

The Ideal Body in the Hebrew Bible Compared to That in Transpersonal Psychology

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Abstract

Despite the Hebrew Bible's canonicity it does not present a single picture of the ideal body, ranging from texts from the Priestly Source to the Song of Songs and the way the body of God has been portrayed. Its response to and interaction with pluralistic postmodern searching for the ideal, such as in trans-, super- and posthumanism, are therefore a complex struggle which transpersonal psychology can clarify, even if it cannot resolve it.

Keywords: body; ideal; Hebrew Bible; transpersonal psychology; postmodernism; transhumanism; posthumanism; superhumanism

Introduction

On a psychological level this study is written out of concern about the suffering which notions of the ideal body, often disseminated by the media, are causing, even amongst professional models. This study is for that reason also indirectly one more response to some of the issues of disability studies, even if the biblical perspective on this theme will not be engaged with here, simply due to brevity as a practical constraint.

On a philosophical level this study stems from the non-systemic, postmodern struggles for the ideal beyond traditional religions as symbolic systems of idealism. It also takes the postmodern insistence on the immanent and the body seriously, and focusses on hidden corporeal conflicts.

It is probably not necessary to spend much time in this context to show how current Western society has become at times almost obsessed about the ideal and even the



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perfect body. The body has virtually become God¹ and therefore unconscious fantasies of immortality, probably a defence reaction after ages of religious demonising of the body, are surging up anew. Never before in known history have people invested so much into their bodies: on health and beauty centres, on correct nutrition and medical aid, etc.

The perfect body may sound like an oxymoron, as Neo-Platonism regarded the perfect as the non-bodily soul to which the body is just a hindrance. Similarly, Gnosticism saw the body as a prison. This sentiment has also recently been expressed by Van Niekerk (2012), who is struggling with Parkinson's disease, when he regards a theology of the body as a spirituality of imperfection.

On the other hand, the ideal has always been closely linked to the realm of ideas which are by definition non-bodily as well. In fact, according to Shusterman (2000, 9), philosophical idealism blocks bodily observation. Those who believe that one is not one's body dissociate from and deny the body.

The ideal body is therefore a problematic concept and might appear at the outset as self-subversive. Yet a brief outline of the psychology of the ideal, followed by some impressions from the Hebrew Bible on the one hand, compared to insights from transpersonal psychology on the other, will allow one to relativise but also celebrate this fantasy for the potentially healthy contribution it can also make to one's spirituality.

Psychology of the Ideal

The French psychoanalyst Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel (1975; 2000) regards idealism as pathology because it strives to regress to the lost paradise of the subject's oneness with the mother and therefore the world, and in this way seeks to regain a lost state of perfection, the state in which the dyad of the mother-child was their own ideal. For her, idealism is fed only by primary narcissistic grandiosity and omnipotence fantasies.

The German psychoanalyst Dieter Funke (2016, 37) corrects this view by distinguishing this pathological possibility from a healthy one where idealism reaches out beyond the limitations which reality seems to impose on us.

Some emotional conflicts lead to a splitting of the ideal-ego and the ego-ideal and to pathological idealism. In brief, the ideal-ego is part of the primary process, i.e. the unconscious, a combination of the ego and the id, prior to the superego (which includes the ego-ideal), and is therefore believed to be narcissistically omnipotent, asexual and immortal (cf. Laplanche and Pontalis 1973, 201–202). Its ideal is static purity and so splits off ambivalence to recover through reduction a (believed) monistic originality.

¹ Although Staubli and Schroer (2014, 153) claim that all body cult was opposed in the Hebrew Bible, no textual proofs are given.

The ego-ideal, on the other hand, is part of the secondary process, i.e. the conscious, the positive side of the superego (in contrast to the “negative” conscience) and interdependent, inclusive and integrated. It is therefore more complex than the ideal-ego and lives from tension resulting in more instability.

It could also be argued that idealism is a sublimation of aggression in the form of exclusivity, ingratitude and envy, and risks denigrating reality behind the facade of criticism and critique. Idealism is not a simple, individual concern but socially driven and invested. Even when the ideal sounds like a fixed target to be reached, there is something elusive, or perhaps even illusive, to it, not due to an asymptotic nature but due to its infinite reality. Freud characterised neurosis as the denial of limits because of the belief in infinity which he, in turn, denied.

