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The Meaning of the Body

AESTHETICS OF HUMAN UNDERSTANDING

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INTRODUCTION

Meaning Is More Than Words and Deeper Than Concepts

The central thesis of this book is that what we call "mind" and what we call "body" are not two things, but rather aspects of one organic process, so that all our meaning, thought, and language emerge from the aesthetic dimensions of this embodied activity. Chief among those aesthetic dimensions are qualities, images, patterns of sensorimotor processes, and emotions. For at least the past three decades, scholars and researchers in many disciplines have piled up arguments and evidence for the embodiment of mind and meaning. However, the implications of this research have not entered public consciousness, and so the denial of mind/body dualism is still a highly provocative claim that most people find objectionable and even threatening. Coming to grips with your embodiment is one of the most profound philosophical tasks you will ever face. Acknowledging that every aspect of human being is grounded in specific forms of bodily engagement with an environment requires a far-reaching rethinking of who and what we are, in a way that is largely at odds with many of our inherited Western philosophical and religious traditions.

To see what this reconceptualization means, consider this: The best biology, psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and phenomenology available today teach us that our human forms of experience, consciousness, thought, and communication would not exist without our brains, operating as an organic part of our functioning bodies, which, in turn, are actively engaged with the specific kinds of physical, social, and cultural environments that humans dwell in. Change your brain, your body, or

your environments in nontrivial ways, and you will change how you experience your world, what things are meaningful to you, and even who you are.

THE ILLUSION OF DISEMBODIED MIND

Contrast this embodiment hypothesis with our commonsense view of mind. Although most people never think about it very carefully, they live their lives assuming and acting according to a set of dichotomies that distinguish mind from body, reason from emotion, and thought from feeling. Mind/body dualism is so deeply embedded in our philosophical and religious traditions, in our shared conceptual systems, and in our language that it can seem to be an inescapable fact about human nature. One pervasive manifestation of this dualism in many of our ethical, political, and religious practices is the assumption that we possess a radically free will, which is assumed to exist apart from our bodies and to be capable of controlling them. We postulate a "higher" self (the rational part) that must seek to control the "lower" self (body, desire, emotion). We assume that each of us has an inner core (a "true self" or a "soul") that transcends our bodily, situated self. We buy into the notion of thinking as a pure, conceptual, body-transcending activity, even if we realize that no thinking occurs without a brain.

This pervasive illusion of disembodied mind, thought, and meaning is beautifully explored and criticized by the American poet Billy Collins, who unmasks our dream of pure thought by showing that we can think and imagine only through our bodies.

PURITY

My favorite time to write is in the late afternoon,
weekdays, particularly Wednesdays.
This is how I go about it:
I take a fresh pot of tea into my study and close the door.
Then I remove my clothes and leave them in a pile
as if I had melted to death and my legacy consisted of only
a white shirt, a pair of pants and a pot of cold tea.

Then I remove my flesh and hang it over a chair.
I slide it off my bones like a silken garment.
I do this so that what I write will be pure,
completely rinsed of the carnal,
uncontaminated by the preoccupations of the body.

Finally I remove each of my organs and arrange them
on a small table near the window.
I do not want to hear their ancient rhythms
when I am trying to tap out my own drumbeat.

Now I sit down at the desk, ready to begin.
I am entirely pure: nothing but a skeleton at a typewriter.

I should mention that sometimes I leave my penis on.
I find it difficult to ignore the temptation.
Then I am a skeleton with a penis at a typewriter.
In this condition I write extraordinary love poems,
most of them exploiting the connection between sex and death.

I am concentration itself: I exist in a universe
where there is nothing but sex, death, and typewriting.

After a spell of this I remove my penis too.
Then I am all skull and bones typing into the afternoon.
Just the absolute essentials, no flounces.
Now I write only about death, most classical of themes
in language light as the air between my ribs.

Afterward, I reward myself by going for a drive at sunset.
I replace my organs and slip back into my flesh
and clothes. Then I back the car out of the garage
and speed through woods on winding country roads,
passing stone walls, farmhouses, and frozen ponds,
all perfectly arranged like words in a famous sonnet.

