

The  
Metaphysics  
of  
Consciousness

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# Sprigge's Ontology of Consciousness

LEEMON MCHENRY

## Abstract

Timothy Sprigge advanced an original synthesis of panpsychism and absolute idealism. He argued that consciousness is an irreducible, subjective reality that is only grasped by an introspective, phenomenological approach and constructed his ontology from what is revealed in the phenomenology. In defending the unique place of metaphysics in the pursuit of truth, he claimed that scientific investigation can never discover the essence of consciousness since it can only provide descriptions of structure and function in what we normally think of as physical existence. In this paper I present a critical evaluation of Sprigge's view focusing in particular on his conception of the nature of scientific inquiry vis-à-vis the ambitious project of his metaphysics. I argue that a naturalistic metaphysics provides a more adequate approach to the relation between science and metaphysics.

## 1. Introduction to Sprigge's Philosophy

Timothy Sprigge arrived at a solution to the problem of consciousness that became the basis for a metaphysical system in the grand style of Spinoza, Hegel, Bradley and Whitehead. He said he came to his view by a transformation of his philosophical outlook, one that enabled him to escape from a variety of absurdities into which he had been led by premises he did not think to question.<sup>1</sup> By the early 1970s he had been influenced by the most respected figures in British philosophy, Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore and A. J. Ayer, but it was the serious study of the American philosophers, George Santayana and William James, who provided a more intellectually satisfying answer to his questions, and after a long period of gestation, the impact of Spinoza and Bradley put the final touches to his system. This transformation is much in evidence from the publication of his first book *Facts, Words and Beliefs* (1970) to *Santayana* (1974) and then with the publication of his *magnum opus*, *The Vindication of Absolute Idealism* (1983). In short, Sprigge traded the relative security and respectability of mainstream analytical philosophy for what he

<sup>1</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, 'Consciousness' in *The Ontological Turn*, edited by M. S. Gram and E. D. Klemke (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 1974), 115. Also see 'Orientations', *Philosophical Writings* 2 (1996), 98–100.

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knew would be widely perceived as a retreat into soft-minded, muddle-headed metaphysics.

Sprigge began his career at the University of Cambridge where he worked with R. T. H. Redpath and then A. J. Ayer at University College, London. He became Lecturer and then Reader in philosophy at the School of English and American Studies at the University of Sussex, Regis Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at the University of Edinburgh and finally Emeritus Fellow retiring in Edinburgh and then Lewes, Sussex. It was in this final period that he produced three studies of the same large scale as the Victorian novels he used to read, *James and Bradley* (1993), *The God of Metaphysics* (2006) and *The Phenomenology of Thought* (unfinished). He always preferred the sustained chain of thought in book-length monographs to journal articles and claimed he seldom read the latter in spite of the fact that he himself contributed over a hundred articles and book chapters in the course of his career. In addition to his scholarly work on Spinoza, Bentham, James, Royce, Santayana, Bradley and Whitehead, and the construction of his own original system of metaphysics he called 'panpsychistic absolute idealism', Sprigge also produced important work in utilitarian ethics and was a leading figure in the animal rights movement in Britain.

In this paper I will examine the main features and motivating factors in Sprigge's view of consciousness, explain some of the metaphysics he constructed from his initial discovery and then offer a critical evaluation of the results. His philosophy is filled with creative connections between the thinkers he absorbed, unique insights into how these positions form a consistent whole and innovative arguments for the views advanced, but as with any system of philosophy, there are problems that need to be clearly exposed and debated.<sup>2</sup> Enthusiasm is no homage to genius.

## 2. The Irreducibility of Consciousness

W. V. Quine once said of philosophical curiosities about which he was in no position to cope: 'Closer to home, there are the mysteries of the mechanism of memory; also of consciousness – I am even at a loss for a satisfactory statement of what consciousness is, though nothing is

<sup>2</sup> For a critical evaluation of Sprigge's thought, see P. Basile and L. McHenry (eds), *Consciousness, Reality and Value: Essays in Honour of T. L. S. Sprigge* (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2007).

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more familiar'.<sup>3</sup> Regarding nothing more familiar, Sprigge claimed that he and 'Thomas Nagel offered, independently of each other, a definition of consciousness which amounts to saying that an individual is conscious at a certain time if there is an answer to the question what it was like being him, her, or it, at that time'.<sup>4</sup> In fact he had published this view three years before<sup>5</sup> Nagel's highly influential article, 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?'.<sup>6</sup> He said that this essentially non-physical view of consciousness had been obvious to him since he had been engaged in serious philosophy and believed it long before he first used it in print.<sup>7</sup> As Sprigge put it in a slightly more refined manner: 'An individual's state of consciousness at any moment is that concerning the character of which one is wondering if one asks oneself what it is like to be them just then'.<sup>8</sup> This is obviously not an epistemological matter of our attempt to know what it is like to be some individual or creature, nor is an issue of how much of one's self-consciousness one currently grasps, but rather an ontological matter concerning the reality of subjective experience. In what seems like a direct reply to Quine, Sprigge claimed that 'Whenever the question 'What is consciousness' is asked, as though consciousness were something very mysterious, one can be sure that the treatment of the subject is likely to be unsatisfactory. For consciousness is the most familiar of realities and its nature should be easier to grasp than is the nature of anything else'.<sup>9</sup> Should there be a lack of clarity in this formulation, Sprigge claimed one gets nearer to such a statement of the essence of consciousness as that in which being is one with its own non-discursive

<sup>3</sup> W. V. Quine, *Quine in Dialogue*, edited by D. Føllesdal and D. Quine (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 28.

<sup>4</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, 'The Importance of Subjectivity: An Inaugural Lecture', *Inquiry* 25 (1982), 146.

<sup>5</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, 'Final Causes', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 71 (1971), 166–8.

<sup>6</sup> T. Nagel, 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?', *Philosophical Review* 83 (1974), 435–50. See also Nagel's acknowledgement to Sprigge in *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 15n. Nagel also acknowledges in the same note that B. A. Farrell had asked in 1950 what it would be like to be a bat but dismissed the difficulty for materialism.

<sup>7</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, 'Consciousness', *Synthese* 98 (1994), 79.

<sup>8</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, 'Is Consciousness Mysterious?', *Anthropology & Philosophy* 3:2 (1999), 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

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knowing of itself.<sup>10</sup> This is sometimes called ‘phenomenological consciousness’.<sup>11</sup> It is the view that what makes a state phenomenally conscious is that there is something ‘it is like’ to be in that state. For both Sprigge and Nagel, this is to assert that consciousness has an essentially inner, subjective nature that is not specifiable in any physical terms. Consciousness is available to us simply because we are conscious. We know it as something that has its own appreciative sense of itself rather than by description.

The inner subjectivity of what it is like to be a person and ‘the fact that he is conscious does not follow logically – however firmly it follows inferentially – from any fact about him of a physical kind, whether it concern the patterns of his behaviour, the occurrence of various computer type processes within his brain, or whatever’.<sup>12</sup> The notion was reinforced in *The Phenomenology of Thought* when Sprigge recounted a point made by John Wisdom to the effect that the concept of mind has little or nothing to do with the concept of the brain.<sup>13</sup> After the death of some eminent thinker, let us say Albert Einstein, his brain is examined. But to everyone’s amazement all that there is inside his head is hay! The very bases of science seem destroyed, but no one decides that Einstein never had any thoughts. We all believe that consciousness, in the normal case, at least, depends on the brain, however, our conception of the brain does not imply anything about consciousness and vice versa. Was the concept of consciousness enriched by the discovery of nerve-cells seen in brain slices or the discovery of the electrochemical activity of the neurotransmitters in the same way as our concept of combustion was enriched by the discovery of oxygen? Sprigge argued that it did not. While there is a causal connection between the grey and white gooey stuff normally found in a person’s skull and consciousness, there is no logically necessary relation between the two, and the concept of consciousness remains relatively untouched by any advances in the neurosciences.

