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## THE VIOLATED BODY

David Canter

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### The Colour of Murder

Many murderers have similar characteristics. Not only are they likely to be men, but many studies also show they are likely to be in their early 20's, from disturbed, dysfunctional family backgrounds with some prior criminal experience, not necessarily for crimes of violence. These features that murderers tend to have in common, can be seen as contributing to a limited portfolio of ways of dealing with other people. Their dysfunctional backgrounds mean that they have difficulty in feeling and knowing what it means to be a person, especially in seeing the world from another's point of view. They see the cause of their frustration, anger or jealousy, or opportunity to slake their greed, as encapsulated in the object of another being. They want to remove or destroy that entity as the only way they can relate to the individual they see as causing their reactions. Murderers therefore provide a rather exaggerated illustration of the consequences of confusing the person and their body, violating the body through acts of aggression, as a product of this confusion.

Yet there are many different ways in which a murder can be carried out. These different styles of murder are likely to relate to differences between the murderers themselves. The vicious rage that leads to violent mutilation is likely to be a product of anger with the victim in which the act of murder is what drives the killer on, the "righteous slaughter" that the American sociologist Jack Katz identified. In contrast the murderer for profit that Bolitho identified in the 1920's has the end result clearly in mind as he goes about his devious plan to poison, or kill in some other way, that distances himself from his victim.

Variations in murder and other forms of bodily violation illuminate the confusions surrounding the relationships between the person and the body. These confusions are now at the heart of many debates about the influence that current science may give us over our bodies. Attempts to reduce so much of the complexity of being people to the processes of physics and biology also challenge the rich notions we have of the relationships between self and body. Variations in the chosen modes of killing people might be thought of as the colours that distinguish one dark crime from another. These colours, I will argue, are reflections of many other differences that can be found in the struggle to make sense of being human.

The reason why these various shades and hues of murder are so illuminating is that they do not seem to be created solely by the offender's practical considerations. The use of a knife or a rope, slow poison or an illegal firearm, all derive as much from the offender's lifestyle and ways of seeing the world and his victim as they do from ready availability or the overt demands of the task at hand. The activities surrounding the choice of method for dispatching the victim add further information beyond the murderous act itself. How the body is dealt with after death, for instance whether it is hidden or covered, or the type of interaction that may have occurred before death, such as whether it was a sudden unexpected attack or one that grew out of an argument, also provide important signifiers of the mood and tone of the killing. They may indicate what the victim meant to the offender such as the role that the victim played in the killer's life. As Bolitho wrote in 1926 about murderers "They very commonly construct for themselves as life-romance, a personal myth in which they are the maltreated hero, which secret is the key of their battle against despair". In other words the victim takes on significance in the offender's self-constructed life story that is reflected in how the body of the victim is violated.

As so often happens, fiction writers appreciated the significance of such matters long before detectives, and in their wake psychologists, began to examine these subjects systematically. In Raymond Chandler's *The Long Good-Bye* the plot revolves around the private detective, Philip Marlowe, being unconvinced that the violent murder with which the story opens, could have been perpetrated by the suspect. Marlowe is convinced that the suspect adored the victim too much to assault her in that way. The actions revealed at the murder scene were at variance with what was known about the role the victim had in the life of the person who was thought to have committed the

crime. Real life examples are often more horrific but reveal similar processes, as when, for example, the mutilation of sex organs is clearly part of an act of jealousy.

Therefore, beyond the twists it can give to the plot of a thriller, or the assistance to a police investigation, the significance of the variations in violent physical assault raise questions about crucial psychological processes. They draw our attention to the fact that different ways of assaulting the body carry implications for different ways of relating to the person whose body it is. The psychological examination of violations of the body are therefore an important, if somewhat unusual, gateway to considering the fundamental nature of the relationship between the person and the body.

### **The range of violations**

The problematic nature of violations of the human body, and the profound questions those problems raise, can be illustrated further from something I noticed near the Royal Courts of Justice on The Strand in London. In a telephone kiosk outside the Courts it was difficult to avoid becoming aware that Tara and her colleagues were advertising their services by means of blu-tacked postcards. What was especially interesting about Tara is that she was willing, presumably for a fee, to be spanked. By contrast one of her colleagues, who prefers the more anonymous sobriquet Severe Mistress, was charging for the privilege of humiliating, binding and torturing her clients. I suspect that this latter service is rather more expensive than Tara's because of the higher overheads. Severe Mistress boasts a "fully equipped dungeon".

