

PHILOSOPHICAL TOPICS  
VOL. 26, NO. 1 & 2 SPRING & FALL 1999

## *Experiences, Subjects, and Conceptual Schemes*

Derek Parfit  
*Oxford University*

Like many of those who have written about the nature and identity of persons, I have been deeply influenced by Sydney Shoemaker's ideas.<sup>1</sup> I shall respond here to some remarks by Shoemaker on what I have written, and to some similar remarks by John McDowell. My view about persons, I shall argue, is closer to Shoemaker's than he believes.<sup>2</sup>

My main claims have been these:

- (A) Even if we are not aware of this, most of us are inclined to believe that, in all conceivable cases, our identity must be determinate. We can find this out by imagining that we are about to undergo some identity-threatening operation, such as the replacement of our brain, and then asking "Would the resulting person be me?" Such questions, most of us assume, must have an answer, which must be either Yes or No.<sup>3</sup> Either we would wake up again, or we would lose consciousness for the last time.
- (B) For this assumption to be true, our existence would have to involve the existence of some ultimate and simple substance, such as a Cartesian Ego.<sup>4</sup>
- (C) There are no such entities.

- (D) Our existence consists in the existence of a body, and the occurrence of various interrelated mental processes and events. Our identity over time consists in physical and/or psychological continuity.
- (E) We can imagine cases in which questions about our identity would be indeterminate: having no answers. These questions would also be in the following sense *empty*: they would not be about different possibilities, but only about different descriptions of the same course of events. Even without answering such questions, we could know what would happen.
- (F) Reality could be fully described in impersonal terms: that is, without the claim that people exist.
- (G) Personal identity does not have, as is widely assumed, rational or moral importance. But some of this importance can be had by psychological continuity and connectedness, with any cause.<sup>5</sup>

(F), as I shall admit here, was a mistake. The view expressed by (D) I shall call *Reductionism*. According to some Reductionists, such as Bernard Williams and Judith Thomson, each of us is a human body.<sup>6</sup> This view is not, strictly, reductionist, but that is because it is hyper-reductionist: it reduces persons to bodies in so strong a way that it doesn't even distinguish between them.<sup>7</sup> On a variant of this view, defended by Thomas Nagel, we are embodied brains.<sup>8</sup> According to the version of Reductionism that Shoemaker and I prefer, we are distinct from our bodies and our brains, though we are not, in relation to them, separately existing entities. This we can call *Constitutive Reductionism*.<sup>9</sup>

Shoemaker's view differs slightly from mine. Shoemaker defends a pure version of the Psychological Criterion of personal identity, according to which some future person would be the same as some present person if and only if these persons would be uniquely psychologically continuous. Though I once defended this criterion, I wouldn't do so now. And Shoemaker assumes that what we are essentially is persons, while I regard it as acceptable to claim that what we are essentially is human beings, treating the concept *person* as a phased-sortal, like *child* or *chrysalis*, so that we exist before we become persons and we may continue to exist after we cease to be persons.<sup>10</sup> I shall ignore these disagreements here. They are less important if, as I believe, our identity is not what matters, and it is only while we are persons that we could have most of the special moral status that, on most views, persons have.

In his comments on what I have written, Shoemaker suggests that there is another difference between our views. Shoemaker's view is broadly Lockean; mine, he suggests, goes too far in the direction of Hume. Thus he

writes that I seem to regard experiences as separate entities, like bricks, rather than as entities that “of their very nature require subjects” (Reading Parfit, *op. cit.*, henceforth *RP*, 139). McDowell similarly writes that, on a view like mine, thoughts and experiences are “conceived as happenings of which we can make sense independently of their being undergone by subjects,” adding that it is “doubtful that we can conceive of thinking as a subjectless occurrence, like a state of the weather” (*RP*, 235). I shall try to resolve this disagreement.

Since this paper is long, and may seem to be discussing fairly minor and marginal questions, I shall say why these questions seem to me worth pursuing. Of the claims that I listed above, the most important I believe to be (A) to (C) and (G). Even if we accept the Reductionist view expressed in (D), many of us don’t fully accept the implications of this view. We think about ourselves and our futures in ways that could not be justified unless something like a Cartesian view were true. So it is worth trying to make clearer what Reductionism implies, and asking how we might think differently about ourselves.

## I. INDEPENDENT INTELLIGIBILITY

According to Reductionists,

- (1) when experiences at different times are *copersonal*—or had by the same person—this fact consists in certain other facts.

For this claim to be significant,

- (2) these other facts must be describable in a way that does not assume the copersonality of these experiences.

These other facts, as Shoemaker has argued, can be so described.<sup>11</sup> Thus, in describing the continuity of consciousness to which Locke appealed, we need not use the concept of memory, which may imply the copersonality of any experience-memory and the experience that is remembered. We can appeal to the wider concept of *quasi-memory*—or, for short, *q-memory*—in which copersonality is not implied. And we can make similar claims about the other elements in psychological continuity.

McDowell suggests another, stronger requirement. He assumes that

- (3) a Reductionist account of persons must be “intelligible independently of personal identity” (*RP*, 230).

For Reductionists to achieve their aim, McDowell suggests, they must appeal to facts that we could understand without drawing on our understanding of “the continued existence of persons.” If their account were not in this sense independently intelligible, it would achieve little, since it would take for granted what it claims to explain.

It can be hard to tell whether, in understanding one fact, we must draw on our understanding of some other fact. Perhaps for this reason, McDowell sometimes states (3) in a different way. Reductionists, he writes, look for some “conceptually simpler relation . . . which might subsequently enter into the construction of a derivative notion of a persisting subject” (*RP*, 233). This remark may suggest that, according to Reductionists,

- (4) we start by understanding some reductionist concept, such as that of psychological quasi-continuity, and only later construct or acquire the concept of a persisting subject, or person.

But, as Reductionists can agree, (4) is false. We start by learning the ordinary concepts of a person and of identity-involving memory. It is only by appealing to these concepts that Reductionists later develop a concept like quasi-continuity. McDowell’s requirement, I assume, is that for Reductionism to succeed, it must be true that

- (5) we *could* have understood the Reductionist account before we acquired the concept of a person.

My account did not meet this requirement, since it often used the concept of a person. Could some revised account do better? When Reductionists describe the facts to which their view appeals, could they use concepts which did not presuppose the concept of a person?

McDowell, I think, would answer no. Thus he writes:

It gets things backwards to suppose that the first-person mode of presentation can be understood in terms of an independently intelligible “interiority” or “subjectivity” of the flow of experience, with reference to a subject introduced, if at all, only by a subsequent construction (*RP*, 244).

Reductionists do not suppose that we could understand the *first-person* mode before we even had the concept of a person. McDowell’s point, I assume, is that, for Reductionism to succeed, the “flow of experience” must be able to be impersonally understood. It must be possible to understand what thoughts and experiences are, and how they are related, without having the concept of a thinker, or subject of experiences. McDowell suggests that this would be impossible.

Some Reductionists would object that McDowell's requirement is too strict. But, for various reasons, it is worth asking whether this requirement can be met. Could we have understood the "flow of experience" before we acquired the concept of a person? This should not be taken as a question about human cognitive psychology. Perhaps we could not have learnt, as our first language, one that was wholly impersonal. But that may be only a contingent fact, since we may be genetically disposed to acquire certain concepts before certain others. Such a fact would be irrelevant here. To meet McDowell's requirement, it would be enough to show that we can coherently imagine thinkers who could understand the facts to which a Reductionist account appeals, even though they did not have the concept of a person, or the wider concept of a subject of experiences.

In trying to imagine such thinkers, we should suppose that, in other ways, they would be as much like us as possible. Apart from their having no concept of a subject, and the consequences of that fact, their conceptual scheme would be like ours. Thus they would have concepts of persisting objects, such as stones or trees, and among such objects they would include their bodies. And they would have concepts of connected sequences of thoughts, experiences, and acts, each of which is closely related to, or occurs in, one such body. But they would have no concept of themselves as the thinkers of these thoughts, or as the agents of these acts. And they would regard their experiences as occurring, rather than as being had.<sup>12</sup>

Is this impersonal conceptual scheme metaphysically or scientifically worse than ours? Would this scheme condemn these imagined beings to a worse understanding of themselves? I am inclined to answer no. Since this answer claims this *impersonal* scheme to be *no worse* than ours, we can call it *INW*.

In the book that McDowell discusses, I made a similar claim: that we could fully redescribe our lives without referring to ourselves, or explicitly claiming that we exist.<sup>13</sup> This we can call the *impersonal redescription claim*, or *IRC*. This claim was misleading, since it suggested that the important question is whether we exist. I asserted *IRC*, not because I doubt that we exist, but as another way of explaining what kind of entity we are, and in what our existence consists. On my view, though we can acceptably regard ourselves as distinct from both (a) our bodies and (b) our thoughts, other experiences, and acts, we are not, in relation to (a) and (b), independent, separately existing entities. That is why, if we have described both (a) and (b), our description would be complete. Since we are not separately existing entities, we would not need to be separately listed in an inventory of what exists.

Such claims are a natural way to explain this kind of constitutive reductionism. Compare Saul Kripke's claim that, to explain "the sense in which

facts about nations are not facts ‘over and above’ those about persons,” we can say that “a description of the world mentioning all facts about persons but omitting those about nations can be a *complete* description.”<sup>14</sup> But, though IRC is a natural way to express Reductionism, it added little to my account, and is open to various objections.<sup>15</sup>

One objection is unclarity. Whether some description is complete depends in part on the describer’s aim. I had in mind the aim of reporting all of the facts that some biographer might need. Hence my claim that, if we knew all of the facts about human bodies, and about thoughts, experiences, and other mental states and events, we could thereby know, or be able to work out, any truths that there might be about the existence and identity of persons. Such a description would be complete in the sense that any such further truths would be recoverable from it. But if we had certain other aims, such as that of writing our biography, our description would have to refer to persons. As this suggests, the notion of a complete description is too vague to be of much use.

Quassim Cassam has also shown that, even in my intended sense, IRC is false.<sup>16</sup> As Cassam points out, the content of demonstrative or indexical thoughts—ones that we express with words like “this” or “I”—depends in part on what these thoughts are about. Since we have such thoughts about ourselves, we cannot fully describe the content of these thoughts without claiming that they are about ourselves. We shall then be claiming that we exist. This refutation of IRC is not, however, an objection to Reductionism about persons. Similar claims apply to entities that can obviously be understood in a reductionist way. Thus, to describe the content of the thought “That is my audio system,” we must say which audio system I have in mind. But that would not count against the view that such a system consists in certain interacting components.

Return now to INW. On this claim, my imagined beings have a conceptual scheme that is metaphysically no worse than ours, though they have no concept of a person. Since these beings have no thoughts about persons, Cassam’s objection does not apply to them. And, if their conceptual scheme is coherent, and no worse than ours, this would answer McDowell’s objection to Reductionism. If we met these imagined beings, we could teach them the concept of a person in the way that McDowell doubts is possible: as a construction out of impersonal elements which they already understood. That would show that a Reductionist account of persons need not presuppose what it claims to explain. It would be irrelevant that, to understand this impersonal scheme, we must start from our own, person-including scheme.

What if INW were false? Would that refute Reductionism? This depends on what Reductionists are trying to achieve. McDowell assumes that their aim is conceptual analysis. Thus, when he queries the motive for

reductionism, he writes, “It is not just obvious that the task of philosophy is to ‘analyse’ every concept around which philosophical issues arise” (*RP*, 236). But, though some Reductionists have had this aim, Shoemaker and I have a different aim. Our Reductionism is not analytical but ontological. In John Mackie’s phrase, we hope to provide not conceptual but factual analysis. What makes our view Reductionist is our belief that, when experiences at different times are had by the same person, the copersonality of these experiences cannot be a bare or ultimate fact, but must consist in certain other facts. In defending this view, we must make some claims about the concept of a person, but that is just a preliminary to asking what kind of entity we really are and in what our identity consists.

When applied to certain questions, analytical reductionism succeeds. In the stock example, every claim about the Average American means the same as some statistical claim about some set of actual Americans. But, in most interesting cases, analytical reductionism is not justified. Most claims about nations do not mean the same as some claim about persons. And, if analytical reductionism fails even when applied to nations, it cannot apply to persons. In both cases, however, ontological reductionism may be true. Just as the existence of a nation can be truly claimed to consist in the existence of a group of people interacting in certain ways on some territory, the existence of a person may consist in the existence of a brain and body, and the occurrence of various interrelated mental processes and events.

Some analytical reductionists hold a weaker view. They believe that, though statements about persons cannot be given an impersonal translation, it is part of the meaning of the word “person” that facts about persons consist in facts about human bodies and such related sequences of events. According to these writers, to understand the concept of a person, we must at least implicitly accept that some reductionist view is true.<sup>17</sup> This claim, I believe, is also mistaken. The most that Reductionists should claim is that our concept of a person leaves it open whether some reductionist view is true. When Reductionists defend their view, they should not claim it to be part of our conceptual scheme.

According to McDowell, for Reductionists to achieve their aim, their account must be able to be understood without appealing to the concept of a person. When applied to analytical reductionists, who aim to describe the concept of a person, this requirement has obvious force. Since ontological reductionists aim to describe, not the concept of a person, but the kind of entity that persons are, McDowell’s requirement may seem not to apply to them. And, in considering such a view, there may seem to be no point in asking whether an impersonal conceptual scheme would be no worse than ours. But these conclusions would be too swift. To think about reality we must use concepts, and certain truths about concepts may reveal, or reflect,

truths about reality. If this impersonal scheme is incoherent, or in other ways inadequate, that might help to show what kind of entity persons are. The falsity of INW might refute the kind of view about persons that Shoemaker and I defend. That would depend, however, on the particular way in which INW were false. As in the case of Cassam's objection to IRC, some objections to INW would not count against our view.

