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IS THERE A MIND—BODY PROBLEM?

by

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1. Introduction

The title --“Is There a Mind—Body Problem?”-- will suggest that I have doubts as to whether there is a mind—body problem. And I do have doubts as to whether there is a special problem concerning the relation between the mind and the body. You may say: “Well, plenty of people have worried about the problem of the relation of the mind and the body. And so therefore there is a problem.” And of course that is true enough: people have been concerned with it. But what I wish to suggest is that they shouldn’t have been concerned with it: there is no evidence to suggest that I have something to be called a mind which we must relate somehow to the body.

Now in saying this --there is no reason to suggest that I have something to be called a mind-- I do not mean to say that there is no person—body problem. If we use “person” to designate such entities as you and me, then there is no question but that there are such things as persons. And obviously there is no question but that there are such things as our bodies. There is a problem about the relation between those entities. Thus there is the question: What is the relation between me and my body? There are two broad possibilities: Either I am identical with my body or I am not identical with it. And if we decide that I am not identical with it, then once again there are two possibilities: either I am identical with some part of my body or I’m not. And if I’m not, then just what kind of thing am I? So there is a person—body problem.

But I want to urge that we multiply problems beyond necessity if we suppose, that in addition to the person—body problem, there is also a mind—body problem. In suggesting that there is no mind—body problem, then, I am suggesting this: if the substantival expression “mind” is taken to designate some individual thing which is other than the person, something that person may be said to have, just as it has a hand and a foot, then there is no reason to suppose that there is such a thing as the mind; and if there is no reason to suppose that there is such a thing as the mind, then there is no problem about how it may be related to the body.

2. One Case for Minds

So let us ask, then, “Why assume that there is such a thing as my mind?” This is different from asking “Why assume that there is such a thing as me?” And it is also different from asking “Why assume that I have various mental properties and potentialities, such as the ability to think or to think in such ways?” For the assumption that I have these mental properties and potentialities doesn’t imply that I have a mind which has them.

Why should one suppose that there is a non-material thing which is the mind?

Aristotle had argued that “that in the soul which is called mind (by mind I mean that whereby the soul thinks and judges)...cannot reasonably be regarded

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as blended with body.”¹ The mind, he said, must be “capable of receiving the form of an object” but without thereby becoming that object.² And this would be impossible if the mind were itself a material thing.

Aristotle’s reasoning was essentially this. (1) If you apprehend a thing --say, a dog,-- then you do it by means of something which bears a certain intimate relation to the form or nature of a dog. But (2) a material thing couldn’t bear the requisite relation to the form or nature of a dog unless the material thing were thereby to become itself a dog. On the other hand (3) a non-material thing could bear the requisite relation without thereby becoming a dog. Hence if you and I can apprehend dogs, and of course we can, then it is by means of a certain nonmaterial thing which is our mind.

What are we to say of this argument? The argument requires a more specific characterization of the relation in question --the relation that must be born to the form or nature of a dog if one is to be able to apprehend a dog. Until we have such an account, I think we must say that both premise (1) and premise (2) are problematic.³

Perhaps the most important consideration which may make us wonder whether there is a nonmaterial substance which is a mind is the nature of our immediate experience --our experience of what are sometimes called “sense-data” or “appearances.” Let us consider one twentieth century conception of appearances, for this was thought by many to demonstrate an irreducible dualism between mind and body. I am referring to the view set forth by A.O. Lovejoy in his book, The Revolt Against Dualism. (1930)

“No man doubts,” Lovejoy wrote, “that when he brings to mind the look of a dog he owned when a boy, there is something of a canine sort immediately present to and therefore compresent with his consciousness, but that it is quite certainly not that dog in the flesh” (p. 305). The thing that is there --the something of a canine sort that is immediately before the mind-- is not itself a physical object, Lovejoy said; it is a private, psychological object, conditioned by a series of physiological and psychological events, reaching back to the earlier dog which it now reveals.