Rather than a celebration of the real, religion is more often a symbolisation of the ideal. That is why Marx saw it as opium for otherwise unbearable experiences, and why Freud regarded it as a childish and naïve dream refusing to accept reality. They therefore both focussed on the pathological side of idealism.

Another danger of idealism is that its supreme expression is probably perfection and the extreme or superlative of perfection is perfectionism, an anal but also flawed view of reality where all parts are of equal value with no higher overarching ones. To this can be added the implied reductionism of superlatives. This limits the creative multiplication of possibilities.

Despite this pathological possibility, religion is an all-embracing idealism: not only does it envision the good in terms of the ethical, but also the truth in terms of revelation and the beautiful in terms of sensual experiences during cultic practices, if one wants to follow the three-dimensional thinking of Plato, probably the archetypal idealist.

At the base of all these aspects of idealism lies the body which could satisfy all desires for the infinitely beautiful, pleasurable and healthy experience. All other aspects, such as Plato’s three broad categories just mentioned, are but derivatives, disguises and sublimations of bodily desires.

With regard to the ideal body one can methodically distinguish between a medical and a psychological point of view, although the two are interdependent. In this study the focus is on the psychological, where body-image will be the leading concept, as it has been scientifically well researched over the last century.

Freud (2010, 253–255; see below) regarded the ego as, in the first place, a body-ego; for an infant experiences the care of its body by its mother as love as this forms the basis of all other relationships. The infant experiences love only when it enjoys its body. It

experiences its mother's love as bodily love. What its mother does to its body determines how it will one day feel towards its body as an adult.

That also means that one cannot feel well and healthy if one has a poor body-image, if one does not like one's body. Not feeling healthy does not, however, mean being unhealthy. Being unhealthy bodily and suffering from it would make loving the body difficult.

For the narcissist, the own body is probably the ideal, but for others perhaps the body they do not have is their ideal, and hence penis envy and womb envy can be understood as their struggle to accept their lack, which can be virtually satisfied by the complementarity of differently sexed bodies.

The Concept of the Ideal in the Hebrew Bible

Several concepts in the Hebrew Bible need to be distinguished, even if they are related: purity, holiness, perfection, and the ideal. Purity and holiness are priestly ideas stemming specifically from Leviticus 1–16 (and particularly 11–16) and 17–26 respectively, the former referring to cult and the latter, being wider, to code and creed (Houston 2003, 101–102).

Whereas the first two concepts derive directly from the Hebrew Bible, the latter two are implied. Perfection could be regarded as the ultimate and even the superlative of the ideal, which may be a lower rank in the hierarchy. It is currently fashionable to discredit any contemporary concept as if it were an imposition or anachronism when applied to an ancient text such as the Hebrew Bible. The temptation is therefore real to regard the concept of the ideal as such, simply because it is not formulated explicitly in the biblical text. However, not only is it constantly implied, but also verbalised by, for example, the Hebrew noun **שְׁלֵמָה** (completeness, integrity), the adjectives **שָׁלֵם** or **שְׁלֵמָה** (complete, sound, healthful) or the verb **שָׁלַם** (be complete, finished). Completion as an end-state is the common denominator here, suggesting wholeness and also closure. That means that boundaries are to be firm in order to contain all content completely. Transgressions of these limits would mean that something is lost, that the body is “leaking,” for instance. Solidity is therefore to be preferred, as fluids, such as blood or semen escaping from the body, endanger its security and threaten it with death.

The plurality of perfection even in the closed, canonised text is, however, a self-subversive force, which plays into the fluidity of postmodernist thinking itself.

The Ideal Body in the Hebrew Bible

In the Western world the Hebrew Bible is probably the oldest surviving normative canon of idealism. From it developed three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and indirectly others such as Baha'ism, Sikhism, Druzism and Yezidism.

Priestly Theology

The Hebrew Bible has been recognised as interweaving different, sometimes contradictory, traditions, and in this way offers different perspectives and ideals. One such tradition is the Priestly Source, hypothetically one of four sources of the Torah and probably the most recent amongst them, even if it includes the very first two verses of the Bible. The Priestly Source arose from the suffering in Babylonian exile and is therefore particularly idealistic, a typical reaction to crisis and trauma. When idealism goes too far, it tends to render reality as hostile, however. At the same time, the Priestly tradition emphasises the cultic institutions and rites, and so promotes the class interests of the priests as a profession. Although some (Schmitt 2007, 195–197; Gertz 2009, 244; Gilbert 2009, 34) regard the Priestly Source as viewing God as abstract and transcendent, demanding a spiritualised kind of holiness, others believe that it sees God as embodied and includes materiality in its concept of holiness (Schellenberg 2014, 166).

