

Body and Person

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The question of the relations between body and mind, the physical and the personal, this question is the strongest example one could cite of a *philosophical* question. If one wanted to teach someone just what the strange inquiry known as philosophy is, or has traditionally been thought to be, this, rather than the question about chairs and tables in untenanted rooms, would, I think, be the right question to choose, both for its richness and for its puzzling character. The puzzle about the relations between the mental, the personal, the spiritual, on the one hand, and the physical, the bodily, the material, on the other, is not (or doesn't seem to be) a puzzle about what is in fact the case. It is not a question such as the question "*What is the function of the pancreas?*" might be. Even if we don't know the answer to this question, we know the kind of observations that would be relevant to settling it. But if to the question "*How are body and soul/mind/spirit/personality related?*" we give the reply, "*Look and see!*" the point seems to have been missed. We have all the information we need in order to answer the question, surely; we know what it is to walk and run, to speak and sing, to add up a column of figures, to look out on the world and pick out the roses and the blackbirds, the sun and the moon and the constellations, to distinguish the smooth from the rough, the sphere from the cube, the animate from the inanimate, the past from the future; we can even, though this gets very difficult and our lives are filled with mistakes in this respect, distinguish friends from enemies, true lovers from false, the solidly good from the merely clever. Further, we know that men whose brains have been damaged may not be able to think properly, that by taking a little pill or a shot of liquor our mood, our sentiments, may be changed, that if we were deprived of sleep and kept under bright lights for long enough we should probably put our names to any kind of nonsense that was proposed to us. I won't continue to cite the many things, beyond all computation, men and women can undergo and do. About all of them we can speak appropriately and intelligibly, that is, we can communicate with each other on all these matters, and often what we say is right.

It might be thought that questions about body and soul are a bit different from other questions. It is true, soul has become a somewhat churchy word, unlike mind and person; the sign of our embarrassment over using it is that we use Greek to refer to it: soul doctors are called "psychiatrists" and "psychoanalysts," and the study of the soul is called "psychology." It seems less embarrassing to say *psyche* than soul, and perhaps some day "soul" will

become archaic, as “ghost” has become—I suppose children in school who came across a New Testament translation in which it was stated that when Christ died on the cross He “gave up the ghost,” would now have very curious spectral thoughts in their minds. (The flight to the ancient languages is a fascinating topic in itself: consider such examples of meiosis as “euthanasia,” “termination of pregnancy,” “the liquidation of antisocial elements.”) Some people might want to say that we no longer use the word “soul” because we no longer think it denotes anything. “Dragon” and “witch” are not thought to denote anything but still have meaning. But to suggest that psychology has no subject matter seems preposterous. There are still many contexts in which the use of the term is wholly intelligible. We don’t jibe at “My soul, there is a country/ Far beyond the stars” or Isabella’s “Why, all the souls that were were forfeit once” (*Measure for Measure*, II ii); nor do we construe such formulations as we might statements using words for which we now believe there is in a very strong sense no denotation (“phlogiston,” “animal spirits”). There is an illuminating conversation towards the end of *Anna Karenina*. Levin is talking to one of the peasants of his district. The peasant says of “the old peasant Platon”:

“Do you suppose he’d flay the skin off a man? He’ll give credit and sometimes let a man off. And go short himself, too. He’s that sort of person.”

“But why should he let anyone off?”

“Oh, well, of course, folks are different. One man lives for his own wants and nothing else . . . but [Platon] is an upright old man. He thinks of his soul. He does not forget God.”

“Not forget God? And how does he live for his soul?” Levin almost shouted.

“Why, that’s plain enough: it’s living rightly, in God’s way. . . .”¹

That’s plain enough; here, no questions about the soul as a mysterious *entity* connected, if it is, with the body we can point to, have to be raised. Indeed, to raise such questions seems in many contexts to be a misunderstanding. If I say “I did the sum in my head,” it would be a mistake for some interlocutor to suppose that this is a claim made about a certain performance going on at a point in space just below the skull. The question “Where precisely did you do that piece of mental arithmetic?” is either a question about where I was when I was doing it (e.g., in the aeroplane between Toronto and New York), or a nonsense question. And yet we may be filled with paralysing anxieties when we reflect that the right answer to a question about a mental performance is a piece of information about the spatial location of a body. The questions

1 Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenin*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (Penguin Books 1954, p.829

which express the philosophical puzzle seem to be requests, not for an answer, but for an elucidation of their own meaning. It is not clear what such philosophical questions are questions *about*, for we find it hard to give them a sense *as questions*.

