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The Self and the SESMET

I: Introduction

I am most grateful to all those who commented on '"The Self"'. The result was a festival of misunderstanding, but misunderstanding is one of the great engines of progress. Few of the contributors to the symposium on 'Models of the Self' were interested in my project: some (like Olson and Wilkes) were already highly sceptical about the value of talk about the self, others were committed to other projects centred on the word 'self' that made mine seem irrelevant at best and many worse things besides. Large differences in methodological and terminological habits gave rise to many occasions on which commentators thought they disagreed with me although they had in fact changed the subject. So I am not sure anyone found my paper useful. But I found some of the responses extremely useful, especially those that adverted to Eastern and phenomenological traditions of thought.[1]

I decided to take on the self — the self understood as an internal mental presence, a mental entity in the old, strong, classical-philosophical sense — as a lawyer takes on a client. I took my sadly maligned client's innocence and good standing on trust. I took it that there really are such things as mental selves in every sense in which there are dogs or chairs. I then committed myself to making the best case I could for them from a realistic materialist standpoint.[2] My starting assumption was that whatever a self is, it is certainly (a) a *subject of experience*, although it is certainly (b) *not* a person, where a person is understood to be something like a human being (or other animal) considered as a living physical whole.[3]

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[1] Such as Forman (1998), Hayward (1998), Laycock (1998), Parnas and Zahavi (1998) and Shear (1998). When I cite a work I give the date of composition or first publication, while the page reference is to the edition listed in the bibliography.

[2] A realistic materialist standpoint does not much resemble some of the positions that claim to be materialist — see section **XIII** below.

[3] This immediately separates me from Bermúdez, who, like many philosophers, chooses to use '"person" and "self" interchangeably' (1998, p. 459), and peels off into a different debate — along with Gendler in her well-balanced piece on thought-experiments (1998). It also separates me from all those in the analytic tradition who think that facts about language suffice to show that 'the self' is either a human being considered as a whole or nothing but a 'mythical entity' (e.g. Kenny, 1988; 1989, ch. 6).

It seems to me that if one is going to take this brief seriously, as a materialist, and try to show that such selves exist, then one must aim to show that they are objects of some sort — concrete objects, not abstract objects — and hence, given materialism, physical objects.[4] This view strikes nearly everyone as obviously — even hilariously — false, and a central aim of this paper is to argue that this reaction stems from a failure to think through what it is to be physical, on a genuine or realistic materialist view, and, equally, from a failure to think through what it is to be an object.[5] I think that one has to solve for three inadequately conceived quantities — *self*, *object*, *physical* — simultaneously, using each to get leverage on the others.

I confess that I was attracted by the counterintuitive sound of the claim that selves are physical objects, and was duly rewarded by the quantity and quality of the protests. But I would have made the claim anyway, because I think it is correct. It is unwise to be gratuitously provocative. In areas like this it is not enough to write so as to be understood; one must write so as not to be misunderstood. Problems of communication that afflict metaphysics in general proliferate like rabbits when the topic is the self.

I will, then, try to clarify what I understand by the words 'object' and 'physical', in the hope that to understand everything will be to forgive everything,[6] and that we can — together with the cognitive self, the conceptual self, the contextualized self, the core self, the dialogic self, the ecological self, the embodied self, the emergent self, the empirical self, the existential self, the extended self, the fictional self, the full-grown self, the interpersonal self, the material self, the narrative self, the philosophical self, the physical self, the private self, the representational self, the rock bottom essential self, the semiotic self, the social self, the transparent self, and the verbal self (cf. e.g. James, 1890; Stern, 1985; Dennett, 1991; Gibson, 1993; Neisser, 1995; Butterworth, 1995; 1998; Cole, 1998; Gazzaniga, 1998; Legerstee, 1998; Gallagher and Marcel, 1999; Pickering, 1999; Sheets-Johnstone, 1999), *none* of whom I object to, although I have not chosen to write about them — fall into each others' arms in a passion of mutual understanding and, like Bunyan's pilgrim, go on our way rejoicing.

This paper is only a report on work in progress, however. Much argument is omitted, and I have not thought enough about some of the proposals it contains. Nor have I had space to comment as fully as I would have liked on many of the contributions to the symposium (e.g. Blachowicz, 1997; Edey, 1997; Perlis, 1997; Ramachandran and Hirstein, 1997; Radden, 1998; Tani, 1998).

My brief for the self also led me to conclude that there are many short-lived and successive selves (if there are selves at all), in the case of ordinary individual human beings. Some find this conclusion disappointing — they think it amounts to saying that there is no such thing as the self, or at least no such thing as 'a self worth wanting' (Wilkes, 1998, pp. 154, 156, 159, 161). But if 'self' is so defined that its existence

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[4] Dennett's proposal that the self is a 'center of narrative gravity' (1991, pp. 426–7) does not take the brief seriously in this sense: it denies that there really are such things as selves (and is I believe correct, in so far as selves are taken to be things that persist over long periods of time). Brook's (1998, p. 590) reason for accepting the claim that the self is an object — i.e. that human beings are objects — is ruled out by my starting point as just described.

[5] For one thing, all physical objects are literally processes. If this is a 'category mistake', don't blame me, blame nature — or ordinary language.

[6] In spite of J.L. Austin's remark that to understand everything might only increase one's contempt.

necessarily involves some sort of substantial long-term continuity, my aim is to disappoint.

William James also holds that there are many short-lived selves (1890, pp. 360–3, 371, 400–1). I did not know this when writing '"The Self"' because I had never read to the end of his great chapter on 'The Consciousness of Self' and had participated in the common error of thinking that he held the self to '*consist mainly of* [*muscular*] *motions in the head or between the head and throat*' (1890, p. 301).[7] Now I know better, and am happy to be on the same side as James. I am also still hopeful of receiving the blessing of certain Buddhists, in spite of widespread scepticism about the validity of my claim to their support,[8] and I hope eventually to show that there is something right about the view of the self famously expounded by Hume in his *Treatise,* and equally famously rejected by him.[9]

The claim that there are many short-lived selves and that they are physical objects may not only look disappointing. It may also look like one of those philosophical views that can perhaps be defended and made consistent and even shown to have certain theoretical advantages, but that remains ultimately boring because it is too far removed from what we feel and what we want.[10] My hope and belief is that it can be made compelling and shown to be natural and true to life, although I suspect that deep differences of temperament will make this hard for some to see. My overall aim is not to produce a piece of irreducibly 'revisionary' metaphysics — one that shows that we are all wrong in our ordinary views.[11] It is to set out some rather ordinary and widely agreed facts in a certain way that I believe to be illuminating and true, although initially rebarbative.

II: The Problem

The notion of the self as we have it is much too baggy and unclear for us to answer questions like 'Do selves exist?', and Olson thinks we should stop speaking of selves altogether (1998, p. 645). But psychologists and philosophers and a host of others will

[7] This ostensibly ontological remark, which is often lifted out of context and mis-understood, is not a claim about what selves are. It is a claim about what gives rise to our sense or feeling of the self. The question James has asked himself, and is answering (1890, pp. 299, 301–2, James's italics, my underlining), is '*Can we tell more precisely in what the feeling of this central active self consists*, — not necessarily as yet what the active self *is*, as a being or principle, but what we *feel* when we become aware of its existence?' His final, somewhat tentative reply is that it may be that '*our entire feeling of spiritual activity, or what commonly passes by that name, is really a feeling of bodily activities whose exact nature is by most men overlooked*' — the stress falling heavily on the words 'feeling' and 'activity'. (No trace of this claim remains in the shorter version of the chapter on the self in *Psychology: A Briefer Course* that James published in 1892.)

[8] Sheets-Johnstone quotes Epstein — 'the distinguishing characteristic of Buddhist meditation is that it seeks to eradicate, once and for all, the conception of self as an entity' (1999, p. 68, quoting Epstein, 1995, p. 138–9) — as evidence of the vanity of my aspiration, although I tried to make it clear (cf. e.g. Strawson, 1997, p. 427, and section **XVII** below) that there is no tension between this view and my claim that selves are physical objects.

[9] Hume (1739), pp. 251–63, 633–6. I think there is something right about it although Hume formulates it badly, gives very bad reasons in its support (as he doubtless knows), and rejects it for reasons that are confused.

[10] Olson (1998, p. 655) finds it 'absurd'.

[11] For the distinction between 'descriptive' and 'revisionary' metaphysics, see P.F. Strawson (1959), pp. 9–10.

never do as he says, and an alternative approach is to try to clarify and define the notion of the self in such a way that it is possible to answer such questions. Olson doubts that this can be done. He doubts, in fact, that there is any such thing as 'the problem of the self'. But there is a clear sense in which there is a problem of the self simply because there is thought to be a problem of the self; and the main reason why there is thought to be a problem of the self is that there is thought to be such a thing as the self; and the main reason why there is thought to be such a thing as the self — an inner, mental self, 'a secret self . . . enclosed within', a 'living, central, . . . inmost I'[12] — is simply that we have experience that has the *character* of there being such a thing. And this is not, as some have suggested, because we have been misled by words or beguiled by bad religious, psychotherapeutic, or philosophical traditions (Kenny, 1988; 1989). Such experience — I called it 'the sense of the self' in '"The Self"' and will call it 'Self-experience' in what follows — is fundamental to human life. I am puzzled by Steven Pinker when he talks (albeit sceptically) of 'the autonomous "I" that we all feel hovering above our bodies',[13] for if I had to say where I thought ordinary experience imagines the I or self to be, I'd say 'Two or three inches behind the eyes, and maybe up a bit'. But Self-experience doesn't have to involve any particular sense of location in order to be vivid, and to give rise to a genuine problem of the self.

III: Phenomenology and Metaphysics

What is the central question to which we would like an answer — granted that there is a problem of the self? It is, I take it, the straightforward question of fact

(I) Do selves exist, and if so, what are they like?

But we need to know what sort of things we are asking about before we can begin trying to find out whether they exist.

How should we proceed? Well, it is Self-*experience* that gives rise to the problem — the vivid sense, delusory or not, that there is such a thing as the self. I think, in fact, that it is the whole source of the problem, in such a way that when we ask whether selves exist, what we are actually asking is: Does anything like the sort of thing that is figured in Self-experience exist?[14]

I suggest that there is nothing more at issue than this. And this, just this, is my fundamental move in trying to bring order and a chance of progress into the discussion — in particular, the philosophical discussion — of the self.

Does anything like the sort of thing that is figured in Self-experience exist? The first thing to do is to see what sort of thing is figured in Self-experience. Before we ask the factual or *metaphysical* question

(I) Do selves exist?

we must ask and answer the *phenomenological* question

(II) What sort of thing is figured in Self-experience?

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[12] Traherne (1637–74, first published 1903) and Clough (1862), quoted by Kenny (1989, p. 86).

[13] 1997, p. 20. Note that this remark is phenomenological; Pinker's (rather unclear) metaphysical proposal is that the 'I' is . . . a unity of selfness over time, a locus that is nowhere in particular' (p. 564).

[14] I use 'figured' in a highly general sense, one that carries no implication of picturing.

I think this is at first best taken as a question about human beings, as the *local* phenomenological question

(II.1) What sort of thing is figured in ordinary human Self-experience?

But once we have an answer to the *local* phenomenological question, we have to go on to the more fundamental question, the *general* phenomenological question

(II.2) Are there other possibilities, so far as Self-experience is concerned? (What sort of thing is figured in the minimal form of genuine Self-experience?)

Once we have an answer to this second question we can go back to the metaphysical question 'Do selves exist?', which we can now address in two versions: 'Do selves exist as figured in ordinary human Self-experience?' and 'Do selves exist as figured in the minimal form of Self-experience?' But we have to begin with phenomenology.[15]

Some cultural relativists doubt that we can generalize about human experience, but it should become clear that the aspects of Self-experience that concern me are situated below any level of plausible cultural variation. Even if there is some sense in which it is true that

> the Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational universe, a dynamic centre of awareness, emotion, judgement, and action organised into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against its social and natural background, is . . . a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures (Geertz, 1983, p. 59, quoted in Watson, 1998),

it doesn't constitute grounds for doubt about the present project.