The irony of these services being on offer so close to one of the highest courts in the land is that, nowadays, those courts would never countenance spanking as fit punishment for any crime. Neither would they ever endorse humiliation and torture as an appropriate redress for even the most serious of crimes. This irony reflects the changing views we have of our body and what officialdom is allowed to do to it. Torture of many forms was not uncommon in Britain until relatively recently, not only as a method for obtaining a confession and other information, but as a form of punishment in its own right. The sentence of 'hard labour' that still obtains in many places is a recognition that the removal of a person's freedom is not enough, but they should suffer physically as well. Indeed, the 'boot camps' and 'short sharp shock' that recent British governments have introduced in the sentencing of young offenders is part of a long tradition of severe physical punishments. Many of those used in the past would today be regarded as torture. But it can be argued that there are only differences of degree between some current punishments and the treadmill that was still in use in British prisons less than a century ago, before that the 'cat' that was used to flog British soldiers for minor offences, or the various forms of rack of earlier centuries.

What has happened over the centuries that no longer make acceptable punishments that were once commonplace? I would argue that it is the relationship between the person and the body. This relationship has been growing ever more complex over the centuries as the clear distinction between the body and the spirit has eroded.

There are two different trends that these distinctions elucidate. One is the growing view that the person has to be changed by means that go beyond the modification of the body. Another is the growing reluctance to insult the person even when it is acknowledged that physical punishment is acceptable.

With the growth in the recognition of human identity and person-hood has emerged a more psychological approach to torture. Changing the nature of the person through fear and other devices have always been used. But mind-changing strategies have been lowered to new depths in the twentieth century. Indeed, if a person can be shown to have changed his allegiances, and thus, in effect, who he is, without any overt indication of physical coercion, that is now deemed more of an achievement than physical change. In the past the physical mark was seen as a prerequisite of an indication of change, often the ultimate physical control of death.

The distance between Tara and her colleagues and the tortures of the Spanish Inquisition is very great indeed, but it is remarkable what people will inflict on themselves. From time to time suicide occurs in the pursuit of exquisite pain. So it is difficult for us to grasp the huge variations there are between people in their reactions to violations of their bodies. What is clear though, from accounts of the suffering of martyrs as much as from the sadistic and masochistic indulgences of fetishists, is that

the role the person himself, or herself, plays in the process is crucial to making sense of their reactions. People who have been tortured comment on how they lose their sense of identity long before they lose consciousness. A possibly related process of feeling separated from their day-to-day existence seems to be what produces the heightened excitement that seems to characterise some reports of sad-masochism. It is the difference in relationships people have to their bodies that, at its extremes, can make the difference between an act of violation being torture or a service for which people will pay. After all it is lack of reciprocal acceptance that makes sexual activity rape.

At first sight the difference in circumstance appears to be volition. It is not a violation if you seek it out. But there is a rather more subtle and potentially more important distinction. One that is the foundation for banning many forms of punishment and that is reflected in the American Constitution's Eighth Amendment forbidding "cruel and unusual punishment". The concern not to violate the *person* and the rights that person should have. It is the recognition that the person can be violated even if there is no physical damage. The clients of Tara and others claim the freedom to do to their *bodies* as they wish.

It is the significance of the acts on the body of a person whether self inflicted or not that raise so many questions about what ours and other's bodies mean and how in many cases the transactions with people are mediated by transactions with their mortal flesh. The caresses and acts of love do of course reveal the significance of the persons between whom the actions take place. A gentle touch from a lover can be a fearful act of gross violation from a stranger. But, the offensive, destructive acts may offer as much of an insight, if not more, into the confusing relationship there often is between our bodies and our selves.

