from saying that the disembodied subject does visually perceive things, in the same way that it does not stop us saying that certain causal relations (whatever their exact nature) between ourselves and distal objects give rise to visual experiences in us. In other words disembodied perceptual experience may be 'strange but true'.

The problem in accounting for disembodied perceptual experience is thus supposed to be precisely the same as accounting for embodied perceptual experience, except that here the problem lacks the mediating difficulties associated with the physiological processes in the body. At least, it may be argued, the two cases stand or fall together. Popper's riposte is an extremely powerful counter-argument; nevertheless it seems to me that that the way he has presented it fails to bring out the crux of Descartes' Problem and so glosses over important differences between our own case and that of the disembodied subject. Firstly, for the sake of historical accuracy, it must be remembered that this was largely a problem of Descartes own making for it is his separation of reality into two categorially distinct realms of being, *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, which underpins the orthodox view of cause as the mechanical 'push' of one thing on

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49. K. Popper [1962]; *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (Routledge & Kegan Paul), p.298. See also K. Popper & J. C. Eccles [1977]; *The Self and its Brain* (Springer International), especially Chapter P5, and relevant sections of K. Popper [1972]; *Objective Knowledge* (Oxford University Press). Strictly speaking Popper was a pluralist rather than a dualist; his views are made more complex by the introduction of his theory of World Three Knowledge.

another or in terms of some Lockean 'impulse'. Descartes himself understood cause in precisely this way and, furthermore (as is clear from the exegesis of his position in Chapter 2), understood the process of perception almost exclusively in these terms. More importantly, however, the reason why Descartes' Problem has proved to be such an intractable difficulty in the philosophy of mind is because these categorially distinct realms of being have been regarded as *autonomous* and *independent* realities.

The problem then, as I see it, is this: we are being asked to provide an account of causal relations which embraces two logically distinct and autonomous types of reality. Whatever the problems with trying to give an explanation of such relations within one type of reality, to request an explanation that encompasses both raises difficulties which are different in kind and not just degree. There is a genuine and intuitive worry that the existence of causal relations between, on the one hand, things which are material and spatial and, on the other, things which are immaterial and non-spatial is a very queer notion indeed. It is to Descartes' credit that he, at least, recognised the difficulties involved in establishing these relations. His own 'solution' was extremely radical: that the existence of such relations is simply beyond our powers to conceptualise. We know, through our lived experience, that the autonomous realms of mind and matter interact but we cannot come at how they interact through intellectual reflection. Now, what is not clear in Popper's account is whether or not he wishes to adopt an analogous 'solution' for causal relations between material entities. Does Popper want to suggest that we are, in principle, intellectually unable to come to any understanding of causal relations; either between mind and matter or between material things? Or is it that we presently lack the resources and that at some time in the future we could develop a theory which encompasses and accounts for both? If the latter is the preferred option, what of our intuitive worry? The Cartesian apologist must say something to address this worry more than just that we should not be concerned at the queerness of the relation. It is ironic that it is partly the doctrine of the Autonomy of the Mental, which allows for the possibility of disembodiment, which renders problematic our attempts at providing a coherent account of that very phenomenon.

Despite the difficulties which persist between relating subjective intentional experiences to objective extentional causes, at least the embodied subject who enjoys these intentional experiences is locatable within a network of causal relations. Herein lies a radical dissimilarity between our own case and that of the radically disengaged subject; a difference which puts a further twist on the notion of real relations. It also provides grounds, one should note, for a distinction between any putative explanation of causal relations between material entities

and any putative explanation of causal relations between material and immaterial entities. Even a dualist interactionist like Popper can hardly deny that we, at least *qua* subjects of sense, are locatable within the world in virtue of being intimately connected with a particular physical organism; itself considered as part of a framework of causal relata. The framework of causal interactions is thus co-extensive with the spatial framework of the world.<sup>50</sup> This point was, of course, Hume's - hardly the most avid supporter of mechanistic causation;

[W]hatever objects are consider'd as causes or effects, are *contiguous*; and [...] nothing can operate in a time or place, which is ever so little remov'd from those of its existence. Tho' distant objects may sometimes seem productive of each other, they are commonly found upon examination to be link'd by a chain of causes, which are contiguous among themselves, and to the distant objects; and when in any particular instance we cannot discover the connexion, we still presume it to exist.<sup>51</sup>

In other words: if  $\alpha$  is the cause of  $\beta$  then either; 1).  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are spatio-temporally contiguous, or 2).  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are linked by a chain of contiguous causal intermediaries. Therefore, spatio-temporal contiguity is a necessary part of any genuinely causal relationship - whether or not this is construed in mechanistic terms or simply in terms of constant conjunctions. If there is no spatial contiguity, how do we explain that the subject has been affected by one set of causal relata and not another or, indeed, any set of causal relata? The fact is that spatial relationships play an extremely important rôle in determining what, if any, causal relationships obtain between things; here between the subject and what its experiences are said to be of.<sup>52</sup> If we abandon contiguity as a criterion of causality then it seems to me we must also abandon hope of ever establishing a causal relation between anything. Of course, this does not amount, by itself, to a solution of Descartes' Problem but at least it has the virtue of placing the subject so that one can ask of it whether it is affected by a particular sequence of causal events. Because I do not wish to construe perception solely in causal terms, least of all as a channel of sense (where the subject simply lies passively at the end of a causal chain), this is all we require for our present purposes. All we need to demand is that the subject of a given perceptual experience be locatable within a *milieu* of causal relata; and to be locatable in this manner must therefore mean having a position in space. To claim that the 'of' relation of perception is a real relation is therefore to claim that the relation is both causal and spatial.

Given that this line of argument regarding perception is secure, how are we then to make sense of the notion of a radically disengaged subject? The

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50. If two worlds are causally discreet, then it seems to me that they must be also spatially discreet. If they are not, then there must be some overarching spatial framework in which they are related.

51. Hume [1978]; *A Treatise of Human Nature* [ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge] (Oxford University Press), Book I, Part III, §2.

52. Cf. S. Shoemaker [1984]; "Immortality and Dualism", reprinted in *Identity, Cause and Mind: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge University Press), p.146.

prognosis does not look too promising. As the subject is said to lie outside the spatial framework of the world, it is therefore also outside the network of possible causal relata: there is nothing with which it is spatially contiguous and therefore nothing with which it could causally interact. Recent work on reference, notably that of Hilary Putnam and Tyler Burge, supports my argument against the notion of disembodied perception.<sup>53</sup> Perceptual states are uncontroversially thought to refer to that of which they are said to be about. But, if the above description of the disembodied subject is the case, are we not entitled to ask what makes its visual experiences perceptions of *this* world or, for that matter, perceptions of *any* particular world? To bring this point out further, why should we say, for example, that the contents of these experiences, or that beliefs formulated on the basis of these experiences, refer to Our World rather than to Twin World - a world which appears exactly the same as Our World and yet is different in other important respects? But then, in the absence of any real relations obtaining between the subject and what its perceptual experiences are said to be of, why should we say that the contents of their sensory states refer to anything at all, even a Putnamesk Twin World? Such considerations are familiar enough and amount to arguing that the contents of a subject's mental states (or at least certain types of mental states) are not individuated simply by reference to the internal, qualitative aspects of those states but are environmentally determined.

These 'externalist' considerations seem to me to provide a strong argument against the intelligibility of a radically disengaged subject. Externalism is the contemporary philosophical thesis which argues that the world enters constitutively into the individuation of mental states; *i.e.* that the contents of these states, and the contents of the propositional attitudes that express them, are partly determined by reference to states of affairs outside the narrowly construed sphere of the subject. In other words, the world provides a necessary context in which these states can be discriminated; the mind is essentially 'world-involving'.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, the world and the mind are, *ex hypothesi*, not autonomous or exclusionary realms of existence as the dualist supposes, nor are the contents of the mind wholly determined by what lies within the sphere of the subject. In contrast the dualist takes the content of the subject's experiences for granted and the individuation of these experiences, and the propositional

53. See especially H. Putnam [1975]; "The Meaning of Meaning", H. Putnam *Mind, Language and Reality* (Cambridge University Press), pp.215-271, T. Burge [1979]; "Individualism and the Mental", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 4, pp.73-121, and T. Burge [1982]; "Other Bodies", A. Woodfield (ed.) *Thought and Object* (Clarendon Press), pp.97-120. Although primarily concerned with the reference of words, their insights can have a much broader application.

54. The world may provide a context in two, complementary ways; 1). in terms of a *physical* environment, and 2). in terms of a *social* environment. My argument concentrates on the first of these. Both Putnam and Burge emphasise the importance of a link between the subject and his or her physical and social environment in determinations of content. See the references above.

attitudes formulated on the basis of them, to be antecedently fixed - without any reference to a non-mental reality. This is to say that the dualist's understanding of mind has a distinctly 'internalist' flavour; psychological facts are construed simply as facts about an individual subject of thought and experience regardless of the subject's relation to an 'external' world.

These considerations also suggest a broader conclusion; that perception is essentially perspectival. To perceive is to have a perspective from which one perceives and this means having a position in a spatial framework which encompasses both what the subject perceives and the subject itself. If this were not the case then we are again entitled to ask what makes the subject's perspective a perspective on *this* particular world rather than another, or indeed *any* particular world at all. Furthermore, unless the subject has a perspective in this way it seems that there is no sense to be made of it making use of the distinction between how things appear and how they are for it could not be attributed with the capacity for correcting misleading perceptions by seeking out less misleading ones. As we saw towards the end of the last section, this requires the subject to find a route through the world and to move along it; that is, to change its perspective. Obviously, if the radically disengaged subject does not have a perspective at all, then it cannot be said to change its perspective; hence it is unable to make use of the distinction and so nothing that it sees can look different to it from the way it 'really looks'. No attribution of special psychokinetic powers can help out here.

I wish to end this section by considering a very puzzling corollary of interpreting disembodiment in this radical way. It will be remembered that one of our concerns is the claim that the disembodied subject can enjoy perceptual experiences, in Strawson's phrase, "as at present". This means that if the disembodied subject has the visual experience of some state of affairs that obtains in the world, this is precisely the same experience as enjoyed by an embodied subject perceiving this state of affairs. Now, as Merleau-Ponty correctly observed, perceptual objects present themselves as before me; that is, that perceptual experience is structured in a way such that what is perceived is presented within a network of spatial relationships centred on the percipient - an egocentric spatial framework. This network is essentially holistic: the percept is presented as 'up', 'down', 'over there', 'to the left of  $\Phi$ ', 'in front of  $\vartheta$ ', *etc.*, as opposed to the 'here' of the subject's situation; but 'here' is not an absolute in itself that can be fixed antecedently to these other determinations. It is true that, in one sense, 'here' is always the place from where I perceive and act; but it is also true that, in another sense, where this is relative and determined by reference to these other egocentric spatial concepts in the same way that they are determined by reference to 'here'.

The question then arises as to where the radically disengaged subject takes 'here' to be, if not from where it perceives and acts; that is, if not at the centre of an egocentric network of spatial relations? If its experiences are anything like ours, then it must think of itself as within an egocentric frame of reference such as this. But, if it does think of itself in this way then it must think of itself as having a perspective on what it perceives from a point of view anchored within the world it perceives. Apologists for disembodiment might argue that the radically disengaged subject could think of its position outside the spatial framework of the world as 'here' for this means simply 'the place where I am'. What I am suggesting is that 'here' cannot be simply construed in this absolute way and that it, in fact, presupposes some sensory and intentional links to the place the subject takes itself to be. To think of its position as 'the place where I am' is for the disembodied subject to think of itself under a mode of identification which is *de dicto* and not *de se* and thus under a mode of identification which lacks the logical simplicity of the thought we have when we think of ourselves as 'here'. To think of a place as 'where I am' is, as Gareth Evans says, "a mode of identification of a place quite unlike that expressed by 'here'."<sup>55</sup> If the radically disengaged subject had no sensory or intentional links to any world, then, to paraphrase Evans, in the perpetual darkness and silence of its existence, it could surely have no use for 'here'.

On Evans' account, this conclusion has far reaching implications. The cardinal error the apologists make in their counter-argument is to presume that the disembodied subject could have an adequate conception of itself prior to a conception of where it takes itself to be; that 'I'-thoughts have primacy over 'here'-thoughts. This, of course, is a fundamental assumption in Cartesian thought; to think of myself as a thinking thing, according to Descartes, is to think of myself as a 'complete thing'.<sup>56</sup> But Evans objects that we do not first have a conception of who or what we are and then subsequently where we are located in the world. Both 'I'-thoughts and 'here'-thoughts involve a sensitivity of thought to information so that, despite important differences, they are, Evans argues, "really two sides of a single capacity, each wholly dependent on the other. Both 'I'-thoughts and 'here'-thoughts are ways in which the subject's capacity to locate himself in the objective spatial order is exploited."<sup>57</sup> We have been here before. As we saw in Chapter 2, this seemed to be a difficulty encountered by Husserl in

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55. G. Evans [1982]; *The Varieties of Reference* (Clarendon Press), p.153.

56. See Chapter 2, §2.1.

57. G. Evans [1982]; *op. cit.*, p.256. Cf. S. Hampshire [1959]; *Thought and Action* (Chatto & Windus), p. 51. Hampshire goes so far as to set up the order of priority between spatial thinking and thinking about oneself in reverse; "I distinguish myself from other things, first, as being in a certain situation, as being here rather than there, and, secondly as being capable of planning to move from here to there. [...] The hypothesis of the disembodied thinker supposes both of these conditions of distinguishing myself from other things as removed."

attempting his transcendental *epoché*; where, as a result, the self appears to dissolve into an anonymous 'subjective pole' or 'principle of unity'.<sup>58</sup> I think, therefore, that Evans is probably correct in this and that when Descartes asserts that "I could pretend that I had no body, that there was no world and no place existed for me to be in" he had not recognised the fundamental rôle these factors play in determining one's own self-identity. However, my own conclusion here is much more narrowly circumscribed.

On the basis of my discussion the conclusion we can draw is simply that if the subject is to take its thoughts and experiences to be of a particular world, there must be a place in that world, the place from which the subject perceives and acts, which counts as 'here' for the subject. Hence, the subject itself must take itself to have a position in the unitary spatial framework of the world. This, then, is my puzzling conclusion: even if there were such a thing as a radically disengaged subject, a contentious enough assumption given Evans' insight, neither we nor it itself could think of it as such. Shoemaker argues that; "It would seem [...] that what bestows extramental content on mental states must always involve what I have called 'paradigmatic embodiment', or something closely analogous to it. For both volitional and sensory embodiment are crucially involved in the causal transactions that determine reference." I have not quite succeeded in showing this; but, given my preliminary conclusion, it may be that these are crucially involved in determining the spatiality of the subject's situation and providing the subject with a perspective on the world. This is a line of investigation I shall pursue further in the next section.

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58. See Chapter 2, the end of §2.3.

## 5.4 Embodiment, Spatiality and Human Agency

What, then, of disembodiment less radically conceived? On this second understanding, the subject is disembodied but, nevertheless, is said to view the world from a particular position within the world. In other words, the disembodied subject is said to have a perspective on the world. This, after all, is the interpretation of disembodiment which is more central to Penelhum's account and is far more representative of folk-eschatological interpretations of disembodiment - as well as being closer to the claims of those who have experienced out-of-body experiences. As I have said before, what Penelhum says suggests that he thinks this is the least problematic interpretation for, although the disembodied subject obviously cannot be in space in the same exclusionary way a material object is in space, "there is some temptation to say nevertheless that he is in it, just because he sees things that are in it."<sup>59</sup> This, of course, is to assume that the disembodied subject *does* see things that are in it, the very point under contention. However, let this pass for the moment. If the disembodied subject is said to be somehow in the world, how do we unpack this 'somehow'? Let us approach this by asking where in space it might be. This cannot be answered by reference to our normal criteria of spatial occupancy, as Penelhum recognises, for these are framed in terms of the possession of a body.

At first glance it seems that it should be easy enough for us to say where it is; after all, we unproblematically speak of certain localities such as houses or rooms as being the haunts of apparitions and other paranormal manifestations. Need we be more specific than this? Must the disembodied subject 'occupy' a region of space at least as localised as that we occupy? Well, if it does not, are we not entitled to wonder if the arrangement of particulars in its egocentric space would be anything like the arrangement of particulars in ours? If, for example, the disembodied subject is localised to a particular house but is said to be only as localised as the house, could it think egocentrically about objects in the house? This would be like us trying to think egocentrically about the atoms or molecules in our brains: everything encompassed in that region of space would be reduced to the 'here' from where the subject perceives. The more expansive the localisation, the more things are included in the 'here' - until we reach a point at which everything is 'here' and consequently there is no 'here' and thus no perspective. Alternatively, as a disembodied Cartesian mind, it might be thought to be completely unextended and thus not to 'occupy' any space at all. In this case, to speak of a disembodied subject being locatable in space must mean, if

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59. T. Penelhum [1970]; *op. cit.*, p.25.



indeed this does mean anything, that it can be found at an unextended point in space. I am not sure I can make sense of the idea of an unextended thing being locatable in space - despite what some theoretical physicists now tell us. But, even if we let this pass as well, analogous difficulties arise. If we reduce the subject to an extensionless point, could the egocentric spatial structuring of its experiences be anything like ours? Or is this just another way of denying the subject a perspective on the world? As for the radically disengaged subject, everything is again reduced to the 'there' to which it perceives and consequently there is no 'here' and no perspective.

It appears that without the subject having a body to anchor it in the world, attributing it a specific location with a particular boundary seems fairly arbitrary, if it can be done at all. What determines whether it is at a particular place and not another, or that it is at any place, or that, if it does have a particular location, its 'location' is of a particular extent? These secondary questions of scaling may seem very peculiar; but, in fact, as I shall show a little later, they are vitally important in determining an important part of the content of our perceptual experiences. Therefore, is there any alternative way a disembodied subject can be more precisely located? As we have seen before, Penelhum argues that, as normal criteria for spatial location do not apply in the case of the disembodied subject, the only non-arbitrary way of fixing its location is to say that the subject is "at the centre of his visual field."<sup>60</sup> This may not help *us* very much, in our attempts to fix its spatial position; but it suggests that it may be possible to make sense of the disembodied subject locating itself. Or does it?

First of all, this phenomenalist understanding of spatial location suggests that the disembodied subject positions itself in the world always and only inferentially: "I am perceiving such and such state of affairs, and these are characterised by certain egocentric spatial arrangements, therefore I must be at  $\phi$ ." Now, it is certainly true that we can and do occasionally think about our own location in a similar way: "Ah, I know where I am. That's Hay Stacks, with Great Gable to the right, so this must be the path to Wasdale Head." Nevertheless, this does not mean we only understand having a spatial location in these terms; still less that this mode of identifying a place is exhaustively constitutive of our spatial thinking or what it is for us to have a particular spatial location. On Penelhum's account, a change in the disembodied subject's experiences is constitutive of a change in its location; but our experiences and our location do not *necessarily* coincide in a way which is required by this. Therefore the having of a spatial location cannot be unpacked simply in terms of the contents of a percipient's experiences; a simple enough thought-experiment reveals this.

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60. T. Penelhum [1970]; *op. cit.*, p.25.

