

## A Quest for the Self through Bodily Awareness

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**Abstract:** *Determining the Self by a single notion is difficult. Yet, there are undoubtedly some details that define who I am. Nothing, in my view, is more intimately known to and specific to an individual than Consciousness, which forms the "I". It makes sense that there must be a self for the I Consciousness to exist. We need to treat consciousness seriously if we are to understand the authenticity of the Self. When an organism has conscious experience, it indicates that it has some sense of what it's like to be that creature. Without changing the underlying structure, one could appear or act like a certain creature, but their conscious experience would be entirely distinct from that of that particular creature. In this essay, I strive to find the "Self," but I am unwilling to eliminate or even reduce the body—rather, I want to affirm its significance in defining the self. How self-consciousness could be objectively understood without a specific perspective is unquestionably an open question. Understanding a person's point of view—that is, how he or she feels or sees the world—is the only way to truly comprehend that person. In the specified sphere of an endured world, this uniqueness starts with the body. Our bodies are the aspect that unifies us, contributing to what has been alluded to as a sense of ownership.*

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### Introduction

Sam Callahan: *You're licking the mirror.*

Lydia Callahan: *I'm making contact.*

Sam Callahan: *With whom?*

Lydia Callahan: *Myself.*<sup>1</sup>

You might be wondering why have I included this conversation from Tamra Davis's 2000 American comedy-drama "Skipped Parts"? I find it humorous and perplexing at the same time because, like Lydia, I occasionally contemplate and discover myself standing in front of the mirror, looking at my physical appearance and asking myself is that who I am? Certainly, this is a hard topic to pin down. But the most difficult inquiry, though, is: does the body constitute the self? The term "self" is multilayered, encompassing many different concepts, such as the notions of body, memory, experiences, and consciousness among others. Taking into consideration the most basic organism, it sets itself apart from what it is not through the self by maintaining its structure. Living things capable of locomotion, or active self-movement, exhibit the earliest form of self-awareness. These creatures are active participants in their immediate surroundings and ecological lives. In this essay, I strive to find the "Self," but I am unwilling to eliminate or even reduce the body—rather, I want to affirm its significance in defining the self. It may seem at this point that I am bypassing other aspects of self-identity. However, that is untrue. I am not attempting to the body appear superior to other dimensions. They are also crucial for the manifestations of self. But I intend to show that the body is also not redundant in our quest for the "self". The idea of the self has historically been associated with philosophical debate, but with the advent of psychoanalysis, it has been shifted into the domain of psychology, where it has often been defined as the ego. In the last few years, brain imaging has enabled us to investigate the neural mechanisms that underlie our subjective perception of who we are. Determining the Self using a single concept is difficult. But there are undoubtedly some characteristics that define who I am. Nonetheless, our bodies are an aspect that unifies us, contributing to what has been alluded to as a *sense of ownership*<sup>2</sup>.

### Traditionalism and the Idea of Self

<sup>1</sup> Davis, T, Skipped Parts. English. Trimark Pictures. 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Bermúdez, J., L. "Ownership and the Space of the Body". *The Bodily Self: Selected Essays*. MIT Press. 2018.

The body and the self are unrelated in traditional thinking. The self is intended to be something superior and distinct from the body. Descartes posed a query in his second Meditation. He attempted to determine what he could know for sure using his method of systematic doubt. He had established his own existence earlier with his *Cogito, ergo sum*. The inquiry resulting from this is, however: what kind of thing is it that exists because it can think? The response is:

A thinking thing... to speak accurately I am not more than a thing which thinks, that is to say, a mind or a soul<sup>3</sup>.

Descartes claims that my mind, which is what makes me who I am, is entirely and legitimately unlike my body and is able to exist without it. Cartesian dualism attempts to eliminate the body drastically. Additionally, he further argues that,

I am not only lodged in my body as a pilot in a vessel.... I am besides so intimately conjoined, and as it were intermixed with it, that my mind and body compose a certain unity<sup>4</sup>.

Right now, it appears that there could be two main questions that can be raised:

- (1) Is the body and mind completely separate from one another?
- (2) Is it really possible to be independent of my body?

