

An introduction to the philosophy of mind



E. J. LOWE

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In this book Jonathan Lowe offers a lucid and wide-ranging introduction to the philosophy of mind. Using a problem-centred approach designed to stimulate as well as instruct, he begins with a general examination of the mind-body problem and moves on to detailed examination of more specific philosophical issues concerning sensation, perception, thought and language, rationality, artificial intelligence, action, personal identity and self-knowledge. His discussion is notably broad in scope, and distinctive in giving equal attention to deep metaphysical questions concerning the mind and to the discoveries and theories of modern scientific psychology. It will be of interest to any reader with a basic grounding in modern philosophy.

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Preface

At a time when many introductory books on the philosophy of mind are available, it would be fair to ask me why I have written another one. I have at least two answers to this question. One is that some of the more recent introductions to this subject have been rather narrow in their focus, tending to concentrate upon the many different ‘isms’ that have emerged of late – reductionism, functionalism, eliminativism, instrumentalism, non-reductive physicalism and so forth, all of them divisible into further sub-varieties. Another is that I am disturbed by the growing tendency to present the subject in a quasi-scientific way, as though the only proper role for philosophers of mind is to act as junior partners within the wider community of ‘cognitive scientists’. It may be true that philosophers of an earlier generation were unduly dismissive – and, indeed, ignorant – of empirical psychology and neuroscience, but now there is a danger that the pendulum has swung too far in the opposite direction.

Perhaps it will be thought that my two answers are in conflict with one another, inasmuch as the current obsession with the different ‘isms’ does at least appear to indicate an interest in the *metaphysics* of mind, a distinctly philosophical enterprise. But there is no real conflict here, because much of the so-called ‘metaphysics’ in contemporary philosophy of mind is really rather lightweight, often having only a tenuous relation to serious foundational work in ontology. In fact, most of the current ‘isms’ in the philosophy of mind are generated by the need felt by their advocates to propound and justify a broadly *physicalist* account of the mind and its capa-

cities, on the questionable assumption that this alone can render talk about the mind scientifically respectable. Many of the esoteric disputes between philosophers united by this common assumption have arisen simply because it is very unclear just what 'physicalism' in the philosophy of mind really entails. In the chapters that follow, I shall try not to let that relatively sterile issue dominate and distort our philosophical inquiries.

This book is aimed primarily at readers who have already benefited from a basic grounding in philosophical argument and analysis and are beginning to concentrate in more detail upon specific areas of philosophy, in this case the philosophy of mind. The coverage of the subject is broad but at the same time, I hope, sharply focused and systematic. A start is made with a look at some fundamental metaphysical problems of mind and body, with arguments for and against dualism providing the focus of attention. Then some general theories of the nature of mental states are explained and criticised, the emphasis here being upon the strengths and weaknesses of functionalist approaches. Next we turn to problems concerning the 'content' of intentional states of mind, such as the question of whether content can be assigned to mental states independently of the wider physical environments of the subjects whose states they are. In the remaining chapters of the book, attention is focused successively upon more specific aspects of mind and personality: sensation, perception, thought and language, reasoning and intelligence, action and intention, and finally personal identity and self-knowledge. The order in which these topics are covered has been deliberately chosen so as to enable the reader to build upon the understanding gained from earlier chapters in getting to grips with the topics of later chapters. Rather than include separate guides to further reading for the topics covered by the book, I have avoided unnecessary duplication by constructing the notes for each chapter in such a way that they serve this purpose as well as providing references.

The book is not partisan, in the sense of espousing an exclusive approach to questions about the mind in general –

such as any particular form of physicalism or dualism – but at the same time it does not remain blandly neutral on more specific issues. Developments in empirical psychology are taken into account, but are not allowed to overshadow genuinely philosophical problems. Indeed, my approach is a problem-oriented one, raising questions and possible answers, rather than aiming to be purely instructive. I have tried to write the book in a simple and non-technical style, with a view to making it accessible to as wide a readership as possible. At the same time, I hope that professional philosophers specialising in the philosophy of mind will find it of interest more than just as a teaching aid.