Men have not always felt this difficulty so sharply as we do today. Descartes is perhaps the first to point out that questions about soul and body have quite different senses according to whether we put them philosophically or in some other way. He himself thought that soul and body were two entities, that the problem of their interaction was difficult or impossible to solve, and that—this is perhaps the most surprising thing—we are very well acquainted with the soul, knowing it, and about it, much better than we know the body; indeed, it's conceivable that the body is no more than a hypothesis to explain psychic or soulish phenomena: *cogitationes*, that is thoughts and sensations. (This is the part of the Cartesian tradition Hume inherits.) In a letter to the Princess Elizabeth, Descartes writes that “those who never do philosophise and make use only of their senses have no doubt that the soul moves the body and the body acts on the soul; indeed, they consider the two as a single thing.”

Later he speaks of the idea of the union of soul and body: “. . . which everybody always has in himself without doing philosophy—viz. that there is one single person who has at once body and consciousness, so that this consciousness can move the body and be aware of the events that happen to it.”²

I propose, then, to adopt for this occasion what Descartes supposes to be the common precritical and prephilosophical way of conceiving human beings, that is, as “one single person who has at once body and consciousness.” I think that in the end this is philosophically right, too, but I shan't go thoroughly into this critical question except to say that this is on the whole what Aristotle meant when he spoke of the soul as the form of the body; and what Aquinas took for granted when he said in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, that *Anima mea non est ego* (“My soul isn't I or I am not just my soul”). At any rate, we can point to John or (Mary), embrace him, care for him by binding up his wounds, take him to the party, mourn his death by cancer or pneumonia or by being run over in the street. We don't say, and surely this is significant: I am pointing to John's body, I embrace John's body, I am taking John and his body to the party, John's body died yesterday. There are cases in which we do talk about John's body. It lies mouldering in the grave (there is an interesting but perhaps no longer fashionable locution according to which the dead body is termed “the remains”); where we compare John physically with others, we might say of his body that it is well formed or musc-

² Renee Descartes, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and edited by Elizabeth Anscombe and Peter Thomas Geach (London 1954) pp. 279-281

ular; some parts or operations of the body are spoken about without explicitly ascribing what is said to the person John, as when we speak of involuntary movements or the activities of the ductless glands; these are things that happen to John, rather than things that belong to his personal life, like his speaking or walking or writing.

There seems to be no doubt that philosophy and religion as a whole are dualistic, that is, they think of soul and body as two entities; and commonly they look upon the connection between the two as contingent and the separation of the two at death as on the whole a good thing, since what man essentially is is his soul and the connection with the body has consequences that are often tiresome for the real man (“the man in man,” says Plato). He is much better off without this encumbrance—in some traditions to have a bodily life is a punishment, a consequence of some fall from the authentic, godlike life of the soul. Pains and pleasures that come from the frustration of free exercise of the organs of the body are thought to distract the soul from its proper business; the appetites and passions, hunger and thirst and lust and fear and anger, are thought to be connected with our bodily life, and this is surely correct, and are therefore tests of our virtue and trials of our patience. Bodily life can become a weariness to man. All this is a commonplace in what we may broadly and loosely call the Platonic tradition. It isn’t accidental that within this tradition there is much intellectual hospitality to the doctrine of the transmigration of souls. Nothing brings out more vividly the accidental, contingent conjunction between body and soul in this tradition. Species and sex are irrelevant to the soul considered as a subsistent entity. Human souls may inhabit birds and serpents, crocodiles and donkeys, as easily as they inhabit human bodies. Thus, *homo sapiens* is a spiritual and not a biological classification, since what is distinctive about *homo sapiens* is the kind of spiritual performances—thinking about formal questions, seeking the good, the beautiful and the true—he can go through, and this he can do better without the distractions of physical life.

There is no question that this is an interesting and, on first examination, a consoling doctrine. That it is not really intelligible isn’t evident. With the belief about transmigration chopped off it, it represents the belief of many Christians, Protestant and Catholic, and of many others in Western society; so powerful is the spell of Plato, so insinuating the world outlook of Gnosticism. In the English Penny Catechism one used to find the following bit of dialogue: “Q: Of which ought I to take most care, my body or my soul? R: My soul, because my soul will never die.”

I have no doubt this can be given a benevolent and orthodox interpretation. Indeed, that we should take great care of our souls is enjoined by the example of the godly peasant Platon, and, of

course, we ought always to prefer death to harm to the soul. But the popular inference made from the words of the Catechism is, I am confident, that there is an imperishable entity called the soul, a perishable entity called the body and that the former entity is the “real” man, the one who will go on living after death. If we look forward to the resurrection of the dead, as we profess to do when we recite the traditional creeds, this is either to be construed as a piece of poetry, a quaint and primitive belief, or as an anticipation of an extra, a kind of dessert for good children, that fortunately is given to us but that in principle we could have done without. This is not, it may be noted, the view of the Apostle Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 15:16-19).