Leviticus belongs to this Priestly Source and includes the Holiness Code in chapters 17–26. In 21:17–22:33 only a male can have a perfect body and therefore become a priest (“genetically” acquired from Aaron, according to Exodus 28:1, Leviticus 8:2, etc.) or, in the case of animals, become a priestly sacrifice. Because of this descendancy from Aaron and because of what is implied in 22:25 only an Israelite can have a perfect body, whereas animals as an Israelite’s property can be regarded as an extension of that human body. A sacrificial animal belonging to a foreigner is therefore imperfect and unacceptable. The possibility of theft in such a case means that the moral aspect also affects the bodily condition of the animal (Milgrom 2002, 1881). The ideal body is therefore also a cultural, because an ideological, issue.

Furthermore, the perfect body, both human (Leviticus 21:17–21, Deuteronomy 23:2, 2 Samuel 5:8) and animal (Exodus 12:5, Leviticus 1:3, 22:19–24, especially verse 22; Deuteronomy 15:21; Malachi 1:8), should be both clean and unblemished (Schellenberg 2009). The perfect body should also somehow resemble the beauty of Absalom (2 Samuel 14:25). It should be healthy and not have any of twelve kinds of bodily problems (six of them shared between humans and sacrificial animals), such as poor eyesight, a broken hand or foot bone, a skin problem, lameness, dwarfishness, a hunchback, facial deformities or crushed testicles,² probably because procreation is primary for the ideal body.³

A man is not responsible for these imperfect bodies, but he would be responsible for others, such as associating with death and in this way magically contaminating his body:

² An exception to the fact that all are about external integrity as Schellenberg (2014, 168) maintains.

³ A similar list is TUAT II, 173ff., a Sumerian ritual text (Staubli and Schroer 2014, 268). Cf. also Numbers 5:2, another Priestly text.

he is not allowed to touch any corpses except those of his closest family, excluding non-virginal daughters or sisters;⁴ neither is he allowed to cut his skin or trim his hair⁵ or beard to show mourning or commemorate the dead (Leviticus 19:27⁶–28 [in the Holiness Code holiness is generalised to all Israelites], 21:5), because the dead body could obviously not be the ideal body. One also finds this pretence that death does not form part of one's body with the Nazirites (Numbers 6:3–7) who were not to touch the dead or cut their hair, as hair symbolises vitality and cutting it has further been interpreted by psychoanalysis as symbolising castration. That is after all how Delilah psychologically emasculated Samson. According to Erbele-Küster (2008, 86) Leviticus 19:28 demands integrity of the body. The only removal allowed and even demanded is that of the foreskin through circumcision.

In addition, the perfect male body loses its perfection when a man sleeps with a woman whom he has not deflowered himself. He also renders himself unclean for the rest of the day on which he sleeps with any woman, irrespective of whether he is married to her or not, according to Leviticus 15:18.

Some of these bodily imperfections such as a broken foot bone are obviously temporary, but some of them appear with aging, meaning that the perfect body is also age-restricted and temporary, just as in Western society. For the perfect sacrificial animal body there is also an age restriction, but in an inverse way, namely eight days as a minimum. In summary, the ideal body according to these views is male, Israelite,⁷ young and, in the case of humans, belongs to a certain class, the priestly one, apart from being whole, moral and “alive.” Incidentally, freedom from illness seems to be irrelevant. As Schellenberg (2014, 167) correctly points out, the focus in the Priestly texts is clearly on the body and spiritual issues such as morality are only implied.

The Priestly Source shares its theology with Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah (see below). In Ezekiel 44:25–26 some parallels occur with Leviticus 21:1–3,⁸ limiting contact with the dead to close relatives, except a sister who is not a virgin anymore.

Crossing body boundaries includes עֲזָזָה (sweat), probably regarded as unclean (Allen 1990, 263), in Ezekiel 44:18. The only other instance where the same root occurs in the Hebrew Bible is in Genesis 3:19 (עֲזָזָה), where it has the connotation of labour as a curse. Body boundaries are, in fact, subtly dealt with by the elaboration on the subject

⁴ Cf. also Leviticus 21:1–4, 11, Numbers 6:6–9, 19:10–22 (all Priestly) and Ezekiel 44:25.

