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# First-personal ontological commitment, Self-body

i.e.: What is the “I” in Psychology? ...



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## Introduction

2.

At the 2013 Annual Royal Institute of Philosophy David Chalmers pondered, “Why isn’t there more progress in philosophy?” He pointed out that the method of philosophy results in arguments that don’t lead to agreement, but rather to sophisticated disagreement! He highlighted some particular problems that have proved resistant to resolution such as the mind-body problem, free will and the nature of morality and speculated that a lack of progress might also be due to a variety of reasons, including anti-realism, verbal disputes and sociological factors.

Chalmers, in his helpful, sociologically focused article, remains optimistic (“we have to keep doing philosophy” p 26 Chalmers, forthcoming 2014) - but we ask why think that philosophers can deal with such problems on their own? Indeed why think that psychologists or neuroscientists can solve the mind-body problem on their own either? (Chalmers laments “these sciences seem to have left the big questions—the problems of consciousness and intentionality, of mental causation and free will—wide open.” p 19 Chalmers, forthcoming 2014)

We adopt a different stance and are motivated by Susan Haack’s crossword analogy for research and enquiry into problems (Haack, 2013). “Everyone who looks into how some part or aspect of the world is ... works on part of a part of the same vast crossword.” Location 564 of 9410, Kindle (Haack, 2013). “Just about every inquirer, in the most mundane of everyday inquiries, depends on others; otherwise, each would have to start on his part of the crossword alone and from scratch.” Location 596 of 8410, Kindle (Haack).

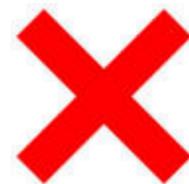
And we contend that for some questions, such as the mind-body problem, neither philosophy nor science alone will provide answers. Rather philosophy together with psychology is needed to get to the truth of how mind and body are related, that is, a combination of a discipline that deals in the nature of things (philosophy) along with a discipline that deals in how individuals think, feel and behave (psychology).

We assert that this working together of philosophy and psychology should be taken as a self-evidently sound way to proceed to investigate the mind-body problem. We hold that the metaphysics of mind and the social psychology of the individual are the relevant domains from each discipline to arrive at the knowledge we are seeking in order to make progress with the mind-body problem. While neuroscience is indubitably germane to uncovering many important facts in relation to brain and behaviour it will not be helpful in illuminating the mind-body problem because of its implicit physicalist commitments. Such commitments entail that neuroscience must endorse a reductionist or eliminative position with regard to mind and whilst of course reduction or elimination are possible strategies they are not helpful for psychology as a discipline, for one thing they result in at best a meagre if not inconsequential role for mental states. We take seriously the discipline of psychology in making a contribution to our understanding of the wellsprings of behaviour in the broadest sense and the ontological implications of contemporary psychological methodology.

1.



“This intuitive sense of self is an effortless and fundamental experience. But it is nothing more than an elaborate illusion”, p 33, New Scientist, Feb 2013



!!!

3.

The purpose of this presentation is three-fold:

- 1/ to reject the claim that the self is an illusion or does not exist and show its central role in dissolving the mind-body problem in a consilience of evidence and arguments
- 2/ to detail some “penciled in” crossword entries for the mind-body problem – an ontological commitment to the first person (Janssen-Lauret, 2014) (see section 4) and Self-body Dualism (Bleau, 2013; Lowe, 1996, 2006, 2008) (see sections 5 and 6)
- 3/ to highlight some theorists in social psychology committed to the existence of the Self (see section 9) and to propose that we have new warrant for focusing on the Self (the subject of experience) as a non-physical posit and legitimate scientific entity (see section 7)

4.

