

8. Human bodies and human beings

'Bodies'

My aim, in stressing the importance of the bodily in our relations with others, has been to challenge Descartes' contrast between the real person and her body. Now suppose that, wishing to reject Descartes' image of the 'real person' as an immaterial mind or soul that is somehow lodged within a mechanical body, we insist that: 'The real person just *is* the body'. Many, I suspect, will feel that such a conclusion would, in some sense, be seriously degrading: that to speak in those terms is to imply that a person is something less than we had previously supposed it to be.¹ We might add that, so long as we are left with this sense we will be tempted to slide back to images of the *real* person as something non-bodily that has its seat in the body.

Why should we – or, at any rate, some – feel the claim that 'The real person just *is* the body' to be degrading? In asking that question I am not challenging the suggestion that the proposal *is* degrading. I am, rather, attempting to dig a little below the feeling: to see what underlies it.

I would like you, with this question in mind, to read a further paragraph from an article that we looked at when considering Descartes' dreaming argument: the paragraph running from page 123 to 124 in the extract from John Cook's article that is included as a reading in week 2. Cook reminds us here of various ways in which the word 'body' is actually used in our everyday talk about people. You might like to think of some other examples of your own. In addition to this, when you have read this passage, make a note of your answer to the question: what does Cook think is mistaken in the claim that Descartes was *only* a body?

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Here are two more examples that I would like to add to Cook's list. Suppose that I say of one person's thought about another: 'He is only interested in her body'. We would normally find the implications of such a remark pretty clear: depending on the context, it is either lust or he's a surgeon. The notion of 'the body' as it appears here is tied up with either, on the one hand, sex, or, on the other, doctors. To express this in terms that we have encountered earlier in this module: an interest in 'her body' is an interest bound up with one or another of sin or science.

My second example is not wholly unconnected. Suppose that a man says of a woman: 'She has a wonderful body'. Do we learn anything from this about what he thinks of her *face*? I am inclined to say that we do not. The word 'body', in this remark, signals fairly unambiguously that he is commenting only on the portion of her from the neck down; and while he may not actually be saying that her face is unattractive, we will not be at all surprised to learn that that is his view.² (I am inclined to say that a parallel point applies to Cook's example: 'His body was covered with mosquito bites'. I am inclined – though

¹ As Descartes implies of non-human animals when he insists that they are simply machines.

² His remark does, perhaps, contrast in an interesting way with the words: 'She is beautiful'. In this case, he is unambiguously speaking of her face; and - I am inclined to say, though there may be room for disagreement here - he is explicitly not committing himself to any views on her *body*: that is, on the portion from the neck down.

only inclined – to say that this remark explicitly leaves open the question of the condition of his face.)

‘His body was covered with mosquito bites’; ‘His body was found at the bottom of the cliff’; ‘He has a strong body but no brains’; ‘He is only interested in her body’; ‘She has a wonderful body’. Perhaps you thought of other examples, of different kinds. They are a mixed bag. I believe, however, that there may be interesting connections between them.

Consider, for example, the last two examples on my list. I suggested that if someone says of another ‘He is only interested in her body’ there is a pretty clear implication that it is either lust or he’s a surgeon. Now consider the first of these possibilities. It might be said, not, I think, *totally* unfairly, that lust is a form of interest that focuses on the other from the neck down. Or rather, while that is no doubt a little unfair on lust in general, it is, I suspect, fair on forms of unfocused sexual desire that are quite widely regarded as unambiguous vice. What is found, by many, particularly repellent is a physical desire for another that is quite indifferent to the other’s *face*. We feel that I am not really interested in *her* – I am not interested in her *as a person* – if I am wholly indifferent to her face, and to what is to be seen in it. While the connection between an interest in *her* and a focusing of attention on the face has a number of dimensions, I will note just two. First, it is generally in the other’s *face* that her feelings are to be seen most clearly (if they are to be seen at all); and second, the face – along, perhaps, with something that comes from it: the voice – is overwhelmingly the most significant factor in our normal recognition of *who* this person is.

