

***"The Human Body is the best picture of the Human Soul".  
What is the significance of this remark?***

**Part Two: Later Wittgenstein**

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This remark is open to several vastly different interpretations. Many have supposed it to be evidence of a strong step towards behaviourism in Wittgenstein's philosophy. The metaphysical implications seem to be quite a radical departure for one who is traditionally seen as a philosopher concerned primarily with language. It is vital to understanding Wittgenstein that we ascertain exactly what he is implying in this statement.

In answering this question, it will be necessary to devote a significant amount of time to the discussion of what Wittgenstein means when he refers to notions such as bodies, humans and souls. This essay will discuss the significance of the remark, not only in relation to the rest of Wittgenstein's philosophy, but also in terms of the broader implications it has for the way we view Wittgenstein's metaphysical stance. Naturally, the focus will be on the Philosophical Investigations, but reference will also be made to material from various commentators on Wittgenstein, human beings and theological concepts such as the soul.

While the whole of the Philosophical Investigations makes constant reference, in the form of thought-experiments, to human activities, commonly to illustrate the falsehood of some counter argument or other, it is difficult to find any specific reference to the body as such. Compounding this problem is the fact that it is often hard to discern whether Wittgenstein is talking 'in his own voice' or in the voice of an imagined objector. Consequently, any arguments made here will need to be examined in detail to ensure that what we take for a particular stance of Wittgenstein is actually what *he* means, and is not instead what he thinks we will incorrectly attribute as his thought. Wittgenstein makes few explicit references to his view of the metaphysical nature of a human body, and even less time is spent talking directly about souls. As such it is no trivial task to deduce what *kind* of body Wittgenstein is talking about when he says it is the best picture of the human soul. We have instead to deduce from numerous disparate sections what his overall picture of 'humanity' is. This will be the focus of the first part of the essay. It will then be argued that once we correctly identify the terminology used in this remark, i.e. what Wittgenstein's notion of a human body, and the picture of a soul is, then we will realise what the significance of this remark is.

It could be that Wittgenstein sees that the crucial factor for things to be bodies is in their having sensations. In PI §281, Wittgenstein states that "Only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations"<sup>1</sup>. The parenthesised section is of utmost importance. Resemblance to a living human being solely in a visual or physical manner will not do. It is the whole of the human's behaviour that is crucial to allowing us to ascribe to it such things as sensations, any internal state, or indeed a soul. Wittgenstein asks us to consider a case where I have turned to stone, yet still feel pain; "Couldn't I imagine having frightful pains and turning to stone while they lasted"<sup>2</sup>. Malcolm notes in regard to this example, "Wittgenstein's concern here is with the philosophical conception that the normal behavioural 'expressions' of sensation and consciousness are only frequent 'accompaniments' of sensation and consciousness"<sup>3</sup>. This is not to say that the normal 'expressions' simply are the sensations, nor that the 'accompaniments' are not frequent but instead necessary. Rather, Wittgenstein is presenting a picture of our lives where the associated behaviour is an inextricable, *yet still separate*, part of our sensations. Malcolm states that turning to stone is "Wittgenstein's device for eliminating *in totality* any of the human behaviour ... (in order to later) ... test the conception that the behaviour ... has nothing to do with the *meaning*"<sup>4</sup>.

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1 PI §281

2 PI §283

3 Malcolm: 135

4 Malcolm: 135

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It is important not to be drawn so far from the traditional 'accompaniment' picture that one denies any kind of inner state of sensation and sees only behaviour. This would be the exact opposite of the traditional picture, and for Wittgenstein would make as little sense.

Wittgenstein clarifies the type of relationship that behaviour and meaning, sensations, and souls have with an example in PI2, v; " 'I noticed that he was out of humour.' Is this a report about his behaviour or his state of mind? ... Both; not side-by-side, however, but about one *via* the other"<sup>5</sup>.

