

UNITED WISDOM

A bodily sensation and its explanation

Human Nature and Inner World

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Epigraph

> *“opining is distinct from perceiving”*
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> *Aristotle, On the Soul, II.2, J. A. Smith translation; excerpt from a conditional distinction between capacities. This is a philosophical context, rather than a contemporary theory of symptoms.*

What this article is about

Before sending a letter, you notice tension in your abdomen. An explanation appears almost immediately: your body is warning that you must not agree. Or another explanation: this is merely fear and needs overcoming. One sensation has already received two opposite instructions. The letter remains unsent and the circumstances unchecked, while the body has been assigned a finished speech. The tension itself is genuinely experienced. Explaining its cause and deciding what to do appeared separately, however.

This article concerns the interval between what we feel and what we assert on the basis of feeling. We examine ordinary situations in which description, meaning, supposed cause, and decision quietly merge. Respecting a sensation does not require considering every explanation true. Testing an explanation does not require declaring the sensation imaginary. Scientific work, philosophical distinction, and figurative language perform different tasks here. None allows one bodily signal to establish a diagnosis, someone else's intention, or the correct path through life. We can remain attentive to experience while leaving room for what remains unknown.

I. Description has not yet named a cause

Let us stay with the first sentence: I notice tension in my abdomen. It names the location and quality of experience. Adding timing—it appeared before the letter—makes the description more detailed. Adding a supposed cause—because the agreement is dangerous—introduces a new part requiring separate grounds. A sequence of events can prompt checking a connection without establishing it automatically. The first guess need not be rejected. We simply need not consider it part of the sensation, as though the body supplied both a signal and an explanatory note immediately.

Ordinary language rarely maintains this distinction. Someone says everything tightened inside because of another person's lie. Sometimes independent evidence of deception already exists,

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and the experience accompanies a known event. Sometimes no evidence exists and the bodily response becomes the sole proof. The cases resemble each other in intensity of feeling but differ in grounds for accusation. We can honestly say a conversation caused tension without asserting that tension exposed the interlocutor. This preserves experience while limiting a conclusion about another person.

Description is not absolutely neutral either. Words such as tight, heavy, empty, and warm are chosen from available language and past experience. Two people may describe similar experiences differently; one person may change the name after clarification. Precision therefore does not require finding the single correct word. It requires showing which part you actually notice and which you suppose. “It resembles pressure, but I cannot describe it more precisely yet” may help more than a confident explanation concealing uncertainty within the observation itself.

In the letter scene, we can keep four lines: sensation; circumstances; suggested explanation; decision under consideration. For example: tension in my abdomen; the promise of a large workload; perhaps the deadline concerns me; I want to clarify the amount of work. This division is no diagnostic instrument. It simply restores a visible sequence. Clarifying the workload may be reasonable under the agreement's conditions regardless of why tension arose. The body need not prove our right to ask an ordinary business question.

II. A scientific name does not make a signal all-knowing

In Chen and colleagues’ 2021 review, interoception includes sensing, interpreting, integrating, and regulating signals. This is a proposed expanded definition. The abstract and definition were read, not the complete review. They establish neither a particular sensation’s cause nor infallibility of everyday attention.

When a scientific word enters everyday speech, it can easily become a sign of final certainty. Someone no longer merely feels tension; they receive an interoceptive truth. Naming a research field does not, however, confirm an individual conclusion. Establishing the cause of an event requires data appropriate to that particular question. An everyday example can demonstrate a useful distinction but does not become an experiment because of a scientific term. We need to preserve science's method and limits, and personal experience's available meaning, without borrowing a promise of omniscience.

Attention should not become a competition in sensitivity either. One person readily notices a breathing change, while another finds an internal state hard to describe. Our article cannot infer merit, maturity, or decision-making ability from this. Different people have different ways of finding their bearings: circumstances, records, conversation, measurement, and their usual organisation of the day. Bodily description may be one of these. It need not become

everyone's principal channel or displace information obtained more easily and reliably another way.