I should stress that the expression 'Self-experience' is just a phenomenological term: it is a name for a certain form of *experience* that does *not* imply that there actually are such things as selves. My use of the word 'self' is like William James's when he says that we must first try 'to settle . . . how this central nucleus of the Self may *feel*, no matter whether it be a spiritual substance or only a delusive word'. He uses the word 'self' freely as if it refers, while allowing that it may turn out to be 'only a delusive word', and I do the same (James, 1890, p. 298). Every time I use the phrase 'experience of the self' it can, if desired, be read as 'experience (as) of the self'.[16]

Some object that what I call 'phenomenology' is no such thing.[17] It is, however, a matter of the study of certain structures of experience considered just as such, and so fully qualifies for the name 'phenomenology'. I use the term in the standard non-

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[15] Brook (1998, p. 583) agrees that we must begin with phenomenology, but his reason differs from mine. His basic idea — which deserves serious consideration — is that the self considered as a metaphysical entity is a kind of phenomenologically constituted entity: 'the self is simply what one is aware of when one is aware of oneself [and specifically of one's mental features] from the inside' (p. 585). Zahavi and Parnas make a related move when they say that 'there is no difference between the . . . phenomenon of self and its metaphysical nature. Reality here is the same as appearance' (1998, p. 697). I think, in fact, that we have to suppose that there is more to a self than is phenomenally given in this sense (compare the claim that a subject of experience cannot itself be an entirely experiential phenomenon), and this seems to put me at odds with Zahavi and Parnas; but not necessarily with Brook.

[16] Cf. Strawson (1997), p. 406. Wilkes (1998, p. 154) misses this point, taking it that I must suppose there to be a self in talking of a sense of the self.

[17] Cf. e.g. Sheets-Johnstone, who criticizes my 'so-called "phenomenological" approach' (1999, p. 48), and Zahavi and Parnas (1998, p. 688).

aligned sense, which is widespread in analytic philosophy and has nothing to do with the special use that derives from Husserl.

IV: Phenomenology: Self-experience

But what do I mean by 'Self-experience'? (What, in '"The Self"', did I mean by 'the sense of the self'?) I don't (didn't) mean the 'sense of self' that is discussed in books about 'personal growth' and that is meant to be a good thing. Nor do I mean something that involves one's sense of oneself considered quite generally as a human being. I intentionally avoided the common phrase 'sense of self', using 'sense of *the* self' instead, and giving it an explicit definition: 'the sense that people have of themselves as being, specifically, a mental presence; a mental someone; a single mental thing that is a conscious subject of experience' (1997, p. 407). This definition was widely ignored, however, and the move from 'sense of the self' to 'sense of self' caused much misunderstanding.

Jonathan Cole, for example, shifted to 'sense of self' on his first page and contributed an excellent paper, on neurophysiological problems that affect the face, with which I have no disagreement (Cole, 1997). Pickering (1999) also dropped the 'the' and changed the subject, choosing to define the self as 'a semiotic process that emerges in a web of relationships'.[18] Maxine Sheets-Johnstone also changed the subject in her agreeably hostile paper. Oscillating freely between 'the sense of the self' and 'sense of self', she detailed a number of important facts about normal human experience and mental development. She was wrong, however, to think that these facts conflict with my views either about Self-experience (especially the minimal, non-human case of Self-experience) or about the nature of selves.[19]

By 'Self-experience', then, I mean the experience that people have of themselves as being, specifically, a mental presence; a mental someone; a single mental something or other. Such Self-experience comes to every normal human being, in some form, in early childhood. The realization of the fact that one's thoughts are unobservable by others, the experience of the sense in which one is alone in one's head or mind, the mere awareness of oneself as thinking: these are among the very deepest facts about the character of human life.[20] They are vivid forms of Self-experience that are perhaps most often salient when one is alone and thinking, although they can be equally strong in a room full of people. Many psychologists and anthropologists are quite rightly concerned to stress the embedded, embodied, ecological or 'EEE' aspects of our experiential predicament as social and organic beings located in a

[18] This is another interesting paper. Once again my only major disagreement is that there is something he and I disagree about.

[19] Thus I am not 'denying . . . a *developing* sense of the self' (Sheets-Johnstone, 1999, p. 65), or that 'the conceptual sense of self has any foundation in affectivity' (p. 65). I am not committed to 'an instant self fabricated on the spot' (p. 65), and don't contradict myself (p. 66) when I say (1) that a self is as much a physical object as a cow, and (2) that it is not thought of as being a thing in the way that a stone or a cat is ((1) is a metaphysical claim, (2) is phenomenological). Similarly, my only disagreement with Legerstee's (1998) paper on infant self-awareness is on the question whether we disagree. Nor do I disagree with Butterworth's (1998) views about 'ecological' aspects of self, given the way he chooses to use the word 'self', although I am sorry to see that psychology has not yet abandoned the false view that children can't attribute false beliefs to others, and don't acquire a 'theory of mind', until they are four (they can be adept at the age of two).

[20] I do not identify them with 'the origin of the sense of mental self' (Pickering, 1999, p. 41), and can accept the various claims about the development of Self-experience made in this symposium.

physical environment; but they risk losing sight of the respect in which Self-experience — the experience of oneself as a specifically mental something — is, none the less, the central or fundamental way (although it is obviously not the only way) in which human beings experience themselves.

I hear the objection that this is a Western, academic, deskbound, perspective, but I have in mind something that becomes clear after one has got past such objections, something that has now become relatively hard to see. It is, in large part, a simple consequence of the way in which our mental properties occupy — and tend to dominate — the foreground, when it comes to our apprehension of ourselves. It is not only that we are often preoccupied with our own thoughts and experiences, living with ourselves principally in our inward mental scene, incessantly presented to ourselves as things engaged in mental business.[21] It is also that mental goings on are always and necessarily present, even when we are thoroughly preoccupied with our bodies, or, generally, with things in the world other than our own mental goings on. Obviously we can be the subjects of mental goings on without being explicitly aware of them as such. Our attention can be intensely focused outward. But even then we tend to have a constant background awareness of our own mental goings on — it is usually inadequate to say that it is merely background awareness — and a constant tendency to flip back to some explicit sense of ourselves as minded or conscious.

Many lay very heavy stress on our constant background awareness of our bodies, but this awareness is fully compatible with our thinking of ourselves primarily or centrally as mental things, and those who stress somatic awareness may forget that it is just as true to say that there is constant background (as well as foreground) awareness of our minds. Kinaesthetic experience and other forms of proprioceptive experience of body are just that — experience — and in so far as they contribute constantly to our overall sense of ourselves, they not only contribute awareness of the body, they also contribute themselves, together with background awareness of themselves. The notion of background awareness is imprecise, but it seems plausible to say that there is certainly never *less* background awareness of awareness (i.e. of mind) than there is background awareness of body; and unprejudiced reflection reveals that awareness of mind, background or foreground, vastly predominates over awareness of body. Nothing hangs on this quantitative claim, however. For whether or not it is true, the constantly impinging phenomena of one's mental life are far more salient in the constitution of one's sense that there is such a thing as the self than are the phenomena of bodily experience.

Shear, in his contribution to the symposium, points out that it is common to have no particular sense of oneself as embodied when dreaming, although one's sense of one's presence in or at the dream-scene is extremely vivid. Such dream-experience is probably part of our experience from infancy, and doubtless contributes profoundly to our overall sense of the self as a mental something. To consider its experiential character is, as he says, to get an idea of 'how discoordinated a basic aspect of our

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[21] Russell Hurlburt made random samplings of the character of people's experience as they went about their daily life by activating beepers that they carried with them: 'it was striking that the great majority of subjects at the time of the beep were focused on some inner event or events, with no direct awareness of outside events at that moment' (Hurlburt *et al.*, 1994, p. 387). Obviously such disengaged thoughts may themselves be focused on outside events — e.g. past events or possible future events. The fact is none the less of considerable interest (it is instructive to watch people as you pass them in the street).

deeply held, naive commonsensical notions of self [is] from anything graspable in terms of body, personality, or, indeed, any identifiable empirical qualities at all' (Shear, 1998, p. 678).[22]

Independently of this point there is, as Shear says, 'an important sense in which we conceive of ourselves purely as experiencers' (p. 676), in a way which is certainly not just a recent and local product of modern (Western) man's 'hyperreflexivity' (Sass, 1998, p. 545).[23] We may allow Gallagher's and Marcel's phrase 'hyperreflective consciousness' as a description of such Self-experience, but only if we explicitly cancel any suggestion that it is recent and Western and in some way marginal, rather than something that has always been an essential part of the human experiential repertoire — and not restricted to solitary shepherds, spinners, trappers, messengers, farmers or fishermen, or times of 'philosophical reflection and certain limit situations like fatigue and illness' (Gallagher and Marcel, 1999, p. 16). Many of those who are anxious to dissociate themselves from any 'taint' of 'Cartesianism' and to emphasize their EEE 'enthusiasm for the body' (Shoemaker, 1999)[24] have overcompensated. They have become unable to give a proper place to — clearly see — some of the plainest, most quiet, and most fundamental facts of ordinary human experience.

I am not saying that we don't also naturally experience ourselves as embodied human beings considered as a whole. Obviously we do.[25] Nor am I claiming that Self-experience involves any belief in a non-physical soul. It doesn't. It is as natural and inevitable for atheists and materialists as for anyone else.

V: Phenomenology: The Local Question

Let me now add some detail to this general description of Self-experience. In ordinary human Self-experience, I propose, the self tends to be figured as

[1] a *subject of experience*, a conscious feeler and thinker
[2] a *thing*, in some interestingly robust sense
[3] a *mental* thing, in some sense
[4] a thing that is *single* at any given time, and during any unified or hiatus-free period of experience
[5] a *persisting* thing, a thing that continues to exist across hiatuses in experience
[6] an *agent*
[7] as something that has a certain character or *personality*.[26]

[22] To say this is not to say that one could dream in this way if one didn't have (or hadn't once had) normal experience of embodiment. Nor is it to say that there is any sense in which one is or even could be independent of one's body — as Shear stresses (p. 677).

[23] Sass claims that we must look to 'the [modern] era of western intellectual history' to find the time 'when consciousness first comes to know itself as such', but — waiving objections based on many ancient western and non-western traditions of thought — I would say that this happens, in a deep, plain, unqualified sense, in the case of every normal human being.

[24] Shoemaker is himself a 'friend of the body', as I am, but he senses that we live in a period of excessive reaction to the 'spectre' of 'Cartesianism'.

[25] Gallagher and Marcel (1999) give some outstanding descriptions of this phenomenon.

[26] I have dropped one of the eight conditions (the ontic distinctness condition) given in Strawson (1997) on the grounds that it is redundant, and have renumbered the others, giving first place, as seems appropriate, to the subject-of-experience condition.

I offer this as a piece of 'cognitive phenomenology': it aims to give the basic *conceptual structure* of our sense of the self, in so far as the self is experienced specifically as an inner mental presence. It does not advert to *affective* elements in our Self-experience, which require separate discussion, but it does not thereby cast any doubt on their profound importance to the overall character of Self-experience, or on the (phylogenetic and ontogenetic) importance of affect in the development of consciousness and self-consciousness, or on the view that 'affects constitute the core of being for many of our higher faculties' (Panskepp, 1998, p. 579). It just focuses for purposes of discussion on one aspect of the phenomenon that is in question.[27]

All of [1]–[7] need explanation or argument, but here I will add only two brief illustrative comments to what I said in '"The Self"'. First, as far as [4] is concerned, I take the idea of a strongly experientially unified or hiatus-free period of thought or experience as primitive. The conscious entertaining of a thought like 'the cat is on the mat', in which the elements *cat*, *on* and *mat* are bound together into a single thought, is a paradigm example of such a period of experience. So is looking up and seeing books and chairs and seeing them as such. Like Dennett, I take it that such periods are almost always short in the human case, and I believe that there is strong experimental support for this view.

Condition [2], the proposal that a self is experienced as a thing in some sense, is generally doubted, and I defend it in section **VII** below. The general idea is that Self-experience does not present the self as (merely) a state or property of something else, or as an event, or some sort of process. To that extent, *there is nothing else for a self to seem to be*, other than a thing of some sort. Obviously it is not thought of as being a thing in the way that a stone or a chair is. But it is none the less figured as a thing of some kind — something that can *undergo* things and *do* things and, most simply, *be in some state or othe*r. None of these things can be true of processes as ordinarily conceived of.