If the man now looks at his desk, then, according to Lovejoy, there is another series of physiological and psychological events, this time involving the activity of sense organs, but resulting as before in a private, psychological object --a sensation, this time something of a desk sort, a “visible desk” which in certain respects serves to duplicate the real, external, physical desk which it makes known to us.

Both of these examples --the earlier dog and the external desk being presented by an inner visual desk-- provide us with the essentials of two philosophical theories, which Lovejoy had referred to as “epistemological dualism” and psychophysical dualism.” According to “epistemological dualism,” which is a thesis about our knowledge, we have direct or immediate knowledge only of certain private or subjective states; some external objects, past or present, are “duplicated” in these private or subjective states and it is in virtue of this duplication that we know what we do about the rest of the world. Our knowledge of external things and of past events involves a “cleavage” between the object of our knowing and the subjective vehicle which makes that object known. And according to “psychophysical dualism,” which is a thesis about reality, the world is constituted out of at least two fundamentally different kinds of stuff --the physical or material things that are studied by physics, and the psychical or mental things that are objects of our private or subjective states. When asserted in con-

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junction, as they were by Lovejoy, and in the seventeenth century by Descartes and Locke, these two forms of dualism imply that our knowledge of physical or material things is derived from our knowledge of the mental or psychical duplicates of these things.

Our present interest is in the second of these types of dualism --psycho-physical dualism, the view that there is a set of mental or psychical entities, which are appearances or sense-data and that these psychical entities are housed in a psychical place, known as "the mind."

3. The Sense-Datum Fallacy

Let us begin by considering those strange entities which are sense-data or appearances.

It was supposed, for example, that if a man were to walk around a table, while focusing upon the white tablecloth on the top, he could experience a great variety of sense-data or appearances. Some of these entities would be rectangular like the table-top itself; they would be the ones he would sense if he were to get his head directly above the table and then look down. Most of them, however, would be rhomboids of various sorts. If the lighting conditions were good and the man's eyes in proper order, most of the appearances would be white, like the table-cloth. But if the man were wearing rose-colored glasses, he might sense appearances that were pink, or if he were a victim of jaundice, he might sense appearances that were yellow. The other senses, as well as imagination, were thought to bring us into relation with still other types of appearances or sense-datum.

It was assumed that, if a physical thing appears white or rhomboidal or bitter to a man, then the man may be said to sense or to be aware of an appearance that is white, or an appearance that is rhomboidal, or an appearance that is bitter. It was assumed that if a dog presents a canine appearance, then the dog presents an appearance that is canine.⁴ And it was assumed, more generally, that whenever we have a true statement of the form "Such-and-such a physical thing appears, or looks, or seems so-and-so to Mr. Jones," we can derive a true statement of the form "Mr. Jones is aware of an appearance which is in fact so-and-so." But this assumption is quite obviously false.⁵

Consider the following reasoning, which would be quite sound if the assumption were true: "That dog looks vicious and more than 10 years old. Therefore he presents an appearance which is vicious and he presents an appearance which is more than 10 years old." It is absurd to suppose that an appearance, like a dog or a man, may be vicious or more than 10 years old. It is also absurd to suppose that an appearance may be a dog --i.e., something of a "canine sort." And, I think, it is equally absurd to suppose that an appearance, like a tablecloth, may be rectangular, or pink, or white.

We should compare the grammar of (a) "I sense a red appearance," (b) "I have a depressed feeling," and (c) "I have a green Chevrolet." The sense-datum philosopher interprets (a) as though it resembled (c) more than (b). But I suggest that it should be taken in such a way that it resembles (b) more than (c). Thus "I have a depressed feeling" should not be taken to say that I have a feeling which is itself depressed. It doesn't predicate being depressed of a feeling; it predicates feeling depressed of a person. And "I sense a canine appearance" doesn't predicate canninity of an appearance. It predicates being appeared to in-a-certain-way to me. I'm appeared to in a way which is optimal for the per-

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ception of dogs. Being appeared to is an undergoing --a nonrelational quality of the person.