The distinction also helps in reverse. An experience not proving a hidden cause does not make it insignificant. Uncomfortable clothing requires no complex theory before trying a different size. If conversational conditions are difficult to bear, we can request a pause without establishing the sole cause of the response. A decision sometimes meets an available need while remaining reversible. Scientific uncertainty does not require inaction until a complete explanation exists; neither does it permit turning an action into confirmation of the whole story we told about a signal.

III. Meaning belongs to a person; cause requires checking

A sensation may have personal meaning regardless of whether its cause is known. After a long absence, you enter a familiar courtyard and feel warmth. It recalls childhood, people, and lost time. Such meaning need not be confirmed in a laboratory. You are saying this courtyard is associated with closeness for you. If warmth leads you to conclude it is safe to live here now or every earlier relationship was good, personal meaning begins performing another task. New information is required for that task.

Meaning may remain mixed too. Someone is happy about a meeting and simultaneously feels constrained. One feeling need not be selected as true and the other as interference. Different aspects of an event can matter at once. We can want closeness without agreeing to earlier conditions, love a place without wanting to return, value work while needing another schedule. Bodily experience need not issue one overall verdict on a complex relationship. Sometimes respecting it means maintaining several distinctions a simple instruction would try to remove.

A suggested cause can be checked accessibly and within limits. If tension appears before a particular letter, examine what remains unclear in it: deadline, price, responsibility, or permission to refuse. Feeling easier after clarification is a useful observation. It does not prove no other causes existed or every similar tension always concerns an agreement. One everyday check can support the next step without creating a universal theory of your physiology. A modest conclusion preserves the possibility of noticing future differences.

Sometimes no everyday check provides an answer. This is an acceptable result: I feel this and do not yet know why. That sentence should not sound like defeat. It separates existing experience from an unavailable explanation. We can then decide whether rest, changed conditions, conversation, or an appropriate professional assessment is needed. An unknown cause does not cancel care or oblige us to invent a spiritual, psychological, or medical explanation merely to make the record look complete.

IV. Philosophical distinction is not physiology

In On the Soul, II.2, translated by Smith, Aristotle distinguishes the capacity to have an opinion from the capacity to perceive. In II.1 the living body is considered together with its organised capacities through form and actuality. This is ancient philosophy of life. We use a distinction between tasks without transferring the classification into contemporary neuroscience. A similar question does not establish identical theories, and soul here does not name a hidden signal this article has learned to measure.

A philosophical text helps us ask which actions we have combined. Sensing, judging, remembering, and choosing can be discussed separately even when closely connected in life. A contemporary person need not accept the entire ancient worldview to see the question's value. Honest reading nevertheless preserves context: the author addresses his own task and does not automatically anticipate each of our conclusions. We do not call his proposition a research result or use the text's age as additional evidence.

Figurative language performs another kind of work. “My body asks for space” may precisely convey wanting to leave a cramped room. It requires no separate bodily interlocutor with a finished system of intentions. A metaphor helps while it expresses experience and supports choosing an action. It becomes dubious evidence when used to infer someone's guilt, a medical cause, or a compulsory decision for everyone. We can preserve an image as our own language without making it a literal description of a mechanism.

For example, someone says their body rejects a new project. We can clarify what they notice and which conditions they do not want to accept. Perhaps naming an absence of available time is sufficient. Perhaps they do not know yet. Neither case requires proving a separate bodily entity has already decided. Refusal can rest on the person's values, resources, and consent. Their right to choose needs no special bodily certificate obtained through a supposedly correct method of inward observation.

V. A medical question cannot be replaced by a story of meaning

Some questions about cause require medical consideration. A personal explanation does not replace that assessment. For example, NHS guidance on chest pain distinguishes immediate help from seeking advice when pain recurs or causes concern. No diagnostic algorithm is reproduced here. Particular symptoms, urgency, and available help are assessed using current medical information and local circumstances. A sensation cannot first be declared emotional and then used on that basis to exclude a medical question.

