Personal Identity and the Mind-Body Problem

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Many thinkers have felt that any account we may give of personal identity must be such as to show that the identity of the self is not essentially different from the identity of other entities like machines or nations. The account we give of the identity through time of these latter must be in terms of some set of observable connections which hold between the stages of the entity in question; in short, in terms of some form of observable continuity. In the same manner, then, it is felt that any analysis of personal identity through time must be in terms of some empirical continuity, and this has usually meant either an analysis in terms of bodily continuity or one which sees psychological continuity, with memory at its heart, as the central criterion of personal identity. Sometimes it is suggested that a judicious mixture of the two is called for.

It is strange that this sort of approach has been so wholeheartedly accepted by the majority of writers on personal identity, since, as some of these same writers have been ready to admit, this view is fundamentally opposed to what the majority of people feel to be the case about personal identity. In this chapter I shall examine the main tenets of what we can call the empiricist view of personal identity and show that they are incoherent. What emerges is a view much closer to that of our ordinary conception of personal identity. In the second part of this chapter, I shall show that this view is essentially dualistic and examine some obstacles in the way of a full recognition of this.

I

Nothing brings out more clearly what is wrong with the empiricist view than an examination of the difficulties that the bodily criterion gets
into. The bodily criterion holds that what it means for a set of experiences to be the experiences of one person is that they are all immediately related to one and the same body. Sometimes it is held that the bodily criterion has a special advantage in that it can explain what it is for a group of simultaneous experiences to belong together in the one mind, as well as being able to explain what it is for experiences over time to belong together. However we construe the nature of experiences, what holds them together, it is held, is their being related, in a way whose precise nature we needn’t here be specific about, to one and the same body. Widely though some such view has been held, an examination of it soon shows it to be embroiled in absurdity, an absurdity, moreover, which undermines not only the bodily criterion but the whole empiricist view of the nature of personal identity.

If we take the case of simultaneous experiences first, it is clear that the central question cannot really be, what holds such a group of experiences together in the one mind? For this would be to imply that there is no problem about how any single experience is mine, say, but only a problem about how other experiences hang together with this one. This cannot be the problem: if the one experience can be allowed to be mine without further analysis, then so can the others, and what holds them together will simply be their all being mine. The real question must therefore be, what is it by virtue of which any experience or group of simultaneous experiences is mine? And the suggested answer is: by virtue of being related to this body.

This suggestion immediately involves us in vicious circularity. In order to claim any such group of experiences as mine, I must first establish that they satisfy the suggested criterion. But I can only do this if I first identify the experiences in question, and just doing this is to identify them as mine. Nor can it be supposed that this difficulty is confined to the case of simultaneous experiences. The same absurdity confronts us if it is claimed that what unites a set of experiences over time is their being all related to the same body. This must be so, since on the criterion of bodily continuity the fact that I have the clearest possible memory of a past experience as an experience of mine and that no one else has such a memory or ever will still leaves us with the question, did that experience happen to me? This question remains simply because the truth of all the above propositions cannot guarantee the truth of the proposition that the experience in question was dependent in the approved manner on the body continuous with this present one. Once again, one is obliged first to identify the experience in question and then to try to establish that it was dependent on this body. But, once again, just to identify it is to identify it as one’s own.

This absurdity in which the bodily criterion is involved is closely connected with others. First, if it is the case that an experience is mine by virtue of being related to this body, then whether any particular experience is so related is something about which I could very well be mistaken. But we cannot make sense of the idea that one could be mistaken in ascribing some present experience to oneself. It is not intelligible to suppose that one could be aware of some present experience and yet be wrong in ascribing that experience to oneself. But precisely this possibility must be allowed on the bodily criterion. I could be wrong about whether the condition of bodily dependence is satisfied, just as I can be wrong about any other fact about the physical world. It is equally absurd to suggest that I could have the clearest possible memory of a past experience and yet be mistaken in ascribing it to myself because I mistakenly suppose that it satisfied the bodily criterion when in fact it does not. First-person ascriptions of experiences are, as Shoemaker has pointed out, immune to error through misidentification of the subject. Such immunity is impossible to explain if we suppose that an experience’s being mine is a matter of its satisfying some condition of the sort involved in the bodily criterion.