It is conceivable, for example, that our perceptual experience may not reveal to us that our spatial position is, in fact, changing. Imagine that we were in a rather austere environment in which we perceived a uniform sphere against a uniform background and that we were circling this sphere. Nothing in our perceptual experience discloses the fact that we are circling the sphere and thus our location relative to it is constantly changing; we simply could not tell. But not being able to tell we are moving is obviously not the same as not actually moving. This is a fundamental distinction; yet it is one which the disembodied subject apparently lacks the resources to grasp - as far as it is concerned, no change in perceptual experience means no change in location. To grasp this distinction, one has to have a notion of oneself as having a spatial position which amounts to more than just having a certain experience or set of experiences or things looking a certain way. In fact it requires one to have a conception of oneself as a *spatial entity*; that is, something which occupies a place in a network of objectively conceived sets of spatial relations. If the disembodied subject does not have this conception of itself, which it seems it does not for this requires it has a conception of itself as embodied, then not only is it inferring that it is at a particular place but it also making the broader inference that it actually has a spatial position and perspective on the world. Is it entitled to make such an inference? When we position ourselves in this way, we are simply inferring that we have a particular location (one rather than another), not that we have a location in the spatial order *tout court*.

It appears that it is not entitled to make such an inference. Any adequate account of perception must provide some explanation as to why the subject has the sensory experiences it does have and part of this explanation will be to state what spatial location the subject has or what route through the world the subject is tacking. Penelhum's account cannot provide grounds for doing this and, in fact, makes such an explanation impossible. It was noted before that one of the immediate consequences of Penelhum's account is that what the disembodied subject sees is not a consequence of its occupying a particular location but that being at a particular place is exhaustively constituted by it perceiving what it is said to perceive. Similarly, a change in what it sees is not a consequence of the subject's spatial trajectory; rather this is exhaustively constituted by a change in its experiences. What Penelhum fails to recognise, however, is the seriousness of these corollaries for he suggests that the point may be minor - it is not.<sup>61</sup> On his account, being at a particular place, or moving places, for a disembodied subject can mean nothing more than that its perceptual experience has a particular phenomenal characterisation or sequential series of such characterisations. Therefore, with respect to having a particular position, to say "If the subject is at

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61. T. Penelhum [1970]; *op. cit.*, p.26.

position  $\phi$ , it will have perceptual experience  $\phi$ " amounts to no more than giving expression to the tautology "If the subject has perceptual experience  $\phi$ , it will have perceptual experience  $\phi$ ." We cannot, on this basis, even begin to give an explanation as to why it has this particular experience; the whole attempt collapses from the simplest phenomenal reduction - as does any attempt to explain the subject moving through the world. And if we cannot adequately account for why it has an experience in terms of what spatial position it occupies, then, conversely, it is not clear how we can draw any conclusions about its purported spatial position, or the fact that it has a spatial position, on the basis of the experience or set of experiences it is said to enjoy.

Bill Brewer has indicated two fundamental difficulties with the type of phenomenalist account given by Penelhum.<sup>62</sup> Firstly, the disembodied subject proceeds from a preliminary identification of itself as "the subject of this experience." This, of course, at once raises the difficulty we encountered at the end of the last section; namely, that it assumes that the disembodied subject has an adequate conception of itself prior to a conception of where it takes itself to be and that 'I'-thoughts have primacy over 'here'-thoughts.<sup>63</sup> As Evans argues, this is a highly contentious supposition; but Brewer highlights a slightly different set of difficulties involved in the above identification. As Brewer argues, the type of explanation offered by Penelhum effectively undermines the subject's grasp "of the contingent dependence of the course and nature of his experience on the way the world is in itself and his continuous spatio-temporal route through it."<sup>64</sup> The fact that the subject perceives what in fact perceives is a contingent matter; contingent upon the way the world is, the subject's receptivity, and the subject's spatial relation to the state of affairs it perceives. What the above self-identification ("I am the subject of this experience") does, argues Brewer, is make this contingent fact a necessary truth, linking the subject to the actual course of its experiences by definition. This does not appear to be an acceptable outcome if these experiences are supposed to be perceptions of a mind-independent reality. What is required, therefore, is that the subject's identification of itself allows for the contingency of the course of its experiences and this, in turn, requires the subject to have a grasp on its having a spatial location over and above the nature of those experiences.

Brewer's second point supports my contention above that the disembodied subject cannot legitimately infer that it has a spatial location from its experiences. In virtue of what phenomenal content of the experience could the perceptual experience itself justify such an inference? Perhaps it could be responded that

62. B. Brewer [1992]; "Self-Location and Agency", *Mind* 101, pp.17-34.

63. G. Evans [1982]; *op. cit.*, p.153 ff. Also §5.3, p.202.

64. B. Brewer [1992]; *op. cit.*, p.20.

this is in virtue of the egocentric spatial arrangement of the particulars which the experience comprises. In other words, the contents of the experience are presented to the disembodied subject as its spatial environment in the same way, as Penelhum says, "as they would look to a normal observer under optimum circumstances from a certain position in space."<sup>65</sup> But then, as Brewer notes, in normal circumstances there is no need for an inference. What has to be asked, Brewer suggests, is "How *can* such experience - experience of objects, their relations and properties - in which the subject himself never appears qua subject, manage to place him in the world of those objects?"<sup>66</sup> We cannot answer this by simply saying that perception is 'self-locating'; what we need is an examination of the egocentric spatiality of such experiences "within a wider context of the psychological states and abilities which contribute to the perceptual placement of the subject in the perceived world."<sup>67</sup> What Brewer means by this, I believe, is that we require an examination of how this spatial structuring of experience has meaning.

In attempting to unpack Penelhum's account of how the spatial location of the disembodied subject could be fixed, I suggested above that the disembodied subject might endeavour to position itself with the thought "I am perceiving such and such state of affairs, and these are characterised by certain egocentric spatial arrangements, therefore I must be at  $\phi$ ." What this assumes, of course, is that the disembodied subject has a grasp on these spatial arrangements and that the egocentric ordering of perceptual experience is perfectly intelligible to it. Any subject of sensory experience will be at the centre of their own 'egocentric' or 'phenomenal' space; the holistic, indexical network of spatial relationships expressible by the use of spatial terms (such as 'up', 'down', 'left', 'right', 'before', 'behind' *etc.*), which implicitly include a reference to the subject themselves. This network of relationships is partly constitutive of the non-conceptual, phenomenological content of the subject's perceptual experiences; the position in which a certain object lies or the direction a certain sound is coming from is part of the information conveyed by the experience - that is to say, part of the way things appear to the subject. It is extremely difficult to imagine a subject's experiences being coherent sensory experiences without this element. Therefore, it may seem safe to assume that the structuring of perceptual experience in this way would form part of any phenomenological residuum left over after a process of disengagement with the body - especially after a limited disengagement where the disembodied subject is thought to locate itself somewhere in the world it is said to perceive.

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65. T. Penelhum [1970]; *op. cit.*, p.25.

66. B. Brewer [1992]; *op. cit.*, p.22.

67. B. Brewer [1992]; *op. cit.*, p.22.

However, it is not clear that this conjecture is well grounded. As we saw in Chapter 4, the configuration and physical construction of the body plays an important rôle in limiting what is perceived.<sup>68</sup> Our eyes, for example, are set in the front of our skulls and look forward, requiring us to turn our heads in order to perceive our environment sequentially. For any physical organism there will always be a gap in the field of view such that a complete simultaneous perception of its environment will be impossible; as James Gibson notes, there will always be “*a closed boundary in the array that specifies the body.*”<sup>69</sup> In other words, what we perceive is bounded by the architecture of the body. Now, the question which naturally arises with respect to a disembodied subject is this: “Can it perceive in all directions at once?” As its perceptual experiences are assumed to be, in Strawson’s phrase, “exactly as at present”, we must assume that the answer to this is in the negative; but why should this be so? If its visual perception, for example, has a closed boundary, what does this boundary specify if not the body of the percipient? What information does this gap in the visual field carry for the disembodied subject? Indeed, could this gap actually have any meaning for the disembodied subject? If, on the other hand, we bite the bullet and answer in the affirmative, are we sure that the egocentric structuring of its experiences could be anything like “exactly as at present” or, indeed, that its experiences could have any meaningful structure at all in this sense? For example, what would it mean, for this subject, for an object to lie in a particular position relative to it, or for a sound to appear to be coming from a particular direction? Surely not that the object is ‘in front of me’ or the sound ‘is coming from the right’ for what determines the content of ‘in front of’ or ‘to the right’ in this case?

In fact it is our embodiment which confers significance upon this egocentric spatial structuring and it does this by simultaneously providing us with a particular concrete perspective and by giving us ‘direction’. The fundamental, albeit limited, insight at this point was Merleau-Ponty’s own. What he says specifically about a constituting mind could equally apply to our disembodied subject; that it is “eminently able to trace out all directions in space, but has at any moment no direction, and consequently no space, without an actual starting point, an absolute ‘here’ which can gradually confer a significance on all spatial determinations.”<sup>70</sup> As we have seen, prompted by Stratton’s experiments with field-inverting glasses, Merleau-Ponty argued against traditional conceptions of spatiality in which it was either considered as a factual datum, given together with the general contents of experience, or as a form imposed by a non-spatial

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68. See Chapter 4, the beginning of §4.1.

69. J. J. Gibson [1979]; *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Houghton Mifflin), p.204.

70. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *Phenomenology of Perception* (trans. Colin Smith) (Routledge & Kegan Paul), p.247.

subject in order to make experience possible.<sup>71</sup> Merleau-Ponty thought that the results of Stratton's experiments showed that these traditional notions of spatiality were inadequate and that spatial orientation could no longer be thought to lie 'out there' or 'in here' in the way these presupposed. In assuming, as we have done above, that the disembodied subject unproblematically has a handle on these spatial orientations, we are assuming that this spatial structuring is given absolutely with the content of the subject's experiences. This is equivalent to the 'empiricist' assumption of which Merleau-Ponty was so critical. It may be true, as I say, that this network of relationships is partly constitutive of the non-conceptual, phenomenological content of the subject's perceptual experiences; but this does not mean that this content is fixed antecedently to the subject's involvement with the world.<sup>72</sup> Externalist considerations, if you like, similarly play a part here; this content is equally determined relationally.

Thus the content of experience is not orientated absolutely or in itself. Egocentric spatial directions such as 'up', 'down', 'in front of', 'to the right' *etc.* are relative; but to what are they relative? Merleau-Ponty answers that we must discover the "absolute within the sphere of the relative." What is important here is undoubtedly the human body; but not as a thematised, perceived, or objectified body, occupying objective space as a sign of orientation, rather it is the lived body as the potentiality of actions and the vehicle of one's being-in-the-world. One does not position oneself in the world by continually perceiving a particular thematised object, one's body, relative to the other thematised objects it encounters.<sup>73</sup> This is why Merleau-Ponty speaks of the spatiality of the body being unlike the spatiality of perceived objects; it is a third kind of spatiality distinct from that of content or form, a spatiality of *situation* rather than simply a spatiality of *position*. Thus, 'here' expresses the body's presence in the world and determines this presence as being-to-the-world. The world responds by presenting itself egocentrically as a possible habitat for an embodied subject and, as such, is structured as a field of potential action for this subject. Merleau-Ponty therefore stresses the importance of the subject's embodiment and the fact that this is of a kind which is essentially characterised by the subject's sensory and volitional involvement with the world; an important feature of what we have previously referred to as 'paradigmatic embodiment'. It is only as a bodily agent functioning in the world that this egocentric structuring of experience has any meaning for the subject and that directions such as 'up' and 'down' have any significance.

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71. See Chapter 3, §3.2.

72. Thus, again, it cannot be used as a basis for an inference that the subject has a location in or a perspective on the world.

73. Cf. B. Brewer [1992]; *op. cit.*, pp.18-20.

Why is this? Why do these spatial orientations require the subject to be embodied and an agent? We have already explored the significance of these factors in our grasp on the spatial directions of 'up' and 'down' and it is worth repeating some of those deliberations here.<sup>74</sup> Our grasp on these particular orientations is determined by two interrelated facts; that we are asymmetrical bodies operating within a gravitational field. Merleau-Ponty is right to insist that the spatiality of the perceived world cannot result from the 'simple summation' of the material arrangement of the human body; the asymmetrical nature of our bodies alone do not determine the perceptual structure. But, as I have argued before, neither is our corporeal architecture entirely irrelevant so that this also cannot be determined by agency alone. Taken in isolation neither the fact that our bodies have a particular physical structure or the fact that we are agents account for the significance that these spatial directions have for us. It is only when the two come together that they have the significance that they do; the spatiality of the perceived world is a reply to both the body's dimensions *and* its capacity for purposeful action.

As I have said before, unlike symmetrical or uniform objects such as beach-balls, we have a top and a bottom, a front and a back *etc.* and so in order to achieve what Merleau-Ponty calls a 'behavioural optimum', and so gain the enjoyment of space, we must align our asymmetrical structures to gravity and to the world and its objects with which we interact. Similarly, what determines the top of an object for us is that when it is appropriately aligned with gravity its function is unimpeded: a beach-ball has no top or bottom for it can function in any alignment; but a typewriter is only of use if it is the right way up. Up and down are thus not simply perceiver dependent; but then nor are they determined by reference to a paradigm object in perception, either the objectivised human body or the surface of the earth - they are primarily determined by our capacity to move and act as asymmetrical objects in a gravitational field. Nevertheless, gravity is not an indispensable factor in these determinations for we carry our structural asymmetries with us into space. Such considerations are therefore equally important in a weightless environment for in order to act we still have to achieve a behavioural optimum and so align our asymmetrical bodies appropriately with whatever it is with which we wish to interact: with the best will in the world I simply cannot type either in space or on earth if I am not correctly aligned to my typewriter; that is, unless I am the right way up and facing it. Thus the spatial structure of what I perceive is directly connected with my need to achieve coherence in action. As Evans says;

Egocentric spatial terms are the terms in which the content of our spatial experiences would be formulated, and those in which our immediate behavioural plans would be

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74. See Chapter 3, §3.4.

expressed. This duality is no coincidence: an egocentric space can exist only for an animal in which a complex network of connections exist between perceptual input and behavioural output.<sup>75</sup>

In other words, spatial information embedded within a particular perceptual experience can only have significance for a subject insofar as it has a place in the network of these connections. Both Merleau-Ponty and Evans point to the essential interconnectedness of perception and agency and how the subject's perceptions are spatially structured so as to govern the subject's purposeful and goal-directed actions.<sup>76</sup> But our discussion above reveals that this is only necessary if the subject is a physical organism operating within the boundaries set by its particular corporeal architecture and the nature of its physical environment. Given this, what would be the 'behavioural optimum' of a disembodied subject? As an incorporeal ego does not have to these architectural constraints it is not clear that spatial co-ordinates such as 'up' and 'down' can mean anything to such a subject. Thus, the significance of these spatial orientations emerges in response to two factors; that the perceived world is also a world of potential action (the objects of perception are identical to the objects of purposeful action), and that the subject is embodied in this world as an agent. But being embodied means being a part of the objective order - with all the limitations and constraints this implies. In other words, it follows from this that while it is true that the spatiality of the subject is not simply one of position, it is also the case that it is not simply one of situation either; it is one of both position and situation.

The egocentric field reveals that the subject has a point of view on the world (situation) *qua* embodied subject, but the significance of this requires the subject to be conceived of as a physicality, *i.e.* as itself an item in the objective order. If this were not the case, as Evans notes, it is difficult to imagine how the subject's egocentric space is a *space* at all. To think of oneself as located must also mean that one can think of one's situation 'from the objective point of view'. Therefore, there must be some coincidence between positions represented in the subject's egocentric or phenomenal spatial thinking and those conceived under a larger spatial representation of the world: the subject's egocentric space must be mappable onto public space so that a particular position on one is also a particular position in the other.<sup>77</sup> Surely this is correct; especially if the subject's

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75. G. Evans [1982]; *op. cit.*, p.154.

76. Cf. B. Brewer [1992]; *op. cit.*, pp.26-28. Brewer says, "Egocentric spatial perception enables a subject to keep track of the changing spatial relations between himself and salient environmental objects in precisely the way required appropriately to modulate his spatial behaviour with respect to such objects."

77. G. Evans [1982]; *op. cit.*, pp.162-164. Evans conceives of this 'larger spatial representation' in terms of a *cognitive map*; a non-indexical conception of the subject's environment. The subject's capacity to think objectively about the world is manifested in its ability to grasp and utilise such a map by relating its experiences to it. It seems that Evans was exercised by a worry that, as the



sensory experiences are supposed to be experiences of an independently existing world through which it moves. It follows that the same must be true of the body: the lived body itself is also an object in the world.<sup>78</sup> Hence, the egocentric field only has significance for a subject which is paradigmatically embodied - embodied as both a physicality and as a set of capacities. As I have said before, Merleau-Ponty overstates his case when he says; "What counts for the orientation of the spectacle is not my body as it in fact is, as a thing in objective space, but as a system of possible actions, a virtual body with its phenomenal 'place' defined by its task and situation."<sup>79</sup> In fact it is determined by both.

Before we break off our discussion of disembodiment, I wish briefly to draw attention to another way in which perception and agency are linked and the consequences of this for the content of what we perceive. It is more widely recognised now than it once was that the distinction traditionally drawn between perception and action is, in any case, somewhat artificial. It is a distinction, as Drew Leder says, which divides "in reflection what is always united in lived experience."<sup>80</sup> Perception itself is a motor activity; as I mentioned before, to 'see' involves concomitant abilities to 'look', 'peer at', 'stare', and so on. It also requires one to turn one's head and pick out a route through the world; as Gibson says, "One sees the environment not just with the eyes but with the eyes in the head on the shoulders of a body that gets about."<sup>81</sup> To listen, as opposed to simply hearing, one may also have to turn one's head. To touch, one has to reach out and grasp an object or run one's hand over a surface. What is more, that which is perceived is thoroughly imbued by the possibilities it affords the subject for action. Here is another important part of the content of perceptual experience not recognised by those who claim that the experiences of a disembodied subject could be "exactly as present." This implicit reference to motility is not only in terms of the structuring of the perceptual experience but

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subject's right to be thinking about positions in space objectively conceived depends upon the rôles these have played in its past life, this mode of thinking is 'contaminated' by, if not reducible to, an egocentric mode of thinking (see Chapter 7, Appendix 3, pp.264-265). However, perhaps this merely shows the interrelatedness of the two modes of spatial thinking, not that one is more fundamental than the other. As Thomas Baldwin points out, Evans' worry shows that the content of an objective thought is fixed by the egocentric mode but not that it is exhaustively determined by it. T. Baldwin [1988]; "Phenomenology, Solipsism and Egocentric Thought", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 62, p.42.

78. Cf. T. Baldwin [1988]; *op. cit.*, p.41. Baldwin argues, correctly in my view, that these two conceptions of the body are interdependent: "[T]here is no way to hold a phenomenal conception of one's body without also recognising that the objective conception applies to it. [...] One's understanding of action would be completely mysterious unless intrinsic to one's conception of oneself as an agent was an understanding of oneself as located within objective space and interacting causally with objects in the environment. [...] To a considerable extent the converse also holds: I cannot think of an object as my body unless I can think of it as constituting my point of view and means of basic action."

79. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, pp.249-250.