We can see something like the thoughts behind this at the end of section five of PI2; "It is like the relation: physical object - sense-impression. Here we have two different language-games and a complicated relation between them. -- If you try to reduce their relations to a *simple* formula you go wrong"<sup>6</sup>. Indeed for many relationships that are traditionally seen as dichotomous, Wittgenstein simply states that the two concepts cannot be understood without reference to each other, be it the soul and the body, meaning and use or actions and attitudes. As Dilman states; "what we consider as paradigms of the mental and the bodily ... such as thinking and walking, cannot be conceived in separation from each other"<sup>7</sup>.

Wittgenstein's body is one that necessarily behaves, and his use of 'behaviour' in this context is bound up with conceptions he has about grammar and language-games. Behaviour is obviously not a purely internal thing, but it is also not simply an external thing. Instead, his behaviour involves personalities acting and reacting within a social context, where all players of the language-game understand the rules. Thus 'behaviour' deals with a more social phenomenon than simply the physical movements of a body driven by reflex action.

As for pictures, in PI2 ii Wittgenstein does offer a fairly concise explanation of what constitutes a picture; "What is the content of the experience of imagining? The answer is a picture"<sup>8</sup>. So the picture of a human soul is simply what is brought to mind when imagining the soul. Is this to say that the human soul is whatever we imagine it to be? No, again we are making the mistake of assuming that Wittgenstein's statement is metaphysical in nature. This mistake stems from a temptation to simplify the quotation to read: "the content of the imagination is a picture", but there is a dangerous ambiguity here. The picture is not that which is contained, rather the word 'content' and 'picture' can be seen as synonymous. 'Contents of imagination' are pictures, but pictures are not *the* contents of the imagination.

So a body is a behaving entity, which is one which plays a language game, belongs to a society of rule-followers, follows established conventions and in general knows the 'use' of its words. The mental image we arrive at when we try to think of something that has a soul is of this kind of entity. Our belligerent objector still asks; but what is this 'soul'? To which we answer: Wittgenstein is not trying to define the soul, rather he is stating that what we as humans think of when we think of something having a soul, is intimately bound up with the idea of the human body. Again, the two concepts simply can not be disentangled.

Having discerned the sense in which Wittgenstein uses the terms body and soul, we can now begin to piece together the significance of this remark in relation to Wittgenstein as a whole. It is here that we begin to find problems associated with the existence of other minds. Wittgenstein has borrowed<sup>9</sup> the empirical technique of the logical positivists and early behaviourists, though he takes neither of their conclusions. In following this scientific method

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5 PI2, v: 153

6 PI2, v: 154e

7 Dilman: 30

8 PI2, ii: 149e

9 (or perhaps invented)

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he has ignored, but by no means denied, the mental aspects of behaviour; "If we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of object and designation, the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant"<sup>10</sup>. The problem with this scientific approach is that Wittgenstein falls victim to the same kinds of argument as are used against both the psychological behaviourist and the Cartesian dualist: If the only signs of internal sensations or thoughts are their external manifestations, then how are we to discern that any person actually has those mental states and is not instead merely acting in the same way as one who has those states?

As Dilman notes, Descartes' objection to direct knowledge of other minds is that "I may look out of the window ... and say that I see men who pass in the street. But all I really see are hats and coats that may cover automata. If I claim that *what* I see are men then what I claim goes beyond what I *see*"<sup>11</sup>. The objection is that I can never know purely through observation that the men in the street are playing a language game. I cannot know whether they know the rules or are merely acting as though they know the rules.

If people as automata is an unrealistic or somehow unconvincing scenario, the American science-fiction writer, Charles L Harness, describes a similar case where simulation of intention is confused with actual intention. He writes of a rat being taught chess. A German professor describes the method of teaching the rat, Zeno, thusly: "Tied each chessman in succession to body and let Zeno run simple maze on the chess board composed of moves of chess man, until reached king and got piece of bread stuck on crown"<sup>12</sup>. If one is tempted to assert that the rat could not learn tactics, and that this is the difference between the rat and his opponents, one could argue that tactics would come with practice, or perhaps that in training, the longer the rat takes to solve the maze, the less bread is given. So for all outward characteristics, the rat is playing perfect chess.