Sprigge’s discovery about consciousness might very well seem obvious to us in retrospect, and this I suggest is because of the

<sup>10</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, ‘The Importance of Subjectivity’, *op. cit.*, 146–7. Sprigge credits F. H. Bradley with articulating this view. See also his ‘Knowledge of Subjectivity’, *Theoria to Theory* 14 (1981), 320.

<sup>11</sup> N. Block, ‘On a Confusion about a Function of Consciousness’, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 18 (1995), 227.

<sup>12</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, ‘Consciousness’, *op. cit.*, 79.

<sup>13</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, *The Phenomenology of Thought*, edited by L. McHenry (unpublished manuscript, Sprigge Archives, Edinburgh University Library), Part 2, Chapter 1, 17.

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influence that Nagel's paper has had over thirty years of discussion, but in the late 1960s when Sprigge was making his case, he said: 'a striking feature of contemporary English philosophy is the insistence that philosophers since Descartes have been led astray by incoherent notions of a realm of private experience...'.<sup>14</sup> Such was the stranglehold of logical positivism and behaviourism at the time. The dominant views of mind shaped by Ryle and Wittgenstein amounted to a denial of consciousness in the sense in which its existence is taken as a basic fact of the reality of our subjective experience.<sup>15</sup> But there is, Sprigge argued, nothing incoherent or absurd about an intrinsic quality exemplifiable by private experience. In fact, following Descartes on this one point, he agrees our knowledge of our own consciousness is basic and certain. At each moment there is a quite definite character, however easy or difficult it is to identify this character about the private aspects of one's stream of consciousness. So, there is something it is like to be a person, a cat, and indeed probably almost all of the creatures in the animal kingdom. The main difference between human consciousness and other sentient creatures is that our consciousness is largely though not exclusively preoccupied with linguistic discourse or various types of symbolic representations of our experience. But it is quite clear that there is a definite character of the experience of other creatures even if at some very low level it is merely one of a dull throb of existence, a faint awareness or a vague sense of passage. Sprigge did not think that there was something it is like to be a mere aggregate like a cloud or a mountain even though in his view there is something it is like to be one of the ultimate constituents of all things and indeed the whole universe itself which he conceived of as one single substance in the fashion of Spinoza and Bradley.

The view of experience advanced by Sprigge begins with an approach to the study of consciousness that was pioneered by William James and Edmund Husserl.<sup>16</sup> He thought that the phenomenological approach was the only way to understand consciousness and that no one has come closer to illuminating its nature than James. What it is like to be a conscious human being is best grasped from within and described in watery metaphors of drops of

<sup>14</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, 'The Privacy of Experience', *Mind* 78 (1969), 512.

<sup>15</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, 'Consciousness', *op. cit.*, 80.

<sup>16</sup> W. James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vols 1 & 2 (London: Macmillan and Co, 1901); E. Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, translated by J. S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964).

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experience flowing together in a stream of mental discourse, continually fading into the past and advancing into the future. The lesson from James is 'a habit of directing one's attention at a certain reality, one's own total experience, and bearing the character of what one then notes vividly in mind whenever theorizing about mind or related matters'.<sup>17</sup> The crucial method here involves introspection, empathy, and insight into the necessities present in what this approach reveals. As James says: 'That unsharable feeling which each one of us has ... may be disparaged for its egoism, may be sneered at as unscientific, but it is the one thing that fills up the measure of our concrete actuality, and any would-be existent that should lack such a feeling, or its analogue, would be a piece of reality only half made up'.<sup>18</sup>

One becomes especially aware of James' accomplishment by seeing how badly philosophy is done in complete neglect of this approach, as for instance one finds in the sort of identity theory of mind and brain in which consciousness is treated as a theoretical entity invoked to explain certain sorts of behaviour. All the wrong turns in contemporary philosophy of mind that have obscured our path to the essence of consciousness have resulted from preoccupations with abstractions rather than with absorption in the lived character of conscious experience. This includes what Daniel Dennett has referred to as a 'tormented snarl of increasingly convoluted and bizarre thought experiments ... and a bounty of other sidetrackers and time-wasters',<sup>19</sup> though obviously Dennett and Sprigge are odd bedfellows in this complaint. For Sprigge the phenomenological study of consciousness is the foundation of other inquiries. Thus unlike Nagel's limited point, Sprigge developed this crucial insight about the essence of consciousness in a systematic manner both for his metaphysics and ethics. Conscious states, or more generally sentient states, with their subjective, first-person ontology are the true reality.

So, for Sprigge, this is the answer to the not-so-mysterious question 'what is consciousness?' As for the more difficult question of how consciousness is related to the brain, he argued that the first thing to know in charting the relation is to know what each term is,

<sup>17</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, 'The Distinctiveness of American Philosophy' in *Two Centuries of Philosophy in America*, edited by Peter Caws (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 205.

<sup>18</sup> W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 499.

<sup>19</sup> D. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 369.



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and that he had illuminated the nature of the former in his phenomenological consciousness. Given that the relation of mind and brain is one of identity, and given further that Sprigge has been successful in capturing the essence of consciousness as subjective inwardness, then for him the substance of brain activity must consist of particulars that have the same character.<sup>20</sup> From this point of departure, he constructed a panpsychist ontology in which consciousness or sentience is omnipresent in the universe.

### 3. The Limits of Scientific Investigation

The problem of consciousness, as Sprigge saw it, is that it refuses to cooperate with the prevailing materialistic paradigm; it is the stubborn irreducibility of consciousness or the failure to explain how neurophysiological processes of the brain have any connection at all to that nothing more familiar phenomena of consciousness that remains the major stumbling block. It is, he said, the problem that has 'bedeviled philosophy'.<sup>21</sup> More recent writers have identified this as the 'hard problem', one that might very well be intractable because human beings simply don't have the intelligence or cognitive tools designed for understanding consciousness in the same way dogs don't have enough wattage in the bulb to do mathematics.<sup>22</sup> At least here we seem to know enough to know what we can't know, but Sprigge disagreed. Somehow this attitude of the 'new mysterians' such as Nagel and McGinn has escaped notice that it is defeatist. Why aren't all the unending philosophical problems just like the hard problem of consciousness equally intractable or hopeless? In Sprigge's idealist reversal of the hard problem, it is not consciousness that we fail to understand; rather in a move reminiscent of Berkeley, it is the very concept of physical matter that we do not understand. So, any notion that the nature or essence of consciousness is something that awaits the results of neurophysiological research to be understood is fundamentally misguided.

Sprigge argued that our knowledge of our own states of consciousness which are irreducibly subjective and private will be threatening

<sup>20</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, 'Is Consciousness Mysterious?', *op. cit.*, 19.

<sup>21</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, *The Phenomenology of Thought*, *op. cit.*, Part 1, Chapter 1.

<sup>22</sup> C. McGinn, *The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 47.

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only to those absorbed in current physicalistic dogma because such states present them with the possibility of failure to give a complete account of knowledge about the world. Some physicalists have even tried to convince themselves that they are not, in fact, conscious. The very title of Sprigge's major work, *The Vindication of Absolute Idealism*, was a challenge to such philosophers for he thought that physicalism had become such a dogma that it had shut down discussion of other plausible options even if they were thought to be buried once and for all by the critiques of Russell, Moore and Ayer. The fact that we can know things about our own states that others cannot know is knowledge of truth about the world that even the most complete description of how things are in reality would miss out. This is the essence of the argument from phenomenological consciousness. Given all the physical information about a person, a bat or whatever, we still would not know what it was like to be that person or creature. Something would be left out, but it is not something physical, hence physicalism, the thesis that all reality must be physical reality, must be false.

