

The Imagination

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Preamble

We pursue here the inquiry of the embodied one: the inquirer possessed, necessarily, radically, and unreflectively of a body. For such a being, the following pair of statements apply:

- You are not excused from the paradox of being.
- You are not responsible for the paradox of knowing.

But, and also:

- You are not responsible for the paradox of being.
- You are not excused from the paradox of knowing.

This forestalls, as we must, any unreflective split into subjects and objects.

1 Hearts, Minds, Brains

The heart and the brain can both be considered as important loci in the body of an inquirer. Whole imaginative universes can be constructed if we pursue either of these organs. It has been conventional in scientific discourse to assume that the heart is merely biological, whereas the intellect, mind, and persona are presumed to be more directly related to the brain. When the heart is invoked, we typically find ourselves in the world of analogy, association, and romance. Nobody really expects to find fortitude in the biological heart, but they confidently hope to find consciousness or its correlates in the brain. Such is the conventional view, which we will not pursue further here.

Across the intellectual schools of the dharmic traditions, the religious imagination of the Orthodox Christians, and in the constructions of Daoism, heart and mind are not as cleanly separable. Everybody knows that what we value in ourselves is not to be confined to a mere piercing intellect. Many terms defy translation, as translation into English inevitably means adjusting the boundaries of key terms to suit the Great White imagination, or the scientific myth. The sutras are poorly treated when translated into White English. But the development of the terms in such schools and traditions is not done with the same economic and regulative goals as the English scientific tradition. The scientific tradition knows no real soteriology, and offers little promise to the embodied being beyond the preservation of a functional body in its web of social obligations and responsibilities. Those who familiarize themselves with Greek philosophy know well that terms like *nous* and

ousia cannot be simply translated, for the manner in which these technical terms work in any given discourse is inextricable from the entire edifice of the philosophy that engendered them. If *nous*, for example, is clearly not English “mind”, then nor are *cit*, *caitanya*, *citta*, *buddhi*, *manas*, to take just a few terms from the longest continuous dialectic on the theme of consciousness, cognition and the body. The scientific tradition knows nothing of the field of consciousness, which these terms perhaps point to, and its “cognition” is of an instrumental, constructive sort that produces robots and no wisdom.

So we choose here to explore a different route. Let the brain be the organ of the imagination. Let the heart be the question that drives the inquiry. The heart as monadic “one-without-another” is a promising starting point. Distinctness is separation, and the embodied being lives in the continuum, prior to language and distinction. We place the question of One (and thus of multiplicity) therefore in abeyance. On hold.

Without one, without number, letter, or bit, with no more than this monadic origin, the inquiry can proceed nonetheless.

2 The Origin of Time

The heart is the origin of time, for the being, such as we are, who considers itself to be a body. Heart beats: there is life. Heart stops, there is no time any more for that being. This is a simple matter. The physicists may draw up their cosmological cartoons, but the embodied one knows the origin of time.

William Harvey discovered the circulation of the blood. This provided the most poignant functional definition science has ever found: the function of the heart is to keep on, to persist. The body is driven by this. To an embodied being with a heart, this function is obvious. The heart can know nothing of this, of course, for its failure could only be observed by another. The ascription of function always demands an observer to whom things appear thus and not so. We are those who can see this. We are the embodied one.

3 Embodiment

To venture too much into theory or text is to lose touch with this simplicity. But we will note at this point the popularity of the term “4E” in adumbrating, vaguely, notions to do with our experience and living that are not constructed using the White Man’s Dream of computationalism. The 4 E’s are these: **Extended:** Mind as extended. This is obviously a productive and insightful way to treat the term “mind,” and will not be argued for or against, but perhaps illuminated. **Embedded:** Everything happens in situ, in a context, and every context has its context, and this recurses infinitely. We are not graspable as totalities. Again, no quibble here, and the import of this particular “E” has yet to be recognized in its enormity. **Enacted:** We bring ourselves into being through our doings. Enaction is a precious vocabulary being developed whose spirit is to replace nouns (names of things excised from the continuum) with verbs (goings-on). A parade can be discussed, planned, reported on, licensed, and a host of other words. But to have a parade, a real parade, you must march in the streets in a line. You have to do it. Its reality lies in its doing. Immanence. Enaction draws on Buddhist epistemology rather than Cartesianism. Again, no quibble. This is a good way to think.

But this whole enterprise of escaping computationalism, the White Man's Dream, runs into a snag with the fourth term: **Embodied**. Centering the body seems like a great idea to the embodied one, but what is a body, the body?

When you are unsure of things, when you no longer know quite what your own mind is, or where you end and others begin, or where things come from and go to, or who or what you are, you entertain or suffer these intriguing questions from an unreflective body. It is an embodied being that considers such questions. The body is all question and no answer. It is the locus of inquiry of the magnum opus. I am rotifer. I am jellyfish. I am the incarnate one. And I am in the universe up to my chest (or just above), with no manifest head, or is that relationship the other way around?

I sit and ask, what is this body? A method taught in the Taittirīya Upaniṣhad, Chapter 2, involves taking the question up repeatedly. As one answer is considered, its limitations and strengths become apparent. Then the question is renewed. In the Sanskrit, it works something like this:

What is this body: the material body. Good, that is correct. Begin again. Inside this body and pervading it is another. The body of the spirit. Good, that is correct. Begin again. Inside this body and pervading it is another. This is the mind. Good, that is correct. Begin again. Inside this body and pervading it is another. This the manifestation. Good, that is correct. Begin again. Inside this body and pervading it is another. This is the body of bliss.

That is the format of the Upanisadic questioning, and it bears elaboration. There is no point in trying to find the right answers in a general sense. The inquirer must do this on their own body. The exercise is not unfamiliar, though. Let us try different ways of stepping through such a series, to see if there are any resonances.