## II. CONCEPTUAL AND ONTOLOGICAL DEPENDENCE

Before we discuss this impersonal conceptual scheme, we can review some of the connections between concepts and entities, and between conceptual and ontological truths. Most pairs of concepts are, in this sense, *independent*: we could have either concept without having the other. Some pairs of concepts are *interdependent*, since having either requires having the other. One such pair are the concepts of a parent and of a child. In the remaining kind of case, having one of two concepts requires, but is not required by, having the other. Thus, to have the concept of a husband, we must have the concept of a man, but not vice versa. In such cases, the first concept depends on the second, which some would call *conceptually prior*.

Turn now to ontological dependence. With any pair of entities, we can ask whether, for either to exist, the other must exist.<sup>18</sup> But some of the entities that we may want to consider, such as events, are not happily said to exist. So we can use the wider verb "to be," as it occurs in the questions whether there could be lightning without thunder, or thoughts without language. Such questions could take different forms. Thus we might ask whether there could be *any* Xs without there being any Ys, or whether, for each particular X, there must be some particular Y. And the sense of "could" might vary. If there could not be Xs without Ys, this impossibility might be causal, or metaphysical, or logical.

Another distinction is this. Perhaps there could not be Xs without there being Ys because, in the absence of Ys, the Xs, though still existing or occurring, would not be Xs. Thus there could not be parents who have had no children, but if any actual parents had not had children, these parents would still have existed, and would have merely not been parents. There is a different and stronger sense in which there could not be children who have had no parents. It is not true of any children that, if they had not had parents, they would still have existed. When we are discussing ontological dependence, it may seem irrelevant whether, if there were no Ys, the Xs would still be Xs. It may seem enough to ask whether, in the absence of Ys, there would be any Xs at all. For our purposes, however, we may need both questions. We may want to ask whether, if there were no Ys, there could still be

entities that were, in relevant ways, sufficiently *like* Xs. Perhaps, for example, there could not be human beings who had no parents; but could there be parentless entities—such as my imagined artificially created replica on Mars—that were relevantly like human beings? And perhaps there could not be thoughts without thinkers, or acts without agents; but, if there were no thinkers or agents, could there still be events that were, in the relevant respects, sufficiently like thoughts and acts?

Let us now review the answers to such questions. As before, there are three possibilities. Most pairs of entities are independent, since there could be either entity without there being the other. Thus there could be cabbages without kings, or vice versa. Some pairs of entities are ontologically interdependent, since there could be neither entity without there being the other. Some writers claim, for example, that there could not be change without time, or time without change. In the remaining kind of case, there could be one of two entities without there being the other, but not vice versa. Thus there could be people without there being nations, but there could not be nations without there being people. In such cases, one kind of entity may ontologically depend on another.

There are several other kinds of ontological dependence. According to some writers, for example, dents *adjectively* depend on the surfaces in which they are dents. Similarly, smiles adjectively depend on mouths, and deaths adjectively depend on the living beings whose deaths they are. I shall return to the question of how such dependence should be understood. A more straightforward kind of dependence is *compositional*. Trees, for example, compositionally depend on the cells of which they are composed, and cells compositionally depend on their component molecules. There are further kinds of ontological dependence, such as the creative dependence of works of art on artists and languages on language-users. But we need not continue the list.

According to some writers, whenever there could be Xs without there being Ys, but not vice versa, Ys ontologically depend on Xs, which are ontologically prior. But this definition may be too broad. On this definition, planets ontologically depend on stars, and sheep-dips ontologically depend on sheep. Those may not be useful claims. And this definition is, in another way, too narrow. According to these writers, for Ys ontologically to depend on Xs, it is not enough that there could not be Ys without there being Xs. It must also be true that there could be Xs without there being Ys. This requirement seems too restrictive. Surfaces, for example, adjectively depend on the objects of which they are the surfaces, and, for that reason, there could not be surfaces without there being objects. These facts seem enough to justify the claim that surfaces ontologically depend on objects. Such a claim need not require that there could be objects without surfaces.

Or take the question of whether thoughts ontologically depend on thinkers. Do we want our answer to depend on whether there could be thinkers who never had any thoughts? That seems wrong. It makes the ontological relation of thoughts to thinkers turn on marginal and perhaps empty questions, such as the question whether my replica would be a thinker even if, because he dies before he becomes conscious, he never exercises his ability to think.<sup>19</sup>

Return now to conceptual dependence. How does this connect with ontological dependence? If the concept of a Y depends on the concept of an X, but not vice versa, can we conclude that Ys ontologically depend on Xs?

Not directly. We must first ask why one concept requires the other. Some kinds of conceptual dependence have no ontological significance. Suppose that, as Peter Strawson argues, we could have concepts of ordinary middle-sized objects without having the concept of a subatomic particle, but not vice versa.<sup>20</sup> Though the concept of such a particle would then depend on the concepts of ordinary objects, that would not show that subatomic particles ontologically depend on ordinary objects. On the contrary, ordinary objects compositionally depend on particles. And, while there could not be ordinary objects without the particles of which they are composed, there are particles which do not compose such objects. The Universe, moreover, might have contained only such particles.<sup>21</sup>

As this example shows, conceptual and ontological dependence may hold in opposite directions. But they may also go together. Conceptual dependence may rest upon, and thus reflect, ontological dependence. The concept of a Y may depend on the concept of an X because of the way in which Ys ontologically depend on Xs. As we have seen, such a claim does not apply to compositional dependence: even if all Ys are composed of Xs, it may be the concept of an X which depends on that of a Y, as in the case of particles and the objects they compose. But such a claim may apply to adjectival dependence. This may be, as its name suggests, both conceptual and ontological. According to some writers, if Ys adjectivally depend on Xs, we could not have the concept of a Y without having the concept of an X. And, at least in some cases, that may be so. Dents, for example, are essentially *in* or *of* surfaces, and the way in which that is true may make it impossible to have the concept of a dent without having the concept of a surface. And, given the way in which deaths are adjectival on the living beings which die, it may be impossible to have the concept of a death without having the concept of a living being.

We can now return to our main subject: ourselves. Reductionists make claims of compositional dependence. On their view, our existence consists in the existence of a body, and the occurrence of various mental processes and events; and our identity over time consists in physical and/or psycho-

logical continuity. Since these are claims of compositional ontological dependence, we might expect them neither to imply, nor to be able to be challenged by, claims of conceptual dependence. These two kinds of dependence may, as in the case of the subatomic particles, hold in opposite directions. But there are two ways in which, in the case of persons, ontological and conceptual dependence may be more closely connected. First, when Reductionists claim that personal identity consists in certain kinds of continuity, their sense of *consist* is not the same as that in which physical objects may be claimed to consist in fundamental particles. As I argue elsewhere, they have in mind a closer relation.<sup>22</sup> So Reductionist claims of compositional dependence might be challenged by counterclaims of conceptual dependence.

Second, to judge the significance of conceptual dependence, we must ask why it holds. When Strawson argued that we could not have the concept of a subatomic particle without having concepts of ordinary persisting objects, he appealed to the role that such objects play in our spatiotemporal scheme. That argument does not count against the claim that ordinary objects ontologically depend on particles. In contrast, when McDowell suggests that we could not understand the “flow of experience” without the concept of a subject, he may be assuming that experiences adjectivally depend on subjects. And *adjectival* dependence may be both conceptual and ontological.

If experiences adjectivally depend on subjects, does that refute ontological Reductionism? That conclusion would also be too swift. If experiences depended on subjects in the way in which dents depend on surfaces, such Reductionism might be undermined. But, as we shall see, not all adjectival dependence is of this kind.

### III. AN IMPERSONAL CONCEPTUAL SCHEME

We can return, first, to the conceptual scheme of my imagined beings. If these beings could think about their experiences without even having the concept of a person, or the wider concept of a subject of experiences, that might help to show either that experiences do not conceptually depend on subjects, or that such dependence is not ontologically significant.

Apart from lacking the concept of a person, and whatever else that implies, my imagined beings think like us. In place of our concept of a person, they have concepts of two closely related entities: living bodies and unified sequences of interrelated mental processes and events, such as thoughts, experiences, and acts. The unity of each sequence they take to consist in various psychological connections between these events, and in

their direct relations to the same body. Some of these beings might be physicalists, who believe that all these mental events are changes in the states of this body's brain. Others might be non-substantival dualists, who believe conscious mental events to be non-physical.

Is this conceptual scheme coherent? Could these beings have the concept of an experience, though they have no concept of a subject? Or must experiences, as McDowell suggests, be conceived as events in the lives of subjects?

That, I believe, is not necessary. More exactly, since our concept of an experience is the concept of an event that involves a subject, these imagined beings may not have *our* concept of an experience. But they might have a variant of this concept, and one that is similar enough to count as applying to the same part of reality.

Here is a trivial example of this kind. To have the concept of a handshake, we must have the concept of a hand. But there might be people who had the concepts of an arm and a finger, but no separate concept of a hand. Such people could think about what we call handshakes, though they would not think of these events as involving hands. Consider next rivers, the entities that inspired the first recorded philosophical mistake about identity over time. Rivers are persisting entities. But, instead of the concept of a river, we might have the concept of a certain kind of process: a continuous flowing of water in a certain pattern. Many claims that apply to rivers cannot apply to such a process. A process cannot consist of water, or be wide or narrow, or break its banks, or freeze over. But a process can be claimed to involve water, and to occur within some wide or narrow area, and it can be claimed to include a breaking of banks and a freezing over.

When we think about rivers, it is unusually easy to replace the concept of a persisting entity with that of a process, or series of events. Rivers transparently consist in a continuous flowing of water in a certain pattern. When we think about persons, things are less straightforward. The concept of a persisting body might be replaced with that of a continuous movement of matter—most of it, once again, water—in a much more complicated pattern. But this conceptual revision need not concern us here, since my imagined beings have our ordinary concept of a body. Their scheme differs from ours in a more restricted way. They have the concept of a sequence of thoughts, experiences, and acts, and they might regard each sequence as *occurring in* some persisting body. But they do not regard this body, or any other entity, as the subject of these experiences, the thinker of these thoughts, or the agent of these acts.

To give a rough translation of their thoughts, we can adapt parts of our own scheme. In describing how these beings think about their lives and about “the flow of experience,” we might describe them as thinking, for example, of what is involved in first seeing something, then thinking some-

thing, then feeling something. But that description may not be impersonal, since it may imply that there is some entity which first sees, then thinks, then feels. These beings might think instead of what is involved in something's being seen, followed in the same sequence by something's being thought. Or they might think of what is involved in a seeing of something, followed in the same sequence by a thinking of something. Such impersonal descriptions are already used. Thus an astronomer may write, "A solar flare was seen at twelve noon," and a diarist may write, "Despair again this morning, followed by a sense that anything could happen."

We can next suppose that, just as we give people names, these beings give names to particular sequences. Where we might claim, for example, that Tenzing climbed Everest, they would claim that in Tenzing—that is, in the sequence with that name—there was a climbing of Everest. This sequence does not itself climb Everest; nor does its associated body. Rather, this sequence includes a climbing, achieved with this body.

In place of the pronoun "I," these beings might have a special use of "*this*" which referred to the sequence in which this use of "*this*" occurred. Where one of us would say, "I saw the Great Fire," one of them would say, "*This* included a seeing of the fire." In place of "you," they might have a corresponding use of "*that*," which referred to the sequence to which it was addressed. Where we would say, "Did you see the fire?" they would say, "Did *that* include a seeing of the fire?" They might also have a special use of "here," so that, instead of "I am angry," they would say, "Anger has arisen *here*." In the mind of our imagined mountaineer, a few connected thoughts might be as follows: "Was it wisely decided *here* to make an attempt on the summit? Since a storm is coming, *this* may not have another chance. Should *this* include a crossing of that ridge of ice? The pain of the wind against this face hardly matters with a view like that."

My imagined beings are aware of their decisions, and of what they do. But they do not think of their decisions as made by them, or of their acts as done by them. The making of decisions, and the resulting acts, seem to them another kind of happening, distinctive only in the way in which these events are the product of practical reasoning, or, in simpler cases, of beliefs and desires. This feature of their scheme may seem obviously defective. Thoughts and experiences, we may concede, can be thought of as mere happenings. But it is hard to think that way about our decisions and our acts. This is the part of our mental lives in which, it seems, we most clearly enter in. We inject agency.<sup>23</sup>

Though this objection has considerable force, it could, I believe, be answered. It is only while we are making some decision that it may be hard to regard this decision as an event. When we think about our own past decisions, or the decisions of other people, it is clear that decisions are events. If

we find that hard to believe while we are making some decision, that may be a perspectival illusion.<sup>24</sup> Decisions are, of course, events of a special kind. But their distinctive qualities could, I believe, be recognized and expressed in an impersonal scheme. My imagined mountaineer had just thought: "Should *this* include a crossing of that ridge of ice?" These thoughts might continue: "Yes it should. And, unless that crossing starts now, it will be too late. So let the ascent begin!" After this last thought, unless this being is weak-willed, the ascent would begin.