Scientific investigation can no more reveal the essence of consciousness than the congenitally deaf can hear music or the congenitally blind can see colours. Our knowledge of the physical world remains nothing but structure and function no matter how far down or up we go with our microscopes and telescopes. Recent developments in neuroimaging reveal much fascinating information about the brain and might possibly aid in our understanding of affective disorders, but still reveal nothing about what it feels like to suffer from depression. Computer programmes might tell us much about cognitive functioning, but we still remain in the dark about how the brain thinks or what it is like to be a thinking thing. Sprigge thus armed with his distinction between the World of Description and the World of Acquaintance argued that scientific investigation is limited to investigations of appearances rather than the underlying reality of noumenal existence.<sup>23</sup> Here his view has been echoed in a powerful way by David Chalmers' argument against reductive explanation. As Chalmers puts it, '...the explanation of consciousness is not just a matter of explaining structure and function. Once we have explained all the physical structure in the vicinity of the brain, and we have explained how all the various brain functions are

<sup>23</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, 'The World of Description and the World of Acquaintance' in *Beyond Conflict and Reduction: Between Philosophy, Science and Religion*, edited by W. Desmond, J. Steffen and K. Decoster (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), 23.

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performed, there is a further sort of explanandum: consciousness itself'.<sup>24</sup> Other philosophers such as Russell have also made this point about the limits of scientific investigation and the non-inferential nature of our knowledge of the mental. 'Physics', he said, 'is mathematical not because we know so much about the physical world but because we know so little; it is only its mathematical properties that we can discover. For the rest, our knowledge is negative...'.<sup>25</sup> But Sprigge's view is not simply that science fails to get at the inner essence of what is perceived as physical reality. It is rather that science and metaphysics have two completely different aims. His view in this respect parallels Bradley who espoused a strong distinction between appearance and reality. Empirical science is confined to the former while metaphysics attempts to uncover the true or absolute nature of the latter. In other words, science is primarily concerned with abstractions whereas metaphysics is focused on revealing the nature of concrete reality.<sup>26</sup> What Sprigge meant by 'metaphysics' however is clearly not just any metaphysics but rather the sort that begins with affirming the subjective reality of consciousness. Accordingly, he argued that the World of Acquaintance is more real than the World of Description. Everything that exists must have its own appreciative sense of its own being and of its relation to others. What actually presents itself to us as the physical world is really a system of just such self-and-other-appreciating individuals whose togetherness forms one eternal cosmic consciousness.<sup>27</sup>

### 4. The Argument for Panpsychism

In his *Vindication of Absolute Idealism*, Sprigge argued that every conception of a physical reality is on deeper reflection really a phenomenological conception of reality, and corresponding to every phenomenal appearance there must be a noumenal backing that is

<sup>24</sup> D. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 107.

<sup>25</sup> B. Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1992), 125. Also see *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1948), 240.

<sup>26</sup> F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893), 250–51 and T.L.S. Sprigge, *The God of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 476–8.

<sup>27</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, *The Vindication of Absolute Idealism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), Chapter 6 and *The God of Metaphysics*, *op. cit.*, 486–90.

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essentially consciousness.<sup>28</sup> Whereas Kant had claimed that the noumenon or the thing-in-itself is essentially unknowable since it lies outside the categories of the understanding and sensible intuition,<sup>29</sup> Sprigge developed the idea that whatever we understand by physical reality, it must have a noumenal backing or being that is essentially psychical in character. The sort of knowledge one has in knowing oneself as a centre of consciousness reveals the inherent nature of one concrete reality or one such noumenon behind the phenomenon.<sup>30</sup> Once one has a sense of what Sprigge meant by the noumenal reality of human consciousness, it is then relatively easy to understand how he extended this concept to other beings as the noumena behind the phenomena perceived as physical reality. This he articulated as an ontology of distinct units, momentary centres of experience, that make up nature but are also related in such a way as to compose wholes which may or may not be sentient or conscious themselves.

Sprigge argued first in a Berkeleyan fashion that there is no such thing as an unexperienced physical reality because none of us, he claimed, can conceive of a world divested of consciousness. As he said: 'Whenever we seriously try to bring into clear consciousness the nature of any situation in the existence of which we believe, we imagine it either as a form or a content of some consciousness, actual or possible.'<sup>31</sup> But nature does not exist only as an object for human consciousness or as a system of possible sensations on our part. This leaves him with the view that for something to exist it must be experience.

Put in its simplest form, the crucial argument for this position is based on two premises:

1. That the physical world, or at least something which is the reality which we conceive as the physical world, exists independently of the consciousness of it by humans and animals, and that it existed before there were any humans or animals.
2. That nothing can exist except sentient experience.

From which it follows that:

3. The physical world is composed of sentient experience.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, *The Vindication of Absolute Idealism*, *op. cit.*, 39.

<sup>29</sup> I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by N. Kemp Smith, (London: Macmillan & Co., 1963), A 236/B 295–A 260/B 315.

<sup>30</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, *The Vindication of Absolute Idealism*, *op. cit.*, 40–1, 105–10.

<sup>31</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, 'Are There Intrinsic Values in Nature?', *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 4 (1987), 25.

<sup>32</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, *The God of Metaphysics*, *op. cit.*, 484.

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The first premise distinguishes Sprigge's view from Berkeley's subjective idealism and commits him to a form of realism. For Berkeley there are two sorts of things: minds (divine and human) and ideas whereas for Sprigge there are innumerable streams of experience existing independently of human and animal consciousness. But as is implied in the second premise what is external to us is nothing but sentient experience. This is a bold claim since it appears he neglects the unlikelihood of any trace of consciousness or sentience in the explosive beginning of the universe in the Big Bang or the magma oozing from a volcano. There is also the question about whether consciousness or sentient experience needs a brain. Panpsychism has thus been frequently characterized as lovely and tempting but less than sober.<sup>33</sup> Yet according to Sprigge it provides the best explanation for the answer to the question of the noumenal backing of phenomena and a solution to the mind-body problem. What is required in understanding the second premise is an obvious extension of the term 'experience' such that it is not understood in terms of human perception. Royce seems to come closest to making sense of this idea with his notion of apperceptive time spans.<sup>34</sup> What we perceive as inorganic nature is really a nature alive to various degrees. Another is Whitehead's concept of causal efficacy as the basic mode of perception in nature. As he argued:

A jellyfish advances and withdraws, and in so doing, exhibits some perception of causal relationships with the world beyond itself; a plant grows downwards to the damp earth, and upward towards the light. There is thus some direct reason for attributing dim, slow feelings of causal nexus, although we have no reason for any ascription of the definite percepts in the mode of presentational immediacy....

As we pass to the inorganic world, causation never for a moment seems to lose its grip. What is lost is originativeness, and any evidence of immediate absorption in the present.<sup>35</sup>

What these philosophers sought to achieve was a radical revision of classical British empiricism, one that naturalized mind and mentalized nature. Sprigge followed very closely these views when he formulated his ontology of momentary centres of experience.

<sup>33</sup> See C. McGinn, 'Hard Questions' in *Consciousness and its Place in Nature*, edited by A. Freeman (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2006), 93.

<sup>34</sup> J. Royce, *The World and the Individual*, second series (New York: Dover, 1959), 226–7.

<sup>35</sup> A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, *op. cit.*, 249.

