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The Philosophical Concept of a Human Body

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## THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPT OF A HUMAN BODY

THE ARGUMENT from analogy for the existence of other minds has been repeatedly attacked on two general counts. Its defenders have long been criticized for attempting to justify the inference that other "bodies" are associated with minds by an appeal merely to one's own case, while more recently the intelligibility of the concept of mind which the formulation of such an inference requires has been seriously challenged. Nothing has been said, however, about difficulties that come to light when the other half of the Cartesian dualism is given careful scrutiny. In this paper I will argue (1) that philosophers have not clearly introduced the concept of a body in terms of which the problem of other minds and its solutions have been traditionally stated; (2) that one can raise fatal objections to attempts to introduce this concept; and (3) that the particular form of the problem of other minds which is stated in terms of the concept is the offspring of confusion and so requires no solution.

### I

Perhaps to some it will not be obvious that we have to bring "bodies" into the problem of other minds at all. Ordinarily we talk about the thoughts and feelings of *human beings*, and for this reason it seems natural to view the problem of other minds as an attempt to give "rational justifications" for statements ascribing psychological states to *persons* other than oneself. For example, in one of his essays A. J. Ayer discusses the position that "the only ground that I can have for believing that other people have experiences, and that some of their experiences are of the same character as my own, is that their overt behaviour is similar to mine."<sup>1</sup> The question he is asking himself is whether or

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<sup>1</sup> A. J. Ayer, "One's Knowledge of Other Minds," in *Philosophical Essays* (London, 1954), p. 192.

not he is justified in believing that some person is or was or will be in a given psychological state.

Unfortunately, beginning the discussion of the existence of other minds at this level appears to beg an important question, since in referring to "others" as persons it is already assumed that it *makes sense* to ascribe psychological states to them. To be sure, the question whether or not such ascriptions are *true* or *false* remains open. But a philosophical skeptic might refuse to agree that we are justified in believing that the behaving bodies we observe are those of human beings or persons. He could try to suggest, for example, that an automaton might behave in all of the ways that people behave, even including the uttering of intelligible sounds in the form of sentences, and yet not be a creature whose movements serve to justify the ascription to it of thoughts and feelings. So it appears that there is a "gap" between the obvious fact that we are surrounded by physical bodies shaped like ourselves and our "claim" that these have minds. He will go on to point out that we certainly cannot say that the bodies themselves are conscious, that they have feelings, for they are only material objects, and one cannot intelligibly ascribe conscious states in a literal sense to such objects. They are not what we may call "fit logical subjects" for such ascriptions. Saying that a given person is conscious or in pain may be either true or false, but even if it is false, it is intelligible. But saying that a certain "body" is conscious or in pain makes no sense; the wrong sort of entity is in the subject position.

This form of objection, however, raises no difficulty not already recognized by the numerous discussions of the problem of other minds which take *bodies* as their subjects of reference rather than persons. In such discussions the proper subject for the ascription of psychological states is taken to be either the mind itself or the partnership formed by the mind with a body. The philosophical problem is then construed as that of justifying the belief that certain bodies are in fact associated with minds. Thus it is initially an open question whether or not there are other entities to which psychological states can be intelligibly ascribed besides ourselves, and no fundamental question about other minds appears to be begged.

But it is easy to be careless in stating this question. Since the word "body" is one we all use in everyday discourse, it is not surprising to find that those who treat the problem of other minds at the level of bodies give little attention to the introduction of this key term. The concept of the human body seems to be perfectly clear; it is obvious that we all do have bodies, and there is no great mystery about their nature, as there is about the nature of minds. Even those who criticize the whole enterprise of trying to give a general justification of the belief in the existence of other minds continue to suppose that the concept of a body which they accept from the tradition is perfectly in order.<sup>2</sup> Yet, without some acceptable verbal or ostensive definition of the concept to examine, we cannot be certain that we have a term which can be properly used in posing a philosophical question about the existence of other people. In the next section I will consider various ways in which the word "body" might be introduced and show that none of them defines a sense in terms of which that question can be posed.