First-personal ontological commitment

What exists? What is the best strategy to work out what ontological assumptions are in play in a theory? Quine (Quine, 1960, 1969) thinks that we are justified in assuming the existence of objects that our best theory posits qua their playing a particular explanatory role within it. To make all posits fully explicit, he translates theories into a formal language, where the existential quantifier, the analogue of ‘there is’ or ‘exists’ reveals the presence of a posit. For example, there exists an x, and x is an electron. His formal language of choice is bivalent first order logic without individual constants. Thus no commitment is incurred to an individual qua individual, but only insofar as the posit plays an indispensable explanatory role in the theory: i.e., if the theory can only explain what is to be explained by invoking that entity. Janssen-Lauret (2014) identifies a problem with this procedure, in that it proscribes the use of first-personal, introspective methods which are not only of interest to philosophy, but indispensable in psychology. Although many useful posits like electrons, space-time, ecosystems, and models are not directly observed, but known only qua playing some explanatory role in the system, there is a small but philosophically interesting class of entities that are known only (or primarily) directly, via what philosophers call ‘privileged access’ and in the first person: mental entities, selves and mental states. One interesting example of ontological commitment is in the Cartesian ‘cogito, ergo sum’: Whatever else I may be mistaken about, I know that I cannot ever truly assert ‘I do not exist’. So whenever I say ‘I exist’, I must be saying something true. It follows that at least one thing exists. Any attempt to translate this argument into the kind of impersonal, third-personally verifiable terms Quine demands mangles the logical form of the original beyond recognition. Still, the argument is compelling, and there are examples of indispensable uses of the first person from contemporary psychology, too. Quine’s strictly third-personal methodology entails that he cannot countenance any use of introspective data in science, but scientists working in psychology and psychiatry have now mostly renounced this behaviourist impulse and are open to non-behaviourist methodology (Miller 2003). Introspection yields first-personal beliefs about the subject’s own current mental states, usually by immediate privileged access. The science of psychology has a need for self-reports which are introspective in that sense, and for grammatical differentiation between self and other. For example, first-personal judgments are reliably remembered even by patients with severe Alzheimer’s (Costabile, et al, 2003), and attitude surveys use first-personal self-reports as their primary kind of evidence (Sirken, et al, 1999). This means that a full statement of contemporary psychology needs some way of marking the difference between ‘self’ or ‘other’, and we argue it will end up having to countenance first-personal posits.

5.

## Self-Body Dualism (Non-Cartesian Substance Dualism)

Dualism in the philosophy of mind is traditionally divided into two types: Substance Dualism and Property Dualism. Substance Dualism usually maintains that physical and mental substances are distinct while Property Dualism only maintains that mental properties are distinct. EJ Lowe’s Self-Body Dualism holds that Selves and Bodies are distinct substances; Lowe’s preference is to talk of the self-body problem (rather than the mind-body problem) for he does not wish to reify the mind – the mind is not a thing in itself. Rather a self (or a person) is a thing in itself and the body is quite a different thing. Selves and bodies are each substances in their own right; the self is not to be identified with the brain or body. The body is a living organism made of matter (Lowe, 2009) whereas Lowe contends that selves are ontologically unitary entities unifying both physical and mental properties as properties of the same bearer.

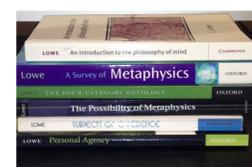
Lowe is also committed to the following claims in relation to the self:

- 1. The self is the unique subject of all its conscious mental states
- 2. The self is a substance, a thing in itself; it is a simple substance however, not a composite substance, capable of being divisible into parts
- 3. The self is the bearer of physical, as well as, mental properties
- 4. The self-body relation is a relation of embodiment
- 5. The self plays a distinctive role in mental causation and deliberative action

E.J. Lowe (1950-2014)



[Photo: Tuomas E. Tahko, [www.tahko.net](http://www.tahko.net)]



For Bleau’s (2012) defense of Lowe’s view, see <http://glasgow.academia.edu/RenéeBleau/>



# Dualism and Contemporary Psychology

6.

The philosophical doctrine relied on here is known as the Indiscernibility of Identicals (Leibniz), formally:  
 $\forall x \forall y [x=y \rightarrow \forall F (Fx \rightarrow Fy)]$   
That is: if selves and bodies do not have exactly the same properties, then they cannot be identical.

## Selves and Bodies: distinct substances on Lowe's account as they have different properties

- i/ Selves and Bodies have different persistence conditions
- ii/ Self is a simple substance; Body is a composite substance
- iii/ Selves and Bodies have different criteria of identity

### Lowe's Unity Argument (Lowe, 2008)

Premise 1: I am the subject of all and only my own mental states

Premise 2: Neither my body as a whole nor any part of it (such as my brain) could be the subject of all and only my own mental states.

Conclusion: I am not identical with my body or any part of it. That is, I am an entity which is distinct from my body, which is another entity.

7.

## Contemporary Psychology

BPS "Psychology is the scientific study of people, the mind and behaviour." APA "Psychology is a diverse discipline, grounded in science, but with nearly boundless applications in everyday life... Today...as the link between mind and body is well-recognized..."

As Psychology became a separate discipline at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was much debate about its status as a science and its focus as a discipline. Was the focus to be on an evidence base of knowledge classed as the nomothetic (focusing on the general) or the idiographic (focusing on the individual)? (Windelband, 1998, orig: 1894); despite Munsterberg's early attempt to argue that such a distinction was too divisive (Munsterberg, 1899), Psychology, searching for scientific legitimacy, developed experimental methods to focus on the nomothetic aspect of the newly formed discipline. The idiographic focus began to take on an anti-scientific tenor. However, this nomothetic-idiographic distinction reflects a false dichotomy (Salvatore & Valsiner, 2010) and in any case, science is not only interested in the nomothetic but also the idiographic. (For instance a recent example of a body of published scientific research in the idiographic variety is the research that was conducted following the collapse of the Twin Towers on 9/11 (Robinson, 2012).