That there are many dualities in man I wouldn't wish to deny. We are like the other animals in many respects and many of our peculiar problems seem to arise out of the conjunction of our urgent animal nature, subject to the imperatives of appetite and differentiated according to sex, with our nature as symbol-framing and -using animals, able to look before and after and make fictions that both console and disturb. Only men among the animals have language and only men can frame questions about their own existence and purposes. The argument for an absolute dualism—the idea that man essentially is his symbol-framing and symbol-using nature and that his physical life is something inessentially his and dispensable with—rests upon what seems the plain implication of the conjunction of physical and mental predicates that can be attached to the same individual: if we exclude the mental predicates we are left with nothing distinctively human; if we exclude the physical predicates, what we have left seems to be all that is distinctively human, “the man in man,” to repeat Plato's striking phrase. As I have said, I think this to be philosophically confused. Crudely—very crudely—if we exclude the physical predicates it isn't clear that we have any particular thing to which we can refer the mental predicates. My identity seems to be connected with my bodily persistence through time. It isn't that I go from Toronto to New York, and from the sixth to the ninth of May, *and take my body with me*. Again, it isn't the case that my senses report to me, the essential spiritual me, what goes on in the world: I touch with my hands, see with my eyes, hear with my ears. My concepts are such that they arise out of my practical, sensuous existence. When I. A. Richards said that metaphor is the constitutive form of language, he was profoundly right. We survey the material, press on to the conclusion, smell rats, take on the burden of the argument, go to the centre of the problem, find conflicting interpretations. . . . Even the tall stories people tell about when they almost died, the stories about floating up to the ceiling and seeing the body lying on the bed, approaching a light and hearing voices, all such stories of course presuppose practical and

sensuous experiences that only have sense if they are ascribed to subjects having bodies. I suppose this is why, in the theosophical tradition, the living have astral bodies they can conveniently pick up when they die and why spiritualist mediums reporting on the dead have sometimes allowed them the ectoplasmic equivalent of whiskey and cigars. It makes a kind of sense.

It is very striking that (so far as I know) only one religious tradition, that of Judaism, and only one philosophical tradition, that of Aristotle, has not found a metaphysical duality in human nature.³ I think it also true that, on the whole, often despite itself, Christianity has remained faithful to this tradition, shedding as heretics all those who have wanted to insist on an ultimate dualism. At best, dualism depreciates the value of the physical world; at worst, it takes it to be something evil, as with the Manichaeans. The Biblical doctrine of the goodness of the creation, inanimate and animate, in all its perplexing variety, with all that charms and all that terrifies, stands in the way of dualism. The two accounts in Genesis of the creation of man insist upon his community with the rest of creation: he is made out of the dust of the earth; he is made male and female—"male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:27), like the other animals and like the plants—and he is made "in the image of God." All that this last point means I wouldn't dare to go into; but I think we may connect it with the Genesis account of man's *naming*⁴ all the living creatures; it is connected with what I have called symbol-making and symbol-using, that is, with the framing of concepts and with the use of language. The hope of Israel throughout the Old Testament is for the bodily and social restoration of the people, not for a timeless existence in a celestial realm. The question of personal immortality is scarcely raised until very late in the history of Israel, and then it is perhaps characteristic that it is raised as a somewhat different question, and one no doubt ludicrous to those of Greek culture, namely, that of *resurrection*: coming to life again, for men are embodied creatures and can't live in any other way.

"God graciously called Himself *the God of Abraham*. He did not say the God of Abraham's *soul*, but simply of *Abraham*. He blest Abraham, and He gave him eternal life; not to his soul only without his body, but to Abraham as one man" (John Henry Newman, "The Resurrection of the Body," in *Parochial and Plain Sermons I*).

Thus Newman in a memorable sermon. His witness is all the more precious in that he is often deeply influenced by dualism, both that of the Platonic tradition and that of the English empir-

³ Of course, I leave out of account materialists—Holbach, La Mettrie and such.

⁴ These are not proper names. We only call Fido "Fido" in view of our already knowing that "dog" applies to him.

icists (see my "Newman and the Empiricist Tradition," in John Coulson and A. M. Allchin's *The Rediscovery of Newman*, London, 1967, p. 76-96). But when fundamental dogmatic questions come under his notice, the difficult orthodoxy of the main Christian tradition always asserts itself and the paradoxes of the philosophical schools fall away from him, as I think they on the whole do with Augustine.

Historically, dualism has shown its influence within Christian life in the following ways. There are the Gnostic heresies, most important of all, perhaps, the heresy of Marcion. He thought the physical world, and this of course included the human body, the work of a Demiurge whose creative activities are recorded in the Old Testament. This Demiurge is not God; God lies beyond the world, has nothing to do with the creation, but is represented by Jesus who reveals the Father and offers us a saving wisdom which, correctly apprehended, will release us from our bondage to the physical world. Such currents of thought are to be found in the various Christological heresies that denied the humanity of Jesus and suggested that the appearance of His manhood was a kind of disguise and that He did not really undergo crucifixion and death.