My point, I should stress, is not that all interest in another that has a sexual dimension is an interest that bypasses the face. That would, I believe, be an absurd suggestion; and one that would reflect a seriously distorted and degrading understanding of sex: an understanding that views a sexual interest as necessarily at odds with an interest in *the person*. My point is, rather, that where a sexual interest takes a form that can be characterized by the words ‘He’s only interested in her body’ – with their connotations of a complete lack of interest in *her* – there is a strong connection with the idea of ‘the body’ as the portion of the person from the neck down: with, that is, the idea of ‘the body’ that I suggested we find in the expression ‘She has a wonderful body’.

That was lust. What about the way in which we might say of a particular doctor that he is ‘only interested in her body’? Does that have connections with the idea of ‘the body’ as the person from the neck down? I think there may be connections: and, perhaps, they are of at least two distinct kinds. First, we may be inclined to think of our doctors as often dealing with our bodily mechanics in a way that abstracts from any interest in the *person*; an interest in the *person* being linked, as before, with paying attention to her *face*: to the anxiety, pain, or relief, for example, that is to be seen in it; and to the fact that this interesting rash is a rash on the body of Mary Jones and not Elspeth McDonald. And second, we may feel that doctors are moving beyond their proper sphere of bodily mechanics when they start probing around inside a person’s head.³

Here is one final observation on the idea of ‘the body’ as the person from the neck down. Consider: ‘His body was found at the bottom of the cliff’. John Cook suggests that this is equivalent to: ‘He was found dead at the bottom of the cliff’. But that does not seem to me to be quite right. For we could, I think, say the first, but not second, of these

³ I say that we *may* feel these things. We also may not. In particular, we will, if we are lucky, encounter doctors of whom we can say that they are interested in *the person*.

if the corpse was headless. As we might put it: this is still a *person*, even if a dead one, so long as he has a head. Once the head goes, what we have left is '*just a body*'.

While there is, I am sure, room for further fascinating exploration of the colloquial connotations of the word 'body', and of the connections between them, we must leave it at that for now. Now it will be clear that in speaking of these as 'colloquial connotations' I do not at all mean to suggest that they are, in some way, insignificant. In exploring these connotations we may discover aspects of our thought about and relations with others that are readily overlooked in our more abstract philosophical reflections. With that, proper attention to such connotations is, I believe, crucial to seeing our way clear of the distorting pictures that have dominated so much philosophical thinking about human beings. For the word 'body' just does feature in our thought and speech in a range of quite particular ways; and if we employ that word in formulating our position we cannot simply wish away all of those aspects of its meaning – all of those connotations – that we want to leave behind if we say: 'The real person just is the body'. There is a difference between being interested in, or admiring, a person and being interested in, or admiring, his or her body. And, while Descartes' account of the person may give us quite the wrong picture of the kind of difference that is, if, in reaction to this, we simply ignore, or deny, the differences, we may find that we have thrown out the baby with the bathwater.

Is the *real* person the mind? Is the *real* person the body? The real person, Wittgenstein suggests, is the human being. Talk about a person's 'mind' is talk about certain qualities of the human being: qualities relating to, among other things, her thoughts (especially those that she does not openly express), and her abilities in certain areas – for example, in mathematics, chess, history, philosophy, and so on. Talk about a person's 'body' is talk about certain other qualities of the human being: qualities relating to, among other things, her physical strength and her physical form (at least from the neck down.) We do not, then, have two things here – the mind and the body – whose relations to each other the philosopher or scientist can investigate. We have one thing – the human being – that has a diverse range of features in which one might be interested: interested in one of the many different ways in which one human being can take an interest in another.

Is emotion a bodily condition?