And so, if what we have said is correct, then one of Lovejoy's arguments for psychophysical dualism --the dualism of mind and body-- is inconclusive. For Lovejoy had argued: (1) We see desks and stars and other objects by means of internal desks and stars which are not identical with the objects they enable us to perceive; but (2) no place among physical objects can be found for such internal desks and stars; therefore (3) the latter objects inhabit "the world of the mind" and not "the world of matter." But if premise (1) is false, this argument for psychophysical dualism is no longer available. Since there are no internal desks and stars, the materialists need not be asked to find a place for them. (But he must, of course, fit the fact of appearing into his scheme of things.)

But does this settle the matter? What if being sad and being appeared red to are undergoings --and not relations between persons and sense-data? Isn't there something special about these undergoings? After all, they seem to give the world a "qualitative dimension" it might otherwise not have.⁶ And isn't this qualitative dimension a mental or psychical aspect of the world?

Let us try to do justice to this. In particular, let us consider what has sometimes been called the "double aspect" theory. I think that those who spoke this way may have been on the right track.

4. The Daylight View of Matter

The property of being depressed, I have said, is not a property of a feeling and the property of being red is not a property of a sense-datum. But feeling depressed and being appeared to redly are properties of the person --they are nonrelational qualities of the person. So, too, for those other properties which present us with "a qualitative dimension of being." They are all "modifications" of the subject of experience.

But if the subject of experience thus exhibits a "qualitative dimension of being," then doesn't the subject have certain mental properties thereby? And doesn't this mean that the subject --the person-- is a mind?

It may be natural to say that such a qualitative dimension is "mental," and this statement is harmless enough if "mental" is taken to mean the same as "that which is known immediately." For being appeared to is mental in that respect: roughly speaking, it can't happen to you unless you know that it is happening to you. But this use of the adjective "mental" should not be taken to suggest the substantive "mind." There is no reason to suppose that only minds can have mental properties in this sense of the word "mental." It is possible that, in this sense of "mental," physical things may have properties that are "mental." Or to put the matter more carefully, it is possible that there are things having properties that are physical and also having properties that are mental.

These remarks will recall what has sometimes been called "the double aspect theory." The theory may be put by saying that persons have "inner" and "outer" aspects. The "inner" aspects are "mental"; that is to say, they are those subjective and intentional properties which are necessarily such that, if a person has them, then it is evident to the person that he has them. And the "outer" aspects are certain physical properties.

It is essential not to confuse this use of the expression "double aspect" with certain other uses that the expression has been given in recent philosophy.

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Thus we are using it for the view according to which certain individual things --namely persons-- have both "mental" and "physical" properties. But it has also been used for the view according to which there are certain events or activities having both mental and physical properties.⁷ The latter view is quite different from the one that I have suggested. (Obviously, it would be a category mistake of the most egregious kind to identify persons with events or activities.) The expression "double aspect" theory has also been used for the so-called identity-theory, according to which "mental events" are to be identified with "physical events."⁸ But "the double aspect theory," as I use this term, refers to a theory about the nature of persons and not to a theory about events.

The double aspect view has been clearly set forth by Gustav Theodor Fechner.⁹ Thus he held that we are "to ourselves" psychical and "to others" material. The important point of his doctrine, it seems to me, is the assertion that we are both mental and material. For the assertion implies that what is material can also be mental. A material thing can be "intrinsically psychical."

Perhaps we could accept this conclusion without holding, as Fechner did, that all matter is intrinsically psychical. But if some material things are intrinsically psychical, what about the others? What could their intrinsic properties be? Do we know of any intrinsic properties other than those we have been calling psychical? Or is it possible that only some individual things have intrinsic properties and hence that others have no intrinsic properties?

The word "intrinsic" has two senses here. One is suggested by the concept of "self-presentation"; Fechner says that certain things are "psychical to themselves," and this means that they have certain states that "present themselves." The other sense of "intrinsic" is that of nonrelational: an intrinsic property of a thing would be a property not entailing relations of the thing to other things.