Characteristically, Gnosticism swings violently between a rigorous asceticism—if the physical world is evil, we can't begin too soon detaching ourselves from it—and an antinomianism—since bodily life in the world is a deceitful show, not really real, it does not matter what we do. These two extremes are often to be found within one ecclesiastical body. Most Gnostic sects, like the Manicheans, seem to have met the difficulties of day-to-day existence in the world by dividing into the Perfect and the rest.

Of course, historians of the church differ a great deal over how deeply Gnostic and allied ways of thinking influenced the main Christian tradition. I think there can be no doubt that even the orthodox were more influenced by Gnosticism than they realised. This shows itself not so much in bald statements as in tones of voice, ways of putting things, those picked out for emphasis and those things understressed. It would have been strange had this not been so. After all, Gnosticism, Platonism, all that the Apostle Paul meant by the "Greeks" for whom the cross is foolishness, all the dualistic philosophical religions for which the physical world and bodily life were trivialities, shadow shows, represented the educated world of paganism; and it is very hard not to be captivated by the insinuating manners, the propagation of ideas by innuendo, that are characteristic of all highly-educated groups. At any rate, as Peter Brown once put it, and I think this perfectly makes my point: "[Saint Augustine's] defence of married life was conscientious [but] his treatise on virginity was quite lyrical." Augustine cannot quite condemn marriage, for he knew what the right belief in this matter was. All the same, he is embarrassed. But it is won-

derful to note how, in his old age, this former Manichean, this Platonist, is preoccupied with the Resurrection. "I want to be healed completely, for I am a complete whole." "Take away death, the last enemy, and my own flesh shall be my dear friend throughout eternity."⁵ The new Christian sexual morality must have been startling enough in the ancient world: no fornication, marriage a permanent union, no adultery, no homosexual relations. Only Jews, whose morality this is, were not surprised. It isn't odd, then, that a dualistic view of human sexuality should have tinged the views of most Christians; it seemed somehow sympathetic, though in the end inadmissible, for it contradicted what is deepest in the tradition, the goodness of the creation.

We may see dualistic influences at work, too, in the virtual division of Christians between the perfect and the others: the consecrated virgins, who include the higher clergy, and those who live in the insecurity of the rough world. As a consequence of this, the functional divisions of the ecclesiastical community become, as it were, differences of caste. Again, with the dwindling of eschatological expectations, there comes about that lightness in touching upon the Resurrection, that immense emphasis on talk about a purely spiritual celestial or infernal realm that awaits us after death, we have already noticed. (There are always rumblings. Aquinas maintains that the soul is the form of the body [cf. "The human body is the best picture of the human soul."⁶] and that the survival of the "separated soul" is not the survival of John or Mary. John XXII was censured for heresy: his heresy was that of maintaining that just men don't enjoy the vision of God until after the Resurrection. This is a belief that shows up again among some of the Protestant sects after the Reformation, and in Hobbes's *Leviathan*, and comes to be known as mortalism.)

On all these matters we are today disposed to congratulate ourselves that we are not as our ancestors were. Augustine and the Apostle Paul before him, have had a bad (and an ignorant) press. We are manifestly concerned to reshape the earthly city on the best models. We have what appears to be the rudiments of a new theology of sexuality in which sexual activity is given a positively salvific function. Otherworldliness and asceticism are not today notable features of Christian life. Social and economic progress, defined much as the world defines them, are no longer clearly distinguished from "the kingdom of God and His justice." Altogether, this warm, dense, tangible, pulsating world, with its pleasures and its pains, seems to be taken very seriously; time, too, is taken seriously, time that blunts the lion's paws also serves as op-

⁵ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley 1967) p. 366

⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford 1953) II iv p. 178e

portunity now, here, to right wrongs, to feed the hungry, to fulfil in at least the fortunate those inward movements towards self-perfection that have in the past been frustrated by a world-hating asceticism. We seem at last to be rid of the Gnostics and the Neoplatonists and the Manichees. I believe this impression is mistaken.

I think there are some topics much discussed today that betray the often unsuspected presence of Gnosticism among Christians and others. They are: fashionable ways of talking about the Resurrection stories in the Gospels; much of what is taken to be enlightened common sense in discussing relations, sexual and social, between men and women (and men and men and women and women); our thought about death; and, finally, new ways of thinking about morality, especially those associated with such moralists as Joseph Fletcher. What many discussions of these topics have in common is a notion I formulate in the following way: human beings are primarily persons and their being at the same time bodies gives rise to differences between them that are in the final analysis accidental and unimportant. Stated in this way, it looks like a great commonplace that ought everywhere to be received and nowhere denied. Of course, it is. In Christ there is neither male nor female, neither bond nor free, neither Jew nor Greek. . . . Man is constituted and grounded in the Word and his ability to respond to the Word is what makes him a religious animal, and in this respect there are no differences of sex or race or of anything else that comes from his bodily constitution. In heaven there will be neither marrying nor giving in marriage; sexuality, with what justifies it functionally, procreation, is a feature of the present age but will not matter *in illo tempore*. . . . If this were all that is meant by the distinction between person and body, one would have to be a brute—a fascist, sexist beast—to dissent from it. What I have in mind in maintaining, nevertheless, that the person/body distinction may represent, and sometimes does, a revival of Gnosticism and a calamitous error, can only be brought out in the detailed discussion of particular points.