⁵ Cf. Leviticus 10:6 and 21:10 about hair requirements.

⁶ One may assume that verse 27 also relates to commemorating the dead as it is explicitly mentioned in the next verse.

⁷ In Deuteronomy 23:3 even מִזְרַם (someone of mixed origin, a “bastard”) is deemed so imperfect that the person may not enter the sanctuary.

⁸ Although verse 11 seems to contradict this exemption.

of garments and hair in Ezekiel 44:17–19 and verse 20 respectively. Likewise, orifices such as the mouth and the genitals are to be taken care of when drinking wine and having sex respectively, according to verses 21 and 22 respectively.

If one finds all of this naïve and arrogant pettiness, one should not forget how much discrimination against black, female, non-national, “disabled,” and “sexually deviant” bodies has forced the artificial implementation of politically correct inclusive language as if it would express a new idealism. In practice these categories are, however, still those by which one should not be defiled, despite their erotic appeal. This led apartheid South Africa, for instance, to promulgate laws to try to prevent sex with people belonging to some of these groups. This followed in the wake of German idealism resulting in harsh exclusions of bodily differences in the worst war the world ever suffered.

Song of Songs

A word, **מַגֵּן** (imperfection), which appears seven times in this Leviticus passage (21:17–22:33), the most frequently compared to the rest of the whole Hebrew Bible, also appears in Song of Songs. The latter was probably finalised much later than Leviticus, a book of which it would therefore have been reminded. There one finds the word only once, in 4:7, where it is, however, denied in the female beloved. From psychoanalysis one knows that the unconscious does not recognise negatives (Freud 1991a, 285–286; 1991b, 15; 2005, 113n2), just as in mathematics -2 and 2 both have the same absolute value. That is why negative instructions actually plant the idea which one wants to stop: if one were to be asked not to think of pink elephants, one’s unconscious would only hear “pink elephants” and think involuntarily of precisely that. In 7:3 one finds the same literary figure, a litotes, where a negative, **יִקְדָּר** (is wanting), is denied by **לֹא** (not) to emphasise the positive. It also occurs in 4:2 and 6:6 where the negative, **אֵין** (is not), is used but means that her teeth are perfectly symmetrical. This means that “imperfection” is actually in the back of the lover’s mind, because “every body” has imperfections, but here he consciously denies them in her.

Her body becomes perfect because she is loved, and not the other way around: she is not loved because she has a perfect body. Quite early, already in 1:5, she is sensitive and ashamed about her skin, not because she belongs to the wrong race, but because it is burnt by the sun, making her look like a labourer and so “outclassing” her, here meant ironically, of course. It is the first of her body parts which she mentions because she is bothered by it: her later idealisation of the man’s skin can be based in this shame (cf. Seidler 2012, 159). In the same way it is the first body part of her lover which she mentions because his represents the ideal one, described as white and ruddy in 5:10.

Both bodies, male and female, are called perfect in the Song without having complied with any of the conditions laid down by Leviticus. In 5:2 and 6:9 the woman is called

תְּמִתִּי (pure, perfect). Some Jewish exegetes believe the word to always have a moral sense when it refers to humans, which might here mean that she is still a virgin, that she is still perfect and whole because she has not lost her hymen yet.

In addition, their bodies or their parts are so perfect and ideal that they are deified as doves, a symbol of the divine in that culture, in 1:15, 2:14, 4:1, 5:2, 5:12 and 6:9. The woman is כְּמוֹ-שָׁחַר (as the dawn), כְּחַמָּה (as the sun) and כְּלַבָּנָה (as the moon) in 6:10, all of which had heavenly and holy connotations at the time, and the man's body is described as if it is a statue of a god in 5:14–15. Generally, visual images in ancient Near Eastern art refer not to their optic correspondence to individual occurrences in reality but to the general ideal and the ideational behind the real. For literary images of the body the most important was their symbolic side referring to their functionality (Wagner 2010, 183), in these cases in the Song expressing their overwhelming effect on the lover. The man's lover likens him לְצִבְיָי (to a gazelle) or לְעֶפְרַי הָאַיִלִים (to a young hart) in 2:9, 2:17 and 8:14 and in this way associates him with the mythological animals which she adjures in the famous refrains in 2:7 and 3:5 because they represent divine powers (see below). Ultimately the loving and beloved body is compared in the climax of the Song in 8:6 to שֵׁלֶהֶב־תַּיִתָּה (a divine flame) which is עֲזָה כְּמָוֶת (as strong as, or even stronger than, death). The bodies in the Song therefore do not share the anxiety about death found in Leviticus.