Ah, if only mind could float free of its carnal entanglements, thinking pure thoughts of things certain, eternal, and good. *But that is a dysfunctional dream!* It is our organic flesh and blood, our structural bones, the ancient rhythms of our internal organs, and the pulsing flow of our emotions that give us whatever meaning we can find and that shape our very thinking. Collins humorously reminds us that if we want to write great love poems (or any poems), we had better retain not just our sexual organs, but also our whole fleshy body, with all of its desires, emotions, and moods.

HOW THE BODY HIDES OUT

René Descartes, one of the most famous mind/body dualists in the Western philosophical tradition, argued that just by clear thinking, we can in-

dubitably see that mind and body are two radically different and distinct kinds of thing:

> I have a complete understanding of what a body is when I think that it is merely something having extension, shape and motion, and I deny that it has anything which belongs to the nature of a mind. Conversely, I understand the mind to be a complete thing, which doubts, understands, wills, and so on, even though I deny that it has any of the attributes which are contained in the idea of a body. This would be quite impossible if there were not a real distinction between the mind and the body. (Descartes 1641/1984, 86)

> Simply by knowing that I exist and seeing at the same time that absolutely nothing else belongs to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing, I can infer correctly that my essence consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing. It is true that I may have (or, to anticipate, that I certainly have) a body that is very closely joined to me. But nevertheless, on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it. (Descartes 1641/1984, 54)

Why should it seem so obvious to most people that mind and body are two, not one? One important reason is that our lived experience itself reinforces an apparently inescapable dualistic view of mind versus body. We don't have to work to ignore the working of our bodies. On the contrary, our bodies hide themselves from us in their very acts of making meaning and experience possible. The way we experience things appears to have a dualistic character. Ironically, it is the nature of our bodies and brains that gives rise to this experience of a split (mental plus physical) self.

Drew Leder (1990), following the groundbreaking work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), has catalogued the many ways in which the successful functioning of our bodies requires that our bodily organs and operations recede and even hide in our acts of experiencing things in the world. One of the chief ways the body hides from our conscious awareness is a result of what Michael Polanyi (1969) called the "from-to" character of perception. All our acts of perception are directed *to* or *at* what is experienced and *away from* the body doing the perceiving. This is what phenomenologists call the *intentionality* of the mind. In Polanyi's words, "Our body is the only assembly of things known almost exclusively by relying on our awareness of them for attending to something else. . . . Every time we make sense of the world, we rely on our tacit knowledge of impacts made by the world on our body and the complex responses of our body to these impacts" (1969, 147–48).

For example, our acts of seeing are directed toward and focused on what we see. Our intentionality seems to be directed "out there" into the world. The mechanisms of our vision are not, and cannot be, the focus of our awareness and attention. We are aware of what we see, but not of our seeing. The bodily processes hide, in order to make possible our fluid, automatic experiencing of the world. As Leder says, "It is thus possible to state a general principle: insofar as I perceive through an organ, it necessarily recedes from the perceptual field it discloses. I do not smell my nasal tissue, hear my ear, or taste my taste buds but perceive with and through such organs" (1990, 14). In a discussion of the "ecstatic body," Leder names this perceptual hiding of the body "focal disappearance" of the specific bodily organs and activities of perception.

In addition to focal disappearance of our perceptual organs, there is also a necessary "background disappearance" of other processes and activities that make perception possible, processes of which we are seldom, if ever, aware. This includes such things as the complex of bodily adjustments and movements that make it possible for a certain perception to occur. I see *with* my eyes (which undergo focal disappearance), but that seeing would be impossible without those eyes' existence in a body that makes a number of fine adjustments, such as holding the head in a certain way, keeping the body erect and pointed in a certain direction, and moving the body in ways that ensure a clear line of sight. When I reach out to pick up a cup, I am not aware of the multitude of fine motor adjustments or the ongoing cooperation of hand and eye that make it possible for me to locate and touch the handle of the cup.