I will say little about modern treatments of the Resurrection stories in the Gospels. It is often very hard to determine just what it is that particular pieces of exegesis are meant to imply about the Resurrection of Jesus. There seems to be a general reluctance to say in so many words that the stories about the Resurrection and the empty tomb are exercises in midrash or pictorial representations of the faith of the early Christians, though of course some scholars do say such things. What seems to me to lie behind what I find to be a remarkably diffident handling of this theme is a certain presupposition about what it would mean for a man to survive death, a presupposition that rules out as inconceivable the restoration of bodily life in any nonfigurative sense. In part, this may well come from an identification of resurrection with pictures like

those of many medieval painters, and of Stanley Spencer among the moderns, in which we see men and women in various states of disarray climbing out of graves or coming to the surface of the sea. This can scarcely have been even the faith of the simple, for no one has ever thought that those who perished by fire or were devoured by wild beasts were on that account excluded from the resurrection. Nothing, in fact, is said in the Gospels or in the Epistle to the Corinthians about the actual event of the Resurrection of Jesus or about the "how" of it. But the New Testament writers do seem to wish to teach that the tomb was empty and that the encounters of Jesus with the disciples were bodily encounters, not visions. Even if we take the Johannine accounts, in which the physical wounds of Jesus are shown and touched, as theological reflections, we still have to ask what such reflections are designed to teach; not surely that the first disciples had remarkable visionary experiences or that they had recovered their nerve after being put out by the apparent failure of the mission of Jesus. I am not here arguing for the veridical character of the Gospel accounts: I am simply suggesting that what they are designed to convey to the reader is that in some way the bodily life of the dead Jesus was renewed; and that the presupposition that Jesus' bones rest in Palestine is incompatible with what the evangelists wished to convey. That this was the drift of the Gospels was never doubted, by believers or unbelievers, until the nineteenth century. Now it is common to argue that the evangelists are subtle writers who really intended to convey that Jesus "lives on," is raised from the dead, only in some Pickwickian sense. Why this should be so is in part to be explained by a general feeling that accounts of miracles are always either impostures or dressings up for symbolic purposes of ordinary happenings,⁷ but in part, too, by a belief that whatever the victory over death of any man may be, it cannot be a bodily victory.⁸

Modern writing on sexuality, among both the religious and the secular, is so occupied with rhapsodising over physical relations between sexual partners that it would seem most implausible to argue that here we come across a failure to give due weight to bodily existence. I do argue this. First, it has to be noted that in much modern writing, many forms of sexual behaviour forbidden by the Torah and once thought to be perversions are now taken to be commonplace. Paul Robinson has remarked that, "from its pathogenic status among the Victorians, masturbation has risen to the

⁷ For all I know, someone may already have written an article or a book claiming that the real meaning of the Resurrection is that it symbolises the proletarian revolution.

⁸ For an interesting discussion of modern exegetes' view of the Resurrection, see Michael Dummett, "Biblical Exegesis and the Resurrection" *New Blackfriars* 58 February 1977 pp. 56-72.

position of final sexual arbiter"; it is the badge of sexual independence for women; proficiency in it was a precondition of being accepted as a participant in the Masters and Johnson experiments. Again, oral sex and buggery between heterosexual partners are now thought to be commonplace activities; they are described in novels and mimicked in films and illustrated in gourmet-style "how-to" books. Again, homosexuality is now frequently considered a matter of taste and native disposition, and homosexual activities are regarded as physical expressions of affection that ought to enjoy the same esteem as heterosexual activities. I needn't go on: everyone, presumably, knows what the content of the movement for sexual liberation is. Such a profound change in morality seems to require some kind of rationale. One simple and crude one is that pleasure is good and that whatever doesn't "hurt" anybody else is all right. There is a sublime simplicity in the assumption that the hurtful is something any fool can recognise and use as a criterion. But this is notoriously an argument people fall back upon when they haven't anything left to say. One doesn't have to penetrate into the mazes in which the sexually liberated live to know that jealousy, tension, possessiveness, guilt, dark feelings of inadequacy and so on, are as much a part of their lives as of the lives of those who aren't liberated. Of course, sexual feelings and activities, of whatever kind, occur within a network of human relations, many of them nonsexual, are had and engaged in by people who are, like all of us, puzzling, enigmatic, to themselves and others, captivated by dreams and projects they don't fully understand. It is indeed a mark of civility, a sign of the liberally educated man or woman, to know that in this field above all motives and intentions are rarely clear. To suppose that a simple hedonism can be the great clue as to how to crack life's problems is impossibly simple-minded.