## II

Suppose we ask a skeptic about other minds to provide a verbal definition of the word "body" that will permit him to ask his question about other minds. One can think of various phrases he might suggest. For example, he might say that a human body is "the physical aspect of a person." But clearly this will not do for his purpose, since it brings the word "person" into the definition. If the philosophical skeptic does this, he cannot identify something as a human body—that is to say, as the physical aspect of a person,—and then go on to ask whether or not it is the body of a person. That question is no longer open.

This difficulty may seem easily remedied. Can he not define the word "body" in physical terms without mentioning persons in his definition? This seems to be what a number of philosophers have had in mind when they used the term, though they seldom

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<sup>2</sup> In particular I have in mind P. F. Strawson's discussion of the problem of other minds in *Individuals* (London, 1959), ch. iii.

say so explicitly. For instance, C. D. Broad, after announcing at the beginning of his discussion that he will confine his remarks to “human bodies and their perceptible behaviour,” neglects to explain to what he is referring when he speaks of “human bodies,” but he does say that “when we see anything which has the characteristic shape, size, appearance, and movements of a human body, we treat it as if it were animated by a mind like our own.<sup>3</sup> This suggests that he regards a human body as a physical body that is distinguishable from other physical bodies by the fact that it has a particular shape, size, and so on, and that it moves in ways that other material bodies do not. To be really serviceable, of course, a definition of the phrase “human body” would have to specify the required shape, structure, and material of composition (and possibly origin) in enough detail so that one could pick out a class of material bodies each member of which would be an acceptable candidate for the role of “body of a person.” Wax dummies, robots, and even monkeys would have to be carefully ruled out by the physical description.

In addition, a further important qualification must be added. The “human bodies” of which philosophers have been speaking are *living* things, not corpses. Were they dead bodies, the question whether or not they had minds then associated with them could be answered in the negative, for a corpse, like a material object, is nonconscious, rather than merely unconscious. Indeed, in this respect a corpse is nothing but a material object.<sup>4</sup> But the question before us is not about the bodies of dead persons. The philosophical skeptic is concerned with living human bodies.

We must keep in mind, however, that his skepticism compels him to view these bodies in a very special light. It is supposed to be an open philosophical question whether or not they are the bodies of living human beings. But why should we accept this supposi-

<sup>3</sup> Broad, *The Mind and Its Place in Nature* (New York, 1951), p. 321.

<sup>4</sup> These remarks are meant to reflect our current attitudes toward corpses. Perhaps it is conceivable that our attitudes might change if, for example, bodies of persons who have been pronounced dead by a physician went on “behaving” and “speaking” in otherwise normal fashion. Yet, even if we continued to ascribe psychological states in such a case, it seems likely that we would also continue to ascribe them to the person whose body it is rather than to the corpse.

tion? What we see around us are people; we see their bodies too, of course, but these are the bodies of living persons. We have not yet been told how to pick out living human bodies that *may or may not be the bodies of persons*. Unless this is explained, there is no reason to think that the concept of a living human body is not the same as the concept of the living body of a person or of the body of a living person. And if these are the same concept, the question whether or not such a body is that of a person is still not an open one.

In reply to this objection the philosophical skeptic may offer the following, more sophisticated verbal characterization of the word "body." He will explain that the kind of body he is referring to is that which will become a person's corpse when he dies. Since the individual is not supposed to be dead yet, his body is a living body, but the word "body" is intended to refer only to that "part" of the person which will be his corpse. This explanation leaves us as much in the dark as before, however, because it is not clear what it is of the living person that becomes his corpse. If we say it is the *person* himself that becomes his corpse, this is not what the skeptic means by "a body." Yet if we say that it is the living person's body that becomes his corpse, then the skeptic's defining phrase denotes the bodies of persons and, once again, about bodies in this sense the question of their association with persons is not open.

The skeptic may then try to get me to understand from my own case what is meant by the phrase "human body which may or may not be the body of a human being." Let us suppose he instructs me to imagine what would be left of myself if I had no mind, a kind of reversal of the Cartesian device, employed in the *Meditations*, which is designed to spotlight that part of a person which remains after everything physical is subtracted. Following these instructions I first suppose myself to be without conscious experiences. But this leaves an unconscious person, not a body. So something more fundamental must be removed. Yet it must not be so fundamental that only my dead body remains, because we are not taking corpses as the subjects of reference when discussing the problem of other minds. I should subtract something "in between" consciousness and life which would leave only my

living human body—that is, *a* living human body. But whenever I try to take away something short of life itself, I am invariably left with a living human being.