The first two stages bring out a well known contrast. But the contrast is known by many names.

- The first is anatomy, the second is physiology.
- The first is Körper, the second is Leib.
- The first is material, the second is spiritual.
- In one reading of the Sanskrit, the first is the body of food, and the second the body of the lifebreath.

The first three elaborations are probably familiar. Each of the two ways of regarding the body brings with it an entirely different context, environment, or Umwelt of the body. Material body, material surrounds. Körper is inert, so its Umwelt is inert and defined using conventional spatial metrics. The Leib is the living body, so its Umwelt is the riotous company of other living beings.

The meditation of the heart reveals another way of drawing out this first in a series of contrasts, each starting from the center of the body, each pervading in a different manner. In the Sanskrit, the body of food and the body of life breath were distinguished. Let us consider them from what we know of the heart.

The heart has four chambers, and we begin our thinking in the release of blood through the aortal valve out into the body. The heart knows nothing of the clients for this rich oxygenated red blood, but the clients can be coarsely enumerated. They are: the brain, the gut, the muscles, and the kidneys. The blood destined for the kidneys is washed and returned. The blood destined for the brain supplies that eager organ and is returned. The blood provided to the muscles effects

movement and it is returned. But the blood supplied to the gut, the other major client, is not returned.

Shift now to the right atrium, where the blood is returned, from kidneys, brain, muscles and not the gut. The returned blood is from the liver, and between the gut and the liver an entirely different world of circulation opens up. Between the gut and the liver, the substances are unthinkable, but here the fundamental distinction between food and shit is drawn. This dark circulation belongs to the body of food. The Sanskrit is correct.

But shift now to the left ventricle and the right atrium. Blood traversing here enters the world of spirit. It goes through the lungs, mixing with the winds, air, spirit. This is where lifebreath lives, where voice will arise, where interaction with the world of spirits and angels happens. The first circulation was concerned with food. This is lifebreath. Again, the Sanskrit is correct.

In debates I have encountered, the form of discourse is dualistic, in which either/or is the main operator. An immediate drawback is clear: if you characterize the body in any one way, you necessarily bring into being its complement, its theatre of operations, its Umwelt, its environment. If you characterise it in a different way, its complement also changes.

Not so with the Upaniṣadic approach. These were the first two of five stages, and moving from stage to stage effects a total transformation of the body, its world, its remit and reach, capacity, and the things it participates in. The formula used in the OUP's translation by Patrick Olivelle, is repetitive in a very constructive manner, allowing the inquiry to be refreshed. Let us walk through this version of the text.

- Now, a man here is formed from the essence of food.
- Different from and lying within this man formed from the essence of food is the self (*ātman*) consisting of lifebreath, which suffuses that man completely.
- Different from and lying within this self consisting of breath is the self (*ātman*) consisting of mind, which suffuses this other self completely.
- Different from and lying within this self consisting of mind is the self (*ātman*) consisting of perception, which suffuses this other self completely.
- Different from and lying within this self consisting of perception is the self (*ātman*) consisting of bliss, which suffuses this other self completely.

We could recognize in the first two stages here some familiar contrasts. But we will rapidly run out of familiar terms as we move through the third, fourth, and fifth steps. William Butler Yeats tried his hand at translation, with the help of Shree Purohit Swāmi, and they came up with the sequence “elemental self—living self—thinking self—knowing self—joyous self.” That is fond, but inevitably inadequate. Know thyself!? The inquiry understood in a Greek manner does not go much further than this wishful thinking. But the Upaniṣadic approach is concerned with the relation of *ātman* to *Brahman*, not with personal individual selves. As in the enlarging series of bodies, so the *ātman*, or the notional ‘one’ that began the inquiry, can be understood with respect to ever larger worlds with which it is in communion. Hegel, the old fool, saw Napoleon on horseback and opined that this was the World Soul. The space of ways of thinking is vast, but then, the brain is the organ of the imagination.

We found correspondences that were familiar in many ways in the two first steps of the series. The lumpen body that sits on the ground, the breathing interacting body that sings and whispers

to the wind. The third stop has been glossed as ‘mind’ and here we need all the resources of two of the first three E’s. How big can you think ‘mind?’ Mind as extended, as you chat on videophone to your mum in Australia. Mind as embedded, as your context grows from a room to a forest, to the company of fellow souls. Strain your imagination. Be vast. You can do it. As you do so, notice that this realm is no longer bounded by the body conventionally and materially considered. This is the vastness that is available to the thinker, and you can think rather a lot.

There will be difficulties in trying to even wave vaguely at the next two. Certainly the terms ‘perception’ and ‘bliss’ do not give us familiar footholds. But we learned, as we went from 2 to 3, to get rid of any objectivised body, and, in the spirit of participatory knowing, to consider ourselves as part of larger, less familiar spheres. With the tortured word choice of ‘perception,’ the door is open to the glory of the manifestations of energy and light. To Sakti. But Sakti and Siva are not in the Greek and Christian imaginations (for now). But psychedelics have taken hold of many and the immersion in churning dynamics of energy and light are not entirely unknown.

As for the last, the body of bliss. The culmination of the series is henosis, union with the divine, recognition of the non-difference of the *ātman* and the *Brahman*. Unknown to science, perhaps, but these ways are not closed to anyone. Cornelius Agrippa’s notion of felicitas comes close in the Western canon, but see also Nicholas of Cusa or any of the so-called Christian mystics. Hegel’s apotheosis itself speaks of this fifth body.

What is laid out for us in this nested doll way of thinking of the body is a way to avoid dichotomizing choices that fix the body. The body cannot be fixed, and this is why the term ‘Embodiment’ has never stabilized, and will never stabilize.