A more seductive rationale is offered by those who want the concept of *person* to be central in matters of love and sexuality. The argument goes something like this (it is to be found in much modern Christian writing on marriage; a notable recent example is *From Machismo to Mutuality: Essays on Sexism and Woman-Man Liberation*, by Eugene C. Bianchi and Rosemary Radford Ruether): Distinctively human relations, within the sexual relation as outside it, are relations between *persons*. The concept of person is rarely analysed. What seems to be intended is that human beings are free and rational, and self-transcendent, at least this is what is distinctive about them; and it is thought to follow from this that close relations of affection, within marriage or out of it, cannot be distinctively human so long as sexual difference is taken to involve marked differences of role and response. In particular, that the function of sex, biologically speaking, is reproduction is thought not to be decisive in determining how we are to understand the

marriage relationship; and it seems to be assumed that this is a truth that we have come across with the discovery of relatively efficient contraception. It is clear that the reproductive function of sex is what we share with the other animals and with the plants; and it seems therefore plausible that what is distinctively human, our capacity for the free response of love, should somehow transcend the limitations of biological nature. As I have said elsewhere, "this seems somehow not so much wrong as cerebral; and avoids what is deepest in the Jewish and Christian traditions of marriage: that in marriage the partners are one flesh."⁹ Further, if I may quote again from the same article, this set of beliefs implies "that in a union of love between two people, personal, nonsexual relations are fundamental and that to these relations, between males and females, males and males, females and females, there may be added sexual relations, as relaxation, play, signs of affection, on occasion as a means to procreation. In the Biblical tradition, by contrast, it is the sexual relation between man and woman that constitutes the relation of marriage, and the love of friendship. . . is an added grace that belongs to the perfection of marriage but isn't constitutive of it."¹⁰ Of course, there is much more in the Biblical tradition, notably the relationship of covenant, beneath the overarching covenant between the Lord and Israel.

As I understand the Christian tradition, then, the distinction in creation between male and female, and not what is common to men and women, that is, their being equally persons, is a ground of marriage. The sexual difference is a bodily difference that belongs to what we are in creation; and I discern in much that is now written about relations between men an attitude that moves from a light depreciation of the importance of this difference to a deep hostility to attaching importance to this difference, a difference which has historically, so it is believed, been a badge of servitude for women. It is very strange that this should be so, for it is now fashionable to suppose that a study of the life of the other animals will illuminate a variety of moral and political issues; and there can be no doubt that in the brute creation, sexual difference has a governing role that other differences within a species don't have. Analogously, we may say that, since God has made of one blood all nations of the earth (that is, all human groups are interfertile), racial differences are relatively unimportant; but sexual differences inevitably make a difference to the shape and tone of human life. We are embodied persons; and *how* we are embodied in this respect is a thing to take seriously and, I suggest, be glad about. I thought it symptomatic of deep convictions of a Gnostic kind that the section of the recent Vatican statement on the ordination of

⁹ *The New York Review of Books*, 23 13 May 1976 p. 26

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 27

women that roused extreme fury was that in which it was suggested, not as demonstrative argument but as a persuasive one, that maleness might conceivably have some connection with the aptness of a human being for the ministerial priesthood.

How we are to think about death seems necessarily to be shaped by how we analyse the body/soul distinction. If the soulish or psychic predicates are thought to describe, exhaustively, the man in man, then in some sense we may think of death as a release from prison. If we think of the soul as a shadow or wraith, then the thought of immortality is a sadness, as the thought of it was for many of the ordinary people of the ancient world. Achilles, summoned back from Hades to speak with Ulysses, tells him that it is better to be a poor workman on earth than a king among the dead. Lucretius is delighted when he thinks that he has proved that men can't be immortal, for the only concept of immortality he had was a sad one. Here there seems to be a strong sense that what makes human life worth living is bodily existence, though on the whole the philosophers went against this popular sentiment, a sentiment reflected in the elegiac poems in the Greek Anthology. In the Jewish and Christian traditions, death is always thought of as a sign of man's falling away from God and therefore as something terrible, a sundering of Man's physical and spiritual nature; and this is terrible just because man is a unity of body and soul, not a composite being whose constituents can be separated without harm to the individual man. If John or Mary is the man or woman we can point to and touch and talk to, then death is something terrible, for it *is* the end, no matter what may happen to the psyche, of John and Mary. If John or Mary is to survive, or to be revived, it must be as a reconstituted, or revived bodily life. *Anima mea non est ego*. To put the point in what is essentially Aquinas's way, though the language is not his, the psychic predicates have no subject to be attached to once the body is gone. (This is shown in the difficulties Aquinas finds in knowing just what to say about the "separated" soul. If the soul is the form of the body, and if this is what makes a man a substance, then we are bound to ask what a form may be without its matter. Thus, even if the soul survives, it isn't the man who survives. For this he needs to be restored as a complete human being. If we are asked why we should hold on to such a strange belief as that of the survival of the soul, then I think the only decisive argument, for Catholics, is the primitive and continuous tradition of praying for the dead.¹¹) As to what our survival, or rather revival, as human beings will be like, this is not a speculative problem men can handle easily; commonly we fall flat on our faces. Perhaps we can leave it that "it does not

