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The Repercussions of Having a Body

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Dr. Mackler

The Repercussions of Having a Body

The Repercussions of Having a Body

Although it is thought that the body is an essential part of human nature, there are many downfalls that come with it. The human body, the most complex machine that could ever be created, can still go astray in an infinite number of ways. With so many tiny mechanisms working at incredible speeds, something is bound to break. On the other hand, our mind seems like it can last forever. Therefore, it would be much more reasonable for humans to simply ditch bodies altogether and upload our minds to another source. With advances in technology, this dream may not be as farfetched as it first sounds. As stated in a New York Times article, “perhaps thousands or even millions of years from now, [we] might have the technological capacity to “upload” and recreate that individual’s mind.” Despite the fact that this advancement won’t be possible in the near future, the simple fact that it could be available someday is astonishing. Two older writings, *The Bhagavad-Gita* and *A Discourse on the Method*, both provide valuable insight into this idea, far before any such possibility was even remotely realistic. These authors give evidence that the body is just holding humans back, and our true potential won’t be obtainable while we still possess one.

The power of the human mind is immense, having much more complicated calculations than any computer. In *A Discourse on the Method*, when Descartes was attempting to determine truth, he came up with a distinct method that could be followed and lead someone to discover what is actually true. In doing so, he disregarded everything that he was not certain to exist. The only thing that was left with was the fact that he was thinking. This led him to conclude that he existed, but not necessarily that his body existed. He continues on this topic saying, “no one can deny, short of being irrational, that there are sufficient grounds for not being absolutely certain, as when we note that while we are asleep we can in the same way imagine having another body, or

seeing other stars and another earth, without this being the case” (Descartes 32). In this quote, Descartes is arguing that we cannot be positive that our body is even real, or anything that our body perceives. We could be dreaming all of the time, and never actually be in reality. However, he can be sure that he is thinking those thoughts, and therefore he is something. The only thing that he is certain about is that he has a soul, or mind, and that that is what is real. Following this logic, he doesn’t need a body. Everything that Descartes has ever encountered could be his imagination, but he was the one to imagine them. The big picture of this quote is that Descartes is claiming that his thoughts and his body are made of different things. He can doubt that his body exists, but he can’t doubt that he exists, so the body and mind cannot be the same thing. He is a being, whether he has a body or not, and nothing can change that.

The body therefore can be described as simply a machine purposed to carry our being. Descartes states that “it is not sufficient for it to be lodged in the human body like a pilot in his ship” (Descartes 48). In this claim, “it” refers to the human mind. Our mind is trapped in our body, which limits it in many ways. The body is just a machine that the mind controls, but it deteriorates over time. The mind would be just as good by itself, or likely even better. It wouldn’t have to worry about the wellbeing of its vessel, and could simply exist. Descartes continues and brings up the idea that there might not be a limit to our mind. He argues “and given that we cannot see any other causes which may destroy the soul, we are naturally led to conclude that it is immortal” (Descartes 49). Without our body to hold us back, the human mind could be eternal. There is no decay, and the mind could continue to think and exist forever, if it wasn’t confined to our body. This idea relates to the advancements mentioned in the introduction, uploading our computers could therefore make us immortal creatures.

The Bhagavad-Gita provides a similar view that disputes the necessity of a body. This writing also discusses the difference between the survivability of our bodies in comparison to our souls. This book begins with Lord Krishna talking to Arjuna to prepare him for the battle and his conflict. He doesn't want to kill his own kin, but Krishna explains the situation to him in a different perspective, saying that "our bodies are known to end, but the embodied self is enduring, indestructible, and immeasurable: therefore, Arjuna, fight the battle!" (Bhagavad-Gita 34). This again argues that bodies are temporary, while our minds are not so vulnerable. The body is simply a vessel and external covering, with our mind in the inside. Krishna uses the words "enduring," "indestructible," and "immeasurable" to describe this inner self, which adds even more emphasis. These words indicate a being that is both extremely powerful and lasting. This talk to Arjuna is to show that humans perceive things in the wrong way. We only take into account the material side of things, including the worldly body. This is not correct, as the important thing is actually the emotional and spiritual aspect, involved with the mind. Lord Krishna expands on this, exclaiming "He who really knows my divine birth and my action, escapes rebirth when he abandons the body - and comes to me, Arjuna. Free from attraction, fear, and anger, filled with me, dependent on me, purified by the fire of knowledge, many come into my presence" (Bhagavad-Gita 52). Krishna is saying in this quote that in order to obtain one's full potential, they cannot be concerned with the body. He is again showing that the body is something that holds Arjuna back and distracts him with material things. We need to abandon these things to focus on what is of real importance, which Krishna argues is him and knowledge. The mind is not preoccupied with distracting characteristics, and can focus on the spirit. This quote shows that even though humans have bodies and cannot escape them, they still need to focus on the mind and its power. The eternal interests of the mind are far more important than the worldly interests of the body. This is much easier said

than done, so humans need to learn how to control this. This is demonstrated when Krishna says “He shuns external objects, fixes his gaze between his brows, and regulates his vital breaths as they pass through his nostrils. Truly free is the sage who controls his senses, mind, and understanding, who focuses on freedom and dispels desire, fear, and anger” (Bhagavad-Gita 63). The body not only breaks down, but serves as a distraction to the mind. Humans can use their mind to control their body, even though it is sometimes very difficult. Therefore, we must practice and train our mind, which proves to be a more powerful tool than anything else. This seems like the best way to fully utilize our mind while it is still confined in a body.

All of this evidence works to show that our bodies are perhaps the worst part about us. They make humans focus on things that are not important, and don't allow our minds to reach their full potential. This leads to the question of why we even still have a body if they are so detrimental to our minds. The best argument for this is to preserve our humanity in the first place. Although they may be simply machines that yield many disadvantages, they can add to certain aspects of life. Primarily, our body works to express what we are thinking in ways that can't be done by our mind. It can display emotions and feelings simply by the instinctive responses that we have in certain situations. Another reason to keep our bodies is for transportation. Even though we could make our computers drive us around, having a body is a convenient and somewhat reliable way of moving our inner self around. The last reason, and possibly most grim, is that humans are meant to be imperfect. Our body is just another check set upon us by God, meant to show that humans are not the perfect being that He is. In spite of these benefits of our body, it should be seen as more of a liability than an asset. The downfalls of the human body far outweigh the benefits that it gives to us.

The beneficial aspects of the human body do not even compare to the areas that it is detrimental to our survival. The body breaks down and falls apart before our mind even reaches its peak. Our mind would be much better off if it wasn't confined to such a limiting machine, and it prevents us from reaching our full potential. The power of the human mind is not even close to being fully understood, but hopefully technology can one day solve this dilemma and allow our minds to be transferred onto a platform that doesn't limit our thinking abilities.

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