Fechner called this the "daylight view" (die Tagesansicht) of matter and contrasted it with the "night view" of matter.¹⁰

The "double aspect theory" tells us this: There are certain things which have physical properties and therefore physical objects; some of these things also have certain mental or intentional properties; and persons --you and I-- are such things as these.

C.A. Strong put this last point clearly. He wrote:
I am to outer appearance physical but to inner perception psychical;
there is therefore no contradiction in a thing being at once physical,
that is, extended, composed of parts, productive of effects, and
psychical, that is of the nature of feeling.¹¹

Strong is not here saying that "my mind" is an aspect of a physical thing, much less that I am an aspect of a physical thing. What he says is that there is a certain physical thing which has inner and outer aspects and that that physical thing is identical with me.

5. "Which Physical Thing Am I?"

If we were to accept this theory, then we could ask: "Which physical thing am I?" I am afraid we could not provide a precise answer to this question.

If I am in fact a physical thing, then, it should be obvious, that physical thing is either this gross physical body now standing before you or it is some

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proper part of this gross physical body. There are, of course, many philosophical arguments professing to show that the person cannot be identical with his gross macroscopic physical body. Some of these arguments, I think, are sound --in particular those appealing to certain facts about persistence through time.

The body that persists through time --the one I have been carrying with me, so to speak-- is an ens successivum. That is to say, it is an entity which is made up of different things at different times. The set of things that made it up today is not identical with the set of things that made it up yesterday or with the set of things that made it up the day before. Now one could say that an ens successivum has different "stand-ins" at different times and that these stand-ins do duty for the successive entity at the different times. Thus the thing that does duty for my body today is other than the thing that did duty for it yesterday and other than the thing that will do duty for it tomorrow. But what of me?

Am I an entity such that different things do duty for me at different days? Is it one thing that does my feeling depressed for me today and another thing that did it yesterday and still another thing that will do it tomorrow? If I happen to be feeling sad, then, surely, there is no other thing that is doing my feeling sad for me. We must reject the view that persons are thus entia successiva.

Our reasoning can be summarized. Suppose (i) that I am now sad. Now (ii) if there is an ens successivum that bears my name and is now sad, then it is sad in virtue of the fact that one of its stand-ins is now sad. But (iii) I am not sad in virtue of the fact that some other thing is doing my feeling sad for me. Therefore (iv) I am not an ens successivum.

What would be an ens nonsuccessivum? If an individual thing were a non-successive entity, what would it be like? If an ens successivum is an individual thing that is made up of different things at different times, then an ens nonsuccessivum would be an individual thing that is not made up of different things at different times. This means that, at any moment of its existence, it has precisely the same parts it has at any other moment of its existence; at no time during which it exists, does it have a part it does not have at any other time during which it exists.

It is tempting to reason, in Leibnizian fashion: "There are entia successiva. Therefore there are entia nonsuccessiva." I believe this reasoning is sound. I would add, moreover, that every extended period of time, however short, is such that some ens nonsuccessivum exists during some part of that time. For I believe it is only by presupposing this thesis that we can make sense of the identity or persistence of any individual thing through time.

Might I not be, then, such an ens nonsuccessivum? Leibniz mentions --and rejects-- a theory which is similar to this. "The soul," he says, "does not dwell in certain atoms appropriated to itself, nor in a little incorruptible bone such as the Luz of the Rabbis."¹² Of course, the hypothesis I have suggested, if filled in by reference to such a material thing as the Luz bone, would not imply that "the soul" dwells there --if the soul is understood to be something other than the person, still another thing that the person "has." We would be saying rather that the person dwells there. And to say that he "dwells" there would be to say that the person is the Luz bone or some proper part of it.