The distinction applies regardless of someone's relationship to spiritual practice. Someone may find meaning in experience while also checking their health. They need not choose

between caring for the body and an important personal account. A story of meaning nevertheless answers a different task. Even a compelling connection between a sensation and a difficult conversation does not exclude other circumstances. This article cannot establish what is happening to an individual reader. The limit is substantive: available self-description helps convey experience rather than replacing examination or a professional decision.

Concrete description helps a conversation with a professional more than ready-made certainty about a hidden emotion. When it began, what is felt, what changes, and which circumstances were noticed are different pieces of information. Not knowing the cause can be stated plainly. An ideal record need not be completed before seeking help, nor must full clarity be awaited. Conditions for seeking help and urgency do not depend on the quality of your text. We consider description an aid to communication rather than permission someone must earn before their experience deserves attention.

Disappearance of an unpleasant feeling after a conversation should not be treated as proof of its original cause either. A change was noticed; the explanation may remain incomplete. A sensation returning does not prove you understood yourself incorrectly. Everyday choice can preserve several levels: actual experience, action taken, result, and what remains unknown. This limits both premature reassurance and an unnecessary judgment of yourself. The article proposes no identification of illness from such a record and does not promise that recording will remove a sensation.

VI. Another person cannot decipher you completely

Sometimes explanation arrives from outside: tense shoulders mean suppressed anger; a tightened abdomen means the relationship is wrong. Such confidence can sound caring while exceeding the evidence. We can listen to a suggestion without accepting it as final access to experience. Asking whether a description fits must leave room for no. If every refusal is treated as proof of hidden resistance, an explanation becomes untestable: agreement confirms it, and disagreement does too. Such a construction gives someone no real opportunity to clarify their account of themselves.

A more open form sounds different: you notice tension; what do you associate it with; is another explanation possible; what do you want now? It does not guarantee the correct cause, but preserves participation. Sometimes the answer is not knowing. Sometimes it is a request not to discuss the body. Sometimes it is a concrete need to change position, leave a room, or continue later. Respecting experience includes the right not to explain it in detail. Closeness provides no automatic right to map another person's entire internal state.

This also concerns our own wish to help. When someone close reports bodily discomfort, we want to discover meaning and a solution immediately. We can first clarify the task: are they

asking to be heard, for help with an action, for information, or simply reporting a state? Not every account invites interpretation. Sometimes useful participation changes an external condition rather than explaining an internal one. Bringing a comfortable chair may be more appropriate than confidently naming an emotional conflict the person never reported.

Leaving an explanation open does not abandon conversation. It makes conversation shared. We can offer a guess with a clear qualification and accept correction. We can notice our own response separately from someone else's condition. We can agree which information is needed and where discussion ends. This precision is not cold: it does not appropriate the meaning of someone's sensations. It lets us stay with an actual participant who may differ from a familiar scheme, even if that scheme once seemed very convincing.

VII. A pleasant sensation does not guarantee correctness either

We more often question unpleasant signals, but pleasant ones also need distinction. Calm before a decision can be important experience. It does not confirm financial conditions, the reliability of a promise, or another person's consent. Enthusiasm after meeting does not make every agreement reasonable. We can value joy while separately reading the document, clarifying possibilities, and considering consequences. Checking need not destroy a pleasant feeling. It simply does not assign that feeling a task for which it lacks sufficient information.

In an illustrative scene, someone leaves a discussion of a joint project with lightness and clarity. This describes their meeting well. An hour later, they discover deadlines were not discussed. The lightness was real, and the agreement incomplete. Their joy need not be exposed as false; the agreement needs supplementing. This combination protects against the opposite extreme of treating every good experience as suspicious. Experience can be valuable even when it does not perform a complete check of an external situation.

