



RICHARD TAYLOR

# TIME AND CAUSE

*Essays Presented to Richard Taylor*

*Edited by*

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PHILOSOPHERS AND THE WORDS 'HUMAN BODY'

Sing, O Goddess, the ruinous anger of Achilles . . . ,  
which . . . sent too soon to Hades the *psuchai* of many  
mighty heroes, and made the heroes themselves the  
food of dogs and carrion birds . . .

*Iliad* 1. 1–5

J. L. Austin once began a paper by listing specimens of sense and specimens of nonsense. I shall do the same.

SPECIMENS OF SENSE

- (1) His doctor told him he must not go on abusing his body that way.
- (2) Anatomy is the study of the structure of the human body.
- (3) Alice told James she hungered for his body.
- (4) His body was covered with scars.
- (5) The force of the explosion had nearly torn his limbs from his body.
- (6) A brain might be removed from one body and implanted in another.
- (7) The undertaker laid out Alfred's body.
- (8) I believe in the Resurrection of the Body . . .

SPECIMENS OF NONSENSE

- (A) A person is [is not] identical with his body.
- (B) It is reasonable for each of us to believe that thoughts and feelings are associated with other human bodies.
- (C) A person might have [could not have] different bodies at different stages of his career.
- (D) I might [could not] have had a different body from the one I have.

- (E) There might [could not] be two persons inhabiting the same body.
- (F) That poor girl in the hospital is really dead, even though the doctors are keeping her body alive.
- (G) It is an open question whether, when I use the word *I*, I refer to my body or to some other thing.
- (H) After the Resurrection, one will [will not] have the same body one has in the present age.

## I

My purposes in this paper are to explain in what sense of 'nonsense' I contend (A)–(H) are nonsense, to argue for the conclusion that (A)–(H) are nonsense, and to explain why my arguments do not lead to the absurd conclusion that (1)–(8) are nonsense.

In what sense do I think (A)–(H) are nonsense? This claim, I admit, is a carelessly stated one. I do *not* mean that the English *sentences* displayed above are 'nonsense'. To call a syntactically correct English sentence made of real English words 'nonsense' must be to claim that that sentence *could not* be used by someone speaking English to express a proposition, ask a question, issue a command, and so on. Or, at least, it must be to claim that that sentence could not be so used unless words were to change their meanings, or unless the user and his audience had established some special convention ("If I say, 'The Absolute is subsumed under a continuum of porous variation', I'll mean 'Orcutt is the spy'"). And I think that at least some among (A)–(H) are not 'nonsense' in this sense. Take (E), for example. This sentence might be used by an English-speaking interplanetary explorer to convey to the other members of his expedition, among whom no special linguistic conventions are in force, a fact about the distribution of population in a certain cluster of planetoids.

So I am not calling *sentences* nonsense. What I mean is roughly this: *typically* when philosophers utter or inscribe sentences like (A)–(H), they are talking or writing nonsense. By *philosophers*, I mean people engaged, perhaps unwittingly, in the philosophical enterprise, whether or not they are professional, academic philosophers. [Someone who utters sentence (F) is almost certainly doing philosophy, even if he has never heard of the subject.] When I say that someone is *talking nonsense* I mean that he is uttering or inscribing words and purports to be expressing a proposition — that is, asserting something or telling how things are — by doing this uttering

or inscribing, and that he fails to. (I shall not explicitly discuss nonsensical attempts at questions, commands, and so on. But everything I say will be applicable to uses of language other than assertion, *mutatis mutandis*.) That is to say, to talk nonsense is to represent oneself as saying something when one is only uttering words. But I must append two qualifications to this, or I shall be misunderstood.

First, I have no *theory* about how one should separate sense from nonsense. (By a *theory*, I mean something like the Verification Theory of Meaning.) I do not understand what philosophers say, at least in typical cases, when they utter sentences like (A)–(H), and I think the reason I do not understand them is that they have failed to explain what they mean by the word *body* as they use it. And I think the reason they have failed to explain what they mean is that there is nothing, or nothing coherent, that they do mean. [There are two alternative hypotheses that equally well explain my incomprehension: (i) I do not understand them because I am not clever enough; (ii) I do not understand them because I am too clever by half: I have convinced myself by some sophistical means or other that what is perfectly plain is obscure. Naturally enough, I reject both these hypotheses.]

