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THE BODIES OF PERSONS *

A FAVORITE device employed by philosophers who discuss questions concerning the nature of persons, personal identity, and the relation between persons and their bodies is the recounting of a story in which one person exchanges bodies with another. John Locke tells of a prince whose soul entered into the body of a cobbler, thus illustrating Locke's thesis that personal identity is preserved by identity of consciousness, even if this does not preserve "the same man."¹ A Lockean exchange of bodies is used by Anthony Quinton as a basis for his claim that "bodily identity is not a logically complete criterion of personal identity" since, if body-switching is conceivable, then tracing the career of a particular body does not guarantee that one will be tracing the career of just one individual.² Quinton is thus moved to assert that "the soul is not only logically distinct from any particular human body with which it is associated; it is also what a person fundamentally is" (403). More recently this dualistic conception of persons has been championed by Jerome Shaffer, who, like Quinton, argues from the alleged possibility of a Lockean exchange of bodies. His classically Cartesian thesis is that a person is not "a body which has mental events"³ but is a "nonbodily thing" (59).

The kind of nonsurgical body exchange discussed by these authors I call "Lockean" in order to distinguish it from another sort of "body-switch" that has been mentioned in philosophical literature of late. David Wiggins has argued, for example, that the possibility

* I am grateful to Wilfrid Sellars, Jay Rosenberg, and John Heintz for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

¹ *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, bk. II, ch. 27, sec. 15.

² "The Soul," this JOURNAL, LIX, 15 (July 19, 1962): 393-409, p. 402.

³ "Persons and Their Bodies," *Philosophical Review*, LXXV, 1 (January 1966): 59-77, p. 67; parenthetical page references to Shaffer are to this article.

of putting the brain of one individual into the body of another is a reason for denying that persons are identical with bodies.⁴ If it is conceivable that a brain or "core person"⁵ could be removed from one body-shell and connected appropriately to another, then, although neither the original body-shell nor the original brain-body-shell combination would be retained, personal identity would be preserved. Hence a person is not identical with either a particular body-shell or a particular brain-body-shell combination.⁶ This also shows that, contrary to what has often been argued by philosophers who reject psychological criteria of personal identity, the correct alternative criterion need not be continuity of the human body. What is necessary may be only the physical continuity of the causal basis of a person's personality, memories, and the like, as in the case of human brain transfer.

Yet, because some degree of physical continuity is maintained in these cases, they do not serve the dualist's purposes nearly so well as a Lockean "body-switch." It is the conceivability of an exchange of bodies without a brain transfer which has seemed to offer support for a radical distinction between the person regarded as a Cartesian ego, on the one hand, and his entire material constitution—not just a body-shell—on the other. It is this line of reasoning that I wish to examine in this paper. My main contention is that those who have attempted to use the alleged conceivability of Lockean body-exchanges in order to convince us that persons are not to be thought of as bodies have got the argument completely turned around. In order to know whether or not such body-switching is conceivable in the case of human beings we first have to know what sort of entities human beings are. In particular we have to know whether we are related to our bodies in such a way that exchanges of the sort Locke describes are in fact possible. To extract dualistic conclusions from fantasies about personality changes that can be imagined to occur is simply to beg the entire mind-body question.

The proponents of such arguments have failed to see that this is what they are doing, I believe, because they have not carefully

⁴ *Identity and Spatio-Temporal Continuity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), pp. 50–51.

⁵ Wilfrid Sellars has used this term for the nervous system, suggesting that we might think of "a person as a nervous system clothed in flesh and bones." See "The Identity Approach to the Mind-Body Problem," *Review of Metaphysics*, xviii, 3 (March 1965): 430–451.

⁶ This line of argument uses the controversial assumption that a person cannot be identical with one brain-body combination at one time and with another brain-body combination at a later time.

considered what we are talking about when we use such phrases as 'a body', 'the human body', 'his body', and the like. Although the word 'body' is a term of ordinary discourse it has several different relevant uses or senses and it is extremely important to distinguish these so that quite different philosophical theses are not conflated. In the section that follows I will describe several senses of the word 'body' which are germane to the mind-body problem. Because of space limitations, my treatment of the concept will by no means be exhaustive. But I hope to say enough to enable me to explain in the final section of my paper the way in which a failure to clarify the concept of a human body can mask fatal flaws in an argument for a dualistic view of persons based upon the idea that a Lockean body-switch is possible.

