

I Seem to Have Misplaced My Body

As I sit on my couch watching TV, I am without a body. However, if I try to tell this to another person, I get all kinds of objections.

“I can see you. I can take a picture of you with my phone. I can pinch you.”

“Ouch!”

“See! Stop being ridiculous. You are embarrassing me with such talk.”

Of course, this is the most basic common sense.

It reflects rule number one: To exist, you have to have a body. Everything in experience proceeds from that fact, but what exactly is this thing I call a body and what can I really know about it based on my direct experience?

Mostly, while I’m watching TV, my body is not acting up, I don’t need it to move around, and nobody in the room is commenting on it. For the period of time I am engrossed in a TV show, I am much more the TV show than I am a body or a mind. This is what I must admit if I depend on my subjective experience without the intrusion of thought; that is, using the childlike beginner’s eyes so often recommended to spiritual seekers.

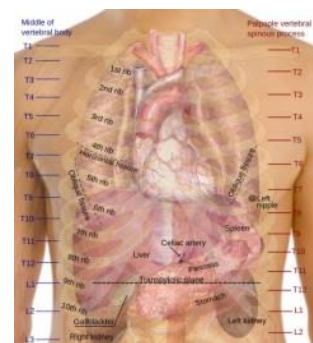
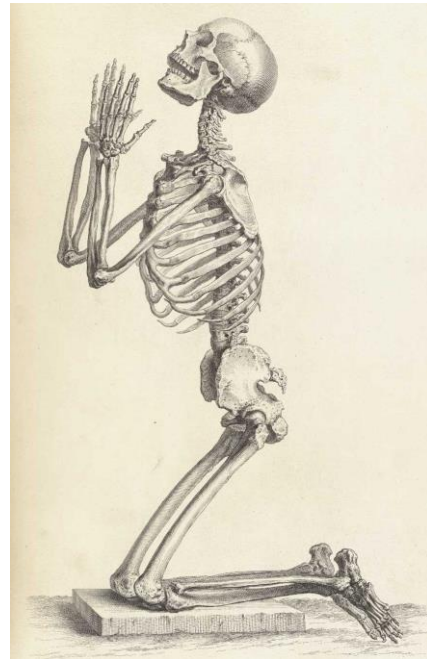
Using beginner’s eyes, when I compare my body to the TV set that I am watching, I find there is not a lot of difference between them as perceptions. Like my body, the TV is in my field of view. It does seem to be a little farther away and I can see more of it, but what I can see of my body is equally in front of me, mostly my lower torso, protruding legs, and perhaps my forearms and hands. Certainly, the TV set and my body look different, but they are both made up of the colors my eye can see. As objects, they are equal.

Yeah, but you can feel your body!

True, but I can also feel the TV set, and if I leave my hand on it for a few moments, it is very difficult to tell where my hand stops and the TV set begins.

But you can feel your body from the inside!

I have to admit that I have a hard time locating this “inside” people so often bring up. In the words of a very wise man, I have “a sense of” inside, but frankly, even when I had an invasive surgical procedure, I didn’t experience any inside problems. The doctor’s business is my insides. For him I



have a lot of very complicated insides, but even though he feels he is intimately familiar with my colon, that intimacy is for him, not me. I can imagine my insides. I can look at an anatomical chart and familiarize myself with the various insides I presumably have. I can even watch a TV image of my insides. However, none of those activities proves I have an inside unless I take someone else's word for it.

Suppose I socked you in the jaw! Would you claim you didn't have a body then?

I have been socked in the jaw, and I can say that affirming or denying that I had a body was the last thing on my mind. This was no grazing blow. It was right on the button, and I think it was more likely to prove that I didn't have a body than I did; that is, if I trust my own perception and not some idea I got from a boxing movie.

You are impossible! All these intellectual evasions and gymnastics to throw into doubt something that everybody knows is true. Don't you have something better to do?

No. What I am doing is crucial for me. The only problem for others is that *I* am the one doing it. If this kind of basic questioning came up in a philosophy class, it would seem a lot cooler, not to mention safer. Consider René Descartes' first principle, "I think therefore I am." His starting point was that waking life could be as fake as dreaming life, so what could be counted on? He reasoned that before he could try

proving anything else, he would have to prove his own existence. Do you think he didn't run into resistance?



Prove your existence! Why sir, I will clout you on the jaw and prove it beyond question!

This is why I doubt Descartes brought the subject up at the local tavern and why I really don't announce to most people that I lose my body while watching TV. I save that for my fellow spiritual kooks who have no doubt come across statements like the following from Nisargadatta:

You are neither the body nor in the body. There is no such thing as body. You have grievously misunderstood yourself. To understand rightly, investigate.

Anybody who has done any nondual reading will have wrestled with similar sentiments. The body takes a licking, yet for most of us it keeps on ticking, often in subtle ways. It certainly has for me. I once had an exchange with a teacher on the subject of solipsism. I said, "I know there is awareness on my side, but how can I know there is any on your side, anymore than there is in a dream character?" He said, "You are identifying with the body." I begged to differ. He said, "When you start talking of 'sides,' you betray that you are identifying with the body. What you really are has no sides."

That is a smack-down one doesn't forget. Afterward, all you can do is say, "Thanks for the info." and move on. And I hear similar subtle indications of body identification in others. "I had an out-of-body experience." "I felt disconnected from my body." "I

transcended my body.” “I lost my body.” These all place a suspicious importance on the body that suggests untoward identification. I prefer to think of the body as a persistent arising similar to a favorite shirt. It is around a lot of the time, it is dear to us, we are sorrowful when it is damaged, and we may get frantic if we lose track of it. Furthermore, our significant other may very well give us some good spiritual advice regarding that treasured old shirt. “Will you please let that thing go!”

You seem to be quibbling with expression. If I have an out-of-body experience, how would you suggest I express it?

It isn't the expression so much as it is the underlying sense that these are the truly meaningful experiences, the things that will help us progress spiritually or prove we are progressing. I find it more fruitful to realize that all of those statements (“I had an out-of-body experience.” “I felt disconnected from my body.” “I transcended my body.” “I lost my body.”) apply many times throughout the course of twenty-four hours, and most times I just don't notice. The more I do notice, the more I feel on the right track. When everyday experience confirms Nisargadatta's assertion, then I have something.

So, I guess we should just sit around congratulating ourselves on not having bodies! Good lord, man, some of us have lives to live!

I am all for living, and that includes my body. I exercise, take supplements, go to a massage therapist, and if the face in the mirror needs some touching up, I accept the hint and give the beard a trim. I've been moisturizing for the last forty years. But all of this is under suspicion. I take care of my body, but I try not to take it too seriously.

What I take more seriously is Nisargadatta's advice:

One can get rid of habits only with considerable difficulty. Once the habits are formed, it takes quite some time to get out of them. Similarly, although you have got this knowledge now, what it gives you you don't know yet. Because you have been associated with the body-mind for such a long period, to get rid of that will take some time. But for you to become established in the knowledge, reflecting and meditating on it is very essential. For that it is necessary to quit one habit you are normally given to and substitute another habit. Now what is this substitute habit? It is to think constantly that you are not the body.