Second, it is not my intention to insult anyone. It is very hard to make any sense at all when talking about philosophical matters, and it is not necessarily a disgrace for a philosopher to lapse into nonsense. It is not, or *should not* be, any more insulting to say to a philosopher, 'What you say is nonsense', than it is to say, 'What you say is false'. Very great philosophers, philosophers whose shoes I am not fit to untie, have talked mostly nonsense. Descartes's *Meditations*, for example, is almost entirely nonsense. And yet Descartes was a great philosopher, a philosopher deserving of only the very highest admiration. Is this a paradox? Not really. If I know that most of the *Meditations* is nonsense, I did not discover this for myself: I was shown it by a philosopher no less great than Descartes; it was not within *my* power to discover it; the *Meditations* is not *obvious* nonsense. Moreover, nonsense is as variable in its quality as falsity. Newton's theories of motion and gravitation and Lysenko's genetic theories are equally false. Descartes's philosophy and what I wrote in my undergraduate philosophy papers are equally nonsense. But in the same spirit in which one might say of Newton's explanation of planetary motion, 'Would that I were capable of such falsity!', one might quite properly say of Descartes's explanation of voluntary motion, 'Would that I were capable of such nonsense!' (The unwanted air of paradox in what I have just written is aggravated by the fact that one meaning of *nonsense* is

'the obviously and inexcusably false and wrong-headed'. Of course I do not mean the word in that sense.)

Having explained what I am going to argue for, I must now do the arguing. But it is very difficult to show that a certain way of talking is nonsense. The best one can do is examine various explanations of that way of talking and show that they are severally defective. This way of arguing has an obvious weakness: one who employs it can never be sure he has not overlooked some good explanation. I can only say that I shall try not to do this, and concede that someone *might*, for all I say here, give an adequate explanation of what philosophers typically mean by *body*. Besides this obvious weakness, there is a deeper and more subtle weakness in my argument. From the fact that a certain word or idiom cannot be adequately explained, it does not follow that it is meaningless. A case in point is the word *set*. All explanations I have ever seen of the meaning of this word are either *wrong* (e.g., have the consequence that something that is not a set is a 'set') or circular (involve words that are essentially synonyms for *set*). But *set* is as meaningful as a word can be. (We meet other philosophically interesting cases of this phenomenon when we examine proposed definitions of modal and moral terms.) We must not be seduced by what Professor Geach has called 'the Socratic fallacy': for it just *is* possible to use a word correctly — and hence meaningfully — without being able to define it in any nontrivial way.

And yet, *Ich kann nicht anders*. Perhaps if I succeed in showing that various proposed definitions or explanations of *body* are defective, I shall, in the course of doing this, convince others that this word is, in the mouths of philosophers, usually meaningless.

I shall begin by imposing a criterion of adequacy on any definition of *body*: an acceptable definition of *body* must not be *tendentious*. This requirement may be spelled out as follows. Consider those famous and respected philosophers who do think the word *body* (or *corpus*, etc.) is meaningful and who use it in stating their theories. An adequate definition of *body* should not render any of the sentences containing the word *body* that any of these philosophers uses to state his theory a trivial, verbal falsehood. For example, if a Cartesian were to define *body* to mean 'the material thing animated by the immaterial person', this definition would rightly be regarded by the materialist as *tendentious*. For it renders *his* sentence 'A person is identical with his body' a trivial, verbal falsehood. A way to state essentially the same requirement is this. Consider those philosophers who use the word *body* and who believe that the sentence 'There are bodies' expresses a truth. We must not define *body* in such a way that any of these philosophers could be

expected to respond to our definition by saying, 'If *that's* what the word means, then there are no "bodies"'. For example, the materialist might well respond to the 'Cartesian' definition given above by saying something like, 'Since no material things are animated by immaterial persons, there are no such things as "bodies" in *your* sense of the word', and the fact that the materialist could be expected to say this shows that the 'Cartesian' definition is *tendentious*.