McDowell doubts that we can make sense of what he calls "the 'from within' character of 'consciousness' . . . in abstraction from the idea of a continuing life, lived by a subject whose experiences figure in its 'consciousness' as belonging to itself" (*RP*, 243–44). This remark suggests that, for us to make sense of this "inner" character of consciousness, two conditions must be met. We must think of experiences that are both had by a subject and are thought of by this subject *as* had by it.

My imagined beings do not meet this second condition. With no concept of a subject, they do not think of their experiences as theirs. But we can make sense of the "inner" character of their experiences. And so, I believe, could they. Their experiences could be accompanied by a reflective awareness, such as the thought "This is a smelling of the scent of honeysuckle." And they could distinguish such direct awareness from their indirect knowledge of other experiences. While they do not think of experiences as being *theirs*, they could think of them as being *these*—these present experiences, of which, in the conscious state that includes *this* thinking of a thought, there is a direct awareness. And they could think of other experiences as either being, or not being, in *this* sequence: the one that contains *this* experience. With such thoughts as these, my imagined beings could, I believe, understand "the 'from within' character of 'consciousness,'" or what McDowell elsewhere calls the "'interiority . . . of the flow of experience.'"

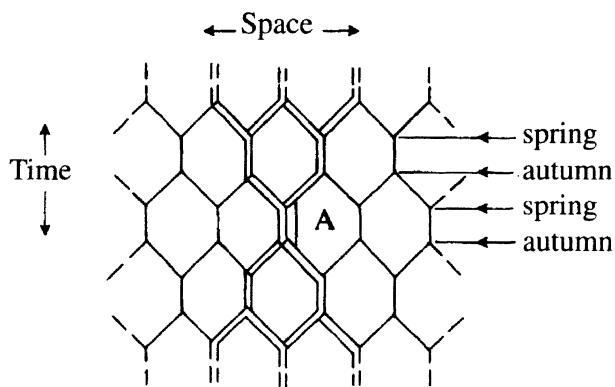
McDowell's first condition, it may be pointed out, would still be met. Even though my imagined beings would not think of themselves as subjects, that would be what they were. And what they call "sequences" would be continuing lives. So, even if *they* could understand the "interiority" of experience in abstraction from the idea of a subject, *we* have not, in imagining these beings, made sense of one of these ideas without the other. This fact, though, is no objection to my appeal to this imagined scheme. Reductionists do not deny that experiences have subjects. They aim to give an informative account of the kind of entity that subjects are, and of the unity of a subject's mental life. We are now discussing McDowell's charge that a Reductionist account must appeal to a prior understanding of what it claims to explain. If my imagined conceptual scheme is coherent, and metaphysically no worse than ours, there could be beings who understood both what experiences are like, and how experiences at different times can form unified sequences,

without even having the concept of a subject. Such beings would have what McDowell doubts is possible, an impersonal understanding of psychological continuity “which might subsequently enter into the construction of a derivative notion of a persisting subject.” It is irrelevant that these beings would themselves *be* subjects.

There are, however, several grounds for doubting that my imagined beings have a coherent conceptual scheme. One objection can be introduced like this. For there to be knowledge of the world, Strawson writes, there must be “the distinction between being observed and being unobserved.” He then asks, “how can this distinction exist without the idea of an observer?”<sup>25</sup> My imagined beings could distinguish, I believe, not only between observations and the objects that are observed, but also between what is observed and what isn’t, and between accurate observations and mistakes or illusions. But Strawson gave a neo-Kantian argument for the view that, for observers to draw such distinctions, they must be able to ascribe these observations to themselves.<sup>26</sup> Shoemaker gave, independently, a similar argument.<sup>27</sup>

The argument is, briefly, this. For there to be knowledge of an objective world, the knowers must have, and be able to rely upon, sets of partly non-inferential beliefs—or q-memories—about past observations of that world. For such sets of q-memories to provide knowledge of the world, it must be knowable when and where the q-remembered observations had been made. And, for that to be knowable, there must be some known restriction on the points of view from which these observations could have been made. If these observations might have been made from *any* point of view, it would be too difficult to put together a unified picture of the world, and to answer various skeptical doubts, thereby distinguishing between appearance and reality. This required restriction would be provided if the observations that were q-remembered must have been made from a single spatiotemporal route. And that would be so if the carrier of such q-memories was a single, persisting entity, such as an embodied brain. But if that were true—if any set of observations jointly q-remembered were all directly dependent on a single persisting brain—these observations could all be ascribed to the observer whose brain that was. In developing his version of this argument, Cassam takes a natural further step. To have knowledge of the world, Cassam concludes, the knowers must be aware of their own identity through time.<sup>28</sup>

I would apply, to this argument, Strawson’s comment on some arguments of Kant’s. While this argument may show something, it shows less than Cassam claims. Perhaps, for there to be knowledge of an objective world, the knowers must have q-memories of many observations whose possible points of view must have been restricted in some way. The simplest form of such a restriction would be the one that obtains in our world: that in which these points of view trace out a single spatiotemporal route. But there



are other possibilities. Consider, for example, some imagined beings who, rather than reproducing sexually and then dying, frequently divide and unite. *A* is the being whose life is represented by the three-lined branch. The two-lined tree represents those lives that are psychologically continuous with *A*'s.<sup>29</sup> In this more complicated world, the neo-Kantian requirement would still be met. There would still be the needed restriction upon the possible points of view of the observations that were, at any time, jointly q-remembered. But, since this restriction would take this more complicated form, most of these observations could not be usefully self-ascribed by the q-rememberer.

We are now considering different imagined beings: ones whose lives are like ours but who have an impersonal conceptual scheme. For these beings, as for us, all observations that were jointly q-remembered would trace out the single route taken by one body. These observations would thus meet the condition which would allow them to be usefully self-ascribed. But the neo-Kantian argument at most shows that this condition must be met: the one that makes such self-ascription *possible*.<sup>30</sup> The argument does not show that these observations must *be* self-ascribed. It would be enough if my imagined beings knew that jointly q-remembered observations must have occurred in the mental sequence that was directly related to the same persisting body. These observations need not be thought of as having been made *by* that body, or by an observer who had that body. (The q-memories of these imagined beings would not be what McDowell calls "identity-involving," since they would not present past experiences in "the first-person mode." But they could present experiences in the impersonal analogue of that mode. In any q-memory of some experience, this experience could be presented as having occurred in the sequence which contained that very q-memory.)

#### IV. COGITO ERGO SUM

Commenting on Descartes's *Cogito*, Lichtenberg wrote, "to say *I think* is already to say too much. . . . We should say *it thinks*." And, to explain this use of "it," Lichtenberg compared "it thinks" to "it thunders." There is no entity which thunders. Rather, there is thunder, or thundering occurs.<sup>31</sup> Following Lichtenberg, I suggested that, instead of

- (1) I think, therefore I am,

Descartes should have thought

- (2) This is the thinking of a thought, so at least some thinking is going on.<sup>32</sup>

McDowell objects that, in making this suggestion, I implied "that psychological goings-on can be intelligibly reported impersonally" (*RP*, 235). McDowell's objection cannot be that thoughts cannot be intelligibly reported impersonally. They often are, as in the minutes of committee meetings. McDowell's point, I assume, is that there could not be thoughts which could *only* be reported in this impersonal way. Thoughts must all be able to be reported in a personal way, since they must all be had by thinkers. As he later writes, "it is really quite doubtful that we can conceive of thinking as a subjectless occurrence, like a state of the weather." On this reading, McDowell's objection is that, in my remarks about Descartes, I implied implausibly that thinking could occur without a thinker.

My claims did not, I believe, have that implication. While fowling by his stove on that wintry day, Descartes tried to doubt everything that could possibly be doubted. It then struck him that, in his *Cogito*, he had found a rock on which he could rebuild his structure of beliefs. The thought "I am thinking," as he saw, guarantees its own truth. Given certain further assumptions, Descartes later concluded that he was an immaterial substance, whose essence was to think. As Lichtenberg's remark suggests, Descartes may have read too much into his argument's first premise. And language may have led him astray. Descartes's self-guaranteeing thought would have been better expressed as

- (3) This is the thinking of a thought.

Descartes' actual thought,

- (4) I am thinking.

also guarantees its own truth; but compared with (3), (4) is more easily misunderstood. Descartes may have believed that, from (4), he could infer both

(5) I am a thinking substance,

and

(6) I am either a body, or an immaterial substance.

That would have been a mistake. Though a thinker might be a body, or an immaterial substance, we cannot assume that these are the only possibilities. There is at least one other possibility. A thinker might be the kind of entity in which Constitutive Reductionists believe: an entity which is distinct from that thinker's body, but is not, in relation to that body, an independent, separately existing substance. Because there are such other possibilities, I suggested a weaker alternative to (5). Descartes could have thought:

(7) Since this is the thinking of a thought, it can be ascribed to a thinker,  
and I am that thinker.

Some suggest that, from (3), Descartes could not even infer that he was a thinker. That was not my claim. Descartes could be certain, I allowed, that he was a thinker. But, in the form in which it would be certain, that conclusion would add little. It would merely be that, *whatever* thinkers were, he was one. Compared with the impersonal (3), (7) does not give further information about reality.

Could Descartes be certain that, as a thinker, he was a persisting entity? Might he be just an episode of thinking? Descartes, I assumed, could reject that possibility. But, as before, he could reject it only on conceptual grounds. Our concept of a thinker is that of a persisting entity, not a series of events. As Reid wrote, "I am not thought, I am not action, I am not feeling; I am something that thinks, and acts, and suffers." From the conceptually grounded fact that he was a persisting entity, Descartes should not have drawn any further ontological conclusions.

Like Descartes, I may have gone astray. *Is* it a conceptually grounded fact that all thoughts can be ascribed to thinkers, and all experiences ascribed to subjects? There may be at least two other possibilities. First, this may not be a fact at all. Perhaps there could be thoughts, or other experiences, which could not be truly ascribed to any thinker, or subject. That would be possible if both

(8) our concept of a thinker requires more, for a thinker to exist, than the mere thinking of a thought,

and

- (9) an episode of thinking could occur without the more—the further fact or facts—which this concept requires.

If both (8) and (9) were true, thinking *could* be a “subjectless occurrence.” In that case, I should not have suggested that, in his search for what could not be doubted, Descartes could appeal to (7). But, though that suggestion would be mistaken, the rest of my view would be easier to defend. It would be clearer, for example, that the concept of a thought need not presuppose the concept of a thinker.

Another possibility is that, though (7) is true, its truth is not merely conceptually guaranteed. Thoughts may require thinkers, and experiences require subjects, in some stronger sense. (7) would then have a deeper explanation, which I failed to give.

This objection needs to be distinguished from another that we have been discussing. McDowell suggests that, for Reductionists to achieve their aim, they must appeal to a conception of experience that is “detachable in thought from the continued existence of persons” (*RP*, 230). That phrase is ambiguous. Reductionists might need to claim either

- (10) It would be coherent to think about experiences without thinking that these experiences have subjects,

or

- (11) It would be coherent to think that some experiences might not have subjects.

These claims are quite different. If (10) were false, that might support McDowell’s charge that Reductionists cannot achieve their aim. That is one reason why, by appealing to my imagined beings, I am defending (10). But, to show that my imagined beings have a coherent scheme, we need not defend (11). And we can agree, as I have said, that these beings would themselves *be* subjects.

Suppose that we could not defend (11), since all experiences must have subjects. It is even less clear that this would provide an objection to Reductionism. Such an objection would have to claim that, on a Reductionist view, we must be committed to (11). Like McDowell, Shoemaker suggests that my version of Reductionism commits me to (11). That, I am arguing, is not true. And Shoemaker defends a version of Reductionism which explicitly denies (11). If all experiences must have subjects, that might be an objection to all forms of Reductionism. But that would still need to be shown.

## V. EVENTS AND SUBSTANCES

Of the arguments for thinking that experiences must have subjects, one appeals to what Nagel calls "the metaphysics of substance and attribute." On this view, all events or processes must involve changes in the attributes, or properties, of one or more substances. This we can call the view that *events require substances*, or *ERS*. Of those who claim that *experiences require subjects*—or *ERS II*—some take this claim to follow from ERS. But that, I believe, is a mistake.

We can first distinguish ERS from another view. Just as I claimed that any experience could be ascribed to a subject, it might be claimed that any event could be described as involving a substance. In the case of some events, this substance might have to be space, or space-time, or (as in Spinoza's view) the Universe. But it may be claimed that, by adopting such descriptions, we could always avoid the category of substanceless events.

Such a view may not, I believe, be metaphysically significant. The concept of a substance, when stretched so far, may exclude too little. And, even if we always *could* think in this way, that would not show that there is no alternative. If this is how we defend our view, we may have to admit that there could be a conceptual scheme which was no worse than ours, though this scheme either treated some events as not involving a substance, or even made no use of the category of substance. ERS is a stronger claim. On this view, it is logically possible that there should be events that involve no substance; but such events can be excluded on some other ground, such as their being either metaphysically or causally impossible.

Taken as a significant thesis, one which excludes some possibilities, it does not seem true that all events require a substance. As Strawson writes, "that a flash or a bang occurred does not entail that anything flashed or banged. 'Let there be light' does not mean 'Let something shine'."<sup>33</sup> Nor are there just a few exceptions. It has become doubtful that the category of substance covers the whole of physical reality, since we seem forced to recognize, and at the most fundamental level, not only particles but also waves and fields. But, though ERS appears to be false, let us be cautious, and ask what would follow if ERS were true.

