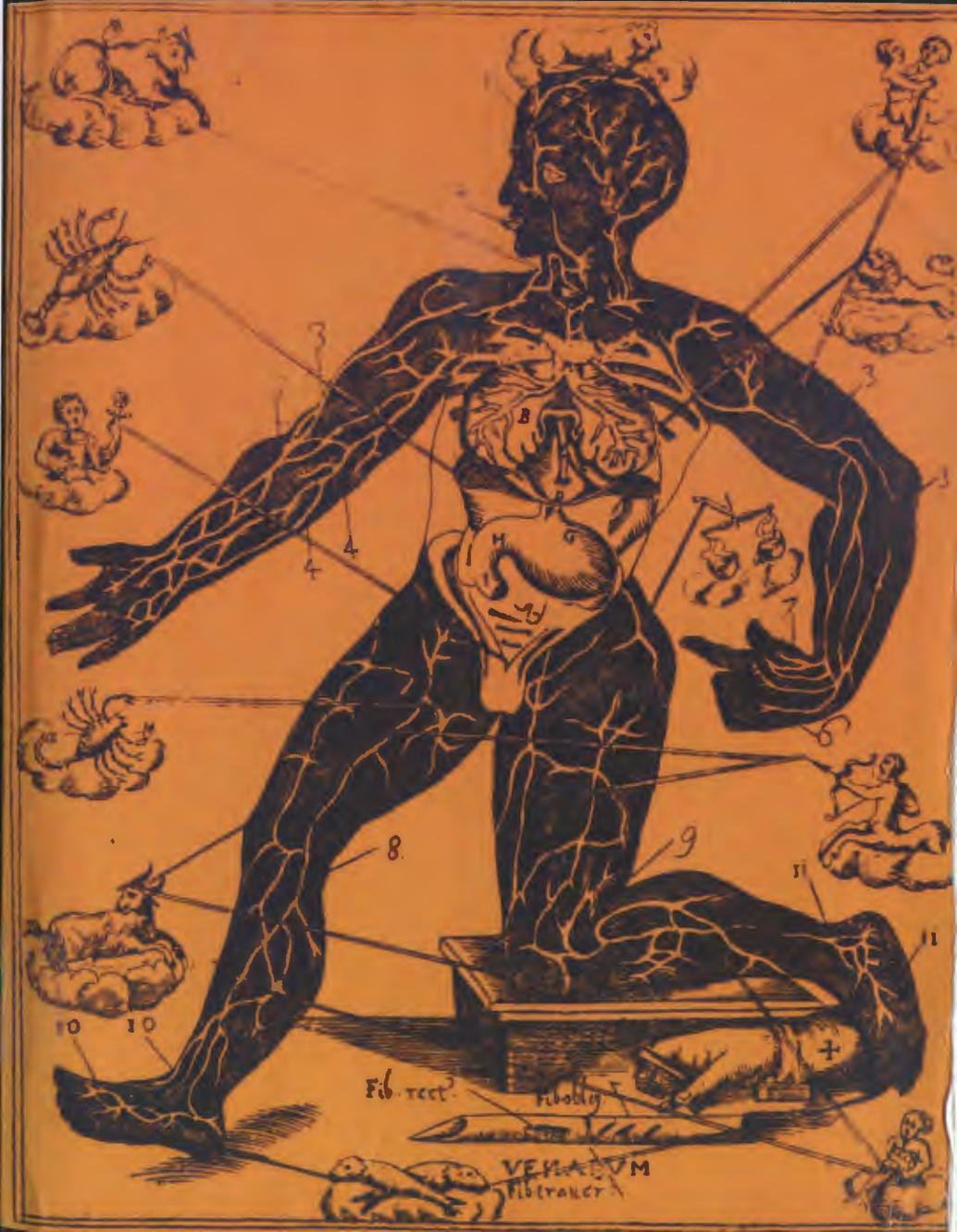


THE BODY SOCIAL

Symbolism, Self and Society



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BODY

Tomb, temple, machine and self

The body is the tomb of the soul.

Plato

Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Saint Paul

The human body may be considered as a machine.

Descartes

The body is what I immediately am . . . *I am* my body.

Sartre

What is the body? Opinions have differed dramatically, as the quotations above indicate. The body has been regarded as a tomb of the soul, a temple, a machine, and the self, and much more; and it has also been treated accordingly. Bodies may be caressed or indeed killed, they may be loved or hated, and thought beautiful or ugly, sacred or profane. Ideas about what the body is, what it means, its moral value and the values of its constituent parts, the limits of the body, its social utility and symbolic value, in sum, how the body is defined both physically and socially, vary widely from person to person, and have changed dramatically over time. The one word, body, may therefore signify very different realities and perceptions of reality. Our task here is to explore the range of these meanings, and to indicate how and why these meanings change.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the body as: 'The physical or material frame or structure of man or of any other animal; the whole material organism viewed as an organic entity'. Yet even this spare definition raises questions. What constitutes, and who defines, 'the whole'? Opinions differ. Some would include hair and nail-clippings, spilled blood and faeces, defining them as the

body in another place; and some include the shadow; others would not. Sartre denies that the body simply is the 'frame or structure' of 'man' or animal; for him, and for others, the body *is* the self. And is the body wholly physical? For Descartes, yes, it is a machine; for Saint Paul, no, it is also and even primarily spiritual. Above all, the body, defined as tomb or temple, machine or self, is normative.

Here we will explore some of the principal themes in the thinking about the body from the Greeks and the Romans to Judaeo-Christian thought and practice, through the Renaissance to the present. We conclude with a discussion on the range of modern constructions.

GREEK PHILOSOPHY: THE BODY AS PLEASURE OR TOMB?

The Greeks glorified the body. Their sculptors, painters and potters celebrated the beauty of the naked human form in stone and paint and clay. The Olympic Games, which were held every four years from 776 BC to AD 394, celebrated the power and strength of the male body, on the sacred slopes of Mount Olympus. They seem to have held relaxed attitudes to sex, at least in Athens, to judge by *Lysistrata*. And the Greeks were the first to develop theories of beauty (Carritt, 1962; Eco, 1986).

Although Greek culture was body-centred, there was no philosophical consensus on the body. Several theories prevailed. Hedonism was asserted by Aristippus (c. 435–366 BC), the founder of the Cyrenaic school, and a friend of Socrates, who insisted that 'bodily pleasures are far better than mental pleasures'. He practised what he preached and lived a luxurious life (in Laertius, vol. 1, 1972: 219).

Countervailing this philosophy were the Epicureans. Epicurus (341–270 BC), the founder of this school, stated clearly: 'we call pleasure the alpha and omega of a blessed life. Pleasure is our first and kindred good' (in Laertius, vol. 2, 1972: 655). But they believed mental pleasures were superior to those of the body. For the Cyrenaics, the mind is fine, but the body is better; for the Epicureans, the body is good, but the mind is better. Neither philosophy challenged the Greek lifestyle.

The third stream of Greek thought, Orphism, which began to emerge in about the fourth century BC, was radically different. It was said to have been founded by Orpheus, one of the Greek heroes and an Argonaut. According to Orphic belief, Dionysus,

the son of Zeus, was killed and eaten by the Titans, the wicked sons of Earth. Zeus destroyed them, but from their ashes rose the human race with a dual nature, part earthly (the Titans) and part heavenly (Dionysus, the son of Zeus). The Orphic life consisted of the cultivation of the divine nature by asceticism: abstention from meat, wine and sexual intercourse. The body was regarded as the tomb of the soul. This *soma-sema* (body = tomb) philosophy was most unpopular; but it did influence such leading philosophers as Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato, and hence Neoplatonism and Christianity.