Should the skeptical philosopher become frustrated enough in his attempts to give a verbal definition of “a body,” he may try to *show* us the kind of body he means and thereby give an ostensive definition of the phrase. Since a person’s body is visible and tangible, it would appear to be perfectly easy to indicate Smith’s body by pointing to it and explaining, “This is what I am referring to when I say ‘this body.’ It is about such a ‘body’ that I am asking whether or not it is currently the body of a living person.”

This attempted ostensive definition will not do either, however. We can simply reply that the skeptic has pointed to Smith or laid his hand upon Smith’s shoulder, and this is not a successful way to introduce the required concept of a “human body.” It is Smith, *a person*, that we see and feel. To be sure, Smith has a body, and we can look at that and describe it. We can note, for instance, that he has a muscular or lean or lithe body. We might even say, “There’s a fine body!” But it is nevertheless the body of a person which we are admiring.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, we cannot see and touch Smith’s body while he is alive without necessarily seeing and touching Smith himself.

It may be objected at this point that I am begging the skeptic’s question about the existence of other people by insisting that he cannot point to Smith’s body without pointing to the body of a person. After all, it may be said, the skeptic wants to *ask* whether what he points to is the body of a person or not, so it is unfair to reply to his attempted ostensive definition of the word “body” by saying that he has pointed in the direction of a person. That it is indeed a person he is pointing to has not yet been shown. All he is claiming so far is that it is a body having certain physical characteristics.

Such an objection misses the point of my reply to the skeptic. To see just why this is so, it is important to understand that when

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<sup>5</sup> In this sentence the phrase “the body of a person” is itself somewhat ambiguous. It may refer to a person’s whole physical structure or to just the trunk exclusive of head and limbs. Compare “His body was too long for the coffin” with “He had long arms and a large head set on a thick body.”

I insist that it is the body of a person to which the skeptic is referring, the skeptic has *not yet asked* his question about other minds. He has not asked it because he has not yet succeeded in introducing the concept of a body he requires, one which will leave the question about the existence of other people open and philosophically interesting. Therefore I cannot be begging his question. What I am doing is saying that I do not understand what he means by "body" if he points at people and asks whether "those bodies" are the bodies of people. When he tries to point out a "body" in the required sense, all he can do is point helplessly to living people; and his verbal definitions either presuppose that we can identify people and hence their bodies or fail to distinguish his concept from that of the body of a living person. Unless there is a concept in terms of which a meaningful question about whether or not there are other people can be stated, there is no such question to be begged.

There are ways of stipulating that one is using a phrase in a special noncommittal sense, and the possibility of doing this may seem to offer a way to introduce the skeptic's concept of a "body." But instead of employing the suspect word "body" for this purpose, it would be safer to say instead that one intends to use the word "figure" or  $X$  as a general term ranging over objects and people indiscriminately. If this were done, it would be possible to ask, "Is that  $X$  over there a person or not?" when one sees a spot moving on a distant hillside or a figure at the end of the garden. One could ask whether the  $X$  sprawled in the street is a dead body or a living person, or whether the figures in the store window are dummies or window decorators. But although one can ask such questions about the presence or absence of people in particular contexts, these are not philosophically interesting questions. We all know perfectly well how to answer them. We get field glasses or look for movement on the hillside; we take a closer look at the figure in the garden or the one in the store window; we try to find the pulse of the figure in the street. In some instances such questions may present practical difficulties, but not theoretical or philosophical ones of the kind the skeptic wants us to imagine. He wants to ask his question about people who are right in front of him and whom he can see clearly. He

already knows that they are not corpses or store dummies or robots in human clothing. What he hopes to suggest is that there is a "gap" between the concept of a living human body and the concept of the body of a person such that he can identify an  $X$  as a living human body and then ask whether it is also the body of a person. But there is no such "gap," for we cannot identify something as a living human body without necessarily identifying the body of some person or other.