Descartes, you will remember, insists that an emotion is a condition of the mind. Now we can ask: what, on Descartes' view, is the relation between emotion and the body? We might say that, given his overall picture of the relation between mind and body, there is a two-way relation between emotion and the body. There is, on the one hand, the *dependence* of an emotion on the body, and, on the other, the *effects* of the emotion on the body. In these terms, we can say that, for Descartes, an emotion is a condition of the mind that, on the one hand, is strongly dependent on physical processes within the body, and, on the other, itself has little impact on bodily behaviour. Now it is these facts that allowed me to say that, while his overall judgement on emotion is pretty negative, the biggest villain in Descartes' plot is *the body*. For it is physical processes within the body that cause and maintain the emotion that I feel on a particular occasion, making it so resistant to my control; and it is these same physical processes – *not* the feeling of, for example, fear – that leads the body to act as it does: perhaps fleeing when reason tells me that the best thing to do is stand still.

From the perspective of Wittgenstein's approach to these issues things look rather different. I would like you now to read another section of his writings:

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* 281-7

281. "But doesn't what you say come to this: that there is no pain, for example, without *pain-behaviour*?"--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; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious.

282. "But in a fairy tale the pot too can see and hear!" (Certainly; but it *can* also talk.)

"But the fairy tale only invents what is not the case: it does not talk *nonsense*."--It is not as simple as that. Is it false or nonsensical to say that a pot talks? Have we a clear picture of the circumstances in which we should say of a pot that it talked? (Even a nonsense-poem is not nonsense in the same way as the babbling of a child.)

We do indeed say of an inanimate thing that it is in pain: when playing with dolls for example. But this use of the concept of pain is a secondary one. Imagine a case in which people ascribed pain *only* to inanimate things; pitied *only* dolls! (When children play at trains their game is connected with their knowledge of trains. It would nevertheless be possible for the children of a tribe unacquainted with trains to learn this game from others, and to play it without knowing that it was copied from anything. One might say that the game did not make the same *sense* to them as to us.)

283. What gives us *so much as the idea* that living beings, things, can feel?

Is it that my education has led me to it by drawing my attention to feelings in myself, and now I transfer the idea to objects outside myself? That I recognize that there is something there (in me) which I can call "pain" without getting into conflict with the way other people use this word?--I do not transfer my idea to stones, plants, etc.

Couldn't I imagine having frightful pains and turning to stone while they lasted? Well, how do I know, if I shut my eyes, whether I have not turned into a stone? And if that has happened, in what sense will *the stone* have the pains? In what sense will they be ascribable to the stone? And why need the pain have a bearer at all here?!

And can one say of the stone that it has a soul and *that* is what has the pain? What has a soul, or pain, to do with a stone?

Only of what behaves like a human being can one say that it *has* pains.

For one has to say it of a body, or, if you like of a soul which some body *has*. And how can a body *have* a soul?

284. 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 a wriggling fly and at once these difficulties vanish and pain seems able to get a foothold here, where before everything was, so to speak, too smooth for it.

And so, too, a corpse seems to us quite inaccessible to pain.--Our attitude to what is alive and to what is dead, is not the same. All our reactions are different.--If anyone says: "That cannot simply come from the fact that a living thing moves about in such-

and-such a way and a dead one not", then I want to intimate to him that this is a case of the transition 'from quantity to quality'.

285. Think of the recognition of *facial expressions*. Or of the description of facial expressions--which does not consist in giving the measurements of the face! Think, too, how one can imitate a man's face without seeing one's own in a mirror.

286. But isn't it absurd to say of a *body* that it has pain?--And why does one feel an absurdity in that? In what sense is it true that my hand does not feel pain, but I in my hand?

What sort of issue is: Is it the *body* that feels pain?--How is it to be decided? What makes it plausible to say that it is *not* the body?--Well, something like this: if someone has a pain in his hand, then the hand does not say so (unless it writes it) and one does not comfort the hand, but the sufferer: one looks into his face.

287. How am I filled with pity *for this man*? How does it come out what the object of my pity is? (Pity, one may say, is a form of conviction that someone else is in pain.)