Socrates (466–399 BC) described the soul as a 'helpless prisoner, chained hand and foot in the body, compelled to view reality not directly but only through its prison bars'. He insists that the body is a 'hindrance' to the soul, an 'impediment' and an 'imperfection, constantly interrupting, disturbing, distracting and preventing us from getting a glimpse of the truth'. It enslaves us and shackles us (Plato, 1963: 66, 47–50). Indeed the body is 'the grave [tomb] of the soul' (1963: 437). Body and soul are not only separate but opposed and unequal. Plato (c. 427–348 BC) maintained this dualism in his last work, stating that 'soul is utterly superior to body . . . the body is no more than a shadow which keeps us company' (1963: 1503). Only in death is 'the soul . . . liberated from the desires and evils of the body' (1963: 441; emphasis added).¹

The conflict between body and soul is therefore built-in, permanent and total. The logical consequence of this body-negative dualism is, Plato explained, 'purification' and the pursuit of philosophy, but, he explains, 'the philosopher's occupation consists precisely in the freeing and separation of soul from body' (1963: 50); i.e. asceticism, the way to wisdom, goodness and truth. Socrates was not afraid to die; and in rejecting his bodily life, he welcomed immortal life. Even in his death, his philosophy scandalized his contemporaries.

None the less, Plato was not entirely body-negative and body-denying. He also explained that a beautiful body is the first step on the way to Absolute Beauty and God. In *The Symposium*, Plato suggests that there is a scale of perfection ranging from the love of physical beauty to a love of beautiful souls up 'the heavenly ladder' to the love of beautiful thoughts and ideas to, finally, the love of God who is Absolute Beauty (1963: 561–3; see chapter 3). Thus for Plato, the body may lead to God or away from God; the beautiful body may inspire the philosopher, or hinder, contaminate, disturb, enslave and shackle the same philosopher.

Aristotle (384–322 BC), a former student of Plato's, and a keen naturalist, was enormously interested in the body; he also promptly rejected Plato's dualism and his body-negativism. He defined the soul as 'the principle of life' and described it as 'the form of the particular living body'. There cannot be one without the other. In his treatise *On the Soul*, he states: 'we can dismiss as unnecessary the question whether the soul and body are one: it is as though we were to ask whether the wax and its shape are one' (1984: 657). Hence Aristotle's materialism. None the less, he did agree with Plato that the soul is superior to, and rules, the body, and there are elements of dualism (although without the body-negativism) in his remarks that we must take care of the body 'for the sake of the soul', and that 'intellect more than anything else is man' (1984: 1989–90, 2117, 1862; his emphasis).²

A.N. Whitehead has suggested that the history of European philosophy consists of a series of footnotes to Plato. Certainly this would seem to be correct with respect to the philosophy of the body; for these two competing views of the body – dualist versus monist, idealist versus materialist, negative and positive – have persisted in Western philosophy. Each viewpoint has been developed, in time, to its logical extremes. The Stoics developed out of Plato's dualism and idealism, and Christian asceticism also. Dualism influenced such diverse thinkers as Augustine and Descartes, and still characterizes contemporary bio-medicine; and materialism has persisted from hedonism and Epicureanism through Marxism to contemporary existentialism.

THE ROMANS: THE BODY AS CLAY, CORRUPTION AND CORPSE

Stoicism was the dominant philosophy in the Roman Empire at the turn of the millennium and exerted a strong influence over Christian thought during its formative years. Seneca (d. 65 BC) was very clear: 'a high-minded and sensible man divorces soul from body, and dwells much with the better or divine part, and only as far as he must with this complaining and frail portion'. And again: 'nature has surrounded our soul with the body as its cloak' (1953, Vol. 2: 187, 455). The dualism and the superiority of the soul reflect Plato, although Seneca is not so body-negative: a cloak is not a tomb or a prison, indeed it protects from the elements; but nor is it as important as the wearer of the cloak. He advised his

friend in words that would not go down too well with contemporary athletes and body-builders:

It is indeed foolish, my dear Lucilius, and very unsuitable for a cultivated man, to work hard over developing the muscles and broadening the shoulders and strengthening the lungs. For . . . you can never be a match, either in strength or in weight, for a first-class bull . . . whatever you do, come back soon from body to mind.

(1953, Vol. 1: 97–9)

Epictetus (1st century) was more emphatic: both more dualistic and more negative. He says of humanity: 'There are two elements mingled in our birth, the body which we share with the animals, and the reason and mind which we share with the gods.' He described the body as 'a slave to fever, gout, ophthalmia, dysentery, the tyrant, fire, sword, [and] everything stronger than itself'. He added: 'You must treat your whole body like a poor ass, with its burden on its back, going with you just as far as it may' (1968: 11, 182, 221). And in an epigrammatic comment he states that 'Man is a poor soul burdened with a corpse' (Aurelius, 1964: 73). Marcus Aurelius spoke in similar terms in his *Meditations*, describing the body as 'but clay and corruption'. He described death as 'a release from impressions of sense, from twitchings of appetite, from excursions of thought and from service to the flesh' (1964: 55, 97).

Most Romans, it may be well to remember, were not Stoic philosophers and probably did not regard their bodies as a poor ass, a little corpse, clay and corruption.

Indeed many Romans, including Ptolemy and other astronomers, were firm believers in astrology, and thought of the body as cosmic.³ Also Ovid's poems, particularly *The Art of Loving*, show a jaunty enjoyment of the physical body in general, and sex in particular, which perhaps began (philosophically) with the Cyrenaics, but certainly counter-balanced the Stoics. Each age seems to have a love-hate relationship with the body, from the Greeks and Romans to the Christians.

THE CHRISTIANS: THE BODY AS TEMPLE OR ENEMY?

The early Christians entertained several different paradigms of the body. They distinguished between the body as physical, as spiritual and as mystical; their attitudes to the body as physical were ambiguous, however, in tension between positive and negative. At the

same time, the body was a pervasive allegory of the hierarchies of society: church and family, and then state (cf. O'Neill, 1985).

The Incarnation transformed the ancient philosophical debates. 'The Word was made flesh' (John 1: 14). God became Man. Divinity was humanized, but conversely humanity, in all its fleshiness, was divinized. Christ formulated the doctrine of the mystical body in the parable of the vine and the branches: 'I am the vine, and you are the branches' (John 15: 5). And later at the Passover meal:

Jesus took a piece of bread, gave a prayer of thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples. 'Take and eat it,' he said, 'this is my body.' Then he took a cup, gave thanks to God, and gave it to them. 'Drink it, all of you,' he said, 'this is my blood.'

(Matthew 26: 26-7)

This last supper is re-enacted ritually and sacramentally in the Mass and the Liturgy. The Christian therefore participates in the body of Christ, as Christ lives in the Christian. For the believer, therefore, the body participates in an order other than the purely corporeal: holy, sacramental and mystical, and also personal, loved and loving. Teilhard de Chardin (1964: 125) suggests that 'the sacramental action of Christ . . . sanctifies matter'. Saint Paul developed this doctrine further:

Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts. In the same way, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, have been baptized into the one body by the same Spirit, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink.

(I Corinthians 12: 12-13)

He insisted: 'You know that your bodies are parts of the body of Christ . . . Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourselves but to God; He bought you for a price. So use your bodies for God's glory' (I Corinthians 6: 15, 19-20). This view of the body as a temple, and as part of Christ, is a far cry from the Orphic view of the body as a 'tomb' or the Stoic belief in the body as a 'corpse', an 'ass', or 'clay and corruption'.

Saint Paul also clearly distinguished between the body as physical and as spiritual. The doctrine of the resurrection of the body had been lived by Christ in his own resurrection - 'I am the resurrection and the life' (John 11: 25) - and pre-figured in

the raising of Lazarus and Jairus' daughter from the dead. Paul explains this idea to the Corinthians as follows:

This is how it will be when the dead are raised to life. When the body is buried, it is mortal; when raised it will be immortal. When buried, it is ugly and weak; when raised it will be beautiful and strong. When buried it is a physical body; when raised it will be a spiritual body. There is, of course, a physical body, so there has to be a spiritual body.

(I Corinthians 15: 35-6, 42-4)

In Christ's teaching, the care of the physical body figures prominently. The Lord's Prayer, the only prayer Christ gave to his disciples, requests: 'Give us this day our daily bread' (Matthew 6: 11). Furthermore, Christ instructed his disciples that on the last day the Son of Man will separate the sheep from the goats and he will say to the former:

Come, you that are blessed by my Father! Come and possess the Kingdom which has been prepared for you ever since the creation of the world. I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me.