It is interesting that two similar classical Hebrew words for “perfection,” שְׁלֵמוֹת and מְשֻׁלְּמוֹת, and the modern for “ideal,” השואף לשלמות, are all linked to the word שְׁלוֹם, meaning, amongst other things, “health” and “integration,” as these words all share the same consonantal root. שְׁלוֹם is a word that has such prominence in the Song that it perhaps constitutes its main theme.

The Song is well known for its superlatives, found already in its title,⁹ the projection of which as an expression of wishes and ideals is one of the foundational features of religion, according to Freud (1991c, 439), as it lays the foundations of an as-if reality. Logically, idealism can go beyond comparatives and superlatives, but in practice they often coincide. In addition, the repeated hyperboles, dualistic extremes, and perhaps also the many *hapax legomena* suggest not only excess but also singularity and exceptionality in the sense of superiority. As a peak experience (cf. Van der Zwan 2017a, 490ff.) idealism reaches out into infinity as if there are no limits, sometimes even in a manic state.

The dream of seeing a king in the lover has been interpreted as a travesty by some commentators, just as the opposite, fantasising about being simple shepherds falling in

⁹ Also found in הַיְיִפָּה בְּנִשִּׁים (the most beautiful amongst women) in 1:8, 5:9 and 6:1, הַטּוֹב (the best) in Song 7:10 and indirectly through שֵׁלֶהֶב־תַּיִתָּה (a divine flame) in 8:6, according to Pope (1977, 670).

love in the countryside, has been interpreted thus by others (Fox 1985, 292–294). Keel (1986, 39) goes even further and calls the supernatural portrayals of the lovers, for instance in Song 6:10, “‘Göttertravestie’, ‘Theomorphie’ oder divine fiction” (travesty of the gods, theomorphism or divine fiction) as parallels to the royal and pastoral travesties. These are some ways in which idealism finds forms for fantasies. It reveals the complementarity which is lacking in a person’s life and which is longed for, but which when found and integrated will make it whole. The greater the lack, the stronger but also more distorted and one-sided the idealism.

The Song is an exception in the Hebrew Bible, a protest song which Protestants in particular are invited to join in. In contrast to the ideal body in Leviticus, that in the Song is the erotic body. It is perfect—unconditionally. There is no long list of virtually impossible requirements.

God’s Body

The primal, original and therefore ideal human being is said to be created in the image of God, a theomorphic body, recalling the ancient Near Eastern ideology that the king’s legitimacy is based on his reciprocal relationship with God and manifested in his bodily resemblance to the divine (Willis 2010a, 55), which is, however, democratised in Genesis 1:27–28 (Willis 2010b, 19).

Yet God is said to have no form in Exodus 20:4 and Deuteronomy 4:12 and 15. Smith (2001, 83–103) also found a greater reluctance to graphically describe Yahweh’s body compared to those of El and Ba’l. God is, however, also portrayed in the Hebrew Bible as having or being a body in theophanies, including in such passages as in Isaiah 6:1–5, Ezekiel 1:26–28 and Daniel 7:9. Eilberg-Schwartz (1994, 64–65) distinguishes between three responses to this confusion: those who interpret it all as metaphors, those who insist on the material substance of God’s body, and those who see a development from the literal to a spiritualised body of God. Understanding the body of God has recently drawn more attention than before and the concepts of anthropomorphism and metaphor in this regard have been questioned. God’s body has been found not to be allegorised as used to be the case with divine figures in Homer’s work and in Hellenistic and imperial Roman times (Markschies 2016, 45). These concepts imply a difference which is opposed by the similarity which the Priestly concept of a human as image-of-God suggests in (only) Genesis 1:26–27, 5:3 and 9:6. From a psychoanalytic perspective they are splitting off the human ego-ideal and projecting it as a figure of God. Nevertheless certain body parts such as flesh, skin, bones, blood, insides, tongue, belly, fat and left hand¹⁰—suggesting that lefthanders are handicapped— are, on the one hand, never

¹⁰ This does not imply that God’s body is asymmetrical, as if God had just one hand: Psalm 19:2 uses the dual form, יָדָיו (His [two] hands), as do Psalm 119:73 with יָדְיָ (Your [two] hands) and Isaiah 45:12 with יָדַי (My [two] hands), all referring to God. Wagner (2010, 138) claims that the left side or hand

attributed to God and therefore imply difference and deviation from a usual human body.