## 5. Recent Developments

Sprigge divided philosophical positions into two classes: (1) *incredible* because they contradict basic premises regarded as personal certainties by those who hold them, and (2) *serious options* because they supply answers to questions, the holding of which does not require an extraordinary leap of imagination.<sup>36</sup> In his own time Sprigge found himself among philosophers who regarded his position as incredible for his holding the view that consciousness is the basic certainty, and more specifically the existence of consciousness as something not explicable in physical terms. We have come a long way in that the number of philosophers who no longer regard his views as incredible has increased significantly. Given the stalemate in explaining consciousness in contemporary philosophy of mind, even panpsychism has been re-introduced into mainstream by the likes of David Chalmers, Galen Strawson, David Skrbina, and William Seager.<sup>37</sup> Galen Strawson has breathed new life into panpsychism with his argument that physicalism, rightly understood, entails panpsychism. He begins like Sprigge with a realism about experience, consciousness or what-it-is-likeness that commits him to the idea that the experiential is physical and thereby challenges Descartes' notion of the unextended mind.<sup>38</sup> David Chalmers has flirted with the notion by suggesting that any physical process can be treated as an information-processing system which is realized both physically and phenomenally.<sup>39</sup> There is even some question here as to whether Andy Clark's extended cognition thesis leads to extended consciousness.<sup>40</sup> For Sprigge the skull and skin are no boundary since our experience is just a fragment, a stereoscopic perspective of a field, which must be conceived as sentience lying behind the extended four-dimensional space-time. When physicalist philosophy

<sup>36</sup> T. L. S. Sprigge, 'Consciousness', *op. cit.*, 73.

<sup>37</sup> See for example, D. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, *op. cit.*, 276–310; G. Strawson, 'Realistic Monism: Why Physicalism entails Panpsychism' in A. Freeman (ed.), *Consciousness and its Place in Nature*, *op. cit.*, 3–31; D. Skrbina (ed.), *Mind that Abides: Panpsychism in the New Millennium* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2009); W. Seager, 'Consciousness, Information, and Panpsychism', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 2:3 (1995), 272–88.

<sup>38</sup> G. Strawson, 'Realistic Monism', *op. cit.*, 3–31.

<sup>39</sup> D. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, *op. cit.*, 288–99.

<sup>40</sup> This is a view that was considered but rejected in A. Clark and D. Chalmers, 'The Extended Mind', *Analysis* 58 (1998), 7–19, yet the authors agree the extended mind implies an extended self.

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of mind begins to make overtures to panpsychism we know we have entered a new period of discourse. Even if its new adherents embrace the doctrine with a certain amount of reluctance and caution, it seems they no longer feel they need to disguise their views when appearing among their orthodox analytical colleagues. Sprigge never needed to do so; he was unabashed in his commitment to panpsychism.

### 6. Critical Evaluation

Beginning with the irreducibility thesis and ending with a full-blown panpsychistic absolute idealism has a certain respectable coherence and explanatory power. It solves certain problems and avoids others, but then creates obvious problems of its own, many of which are generic to idealism. While I think Sprigge's argument about phenomenological consciousness is as good as one finds in philosophy of mind, I have always found his panpsychism fascinating yet fraught with difficulties. Aside from presenting a strong case against physicalism, it is less clear that he provided convincing justification for the second premise of his argument for panpsychism, *i.e.* that nothing can exist except sentient experience. That is, granted the Berkeleyan argument that to be is to be perceived – *esse est percipi* – or that objects of experience exist only in perceivers, how do we then get all objects of nature are themselves subjects of experience? Second, in spite of the attempts by Royce, Whitehead and Sprigge, it is very hard to understand how the use of the terms 'experience', 'sentience' and 'consciousness' can be meaningfully applied to inanimate nature. Our powers of imagination or empathy fade once we are outside of the realm of animal sentience. And finally, there are still far too many explanatory gaps to understand the emergence of the high grade streams of consciousness from the low grade momentary centres of experience even though the theory has the overall advantage of providing a smooth and continuous interpretation of nature in term of one ontological type. Sprigge thought we needed a panpsychist philosophy of science, but admitted he was not prepared to do the job. But in what follows I have a broader concern about his view of the relation, or lack of relation, between science and metaphysics.

Regarding Sprigge's view of the aims of science, I suspect many scientists would find it unsatisfactory to describe their objectives as restricted to mere appearances, and that a special group of thinkers called metaphysicians have a privileged access to reality that reveals the truth about the world. Aside from remnants of positivism



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surviving in current science it is hard to see how science is confined to this severely limited role. Scientific theories often pass beyond phenomena altogether to postulate an unseen world whose detailed workings explain and unite diverse phenomenal effects. The quest for a Theory of Everything in theoretical physics incorporating such speculative theories as quantum ontologies, quantum theories of gravity, superstring theory and the multiverse hypothesis are prime examples. Theories of speculative biology seek explanations of the origin of life beyond mere structure and function. So, while it may seem useful to make a sharp distinction between appearance and reality, it is implausible that science and metaphysics operate in two realms, serve different purposes or have different functions.

As opposed to overly optimistic claims of pure metaphysicians a more defensible role for the discipline has been articulated by naturalized metaphysicians who see such theorising as merely the general end of theory.<sup>41</sup> Metaphysics is therefore continuous with science and risks its dignity in the same way. As Quine made the point: '[Naturalism] sees natural science as an inquiry into reality, fallible and corrigible but not answerable to any supra-scientific tribunal, and not in need of any justification beyond observation and the hypothetico-deductive method'.<sup>42</sup> Naturalized metaphysics rejects the idea of some other way to truth independent of science, but this is not necessarily an affirmation of physicalism, since the specific ontology will be an open question. It might be panpsychist if, for example, the philosopher or scientist sees it as the best, tentative solution to the problem of emergence or the mind-body problem. It might be monistic in the fashion of Einstein, pluralistic as in the case of Heisenberg, an Aristotelian substance ontology or a Whiteheadian event ontology. Where it seems to me, however, that Sprigge was right is in thinking that scientific investigation has nothing to contribute to the understanding of the intrinsic nature

<sup>41</sup> This distinction appears in my *Whitehead and Bradley: A Comparative Analysis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 16–9. Pure metaphysicians would include Bradley and Sprigge who argue for a sharp separation of science and metaphysics whereas naturalized metaphysicians would include Peirce, Whitehead and Quine who see metaphysics and science as necessary to rounding out our general theory of the world.

<sup>42</sup> W. V. Quine, *Theories and Things* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981), 72. Quine espoused a thoroughgoing physicalism and behaviourism in line with his naturalism. Private, subjective phenomena play no role in his ontology, which perhaps explains why he regarded consciousness as a mystery.



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of conscious experience, but this has more to do with the limits of empirical investigation and the recognition of the role of introspective psychology than with metaphysics *per se*. Sprigge himself much admired scientific metaphysics but was also concerned to demonstrate that metaphysics could arrive at truth independent of science. It is this assertion that I find most problematic in his system. That is, it seems to me one claim that a phenomenological approach best grasps the nature of consciousness and quite another that metaphysical speculations from this point of departure reveal truth about the universe. Once experience has been interpreted in terms of ontological categories, one has left the relatively safe haven of phenomenology and entered the realm of metaphysical speculation. It is this leap between the what-it-is-likeness of consciousness to a panpsychist ontology that begins the process of theorising, one in which I find science and metaphysics to be engaged in the same quest. Sprigge equated a phenomenological description or state with a metaphysical truth without recognising the heavy dose of ontologising involved in the interpretation of experience. For example, this becomes clear in his very use of the concept of the noumenon to describe the subjectivity of experience which then becomes the basis for the ontological units of his system, the momentary centres of experience. Not that I deny him the ontological interpretation of experience or the leap from the phenomenological to the ontological, but however plausible or implausible it is, it needs to be recognized as such.

The view of science as mere abstractions may strike us as an obvious defect of idealism that warranted a strong revival of materialistic philosophy of mind. It was after all the failure of idealism to serve as an adequate foundation for the sciences that led to its demise at the beginning of the twentieth century, but Sprigge need not propound the strong separation of metaphysics and science to make his case for how much science is limited to revealing the essence of consciousness.

### 7. Conclusion

To engage in the project of systematic metaphysics at the time in which Sprigge did was a bold endeavour and one that ran so much against the grain of respectable philosophy that he faced isolation and ridicule. He demonstrated, however, through the sheer reasonableness of his arguments the strength of his view of consciousness which raised serious doubts about the complete success of the physicalist programme. Explaining consciousness is no mystery as long as one begins with one's own phenomenology rather than the theoretical

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constructs of physicalism, functionalism or behaviourism. Commitment to phenomenological consciousness, however, does not, in my view, privilege metaphysics against science as the only discipline with access to truth.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> I have profited from discussions with Frank McGuinness, Pauline Phemister and Pierfrancesco Basile on earlier drafts of this paper.