VI: Phenomenology: The General Question

Conditions [1]–[7] constitute the answer to the *local phenomenological* question, and deliver the following version of the *metaphysical* question: 'Do selves exist as figured in ordinary human Self-experience?' I think the answer is No, and on this I agree with James, Dennett, many if not all Buddhists, and probably with Hume, and even with Fichte. The related question 'What is the very best one can come up with, if one's brief is to argue that selves do exist as figured in ordinary human Self-experience?' is well worth pursuing, but I am going to bypass it and go on to the *general phenomenological* question: 'What is the minimal form of Self-experience?'

[27] The term 'cognitive phenomenology' confused many: it is in no sense true that I have a 'determinedly cognitivist' conception of the self (Butterworth, 1998, p. 132), or attempt to 'define a self in purely "cognitive rather than affective terms"' (Hayward, 1998, p. 621), or think that 'the self is made up of cognitive phenomena' (Legerstee, 1998, p. 640), or have 'a strictly cognitive view of the self' (Cole, 1997, p. 467). More generally, it is in no sense true that I am not interested in, or discount, the affective aspects of Self-experience. (I first used the term 'cognitive phenomenology' in 1980 in discussion of the experience of freedom, which is clearly not just a matter of sensory experience: see Strawson [1986], pp. 30, 55, 70, 96, 107–9. I later took it to cover aspects of the experience of understanding language: see Strawson [1994], pp. 4–13, 182–3; see also Ayers [1991], pp. 277–88, and Pitt [forthcoming]. I have grown accustomed to it, and should have realized that it invited misunderstanding.)

I think that [5], [6] and [7] — long-term continuity, agenthood and personality — can be dispensed with (remember that we are no longer restricted to the human case), and that the minimal form of Self-experience is a sense of the self as

[1] a *subject of experience*
[2] a *thing*, in some interestingly robust sense
[3] a *mental* thing, in some sense
[4] *single* at any given time, and during any hiatus-free or strongly experientially unified period of experience

Many doubt whether any of [5], [6] and [7] can be dropped, and their dispensability needs to be argued for at length. But I think that they can be seen to be absent even in certain human cases.

Some hold that [7], the personality condition, is clearly ineliminable, because to think in terms of self just is to think in terms of individual personality. But Self-experience is just: the specific experience of being a mental subject or inner mental presence; and even if this can involve a sense of oneself as having personality, it need not.

One way to make this vivid is to appeal to the fact that nearly everyone has at some time experienced themselves as a kind of bare locus of consciousness, void of personality, but still for all that a mental subject. Equally important, however, is the respect in which lack of any sense of the self as having personality is normal, in the human case. One tends to see personality clearly when one considers other people, but not when one considers oneself. One's personality is usually built so deeply into the way one apprehends things that it does not present itself to awareness in such a way as to enter significantly into one's Self-experience. Obviously one may experience oneself as being in certain moods, but it certainly does not follow that one experiences oneself as having a certain personality. One's own personality is usually something that is unnoticed in the present moment. It's what one looks through, or where one looks from; not something one looks at.

What about [6], the agency condition? One of the great dividing facts about humanity is that some people experience their mental lives in a Rimbaud- or Meursault-like or fashion, i.e. almost entirely as something that just happens to them, while others naturally think of themselves as controllers and intentional producers of their thoughts.[28] The latter group are particularly likely to doubt whether [6] can be dispensed with, even in non-human cases, and I will not try to convince them here. What does need to be said, in the context of the symposium, is that there is no tension at all between the claim that [6] can be dispensed with and facts about the crucial role of the experience of agency in human mental development, the importance of kinaesthesia to human self-awareness, and so on.[29]

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[28] Rimbaud (1871), pp. 249, 250: 'It's false to say: I think. One ought to say 'it thinks [in] me . . . for *I* is an other . . . It's obvious to me that I am a spectator at the unfolding of my thought: I watch it, I listen to it'. Cf. also Camus (1942; 1960) and the description of the 'Spectator subject' and the 'natural Epictetans' in Strawson (1986), chs. 12 and 13. Bruner, referring to Happé (1991), notes that 'autists give typically nonagentive accounts of themselves and their lives' (1994, p. 48), and autism is clearly of great interest when considering whether [5], [6], and [7] are necessary parts of human Self-experience.

[29] So I have no disagreement with Legerstee (1998). The appearance of disagreement arises from three things: her reading of phenomenological claims as metaphysical claims, her focus on the human case, and her assumption that I *argue* 'that the "self" is a purely mental entity' (p. 627), whereas in fact I

VII: Phenomenology: Diachronics and Episodics

Condition [5], the long-term persistence condition, engages with another of the great dividing facts about humanity. Some people have a strongly narrative or (more neutrally) *Diachronic* way of thinking about themselves, a strong sense that *the I that is a mental presence now* was there in the past and will be there in the future. Others have a very different, *Episodic* way of being in time. Episodics, looking out from the present, have very little sense that the I that is a mental presence now was there in the past and will be there in the further future. They are, perhaps, like John Updike when he writes that he has 'the persistent sensation, in my life . . . that I am just beginning' (Updike 1979, p. 239). They relate differently to their autobiographical memories. In my own case, the interest (emotional or otherwise) of my — rather sparse — autobiographical memories lies in their experiential content considered quite independently of the fact that what is remembered happened *to me*. In fact I am strongly inclined to say that the events in question didn't happen to me — to *Me**, to that which I feel myself to be, in having Self-experience — at all.[30] These memories are of course distinctive in their 'from-the-inside' character, and they certainly happened to the human being that I (also) am; but it simply does not follow that they present, or are experienced, as things that happened to Me* as just characterized.

Many are surprised by this last claim. They take it that having a 'from-the-inside' character immediately entails being experienced as something that happened to Me*. But this is not so. The 'from-the-inside' character of a memory can detach completely from any lived identification with the subject of the remembered experience. My memory of falling out of a punt has, intrinsically, a from-the-inside character, visual (the water rushing up to meet me), kinaesthetic, proprioceptive, and so on, but it does not follow that it carries any sense or belief that what is remembered happened to Me*.[31]

It does not follow even when the remembered event is experienced from the inside in emotional respects. I can have a memory that incorporates emotional concern felt from the inside without in any way feeling that what I remember happened to Me*. So the inference from (a) 'The memory has a from-the-inside character emotionally considered' to (b) 'The memory is experienced as something that happened to Me*' is not valid, although (a) and (b) may very often be true together (especially in the case of certain kinds of memory). I find this to be a plain fact of experience. Those who do not may gain a sense of it if they know what it is to be emotionally involved, by sympathy or empathy, in the life or outlook of another person or a fictional character without having any sense that one is that other person or character.[32]

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define the notion of self in this way in order to see what can then be made of it (see section **I** above). Nor do I disagree with Sheets-Johnstone here. She finds my 'treatment of agency — or rather non-treatment of agency — . . . near astounding' (1999, p. 56), but the principal explanation, apart, perhaps, from differences in the way we experience things, is simple: I am not particularly concerned with the ordinary human case, or indeed with any human case, and certainly not with human developmental necessities.

[30] I introduced 'Me*' in Strawson (1997), p. 420. It is an essentially phenomenological notion.

[31] For the visual aspect, imagine two video recordings, one from the river bank, one from a camera placed between my eyes.

[32] The common phrase 'empathetic *identification*' can be misleading.

This is obviously not enough to show that Self-experience need not involve [5], experience of the self as having long-term diachronic continuity. Large issues are involved.[33] One concerns another great dividing fact about humanity which can be briefly described as follows. Many think it beyond question that we can and inevitably do (and in any case should) 'create and construct our "selves"' (Wilkes, 1998), p. 164).[34] Others find such a claim bewildering, in so far as it implies that one's development as a person involves (or should involve) any significant amount of conscious planning, any need for studied reflection on where one has come from or where one is going, any pre-occupation with one's life considered specifically *as one's own life*, rather than as a source of understanding and possible deepening whose instructiveness does not depend internally and constitutively — even if it depends causally — on the fact that it is one's own life.[35] For members of the second group the process is effectively automatic and unpondered; and they may observe that a person could develop just as valuably by empathetic participation — involuntary, unplanned, never consciously mulled over, not a matter of identification in any strong sense — in the experiences of the protagonists of great novels. In general, we can all learn deeply from experience, and from vicarious experience, and develop in various ways, without any particular autobiographical concern with ourselves, and indeed with little reflection on ourselves. The less conscious reflection the better, in many cases. The 'examined life' is greatly overrated.

Diachronics may feel there is something chilling and empty in the Episodic life, but the principal thing about it is simply that it is more directed on the present. The past is not alive in memory, as Diachronics may find, but it is alive — Episodics might say more truly alive — in the form of the present: in so far as it has shaped the way one is in the present. There is no reason to think that the present is less informed by or responsible to the past in the Episodic life than in the Diachronic life. It is rather that the informing and the responsiveness have different mechanisms and different experiential consequences.

VIII: Phenomenology: Me* and Morality

There is one other issue relating to [5] that is worth a comment. I claim in a footnote that the Episodic life may be 'no less intense or full, emotional or moral' than the Narrative or Diachronic life, and Wilkes argues forcefully that this cannot be so:

> Morality is a matter of planning future actions, calculating consequences, experiencing remorse and contrition, accepting responsibility, accepting praise and blame; such mental phenomena are both forward- and backward-looking. Essentially. . . . Emotions such

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[33] There is more in Strawson (1997), pp. 418–24, but it is only a summary of a longer work.

[34] For a powerful statement of this position, see Schechtman (1997), ch. 5, 'The Narrative Self-Constitution View': 'baldly . . . stated', her view is that 'a person creates his identity by forming an autobiographical narrative — a story of his life' (p. 93).

[35] Hirst (1994) has an interesting discussion of personal development in people who have severe anterograde or retrograde amnesia, or both, and are to that extent incapable of 'narrative self-construction' of the sort that some believe to be necessary to such development, although they clearly continue to have Self-experience, as does patient 'W.R.', who is 'locked . . . into the immediate space and time' by damage to his dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, in Knight's and Grabowecky's paper 'Escape from Linear Time' (1995).

> as love or hate, envy or resentment, would not deserve the name — except in some occasional rare cases — if they lasted for but three seconds, and were thereafter claimed, not by any Me*, but by some former self . . . . The Episodic life could not be richly moral and emotional; we must have a life, or self, with duration. We are, and must consider ourselves as, relatively stable intentional systems. Essentially. (Wilkes, 1998, p. 155.)

Well, the moral life of Episodics is not the same as that of Diachronics, but that is not to say that it is less moral or less emotional. There are spectacularly different 'varieties of moral personality' in the human species,[36] and members of one variety tend to have an incorrectly dim view of the moral nature of members of another. The question is very complicated, and here the following brief points will have to suffice.

The main problem is that Wilkes exaggerates my position. In '"The Self"' I note that I make plans for the future, although I am somewhere down the Episodic end of the human spectrum, and in that sense 'think of myself perfectly adequately as something that has long-term continuity'. I add that 'I'm perfectly well aware that [my past] is mine, in so far as I am a human being considered as a whole', observe that there are certain things in the future — such as my death — and equally certain things in the past — such as embarrassment — that I can experience as involving Me*, and stress the point that 'one's sense of one temporal nature may vary considerably depending on what one is thinking about' (Strawson, 1997, pp. 419–21).[37] There is, then, no reason why some Episodics may not sometimes apprehend some of their past dubious actions as involving their Me*, and accordingly feel remorse or contrition.

This is not to concede that remorse and contrition are essential to the moral life.[38] There is a great deal more to say, and Wilkes confuses an ontological proposal about the normal duration of human selves (up to three seconds) with a phenomenological description of Episodic experience that does not suggest that the present Me* is experienced as lasting only three seconds.[39] The Episodic life is not absolute in the way she supposes. Human beings fall on a continuous spectrum from radically Episodic to radically Narrative, and may move along the spectrum in one direction or another as they age.

It is true that Episodics are less likely to suffer in Yeats'way —

> Things said or done long years ago,
> Or things I did not do or say
> But thought that I might say or do,
> Weigh me down, and not a day
> But something is recalled,
> My conscience or my vanity appalled.
> (Yeats, 1933, p. 284)

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[36] Cf. Flanagan (1991). One particularly striking difference is between those for whom the moral-emotional categories of resentment and humiliation are central, and those for whom they are hardly visible.

[37] One may link up to various discrete, non-narratively apprehended sections of one's past in exactly the way that Locke envisages in his massively misunderstood theory of personal identity (for the correct understanding, see Schechtman, 1997, pp. 105–9).