Emphasizing dimensions of nonconscious bodily processes, Shaun Gallagher has usefully distinguished between our *body image,* which involves "a system of perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs pertaining to one's own body," and our *body schema,* which is "a system of sensory-motor capacities that function without awareness or the necessity of perceptual monitoring" (Gallagher 2005, 24). It is our body schema that hides from our view, even while it is what makes possible our perception, bodily movement, and kinesthetic sensibility. Our body schema is "a system of sensory-motor functions that operate below the level of self-referential intentionality. It involves a set of tacit performances—preconscious, subpersonal processes that play a dynamic role in governing posture and movement" (ibid., 26). As Gallagher documents with great care and insight, it is only when some

breakdown occurs in our body schema, such as through traumatic bodily injury or a lesion to some sensorimotor area of the brain, that we even become aware that we have a body schema.

Another major type of bodily disappearance is based on the recession of the internal organs and processes throughout nearly all of our experience. Without these visceral processes performed by the respiratory, digestive, cardiovascular, urogenital, and endocrine systems, we would die, and so, in an almost trivial sense, they provide conditions for the very possibility of experience. More significantly, these systems underlie some of our most powerful experiences, even though we are almost never aware of their operations, and some of them are simply inaccessible to conscious awareness. To cite just one salient example, our emotional experience depends on complex neuronal and endocrine processes, although we typically cannot have a felt awareness of those processes. The result is that we feel a feeling, but we never feel our internal organs generating that feeling. Joseph LeDoux (2002) and his colleagues have studied the crucial role of the amygdala in the feeling of fear. The amygdala receives neural information about a certain stimulus and controls the release of hormones that create effects in many organs and systems, such as increased heartbeat, changes in respiration, and the activation of certain defense responses. We are not, of course, ever aware of the operations of our amygdala, but only of the systemic organic effects of those operations.

In short, the body does its marvelous work for the most part behind the scenes, so that we can focus on the objects of our desire and attention. We can be directed out into our world and be about the business of affecting the character of our experience so that we may survive and flourish precisely because our "recessive body" is going about its business.

The principal result of these forms of bodily disappearance is our sense that our thoughts, and even our feelings, go on somehow independent of our bodily processes. Our body-based experience reinforces our belief in disembodied thought. Leder summarizes the bodily basis of our latent Cartesianism:

> It is *the body's own tendency toward self-concealment* that allows for the possibility of its neglect or deprecation. Our organic basis can be easily forgotten due to the reticence of the visceral processes. Intentionality can be attributed to a disembodied mind, given the self-effacement of the ecstatic body. As these disappearances particularly characterize normal and healthy functioning, forgetting about or "freeing oneself" from the body takes on a positive valuation. (Leder 1990, 69)

There are disturbing overtones to the dream of "freeing oneself from the body," as if this would actually be a good thing to strive for! It reinforces the dangerous idea, so deeply rooted in Western culture, that purity of mind entails rising above one's bodily nature. Immanuel Kant famously argued for a "pure reason" that generates formal structures that are supposedly not based on anything empirical and thus are in no way dependent on our embodied, phenomenal selves. Kant also claimed that moral laws could issue only from "pure practical reason," completely free of feeling, emotion, or bodily constraints. A good will, on Kant's view, is a pure will, one that rises above the demands of our bodily desires and answers only to the commands of pure moral reason. Within most Christian traditions, a person's "true" self is not *of* this world of the flesh, even though it must temporally dwell *within* that world. In Kantian terms, this is formulated as the view that we most essentially are rational egos—transcendent sources of judgments, spontaneous free acts, and universally binding moral imperatives.

In short, the idea of a fundamental ontological divide between mind and body—along with the accompanying dichotomies of cognition/emotion, fact/value, knowledge/imagination, and thought/feeling—is so deeply embedded in our Western ways of thinking that we find it almost impossible to avoid framing our understanding of mind and thought dualistically. The tendency of language to treat processes and events as entities reinforces our sense that mind and body must be two different types of thing, supporting two very different types of properties. For example, just asking the question "How are body and mind one, not two?" frames our whole conception of the relation dualistically, since it presupposes that two different kinds of things must somehow come together into one. Consequently, anyone who is trying to find a way to recognize the unity of what Dewey called the "body-mind" will not have the appropriate vocabulary for capturing the primordial, nonconscious unity of the human person. Even our language seems to be against us in our quest for an adequate theory of meaning and the self.