II

In his defense of Cartesianism mentioned above Shaffer maintains that there is only one sense of 'body' to be considered. The term means, on his view, "a particular sort of material object, as in the formulation of the Newtonian Law, 'a *body* continues its state of rest or steady motion unless . . .'" (68). Clearly this is a very general sense of the term 'body' which need not have anything to do specifically with the body of a person. It is kin to its use in such phrases as 'a body of water' or 'a body of cold air', where a distinct portion of matter is being referred to. If the matter forms a relatively solid mass we may speak of a "moving body," "a falling body," "a massive body," "a material body," or simply "a body," as when we refer in a general way to objects that move in accordance with the laws of Newtonian mechanics. In the subsequent discussion I will tag this sense of 'body' by referring to a particular material entity as a body (1).

I do not agree with Shaffer that this is the only sense of 'body' relevant to our problem, but it is an important and useful concept. In particular it can be used to state concisely a major difference in the views of the classical dualist and materialist regarding human beings. According to a radical dualism which regards the mind and body as two distinct substances, a person's *body* is a body(1). It is nothing but a system of material parts in contrast either to the mind, which is a substantial but nonbodily entity, or to "sensations," thought of as nonmaterial, mental particulars. The structure of a person's body is completely describable in terms of the organization of atoms, molecules, cells, and other units standardly recognized by modern biology and physics. But the structure of the

person is not completely describable in these terms alone. A person is not identical with the body(1) that is *his* body.

This view contrasts with that of the materialist, who insists that a person, taken as a whole, is a body(1), a system of particles with no nonphysical particulars existing alongside these particles in a logically independent status. There are no "ghostly" entities, as it is sometimes expressed. This is not to deny that a person is a conscious entity to which psychological predicates can be properly and truly ascribed. For although a body(1) is a material structure and may in many instances be a mere material object to which states of consciousness cannot be truly ascribed, the meaning of the word 'body', as used in this sense, does not exclude the thesis that *persons* are bodies(1). Psychological phenomena may be physical states or events taking place within a body(1) (a reductive materialism), or psychological phenomena may derive from emergent mental properties of the complex system of physical entities that constitute a body(1) (an emergent materialism). It is important to stress that, on this latter alternative, although the psychological properties in question are not thought of as being reducible to physical properties, they are nonetheless, envisaged as properties of a physical system rather than as properties of special psychological entities. Hence it seems reasonable to treat this as a view which claims that persons are bodies in our first sense.

There are, however, other senses of 'body' which Shaffer ignores, which have to do specifically with the human body. For instance, we use the term 'body'(2) to refer to the main bulk of an individual in contrast to his face, head, or limbs, as when we say of someone that he has a small head set on a stocky body or that she has a homely face but a beautiful body. It is obvious that a person is not identical with his body(2). Indeed, this sense of 'body' is worth noting primarily to avoid confusion with a third sense which has enormous importance for the mind-body issue. I am referring to our use of the term 'body'(3) as a subject of descriptions of the *physical* structure and appearance of human beings in contrast to descriptions in which the subject is either the person or his mind. For instance, we may say of an elderly gentleman that his *body* is weak and frail, but his *mind* is still alert and active. Clearly this is not to use 'body'(2) since, in this context, a person's limbs, head, and brain are not explicitly excluded by the implied relevant contrast, which in this case opposes his body either to him or to his psyche, not to his appendages.

A dualist will, of course, contend that the expressions 'the human

body'(3), meaning the physical aspect of a person, in fact denotes a "Cartesian body"—a material thing, or body(1), which plays the role of a body of a person in virtue of its being associated with a Cartesian ego. Our grammar may seem to support this contention, since a sentence like "Gandhi had an alert mind but a frail body" suggests that we are ascribing characteristics to two distinct types of entity—a mind and its physical partner, the body, which the individual is said to "have" because he (his mind) stands in a certain relation to it.⁷

But even though radical dualism may be *expressed* by saying that the subject of a person's physical predicates, i.e., his body(3), is a body(1), it is a mistake to assume that our concept of a human body(3) *commits* us to this view. Our grammar suggests an alternative. In general we do not use the expression "X has a body" but "X has an *F* body" where 'X' stands for an animal or person and '*F*' stands for an adjective descriptive of X's physique, as in the sentence "An acrobat has a supple body." Here the word 'body'(3) appears to serve merely as a grammatical subject of certain physical predicates which are used in descriptions of a person's physical aspect, just as 'mind' and 'heart' frequently function as dummy subjects of certain psychological predicates used in describing his mental character or personality. For instance, we may say of the acrobat that he has a supple body, a quick mind, and a stout heart. What is thus conveyed can be stated—although frequently neither so expressively nor so succinctly—in terms of his physical and psychological characteristics. We could have said that *he* is limber, thinks quickly, and is courageous. We might have said of Gandhi that *he* is (physically) weak and frail and yet still alert and mentally active. Thus to say of someone that he has a frail or robust body need reflect no more genuine Cartesian commitment on our part than our saying of him that "his heart is broken" or that "his spirit is willing but his flesh is weak."