[38] Note, for example, that matter-of-fact self-criticism — or indeed self-anger — that lacks the characteristic phenomenology of remorse or contrition (or self-reproach, or self-disgust) need not be a morally inferior way of experiencing one's own wrongdoing.

[39] Half an hour is offered as a possible candidate — subject to the point, mentioned above, that 'one's sense of one temporal nature may vary considerably depending on what one is thinking about'.

— even if their lives have been as imperfect as everyone else's. But if they are faced with criticisms from Diachronics who see their lightness as a moral failing, they may observe, correctly, that there is a point (perilously close in some cases) where vanity and conscience — what appears to be conscience — turn out to be a single phenomenon. And this line of thought has striking continuations. It is, for example, arguable that *guilt*[40] is a fundamentally self-indulgent — selfish — moral emotion, as well as a superficial one; although *sorrow* about what one has done is neither selfish nor superficial. Some may suggest that this view of guilt is itself evidence of moral failing, and that someone who holds it cannot fully participate in the moral form of life (although one can hold it while continuing to feel guilt), but they are surely wrong.

This last suggestion shows a serious lack of feeling for human difference, but it isn't as bad as an objection that some (not Wilkes) have made, according to which Episodics cannot be properly moral because, in feeling unconcerned in their past, they lack a vital moral constraint on action. This is clearly false. One doesn't have to care about one's past (considered as such) in order to want to act rightly, and in order to do so. One doesn't have to be governed by prudential concern about one's *future past* — the past one will have to live with in the future; one's present commitments — outlook — feelings — awareness of the situation — can be wholly sufficient. Many find concern about the future past completely absent from the phenomenology of moral engagement. Their concern is to do what should be done simply because it is what should be done, or (without the Kantian loop) simply to do what should be done. To be guided by concern about one's future past when making decisions is not to have a distinctively moral motive at all, nor indeed a particularly admirable motive.

I want to finish with phenomenology and get on to metaphysics, but I still haven't discussed the widely rejected[41] phenomenological claim that Self-experience (necessarily) involves [2] experience of the self as a thing in some sense. My optimistic view is that no one will disagree once I have adequately explained what I mean.[42]

IX: Phenomenology: The Experience of the Self as a Thing

The objection to [2] is clear. Why couldn't a self-conscious creature's Self-experience involve experiencing the self as just a property or set of properties of something else (perhaps a human being), or just as a process of some sort?

It depends, of course, on what you mean by 'thing', 'property' and 'process', and by 'experience something as a thing . . . or property . . . or set of properties . . . or process'. I take the words 'thing', 'property' and 'process' to have their ordinary, imprecise pre-theoretical force when they are used phenomenologically to characterize forms of experience. (The issue of how they are best used in metaphysics remains to be considered.)

The question recurs. Must genuine Self-experience really involve [2], experience of the self as a thing of some kind?

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[40] Also mentioned by Wilkes as important (1998, p. 153).

[41] See for example Forman (1998), p. 191; Hayward (1998), pp. 611, 624; Laycock (1998), p. 142; Pickering (1999), p. 33; Sheets-Johnstone (1999), p. 66.

[42] I give a further independent argument in 'The Grounds of Self-Consciousness'.

It may seem very hard to be sure, given the vagueness of the word 'thing', and after the discussion of the question 'What is a thing?' in sections **XIV–XVIII** below some may feel that little hangs on the answer. What I have in mind is simply this: Kant is right that 'everyone must necessarily regard himself', the conscious subject, 'as [a] substance', and must regard all episodes of thought or conscious episodes 'as being only accidents of his existence, determinations of his state' (1781–5, A349). As he says, 'the "I" who thinks or is conscious must always be considered in such thought or consciousness as a *subject* and as something that does not merely attach to thought or consciousness like a predicate' (B407).[43]

Kant's main aim in the Paralogisms is to show that one cannot argue from this phenomenological fact to any corresponding metaphysical fact. He points out that it does not follow, from the fact that we must *experience* or regard the 'I' or self as a substance or thing, that it actually *is* a substance or thing, or that we can know that this is so. We cannot, he says, rule out the possibility that the 'I' of thought or consciousness may in the final analysis be just a property of something else, 'a predicate of another being'. It is, he says, 'quite impossible' for me, given my experience of myself as a mental phenomenon, 'to determine the manner in which I exist, whether it be as substance [or object] or as accident [or property]' (B419–20). As a theorist one may believe (as I do) that there is a sense in which the phenomena that constitute selves (if they exist) are 'just' processes in the brain;[44] and one may also think (as I do not) that this view of selves is incompatible with the view that they are things in any worthwhile sense; and so conclude that they are definitely not things (in so far as they exist at all). So be it, Kant will reply. None of this constitutes an objection to the fundamental phenomenological claim that if one has Self-experience at all, one must experience the self as a 'substance' or thing of some kind.

I agree. I have little to add to Kant's arguments and the last paragraph of section **V** above, where it was suggested that the fundamental respect in which the self is apprehended under the category of thing is already manifest in the way in which it is experienced as something that can *have* or *undergo* things like sensations and emotions, something that can *be in some state or other*. No experience that presents something as something that *has experience* or even just as something that can *be in some state or other* can figure it merely as a property of something else, or as a mere process, or event.[45] This is the primary intuition.

It is worth thinking an explicit I-thought like 'I am reading an article' or 'I am present, here, now, thinking that I am present here now'; not simply apprehending the content of some such thought by reading, but stopping to think one through. If, overcoming one's natural contrasuggestibility, one accepts to do this, one encounters, in a vivid way, the inescapable respect in which Self-experience — experience of oneself as a mental subject of experience — must involve figuring the self as a thing in a sense sufficient for the truth of [2].

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[43] I read 'must' with Pluhar rather than 'can' with Kemp Smith.

[44] For the trouble with 'just' see section **XVII** below.

[45] Here 'property', 'process' and 'event' have their ordinary pretheoretical sense, and 'mere' and 'merely' are added to match.

'But how can you rule out *a priori* the idea that an alien might have Self-experience that figured the self as just a process?'

Well, if it really does have Self-experience, and really does experience itself, when it apprehends itself as a mental self, as a subject of experience that has thoughts and experiences and is in certain mental states, then it experiences the self as a thing in a sense sufficient for my purposes. Kant got it right. If someone says that I have not really given an argument for this, and have merely presented an intuition in a certain way, I will not take it as a criticism. If someone says that I have taken a long time to say something obvious that Kant said long ago, I will accept it as a criticism but I will not mind. If someone says the whole section is a laborious statement of the obvious, I will be rather pleased. If, finally, someone says that any sense of the self as a thing may dissolve in the self-awareness of meditation, I will agree, and reply that in that case Self-experience of the kind that is at present of concern will also have dissolved (this being, perhaps, and after all, the aim of the meditation).

X: Phenomenology: Eyes and *I*s

The preceding sentence raises an important issue. Self-experience is defined as experience that has the character of being of a — the — mental self. But it is not clear that any genuine experience of *what one is considered as a whole and specifically as a mental phenomenon* — call this 'M-experience' — must *ipso facto* be a form of *Self*-experience. It is not clear that all genuine M-experience must have the full structure of Self-experience. By the same token, it is not clear that the minimal case of Self-experience is *ipso facto* the minimal case of M-experience. I suspect that the minimal case of M-experience may be some kind of 'pure consciousness' experience, of the kind discussed by Buddhists and others, that no longer involves anything that can usefully be called 'Self-experience' at all.[46]

I will take this suggestion a little way, in combination with a point about the notion of an object of thought, for some contributors to the symposium focused on such matters, and may feel that their central doubts have not yet been addressed, let alone answered.

When I claim that Self-experience must involve [2] experience of being a (mental) thing of some sort, the sort of self-apprehension that I have in mind need not and typically does not involve targeting oneself as an *object of thought* in a way that opens a path to the well known view that the I or self or subject is 'systematically elusive' to itself and cannot ever truly take itself — i.e. itself as it is in the present moment — as the object of its thought (cf. Ryle 1949, p. 186). I think this view is false, in fact, but the first point to make is that it would not matter to [2] if it were true, for the root thought behind [2] is simply this: if you have Self-experience, you can't *live* yourself, experienced as mental *subject*, as somehow merely a process or property or event. (This thought is, I suppose, very close to triviality, which is a sometimes very good place to be.)[47] In this regard I agree with Sass when he says that 'the most fundamental sense of selfhood involves the experience of self not as an *object* of awareness but, in some crucial respects, as an unseen point of origin for action, experience, and

[46] In this symposium, see e.g. Forman (1998), pp. 186ff; Hayward (1998); Shear (1998). See also Parfit (1998).

[47] Once, after having given a paper, Brian McGuinness was faced with the objection that one of his claims was trivial. He looked worried for a moment, and then replied 'I *hope* it's trivial'.

thought', and again when he says that 'what William James called . . . the "central nucleus of the Self" is not, in fact, experienced as an entity *in the focus of our awareness*, but, rather, as a kind of medium of awareness, source of activity, or general directedness towards the world' (1998, p. 562, my italics). This is well expressed, and I take it to be fully compatible with the lived sense in which the self is [2] experienced as a thing of some sort. [2] does not require experience of self that is experience (as) of 'an entity in the focus of awareness'.

Is the I or subject none the less systematically elusive? Is there some sense in which genuine self-presence of mind is essentially impossible? The matter requires reflection, but it seems to me that Lonergan, for one, is right when he says that 'objects are present by being attended to, but subjects are present [to themselves] as subjects, not by being attended to, but by attending. As the parade of objects marches by, spectators do not have to slip into the parade to be present to themselves' (Lonergan, 1967, p. 226, quoted by Forman [1998, p. 193]).[48] Deikman makes the same point: 'we know the internal observer not by observing it but by *being* it . . . . knowing by being that which is known is . . . different from perceptual knowledge' (1996, p. 355), as do Zahavi and Parnas, introducing the notion of 'the basic self-awareness of an experience', which they describe as 'an immediate and intrinsic self-acquaintance which is characterized by being completely irrelational' (Zahavi and Parnas (1998), p. 696).[49]

Certainly the eye cannot see itself (unless there is a mirror), and the knife cannot cut itself (unless it is very flexible), and the fingertip cannot touch itself, and one cannot jump on to the shadow of one's own head.[50] It is a very ancient claim, with many metaphorical expressions, that the I cannot take itself as it is in the present moment as the object of its thought, that 'my . . . present . . . self perpetually slips out of any hold of it that I try to take' (Ryle, 1949, p. 187), and several contributors to this symposium concur. Laycock expresses the claim in dozens of different ways in his extremely rich Husserlian-phenomenological paper 'Consciousness It/Self', and observes that it is part of 'perennial Buddhist wisdom' (Laycock, 1998, p. 142).[51]

And so it is, considered as a truth about the limitations of a certain form of self-apprehension. But it is as such fully compatible with a claim to which it appears to be opposed, according to which there is another form of self-apprehension in which the I or subject — or just consciousness, if you wish — *can* be directly or immediately explicitly aware of itself in the present moment. I think this is true, and will try to say why. First, though, note that it doesn't matter whether it is true or not when it comes to [2], the claim that Self-experience involves experience of the self as a thing of some sort; for even if the I or subject cannot be explicitly aware of itself as it is in the pres-

[48] It is interesting to note how this parallels some of Gallagher's and Marcel's remarks about the experience of agency (1999), notwithstanding the strong EEE emphasis of their discussion.

[49] Note that we certainly do not have to suppose that (1), 'knowing by being that which is known', or rather, perhaps, knowing (oneself) by being that which is knowing, entails (2), knowing everything there is to know about that which is known. On a materialist view, one may grant that that which is known, in the case of self-presence of mind of the sort envisaged in (1), has non-experiential being that is not known.

[50] Ryle (1949), p. 187. But perhaps it is high noon. One leans one's head forward and makes a small jump while slightly drawing back one's head.