## II

Let us begin our search for a definition. The form of words we wish to define is '*x's* body'. If we understand this form of words then we can define '*x* is a body' in terms of it. Say it some such way as: '*x* is a body' = df. 'There is, was, or will be — or perhaps only "could be"? — a *y* such that *x* is *y's* body'. If we *begin* by trying to define '*x* is a body', we shall, even if we succeed, still be faced with the task of defining '*x's* body', and there is no *obvious* way to define '*x's* body' in terms of '*x* is a body'. (Such *definientia* as 'the *y* such that *y* is a body and *x* animates *y*' and 'the *y* such that *y* is a body and *x* is *y*' are obviously *tendentious*.) Moreover, we cannot regard it as our sole task to define '*x* is a body' while neglecting '*x's* body'. For if there is such a concept as the concept of a human body, then simple inspection of philosophers' use of *body* shows that it is part and parcel of understanding this concept to understand what it is for a given body to be the body of a given human being.

Let us, for the sake of concreteness, attempt to define 'Descartes's body'. If we discover an adequate definition for 'Descartes's body', then, presumably, our discovery can be generalized in such a way as to provide a definition for '*x's* body'.

There is a certain sort of answer to our question that is very popular. An excellent example of an answer of this sort is cited in the Oxford English Dictionary:

1869 GOULBOURN *Purs. Holiness* ix. 78 By 'the body' is to be understood the mass of matter which we carry about with us, with all the animal properties that belong to it.

(An erudite historian of philosophy — not, I think, so erudite as to have read Goulbourn — once gave me an almost verbally identical definition of *body* when I pressed him for one in the course of a philosophical discussion.) This definition suggests the following definition of 'Descartes's body':

Descartes's body = df. The mass of matter Descartes carried about with him, with all the animal properties that belonged to it.

But this is very puzzling. I doubt very much whether there was a mass of matter — as opposed to a mass of . . . ? — that Descartes carried about with him *always*; and if there was, I should expect it to have been something like a good-luck charm, which would presumably have been devoid of 'animal properties'. But suppose Descartes did always carry about with him something possessing animal properties: suppose he always carried about a *mouse*, like Benjamin Franklin in the children's book *Ben and Me*. Then, so far as I can see, this mouse would have satisfied our definition and would have been 'Descartes's body'.

I am not being flippant. And if I am being deliberately obtuse, it is with what I conceive as a good purpose. I really *am* aware that Goulbourn's words "carry about with" are supposed to be understood metaphorically. But what is the 'cash value' of the metaphor? I do not know. I think no one knows.

Perhaps I am being too hard on poor Goulbourn. Perhaps he expressed himself carelessly and attempted to convey a simple and straightforward idea by unsuitable means. I can imagine a defender of Goulbourn saying impatiently, 'Look, this is mere pedantry. It's easy enough to see and to express clearly what Goulbourn meant to say:

Descartes's body = df. The mass of matter (i.e., the material thing) that was the *bearer* of all Descartes's animal (and, more generally, physical) properties.'

But this will not do. For it was Descartes himself who was the bearer of all Descartes's animal and physical properties. That is, Descartes had such animal and physical properties as Descartes had. This is a simple logical truth, a truth that must be accepted by anyone, whatever his metaphysical opinions may be. Therefore, it is a trivial, verbal consequence of our definition that either Descartes was identical with his body (if he had some animal properties), or else there was no such thing as Descartes's body (if he had no animal properties). But this disjunctive proposition is incompatible with dualism, and hence our definition must be rejected as tendentious.

I can, I fear, imagine a defender of our imaginary defender of Goulbourn saying (of course, impatiently), 'Look, this is mere pedantry. It's easy enough to see and to express clearly what Goulbourn's defender meant to say:

Descartes's body = df. The material thing that bore the animal (or physical) properties commonly if loosely predicated of Descartes.'

But what does 'commonly if loosely predicated of Descartes' mean? Whatever precisely this condition may come to, surely it is satisfied by any property Descartes was commonly believed to possess. Now suppose Descartes was commonly believed to suffer from kidney stones (*being a sufferer from kidney stones* is surely an 'animal property'), though this common belief was false. Then there was *nothing* that bore all the animal properties commonly if loosely predicated of Descartes, and there was no such thing as Descartes's body. Or suppose Descartes had a twin brother who shared all the animal properties Descartes was commonly believed to have. Then nothing uniquely satisfied the condition laid down in our definition, and, again, there was no such thing as Descartes's body. This second example, by the way, would also serve to refute any attempt to emend our definition by laying it down that Descartes's body was the material thing that bore *most of* the animal properties commonly predicated of Descartes.