MEANING RUNS DEEPER THAN CONCEPTS AND PROPOSITIONS

In challenging our inherited mind/body dualism, my real target will be the disembodied view of meaning that typically accompanies such a dualism. According to the view of "mind" and "body" as two different substances, structures, or processes, meaning is something that belongs

first and foremost to words. Linguistic meaning (the meaning of words and sentences) is taken to be based on concepts and their capacity to be formed into sentence-like thought units that philosophers call propositions. I am going to argue that this notion of meaning, which underlies much mainstream philosophy of mind and language, is far too narrow and too shallow to capture the way things are meaningful to people. Any philosophy based on such an impoverished view of meaning is going to overintellectualize many aspects of human meaning-making and thinking.

The dominant view of meaning and thought that I will be challenging is what I will call the conceptual-propositional theory of meaning. Here is a capsule summary of its key points:

THE CONCEPTUAL-PROPOSITIONAL THEORY OF MEANING

Sentences or utterances (and the words we use in making them) alone are what have meaning. Sentences get their meaning by expressing propositions, which are the basic units of meaning and thought. Propositions typically have a subject-predicate structure. Our language and thought are thus meaningful to the extent that they express propositions, which allow people to make assertions about the way the world is and to perform other speech acts, such as asking questions, issuing commands, pleading, joking, expressing remorse, and so on. Our capacity to grasp meanings, and our capacity for reasoning, depends on our conscious use of symbolic representations in the mind that somehow can relate to things outside the mind. These symbolic representations (usually thought of as concepts) are organized into meaningful propositional structures via formal rules of syntax, and then the propositions are organized into thoughts and arguments via formal rules of logic. According to this objectivist semantics, neither the syntactic rules, nor the logical relations, nor even the propositions themselves have any intrinsic relation to human bodies.

The key components of disembodied views that I want to challenge are the seriously mistaken claims that meaning and thought are exclusively conceptual and propositional in nature and that the apparatus of meaning, conceptualization, and reasoning is not intrinsically shaped by the body, even if these processes have to occur *in* a body. I will argue in chapter 2 that if babies are learning the meaning of things and events, and if babies are not yet formulating propositions, then meaning and understanding must involve a great deal more than the ability to create and understand propositions and their corresponding linguistic utterances. Obviously, I do not mean to deny the existence of propositional thinking, but I see it as

dependent on the nature of our embodied, immanent meaning. In short, contrary to the fundamental claim of Gottlob Frege (1892/1970), the father of modern analytic philosophy, propositions are *not* the basic units of human meaning and thought. Meaning traffics in patterns, images, qualities, feelings, and eventually concepts and propositions.

One popular strategy for acknowledging that there is nonpropositional meaning while still privileging the propositional is to claim a rigid dichotomy between two fundamentally different kinds of meaning: (1) descriptive (cognitive) meaning, and (2) emotive (noncognitive) meaning. Once this illusory demarcation was made, it was easy for philosophers of language like A. J. Ayer (1936) and Charles Stevenson (1944) to retain an exclusive focus on the conceptual/propositional as the only meaning that mattered for our knowledge of the world. So-called emotive meaning had no place in science or any allegedly rigorous, empirically testable modes of knowing.

I am going to argue that the cognitive/emotive dichotomy does more harm than good. It is a mistake to banish emotional aspects of meaning to the nether land of the merely emotive and then to claim that *real* meaning is cognitive meaning of the conceptual/propositional sort. Instead, I will be arguing for the central role of emotion in how we make sense of our world. There is no cognition without emotion, even though we are often unaware of the emotional aspects of our thinking.