(Matthew 25: 34-6)

Again, Christ's miracles attest to the importance he attached to the body; most of them were concerned with healing people or feeding them: the curing of the leper, the healing of the paralysed man, the feeding of the five thousand, the turning of water into wine. Such attention to the body has been, and still is, taken to legitimate liberation theology. None the less, there is a balance. The body is important, but it is not everything. Christ's teaching is uncompromising on this point:

If your hand or your foot makes you lose your faith, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life without a hand or a foot than to keep both hands and both feet and be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye makes you lose your faith, take it out and throw it away! It is better for you to enter life with only one eye than to keep both eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

(Matthew 18: 8-9)

Origen (c. 185–254) interpreted this doctrine literally, and castrated himself rather than risk being thrown into the fires, as did others; but the practice of self-mutilation was later condemned by various Councils, and a limit was therefore set to the ascetic construction of the body as enemy. None the less, throughout his ministry Christ emphasized the necessity of self-denial, fasting, watchfulness, renunciation, poverty, and even chastity; indeed he gave up his own life for his flock.

Paul, too, was very aware of the danger of the body; he described his inner conflict as follows:

My inner being delights in the law of God. But I see a different law at work in my body – a law that fights against the law which my mind approves of. It makes me a prisoner to the law of sin which is at work in my body. What an unhappy man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is taking me to my death?

(Romans 7: 21–4)

This conflict between God and sin, mind and body, may reflect Platonist or Stoic philosophy; but his resolution of this conflict is within neither tradition. He assured the Corinthians: 'I bruise my body and make it know its master, for fear that after preaching to others, I should find myself rejected' (1 Corinthians 9: 27). Again: 'They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts' (Galatians 5: 24). Finally: 'each one of you must learn to gain mastery over his body, to hallow and honour it' (1 Thessalonians 4: 4).

Paul did not equate the body with sins and evil, nor sin with the body – as the Manicheans were to do later; yet it is one of the complex aspects of Pauline teachings that the body should be bruised, but honoured; mastered, but hallowed; crucified, but glorified; it is an enemy, but also a temple and a member of Christ. This 'double message' in the teachings of Christ and Paul caused a split in the early church between the ascetics and the moderates: a split which has continued through the centuries, and is strikingly evident in the deep ambivalence towards the body in general and sexuality in particular.⁴

In the first centuries of the church, asceticism was expressed particularly in the ideals of martyrdom, virginity and celibacy, regarded as the total dedication of the self to God. When the persecutions finished, and particularly after the Peace of

Constantine in 313, asceticism took new directions. Origen's direction had been repudiated by various Councils; but many Christians 'left the world', i.e. society, either to live in the new monastic communities or as hermits and stylites (pillar ascetics). Anthony the Great (c. 251–356), known as the Father of Monks, initiated the movement in the Eastern church; and Simeon Stylites (c. 390–459) was one of the first of the pillar ascetics, living on the top of a pillar for years. These ascetics developed ingenious ways to mortify themselves: Alipius spent 53 years on his pillar, then, having lost the use of his feet, lay on his side for the next 14 years. Another spent 10 years in a tub hanging in mid-air. Still another never turned his face to the West. Their sayings and deeds were collected and distributed to inspire further heroic holiness (Ward, 1975). Attitudes to the body were distinctly negative in these movements, and followed a Pauline dualism. They were perhaps not typical; certainly only a minority of Christians were martyrs, monks, celibates or stylites. But dualism was widely assumed.

John Chrysostom (c. 347–407), Archbishop of Constantinople, distinguished clearly between body and soul: 'There is soul and body: they are two substances; there is a beauty of body and there is a beauty of soul . . . When thou hearest the word beauty, think not of eye, or nose, or mouth or neck, but of piety, faith, love, things which are within.' The body is relatively unimportant: 'The man ought to be praised and admired, not for his dress . . . not even for his bodily form, but for his soul.' Indeed, 'if you consider what is stored up inside those beautiful eyes, and that straight nose, and the mouth and the cheeks, you will affirm the well-shaped body to be nothing else than a whited sepulchre'. On the other hand, Chrysostom also praised the body, 'leading us on by its beauty to admiration of Him who framed it' (1956: 264–5, 466, 104, 413). Here he reflects Plato's view of 'the heavenly ladder' of beauty in *The Symposium*.

Augustine (354–430) clarified this Pauline dualism, emphasizing the will rather than 'the flesh' in the making of moral choices. Insisting that Paul used the term flesh to mean 'human nature' and 'old ways' rather than the body itself, he argued that 'the flesh, in its own kind and order, is good'. Generally he is more positive, even enthusiastic, about the physical body: 'The human body is a revelation of the goodness of God and of the providence of the body's Creator.' He praises its 'rhythm, poise, symmetry, and beauty' and concludes that: 'The whole body, inside and out,

can be looked upon as a kind of organ with a music all its own' (1958: 302, 508).

None the less, the soul remains superior to the body. Basil the Great (c. 329–79), founder of Eastern monasticism, is very clear on this: 'The soul is as far superior to the body as heaven is above the earth and heavenly things above those of earth' (1970: 28).

In the second millennium of Christianity, asceticism took new directions again. First, there was the founding of the great monastic orders of the West. The Benedictines had already been founded (c. 529), but the Carthusians (1084), Cistercians (1098), Franciscans (1209) and the Dominicans (1216) were founded in swift succession. All the members of these orders took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and some, in the contemplative orders, took vows of silence. In this sense asceticism was institutionalized. The second change in asceticism, concomitant with the growing devotion to the humanity of Christ, especially in his Passion, was a new type of practice: the deliberate infliction of pain. Hitherto asceticism had involved, generally, the acceptance of physical sufferings imposed by others (e.g. the persecutions) or asceticism by omission (e.g. denying the physical needs of the body, for sleep, sex, talk, etc.); the new asceticism demanded self-denial and pain by commission. The reasons, however, remained the same: the expiation of sin, self-conquest, the intercession for divine graces and favours, and the imitation of Christ. All these are logical consequences of the belief in both the evil of the body in a dualistic philosophy, and the holiness of the physical body in the Mystical Body of Christ.

Francis of Assisi (c. 1182–1226) was very straightforward in one of his letters: 'We must hate our bodies with [their] vices and sins.' His biographer states: 'He used to call his body Brother Ass for he felt it should be subjected to heavy labour, beaten frequently with whips, and fed with the poorest food' (Bonaventure, 1978: 70, 222). He practised what he preached. Brother Giles, one of his first followers, was equally emphatic: 'Our flesh is like a hog that runs eagerly into the mud and enjoys being in the mud' (Brown, 1958: 273).

Many Christians felt as he did. After various outbreaks of the plague in the twelfth century arose the Flagellants: groups of Christians who practised public flagellation as a penance. The practice was prohibited by various popes, but revived particularly during the Black Death (1346–9) and continued sporadically into

the fifteenth century. The practice is particularly significant as demonstrating the close spiritual relation between the physical body and the body politic, in the *public* realm. Health and happiness on this earth are perceived not only as individual matters within Divine Providence, but also as social and corporate. Not only can Christians reach God directly through pain-infliction, and save their own souls, but they can also save others. The body mediates.⁵

A certain distrust rather than hatred, of the body is evident in the medieval lyric poem *Piers the Ploughman* by William Langland (c. 1332–c. 1399); a lovely lady representing Holy Church explains a dream Piers has had, but warns him:

Put no trust in your body, for its promptings come from the World, and the World is a liar out to betray you. And the flesh and the devil are in league to pursue your soul, and speak evil things to your heart.