### III

Let us abandon our attempts to repair Goulbourn's definition and look at a different sort of attempt to show what *body* means. In this section and the following sections, I shall imagine people saying various things to me: offering definitions of *body*, qualifying them, objecting to my replies, and so on. These imaginary conversations are based on real conversations I have had.

A philosopher points at me and says, 'This is your body. It may *also* be *you* — whether it is an open philosophical question — but it is what I call "your body".' (Of course, a similar definition could have been given for 'Descartes's body'. In this section I shall try to understand 'my body' rather than 'Descartes's body', since Descartes is unfortunately not available to be pointed at. The fact that I shall be trying to understand 'my body' rather than 'his body' has no particular significance.)

Well, *what* does he point at? (I said he points at *me*, but perhaps I ought not to have said that. At any rate, you can imagine what his gesture is supposed to have looked like.) He might have used the same gesture, the same tone of voice, the same glance, in referring to my skin or my navel or my abdomen. But these are not what he was pointing at, though an observer sighting along my philosopher's index finger as along the barrel of a gun would have found all these things or parts of them at the center of his field of vision. When someone points and says, 'That is such-and-such', we may always ask, 'That *what?*', and the answer we receive ('Man', 'Vase', 'Number',

'Grass', 'Star', 'Empty space', 'Country', 'Sentence', 'Handwriting') tells us what was being pointed at.

So I ask, 'That *what*?' What will my philosopher say? He cannot say, 'That body', for this will not help me. He had better not say, 'That man' or 'That human being' for *I* am a man and a human being, and if he points at a human being, he points at *me*. (Well, I might turn out to be a Martian foundling or a robot, but in such a case, there would not be any man or human being there for him to point at. Insofar as it is controversial whether I am a human being, it is controversial whether any human being is where I am.) Or perhaps this is wrong. One might interpret Descartes, and perhaps Locke, as saying this: *I* am not a human being, for I am a soul, and a human being is a sort of compound of a soul and a body. Well, of course, I do not understand this view, because I do not understand *body* – or *soul* – in this context. Moreover, my respondent himself must admit that if this view is correct, then he cannot ostensibly refer to my body as 'this human being'. Of course he might call it 'the body of this human being', but this latter phrase would serve his purpose no better than 'this body'.

Perhaps he will answer, 'This material object'. But what does he mean by this? The words 'material object' are a philosophers' term of art. They constitute a 'stand-in phrase' whose function is to save a philosopher's having to say 'vase, ashtray, teacup, stone, . . .', every time he wants to state a general philosophical thesis. (Of course, various philosophers have, for their own several purposes, *defined* 'material object'. But the only generally agreed-upon condition on the adequacy of such a definition is that 'moderate-sized specimens of dry goods' must count as material objects.) There are many things such that it is not clear whether they are 'material objects'. The ashtray is a material object, but what about the left half of the unbroken ashtray? What about the ashtray and the teacup 'taken together'? What about a cloud? A galaxy? A proton?

More to the point, what about men and women? If a man is uncontroversially a material object – that is, if *man* is one of those words that, as a matter of the *meaning* of 'material object', should occur on a complete list of words that 'material object' can properly stand in for – then my philosopher has pointed at me, for I am a man, whatever Descartes and Locke may say: a certain man is the only 'material object' *there*. On the other hand, if the meaning of 'material object' precludes its standing in for a list of words including *man*, then there is no material object for my philosopher to point at: a certain man occupies the region of space he is indicating, and there is no *room* for any 'material object'.

A third possibility is this: the meaning of 'material object' is such as to leave it an open question whether these words can stand in for a list of words that includes *man*. But in that case, it seems to me, it is an open question whether my philosopher succeeds in pointing at *anything*. There is a man before him, after all. If it is not clear whether he is pointing at that man, then it is not clear what he *is* pointing at.

These difficulties arise only if 'material object' is simply a 'stand-in phrase'. Let us therefore explore the consequences of *defining* 'material object'. Let us say that a 'material object' is a *ponderable* object: one that weighs something. To achieve greater generality of application, we might say that a material object is an object that has a mass, but we need not be so subtle. Other definitions – e.g., 'object that occupies space' – might be examined, but I think they would all have consequences like those I shall argue follow from the definition we are considering.