The second related difficulty is the most important of all, and the one from which the others can be seen to flow. The bodily criterion, to repeat, holds that my experiences are mine by virtue of the satisfaction of a certain condition, that of dependence on the one body. Now we saw that the search for what unites any set of simultaneous experiences in the one mind does not make sense; the search must rather be for the condition which any experience or group of experiences must satisfy if they are to be mine. We saw that the claim that relation to the body is this condition leads to circularity and also to the unacceptable possibility of mistake in identifying oneself as the subject of an experience. But underlying these difficulties is the basic truth that the very logic of the first person absolutely precludes there being any such condition. No description of what is in fact my body and of its connection to some set of experiences could possibly entail or imply that what is thus described is mine. No description, no matter how elaborate, which does not feature a first-person ascription can possibly entail or imply the truth of a proposition which does feature such an ascription. Thomas Nagel has pointed out that even a complete description of the world and its total history, if made without the use of token-reflexives, will leave unsaid the fact: “I am Thomas Nagel.” The point in fact goes back to McTaggurt, who argued that knowledge of the self
cannot be knowledge "by description," since it's one thing to know that some set of properties, specified in the description, is instantiated, while it is quite another to know that such a set of properties is mine. In brief, I can know some set of properties to be instantiated without knowing that they are mine, and I can refer to myself without knowing what, if any, properties I have. Considerations of this sort have led Castaneda to argue in great detail for the thesis that the first person is a basic and unanalyzable category of thought. There can, then, be nothing by virtue of which some present experience is mine, since, no matter what the condition is, it cannot follow from the fact that this condition is satisfied that the experience in question is mine.

It may, however, be thought that the fact that it is absurd to suppose that this present experience's being mine follows from its satisfying some condition does not show that it is similarly absurd to claim that a past experience's being mine is a matter of its satisfying some condition such as its being connected with that past body which is continuous with this present one. The present body in question, it might be claimed, is the one which is the locus of my sensations and directly under the control of my will, and any past experiences are mine if and only if they are related to this same body. But in fact it is fairly clear that this position is incoherent. It would, in any case, be exceedingly odd if it were the case that while what makes this present body mine is the fact that it is the center of my experiences, what makes past experiences mine is the fact that they were centered on this particular body. And it would surely be an extraordinary and inexplicable fact if it were the case that while this present experience's being mine cannot be a matter of its satisfying some bodily condition, the very same experience can remain mine as it recedes into the past only if it is seen to satisfy the bodily criterion. If this present experience's being mine cannot be a matter of some bodily connection-holding, my memory of it as mine as it recedes into the past cannot be a memory of some such bodily connection-holding either. Only if we recognize this can we accommodate the point made above that first-person ascriptions of experiences are immune to error through misidentification of the subject, and that this is the case for past as well as present experiences. We see now that what explains this immunity to error is precisely the unanalyzability of the first person to which McTaggart and others have drawn attention. Just because no description which does not feature the first person can entail or imply a first-person ascription, it must follow that there can be no condition which an experience has to satisfy to be mine, and the removal of any such condition also removes the only possible source of error in self-ascription, that of mistakenly supposing some such condition to be satisfied when it is not. We see, too, that it is just because their being mine is an unanalyzable property of my experiences that any attempt to analyze the ownership of experiences in terms of the satisfaction of some condition must result in circularity: my experiences first have to be identified as mine before it can be seen whether they satisfy the supposed condition for being mine.