(1959: 71)

In Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), however, the leading theologian of the age, there is no such hatred or distrust of the body. He rejected both Plato's dualism and Aristotle's materialism, and developed a new synthesis: asserting the unity of body and soul, matter and form (the theory of hylomorphism, taken from Aristotle), as well as the immortality of the soul (from Plato), and the resurrection of the body. He insisted: 'my soul is not I; and if only souls are saved, I am not saved, nor is any man' (Spicker, 1970: 10). The body therefore has intrinsic moral value; he insisted that 'divine goodness is the good of everything corporeal' (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1: 65, 3; 1981, vol. 10: 13). Thus the body in scholastic philosophy is neither tomb, nor prison, nor enemy. His fellow Dominican Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–c. 1328) was less enthusiastic about things corporeal, however, stating firmly: 'There is no physical or fleshly pleasure without some spiritual harm' (Davis, 1976: 35).

The ascetic tradition was reinforced by Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471), whose spiritual classic, *The Imitation of Christ*, was enormously influential, and indeed still is. He echoed Plato and Saint Paul when he advised that:

to eat and drink, to wake and sleep, to rest and labour, and to be subject to all the necessities of nature is a great trouble and affliction to the devout man, who would rather be

released and set free from all sin . . . The inner life of man is greatly hindered in this life by the needs of the body.

(1952: 55)

Not all the medievals lived such ascetic lives, however, nor held such ascetic views. The troubadours indeed praised a secular love; and *The Art of Courty Love*, written in the late twelfth century, described the service of the King and Queen of Love, and the virtue of 'the work of Venus' (Capellanus, 1959). The rules of love were enumerated, parodying the Ten Commandments, and capsizing Christian morality. Indeed the title, and the text, were strongly influenced by Ovid's *The Art of Love*. Similarly the stories of Boccaccio (1313–75) in *Decameron* and Chaucer (c. 1340–1400) in *The Canterbury Tales* show men and women thoroughly enjoying each other's bodies. This frank admission of sensuality ran counter to the Christian tradition. Nature, i.e. Love, was opposed to reason, law and morality, in this view; and Chaucer's nun epitomized the contradiction with her enigmatic legend '*Amor vincit omnia*'. Both Boccaccio and Machiavelli reversed the Christian tradition in their assertion of the primacy of new values: sexual love and political power. The body was more lusted after than distrusted. Attitudes towards the body varied considerably during the Middle Ages, and so did the treatment of the body, but the ascetics were presumably a minority. Indeed, popular attitudes towards the body may well have been precisely the opposite of what the ascetics and religious described.

THE RENAISSANCE: THE BODY AS SECULAR AND PRIVATE

The Renaissance, beginning in Italy in the fourteenth century, re-discovered the body, and transformed attitudes towards it. Artists like Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael and Titian painted the body as beautiful and in glowing colours. Cellini gave new poise to sculpture. Philosophers like Castiglione (1517/1983: 330–2) praised beauty as a 'sacred thing' and 'a true sign of inner goodness'; 'the good and the beautiful are identical, especially in the human body'. This integration of body and soul, and physical and moral beauty, would have upset John Chrysostom and others; clearly beauty was being appreciated for its own, purely secular sake, not simply as a rung on the ladder to God.

The secularization of the body is indicated by Erasmus's (1530/1985) treatise *De civilitate morum puerilium*. He discussed the social

control of such bodily functions as eating and drinking, spitting, blowing the nose and so on, far more frankly than they are discussed in contemporary etiquette books. Elias (1982) has shown that as standards of refinement rose, so more and more areas of 'instinctive' or 'natural' behaviour came to be judged as indelicate and unmannerly. New notions of civility began to *privatize* the body. Increasingly people distanced themselves from bodily functions and indeed from the body itself, both their own and other people's, not only ideologically but also with implements of various sorts: table cutlery, handkerchiefs, commodes, nightwear, spittoons, etc. Little had been hidden in the past, or could be hidden. Now a 'conspiracy of silence' begins to descend upon sexual matters, and what might be called a 'conspiracy of invisibility' descends upon the 'private' parts of the body. Elias attributed these changes in the discourse on, and the living of, the body to the rise of individualism at the Renaissance and, more specifically, to the breakdown of group identities in feudalism and in the church. Increasing social and geographical mobility and technological change facilitated the development of an egocentric universe. Other factors would later accelerate this process, notably the rise of Calvinism and Puritanism, urbanization, industrialization, and the privatization of the family; but increasingly after the Renaissance everyone is an island – which is what Descartes implied and Donne protested against. Indeed only 100 years after Erasmus's book, the new realities of the individual as *alone* (divided from others), *secular* (divided from God) and *dual* (internally divided) are succinctly expressed in the Cartesian '*Cogito, ergo sum*'.

The Renaissance therefore witnessed the beginning of the end of the ascetic idea of the body as *enemy*, and the strengthening of the idea of the body as beautiful, good, personal and *private*. This movement should not be over-emphasized, however. For the leper – and leprosy was endemic in Europe in the early Middle Ages – the disfigured body was a *public* symbol of sin, and was a visitation from God. Thus the body remained an instrument of God's will, public or private, beautiful or leprous, friend or enemy.

The Renaissance did not displace traditional ascetic ideas totally. Teresa of Avila (1515–82), echoed Paul, Francis and Thomas à Kempis when she advised the sisters of her order:

The first thing we have to do, and that at once, is to rid ourselves of love for this body of ours . . . [By] the grace of

the Lord we shall gain *dominion* over the body. To conquer such an *enemy* is a great achievement in the battle of life.

(1964: 90, 97; emphasis added)

The theme is Pauline. Having conquered the body by exterior (bodily) mortification, the sisters were expected to subdue the will by interior mortification. This required going against one's 'natural' emotional desires and needs; in Ignatius Loyola's phrase: '*agere contra*'. This is necessary for the 'overcoming of self'. Some examples of such ascetic behaviour: Margaret-Mary Alacoque (1647-90) filled her mouth with the diarrhoea of a sick man, and she cleaned up the vomit of another with her tongue; Angela of Fuligno described how she drank the dirty water with which she had just been washing the hands and feet of lepers:

The beverage flooded us with such sweetness that the joy followed us home. Never had I drunk with such pleasure. In my throat was lodged a piece of scaly skin from the lepers' sores. Instead of getting rid of it, I made a great effort to swallow it and I succeeded. I shall never be able to express the delight that inundated me.

(In Beauvoir, 1953: 676)

This may seem gross, disgusting, masochistic and neurotic to some; to others it has seemed the peak of holy asceticism.

Ignatius Loyola (1491-1536), the founder of the Society of Jesus, emphasized in his *Spiritual Exercises* that 'we need to train ourselves to be impartial in our attitudes towards all created reality', including the body; this is a typically Stoic idea, in a different context. And he gave clear instructions on penance, recommending that the retreatant cut down on food and sleep, and 'chastise the body by inflicting actual pain on it. This is done by wearing hairshirts or cords or iron chains, by scourging or beating ourselves and by other kinds of harsh treatments' (1963: 22, 39-40). Contemporary Jesuits, and no doubt members of other religious orders, still practise the traditional 'mortification of the flesh' as Ignatius had recommended. For Ignatius, as for Paul, salvation is achieved, at least in part, by conquest of the body; for Augustine it was more a matter of the will.

Loyola's contemporary, Martin Luther (1483-1546), had a very different attitude towards the body. He enjoyed his food and drink and once remarked: 'If our Lord is permitted to create nice, large

pike and good Rhine wine, presumably I may be allowed to eat and drink' (Friedenthal, 1970: 445). And he argued persistently against the traditional clerical views of celibacy, and praised marriage.

Rabelais (1494-1553) was also a contemporary of both Loyola and Luther, with very different ideas about the body. The 'grotesque body' which he described in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* is the body of the medieval folk-culture, carnivals, Hallowe'ens, comedy and satire. Bakhtin (1968: 319) notes:

The body that figures in all the expressions of the unofficial speech of the people is the body that fecundates and is fecundated, that gives birth and is born, devours and is devoured, drinks, defecates, is sick and dying. In all languages there is a great number of expressions related to the genital organs, the anus and buttocks, the belly, the mouth and nose. But there are few expressions for the other parts of the body: arms and legs, face, and eyes.