I am grateful to a number of anonymous referees who provided valuable suggestions and advice at various stages in the preparation of this book. I only regret that limitations of space have prevented me from adopting all of their suggestions. I am also very grateful to Hilary Gaskin of Cambridge University Press for her encouragement and help throughout the process of planning and writing the book.

Introduction

What is the philosophy of mind? One might be tempted to answer that it is the study of philosophical questions concerning the mind and its properties – questions such as whether the mind is distinct from the body or some part of it, such as the brain, and whether the mind has properties, such as consciousness, which are unique to it. But such an answer implicitly assumes something which is already philosophically contentious, namely, that ‘minds’ are *objects* of a certain kind, somehow related – perhaps causally, perhaps by identity – to other objects, such as bodies or brains. In short, such an answer involves an implicit *reification* of minds: literally, a making of them into ‘things’. Indo-European languages such as English are overburdened with nouns and those whose native tongues they are have an unwarranted tendency to suppose that nouns name things. When we speak of people having both minds and bodies, it would be naïve to construe this as akin to saying that trees have both leaves and trunks. Human bodies are certainly ‘things’ of a certain kind. But when we say that people ‘have minds’ we are, surely, saying something about the properties of people rather than about certain ‘things’ which people somehow own. A more circumspect way of saying that people ‘have minds’ would be to say that people are *minded* or *mindful*, meaning thereby just that they feel, see, think, reason and so forth. According to this view of the matter, the philosophy of mind is the philosophical study of minded things just insofar as they are minded. The things in question will include people, but may well also include non-human animals and perhaps even robots, if these too can

be minded. More speculatively, the things in question might even include disembodied spirits, such as angels and God, if such things do or could exist.

Is there some single general term which embraces all minded things, actual and possible? Not, I think, in everyday language, but we can suggest one. My suggestion is that we use the term 'subject' for this purpose. There is a slight inconvenience attached to this, inasmuch as the word 'subject' also has other uses, for instance as a synonym for 'topic'. But in practice no confusion is likely to arise on this account. And, in any case, any possible ambiguity can easily be removed by expanding 'subject' in our intended sense to 'subject of experience' – understanding 'experience' here in a broad sense to embrace any kind of sensation, perception or thought. This agreed, we can say that the philosophy of mind is the philosophical study of subjects of experience – what they are, how they can exist, and how they are related to the rest of creation.¹

EMPIRICAL PSYCHOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

But what is distinctive about the *philosophical* study of subjects of experience? How, for instance, does it differ from the sort of study of them conducted by empirical psychologists? It differs in several ways. For one thing, the philosophy of mind pays close attention to the *concepts* we deploy in characterising things as being subjects of experience. Thus it is concerned with the analysis of such concepts as the concepts of perception, thought and intentional agency. The philosophical analysis of a concept is not to be confused with a mere account of the meaning of a word as it is used by some speech community, whether this community be the population at large or a group of scientists. For example, an adequate analysis of the concept of *seeing* cannot be arrived at simply by examin-

¹ I say more about the notion of a 'subject of experience' in my book of that title, *Subjects of Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): see especially chs. 1 and 2.

ing how either ordinary people or empirical psychologists use the word 'see'. Of course, we cannot completely ignore everyday usage in trying to analyse such a concept, but we must be ready to criticise and refine that usage where it is confused or vague. The philosophical study of any subject matter is above all a critical and reflective exercise which – the opinion of Wittgenstein notwithstanding – almost always will not and should not leave our use of words unaltered.²

No doubt it is true that good empirical psychologists are critical and reflective about their use of psychological words: but that is just to say that they too can be philosophical about their discipline. Philosophy is not an exclusive club to which only fully paid-up members can belong. Even so, there is such a thing as expertise in philosophical thinking, which takes some pains to achieve, and very often the practitioners of the various sciences have not had the time or opportunity to acquire it. Hence it is not, in general, a good thing to leave philosophising about the subject matter of a given science exclusively to its own practitioners. At the same time, however, it is incumbent upon trained philosophers to inform themselves as well as they can about a domain of empirical scientific inquiry before presuming to offer philosophical reflections about it. A scientific theory of vision, say, is neither a rival to nor a substitute for a philosophical analysis of the concept of seeing: but each will have more credibility to the extent that it is consistent with the other.