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While there are things in these paragraphs that, I suspect, will have struck you as pretty obscure, there are also, I hope, things that you now feel moderately comfortable with. The paragraph that I want to highlight at this point is the first of those you have just read. Wittgenstein insists here that his fundamental point is that the person – that which has sensations, sees, and so on – is the *human being*. As we can also express this, what we pity, love, envy, and so on is not a non-material mind that we suppose to be lodged inside this thing that we see; it is the human being: the creature of flesh and blood, that is 6' tall, has arms, legs, a face, and so on. In contrast with Descartes, then, Wittgenstein suggests that an emotion is a condition of the *human being*. It is the human being – not a non-material mind or soul lodged within it – that is angry, afraid, depressed, or in love.

In articulating Descartes' view of emotion, I spoke of a potential two-way relation between emotion and the body. I want, now, to consider, these in turn.

(i) The expression of emotion

The force of Wittgenstein's proposal lies, in part, in the way in which he understands the relation between an emotion and its expression in human behaviour. In his paper 'Feeling and Expression' Stuart Hampshire discusses this relation in broadly Wittgensteinian terms. I would like you to read this now.

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I hope you felt, as I do, that this is a rich and sensitive paper. In my comments on it I will highlight just two of the many suggestive points that it contains. First, noting, as we did in section 4, that Descartes' picture of the mind leaves us with a serious problem about how the feelings of another can ever be validly inferred from her observed body, Hampshire remarks: 'The picture from which this problem arises is of feelings and states

of mind, which are *first* distinguished and identified by the subject as feelings of certain kinds, and which are then *independently* found to have typical manifestations in behaviour' (81). In opposition to this picture Hampshire argues that our identification of what someone is feeling as 'anger' or 'fear' itself involves a reference to how she is inclined to behave. As we might put this: grasping what anger *is* – grasping the meaning of the word 'anger' – itself involves recognising the kinds of way in which one who is angry is inclined to behave. Thus, while there is in practice often room for doubt about whether or not another is angry, there is no room for a *general* concern about how one is to tell on the basis of another's behaviour that she is angry. In understanding what anger is I understand that it is a state that is characteristically manifested in, for example, certain facial contortions, in a tendency to shout, to attack, and so on.

The second point I want to highlight is this. Hampshire suggests that there is an important contrast between different ways in which a person's feelings may find expression in her 'behaviour'; or, as he prefers to express this, he suggests that there is an important contrast between *expression* and *behaviour* – where 'behaviour' is understood as 'effective actions performed', or 'making changes in the world'. Now in so far as Descartes makes any reference to the bodily manifestation of emotion his emphasis is exclusively on *behaviour* in this sense. As I expressed his view: an emotion reinforces, by leading the soul to want, useful actions, such as (in the case of fear) running away from dangerous animals. Hampshire's suggestion is that this emphasis on effective action generates a seriously lopsided picture of the place of emotion in our lives. Bodily *expression* is equally fundamental to our understanding of emotion and to the importance that the emotions of others have in my life. Think, for example, of the way in which I may be moved by what I see in the other's face: by the anger or the jealousy that I see there. Think too of the way in which, if asked to mimic anger or fear, or to draw a man who is angry or afraid, facial expression may be central to my representation. As I expressed it earlier: it is generally in the other's *face* that her feelings are to be seen most clearly (if they are to be seen at all).

Is emotion a condition of the mind or of the body? How, in the light of the above considerations, do you think we should answer this question?

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Your answer to that question will have depended on just how impressed you are by the Wittgensteinian considerations that I have been presenting. My answer would be along the following lines. I would say, first, that the question itself contains a false picture of the options. Emotion, as I expressed it above, is a condition of the *human being*. And to put a little more flesh on that answer we will need to rehearse the ways, suggested above, in which our understanding of a particular kind of emotion – our understanding of what fear, anger, love, and so on, are – is bound up with our understanding of the ways in which that emotion is characteristically expressed in human 'bodily' behaviour.