80. D. Leder [1990a]; *The Absent Body* (University of Chicago Press), p.17.

81. J. J. Gibson [1979]; *op. cit.*, p.222.

also of the objects of perception themselves. This was recognised by both Dewey and Straus; features of our world immediately, and non-inferentially, have meaning for us in terms of their values and possibilities for action.<sup>82</sup> At a very basic level these features are perceived as being 'alluring' or 'repulsive', 'attractive' or 'frightening', and so on. Dewey puts it this way;

The live animal does not have to project emotions into the objects experienced. Nature is kind and hateful, bland and morose, irritating and comforting, long before she is mathematically qualified or even a congeries of 'secondary' qualities like colors and their shapes.<sup>83</sup>

However, James Gibson made this insight his own and developed it into his Theory of Affordances: "The *affordances* of the environment are what it *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill."<sup>84</sup> An important feature of Gibson's theory is how it emphasises that features of the world are equally experienced with respect to their functional significance. This theory implies, he says, "that to see things is to see how to get about among them and what to do or not do with them."<sup>85</sup> It is a theory which therefore, once again, stresses that perception and agency are interdependent; "visual perception serves behavior, and behavior is controlled by perception."<sup>86</sup> Even a subject which is not actually manipulating, moving, or behaving at any given moment cannot help but see the affordances for behaviour in what it sees. What are the affordances thus seen by the subject? According to Gibson the subject sees affordances provided by the medium (air, he says, affords respiration), substances (liquids and solids), surfaces and their layouts, objects, animals and people, and occluding edges. For example, certain surfaces are perceived as affording support. If the surface is horizontal, flat and rigid, and at a certain height from the ground, it may offer me a surface upon which to sit and rest. Alternatively, one that is non-rigid, such as the surface of a lake, might afford floating or swimming but not one for walking, climbing, running, or sitting upon and resting. An extended, rigid and vertical surface such as a wall forms a barrier to locomotion; the brink of a cliff is a place where one might fall off. What he calls 'detached objects' afford a vast variety of behaviours, as long as they are comparable in size to the subject;

Objects can be manufactured and manipulated. Some are portable in that they afford lifting and carrying, while others are not. Some are graspable and others not. To be graspable, an object must have opposite surfaces separated by a distance less than the span of the hand. A five inch cube can be grasped, a ten inch cube cannot. [...] Sheets, sticks, fibers, containers, clothing, and tools are detached objects that afford

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82. Dewey [1934]; *Art as Experience* (G. P. Putnam's Sons), p.16, and E. W. Straus [1963a]; *The Primary World of Senses* [trans. J. Needleman] (The Free Press of Glencoe), pp.233-236. Cf. H. Jonas [1966]; *The Phenomenon of Life* (University of Chicago Press), pp.152-156.

83. J. Dewey [1934]; *op. cit.*, p.16.

84. J. J. Gibson [1979]; *op. cit.*, p.127.

85. J. J. Gibson [1979]; *op. cit.*, p.223.

86. J. J. Gibson [1979]; *op. cit.*, p.223.

manipulation. [...] Orthodox psychology asserts that *we perceive these objects insofar as we discriminate their properties or qualities*. [...] But I now suggest that what we perceive when we look at objects are their affordances, not their qualities.<sup>87</sup>

If Gibson is right in this, and I suspect that he is, the world immediately presents itself as a meaningful, functional environment for a perceiving and acting subject; that is to say, it is perceived in terms of the ways the subject interacts, or could interact, with it. Meaning is therefore inherent in the sensory experience, not imposed by subsequent mental processes. Despite this, affordances, he says, are properties of things taken with reference to the observer.<sup>88</sup> In this respect we need to note three things. Firstly, once again, the perceived object is identical with the object of action and this presupposes both the motility of the observer and its ability to manipulate its environment. Secondly, and equally as importantly, the observer is clearly embodied. What are revealed by affordances are possibilities for action for an embodied agent. The significance of these features would be entirely lost on a disembodied observer of the scene. Thirdly, Gibson's analysis of perceptual experience again shows the importance of the body's architectural structure and dimensions. How we perceive our environment is determined as much by the constraints imposed by this structure as by the fact that we are intentional agents. This is seen, for example, in the question of scaling I alluded to above: only objects of a certain size afford lifting or are perceived as graspable, only surfaces of a particular height are perceived to offer a platform for rest or surfaces on which we can climb, and so on.

In conclusion: lacking the normal criteria of spatial occupancy, it is not clear that we can attribute a spatial location to a disembodied subject and therefore a perspective on the world. The response to this was to suggest a phenomenalist interpretation of the subject's spatiality by arguing that the disembodied subject may be able to locate itself in virtue of being "at the centre of its visual field." This suggests that the disembodied subject can locate itself inferentially, a manoeuvre that proves to be illegitimate. Furthermore, the attempted solution requires the subject to have a grasp on the significance of orientation and the spatial ordering of its experiences. If the disembodied subject's perceptual

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87. J. J. Gibson [1979]; *op. cit.*, pp.133-134. Gibson distinguishes between 'attached objects' (*i.e.* those he defines as objects whose substance is continuous with the substance of another object, usually the ground) and 'detached objects' (*i.e.* objects whose surfaces are completely surrounded by the medium and which are therefore usually movable): see p.34.

88. Gibson's ecological approach to perception is not without controversy. There exists a tension in his work between his *relational* approach to perception, characterised in his concept of affordances, and his *realism*, in that he claims that properties of the perceived environment, including affordances, are real and exist independently of the perceiver. See J. W. Yolton [1969]; "Gibson's Realism", *Synthese* 19, pp.400-407, A. Ben-Zeev [1981]; "J. J. Gibson and the Ecological Approach to Perception", *Studies in History and the Philosophy of Science* 12, pp.107-139, and H. Heft [1989]; "Affordances and the Body: An Intentional Analysis of Gibson's Ecological Approach to Perception", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 19, pp.1-30.

experience, and hence its visual field, is thought to be anything like ours, then it must be characterised by the egocentric spatial ordering characteristic of our perceptual experience and perhaps by the way objects in this field offer possibilities for behaviour and action. However, it is clear that neither this spatial ordering, nor the affordances offered by perceived particulars, cannot mean anything to a disembodied subject. What is required, therefore, is a grasp on having a perspective on the world over and above the nature of these experiences themselves. This involves understanding the subject to be both an embodied agent and a spatial entity in itself.

But what if the disembodied subject had a conception of itself as a spatial entity and therefore as an incarnate consciousness? For this to be the case, as Husserl notes, it would have to ascribe to itself a body. Perhaps, in this way, the teeth of my criticisms can be pulled. But then the apologist for disembodiment would have to admit something like the paradoxical conclusion we reached at the end of the last section: that, even if there were a disembodied subject which had a genuine perspective on the world, not only could we not think of it as such but it could not think of itself as such either. It also has to be noted, in admitting this, just how far we have removed ourselves from the claims of folk-eschatology and from Descartes claim that we can unproblematically conceive of ourselves as without a body. However, this seems to be a deeply problematic suggestion in itself. What sort of body would this be? Is this a body with terrestrial weight? Presumably this would be a body which is continuous and capable of interacting with the world it purportedly takes itself to enjoy sensory experiences of; but, *ex hypothesi*, this world is *this* world - the world of independently existing material entities we perceive and not something like a Priceian mind-dependent dream world. The body it ascribes to itself must therefore be, and conceived by it to be, a persisting item in the objective order and not simply a virtual or phenomenal body of its own construction. Unless this is the case its body would have to be conceived by it to be of a different ontological order to the world it perceives and this does not seem to be a body that can do the job required of it. On the other hand, if this is not the case, then it must take this body to be one which excludes other bodies, which has certain physical dimensions and weight, which yields to other objects and to which other objects yield, and which can be perceived and acted upon by others.

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## 6. Embodiment and the Brain

So far we have been faced with two questions; is it necessary for the subject of thought and experience to be embodied and, if so, what type of embodiment is necessary? In the chapters immediately previous to this I have attempted to give answers to both of these questions; that it is necessary and that we that the type of embodiment that is necessary is that which Shoemaker refers to as 'paradigmatic embodiment'. Nevertheless, many would argue that a more austere form of embodiment is possible, and may even be the case; that we are embodied simply in virtue of being our brains. In this final chapter I wish to alter my approach to the question of embodiment in two ways. Firstly, so far I have concentrated my attack on what might be broadly construed as Classical Psychology; the positing of the human subject as an immaterial thing which can be conceived to exist in isolation of any body whatever. Here I intend to focus on what I have repeatedly said is the complementary Cartesian sibling of Classical Psychology, Mechanistic Physiology - or, at least, a particular and increasingly popular form of materialism. Modern materialism, despite its overt denials, shares its origins in the Cartesian turn in philosophy with the transcendant immaterialism of Classical Psychology. Both partake in the fallacy of the essential person and its concomitant view of the human body as something Other; an impervious, inert, or dead thing relegated to a second order of being. Consequently materialism often searches around for an alternative and real living entity which grounds our subjective life and alights upon the brain as the organ which fulfils this rôle.

On this view, to be embodied simply means to be 'embrained'; the rest of the body is contingently associated with the brain, and thereby the human subject, as a tacked-on life support apparatus and sensory link. The picture of the human subject we are presented with is, once again, therefore remarkably homuncular; the real subject and agent of thought and perception is not the whole embodied human being but an abstracted and isolatable part - in this case an isolated anatomical part, the brain. Thus we have here another philosophical position which appears to be based upon a broadly Cartesian view of the human body and an equally divisive account of human embodiment. In exactly the same way as immaterialism it tries to force us to view the subject in isolation; as if an account

of the subject's psychology could be given without reference to the body or the world which forms its environment and the context for its agency. The view we are presented with therefore has something of a paradoxical nature: as brains we appear at once to be both embodied and disembodied. On the one hand we are materially or 'biologically' embodied in our brains; but on the other, *ex hypothesi*, we are not fully or 'paradigmatically' embodied. Hence, in an important sense, we are effectively disembodied. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that many of the arguments which support this view mirror Descartes' own arguments and that the critique I give of this position often mirrors the critique I gave of his arguments in Chapter 2 as well as that I gave of disembodiment in the last chapter.

I could leave the question there - with an analogous set of criticisms to those previously elaborated. However, in this chapter, I also wish to take this opportunity to develop a different, but complementary, line of attack. Despite the discussion of real relations and part of the discussion concerning the subject's spatiality, my previous criticisms of divisive accounts of human embodiment have tended to focus mainly on first-person, phenomenological considerations; here I also wish to emphasise the rôle of the body in our third-person ascriptions of thought and experience. Also, I have previously concentrated on the body as the organ of perception and agency and have passed over another consideration which is of vital importance in our attempt in coming to a less divisive account of embodiment; the fact that the sensori-volitional body of a human being is also an *expressive* body. I therefore wish to re-address that imbalance here. In both respects I shall draw heavily upon the later work of Ludwig Wittgenstein as another twentieth century philosopher who, I believe, offers a reappraisal of the way we conceptualise both the human subject and the human body. In short; I take Wittgenstein's account to be a critique of divisive models of embodiment and the advocacy of a more dialectical and integrative model. In *Zettel* Wittgenstein goes on the attack against the materialist's line of reasoning and the unspoken Cartesian assumptions that seem to inform it;

One of the most dangerous ideas for a philosopher is, oddly enough, that we think with our head or in our heads. The idea of thinking as a process in the head, in a completely enclosed space, gives him something occult.<sup>1</sup>

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1. L. Wittgenstein [1967]; *Zettel* (eds. G. E. M. Anscombe & G. H. von Wright, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe) (Basil Blackwell), §§605-606.

## 6.1 Are We Our Brains?

A few years ago the title of an article in a prominent scientific journal asked the question "Can brains be conscious?"<sup>2</sup> Co-authored by a neuropsychiatrist and a colleague, the article attempted to adumbrate the possible methodological framework within which science can begin to answer this poser. But the question invites another, more straightforward answer, one we can give without recourse to protracted empirical investigations or waiting for the settlement of methodological conundrums, "No, but people can be!" - or as Erwin Straus has put it, equally pithily; "It is man who thinks, not the brain."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the authors would have been better advised to have phrased their question differently for their real concern is whether, and how, materialistic science can account for mind. In their article they reject what they see as the present reductionist assumptions of science as inadequate for the task; but their robust repudiation of materialistic reductionism seems to have left them embracing a disturbing and somewhat muddle-headed idealism and solipsism. Consciousness is held to be a product of processes in the brain alone and the nature of consciousness (e.g. that our perceptual awareness affirms an ontology of material objects) is due entirely to the structure of these processes. Everything other than the brain itself (i.e. all of the so-called external world and even the rest of the human body) is but a 'mental model' constructed by the brain on the basis of the sensory information that it actually receives; that is, energy in the form of vibrations of different frequencies. This radiation, they suggest, triggers neural codes which the brain makes into a model of the external world. This construct is then projected outwards, "by a trick of brain functioning", to form the world we experience and which we mistakenly take to be real. "It need not have any objective validity," they argue lamely, "although it usually does."<sup>4</sup>

To a philosophical audience such views appear extraordinary, if not to say naïve and depressingly simplistic. What is perhaps truly remarkable about this position, however, is how endemic it is amongst the scientific community who study the brain.<sup>5</sup> The reverential awe in which the brain is held can easily lead

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2. P. Fenwick & D. Lorimer [1989]; "Can Brains Be Conscious?", *New Scientist* 123 (5/8/89), pp.54-56.

3. E. W. Straus [1963a]; *The Primary World of Senses* (translated J. Needleman) (The Free Press of Glencoe), p.158.

4. P. Fenwick & D. Lorimer [1989]; *op. cit.*, p.55.

5. Cf. the work of Susan Blackmore to which I have previously referred; Chapter 5, §5.1 - especially S. J. Blackmore [1988]; "Visions from the Dying Brain", *New Scientist* 118 (5/5/88), pp.43-45 and [1989]; "Consciousness: Science Tackles the Self", *New Scientist* 122 (1/4/89), pp.38-41. One could also choose as an example virtually any article on the brain appearing in popular science journals.

such practitioners to disregard the whole embodied person when speaking of the mind and consciousness, and so confuse all sorts of conceptual and causal issues. A good example of this can be found in an introductory textbook on the physiology of the nervous system. The book informs us that it will proceed upon the basic premise that all normal and abnormal functions of the brain (that is, as they say, "everything that the brain does") are "ultimately explainable in terms of the basic structural components of the brain and their functions."<sup>6</sup> So far so good; the problems arise when they then go on to elaborate what exactly it is that the brain does. Apparently this includes such diverse activities as moving, sensing, eating, drinking, breathing, talking, and sleeping as well as specifically 'mental acts' such as thinking, dreaming, musing, and so on. The brain is therefore engaged in interacting with the environment, mental activities and controlling the body. They conclude, in a way reminiscent of John Searle's 'biological naturalism', "that 'the mind' results when many key cells of the brain work together, just as 'digestion' results when the cells of the intestinal tract work together."<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, Searle thinks it is quite reasonable for us to say things such as "This brain is conscious" or "This brain is experiencing thirst or pain."<sup>8</sup> But in what sense does the *brain* do all these things or experience thirst or pain? The rate and depth of breathing may well be regulated by the hypothalamus; but the brain itself no more breathes than a bottle of wine literally breathes when it is uncorked. Likewise, the brain itself no more sleeps than my leg sleeps when I say "My leg has gone to sleep." Can a brain be angry? Of course, we can monitor the activities of the neural impulses in the brain's amygdala-hypothalamic structures; but it is not the brain that is angry, it is the person whose brain we are monitoring who is angry. And what on earth should we make of the suggestion that a brain is experiencing thirst? Could it satisfy this thirst by drinking? But surely a brain can only be 'thirsty' or 'drink' in a secondary or metaphorical sense, in the same way that cars and plants can be 'thirsty' and 'drink'. Perhaps Searle might respond by saying something like "A brain has teeth in the mouth of a human body" - but surely this could only be meant as a joke.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the

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6. F. E. Bloom & A. Lazerson [1985]; *Brain, Mind and Behavior* (Freeman), p.5.

7. F. E. Bloom & A. Lazerson [1985]; *op. cit.*, p.6. Searle argues that mental events and processes are due to the causal powers of the brain and "are as much part of our biological natural history as digestion, mitosis, meiosis, or enzyme secretion." J. R. Searle [1992]; *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (MIT Press), p.1. See also J. R. Searle [1983]; *Intentionality* (Cambridge University Press), [1984]; *Minds, Brains and Science: The 1984 Reith Lectures* (British Broadcasting Corporation), and elsewhere.

8. J. R. Searle [1984]; *op. cit.*, p.22. These quotations are taken from the chapter entitled "The Mind-Body Problem". It is interesting to note how Searle quickly and effortlessly abandons any discussion of this problem and concentrates on what he calls the 'mind-brain problem'.

9. Cf. L. Wittgenstein [1953]; *op. cit.*, Ilxi, pp.221-222. "'A new-born child has no teeth.'- 'A goose has no teeth.'- 'A rose has no teeth.'- This last at any rate - one would like to say - is obviously true! It is even surer than that a goose has none.- And yet it is none so clear. For where should a



position simply rests upon the crudest form of category mistake, applying to brains attributes we normally ascribe to people. No doubt my brain has some causal rôle to play in my being able to write this thesis; but this does not mean that it is my brain which has actually written the thesis, praise or blame, the responsibility is entirely my own. Similarly, surprising as this may sound to some ears, it is not my brain which thinks, dreams, muses *etc.* but it is I who do these things. All of these things, both the obviously physical and the obviously psychological, are things people do and not brains. As Straus says, the abilities to do these things are characteristics we ascribe to people, not to brains.

It is great fun to point out the absurdities in the way scientists talk about the brain; but in order to quickly blunt any disciplinary conceit I should also point out that it not just scientists who are apt to blunder in this area. It should already be apparent that philosophers are just as prone, if not more so. Indeed, philosophers have been making similar mistakes for centuries and continue to do so. This particular confusion is merely a new symptom of an old illness. We should therefore be careful not to let the fun cloak the serious point that I am trying to make. The attempt to ascribe these things to brains is at once indicative of a prejudice and a deep conceptual confusion. Of course, the prejudice is the familiar somatophobia which pervades our thought and leads us to disregard the human body in explaining conceptualisation and reasoning as well as the sensory life of the subject. The body is again relegated to the status of an Other, 'out there' as just another object in the world. If it has a rôle, this seems to be simply as a conduit for the vibrations of different frequencies from which the brain constructs this world. Once again, the view assumes an impoverished and divisive account of human embodiment and the human subject. As I have said, being embodied really amounts to no more than being 'embrained' (that is, biologically embodied in a brain); the brain standing in a position of privileged opposition to the world and the rest of the human body. However, the conceptual confusion this view represents concerns the constraints placed upon our ascriptions of such abilities; constraints drawn by the non-empirical grounds of their ascription. There may be good physiological reasons why a brain cannot breathe or write theses but there are also good conceptual reasons why they cannot do these things or think, dream, muse *etc.* It may well be the case that the brain plays an important causal rôle in these activities; but just because some organ or mechanism plays an essential rôle in producing an activity does not mean that we, perforce, identify it as the agent of that activity. For example, having a diesel engine may be essential for a particular locomotive to be driven;

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rose's teeth have been? The goose has none in its jaw. And neither, of course, has it any in its wings; but no one means that when he says it has no teeth.- Why, suppose one were to say: the cow chews its food and then dungs the rose with it, so the rose has teeth in the mouth of a beast. This would not be absurd, for one has no notion in advance where to look for teeth in a rose."

but notice that the engine only 'drives' the locomotive in the sense that it provides the motive power. It is the engine driver who drives the locomotive and it is the locomotive which pulls the coaches, not the diesel engine.