This last statement may seem to be open to objection on the grounds that although there are *in fact* no bodies that are both indistinguishable from human bodies and at the same time not the bodies of people, there might be such. Suppose that scientists could produce something in a chemical vat that is indistinguishable from a living human being. This implies that it would have all of the *physical* characteristics required to be a "human body," ignoring for the moment its artificial origin. But now it seems we can ask whether or not it is a fit logical subject for the ascription of psychological states, a question which certainly looks like one the skeptic has been trying to ask about nonartificial "human bodies."

This is not so much a question, however, as a request for a decision concerning a type of case that we have not before encountered. It is being asked whether or not the lack of natural propagation conceptually blocks a creature's being regarded as a human being. If its behavior were sufficiently like that of a human being, we would probably decide that it could be regarded as such and that psychological states could be ascribed to it. That is to say, it would be a human being with a human body. On the other hand, if we thought that its artificial origin made it importantly different from human beings, we might decide that it could not have conscious states. In that case it would not be regarded as a human being. Nor would it be a human body either; for if the condition of natural propagation were so important to being a person, that condition would have to be included in the description of what is to be counted as a human body. Thus it can be maintained that this case would not provide an example of a human body that turned out not to be the body of a person.

Doubts about such artificial creatures are not doubts that much interest the skeptic in any case. His hopes rest on the success of attempts to pose a philosophical question concerning the existence of other human beings. He would like to have us acknowledge the possibility, for example, that Smith might suddenly evaporate, not merely losing consciousness, but disappearing from the scene as a person, leaving only his nonconscious body before us to carry on, without any change being detectable, even in "his" behavior. This is not the same as saying that he might die and his corpse continue the discussion, for *that* change would be detectable. We are invited to imagine that everything about Smith remains the same *physically*. All that is different is that there is no longer a conscious person standing before us and talking with us. There is just Smith's living body.

The claim that there might be such a change is unintelligible. This is not simply because the change would be undetectable; the skeptic knows this and is not impressed. It is because the distinction between Smith and a nonconscious, living, human body does not make any sense. As we have seen, no such concept of a body can be introduced. Consequently a change from there being Smith to there being merely such a body makes no sense. Where a living human body is, there also is a person—necessarily. The philosopher's alleged concept of a living human body that might be without a mind, and thus fail to be the body of a person, is a confusion. Therefore, the skeptical question about other minds which is raised at the level of bodies is not an intelligible one, and we are thus absolved from any responsibility to give an answer to it.

### III

In view of the difficulties we have encountered in trying to make clear to ourselves the concept of a "body" which occurs in discussions of the problem about the existence of other minds, one may well ask why philosophers have thought they were adequately stating a genuine problem in terms of that concept. One reason for this which I have mentioned already and which I will now illustrate is their failure to see any need for a careful introduction

of an apparently ordinary, uncomplicated term. Broad, for instance, initiates his discussion of the problem of other minds with the announcement that he will begin “with propositions about which everyone will agree” and then goes on to observe that the “perception of a foreign body of a certain kind, which moves, alters its expression, makes noises, and so on, in certain characteristic ways, is a necessary part of the basis of our belief in the existence and activity of another mind.”<sup>6</sup> Without giving a second thought to this concept of a “foreign body” he is led to the view that no matter how intelligently an “external body” appears to behave, it is always sensible to ask whether it has a mind or is merely an automaton.<sup>7</sup> But what sort of “body” is he referring to? If he means simply “that *X* over there,” it may well make sense to ask whether it is a living human being or a mechanical man. This, however, is not the philosophically difficult question Broad was trying to ask. Yet, if he is pointing in the direction of a living person, knowing that it is not a robot or dummy or the like, then there is no question that the person has a mind in the sense of being a fit subject for the ascription of psychological states. Of course, we may not know how much mental capacity or intelligence he has, but that is a question to be asked and answered at the level of persons.