It makes a difference here whether we accept the physicalist view that all mental events must either be, or be realized in, neurophysiological events. My account of persons was intended to be neutral over the mind-body problem. Like many others, I doubt that we have a clear and good distinction between what is and is not physical.<sup>34</sup> But, if we waive such doubts, I would make the following claims.

Assume, first, that we accept physicalism. To conform to ERS, it would then be enough to claim that any mental event, such as the thinking of some

thought, must be a change in the state of some brain, or part of a brain. We need not take this brain to be the *thinker* of this thought. As far as ERS goes, the substance that an experience requires need not be a person, or subject of experience. To show that experiences require subjects, we would need some different argument.

Assume next that we reject physicalism, and we deny that mental events can be changes in the states of a physical substance. If we accept this form of dualism, and appeal to ERS, we must conclude that there are substances that are non-physical. As before, I would be inclined to reject ERS. Just as I believe that there could be physical events that were not changes in the states of physical substances, I am inclined to believe the same of non-physical events. More exactly, if there could be non-physical substances, there could also be non-physical events that did not involve any substance.

Suppose that I am wrong, and that non-physical mental events would have to be changes in the states of an immaterial substance. If we were dualists, would we then have to be Cartesians, who believed this substance to be the Ego, which was in turn identified with the person? That does not follow. As before, the required substance need not be a person, or an individual subject of experience. Thus, when Nagel denies that mental events could “simply occur,” he writes:

something must be there in advance, with the potential for being affected with mental manifestations... experiences can't be created out of nothing any more than flames can. . . . [But] this “medium” might be of any kind: it might even be an all-pervading world soul, the mental equivalent of space-time, activated by certain kinds of physical activity wherever they occur. No doubt the correct model has never been thought of.<sup>35</sup>

On Nagel's suggestion, the required substance might be a single entity that underlay all mental lives. Locke suggested a view in which the divergence went the other way. On Locke's view, each episode of thinking might require an immaterial substance, but such a substance would have no more claim to be a person than did the atoms of which a person's body is composed. A person might be successively composed of sequences of both material and immaterial atoms.<sup>36</sup> If dualists reject such views, claiming that mental events must be changes in the states of an individual soul, or Ego, they cannot appeal only to ERS, but would need some other argument.

## VI. ADJECTIVAL DEPENDENCE

There are other grounds for thinking that experiences must have subjects. Thus, when defending this conclusion, Shoemaker appeals to the claim that

experiences adjectivally depend on subjects. In explaining this dependence, Shoemaker appeals to what he calls “the grammatical structure of our talk” (*RP*, 139). Experiences, he writes, are “*experiencings*,” such as seeings, hearings, or feelings. Since these words are the gerunds of verbs, they imply a seer, hearer, or feeler. In the same way, however, thundering implies a thunderer—something that is doing the thundering; but that shows nothing. If experiences depend on subjects in some more important sense, we need more than grammar to show us that.

Shoemaker also gives some analogies. Experiences, he writes, “are ‘adjectival’ on mental subjects, in the way . . . dents are adjectival on dentable surfaces” (*RP*, 139). And he writes elsewhere: “The ontological status of an experiencing. . . is similar to that of a bending of a branch . . . an experiencing is necessarily an experiencing by a subject of experience, and involves that subject as intimately as a branch-bending involves a branch.”<sup>37</sup> Such analogies are common. For example, Harold Noonan writes: “the relation between the self and its perceptions is analogous to that between the sea and its waves. The waves are modifications of the sea and perceptions are modifications of the self.”<sup>38</sup>

What do these analogies show? Dents and bendings are both observably states of, or changes in, the shapes or positions of physical objects. Are experiences, in the same way, observably changes in the states of subjects? The answer seems to be no. Suppose that, as some writers claim, experiences are changes in the states of brains, which are the subjects of these experiences. Even if these claims are true, their truth is not directly observable. Introspection, as Shoemaker argues, is not an inner sense.<sup>39</sup> We do not, in having our experiences, observe ourselves, or our brains, or the identity between them. And, if neurophysiologists observed the changes in the states of brains that were experiences, they would not be observing them as experiences. On the different view that Shoemaker and I prefer, it is we and not our brains who have experiences. We are distinct from our brains and bodies, though not separately existing, since we are constituted by our bodies, brains, and experiences, in the kind of way in which some statue may be constituted by a lump of gold. The dependence of experiences on subjects is not, on this view, any more observable.

Adjectival dependence, it may next be claimed, involves conceptual dependence. When applied to dents and bendings, this claim may be true. It may be impossible to conceive of dents except as features of surfaces, or to conceive of bendings except as happening to what is bent. But, even if experiences adjectivally depend on subjects, this dependence is not, I believe, as straightforward and direct as that of dents on surfaces. It may thus be possible to conceive of experiences without conceiving of their subjects. Thus it seems possible to conceive of experiences without conceiving that they are had by brains, or bodies. And it seems possible to conceive of experiences

without conceiving that they are had by the kind of subject in which Constitutive Reductionists believe. Things might be different if there was some sound conceptual argument for a Cartesian view. If we were Cartesian egos, whose essence was to think, the dependence of experiences on subjects might be claimed to be like that of dents on surfaces, or of bendings on what is bent. But, as things are, these analogies do not seem close. Though experiences may require subjects, they do not seem to involve that subject “*as intimately as a branch-bending involves a branch.*”

In looking for closer analogies, we can start by asking what these cases have in common. For Xs to be *adjectival* on Ys, we might require at least the following:

- (1) Xs are, essentially, *of* or *in* Ys.
- (2) There could not be Xs without a Y.
- (3) An X of one Y could not have been an X of a different Y.

All three claims apply to dents. These are, essentially, of or in surfaces. There could not be dents without a surface. Nor could a dent in one surface have been a dent in a different surface. For an example of a different kind, consider the moves in some actual game of chess. These are, essentially, moves in a game. There could not be such moves except in a game. Nor, it seems, could a move in one game have been a move in some other game. If our three conditions are sufficient, such moves are adjectival on some game.<sup>40</sup>

Turn now from events to persisting entities. It is sometimes said that, because Hume failed to see how experiences depend on subjects, he regarded experiences as like the bricks that make up a building. Bricks are not adjectival. While they may be the bricks of some building, that is not part of their essence. They could exist separately, without ever composing a building. And any brick in one building could have been part of a different building. This may suggest that our conditions for adjectival dependence cannot be met by persisting entities. But consider next the trunk and branches of some tree. These seem to be, essentially, the trunk and branches of this tree. They could not exist except as parts, or what were once parts, of a tree. Nor could they have been, at least originally, the trunk and branches of some different tree.<sup>41</sup> So, if our three conditions are sufficient, trunks and branches adjectivally depend on trees.

On these assumptions, we have an interesting result. Chess moves constitute a game, and a trunk and branches constitute a tree. So adjectival and compositional dependence may hold in opposite directions. Xs may be adjectival on the Ys which they together constitute. That suggests the following possibility. According to Reductionists, the existence of a person

consists in the existence of a body, and the occurrence of such events as thoughts and experiences. These events may be adjectival on the person whose thoughts and experiences they are. But, even if that is true, the occurrence of these events may be part of what constitutes the existence of this person. Even if thoughts and experiences adjectivally depend on persons, persons may in part compositionally depend on them.

It may now be objected that our three conditions are not sufficient. Perhaps, for Xs to be adjectival on Ys, we should also require that

- (4) Xs are states of Ys, or changes in these states, and Ys are persisting entities.

(4) applies to experiences and subjects, and to dents and surfaces. But it does not apply to our other examples. While moves are in some ways adjectival on a game, they are not changes in the states of a persisting entity. Nor are trunks and branches either states, or changes in the states, of trees. So, if we add condition (4), we are back with only two examples of adjectival dependence: that of dents on surfaces, and of experiences on subjects.

For a third kind of example, we might take the victories won by football teams. Such a victory is adjectival on some team. It is, essentially, the victory *of* a team. It is the team which wins, not any member of the team. There could not be such victories without teams. Nor, it seems, could any particular victory have been the victory of some other team. This example also meets our fourth condition. While victories are events, teams are persisting entities. There are many other such examples, such as an orchestra's performance of some symphony.

Return now to Shoemaker's claims about the dependence of experiences on subjects. Shoemaker suggests that, because I ignored this dependence, I made Hume's mistake of regarding experiences as separate entities rather than as entities "that of their very nature require subjects" (*RP*, 139). Other writers make such claims, as when Strawson criticizes what he calls the *no-ownership theory*.<sup>42</sup> These forms of Reductionism, it is often claimed, have implications that are false, or absurd. Such views are claimed to imply the following:

- (5) An experience had by one person could have been had by a different person.  
(6) An experience could occur all on its own.  
(7) There could be experiences that were not had by a person, or by any other subject.

Let us call these alleged possibilities *contingent ownership*, *isolation*, and *no ownership*. And let us assume, for the time being, that (5) to (7) are false. These objectors claim that, if some Reductionist view makes no appeal to adjectival dependence, it cannot explain why these claims are false. Consider any experience, such as my seeing of a flash of lightning. If this experience is not adjectival on me—if it is not a change in some state of me—this experience cannot, it is argued, be essentially tied to me. Without that tie, this experience could have been had by someone else, or have occurred all by itself, or have been had by no one.

As some of our examples suggest, these conclusions do not follow. Return to the relation between chess moves and games, or between trunks and trees. Suppose, first, that these are not cases of adjectival dependence. Even if that is so, the analogs of (5) to (7) are, we have seen, false. If a certain move is played in some game of chess, this event could not have been a move in a different game. Nor could the trunk of some tree have been the trunk of a different tree. In these cases, to exclude the possibility of contingent ownership, we need not appeal to adjectival dependence. The same could be true of the relation between experiences and persons. Even if experiences were not adjectival on the person who has them, it might be impossible that one person's experience could have been had by someone else. Consider next isolation and no-ownership. With the possible exception of White's first move, no move in a game of chess could occur all on its own, and there could not be a move that was not part of some game. Nor could there be a trunk or branch that was never part of some tree. The same might be true of thoughts, even if these did not adjectivally depend on thinkers. Perhaps, as Shoemaker claims, no event could be the thinking of a thought except in the context of other thoughts (*RP*, 139). As these remarks suggest, even without appealing to adjectival dependence, Reductionists may be able to reject (5) to (7). They may be able to explain, consistently with their account, how no experience could have been had by someone else, or have occurred all on its own, or have been had by no one.

Suppose, next, that moves in chess do adjectivally depend on the game which they together constitute, and that trunks and branches adjectivally depend on trees. These objections to Reductionism may still fail. On a Reductionist account, the existence of a person consists in the existence of a body, and the occurrence of a series of related events, such as thoughts, experiences, and acts. On this new assumption, these events adjectivally depend on the series which they together constitute. That might explain why (5) to (7) do not describe real possibilities. If Reductionists have not recognized this kind of adjectival dependence, they might not have seen how, even on their view, (5) to (7) could be rejected. But that would be an oversight, not an objection to their view.

It may help to summarize these points. We are assuming that

- (a) thoughts and experiences adjectivally depend on the person who has them.

It may also be true that, just as moves depend on a game, or trunks and branches depend on a tree,

- (b) thoughts and experiences depend on the larger sequence which they together form.

We are now considering the objection that, because some Reductionists ignore (a), they cannot explain why it is impossible that one of our experiences could have been had by someone else, or have occurred all on its own, or have been had by no one. But, to exclude these possibilities, it may be enough to appeal to (b). And it would be irrelevant whether (b) should also be claimed to involve adjectival dependence. Whatever the answer to that question, (b) could be part of a Reductionist view.

These remarks at most suggest how these objections *might* be met. Let us now look more closely at what some of the objectors claim.

## VII. THE IDENTIFICATION AND INDIVIDUATION OF EXPERIENCES

Strawson writes:

if we think . . . of the requirements of identifying reference in speech to particular states of consciousness, or private experiences, we see that such particulars cannot thus be identifyingly referred to except as the states or experiences of some identified person. States, or experiences, one might say, owe their identity as particulars to the identity of the person whose states or experiences they are . . . it is logically impossible that a particular state or experience in fact possessed by someone should have been possessed by someone else.<sup>43</sup>

In this much discussed passage, Strawson makes three claims:

(S1) We cannot *refer* to particular experiences except as the experiences of a certain person.

(S2) Experiences *owe their identity* to the person who has them.

(S3) If some experience is had by one person, this experience could not have been had by a different person.

These claims are widely thought to count against Reductionism.

Consider first the challenge posed by (S1). Reductionists claim to explain the unity of our mental lives. On their view, when experiences at different times are all had by the same person, the copersonality of these experiences consists in their relations to each other and/or to the same brain. For this account to be informative, Reductionists must be able to refer to these experiences, without presupposing that they are all had by the same person. It may seem that, if (S1) were true, no such account could be given. And, even if it could be given, (S1) might support McDowell's charge that Reductionism is not independently intelligible. (S1) would also undermine part of my suggested answer to this charge. If experiences could not be referred to except as the experiences of some person, my impersonal conceptual scheme would be impossible.

Strawson himself qualifies (S1), since he goes on to write that experiences "cannot *in general* be identified" except by ascribing them to people. An experience, he concedes, might be identified "as the one experience of a certain kind suffered in a certain identified place at a certain time." But this qualification is not, he writes, far-reaching, since it would require that someone knew whose experience this was.