It is conspicuous that God is not reduced to a specific gender. This is in sharp contrast to the lengthy Ugaritic description of El's penis in KTU 1.23.33–35 (Smith 2001, 84, 86–90).

This does not mean that God lacks gender, as this would seem to contradict Genesis 1:27. From this verse but also from the Hebrew Bible in general, it is clear that God incorporates both genders instead, despite the masculine form always being used in verbs applied to God. No genitals are ever attributed to God according to the list of God's body parts compiled by Baumann (2003, 246) and Wagner (2010, 135–136). In Israelite myths the parts of God's body which would have revealed God's gender are therefore covered (Eilberg-Schwartz 1994, 73ff. and 107), or even denied (Eilberg-Schwartz 1996, 44, 52), although feet and hands are explicitly mentioned for God, and could suggest God's sexuality in a euphemistic way (Schorch 2000, 127, 194), without limiting it to either male or female. Even if this cover-up is due to shame about genitals in general or shame about a homosexual relationship with God if God were (only) male, or about both, the implication is that God's body is free from these shameful features and so is the ideal. According to Wagner (2010, 159) this openness, or rather inclusivity, about God's gender is unique in the cultural environment of the time but also understandable in monotheism where God does not have a goddess as partner. Just as monotheism can be interpreted as an integration of multiplicity, so this gender-inclusive androgyny can be understood likewise, i.e. as the ideal. Much has recently been written about the female side of God and of God's body (e.g. Baumann 2003). Most of this focuses on the womb-like feelings of God, such as *חַיְיָ* (His compassions) in Psalm 77:10, where the masculine pronominal suffix is, however, used. Another hint would be God's wings as symbol of and reference to the womb as well (Schroer 1997).

God's body is therefore a glorified (Markschies 2016, 48) and idealised one with, on the other hand, wings as in Psalm 57:2, Exodus 19:4, Deuteronomy 32,11 and Malachi 3:20, apparently animal body parts which humans do not have but perhaps wish for. Although Wagner (2010, 160–161, 187) denies any theriomorphic features in God's body according to the Hebrew Bible, as this would distance God from humanity and make God into a mixed being, he explains these texts as perhaps referring to numinous beings. One can assume that he has angelic beings in mind, which would then still make God into a mixed being. Yet certain animals can also be divine figures, which the female lover adjures in the Song (see above), for instance (cf. also Ris-Eberle 2004, 50). Just

of God is mentioned twice in the Hebrew Bible but does not give the textual proofs thereof. It is, however, not listed by Baumann (2003, 246) amongst the body parts which have been attributed to God (cf. also Scharf 1999, 30 and Markschies 2016, 48).

as anthropomorphism does not render God into a human being, so theriomorphism does not reduce God to an animal.

Connected to this image of the wings is God as the rays of the sun and the sky disc as suggested by Psalms 17:7–8, 57:2; 61:4–5., 63:8–9, 110:3b and Malachi 3:20. The body of God is therefore not only imaged as a selection of human body parts but goes beyond the human to include and integrate parts from the broader body of nature.

Markschies (2016, 48) infers from the wings of God that the divine, and therefore the ideal, body consists of light material, not of flesh, blood or bones, which are body parts God lacks. This is a second way in which the ideal body of God has *less*, just as some human body parts are absent (see above). This imagination about God must be relative, as in poor cultures a fat body is idealised on account of a good life, which is idealised at the same time. This would probably apply to wings as well, as flying suggests freedom. Humans lack both wings and, therefore, the ability to fly without technology, which, however, extends and expands their bodies in some way. Confirming this bodily freedom is also the silence on skin for God's body, which therefore suggests its absence (Van der Zwan 2017b, 8).