### **A Scale of violation**

The lover's touch, when unwanted, is at one end of a scale of bodily violations. Violent and abusive dismemberment of the body is at the other end. This scale seems to reflect an increasing desecration of the individual as more aspects of their personal, private selves are defiled through the actions on the body. For even the act of touching varies in its significance depending on the body part touched as much as on the person doing the touching. When two strangers have to squeeze past each other in a crowded public place there will be a tendency for them to pass back to back, or side to side. Great contortions will often be gone through to ensure that they do not touch face to face. This shows that it is our faces and the front parts of our bodies that carry so much social and related symbolic significance. These are the parts of our bodies that most capture our unique selves as individuals and which are therefore considered most vulnerable to violation.

One interesting consequence of this is that marks to the face have huge significance, as studies of even the smallest facial marks show. A number of psychological experiments, for example, have revealed that quite small facial scars can have a big impact on the judgements people will make of the scarred people. This is also illustrated in the big difference in the practice of tattooing that many young people accept. One current fashion is to have the tattoo on the upper rear shoulder so that it can be revealed or hidden as the person wishes. A tattoo on the face is part of a much more extreme expression of distinctiveness through group membership.

Beyond these forms of apparently minor violations are the wounding and mutilation that people in depressed and despairing states or ecstatic moods inflict on themselves. There are many forms of masochistic acts the world over. Dr Guy Grant, an Australian physician who provides a lot of guidance to police investigations, has been collecting accounts from many cultures of the range and variety of bodily violations people inflict on themselves and others. The extent and nature of these acts are quite remarkable. But what is particularly notable is the range of facial modifications that are carried out for apparently cosmetic reasons. Another large group involves activities relating to sexual organs. Clearly both the face and the sexual organs play a significant role in all cultures in the defining of a person's identity and it is therefore perhaps not surprising that these are popular targets for modification that can lead to violation.

The most obvious extreme form of violation is rape. It is an important question as to why rape is regarded as such a distinct crime from other forms of violent assault. A feminist interpretation could be that the value of a woman as some form of property is greatly reduced once she has been sexually violated. So special laws are required to protect this particular value. It can be seen that such

an argument can readily be developed to recognise the special sensitivity of women and therefore the need for them to have special protection. This is particularly worth noting because the crime of male rape has only been recognised in many jurisdictions in very recent times. This is all probably part of the growing acceptance of the particular challenge of sexual violation to many people's identity. Certainly there is growing evidence that sexual assaults of all forms produces psychological confusions and often traumas that go far beyond the intensity of the physical insult itself. Yet again this reveals the very important symbolic qualities that our bodies carry for us

### **Strategies for Violation**

When we turn to the extreme forms of violation that occur in murder we can see the way the meaning of the victim for the offender is enshrined in the actions committed on the body. As I have hinted earlier, two dominant strategies seem to capture most processes. One is the emphasis on the person with a limiting of the significance of the body. This can give rise to the mutilation of the body as a by-product of attempting to change the person. It is the person that is the target of the actions.

This idea is open to empirical examination through the rather grisly consideration of what sort of actions co-occur in crimes of violence, particularly those committed by serial killers. This is not an easy empirical area in which to work. The data is hard to come by, partly because of the mercifully few cases available for study. The data that is available will invariably be crude and of low levels of reliability, having been collected by criminal investigators for legal reasons not for the purposes of research. So often details of crucial psychological significance, such as at which stage in the act of murder sexual acts took place, will not be carefully determined or recorded because they have little legal significance. Yet in the Centre for Investigative Psychology at The University of Liverpool we have begun collecting appropriate data sets and some patterns are beginning to emerge that illustrate the processes being discussed here.

The hypothesis would be that when the focus was on controlling and manipulating the person there would be subsets of activities that would share a common theme, or colour. That is what we find. So, for example, sexual activity and attacks to the upper torso, often with little immediately life threatening implications are likely to co-occur in offences. Some of the victims may even be released. Humiliation and degradation are often objectives because the attack is on the person. The killer here is angry with particular people or what they represent.

A somewhat distinct strategy is when the person is ignored. This gives primacy to the body. The victim is little more than a body to these offenders and its use for their own ends is the driving force that leads them to kill. This is supported by finding that these killers insert objects into the dead body, carry out necrophilia and rituals on the body, perhaps even indulge in cannibalism. This is the psychotic killer for whom the body is independent of any person.