I claim, then, that the suggestion that what holds together experiences in the one mind, either simultaneously or over a period of time, is some sort of connection with one and the same body is an untenable one, and untenable just because the first person is unanalyzable. What it is for an experience to be mine cannot be analyzed into something of the form "being an experience satisfying some specified description." I want now to claim that the very same fundamental fact also rules out the possibility of personal identity over time being a matter of psychological continuity or connectedness, a matter of the continuity of one's personality and memory. The essential truth to recognize is this: an experience's being mine is something quite independent of any particular objective character it may have. This follows immediately from the basic logical point about first-person ascriptions: an experience's being mine cannot be a matter of its having some particular objective properties, and its having these properties cannot entail or imply that the experience is mine. This logical point is strongly supported by the simple thought experiment of imagining one's present state of consciousness to be more and more different from what it actually is; one imagines one's personality traits and memory impressions to be very different from the actual. It is quite obvious that the difference in the character of one's present state of mind which one imagines in no way implies that the state of mind is somehow less one's own. It makes no sense to talk of a state of consciousness which is partly mine and partly not. Nor does it make sense to suggest that one comes to a stage in this process when the state of mind switches from being mine to being not mine. It would be extraordinary to hold that up to a certain level of imagined difference the state of mind in question remains mine, but that some extra difference that I imagine—some extra change in my memory impressions, perhaps—means that the state of mind suddenly switches from being mine to being not mine. It should be clear, in addition, that not only is such an outcome one which it is impossible to grasp in the imagination, but it is one which is precluded by the logic of the first person. Were such an outcome to be envisaged, we should have to admit that there is after all some mysterious logical connection between descriptions and first-person ascriptions, for we would have committed ourselves to the view that for a state of mind to have some particular objective character, the character which obtains after the crucial extra difference, is logically
incompatible with such a state of mind’s being mine. It is enough to point out that McTaggart’s basic insight rules any such suggestion out of court.

This fact, that an experience’s being mine is something quite independent of its objective character, is, as I say, enough to undermine the suggestion that psychological continuity constitutes the essence of personal identity. The following consideration shows this clearly. Let us suppose that my present state of consciousness is related to some past state in the manner approved by supporters of the psychological criterion. By this criterion, then, that past state will be mine as well. But I can easily imagine this objective connection between the present and the past state of consciousness to be broken just by imagining my present state of consciousness to be radically different. But imagining this, as we saw, is not imagining a change of identity. I do not become a different person in having this very different state of consciousness. Hence, if the two states of consciousness were those of the same person before, the breaking of the objective connection between them cannot mean that they are now the state of different persons. We have to say that while it is the case that one’s states of consciousness normally exhibit the sort of continuity and connection we are discussing, their all being one’s states of consciousness cannot be a matter of their exhibiting such connections. The clearly indicated conclusion is that there is nothing that holds together my experiences as the experiences of the same self except their being all, unanalyzably, mine.

It is worth pointing out now how misguided was the original hope that any theory of personal identity could be seen as just a special case of an overall theory of identity. Persons are not things, and their identity through time is a very different matter from that of things. To imagine a nation markedly different from the actual is to imagine something whose identity with the actual is only partial, but we have seen that it makes no sense to suppose that there is a possible world containing a state of consciousness which is only partially mine. And while it is the case that the question “Is it the same nation as it was?” may have to be answered, “To some extent, yes, but to some extent, no,” that answer cannot be given if our question is, “Is it the same person?” Of course, we often say, “He is not the same person,” meaning to say that his personality is quite different, but we do not thereby imply a change of identity. Personal identity through time, it must be accepted, is strict. What unites my experiences over time as experiences all of the same self is their being unanalyzably mine, and their being mine is not a property which experiences can have to a greater or lesser degree. Personal identity through time, therefore, cannot be a matter of degree. The identity of other entities, by contrast, is a matter of certain preferred objective connections holding between the successive states of the entity, connections which can hold to a greater or lesser degree, and in consequence the identity through time of such an entity is a matter of degree. Personal identity, by contrast, is both strict and unanalyzable: all that can be said about what unites my experiences is that they are all, unanalyzably, mine.