¹¹ Of course, there are philosophical arguments that claim to establish the soul's immortality. I am not here concerned with these.

yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him as He is" (1 Jn. 3:2).

The last issue I want to raise is one connected with ethics, with the theory of morals, and it isn't immediately clear that the questions that are relevant to the discussion of sexuality and death are relevant here. That they are relevant does follow, in my view, from the nature of human action, and from the kinds of things that fall under the injunctions and prohibitions of the moral law.

Actions and thoughts about actions make up the subject matter of moral judgments. An action is certainly a bodily performance, though one of a special kind. A knee-jerk response is not an action, nor is a shudder, a blink, a blush. Signing a cheque is an action, pointing is an action, dressing and undressing are actions . . . and so on. We have to note that what makes signing a cheque or pointing to the west an action is first that we do it voluntarily, it is in our power not to do it, then, we do it with a certain intention in mind (to the question *why* we give a reply in terms of what we seek to bring about), lastly, the act only makes sense within a social context that is essentially linguistic—it exemplifies the range of symbolic uses available to a community of embodied persons. That is, an action is something we do freely, intentionally, and with a meaning that depends not upon the whim of the actor but upon the commonly understood "language" of the human community within which men act.

Now, any action may be more or less completely described. It is not false to describe signing a cheque solely in terms of the muscular tensions in the writer's hand and arm, the friction of the pen on the paper, the changes of direction of the pen as the signature is executed. And so on. All this happens and would enter into any "complete" description of the action, supposing one had the mad ambition to construct such a description. But this kind of description seems to leave out just what differentiates signing a cheque from involuntary doodling. It is tempting, therefore, to say there are two stories about any action: first, a physical story in terms of muscular tension, electro-chemical changes in the brain and what have you; then, a story, as it were, from the "inside", a spiritual story about intentions, motives, volitions and so on. The problem then arises: How does the volition (or whatever) get the hand to tighten and make the necessary motions, etc.? To put it this way *seems* right, for we can certainly want to do X and intend to do it, but find ourselves unable to do it through a sudden paralysis. That is, there can be inner "acts" which don't express themselves in external actions; not always, of course, on account of such things as paralysis. This is what is meant by the sayings in the Gospels about committing murder or adultery in one's heart. All the same, an unrealised intention to do X gets its sense from the description of X. And, of course, it is a mistake to suppose that what goes on inside

is necessarily occult, something belonging to a private world. It isn't only the physically observable that belongs to the public world. So do intentions and choices.

Now to say something about what ten years ago or so was called "the new morality".

Although our intentions may on occasion be defeated, our concept of action requires that ordinarily our intentions should be realised under a description we are able to formulate at the time of acting. What are you doing? I'm filling my fountain pen, lighting the fire. . . . All these things have a certain point, and I shouldn't do them unless I took the world to be, so to speak, reliable: I fill my fountain pen in order to write a letter which I have reason to think will give pleasure: I am lighting the fire because I think we'll need the warmth in the evening. In these cases, my expectations may be defeated, but unless their defeat were exceptional, I should scarcely have an inducement to perform any of these actions. It is actions of this kind, having consequences that are on the whole predictable, that come under moral judgment. We have to distinguish these cases from other cases that seem at a glance to resemble them but don't really. These other cases, or the ones most discussed, are cases where we have some strong reason for disregarding a straight and fairly commonplace moral injunction or prohibition. For instance, it seems clear to an uncorrupted mind that dropping a nuclear bomb on a city is *prima facie* a wicked thing to do; or, to cite an example from Pascal's *Provincial Letters*, that a valet who helps his wicked master to get into the bedroom of a lady not his wife by holding the ladder and keeping watch for the return of the wronged husband is co-operating in his master's adultery. A way of justifying actions such as these is to advert to remote and speculative consequences or to misdescribe what it is you are doing. In the former case: I am incinerating 2,000,000 people because if I don't the war will go on much longer and there will be many more casualties than these two million. In the latter case: what I *intend* to do is not to aid my master in his wicked enterprise, but to keep my job; if I don't, my wife and children will starve. In the former case we are pretending to be God and to have a godlike knowledge of consequences—we know that human beings don't have and can't have such knowledge; we can't *intend* consequences so nebulous, so uncertain; the description we offer of what we intend isn't one that can be believed with good reason: the only formulable intention is that of dropping the nuclear bomb and killing whatever people are in the city, and this is what falls under moral judgment. In the latter case, we may sympathise with the valet, but there can't be any doubt that he is cheating. We shall sympathise less if we change the example: I am conducting these people to the gas chamber, for if I don't I shall be shot and my wife and children will suffer bad consequences.