# The Road to Substance Dualism

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## Abstract

The common materialist view that a functional account of intentionality will eventually be produced is rejected, as is the notion that intentional states are multiply realisable. It is argued also that, contrary to what many materialists have held, the causation of behaviour by intentional states rules out the possibility of a complete explanation of human behaviour in physical terms, and that this points to substance dualism. Kant's criticism of the Cartesian self as a substance, endorsed by P. F. Strawson, rests on a misinterpretation of Descartes. The so-called 'causal pairing problem', which Kim sees to be the crucial objection to substance dualism, is examined, and Kim's arguments are rejected.

## 1. Why a Functional Account of Intentionality is not Possible

I don't see principled objections to a functional account of intentionality. Let me say here that it seems to me inconceivable that a possible world exists that is an exact physical duplicate of this world but lacking wholly in intentionality.<sup>1</sup>

This claim of Kim's expresses a view which is widely held. The standard materialist view seems to be that the real problem for the physicalist (the 'hard' problem) is presented by 'qualia' rather than by intentionality itself. For reasons I shall explain, I find this position quite incredible. But first, let us note that Kim's supporting consideration expressed in the second sentence in fact offers no support for a physicalist conception of intentionality at all. It is surely obvious that an interactionist dualist will accept that there cannot be a duplicate world lacking intentionality, since to remove the intentional causes of behaviour will result in a world which cannot be a duplicate of this one. Kim offers another supporting consideration for his view, which runs as follows:

Consider a population of creatures ... that are functionally and behaviourally indistinguishable from us ... If all this is the

<sup>1</sup> J. Kim, *Mind in a Physical World* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1998), 101.

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case, it would be incoherent to withhold states like belief, desire, knowledge, action and intention from these creatures.<sup>2</sup>

This equally offers no support for a physicalist position, since, once again, it is something with which any interactionist dualist can readily agree. If these creatures really are behaviourally indistinguishable from us, we would ascribe to them much the same sort of inner life as we have ourselves, and which we ascribe to other people on the basis of their behaviour. It is difficult to understand how Kim could have supposed that either of these points offers support for physicalism.

Now let us look at Kim's claim that there are no principled objections to a functional construal of intentionality. The obvious objection to Kim's claim is that, while it is indeed possible to give what might look like a functional construal of intentional states in terms of their typical causal inputs and outputs, those inputs and outputs themselves are irreducibly mental. Indignation, to take one example, might be defined as that state which is brought about by the perception of a wrong or an insult, and leads in turn to the desire to protest. And gratitude might be defined as that state which is brought about by the recognition that one is the recipient of something which one values and which causes in its turn the desire to express one's thanks. And so on. But, of course, these states are irreducibly mental, or so I would claim.

Kim, by contrast, while allowing that no one has yet produced full functional definitions of believing, desiring and intending, and that it is 'perhaps unlikely that we will have such definitions any time soon',<sup>3</sup> sees no problem in the idea that such definitions will eventually be produced. We surely need to ask what such definitions could possibly look like, even in their most abstract form. One obvious obstacle that stands in the way of the possibility of such definitions is that an intentional state such as that of the experience of gratitude or indignation must involve the here-and-now or categorical direction of consciousness to its object: my thought is here and now directed to the benefit I have received and to a way of conveying to the benefactor how much I appreciate this benefit, or to the wrong I have suffered and to the need to make this clear. Such states are necessarily events in consciousness and necessarily involve the categorical, non-dispositional, directedness of consciousness to an object of thought. It is

<sup>2</sup> J. Kim, *Physicalism, or Something Near Enough* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 165.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

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utterly unclear how this essential property of intentional states could be realised in an assembly of physical elements; at any rate, I know of no explanation of how this is possible. And it is impossible to tell from Kim's discussion whether, in claiming that full functional definitions of states such as believing and desiring will eventually be found, he supposes that such definitions will show that these intentional states do not, after all, involve occurrent states of consciousness which are here-and-now directed to their objects, or, on the other hand, that this essential property of non-dispositional directedness to an object can be accommodated within the complete physicalist-functionalist story. The former option is, in my view, clearly false, and the second a bewildering claim.

### 2. Why Intentional Patterns are not in the Physical World

Dennett has argued for a position with which Kim may be in agreement, and examining it will bring the issue more into focus. In a departure from his earlier instrumentalist position, Dennett claims that there is a sense in which we can accept that intentional concepts pick out real patterns in the world. These patterns, however, are not visual patterns, but, one might say, *intellectual* patterns. To adapt one of his examples slightly, a range of chess games all played to a conclusion will reveal to the novice a completely haphazard collection of physical events. Eventually, however, one might expect that a certain pattern will begin to become evident: something about the way a selection of pieces of one colour is grouped around a particular piece of the other colour – checkmate. Similarly, the Martian peering through a telescope at the Superbowl game might eventually begin to understand what is going on, particularly if he adopts 'the intentional stance'. And in an earlier paper Dennett considers the Martian (again) looking at a stockbroker placing an order for 500 shares in General Motors, and goes on:

But if the Martians do not see that indefinitely many *different* patterns of finger motions and vocal chord vibrations – even the motions of indefinitely many different individuals – could have been substituted for the actual particulars without perturbing the subsequent operation of the market, then they have failed to see a real pattern in the world they are observing.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> D. Dennett, 'True Believers' in *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1987), 26.

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Adopting the intentional stance in these cases, Dennett tells us, hugely increases one's predictive power, and enables one to discern the relevant patterns far more easily. These patterns, at any rate, are real, though perceiving them is not a matter of our being confronted with some easily perceptible visual pattern, but of discerning a high-grade 'intellectual' pattern, a pattern which may be difficult to detect through the surrounding 'noise'. And I suppose that this must also be Kim's view, though, for him, the noise is such as to have prevented us up to now from perceiving the underlying intellectual patterns, or algorithms. To discern this in any particular case is to be able to pick out the relevant paths through the physical world, the paths which constitute the different possible realisations of the intentional state.

The suggestion that 'the reality of intentional patterns', to use Dennett's phrase, can be accounted for in this way is deeply flawed. What primarily undermines the suggestion is that all Dennett's examples involve either games (chess, the Superbowl game) or an activity defined by certain rules or conventions (placing an order for shares in General Motors). In these examples, it is true that understanding what is going on is a matter of grasping the underlying pattern or algorithm, a matter of coming to understand the rules which govern the activity in question. And it is true that, while adopting 'the intentional stance' will help one to grasp what is going on much more easily (or so we can allow), it is not essential that one adopts this stance. The relevant paths through the physical world might be grasped without assuming intentions on the part of any imagined person.

But grasping that what one is witnessing is an expression of indignation or gratitude cannot be like this. There is no pattern to be discerned, not even the most high-grade or 'intellectual', no underlying rule or algorithm, something which might initially be discerned without presupposing any underlying intentional attitude. The only thing common to a range of possible expressions of indignation or gratitude or remorse is that they are all seen by us to be such expressions. Such understanding is not a matter of discerning some pattern which obtains in the physical world, a pattern which we might eventually perceive through the surrounding 'noise'. It is not an understanding which might be achieved without adopting the intentional stance at all. It is essentially intentional understanding, subjective or first-personal. It is understanding which is achieved initially by bringing the template of one's own conscious experience of what it is to have intentions and emotions to bear. And, to repeat a point made earlier, it is knowledge of intentional states as involving

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the immediate, non-dispositional directedness of consciousness to its various objects. I take all this to show, contrary to what Kim and others suppose, that the expectation that we will eventually have a functionalist account of intentionality which is compatible with physicalism is totally misconceived.