There are stronger grounds for claiming that, to refer to particular experiences, we need not refer to the persons who have them. Thus Ayer claims that, since we can identify persons by referring to their bodies, the reference to persons is unnecessary. We could identify experiences as the ones that are directly causally dependent on, or expressed in, some body.<sup>44</sup>

Strawson seems to rest (S1) on (S2). He assumes that, for us to identify some particular item, we must be able to appeal, even if only indirectly, to whatever makes this item the one it is. And he assumes that, as (S2) claims, what makes experiences the ones they are is their being had, at some time, by a certain person. In his words, "The principles of individuation of such experiences essentially turn on the identities of the persons to whose histories they belong."<sup>45</sup>

It is not clear that, if (S2) were true, that would establish (S1). As Christopher Peacocke claims, there may not be such a close connection between what individuates experiences and how experiences could be identified.<sup>46</sup> Nor is it clear that (S2) by itself would provide an objection to Reductionism. If (S1) were false—if experiences could always be referred to without ascribing them to persons—that might be all that Reductionists need.

In asking whether (S2) is true, it will help to start with Strawson's third claim. According to (S3), an experience of one person could not have been

the experience of some other person. These two claims stand in a similar relation. If (S3) were false, that would undermine (S2); but, even if (S3) were true, that would not be enough to establish (S2).

The ownership of experiences, Strawson claims, is “logically non-transferable.” It may be impossible that some experience could first be mine and then *become* yours. But that might be only because experiences are brief events, not persisting things. That is why our question is: Could it be true, of some of my experiences, that these experiences *might have been* yours?

It can be argued that this could be true. In presenting this argument, we must assume some view about the criterion of personal identity. Suppose, first, that we accept either the Brain Criterion, or some version of the Psychological Criterion. We can then appeal to the imagined example that I called *My Division*.<sup>47</sup> In what we can call the *Single Case*, one half of my brain would be destroyed, and the other half would be successfully transplanted into the empty skull of some other body, so that the resulting person would be psychologically continuous with me. On either of these views, this person would be me. Since I could survive with only half my brain, and I would survive if my whole brain were transplanted, I would survive if half were destroyed, and the other half were transplanted. In the *Double Case*, both halves would be transplanted, each into a different body. Since the two resulting people could not each be me, and we could not plausibly believe that only one of them is me, these views conclude that neither would be me. When some amoeba divides, the result is two new amoebae. On these views, we should similarly claim that, in the Double Case, the result would be two new people.

We can next add some details to this example. Suppose that, after my brain is divided, its halves would be taken to different hospitals. In both cases, in Hospital A, one half of my brain would be transplanted. What makes the cases differ is what happens, in Hospital B, to the other half. If that half is destroyed, the result is the Single Case; if it is transplanted, the result is the Double Case.<sup>48</sup> We can next suppose that there is no communication between these hospitals. What happens in Hospital B cannot affect what happens in Hospital A. So, in both cases, what happens in A would be intrinsically the same.

We can now argue

- (1) Since what happens in A would be intrinsically the same, the person who woke up in A would, in both cases, have the very same—or numerically identical—experiences.

But, on our assumptions,

- (2) In the Single Case, it would be I who woke up in A; in the Double Case, it would be someone new.

We can thus conclude

- (3) The very same experiences might be had by either of two different people.

Call this the *Hospital Argument*. If this argument is sound, we can reject Strawson's view. If one and the same experiences might be had by different people, it cannot be true that experiences owe their identity to that of the person who has them.

Suppose next that we accept the Bodily Criterion of personal identity, either on its own or within the context of the *Animalist* view that persons are human beings. We could then revise this example. We could suppose that, in the Single Case, what would be destroyed would be half, not only of my brain, but also of the rest of my body. With prosthetic devices and skillful reconstructive surgery, the rest of my brain and body would continue to function. It would be most implausible to deny that, in this case, the resulting person would be me. In the Double Case, there would be two future people, each with half of my body. The rest of the argument proceeds as before.

Is this argument sound? Its premises may seem inconsistent. Though (1) assumes that, in both cases, what happened in (A) would be intrinsically the same, (2) assumes that, in the different cases, it would be a different person who woke up. That may seem to be a difference in what happens. But, on the views we are now assuming, though a different person would wake up, that would not be an *intrinsic* difference in what happened in A, since that difference would consist entirely in a difference in what happened in B.

The objection might be revised. Since (2) assumes that personal identity can depend on such *extrinsic* facts, why does (1) assume that the identity of experiences cannot so depend? If what happened in B would make a difference to *who* it was who woke up in A, why couldn't it make a difference to *which* experiences this person had? It may be claimed that, to be consistent, the argument should treat these identities in the same way: assuming that either both or neither can depend upon extrinsic facts.

That claim, however, can be reasonably denied. In discussing personal identity, we are asking whether events at different times are parts of a larger whole: the life of a single person. To answer this question, we must know how these events are related, and how each is related to other events at other times. That is, how, on the views we are assuming, personal identity can depend on extrinsic facts. In discussing the identity of a particular experience, we are not asking whether this experience is part of some larger

whole. We are asking what makes this experience the one it is. Given the difference between these questions, it would not be surprising if, unlike the identity of persons, the identity of experiences could not depend on extrinsic facts. Consider a simpler pair of questions. If we ask whether two mountains are parts of a single mountain range, the answer depends on how each mountain is connected to other mountains. But facts about other mountains have no bearing on the question of what makes each mountain the one it is.

It may next be objected that, for those who accept Strawson's view, the Hospital Argument shows nothing. If such people accepted either of this argument's premises, they would reject the other. On their view, if in my two cases different people would wake up in A, that would be enough to make it true that different experiences would be had. It may therefore seem that, in appealing to this argument, I am merely assuming that Strawson's view is false. But that, I believe, is not so. This argument points out that, on the most widely accepted criteria of personal identity, Strawson's view implies that the identity of experiences could depend on extrinsic facts: which experiences are now being had, right here, could depend on what happened, in a causally unconnected way, elsewhere. If we find that hard to believe, the argument gives us a reason to reject Strawson's view.

There is another reply. Reductionists need not reject this view. Strawson claimed

(S2) Experiences owe their identity to the person who has them.

We are asking whether, if (S2) is true, that creates a problem for a Reductionist account of persons. The apparent problem was the following. For Reductionists to give an informative account of what makes different experiences copersonal, they must be able to refer to these experiences without saying who has them. According to Strawson, since (S2) is true, that is not in general possible. But, to meet this objection, Reductionists need not deny (S2). They could agree that, on our ordinary way of thinking, experiences may owe their identity to the person who has them. Their claim need only be that there is another way of thinking, which gives to experiences different identity conditions.

Here is a simple analogy. When a race horse finishes first, a victory is won. But there are two ways to think of such victories. We might say that, in the *intrinsic* sense, such victories owe their identity to that of the winning horse, but that, in the *ownership* sense, they owe their identity to that of this horse's owner. It is in the latter sense that, for example, the Queen has three times won the Derby. Suppose that, just before the Queen's last victory, you had bought her winning horse. This transaction, we can assume, would have occurred elsewhere, and would have had no effects on the race. The same horse would have won, and in just the same way. So, in the intrinsic sense,

the same victory would have been won. But, in the ownership sense, a different victory would have been won. The Queen's victory would not have occurred. Since you would have owned this horse, the victory would have been yours. If we are Reductionists, we can draw a similar distinction. We can claim that, in both my cases, the person who woke up in A would have intrinsically the same experiences. That is compatible with the claim that, in the ownership sense, these experiences would be different. Just as what occurs elsewhere could make the same horse's victory either the Queen's victory or yours, so, too, what occurs elsewhere could make the same experiences either mine, or someone else's.

These remarks assume that

(X) on one way of thinking of experiences, their identity cannot depend on extrinsic facts.

(X) leaves it open what, in this intrinsic sense, does individuate experiences. We might claim

(Y) Experiences owe their identity, in the intrinsic sense, to the neurophysiological events to which they are either directly related, or in which they are realized.

There are other possibilities, which I shall not consider here. If experiences can be individuated in some such intrinsic way, that is all that Reductionists need.

To challenge these claims, it is not enough to appeal to Strawson's (S2). The objection must appeal to the stronger

(Z) In the only intelligible sense, experiences must owe their identity to the person who has them.

Return to the analogy with dents and surfaces. If we ask what makes some particular dent the one it is, our answer may have to be: its being a dent in some particular surface. There may be no intelligible sense in which this dent might have been a dent in some other surface. Could such a claim be made about experiences and persons?

It would help such a claim if experiences were changes in the states of an immaterial substance, such as a Cartesian Ego. There might be no intelligible sense in which a change in one such Ego might have been a change in another. And, if we were such Egos, or we owed our identity to them, there might be no sense in which our experiences might have been had by other people. Suppose next that these Egos were both ultimate and simple, in the sense of having no components. It might then be true that the identity

of these Egos, and hence of persons, could not depend on extrinsic facts. There would then be no conflict between (X) and (Z). It would be true that, in the *intrinsic* sense, experiences owed their identity to that of the Ego, or person, of which they were the changing states. If all these claims were true, at least one premise of the Hospital Argument could be denied. For it to be true that, in my two cases, it would be different people who woke up in A, it would have to be true that, in these cases, different Egos were involved; and that would be an intrinsic difference in what happened. So I could not claim that, even though what happened in A would be intrinsically the same, different people would wake up. And my argument would face other objections. According to some Cartesians, it is the Ego rather than the brain which carries psychological continuity. If such Egos were also indivisible, my imagined case would be deeply impossible, since there could not be two future people who would each be psychologically continuous with me. But, though these claims would undermine my argument, they are, I am assuming, false.

Of the other forms of dualism, some, I believe, might be true. But such views do not support a similar challenge to my argument. Nor do they imply that, as (Z) claims, experiences must owe their identity to the person who has them. Only Cartesians believe *both* that experiences are changes in the states of an immaterial and simple substance, *and* that this substance is, or is what individuates, a person. That is what, on a dualist view, (Z) requires.

Suppose, next, that as physicalists claim, our experiences are changes in the states of our brains. On this assumption, as we have seen, we can deny (Z). And we might appeal to the same analogy. A dent owes its identity, we might say, only to that of a narrowly defined surface, or object. Suppose that there is a dent in the roof of some particular truck. It may be inconceivable that this very dent could have been a dent in a different piece of metal. But it could easily have been a dent in a different truck. That would have happened if this piece of metal, after being dented, had been used in the making of a different truck. We might make a similar claim about experiences and persons. Experiences could owe their identity, not to the person who has them, but to something smaller: the brain, or group of brain cells, in which they are realized. And, just as a piece of metal might have been part of a different truck, a brain, or a group of brain cells, might have been part of the body of a different person. That is how one person's experiences might have been had by someone else.

### VIII. DIVIDED MINDS

Let us now turn to the actual cases in which, in treatments for epilepsy, the hemispheres of people's brains have been disconnected. These cases rein-

force the conclusions I have just drawn. In an earlier discussion of such cases, I gave a simplified version of the kind of result that certain tests produce.<sup>49</sup> A split-brain patient is shown a screen, whose left half is red and right half is blue. On each half in a darker shade are the words "How many colors can you see?" With each hand this person writes "Only one." The words are now changed to read "Which is the only color that you can see?" With one of her hands, this person writes "Red"; with the other, she writes "Blue." These answers would seem to report two unconnected visual experiences: an awareness of only red, and an awareness of only blue. Since there is much experimental data of this kind, we have good reason to believe that, in such cases, there are two streams of consciousness, or two sequences of thoughts and other experiences, in each of which there is no awareness of what is then occurring in the other.

On the most straightforward description, such cases involve only a single person, or subject of experiences, who has the thoughts and experiences in both streams. In seeing red, this person is unaware of seeing blue, and vice versa. I asked how, on this assumption, we could explain the unity of consciousness *within* these streams. What unites the different experiences that this person is now having in each stream? We cannot say, "the fact that these experiences are all being had by this person," since that answer would conflate these streams. The unity within each stream must, I claimed, be explained in a different way. And this explanation could then be applied to ordinary cases.

Peacocke makes a similar claim, which is more relevant here. Such a person might have, in her two streams, two simultaneous and qualitatively identical experiences. These experiences, Peacocke claims, could not owe their identity only to the person who had them, their qualitative character, and the time at which they were had. That would not distinguish them. There must be something else that individuates these experiences. And that might be enough, without the ascription to this person, to make them the particular experiences they are.<sup>50</sup>

What else might individuate these experiences? For physicalists, as we have seen, the answer is the part of the brain in which these experiences are realized. Dualists have a choice of answers, which I shall not discuss here. To identify these experiences, we can refer, as Peacocke suggests, to their more remote causes and effects. Thus we could talk of the awareness of seeing blue which is caused by the blue light entering this person's eyes, and which is reported by the writing of the word "Blue."

Criticizing Peacocke's argument, McDowell suggests that, though such cases involve only one person, they involve two other subpersonal subjects of experience, one for each stream of consciousness. McDowell then writes:

[I]f we find a simultaneous experience of a given qualitative type in both streams, we can say that there are two experiences, on the basis of the independent fact that there are two "centres

of consciousness." The number of experiences is not somehow given, as Peacocke suggests, in advance of our deciding how many subjects we have to attribute experiences to. This alternative . . . preserves the thesis that conscious states are individuated in terms of their subjects.<sup>51</sup>

But, as Peacocke replies, we do not *first* decide how many "centres of consciousness" or "subjects" there are, and only then conclude that there are two series of experiences.<sup>52</sup> The most that might be claimed is that these decisions must go together—that, in deciding that there are two series of experiences, or two streams of consciousness, we must thereby be deciding that there are two "subjects."