If we accept this theory, then, of course, we part company with personalism. The doctrine that persons are physical things --even intactly persisting physical things-- would not have been taken seriously by Borden Parker Bowne and his followers. Yet, if we view the person in the way I have suggested, we

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may go on to affirm many of the other philosophical theses that the personalists felt to be important. Thus we could say, as Bishop Butler did, that "our gross organized bodies with which we perceive the objects of sense, and with which we act, are no part of ourselves... We see with our eyes in the same way we see with our glasses."¹³ The eyes are the organs of sight, not the subject of sight. We could say, as Butler and the personalists did, that the destruction of the gross physical body does not logically imply the destruction of the person. And we could accept the view that St. Thomas attributes to Plato: the person is "in a body in somewhat the same way as a sailor is in a ship."¹⁴

6. Some Objections Considered

To understand the view that is being proposed, let us formulate certain objections that readily come to mind and then attempt to reply to them. I will consider four such objections.

(1) "The hypothesis you are considering implies, then, that there is a kind of matter that is incorruptible and that the person is a material thing of that sort? But this is hardly adequate to the facts of physics."

The reply is that the theory does not imply that there is certain matter that is incorruptible. It implies rather that there are certain material things --in all probability, certain material particles or subparticles-- that are incorrupted and remain incorrupted as long as the person survives.

The theory would be, then, that I am literally identical with some proper part of this macroscopic body, some intact, nonsuccessive part that has been in this larger body all along. This part is hardly likely to be the Luz bone, of course; more likely, it would be something of a microscopic nature, and presumably something that is located within the brain.

(2) "Persons, being thinking things, must have a complex structure. But no microscopic entity that is known to physics has the equipment that is necessary for thinking. After all, you can't think unless you have a brain. And those little things don't have brains!"

The hypothesis being criticized is the hypothesis that I am such a microscopic entity. But note that I do have a brain. And therefore, according to the hypothesis in question, the microscopic entity has one, too --the same one that I have, the one that is inside my head. It is only a confusion to suppose that the microscopic entity --which may in fact be inside my brain-- has another brain which is in fact inside of it.¹⁵

The brain is the organ of consciousness, not the subject of consciousness --unless I am myself my brain.¹⁶ The nose, similarly, is the organ of smell and not the subject of smell-- unless I am myself my nose. But if I am one or the other --the brain or the nose-- then, I the subject, will have some organs that are spatially outside me.

The hypothesis in question, then, is that I am a certain proper part of my brain. This would imply that the subject of consciousness is a proper part of the organ of consciousness.

(3) "You say I'm identical with some microscopic particle or some sub-particle. But I am 6 feet tall and weigh 175 pounds. Therefore your theory would imply that there is a certain microscopic particle which is 6 feet tall and weighs 175 pounds. But this is absurd and therefore your theory is absurd."

The argument, of course, errs in taking too literally the premise expressed by saying "I am 6 feet tall and weigh 175 pounds." For what the premise actually tells us is that I have a body which is 6 feet tall and weighs 175 pounds.

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(4) “Do you mean to suggest seriously, then, that instead of weighing 175 pounds, you may weigh less than a milligram?” The answer has to be yes. We must be ready, therefore, to be ridiculed, for, in this case, even those who know better may be unable to ~~resist~~ the temptation. But those who do know better will realize that a person can truly say, in one sense, that he weighs 175 pounds, and in another sense, that he weighs less than a milligram. The formulation of the first statement would be more nearly accurate (I say “more nearly accurate,” not “more nearly correct”) if it read: “I have a body that weighs 175 pounds.”

Speaking in a loose and popular sense, I may attribute to myself certain properties of my gross macroscopic body. (And speaking to a filling station attendant I may attribute certain properties of my automobile to myself: “I’m down there on the corner of Jay Street without any gasoline.” The response needn’t be: “How, then, can you be standing here?” One might say that the property of being down there is one I have “borrowed” from my automobile.) But if I am a microscopic part of my gross body, then, strictly and philosophically, one cannot attribute to me the properties of it. The properties of weighing 175 pounds and being 6 feet tall are properties I “borrow” from my body. Strictly and philosophically, it has them and I do not.¹⁷

7. Conclusion

What are the possibilities, after all? There are persons. Therefore either the person is a physical thing or, as Lovejoy suggests, the person is a nonphysical thing. But does anything we know about persons justify us in assuming that persons are nonphysical individual things?