Thus Psychology is legitimately the study of the individual person and of people as individuals generally. How is this individual to be conceived? To be sure over its young history Psychology has conceptualized the individual differently at different stages. Early theorising was founded on Behaviourist principles, when behaviour was regarded as being shaped and controlled "mechanically" by environmental stimuli, with reference to mental concepts out of the picture as they were deemed unscientific (Skinner, 1938). Subsequently in the 50s with the cognitive revolution (Miller, 2003) psychological theorising turned to the mind as computer and more recently with the ascendancy of neuroscience, some theorists proclaim that we are simply our brains (Swaab, 2014) or that the self is a deception created by our brains (Hood, 2012) or that we experience a *sense* of self (Damasio, 2010).

It seems that for some scientists, for example, Atkins (2011) neuroscientific claims are currently regarded as more "authoritative". In *On Being* Atkins writes "*science can penetrate into people's heads and minds. The mode of inspection is neuroscience and is foot-soldier psychology. Both may still be emerging, and not yet fully reliable sciences, but they are ways to penetrate through the protective carapace of the skull to reveal aspects of the brain's beliefs and sentiments and why they dwell there*". (Atkins, 2011, p xi). But we need to be careful about the apparent claims for authority on the part of biological neuroscience in explaining mind due to pressing popular demand as Brothers highlights (1999) p 832 "*With the waning of Freudian authority, there appears to be a waxing appetite for neuroscientific authority*". And as we determined in the Introduction (section 2), neuroscience is not helpful in addressing the mind-body problem other than to offer solutions which are eliminative or reductive and make a mystery out of the psychology of thought and emotion, given that neural firings without a subject's correlative utterances are enigmatic. While it might be true that "*The modern science of mind proceeds on the assumption that the mind is simply what the brain does*" (Greene, 2011), we assert that this assumption rests on physicalist prejudice and that neuroscientists in their haste to leave the mind-body problem behind have closed their minds to other credible metaphysical theories.

We propose then that there is a new warrant for psychology to investigate the Self or the "I", the subject of experience, as a legitimate scientific entity, according to the accounts carefully elaborated by Lowe (2008) and Janssen-Lauret (2014). Much work needs to be done now in psychology to tease out the impact of this new ontological commitment to the "I" in terms of appropriate epistemological approaches and determining what kinds of conclusions may follow. In addition with the right metaphysics in place, other intractable problems, such as the problem of Freewill may prove to be more amenable to resolution.

## Which is more fundamental – Mind or Self?

8.

Of course for Descartes the terms both mind and self were used to refer to the immaterial substance that was not body. This conflation of terms has led to much confusion in philosophy and psychology. On Lowe's account, we are minded creatures, but our minds could not exist without our bodies (or brains). As minded beings, subjects of experience, we "*feel, perceive, think and perform intentional actions*" (Lowe, 2000, p8). But the self is the more fundamental entity which bears both mental and physical properties and as Janssen-Lauret, on revising Quine's meta-ontological theoretical methodology, has shown, is the ontologically committing entity for which the normal use of the referent "I" is reserved.

## Social Psychologists committed to the existence of the Self

9.

In addition to the use of self-reports ubiquitous in all areas of psychology, there are a number of prominent theorists in psychology who make core use of the notion of self, where self refers to neither mind nor body.

**Bandura** Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive theory adopts an agentic perspective. "*People are self-organizing, proactive, self-regulating and self-reflecting. They are not simply onlookers of their behavior.*" (p 164, Bandura 2006)

**Baumeister** Roy Baumeister's Self-Regulation theory postulates that acts of self-control cause ego depletion causing short-term impairments in subsequent tasks requiring self-control, even when tasks are unrelated. (Baumeister, et al, 2007).

**Berne** Eric Berne developed an elaborated theory of social relationships based on ego states and how people behave according to set patterns in relationships. Berne's theory is based on the symbolic forms of recognition we seek in social interactions, which have their analogue in biology (Spitz, 1945) and physical handling needs in infancy. (Berne, 1964).

10.

## Concluding Remarks

- Different disciplines must work together to solve the intractable problems of philosophy and science such as the mind-body problem
- Ontology is a focus of both philosophy and science
- Science should be constrained by good philosophy and philosophy should be equally constrained by good science
- We endorse E J Lowe's Self-Body Dualism and F Janssen-Lauret's First-personal Ontological Commitment accounts to show how the mind-body problem dissolves when the Self is acknowledged as a real existent which is a non-physical substance to which the term "I" refers
- We highlight the Self as an irreducible, emergent entity, a bearer of both physical and indispensable mental properties and it serves as a core construct in theoretical and empirical Social Psychological accounts.

11.

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