METAPHYSICS AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

The philosophy of mind is not only concerned with the philosophical analysis of mental or psychological concepts, how-

² It is in the *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), § 124, that Ludwig Wittgenstein famously says that 'Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language . . . [i]t leaves everything as it is'. As will be gathered, I strongly disagree with this doctrine, which has, in my view, had a malign influence on the philosophy of mind. At the same time, I readily concede that Wittgenstein himself has contributed much of value to our understanding of ourselves as subjects of experience.

ever. It is also inextricably involved with *metaphysical* issues. Metaphysics – which has traditionally been held to be the root of all philosophy – is the systematic investigation of the most fundamental structure of reality. It includes, as an important sub-division, *ontology*: the study of what general categories of things do or could exist. The philosophy of mind is involved with metaphysics because it has to say something about the ontological status of subjects of experience and their place within the wider scheme of things. No special science – not even physics, much less psychology – can usurp the role of metaphysics, because every empirical science presupposes a metaphysical framework in which to interpret its experimental findings. Without a coherent general conception of the whole of reality, we cannot hope to render compatible the theories and observations of the various different sciences: and providing that conception is not the task of any one of those sciences, but rather that of metaphysics.

Some people believe that the age of metaphysics is past and that what metaphysicians aspire to achieve is an impossible dream. They claim that it is an illusion to suppose that human beings can formulate and justify an undistorted picture of the fundamental structure of reality – either because reality is inaccessible to us or else because it is a myth to suppose that a reality independent of our beliefs exists at all. To these sceptics I reply that the pursuit of metaphysics is inescapable for any rational being and that they themselves demonstrate this in the objections which they raise against it. For to say that reality is inaccessible to us or that there is no reality independent of our beliefs is just to make a *metaphysical* claim. And if they reply by admitting this while at the same time denying that they or any one else can justify metaphysical claims by reasoned argument, then my response is twofold. First, unless they can give me some *reason* for thinking that metaphysical claims are never justifiable, I do not see why I should accept what they say about this. Secondly, if they mean to abandon reasoned argument altogether, even in defence of their own position, then I have

nothing more to say to them because they have excluded themselves from further debate.

Metaphysics is unavoidable for a rational thinker, but this is not to say that metaphysical thought and reasoning are either easy or infallible. Absolute certainty is no more attainable in metaphysics than it is in any other field of rational inquiry and it is unfair to criticise metaphysics for failing to deliver what no other discipline – not even mathematics – is expected to deliver. Nor is good metaphysics conducted in isolation from empirical inquiries. If we want to know about the fundamental structure of reality, we cannot afford to ignore what empirically well-informed scientists tell us about what, in their opinion, there is in the world. However, science only aims to establish what *does* in fact exist, given the empirical evidence available to us. It does not and cannot purport to tell us what *could* or *could not* exist, much less what *must* exist, for these are matters which go beyond the scope of any empirical evidence. Yet science itself can only use empirical evidence to establish what does in fact exist in the light of a coherent conception of what could or could not exist, because empirical evidence can only be evidence for the existence of things whose existence is at least genuinely *possible*. And the provision of just such a conception is one of the principal tasks of metaphysics.³

The point of these remarks is to emphasise there cannot be progress either in the philosophy of mind or in empirical psychology if metaphysics is ignored or abandoned. The methods and findings of empirical psychologists and other scientists, valuable though they are, are no substitute for metaphysics in the philosopher of mind's investigations. Nor should our metaphysics be slavishly subservient to prevailing scientific fashion. Scientists inevitably have their own metaphysical beliefs, often unspoken and unreflective ones, but it

³ I explain more fully my views about metaphysics and its importance in my *The Possibility of Metaphysics: Substance, Identity and Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), ch. 1.

would be a complete abdication of philosophical responsibility for a philosopher to adopt the metaphysical outlook of some group of scientists just out of deference to their importance as scientists. We shall have occasion to heed this warning from time to time in our examination of the problems which the philosophy of mind throws up.