Obviously we have good evidential grounds for supposing that the brain is more intimately connected with thought and experience than are other organs of the body. These evidential grounds may result from the systematic investigations of the medical and neurological sciences, or from phenomenological examinations of the lived body. With respect to the latter we have already seen how the brain is subject to a unique degree of disappearance, such that this is quantitatively and qualitatively different to that of any other bodily organ.<sup>10</sup> This is partly because of the brain's sensitivity and its need for adequate protection and partly because it acts as a 'node of synthesis' for all sensori-motor activity, therefore playing a tacit rôle in all the body's gestalt 'from' structures. Consequently, we might be tempted to draw two very different sorts of conclusion on the basis of these considerations; that the brain is either essential or non-essential to our notion of self. On the one hand we might be tempted to agree with Richard de Mille when he argues that, as the brain is such an essential part of the executive self (as testified by its complete experiential invisibility), it is therefore reasonable to conclude that it *is* the executive self.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, we might have more sympathy with Paul Valéry when he says "Words are more a part of us than our nerves, we only know our brains by hearsay."<sup>12</sup>

My inclination is to lean towards the latter view; but this does not mean that I would deny that the brain is a remarkable organ of central importance, one which lies at the heart of all embodied thought and experience. Clearly it is and it does. Nonetheless, such considerations should not lead us into erroneously concluding that it is the seat of consciousness or identifying it with the conscious subject or executive self. We cannot attribute sentience to brains themselves, nor do we even attribute consciousness to any given organism on the basis that it has a brain. This latter claim may sound equally, if not more, surprising in the context of a late twentieth century culture indoctrinated by the findings of neuroscience and no doubt many would object along the following lines; "The brain, it is true, is no more intimately connected with breathing than the lungs, or with eating and drinking than the alimentary canal; but surely it is responsible in some intimate way for consciousness and the so-called 'mental acts' such as

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10. See Chapter 4, the end of §4.1.

11. R. de Mille [1976]; "The Perfect Mirror is Invisible", *Zygon* 11, pp.25-34. See also Chapter 4, §4.1.

12. Quoted in J. Starobinski [1989]; "The Natural and Literary History of Bodily Sensation", J. Crary, M. Feher, H. Foster & S. Kwinter (eds.); *Fragments for a History of the Human Body* 4 (Zone), p.372.

thinking, dreaming, and so on. Indeed, has not empirical investigation revealed that the brain is the organ of thought? We all know that Aristotle thought that the brain had the appearance of animal excrement and that he thought that it was merely there as a blood-cooling system. But we also now know that he was wrong - at least about its function. Aren't you saying that the brain has nothing to do with thinking? This is madness! It runs counter to all our best available evidence."

It is worth my while pointing out that this is not what I am arguing.<sup>13</sup> I am not trying to deny the fact that the brain has something very important to do with thought and experience; to deny *this* would be madness. As I say, we have both empirical and phenomenological evidence which suggests its central importance. However, in line with the general trust of this thesis, I would deny the homuncular and somatophobic contention which states that the brain alone is the subject of thought and experience. For reasons similar to those which lead me to deny this, I would also deny that we ascribe sentience on the basis of the possession of a brain or that we understand our relation to the world in terms of the brain's functions. Gonzalez-Crussi comments that;

Ortega could say that it was plain how cutting off a man's head seriously interfered with his capacity to feel and think, but that, beyond this, he placed little reliance in the physiology of cerebral locations. Today this wit is outmoded.<sup>14</sup>

He then goes on to argue that anatomical research currently suffers from an embarrassment of riches and that the human body, and presumably the human subject, as something which is inseparably part of an environment with which it interacts (here he refers to Valéry's metaphor of vortices in water), can *only* be revealed through the study of the 'body-object-of-scientific-inquiry'. No doubt Ortega's cynicism, like Valéry's, is a little exaggerated; but then Gonzalez-Crussi's over optimistic scientism is even more so. Maybe this is simply special pleading on the part of an anatomist; though perhaps it is a little uncharitable to say this. Nonetheless, as interesting and as valuable as these empirical investigations are, they actually have a limited impact on our understanding of ourselves as subjects of thought and experience or the way we relate to the world or to others. This is because these concepts and relations, and our notion of what it is to be a human being, are *primarily* tied up with other considerations.

In order to get clear about this, we must draw an important distinction between the causal rôle our physiology plays in grounding our sensory and cognitive capacities and the conceptual grounds upon which we ascribe the

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13. I say this because I have had objections raised to my argument along exactly these lines. One wit suggested to me that what I was arguing was that one did not need to have a brain in order to do philosophy! Well, not quite.

14. F. Gonzalez-Crussi [1985]; *Notes of an Anatomist* (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich), p.60.

attributes of thought and experience; these are not the same. We do not in fact ascribe these attributes upon the basis of our empirical discoveries about the functions and structures of the brain. The fact that the particular biochemical structure we call the brain is causally responsible in some way may be a contingent fact; we know of no logical or conceptual reason why another structure would not do as well. Of course, possessing a brain is not a sufficient condition of being sentient; but it may also be the case that having a brain, at least of this particular biochemical make-up, is not even a necessary condition of being sentient. Mind may well be 'variably realisable' on any number of different structures or physical processes; just as the locomotive's tractive effort is variably realisable on any number of means of motive power (diesel, steam, electric *etc.*). But even if we were to allow that the causal grounds of consciousness are contingent, and that we could discover that variable realisation was not actually the case, nothing would change about the way in which we do, in fact, ascribe these qualities: this discovery would not necessarily lead to a conceptual revision in which we substitute brain processes for our present criteria of ascription.<sup>15</sup>

This is because our present criteria of ascription have primacy over the subsequent empirical discoveries we make. Indeed, if this were not so it would be difficult to think of how we would even begin to make these discoveries. When, for example, Searle says "If one knew the principles on which the brain worked one could infer that it was in a state of thirst or having a visual experience", he is not simply committing an elementary category mistake, he is also presenting a completely topsy-turvy way of looking at the attribution of such states.<sup>16</sup> The means whereby we discover the functions of certain structures in the brain, or the general principles upon which the brain works, is by noting regularities in the workings of these structures and relating these to the normal expressions of thoughts, feelings, desires, *etc.* in the context of the whole embodied person. In other words, these empirical inferences presuppose that we *already* have a completely reliable way of telling what someone is thinking or feeling. If the suggestion here is that an understanding of these empirically discoverable principles provides a more certain ground for the attribution of such states, this is nothing more than a tendentious fiction. One can only say that, at best, Searle-type inferences have the logic governing the attribution of these states completely the wrong way round.

Nevertheless, the concomitant view that the brain is the real subject of thought and experience is a difficult nut to crack. This prejudice appears to operate even where the specific position is a functionalist one; admitting the

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15. See J. J. C. Smart [1963]; *Philosophy and Scientific Realism* (Routledge & Kegan Paul), p.98.

16. J. R. Searle [1983]; *op. cit.*, p.268. He is also, tacitly, giving primacy to the notion of 'biological embodiment' over the notion of 'paradigmatic embodiment'. Cf. Chapter 2, §2.3.

possibility of mind being variably realisable on *some* form of physical structure or 'brain' - I shall return to this shortly. For the moment I wish to suggest that the idea that we are our brains seems to implicitly affirm two doctrines which, *mutatis mutandis*, are remarkably similar to the two doctrines of Descartes I spelt out at the beginning of this thesis;

1). *The Primacy of the Brain*. The brain is the locus of cognitive, perceptual, and motor capacities. The neurological processes in the brain are therefore what really count in determining thought and experience. Consequently, given the appropriate conceptual revision, perhaps these could be attributed on the basis of our discoveries about brain processes or brain functioning.

2). *The Autonomy of the Brain*. Although the brain cannot continue to function in complete isolation of some means of support, it can exist independently of the human body: not only of a particular body, but of any human body whatever. Thus, the body's rôle is merely as a tacked-on appendage; a naturally provided means of life support and conduit of data.

If we run these two doctrines together we get the view that the human subject is really none other than his or her brain; for the consequence of both is that the human body as a whole is not necessary for mind. Given that these two doctrines assume a broadly Cartesian conception of the body as something external to the mind we should not be surprised by their homuncular conclusion; it is as if the brain as a whole has become a contemporary substitute for the rôle the pineal gland played in Descartes' thought.<sup>17</sup> Now, there is no compelling reason why materialism should lead to this privileging of the brain and the consequent claim that human persons are nothing but their brains. I suspect that what is going on here is that philosophers who hold the above views really agree with Descartes that we are essentially our minds; but they cannot bring themselves to say this because they disagree with his claim that to think of myself as a mental entity is to think of myself as a 'complete thing'. They therefore displace Descartes' privileging of the mind onto whatever isolated or discrete anatomical feature they deem to underlie or to be necessary for the mind and so continue to provide a divisive account of the human subject. Consequently, we should also not be surprised that the arguments that support these doctrines, in many respects, also reflect Descartes' own arguments.

For example, Thomas Nagel insists that "I am whatever persisting individual in the objective order underlies the subjective continuities of that mental life I call mine."<sup>18</sup> Where there is such a continuity, he says, the brain is

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17. Cf. M. Moussa & T. S. Shannon [1992]; "The Search for the New Pineal Gland: Brain Life and Personhood", *Hastings Centre Report* 22, pp.30-37.

18. T. Nagel [1986]; *The View From Nowhere* (Oxford University Press), p.40. Cf. J. L. Mackie [1976]; *Problems from Locke* (Oxford University Press), p.200. Mackie suggests that we 'annex' the terms 'I' and 'person' to that which grounds consciousness and argues that "The unity of consciousness is, at it were, the nominal essence of personal identity [...] But the real essence of personal identity

both the bearer and the cause of that continuity and thus it is the brain that is essential to self. It is not clear why we should want to identify ourselves simply with whatever it is that *underlies* the mind; but even if we do decide to do this, it is still not clear to me why this should be the brain *alone*. Nevertheless, Nagel argues, in a way highly reminiscent of Descartes' Argument from Conceivability, that "the brain is the only part of me whose destruction I could not possibly survive."<sup>19</sup> He then continues by asserting that as mental states are states of the brain (on which basis he claims that the brain is therefore not just a physical system), the brain must be a 'serious candidate' for the self as it is, as he says, the 'seat' of the person TN's experiences. He expresses this thesis, he says, "with mild exaggeration as the hypothesis that I am my brain."<sup>20</sup>

Is this argument simply fallacious? Nagel's central contention is that he could survive the destruction of his body but not that of his brain. What he means, of course, is that he can *imagine* his continued existence in one case but not in the other. In other words, Nagel expresses his argument in extensional terms when in actual fact it is another, albeit concealed, misapplication of *Leibniz's Law* in an intensional context. In this respect it is invalid for exactly the same reasons as Descartes' Arguments from Doubt and Conceivability are invalid. However, there is more to his argument than just this for he not only wishes to deny that he is his body but affirm that he is his brain. One way he could do this is by making use of the second half of *Leibniz's Law*, the *Identity of Indiscernibles* (if  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  have exactly the same properties in common then they are identical); but, as I have noted already, this is a highly contentious principle. In any case this is not Nagel's strategy - which is just as well for in trying to establish an identity between the person TN and TN's brain by attributing properties such as 'being happy' or 'having a thought' in common to both would seem to beg the question in favour of his thesis. Like Descartes, Nagel attempts to establish an identity by a process of elimination; in this case by pairing down his corporeal existence to that item in the objective order that underlies the continuity of his mental life. This strategy raises several questions, many of which are familiar from the previous chapter.

The first question that springs to mind concerns whether Nagel believes that the whole, intact brain is necessary for his continued existence or only a part thereof. He gives us no clues as to an answer to this but I think he would accept as uncontroversial the claim that people in fact do survive considerable damage to their brains. How far could this process be taken? How much of the brain must there be in order to ground the continuity of the mind or something still

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will be whatever underlies and makes possible the unity of consciousness."

19. T. Nagel [1986]; *op. cit.*, p.40.

20. T. Nagel [1986]; *op. cit.*, p.40.

recognisable as mind? What would be his view if it were discovered that only a fraction of his brain was required to physically ground the continuity of his subjective life? What if this were only one neuron or a small group of neurons I shall call 'structure  $\xi$ '? Perhaps he would grasp the nettle and, consistent with his own logic, declare "I am my 'structure  $\xi$ '"; but I think you would concede that this is stretching credulity to breaking point. In any case I can imagine many philosophers objecting that we could conceivably survive the destruction of our *entire* brains and that the continuity of the mind could persist through this calamity. Nagel does not discuss what he means by a 'brain'; one can only assume that he thinks it is obvious that he means the organic brain with which *Homo Sapiens* are endowed. However, many would argue that this organic brain could be replaced by a prosthetic brain or computer so that there would be "a layer-by-layer transformation, from the outside in, of an organic subject of consciousness to an artificial intelligence."<sup>21</sup> Hence it is not clear that any part of the organic brain is necessary for grounding his subjective mental life. In spite of this difficulty perhaps Nagel could make a tactical withdrawal and claim that normally he is his organic brain but that, in special circumstances, he would be prepared to say that he is whatever physical structure it is that fulfils the rôle normally fulfilled by his organic brain. His view is thus perfectly compatible with the idea of mind being variably realisable upon a number of different physical structures; perhaps even with the idea of an individual mind being variably realisable across time.

Nevertheless, it is still not clear to me why the brain alone (whatever its physical composition) should be taken to be the physical ground of our sensory or intentional life and thus construed as the real subject of thought and experience. Is to think of myself as a brain to think of myself as a 'complete thing'? As I have admitted, the brain is the 'node of synthesis' for sensori-motor involvement with the world but, as I have also argued, it alone cannot be responsible for establishing these relations. At the sensory level Nagel again seems to be assuming that perception is a purely passive affair; a channel of sense to the brain. However, although the brain plays an important causal rôle, so do other physical systems as well. Perception is not a channel of sense, relying upon the operations of discrete anatomical parts of the body, but the interaction of the whole embodied structure (acting as a gestalt, synergic system) with its environment. The brain alone is not the organ of sight any more than the eyes alone are the organs of sight; nor alone is it the organ of any other sense modality. The content of one's sensory experiences is not simply determined by the physical processes of the brain but is dependent upon real relations obtaining

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21. D. H. Sanford [1981]; "Where Was I?", D. C. Dennett & D. R. Hofstadter [1981]; *The Mind's I: Fantasies and Reflections on Self and Soul* (Basic Books), pp.233. Cf. D. M. Armstrong [1968]; *A Materialist Theory of Mind* (Routledge & Kegan Paul), p.72.

between the subject of those experiences and its environment; relations which are established by the interaction of the whole, paradigmatically embodied subject with its world. Consequently it is not simply the brain that underlies the sensory life of the subject. The same is equally true at the intentional level, as these two modes of existence are dialectical terms. If the content of one's sensory states is determined by real relations obtaining, it is also, and thereby, true that the content of one's propositional attitudes is equally determined by these relations. One acts in the world through one's body upon the basis of beliefs formed by one's perceptual interaction with the world; the subject which acts is the same subject which perceives - the whole embodied subject. It is not simply the brain that underlies the intentional life of the subject as other physical systems are thus involved in the subject's intentional interaction with the world.

It was a manoeuvre similar to this, of course, that Putnam makes against the intelligibility of the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis. According to the hypothesis you are to suppose that you are your disembodied brain being kept alive *in vitro* and ingeniously wired up to an advanced computer operated by an (obviously) mad and malicious scientist who stimulates your brain *via* the computer link-up in such a way as to implant sensory and intentional content and make you believe you are sitting reading this thesis. The hypothesis is again an epistemological thesis pressed into service of a metaphysical doctrine; as Putnam asks "*How do you know you aren't in this predicament?*"<sup>22</sup> This is, of course, Descartes' Evil Genius argument in modern dress (though much less parsimonious in the assumptions it makes).<sup>23</sup> The metaphysical doctrine it is often associated with is, of course, the claim that we actually *are* in a similar, albeit natural, predicament; that is, as Searle says, "Each of our beliefs must be possible for a being who is a brain in a vat because each of us is precisely a brain in a vat; the vat is a skull and the 'messages' coming in are coming in by way of impacts on the nervous system."<sup>24</sup> My sensory and intentional content is the product of my brain being stimulated in a certain way (by certain impacts on the nervous system); if the computer can simulate this then it can implant the same content synthetically.

Putnam's response to the hypothesis is to suggest that it is a 'self-refuting supposition'; that is, it implies its own falsity. This is because, although you (brain-in-vat) believe you are reading a thesis, what the word 'thesis' refers to in this context is not the same as what this word refers to in normal circumstances. In normal circumstances it refers to actual words on an actual page in an actual book, whereas for a brain-in-a-vat it can only refer to an image produced by the computer. Thus the words of English and vat-English simply mean different

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22. H. Putnam [1981]; *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge University Press), p.6.

23. Descartes; ATVII pp.22 & 25 ff., CSMK II pp.15 & 17 ff.

24. J. R. Searle [1983]; *op. cit.*, p.230.



things; in English the word refers to actual theses whilst in vat-English it refers to 'theses<sup>v</sup>'. You may have the impression of seeing this page but, however qualitatively similar to a veridical perception (or even if it were identical to a veridical perception), it does not represent an actual page of this thesis. In other words, brains-in-vats cannot think about real theses when they think "There is a thesis in front of me" because there is nothing in virtue of which this thought represents an actual thesis. If this is correct, then it follows that the supposition is self-refuting because if you *are* a brain-in-vat and you think "Maybe I am a brain-in-a-vat" then what you mean by 'vat' is not an actual vat but something like 'vat image produced by computer' or 'vat<sup>v</sup>'. As Putnam says, "If we are brains in a vat, then the sentence 'We are brains in a vat' says something false (if it says anything)."<sup>25</sup> If it is true we cannot consider whether it is true or false and if we can consider its truth or falsity then it must thereby be false; that is, necessarily false.

Putnam's argument amounts to saying that brains-in-vats cannot think of themselves as such but only as 'brains<sup>v</sup>-in<sup>v</sup>-vats<sup>v</sup>'. Still, for reasons similar to those we explored in the last chapter with regard to disembodied subjects, I think we can push this a little further. Whether or not we are brains-in-vats, I wish to argue that we cannot think of ourselves as either brains or 'brains<sup>v</sup>' and thus, by extension, neither as 'brains-in-vats' or 'brains<sup>v</sup>-in<sup>v</sup>-vats<sup>v</sup>'. Consider the following (hopefully fictitious) story told by Daniel Dennett.<sup>26</sup> Dennett has been charged with a secret and highly dangerous mission which has required, for reasons of safety, his brain to be surgically removed from his body and kept alive and functioning in a vat of nutrients. However, his brain is still able to control his body by means of an innovative radio link-up between his body and brain. The surgery is a success and Dennett awakes from the anaesthetic to find that, apart from the transcievers cemented into his skull, everything appears quite normal. Despite some initial giddiness he finds it almost impossible to believe that he is now awake and walking around with an empty cranium; his perceptions of the world have not altered and, as far as he can tell, his thoughts continue to be tokened between his ears and behind his eyes. Yet, as a "philosopher of firm physicalist conviction", he knows that this cannot be so for there is nothing there, except for some bio-electrical gadgetry, for them to be tokened on. If his thoughts are going on elsewhere (at some other geographical point) then surely he, Daniel Dennett, is at that other place too.