One particular way in which the misguided attempt to assimilate personal identity to object identity has shown itself is over the question of the importance to be attached to the origin of any entity. Kripke has argued that the origin of any object is of its essence. I can suppose that this coin in my pocket might have had a totally different history from the actual from the time of its production, but I cannot suppose that this very same coin, minted in 1976, could have been produced a century earlier or in another country. Kripke and others have not hesitated to claim that origin is equally of the essence of persons. Something is clearly very wrong with this claim. There is not the slightest difficulty in imagining not only that one’s life was very different from what it has in fact been, but also that it began earlier or later and, indeed, that one had different parents from one’s actual parents. In fact, my present moment of consciousness was preceded by the series of experiences that constitutes my life history so far, but it would be extraordinary to claim that however different this series of experiences might otherwise have been, it could not have been different in respect of its origin. The insistence on the importance of origin in this context is totally incomprehensible, whereas everyone must see that it is at least plausible to claim that it could not be this very same coin if it were minted earlier or in a different country.

I claimed at the beginning of this chapter that the view of personal identity for which I am arguing is much closer to our ordinary conception than is the empiricist view. I think we can see this immediately when we consider something as apparently simple as the fear of pain. Since on the psychological criterion the essence of personal identity is constituted by the continuity of memory and personality, it follows that for the supporter of this criterion to fear that one will be in pain in the future is to fear that the future pain will be accompanied by the appropriate memory impressions and personality traits. But this position is barely intelligible. What I fear is that the future pain will be mine; the fact that it may or may not be accompanied by a particular set of memory impressions and personality traits seems quite irrelevant. It does seem obvious that whether or not a sensation is mine has nothing whatever to do with what other states of mind may obtain at the same time as the pain. What I fear about the future pain is not its being accompanied by some particular memory impressions, etc., but simply its being felt by me. It is equally clear that our
ordinary attitude toward future pain leaves no room for the notion that whether or not some future pain is mine could be a matter of degree. We, rightly, find unintelligible the idea that there could be a pain in the future which is in part mine and in part not.

Another respect in which the psychological criterion in particular is out of accord with our ordinary thinking is the following. Almost inevitably, the supporter of the psychological criterion sees the basic constituents of the mind as separable experiences, items with no more than the connections of similarity and causal connection between them. We are therefore just as free to adopt an ontology of person-phases as we are to retain our present ontology of persons. This leads straight to the view that what we count as one person existing through time is at bottom a matter of convention. It hardly needs saying that such a view can provide no foundation whatever for our ordinary notions of responsibility, pride, remorse, and so on.

Some thinkers have attacked the sort of view I am advocating on the grounds that it takes the first person to be an essentially unanalyzable referential term, and indeed this view of the first person is at the heart of the position for which I am arguing. Yet examination of alternative analyses of “I” very soon forces one to the conclusion that there is no proper alternative conception of the first person to be had. Some have argued that “I” is some sort of nonreferential indicator, and one writer has claimed that its being such is shown by the fact that one can still use “I” to indicate oneself even though one may have completely forgotten who one is.9 It is, however, quite impossible to see how I can choose to indicate myself without being aware that it is myself, and not any other thing, to which I wish to draw attention; and this is just to say that I am aware of myself as the referent of “I.” Pointing out that one may use “I” even when ignorant of who one is simply makes McTaggart’s central point again: awareness of oneself is not awareness of oneself under this or that description.

Others have claimed that “I” is not any sort of name, but rather an “index-word,” to be treated, somehow, as on a par with other indexicals like “this,” “here,” and “now.” It is very difficult to see the point in this claim once it is realized that the other indexicals are parasitic on “I”: “here” is where I am, “this” is what is in my vicinity, “now” is when I make this utterance. Nor can there be any point in the move some have favored of arguing that “I” might itself be analyzed in terms of one of the other indexicals, “this” being the preferred candidate. Any such move clearly involves putting restrictions on the normal use of “this,” and the special use of this word will now have to be explained in terms of the first person. We would have, in effect, an alternative first-person device. In any case, even if we imagine such an analysis to be successful, we should still have the awkward job of explaining just why it is that reference to “this speaker,” say, isn’t equivalent to “speaker satisfying such-and-such description.”

