

Part I

The Explicit Animal

If there is one thought that is central to the many and varied intellectual endeavours that Raymond Tallis has undertaken in the fields of philosophy, the history of ideas, art and literature it is that what above all separates us as human beings from the physical and biological world in which we find ourselves is the fact that we are *explicit* animals. Human beings are that in virtue of which 'That' as in 'That X [is the case]' is imported into Being. It is this quality of explicitness that pervades the human sense of individuality: for Tallis, 'That I am this thing' may be said to lie at the heart of a distinctively human sense of self.

Furthermore, this ability possessed by human consciousness of making states, events, objects and itself explicit is underivable and inexplicable; in particular, it cannot be accounted for in terms of the properties of the material world. (One might say that there is no material X whose properties could explain the transition from X to 'That X [is the case]'.) More specifically, human consciousness cannot be explained by the special properties of the brain. The brain is a piece of the material world, and the neural theory of consciousness, no matter how cunningly it may be elaborated, is therefore always going to be inadequate. Mechanistic explanations, based on biological and/or computational models, seem to promise progress only because they are cast in the language of neuromythology which allows the really difficult questions about consciousness to be bypassed.

Several consequences flow from the failure of neural theories of consciousness and the affirmation of the *sui generis* status of the human mind. Darwinian accounts of human behaviour will always be inadequate: we are explicit human beings and part of what that means is that we act deliberately and at several removes from instinctive and other mechanisms, even in pursuit of our appetites. Evolutionary epistemology – which attempts to explain human knowledge and the nature of truth in terms of adaptation to the environment – is thereby ruled out. To affirm this is to affirm the fact that

the liberation of human culture from animal nature is real and capable of unlimited development. For Tallis, such a liberation is what constitutes, in Wittgenstein's phrase, the natural history of mankind: we have limitless possibilities for creating new meanings, new institutions, new relations with the material world and that part of ourselves which is rooted in the organic body.