Even that claim, however, seems to be false. If we decide that there are two streams of consciousness, we are not thereby forced to believe that the case involves either two subpersonal subjects of experience or (as some suggest) two persons. We can describe the case as involving only one subject, the person or human being, who is having two unconnected streams of experiences. If that claim makes sense, as I believe, Peacocke's argument is unanswered.

Suppose next that, like McDowell, we take such cases to involve two subjects of experience. We might still deny that the experiences in each stream owe their identity to the identity of their subjects. Peacocke suggests that, on the contrary, these subjects would owe their identity to that of their experiences.<sup>53</sup> This suggestion may seem to imply that, if these particular experiences had not occurred, these subjects would not have existed. But that is not what Peacocke means, since he would agree that, if different printed cards had been shown to this person, these two subjects would have had different experiences. Peacocke's claim might be put like this. Though these subjects could have had different experiences, what makes them the particular subjects that they are is that they in fact have these experiences. In the same way, a tree may owe its identity to the trunk and branches of which it is in fact composed, even though this tree could have developed differently, and it would not then have had all of the same components.

There is a further point. McDowell's subpersonal subjects are entities that are distinct both from the person, or human being, and from that person's brain or body. But they are not, in relation to these other entities, separately existing. It is, I believe, acceptable to claim that, in split-brain cases, such entities exist. But these are not the kind of entity that could individuate experiences. The same is true, I believe, of persons. If we are distinct from our brains and bodies, but are not separately existing entities, we cannot be what, in the intrinsic sense, individuates our experiences. When we consider McDowell's subpersonal "subjects," this point is easier to see.

Peacocke rightly rejects the claim that, in the split-brain cases, we must first decide that there are two subjects of experience and only then decide

that there are two streams of consciousness. John Campbell and Susan Hurley each make a somewhat similar claim. They suggest that, in deciding that there are two such streams, we must appeal to certain constraints about what can be claimed, or believed, by or about a single person.<sup>54</sup> Return to my simplified example in which, at the same time, a person writes with one hand that she can see only red, and writes with the other that she can see only blue. If we assume that this person has a unified stream of consciousness, these answers make no sense. That is what leads us to conclude that there must be two unconnected streams.

Though our reasoning may have to appeal to such constraints, that does not show that experiences owe their identity to their subject. These constraints need not be about what makes sense for a single subject. They could be about what makes sense within what Cassam calls the same “psychological space.”<sup>55</sup> Indeed, if we regard the split-brain cases as involving only a single subject, the person or human being, we *must* re-express these constraints in such other terms. This person claims, at the same time, both that she is seeing only red and that she is seeing only blue; and, since this person has two unconnected streams of consciousness, such claims make sense. The constraints on such thinking must be restated so that they apply within each single stream. She could not intelligibly claim that, at the same time and *in the same stream*, she is seeing only red and seeing only blue. As this suggests, these constraints could also be expressed in the impersonal scheme of my imagined beings. They could be constraints about what could be true of the thoughts and experiences occurring in a single sequence at some time.

## IX. COULD AN EXPERIENCE OCCUR ALL ON ITS OWN AND WITHOUT A SUBJECT?

We have been considering the objection that, if Reductionists ignore the adjectival dependence of experiences on persons, they cannot explain why it is impossible that an experience of one person's might have been had by someone else. I have argued that this may not be impossible, and that, if it is, Reductionists could explain why. Shoemaker suggests a similar objection. He takes my view to imply, falsely, that an experience could occur all on its own, and without a subject. There are here two questions: Does my view have these implications, and are they false?

Shoemaker quotes my claim that “because we are not separately existing entities, we could fully describe our thoughts without claiming that they have thinkers.” He then comments, “This suggests that the only entities referred to or quantified over in impersonal descriptions are entities that could exist without there being persons” (*RP*, 138). But my claim did not

imply that our thoughts might not have thinkers. On the contrary, I made this claim because I believed that there was no such possibility. I wrote that, if we were given an impersonal description of the occurrence of certain thoughts, and of their relation to some body, that “would enable us to know” that there was a person who was the thinker of these thoughts. It would not be an open question whether these thoughts were had by a thinker, since the existence of this thinker was, I assumed, conceptually guaranteed. That is why I claimed that, in a full description, this fact would not need to be separately mentioned.<sup>56</sup>

Shoemaker also claims that, on my view, “persons are logical constructions out of entities whose existence does not require that they be states of persons or other ‘subjects’” (*RP*, 139). I seem to think of experiences, he writes, not as “entities that of their very nature require subjects,” but as “entities that could exist without there being persons—just as the people who are in fact members of clubs could exist without there being clubs” (*RP*, 138). These remarks may suggest that, if we regard persons as entities which consist in other entities, we are thereby committed to the view that these other entities could exist all on their own, without constituting persons. But this cannot be what Shoemaker means, since he himself goes on to claim that a person is a composite entity, not all of whose components could have existed on their own. Shoemaker’s point may only be that, though reductionists can explain why experiences could not occur all on their own, I failed to see this point, and to give that explanation. That objection may well be justified.

We can now ask: Could experiences occur all on their own? Hume claimed, notoriously, that experiences were “distinct existences,” which could “exist separately, and have no need of anything to support their existence.” Noonan writes that, on this view, “the ache I now have in my big toe . . . might have been the only thing in the Universe.”<sup>57</sup> Such a view may be, as Noonan says, absurd. But this is not the best way to ask whether some entity could “exist separately.” Though Noonan’s big toe could exist separately, it could not have been the whole of reality. In considering Hume’s claim, our question should be only whether an experience might occur without having certain relations to certain other entities.

We can first ask whether experiences might occur without connections to other experiences. Since there are many kinds of connection, there are many versions of this question. All that I shall briefly ask is this. Could there be a subject whose mental life consisted of only one experience? This possibility seems least plausible in the case of experiences that involve concepts. As Shoemaker argues, for any thought to have its particular content, it must occur within a context of many other thoughts. But suppose that, while I am alive, a replicator makes an exact copy of my brain and body. My replica, most of us believe, would not be me. Since his brain would be

just like mine, however, could he not, when he first woke up, have any kind of thought that I myself might have had? And, if he then suddenly died, would he not be a subject whose mental life consisted of only one thought? Even if the thinking of any thought requires the context of many other thoughts, it is not clear that these thoughts must all be had by the same thinker. My replica would be psychologically continuous with me because his brain had been copied from mine, and this might provide the context which would allow his mental life to consist of only a single thought, and one that was just like any thought of mine.

This example suggests another. Our conscious lives start gradually, like the dawn. But it seems possible that there should be conscious beings in whose case it was determinate when their first experience occurred. Nor need such beings have the derivative status of my replica. If such a being were suddenly destroyed, just after its first experience, that could not make it true that this experience never occurred. This would be another mental life that consisted of only one experience.

Return now to the question whether there could be thoughts without thinkers, or subjectless experiences. Like many other writers, Shoemaker denies this possibility. One of his arguments appeals, we have seen, to adjectival dependence. Thoughts without thinkers, Shoemaker suggests, are as inconceivable as dents without surfaces. I believe that, for this analogy to be good, it would have to assume something like the Cartesian view that thoughts are changes in an immaterial substance whose essence is to think. And Shoemaker rejects such views. Nor would it help to argue that, since thoughts are events, they must be changes in the states of a material substance. That could not show, as I have said, that this substance was the *thinker* of these thoughts.

When I claimed that all thoughts have thinkers, and all experiences have subjects, I took this truth to be implied by our concepts of a thinker and subject. Shoemaker suggests a more substantial argument, whose main premise I have already mentioned. On what Shoemaker calls his functionalist account, in order for some event to be the thinking of a thought, or to be any other kind of mental state or process, it must play a certain role in a larger system, which consists of other mental states and processes which are dependent on, or realized in, some persisting body. And, on the view that Shoemaker and I defend, such a system constitutes a thinker (RP, 139). If this argument is sound, it is not merely a conceptually grounded truth that all thoughts can be ascribed to thinkers, and all experiences ascribed to subjects. This truth has significant ontological implications.

It is worth remarking that, even given this argument's conclusion, we can imagine a world in which thoughts and experiences could not be *usefully* ascribed to thinkers, or subjects. Return first to my imagined beings who do not reproduce sexually and then die, but who frequently divide and

unite. These beings would have quasi-memories of past observations and other experiences, not within one single past life, but in a complicated overlapping network. Given the regularity of these divisions and unions, these beings could usefully employ the notion of a subject; but most of the experiences that they quasi-remembered would have been had, not by them, but by other subjects. We can now suppose instead that the interrelations between these observations and q-memories took a much more complicated and irregular form. It might then be pointless to try to assign these observations and q-memories to different persisting subjects. There might be only two non-arbitrary assignments, or conceptual schemes. One would ascribe each unified state of consciousness, at any time, to a different momentary subject. The other would ascribe all thoughts and experiences, at all times, to a single global subject, or World Soul. Neither scheme would do any useful work. So, in this world, the concept of a subject would not be, metaphysically, worth applying.

## X. COMPARING CONCEPTUAL SCHEMES

Return now to the impersonal conceptual scheme of my other group of imagined beings: those whose lives are in other ways like ours. Is this scheme coherent, and metaphysically no worse than ours? Would it allow these beings to know as much about themselves as our scheme would allow them to do?

Before we try to answer this question, it will help to sketch some ways in which two conceptual schemes might be related. These schemes might, first, be *mere notational variants*. That would be true if, for every thought that one scheme makes possible, there could be a close equivalent in the other scheme. Such conceptual schemes, or the languages in which they were expressed, would be close to being fully mutually translatable. As that remark implies, this relation is a matter of degree.

One of two conceptual schemes may, next, either include or be included in the other. This relation holds, for example, between some ordinary pre-scientific scheme and an enriched version of that scheme which includes the concepts of modern science. These two schemes are not notational variants, since there are many facts, claims, and questions which cannot be recognized or expressed in the pre-scientific scheme. But these schemes may not conflict. The enriched scheme, we might then say, *differs only by addition* from the pre-scientific scheme.

Another relation holds when two schemes provide *different but compatible* ways of thinking about some parts of reality. This relation holds, in miniature, between our concept of a river and the concept of a continuous

flowing of water. Different schemes may instead be *incompatible*. This relation holds, for example, between a Newtonian spatiotemporal scheme, and the space-time scheme of modern physics. These schemes cannot both truly apply to reality.

It can be difficult to know how two schemes are related. Consider, for example, wholly general versions of the two ways of thinking about flowings of water. Our ordinary conceptual scheme has many concepts of *three-dimensional* entities: persisting objects that have spatial but not temporal parts, since the whole object exists at any time. That is true of objects like the Pyramids or the Nile. There could also be a wholly *four-dimensional* scheme, whose spatiotemporal entities are all conceived as having temporal parts, in the way that processes do. The first act of *Aida* is not the whole opera. Of those who discuss these two schemes, many claim them to be incompatible. That claim would be justified if, as some of these writers argue, these schemes involve conflicting assumptions about the metaphysics of time. But these schemes may instead be compatible, and may both apply to reality. Our ordinary three-dimensional scheme may be conceptually prior, since we may need to start with this scheme. But, as in the case of the subatomic particles, this fact would not show that the four-dimensional scheme was metaphysically or scientifically inferior. If these schemes are compatible, we may benefit from using both, since that may help us to understand better how our concepts are related to reality.

Return now to my imagined impersonal conceptual scheme. This scheme differs by subtraction from our ordinary scheme, since it lacks the concepts of a person, subject, thinker, and agent. When one scheme differs from another by lacking certain concepts, these two schemes might be related in any of the other ways just sketched. If the missing concepts are unimportant, these schemes may be close to being mere notational variants. If the missing concepts are important, these schemes may instead be like a pre-scientific scheme and its scientifically enriched version. The scheme with fewer concepts may be coherent and compatible with the enriched scheme, but provide less knowledge of the world. The two schemes may instead be incompatible. Or the missing concepts may be essential, so that the scheme without them is incoherent. Which of these relations holds between my imagined scheme and our ordinary person-involving scheme?

These schemes are not, I believe, mere notational variants. The concepts of a subject, thinker, and agent have great importance in our scheme, and these concepts have no full equivalent in my imagined scheme. It may also be true that, because my imagined beings lack these concepts, they could not have our concepts of an experience, thought, or act. If that is true, I have claimed, these beings would have variants of these concepts, in which subjects, thinkers, and agents were not presupposed. These concepts we might call those of an *experience\**, the *thinking\** of a thought, and an

*act\**. Given the difference between these concepts and ours, the concept *experience\** might not refer to experiences. But that would not show that this conceptual scheme must be worse than ours. If we used the concept of a continuous flowing of water in a certain pattern, this concept would not refer to rivers; but it would refer to continuous flowings of water. In the same way, the concept *experience\** might refer to experiences\*. This alternative conceptual scheme would then be, I suggest, metaphysically as good as ours.

McDowell's assessment differs from mine. He assumes that, even if my imagined beings could think about experiences, their scheme would be much worse than ours. They would fail to realize that experiences must have subjects, and that they themselves were subjects. As McDowell remarked to me:

Suppose your story does make sense.... Even so, so what?... Why isn't this just to have conceived a mode of thought... that involves being egregiously wrong about its subject matter?... If it's indeed possible to think and talk about experiences even while being this far away from understanding what experiences are... why should that threaten my conviction that experiences, for all that, are episodes in lives?