[51] Cf. also Deikman (1996, p. 350): distinguishing between experiencing and 'seeing', which presumably stands for any sort of experientially mediated operation, he says that the 'I' can be experienced, but cannot be 'seen'.

ent moment, [2] remains unaffected as a claim about how one must *live* oneself in having Self-experience.[52]

The view that the mental subject can be aware of itself as it is in the present moment may be challenged as vague and mystical. The systematic elusiveness objection — according to which one cannot after all directly apprehend oneself as mental self or subject or thinker in the present moment — may be redeployed. 'You may think *I am now thinking a puzzling thought*, or *I'm looking down on India*, or just *Here I am*, in an attempt to so apprehend yourself, but in entertaining these contents you necessarily fail to apprehend the thing that is doing the apprehending — the entertainer of the content, the thinker of the thought, i.e. yourself considered as the mental self at that moment. Any performance, as Ryle says, 'can be the concern of a higher-order performance' — one can think about any thought that one has — but it 'cannot be the concern of itself'. When one thinks an I-thought

> this performance is not dealt with in the operation which it itself is. Even if the person is, for special speculative purposes, momentarily concentrating on the Problem of the Self, he has failed and knows that he has failed to catch more than the flying coat-tails of that which he was pursuing. His quarry was the hunter (Ryle, 1949, pp. 188–9).

It is arguable, however, that to think *This very thought is puzzling* — or *I am now thinking a puzzling thought,* or *The having of this thought is strange* — is precisely to engage in a performance that is concerned with itself; so that a certain kind of immediate self-presence of mind is possible even in an intentional, designedly self-reflexive, and wholly cognitive act, quite independently of the truth of the considerations adduced by Lonergan, Deikman, Forman, Shear, and others. It is only when one tries to apprehend that one has succeeded that one triggers the regressive step. It may be added that there does not seem to be any obvious reason why a hunter cannot catch the quarry when the quarry is himself. A detective with amnesia, sitting in her chair and reasoning hard, may identify herself as the person who committed the crime she is investigating. Wandering in the dark, I may get increasingly precise readings regarding the location of my quarry from a Global Positioning System, activate my grabber arms to move to the correct spot and grab, press the grab-function button, and get grabbed.[53]

Actually one can allow, if only for the sake of argument, that concentration on cognitively articulated thoughts like *I am now thinking a puzzling thought* or *Here I am* cannot deliver what is required, or provide a successful practical route to appreciation of the point that it is possible to have genuinely present self-awareness of oneself as the mental subject of experience. For the best route is more direct, and does not involve any such cognitively articulated representations. It is simply a matter of coming to awareness of oneself as a mental presence — as mental presence — in a certain sort of concentrated but global — unpointed — way. It can be done; the object of one's awareness doesn't have to be a content in such a way that it cannot be the thing that is entertaining the content. On this point Ryle and others are simply wrong. There is no insuperable difficulty in the matter of present or immediate self-awareness. I can engage in it with no flying coat-tails time-lag. The case is just not like the case of the eye that cannot see itself, or a fingertip that cannot touch itself. A mind is, rather

[52] So I need not disagree with Edey when he claims (1997, p. 528) that 'the subject is not an object'.

[53] There is also the case of Winnie the Pooh and Piglet and the Heffalump (Milne, 1928).

dramatically, more than an eye. If Ryle had spent more time on disciplined, unprejudiced introspection, or had tried meditation, even if only briefly, and in an entirely amateur and unsupervised way, like myself — he would have found that it is really not very difficult — although it is quite difficult — for the subject of experience to be aware in the present moment of itself-in-the-present-moment. As far as the level of difficulty is concerned, it seems to me that is like maintaining one's balance on a bar in a way that is quite hard but not extremely hard. One can easily lose one's balance — one can fall out of the state in question — but one can also keep it. No doubt it is something one gets better at if one practises certain kinds of meditation, in which such self-awareness has the status of a rather banal first step (about which there is extremely wide consensus) towards something more remarkable.

The direct evidence for this, and for 'pure consciousness' experience, is and can only be introspection in the widest sense of the term. Each must acquire it for himself or herself. This does not mean it is not empirical; clearly it is. It does mean that it is not publicly checkable, and it will always be possible for someone to object that the experience of truly present self-awareness is an illusion — produced, say, by Rylean flashes of 'swift retrospective heed' (Ryle, 1949, p. 153).

Whatever one thinks of this, there is another mistake, which may tempt those who carry EEE thinking (see p. 105 above) too far, that can be decisively blocked. There is no good argument from the true EEE fact that naturally evolved forms of consciousness are profoundly, and seemingly constitutively, and, in the natural course of things, almost incessantly, in the service of the interoceptive and exteroceptive perceptual and agentive survival needs of organisms[54] to the conclusion that Forman (for instance) must be wrong to claim that 'consciousness should not be defined in terms of perceptions, content, or its other functions' (Forman, 1998, p. 197). Forman holds that in certain meditative states 'awareness itself is experienced as still or silent, perceptions as active or changing. Therefore instead of defining awareness in terms of its content, we should think about awareness and its mental and sensory *functions* as two independent phenomena or processes that somehow interact.' I think that this notion of interacting processes may be too separatist, and that the contentual features of states of awareness — more precisely, the contentual features of states of awareness that involve content other than whatever content is involved in simple awareness of awareness — should rather be seen as modifications of awareness. But the basic idea of pure awareness or consciousness is not in tension with anything in the theory of evolution by natural selection.

This is a topic that needs a lot more discussion. Here let me say that even if consciousness is not a primordial property of the universe, and came on the scene relatively late, there is no good reason — in fact it doesn't even make sense — to think that it first came on the scene because it had survival value. Natural selection needs something to work on and can only work on what it finds. Consciousness had to exist before it could be exploited, just as non-conscious matter did. I take it that natural selection moulded the consciousness it found in nature into adaptive forms just as it moulded the non-conscious phenomena it found. From this perspective, the task of

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[54] Damasio (1994, ch. 10) gives a powerful description of the profundity of the connection between the mind and the rest of the body. Cf. also Panskepp (1998) on what he calls 'equalia . . . the most ancient evolutionary qualia', Ramachandran and Hirstein (1997) and Balleine and Dickinson (1998).

giving an evolutionary explanation of the *existence* of consciousness is just like the task of giving an evolutionary explanation of the existence of non-conscious matter (there is no such task). And the evolution by natural selection of various finely developed types of consciousness (visual, olfactory, cognitive, etc.) is no more surprising than the evolution by natural selection of various finely developed types of body. Finally, even if evolved forms of consciousness came to be what they were because they had certain kinds of content that gave them survival value and that were (therefore) essentially other than whatever content is involved in simple awareness of awareness, it doesn't follow that pure consciousness experience is some sort of illusion or mere surface effect: even if pure consciousness experience as we can know it becomes possible only after millions of years of EEE-practical forms of consciousness, it does not follow that it is not uniquely revelatory of the fundamental nature of consciousness.

XI: Transition: Phenomenology to Metaphysics

I have made a negative claim about Self-experience and a positive claim with a rider. The negative claim is that Self-experience does not necessarily involve [5]–[7]: it need not involve any experience of the self as an agent that has long-term diachronic continuity and personality, even if it can do so. The positive claim is that any genuine form of Self-experience must involve [1]–[4]: it must present the self as a subject of experience that is a mental thing that is single at any given time and during any unified or hiatus-free period of experience. The meditative rider to the positive claim is that genuine 'M-experience' (see p. 113 above) — genuine experience of what one is considered as a whole and specifically as a mental phenomenon — need not involve Self-experience.

I turn now from phenomenology to metaphysics, for the phenomenological investigation of Self-experience has duly delivered two versions of the metaphysical question. (1) 'Do selves exist as figured in ordinary human Self-experience?', (2) 'Do selves exist as figured in the minimal form of Self-experience?' I am inclined to answer No to (1) and Yes to (2), but here I will consider only (2).

XII: Metaphysics: SESMETS

Do selves exist as figured in the minimal form of Self-experience? Are there [1] subjects of experience that are [4] single [3] mental [2] things? I think there are, and for the moment I will call them SESMETS (**S**ubjects of **E**xperience that are **S**ingle **ME**ntal **T**hings), for this will allow me to put the case for their existence while leaving the question of whether it would be right or best to call them 'selves' entirely open.

In essentials I agree with William James, who holds that 'the same brain may subserve many conscious selves' that are entirely numerically distinct substances. Using the word 'thought' in the wide Cartesian sense to cover all types of conscious episodes, he claims that each '"perishing" pulse of thought' is a self, and in a famous phrase, says that 'the thoughts themselves are the thinkers' (1890, p. 401, p. 371; 1892, p. 191). I think it is clearer to say that the existence of each thought involves a self, or consists in the existence of a self or SESMET or subject of experience entertaining a certain mental content, but the basic idea is the same. The apparent continuity of

experience, such as it is,[55] and the consistency of perspective across selves, derives from the fact that SESMETS 'appropriate' — in James's word — the experiential content of the experiences of their predecessors in a way that is entirely unsurprising in so far as they arise successively, like gouts of water from a rapidly sporadic fountain, from brain conditions that have considerable similarity from moment to moment even as they change. Given short-term or 'working' memory, the immediately preceding contents form part of the context in which new contents arise in every sense in which features of the external environment do.

'The *I*', James says,

> is a *thought*, at each moment different from that of the last moment, but *appropriative* of the latter, together with all[56] that the latter called its own. All the experiential facts find their place in this description, unencumbered with any hypothesis save that of the existence of passing thoughts or states of mind (1892, p. 191; 1890, pp. 400–1).

I take it, then, that there are many SESMETS, in the case of a human being, and that for the most part they exist successively, although I agree with James that there is no theoretical difficulty in the idea that they may also exist concurrently.[57] Each one is an 'indecomposable unity' and 'the same brain may subserve many conscious selves' that 'have no *substantial* identity' (1890, p. 371, p. 401; 1892, p. 181). James expresses himself loosely when he says that the self consists in 'a remembering and appropriating Thought incessantly renewed', for this phrase suggests that selves are things that have some sort of long-term continuity, but his more careful statement of his view explicitly cancels any such suggestion. He knows it is intensely natural for us to think of the self as something that has long-term continuity, and is accordingly prepared to speak loosely in sympathy with that tendency, while holding that it is in fact quite incorrect:

> My present Thought stands . . . in the plenitude of ownership of the train of my past selves, is owner not only *de facto*, but *de jure*, the most real owner there can be . . . Successive thinkers, *numerically distinct*, but all aware of the past in the same way, form an adequate vehicle for all the *experience* of personal unity and sameness which we actually have (1890, pp. 362–3, 360; 1892, p. 181; my emphasis).[58]

A SESMET, then, is a subject of experience as it is present and alive in the occurrence of an experience. It is as EEE — as embodied, embedded and ecological — as anyone could wish. There cannot be a SESMET without an experience, and it is arguable that

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[55] For doubts see Strawson (1997), pp. 421–3.

[56] This is surely too strong.

[57] See James (1890), p. 401. Note that there is no more metaphysical difficulty in the idea that a thing that lasts for two seconds can know Latin, be exhausted, kind, and in love, than there is in the idea that an ordinary human being considered during a two-second period of time can be said to have these properties during that time.

[58] Compare Damasio (1994), pp. 236–43: 'at each moment the state of self is constructed, from the ground up. It is an evanescent reference state, so continuously and consistently *re*constructed that the owner never knows that it is being *re*made unless something goes wrong with the remaking' (p. 240). Damasio goes on to say the same about what he calls the 'metaself' (p. 243), which is more closely related to the phenomenon currently under discussion.

there cannot be an experience without a SESMET.[59] I take it that SESMETs exist and are part of (concrete) reality. I think, in fact, that they are physical objects, as real as rabbits and atoms. It is true that this unpopular view depends on taking the words 'object' and 'physical' in an unfamiliar way, but I think that we have to take them in this way when we do serious metaphysics from a materialist standpoint. I will say something about this now, beginning with a brief account of how realistic materialists must understand the physical.

XIII: Metaphysics: Realistic Materialists and the Physical

Step one. Materialism is the view that every thing and event in the universe is physical in every respect. It is the view that 'physical phenomenon' is coextensive with 'real phenomenon',[60] or at least with 'real, concrete phenomenon'.[61] Step two. If one thing is certain, it is that there is conscious experience: it is that *experiential phenomena* — by which I will mean the phenomena of conscious experience considered just in respect of the qualitative character that they have for those who have them as they have them — exist. Step three. It follows that genuine or *realistic* materialists (realistic anybodies) must fully acknowledge the reality of experiential phenomena. Step four. It follows in turn that they must hold that these experiential phenomena are wholly physical phenomena, and are wholly physical considered specifically in respect of their qualitative-experiential character.