(ii) Emotions and bodily chemistry

I suggested that, given Descartes' overall picture of the relation between mind and body, there is a potential two-way relation between emotion and the body: there is, on the one hand, the *dependence* of an emotion on the body, and, on the other, the *effects* of the

emotion on the body. We have been focusing on the second of these relations: as I would prefer to put it, on the ways in which emotions are *expressed in* bodily behaviour. I want to turn briefly now to the first of these relations. You will remember that Descartes suggests that an emotion is a condition of the mind that is strongly *dependent on* physical processes within the body: it is physical processes within the body that cause and maintain the fear, for example, that I feel on a particular occasion, making it so resistant to my control. Today it is more common to suggest that an emotion simply *is* a certain bodily condition: in the sense that my love or fear simply is a certain condition of my brain. What should we make of such proposals?

It is helpful to start by reflecting on the way in which we sometimes think of a *particular* emotion, or mood, that a person is experiencing – the depression, for example, that he is now undergoing, or his passionate feelings for this woman – as something that is, as we might put it, down to his brain chemistry. Expressing the matter in terms such as these perhaps leaves open the question of whether (as on many modern views) the emotion or mood just *is* a condition of his brain or whether (as on Descartes' view) it is something distinct from, but utterly *dependent on*, a physical condition. Either way, the implication, I take it, is that his state is one to be thought of and treated in a certain way. *He* is not responsible for his state; his brain chemistry is. Thus, he is not to be blamed for being carried away in the way that he is; and, with that, we should not expect him to be able to reason himself out of his condition by reflecting on the fact that his circumstances are not really so dreadful, or on the fact that the woman he has fallen for is not really so wonderful. It is all down to his brain; and that is to say, his unfortunate (if that is what it is) condition is one to be *treated*: much as any other bodily condition – for example, a cold, or a broken leg – is something to be treated. The problem is, as we might say, a 'medical' one: one to be approached, perhaps, with drugs or brain surgery rather than reasoning, urgings to pull himself together, or spiritual guidance.

These ways of thinking of someone's emotional condition are very different from other ways in which we sometimes think of what someone is feeling. Thus, we may, on a particular occasion, think of somebody's anger or jealousy as reflecting a failing in *him*. He shouldn't feel as angry as he does about what happened on his drive to Lampeter; and he would not do so had he thought more clearly about what happened, or had he not allowed his feelings to be coloured, quite unreasonably, by the fact that, for example, it was a *woman* who overtook him. What he needs is not, perhaps, sympathy and brain surgery, but, rather, a good talking to.

I hope that this picture of two contrasting ways of thinking of an emotion or mood is recognisable – even if painted in slightly black and white terms. I am suggesting that in daily life our thought about a particular emotion that someone is undergoing may approximate to one or the other of these patterns: we may think of it, on the one hand, as 'down to him', or, on the other, as 'down to his brain' – or, more broadly, his body.

How do we – how *should* we – decide in a particular case whether an emotion is, in this sense, down to the person or down to his body? Here is one proposal that might be made: if a particular emotional state is responsive to drugs – that is, to something that acts on the body – then it is clearly one that we should think of as essentially a bodily condition. Would that be an appropriate test? I would like you to make a note of any thoughts that you have on this.

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I don't think it would be. One way to bring this out is by considering analogies such as the following:

1. Suppose that when we remove a particular concrete pillar from the base of a building it collapses. It would not follow that this pillar had been what was supporting the building. While it would no doubt follow that the pillar was playing *some* role in supporting the building we would have no grounds for concluding that it was *this* pillar, as opposed to any of the others, that was doing the work.
2. Suppose that we manage to quell an unruly mob by picking out, and very publicly roughing up, one of its number. It would hardly follow that *he* can be held responsible for the riot. In this case it is not even clear that it would follow that he is *partially* responsible for the riot. The fact that roughing him up stops the riot is quite consistent with the possibility that he played no role at all in instigating it.

While there are, no doubt, all kinds of important differences between these cases and that of the curing of an emotional condition by drugs, the examples do, I think, demonstrate that the connection between what can *change* a situation and what *produces* and *sustains* it is not a simple and direct one. Thus, it does not follow immediately from the fact that an emotional state is responsive to treatment by drugs that it itself was a bodily condition, or that it was a bodily condition that was doing the work in producing and sustaining it.