The idea that meaning and understanding are based solely on propositional structures is problematic because it excludes (or at least hides) most of what goes into the ways we make sense of our experience. In striking contrast to this conceptual-propositional view of meaning and knowledge, a substantial body of evidence from the cognitive sciences supports the hypothesis that meaning is shaped by the nature of our bodies, especially our sensorimotor capacities and our ability to experience feelings and emotions. If we look at prelinguistic infants and at children who are learning how their world works and what things mean to them, we will find vast stretches of embodied meaning that are not conceptual and propositional in character, even though they will later make propositional thinking possible.

In the account of embodied meaning that I am developing in this book, I am using the term *meaning* in a broader sense than is typical in mainstream Anglo-American philosophy of language and mind. I seek to recover most of the resources for meaning-making that are ignored in the writings of influential philosophers such as Quine, Searle, Davidson, Fodor, Rorty, and many others. In addition to the standard notion that meaning involves

the conscious entertaining of concepts and propositions, I am focusing on mostly nonconscious aspects of a person's ability to meaningfully engage their past, present, and future environments. I am proposing what I call

THE EMBODIED THEORY OF MEANING

Human meaning concerns the character and significance of a person's interactions with their environments. The meaning of a specific aspect or dimension of some ongoing experience is that aspect's connections to other parts of past, present, or future (possible) experiences. Meaning is relational. It is about how one thing relates to or connects with other things. This pragmatist view of meaning says that the meaning of a thing is its consequences for experience—how it "cashes out" by way of experience, either actual or possible experience. Sometimes our meanings are conceptually and propositionally coded, but that is merely the more conscious, selective dimension of a vast, continuous process of immanent meanings that involve structures, patterns, qualities, feelings, and emotions. An embodied view is naturalistic, insofar as it situates meaning within a flow of experience that cannot exist without a biological organism engaging its environment. Meanings emerge "from the bottom up" through increasingly complex levels of organic activity; they are not the constructions of a disembodied mind.

The semantics of embodied meaning that is supported by recent research in the cognitive sciences provides a naturalistic perspective, one that makes no explanatory use of any alleged disembodied or "purely rational" capacities. A naturalistic theory of meaning takes as its working hypothesis the idea that all of our so-called higher cognitive faculties (e.g., of conceptualization and reasoning) recruit cognitive resources that operate in our sensorimotor experience and our monitoring of our emotions. The guiding assumption for such a naturalistic semantics is what John Dewey called a "principle of continuity."

DEWEY'S PRINCIPLE OF CONTINUITY

> The primary postulate of a naturalistic theory of logic is continuity of the lower (less complex) and the higher (more complex) activities and forms. The idea of continuity is not self-explanatory. But its meaning excludes complete rupture on one side and mere repetition of identities on the other; it precludes reduction of the "higher" to the "lower" just as it precludes complete breaks and gaps. . . . What *is* excluded by the postulate of continuity is the appearance upon the scene of a totally new outside force as a cause of changes that occur. (Dewey 1938/1991, 30–31)

An embodied view of meaning looks for the origins and structures of meaning in the organic activities of embodied creatures in interaction with their changing environments. It sees meaning and all our higher functioning as growing out of and shaped by our abilities to perceive things, manipulate objects, move our bodies in space, and evaluate our situation. Its principle of continuity is that the "higher" develops from the "lower," without introducing from the outside any new metaphysical kinds.

I will be using the terms *embodied meaning* and *immanent meaning* to emphasize those deep-seated bodily sources of human meaning that go beyond the merely conceptual and propositional. Structures and dimensions of this immanent meaning are what make it possible for us to do propositional thinking. But if we reduce meaning to words and sentences (or to concepts and propositions), we miss or leave out where meaning really comes from. We end up intellectualizing human experience, understanding, and thinking, and we turn processes into static entities or properties. I will therefore be suggesting that any philosophy that ignores embodied meaning is going to generate a host of extremely problematic views about mind, thought, and language. I want to suggest, in anticipation of my arguments to come, some of the more important consequences of taking seriously a nondualistic account of mind and personal identity and recognizing the bodily basis of human meaning.

PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE BODY-MIND AND OF BODY-BASED MEANING

This fact of embodied mind has several profound consequences for who you are and how you should live your life: it denies a radical mind/body separation, sees meaning, imagination, and reason as embodied, denies radical freedom, ties reason to emotion, and requires an embodied spirituality. Here are some of the more striking implications of taking our embodiment seriously:

1. *There is no radical mind/body separation.* A person is not a mind *and* a body. There are not two "things" somehow mysteriously yoked together. What we call a "person" is a certain kind of bodily organism that has a brain operating within its body, a body that is continually interacting with aspects of its environments (material and social) in an ever-changing process of experience. As I will explain later, we designate certain dimensions of these ongoing experiential processes "mind" and other dimensions "body," but we do this only reflectively and for very specific purposes that we have in trying to make sense of our experience. In short,

"mind" and "body" are merely abstracted aspects of the flow of organism-environment interactions that constitutes what we call experience. When your "body" ceases to function as a living, organic whole of coordinated activities and processes, you lose your "mind." It doesn't just go away somewhere and hide. Rather, it ceases to exist. If there is life after death, we can't know what it is like, but strong neuroscientific evidence suggests that it could not involve the kind of conscious experience and meaning-making that is so distinctive of humans—unless, of course, this life after death involved the resuscitation of our human brains, bodies, and physical and social environments.

This claim is based on the idea that we are beginning to understand how our consciousness and our experience depend on our brain operating within our body and our body operating within our world, so that when our bodies cease to function, in a global, devastating fashion, we lose the capacity for experience. This realization has led many people to reject the idea of disembodied soul and life after death, and to focus instead on the importance of living rightly and well in the world as we know it.

Of course, no one could ever disprove (or prove, for that matter) the existence of a disembodied soul, which must always remain a possible hypothesis. William James, who was a pioneer in the scientific study of mind and is famous for revealing the workings of the body within our thinking and feeling, always insisted that disembodied soul must remain a real possibility. And so it must. However, such a supposition is clearly at odds with virtually all contemporary biology, neuroscience, and cognitive science. My point is that if such a soul exists, it is hard to see any way in which it could be me, or you, as we exist in our present incarnation.

2. *Meaning is grounded in our bodily experience.* If there is no disembodied mind—no transcendent soul or ego—to be the source of meaning, then what things are meaningful to us and how they are meaningful must be a result of the nature of our brains, our bodies, our environments, and our social interactions, institutions, and practices. This fact gives rise to a major problem: how does meaning emerge from a continuous process of organism-environment interactions, bottom-up, if it can't issue top-down from some alleged pure ego? The answer to this is a story based on recent empirical research in the cognitive sciences concerning the nature of meaning and thought. I will try to tell part of this story in part 2 of this book. The core idea is that our experience of meaning is based, first, on our sensorimotor experience, our feelings, and our visceral connections to our world; and, second, on various imaginative capacities for using sensorimotor processes to understand abstract concepts. Any adequate explanation of meaning must avoid attributing it to either "body" or "mind," for then we simply reproduce the dualism that is the source of the problem in the first place.

3. *Reason is an embodied process.* Our "body" and "mind" are dimensions of the primordial, ongoing organism-environment transactions that are the locus of who and what we are. Consequently, there is no mind entity to serve as the locus of reason. What we call "reason" is neither a concrete nor an abstract *thing,* but only embodied *processes* by which our experience is explored, criticized, and transformed in inquiry. Reason is more an accomplishment of inquiry than a pre-given fact or capacity. If there is no "pure" reason, then it is necessary to explain how reason and logic grow out of our transactions in and with our environment. This, again, is a huge problem for any naturalistic account of mind. I will present evidence from the cognitive sciences that reason is tied to structures of our perceptual and motor capacities and that it is inextricably linked to feeling.

4. *Imagination is tied to our bodily processes and can also be creative and transformative of experience.* Our ability to make new meaning, to enlarge our concepts, and to arrive at new ways of making sense of things must be explained without reference to miracles, irrational leaps of thought, or blind impulse. We have to explain how our experience can grow and how the new can emerge from the old, yet without merely replicating what has gone before.