A BRIEF GUIDE TO THE REST OF THIS BOOK

I have organised the contents of this book so as to begin, in chapter 2, with some fundamental metaphysical problems concerning the ontological status of subjects of experience and the relationship between mental and physical states. Then, in chapters 3 and 4, I move on to discuss certain general theories of the nature of mental states and some attempts to explain how mental states can have *content* – that is, how they can apparently be ‘about’ things and states of affairs in the world which exist independently of the individuals who are the subjects of those mental states. In chapters 5, 6 and 7, I look more closely at certain special kinds of mental state, beginning with *sensory* states – which even the lowliest sentient creatures possess – and then progressing through *perceptual* states to those higher-level cognitive states which we dignify with the title *thoughts* and which, at least in our own case, appear to be intimately connected with a capacity to use *language*. This leads us on naturally, in chapter 8, to examine the nature of *rationality* and *intelligence* – which we may like to think are the exclusive preserve of living creatures with capacities for higher-level cognition similar to our own, but which increasingly are also being attributed to some of the machines that we ourselves have invented. Then, in chapter 9, I discuss various accounts of how intelligent subjects put their knowledge and powers of reasoning into practice by engaging in *intentional action*, with the aim of bringing about desired changes in things and states of affairs in the world. Finally, in chapter 10, we try to understand how it is possible for us to have *knowledge of ourselves and others* as subjects of experience existing both in space and through time:

that is, how it is possible for intelligent subjects of experience like ourselves to recognise that this is precisely *what we are*. In many ways, this brings us back full circle to the metaphysical problems of self and body raised at the outset, in chapter 2.

Minds, bodies and people

A perennial issue in the philosophy of mind has been the so-called *mind-body problem*: the problem of how the mind is related to the body. However, as I indicated in the previous chapter, this way of putting the problem is contentious, since it suggests that ‘the mind’ is some sort of *thing* which is somehow related to the body or some part of the body, such as the brain. We are invited to consider, thus, whether the mind is *identical* with the brain, say, or merely causally related to it. Neither proposal seems very attractive – the reason being, I suggest, that there is really no such thing as ‘the mind’. Rather, there are *minded* beings – subjects of experience – which feel, perceive, think and perform intentional actions. Such beings include human persons, such as ourselves, who have bodies possessing various physical characteristics, such as height, weight and shape. The mind-body problem, properly understood, is the problem of how subjects of experience are related to their physical bodies.

Several possibilities suggest themselves. In describing them, I shall restrict myself to the case of *human persons*, while recognising that the class of subjects of experience may be wider than this (because, for instance, it may include certain non-human animals). One possibility is that a person just *is* – that is, is identical with – his or her body, or some distinguished part of it, such as its brain. Another is that a person is something altogether distinct from his or her body. Yet another is that a person is a composite entity, one part of which is his or her body and another part of which is something else, such as an immaterial spirit or soul. The latter

two views are traditionally called forms of 'substance dualism'. A 'substance', in this context, is to be understood, quite simply, as any sort of persisting *object* or *thing* which is capable of undergoing changes in its properties over time. It is important not to confuse 'substance' in this sense with 'substance' understood as denoting some kind of *stuff*, such as water or iron. We shall begin this chapter by looking at some arguments for substance dualism.