However Wittgenstein would argue both in cases such as this and Descartes' automata, that there is something fundamentally missing from these scenarios, the absence of which prevents us from talking of the rat as actually playing chess, and the automata as actually behaving in the manner that those with souls do. In both cases, the simulators of behaviour would not know the *significance* of their actions. For the rat, chess is about finding bread, while to the other players it is about winning the game. In this way, we cannot say of the rat that he is playing chess in the same sense that his opponents are. In §250, in a response to just this kind of conditioning, Wittgenstein states that "the surroundings which are necessary for this behaviour to be real simulation are missing"<sup>13</sup>. As Tilghman succinctly explains: "A chimpanzee wearing trousers can aspire to no higher estate than to be a parody, but to speak more carefully, that is not the chimpanzee's aspiration at all for it is someone else who is dressing him up"<sup>14</sup>.

However this does not allow Wittgenstein to escape the assertion that his 'surroundings' are by their nature unobservable, and so we are still left with a sceptical doubt as to the existence of other minds. All Wittgenstein has done here is to assert that there is in fact a difference, not that we might actually be able to observe that difference. The only real difference that Wittgenstein seems to give us is that whatever simulators do, it "(does) not make the same *sense* to them as us"<sup>15</sup>.

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10 PI, 293

11 Dilman: 27

12 Harness: 105

13 PI: 250

14 Tilghman: 106

15 PI: 282

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But the crucial difference that Wittgenstein is alluding to is that as a matter of fact that our attitude is an attitude towards a soul, that this just is the way we conceive of people. On the face of it, Wittgenstein may seem as though he is saying that, regardless of any potential doubt, we just do not treat people in the way the sceptic is suggesting is possible. However Tilghman asserts that there is more to his argument than this; "We can make intelligible the suppositions that a group ... are really only physiological automatons by understanding it as the expression of a practice"<sup>16</sup>. This links closely with Wittgenstein's assertion that "I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul"<sup>17</sup>. If we do not (and cannot) hold *opinions* about souls, but rather hold attitudes towards bodies, then "dualist arguments drop out as of no interest"<sup>18</sup>. Further, there is the suggestion that the dualist argument simply makes no sense, it is as if the dualist is "standing on the sidelines of a language-game, but not really engaged in it and yet not playing some other game either"<sup>19</sup>. This Tilghman says is because the dualist is by their very own admission and intention, forgetting all of the implied meaning behind a language-game. Tilghman later talks of gestures having meaning by virtue having a place in the "'context' of an ongoing human relationship"<sup>20</sup> - this is what the Cartesian does, yet sensibly cannot, forget.

Wittgenstein is not answering the question of why people could not be automata, but is instead rejecting the question as being based on a philosophical confusion regarding both the nature of human beings, body and behaviour, and also language. The real significance of Wittgenstein's remarks regarding souls is brought out in an understanding of the way he sees the relationship between human behaviour and the attribution of soul qualities. For him, humans are entities that not only behave as human beings, but understand that they and others behave so. To see these as anything other than soul bearing beings, is to suffer one of several possible confusions. Kerr describes the misconception by stating that "Again and again ... we return to the material object, deny its materiality ... and think that we have found our true selves. The relationships and demeanour of human beings towards one another disappears from sight"<sup>21</sup>. Either there is a confusion regarding the nature of bodies and souls, or there is a mistake being made in the viewpoint of the observer; naturally human behaviour makes no sense outside of the wider context; but we cannot be what it is that makes us human without this context, simply: "there is no room for the fear ... that we are radically unintelligible to one another"<sup>22</sup>.

In conclusion, we have seen that the remark that "the human body is the best picture of the human soul"<sup>23</sup> is significant in a number of ways. When Wittgenstein's views on bodies and souls are seen in bodies being essentially true behavers, behaviour as including grammar in the sense of knowing the rules both of language and life, and souls as entities within a specific type of language game, we see that the significance of the remark is that it embodies a complete rejection not of the Cartesian argument, but that the Cartesian is talking sense at all. Further, the remark is significant in that it helps bring out, or is at least indicative of, a much deeper, more metaphysical reading of the entire *Investigations*.

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16 Tilghman: 105  
17 PI2, iv: 152  
18 Tilghman: 105  
19 Tilghman: 103  
20 Tilghman: 110  
21 Kerr: 100  
22 Kerr: 93  
23 PI2, iv: 152

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