Many find it odd to use the word 'physical' to characterize experiential phenomena. Many self-declared materialists talk about mental and physical as if they were opposed categories. But this, on their own view, is exactly like talking about cows and animals as if they were opposed categories. For every thing in the universe is physical, according to materialists. So all mental phenomena, including experiential phenomena, are physical, according to materialists; just as all cows are animals.

So why do materialists talk as if mental and physical were different? What they presumably mean to do is to distinguish, within the realm of the physical, *which is the only realm there is,* according to them, between the mental and the non-mental, or between the experiential and the non-experiential. But their terminology is flatly inconsistent with their own view, and they are in danger of forgetting the first lesson of realistic materialism — which is that if materialism is true, then qualitative-experiential phenomena must be wholly physical, strictly on a par with the phenomena of extension and electricity as characterized by physics. I use the words 'mental' and 'non-mental' where many use 'mental' and 'physical' simply because I assume, as a (wholly conventional) materialist, that every thing and event in the universe is physical, and find myself obliged to put things in this way.

So when I say that the mental and (in particular) the experiential are physical I mean something completely different from what some materialists have apparently

[59] If this is so then SESMETs (and hence possibly selves) exist even in the case of unself-conscious beings (cf. Damasio, 1994, pp. 238 and 243). Many, however, will prefer to say that SESMETs exist only in self-conscious beings, or (even more restrictedly) only in the case of explicitly self-conscious experiences. I note this issue in order to put it aside for another time.

[60] I use 'phenomenon' as a completely general word for any sort of existent, abstracting from its meaning of *appearance*, and without any implication as to ontological category.

[61] Some say numbers are real things, but it is agreed that they are abstract objects, not concrete objects in space–time, if they exist.

meant by saying things like 'experience is really just neurons firing'. For I don't mean that all features of what is going on, in the case of conscious experience, can be described by physics (or some non-revolutionary extension of physics). Such a view amounts to radical 'eliminativism' with respect to consciousness, and is mad. My claim is quite different. It is that the experiential (considered just as such) 'just is' physical. No one who disagrees with this claim is a *realistic* materialist.[62]

The next step in realistic materialism is to undercut the common view that the mind–body problem is a problem about how mental phenomena can possibly be physical phenomena *given what we already know about the nature of the physical*. If one thinks this one is already lost. The fact is that we have no good reason to think that we know *anything* about the nature of the physical world (as revealed by physics, say) that gives us any reason to find any problem in the idea that mental or experiential phenomena are physical phenomena, strictly on a par with the phenomena of extension and electricity as characterized by physics. Why do so many think otherwise? Because they are, as Russell says, 'guilty, unconsciously and in spite of explicit disavowals, of a confusion in [their] imaginative picture of matter' (1927a, p. 382). They think they know more than they do. They think, quite wrongly, that they have a pretty good fix on the nature of matter, and are naturally led thereby, as Zahavi and Parnas remark, to suppose that 'a better understanding of physical [i.e. non-mental] systems will allow us to understand consciousness better'; thereby ignoring the more plausible view 'that a better understanding of consciousness might allow us to understand the metaphysical nature of physical reality better' (1998, p. 702).

I think that these points about realistic materialism (or whatever you want to call it) are extremely important. Once understood, they suffice to dissolve many people's intuitive doubts about materialism. But I will say no more about them here.[63]

XIV: Metaphysics: Particles, Simples, U-fields

I have claimed that SESMETS have as good a claim to be thought of as physical objects as stars, cats and bosons, and I have tried to check some of the doubts that this claim arouses by giving a brief sketch of what it is to be a realistic materialist. But it also raises a very general metaphysical question about which phenomena are properly said to be things or objects, and it is to this that I now turn.[64] As in '"The Self"' I will appoint Louis as a representative human being, and call the portion of reality that consists of Louis the 'L-reality'. The notion of the L-reality is rough — as a concrete physical being Louis is enmeshed in wide-reaching physical interactions and is not neatly separable out as a single portion of reality — but it is serviceable and useful none the less.

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[62] In the longer run, I think that the mental/non-mental distinction may need to give way to the — clearer — experiential/non-experiential distinction, but I will continue to operate with the former for the moment.

[63] I discuss the question in Strawson (1994), chs. 3–4, and (forthcoming), following Locke (1690, pp. 311–14, 539–43), Hume (1739, pp. 246–8), Priestley (1777, pp. 103–32), Kant (1781/5, A358–60, A380, B427–8), Russell (1927a, ch. 37, and 1927b, chs. 12–16), Foster (1982, ch. 4), Lockwood (1989, ch. 10), and Chomsky (1995, pp. 1–10), among others.

[64] I often use 'thing' rather than 'object', but I make no distinction between these terms. I am not trying to make things easier for myself by using the former rather than the latter.

I will assume that every candidate for being a concrete thing or object is either a fundamental 'particle' or a 'simple' or 'field' or as I will say *U-field* ('U' for *Ur* or ultimate) or is made up of some number of U-fields in a certain relation. Accordingly I will take it that SESMETS are either single U-fields or made up of U-fields.[65] I agree with van Inwagen (1990, p. 72) that the Leibnizian term 'simple' is preferable to 'fundamental particle' as a term for the ultimate constituents of reality, first because the term 'fundamental particle' has potentially misleading descriptive meaning, provoking a picture of tiny grains of solid stuff that has no scientific warrant, second because many of the things currently called 'fundamental particles' may not be genuinely ultimate constituents of reality.[66] I prefer to use 'U-field' because 'simple', too, carries implications — of radical separateness, non-overlappingness and indivisibility — that are best avoided.[67]

XV: Metaphysics: Subjectivism, Objectivism, Universalism

What, then, is a physical object? It is, no doubt, *some kind of physical unity*. But this is vague, and some philosophers — the *subjectivists* — think that judgements about which phenomena count as objects are never objectively true or false. On this view, there are *no metaphysical facts of the matter*, and whenever we judge something to be an object we (explicitly or implicitly) endorse an ultimately *subjective* principle of counting or individuation relative to which the phenomenon *counts* as a (single) object: we are endorsing an ultimately subjective *principle of objectual unity*.

It is true that many judgements of objecthood — many principles of objectual unity — are so natural for us that the idea they are in any sense subjective seems preposterous. (Nearly all of us think that cups, saucers, meerkats, jellyfish, fingers, houses, planets and molecules are individual objects, and there are clear pragmatic and evolutionary reasons why this is so.) But the subjectivists are unimpressed by this. They deny that the fact that some judgements of objecthood are very natural for human beings entails that those judgements are objectively correct, or record metaphysical facts. If we were electron-sized, they say, our natural judgement about a stone might be that it was a collection of things, a loose and friable confederacy, and not itself a single object. And although it seems uncomfortable at first to think that merely subjective principles of objectual unity underlie our judgements that chairs and stones are objects, the idea becomes increasingly natural as we move away from such central cases. Thus although nearly everyone thinks a chair is a single object, not everyone

[65] I will also take it that 'virtual' particles (or U-fields) and 'antimatter' particles (or U-fields) are objects; and that space–time itself may be best thought of as an object (one view worth serious consideration is that it is the only object there is).

[66] One view is that the fundamental particles currently recognized — leptons and quarks — are not strictly speaking elementary and are to be 'explained as various modes of vibration of tiny one-dimensional rips in spacetime known as strings' (Weinberg, 1997, p. 20). Whether this leaves strings in place as ultimates, or only space–time, I do not know.

[67] For purposes of discussion I am taking it that it makes sense to speak of individual U-fields, perhaps by reference to certain particle-like observational effects, and in spite of the phenomenon of quantum entanglement. But nothing much hangs on this. There aren't any U-fields if there is 'structure all the way down' (a view that seems profoundly counterintuitive, but that may have to be taken seriously), and Post (1963) famously suggested that even if there are U-fields, they may have to be seen as 'non-individuals' in some way. Cf. also Lockwood (1989), p. 253; French (1998).

does.[68] And although many think cities, newspapers, galaxies and flutes (assembled from parts) can correctly be said to be single things, quite a few do not. Some think a body of gas is an object, but many do not.

Very few (to move to a distinctively philosophical example) think that three spoons, one in Hong Kong, one in Athens, and one in Birmingham, constitute a single thing, but some do sincerely believe that the three spoons' claim to be considered an individual object is as good as any other. According to one form of *universalism*, an extreme version of this view, any collection of U-fields in the universe, however scattered, counts as a single object in every sense in which a table does. A lepton in your amygdala, a quark in my left hand, and the U-fields that make up the rings of Saturn jointly constitute a single object just as surely as your pen does. No collection of U-fields has a better claim to be an object than any other.

Whatever you think of this form of universalism, it has the merit of being a wholly objectivist theory of objects. It endorses a principle of objectual unity that delivers a clear principle of counting. It tells you that if there are n U-fields in the universe then there are exactly $[2^n - 1]$ objects in the universe. But it also has, in a way, a highly subjectivist or 'post-modern' aura, for it tells you that anything goes and everybody wins, that there is no real issue about whether any particular collection of U-fields is an object or not. It is, accordingly, arguable that genuinely objectivist positions emerge clearly only when more specific and limited principles of objectual unity are endorsed, e.g. by dogmatic common sense, which rules in favour of tables and chairs and against the three spoons; or by Spinoza, who holds that there is, as a matter of fact, only one thing or substance (God or nature, or space–time, as we might now say); or by van Inwagen, who argues very forcefully that only individual U-fields and living beings — and not, say, tables and chairs — are material objects.

Actually, it doesn't matter which side you take in this debate. For if you think that there are indeed objective principles of objectual unity, and therefore that there are indeed metaphysical facts about which phenomena are genuine objects and which are not, then you can take me to be arguing that SESMETS (and thus perhaps selves) are among the genuine objects. If, alternatively, you think that the subjectivist view is best, and that there are no ultimate metaphysical facts about which phenomena are genuine objects, then you may take me to be trying to convince people who are disposed to think of certain but not all collections of U-fields as objects (jellyfish and chairs, but not arbitrarily selected cubic feet of the Pacific Ocean or the three newspapers) that it is at least equally reasonable to think of the collections of U-fields that I choose to refer to by the expression 'SESMETS' (or indeed by the expression 'selves') as objects. Practically speaking, my task is the same.

XVI: Metaphysics: The Nature of Objects

A concrete object, then, is a certain kind of physical unity. More specifically, it is either an individual U-field (subject to the doubt expressed in note 67, p. 122 above) or a number of U-fields in a certain relation. I take it, anti-universalistically, that there are various grades and types of physical unity, and that some candidates for objecthood have a (much) better claim than others; that a human being, say, has a

[68] Van Inwagen (1990) does not.

(much) better claim than your lepton + my quark + the rings of Saturn, or the three spoons, or a pile of bricks.

With this in place, consider the following suggestion. As one advances in materialism, deepening one's intuitive grasp of the idea that mental phenomena and non-mental phenomena are equally physical phenomena, one of the things that becomes apparent is that when it comes to deciding which things count as objects and which do not *there are no good grounds for thinking that non-mental criteria or principles of unity* — of the sort that we use to pick out a dog or a chair — *are more valid than mental criteria or principles of unity.*

It is arguable, in fact, that there is no more indisputable unity in nature, and therefore no more indisputable physical unity, than the unity of a SESMET — the unity of a subject of experience that is the subject of, say, a single, unified experience of looking up and seeing books and chairs and seeing them as such, or the subject of the binding or seizing together in thought of the concepts *grass* and *green* in the conscious thought 'Grass is green'.[69] The only comparable candidates that I can think of are space–time, and individual U-fields — if indeed there are any. I agree with the physicist Richard Feynman and the philosopher Peter van Inwagen that things like chairs are distinctly inferior candidates for being objects, when one gets metaphysically serious, and it is arguable that SESMETS are about the best candidates there are for the status of physical objects.

'Hold on. I am prepared to grant, for the sake of argument, that there is a real phenomenon picked out by your use of the word "SESMET". And I am prepared to accept that SESMETS are short-lived. A SESMET, let us say, is: the whole (and wholly material) phenomenon of the live-aware presence of the subject of experience in the present moment of consciousness or in the present hiatus-free period of experience. But why on earth should I also accept that the right thing to say about a SESMET is (A) that it is a *thing* or *object* like a rock, or a mayfly? Why isn't the correct thing to say simply (B) that an enduring object of a familiar sort — viz. Louis, a human being — has a certain *property* at a certain time, in having a certain unified, one-or-two-second-long, subject-of-experience-involving episode of experience? Why, alternatively, can't we say (C) that the occurrence of such an episode is just a matter of a certain *process* occurring in an object at a certain time, and does not involve any further distinct *object*?'

