

THE BODY IN THE MIND

The Bodily Basis
of Meaning,
Imagination, and
Reason

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Putting the Body Back into the Mind

The key to an adequate response to this crisis is to focus on something that has been ignored and undervalued in Objectivist accounts of meaning and rationality—the *human body*, and especially those structures of imagination and understanding that emerge from our embodied experience. The body has been ignored by Objectivism because it has been thought to introduce subjective elements alleged to be irrelevant to the objective nature of meaning. The body has been ignored because reason has been thought to be abstract and transcendent, that is, not tied to any of the bodily aspects of human understanding. The body has been ignored because it seems to have no role in our reasoning about abstract subject matters.

Yet, in all of the empirical studies cited above, which have given rise to the crisis, the embodiment of human meaning and understanding manifests itself over and over, in ways intimately connected to forms of imaginative structuring of experience. The kind of imaginative structuring uncovered in these studies does not involve romantic flights of fancy unfettered by, and transcending, our bodies; rather, they are forms of imagination that grow out of bodily experience, as it contributes to our understanding and guides our reasoning.

To illustrate this important and undervalued notion of embodied, imaginative understanding, let us consider two types of imaginative structure that are central to the present study: image schemata and metaphorical projections. An image schema is a recurring, dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motor programs that gives coherence and structure to our experience. The VERTICALITY schema, for instance, emerges from our tendency to employ an UP-DOWN orientation in picking out meaningful structures of our experience. We grasp this structure of verticality repeatedly in thousands of perceptions and activities we experience every day, such as perceiving a tree, our felt sense of standing upright, the activity of climbing stairs, forming a mental image of a flagpole, measuring our children's heights, and experiencing the level of water rising in the bathtub. The VERTICALITY schema is the abstract structure of these VERTICALITY experiences, images, and perceptions. One of the central arguments of this book is that experientially based, imaginative structures of this image-schematic sort are integral to meaning and rationality.

A second, related type of embodied imaginative structure central to my inquiry is metaphor, conceived as a pervasive mode of understanding by which we project patterns from one domain of experience in

order to structure another domain of a different kind. So conceived, metaphor is not merely a linguistic mode of expression; rather, it is one of the chief cognitive structures by which we are able to have coherent, ordered experiences that we can reason about and make sense of. Through metaphor, we make use of patterns that obtain in our physical experience to organize our more abstract understanding. Understanding via metaphorical projection from the concrete to the abstract makes use of physical experience in two ways. First, our bodily movements and interactions in various physical domains of experience are structured (as we saw with image schemata), and that structure can be projected by metaphor onto abstract domains. Second, metaphorical understanding is not merely a matter of arbitrary fanciful projection from anything to anything with no constraints. Concrete bodily experience not only constrains the "input" to the metaphorical projections but also the nature of the projections themselves, that is, the kinds of mappings that can occur across domains.

As an example of this constraint on meaning and reasoning, let us consider a very simple, but pervasive, metaphorical understanding: MORE IS UP. The propositional expression "more is up" is a somewhat misleading shorthand way of naming a complex experiential web of connections that is not itself primarily propositional. It is no accident that we understand QUANTITY in terms of the VERTICALITY schema mentioned above in exactly the way we do. Examples such as *Prices keep going up*; *The number of books published each year keeps rising*; *His gross earnings fell*; *Turn down the heat*, and many others, suggest that we understand MORE (increase) as being oriented UP (involving the VERTICALITY schema). There is a good reason why this metaphorical projection from UP to MORE is natural, and why MORE is not oriented DOWN. The explanation has to do with our most common everyday bodily experiences and the image schemata they involve. If you add more liquid to a container, the level goes up. If you add more objects to a pile, the level goes up. MORE and UP are therefore correlated in our experience in a way that provides a *physical* basis for our *abstract* understanding of quantity.

In this book, then, the term "body" is used as a generic term for the embodied origins of imaginative structures of understanding, such as image schemata and their metaphorical elaborations. An alternative way to state my project is to say that, contrary to Objectivism, I focus on the indispensability of embodied human *understanding* for meaning and rationality. "Understanding," of course, is here regarded as populated with just those kinds of imaginative structures that emerge from

our experience as bodily organisms functioning in interaction with an environment. Our understanding, I shall argue, involves many pre-conceptual and nonpropositional structures of experience (such as image schemata) that can be metaphorically projected and propositionally elaborated to constitute our network of meanings.

Finally, in addition to the key terms "body," "imaginative structure," and "understanding," I want to emphasize a notion of "experience" richer than that typically countenanced by Objectivism. Image schemata and metaphorical projections are *experiential* structures of meaning that are essential to most of our abstract understanding and reasoning. The metaphorical projections are not arbitrary but rather are highly constrained by other aspects of our bodily functioning and experience. "Experience," then, is to be understood in a very rich, broad sense as including basic perceptual, motor-program, emotional, historical, social, and linguistic dimensions. I am rejecting the classical empiricist notion of experience as reducible to passively received sense impressions, which are combined to form atomic experiences. By contrast, experience involves everything that makes us human—our bodily, social, linguistic, and intellectual being combined in complex interactions that make up our understanding of our world.

The Body in the Mind is thus an exploration into some of the more important embodied imaginative structures of human understanding that make up our network of meanings and give rise to patterns of inference and reflection at all levels of abstraction. My purpose is not only to argue *that* the body is "in" the mind (i.e., that these imaginative structures of understanding are crucial to meaning and reason) but also to explore *how* the body is in the mind—how it is possible, and necessary, after all, for abstract meanings, and for reason and imagination, to have a bodily basis.