The first question relates to the body and mind taken into consideration. The fundamental idea of Descartes's dualistic notion is that they are conceivable distinct from one another, both in abstraction and generally as they are different substances with distinct essences of their own, merely extension and consciousness. Given the context of my article, the second question is more pertinent. Descartes supports the idea of a mind-body composite. It is important to remember that the body as a component of the union should not be confused with the extended substance, and the soul is also a component of the union but goes beyond the notion of thinking. In this framework, the concept of the self somehow gets connected to the concept of thinking substance or consciousness, while the concept of the body remains merely a locus and has little impact whatsoever on the identification of the self. Despite quantitative physical changes, a subject's body remains a subject's body for the duration of his life since it is determined by its union with his mind. A subject's mind is nevertheless significantly, as opposed to merely contingently, connected to his body, even though the mind can be conceived abstractly as a solely spiritual substance. An individual's concept of their own body is unique in the Cartesian view of the self. Unlike everyone else, my body is the one that gives me sight, whose lips move when I speak, whose arm rises when I extend it, and so on. Although it's not me, it's mine. Does my body, however, simply belong to me? Does "my body" and "my house" not mean something different? That is a legitimate question to ask. But can we really conceive a man devoid of a body? As Merleau-Ponty correctly asserted,

a handless or sexless man is as inconceivable as one without the power of thought.<sup>5</sup>

One could argue that it is feasible to envision a man without corporal existence in the era of artificial intelligence. My simple response is that, while we are capable of picturing, not everything imaginable—such as the Golden Mountain—is logically feasible. We must concede that logical necessity does not imply metaphysical possibility, even if we believe that an idea is sufficient for existence at that point as well. While I certainly appreciate science fiction films in the relevant genre and can imagine such things in my mind, still I cannot accept them as reality. Even with his extreme dualism, Descartes is unable to disembodify the factual subject's mind; instead, his perspective fosters further inquiry into the body and self. I argue that the self is both a spatially extended, corporeal being and, at its core, a thinking thing. The mind and body are equally integral parts of who we are. Put more radically, if this mind had not been connected to this body, it would not have taken on this role in any way.

### Inclination towards the Reduction of Body

<sup>3</sup>Descartes, R. (1641), Meditation 2, Meditation 6, in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. E.S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).vol i, 151.

<sup>4</sup>Descartes, R. (1641) *Meditations Concerning First Philosophy*, Vi, 13, trans. Cottingham J.(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>5</sup>Merleau-Ponty M (1945). *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans: C Smith. (Paris: Routledge Classics, 1962)

A disembodied conception of the mind is supported not only by dualism but also by materialism. The infamous "brain-in-a-vat"<sup>6</sup> thought experiment serves as an excellent example of this viewpoint's radical interpretation. The version states that your brain is surgically separated from the rest of your body by a neurosurgeon. Then your brain is kept in a vat full of nutrients, and that's how it remains alive. Because of its computer connection, it also preserves an interaction with the world outside. The combination of brain, vat, and computer would be adequate for achieving a comprehensive notion of consciousness and self. This validates the hypothesis that self-consciousness is a skull-based, in-brained, but disembodied concept by trying to separate the physical components of self-consciousness in a subset of neuronal stimulation.

I will contend that the experiment fell short of establishing the body's reducibility to self-recognition. First, according to the "thought-experimenter," the originally mentioned operation would disembody his "patient's" brain while keeping his subjective experiences unchanged. The patient would likely experience his body even after the surgery, exactly the way he used to encounter it. Hence, the experiential feature of the body—which is defined as the individual's subjective first-person impression of the body—is not completely removed by the thought experiment. Each component of what one considers to be a body is covered in this aspect. Second, the subject of this thought experiment is a brain-in-a-vat rather than a real brain. The brain's ability to regulate life is made possible by the vat, and for that to be the case, the "vat" has successfully mimicked bodily living functions along with harboring the brain. Thus, the architectural structure of the body—that is, everything that exists within the circumference of the skin—would not be annihilated by the so-called experimental disembodiment. Third, a brain in a vat linked to a computer is the topic of this thought experiment as opposed to a brain inside a vat. An effective computer would accurately replicate the sensorimotor aspect of the human body to facilitate the interaction of brain stimulation with the outside environment. Ultimately, the body is also present at the neuronal level in the thought experiment, going beyond the straightforward assertion that the brain is a component of the body. This illustrates the human body's neurological aspect. In addition to being irreducible to one another, these four bodily dimensions are also cannot be withdrawn. Not just any artificial device could replace their biological manifestation; rather, it would need to be able to replace it with one that could perform a function equivalent to that which the biological body typically accomplishes. In a functional sense, these measurements would be considered bodily. Furthermore, current research indicates that these fabricated gadgets must comply with fundamental standards to operate as true substitutes for the biological body if they were to be productive at all. As a consequence, it seems reasonable to regard these processes as physiological.