I claim, then, that the empiricist view of personal identity is incoherent in itself and that it is in conflict with some of our most basic moral and nonmoral attitudes. What emerges from a study of the way the empiricist view breaks down is a conception of personal identity under which the question “What is it by virtue of which a set of experiences are the experiences of one and the same person?” is rejected. There can be no such condition as this question envisages. Personal identity, to repeat, is both strict and essentially unanalyzable.10

II

It might seem obvious that the view of persons and their identity which I have outlined is dualistic in conception, and dualistic in something very like the Cartesian sense. I have been surprised, however, by the number of people who have told me that while this sort of view is clearly compatible with dualism, it does not, in their eyes, entail it. This seems to me a totally mistaken position, and I shall try to show why. This will involve our looking at one or two major misconceptions in recent philosophy of mind, misconceptions that have prevented some thinkers from seeing the dualistic implications of positions which they espouse.

The first misconception is that the fact of subjectivity (which is what we are essentially concerned with), the elusive and unanalyzable nature of the first person, isn’t something which points to dualism at all. Physicalism, indeed, may find room for the first person simply in the recognition that “under another description” the body itself may appear as the subject of my experiences, and not simply as something which is derivatively mine by virtue of being the center of my experiences.11 The second misconception is that we have all the more reason for looking at the matter in this way, since, even if we have to grant that subjectivity is in some way mysterious, this mysteriousness is in no way allayed by ascribing subjectivity to a mental substance. It is, so it is claimed, just as difficult to see how a mental substance could have subjective properties as it is to see how a physical substance could have them, a difficulty made all the more obvious by the fact that just as no description of a body could entail or imply that it is mine, so no description of any mental substance could have this implication either.

These two claims do seem to me fundamental misconceptions which have bedeviled a good deal of recent philosophy of mind, and they need
careful examination. The first claim, then, is that “under another description” the body can be regarded as the bearer of subjectivity. Now if this claim is to be acceptable, we need some explanation of just how it is that the body is capable of being described in this alternative fashion; we clearly cannot just decide to describe the body in any way which would suit our overall philosophy of mind. We have to show that our mooted alternative description connects with the ordinary physical description of the body. More precisely, we have to show that the fact that the body is capable of being described in this alternative fashion is allowed by, perhaps in some way necessitated by, the physical facts. To show this is to show that the mental, or in this case the subjective, is “supervenient upon” the physical.

The doctrine that the mental is the physical “under another description” is most influentially found in the work of Davidson, and it is to him that we owe the view that the mental supervenience on the physical. The doctrine holds that every mental property must be physically realized, such that if any creature instantiates physical property at any one time, then he necessarily instantiates mental property at that time. In Davidson’s words, “It is impossible for two events (objects, states) to agree in all their physical characteristics ... and to differ in their psychological characteristics.” To take what has become the stock example, it is impossible for two computers to perform the same sequence of physical operations and yet for it to be the case that only one of these computers is calculating. Given our understanding of what calculating is, we have no choice but to see such a sequence of operations as an instance of calculating. The instantiation of the physical properties necessitates the instantiation of the mental. The physical setup has to be seen as a realization of the mental operation of calculating. However, while it is the case that the instantiation of the physical necessitates the instantiation of the mental, it does not follow that a computer’s calculating necessitates the occurrence of some particular sequence of physical operations. Computers are of different designs, and the same mental operation, therefore, may be physically realized in markedly different ways.

This example of calculating is the model to which we must refer when it is claimed that this or that mental state or operation is some physical state “under another description.” My contention is that the suggestion that the subjective is the physical under another description is so far removed from this paradigm that it is not intelligible at all. Sometimes what is meant by subjectivity is what is at the center of our concern in this chapter: the ownership of experiences, their being of some subject. Sometimes what is discussed is the special quality of conscious experience, what it is like to be in this or that conscious state. Whichever sense of subjectivity we are concerned with, it is impossible to see subjectivity as anything other than contingently connected with the physical. Indeed, so far as subjectivity in the first of the above senses is concerned, McTaggart’s basic insight makes any other conclusion impossible.