Yet God's body is also qualitatively and quantitatively *more* than the human body: apart from the wings mentioned above, the seam of God's garment filled the temple according to Isaiah 6:1, and in Exodus 33:22 God's hand can hide a whole human body. In having less, God's body is also more: the lack of any individual bodily characteristics such as hair colour means that God's body is more than the limitations by which one identifies a human body. Incidentally, the words in Daniel 7:9, וְשֵׁערֵי רֵאשִׁיתָ כְּעֶמֶר נֹקָא (and the hair of His head like pure wool), would be an exception but also raise the question why hair has not been included in the lists of God's body parts compiled by Baumann (2003, 246) and Wagner (2010, 136, 137–138). Amongst all the body parts used for God in the Hebrew Bible, the face is by far the most frequent (cf. Van der Zwan 2017c). Some texts claim that God's face cannot be seen by humans without leading to their death, as imperfect bodies are too weak to deal with perfection.

In addition, angelic appearances come close to being identified with God instead of being separate beings, though this is not the case in the Priestly Source (Schellenberg 2014, 165n8). Incidentally, angelic bodies as divine bodies include sexuality, and angels are not bodiless beings, as only one verse in the whole Christian Bible, Hebrews 1:14, but none in the Hebrew Bible has it. As quote, the word, רוּחֹת, in Psalm 104:4 has been dangerously translated as “spirits” instead of as “winds.” The earlier verse 7 in Hebrews translated that correctly. If God's sons in Genesis 6:1–4 as in Job 1:6 and 2:1 (cf. also 1 Enoch 6:2ff. and Jubilees 5:1) are actually angels, then they have sex with human

women, and so must have bodies.¹¹ In Genesis 19:1–11 they are almost raped. If they represent God in some form, this means that sex is also part of God, which is why mysticism often takes up that image to describe intimacy with the Divine. In Daniel 9:21–23 the angel Gabriel flies, reminding of God’s wings mentioned above, and speaks to Daniel, and so must have a body.

From the fact that the same 10 central body parts, apart from ראש (head), which occur most frequently for humans in the Hebrew Bible are used the most frequently for God as well (all more than 10 times; Wagner 2010, 137, 138), it is clear that the body of God serves as a (humanly projected) model or ideal for humans. Yet the open and even elusive body of God transcending the individual suggests a transpersonal view of the ideal body.

Deutero-Isaiah’s Unwanted but Healing Body

Three diverse views on the ideal body in the Hebrew Bible have been dealt with, but these are just examples: that according to Leviticus, that in Song of Songs and that implied in the body of God. With these can be contrasted the disabled, ugly, ill and wounded body of the mysterious and nameless figure in Isaiah 52:13–53:5 who nevertheless heals and serves in suffering. He is the exact opposite of the priests who also serve almost as healers and mediators between humans and God, but who cannot bear the “imperfect” body, if their dealings with the skin diseases in Leviticus 13–14 are kept in mind.

One can rightly ask why one should limit oneself to the narrow canon of the Hebrew Bible, but it is after all at least one of the seeds—and a very important one—which later blossomed into Near Eastern and Western idealism, also as idealism about the body. The question is, however, a meaningful one and leads one to the culmination point of various idealistic influences in the broad Western culture, transpersonal psychology.

The Ideal Body in Transpersonal Psychology

Not only in the Western world, but globally as well, transpersonal psychology, born from the human potential movement, is the latest and fourth broad current of psychology, even when it reflects and researches the oldest forms of religiosity and therefore forms of idealism, including, of course, that about the body. It fits well into the postmodern world in that it strives to be all-inclusive by studying psychological phenomena from as many perspectives as possible.

¹¹ The words in Daniel 2:11: לֹהֶן אֱלֹהִים--דִּי מְדַרְהוֹן, עַם-בְּשָׂרָא לֹא אִיתוּהִי (except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh) is a quotation from what the Chaldeans say, whose wisdom is exposed as invalid in that biblical book.

Despite this inclusivity transpersonal psychology has emphasised consciousness as some kind of non-bodily essence as if it can leave the body and, even when it is somehow connected to the body, has limited it to the brain. Because Freud (2010, 253–255; see above) based the ego on the body in the first place, transpersonal or “trans-egoic” psychology seems to imply “trans-body” as well. However, this prepositional prefix, “trans-,” does not mean redundancy, but inclusion and extension upon the foundational.

Louchakova and Warner (2003, 115ff.) have shown, however, that there are enough research results to prove that consciousness is in the whole body and, secondly, that different spiritual traditions have different views and ideals of the body. Contrary to this relative absence of the body in transpersonal theory, it features strongly in transpersonal practice such as in various therapies. Psychosomatic mysticism, for instance, can explain how religious involvement is related to physical health and asserts that environmental knowledge is accessible in the body. On the other hand, neuro-immunology has also shown that the body mediates and therefore supports higher expressions of consciousness.