A neutral state is not a bodily refusal either. Sometimes no vivid response is noticed before an important step. A decision can rest on circumstances, values, and available commitments. Inspiration, tension, or a special signal need not be obtained before choosing. Requiring a sensation for every decision gives ordinary uncertainty a new form of waiting. Time passes searching for inward permission although practical information already supports a limited, reversible next step.

Bodily experience thus remains one participant in choice rather than its only judge. It includes comfort, inconvenience, tiredness, pleasantness, and wanting a pause. Facts, agreements, other people, and our own values stand alongside it. Sometimes a sensation deserves first attention; sometimes an external check matters more; sometimes both are needed together. This article establishes no general order for every episode. It invites noticing when one part of

experience quietly receives authority to decide for all the others and declare its version a finished truth.

VIII. Attention can be limited by its purpose

Observing sensations need not become continuous work. If the task is checking whether shoes are comfortable, notice the particular discomfort and choose an available change. No complete account of personality is needed. If the task is describing a condition for consultation, the record has an addressee. If the task is accepting work conditions, bodily description can accompany checking the workload. Purpose limits the amount of attention and lets observation finish once necessary material is available, even if it has not explained the whole experience.

Sometimes why merely expands reflection. We can temporarily turn to what is available now instead. Changing position, taking an ordinary pause, clarifying a condition, reporting discomfort, and seeking appropriate help are different actions. They require no general theory. Choosing one does not mean rejecting other causes. We can act on available circumstances while leaving explanation open. Attention thereby works for life rather than making life endless material for deciphering every small change.

A pause in observation should not, however, prohibit noticing something significant. An experience needing attention need not be suppressed for an ideal of calm. The concern is proportionality to the task rather than a correct quantity of feelings. Someone may record several details, another prefer a brief description, another currently need an external step more. The chosen form is no basis for judging them. Each method is considered through its purpose: does it convey experience, support an available decision, or obtain needed information?

Limiting purpose also eases conversation with ourselves. Instead of demanding immediate understanding of the entire body, we can name what the next action needs. A letter needs clarity about commitments; a room needs a more comfortable place; an inquiry needs an available channel and description; rest needs an agreed pause. The remaining uncertainty can persist. It does not automatically make the action unreasonable. Reasonableness rests on available information and necessity rather than full transparency of every inward process, which this article neither promises nor requires.

The setting itself sometimes offers a more modest question. You are sitting in an uncomfortable chair in a noisy room, trying to understand the profound meaning of tension. First you can check whether another seat is available and whether meeting conditions can change. This does not assert that the setting explains everything. It checks an available condition before a sensation becomes a large account of yourself. If experience remains

unchanged, the record gains another circumstance; if it changes, an observation appears rather than proof of a universal cause. This order is especially useful where an external need can readily be agreed without discussing an entire personal history.

We also have the right to retain simple language in communication. Asking for another chair requires no detailed admission of an inward conflict. Asking for a pause need not include a philosophy of the body. We can communicate exactly what shared action needs and keep the rest personal. A fuller account is available if we want it. Its extent is no measure of honesty or condition for respecting a particular need.

IX. Let experience remain unfinished

Return to the letter. You clarified the workload and decided not to accept the earlier deadline. Tension decreased or remained. Either way, the decision can be assessed through the conditions on which it rests. A change of sensation need not be declared final confirmation that the body knew the answer beforehand. Remaining tension need not prove refusal was wrong. Event, sensation, check, and decision have their own results. Their connection can be discussed but is not established by one desired concluding sentence.

Another outcome is possible: the conditions are acceptable while discomfort remains unexplained. Accepting the agreement can then be separated from further attention to the condition. A third outcome is insufficient information and a postponed decision; a fourth requires a different kind of help. These options form no scale of maturity. They meet different circumstances. Respecting the body does not require the same feeling of relief every time or turn every remaining experience into evidence of a hidden life conflict needing immediate discovery.