### The Notion of Body

The concept of body has a long history in the history of Philosophy. The idea can be followed from ancient to post-modern perspectives. In my opinion, the body is that necessary key by which we live and interact with this world. There is an inclination in the Philosophy of Mind to identify the body with the brain solely. Indeed, the brain is important but there are other, that shares as well and those are also significant. Body means the whole physical constitution. Pain is felt a certain way to me because of this molecular construction. The mainstream embodiment theorists advocate the notion of embodied cognition. Cognition is embodied because it is determined by the physical body of the organism. My claim is a little more radical. Precisely, my conscious experiences are of a specific kind because my consciousness is embodied. If the exclusivity of the self is nothing more than the conscious experience of the individual then that subjectiveness cannot be evaluated outside the realm of the physical form and there comes the body. Here one might ask what the connection between the body and the self is.

What is Self? It is the exceptionality of the conscious experience of an individual. Is the Body synonymous with the Self? The answer is no, they are not. The body is certainly a necessary condition for the Self but it is not sufficient. There is more than the body which contributes to the totality of the Self. It is fundamentally a compound concept that is made up of perception, vision, thought, feeling, memory, body, and so on. But what is primordial to the self is a particular point of view that is too akin to the individual. This point of view is based on the phenomenal experience of that agent and that agent's body has pivotal oversight over that phenomenal character. At this point, one might ask what is special in the phenomenal dimension. Frankly

<sup>6</sup> Putnam, H. *Reason, Truth, and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1982

speaking, it is typically related to *what it is like to be* an organism, and it straightforwardly leads to Thomas Nagel's infamous article<sup>7</sup>.

### What It Is Like to Be A Bat: A Reflection

The reductionist understanding of consciousness was strongly rejected by Nagel. The phenomenal nature of experience, which those functional or intentional states are unable to interpret, must be addressed if we are to comprehend the essence of consciousness. He contends that individualistic conscious experience has a unique quality that can be recognized by the experience's subject. The objective facts alone could never fully capture the experience of being that agent. Because of their unusual experience pattern, Nagel has selected bats. Regarding a bat's perception or experience of the world, we are all slightly acquainted. We can always Google it otherwise. Bats typically use echolocation to detect their surroundings. It is in no way similar to our perception and therefore, it poses a challenge that how to reconcile the notion of being a bat.

Arguably, our personal experiences can contribute to our perception of what it would be like to be a bat. Furthermore, we may be able to experience such outlooks as a result of scientific and technological advancements. We might use gadgets to fly, spend an entire day hanging upside down by our feet, create a system that can reflect high-frequency sound signals, and more. Regretfully, with all of this, one can only speculate as to what it would be like for him or her to act like a bat, given the limited resources that are only available to the mind. Even with his super-advanced equipment and genius-level intellect, our very own Gotham City superhero still continues to be referred to as Batman, rather than simply a bat. I can look or behave like a bat only to an extent without changing my fundamental structure. But my experience would never be similar (maybe not identical) with those bats.

Again, one can claim if we can gradually be converted into a bat (as a thought experiment we can always imagine so), then we can exactly anticipate *what it is like* to be a bat. In this undertone, people often refer to "The Metamorphosis"<sup>8</sup> (Die Verwandlung), a novel written by Franz Kafka, which narrates the tale of a salesman Gregor Samsa, who wakes one fine morning and discovers himself strangely transformed into a gigantic insect. However, it is an absolute bad analogy because as the story proceeds, we will find that the protagonist eventually scuffles to adjust to this new configuration. One thing must be noted here, that bodily amendment does not stand for the alteration of the carapace but the modification of the whole physical-neural framework, which ultimately influences the mind. Our concept of mind is necessarily embodied. The changes in Samsa are only external and that is also quite partial. In principle, transformation means that our present neuro-biological constitution is no longer available to us and we have become a completely different organism altogether. The irony is when one can legitimately experience what it is like to be a different creature then This item does not have an appropriate place or purpose to the genre of human anymore as it has completely converted into a different entity. The conscious experience of self would not continue to be the same. Hence, we can only enjoy a schematic conception of *what it is like* from the outside.