As opposed to conventional psychology, transpersonal psychology views health as more than just the absence of pathology, but as a dynamic towards growth and well-being. In contrast to humanistic psychology, transpersonal psychology recognises a wider spectrum of health beyond (but inclusive of) the self, what is usually taken for human and “positive” health. Negative experiences and negative functioning can, in some cases, therefore also be healthy, as spirituality, the core of one’s being according to transpersonal psychology, includes suffering.

With regard to body-image and the ideal body implied by it, transpersonal psychology has, however, mainly inherited its insights from the rest of psychology without a particularly different contribution. Yet the hierarchical structure of transpersonal psychology implies normativity and idealism, as all lower levels of development point towards the same ultimate aim.

Criticism of transpersonal psychology for being stuck in such a fixed idealism may come from transhumanism, which is partially a product of late capitalism’s individual atomism, consumerism and commodification (Giesen 2004, 7). It uses technology to enhance the capabilities of humans so that they become a different being, called posthuman, with suffering and death eventually being eliminated from the body (Mercer and Maher 2014, 3). This movement has been called the most idealistic amongst all desires to transcend human limitations and has been influenced by Nietzsche’s idea of the “Übermensch” (Sorgner 2016, 195), although he emphasised self-actualisation and not technological extension or compensation. It is possible that transpersonal psychology will have to process and integrate this development, however. Some critics of transhumanism, on the other hand, have argued that it is a narcissistic desire to get

rid of the body and that the mind enjoys prominence over the body (Winner 2005, 390), implying a lack of idealism about the body. When attention is given to the body, it is usually limited to genetics and neurology with a strong focus on the brain. In art, it may have reflections in superhumanism, conceived by Nicholas Treadwell (1979).

The question can be raised whether there is any implied body idealism or whether transhumanism is just playing with the body as a kind of plastic possibility. Therefore the philosopher Mary Midgley (1992, 147) criticises transhumanism as “quasi-scientific dreams and prophecies” and as an escape from the material body due to the fear of death. Another philosopher, Susan Bordo (1993, 296), criticises the programme of body modification from a feminist perspective as reflecting “contemporary obsessions with slenderness, youth and physical perfection” and therefore these ideals as ideological.

Ideals are reached in creative and therefore relative freedom, as in the case of a lesbian, deaf couple who wants a child from a deaf male colleague so that a deaf child will be guaranteed.

The bottom line is that idealism can be a plurality and that the ideal body can have infinite shapes and sizes, etc., so that what has traditionally been regarded as disabilities can now be recognised as gifts if one has an alternative perspective which is not dominated by the majority.

Comparison and Evaluation of These Systems of Idealism about the Body

Both the Hebrew Bible and transpersonal psychology take spirituality seriously. Furthermore, it seems that the ideal body in both the Hebrew Bible and in all kinds of postmodern “trans”-thinking has multiple shapes. The ideal can therefore have a plurality of possibilities which can be celebrated to find more sense in a life which would traditionally have been straitjacketed by a status-quo ideology. The interaction between creative exploration and integration can free the body to develop (also) with regard to higher levels of consciousness.

Transpersonal psychology is one of several approaches and as a hermeneutical lens obviously sees far beyond the possibilities offered by the ideal body-images in the Hebrew Bible, although the latter already points in the same direction and can be interpreted by transpersonal psychology as stepping-stones along a path that does not end with the Hebrew Bible.

The exclusive separation of the clean and the holy in the Hebrew Bible may seem to oppose the inclusive and probably more complex and thus creative transpersonal psychology, even when the latter also points towards a unity at the top of a hierarchical triangle of development.

Conclusion

The idea of idealism was considered above from a psychological perspective. Thereafter an overview of the ideal body in the Hebrew Bible and in transpersonal psychology as the two extremes in reflective history was given. From this, it is clear that an ideal body-image is a crucial factor for all-inclusive health but that it is relative, flexible and free. Secondly, any attempt to reduce an ideal body-image to a single absolute through all kinds of optimising strategies has hopefully been exposed as a friendly front of what is actually brutal dominance and should, for the sake of health, be subverted.

What remains to be investigated and linked to this research theme is, firstly, the problematics around disability and, secondly, that around the concepts of holiness and purity in the Hebrew Bible.

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