I want first, however, to take a brief look at an attempt to accommodate subjectivity, in the sense of what it is like to have any conscious experience, to physicalism, since this is of relevance to our topic. Colin McGinn, in his article “Philosophical Materialism,” considers the claim that physicalism cannot account for subjectivity in this sense. McGinn sees no difficulty in employing the Davidsonian notion of alternative descriptions in attempting to undermine this claim. Just as, for Davidson, the mental qua mental is outside the domain of law (is anomalous), yet it is brought within the domain of law when given a physical description, so the mental qua mental is subjective, yet the very same mental phenomena, given a physical description, appear totally objective. I find much to question in McGinn’s argument, but here I want to focus on the point I made earlier, that we have here a use of the “under another description” ploy which is so remote from our paradigm case of calculating that it is impossible to see how the two descriptions can be taken as descriptions of one and the same phenomenon. We must remind ourselves that the doctrine demands that the instantiation of the physical property be seen as necessitating the instantiation of the corresponding mental property. But there is no chance at all that the instantiation of some set of physical properties be seen as necessitating the instantiation of the subjective aspect. In the very nature of the case this must be so, since any such necessity must be something which can be objectively displayed, whereas the crucial feature of the subjective aspect is, of course, that it can be appreciated only from the point of view of the subject. And it would certainly be quite implausible to suggest that my subjective viewpoint gives me an insight into some sort of necessary connection between the physical facts and the subjective aspect, an insight which cannot be displayed at the objective level. What is more, we have been given no understanding of why there should be these differences of perspective, the objective and the subjective. Reference to our paradigm gives us no line to investigate any of these questions. We can only conclude that this whole approach to the relation between the mental and the physical totally breaks down as soon as the subjective is admitted into the scene.

If there is something which it is like to have any conscious experience, it is something it is like for some subject, and it is even clearer that subjectivity in this sense, the sense in which experiences are always of a subject,
cannot be accommodated to physicalism in the way suggested. McTaggart's basic insight, that no objective description can entail or imply a first-person ascription, entails the falsity of the doctrine of supervenience. We can have no glimmer of an understanding of what it would mean to say that the fact that a body answers to some objective description or other somehow entails or implies that it is mine, that its answering to this description means that it is a realization of myself, in the way in which the physical operations of the computer are a particular realization of calculating, or of what it would mean to say that its being my body is somehow constituted by its having the physical properties that it does, in the way that the operation of calculating is constituted by the sequence of physical events in the computer. Such claims are totally unintelligible, and their unintelligibility is a matter of their not recognizing the logic of the first person. We need only to consider one simple case to see this. Let us suppose that there is a pair of identical twins, as objectively indistinguishable from each other as it is possible to imagine. Now let me suppose that I am one of these twins. Davidson's claim that it is impossible for two entities to agree in all their physical characteristics but to differ in their psychological characteristics is thus shown to be false. We see that, however objectively indistinguishable the twins may be, there is something which is true of one which is not true of the other. We understand this just in seeing that, as one might put it, one can attach the first person to one side of this objective symmetry. The objective symmetry conceals a subjective asymmetry. But the subjective is an essential aspect of the mental. If, then, objective symmetry is coupled, as it must be, with subjective (i.e., mental) asymmetry, then the doctrine of supervenience is false. There is no way in which one can recognize the irreducible reality of the subjective, in either sense, and yet regard it as somehow supervenient on the physical.