But to insist that talk of a person's body(3) carries no Cartesian commitment is not to say that we are to *identify* a person with his body(3) either. Such an identification may be tempting to anyone who objects to dualism on the grounds that it seems to multiply entities unnecessarily and that a person/body(3) identity offers the only way to have a single physical subject of mental and physi-

⁷ Grammar is hardly univocal in its support of dualism, however. A person is also said to *have a mind*, as well as a body, which suggests we comprise a trio of entities. But apparently it is not so easy for us to conceive of a person as having a mental partner distinct from himself as it is a physical partner.

cal predicates. But acceptance of that identity would require us to countenance the ascription of psychological states to human bodies(3), which seems a gross violation of our grammatical intuitions. Such grammatical discomfort is not difficult to explain in this case. To borrow Strawson's useful terminology for a moment, when we speak of a person's body(3) we are talking about the person qua subject of M-predicates.⁸ Accordingly, one's body(3) is not a fit logical subject of P-predicates, just as one's mind is not a fit logical subject for certain M-predicates. We would not say, for instance, that Smith's body is thinking, that it is in pain, that it is jealous, that it knows arithmetic, or that it intends to go for a walk. In special contexts such phrases might be *given* a sense, but in ordinary contexts they do not make sense. This is not because our bodies *happen* to be lacking in mathematical abilities, like dogs, or *happen* to lack pain-sensing organs, as do much simpler animals. There is no prospect that evolutionary processes will eventually produce human bodies(3) that feel pain and think just as the persons "having" the bodies do. P-predicates do not apply to bodies(3) because the term 'body' is here conceptually restricted in its role as a replacement subject for personal descriptions. It is primarily a subject of M-predicates, not as a matter of fact but as a matter of language.

Moreover, it is a subject of only *certain* of the M-predicates applicable to human beings. As indicated in previous examples, we can make various comments about a person's general physique by saying that his body is muscular, weak, frail, and so forth. We can also speak of his moving his body or using his body well in dance. But we do not say, for instance, that his body(3) weighs one hundred and eighty pounds or that it has blue eyes, when it is a living being we are describing. These are thought of as characteristics of the person himself.

Fortunately, once we explicitly distinguish senses (1) and (3) of the word 'body', it becomes evident that it is not necessary to force an identification of a person and his body in order to state an alternative to dualism. We are now able to distinguish the possible thesis that a person is a body(1), i.e., a material thing, from the impossible claim that he is identical with *his* body(3), i.e., his physical aspect. Clearly where the term 'body' is used to refer not

⁸ In *Individuals* (London: Methuen, 1959), p. 104, P. F. Strawson distinguishes M- and P-predicates. Whereas P-predicates apply only to persons, M-predicates are also properly applied to material bodies "to which we would not dream of applying predicates ascribing states of consciousness."

to the entire individual but only to his physical—but not his psychological—aspect, the term does not denote something with which a person can properly be identified.⁹

III

Having drawn these preliminary distinctions among several relevant senses of 'body', we are now equipped to examine dualistic claims that are based upon the alleged conceivability of body-switching. Shaffer's essay will continue to be useful as a source of specimen arguments in support of such claims.

Because he recognizes only one sense of the term 'body' Shaffer is forced to assume at the outset, without justification, that he can express his thesis about persons equally well by saying either "we cannot take a person to be *a body* which has mental events" (67) or by saying "it is wrong to attribute mental events to *the body*" (66). (Both italics mine.) Yet, as we have seen, there are good reasons—reasons that even a physicalist could accept—for admitting that one cannot attribute mental events to "the body" in either sense (2) or (3). It is a much more radical claim to insist, as Shaffer does, that a person is not even a body(1).