When we have looked at other violent crimes like rape and sexual abuse of children we find parallels. For example some paedophiles are focused on using children's bodies for their own gratification. These are the violent people who may kill to control or silence their victims. For others it is the childish person that draws their desires. They will spend a lot of time luring children into an apparently innocent relationship, possibly even believing there is no harm in the acts of abuse they perpetrate.

### **The Person as Invention**

In order to understand the further implications of these considerations of bodily violation it is necessary to realise that the 'person' is an invention of the human psyche. Being a 'person' cannot be a taken for granted 'given'. That is one of the most challenging implication of modern science. The recognition we each have of 'being me' is not a mere consequence of a corporeal existence, but requires that we each transcend our physical experiences and construct a notion of our selves that goes beyond our bodies.

The central message of many studies of child development, spurred on by the great contributions of Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget and the rich metaphors of Sigmund Freud, is that the crucial stages of early childhood are the distinguishing of the self from others. This starts with the

child becoming aware of the separateness of his or her body from that of others that succour it. It then evolves into an awareness of the unique qualities they have as a person. It is distortions in this process that undoubtedly lay the seeds for dysfunction in later life.

What our consideration of the violated body shows is that the notion of self is sometimes a difficult fiction to maintain. It is challenged every time the body is violated in any way. Therefore these violations and the reactions to them can help us to understand more fully the different ways we construct ourselves as people and the vulnerabilities inherent in those constructions.

Every one of us takes it for granted that we are a 'person'; an identifiable, unique, sentient human being with a past and anticipated future. Furthermore, except in the most extreme states of mental disturbance, we see coherence in our 'self'. We know, more or less, who we are and what it means to be that person. We do not experience ourselves as animated organisms, as mechanico-physiological systems, or even animals struggling to survive. Even at our most atavistic we regard ourselves as *people* who have certain urges and desires, needs and aspirations.

Yet, evolutionary biology and the invasive insights of biochemistry and neuroscience are making it increasingly clear that this sense of self and the associated awareness of being a person are fictional constructions. Indeed, it is emerging as a by-product of the biological sciences of the past century that the belief we each have in our own identity as people is probably the greatest innovation in evolutionary history. It is a creative leap of human imagination that requires that we minimise any indications that we are merely sentient animals and all the biological and psychological changes that happen during our lives to turn us into very different entities from those we once were. We have to construct a story about ourselves that encapsulates the central psychological continuity of our existence as the motif around which the variations in our life unfolds. This story is fictional in the sense that it is a particular construction that presents a limited perspective on our selves and in which we are the main characters, carving our identities out of our transactions with the world.

This sense of self and 'person-hood' is a far more significant aspect of our experience than the much-studied consciousness. We may, after all, share aspects of consciousness with our close relatives in the animal kingdom. Conscious awareness of our surroundings and even our recognition that we have that awareness and share it with others, including other primates, may turn out to be a natural evolutionary product of a sophisticated cortex. But it requires much more inventive processes, utilising a combination of uniquely human talents, such as language, social interaction and the creation of cultures to produce the firm belief each of us has that we are persons with a special identity as unique beings.

## **The Emergence of the Person**

Perhaps the earliest recognition that the body has to be handled carefully because of the person it contains is indicated when early humans buried their dead and made provision for a non-corporeal hereafter. For early peoples the body was an inefficient container for the more important soul. But as science has dispelled the myths of religion in parallel with giving us more control over our bodies so the body and the person who enlivens it have become ever more closely equated. Even in these Godless times the care and respect with which the dead are disposed of is a continuing paean to the importance of our non-physical identity. That is why the worst atrocities to be pictured are those of unburied bodies. They challenge our fundamental faith in our own psychological existence.

There may appear, here, to be an equating of the person with other more religious notions like spirit or soul. But the very opposite is my intention. So long as the soul was considered a God-given force that vitalised the body it was feasible to carry out atrocities on the body in order to save the soul. Many of the tortures of previous centuries were supported because of the idea that the immortal spirit of a person was being hampered by the evils inherent in the body. With the demise in the belief in the soul there is a temptation to believe that only the body matters. Its processes and products are seen as the answer to all human strengths and weaknesses. But this ignores the importance of the investment we each make in creating our selves. It ignores the existence of a person that can never be totally reduced to biological and physical processes. It is this recognition of the need to respect a person and their identity that has led to the outlawing of extreme forms of torture. It is confusions individuals have in the nature of their identity and its relationship to their body that leads to self-mutilation and sado-masochism.