H. H. Price also poses his question about other minds in terms of the curious phrase “foreign body,” and he too fails to see any need to give it special and explicit introduction. He does mention in a footnote that he means “a body other than my own,” whether human or not, but this explanation is not very helpful.<sup>8</sup> His own body is the body of a person, namely, that of H. H. Price. But he cannot mean by “foreign body” a *person's body* other than his own body, for if the bodies he is talking about are thought of as those of people, the whole question is decided in advance. On the other hand, if he means by “foreign body” merely “physical body” in the sense of that phrase which refers to physical things or objects, we can immediately protest that the

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 318.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 614-615.

<sup>8</sup> Price, “Our Evidence for the Existence of Other Minds,” *Philosophy*, XIII (1938), 430 n.

source of the sounds "The bus is coming" is no object but a person who said the words "The bus is coming." Price cannot reply to this that we are begging his question, since he has not yet shown that there is any philosophically significant possibility of its not being a person. It might have been a robot or a wax dummy, but we can see without much difficulty that it is not any of those things; and Price has not made it clear in what way it might not be a person.

Once the initial philosophical question about these "foreign bodies" is undercut, Price's further suggestion that the apparently intelligible sounds coming from those "bodies" may be "explained" by saying that they are produced by a mind loses its point. If a person makes intelligible utterances, we say he has a mind, but not by way of explaining or accounting for his ability. It is a way of saying that he has the ability to speak and act intelligently. In contrast, we may explain the "intelligent behavior" of a robot or other machine by discovering a man at the controls. But Price gets his concepts crossed when he tries to explain the intelligent behavior of a "foreign body" by concluding that there is a mind at the "controls." What we observe are people who either control themselves or lose control, people who behave intelligently or stupidly. And although people do have both minds and bodies, we cannot first identify a living human body and then decide that—because it apparently has a mind associated with it—it is the body of a person. Living human bodies are always necessarily the bodies of living human beings.<sup>9</sup> How we are to justify ascriptions to those human beings of particular thoughts and feelings on particular occasions is of course another matter.

The temptation to assume that the concept of a body used in stating the problem of other minds is perfectly in order, while a key factor, is not the only reason for traditional uncritical acceptance of the problem. In fact it is but one aspect of the general

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<sup>9</sup> Strawson has argued in his critique of the idea of a "pure ego" that the concept of a person is, as he terms it, "logically primitive" (*op. cit.*, p. 102). It is worth noting that the criticisms of the philosophical concept of a "body" given above constitute valuable support for this conclusion, approaching the question as they do from the opposite side of the Cartesian dualism.

tendency on the part of those who write about the subject to think of it steadfastly in terms of two traditional dichotomies. These are the dichotomies of mind *versus* body and direct *versus* indirect perception or knowledge. Discussions about the existence of other minds almost invariably begin with some version of the dogma that we cannot “directly perceive” the minds of others. Then, since only the physical part of a person remains as a possible object of perception, it seems but a small step to the conclusion that all we can observe are the movements of their bodies—or, rather, the movement of “bodies.”

Such reasoning is confused by its own terminology, as can be seen in a brief examination of the initial steps of the arguments in question. The phrase “directly perceive” is stock jargon in epistemology and rarely, if ever, is it used with any careful explanation of what it means in a given context. Nevertheless it has always been easy to accept uncritically the dictum that we cannot directly perceive other minds because it sounds obviously true, whatever it means. Perhaps it is meant to deny that we have some special faculty, such as mental telepathy, by which we might have knowledge of other minds without overt communication, or perhaps it calls our attention to the point that we cannot have the feelings of another.<sup>10</sup> Possibly there are other interpretations which are equally true. But what do these interpretations imply for our actual, presumably “indirect” perception of other minds? They merely imply that we do not know of the thoughts and feelings of others by mental telepathy or by having their thoughts and feelings, which is a long way from showing that we “cannot in any sense observe the existence of other people”<sup>11</sup> or that what we really perceive are only moving “bodies” which emit certain familiar sounds that are “evidence” of minds within.

The repetition of phrases which suggest that we are somehow involved in a problem about faculties of perception or barriers to our observation thoroughly obscures the main issue concerning

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<sup>10</sup> See Ayer, *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge* (London, 1951), p. 138, and *Philosophical Essays*, p. 194, for explicit statements of this latter interpretation.