Shaffer does present an argument which is intended to support this more radical claim. It is based upon the premise that it is a *contingent* fact that a person has the body he has. Using this Contingency Thesis, he constructs the following indirect argument against the idea that a person is a body to which mental events are ascribed. Suppose that one could attribute mental events to a human body and, hence, to the person who has that body. By the Contingency Thesis, "a body which belongs to a person just *happens* to belong to *that* person," and so "it would follow that the mental events which occur to that person could have occurred but not to *that* person" (67). Presumably, if the body in question had belonged to some other person at the time, those mental events would have occurred to that other person. However, this is impossible, argues Shaffer, on the grounds that the "ownership" of psychological events is, to use a phrase of Strawson's (96), "logically non-transferable." It makes no sense to suppose that a particular mental event, say, a particular pain or pang of anxiety that I feel, might have occurred to someone else rather than to me. But if our initial supposition that mental events can be attributed to a body is inconsistent with our premises, then, says Shaffer, we must reject that supposi-

⁹ Space limitations prevent me from discussing the use of 'body' to refer to a person's corpse, but this is not essential to a critique of typical body-switch examples.

tion and conclude that "we cannot take a person to be a body which has mental events" (67).

In saying this Shaffer is rejecting not only classical materialism but also the Strawsonian view that a person is something to which two distinct kinds of attributes—physical and psychological—may be ascribed. Although we speak of a person's weighing one hundred-eighty pounds, for example, we are not, according to Shaffer, saying something about that *person* but about something else. This "something else" is his body, a physical object that is closely, but nonetheless, contingently related to him. Hence the concept of a person which Shaffer champions is that which we associate with Descartes—"namely, the concept of a person as a subject of consciousness" (69).

But in which sense of 'body', if any, is it true that a person has the body he has only contingently? Clearly a person might come to have a different body(2), where 'body' is used in the main bulk sense. But this is hardly the kind of switch that Shaffer's argument requires. What then of the possibility of exchanging bodies in some other sense of 'body'? To answer this question, we must carefully examine Shaffer's defense of his Contingency Thesis.

Shaffer attempts to convince us of the truth of this thesis by elaborating upon a story (taken from Quinton) in which a plump, apolaustic Pole and a thin, Puritanical Scot are imagined suddenly to undergo a complete exchange of characters and personalities. The thin one claims to be the Pole, speaks familiarly of a past which only the Pole could have known about, and speaks a superb and rare Polish. Similarly the plump one takes on the mentality of the Scot. Having said this much, Shaffer confidently assures us that we "could so work out the hypothetical details that we should be inclined to believe that the miraculous had happened and that somehow the two persons had switched bodies" (64/5).

It is very important, however, not to suppose that the possibility of imagining such changes in the Scot and Pole by itself establishes the conceivability of a Lockean body-switch. There are other hypotheses which could explain the personality alterations that Shaffer describes and which are compatible with the thesis that the persons involved are material bodies. Our choice of the correct account depends upon those all-important "hypothetical details" which he does not bother to fill in for us. It is conceivable, for example, that the neurological character of the brains of the Scot and Pole have been altered by some sophisticated technique so that each has acquired the "memories," personality, and verbal skills of the other. In this case one could well insist that although the

cerebral organization of the two individuals had been radically altered, nothing had been actually exchanged, and that the plump one was still the Pole and the thin one the Scot. At the very least, one ought to resist saying simply that the individual originally bearing the Pole's identification tag is now *the* Scot, since the very same operation could be performed upon any number of individuals while the original Scot is left unchanged. As B. A. O. Williams has pointed out, the resultant "Scots" could not each of them be *the* Scot, although they might be said to be the same person as each other in a type sense of "same person."¹⁰

Another possible explanation for Shaffer's body-switch "data" is suggested by recent experiments with the transplanting of animal brains from one body-shell to another.¹¹ Exchanging the brains of the Scot and the Pole could conceivably result in the personality changes that Shaffer envisages, and it would also avoid Williams's reduplication argument if it is true that the brain constitutes a unique, individuating physical part of a person, a part embodying a causal basis for those characteristics which most convincingly preserve a person's identity—his memories, personality traits, and verbal skills. To be sure, one may well have justified reservations about whether this kind of switch would genuinely give us the same person in a different physical form, especially when one imagines grossly inappropriate shifts, such as placing the brain of Paderewski in the body-shell of an unmusical Scottish shepherdess. Yet much more favorable circumstances for such a shift are easily imagined. For instance, the Pole's exchanging bodies with his identical twin would provide a more convincing illustration of the thesis that a person has the "body" he has only contingently—in the relevant sense of 'body'.

In a case of this kind, in which the brain of a person enters into a non-Lockean body-switch, the phrase 'the body of a person' marks a quite different contrast from the contrasts, outlined earlier, between one's body and one's appendages and between the physical aspect of a person and his psychological aspect. Here the body is the complement of the brain, as is suggested by the term 'body-shell'. This fourth sense of 'body' can be generalized to mark whatever contrast there might be between an organism's body-shell

¹⁰ "Are Persons Bodies?" in Stuart F. Spicker, ed., *The Philosophy of the Body* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), p. 153.