What must finally rule out the suggestion that subjectivity, in the sense of the ownership of experiences, can be dealt with in the way under discussion is that it is impossible to see a coherent account of personal identity as such emerging from this approach. I have argued that what "I" picks out is a property, the property of being mine, and that this is not a property which it makes sense to suppose might exist in varying degrees. It follows from this, I have claimed, that the identity over time of that which has this property, my self, must be strict. It must also be unanalyzable, in the sense that there is nothing to be said about what makes successive stages of the self all mine. Now, if subjectivity is taken to be a property somehow supervenient on the physical, it must follow that it is possible to offer an alternative description of the body under which its identity through time is strict and unanalyzable. But the notion that there is any entity which is such that under one description its identity is strict and unanalyzable while under another description its identity is analyzable and a matter of degree is clearly an incoherent one. Clearly, one can have no idea of how the two descriptions are supposed to be related, or of how changes in the empirical continuity of the body as a result of organ or limb transplants bear on its supposed strictness of identity. It is, then, its failure to deal with the issue of identity through time which must finally reveal the bankruptcy of the whole "under another description" approach to the mind/body problem. And the bankruptcy of this solution to the mind/body problem points straight to dualism. For if it is the case that that which is the bearer of subjectivity and whose identity through time is strict and unanalyzable cannot be the body, then the self must be an entity other than the body.

If we ask why this conclusion has not been accepted, we must recognize first of all that some thinkers have supposed that the question of subjectivity could be dealt with in the way we have just examined and rejected. But the claim has also been made that nothing is to be gained by positing a mental substance, since it is just as difficult to see how subjectivity could be a property of this. Thomas Nagel has made the point that if there is a problem about what it is for any particular body to be mine, there is equally a problem about what it could be for any particular mental substance to be mine. Just as no description of a body can entail or imply that it is mine, so no description of a Cartesian mental substance can entail or imply that it is mine.

One thing that this objection does, I think, is to show that the notion of a mental substance has no useful role to play. If we posit such a substance as something which owns all one's experiences, it looks as if we have to ask, what is it by virtue of which any particular substance is mine? And the only possible answer is that it is mine in being the center of my experiences. Once again, we see that experiences themselves must be the bearers of subjectivity. Nor is there any point in claiming that the mental substance itself is the bearer of subjectivity, since this would oblige us to ask of any of our experiences whether it is indeed related to the right mental substance before one could be sure that it was one's own. The notion of a mental substance, then, that of something other than experiences but in which our experiences inhere, is a perfectly useless one.

But, it might be said, even if we dispense with the idea of a mental substance, we are still in difficulty. For, just as no description of a mental substance can entail that it is mine, so no objective description of any experience can entail or imply this either. The situations of the mental and the physical thus remain parallel, and the ascription of subjectivity to the
mental remains just as puzzling as the ascription of subjectivity to the physical. We illuminate nothing by adopting a dualist view of reality.

This is a central misconception. The fact is that we have not the slightest difficulty in grasping what it is for an experience to be the experience of someone—mine, yours, his, etc. Indeed, we have no idea what an experience which is no one's could possibly be. We understand, also, just why it is that no description of any experience can entail or imply that it is mine, since we understand that an experience's being mine is something quite independent of its objective properties; I could have been having an experience very different from the one I am now having, but it would not be one whit less mine. Nothing, therefore, about an experience's being mine can entail that it has some particular objective quality, nor can the experience's objective characteristics entail or imply that it is mine. We understand this to be the nature of consciousness. By contrast, we have no idea what it could be for subjectivity to be a property of the body. It can hardly make sense to suggest that it is some extra physical property, if only because it would then belong entirely to the objective realm. Nor, as we have seen, is it possible to regard it as a property supervenient on the physical.