<sup>11</sup> Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York, 1946), p. 128.

justification of our beliefs. It is curious that even writers like Broad and Ayer, who explicitly state that they seek a justification of certain beliefs, speak in terms of "direct" and "indirect" perception and "extraspection,"<sup>12</sup> as though they were interested in what kind of perception we employ while acquiring our knowledge of other minds. The point that they are trying to bring out can be stated more appropriately in the following way. The question "How do you know?" does not make sense when asked of a person who is expressing or reporting his own sensations and thoughts, whereas in many similar cases it does make sense when asked of someone who is reporting the sensations and thoughts of another. In the latter case the informant's knowledge is "indirect" only in the sense that he obtained it through noting the verbal and physical behavior of *the person* about whom he is speaking, together with the context of that behavior. Thus, when the point behind the claim that we do not have "direct knowledge" of other minds is stated more prosaically, it becomes clear that this does not mean that we are "directly aware" only of "bodies" and "noises" issuing from them or that we cannot refer to the actions and utterances of other *people* when discussing the problem of other minds.

But if there is no genuine basis for a general and profound philosophical skepticism about the existence of other people, can one explain what it would be like for someone not to believe that there are others, to fail to believe this in a philosophically interesting way? We know someone could mistakenly believe that the world is flat, and we know roughly how this belief would be expressed and how it might be corrected. But could someone in the same way *mistakenly believe* that there were no other people, no other human beings to whom conscious states could be ascribed? If so, how would this lack of belief in other minds be expressed and how might it be corrected? Or, turning the question around, is there such a thing as a general belief in other minds in the sense that one could be of the opinion that there are other persons and have evidence in support of that opinion? Such questions seem easily answered, but, if what I have argued thus far is correct,

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<sup>12</sup> This is Broad's term (*op. cit.*, p. 328).

they should receive answers contrary to traditional thought on the matter. Since this is an important result which is worth elucidating further, in concluding I will add a few remarks concerning the consequences which my arguments have for our so-called "belief" that there are other people.

## IV

It is possible to imagine how a genuine solipsist—let us call him Solomon—might express or betray the fact that he was not aware of the existence of other human beings. A genuine solipsist should, of course, not be confused with a philosophical skeptic who knows that there are other people but who wonders how he knows. Solomon is someone who believes that what are in fact other human beings are merely physical objects. He behaves as though he were all alone in the world, paying no heed to people except to shoulder them out of the way or to walk around them, moving through crowds as one might move through a thicket of bushes. One would expect him to show no particular concern about hitting and bumping into people, though he would very likely be somewhat cautious about being too rough with "things" that could hit back. But he gives no sign of comprehending that they have feelings and are capable of suffering.

How he would react to the speech sounds which these "things" emitted is a bit more difficult to imagine. Broad claims that for such an individual "all statements uttered apparently by other human bodies will be in the position of statements uttered by gramophones, with the important difference that the 'records' will not have been made by bodies which are animated by minds. And there would be no reason to attach any weight to these utterances."<sup>13</sup> But we, of course, do understand the words spoken in a recording, since it is delayed, meaningful human discourse, and we would "attach weight" to the words if they were relevant to the situation at hand, as we do with recorded directions. So it is not easy to see why someone who heard others speak words he understood would not pay heed and reply, acknowledging their

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<sup>13</sup> Broad, *op. cit.*, pp. 337-338.

attempts to communicate with him. He might not wish to associate with them, but it is difficult to imagine how he could fail to notice that they were living creatures whose words and actions showed that they did understand what he said to them and that they understood the words which they uttered. Their behavior would show this in a way that the operation of an inanimate record player could not. On the other hand, if he regarded their talk as we regard the chattering of monkeys, perhaps treating certain sounds they made as helpful signals warning or informing him, rather like the cries of birds or the barking of dogs, it is most implausible that he would be able to speak and to understand what he himself said. Are we to suppose that he has some selective mental block that allows him to understand his own words but which prevents him from finding significant the same words uttered by others? It is difficult to imagine how this could be so.