Attempts to modify the living are the obverse of the reflected sanctity of the dead body. Because we cannot shake off the body we must attempt to modify it, in extreme cases violate it, in order to construct it more like the person we want it to be. This takes on an importance far beyond what may be achieved by the practical benefits of nips and tucks, marathon runs or other feats of endurance and prowess. This importance comes from the fact that the body is one of the basic metaphors for all human transactions. Any form of mutilation is thus essentially symbolic. This symbolism grows, in part, out of the very strong traditions that the flesh is profane and it is the spirit that is immortal and sacred.

### **Coping with the Person – Body Paradox**

The dualism of person and body is therefore not simply a product of rational thinking. It takes on profound emotional significance. For many people there is a struggle between the things they do not like about themselves, as reflected in their body and what they believe is truly them in the sort of person they are. Utilising the services of Severe Mistress may be one way of trying to cope with this. Other more extreme forms of self-mutilation may provide some temporary relief for more intense inner agitation.

The emotional release of inflicting wounds on the self is difficult for most people to understand. If a person has been abused by people close to them, especially in the early years when they are forming an image of themselves, then there are likely to be a variety of distortions in the way they see themselves and their bodies. This may be reflected in many different ways, anorexia or bulimia, or, if the individual is in deep turmoil over who they are as a person and what role their body plays in that, in self-injury. The distance self-injury places between body and person can be disturbingly soothing. One person who moved through these experiences into professional life has anonymously posted on the Internet a remarkably insightful and convincing account of her personal turmoil:

*“At the age of 13, I found that self-injury temporarily relieved the unbearable jumble of feelings. I cut myself in the bathroom, where razor blades were handy and I could lock the door. The slicing through flesh never hurt, although it never even occurred to me that it should .... The blood brought an odd sense of well-being, of strength. It became all encompassing .... With a safe sense of detachment, I watched myself play with my own flowing blood. The fireball of tension was gone and I was calm...”*

This can be contrasted with those beliefs, often based on religious fundamentalism that emphasises the person so much that that the body is totally its servant, in some cases sacrosanct. The struggles that Jehovah's Witnesses have with the authorities because their beliefs allow no intervention into the body, or the dismay that many other fundamentalist religions have with post-mortem examinations, are founded on quite different views of the relationship between the person and the body than those that are the dominant ones in Western society. Belief that the body *is* the person leads to the view that any modification of it is a violation. Just as in earlier days any amount of drawing and quartering was permitted because it could drive out the devil. Apparently similar beliefs led the Inquisition to assume that the truly insane were so dissociated from their bodies that they would not really feel pain.

A number of anthropologists throw further light on this interplay between the body and the person. Of particular relevance are Alfred Gell's explorations of tattooing in Polynesia in previous centuries. His conclusions have especial resonance for understanding the range of mutilations and violations of the body that can be found in present day societies. He echoes Foucault by stating that “it is through the body, the way in which the body is deployed, displayed, and modified, that socially appropriate self-understandings are formed and reproduced”.

Gell takes our understanding of bodily modifications a stage further by elaborating the different functions of tattooing in Polynesia. To greatly simplify his argument, for brevity, he shows that in some societies, for example Samoa, it was the process of inflicting the tattoo that is paramount. It is permanent evidence of having undergone that process. As Gell puts it, “Tattooing is the perfect vehicle for the bodily registration of commitment”. Here the body was modified as a way of exerting

control over the person. It shows the individual's position in society. The person is shown to be subjugated to the social structure. The process of subjugation is also an acceptance into that society.

Such a 'registration of commitment' requires a society in which there are clear structures and hierarchies. The meaning of the modifications of the body are a consequence of the social processes in which they are embedded. This can be seen in the contrasting role of tattoos in those Polynesian societies that are rather different from those on Samoa, for instance on the small islands of Mangareva where the society is less clearly structured. There, tattoos indicated a person's particular significance. Gell argues that for these more devolved and inherently competitive societies it is the mark of the tattoo itself that is crucial, rather than the evidence it gives of the process through which the recipient has passed. In these high-tension societies with enlarged social distances tattoos label social distinctiveness.