Underlying this refusal to see the fact of subjectivity as pointing to a dualistic view is a further misconception. Positing a mental substance won't do, we are told, since this would be just one more objective item in the world, and as such would throw no light on the subjective. And therefore, Nagel tells us, "the question of how one can include in the objective world a mental substance having subjective properties is as acute as the question how a physical substance can have subjective properties." What lies behind this complaint, it seems to me, is just equivocation with regard to both the terms, "subjective" and "objective." When Nagel tells us that "what is physical is simply there, and can be externally apprehended from more than one point of view," the equivocation is clear. There is one sense of the word "objective" which is, roughly, "being simply there; actual"; there is a quite different sense in which it means "apprehensible from more than one point of view; knowable intersubjectively." Corresponding to these senses are two different senses of "subjective": (1) "not actual; mere impression," and (2) "knowable only by the subject." Now there is no reason, as far as I can see, why what is objective in the sense of being actual, or simply there, should not also be subjective, in the sense of being knowable only by the subject. These senses of "objective" and "subjective" are not opposed to each other, nor is there the slightest tension in the thesis that something can be both objective and subjective in these senses. Yet it is a recurrent theme in the writings of Nagel in particular that there is such a tension. I repeat that simple equivocation underlies this claim, and that once we have seen this we ought to see also that the fact of subjectivity, and the nature of the self and of its identity through time, can only be accommodated by a dualistic view of the nature of reality.

These considerations show conclusively that the conception of personal identity which I have argued for is totally incompatible with physicalism. What we must now look at is the double aspect view of the mind/body relationship. Sometimes the term "double aspect" denotes a view which clearly just is a version of physicalism. Indeed, the claim that there are alternative descriptions of the same (physical) reality is sometimes referred to in this way. But there is also a clearly nonphysicalist position which is often called "double aspect," and it is this that I want to discuss. It holds that the mental, or the experiential, and the physical are two different aspects of the one indivisible reality, perhaps in something like the way in which color and shape are two different aspects of a physical object. No one supposes that talk about color is just talk about shape "under another description," and neither should it be supposed that mental and physical concepts pick out the same reality. I take it that it is something of this sort which is argued for by Strawson in Individuals, and R. J. Hirst is one thinker who has argued for this sort of position.15

It has never been clear to me what is to prevent the double aspect position from collapsing into Cartesian dualism, and I think that a consideration of the way the issue of personal identity impinges on it shows that it does in fact collapse. The crucial issue is this: is the property of subjectivity one which belongs to both the mental and the physical aspects, or is it restricted to the mental? Let us take the latter suggestion. Hirst in fact regards it as one of the great advantages of the double aspect position that it allows us to recognize quite openly that there are properties of the experiential which are not properties of the physical, something which, he feels, the identity theorist is unable to do. If we take this line, then presumably the claim will be that just as only of the mental can one say that it has the properties of rationality, intensity, etc., so only of the mental can one say that it has the property of subjectivity. But this leads immediately to Cartesian dualism, rather than a double aspect position. For we have in effect committed ourselves to saying that only the mental side is really me, and that in so far as a body is mine it is so only because it is related to that which has subjectivity in its own right: my mind, or self. Moreover, if only the mental side has the property of subjectivity, only the mental side has what must go with this, an identity through time which is
strict and unanalyzable. This commits us even more clearly to dualism. It is impossible to reconcile the conclusion we are thus forced to with the view that the mental and the physical are just two aspects of an indivisible unity, as color and shape are aspects of the one object.

The alternative is to claim that subjectivity is a property of both aspects. But this also offers no way out of our difficulties; in fact it leads us straight back to some of the difficulties we have already met. If subjectivity is a property of the physical aspect, we are confronted again with the problem of explaining just how the physical can be seen as having this property. We are also faced with the problem of reconciling the strictness and unanalyzability of identity through time which is a necessary corollary of subjectivity with our ordinary notion of the identity through time of the physical. Once again, it is all too obvious that the yearned-for indivisible unity of the double aspect theorist has suffered a dualistic split.

I want to insist, then, that the only coherent view of the self and of its identity through time is one which recognizes the reality of subjectivity and the consequences for our notion of personal identity which follow from this. I want also to insist that the only view of the mind-body relationship which can accommodate this view is dualism. The tradition of hostility to dualism has led some contemporary philosophers to suppose too readily that the facts about the concept of the self with which we have been concerned can be absorbed into other views on the nature of mind. I hope to have shown that any attempt to do this is doomed to failure.

Notes

7. Ibid., p. 170.