Dennett therefore asks to see his brain and so he (body) is led down a corridor to the room containing the vat of nutrients and his brain. Looking at his own brain he finds it impossible to associate himself with the inert looking,

25. H. Putnam [1981]; *op. cit.*, p.15.

26. D. Dennett [1981]; "Where am I?", *Brainstorms* (Harvester Press), pp.310-323.

bluish-grey dumpling in the vat. His description of this unique encounter is as follows;

"Well, here I am, sitting on a folding chair, staring through a piece of plate glass at my own brain.... But wait," I said to myself, "shouldn't I have thought, 'Here I am, suspended in a bubbling fluid, being stared at by my own eyes'?"<sup>27</sup>

Where, in other words, should his 'here'-thoughts and 'I'-thoughts be centred; on his body or on his brain? As hard as he tries, he cannot project himself into the vat and whenever he thought "I am here", where the thought occurs, or so it seems to him, is outside the vat wherever his body is at the time. Try as he may, Dennett cannot fully convince himself that it is occurring 'over there' in the vat; he simply cannot think of 'here' as 'here in the vat'. Closing his eyes helps a little although this is not altogether persuasive. This fact, I suggest, is not merely due to limitations in Dennett's imaginative faculties but rather displays something fundamental about the nature of indexical thoughts and our notion of self.

Let us develop Dennett's discomfort a little further. Picture him now in a situation in which he has no idea of how or where his brain is being kept. The operation has been a success and Dennett knows that his brain has been removed; but he has no notion as to where it has been taken - or even if it has been kept in one piece. He now tries to think of 'here' as where his brain is; it is quite impossible. Before, when Dennett (body) was sitting facing Dennett (brain-in-vat), it seemed as if this might just be possible; but this possibility was falsely attractive. It depended, I suspect, on the fact that information about its immediate environment was still be supplied to the brain *via* the sensory organs of his body; 'here' for the brain, one was almost tempted to think, could be 'here in the vat, in the laboratory'. But this possibility was entirely dependent upon the presence of the body relevantly situated with respect to the disembodied brain. The simplicity of a genuine 'here'-thought such as this is not something actually open to a brain-in-a-vat. Take away all sensory and intentional links to its immediate environment and 'here'-thoughts centred on the brain lose all of their spurious appeal. In the absence of the requisite sensory and intentional links, 'here'-thoughts cannot operate at all and the brain ends up in the same predicament as the radically disengaged subject. This is because 'here'-thoughts are only one type of thought amongst others, the aggregate forming the holistic system of thought we recognise as egocentric spatial thinking. As I indicated in the last chapter, this holistic system also includes thoughts such as; "It is  $\Phi$  over there", "The  $\vartheta$  is to the left of the  $\Omega$ ", "The  $\Theta$  is in front of me" and so on; all of which depend upon the instantiation of a sensory and intentional link. As Gareth Evans has argued;

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27. D. Dennett [1981]; *op. cit.*, p.312.

Where there is no possibility of action and perception, 'here'-thoughts cannot get a grip. [...] If we knew what had become of us we could certainly think of a place as the place where the brain which sustains our thoughts is located - but this is a mode of identification of a place quite unlike that expressed by 'here'.<sup>28</sup>

Yet this is precisely the mode of identification which characterises Dennett's attempts to think himself into the vat. As Evans says, this type of thought lacks the logical simplicity of a genuine 'here'-thought and is really a mode of identification by description. I can, of course, think of myself under a descriptive, *de dicto*, mode of identification; but the problem here is that I am being asked to think of myself solely under this mode of identification as no other mode is available. As I have noted before, this picture construes the relationship between 'here'-thoughts and 'I'-thoughts in an entirely erroneous way: giving primacy to 'I' over 'here'. As Evans says; "It is not the case that we *first* have a clear conception of which material object in the world we are [...] and *then* go on to form a conception of what it is for us to be located at a particular place."<sup>29</sup> If we insist, nonetheless, that we are *really* in the vat, this is precisely what we are assuming. Questions concerning who or what I am are closely tied to questions concerning where I take myself to be; thus, I suggest, to think of myself as my brain is not to think of myself as a 'complete thing' but rather merely to think of myself completely as a thing.

First-person considerations such as these thus lead to the same conclusions with regard to the brain as we drew in the last chapter with regard to the disembodied subject. In either case the putative subject of thought and experience must think of itself as being paradigmatically embodied and cannot think of itself as being disembodied from its sensory and intentional links to the world. In other words, even if I am a brain-in-a-vat, I simply cannot think of myself as such. In so far as his argument establishes this limited conclusion, Putnam is surely right. Nevertheless, as we can see, the same challenge remains. Again someone might object that just because we have shown that the subject cannot think of itself as thus and so, we have not shown that the subject is not, or could not be, thus and so. Because I cannot think of myself as my brain does not mean that I am not my brain; this, after all, is the epistemic conundrum posed by the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis. But why insist that this epistemological fancy is linked to the metaphysical doctrine that I *am* my brain? The reason for this seems to lie in an unholy alliance between our empirical discoveries regarding the brain and a fairly traditional, philosophical privileging of the first-person point of view. However, the unintelligibility of the doctrine does not simply lie in the above first-person considerations, although we could say a great deal more in this respect, but also in the very nature of our experiential and

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28. G. Evans [1982]; *The Varieties of Reference* (Clarendon Press), p.153.

29. G. Evans [1982]; *op. cit.*, p.153.

cognitive concepts and the grounds for their ascription in relation to bodily form and behaviour. It follows from this, I shall argue, that others could not regard me, *qua* brain-in-vat, as a conscious entity. Something like our puzzling conclusion with regard to disembodied subjects repeats itself: if there were a conscious living brain-in-a-vat, neither we nor it itself could think of it as such. It is now time we turned our attention to the considerations which support these further contentions. I shall do so by first examining a possible motivation for our valorisation of the head and the brain.

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## 6.2 The Head and Its Brain

Whatever their nature, the hidden, internal processes of the brain, whilst not causally irrelevant to thought and experience, are irrelevant to our ascription of psychological attributes. We do not need to know what these processes are in order to ascribe a particular psychological predicate in any particular instance; nor do we have to know anything about them to attribute a psychology in general. In order to legitimately say that someone, or indeed some thing, is in love, or believes in God, or has heard a scream, or is hungry, or is puzzled and is thinking about a particular problem we do not have to refer to whatever it is that is going on inside his or her or its head. The ascription of thought and experience is conceptually tied to considerations other than the possession of a brain and in contexts richer than simply the description of brain processes or neurophysiological events. So even if Searle is right and consciousness is a biological process in the same way as digestion, and thereby necessarily dependent upon some mysterious causal power specific to the brain (so that only organisms with relevantly similar structures could be conscious), the discovery of this fact, as I have argued before, would not materially alter the way we presently ascribe such attributes; this would simply be a fact about organisms to which we already ascribe a psychology. At best such considerations would be supplementary not determining. When it comes to the ascription of a psychology, the brain generally does not enter the picture at all.

Nevertheless, even if it is unable to discover or completely explicate their corresponding biochemical structures or types, contemporary scientific, materialist philosophy is strongly attached to the view that thought-tokens occur in the brain. It might be argued that this view seems to underlie, and perhaps even legitimate, people's spontaneous way of speaking of some thought or perceptual experience, for example, as occurring *in their heads*. People seem quite naturally to say things such as "I have an idea up here" or "I'm sorry; this doesn't seem to be functioning properly today", whilst at the same time *pointing* to their heads. Likewise, intelligence and stupidity are commonly and unreflectively attributed by such phrases as "She has a powerful brain" or "There's nothing going on in his head." Of course, we need to exercise extreme caution in extrapolating from such commonplace linguistic practices; once again it may be that such practices are largely the product of our historically and culturally situated scientific discourses and discoveries concerning the brain. There is nothing necessary about this way of speaking or its implicit assumption that the brain is the centre of our psychic life and it is easy enough to find

examples of other traditions in which the seat of the soul or consciousness is placed elsewhere in the body. In fact I do not believe that such phrases are simply the product of our scientific discourses being encoded into our everyday linguistic practices; nevertheless, as we shall see, caution is still required.

No doubt a trenchant materialist would reply that our scientific discoveries show that such alternative traditions are simply wrong and that we now know that the seat of thought and experience is in the head, in virtue of the fact that this is where the brain is situated. To speak of a thought as 'in the head' is therefore legitimate (though metaphorical) in a way that to speak of a thought being elsewhere is not; its legitimacy being derived from the fact that it is only in the head that the requisite physical structures can be found.<sup>30</sup> There is both something right and something wrong about this response. What is right about it is that the head clearly has a privileged position in our psychological discourse: one would be at a loss if someone were to say that she had an idea in her foot or in her stomach. If we wish to insult someone we might suggest that they do their thinking with a more fundamental part of their anatomy; but a figurative use of language such as this does not mean that when I say "I have an idea in my head" I am using language figuratively or metaphorically.<sup>31</sup> However, what is wrong about this response is the suggestion that this pre-reflective way of speaking about ourselves indicates a literal truth because my brain is in my skull and it is in my brain that my thoughts are materially tokened. What it fails to recognise is that perhaps there is more going on here than simply the encoding of our empirical discoveries in our linguistic practices and that these owe their origin as much, if not more so, to the non-scientific considerations which ground our psychological discourse.

What, then, are these non-empirical or non-scientific considerations? In the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein alludes to certain "very general facts of nature" which may help explain the formulation of concepts.<sup>32</sup> These should not be understood as the causes of the formation of concepts but as a non-arbitrary background against which the formation of concepts takes place. If we have difficulty understanding the intelligibility of a concept, he suggests, we should try imagining that some of these facts are different to what we are used to and perhaps its intelligibility would become clearer. Such facts, Wittgenstein observes, do not normally strike us precisely because of their generality. What I

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30. W. S. McCulloch [1950]; "Why the Mind is in the Head?", *Dialectica* 4, pp.192-205.

31. Gilbert Ryle suggests that the idiom 'in my head' can be used literally (e.g. with respect to 'head-borne' noises such as chewing) or as an expressive metaphor (e.g. with respect to imaginary noises). However, to dismiss most of our 'in the head' talk as metaphorical misses something important about these locutions. G. Ryle [1949]; *Concept of Mind* (Hutchinson), pp.36-40. Cf. T. S. Champlin [1989]; "Head Colds and Thoughts in the Head", *Philosophy* 64, pp.39-48.

32. L. Wittgenstein [1953]; *Philosophical Investigations* (translated G. E. M. Anscombe) (Basil Blackwell), IIxii, p.230.

want to suggest here is that reflecting on our valorisation of the brain and the head may lead us back to consider some of these general facts and the rôle they play in grounding our psychological discourse. The specific nature of the general facts I wish to consider concern the architecture of the body itself. As I have argued before, I believe that the human body should not be understood as a *tabula rasa* but as something which itself contributes to and constrains the constructions we make of it and the nature of the human subject. On this dialectical account of embodiment, the body which is shaped by socially situated discourses is also one which helps shape such discourses; again, as Drew Leder says, "cultural variations are always played out upon the keyboard of possibilities presented by our corporeal structures."<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, in recognising this interplay of concerns, we could take up Wittgenstein's suggestion of imagining these general facts to be slightly different from what they are and so break apart the conceptual and causal considerations which lead to the general confusion I have adumbrated above.

As I say, it is a commonplace linguistic practice that we speak of thoughts occurring in our heads. These practices are pre-reflective and perfectly legitimate; but people often move on from this to develop the erroneous view that the centre of our psychic life is literally located in our heads, a view which both informs and gains support from a 'scientifically' based insistence that our thoughts and experiences are actually locatable in our brains. This is a doubtful philosophical thesis, one that is premised, I suggest, upon the familiar and inadequate Cartesian view of the body and its concomitant view of the human subject as an isolatable homuncular. In her novel *Surfacing*, Margaret Atwood makes an interesting suggestion as to why one might be tempted to draw this debatable conclusion on the basis of our bodily structures. She writes;

The trouble is all in the knob at the top of our bodies. I'm not against the body or the head either: only the neck, which creates the illusion that they are separate. The language is wrong, it shouldn't have different words for them. If the head extended directly into the shoulders like a worm's or a frog's without that constriction, that lie, they wouldn't be able to look down at their bodies and move them around as if they were robots or puppets; they would have to realize that if the head is detached from the body both of them will die.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, because they are separated by the neck, according to Atwood there is an illusionary privileging of the head over the body such that this may lead us to regard the rest of the body as a detachable and purely mechanical appendage. If we were constructed differently, perhaps we would be less inclined, or less ready, to accept this misleading picture. However, she says little more than this. Nevertheless, the parallels with Plato are obvious and, although she does not

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33. D. Leder [1990a]; *op. cit.*, p.3.

34. M. Atwood [1973]; *Surfacing* (André Deutsch), p.70.

mention him by name, one can speculate that she must have had him in mind when writing this passage. In the *Timaeus*, Plato gives a famous and highly fanciful account of our origins. Imitating the spherical shape of the universe, he argues, the gods enclosed the most divine part of us in a spherical body, namely the head, to which they attached an extra, elongated body furnished with four extended and flexible limbs to be the vehicle and servant of the head and so provide it with the means of locomotion. Without such a body the head would be condemned to "tumble about among the high and deep places of the earth"; but with the body providing support we are "able to pass through all places, carrying on high the dwelling place of the most sacred and divine part of us."<sup>35</sup> However, the gods were nothing if not perspicacious and foresaw that combining the mortal and divine together in one body was bound to be problematic.

Wherefore, fearing to pollute the divine any more than was absolutely unavoidable, they gave to the mortal nature a separate habitation in another part of the body, placing the neck between them to be the isthmus and boundary, which they constructed between the head and breast, to keep them apart.<sup>36</sup>

Thus the relation of reason, our most divine part, to other elements of the soul is construed in terms of an agonistic separation and mastery. These mortal and inferior divisions of the soul were consigned to the trunk of the body, especially the midriff, while the higher faculty of reason was contained in the head. However, in line with his general tripartite account of the soul, he thought that courage and passion were settled nearer the head, in the breast (midway between the midriff and the head), "in order that being obedient to the rule of reason it might join with it in controlling and restraining the desires when they are no longer willing of their own accord to obey the word of command issuing from the citadel."<sup>37</sup> In Plato we therefore find a clear privileging of the head over the rest of the body; it is the dwelling place of our most divine part, the 'citadel' to be 'carried on high'. But surely all this valorising is not simply because he noticed an asymmetry in our bodily structure across the horizontal axis; one emphasised by the presence of the neck. Indeed no, for Plato also noticed another asymmetry in this structure which perhaps has more significance (though he expresses this insight in a most bizarre way); one across the vertical axis. He says that the gods deemed our front part to be more honourable and more fit to command than our backs and so made us move in a forward direction. On the basis of this looking-glass logic he concludes that the front parts were required to be unlike and distinguished from the rest of the body. But then he notes;

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35. Plato; *Timaeus* 44d-45a. This explanation fits into a much more ambitious account of creation in general. However, it seems that we, like the rest of what is mortal, were not created by God himself: this task he apparently committed to his 'offspring'.

36. Plato; *Timaeus* 69d-e.

37. Plato; *Timaeus* 70a.



And so in the vessel of the head, they first of all put a face in which they inserted organs to minister in all things to the providence of the soul, and they appointed this part, which has authority, to be the natural front.<sup>38</sup>

Plato has here struck upon an important truth. There is clearly something extremely important about the face as the window on the soul; as Wittgenstein says, "The face is the soul of the body."<sup>39</sup> Like all primates, we put a great reliance on facial gestures and the recognition of these and this fact has probably played a considerable part in flavouring our conceptualisations. It is the face in which are placed, as Plato says, the "organs which minister in all things to the providence of the soul" (our eyes, nose, mouth, and ears) and these form our main sensory receptors and primary means of communication. The fact that the organs of sight, smell, taste, and hearing are located in the head may give rise to the phenomenological illusion that we are situated in our heads, somewhere behind the eyes. Perception, as we have seen before, is perspectival and our perspective on the world is largely a perspective from the head; we see, smell, hear *etc.* from the point of view of our heads. This is the partial and ill-expressed truth that was contained in D. E. Harding's account of his Himalayan experience.<sup>40</sup> Perceiving from the head, the rest of my body can sometimes appear to me as extending out from the neck as that which is perceived.

Because of this James Gibson suggests that it is no accident that we locate ourselves in our heads; "The experience of a central self in the head and a peripheral self in the body is not [...] a mysterious intuition or a philosophical abstraction but has a basis in optical information."<sup>41</sup> We look out upon the world from our eyes-located-in-our-heads, our field of view of the 'outer' environment being partially occluded by the edges of the eye sockets, the eyebrows, the nose, the cheek bones, the body, and its extremities. The hands and feet, he says, "behave more like the occluding edges of an object than like the occluding edges of a window"; being protrusions into the field of view. Consequently, and somewhat uncharacteristically, he refers to these as 'semiobjects'. It seems to me that there are two problems with this line of reasoning. Firstly, as Gibson himself is only too aware of, it focuses too narrowly on visual perception. Proprioception and other non-visual information about

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38. Plato; *Timaeus* 45a.

39. L. Wittgenstein [1980a]; *Culture and Value* (ed. G. H. von Wright, translated P. Winch) (Basil Blackwell), p.23. However, we should be careful not to take my metaphor of a window as a literal description.

40. See Chapter 4, the beginning of §4.1.

41. J. J. Gibson [1979]; *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Houghton Mifflin), p.114. The fact that we generally perceive the world 'from our heads' is something that has also been remarked upon by Norman Malcolm and, in his own way, by Husserl. See N. Malcolm [1972]; *The Problems of Mind* (George Allen & Unwin), pp.64 & 78, and D. Cockburn [1985]; "The Mind, the Brain and the Face", *Philosophy* 60, pp.477-493. See also Husserl [1958]; *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson) (George Allen & Unwin), p.418.

the self, as well as tactual experience, largely negate this tendency to focus on the head as the centre of self and undermine the simplistic opposition between the head and the rest of the body. This is equally true if we understand the mechanisms of vision properly, as Gibson himself suggests, that is, not as a channel of sense, but as the engagement of the whole embodied subject; "One sees the environment not just with the eyes but with the eyes in the head on the shoulders of a body that gets about."<sup>42</sup> In other words, the body as a whole forms part of the visual or any other sensory system.

In any case, the truth that Plato has stumbled upon is far more subtle than this simple phenomenological account suggests; as Wittgenstein argues "We may derive [something] from experience, but experience does not direct us to derive anything from experience."<sup>43</sup> The question which concerns us here is our ability to ascribe thoughts and experiences and how this ability may be partially grounded in the fact that the putative subject of thought and experience has a particular physical form; thus certain very general facts of nature may be the basis of grammar. The second problem I alluded to above is that it tends to overlook the other way in which the face, to paraphrase Plato, ministers to the soul; the fact that it is one of our primary means of communication and expression. It is probably because of this that the face plays a special rôle in the ascription of consciousness; the face of another, its gestures and expressions, elicits certain responses from us and when we address ourselves to another we invariably address ourselves to his or her face. The eyes are therefore not simply the organs of sight, they are also a means of communication and expression.