### 3. Why Mental Causation Rules out Physicalism

Since intentional concepts do not pick out a pattern of pathways through the physical world, a pattern determined by some underlying algorithm, the question must arise, what is the relation between the intentional state and the physical events which are its expression? On the face of it, it is causal: my gratitude for the receipt of a gift, or my remorse for a wrong I have committed, leads me to act in a certain way. The course of events is determined by the nature or the logic of the intentional state. It seems to me incredible that a complete explanation in intentional terms of a certain course of behaviour might be paralleled by an equally complete explanation of the same course of behaviour couched in the terminology of the physical sciences, and one which involved no recourse to intentional notions. That would be simply a miraculous coincidence.

I take the term 'miraculous coincidence' from Adrian Cussins, who has forcefully described the challenge that the physicalist has to answer. However, his attempt to answer this challenge seems to me very puzzling. Here is a relevant passage:

Would a mother hold her child close to the edge of the canyon so the child could see the view? She could count on her intention to hold the child tight, but neither folk psychology nor neurophysiology provides any assurance whatever that her neurophysiology will march in step with her intention. Isn't it a miracle that the predictions march in step? Of course not. *It is the nature of human cognition that this is how things are.* It is because humans have the cognitive nature that they have that their physiology meshes with folk psychology (Cussins' italics).<sup>5</sup>

I cannot see that this point does anything to meet the challenge to the physicalist that I outlined above. What is clear, surely, is that the mother's behaviour is determined by her love for her child and her

<sup>5</sup> A Cussins, 'The Limits of Pluralism' in David Charles and Kathleen Lennon (eds), *Reduction, Explanation and Realism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 198.

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concern for its safety. These are the intentional states which determine her behaviour, and which thus determine the neurophysiological processes which underlie that behaviour. It is not, as Cussins claims, a matter of our physiology meshing with our psychology or our intentional states, but of our intentional states determining the course of our neurophysiological processes.

Imagine a mother who entirely lacks concern for her child, and is quite prepared to use her child as a way of making money. Standing at the edge of the canyon, she remembers that her holiday insurance covers accidental death, and her child then has an unfortunate accident. This mother has the same neurophysiology as the rest of us, but the neurophysiological processes that take place in this case are very different from those that take place in the loving mother, because the intentional states which determine her behaviour are very different.

I am equally puzzled by Galen Strawson's attempt to meet this problem. Here is the relevant passage:

A decent stopping point in the mind body problem ... would be to contemplate a fabulously detailed and exhaustive specification in neurological or particle-physics terms of the causation involved in a line of thought or a practical decision, and to feel no force in the objection that the availability of this specification showed that the mental was epiphenomenal or causally inefficacious ...

I think I have made it ... One of the keys, I am sure, is to see that there is a fundamental component to the business of consciously entertaining and comprehending propositions that is just a matter of 'qualitative-experiential character' in every sense in which an experience of red is just a matter of qualitative-experiential character ... It takes time, though.<sup>6</sup>

I cannot see how this passage does anything to meet the problem which Strawson outlines. To claim, as he does, that part of the answer is to recognise the 'qualitative-experiential character' of consciously entertaining a proposition is to emphasise something which the epiphenomenalist readily accepts. For to insist that consciously entertaining a thought has a qualitative character no more shows that it is not an epiphenomenon than pointing out that pain is a sensation, something having a qualitative character in consciousness, shows that the sensation is not a mere epiphenomenon. Epiphenomenalism readily accepts that such mental events do have

<sup>6</sup> G. Strawson, 'Panpsychism? Reply to Commentators', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 13 (2006), 275–6.



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a qualitative character, but that does not in any way indicate that they are not mere epiphenomena. Strawson's point does nothing to meet the central difficulty: if there is a complete explanation of human behaviour in terms of the categories available to the physical sciences, then the mental is epiphenomenal.

I have looked only at two responses to the problem of mental causation, and I will confess that, on looking back at much of what has been written, and continues to be written, on this issue, after a while I felt the life-force draining out of me and had to give up. So let me just say that I found nothing which threatened to overturn my view that the supposition that a complete explanation in intentional terms of one's acting from gratitude, jealousy, remorse, *etc.*, can be paralleled by an equally complete explanation couched in the terms of the physical sciences would be to posit something utterly miraculous.

### 4. Why the Claim that Intentional States are Multiply Realisable Must be Rejected

One further suggestion that needs to be looked is the claim that what I have said would be utterly miraculous, *viz.* a complete explanation of a stretch of behaviour in intentional terms paralleled by an equally complete explanation of that same stretch of behaviour in physical terms, is not in the least miraculous, since intentional states and operations are realised in the purely physical world. We see this, for example, in the operations of a computer playing chess. Intentional concepts, we can allow, are irreducible to purely physical concepts, but that is only in the sense that the same intentional operation can be realised in different physical set-ups. An intentional activity such as that of playing chess might be undertaken by computers of different designs, for example.

This suggestion cannot stand. The game of chess is governed by certain rules, and, as I said above, grasping the underlying algorithm allows one to see the essential similarity common to a number of games played to a finish. And that is to say that that algorithm, those rules, can be computed. The algorithm determines what possible paths through the physical world are permissible. But the irreducibility of most intentional states is quite different from this. What counts as a possible expression of remorse or gratitude, of jealousy or indignation, is not something determined by an algorithm. To repeat: the only paths through the physical world which count as possible expressions of any of these intentional states are those which, in the first instance, our own experience of emotion enables us to see as such.

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Papineau, by contrast, has indeed suggested that intentional states are multiply realisable in much the same way as, for example, the operation of thermostatic heaters is multiply realisable. There are thermostatic heaters of different designs, and that means that there is no single pathway to the end of heating water to a required temperature.<sup>7</sup> The suggested parallel is quite untenable, however. First, the various possible expressions of gratitude or indignation are not different pathways to some physically identifiable end, or an end defined by some set of rules or an algorithm, but to an end which our own subjective, first personal experience allows us to see as an end. Second, talk of intentional states being *realised* in some pathway through the physical world must be rejected, as I have already claimed. Various pathways through the physical world may indeed be *expressions* of an intentional state, but their being so is a matter of their being ways of achieving the end to which the thought of the subject is directed in that intrinsic, non-dispositional way which is an essential feature of intentionality, but which cannot be a feature of any aspect of the physical world. Simply to be confronted with a complex pattern of pathways through the physical world, *just* that, would leave one without any insight at all into the nature of an intentional state such as what it is to express sympathy for someone or what an expression of gratitude might be.

Recognising the fact that intentional states are causes of behaviour, and that the intentional cannot be reduced to the physical, or seen to be realised in sequences of physical events, leads inexorably to the conclusion that the principle of causal closure has to be abandoned. I think this in turn leads to interactionist substance dualism. I shall defend this claim by looking first at a well-known attempt to undermine the very notion of a mental substance, and then at an argument recently re-invoked by Kim which it is claimed shows that the notion of causal interaction between the physical and the non-physical is incoherent.

### 5. Why Kant's Rejection of the Notion of a Mental Substance is Misplaced

Here is a very well-known footnote from *The Critique of Pure Reason*:

An elastic ball which impinges on another similar ball in a straight line communicates to the latter its whole motion ... If,

<sup>7</sup> D. Papineau, 'Irreducibility and Teleology' in D. Charles and K. Lennon (eds), *Reduction, Explanation and Realism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 60.