What if we suppose that the concept of an extended thing presupposes the concept of ultimate nonextended things which, somehow, make up the extended thing? Could we then identify the person with such an unextended thing? I believe that this hypothesis would contradict the assumption that persons are entia per se. For I could say that the unextended things (boundaries, lines, points, surfaces) that are ~~said to be~~ presupposed by extended things are ontological parasites and not instances of entia per se: they depend for their own properties upon the extended things which are said to presuppose them.¹⁸

What point would there be in the hypothesis that certain individual things have the property of being nonphysical? How could that help us in explaining anything?¹⁹

If I am a physical thing, then the most plausible hypothesis would seem to be that I am a proper part of this gross macroscopic body, even if there is no way of telling from the “outside” which proper part I happen to be.

I would suggest that, if this philosophic hypothesis seems implausible to you, you try to formulate one that is less implausible.

FOOTNOTES

¹ De Anima, 429a.

² Ibid.

³ "In the picture and the pictured there must be something identical in order that the one can be a picture of the other at all." L. Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 2.161.

⁴ A.O. Lovejoy, The Revolt Against Dualism (La Salle, Ill.: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1930), p. 305.

⁵ "The general rule which one may derive from these examples is that the propositions we ordinarily express by saying that a person A is perceiving a material thing M, which appears to him to have the quality x, may be expressed in the sense-datum terminology by saying that A is sensing a sense-datum s, which really has the quality of x, and which belongs to M." A.J. Ayer, The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1940), p.58.

⁶ This expression is used by Roy Wood Sellars, in Evolutionary Naturalism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), pp. 306–7.

⁷ For example, by R.J. Hirst, The Problems of Perception (London: Allen & Unwin, 1959), p. 189.

⁸ Compare Herbert Feigl, "Physicalism, Unity of Science and the Foundations of Psychology," in P.A. Schilpp, ed., The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap (La Salle, Ill., Open Court, 1963), pp. 227–267; see p. 254.

⁹ See in particular his Über die Physikalische und die Philosophische Atomlehre (1855); and The Little Book of Life After Death (English translation, 1912).

¹⁰ Die Tagesansicht Gegenueber der Nachtansicht, 1879.

¹¹ C.A. Strong, "Final Observations," Journal of Philosophy, XXXVIII (1941), pp. 233–243; the quotation is on page 237.

¹² New Essays Concerning Human Understanding, Book II, Ch. XXVIII (La Salle, Ill., Open Court Publishing Company, 1916). p. 242. Alfred Langley, editor of this edition of Leibniz, quotes an ancient discussion of the Luz bone: "The old Rabbis of blessed memory have not only seen this bone, but have found it actually so strong and hard that their hammer and rock flew in pieces before this bone was injured in the least." p. 242n.

¹³ Joseph Butler, The Analogy of Religion, Part I, Chapter 1 ("Of a Future Life"); See The Whole Works of Joseph Butler, LL.D. (London: Thomas Tegg, 1839), p. 7.

¹⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, On Spiritual Creatures: Article II (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1949), p. 35.

FOOTNOTES

15 I have illustrated this confusion in Richard Taylor's Action and Purpose (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 137.

16 Compare Franz Brentano, Religion Und Philosophie (Bern: A. Francke Verlag).

17 Strawson emphasizes that persons have both psychological and physical properties. But, if what I say is true, most of the physical properties that we ordinarily attribute to the person are "borrowed" in this sense from the person's body.

18 Compare Franz Brentano, Religion Und Philosophie (Bern: A. Francke, 1954), p. 224.

19 For a clear formulation of this point, see Richard Taylor, Metaphysics, Second Edition (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974), pp. 34–35.