My philosopher says, '*This* is your body'. I ask, 'This *what*?' He replies, 'This thing that weighs something'. But I weigh something. Rather too much, in fact. Is he referring to me? I do not see how to avoid this conclusion. Some philosophers think they do. They point, for instance, to the fact that a truck driver may say to his dispatcher, 'I weigh seven tons', when, strictly speaking, he weighs far less. But the truck driver *could* say, 'My truck weighs seven tons' instead of 'I weigh seven tons'. What could I say in place of 'I weigh something'? Perhaps, 'My body weighs something'? But this I do not understand.

Compare this case. A certain philosopher holds that nothing has both color and shape. I say that I should have thought that this saucer was both blue and round. He replies that it is the *morphosome* of the saucer that is round and the *chromosome* of the saucer that is blue. I say that I do not understand what he means by, for example, the 'morphosome' of the saucer. He points at the saucer – or so *I* should describe his gesture – and says, '*This* is the morphosome of the saucer'. I say, 'You *seem* to be pointing at the saucer. You haven't yet got me to see what you mean by the morphosome of the saucer'.

This little story suggests a reply that my philosopher (the one who is trying to define *body* by ostension) may make to my objections. He may say, 'You're just a materialist. You think a person is identical with his body. But I have got you to see what I *mean* by *body*. Your insistence that I'm pointing at *you* derives from the meaning I have provided for *body plus* your theory, and not from that meaning alone'. We might compare this with, 'You're just a morphosomatist. You think a saucer is identical with its morphosome. But

I *have* got you to see what I *mean* by *morphosome*. Your insistence that I'm pointing at *the saucer* derives from the meaning I have provided for *morphosome plus* your theory, and not from that meaning alone'. But I *do not* think either that a man is identical with his body or that a saucer is identical with its morphosome. If a man does what I would call 'pointing at a saucer', or performs an act of pointing I cannot distinguish from pointing at a saucer, and says, 'That's the saucer's morphosome', I am not thereby enabled to understand *morphosome*. If a man does what I would call 'pointing at me', or performs an act of pointing I cannot distinguish from pointing at me, and says, 'That's your body', I am not thereby enabled to understand *body*. And since I do not understand *body*, I do not understand the accusation that I think a man and his body are one and the same.

## IV

Let us try something else. 'You know what your arms are, don't you? And your hands, trunk, legs, feet, neck, and head? Well, all these things taken together are your body. Your body may or may not be *you*; that's an open question.' This explanation *seems* to imply that many things and one thing are somehow identical, this logical absurdity (I had to employ a piece of grammatical sleight of hand even to get it stated without falling into obvious incoherence) being disguised with the help of the useful phrase 'taken together'. But I think all that is meant is that the many things are *parts* and are all the parts, other than their own parts, of the one. At least this is the only sense I can make of it. This suggests the following definition (we may now return to Descartes, since we no longer have to employ ostension in our definition):

Descartes's body = *df.* The thing such that Descartes's limbs, trunk, and head [I abbreviate the above list thus] were parts of it, and everything that was part of it that was not one of these things was composed of parts of these things.

I have certain difficulties in understanding this definition. Suppose that Descartes's left hand was surgically removed, in such a way as to leave him otherwise unimpaired, on the first day of 1625. Suppose it was frozen solid throughout 1625, and burned to ashes on the first day of 1626. Taken literally, our definition seems to entail the following:

In 1624, Descartes's body was all in one piece. Throughout 1625, it existed in a spatially separated state (i.e., it was not 'in one piece'). In 1626, it ceased to exist, though Descartes continued to exist.

My impression is that these consequences will not be welcomed by most people who use *body*. Moreover, I do not wish to form a definition that legislates about questions of 'mereological essentialism'. Let us say, therefore, what it is for something to be Descartes's body at a particular moment. This will leave it an open question whether, if one of Descartes's members ceased to exist at *t*, the body, if any, Descartes had after *t* was the same body he had before *t*.

The thing that is Descartes's body at *t* = *df.* The thing such that, for any *x*, if *x* is one of Descartes's limbs at *t*, or is his trunk at *t*, or is his head at *t*, then *x* is part of it at *t*, and, for every *y*, if *y* is part of it at *t*, and *y* is not one of Descartes's limbs at *t* and not Descartes's trunk at *t* and not Descartes's head at *t*, then *y* is composed at *t* of parts of the things that are his limbs, trunk, and head at *t*.