¹¹ Brain transplants are not so completely in the realm of fantasy as one might suppose. Since 1963, experimenters have been able to keep the severed heads of monkeys and dogs alive for several days. See Gordon Rattray Taylor, *The Biological Time Bomb* (New York: New American Library, 1968), p. 123.

and what may be called his "personality-bearing" (and therefore identity-bearing) unit. In the case of human beings we believe this to be the brain or at any rate the central nervous system. Yet it is conceivable that the Scot, the Pole, and the rest of us all contain some as yet undiscovered mini-brain which is the true bearer of our "essential and characteristic vital functions" (Wiggins, 55) and which is capable of the kind of sudden, seemingly miraculous transfer envisaged by Shaffer. This vehicle of personal identity might conceivably consist of some nonbodily, yet physical phenomenon, such as the kind of field encountered in physics. Shaffer has told us nothing that rules this out.

What then does Shaffer's thought experiment concerning body-switching establish? The most it shows is that *if* the sort of case he imagines *were to occur* we might *then* be inclined to believe that human beings have some sort of personality-bearing unit that can move from one body-shell to another. It certainly does not establish that human beings *are* as a matter of fact diaphanous, nonbodily entities (much less Cartesian egos) which can migrate in some nonsurgical manner from body to body, in the appropriate sense of 'body'. For until Shaffer's fantasy actually occurs there is not the slightest reason to conclude that persons *are* nonbodily entities or that they have their bodies contingently in a philosophically interesting sense of 'body'. Indeed, if the materialist is right and we are conscious but totally *physical* beings, then the sort of body switch that Shaffer has in mind is not conceivable for humans at all. We should have to imagine a person shedding his body(3) and taking on another. But where the phrase 'his body' serves merely as a grammatical subject of predicates describing a person's physique, it is not clear what could be meant by the suggestion that an individual might exchange one such body(3) for another. The physical aspect of a person, on this view, is a conceptual abstraction, and if the physical and psychological aspects of human beings do not constitute separable entities such that a person can be detached from all the material of which he is composed and subsequently embodied in a different organism, then Shaffer's Contingency Thesis is not in fact true of human beings. In saying this I am neither denying that it is conceivable that human beings *might* be constituted along Cartesian lines nor denying that they *are* so constituted. My point is simply that we must know whether dualism is correct before we can say whether a Lockean exchange of human bodies(3) is possible. If a person is a material organism, a body(1), then talk of his exchanging with another person that to

which his physical characteristics are ascribed, his body(3), seems to be nonsense. Hence, Shaffer's premature endorsement of the Contingency Thesis simply begs the mind-body question in favor of the dualism for which he is arguing.

It is easy for someone to make this mistake because it is so easy to assume that a coherent body-switch story can be told about human beings. One tends to overlook the difficulty that, if human beings are physical organisms, then there is a fundamental difference between the ontological character of a person's body in sense (3) and that of a body in the other senses. In the case of all but body(3) we are talking about a kind of material object, a kind of body(1). Hence, specifying the criteria for such bodies should not be greatly different from that of specifying the criteria of identity for any particular kind of material thing, whether it be a planet, an automobile, a corpse or a body-shell. Such an undertaking may or may not pose profound philosophical difficulties. But at least it can be said to be an intelligible project.

The same cannot be said for one's body(3) if human beings are physical organisms. Where a human body is but a person's physical aspect it is not to be regarded as an independent or distinct material object at all, and so a question concerning the identity of such a body through time is misconceived. We may, of course, ask whether Smith after his prolonged illness is the very same *person* we met a few months earlier. And we may note how he has changed, how his bodily appearance, his physique has altered. Trying to ask whether he has the same or a different body(3) in any other sense of 'same', or 'different', however, would be like trying to ask a profound identity question about the sameness of his complexion which was at one time ruddy but now is distressingly pale. To be sure, one could ask, "Does Smith have the same body he had two months ago?" and thereby suggest the possibility of a body-switch, which could be made intelligible, for instance, in terms of a brain-transplant operation. In that case we could inquire whether or not he had the same body-shell as before. If someone were to persist and ask whether Smith's acquiring a new body-shell brought with it a new body(3), one could say only that after the operation the physique in question would be Smith's, however it had been acquired and however it differed from his earlier condition. This answer ought to satisfy anyone who understands and accepts what I have been saying about the human body(3).

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