Boccaccio had described the ribald, fun, wild, uncivilized body before him, and Shakespeare and Cervantes would do so later; but Rabelais was hyper-realistic. 'The essential principle of grotesque realism', says Bakhtin (1968: 19-20), 'is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in literature.' At the time, therefore, the grotesque body was (and indeed still is) the exact reversal of the 'ascetic body' of Loyola, the 'body beautiful' of Castiglione, and the private and secular and civilized body of the high Renaissance.

The Christian body of the Renaissance and the Reformation is therefore fluid and multiple. Since Vatican II, however, modern Christians have constructed a gentler and friendlier body. A Franciscan work on spirituality advises that:

The modern mortification is to start taking care of our health once more out of reverence for who we are: temples of the Spirit of God . . . Our mortification . . . does not involve punishing the body, or depriving ourselves of food and drink. It involves the dull task of eating and drinking what is healthy and life-giving; it involves the decision to stop killing ourselves and to start loving ourselves. And moderation is the key.

(Bodo, 1984: 133-4)

Modern theologians increasingly stress that the body is not an 'enemy', nor a 'poor ass'. Thomas Merton states: 'What is important is not liberation from the body but liberation from the mind. We are not entangled in our own body but entangled in our own mind' (1973: 90). This seems, on the face of it, to be a complete reversal of the attitudes of some of the Desert Fathers and Doctors of the Church. Indeed contemporary theologians are far more positive about the body:

The Christian's body is a redeemed body. It has been transferred to another master; it has passed from evil to good, it has returned to God's ownership, it is no longer profane but sacred, and this change of ownership is precisely a consecration.

(Mouroux, 1961: 62)

None the less, asceticism is not dead. Warriors, athletes, dancers, weight-lifters and others still train; and their slogan, 'No pain, no gain', expresses a secular asceticism. Where Christians trained to save their souls, others now train to improve their bodies. And the modern body has now come full circle back to the ancient Greek ideal of the beautiful body, an ideal symbolized by the re-opening of the Olympic Games in 1896.

DESCARTES TO THE MODERNS: THE BODY AS MACHINE

René Descartes (1596–1650) has often been described as the founder of modern philosophy, and Cartesianism, specifically mechanism, has been the philosophy which has underpinned the achievements of modern science. In his *Discourse on Method* (1637) he formulated the first principle of his philosophy: '*Cogito, ergo sum*' – I think, therefore I am; and he went on to say that 'this "I", that is to say, the mind, by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body' (1968: 53–4). And what was this body? Descartes replied: 'I considered myself, firstly, as having a face, hands, arms, and the whole *machine* made up of flesh and bones, such as it appears in a corpse and which I designated by the name of body'. He also compared the body to a clock, which works without a mind (1968: 104, 163; cf. 1972: 1–5).

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) agreed with Descartes on this, and in *Leviathan* (1651) he asks: 'What is the heart, but a spring; and the nerves but so many strings; and the joints but so many

wheels, giving motion to the whole body, such as was intended by the artificer?' (1960: 5). It is ironic that Hobbes, and others, used the inorganic metaphor of machines to explain the body, and the organic metaphor of the body to explain politics.

Descartes had suggested that 'the rules of mechanics' are 'the rules of nature' (1968: 72); and many agreed, including Giorgio Baglivi (1668–1706), Professor of Anatomy at Rome:

Whoever examines the bodily organism with attention will certainly not fail to discern pincers in the jaws and teeth; a container in the stomach; watermains in the veins, the arteries and other ducts; a piston in the heart; sieves or filters in the bowels; in the lungs, bellows; in the muscles, the force of the lever; in the corner of the eye, a pulley, and so on.

(Moravia, 1978: 48)

One point should be clarified, however; very few people regarded the self as *only* a machine. Both Descartes and Hobbes tried to explain that people were not merely machines, although animals were. Descartes (1968: 74–6) said it was because animals do not and machines cannot conduct conversations, or reason; Hobbes (1960: 13, 69) argued from reason also, and from religion. Bishop Butler (1950: 9) announced in one of his sermons in 1726 that 'A machine is inanimate and passive, but we are agents.' And others argued that mechanism could not explain life, energy, growth and movement (Moravia, 1978).

Descartes' division of *homo sapiens* into soul and body effectively allocated the soul to the church and the body to science in a clear 'separation of powers'. The division within the self coincided with and reflected the division within society.

One of the first to attack Descartes was Benedict Spinoza, who flatly denied the Cartesian premise. 'Descartes starts from mind,' he wrote to Leibniz, 'I start from God' (1959: v). And he began his most famous work, *Ethics* (1677), published after his death, with the first chapter on God. 'Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can exist or be conceived without God' (Pt 1, 15; 1959: 11). Furthermore, 'man consists of mind and body', and 'the human mind is united to the body' (Pt 2, 13; 1959: 47); but neither is subordinate to the other, they are merely two facets of the one reality of God. Indeed, mind and body are not separate, as Descartes had insisted; Spinoza argues that: 'the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things' (Pt 2, 7; 1959: 41). Yet while

Spinoza's theory of hylozoism did avoid the Cartesian problem of the interaction of the mind and the body, his philosophy did not convince his contemporaries.

The French philosopher La Mettrie also rejected Cartesian dualism, but from a materialist, not a spiritualist, perspective. In his *L'Homme Machine* (1748), he argued that Man is a machine, just like any other animal. 'The human body is a watch,' he said, 'a machine which winds its own springs', and he described the alleged soul as a 'chimera', an 'empty word' (1961: 141-2, 93, 128).

During the nineteenth century, the philosophy and science of the body were in a ferment; and major contributions to the discussions were made by Feuerbach, Marx, Darwin, Nietzsche and Freud in their different fields. Ludwig Feuerbach interrupted these debates about body and mind, machines and souls, and insisted on the material base of humanity: 'The individual is an individual only in this, his corporeal life' (1980: 87). He rejected the Christian notion of immortality, 'the belief that splits humans into an otherworldly, inconceivable, shapeless soul, which is hostile to both form and nature, and into a crude spiritless body, which is hostile to the soul' (1980: 7). Yet Feuerbach remained a philosopher, rather than an activist, and for all his interest in the body and the senses (chapter 5), he did not investigate corporeal life in practice.

Marx did, and so did Engels (see chapters 5 and 9), and they both researched the destruction, mechanization and animalization of the bodies of the workers. Not only are human and animal labour interchangeable, as Marx noted in *Capital. Vol. 1* (1867) but the worker 'becomes an appendage of the machine' in a sense never intended by Descartes (Marx and Engels, 1967: 87). 'Since the worker has sunk to the level of a machine, he can be confronted by the machine as a competitor.' And 'the inevitable result for the worker is overwork and premature death' (Marx, 1964: 69, 68). Bodies are disposable assets.

Charles Darwin, born 100 years after La Mettrie, was also concerned about humans as animals, but from a biological rather than a social perspective. In the concluding chapter of *The Descent of Man. Vol. 2* (1871) Darwin stated bluntly that: 'man is descended from a hairy quadruped, furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in its habits, and an inhabitant of the Old World' (1981: 389). Darwin delightedly informed a friend: 'Our ancestor was an animal who breathed water, had a swim bladder, a great swimming tail, an imperfect skull, and undoubtedly was an

hermaphrodite! Here is a pleasant genealogy for mankind' (1887, vol. 2: 266). Humans, therefore, are not only animals bodily evolved from other animals, but their/our bodies are still evolving. Darwin had very effectively capsized Victorian values, for now mind was dependent on body, as with other animals, and humans were not 'lords of creation' over animals but descended from these animals, and bearing their animal origins in their bodies for all to see. The ancient dichotomies of mind/body, human/animal, superior/inferior, asserted from Plato to Descartes, were here not only denied, but in some senses reversed.

Where Marx had described the progressive reduction of the worker to animal to body and finally to machine, his contemporary, Walt Whitman, born in the same year, rhapsodized in 'Starting from Paumanok' about the human body as including the soul and indeed as *divine*.

Behold, the body includes and is the meaning, the main concern, and includes and is the soul;

Whoever you are, how superb and divine is your body, or any part of it.