If we are not careful about the meaning of *part*, we shall find that this definition has a very strange consequence. Suppose that Descartes was burned at the stake and that only the finest ashes remained: nothing that existed thereafter was a limb of Descartes or Descartes's trunk or Descartes's head. Let *T* be a moment of time later than this *auto-da-fé* and suppose that at *T* there existed exactly one thing without parts — a Democritean atom, say. It is easy to see that, according to our definition, this atom was Descartes's body at *T* (and doubtless the body of a good many other people). But we can avoid this consequence if we assume that everything is a part of itself, that is, if we stipulate that a 'part' of an object need not be a *proper* part of that object. Then nothing is without parts, not even a Democritean atom, and the absurd conclusion we drew in the last sentence but one can be seen not to follow from our definition.

Still, this definition is not without its odd consequences. Suppose someone had severed one of Descartes's limbs — his left leg, say — and had destroyed his remaining limbs and his trunk and his head. Let *T* be any moment of time thereafter, provided only that Descartes's severed left leg still existed at *T*. Then, according to our definition, this severed left leg was Descartes's body at *T*. (People who think they understand *body* tell me that any definition



that has this consequence is wrong.) Moreover, suppose some marvelously advanced seventeenth-century surgeon had succeeded in grafting the severed leg of Descartes on to the stump of the leg of some contemporary of Descartes's who had lost his leg in an accident. Then, according to our definition, this man could have said truly, 'Descartes's body is part of my body'.

But perhaps this odd consequence does not follow. Someone may object, 'Your argument assumes that when Descartes's leg was severed, it remained Descartes's leg. But this is not literally true. We talk that way, of course, but we are then only identifying the limb by reference to its former owner, like country people who call a farm "the Harkness place" when no Harkness has lived there for forty years. After Descartes's leg was cut off, it was, strictly speaking, *no one's* leg. If it was then grafted on to someone's stump and its tissues sustained by the circulation of that man's blood, then it *became* that second man's leg. It's really very like the transference of a piece of property from one owner to another'.

But this response raises certain difficulties, or, better, makes evident difficulties that have been present all along. These difficulties arise when one attempts to answer the question, 'What does it mean to say that a certain leg was, at a certain moment, "Descartes's"?' One might, of course, say that a certain leg was Descartes's (at  $t$ ) if it was part of Descartes's body (at  $t$ ). But, of course, if this is what 'Descartes's leg' means, then 'Descartes's leg' cannot occur in a definition of 'Descartes's body'.

Now I should say that 'Descartes's leg' means 'leg that was part of Descartes'. If I am right about this, then the definition we are considering is tendentious. If 'Descartes's leg' means 'leg that was part of Descartes', then it is a trivial, verbal consequence of the present definition that Descartes was identical with his body. Or, more precisely, it is a trivial, verbal consequence of this definition that at any moment  $t$ , Descartes was identical with the thing that was his body at  $t$ .

I can see nothing that 'Descartes's leg' could mean besides 'leg that was part of Descartes's body' and 'leg that was part of Descartes'. If it means either of these, the present definition is defective. Therefore, the present definition is defective.

#### V

Let's try again: 'You know what a *dead* body is, don't you? It's what you see laid out at the undertaker's, and what goes into the grave. Well, the dead body you see was once alive, but, alive or dead, what you see is and was a body'.

But I should say that what I see laid out at the undertaker's is a dead *man* (or woman or child). The man I see lying on the bier was once alive and is now dead, just as the man I see lying in the hospital bed was once healthy and is now ill. (Actually, this is only a first approximation of what I want to say about corpses. I shall presently introduce a qualification.) Descartes, a few moments before his death, could truly have said, 'In a few moments, I (this thing that thinks) shall be a corpse', though doubtless, given his philosophical views, he *would not* have said this. And each of us, unless he is fated to suffer a particularly violent death, will one day be a corpse.

'But that can't be right, for when you die you cease to exist. But, at least in most cases, your corpse exists after you die. So it can't be true that we shall one day be corpses.' This objection can hardly win the assent of *everyone* who thinks that *body* is a meaningful word. Descartes, for example, would not have agreed that he should cease to exist after his death. Moreover, it is not true. In some cases a person ceases to exist at the instant he dies: the man who makes a wrong move when disarming a powerful bomb, for example. But this is the exception rather than the rule. In the normal case, even supposing that there is no 'afterlife', one exists after one dies. I hasten to add that I see no particular advantage in being a corpse over not existing at all; and neither of these is a more or less enviable state than being alive but in a perpetual and dreamless sleep.