An unfinished explanation leaves room for language to change. Today a feeling is called heaviness; tomorrow something different is noticed. Today it is associated with work; later an additional circumstance becomes visible. Correction does not make the earlier sensation false. It shows that an account of experience can become more precise. This especially matters when the initial wording sounded like a verdict: my body is against me; my body always knows; my body never errs. All three assign living experience a role with compulsory consistency that the person then has to defend.

More modest language restores freedom: I notice this; give it this meaning; suppose this cause; currently choose this step. Each part can be clarified separately. Someone remains the author of meaning without becoming the sole expert on every cause or neglecting external knowledge out of faithfulness to themselves. Attention and checking can coexist. A sensation does not lose reality when its explanation is questioned. An explanation gains no infallibility

from a sensation's force. Space remains between them in which the next step can be chosen with sufficient honesty.

For your decision, select beforehand which information is actually needed. Agreeing on a deadline requires asking about the deadline; changing a place requires available options. Bodily description then need not expand into a complete personality explanation. It remains part of the case while the request gains a clear addressee. This limit supports ordinary participation despite an unknown cause and lets clarification finish once the necessary agreement is named.

What this means in practice

For one ordinary episode, record what you notice, in which circumstances, which explanation you propose, and which action you are considering. Keep yet, perhaps, and I do not know where they fit the information. Check whether the action needs complete knowledge of the cause. Sometimes changing an external condition or clarifying an agreement is sufficient. Sometimes the question needs another assessment and an appropriate help channel. Do not infer another person's motive from your own sensation.

After acting, separately note the result and remaining uncertainty. Relief can be valued without becoming proof of the whole account. No change can be noticed without accusing yourself of incorrect understanding. If description does not serve the task, change the method or finish recording. These questions are no diagnosis, treatment procedure, or test of spiritual sensitivity. Their limited purpose is to make visible the transition from experience to explanation and choice.

In conversation with someone else, offer your guess as correctable. Clarify whether they want to discuss the sensation and what they need from conversation. Refusing to explain does not confirm your version. In your own choice, leave room for facts, commitments, and values alongside bodily experience. This allows respect for experience without requiring it alone to know everything about health, relationships, and the future.

Key quotation

> *“the whole living body”*
>
> *Aristotle, On the Soul, II.1, Smith; excerpt from reasoning from parts to a whole. The ancient model of living things is not equated with contemporary physiology.*

Connections between traditions

Lines	Similar question	Substantive difference
Aristotle ↔ self-description	Sensing and opinion are distinguishable	Ancient soul is not a neurophysiological term
Chen and colleagues ↔ everyday distinction	Several processes cannot be collapsed into one	A research framework does not check a particular explanation
Metaphor ↔ personal meaning	Images help express experience	An image establishes no cause
Medical assessment ↔ personal record	Description conveys information	Recording does not replace assessment or urgency
Attention ↔ choice	Experience participates in action	Intensity provides no knowledge of every condition

Primary sources

• Aristotle. On the Soul, II.1–2, J. A. Smith translation, MIT. The named parts were read; philosophical context, rather than a clinical source.

• Wen G. Chen and colleagues. The Emerging Science of Interoception, Trends in Neurosciences 44(1), 3–16, 2021, DOI 10.1016/j.tins.2020.10.007. The abstract and definition were read through the primary page and its search presentation; the complete review is not claimed as read. Rights UNKNOWN; no full republication.

• NHS. Chest pain. The official patient page was read on 5 October 2026; used only for the boundary between personal explanation and seeking medical help, rather than a personal recommendation.

Tags

body, sensation, explanation, description, cause, meaning, experience, interoception, Chen, Aristotle, On the Soul, philosophy, science, metaphor, uncertainty, attention, choice, decision, boundary, conversation, agreement, comfort, checking, health, autonomy

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