Here is an alternative proposal that starts from, so to speak, the other end. Sometimes a person's emotional state is responsive to reason and sometimes it is not. For example, the highs and lows in the moods that we all undergo often, very roughly, follow ups and downs in our circumstances that give some reason for joy or gloom. Sometimes, however, mood swings, or long periods of depression, seem to be totally disconnected from any circumstances that could provide reasons for them. Closely linked with that, sometimes where we feel that a person's emotional state is out of line with his circumstances it is possible to reason with him in a way that has some impact on his condition: for example, when we draw his attention to the fact that the other did not mean to be rude, or to the fact that *he* treated *her* just as badly last week, his anger is calmed. In contrast with such cases, however, a person's emotion is sometimes quite unresponsive to reasoned talk; and, we might add, to his own reflections on the foolishness of what he is feeling.

The proposal, now, is this. If someone's emotional state is responsive to reason we should think of it as being 'down to him'. If it is quite *unresponsive* to reason we should think of it as being, or as being 'down to', a condition of his body. As we can put this, a particular emotional state is something to be treated as a *medical* condition – a condition of the body that may call for intervention through surgery or drugs – where attempts to treat it as a condition for which *he* is responsible fail.

What do you think of this proposal?

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While it no doubt stands in need of a good bit of work, I am inclined to say that this proposal is on the right lines. If you disagree, you should try to articulate your reasons as clearly as possible.

Earlier in this section I suggested that we should not think of the contrast between being interested in a person and being interested in his body as a contrast between being interested in one thing and being interested in another⁴; we should think of it, rather, as a contrast between two ways of being interested in *one* thing: this human being. And, perhaps in slightly crude and sweeping terms, I characterised an interest in his body in terms of one or another of lust or doctors. Parallel to this, we have two ways of thinking of an angry, jealous, or depressed human being. To think of his anger or depression as a bodily condition (or, more broadly, as ‘down to his body’) is to think of it as something to be treated in a certain way: as something to be approached in the spirit of the doctor. The appropriate way to engage with his mood is through ‘internal probing of his body’ – through drugs and scalpels – rather than through relating to *the person* – through, for example, reasoning or rebuke. And my suggestion has been that the latter is the ‘default condition’: that is to say, we are to relate to the other in her anger or depression as a *person* whenever this is possible. Treating her emotion or mood as being a bodily condition, or as ‘down to her body’, is a position we can appropriately fall back to when the other approach fails. To suggest, in general terms, that emotion is a condition of, or is down to, the body is to suggest that a person’s emotion is always appropriately engaged with through ‘internal probing of his body’; and, on the face of it, there is no reason whatever to accept that.

Conclusion

The above remarks deal with a large and complex area in brief and schematic terms. My aim has been simply to give some indication of the particular place that the notion of ‘the body’ may have in our thinking about people. Paying proper attention to this may help to bring out why it is extremely unhelpful to respond to Descartes’ dualism of ‘mind’ and ‘body’ by suggesting that ‘A person just is her body’; with that, it may help to bring out where the real issues lie when debates about our ‘bodily’ nature arise.

Reading

I discuss the contrast between the face and ‘the body’ in my paper ‘The Mind, the Brain and the Face’, and the importance of the notion of a human being in chapter 7 of my book *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind*. Both discussions draw heavily on Wittgenstein. On the latter point see also Ilham Dilman *Love and Human Separateness* and Ben Tilghman *Wittgenstein, Ethics and Aesthetics: The View From Eternity*, chapter 5. The *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* – on the internet at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/> - has a detailed entry on ‘Emotion’, with a particularly helpful final section: ‘Summary and Guide to the Recent Literature’. Of the books listed in that guide Patricia Greenspan’s *Emotions and Reasons: an Inquiry into Emotional Justification* can be recommended for its stress on the bodily component of emotions.