This more individuating role probably has more in common with the use of tattoos in our own culture. It is no accident that it is a particular age group who submit to tattoos. Young people at a stage that they are forming their adult identities. They want their bodies permanently marked to make some statement about the person they are.

### **The Battle for the Person**

There is a powerful belief system rooted in the knowledge that we are more than our bodies, but it is constantly challenged by our need to cope with our experiences as mediated by our bodies. The challenge that this paradox raises, of being both body and person, is resolved in many different ways by different people. But the most common strategy is to hold on to a firm dualism that distinguishes these two different realms. On the one hand the body with all its animal trappings, that shares all its major characteristics with every other human. In terms of scholarly debate this fosters studies in the natural sciences in which humans are virtually interchangeable with each other because their bodies are essentially identical. Indeed many of the properties of those bodies are so close to those of other animals that they can be studied interchangeably.

It is out of this perspective that there is the constant search for biological bases to many phenomena such as criminal activity, aggression or other acts of violence and violation. Genetic make-up, brain damage or hormonal influences are held up as the primary causes of violence, aggression or criminality in general. But this has similarities to the perspective of the rapist seeing his victim as merely a body to be used, or the serial killer who keeps body parts as souvenirs of his deeds. The body is taken as all that is significant.

Such a view ignores all those immaterial aspects of person-hood that so enthral disciplines running the gamut from anthropology to psychology by way of linguistics and theology. Here the differences between people or the contexts they experience are a recurring source of debate. Those aspects of an individual that make them unique come to the fore in considering them as people. Aspects such as their creativity, morality, passion, potential, or their particular point in the flux of cultures that they illustrate, are recognised as transcending the bodily functions that support them.

Throughout history it seems to have been the case that the belief in person-hood was protected by elaboration of the distinction between the individual and the body. The soul, psyche, personality, mind, character and many other aspects of the person have always been regarded as quite distinct from their corporeal existence. Yet the paradox that is fundamental to being human is that the significance of any human body is in how it expresses its supra-corporeal capabilities. The spirit can no more throw off its mortal coil than the clay of which we are made can be recognised as a being without evidence of its character as a person.

The struggle with this duality of mind and body is at the heart of most human endeavour. It is a struggle which aims constantly to re-create the fiction of person-hood in defiance of the laws of nature. A fiction that casts its protagonists into opposing camps. Sin and evil are the products of the flesh that must be fought with the weapons of the inherently virtuous spirit. The profane is all that which relates us to our animal past, whether it be the subconscious urges of a Freudian *id*, or the apparently more scientific but no less pessimistic claims of evolutionary bases for aggression and survival. The sacred is to be found in the purity of reason and the contemplative arts that are as far from bodily functions as possible.



But when these protagonists share the same virtual reality (as they do for everyone who has some hold on actuality) then there is the constant need to attempt to modify one or the other to make the person who houses them both more acceptable. The modification may come from upholding the significance of the mind and spirit as targets for manipulation and refinement in an attempt to distance them as far as possible from their degrading companion. Or the body is modified and in extreme conditions violated in order to make it more virtuous.

### **The Person as Product**

The quest for the body beautiful is an interesting development of the corporo-centric perspective. Some of this may be a search for a better quality of internal life but a lot of the quest relates to the way a healthy body symbolises a good person. After all, there is still the temptation to blame people for their physical handicaps, as statements from such significant trend setters as the manager of the English football team makes clear. I think there are some gory parallels with the sorts of serial killers like Jeffrey Dahmer for whom his victims were clearly bodies to be modified and manipulated. He wanted to turn them into some sort of willing zombie for his own gratification. For whose gratification is the willing shaping of bodies by plastic surgery, or the other possibilities that genetic modification may allow? Often the determination to produce the perfect body seems to be an attempt to make the person apparently more spiritually pure. Yet this is always doomed by the paradox that the more we focus on the body the less able we are to allow those aspects of the person that capture their history and character to break free. It is in the transaction between self and non-self, the dialectical relationships between mind and body, that humanity emerges. Too great an emphasis on one or the other leads to barbarity and degradation, whether it is promulgated by genetic scientists or serial killers.