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then in analogy with such bodies, we postulate substances such that the one communicates to the other representations together with the consciousness of them, we can conceive a whole series of substances of which the first transmits its state together with its consciousness to the second, the second its own state with that of the preceding substance to the third, and this in turn the states of all the preceding substances together with its own consciousness and with their consciousness to another. The last substance would then be conscious of all the states of the previously changed substances, as being its own states, because they would have been transferred to it together with the consciousness of them. And yet it would not have been one and the same person in all these states.<sup>8</sup>

A considerable number of commentators have endorsed this conclusion, though none more enthusiastically than P. F. Strawson, who writes:

This line of attack could be pressed further than Kant presses it. Thus when the man ... speaks, we could suggest that there are, perhaps, a thousand souls simultaneously thinking the thoughts his words express, having qualitatively indistinguishable experiences such as he, the man, would currently claim. How could the man persuade us that there was only one soul associated with his body? (How could the – or each – soul persuade itself of its uniqueness?)<sup>9</sup>

Strawson takes this to be ‘the coup de grâce to Cartesianism’.<sup>10</sup> It is no such thing. It rests on a major misinterpretation of Descartes which quite undermines it. To see this, we need first to remind ourselves of Descartes’ definition of ‘substance’: ‘By *substance* we can understand nothing other than a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence’.<sup>11</sup> And it is absolutely clear that for Descartes thought itself is substantial. The idea of thought, that is, is an idea of that which can be understood completely, or as a complete thing. Descartes does indeed acknowledge

<sup>8</sup> I. Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by N. Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1956), A 363–4, footnote.

<sup>9</sup> P. F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense* (London: Methuen, 1966), 168.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> R. Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, I.51 in *Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings*, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 177.

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that there is a distinction between modes of thought on the one hand and the objects which have them, but insists that this distinction is merely a conceptual one. Here is the crucial passage:

Finally, a *conceptual distinction* is a distinction between a substance and some attribute of that substance without which the substance is unintelligible ... And in the case of all the modes of thought which we consider as being in objects, there is merely a conceptual distinction between the modes and the object which they are thought of as applying to ... Thought and extension can be regarded as constituting the natures of intelligent substance and corporeal substance; they must then be considered as nothing else but thinking substance itself and extended substance itself – that is, as mind and body.<sup>12</sup>

You would think that nothing could be clearer than that: the distinction between all the various modes of thought on the one hand and the mind which has them on the other is merely a conceptual one. Thought, then, is not something that inheres in some underlying substratum. Indeed, if that were the case then we could not know of that substratum that it is not also the bearer of corporeal properties, and Descartes would have no argument at all for the real distinction between mind and body, for which he argues in the sixth *Meditation*.

What Kant appears to have done is to foist on Descartes an ontological distinction between thought on the one hand and the object in which thought inheres, ignoring Descartes' clear assertion that this distinction is merely a conceptual one. Kant's claim that the Cartesian view of mind would allow the possibility of 'representations and the consciousness of them' to be passed from substance to substance as motion might be passed from ball to ball is in fact doubly confused. First, the idea of thought is an idea of something which exists in such a way as not to depend on anything else for its existence, and as such cannot be compared to motion, which is clearly not an idea of something which exists in the relevantly independent way, but is something which cannot be understood apart from the idea of the substance of which it is a property – the ball, in Kant's example.<sup>13</sup> Second, Descartes' claim that 'thought ... is nothing else but thinking substance itself' means that the idea, entertained by Kant, that on the Cartesian view 'representations and the consciousness of them' might be passed along from one substance

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, I.62–3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, I.61, the paragraph in which Descartes makes this clear.

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to another is simply incoherent, *for the flow of 'representations and the consciousness of them' is itself substantival*.<sup>14</sup>

Strawson's attempt to press Kant's point even further by suggesting that acceptance of the Cartesian view would mean having to accept the possibility that each thought of mine might be the thought of a thousand souls simultaneously thinking this thought seems to add absurdity to misconception. No sense whatever can be made of the idea that my thought 'It's quite a nice day' might be a thousand such thoughts. In any case, this claim of Strawson's clearly rests on the fundamental misinterpretation of Descartes that I have just emphasised. What remains to be considered, I think, is a concern about the identity of the thinking self through time, and the idea that the Cartesian conception of a thinking substance is so peculiarly vulnerable to doubts about continuing identity as to render the whole idea unusable.

I have two points to make about this suggestion. The first is that it seems to me a mistake to suppose that doubts about the continuing identity through time of the thinking substance (*res cogitans*) are of an essentially different order from the doubts that might be raised about the continuing identity of any physical object. I can always raise a doubt about whether the object in front of me continues as the same object, or whether it is replaced by an exactly similar object each time I blink. This sort of doubt is certainly 'hyperbolic' to use Descartes' word, but it is not logically absurd. Doubts about the continuing identity of the self when one is going through a complex argument, say, or being held by a piece of music, seem to be of the same order. We ought to see that they are indeed of the same order once we free ourselves of the Kantian misconception that for Descartes thoughts inhere in something which is not itself thought, but an unknowable substratum underpinning thoughts. That conception certainly invites the sceptical response expressed by Kant, Strawson and others. There is a very great deal more that I might say about personal identity through time, but I cannot enter more deeply into that issue here.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> After it first occurred to me that the usual interpretation of Descartes' view of substance was a travesty I discovered that Galen Strawson has made the same point in a number of places. However, he actually endorses the footnote of Kant's for what seem to me to be mistaken reasons. I have no space to pursue my disagreement with Strawson on this point and on substance dualism in general, particularly with regard to his claim that Descartes' argument for the real distinction between mind and body was an error.

<sup>15</sup> I have said quite a lot about this issue in *The Identity of the Self* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1981) and in a number of papers, including 'Personal Identity and the Idea of a Human Being' in D. Cockburn (ed.),

The other point that needs to be made is this. I have argued that the relation between the intentional and the physical is causal: intentional mental events are causes of behaviour, and the intentional does not reduce to the physical, nor can it be seen to be realised in the physical. Given this, we must ascribe to the mental the status of substance. To go back to Kant's example, it is certainly true that the motion of one ball might be passed on to the next in some sense, but it is not some theoretically separable property, motion, which has this causal power, the power to cause the next ball to move, but the object-in-a-state-of-motion, and that object is certainly a substance. To ascribe causal power to the mental, and to reject the idea that the mental is a property of the physical, or is reducible to the physical, or is realised in the physical, is to be committed to the view that the mental is substantial. So we have interactionist substance dualism.

## **6. Why Kim's Rejection of Immaterial Minds is Unsuccessful**

It has been a stock objection to Cartesian dualism that the notion of a causal interaction between the material and the immaterial is unintelligible. Yet, as Kim acknowledges, it is very difficult to come up with a conclusive demonstration that the idea of trans-substantial causal transactions is incoherent, and, as he mentions, Descartes actually talks of 'an association between thoughts and bodily motions or conditions so that when the same conditions recur in the body they impel the soul to the same thought; and conversely when the same thought recurs, it disposes the body to return to the same conditions'.<sup>16</sup> What is notable about this passage, as Kim points out, is that Descartes actually posits, not a Humean conjunction between the material body and the immaterial mind, but the operation of causal power across the substantial divide. The challenge to Descartes' critics is, then, to show just why this is incoherent, 'to put up a real argument or shut up', as Kim puts it.

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*Human Beings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 127–42, and 'Personal Identity and Objective Reality' in J. J. MacIntosh and H. A. Meynell (eds), *Faith, Scepticism and Personal Identity* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1994), 185–98.

<sup>16</sup> See J. Kim, *Physicalism, or Something Near Enough*, *op. cit.*, 75, where the passage from a letter of Descartes is quoted.

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Kim claims that he has such an argument.<sup>17</sup> ‘Descartes’ trouble’, he claims, ‘has nothing to do with the bruteness or primitiveness of causation or whether causation is merely a matter of Humean regularity, and it has everything to do with the supposed nonspatiality of Cartesian minds’. Here is the argument:

Suppose that two persons, Smith and Jones, are ‘psychologically synchronised’, as it were, in such a way that each time Smith’s mind wills to raise his hand, Jones’ mind also wills to raise his (Jones’) hand ... There is a constant conjunction between Smith’s mind willing to raise a hand and Smith’s hand’s rising, and, similarly, between Jones’ mind’s willing to raise a hand and Jones’ hand going up ... But there is a problem. For we see that instances of Smith’s mind’s willing to raise a hand are constantly conjoined not only with his hand’s rising but *also with Jones’ hand’s rising*, and, similarly, instances of Jones’ mind willing to raise a hand are constantly conjoined with Smith’s hand rising. So why is it not the case that Smith’s volition causes Jones’ hand to go up, and that Jones’ volition causes Smith’s hand to go up?