I am not, however, questioning this conviction. The experiences of these beings would indeed be episodes in lives. For these beings to be badly *wrong* in their thoughts about experiences, they would have to have false beliefs, such as the belief that experiences were *not* episodes in lives. They have no such false beliefs. They do fail to have certain true beliefs, including the belief that they are subjects, who are living lives. In the same way, however, if we had no concept of a river, but only the concept of continuous flowings of water, we would fail to recognize the fact that our world contains many rivers. That would not give us a worse conceptual scheme. The relative merit of two schemes does not always correspond to the number of facts whose recognition they make possible. We cannot improve our scheme merely by adding concepts which can be truly claimed to apply to some parts of reality.

Even if my imagined beings have no false beliefs, it may seem that, as McDowell suggests, they could not understand what experiences are. When Nagel asked his famous question "What is it like to be a bat?" he meant "What is it like *for the bat*?" To understand the qualitative character of experiences, it may be claimed, we must have the concept of the subject *for* whom these experiences have this character. Since my beings have no concept of a subject, they could not even understand what experiences were *like*.<sup>58</sup>

This objection seems to me mistaken. Though these beings do not think of experiences—or experiences\*—as had by subjects, that would not, I

believe, make them unable to understand the qualitative character of these conscious states and events. My imagined mountaineer might think, "What would the view from the summit be like?" and later think, "So it's like that." Or he might recognize that one of two sensations was like another, but was unlike a third. It is when we are most aware of the quality of particular experiences, as in responding to a work of art, that we think least about ourselves.

This objector might reply as follows. Some phrases fail to express a complete intelligible thought. No such thought is expressed, for example, by

- (1) This experience is exactly like.

For some experience to be thought to be exactly similar, there must be some other experience *to which* this first experience is thought to be similar. Such a thought must be

- (2) This experience is exactly like that experience.

My imagined beings, I have just said, could think thoughts of the kind expressed by (2). But this objector might claim that, like (1), (2) could not be the full expression of some thought. For two experiences to be thought to be similar, he might say, there must be some subject *for whom* these experiences are thought to be similar. For (2) to express an intelligible thought, it must be a shortened form of

- (3) This experience is *for its subject* exactly like that experience.

Since my imagined beings could not think (3), they could not think the kind of thought that we express with (2).

This reply does not, I think, succeed. If I know that you are color-blind, and we are both looking at some painting, I might wonder whether your visual experience is just like mine. I am not then wondering whether your experience is like mine *for me*. Only solipsists assume that, for some experience to be like theirs, it must be like theirs *for them*. When (2) is applied to experiences that are had by different subjects, it could at most be a shortened form of

- (4) What this experience is like for its subject is the same as what that experience is like for that other subject.

As this suggests, the similarity of different experiences need not be, or be thought of as, their similarity *for* some subject. So (2), I believe, need not be a shortened form of (3).

Here is a similar disagreement. I believe that, if sentient beings suffer, that is not only *bad for them*. It is *bad*, or what some call *bad, period*. This is the sense in which it would be worse if there was more suffering. This *impersonal* use of “*bad*” is sometimes claimed to be unintelligible. On this view, when people suffer, that is *bad for these people*, but it cannot be bad in some non-relative, impersonal sense. If more people suffer, there might be people for whom that would be worse. But there might be no such person. And there is no intelligible sense in which it could be impersonally worse if more people suffer.

Just as I believe that one of two outcomes could be worse, even if there would be no one *for whom* it would be worse, I believe that all experiences have intrinsic qualitative features, and that their qualitative character could be thought about without the thought of the subjects *for whom* they have that character. Even for my imagined beings, who have no concept of a subject, (2) could express a complete and intelligible thought. These beings could notice similarities and differences between their experiences. Nor need they be impersonal solipsists. If I was one of these imagined beings, and you and I were looking at the same painting, I might wonder whether there was now occurring, in the sequence dependent on that body there, a visual experience just like *this*.

It might next be claimed that, though my imagined beings could respond to qualitative changes in their experiences, they would not be able to understand these changes. Without the concept of a subject, these beings could not think of experiences *as* experiences—or even as experiences\*. Experiences must be thought of as being had by subjects, just as dents must be thought of as being in surfaces. In suggesting this objection, Peacocke varied this analogy. Thinking of experiences without the concept of their subject is as impossible, Peacocke suggested, as thinking of collisions without the concept of the things that are colliding.

I am inclined to reject this new analogy. But, even if this analogy were good, that would not show that my imagined beings must have an incoherent or defective conceptual scheme. It would show only that they could not have any variant of the concept of an experience. They might have, not a variant of this concept, but an adequate substitute. To illustrate this point, we can return to rivers. In their freely flowing or unfrozen form, rivers that merge cannot be happily said to collide. But two glaciers might collide. It might be impossible to think of such collisions without thinking of the glaciers that collide. But this part of reality could be thought of in a different way. Rather than having the concept of a glacier, or a persisting and slowly moving body of ice, we might have the concept of a continuous movement of ice in a certain pattern. If we used that other concept, we could not think of two such movements as colliding. That would be a category mistake. When dancers collide, it is the dancers, and not their movements,

which collide. But, though two movements of ice could not collide, they could interact and affect each other. By thinking of the interactions of these processes, we could understand what happens when glaciers collide. Similar claims may apply, I believe, to mental processes. Perhaps, if these processes were thought of in subjectless terms, these thoughts could not use any intelligible variant of the concept of an experience. Such concepts may necessarily include the concept of the persisting entity who has this experience. But there might be concepts of pure mental processes, ones that did not ascribe these processes to persisting entities.

## XI. CONCLUSION

I have been supposing that, as these objections claim, an impersonal conceptual scheme would be very different from ours. But that claim seems to me mistaken. My imagined beings are, I believe, fairly close to having the concept of a person, or subject. They have concepts of all of the components of a person, since they have the concepts of a persisting body, and of a related sequence of mental processes and events. But they describe these components, and their interrelations, in a different way.

It may help to remember here that there are different versions of our person-involving scheme. Consider these six claims:

- (1) There are persisting bodies and related sequences of thoughts, experiences, and acts.
- (2) We are the bodies who think these thoughts, have these experiences, and are the agents of these acts.
- (3) We are not bodies but embodied brains. It is brains that think these thoughts and have these experiences.
- (4) We are distinct from our bodies and our brains, though we are not, in relation to them, separately existing entities.
- (5) We are, or partly consist in, souls, or immaterial substances.
- (6) There are no persons, thinkers, or agents. There are only persisting bodies and related sequences of thoughts, experiences, and acts.

Claim (1) is uncontroversial, and is part of every view. My imagined beings believe only this claim. Since they have no concept of a person, thinker, or

agent, these beings have not considered any of the other claims. Their impersonal view is thus quite different from the *eliminative* view expressed by (6).

Of the remaining claims, (5) expresses the Cartesian view, and (2) to (4) express versions of what I have called Reductionism. If the Cartesian view is true, the other views are either false or seriously incomplete, since they fail to recognize that there are such immaterial substances. But (5), I assume, is false.

(5)'s falsity is not enough to justify (6), or the denial that there are any persons. *We* are persons. (6) may be best regarded as an overly emphatic way of rejecting (5). Buddha, for example, is said to have claimed: "There are acts, and also their consequences, but there is no agent who acts. . . There is no person, it is only a conventional name given to a set of elements."<sup>59</sup> If Buddha did assert this *No Self View*, he may have meant that we are not the ultimate and simple substances—such as souls or Pure Egos—that, in many of our thoughts about ourselves, we assume ourselves to be.

If we reject both the Cartesian and the Buddhist View, which view should we accept? (2) and (3), though similar, can disagree. That can be shown by imagining a case in which my head would be successfully grafted onto the rest of your body. While (2) implies that you would wake up with my head, (3) allows us to claim, more plausibly, that the survivor would be me. (4) has the same advantage. But the choice between these views does not, I think, have much importance, partly because it would not matter who the survivor would be. Nor, I believe, do these views describe three different possibilities, one of which might be the truth. They are merely different descriptions of the same part of reality, between which we should choose on other grounds. Though we may think one description to be best—perhaps because it is simplest, or because it best fits our attitudes—we should admit, I believe, that these three descriptions are all acceptable, since none is determinately false, and all sufficiently cover what our existence involves.<sup>60</sup>

Similar remarks apply to my imagined conceptual scheme, which uses only description (1). On the view that appeals to this scheme, there are persisting bodies, and related sequences of thoughts, experiences, and acts. But this view does not describe these bodies as having these thoughts and experiences, or as the agents of these acts. Nor does it ascribe these experiences and acts to any entities that are distinct from these bodies. This view's failure to make these claims does not, I believe, make it either incoherent, or flawed. (1) seems to me another acceptable description.

If we allow, as acceptable, (2) to (4), that makes it harder to reject the view that appeals only to (1). We cannot reject this view because it fails to recognize that there are subjects of experiences that are distinct from bodies or embodied brains. Views (2) and (3), which we allow, fail to recognize such entities. Nor can we reject this view because it does not regard these bodies, or their brains, as the subjects of experiences. View (4), which we

allow, doesn't do that. We might argue that, though an acceptable view need not claim that bodies or brains have experiences, and need not claim that there are subjects of experiences that are distinct from bodies or brains, it must make one of these two claims. But, if neither of these claims is needed, it is less clear that one of them is.

We should remember here that, though the view that appeals to (1) is in one sense impersonal, this view does not *deny* that experiences are had by subjects, and thoughts by thinkers. If we met my imagined beings, we could teach them the concept of a person, and they would learn that they were persons. They would not then be giving up any of their previous beliefs.

Return next to Shoemaker's argument for the impossibility of thoughts without thinkers and subjectless experiences. Shoemaker claims that

- (7) thoughts and experiences could not occur separately, but must occur in some interrelated sequence of such mental processes and events, which must be closely related to some persisting body,

and that

- (8) such a combination constitutes a person.

Even before they learnt the concept of a person, my imagined beings might believe (7). They might think it absurd to claim, like Hume, that thoughts and experiences were "distinct existences."

As these remarks suggest, though this impersonal scheme differs from ours, this difference is not metaphysically deep. And this difference is in part merely grammatical. In our scheme, all thoughts, experiences, and acts are claimed to be *had by* or *done by* either some persisting body or embodied brain, or some distinct entity that has this body and brain. In my imagined scheme, these thoughts, experiences, and acts might instead be claimed to *occur in* this persisting body or embodied brain. Is this an important difference? If we moved from *had by* to *occur in*, would we be moving to an incoherent or radically defective scheme?

The split-brain cases pose this question in a helpful way. When Roger Sperry concluded that his split-brain patients had two separate streams of consciousness, he needed some new form of words with which to report this conclusion. It was not enough to describe what these patients were experiencing and thinking, since that would fail to distinguish their separate streams. Sperry sometimes made claims like

- (A) while one hemisphere sees and understands some message, the other hemisphere has no awareness of this message.

When Duncan Mackay objected that hemispheres don't see and think, Sperry switched to claims like

- (B) while there is occurring, in one hemisphere, a seeing and an understanding of some message, there is no such awareness in the other hemisphere.<sup>61</sup>

There are other possible descriptions. Thus McDowell suggests that

- (C) there are two subpersonal subjects, who are having different thoughts and experiences.

I prefer the claim that

- (D) there is one person who is having, in two separate streams of consciousness, different thoughts and experiences.

But these four descriptions should not, I believe, be regarded as incompatible.

What is most relevant here is the difference between (A) and (B). Unlike (B), (A) counts as a personal or subject-involving description. If we could acceptably claim, like Williams, that we are bodies, we could acceptably claim, like Nagel, that we are embodied brains. On this description, it is brains that think thoughts and have experiences. We could then claim that, in the split-brain cases, different thoughts and experiences are had, not by a whole brain, but by its two hemispheres. On the objection that I have been discussing, while it would make sense to claim that these experiences are *being had by* these hemispheres, we could not intelligibly claim that these experiences are *occurring in* these hemispheres. More exactly, such a use of "occurring in" must be merely a loose way of saying "being had by."

As before, I do not see the importance of this distinction. If my imagined beings thought of their experiences as either directly dependent on or as occurring in their brains, but they did not ascribe these experiences to their brains, or to any other entities, how much would they be missing? They would, I agree, be missing certain truths, since it is true that all thoughts have thinkers, and that all experiences have subjects. But this is like the truth that, for every continuous flowing of water in a certain pattern, there is a river which does the flowing. And that truth does not have to be recognized in any adequate understanding of such flowings of water. The same may apply to the truth that, for every stream of thoughts and experiences, there is an entity that thinks these thoughts and has these experiences.

This impersonal scheme, I have claimed, is metaphysically no worse than ours. It may now be objected that, in defending this claim, I have shown it to be trivial. If this imagined scheme is so similar to ours, giving

us merely a different description of the same facts, this scheme—it may be said—is not really impersonal. My imagined beings have the concept of a person, and merely express this concept in a different way. Though this scheme is no worse than ours, that is only because, despite my denial, it *is* a mere notational variant of ours.

These remarks, even if true, would not make my claim trivial. If my imagined scheme were a mere notational variant of ours, my appeal to this scheme would still achieve its aims.

One of these aims was to respond to McDowell's claim that, for a Reductionist account of persons to succeed, it must be able to be understood in a way that did not appeal to the concept of a person, or the wider concept of a subject of experiences. If my imagined scheme were no worse than ours because it was a mere notational variant of ours, McDowell's requirement would be met. This imagined scheme provides what McDowell thinks impossible: an understanding of the "flow of experience" which does not ascribe these experiences to a persisting subject. My imagined beings could, moreover, claim that our person-involving scheme was a mere notational variant of *their* scheme.