CARTESIAN DUALISM

Perhaps the best-known substance dualist, historically, was René Descartes – though it is not entirely clear which of the two forms of substance dualism mentioned above he adhered to.¹ Often he writes as if he thinks that a human person, such as you or I, is something altogether distinct from that person's body – indeed, something altogether non-physical, lacking all physical characteristics whatever. On this interpretation, a human person is an immaterial substance – a spirit or soul – which stands in some special relation to a certain physical body, *its* body. But at other times he speaks more as if he thinks that a human person is some sort of combination of an immaterial soul and a physical body, which stand to one another in a rather mysterious relation of 'substantial union'. I shall set aside this second interpretation, interesting though it is, largely because when philosophers today talk about 'Cartesian dualism' they usually mean the former view, according to which a person is a wholly immaterial substance

¹ Descartes's views about the relationship between self and body receive their best-known formulation in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), to be found in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoof and D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). In recent times, one of Descartes's best-known and severest critics has been Gilbert Ryle: see his *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson, 1949), ch. 1. For a controversial critique of the received view that Descartes was a 'Cartesian dualist', see Gordon Baker and Katherine J. Morris, *Descartes' Dualism* (London: Routledge, 1996). It is unfortunate that many modern philosophers of mind tend to distort or oversimplify the historical Descartes's views, but this is not the place for me to engage with them over that issue.

possessing mental but no physical characteristics. But it is important, when considering this view, not to confuse the term 'substance' in the sense in which we have just been using it with the sense in which it denotes a kind of stuff. Cartesian dualism does not maintain that a person is, or is made of, some sort of ghostly, immaterial stuff, such as the 'ectoplasm' beloved of nineteenth-century spiritualists. On the contrary, it maintains that a person, or self, is an altogether simple, indivisible thing which is not 'made' of anything at all and has no parts. It contends that you and I are such simple things and that we, rather than our bodies or brains, are subjects of experience – that is, that we rather than our bodies or brains have thoughts and feelings. In fact, it contends that we and our bodies are utterly unlike one another in respect of the sorts of properties that we possess. Our bodies have spatial extension, mass, and a location in physical space, whereas we have none of these. On the other hand, we have thoughts and feelings – states of consciousness – whereas our bodies and brains lack these altogether.

What reasons did Descartes have for holding this seemingly strange view of ourselves – and how good were his reasons? He had several. For one thing, he considered that our bodies were simply incapable of engaging in intelligent activity on their own account – incapable of *thinking*. This is because he believed that the behaviour of bodies, left to themselves, was entirely governed by mechanical laws, determining their movements as the effects of the movements of other bodies coming into contact with them. And he couldn't see how mechanically determined behaviour of this sort could be the basis of such manifestly intelligent activity as the human use of speech to communicate thoughts from one person to another. With the benefit of hindsight, we who live the age of the electronic computer may find this consideration less than compelling, because we are familiar with the possibility of machines behaving in an apparently intelligent fashion and even using language in a way which seems to resemble our own use of it. Whether it is right to think of

computers as really being capable of intelligent behaviour on their own account, or merely as cleverly constructed devices which can *simulate* or *model* intelligent behaviour, is an open question, to which we shall return in chapter 8. But, certainly, there is no simple and obvious argument from our own capacity for intelligent behaviour to the conclusion that we are not to be identified with our bodies or brains.

THE CONCEIVABILITY ARGUMENT

The argument that we have just considered and found wanting is an empirical argument, at least to the extent that it appeals in part to the laws supposedly governing the behaviour of bodies. (Descartes himself thought that those laws had an *a priori* basis, but in this he was almost certainly mistaken.) However, Descartes also had, more importantly, certain *a priori* arguments for his belief that there is, as he puts it, a 'real distinction' between oneself and one's body. One of these is that he claims that he can 'clearly and distinctly perceive' – that is, coherently conceive – the possibility of himself existing without a body of any kind, that is, in a completely disembodied state. Now, if it is *possible* for me to exist without any body, it seems to follow that I cannot be *identical* with any body. For suppose that I were identical with a certain body, *B*. Given that it is possible for me to exist without any body, it seems to follow that it is possible for me to exist without *B* existing. But, clearly, it is *not* possible for me to exist without *me* existing. Consequently, it seems that I cannot, after all, be identical with *B*, because what is true of *B*, namely, that I could exist without it existing, is not true of me.