Here is the qualification I promised: a corpse is not always a dead man or woman or child. A fresh, well-preserved corpse is, but what we see at the undertaker's is not a fresh, well-preserved corpse but something like the shell or ruin of a dead man. I use the words *shell* and *ruin* by analogy to the way these terms are used to talk about buildings. If a building has been gutted by fire or very nearly destroyed in some other way, and if the fire, or whatever, has left standing something that suggests the original outward appearance of the building, then we call what still stands the 'shell' or 'ruin' of the building. Now think for a moment about what the embalmer has done to the corpse you see at the undertaker's, and I think you will see the appropriateness of calling what you see there the 'shell' or 'ruin' of a man, rather than the man himself. So I do not claim that, for example, Lenin can be observed to this day in a glass case in Moscow: what lies in the case is not, literally speaking, Lenin, but rather his shell or ruin; his 'remains', as they say.

What the point of transition is between what is literally a dead *man* and what is a mere ruin of the man that was, I should not like to say.

## VI

For should the Soul of a Prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the Prince's past Life, enter and inform the Body of a Cobbler as soon as deserted by his own Soul, every one sees, he would be the same person with the Prince, accountable only for the Prince's Actions . . .

Locke, *Essay* 2.27

'Bodily transfer' – well, if such stories make sense, then, obviously, *body* makes sense. But, of course, I do not understand Locke's story. 'But I can imagine evidence', says someone, 'that would force you to concede that the soul of a prince had entered and informed the body of a cobbler.' I doubt it, just as I doubt anyone could imagine evidence that would force me to concede that the Absolute issues both imperatives and indicatives. But we all know how the Prince-and-Cobbler story goes, and I will not bore you with it. Let us call the cobbler 'Harry' and the prince 'Charlie'. 'How would you explain the fact that Harry, or someone who looks just like Harry and is in Harry's house, exhibits both an unshakable conviction that he is Charlie and perfect knowledge of the most particular and intimate facts of Charlie's history?' Well, frankly, if I were confronted with such a case, I should not know *what* to say. And neither would you or anyone else *know* what to say. But I can think of many consistent stories that would explain the observable facts of the case, though it would probably be hard to find out which of these stories was true. Here is one. The Martians (who, as Norman Malcolm once observed, are wonderfully technologically advanced in the imaginations of philosophers) perform something like plastic surgery – but much more complete and effective – on Charlie, thereby causing him to look just like Harry; they remove Harry and, faster than the eye can follow, replace him with the altered Charlie. 'But this would be pure fantasy. Wouldn't it be simpler to assume that Charlie's soul, or mind, or personality, or *persona*, had somehow entered Harry's body?' Of course it would be pure fantasy. Is that not appropriate? The Harry-and-Charlie story is pure fantasy to start with. If the Empire State Building grew wings and flew away, and everyone agreed this really had happened, could we call *any* proposed explanation of this event 'just too fantastic'? If a cobbler started talking like a prince (or however we should describe the purely visual and auditory component of the

Harry-and-Charlie story), then *something* pretty odd would be going on in the world.

Let me propose a case. Suppose Harry had a twin brother (a plumber), and they *both* started acting like Charlie. What could be said about this case? Note that it is not a *more* fantastic case than the first. A story in which both the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building fly away is not *more* fantastic than a story in which the Empire State Building alone departs in this remarkable fashion.

## VII

I think I had better bring this essay to a close. I have not examined every possible attempt to make sense of *body*. Other things might be done. For example, one might attempt to combine the methods used in sections III and IV, avoiding the problem of defining 'Descartes's leg' by using in its place, 'this leg'. But arguments ideally have two sides and perhaps it is time for the other side to say something. I have been examining possible defenses of a certain view – that *body* is meaningful – and attempting to refute these defenses. Perhaps those who actually hold this view can construct better defenses of it than someone who, like me, rejects it. All other things being equal, the most effective attorney for the defense is the one who believes in the innocence of his client.