It will not do to say that after all Smith wills *his* hand to rise and that’s why his willing causes his hand, not Jones’ hand, to rise ... The reason is that what makes Smith’s hand Smith’s, not Jones’, that is, what makes Smith’s body the body with which Smith’s hand is ‘united’ is the fact that there is a specially intimate and direct causal commerce between the two. To say that this is the body with which this mind is united is to say that this body is the only material thing that this mind can *directly* affect ... This is *my* body, and this is *my* arm because they are things I can move without moving any other body ...<sup>18</sup>

Thus the claim that an immaterial, or non-spatial, mind causally interacts with a body in space is incoherent, Kim would have us believe. In fact the argument is quite unsuccessful. What undermines it is the claim that ‘to say that this is the body with which this mind is united is to say [only] that this body is the only material thing that this mind can *directly* affect’. This claim is simply false. To see this, let us compare Kim’s claim with what A. J. Ayer said about this issue in his

<sup>17</sup> It is only later in his discussion that Kim acknowledges that the argument (the ‘pairing problem’) was first presented by John Foster in ‘Psychological Causal Relations’, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 5 (1968), 64–70: *ibid.*, 79.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 76–7.

paper, 'Privacy'. In that paper, Ayer lists three conditions in virtue of which some particular body is mine. The body that is mine is the body which (a) is under the control of my will in a way in which no other body is, (b) is delineated by my sensations, and (c) provides, as it were, the centre from which I view the world.<sup>19</sup> This seems to me exactly right. And of these three conditions, only the first is causal; that my body is the one which is the locus of my sensations, and that it provides the centre from which I view the world, are conditions which do not involve causality in any way. I therefore find no obstacle to the claim that when I will my arm to go up, it is my arm, not simply in virtue of the fact that it is a thing which I can directly affect, something which, in Kim's speculation, would also be true of an arm attached to another body, but in virtue of that arm being a part of the body which is delineated by my sensations. And it is also, crucially, that arm to which my volitional thought is directed.

You would think then that there can be nothing which might prevent Kim's acceptance of causal interaction. For surely the notion of a body's being one's own in virtue of being thus delineated cannot present a problem. But if Kim can accept that, then his fundamental claim that what makes an arm Smith's is just that there is a specially direct causal connection between Smith and that arm must be rejected. My volition is directed to the particular right hand, say, which is mine in virtue of being part of the body delineated by my sensations. What is the problem?

Two points of confusion seem to be evident in Kim's discussion of this issue. First, it is very difficult to make any sense of what Smith's willing to raise a hand could be in the example as presented by Kim. Are we to suppose that Smith's willing is not directed to one particular hand, or what? Even if we can accept Kim's speculation that Smith's willing is always followed by the hands of two different bodies rising, the question remains, which hand did Smith in fact will to rise? Was it both of them, or was his willing a sort of objectless mental operation?

The second problem for Kim is what seems to me to be his extraordinary misconception as to the nature of intentionality. Kim claims that 'we need causal relations to understand intentionality'. If this were the case, then there might indeed be the problem that Kim supposes that he has highlighted. For in Kim's imagined case there appears to be an equally direct causal connection running from Smith both to Arm A (Smith's arm, as we would want to say) and

<sup>19</sup> A. J. Ayer, 'Privacy' in A. J. Ayer, *The Concept of a Person and Other Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1963), 55–6.



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to Arm B (Jones' arm). But the claim that intentionality rests on causality is simply false. Kim is led to make this claim by generalising from the case of perception. We can allow that what it is for me to perceive a certain tree rather than a qualitatively indistinguishable one hidden behind it is a matter of the causal impact of that tree on my visual experience. But to suppose that what is true of perception is true of intentionality in general is a clear mistake. I may, for example, be looking at two trees, but only of the one on the left do I think that it is blocking out too much light and may well have to come down. That such a thought is directed to the one tree rather than the other is not a matter of causal connection between that tree and my consciousness at all. I may be thinking, not about one of the trees in front of me, but about the Battle of Hastings or the Big Bang, and no reference to causality is required to understand these examples of intentionality. Once this (surely obvious) point is seen, that is, once it is seen that intentionality is not a matter of a causal process running from an object in the world to the subject, but of the directedness of thought from the subject to an object in the world,<sup>20</sup> then surely there can be no obstacle to accepting that, as I said above, I think volitionally of that right arm which is part of the body delineated by my sensations, and which provides the centre from which I view the world.

### 7. Why Kim's Rejection of the Possibility of Immaterial States Being Connected to the Body is not Coherent

Kim has another concern, which seems to me quite independent of the particular problem about causality which he discusses. This is the problem of how we can make sense of something which is immaterial and non-spatial being connected to or situated in some particular body in space. If the soul is non-spatial, how can it be located in a particular body, or even be connected with some particular body?

We must ask how seriously Kim can press this difficulty, if such it be, in the light of his own view of the nature of qualia or sensations. Kim admits that it is not possible to give a functionalist or physical reduction for sensations. They are themselves, then, not part of the physical world. But it would be a bold person who claimed that they have no position in space at all. On the contrary, we feel them in various areas of the body. The fact that Kim regards them as

<sup>20</sup> Though not necessarily to an object *in the world*, of course, since there may be no such object, as in the case of fear of ghosts.

epiphenomena, as the effects of processes in the body, does not affect the claim that they themselves are not events or objects in the physical world. The fact that they are caused by locatable events in the body is not enough to secure their immaterial effects such a location. But they are, or seem to be, located in the physical world.<sup>21</sup> Given this, I do not see how Kim can press the objection that if the mental is conceived of as immaterial then there is no sense in which it can be located in space.

Further than this, Kim's claim that sensations such as that of pain, which are clearly locatable in the body, are mere epiphenomena, having no effect on behaviour at all, is wholly unconvincing. Pains and itches, he says, have a motivational/behavioural aspect in addition to their qualitative aspect, and 'it is clear that the motivational/behavioural aspect of, say, pain, can be given a functional account'.<sup>22</sup> I think this attempt to sever the motivational aspect of pain from its qualitative aspect is totally incredible. Is it seriously claimed that a world in which the qualitative aspect of pain was totally absent, a world in which no one had ever felt pain, would have been just like this one, a world in which people over the centuries have devised hideously painful ways of putting men and women to death, such as burning at the stake and being hanged, drawn and quartered? What is the current debate on whether torture is ever admissible about, if it is not about whether it can ever be right to inflict such horribly unpleasant experiences on anyone? And in contrast with the case of pain, what can we be doing on Kim's view when we recommend a certain sensory experience – a scent, or a taste, say – as particularly pleasant? How can this be reconciled with the claim that sensations are mere epiphenomena, having no place in the causally determined order of the world? The attempt to hive off qualia as items which have no causal relevance is clearly quite misconceived. Such qualia, then, are, by Kim's own admission, not items in the physical world, but are clearly locatable, or so it seems, and clearly have effects on our behaviour.

I conclude, then, that, however much it may grate against contemporary positions and assumptions, substance dualism remains the most persuasive solution to the mind-body problem.

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<sup>21</sup> There are complications, of course, which relate to Descartes' description of sensations as 'confused modes of thinking'. I cannot pursue this matter here, but I do not think that it has a crucial bearing on the argument.

<sup>22</sup> J. Kim, *Physicalism, or Something Near Enough*, *op. cit.*, 170.