We do not see the human eye as a receiver, it appears not to let anything in, but to send something out. The ear receives, the eye looks. (It casts glances, it flashes, radiates, gleams.) One can terrify with one's eyes, not with one's ears or nose. When you see the eye you see something going out from it. You see the look in the eye.<sup>44</sup>

Obviously Wittgenstein is here referring exclusively to human beings and not to elephants. For human beings the face, and notably the eyes (witness the importance of being face-to-face with someone and, perhaps more particularly, of eye contact), plays a key rôle in our interaction with others; especially in determining what we take others to be thinking and feeling. It is not surprising that they, and the rest of the face, therefore have a profound place in our understanding and the use of these concepts in general. It is also a fact of nature that the face is on the front of the head which also happens to house the brain.

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42. J. J. Gibson [1979]; *op. cit.*, p.222.

43. L. Wittgenstein [1969]; *On Certainty* [ed. G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. G. H. von Wright] (Basil Blackwell), §130.

44. L. Wittgenstein [1967]; *op. cit.*, §222. Cf. E. Levinas [1989]; "Ethics as First Philosophy" [ed. S. Hand] (Blackwell), p.85. Levinas speaks of "the miracle of the ego vindicated in the eyes of the neighbour."

Perhaps this is what underlies the motivation to valorise and privilege the head and, furthermore, to isolate or concentrate the essential person to the head and, by extension, specifically to the brain. Because of general facts about our corporeal form like those above there is a strong conceptual connection between the head and consciousness; thus the connection between the head and our commonplace linguistic practices is not the empirical or contingent connection that the materialist philosopher thinks. When we also discover through empirical investigation that other general facts of nature hold true of the head (that the brain plays a special causal or functional rôle in thought and experience and is also in the head) the temptation to concentrate the person in the head becomes almost irresistible. This is a mistake that must be resisted. However, like most incessant and enduring mistakes, it is a distortion of an important truth or combination of truths; in this case that there happens to be both conceptual and causal connections between the head and thought and experience. But the causal connection, whilst uppermost in the minds (note: not the heads!) of brain scientists and materialist philosophers, is an irrelevance to the attribution of thought and experience or why the head is valorised and held to be important in our psychological discourse. The human head is important because that is where the face is situated and it is in the face that a person's thoughts and experiences are primarily made manifest. When I say this I do not simply mean this is where the 'symptoms' or 'signs' of thought and experience occur; as if these were really going on elsewhere.<sup>45</sup> We respond directly and intuitively to the expression on another's face; we do not have to know any facts about hidden brain processes occurring 'behind' the other's face or make inferences from our own case.

Consciousness in another's face. Look into someone else's face, and see the consciousness in it, and a particular *shade* of consciousness. You see on it, in it, joy, indifference, interest, excitement, torpor and so on. the light in other people's faces. Do you look into *yourself* in order to recognize the fury in *his* face? It is there as clearly as in your own breast. [...] "Consciousness is as clear in his face and behaviour, as in myself."<sup>46</sup>

What Wittgenstein is arguing is the very important thesis that such factors are *part of our concepts*. "We describe a face immediately as sad, radiant, bored, even when we are unable to give any other descriptions of the features:- Grief, one would like to say, is personified in the face. This belongs to the concept of emotion."<sup>47</sup> Yet they are not the consequence of a deliberative process; they are 'primitive' and pre-linguistic, "the prototype of a way of thought and not the result of thought."<sup>48</sup> This is what he means by that enigmatic passage in the

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45. J. L. Austin [1946]; "Other Minds", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 20, pp.148-187.

46. L. Wittgenstein [1967]; *op. cit.*, §§220-221.

47. L. Wittgenstein [1967]; *op. cit.*, §§225.

48. L. Wittgenstein [1967]; *op. cit.*, §§541.

*Philosophical Investigations* where he suggests that one has a certain 'attitude' (*Einstellung*) towards another; "My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul [*eine Einstellung zur Seele*]. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul."<sup>49</sup> I may, on any particular occasion, believe, judge, know that someone is sad, bored, or grieving *etc.*; but it does not follow from this that I believe, judge or know that they are sentient creatures and not automata. Thus there are fundamental differences between the particular case and the general case and the latter cannot be modelled upon the former. The difference is one of kind, not one of degree; it is not, for example, a question of 'degrees of belief'.<sup>50</sup> That another human being is a subject of thought and experience is not simply a belief I do not question or of which I am convinced and thus it would be equally odd to say that this attitude represents an 'assumption' I have about others which forms the basis of my responses: to say this seems to imply that I 'accept' that it is the case and that there is something optional about my acceptance of it. It may be something that 'holds fast' for me so that I act with *complete* certainty;<sup>51</sup> but to say this indicates that it plays a fundamentally different rôle in our 'form of life'. I shall return to this question in the next section.

There is clearly an ethical dimension to these considerations. "For Mercy has a human heart, Pity a human face, And Love, the human form divine, And Peace the human dress."<sup>52</sup> In most circumstances the expression in another's face is not something opaque to me, pain and emotion is clearly discernible in his or her face and, what is more, directly makes demands upon me for action or sympathy. Wittgenstein reminds us that it is a 'primitive reaction' to respond to another's pain and treat the part that hurts when someone else is in pain and not simply when we ourselves are. In fact, we pay attention to the distress and pain-behaviour of others in a way which we do not pay attention to our own. In this respect the face of another is a key factor in determining our responses. We see pain or emotion directly in the face of another and this moves us. Levinas puts it this way; "The Other becomes my neighbour precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in doing so recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question."<sup>53</sup> Levinas also speaks of the 'epiphany of the face' in which the face of another 'breaks through' my habitual involvement with my own projects, interests or needs and confronts me with my obligations.

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49. L. Wittgenstein [1953]; *op. cit.*, IIiv, p.178.

50. P. Winch [1980]; "Eine Einstellung Zur Seele", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 81, pp.1-15.

51. L. Wittgenstein [1969]; *op. cit.*, §§173-174. The general claim that another human being is conscious is as good a candidate as I can think of for the Moore-type propositions Wittgenstein discusses in *On Certainty*.

52. W. Blake [1789]; "The Divine Image", from *Songs of Innocence*, reprinted in G. Keynes [1966] (ed.); *Blake: Complete Writings* (Oxford University Press), p.117.

53. E. Levinas [1989]; *op. cit.*, p.83. See also J. P. Burke [1982]; "The Ethical Significance of the Face", *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 56, pp.194-206.

To return to my central point: we can further bring out the intimate connection between our understanding of ourselves and the nature of our bodily architecture by again interrogating the normal by means of the abnormal. Let us take up Wittgenstein's and Atwood's suggestion and imagine these general facts about our bodily structures to be slightly different. Consider the illustration below (Figure 7). Othello says that when he was wooing Desdemona he told her of the adventures of his 'boyish days'; of his disastrous chances, his hair-breadth escapes, his imprisonment and redemption, the battles and sieges, and "of the Cannibals that each other eat, the Anthropophagi, and men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders."<sup>54</sup> Elizabethan natural history and anthropology is resplendent with such unnatural tales of Empedoclean anatomy brought home by mariners and other travellers of a world opened for the first time up to the systematic exploration of Europeans.

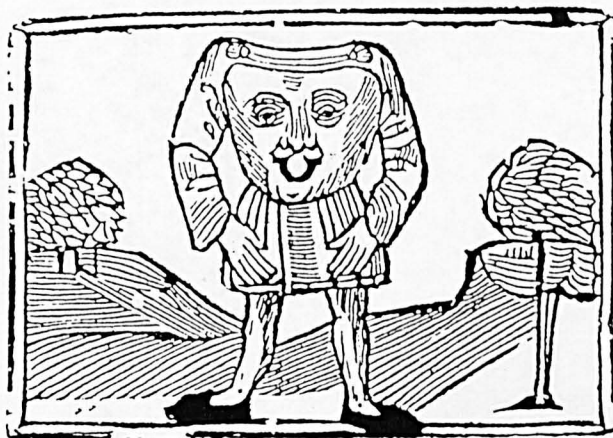


Figure 7: Woodcut from *The Voyages and Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (1582).

The woodcut illustration certainly does away with the neck as Atwood wished and is strikingly reminiscent of the *homme tetârd* drawn by children at a certain level of development. Most psychological explanations of why children tend to draw 'tadpole men' seem to me to be inadequate in one respect or another. Explanations offered include; 1). the trunk is omitted and the limbs are attached according to a rule 'attach to head', 2). the trunk is omitted and the limbs are attached by default, 3). the child does not differentiate the head from the trunk, and 4). that the drawing results from a 'production error'.<sup>55</sup> All of them ignore or fail to account for why the face and head is such a central feature of the drawing. Studies in the development of child psychology uniformly show just

54. Shakespeare; *Othello* Iiii, lines 129-145. W. Shakespeare [1974]; *The Riverside Shakespeare* (ed. G. Blakemore Evans) (Houghton Mifflin).

55. See, for example, N. H. Freeman [1975]; "Do Children Draw Men With Arms Coming Out of the Head?", *Nature* 254, pp.416-417. Freeman's favoured account is the production error theory: that children draw in a fixed sequence of pairs; head-trunk, arms-legs, and that irregularities are prone to occur in the production of the second element of each pair. However, it does not occur to Freeman to ask why the child almost invariably starts with the head and face.

how quickly the human infant learns to recognise the face of its mother and distinguish this from the faces of strangers; this particular recognitional ability is developed almost before the child is able to recognise anything else in its environment. Perhaps this primitive reaction, as Wittgenstein might have put it, underlies the conceptual significance of the face in our interaction with others and the drawing of 'tadpole men' is simply a natural extension of this.

The question that naturally suggests itself, with respect to the woodcut, is why is this an illustration of a man whose head grows beneath his shoulders and not an illustration of a man with *no* head? Similarly with the *homme tetârd*; the question here is why are these normally described as drawings of people with limbs coming out of the head? Perhaps if it were a fact of nature that we were constructed in this way, with our faces in our chests, we would say that our 'heads' were beneath our shoulders and point here when we said "I have a thought in my head."<sup>56</sup> Even if there was a vestigial apophysis on top of the shoulders, housing the brain, we might still refer to the 'head' as being where the face is in the chest. We might even consider the reverse of the woodcut; that we have heads with faces as normal but that our brains were located in our chests. Either way such unnatural natural anatomy would disrupt the combination of conceptual and causal truths relating to the head and perhaps extinguish the occult notion that because we can legitimately refer to a thought as being in the head then thinking must thereby be a process literally in the head.

David Armstrong argues "It is completely natural to speak of the mind as 'in' the body, and so speak of mental processes as 'inner' processes. Now 'in' is primarily a spatial word."<sup>57</sup> This is simply false: 'in' has many primary uses which have nothing to do with specifying spatial location (for example, when we say someone is "in trouble", "in the army" or "in committee"). Armstrong has been captured by a particular picture connected with one usage of this word; but our language is far subtler than he gives it credit for and the same word can be used to give expression to diverse truths. "When we do philosophy we are like savages, primitive people, who hear the expressions of civilized men, put a false interpretation on them, and then draw the queerest conclusions from it."<sup>58</sup> To say "I have a an idea in my head" is to give expression to the truth that there is a conceptual connection between the head and thinking; in virtue of the fact that this is where the face is situated. But to say that someone's thoughts and experiences constitute that person's 'inner life' is to give misleading expression to another truth; *viz.* that there is an asymmetrical relationship between me and

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56. Cf. Wittgenstein's curious remarks: L. Wittgenstein [1968]; "Notes for Lectures on 'Private Experience' and 'Sense-Data'", *Philosophical Review* 77, p.310.

57. D. Armstrong [1968]; *A Materialist Theory of Mind* (Routledge & Kegan Paul), p.75.

58. L. Wittgenstein [1953]; *op. cit.*, §194.

my thoughts and experiences and you and your thoughts and experiences. "No one can think a thought for me in the way no one can don my hat for me."<sup>59</sup> Sometimes I may conceal my thoughts by not giving expression to them and, consequently, you may be unsure what it is that I am thinking; but this does not mean that my thoughts are *always* hidden, or are something *essentially* concealed from public gaze, or that they can be logically detached from *all* expression. "'What I think silently to myself is hidden from him' can only mean that he cannot guess it, for this or that reason; but it does not mean that he cannot perceive it because it is in my soul. [...] The external does not have to be seen as a façade behind which the mental powers are at work."<sup>60</sup> 'Inner' therefore simply means *not disclosed*; it should not be construed literally as internal, inside or even as logically private.

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59. L. Wittgenstein [1980a]; *op. cit.*, p.2.

60. L. Wittgenstein [1982]; *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology* (eds. G. H. von Wright & H. Nyman, trans. C. G. Luckhardt & M. A. E. Aue) (Basil Blackwell), Volume 1, §§977-978.

### 6.3 'The Human Body is the Best Picture of the Human Soul'

"Consciousness in another's face." *In another's face?* This and other remarks of Wittgenstein's seem paradoxical in the light of the philosophical tradition we have inherited with its divisive view of the self and body. This is especially so given the particular conception of the human body as a lifeless mechanism, and as something Other, that this tradition has bequeathed to us. How can consciousness be in someone's face or bodily behaviour? These may be contingently associated outward signs of consciousness but cannot be part of someone's corporeal being unless we enact some form of a reduction. Is Wittgenstein therefore advocating a particular form of behaviourism? This is a charge that is often levelled against him but I believe that this is to misread what he is attempting to say; it is also a charge that, in his later work, Wittgenstein himself goes out of his way to repudiate.<sup>61</sup> In his own way Wittgenstein, as much as Merleau-Ponty, is trying to rethink our inherited categories and find a middle way between Classical Psychology and Mechanistic Physiology. Despite important differences, both philosophers are attempting to walk a tightrope between the seemingly exclusive categories of body and mind; they may occasionally wobble but, given the near consensus the Cartesian tradition still enjoys, this is a particularly difficult trick to pull off. I wish to suggest that Wittgenstein is offering an integrative model of the human subject and human embodiment. The charge of behaviourism probably results from the fact that the divisive model is so dominant in our thinking that we simply fail to recognise an alternative even when it hits us in the face.

What Wittgenstein is addressing is the failure to take account of the whole embodied person in the ascription of psychological attributes. His particular manoeuvre is to argue that considerations of bodily form and behaviour are not simply extras added on to consciousness but are part of our understanding of consciousness: they are part of our concepts. Consequently, we cannot cleanly eloin subjective states of consciousness from their expression in the embodied form of the human person; nor do we need to enact any analogical reasoning in

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61. It has been suggested that the confusion on this question largely results from a failure to recognise that there is a progression in Wittgenstein's views; from a logical behaviourist position in *Philosophical Remarks* to the sort of view I am attributing to him here, expressed in the *Philosophical Investigations* and his subsequently published writings. M. R. M. Ter Hark [1991]; "The Development of Wittgenstein's Views about the Other Minds Problem", *Synthese* 87, pp.227-253. There is probably something in this; but, as I go on to argue, I believe it is also due to a recognitional failure of a different kind. See also C. G. Kuckhardt [1983]; "Wittgenstein and Behaviourism", *Synthese* 56, pp.319-338.



order to inductively infer that another is a co-subjectivity.<sup>62</sup> "Consciousness is as clear in his face and behaviour, as in myself." This is not to privilege objective considerations such as bodily form or behaviour over subjective experience but to combine them within a dialectical unity. He is not arguing that there is *no more* to being in pain, to use his own favourite example, than displaying appropriate types of behaviour but that we cannot legitimately attribute consciousness in circumstances where there is no *possibility* of the appropriate behaviour. The possibility of appropriate behaviour clearly depends upon the putative subject having the appropriate physical form and, I may add, the appropriate form of embodiment. Thus he famously argues;

It comes to this: only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious.<sup>63</sup>

Before all else, therefore, subjects of thought and experience are living human beings. It is the living and paradigmatically embodied human person which provides the paradigm subject for these attributes for it is in the context of the lives of human beings that the rich and complex language-games of thought and experience have their primary and fullest employment. The lives of human beings, of whole persons, provide the logical 'environment' for the employment of such terms. Important elements in this environment may be things such as; facial expressions and other types of body language, the bearing and attitude of a person, gestures and gesticulations, physical needs and actions, interaction with others, and just the day to day mundane processes of living. The further we move away from this environment, or the more of these elements that drop out of the picture, the harder it is for the ascription of a psychology to get a foothold. This is not to say that it could not get a foothold outside of this context; what form or behaviour is considered appropriate is a matter of degree (it is certainly not all or nothing) and appropriateness is judged in accordance with the paradigm case.<sup>64</sup>

Animals, androids and aliens are cases in point. We do not ascribe some

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62. Assuming, of course, that these analogical arguments even constitute a form of inductive argument. In fact they are a bit like a ornithologist arguing that all swans are white on the basis of observing a single swan or observing the same swan over and over again. Cf. N. Malcolm [1964]; "Knowledge of Other Minds", D. F. Gustafson (ed.) *Essays in Philosophical Psychology* (Macmillan), pp.365-376.

63. L. Wittgenstein [1953]; *op. cit.*, §281.

64. Our conceptual framework is rich enough to accomodate a complex variety of means of expression; nevertheless, there are constraints. David Lewis argues that any credible theory of mind must be able to accomodate what he calls 'mad pain' (where the causes and physiological processes are familiar but the ensuing behaviour is extremely abnormal) and 'Martian pain' (where the physiology is abnormal but the behaviour is familiar). However, while we cannot yet rule out something like Martian pain, I cannot see how we could find mad pain intelligible - even less so mad Martian pain! D. Lewis [1980]; "Mad Pain and Martian Pain", N. Block (ed.) *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology* (Methuen), Volume 1, pp.216-222.

psychological attributes to our pets for purely sentimental reasons; dogs and cats are sufficiently close to the paradigm case, to make this legitimate - though goldfish and insects are more problematic, but not necessarily or completely so. However, even in the case of the higher mammals, we do not ascribe the full range. Human beings can cheat and lie and hide the true nature of what they are feeling; but it is inappropriate to accuse a dog of pretence. Why? Not because the dog is too honest; nor because the animal lacks the required internal processes - this may, as a matter of fact, be true. The question is not whether the dog's brain is in a 'state of pretence' (whatever that might be); it is inappropriate because the environment for the ascription is deficient in important respects.<sup>65</sup> This is not specieism for the same is equally true of the human unweaned infant. A human baby is also not a full participant in the psychological language-games played by human adults. Can we be sure that the smile of the child is not a pretence? Yes, says Wittgenstein, because "Lying is a language-game that needs to be learned like any other one."<sup>66</sup> A dog may sham; but it is never a malingerer. Nevertheless, we can and do attribute certain cognitive and sensual capacities to animals; because of a kinship in bodily structure and behaviour. In order to grasp the importance of this, turn the question of pretence around. Do not ask "Can the dog fake pain?"; rather ask yourself "Can I *imitate* or *mimic* the suffering of a dog?"<sup>67</sup> What of a machine or a tree or a stone?