However, the force of this argument (even accepting its validity, which might be questioned) depends upon the cogency of its premise: that it is indeed possible for me to exist without any body.² In support of this premise, Descartes

² One possible reason for questioning the argument is that it assumes that it is an *essential* property of any body, *B*, that it is a body, that is, that *B* would not have existed if it had not been a body. I myself find this assumption plausible, but it

claims that he can at least conceive of himself existing in a disembodied state. And, to be fair, this seems quite plausible. After all, many people report having had so-called 'out of body' experiences, in which they seem to float away from their bodies and hover above them, seeing them from an external point view in the way in which another person might do so. These experiences may not be veridical: in all probability, they are hallucinatory experiences brought on by stress or anxiety. But they do at least indicate that we can *imagine* existing in a disembodied state. However, the fact that we can *imagine* some state of affairs is not enough to demonstrate that that state of affairs is even logically possible. Many of us find little difficulty in imagining travelling back in time and participating in historical events, even to the extent of changing what happened in the past. But on closer examination we see that it is logically impossible to change the past, that is, to bring it about that what has happened has not happened. So too, then, we cannot conclude that it really is possible to exist without a body from the fact that one can imagine doing so.

Of course, Descartes doesn't claim merely that he can *imagine* existing without a body: he claims that he can 'clearly and distinctly perceive' that this is possible. But then, it seems, his claim simply amounts to an assertion that it really *is* possible for him to exist without a body and doesn't provide any independent *grounds* for this assertion. On the other hand, is it fair always to insist that a claim that something is possible must be susceptible of proof in order to be rationally acceptable? After all, any such proof will have to make appeal, at some stage, to a further claim that something or other is possible. So, unless *some* claims about what is possible are acceptable without proof, no such claims will be acceptable at all, which would seem to be absurd. Even so, it may be felt that Descartes's particular claim, that it is possible for him to exist without a body, is *not* one of those possibility

claims which is acceptable without proof. The upshot is that this argument of Descartes's for the 'real distinction' between himself and his body, even though it could conceivably be sound, lacks persuasive force: it is not the sort of argument that could convert a non-dualist to dualism.

THE DIVISIBILITY ARGUMENT

Descartes has another important argument for the 'real distinction' between himself and his body. This is that he, as a subject of experience, is a simple and indivisible substance, whereas his body, being spatially extended, is divisible and composed of different parts. Differing in these ways, he and his body certainly cannot be one and the same thing. But again, the crucial premise of this argument – that he is a simple and indivisible substance – is open to challenge. Why should Descartes suppose this to be true? There are two ways in which his claim might be attacked, one more radical than the other. The more radical way is to challenge Descartes's assumption that he is a *substance* at all, whether or not a simple one. By a 'substance', in this context, recall that we mean a persisting object or thing which can undergo changes in its properties over time while remaining one and the same thing. To challenge Descartes's assumption that he is a substance, then, is to question whether, when Descartes uses the first-person pronoun, 'I', he succeeds in referring to some single thing which persists identically through time – indeed, more radically still, it is to question whether he succeeds in referring to some *thing* at all. Perhaps, after all, 'I' is not a referring expression but has some other linguistic function.³ Perhaps the 'I' in 'I think' no more serves to pick out a certain object than does the 'it' in 'It is raining'. Although some philosophers have maintained precisely this, it seems an

³ For an example of a philosopher who holds that 'I' is not a referring expression at all, see G. E. M. Anscombe, 'The First Person', in S. Guttenplan (ed.), *Mind and Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), reprinted in G. E. M. Anscombe, *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind: Collected Philosophical Papers, Volume II* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981). I discuss this view more fully in chapter 10.

implausible suggestion. It seems reasonable to suppose that what I have been calling 'subjects of experience', including human persons, do indeed exist and that the first-person pronoun is a linguistic device whose function it is to refer to the subject who is using it. And it also seems reasonable to suppose that subjects of experience persist through time and undergo change without loss of identity. Anyway, I shall assume for present purposes that this is so, though we shall return to the issue when we come to discuss personal identity in chapter 10. In short, I shall consider no further, here, the more radical of the two ways in which Descartes's claim that he is a simple substance might be challenged.