Another of his poems is entitled 'I Sing the Body Electric': a sizzling break with the Orphic-Stoic-Pauline-ascetic tradition.

Friedrich Nietzsche also sang the body, in his own way, and rejected Christianity and the ideology of the body which he identified with Christianity, namely asceticism and negativism. In *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883), he takes to task these 'despisers of the body'. He himself praised the body: 'Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a mighty commander, an unknown sage - he is called Self. He lives in your body, he is your body.' In this removal of the self from the brain and from 'thoughts and feelings' and in the location and identification of the Self in and with the body, Nietzsche anticipated Sartre. He added: 'There is more reason in your body than in your best wisdom' (1969: 62); this sentence not only reflects one of Pascal's more well-known aphorisms, but it also reverses the traditional definition of the superiority of the mind over the body. Reason is now defined as pertaining more to the body than to the mind, perhaps in the sense of instinct and intuition; thus the distinctive feature of *homo sapiens* is no longer mind but body.

Meanwhile Sigmund Freud demonstrated in his *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), with Breuer, that psychological phenomena can

be converted into physical phenomena, and that hysterical symptoms are psychogenic. Thus body and mind are one. In his first case history 'Dora' (1905), he asserted that the symptoms of hysteria are both psychical and somatic in origin. Once the psychic material is analysed, the somatic symptoms disappear (1977b: 73). Freud's theory of 'conversion', as he called it, from mind to body seemed to be validated by the success of his therapy; but his theory also seemed to call into question traditional Cartesian dualism, and the separation of mind and body. Indeed, he was a pioneer of psycho-somatic 'medicine'.

Simultaneously, developments in medicine also initiated a reconstruction of the body. Vaccinations had been developed by Jenner in 1795 and had proved to be so effective in combating smallpox that in 1853 Parliament passed legislation making smallpox vaccinations compulsory for all children. The body politic had increased its power over the body physical. The individual body therefore now became, to a degree, *state property*.

The year 1853 therefore marks a turning-point in the political anatomy of the body in England: i.e. in the relation between the body physical and the body politic. During the previous decades the state had slowly expanded its authority and powers over more and more sectors of the population, both public and private. Parliament had introduced legislation affecting mine and factory owners which governed the hours and conditions of labour; parish and town councils were instructed about sewage disposal, garbage tips and cemeteries; the quality of food and water became matters of law; and the reformers insisted on the close relation between the environment and health, and between the health of the population and the health of the state (Porter, 1987: 55-8). 'Filth, misery, vice, and crime are inseparably connected', wrote one reformer in 1851 (Williams, 1965: 202). The elimination of the two physical ills would, it was thought, eliminate the two moral and political ills. Physiology, politics and morality are all *one*.

The body was therefore the last bastion to fall before the new, modern, intrusive government. There were precedents for this conquest, however. The state had always exercised the right to take away life, to inflict pain, to remove parts of the body, to tattoo or brand the body; to quarantine individuals, houses, ships and even towns in times of plague; to imprison people or banish them; and both church and state had traditionally forbidden many physical activities, as in matters of sexual intercourse, masturbation, self-

mutilation, abortion and suicide (see Foucault, 1979). The body had never been entirely private or autonomous; it had always been under some surveillance and some control; but such control had been individual, specific and localized in time and space.

The 1853 legislation was qualitatively and quantitatively different precisely because it had universal and compulsory applicability and was prescriptive for the future. Furthermore, it was legitimized by the Utilitarian doctrine of 'the greatest good'. Also, it was the thin edge of the wedge. The Contagious Diseases Act (1866) required the compulsory examination of prostitutes, and the Vaccination Act (1871) extended the duty of vaccination to the entire population (Porter, 1987). With this new legislation, the instruments of the state now injected directly into the bloodstream of every citizen.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: THE MECHANICAL BODY

The death of Queen Victoria (1901) ended an era. The new century introduced King Edward VII and his numerous liaisons, the Castles and the Gibson girls, Isadora Duncan and the Ballet Russe, Picasso's blue period, the tango, a cure for syphilis (1910), *Sons and Lovers* (1913), the Jim Crow laws in the Southern United States, Boas' attacks on biological determinism, and demonstrations for women's rights. Constructions of the body, particularly in the matters of morality and gender and race, were in flux. Old certainties and meanings were no longer secure.

After the war came the 'Roaring Twenties', with jazz and the blues, the flappers, nudism and sunbathing, Josephine Baker in Paris and the 'Ziegfield Follies', the 'Miss America' Contest (1921), latex condoms and Charles Atlas (1922); Johnny Weismuller, winner of Olympic honours in 1924, became a Hollywood Tarzan in 1930, and women won the right to vote in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada. Havelock Ellis (1897-1929) finished his seven-volume *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1919/1928), and Bronislaw Malinowski wrote two books, startling at the time, on the anthropology of sex; both authors had been deeply influenced by Freud. At the same time Hollywood was packaging beautiful women and handsome men for mass visual consumption. The body beautiful was being institutionalized; and both the meaning and the reality of the body were changing.

Co-existing with the new body-positive constructions of the body, mechanism remained the dominant paradigm in biomedicine. Indeed the rapid advances in medical science and practice confirmed the utility of the scientific perspective. The principal killers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – smallpox, typhoid and cholera – had been largely eliminated by social reforms, and improved standards of living. But two initiatives, the ‘cell’ theory of Rudolf Virchow and the ‘germ’ theory of Louis Pasteur, transformed medicine from an art into a science. The development of vaccines, anaesthetics, sterilization, the sulfa drugs and antibiotics contributed also to further lowering the death-rates. The body, therefore, became not ‘something’ to be feared, potentially dangerous, to be watched all the time, but something to be enjoyed; it can even be abused, and then ‘cured’ by a ‘magic bullet’. These medical advances have contributed to more relaxed and positive attitudes towards the body. They have also accelerated the trend from sacred to profane attitudes: the magic bullets work better and quicker than prayer.

Cartesian mechanism persisted in psychology as in biology. John B. Watson, the founder of Behaviourism in 1924, asserted that ‘the human body . . . is not a treasure house of mystery but a very commonsense kind of *organic* machine’ (1966: 49). Indeed Watson dismissed dualism, and dismissed the soul: ‘No one has ever touched a soul, or seen one in a test tube, or has in any way come into relationship with it as he has with other objects of his daily experience’ (1966: 3). The positivist philosophers had ‘dismissed’ the soul some years before; A.J. Ayer by his principle of verifiability, and Bertrand Russell by his materialism. Thus by the early twentieth century, biology, medicine, psychology and philosophy were largely agreed in their materialism: the body is all.

This mechanistic construction of the body was congruent with the mechanization of society. The first Model T Fords were produced in 1908; and the automobile transformed thinking about the body. Watson indeed referred to the individual as a body, the body as a machine, and the machine as a car:

Let us try to think of man as an assembled organic machine ready to run. We mean nothing very difficult by this. Take four wheels with tires, axles, differentials, gas engine, body; put them together and we have an automobile of a sort.

(1966: 269)

This threefold reduction, man to body to machine to car, however, lost the ‘organic’ in the process.

Mechanism became so powerful a philosophy that it was applied not only to the body but also to children and industrial workers. A popular work on child-care published in the United States in 1921 advised:

It is quite possible to train the baby to be an *efficient little machine*, and the more nearly perfect we make *the running of this machine*, the more wonderful will be the results achieved and the less trouble it will be for the mother.

(In Synnott, 1983: 87; emphasis added)

This was entirely congruent with the view of the worker as machine developed by Frederick Taylor, founder of the ‘scientific management’ school and of the time-and-motion study. Workers become part of the machinery of production, cogs in the wheel, numbers and units of production, scientifically studied and managed. Charlie Chaplin caricatured this reality in *Modern Times*. Ultimately Taylorism generated the ‘human relations’ school of Elton Mayo and others, but the contrasting orientations to workers are still reflected in corporate structures. Corporations have production departments to harness men and machines, and personnel departments to ‘unharness’ them, i.e. to inhibit or ameliorate the negative consequences of the mechanization of workers.