But however the details of the case of Solomon are filled in, we would say that anyone who regarded others as mere physical mechanisms is somehow blind to the very important and obvious differences between human beings and machines or other objects. Anyone so deaf to the attempts of others to communicate with him, so opaque to their attempts to engage his attention that we would describe him as not believing that there are other people, would either be of very low-grade intelligence or mad.<sup>14</sup> This is not a surprising conclusion, of course, but what is significant is the fact that his stupidity or madness renders him incapable of distinguishing persons from objects, and thus he cannot be said to understand how to use the word "person," even of himself. His malady would be of interest to the psychologist, but not to a philosopher who is looking for a solipsist, since this poor man

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<sup>14</sup> This is not to say that certain types of madness in which a person completely ignores other people are necessarily examples of a solipsistic view about other minds. How such a person treats others is important, but we also want to know how he regards others and what reasons he gives for behaving toward them as he does. For instance, it is important to know whether he regards them as being capable of having thoughts and feelings, as opposed to his merely being totally unconcerned with their feelings and beliefs. Such information may not be easily obtained from a madman who ignores us or from a solipsist who is unaware of our existence. But if they kept diaries, we could probably have access to them, since undoubtedly they would feel no concern about leaving them lying about.

would not be in a position even to formulate the solipsistic thesis. We can grant that he might be incapable of seeing any relevant difference between what are in fact trees and machines and people and so regard people much as we do material objects. But if he cannot identify as such the people that are in evidence around him, he does not understand the concept of a person, and so it would not be possible for him to say to himself "I am the only *person* there is; all those other things are just objects." He could not even conjecture whether "these bodies are the bodies of living people," since this conjecture would not be comprehensible to him if he failed to understand the concept of a person.

Doubtless it will be objected that this incredibly stupid or mad solipsist is not the one in whom philosophers are interested. They are interested in the variety of solipsist who is able to formulate the solipsistic thesis. He understands what a person is and also knows that he is one, but he is of the opinion that none of the "things" he observes are in fact people. When the case of this solipsist is examined carefully, however, it turns out to be unintelligible. For if he understands what a person is, enough to know that he himself is one and to wonder whether there are others, he should be able to recognize them when he sees them. If he could not do this, he could not be said to understand the concept of a person. It is not enough to say that he could understand what a person is just from his own case, for his failure to recognize others as people shows that he fails to understand the concept to such a degree that we would have no confidence that he comprehended why the concept applied to him.<sup>15</sup>

This argument ties in with my previous remarks about the philosopher's concept of a "body" in the following way. The concept of a body which a mad solipsist would have is not the one which the philosopher requires in order to state the general problem of other minds. It is simply the concept of a body as a physical object, and this does not leave open the possibility that the body is that of a person. In order for that possibility to be left

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<sup>15</sup> This argument that an individual could not recognize himself as a person unless he could recognize other persons is also given in a brief statement in Bruce Aune, "The Problem of Other Minds," *Philosophical Review*, LXX (1961), 338.

open, the solipsist would have to be in the position of being free to decide on the basis of evidence whether or not the "bodies" he observes are those of people, and this would require in turn that he understand what a person is. But if he understood what a person is, he would be able to identify other human beings as people and the question would not really be open after all.

When the point is put in this way we can see that there are really only two positions that can be taken with respect to persons. Either one believes that there are only material objects in the world and fails, through some defect of mind or training, even to have the concept of a person, or one has that concept and realizes that there are people, one of them being oneself. There is no middle position that can be intelligibly articulated. Our belief that there are other human beings is not a kind of conjecture concerning which we might be in doubt or in need of more evidence and for which we might reasonably be asked for justification.

In this respect the general problem we have been discussing is quite different from those questions about other minds which require us to justify a particular belief or statement about the thoughts and feelings of a certain individual. My belief that Smith has a headache after seeing a long film is only one of many beliefs about him for which justification could be requested and satisfactorily given. About any one of these beliefs it is possible for one to be at times mistaken without thereby manifesting a failure to understand the concepts in question. But if someone doubted there were *people* in the world, he would show, at the very least, his failure to understand the concept of a person.

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