The other way in which this claim might be challenged is to accept that Descartes, and every subject of experience, is a 'substance', in the sense of the term that we have adopted, but to question whether he is a *simple* and *indivisible* substance. Why should Descartes have supposed that he himself is simple and indivisible? After all, if he were to lose an arm or a leg, would he not have lost a part of himself? Descartes's answer, no doubt, is that this would only be to lose a part of his *body*, not a part of *himself*. But this presupposes that he is not identical with his body, which is the very point now in question. What is required is an independent reason to suppose that Descartes's loss of his arm or leg is no loss of a part of *himself*. However, there is perhaps some reason to suppose that this is true, namely, that the loss of an arm or a leg makes no essential difference to oneself as a subject of experience. There are, after all, people who are born without arms or legs, but this makes them no less *people* and subjects of experience. However, even if we accept this line of argument, it doesn't serve to show that *no* part of one's body is part of oneself. For one cannot so easily contend that a loss of part of one's *brain* would make no essential difference to oneself as a subject of experience. Nor do we know of any people who have been born without brains. Of course, if Descartes were right in his earlier claim that he could exist in a completely disembodied state, then this would lend support to his view that even parts of his brain are not parts of

himself. But we have yet to be persuaded that that earlier claim is true. So it seems that, at this stage, Descartes's claim that he himself is a simple and indivisible substance is insufficiently compelling. This is not say that the claim may not be true, however, and I shall give it more consideration shortly.

NON-CARTESIAN DUALISM

So far we have failed to identify any compelling argument for the truth of Cartesian dualism, so perhaps we should give up dualism as a lost cause – especially if there are in addition some compelling arguments *against* it. But before looking at such counterarguments, we need to sound a note of caution. We shouldn't imagine that in rejecting Cartesian dualism we must automatically reject *every* form of 'substance dualism'. There is, in particular, one form of substance dualism which is untouched by any consideration so far raised, because it doesn't appeal to the kind of arguments which Descartes used in support of his position. According to this version of substance dualism, a person or subject of experience is, indeed, not to be identified with his or her body or any part of it, but nor is a person to be thought of as being an immaterial spirit or soul, nor even a combination of body and soul. On this view, indeed, there need exist no such things as immaterial souls. Rather, a person or subject of experience is to be thought of as a thing which possesses *both* mental *and* physical characteristics: a thing which feels and thinks but which also has shape, mass and a location in physical space. But why, it may be asked, should such a thing not simply be identified with a certain physical body or part of it, such as a brain?

At least two sorts of reason might be adduced for denying any such identity. The first is that mental states, such as thoughts and feelings, seem not to be properly attributable to something like a person's brain, nor even to a person's body as a whole, but only to a person himself or herself. One is inclined to urge that it is *I* who think and feel, *not* my brain or body, even if I need to *have* a brain and body in order to

be able to think and feel. (I shall say more in defence of this view in chapter 10.) The second and, I think, more immediately compelling reason is that the *persistence-conditions* of persons appear to be quite unlike those of anything such as a human body or brain. By the 'persistence-conditions' of objects (or 'substances') of a certain kind, I mean the conditions under which an object of that kind continues to survive as an object of that kind. A human body will continue to survive just so long as it consists of living cells which are suitably organised so as to sustain the normal biological functions of the body, such as respiration and digestion; and much the same is true of any individual bodily organ, such as the brain. However, it is not at all evident that I, as a person, could not survive the demise of my body and brain. One needn't appeal here, as Descartes does, to the supposed possibility that I could survive in an altogether disembodied state. That possibility is indeed very hard to establish. All that one need appeal to is the possibility that I might *exchange* my body or brain for another one, perhaps even one not composed of organic tissue at all but of quite different materials. For example, one might envisage the possibility of my brain cells being gradually and systematically replaced by electronic circuits, in such way as to sustain whatever function it is that those cells serve in enabling me to feel and think. If, at the end of such a process of replacement, I were still to exist as the same subject of experience or person as before, then I would have survived the demise of my present organic brain and so could not be identical with it. (Again, I shall discuss this sort of argument more fully in chapter 10.)