In this section, I shall try to say what I think the difference is between my 'specimens of sense' and my 'specimens of nonsense'. That is, I shall try to explain how it is that, if *body*, as philosophers typically use this word, has no meaning, ordinary speakers can utter any of the 'specimens of sense' and succeed in making an intelligible statement. Roughly speaking, I should say that this is the case because *body* occurs *essentially* in (A)–(H), and only *accidentally* in (1)–(8). That is to say, (1)–(8) can be paraphrased into sentences in which *body* does not occur, and no such paraphrases can be given for (A)–(H). Consider these paraphrases of (1)–(8):

His doctor told him he must not go on abusing his health in this way.

Anatomy is the study of the physical structure of human beings. Alice told James she wanted to have sexual intercourse with him. He was covered with scars.

The force of the explosion had nearly torn off his limbs.

It might be possible to remove the brains from two people and implant one in the space formerly occupied by the other.

The undertaker laid out Alfred's corpse.  
I believe that one day God will restore the dead to life.

I would say that each item on this list means *approximately* what the corresponding item on the list of specimens of sense means. I could make the match exact if I were willing to write longer paraphrases, but I wish only to indicate roughly how such paraphrases should go. I think it is evident that the 'specimens of nonsense' cannot be paraphrased in this way. If any philosopher thinks he *can* restate any of (A)–(H) in such a way that the restatement does not involve *body* or some synonym, I shall be willing to look at his paraphrases. But paraphrases, even ones I can understand, will not help me much unless all, or at least, most, philosophers who use *body* will agree that these paraphrases capture the meaning of the original specimens. It is (A)–(H) *as typically used* that I want to understand, after all. Anyone can propose *some meaning or other* for *body*; but if the generality of philosophers insist that this proposed meaning is not *theirs*, then I shall not have been helped to understand *them*.

There are at least two important questions that are closely related to the topics discussed in this essay. The first is: What are the implications of what has been said in this paper for the traditional problems of philosophical psychology and metaphysics (e.g., for the problem of personal identity)?

The second question is this: What is the origin of the idea of a 'human body' – that is, what is the origin of the way we talk when we use these words – and why does this idea have such a grip on us?

I have no space here to say anything adequate in response to the first question. Perhaps I shall return to it in another essay.

The second question is at least partly a question that belongs to the history of ideas, and I, who am no profound scholar, am perhaps not the best person to attempt to answer it. I will venture a guess, however, that 'the body' is an invention of philosophers and theologians. I think it is quite wrong to suppose that primitive, prephilosophical man had any such idea. Some people, I learn from reading works on archaeology, think that gifts and tools placed in ancient graves with evidently elaborate ritual, show that primitive man believed that at death a man's spirit departs to dwell in another place, leaving his body behind. And, of course, what can be *left behind* is something that was *there* all along. Well, I do not dispute the graves and the tools and the gifts and the ritual. But I doubt whether we can infer from them that the gravediggers were Platonic dualists, or even that they held a perhaps confused view that could have been turned into Platonic dualism by a little Socratic dialectic.

Consider Homer's audience. As the epigraph of this essay shows, it was obvious to these men – and it *ought to* be obvious to you and me – that if a man is killed in battle, then it is *he* who lies dead on the stricken field, soon to be burned or to rot or to be eaten by dogs. In the Homeric view, something of the slain man does indeed depart to dwell in another place: his *psuche*, that is, his *breath* or his *life*. (Cf. 'No sooner was the breath out of his body . . .'; 'No sooner had life left him . . .'.) But the *psuche* is not the man himself. Indeed, in an admittedly extraordinary case, the *psuche* of a man is in Hades though he himself is alive and elsewhere (Heracles in *Odyssey* 11). It is a measure of the strength of the grip that the idea of 'the body' has on us that almost any edition of the *Iliad* you may care to examine will contain some such note as this: "I, 4 ἀβρός: *themselves*; i.e. their bodies". Many editors compound this confusion by adding something along the lines of, "For Homer, a person is identical with his body", as if Homer were a modern philosophical materialist like David Lewis!

Burial customs may indeed show that primitive man had some sort of idea of an 'afterlife'; the example of Homer, however, shows us that a belief in an afterlife does not imply a belief in 'the body'. Therefore, I rest easy in my contention that the body, like the unreality of motion, the bare particular, and the Absolute Idea, is an invention of philosophers. I think it is a bad invention. I invite you to consider carefully the possibility of discarding it.

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