B.F. Skinner later summarized the Behaviourist position on the body concisely, in terms that reflect existentialist philosophy: ‘The picture which emerges from a scientific analysis is not of a body with a person inside, but of a body which *is* a person’ (1971: 199).

Buckminster Fuller’s magnificent description of the body-machine in 1938 indicates the rapid pace of technological change:

A self balancing, 28-jointed adapter-based biped; an electro-chemical reduction plant, with segregated stowages of special energy extract in storage batteries for . . . thousands of hydraulic and pneumatic pumps with motors attached; 62,000 miles of capillaries . . . the whole extraordinary complex mechanism guided with exquisite precision from a turret in which are located telescopic and microscopic self-registering and recording range finders, a spectroscope, etc., the turret control being closely allied with an air conditioning intake-and-exhaust, a main fuel intake [etc.].

(Barnard, 1981: 8)

On a practical level, as Dr Jonathan Miller (1980) has noted, each new advance in science and technology has contributed to advances in medical science. This, however, has tended to reinforce the mechanistic, dualistic and reductionist constructions of the body.

Even Dr. Christiaan Barnard, pioneer of the heart transplant, adopts a mechanistic perspective in his book entitled, typically, *The Body Machine* (1981). The book has chapters on the different 'systems' (reproductive, nervous, endocrine, immune, respiratory, digestive and renal) with one chapter on 'The Chassis', and sections entitled 'On the Road', 'Body Maintenance' and 'In the Workshop'. Evidently how we perceive the body is a function of our level of technology; but it is also a function of how we value technology: there are, as we have seen, other values. Certainly the value of the automobile is reflected in a recent letter:

My model is a 1924, and it has had the necessary periodontal work; the varicose veins have been stripped; the windshields have been replaced with bifocal models and upgraded. The paint is still the original, but the soft top has thinned, revealing the excellent hard top below. I don't race in the Indy, but I don't ride in the slow lane either.⁶

(*New York Times Magazine*, 19.2.84: 94)

Not only are physical problems seen in mechanistic terms, so also are psychological problems. The poet Robert Lowell described his manic depression as 'some flaw in the machine' (*Time* 8.10.84).

The logical consequence of this instrumental view of the body as machine is the comparison of the efficiency of the human machine with other machines; and a recent study reports that:

The average human body is between 16 and 27% efficient – which compares badly with several products of the human mind. But by regular exercise the body's efficiency can be raised to 56%, which is better than many machines.

(Diagram Group, 1980: 183)⁷

Normally, an electric motor is extremely efficient at 80%; far more efficient than even the fittest human machine; steam turbines and petrol motors are also normally more efficient, but steam engines are less efficient.

NAZISM: THE ARYAN BODY

If mechanism has been the dominant medical paradigm of the body, the dominant political paradigm was Nazism. Having combined Darwin and Nietzsche in a strange stew of Social Darwinism and Superman, Hitler had convinced himself and others of the biological, cultural and spiritual superiority of the blond Aryan Master Race. This politicization of the body was not new; indeed it had been institutionalized previously in slavery and colonialism, sexism and racism. Nazism was simply the latest ideology of the body, an ideology based on blood as well as colour.

Blood has a long history in somatology. For the Greeks, blood determined temperament: hot-blooded and cold-blooded. By the nineteenth century blood also described class. British aristocrats were 'blue-blooded' as distinct from the rest of us 'red-blooded' peasants. This dichotomy may have reference to the aristocratic propensity for being true-blue Tories, or more likely to the blue of the veins, standing out starkly against the milk-white of their delicate hands, in contrast to the scarred, tanned and dirty hands of the commoners. None the less, the term suggests a biological distinction between 'the two nations', as Disraeli described the nineteenth-century British class structure.

Blood, or the ideology of blood, also differentiated the American race structure. Georgia defined a White: 'White persons are only persons of the white or Caucasian race who have no ascertainable trace of either negro, African, West Indian, Mongolian, Japanese or Chinese blood in their veins'. Similarly, Alabama defined a Black as 'any person who has in his or her veins any negro blood whatsoever' (Montagu, 1965: 421). One drop, a trace, defines the social reality.

The ideology of blood is therefore linked to the politics and economics of class and race; and in the twentieth century was most clearly articulated by Hitler, and institutionalized in the concentration camps. In *Mein Kampf* (1924), Hitler wrote his autobiography and his political platform, beginning with his belief in the supremacy of the Aryan race: 'he represents the archetype of what we understand by the term: MAN. He is the Prometheus of mankind, from whose shining brow the divine spark has at all times flashed forth' (1942: 164). Blood constitutes the state: 'The state is a racial organism, and not an economic organization'

(1942: 93). This one Volk, one Reich, one blood must fulfil its biological and sacred duty, which is world conquest, and is historically inevitable.

The only threat to this future, in Hitler's view, was miscegenation. History proves this: 'All the great civilizations of the past became decadent because the originally creative race died out, as a result of contamination of the blood.' Hitler returned to this theme again: 'The adulteration of the blood and racial deterioration conditioned [by racial mixing] are the only causes that account for the decline of ancient civilizations' (1942: 163, 167). 'The sin against blood and race is the hereditary sin in this world' (1942: 142).

This ideology of blood-purity spilled rivers of blood, with about 40 million dead, and many nations ruined, including Germany. Ultimately Nazism was countered, not so much by another ideology as by the very violence which Hitler had lauded as 'the will of Nature' (1942: 161) and by, in Churchill's immortal words, 'blood, toil, tears and sweat'.

Where Hitler had seen the body as the basis of the state, Sartre described the body as the self; for one, the body is a political tool, for the other it is life.

EXISTENTIALISM: THE BODY AS SELF

Tombs and temples, clocks and cars – all these metaphors imply a distance between the body and the self. In *Being and Nothingness* (1943), however, Sartre insisted that the body is the self, and that the self is the body: 'I live my body . . . The body is what I immediately am . . . I am my body to the extent that I am' (Sartre, 1966: 428–60). Sartre's monism contrasts sharply with Descartes's dualism; furthermore his materialism capsizes Cartesian idealism, for where Descartes had referred to 'the *mind*, by which I am what I am' (1971: 54), Sartre insisted that the '*body* is what I immediately am'.

The new philosophies of the body developed by Nietzsche and Sartre were major reconstructions: from self as mind to self as body; from body as enemy or as 'despised' to body as self; from mind as spiritual to mind as material. Mind and body have changed places in the popular scale of values. None the less traditional Christian values still do persist; and not everyone subscribes to the new materialist existentialism.⁸ Furthermore, those with stigmatized bodies, to borrow Goffman's phrase, are fully

aware that the body is political, central to personal identity and life chances. People judged by their bodies do not take them for granted, and may love or hate their bodies – not for philosophical but for political and very practical reasons, whether they are judged by their physical handicaps, age, colour, gender, or aesthetics (Goffman, 1963; Murphy, 1987). Malcolm X explained:

[The Whites] very skilfully make you and me hate our African identity, our African characteristics. You know yourself that we have been a people who hated our African characteristics. We hated our heads, we hated the shape of our nose, we wanted one of those long dog-like noses, you know; we hated the color of our skin, hated the blood of Africa that was in our veins. And in hating our features and our skin and our blood, why, we ended up hating ourselves. And we hated ourselves.

(1966: 169)

This body hatred and self-hatred began to end, said Malcolm X, with African nationalism and independence movements, and Black nationalism in the United States, and culminated in the new pride in 'Black is Beautiful'.

Blacks blame Whites, and women blame men. Germaine Greer points out that women are 'brainwashed about the physical image they should have'. She insists that:

The universal sway of the feminine stereotype is the single most important factor in male and female woman-hatred . . . Women are reputed never to be disgusted. The sad fact is that they often are, but not with men: following the lead of men, they are often most disgusted with themselves.