The central notion under which both these examples may be grouped is basically Cartesian. We may put it in this way. Whatever the immediate action in which I am engaged, this is simply an instrument for the furtherance of purposes I can clearly and distinctly perceive; these purposes are my motives in doing this action, and it is these that come under moral judgment, (Those of you who saw Mr. Frost interrogate former President Nixon will have noted the frequent occurrence, in Nixon's mouth, of this pattern of argument.) Since we don't control the world and human history, since it is a matter of common experience that long-term expectations are rarely fulfilled in the form in which we envisage them, we never have good reasons of this kind for disregarding straightforward moral injunctions and prohibitions, unless we can conceive of intention in some other way. This is where the Cartesian picture of man comes in. Intention is thought of as some interior "spiritual" action which may or may not accompany an action that may be described in purely physical terms; what falls under moral judgment is never a piece of behaviour but an inner performance that accompanies behaviour: "For [the situationist] nothing is inherently good or evil, except love (personal concern) and its opposite, indifference or actual malice. Anything else, no matter what it is, may be good or evil, right or wrong, according to the situation. Goodness is what *happens* to a human act, it is not *in* the act itself."¹²

I must confess this seems to me sophistical. Love, personal concern—these are not things that exist side by side with external acts. They show themselves *in* these acts. Further, the test whether or not a man possesses a virtue isn't to find out what he does when the justification for the particular virtuous act is obvious, but to find out what he does when he is called upon to act rightly against all human calculation. The heroes and the saints—Franz Jagerstatter was the great example in my lifetime—are those who set aside all calculation, who may even look upon the promptings of affection for those most immediately connected with them as temptations, and choose in almost total darkness nevertheless to act in obedience to the commonplaces of the moral law. Certainly, a man could act in this way only out of love, but I don't think this is what the new moralists mean.

I won't attempt to sum up. We have been looking at very difficult questions, perhaps the most difficult men can put, and what I have attempted to express is not a set of clear knockdown arguments, but a set of considerations that suggest that the exalted notion of person, as applied to human beings, needs the notion of embodiment or incarnation. It is in our bodily existence that we are moral agents, religious animals, lovers; death is the shattering

¹² Joseph Fletcher, "Love is the Only Measure", *Commonweal*, 83 14 Jan. 1966.

of our psychophysical unity, and if we are to get our lives back it can only be as renewed embodied persons. If we want to remain the paragon of the animals, we have to be careful that our godlike apprehensions (and we do have these) do not prompt us to forget our station in life.¹³

Muddying the Waters or — A Book for Babel

Edmund Hill O.P.

I have lately reviewed, for another journal (*The Southern Cross*), a paperback new edition of a book first published in America in 1974, and in Great Britain in 1975: *Jesus Who Became Christ*, by Peter De Rosa¹. No doubt it was reviewed then in *New Blackfriars*. I have not been asked to review it this time by this journal; but I offer this article on it, because it is a very bad book, and ought never to have been published in the first place, let alone reprinted in paperback, and because it strikes me as symptomatic of much that is deplorable in current theological writing. So a fairly detailed analysis of its faults may serve a useful cautionary purpose.

The book is avowedly a work of popularisation, and there is no doubt that De Rosa, then in the employment of the BBC, has the art at his finger tips. As previous reviews, quoted on the back cover, declare, "He is indeed master of the technique of communication" (*Times Educational Supplement*); "He is a brilliant communicator" (*Church Times*). And this, no doubt, is why Collins have thought fit to publish this new edition. I fear it will probably sell quite well, and Collins will profit by their irresponsibility. For it seems to me that religious publishers have a duty not just to follow whatever happens to be the current popular fashion, but to guide and educate their public in more critical reflection. The all-important question is— What does the brilliant communicator communicate? And the unfortunate answer in this case is: junk.

De Rosa is a supporter of 'progressive' theology. What he is proposing to communicate or popularise in this book is the conclusions of the latest new testament scholarship and research as vindicating the complete, normal, unqualified humanity of Jesus

¹³ In what I have written, I am heavily dependent on the work of Professor P. T. Geach and the Rev. Herbert McCabe, O.P. If I had profited more from their writing, I should have avoided the many mistakes I have probably made.