9. Home and dry?

⁴ I set to one side here my suggestion that we sometimes think of ‘the body’ as the person from the neck down.

A range of negative attitudes towards our bodily nature has, I have suggested, led to confused pictures of the body: pictures in which the body is understood as an alien and threatening force that lies alongside, but is quite distinct from, the real *person* - this being something that *inhabits*, or is trapped within, the body. While the pull of those negative attitudes may be much weaker today than they have been in previous generations, one must always be careful not to underestimate the power of the images that one is resisting. Suspicion of the bodily comes in a range of different forms, and it would, I think, be a mistake to consider it simply a delusion of previous ages. I will mention briefly some ways in which its grip may still be strongly felt.

Human beings are vulnerable in the sense that, being bodily creatures, we are readily damaged by external physical forces. The damage can be of a form such as to threaten some of the centrally important ways of relating to another that I stressed in the section on 'Bodily contact'. Damage to the face is the most obvious example of what I have in mind: my interactions with another must be significantly affected by, for example, the fact that her play of facial expression is totally undermined by paralysis. The loss, deformation or paralysis of other parts of the body could, however, have similar, if less dramatic, implications.

The contrast between a person and 'her body' may come to the fore in our normal thought in contexts of this kind; as it does in those related cases in which we gradually come to realise that within the body, crippled in some way from birth, there is a human being with a rich inner life that is struggling to find expression. Now it might seem that to grant to the human form the kind of importance that I have been discussing is to remove the possibility of making this vitally important contrast. It will be agreed, of course, that in practice this kind of bodily damage is desperately distressing: in that sense the human form *does* play a very important role in our relationships. But does not a consideration of this kind of case make it obvious that we must think of that feature of our thought as something to be transcended? As we can put this: does it not bring out that there are powerful reasons for striving to overcome the ways of relating to others in which the body has such a fundamental place?⁵

Such suggestions may be closely related to others. We must, it might plausibly be argued, leave room for the crucial idea that, while they come in a range of radically different bodily forms, the most important thing about each of us is something that is shared by all human beings. I take it that the notion of 'the soul' is, at least in part, an articulation of that idea. Now if we say, with Wittgenstein, that the human body is the best picture of the human soul, we might seem to be committed to the conclusion that some souls are a good bit more beautiful than others. That concern may be closely linked with the way in which we do, in practice, often fail, as Wittgenstein puts it, to see the humanity in another. For example, perhaps I am incapable of seeing deep anguish in the faces of members of another race, or a smile that can warm me as smiles of members of

1 Those 'powerful reasons' might be presented in different lights. We might think of them as involving an ethical demand on us. Alternatively, we might think of them as a piece of sound practical advice: if you want to avoid the suffering that will come with damage or aging in the bodies of those you love, relate to them in ways such that fine features of their bodily form are not of central importance. For a marvellous discussion of this kind of approach in the context of Plato's thought, see chapters 5 and 6 of Martha Nussbaum's *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge University Press, 1986)

my own race can. It may be tempting to describe such cases in this way: while the other's bodily features strike me as coarse, or revolting, I must transcend that reaction and remember that this is a person. Reflection on such points may, in this way, draw us back to the tradition that insists on Descartes' radical distinction between a person and her body

I do not, then, want to leave an impression that I believe that what drives us in that direction are either woefully outdated moral views or shallow confusion. On the other hand, I do think it important that we find alternative ways of acknowledging the kind of difficulties in our relations with others on which I have just touched. I would suggest, very roughly, that we might try approaching the matter in the following terms: if we cannot see a friendly smile in these unfamiliar facial features, what is needed is not so much that we remember that what is important is what lies behind the face as opposed to anything that is to be seen in it. Our problem is, rather, a failure in *perception*: a failure to see the face properly.

That, however, is no more than an indication of a possible line of development. My aim in this section has simply been to suggest that the answer to the question that forms its title is: no. The struggle to think clearly about our bodily nature is an ongoing one. In the following two sections, which form the final part of this module, we will be considering another dimension of that ongoing struggle.