### Body and Self

The Mad Pain and Martian Pain hypotheses have effectively captured the influence of the body over feeling. I will cite a few parts from this article that support my paper. Let us imagine a Martian with a hydraulic mind. Even though he experiences pain occasionally, just like us, his pain is not physically understandable in the same way as ours. One can argue if it feels to him like pain, then it is pain irrespective of its physical characterization. If not, then it is not pain at all. As simple as that. I genuinely subscribe to this notion because pain is ultimately a feeling. Without the experience of being in that state, a phenomenal state is meaningless. However, the domain of an agent's conscious experience is where the subjective nature of experience is found, and the agent's concept encompasses the concept of body. Thus, through conscious experience, the body influences the Self.

### Self and Extended Mind

Not that brains and blood are the only places where consciousness can exist, but it is just embodied in some manner. A lot of people contend that in addition to the body, social conventions and environmental cues

<sup>7</sup> Nagel, T. 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat'. *Philosophical Review*, 83. pp 435-450. 1974.

<sup>8</sup> Kafka, Franz. *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*. Tran. by Stanley Appelbaum, New York: Dover Publications, 1996.

should also be taken into consideration. I am not against this view. They are certainly very substantial. However, it is important to note that the body cannot be entirely eradicated. Understanding the body is always the first step in understanding the self. It is not possible to ignore the first step as you ascend the stairs. That's how fundamental I think the body is.

Because external objects can fulfill the same function as the body in this situation, people frequently question the concept of the body. The extended mind theory, which strongly suggests that human mental state can be observed externally and fused with objects, environments, and even other minds, is a theory that most people are familiar with. This theory was discussed by Andy Clark and David Chalmers, who also offered a thought experiment involving Inga, a woman, and Otto, an Alzheimer's patient, both desiring to visit MOMA in New York City. Until they checked their notes or memory, neither Inga nor Otto knew the exact location of the museum, but both were able to offer it upon request. This experiment is maintained by Clark and Chalmers to demonstrate the correlation between Otto's notebook and Inga's belief regarding memory. They use Inga's example to pinpoint the fact that Inga had her belief that the museum was on 53rd Street even before she referred to her memory. Inga's beliefs before her recollection are ordinary non-occurrent beliefs that vary from occurrent material that might arise and fade away, which is contingent on specific frameworks. While Otto looked through his notebook for the address, Inga used her memory to retrieve the museum's address. They managed to get to the museum together. They contend that Inga and Otto, memory and notebook, are identical in every way. Consequently, when required, the information is logical and consistent in both situations. It can direct behavior in the same way that a dispositional belief does, and it is readily accessible to consciousness. So, here mind goes brain to body and body to external object. Since I wear spectacles, are they now a part of my body? If I say no, it implies I have perfect eyesight, which is not true. Nevertheless, that is not the situation because people who have high power in their eyes are almost unsighted without glasses. Roughly speaking, external to the body does not only mean objects, rather it includes the environment as well if it resonates. Advocates of extended mind theory maintain that the distinction between mind, body, and environment is in principle non-viable. The sense of Self is spread across the mind, body, environment, and other aspects of existence.

### Body Ownership

Bodily awareness is a subset of self-awareness and it gives a kind of ownership that seems permanent. The common-sense understanding is consistent with the idea of permanent ownership of the body as self-awareness. Vignemont<sup>9</sup> asserted that certain feelings are comparatively constant aspects of one's bodily awareness. The comprehension of presence can be used to describe physical experiences, regardless of the validity of the sensorimotor approach. When a person feels ticklish in her neck, she senses the skin, muscles, and joints in the vicinity as well as the spot itself. The body is there in a way, even though not every part of it is currently at the edge of consciousness. In some situations, such as in the case of depersonalization, this feeling of presence can be substituted by the feeling of absence and this can be defined as a sensory impairment. The concept of "presence" is a consequence of the sensorimotor approach, and mainly it is applied in the case of the occurrence of perception. The concept of one's bodily capacities is also significant. In this context, "bodily capacities" encompass the more stable or long-term ability to carry out numerous duties with one's body. One might ask what the cause of these capacities is. These could result from evaluating our previous accomplishments and the capacities that were involved and consequently necessitate specific metacognitive skills that require independent investigation. This perception of one's bodily capacities can occasionally give way to one's perception of one's physical limitations, especially in the situation of hysterical conversion. Feelings of capability and inadequacy related to one's own body are regarded as bodily capacities. It is frequently referred to as the "sense of agency". I am speaking about all of this because I would like to introduce the idea of body ownership. Probably the most talked about phenomenon in this field is ownership of a body. The human body is "opaque"<sup>10</sup> in the sense that one can look at it instead of seeing through it, which is one of its essential properties. In this way, the body is understood as the intentional object, that is, as the object of attention of an intentional act of consciousness.