(1971: 261–2)

Attitudes to the body, individual and collective, persist even after death; and indicate how powerful these attitudes are. In every culture, the dead body is treated with respect and with ceremony; and the body remains the symbol of the self. Indeed people have rights in their bodies after death (Feinberg, 1985). Medical students are particularly traumatized when they first have to dissect cadavers: this becomes a rite of passage into the profession (Lella and Pawluch, 1988). Perhaps the Irish essayist Robert Lynd best illustrated the close connections between the body and the self: 'I know a man who said that he would hate to be buried in a

certain graveyard because it was "very damp". But then he was subject to rheumatism' (1951: 258).

RECENT PARADIGMS: THE BODY AS PLASTIC, BIONIC, HOLISTIC. . .

Political and philosophical constructions of the body co-exist with scientific constructions, and recent advances in medical science have reinforced mechanistic and materialist constructions of the body. Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery is one of the fastest growing specialties in medicine in the United States, with over two million operations performed annually. The body is no longer 'given' (meaning, traditionally, a gift of God); it is *plastic*, to be moulded and selected at need or whim. For mechanists, no problem; but Christian fundamentalists argue that such surgery desecrates the temple of the Holy Spirit: a clash of constructions. The body is not only plastic, it is also *bionic*, with cardiac pace-makers, valves, titanium hips, polymer blood vessels, electronic eye and ear implants, collagen fibre and silicon rubber skins, and even polyurethane hearts. Furthermore, we are increasingly dependent upon machines: diagnostic machines of various sorts, CAT scans, heart monitors, ultra-sound; and even for our lives: incubators soon after birth, dialysis machines and iron lungs, and respirators and life-support systems towards the end. Finally, the humans/machines may be 'unplugged' or 'switched off'. The line between human and machine is blurred, so is the fine line between life and death. The brain-dead can be kept 'alive'.

The body is also *communal* and interchangeable in its parts. Hearts, livers, pancreas, kidneys, corneas and bone marrows are all transplanted, alone or in various combinations. Xenografts, or transplants between different species, are routine. Baby Fae lived for 20 days with the heart of a baboon. The mechanistic implications are clear: just as cars are cannibalized for spare parts, so now humans and animals are also being 'cannibalized'. The ethical implications are not so clear. Recently in the United States a baby was conceived solely to be the purveyor of bone marrow to her big sister, afflicted with chronic leukaemia: a 'biological re-supply vehicle'. A *Time* poll asked if this was morally acceptable: 47 per cent of Americans said yes; 37 per cent said no (*Time*, 17.6.91).⁹

Increasingly the body is *engineered*. The first trials in gene therapy in humans have already been launched in the United

States; and as the genetic code is further deciphered the health benefits for those suffering, or potentially suffering, from the 3,000 or so diseases with a genetic base are obviously high. Again, however, is the body just a machine? Ethicists have raised concerns about 'designer babies', made to order; about the dangers of tinkering with the reproductive or germ-line cells and human cloning – mice and cows have already been cloned; and about the dangers of invasion of privacy from genetic testing, and the creation of a genetic 'under-class' of 'inferior' humans.

The body may also be *chosen*, selected from a wide range of possibilities in sperm and ovum bank catalogues. The new reproductive technologies, including *in vitro* fertilization, artificial insemination, surrogate motherhood, embryo freezing, the research into artificial wombs and embryo implantation in men are raising a host of ethical problems about the body, and humanity. Children may now have five parents: a sperm donor, an ovum donor, a surrogate mother (a rented womb) and two social parents, quite apart from additional parents acquired by fostering, adoption and re-marriages. Children's rights to know their genetic parents are in question, women are being commodified as gene or ovum producers or embryo-carriers; there are possibilities of 'harvesting' babies from petri dishes; embryo experimentation is increasing . . . the ethics of the body remains critical (Corea, 1985, 1987; McDaniel, 1989).

While the benefits of the bio-medical model of the human body have been clearly appreciated over the last 350 years, increasingly the *limitations* of the model are now being perceived for three types of reasons. First, the effectiveness of placebos and hypnosis seems to indicate the role of mind over body. Second, a deeper appreciation of non-Western medical approaches to, and paradigms of, the body has developed. And third, disease is known to be related to emotional and mental states, particularly stress. *Society, mind and body* are all linked in ways that are still being discovered. The very phrase 'psycho-somatic illness' implies that the etiology of illness is, or often is, both psychological and physical – sometimes one more than the other. The medical profession has increasingly come to appreciate the utility of yoga, bio-feedback, acupuncture, relaxation techniques, macrobiotic diets, meditation, massage, aerobic fitness, visualization techniques and other health phenomena, which have traditionally been largely ignored by Western medical science; and research has indicated the therapeutic value

of plants, pets, music, colour, views from windows and even laughter, and especially tender loving care, positive attitudes and the will to live.

Holistic thinkers, as those who emphasize the total context in the etiology of disease are sometimes known, have expressed concern that in Western societies mind and body are so compartmentalized as to be treated by different, disciplines: psychology and psychiatry for the mind, medicine for the body. Furthermore, the American Medical Association now recognizes 24 distinct specializations within the profession. Thus the illness is increasingly 'removed', first by dualism and then by specialization, from the individuals who are ill, and from the physical, psychological, social and environmental contexts in which they become ill. Such reductionism, it is often argued, has created a flawed medical science, based on a false model of health, and may result in the treatment of symptoms rather than the person. These concerns need not be overstated, perhaps. Westerners on average have never lived so long, nor in such good health.

The prevalence of holistic thought is indicated by one survey which found that 87 per cent of the 25,000 people surveyed agreed that 'most problems of the body are strongly influenced by problems of the mind'. And some expressed beliefs as dualistic as ever, but with reversed poles, i.e. disease is perceived as primarily emotional or mental, not physical, in etiology. A 41-year-old cancer patient stated: 'I accept the responsibility of getting cancer - I've had a lot of stress in the past few years - and I also accept the responsibility of curing myself.' In these views, 'it's all in the mind'; the body merely reflects the symptoms of the mind (Rubinstein, 1982: 36). Thus victims 'blame' themselves. This is precisely the *opposite* of the ancient Western tradition, and a quite different construction of the body. The body is not a problem for the mind, as Plato had argued; the mind is a problem for the body . . . or either may be a solution for the other in the new mind/body medicine (Moyers, 1993).

CONCLUSION

Despite centuries of debate about the meaning of the body, there are no signs of universal agreement. Each new age seems to create and re-construct the body in its own image and likeness; yet at any given time there are likely to be many paradigms of the body: competing,

complementary, or contradictory. And no doubt the re-definitions of corporeality will continue in the twenty-first century.

Mary Douglas' dictum that 'the social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived' (1973: 93) is particularly apposite, for both the social body and the perceptions of the physical body are constantly changing, and are infinitely various. However, the perceptions presented here have been, almost exclusively, male. Women have often defined the body differently, as we consider in the next chapter. Similarly, other cultures have 'other bodies', as the anthropologists have shown (see chapter 9). The physical body therefore is eminently social.

In sum, the body has been, and still is, constructed in almost as many ways as there are individuals; it seems to be all things to all people. Thus the body is defined as good or bad; tomb or temple; machine or garden; cloak or prison; sacred or secular; friend or enemy; cosmic or mystical; one with mind and soul or separate; private or public; personal or the property of the state; clock or car; to varying degrees plastic, bionic, communal; selected from a catalogue or engineered; material or spiritual; a corpse or the self.

Any construction of the body, however, is also a construction of the self as embodied; and, as such, influences not only how the body is treated but also how life is lived. Some love the body, some hate it; some hide it, some flaunt it; some 'bruise' it (Paul) and others pamper it with 'nice, large pike and good Rhine wine' (Luther). One may be a libertine or a puritan or a mechanic. Indeed the implications are immense, affecting virtually all areas of one's life.

At present, there is no consensus on the meaning of the body and, in a pluralistic society, no consensus can be expected. Constructions reflect the values not only of the culture, but also of the sub-culture, and of the specific individuals, and they are ever-changing. Thus the discourse continues, debating whether and to what degree, and in what ways, the body is tomb or temple, loved or hated, personal or state property, machine or self.