The complexities of the relationship between the person and the body are at the heart of many important debates about the impact of current biomedical discoveries. These debates are often confusing because the mind is equated with the brain and the existence of a person is ignored. It is these confusions that unbalance debates as wide ranging as the possible inheritance of personality characteristics or the cloning of humans. The argument generated by any attempts to show that we are only what are bodies make us is so heated because each human being feels that his or her memories and intentions, feelings and character are ignored by the focus on the body devoid of the person. Claims that genetics can explain mental prowess, that mood is simply a product of our physiology, or that two identical humans can be created by a laboratory technician, and all the other proposals that challenge the view we each hold of our own rich and complex existence as individuals, are indeed threats to the fundamental, core constructs on which our minute by minute transactions with each other are founded.

### **Beyond the Body**

The focus on involuntary body violations may imply that developments in biomedicine are all negative. But the opposite is often the case. The move away from state sponsored violation has been reflected further in the changing attitudes of the medical profession towards how they may mutilate their patients. When the body was crudely understood so that dentistry and medicine had to be intensely invasive then it was difficult for practitioners to deal with their patients as people. The contrast with the changes to the body were too great, as were the implications that had for the changes to the person, which the surgeon could not control. So mastectomies and hysterectomies were commonplace in contexts that would not now be acceptable. The advent of more refined drugs and keyhole surgery has helped medical practitioners to rediscover the person they are treating. They can afford now to relate to their patients as people and, indeed, they can recognise that it is the person who needs to be treated not just the body. This is what is at the heart of attempts to influence the lifestyles of patients.

It is interesting how this has produced radical changes in the issues that are considered relevant in medicine. Dignity and respect for the patient can take on new emphasis and even override decisions about what to do to patients' bodies. I was interested to learn from my own dentist just how much their practice has changed. I had been aware that teeth were often removed en masse in the earlier part

of this century as a preventative measure. But I had not realised how much this had been enshrined in dental dogma. Apparently it was still the case in the 1960's that dentists operated under the slogan "extend for prevention, cut for immunity". It was an alien idea that a person's view of themselves was related to their relationship to their teeth. But the pride people have in their teeth is clear from the queues for cosmetic orthodontic treatment. Once again the recognition that the person and their body have to be considered together has changed the way both are dealt with.

### **Emergent Complexity**

The mistake which murderers and other violent criminals make is a similar sort of category error to that made by many of the more ardently reductionist biologists. Because a person is an inevitable correlate of a body they assume that they will know everything there is to know about people by knowing everything there is to know about their bodies. Just as the murderer in his limited view of the person who causes him frustration or anguish can only see the body that needs to be removed. Or in extreme cases, sees no person at all but only a body to be examined or exploited.

They ignore the ways in which person-hood emerges as an entity that has its own forms of complexity which give it qualities that cannot be found in the body alone. They are derived from the history and anticipated future, the memories and social transactions, social representations and cultural experiences that give any particular person their unique characteristics.

There are crucial parallels here with the arguments Brian Goodwin, who was until recently Professor of Biology at the Open University, has made about the organism emerging as something more than the sum of its genetic make-up. As he puts it in his challenging book *How the Leopard Changed its Spots*, life has a rationality to it that "makes it intelligible at a much deeper level than functional utility and historical accident" [page 105]. He argues that much of this rationality can be found in the mathematical inevitability of complex processes having properties that cannot be simply derived from knowledge of their arithmetically primitive constituents. For example, he cogently explains how the cell is much more than its genetic makeup and transmits much more to future generations than just DNA sequences.

What I have been illustrating is how one of the emergent properties of the complex systems that are human beings is the person. Any attempt to reduce this creation to bodily components will lose the entity it is describing. The body is one of the resources from which the person is made just as genes are resources that help to create cells.

Functional utility and accident also do not go very far to explain the significance of the voluntary and involuntary violations of the body. They are embedded in a psycho-social process that gives significance both to the body as object and to its reflection of the body as subject, the person. By ignoring the significance of the person and focusing on the body violent criminals teach us the civilising influence of recognising the importance of the person. This is a lesson that many scientists seeking to help humanity rather than destroy it would do well to master.

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