With respect to androids and aliens, like other marginal cases, again much will depend on how sufficiently human-like they are. There may be an important difference, for example, between a robot and an android (if we understand the latter to be anything like a 'synthetic or artificial person').<sup>68</sup> Although a robot has a human-like form, it is a fierce, cold thing whose form is too obviously machine-like and its movements too lifeless and mechanical.

Could a machine think?- Could it be in pain?- Well, is the human body to be called such a machine? It surely comes as close as possible to being such a machine. But a machine surely cannot think!- Is that an empirical statement? No. We only say of a human being and what is like one that it thinks. We also say it of dolls and no doubt of spirits too. Look at the word "to think" as a tool.<sup>69</sup>

These claims should not be construed as empirical claims but as grammatical remarks: in the absence of the appropriate logical environment it makes no sense *to say* that the machine, or whatever, thinks or does not think. But caution is required here: we cannot then go on to think "Ah! We cannot *say* that a machine thinks; but it may *actually* think all the same." This would be to misconstrue completely the generality and the fundamental nature of

65. L. Wittgenstein [1953]; *op. cit.*, §250.

66. L. Wittgenstein [1953]; *op. cit.*, §249.

67. Cf. F. J. J. Buytendijk [1961]; *Pain* (trans. E. O'Shiel) (Hutchinson), p.79.

68. I commend *Star Trek's* Mr. Data as a perfect example of this.

69. L. Wittgenstein [1953]; *op. cit.*, §§359-360.

Wittgenstein's remarks. Wittgenstein does not actually concern himself with the question of whether a human artifact of some description might or might not be said to think. Wittgenstein's contribution to the artificial intelligence debate is merely to suggest that what ultimately determines this are not questions about the artifact's inner processes but whether, and how far, it resembles a human being and how far it could occupy the 'social place' of a person.<sup>70</sup> Similarity of form is therefore not enough by itself: despite its posture and form we would not attribute thoughts to Rodin's *The Thinker*. Where there is absolutely no possibility of behaviour at all, or the participation, however limited, in a particular form of life, it is hard to see how even a secondary application of the concepts is justified for we simply do not possess a 'technique' for applying them in such circumstances.<sup>71</sup>

Look at a stone and imagine it having sensations.- One says to oneself: How could one so much as get the idea of ascribing a sensation to a thing? One might as well ascribe it to a number!- And now look at the wriggling fly and at once these difficulties vanish and pain seems to get a foothold here, whereas before everything was, so to speak, too smooth for it.<sup>72</sup>

There might be some justifiable doubts about whether Wittgenstein's fly actually feels pain, though we can see how pain gets a foothold. The case could be construed as problematic, not impossible. These doubts may rest upon the fact that the fly only very modestly resembles the human form; yes, it has eyes (albeit fairly inexpressive compound eyes) and yes, it has legs (but six!); but it is too small and its movements are again too mechanical and somehow lacking in expression.<sup>73</sup> Perhaps most significant is the fact that it does not possess a human-like face. We have already noted the importance of the face. The face is so expressive that one might think that there is enough appropriate behaviour to make the ascription of thought and experience on the possession of a face alone.<sup>74</sup> To be endowed with a human-like face would seem to be virtually sufficient for a putative subject to have consciousness attributed to it; but this does not mean, perforce, that it is necessary for the attribution. One might be able to envisage there being a faceless organism, the rest of whose form was sufficiently human-like (and whose behaviour was sufficiently rich), where attribution was still possible. All that is required is that their form is similar to the paradigm case in *one or other* respect; in the absence of a face the rest of the body must be sufficiently human-like and in the absence of something

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70. J. F. M. Hunter [1990]; *Wittgenstein on Words as Instruments* (Edinburgh University Press), p.130.

71. L. Wittgenstein [1953]; *op. cit.*, §125 ff.

72. L. Wittgenstein [1953]; *op. cit.*, §284.

73. Size is not an insignificant factor. As I believe Austin once remarked; "What if ants were the size of horses?"

74. David Cockburn suggests that "There is a sense, or a number of senses, in which a person is localized or concentrated in the face" and that this fact may underlie the dualist's and the materialist's penchant for isolating an essential subject and drawing a distinction between the person and their body. D. Cockburn [1985]; *op. cit.*, p.492.

approximating to a human-like body a face becomes necessary. With the want of one the possession of the other becomes critical; but the possession of either may be sufficient.

It seems that in the absence of a human-like form or appropriate behaviour the question of *where* a thought or experience is occurring takes on an importance that it does not have in the case of the human subject. To ask a question like this of a human being, Wittgenstein suggests, appears senseless; but not so in the case of an inanimate object.

The chair is thinking to itself:.....

WHERE? In one of its parts? Or outside its body; in the air around it? Or not *anywhere* at all? But then what is the difference between this chair's saying something to itself and another one's doing so, next to it? - But then how is it with man: where does *he* say things to himself? How does it come about that this question seems senseless; and that no separation of a place is necessary except just that this man is saying something to himself? Whereas the question *where* the chair talks to itself seems to demand an answer.- The reason is: we want to know *how* the chair is supposed to be like a human being; whether, for instance, the head is at the top of the back and so on.<sup>75</sup>

When we say "This person is poor", we do not then ask "Where is their poverty?"; this is manifest in their life. Similarly, we may attribute a thought to someone but it is neither necessary or sensible to go further and attribute the thought to a specific part of that individual or say where in that person the thought is occurring. This is not because of any dualist considerations: we do not specify a place because the thought is non-material and therefore non-locatable. Rather, we cannot do so because it is conceptually inappropriate. "Stella thinks it is going to rain." Where? "On the plain!" Certainly not anywhere in her brain. Rebecca de Boer suggests that a non-controversial answer to a question such as "Where is  $\Phi$ 's present thought occurring?" would be "Where  $\Phi$  is."<sup>76</sup> Although the question is queer because it is self-answering, she argues, it is not thereby a nonsense question; and if this is not nonsense, then it is also not nonsense to ask where the thought is located within this area of space. However, is the question queer because it is *self-answering*? Why would one ask a question such as this? In fact de Boer seems insensitive to the actual queerness of the question and consequently to that of her own answer. If the appropriate answer to the question "Where does Stella think it is going to rain?" (a more naturally phrased question than de Boer's) is "Where Stella is", this can only sensibly refer to where it is going to rain and surely not where the thought is supposed to be. To assume that her strange question, although non-typical, is itself somehow non-controversial is simply to beg the question in favour of her equally strange answer.

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75. L. Wittgenstein [1953]; *op. cit.*, §361.

76. R. R. de Boer [1975]; "Cartesian Categories in Mind-Body Identity Theories", *Philosophical Forum* 7, pp.141.

How does the chair think to itself? This may be taken as either a causal or a conceptual (grammatical) question - something like; in what way does it make sense to say of the chair that is thinking to itself? In the case of inanimate objects we may not legitimately progress from the conceptual to the causal and it would therefore be entirely misplaced to start by looking for internal, hidden processes or the equivalent of a brain. The conceptual question is not answered by reference to such processes and so the presence or absence of a brain does not count for or against the chair thinking. This is not to say that the causal question "How?" is completely unimportant; only that it can only be asked and answered in a context where it is already considered appropriate to ascribe thought to the subject in question - and this is determined by other considerations. The question is in what respect is the chair like the embodied human form and capable of displaying the requisite type of behaviour? This question would be better answered, for example, by looking for a face.

I can imagine someone again objecting that all this amounts to the most excessive metaphysical arrogance. They might say; "You argue that we lack a basis or a 'technique' by which we apply these concepts to stones *etc.* because these are based upon a human paradigm. Given this obviously anthropocentric view, your conclusions are not surprising. But could there not be creatures who express their thoughts and feelings in radically different ways, as David Lewis has suggested; perhaps in ways so alien to us that we might not even recognise them as such? 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy'." It is true that the world is a surprising place and one would not wish to be accused of *a priorism* by ruling out certain possibilities in advance. Nonetheless, this does not mean we have to have an open door for any idea, however outlandish. As I have argued before, inconceivable means inconceivable to us; but this is little more than a pleonasm. After all, these concepts are our concepts, so it is indeed not surprising that they are logically tied to manifestations we recognise as appropriate. Imagine we discover a form of life which was an amorphous blob and whenever this blob was in close proximity to a source of intense heat it changed colour. Is this an expression of pain? It may equally be an expression of delight! This is no different to a mushroom changing colour when it is cooked. But say instead that it also shook violently and tried to retreat from the heat source - perhaps here pain gains a foothold. Why? Because its behaviour more in kin with the paradigm case. The psychologist Henri Piéron took chromatophoric reactions in octopi to be indicative of pain in these animals; but an octopus also reacts in more appropriate ways.<sup>77</sup> Octopi are said to be enraged when certain colour changes occur, as people turn purple with rage,

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77. Cited in F. J. J. Buytendijk [1961]; *op. cit.*, p.78. Interestingly, Buytendijk also notes how human-like and expressive the eyes of an octopus are (they are *the* example of parallel evolution): no doubt this helps in the ascription of pain and anger to them.

yet these are not the only grounds upon which the ascription is made; they also become aggressive and attack.<sup>78</sup> Chromatophoric reactions by themselves are simply not sufficient. However, the difficulties we encounter with animals or blobs are different in kind rather than degree with difficulties encountered with inanimate objects - for where would we begin to attribute these states to chairs or stones?

What has these apparently wild speculations to do with the question of human embodiment and the brain? Well, what is true of an inanimate object such as a chair or a stone is equally true of a brain; "A brain does not have the right physiognomy nor the capacity for participating in any of the forms of life that would be required for it to be a subject of experience."<sup>79</sup> We have already seen the difficulties Daniel Dennett has in thinking himself into his brain. In Dennett's story his brain has been removed and is being kept alive *in vitro*. Despite this his brain still manages to control his body by means of an ingenious radio link. However, even while Dennett (body) sits in the laboratory looking at Dennett (brain-in-vat) he cannot think of the brain-in-vat as 'here'; even though he believes his thoughts are being tokened in the brain, he can only think of 'here' as where he is perceiving and acting from - that is, where he is embodied sensorily and volitionally. And, as we have seen, one's 'here-thoughts' are inseparably linked to one's 'I-thoughts', so it is not clear that Dennett could have an adequate conception of himself *qua* brain-in-the-vat. But Dennett's first-person difficulties in thinking of himself as his isolated and vat enclosed brain are only matched by our third-person difficulties in thinking of him as such. No doubt we will continue to ascribe thoughts and experiences to Dennett, but we do not ascribe these to Dennett's brain. On the other hand, we do not ascribe these to his body *per se* either; it is not the body that has a thought or feels pain.<sup>80</sup> What we would do is ascribe them to Dennett *on the basis* of the behaviour of his embodied human form. If all that was left of Dennett was his brain-in-the-vat one feels that we could not ascribe a psychology to him at all for there would be no grounds upon which we could do so: the case of the brain is far too smooth and too slippery for these concepts to gain a foothold.<sup>81</sup> To think of Dennett's

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78. In John Steinbeck's novel *Sweet Thursday* the character Doc hopes to write a paper entitled "Symptoms in Some Cephalopods Approximating Apoplexy." He notes how one "cannot dissect for emotion" and hence, in order to discover whether the putative expressions of rage in octopi actually are rage, he tries to see if he can induce apoplexy. The barrenness in psychology? In polemical mood Wittgenstein comments; "The confuion and barrenness of psychology is not to be explained by calling it a 'young science' [...] For in psychology there are experimental methods and *conceptual confusion*. [...] The existence of the experimental method makes us think we have the means of solving the problems which trouble us; though problem and method pass one another by." L. Wittgenstein [1953]; *op. cit.*, IIxiv, p.232.

79. N. Malcolm [1972]; *op. cit.*, p.77. See also N. Malcolm [1986]; *Wittgenstein: Nothing is Hidden* (Basil Blackwell), Chapter 10.

80. L. Wittgenstein [1953]; *op. cit.*, §286.

81. If we were more charitable we might still think of Dennett as being embodied in his brain (even

brain as where his consciousness resides seems to me to be no less esoteric than Yoruba tribesmen at one time describing their cowrie-shelled boxes as their heads or souls.<sup>82</sup>

These difficulties are once again familiar from our discussion of the possibility of disembodied thought and experience in the last chapter. Even if we could make sense of someone being partially disembodied, as a brain-in-a-vat, or fully disembodied, as we have discussed previously, they would have to think of themselves as being paradigmatically embodied; but this first-person conundrum is only one side of the coin. In trying to make sense of these possibilities we have to see if *we* could regard them, in their actual condition, as continuing to be subjects of thought and experience: the very idea of a disembodied subject, either as a brain-in-a-vat or some form of ghostly entity, must also satisfy the requirements governing the ascription of these capacities. Here we seem to run up against insuperable difficulties. The ascription is senseless because we do not have a technique whereby we can apply thoughts or experiences to a brain-in-a-vat or a fully disembodied subject. Although we may extend its usage to cover certain animals or other possible organisms (because they are sufficiently similar to us in the relevant respects), mastery of this technique in the case of other human beings does not tell us how to extend its use in other, radically abnormal circumstances: because we know what "It's 5 o'clock here" means, does not entail "It's 5 o'clock on the sun" has any meaning.<sup>83</sup> We might well be tempted to think that "The brain/disembodied person is thinking" should have meaning, even though it might be false, because similar grammatical constructions such as "Stella is thinking" have meaning; but grammatical invariance does not guarantee that sense is carried over. To say "The brain/disembodied person is *not* thinking" is not the same as saying "Stella is not thinking"; rather it is more

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though we would not be able to say what he was thinking or experiencing) because, as Shoemaker says, "We have some notion of what it would be for an amputee, a paralytic, or even the owner of a detached brain to be restored to a state of paradigmatic embodiment." (See also Chapter 2, §2.3) Thus it could be argued that such cases are secondary and parasitic upon normal embodiment but nevertheless conceivable. However, as Shoemaker also suggests, in such a case we might conceivably think of the disembodied brain as the person's 'biological body' and his body proper as his 'volitional-sensory body' and that "most of the work done by the notion of a person's body would be done by the notion of a person's volitional-sensory body rather than the notion of a person's biological body." When, for example, the person said something like " $\Phi$  is in front of me", he or she would be understood to mean that  $\Phi$  was in front of his or her volitional-sensory body; the volitional and sensory criteria are therefore primary - the biological criterion deriving its status from the fact that in normal circumstances it is a causally necessary condition of volitional and sensory embodiment. S. Shoemaker [1984]; "Embodiment and Behavior", *Identity, Cause and Mind: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge University Press), pp.113-138. Nevertheless, it is not clear to me that we can simply view the case of the disembodied brain as the case of an amputee or paralytic writ large as Shoemaker implies.

82. M. Hollis [1970]; "Reason and Ritual", B. R. Wilson [ed.] *Rationality* (Basil Blackwell), pp.221-239.

83. L. Wittgenstein [1953]; *op. cit.*, §§350-351.

like saying "The rose has no teeth."<sup>84</sup> It is not simply a judgement, true or false, which is reached on the basis of an observation, it is an *a priori* judgement about the ascription of the concept. Although Wittgenstein remarks that we say of dolls and spirits that they think, in fact the proposition "The brain/disembodied person is thinking" is not just false, it is meaningless - a different state of affairs altogether.

Furthermore, we must not overlook the fact that we *do* have mastery of this technique in the case of other human beings. Consequently, there is no real mystery concerning the mind of another human being - or indeed anything which sufficiently resembles (behaves like) a human being. "Just try - in a real case - to doubt someone else's fear or pain."<sup>85</sup> The doubt is a philosophical fiction; we cannot doubt it. Our grasp on the very concept of pain, or fear, or whatever partly consists in our grasp of their natural expression; that is, their natural expression in the case of others as much as myself - it is constitutive of our understanding of these concepts. A controversial consequence of this may be that in the presence of sufficient similarity to the human paradigm the denial of the attribution is equally problematic. As George Bush was notorious for saying, "If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck - then it is a duck!" By the same token, of course, if it does not then it is not a duck. An ethologist may refuse to speak of animal pain or suffering, even in the case of the higher mammals, and prefer to speak of 'avoidance behaviour'. This behaviour, they might claim, can exist in the complete absence of any phenomenology. Equally, we might refuse to attribute thoughts and experiences to a human artifact, however human like, simply on the grounds that it is an artifact. However, and I can say little more than this here, the attribution of such states in these circumstances does not seem to me to be simply a misplaced anthropomorphism. If an organism or artifact reacts in the appropriate ways in the appropriate contexts then is there a further question as to the legitimacy of the ascription? One might claim that it is the denial of this legitimacy which is the real example of metaphysical arrogance.

However, what is beyond question is the certainty of the ascription in the case of other human beings. I do not infer that another human being is conscious any more than I infer that the world exists; they are something which lie at the very bedrock of my thought and being. My relationship with another, just as my relationship to the world, is a given; it is established at a pre-conscious level and not at the level of thought. I arrive in the world at a conscious level already interacting with the world and with others themselves already interacting with the world in a community of embodied subjects. My awareness

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84. L. Wittgenstein [1953]; *op. cit.*, IIxi, pp.221-222. See footnote 9, above.

85. L. Wittgenstein [1953]; *op. cit.*, §303.



of my own difference therefore arises from a state, as Merleau-Ponty says, "in which there is not one individual over against another but rather an anonymous collectivity, an undifferentiated group life [*vie à plusieurs*]." <sup>86</sup> In other words, there is no logical or chronological priority of myself over others; they implicated in the very core of my being. As both Merleau-Ponty and Sartre rightly point out, if another, *qua* 'inner' subject of thought and experience, is simply appealed to as a means of explanation of objectified 'outer' bodily behaviour their status can only remain hypothetical, problematic and precarious. <sup>87</sup> This is why Sartre refers to this as a relationship of being and not a relationship of knowledge; this relationship of being forms a background against which there can be a relationship of knowledge - traditional philosophy has had its order of priority reversed.

Nevertheless, in Chapter 3 I suggested that, in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, it seems that Merleau-Ponty himself does not quite succeed in overcoming the difficulty in accounting for other people from within the phenomenological perspective. Husserl attempts to surmount this difficulty by insisting that my recognition of another as co-subjectivity is bound up with an objectivication of myself: I am aware that I am something upon which there may be other points of view. This is an important insight but, unfortunately, it is an insight that is compromised on two counts. Firstly by his distinction, in this respect, between 'perception' and 'apperception': that, although the body of another is not a simple physical reality for me, it is something I perceive, whereas his or her psyche is something I 'apperceive' (*i.e.* something I am *mediately* aware of as lying behind the body I perceive). Secondly, and more importantly, it is compromised by his reaffirmation of the Cartesian *cogito* as the starting point of his philosophy; a transcendental ego which ultimately constitutes in itself and for itself the Other as Other. Although Merleau-Ponty draws on Husserl's original insight, he rejects the analogical and transcendental approach of Husserl. His own attempted solution is to suggest that as my body is not an object for me, the body of another is not an object either: "If I experience this inhering of my consciousness in its body and its world, the perception of other people and the plurality of consciousnesses no longer present any difficulty." <sup>88</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, therefore, the psyche of others are not something I am aware of in a mediate fashion; it lies at the surface of their being in virtue of the fact that they, too, are lived bodies. However, what both

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86. Merleau-Ponty [1964c]; "The Child's Relations with Others", *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics* (ed. J. M. Edie) (Northwestern University Press), p.119.