As it turns out, this may be one of the most difficult problems in all of philosophy, psychology, and science: how is novelty possible? As far as I can see, nobody has yet been able to explain how new experience emerges. The problem is that if we try to give a causal explanation of novel experience or novel thought, these come out looking causally determined, rather than creative and imaginative. An embodied theory of meaning will suggest only that new meaning is not a miracle but rather arises from, and remains connected to, preexisting patterns, qualities, and feelings.

5. *There is no radical freedom.* Most people believe that human will possesses absolute freedom, which is why we think we can hold people responsible for their actions. But if there is no transcendent self, no disembodied ego, to serve as the agent of free choice, then what sense can we make of real choice, or of moral responsibility for our actions? This problem has plagued all naturalistic accounts of mind, from David Hume to William James to Antonio Damasio. We need a view of choice that is consistent with cognitive neuroscience and its insistence on the embodiment of mind and yet which doesn't make a shambles of our notions of moral responsibility.

6. *Reason and emotion are inextricably intertwined.* This claim directly challenges the received wisdom that reason and emotion are separate, independent capacities, one disembodied (i.e., reason) and the other embodied (i.e., emotion). The reason/emotion dichotomy is as basic a metaphysical dualism as you will find anywhere, and it has profound consequences for our view of thought and knowledge. It fosters the illusion of dispassionate reason—reason purified of any bodily contamination by feelings. It is extremely difficult to rethink this pernicious dichotomy, because our own experience appears to tell us that reason and emotion are distinct. I will present empirical evidence that emotions lie at the heart of our capacity to conceptualize, reason, and imagine.

7. *Human spirituality is embodied.* For many people, their sense of spirituality is tied to notions of transcendence—of the soul, of spirit, of value, of God. The traditional notion of transcendence is what I call "vertical transcendence," because it requires rising above one's embodied situation in the world to engage a higher realm that is assumed to have a radically different character from that of the world in which we normally dwell. This other world has to be *radically* other (i.e., nonphysical, infinite, transtemporal), because otherwise it would not solve the basic human problems that stem from the fact of human finiteness—problems that the existentialist theologian Paul Tillich (1957) identified as those of meaninglessness, alienation, injustice, sickness, and ultimately death. If, as the traditional view asserts, our body is the locus of our dwelling in this world and thus the locus of our finiteness, then our body must somehow be transcended if there are to be any satisfactory answers to the human condition of limitation, helplessness, and finiteness.

By contrast, if we are inescapably and gloriously embodied, then our spirituality cannot be grounded in otherworldliness. It must be grounded in our relation to the human and more-than-human world that we inhabit. It must involve a capacity for horizontal (as opposed to vertical) transcendence, namely, our ability both to transform experience and to be transformed ourselves by something that transcends us: the whole ongoing, ever-developing natural process of which we are a part. Such a view of embodied spirituality may well support an environmental, ecological spirituality, but it is hardly likely to satisfy anyone for whom the only acceptable answer to our finiteness is the infinite.

What these seven consequences reveal is that acknowledging the profound truth of our embodiment calls into question several key components of what many people think it means to be a person. It is not surprising, therefore, that once most people really come to understand what an

embodied conception of mind entails, they are going to be upset about it. Much of what they hold dear is at stake—their view of mind, meaning, thought, knowledge, science, morality, religion, and politics. That is why it is not easy to work out the details of an alternative view in a way that is existentially satisfying to most people.

In this book, I focus mostly on exploring the aesthetics of the body-mind—how meaning grows out of our organic transactions with our environment. I try to show why disembodiment is *not* purity of thought but would, in fact, amount to the loss of all the means we possess for making sense of things. As the Collins poem suggests, our bodies are the very condition of our meaning-making and creativity. If a man were reduced to only a skeleton with a penis at a typewriter, then he would, of course, write poems only about sex and death. Remove his penis, and the remaining skeleton can imagine only death, like the air passing through its bare ribs. Our task is not to supersede the body but to embrace it, to learn how it allows us to have meaning, and to nurture it as the locus of our world. We need an aesthetics of embodied meaning. We need to face the tough questions about where meaning comes from, how abstract concepts are possible, what mind is, and whether we have free choice. Such questions define our task, which is to plumb the meaning of the body—both how the body means and what embodiment means for our lives.