If this reasoning is persuasive, it supports a version of substance dualism according to which a person is *distinct* from his or her body, but is nonetheless something which, like the body, possesses physical characteristics, such as shape and mass. An analogy which may be helpful here is that provided by the relationship between a bronze statue and the lump of bronze of which it is composed. The statue, it seems, cannot be identical with the lump of bronze, because the statue may well have come into existence later than the lump did and

has persistence-conditions which are different from those of the lump: for instance, the statue would cease to survive if the lump were squashed flat, but the lump would continue to survive in these circumstances. However, the statue, although distinct from the lump, is none the less like it in having physical characteristics such as shape and mass: indeed, while it is composed of that lump, the statue has, of course, exactly the same shape and mass as the lump does. So too, it may be suggested, a person can have exactly the same shape and mass as his or her body does, without being identical with that body. However, the analogy may not be perfect. The statue is *composed* by the lump. Do we want to say that a person is, similarly, *composed* by his or her body? Perhaps not, for the following reason.

First, let us observe that, so long as the lump composes the statue, every part of the lump is a part of the statue: for example, every particle of bronze in the lump is a part of the statue. However, the reverse seems not to be the case: it doesn't seem correct to say that every part of the statue is a part of the lump of bronze. Thus, for instance, if the statue is a statue of a man, then the statue's arm will be one of its parts and yet it doesn't seem correct to say that the statue's arm is a part of the lump of bronze, even though it is correct to say that a part of the lump of bronze *composes* the arm. For the part of the lump of bronze which composes the statue's arm is not *identical* with the statue's arm, any more than the whole lump of bronze is identical with the statue. So the statue and the lump do not have exactly the same parts – which, of course, is an additional reason for saying that they are not identical with one another. Indeed, if they *did* have exactly the same parts, this would be a good reason for saying that they *were* identical with one another, because it is a widely accepted principle of mereology – the logic of part-whole relations – that things which have exactly the same parts are identical with one another.⁴ Suppose that this prin-

⁴ For a comprehensive modern treatment of mereology, see Peter Simons, *Parts: A Study in Ontology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). I discuss part-whole relations more fully in my *Kinds of Being: A Study of Individuation, Identity and the Logic of*

ciple is correct, then, and turn to the case of a person and his or her body. If a person is *composed* by his or her body but not identical with it, then, it seems, by analogy with the statue and the lump of bronze, every part of the body must be a part of the person but not every part of the person can be part of the body: that is to say, the person must have certain parts *in addition to* parts of his or her body. However, it is very far from evident what these supplementary parts of the person could be, given that we have abandoned any suggestion that a person has an immaterial soul. It will not do to cite such items as a person's *arm*, for this *is*, of course, a part of the person's body. In this respect, the analogy with the statue and the lump of bronze breaks down, because the statue's arm plausibly is *not* a part of the lump. So, on the plausible assumption that a person has no parts which are not parts of his or her body – and yet is not identical with his or her body – it seems that we must deny that a person is *composed* by his or her body.

ARE PERSONS SIMPLE SUBSTANCES?

Now, if the preceding line of reasoning is correct, then we can reach a more remarkable conclusion, namely, that Descartes was right, after all, in thinking that he is a simple substance, altogether lacking any parts. The argument is simply this. First, we have argued that a person is not *identical* with his or her body nor with any part of it, on the grounds that persons and bodily items have different persistence-conditions. Secondly, we have argued that a person is not *composed* by his or her body nor – we may add – by any part of it. Our reason for saying this is that there appear to be no parts that a person could have *other than* parts of his or her body. However, if a person were to have as parts *only* parts of his or her body, then, according to the mereological principle

Sortal Terms (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), ch. 6. Of course, we should not assume that principles of mereology, even if they are widely accepted ones, are immune to criticism.