87. J. P. Sartre [1956]; *Being and Nothingness* (trans. H. E. Barnes) (Washington Square Press), pp.224-228, and Merleau-Ponty [1964]; *op. cit.*, pp.113-120.

88. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *Phenomenology of Perception* (trans. Colin Smith) (Routledge & Kegan Paul), p.351.

approaches share in common is the belief that the presence of the Other as Other can be divined from the resources presented within one's own sphere; in Merleau-Ponty's case by the understanding one has of one's own body. The question remains whether the reciprocity required for a genuine community of co-subjectivities can be established on the basis of this type of first-person assumption.<sup>89</sup>

Wittgenstein's conclusion is largely in agreement with that of Merleau-Ponty, but his approach to the whole issue is radically different. Wittgenstein eschews an analysis of subjectivity and intentionality in terms of perspectivity and comes at the question from the other end by rejecting the Cartesian, epistemic starting point which results in this problem. Instead his analysis turns upon our understanding of what it is to be a subject of thought and experience from a point of view which has no centre - the grounds for the third-person ascription of psychological attributes - but takes as its paradigm the living human being. For Wittgenstein the whole question of other minds is therefore simply a pseudo-problem; the presence of others, *qua* human beings, being another point at which the spade of explanation turns.<sup>90</sup> In other words, the existence of human co-subjectivities presents itself as a 'brute fact' (if, indeed, it is a 'fact' at all) requiring no further analysis. One could argue, I suppose, that this is not to say that a story about other minds like Merleau-Ponty's could not be given, only that it need not.<sup>91</sup>

Wittgenstein asks "How could one so much as get the idea of ascribing a sensation to a thing?" This question neatly encapsulates the problem of embodiment that we have inherited from the Cartesian turn in philosophy. Conceived of simply as a material organism, a thing, or just another object in *res extensa* the human body does not seem to be a suitable bearer of psychological attributes. Consequently both the dualist and the materialist look elsewhere for the subject of thought and experience; the dualist looks to a transcendent self and the materialist looks to the living brain. Both are mistaken; but their mistake embraces a partial truth, this being that we do not ascribe thoughts or experiences

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89. A recent attempt to answer to this question has been provided by Sebastian Gardner. Gardner believes that it can and argues that a 'realist' epistemology of other minds can be achieved by starting from the first-person. The problem arises, according to Gardner, if one's general conception of oneself is Cartesian or Humean and one then tries to extend *that* conception to others. This is an important contribution to the debate and I wish I had more time to do it full justice; unfortunately I do not. S. Gardner [1994]; "Other Minds and Embodiment", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 94, pp.35-52.

90. L. Wittgenstein [1953]; *op. cit.*, §217.

91. It would be interesting to see how far one could push a *rapprochement* between the positions of Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty/Gardner. For example, one could construe Wittgenstein's 'private language argument' as a transcendental argument in which an *a priori* analysis of the grounds of the possibility of language yields an 'intuition' of others. However, a purist might object that, although this is possible, it is nevertheless a superfluous enterprise.

to 'things' *per se* but to people and other living entities. Nonetheless, their common mistake lies in failing to recognise the importance of the fact that people and these living entities are paradigmatically embodied; the dualist fails to recognise the significance of embodiment *tout court* and the materialist the significance of the required kind of embodiment. In fact, one cannot help feeling that the dualist has one over on the materialist in this respect - for is not the brain simply a thing, an anatomical part? "How significance and intentionality could come to dwell in molecular edifices or masses of cells is a thing that can never be made comprehensible, and here Cartesianism is right."<sup>92</sup>

The importance of Wittgenstein's analysis to my thesis is that it seems that he is working with a more integrative model of the human subject; one at odds with the general thrust of our philosophical tradition and its pervasive somatophobia. In this respect there is much common ground between Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty. As we saw in the last chapter, Strawson holds the concept of a 'person' to be logically primitive but actually has no way of articulating this primordially because he was still working largely within a framework of Cartesian categories; Strawson's 'person' is simply an entity constructed out of Cartesian materials. Thus his concept of a 'person' could only be, at best, an amalgam of material and psychological attributes, not a fundamental unity.<sup>93</sup> In contrast Wittgenstein, like Merleau-Ponty, tried to find a way around the divisive Cartesian understanding of the material and the mental by addressing the exclusionary and autonomous natures of these categories as well as the privileging of the mental over the material. However, for his part, Wittgenstein shows how our cognitive and sensory concepts are *intrinsically* tied to considerations of human bodily form and behaviour; both are tied together as terms of mutual implication. Here, again, we see the importance of the body's material structure and the fact that it is a set of capacities. The human subject, or person, in Wittgenstein's account is therefore a genuinely primitive concept and not some Frankenstein monster cobbled together out of second-hand parts.

I began this chapter by noting Wittgenstein's polemical and provocative remark in *Zettel* that the idea that thinking occurs completely within the enclosed space of the skull has something of the fascination of the occult. By insisting on this particular picture neuropsychiatrists and neurophilosophers establish themselves as the high-priests of the arcane mysteries of mind as thought and experience are thereby divorced from the discourse and the lives of living human beings. We become conceived of as homunculi; sitting alone looking out on the world from some indefinite point in brain space. We must

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92. Merleau-Ponty [1962]; *op. cit.*, p.351.

93. See Chapter 5, footnote 24.

resist this picture and resist the underlying temptation to marginalise the body and concentrate consciousness to a specific part of the whole person. We attribute consciousness to people *qua* paradigmatically embodied human beings. The idea that there is an 'essential person' which can be located in, or identified with, a specific part of the whole is an occult philosophy. Wittgenstein is surely right to insist that "The idea of the ego inhabiting a body [has] to be abolished."<sup>94</sup> It is amusing, not to say a little disturbing, to think that many of our hard-headed and scientifically respectable theories of mind may be motivated by a picture of human psychology no more sophisticated, and perhaps a great deal less so, than the folk-beliefs of peoples such as the Yoruba: that is, beliefs upon which the hard-headed scientist or philosopher looks down with disdain.

If I am correct in attributing an integrative model of the human subject to Wittgenstein, then this has other implications as well; specifically with regard to our conception of the human body. It is only with mild exaggeration that one may say that we only ever encounter the Cartesian body in a mortuary. In day to day life what we encounter are other people; we only really encounter their bodies *per se* in very particular circumstance such as medical examinations or autopsies. Keith Campbell writes that "your body is [...] what the undertakers bury when they bury you";<sup>95</sup> but this is not quite right and, once again, seems to construe the living human body as little more than an animated cadaver. As people are embodied entities, who express their 'inner' lives in bodily expression, perhaps it would be fair to say that in encountering them we *thereby* encounter their bodies; but this is a reversal of the traditional philosophical picture. On the traditional account we first encounter the body, construed as just another member of the general class of bodies that comprises the world, and then, through a contingently associated bodily form and expression, we encounter the person. Consciousness of another simply proceeds *via* an inference drawn on an analogy with bodily form and expression in my own case and how this happens to be related to my life as a subject of thought and experience. This is precisely the view Wittgenstein is at pains to attack.

On Wittgenstein's view, as I say, bodily form and behaviour are partly constitutive of our psychological concepts. But one could easily turn this around, in a way compatible with Wittgenstein's insights, and argue that psychological states are equally part of our concept of the human body. The living human body, *contra* Campbell, is not what the undertaker buries; that is a different entity, the corpse. Our conception of the living human body is not of an organism inhabited by a psyche but of something infused with psyche at its most

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94. L. Wittgenstein [1968]; "Notes for Lectures on 'Private Experience' and 'Sense-Data'", *Philosophical Review* 77, p.282.

95. K. Campbell [1970]; *Body and Mind* (University of Notre Dame Press), p.2.

primordial level. This both determines and is determined by our interaction with others: they are mutual and symbiotic. In other words, in turning Wittgenstein's argument around, I could argue that I do not perceive the psyche of another across his or her body, simply construed as a material thing, but that I perceive the living body across his or her psyche. This is not to say that the psyche is more important than the body, that would again be to privilege one term over the other. Better then to say that both are encountered simultaneously in encountering the living human person. Nonetheless, the body of another is not simply an object for me any more than my own body is simply an object for me. Body and psyche are mutual terms in a dialectical and interrelated way of conceptualising the human body and the human person and thus mind and body are not exclusionary or autonomous notions. Consequently, the human body is necessary for our understanding of mind; but it is equally true that mind is necessary for our understanding of the human body. Hence the human body is not simply one object amongst others in the world as Cartesianism insists, least of all is it something inert and dead, for, in a very real sense, the stance I adopt towards the living human body, including the body of another, is *an attitude towards a soul*. The picture of the human body which emerges from the work of the later Wittgenstein therefore contrasts sharply with the picture we explored in beginning of this thesis; summed up neatly in Ignatius Loyola's dictum '*perinde ac cadaver*' ('exactly as a corpse'). Again, as Wittgenstein himself says;

My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul. [...] If the picture of thought in the head can force itself upon us, then why not much more that of thought in the soul? The human body is the best picture of the human soul.<sup>96</sup>

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96. L. Wittgenstein [1953]; *op. cit.*, IIiv, p.178.

## 7. Concluding Remarks

As I said at the beginning, this thesis has been essentially programmatic. In arguing for a dialectical account of human embodiment, in which the human body is seen as both a materiality and as a set of capacities, much more needs to be said about the exact nature of the dialectic. To make sense of our experience, I have argued that both conceptions play an integrated and indispensable rôle. Therefore, we do not want to replace one divisive account of embodiment with another by substituting the mind-body problem for a body-body problem. Despite the undoubted value of his analysis to the project of reappraising our inherited conception of the body, this was the problem with Merleau-Ponty's treatment of the issue. By focusing narrowly on the body's intentional characteristics, Merleau-Ponty was led to posit the body itself as a 'natural subject' or a 'natural "I"'; this body being understood by him to be a 'phenomenal body', an anonymous body subject revealed in perception and action. This body was conceived as fundamental, the objective body being conceived of as something derivative and standing in opposition to this. But, as I have shown, we cannot account in this way for experience or the fact that experience has meaning for us; to do this, due consideration has to be given to both aspects of embodiment. A coincidence therefore has to be effected between the intentional characteristics of the body as it is lived and the non-intentional characteristics of the objective body which does not amount to a naturalising of the intentional in the form of a reduction.

This is obviously no easy task. What was suggested, in different ways, by the discussions in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 was that such a coincidence might be effected through our capacities as embodied agents. In agency the human body is revealed as an intimate combination of form and function where neither has conceptual priority. In a different but complementary way, this was something that emerged in the discussion in Chapter 6. Here we concentrated on the human body as expressive and, following Wittgenstein's lead, suggested that considerations of bodily form and behaviour are partly constitutive of our psychological discourse and thus paradigmatically ground our practices for the

ascription of thought and experience. Undoubtedly, there is much more that could be said in both areas and the notions of agency and expression in relation to the human body usefully pursued. However, I wish to end this thesis by suggesting another way in which this investigation could be developed.

Early on it was noted how Descartes' exclusionary bifurcation of body and mind was premised upon epistemic considerations and his desire to provide an epistemology adequate enough to ground a universal science based on reason. This has led to a peculiar bias in the theory of knowledge which has ignored, or has assumed as unimportant, the rôle played by the body in human cognition. In a way, as I suggested in Chapter 1, this has been a working through of Plato's prejudices about the body and his dichotomy between worldly *doxa* and super-worldly *episteme*. True knowledge has been seen to be essentially asomatic and construed in terms of the operations of the mind alone; as if, as I have said before, that people who engage in cognitive and perceptual activities do so completely divorced from any bodily activity and concerns. Consequently, successive epistemologies have concentrated on the *cogitatio*; abstracted cognitive and perceptual objects of knowledge (e.g. ideas, beliefs, opinions, sense-perceptions, sense-data *etc.*), themselves construed as an autonomous mental residue left over after disengagement with the body. Therefore Heidegger was surely right, in this limited sense, to point to the complementary relationship of the two notions of 'eternal truth' and the 'idealised absolute subject'.<sup>1</sup>

By placing the body at the centre of our understanding rather than at the periphery, is it possible to offer a new ontology of knowledge with a different point of departure? In other words, is it possible to reverse the dynamic of Descartes' project and, by approaching epistemology *via* metaphysics, arrive at a new understanding of knowledge? What this would mean is developing a somatic basis for human knowledge in which the body is not seen simply as a conduit between an 'external' world and an 'inner' mind construed as a passive and detached spectator consciousness. The consequence of such a manoeuvre would be to 'situate' human knowledge and render explicit its essentially contextual character. This, of course, is easy enough to say; but what would such an epistemology look like? To get an inkling of this we might turn to Michael Polanyi's theory of tacit knowledge and the distinctions upon which it rests.<sup>2</sup> The first of these distinctions, and in many ways the most fundamental, concerns that between what Polanyi calls 'focal' and 'subsidiary' awareness. In any given cognitive situation the subject will be attending directly to certain factors and will thus be 'focally' aware of them. However, Polanyi also suggests that there will be

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1. Heidegger [1962]; *Being and Time* (trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson) (Basil Blackwell) pp.48-49 & 229 (original pagination). See also Chapter 1, §1.2.

2. see also Chapter 3, §3.1 and Chapter 4, §4.1.

other factors of which the subject will be aware even though he or she is not focusing on them; he or she will only be aware of them in a 'subsidiary' fashion. I have illustrated this phenomenon before with the example of reading; in reading the physical shape of the words on the page are subsidiary to the meanings they reveal - the reader attends *to* the meaning by attending *from* the physical symbols which themselves recede from focal awareness. Polanyi argues that we comprehend something, recognise the whole by 'interiorising' its parts and so attend from these to their joint meaning; a process he calls 'indwelling'.<sup>3</sup>

What is clear is that the distinction, being contextual, is largely a relative distinction: I may redirect my attention so that something of which I am only aware in a subsidiary fashion one moment may become something of which I am focally aware the next, and *vice versa*. Polanyi's central claim is that the recognition of any object or meaning at the centre of my primary attention or 'focal awareness' is *always* dependent upon our use of subsidiary clues to which we are not directly attending. As I have noted before, Polanyi also draws a distinction within the sphere of the subsidiary; between clues which may be 'subliminal' (*i.e.* never observable in themselves) and those which are 'marginal' (*i.e.* those of which I may become focally aware).<sup>4</sup> This is why I said that the distinction is "largely" a relative one; depending on the factors concerned it may well be absolute. The important epistemological point here is that cognition and knowledge are contextual: they are determined by both the focal and the subsidiary. In order to 'attend to' something one must have a position from which one 'attends from'. Therefore, knowledge cannot be understood in terms of that of which we are focally aware; yet, in concentrating on the *cogitatio*, this is what traditional epistemology appears to assume.

Complementary to the first distinction is a second between conceptual and bodily activity. Traditional epistemology might consider judgement to pertain solely to the first of these. In Chapter 6 we saw how bodily activity and behaviour is part of our concepts of thought and action and this applies equally to judgement: what is left over after we subtract the notion from the possibility of

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3. M. Polanyi [1969]; "On Body and Mind", *The New Scholasticism* 43, p.199.

4. M. Polanyi [1966a]; "The Logic of Tacit Inference", *Philosophy* 41, p.2-3. Given that some clues are 'subliminal', it is not clear why Polanyi insists on speaking in terms of *awareness*. It is clear from his examples that he did not regard this as synonymous with *consciousness* (*e.g.* the violinist focussing on the score and not on his or her fingering); but it seems fairly clear that it is simply inappropriate to speak of awareness at all with respect to many factors which form part of the subsidiary (*e.g.* bodily states such as neurological processes). Nevertheless, it appears this was not something on which he was prepared to compromise. See M. Grene [1977]; "Tacit Knowing: Grounds for a Revolution in Philosophy", *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 8, p.170. One may also wonder why he insists on speaking of different types of *knowledge*. I do not think it is essential to his insights that we are 'aware' of subliminal clues or that, in some sense, these are 'known' to us. Perhaps the insights of the later Wittgenstein, who also contextualised human knowledge, could be brought productively to bear on Polanyi's analysis.



acting on its basis? There must be the possibility of judgement translating into bodily activity if the ascription of judgement is to gain a foothold at all. To a considerable extent the converse also holds: bodily activity, at least intentional bodily activity, always involves judgement. The two are not seen as exclusionary or autonomous but as each involving the other. The majority of human behaviour therefore involves an intimate unity of both cognitive and non-cognitive activity. Relating this distinction to the first gives us a grasp on Polanyi's distinction between 'explicit' and 'tacit' knowledge: when the conceptual and the focal come together, the result is explicit knowledge; when the subsidiary and the bodily are related, the result is tacit knowledge. As all 'awareness' and 'activity' is a mixture of both its elements, all knowledge is thus comprised of both the explicit and the tacit. In other words, just as, in Gestalt Psychology, the figure is always presented against a ground (without which it could not be presented at all), there is always implicit or tacit knowledge presupposed in any so-called explicit knowledge.

As examples of tacit knowledge Polanyi often refers to bodily and perceptual skills and we saw in Chapter 4 how the 'from-to' structure of Polanyi's analysis features as an integral part of the body's perceptual involvement with the world. What Polanyi refers to as 'indwelling' is exemplified in these skills; indeed, he often uses our use of our bodies in perception as a way of explicating by analogy this difficult notion. The importance of Polanyi's theory is that it contextualises human knowledge by giving a fundamental rôle to the body in all human cognitivity. Not only is tacit knowledge involved in all explicit knowledge but, again in parallel with the insights of Gestalt Psychology, there could not be explicit knowledge without it. In this sense, then, it can be construed to be a more fundamental form of knowledge and logically prior to explicit knowledge. Yet an interesting peculiarity of Polanyi's position is that he himself seems to have failed to recognise the importance of human embodiment and human activity as a framework for human cognition. Despite the fact that the general thrust of his analysis demands a non-divisive account of embodiment, he appears to have thought that his work defended Descartes' conception of the mind's separation from the body.<sup>5</sup>

Here then is a rich seam to be mined in a further examination of a dialectical account of human embodiment. *Ex hypothesi*, all knowledge takes place in a context of embodied relationships so that 'to know' means acquiring knowledge through one's bodily participation in the world; knowledge is essentially embodied. The thesis is not without its difficulties, however. If the result of this investigation is to 'contextualise' or 'situate' all human cognitivity,

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5. See M. Grene [1977]; *op. cit.*, pp.169-170.

how do we accomplish a somatic understanding of human knowledge without this collapsing into a debilitating relativity? Traditional epistemology attempted to attain a 'pure' conception of knowledge by eliminating all reference to the bodily subject and his or her situation. One of the problems with this is that it tends to construe knowledge, in the same way as it construes perception, as an essentially passive affair; knowledge is something which happens to a receptive subject as a result of exposure to experience. On the other hand a somatic epistemology recognises knowledge as a product of the interaction of the knowing subject and what is known and that knowledge itself can be seen as a form of activity. Nonetheless, if such an epistemology thoroughly contextualises knowledge, how does it avoid the trap of relativity? This is where the challenge lies; though, perhaps, it can begin to address this quandary by recognising the body in the dialectical manner I have suggested throughout this thesis.

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