

What can a body say about a person? If I look you in the face and see a long and crooked nose can I safely conclude that you are a vile villain? When I come across a plump woman with hips for two can I assume she will be motherly and care for me? Or are the features of the face and lines of the body silent, not betraying an ounce of character? Perhaps instead the body is a vehicle, a fleshy exterior for the true me, and the form or shape a body may take is an entirely arbitrary aspect.

Let us have a look at these two theories. The first theory already has a name – Physiognomy. Physiognomy is the supposed science of being able to determine a person's character by looking at their face and body (314). We refer here to the second theory as the Ghost in the Shell (GitS) theory. According to GitS theory, whatever body you happen to have been born with is totally arbitrary – if you currently occupy the body of a Filipino Midgit you could have just as well inherited the body of a Tall and Stunning Blonde Dane. Your character – who you are as a person – is independent of the body it finds itself in (313).

Is the shape and form of the body an arbitrary aspect? Is the body simply a passive receiver, which the spirit fills like a ghost in a shell and moves according to its will? Or can the body you inhabit tell the disciplined physiognomist where your propensities lie? Before we can decide on one theory or another we should at first try to uncover what both theories take for granted about the nature of man – namely, that there are two parts to man; the inner and the outer part. The inherited body is the outer part of man. His spirit is the inner. What the body does is give this inner being, which is an invisible thing, a form and a shape that places it into the world as an object that can be observed by others. Through the organ of the body, the inner being obtains the ability to externalize itself through action (312). It does this by expressing itself through speech, or by manipulating an object with its hand, or by dancing a particular step. Through self-expression, the inner leaves the shelter of the invisible spirit and lets itself be seen and judged in the world by other observers.

Born out of this unbiased observance of the interplay between inner and outer is another theory. This theory regards the body as the mediator between inner and outer, where the outer transforms into actions the intentions of the inner spirit. We call this theory the Middle Term theory (316). According to this theory, the inner part of man is a result of his natural disposition, education and cultivation, yet this inner part only ever exists by being expressed by the outer (316). The body is neither the passive receiver nor the dictator, it is the mediator that moves between inner and outer. Expression is the marriage of external actions with self-reflection on those same actions (317). Reflecting on a deed done is something different than the deed itself, and while the deed alone can be taken to 'mean' a host of different things, the self-reflection of it by the individual is where we find expression. It is precisely for this reason that we can look a man in the face and tell if he speaks in earnest or if he is lying (318).

Where does the unbiased observer seek a man's true being? It is neither in his body nor his spirit – he finds individuality in the deed – in the work that he does (319). Physiognomy presumes that the face and body make visible what is invisible – namely the spirit or individuality or true being of a man, whereas GitS theory regards the body as an alien thing that can ultimately fail to express what is actually meant by the inner (322). Physiognomy is the layman's polygraph – it is the quick and hasty every day judgements one makes when confronted with a face. Any attempt to elevate the study to the lofty position of a science is doomed to fail, for it can never reveal anything beyond an opinion, let alone contrive laws which consistently explain things the way that they are (321).

Physiognomy has no right calling itself a science, but this does not mean we should abandon the enterprise altogether. A man is to be judged by his deeds, sure enough, and we should leave off calling chubby men jolly and snub-nosed ones inquisitive. But we do say that a man is a product of his peculiar disposition, cultivation and education (316). But from whence does disposition arise? Is the body partly, if not wholly responsible for part of our disposition? And does our body not also dictate in what manner and form we will be cultivated, or what sort of education we will receive – if education can be taken to mean anything as simple as experience?

Following in the footsteps of our forefathers the Greeks us westerners have no small affinity for the feature of beauty. Beauty is to adored, ugliness abhorred. The unfortunate woman who inherits an ugly face will be subjected to experiences – and thus educated – in a manner alien to the pretty ones; rejection by boys at the school dance for example. And supposing she does not get better with age it seems safe to assume she would have to lower her standards of attractiveness in seeking a partner or learn to prefer the company of cats.

A man born short will have to spend his life asking the altitude-unimpaired for assistance in reaching objects far up and away from his limited grasp. His actions, his work, what he can accomplish, will be limited in that regard. There are even terms like Short Man Syndrome and Napoleon Complex which are used to refer to petite men who act big in order to compensate for their lack in size.

Jokes and jests aside, the argument being made here is as such: the body we inherit dictates what and who we can be – by dictating what actions and deeds we do. It is true, we should judge a man by his deeds and not by his face, because this is a liberated and free way of thinking. But we must also be realistic. The sort of actions you can do are dictated by the body you have. Are the severely handicapped in any way less individuals due to their inability to work? Will the man resentful of his short stature or the woman scornful of her sorrowful face experience the world in the same way as the tall and beautiful, or will they learn to respond to situations and therefore act in ways that accord to the bodies they have inherited? Not necessarily, nothing can be said definitively. But the sentiment is that sidewalk physiognomy, without presuming itself to be an exact science but at best a hazy hypothesis given the available evidence, can at times prove to yield invaluable evidence to the freethinker who applies it without abiding by it.