<sup>9</sup>Vignemont, F. Bodily feelings: Presence, agency, and ownership. In *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Consciousness*, ed. U. Kriegel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>10</sup>Legrand, D. "Pre-reflective self-consciousness: on being bodily in the world". *Janus Head, Special Issue: The Situated Body*, 9(1):493-519. 2007.

Not only when I witness the body with exteroception, but also when interoceptive communication draws my attention or when the body withstands my attempts and I feel the resistance of the outside world, I interpret the body as an intentional object and experience it as a physical object. Because it can be experienced as mine/me in a manner that other objects cannot, the body as an intentional object is unlike any other object in existence. One does not generally experience just a body that directly responds to one's intentions; one typically experiences one's own body. This sense of ownership may also be substituted, as in the case of somatoparaphrenia, by a sense of dis-ownership over one's body. Researchers have claimed that affective consciousness is an indispensable part of bodily ownership. An advanced framework for existential feelings that is affective and bodily has been put forward by Matthew Ratcliffe<sup>11</sup>. Human's broad spectrum of choices is shaped by bodily feelings. They constitute the pre-structuring backgrounds of all human experiences and are experiences by themselves. These bodily existential sensations, according to Ratcliffe, are "sui generis" and distinct from emotions and moods.

### Bodily Self-Awareness

Body self-awareness is consistent with Merleau-Ponty's<sup>12</sup> subject-object theory if it can incorporate both subjective and objective viewpoints. On the other hand, the general thesis of the phenomenological tradition holds that we are never conscious of our bodies. We must have a thorough discussion of these concepts to comprehend this. According to the Husserlian framework, a mere body (Körper) is just physical matter, whereas the Body (Leib) is the flesh or a bodily self. Merleau-Ponty establishes an important distinction between the lived body and the objective body, which is made up of neurons, muscles, and bone structure, in his research. The structure in question bears a resemblance to Husserl. Two perspectives exist on the human body: phenomenal and objective. It is only presented phenomenally, not objectively, from the first-person point of view. As Merleau-Ponty notes, the body is not just one more among these external objects.

It is difficult to recognize the lived body from a variety of angles. Pre-reflective awareness is how one acknowledges the phenomenal self, to be aware of oneself. The lived body is fundamentally what makes our consciousness of objects possible, so it cannot exist as an object in and of itself. Therefore, the lived body needs to be considered in terms of how it pragmatically engages with the outside world. The only habitat for body sensation is this lived body. After becoming conscious of the physical body, an individual does not perceive it as a purely physical entity, but rather as a subjective object that sustains their subjective states and affairs.

### Final Remarks

We indeed experience ourselves as numerous distinct entities. At times, we perceive ourselves as nothing more than thinkers, at other times as nothing more than feelers, and at other times as nothing more than the focal point of a story. There are layers to the self. However, there is evidence from multiple sources that the sense of self as an active, embodied being exists well before any "real" storytelling or thinking, and possibly even before any distinctive encountering. It appears that some form of awareness of a physical self exists both ontogenetically and evolutionary, preceding any indication of self-consciousness in the sense of the thinking dimension of self-concept, even for the most primitive organisms. Indeed, our awareness of ourselves is far more advanced and intricate. Occasionally, we may experience a detachment between our consciousness and its physical foundation. Furthermore, one might discover that the walls between the body and soul disappear during meditation. However, each of these various forms of self-awareness and self-concepts are extensions to, or even deviances from, the primary self-concept. That sense of an ecological self, or core self, is therefore what they rely on.

The dynamic combination of body and surroundings gives rise to the corporeal self. There is a debate about whether we should punish a single bit that refers to the body for committing a crime if the Self is distributed. I'm not sure how to respond to this, but it's definitely a very valid question. Questions are and always will be present. The main goal of this entire conversation is to highlight that my body is a part of my conscious experience, and that's what makes me, Me. A key component of the bodily self is the sense of body ownership, which refers to the special status that one's own body has in perception and the conviction that it

<sup>11</sup> Ratcliffe, M. *Feelings of being: Phenomenology, psychiatry and the sense of reality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2008.

<sup>12</sup>Merleau-Ponty, M. *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, 2nd ed. Routledge. 2002. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203994610>.

is one's own. The body is intimately linked to the concept of identity. To be honest, the idea of being a bat would vanish if the body were absent from existence.

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