Well, here the canyons of metaphysics open before us. The object/process/property conceptual cluster — the whole object/process/property/state/event cluster — is structured by strongly demarcatory, ontologically separatist habits of thought that are highly natural and useful and effectively inevitable in everyday life, but deeply misleading when taken to have a claim to basic metaphysical truth. I think a little thought strips (B) and (C) of any appearance of superiority to (A), whether or not one is a materialist. I will start with (C), but I can give only brief reasons where others have written books.

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[69] This is a materialist version of an old thought. I am not suggesting that the subject of experience is the *agent* that *brings about* the binding or seizing, and in fact I do not think that this is so.

XVII: Metaphysics: Object and Process

Any claim to the effect that a SESMET is best thought of as a process rather than an object can be countered by saying that there is, in the light of physics, no good sense in which a SESMET is a process in which a rock is not also and equally a process. So if a rock is a paradigm case of an object in spite of being a process, we have no good reason not to say that a SESMET is an object even if we are inclined to think of it as a process.[70]

In saying this, I don't mean to show any special partiality to the *four-dimensionalist* or *4D* conception of objects as opposed to the *three-dimensionalist* or *3D* conception. I think I can overfly this dispute, noting in passing that there are contexts in which the 4D conception of objects is more appropriate than the 3D conception, and contexts in which the 3D conception of objects is more appropriate than the 4D conception. This debate has its own elegant internal dynamic, and creates contexts in which its disagreements have importance, but it does not really matter to the present question about the existence of mental selves.[71]

'But if there is a process, there must be something — an object or substance — in which it goes on. If something happens, there must be something to which it happens, something which is not just the happening itself. So it can't be true that everything is a matter of process.'

This expresses our pre-theoretical conception of things, but we already know that things are unimaginably strange, relative to our ordinary understanding of them. The general lesson of physics (not to mention *a priori* reflection) is that our pre-theoretical conceptions of *space*, *time* and *matter* are in many respects hugely and provably wrong. So we already have a general reason to be cautious about the claim — which is, after all, a very general claim about the nature of *matter* in *space–time* — that it is a hard metaphysical fact that the existence of a process entails the existence of an object or substance that is distinct from it.

Physics also provides a more specific reason for doubt. For it is of course one acceptable way to talk — to say that if there is a process then there must be something in which it goes on. But physicists seem increasingly content with the view that physical reality is itself a kind of pure process — even if it remains hard to know exactly what this idea amounts to. The view that there is some ultimate stuff to which things happen has increasingly ceded ground to the idea that the existence of anything worthy of the name 'ultimate stuff' consists in the existence of fields of energy — consists, one might well say, in the existence of a kind of pure process which is not usefully or even coherently thought of as something which is happening to a thing distinct from it.[72]

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[70] The claim is not that everything that is naturally thought of a process is legitimately thought of as an object. (There is no good reason to think of the yellowing of a leaf as an object.) It is only that everything that is naturally thought of an object is legitimately thought of as a process.

[71] For an outstanding piece of arbitration, see Jackson (1994).

[72] Unless, perhaps, that something is space–time itself. But in this case the point remains: for now it looks as if all the more limited phenomena that we think of as paradigmatic objects — stars, tigers, and so on — are to be thought of as local *processes* occurring in the only genuine substance there is: space–time.

Physics aside, the object/process distinction lives — covertly — off a profoundly static intuitive picture of objects and matter: an unexamined, massively influential and massively misleading picture of objects and matter as things whose essential nature can be fully given at an instant. This is one of the main confusions in our 'imaginative picture of matter'. For matter is essentially dynamic, essentially in time. All reality is process, as Whitehead was moved to observe by his study of twentieth-century physics, and as Herakleitos and others had already remarked long ago. We might be well advised to call matter 'time-matter' in contexts like the present one, so that we never for a moment forgot its temporality. We think of it as essentially extended, but we tend to think only of extension in space. But space and time are interdependent. All extension is necessarily extension in space–time.

It follows from this alone, I think, that there is no ontologically weighty distinction between an object and a process. There is no need to invoke relativity theory. For even if relativity theory is false there is no metaphysically defensible concept of an object — a 'spatiotemporal continuant', as philosophers say — that allows one to distinguish validly between objects and processes by saying that one is an essentially dynamic or changeful phenomenon in some way in which the other is not. Nor is there anything in the 3D conception of objects that supports such a view.[73] The source of the idea that there might be some such valid distinction lies in habits of ordinary thought, usually harmless, that are highly misleading in certain crucial theoretical contexts. I believe that we continue to be severely hampered by this; even when we have, in the frame of theoretical discussion, fully agreed and, as we think, deeply appreciated, that objects are entirely creatures of time, process-entities.

XVIII: Metaphysics: Object and Property

It seems to me that these (partly *a posteriori*, partly *a priori*) points about the superficiality of the object/process distinction find a different, irresistible and wholly *a priori* expression when one considers the object/property distinction.[74] Our habit of thinking in terms of this second distinction is ineluctable, and there is a clear respect in which it is even more deeply entrenched than the object/process distinction. And it is perfectly correct, in its everyday way. But ordinary thought is no guide to strict metaphysical truth or plausibility, and one has already gone badly wrong, when discussing what exists in the world, if one draws any sort of ontologically weighty distinction between objects and properties according to which there are objects on the one hand and properties on the other hand.

Clearly there can no more be objects without properties than there can be closed plane rectilinear figures that have three angles without having three sides (the strength of the comparison is intentional). Objects without properties — *bare particulars*, as they have been called — things that are thought of as having properties but as being in themselves entirely independent of properties — are incoherent. For to

[73] Nor anything in the 4D view that challenges it — for the fourth dimension is, precisely, that of time, describe it how you will.

[74] Also known as the distinction between particulars and universals, between the particular and the general, between individuals and universals, and so on.

be is necessarily to be somehow or other, i.e. to have some nature or other, i.e. to have properties.[75]

Some, rebounding from the obvious incoherence of bare particulars, suggest that the only other option is to conceive of objects as nothing but collections or 'bundles' of properties. But this option seems no better. Mere bundles seem as bad as bare particulars. Why should we accept properties without objects after having rejected objects without properties?

But this is not what we have done. The claim is not that there can be properties without objects; it is that objects (just) are collections of properties. This debate is as troublesome as it is ancient, conducted as it is against the insistent background rhythm of everyday thought and talk, but the idea is that adequate sense can be given to the admittedly odd-sounding claim that objects are nothing but collections of instantiated properties.

It sounds hugely peculiar, however, to say of a child or a refrigerator that it is strictly speaking nothing but a collection of instantiated properties. In fact it sounds little better than the claim that there are bare propertyless objects. So it is fortunate that there is no need to put things in such troublesome terms. Philosophers have managed to find other ways of describing the object/property topos correctly. When Kant says that 'in their relation to substance, [accidents or properties] are not in fact subordinated to it, but are the way of existing of the substance itself', he gets the matter exactly right, and nothing more needs to be said (Kant, 1781–5, A414/B441).

Armstrong puts the point as follows. We can, he says, '*distinguish* the particularity of a particular from its properties', but

> the two 'factors' are too intimately together to speak of a *relation* between them. The thisness [*haeccitas*] and the nature are incapable of existing apart from each other. Bare particulars are vicious abstractions . . . from what may be called states of affairs: this-of-a-certain-nature (Armstrong, 1997, pp. 109–10).[76]

And states of affairs, one might add, are already static abstractions, vicious or not, from the world-in-time, the essentially dynamic or processual nature of reality.

So the distinction between an object or 'substance' or particular, considered at any given time, and its properties at that time, is, in Descartes' terms, a merely 'conceptual' rather than a 'real' distinction (hence the strong comparison with triangularity and trilaterality). Obviously we want to be able to say, in everyday life, that an object can stay the same while its properties change. Nothing here forbids that way of talking; and there are also theoretical contexts in which one can put things in this way without going wrong. In some theoretical contexts, however, it is essential to maintain a tight grip on the metaphysics of the object/property topos, and to keep Kant's phrase constantly in mind: 'in their relation to the object, the properties are not in fact subordinated to it, but are the way of existing of the object itself'.[77] This, I think, is another point at which philosophy requires a form of meditation, something consid-

[75] I take it that this point is not touched by the claim that one can distinguish between the essential and the contingent properties of individuals, and I am restricting attention, in this discussion, to 'intrinsic', 'non-relational' properties of objects.

[76] Compare P.F. Strawson's philosophical-logical use (1959, pp. 167–78) of the metaphysically suggestive phrase 'non-relational tie' in his discussion of the way in which subject terms and predicate terms are combined in the description of reality.

[77] I have substituted 'object' and 'property' for 'substance' and 'accident' respectively.

erably more than disengaged theoretical assent: cultivation of a shift in intuitions, a learned ability to enable, at least for certain periods of time, a different stress-dynamic in the background of thought.

'All this is very fine. But when one considers a human experience, and hence, on the present terms, an instance of a SESMET, it still seems intensely natural to say (B) that there is just one object in question — namely, a human being like Louis who is a subject of experience and who has the *property* of having an experience of a certain kind — rather than saying that there are really two objects in question, a human being, on the one hand, and a SESMET, on the other.'

True. And yet I think that the two objects claim is correct, although I haven't yet given much of an argument for it, because the objection to the everyday object/property distinction doesn't bear directly against (B) in the way that the objection to the object/process distinction bears against (C).

The direct argument against (B) goes as follows. Consider a human being — Louis — in the light of materialism. Louis is identical with (or is constituted at any time by) a set of U-fields in a certain relation.[78] The same is true of an undetached human hand or pimple. The same is true of a SESMET — the phenomenon of the live-aware presence of the mental subject of experience in the present moment of consciousness or present hiatus-free period of experience. Thus far, then, they are all the same. Now one may grant this similarity, while still wishing to say that a SESMET is a process occurring in a human being, or an aspect of a property — the property of having a certain experience — of a human being. But as one advances in materialism, in one's conception of the nature of a physical object, and in one's intuitive grasp on the point that mental phenomena and non-mental phenomena are equally physical phenomena, one of the things one comes to see, I believe, is that there are in fact no better candidates in the universe for the title 'physical object' or 'substance' than SESMETS.[79] Certainly it seems that there is, in nature, as far as we know it, no higher grade of physical unity than the unity of the mental subject present and alive in what James calls the 'indecomposable' unity of a conscious thought.

Unity, you say, proves nothing about ontological category. Let me re-express the claim. Negatively put, it is that if we consider the phenomenon of the living presence of the subject of experience during an episode of experience, and agree to speak of this phenomenon by saying that a SESMET exists, and make it explicit that we are adopting this (admittedly substantival) form of words without prejudice to any metaphysical conclusions that we may draw regarding its ontological category, then we have no *more* reason to say that it is really just a property (or state) of some other object, or just a process (or event) occurring in some object, than to say that it is itself an object — an instantiated-property-constituted process-object like any other physical object.

Positively put, it is that it is simply correct to say that the SESMET-phenomenon is an object, a physical object. Not only do we have reason to say this given its intrinsic character as a mental unity, and hence a physical unity, in space–time. It is also hard to see that there are any better candidates for the status of physical objects than SESMETS

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[78] I am using the word 'set' without any theoretical load.

[79] The stress is on 'better'; I'm not saying one can't abandon the category *object*.

or selves — no better candidates, at least so far as this universe is concerned, and as far as our knowledge extends, for the title 'substance'.

'This is charming, but it amounts to very little. You have taken the word "object" and stripped away the features ordinarily thought to distinguish objects from properties and processes in such a way that it is then very easy — not to say empty — for you to call whatever phenomenon you finally identify as the self an object.'

The only thing wrong with this objection is that it misdescribes my route and motivation. True, I think that the phenomenon I am proposing to call a SESMET, and am putting forward as a candidate for the title 'self', is an object. I also think that there is, in nature, no better example of an object.[80] But I do not start from that point and then adjust the metaphysics until it allows me to say this. The metaphysical moves that dismantle the standard frontiers in the object/process/property conceptual cluster seem irresistible in any case.

XIX: Metaphysics: the Transience View

According to the *Transience* view,[81] many SESMETS exist in the case of something like a human being like Louis. Each one is an individual physical thing or object, and a SESMET exists in the L-reality (cf. p. 121 above) whenever there is an episode of conscious experience in the L-reality. How long does a given SESMET last? As long as the experientially unitary period of experience of which it is the subject. How many are there? There are exactly as many SESMETS in the L-reality as there are experientially unitary periods of experience. For each experientially unitary period of experience must have a subject *for whom* it is a unitary, bound experience, a subject that holds it together in such a way that it constitutes an experientially unitary experience — the grasping of a thought-content, the seeing of a bird and the seeing of it as a bird, and so on. If distinguishing and counting such experientially unitary periods of experience is an irreducibly uncertain business, epistemologically speaking, the same goes for the counting of SESMETS. It certainly does not follow that there is any metaphysical indeterminacy when it comes to the question of how many there are (though it may well be rather unimportant how many there are). Either way the facts remain what they are: there are many of these SESMET-involving bindings, in the case of a human being, and the conscious experience — the mental life — of a human being is just the living — the internal inhabitings — of these bindings.[82] When we consider a human being as a persisting psychophysical whole, we can perfectly well speak in terms of there being just one subject of experience. It is only when we decide to think about the Problem of the Self — to press the theoretical, metaphysical question of the existence of the self — that we do better to say that there are many subjects of experience — or selves.

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[80] It is also, perhaps, the deep original of our active grasp of the notion of unity and objecthood (such a view is entirely compatible with experimental evidence for the innateness of our ordinary concept of a physical object).

[81] Formerly known as the Pearl View (Strawson, 1997, p. 424).

[82] Hayward is wrong to think that I offer 'the image of a string of pearl-like things as an image of the self', or claim that a self is 'a string of momentary things' (1998, pp. 611, 624). Sheets-Johnstone makes the same mistake, for I do not claim that we experience the self 'gappily', or that 'the self is something that comes and goes' (1999, p. 68).

The Transience view is so called because of its application to the human case. It does not say that SESMETS are necessarily of relatively short duration. It is only relative to everyday human standards of temporal duration that they appear short-lived, in any case,[83] and it is not a necessary feature of their nature. There may be beings whose periods of hiatus-free experience extend for hours, or for the whole of their existence. This is how I'd expect the divine SESMET to be, if I believed in God.[84] We, however, are not like this. The basic form of our consciousness is that of a gappy series of eruptions of consciousness out of non-consciousness, although the gaps are usually not apparent to casual inspection.[85]

There is no SESMET in the L-reality when there is no conscious experience in the L-reality. A SESMET is present only when there is actual experience or consciousness, and is I believe always short-lived in the human case. So it cannot be identified with a human being considered as a whole, or with a brain, or with a relatively enduring brain structure: it has quite different identity conditions. Most philosophers use the term 'subject of experience', which forms part of the term 'SESMET', in such a way that a subject of experience can be said to exist in the absence of any experience, and many have grown so accustomed to this use, and to identifying subjects of experience with human beings (or other creatures) considered as a whole, that they can no longer hear the extreme naturalness of the other use, according to which there is no *subject of experience* if there is no *experience*; according to which a subject of experience cannot exist at time *t* unless experience exists at *t* for it to be a subject of. I hope that those who find this natural use of 'subject of experience' strained can accustom themselves to it. It is only a matter of terminology, after all, and it is only this indubitably real phenomenon — the subject of experience considered as something that is alive and present in consciousness at any given moment of consciousness and that cannot be said to exist at all when there is no experience or consciousness — that concerns me here.

I take it, then, that there are many SESMETS in the L-reality, and that for the most part they exist successively, and in a non-overlapping fashion, although I agree with William James that there is no theoretical difficulty in the idea that they may sometimes exist concurrently in the L-reality.[86] A SESMET may be short-lived, but it is none the less real, and it is as much a physical object as any piano. Modern physics says nothing about it, or rather, says nothing about its mental being considered specifically as such; but the fact that modern physics says nothing about something is a very poor reason for thinking that the something in question is not physical, or does not exist.

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[83] Although 10^{-34} sec. is a short time by human standards, it 'seems by the standards of early-universe physics as interminable as an indifferent production of *Lohengrin*' (Ferris, 1997, p. 237).

[84] Perhaps meditation can engender longer periods of hiatus-free thought in human beings (cf. Pickering, 1999, p. 32).

[85] Cf. Strawson (1997), pp. 421–4. It doesn't take much to become able to detect them. My talk of an 'irruption into consciousness from a basic *substrate* of non-consciousness' was misleading in this connection (Strawson, 1997, p. 422; see Shear, 1998, p. 684 for some effective criticism), for I had no metaphysical-substance-like entity in mind.

[86] James (1890), p. 401; cf. Gallagher and Marcel (1999, p. 16). Wilkes' cases of 'synchronous [multiple] selves' (1998, pp. 161–2) seem to me to support, rather than undercut, my claims about the necessary singleness of a self at a time (Strawson, 1997, pp. 412–17).

XX: Metaphysics: 'I' and 'I'

But what then am I? — to repeat Descartes's question. What am I if the mental subject of experience is not the same thing as the human being? What is the relation between Louis and a SESMET (or self) that exists in the L-reality?

Am I a SESMET, or short-lived self? In one sense No. I am a human being. In another sense Yes, that is precisely what I am, as I speak and think now.

But what then am *I*? Am I two different things, $I_{H(uman\ being)}$ and $I_{S(ESMET),}$ at a given time? Surely that is an intolerable conclusion?[87]

Not at all. It is simply a reflection of how 'I' works. 'I' is not univocal, and can refer to two different things. Or rather, its referential reach can expand outwards in a certain way, so that it can refer to more or less. The same is true of 'here' and 'now', but the phrase 'the castle' provides a better analogy for 'I', given the present concern with objects. Sometimes 'the castle' is used to refer to the castle proper, sometimes it used to refer to the ensemble of the castle and the ground and buildings located within its outer walls. Similarly, when I think and talk about myself, my reference sometimes extends only to the SESMET that I then am, and sometimes it extends further out, to the human being that I am. The castle proper is not the same thing as the castle in the broad sense, but it is a (proper) part of the castle in the broad sense.[88]

The same is true in the case of a SESMET and a human being. Louis is identical with (or is constituted at any time by) a set of U-fields in a certain relation, and a SESMET S existing in the L-reality for a period of time *t* (a two-second interval, say) is identical with (or is constituted at any time by) a set of U-fields in the L-reality in a certain relation.[89] S is a peculiarly shaped thing (it is peculiarly shaped when considered spatially or non-mentally, but not when considered mentally), that has mental being and (I am presuming) non-mental being, and the relation between S and Louis the human being (an object with, say, a seventy-year existence) is a straightforward part-whole relation, like the relation between Louis and one of his toes — or the relation between a morning glory plant and one of its flowers, or between Louis and one of his pimples. That, I believe, is how things are, physically and metaphysically.[90]

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[87] Olson (1998, p. 654) asks why we should 'suppose that you and I are [SESMETs]? Why couldn't we be human beings?' Without expecting to satisfy him, I reply that we are both.

[88] Some philosophers refuse to accept that 'I' is not univocal, and appeal to the court of 'ordinary language'. Others have different reasons for insisting on univocality. I will not pursue this here — no contributor to the symposium pursued such objections — except to note that the non-univocality of 'I' is plainly marked in the ordinary use of language (see Strawson, forthcoming *b*, §2).

[89] The phrase 'a set of U-fields in a certain relation' does not, when used by realistic materialists, refer only or even especially to non-mental, non-experiential phenomena that can be described by current physics or something like it. It refers just as it says: to a set of U-fields in a certain relation, U-fields whose existence in relation is, in the case of a SESMET, as all realistic materialists must agree, as much revealed and constituted by experiential phenomena as by any non-experiential phenomena characterizable by physics. (I am not optimistic about our chances of pinning the U-fields down one by one, for reasons given in Hornsby, 1981, and for reasons deriving from physics; but the claim remains.)

[90] The organization of the set that constitutes S will change during *t*, i.e. during S's existence, not only because each atom will change internally, but also because there will be vast numbers of macroscopic changes, as electrochemical, metabolic and other processes continue. The set's membership may well also change during *t*, and in this respect SESMETs will be like objects of more widely recognized sorts — dogs, human beings, trees, socks — in as much as they are naturally (this is the 'three-dimensionalist' way of describing them) said to be made up of different U-fields at different times.

Some may feel that it is unhelpful to claim that S is a part of Louis, because 'part of' so strongly suggests a persistent spatial part like a finger, but there is no good reason why 'part of' should be restricted to such cases, and no clear lower bound on the period of time required to earn the title 'persistent'. A pimple that lasts for a day is a part of Louis, a flower that lasts an hour is part of a plant, and a carbon atom that takes the following path through Alice is part of Alice:

> Alice drinks a cup of tea in which a lump of sugar has been dissolved. A certain carbon atom that is part of that lump of sugar is carried along with the rest of the sugar by Alice's digestive system to her intestine. It passes through the intestinal wall and into the bloodstream, whence it is carried to the biceps muscle of Alice's left arm. There it is oxidized in several indirect stages (yielding in the process energy, which goes into the production of adenosine triphosphate, a substance that, when it breaks down, provides energy for muscular contraction) and is finally carried by Alice's circulatory system to her lungs and there breathed out as a part of a carbon dioxide molecule. The entire process — Alice began to do push-ups immediately after she had drunk her tea — occupied . . . only a few minutes (Van Inwagen, 1990, pp. 94–5).

The thought or experience of which S (and thus Louis) is the subject is like a highly transient flower growing rapidly from nothing into full maturity and fading as rapidly to nothing, or like one sudden arcing jet of water — one of an indefatigable but essentially distinct series of such jets — from a powerful fountain with air bubbles in the system. This is the Transience view.

If necessary, I can do without the word 'self' and its plural. Others can use these words for whatever they like. They can say, if they like, that selves do not exist at all. I will be happy to make do with SESMETS — objects whose existence is as certain as the existence of experience, which is certain; things whose existence can and must be as fully acknowledged by Buddhists as by anyone else.

That said, I remain strongly inclined to call SESMETS 'selves', because I believe that SESMETS are located at the centre of what we must mean to be talking about when we talk about the self, or selves, in a way that trumps all other claims to the word 'self'. Talk of SESMETS leaves out a great deal of what some have in mind when they talk of selves, but the central component of the idea of the self is the idea of an inner subject of experience, and in the human case, or so I believe, the existence of inner subjects of experience is, as a matter of empirical fact, just the existence of SESMETS. I think it is a deep and difficult truth, fundamental to the Buddhist tradition and prepared for, in the Western tradition, by Hume, that these short-term selves are what most people are really talking about when they talk about *the* self.

Many agree that the central component of the idea of the self is the idea of an inner subject of experience, but insist that this inner subject is or can be something that has long-term diachronic continuity. On my view, though, this amounts to claiming that a many-membered set or series of SESMETS in a certain relation can be a single subject of experience. But a many-membered set of SESMETS in a certain relation is simply not the kind of thing that can itself be a subject of experience.[91] So there is no place for the persisting self, on the present view. So there is no place for the self at all, as many conceive it.

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[91] This is not a philosophico-grammatical point about the word 'set', which I am using without any theoretical load, for a set of U-fields in a certain relation can indeed be said to be or constitute a subject of experience, on my view.

XXI: Conclusion

Olson is right that 'self' is used in many different ways (Olson, 1998, p. 645), but wrong to claim that we should give it up for this reason. Interdisciplinary discussion throws up a chaos of uses, but this turns out to be part of its value.[92] To read all the contributions to this symposium is to see that it is possible to navigate coherently among the many uses and to pursue one's own use fruitfully in the light of one's knowledge of the others. It can be painful at first — one brings cherished habits and sensitivities to the task — but the fall-out from the misprision is, as it accumulates, enlightening. And if one looks down on the debate from high enough, and in a sufficiently pan-dialectical spirit, I think one can see that there is, in spite of everything, a deep consensus about what is being talked about when the self is talked about, shapeshifting though it may be, and structured about various poles (e.g. the high-metaphysical pole and the Ecologically-Embedded-and-Embodied *Lebenswelt* pole) that unite it only by virtue of their dynamic opposition.[93]

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[92] In the course of our disagreements we learn as much about striking differences in human Self-experience as about striking differences in theoretical orientation.

[93] I am grateful to Derek Parfit, Edward St. Aubyn, and the editors of the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* for their comments.

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