Of my other reasons for considering this scheme, one was that it seemed to me that, on the view about persons that I believe to be true, this scheme *ought* to be metaphysically no worse than ours. If it did turn out to be worse, that might show my view to be mistaken. If this imagined scheme were a mere notational variant of our scheme, my view would survive this test. And certain other objections would be answered. Consider, for example, Peter Strawson's discussion of what he calls the no-ownership theory. On this theory, there are persisting bodies and associated sequences of mental events, but the only sense in which these mental events are "owned" is by having some close relation to some persisting body. If my imagined scheme were a mere notational variant of our person-involving scheme, so would be the no-ownership theory, and Strawson's objections to this theory would be met.

These schemes are not, I believe, mere notational variants. The concept of a person, or subject, may not do essential metaphysical work, since this concept is not needed for the identification of particular thoughts and experiences, or for an understanding of how these events are related to a body, and form part of a unified mental sequence. But, even if the concept of a person is not, in these ways, essential, it has other kinds of importance in our conceptual scheme. It enables us to ask questions, and to have beliefs, for which there is no equivalent in my imagined scheme.

This difference is particularly clear when we apply these schemes to the imagined "problem cases" to which discussions of personal identity so often appeal. In such cases, we imagine that we are about to undergo some science-fictional operation. We then imagine asking

Q1: Shall I continue to exist? Will the resulting person be me? Or am I about to lose consciousness for the last time?

There has been much disagreement about how we should answer such questions. Thus, if my brain were transplanted into your body, some of us believe that it would be I who continued to exist, others believe that it would be you, and others are uncertain what to believe. And, if my body were destroyed and a replica created, some of us believe that the resulting person would be me, others believe that he would be a new person, and others are again uncertain. If my imagined beings considered these cases, they could not ask Q1. Their questions would be

Q2: Will this brain and body continue to exist?

Q3: Will this sequence of thoughts and experiences continue?

These questions are easier to answer. Thus, in a brain transplant, the same brain would continue to exist in a different body, and the original sequence of thoughts and experiences would also continue. In a case of replication, the original brain and body would cease to exist, but there would be a sequence of thoughts and experiences in the new brain that was psychologically continuous with the original sequence. These claims do not provide answers to Q1. We could accept these claims but still disagree about who, in these cases, the resulting person would be. Since my imagined beings cannot even ask this question, their conceptual scheme is not a mere notational variant of our scheme.

Because it is not a mere notational variant, this scheme would be in some ways better than ours. As our reactions to such imagined cases show, most of us assume that our identity must be determinate. We also assume that, without an answer to the question of whether we were about to die, we could not know the full truth about what was going to happen. These assumptions, I have claimed, are false. It could be indeterminate whether we were about to die, or would become conscious again, and this question would then be empty in the sense that it did not describe two different possibilities. If we find this hard to believe, as many of us do, that shows that we misunderstand what, even in ordinary cases, our continuing to exist involves. We take our relation to ourselves tomorrow to be peculiarly deep and simple, in a way that guarantees that every future experience must either be, or not be, ours. Since my imagined beings have no concept of a person, they would avoid this illusion.

It might be objected that, just as we may falsely believe that our identity must be determinate, my imagined beings might have similar false beliefs about the identities of bodies, brains, and mental sequences. But,

while these beings might make such mistakes, they would be, I believe, less likely to do so. Unless we identify ourselves with our brains or bodies, we do not find it hard to accept that these are entities whose identity, like that of other complex objects, might be indeterminate, and in a quite unpuzzling way. Thus, if half of some brain were replaced, it is not a puzzling question whether the original brain would still exist. Even without answering that question we could know what happened. It is only our *own* identity, or the identities of those we love, that is so hard to regard in this way.

Turn next to the question of whether the same mental sequence would continue. There is a further reason why, in their thoughts about this question, my imagined beings would be less likely to be misled. Though we are persisting things, all of whom exists at any time, sequences are processes, which have temporal parts. This makes the identity of sequences easier to understand. In asking whether some persisting thing will continue to exist, we are asking whether some thing that exists at one time is one and the same as some thing that will exist at some later time. In asking about the identity of some process over time, we are not asking whether some thing is *one and the same* as some thing. We are asking whether two *different* things—such as two different events—are parts of a single, larger thing. And the relation of parts to wholes is simpler, and clearer, than the relations between persisting things at different times.

Return for example to the case of Teletransportation, in which my body would be destroyed and an exact replica created on Mars. According to some writers, Teletransportation is a way of traveling, since it would be I who woke up on Mars. According to others, though the person who woke up on Mars would be psychologically continuous with me, he would be a new person, and I would have ceased to exist. If my imagined beings thought about such a case, their question would be whether the mental sequence that occurred in the original body on Earth would be continued by the mental sequence that occurred in the body on Mars. That depends on whether, for two sequences to be parts of a single larger sequence, it is enough that they be psychologically continuous, or whether this continuity must also have its normal cause: the continued existence of enough of the same brain. It is easier to see that this not a question about two different possibilities, but is merely a choice between two ways of making more precise the concept of a single mental sequence.

There is a further advantage here. When we are discussing the relation between different things, such as the sequence on Earth and the sequence on Mars, we are not constrained by the logic of numerical identity. These sequences can be claimed to be parts of one kind of larger sequence, while not being not parts of another kind of sequence that is more narrowly defined. Thus two battles may be parts of the same war, while not being parts of the same campaign. And there is less need to choose between these descriptions.

Return finally to the case of Division, in which the halves of my brain would be transplanted into different bodies. There has been much disagreement about what, in such a case, would happen to me. It has been claimed that I would be neither of the two resulting people, or one of them, or both of them since they together would constitute me, or that there would be only one resulting person—me—with two bodies and two minds, or that, even before my Division, the two resulting people already existed, sharing all my thoughts and experiences. There are objections to all these answers. Given the logic of numerical identity as applied to persisting persons, any description of this case is unsatisfactory. For my imagined beings, such a case would present no problems. If these beings were about to divide, they would not ask whether they could expect to wake up again in one of the two resulting bodies, or both, or neither. They would know that there would later be two sequences of thoughts and experiences, each of which would be psychologically continuous with the single sequence in which their thinking of these thoughts occurred, with this continuity having its normal cause. Their question would be whether, given this psychological continuity, these three sequences should be counted as parts of a single, larger process. And, to that question, the answer is obviously yes.

Even if this impersonal scheme is *metaphysically* no worse than ours, it might be worse in other ways. One set of questions here are about the emotions and attitudes that my imagined beings could have. We can also ask whether, if we ourselves sometimes thought in this impersonal way, that might affect our attitudes for better or worse.

Some effects might be good. Thus, when I remember that

(A) after a few more years, I shall be dead,

this thought can be depressing. If my imagined scheme is metaphysically no worse than ours, I could think instead that

(B) after a few more years, there will be no experiences that are related in certain ways to these present experiences, or directly dependent on this brain.

That seems less depressing. In this redescription, my death seems to disappear. Since I believe that (A) and (B) describe the same course of events, I ought rationally to find (B) no less depressing than (A). But, if I managed to find these thoughts equally depressing, they would both, I believe, be less depressing than (A) now seems.<sup>62</sup>

Other possibilities are more disturbing. Thus we can feel sorry for some person or animal who is in pain, but it may seem impossible to feel sorry for a series of experiences, even if some of these experiences are pains. And

there are other attitudes or emotions that might be claimed both to enrich our lives, and to depend essentially on our concept of a person. I doubt whether such a claim is true. But this is a large and difficult question, which I cannot even begin to discuss here. I shall say only that, when we try to imagine variants of our emotions, we can give up too easily, and we can misunderstand what such other emotions would involve. On Williams' view, for example, since persons are bodies, loving a person really amounts to loving a body. That claim, as Williams writes, is "grotesquely misleading"; but it might nonetheless be true.<sup>63</sup> We should also remember that impersonality is not the same as impartiality. My imagined beings could, I believe, be fiercely partial, and could have highly distinctive characters and lives.

It might next be claimed that, since these beings have no concept of a person, they could not understand morality, or be aware of other normative truths. They could not think of mental sequences as having rights or duties, or as being morally responsible. Nor could they have the concept of a normative reason. Reasons, it may be said, must be thought of as reasons *for* some persisting being. Though I doubt these claims, I cannot discuss them here. I shall say only that, as far as I can see, the concepts *reason* and *person* need not go together. An impersonal conceptual scheme could include the concept of a reason, and a reasonless conceptual scheme could include the concept of a person. Of these two schemes, it is the reasonless scheme, I believe, that is defective, and much worse than our ordinary reason-involving scheme. And some people—such as Hume and Kant—have come close to accepting such a scheme. Unlike the concept of a person, the concept of a normative reason is in danger of being forgotten. Normativity is often confused with motivating force.

There is a similar difference between two reductionist views. According to reductionism about persons, there are no souls or Cartesian Egos, and our existence consists in the existence of a body and a related sequence of mental events. According to reductionism about reasons, there are no irreducibly normative truths, and when we have some reason for acting, that fact consists in some fact about our motivation or the effects of our acts. Unlike reductionism about persons, *this* form of reductionism seems to me deeply mistaken; and, if it were fully believed, its effects would be bleak. While we can do without souls, we need to be aware of normative reasons.

## NOTES

1. Shoemaker's first book, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1963), was one of the two that drew me into philosophy, and I have drawn heavily from the papers in his two collections, *Identity, Cause, and Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), and *The First-Person Perspective and Other Essays*

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), and from his joint book with Richard Swinburne, *Personal Identity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).

In the writing of this paper, I have been greatly helped by Kathy Behrendt, Quassim Cassam, Frederick Doepke, Tamar Gendler, John McDowell, David Mackie, Christopher Peacocke, Ingmar Persson, Jim Stone, Galen Strawson, Christopher Williams, and others whose help I have forgotten.

2. Shoemaker's comments are in his "Critical Notice," in *Mind* (1985), of my book *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), reprinted in *Reading Parfit*, ed. Jonathan Dancy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997). McDowell's comments are in his paper "Reductionism and the First Person," also in *Reading Parfit*. There is much in these two papers, especially McDowell's, to which I shall not try to respond here.
3. I took this point from Bernard Williams, "The Self and the Future," *Philosophical Review* (1970) reprinted in his *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).
4. As Shoemaker argues in his "Critical Notice," this is an oversimplification, since there might be complex entities whose identity must be determinate. But this possibility can, I believe, be ignored here.
5. I defend these claims in part 3 of *Reasons and Persons*.
6. See Bernard Williams, "Are Persons Bodies?" in his *Problems of the Self*, and Judith Thomson, "People and their Bodies," in *Reading Parfit*.
7. Some Cartesians claim, not that we are Cartesian Egos, but that our existence consists in the existence of such an Ego and of an associated body. As Quassim Cassam remarked to me, such a view is, in one sense, reductionist. Similarly, some use "reductionist" more narrowly than me. I use *Reductionist* merely as a label for the view expressed by (D).
8. Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), chap. 3.
9. To give Shoemaker's analogy, a gold statue is distinct from the lump of gold in which it consists, though not separately existing. These entities are distinct because, though they share the same matter, either could outlast the other. If we melt the statue, we would destroy the statue without destroying the lump. Suppose instead that we melt and extract, in one malleable lump, all but the outer 1 percent that is the surface of this statue. We could then destroy the lump, though the statue would continue to exist.
10. For the concept of a *phased-sortal*, see David Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 24–27. Just as we can coherently distinguish ourselves from our bodies, we could distinguish persons from human beings, treating both as persisting entities who share a body. But this second distinction faces powerful objections. For some of these objections, and a defense of *Animalism*, see Eric Olson, *The Human Animal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), and two earlier pioneering articles by Paul Snowdon, "Personal Identity and Brain Transplants," in *Human Beings*, ed. David Cockburn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), and "Persons, Animals, and Ourselves," in *The Person and the Human Mind*, ed. Christopher Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). For a forceful partial reply, see Ingmar Persson, "Our Identity and the Separability of Persons and Organisms," *Dialogue* (forthcoming).
11. Shoemaker, "Persons and Their Pasts," *American Philosophical Quarterly* (1970), reprinted in *Identity, Cause, and Mind*.
12. In trying to imagine these beings, I have been influenced by the similar examples in Galen Strawson's *Freedom and Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), and his *Mental Reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), and in Adam Morton's, "Why There Is No Concept of a Person," in *The Person and the Human Mind*.
13. In my *Reasons and Persons*, 212.
14. Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972), 50.
15. For example, as Quassim Cassam points out, it was a mistake to include, within a single claim, both IRC and the claim that we can describe psychological continuity without presupposing personal identity. Shoemaker, for example, accepts the second claim but rejects the first. See Quassim Cassam, "Parfit on Persons," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 93 (1993): 25–26.

16. Quassim Cassam, "Reductionism and First-Person Thinking," sections 1 and 2, in *Reduction, Explanation, and Realism*, ed. David Charles and Kathleen Lennon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
17. This is claimed, for example, by Harold Noonan in his *Personal Identity* (London: Routledge, 1989), section 5.6.
18. In his "Ontological Dependence," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 95 (1995). Kit Fine forcefully challenges this approach to these questions. But it will be sufficient for my purposes here.
19. David Mackie suggests a simpler form of this objection. On this proposed definition, if there could not be Xs without Ys, or Ys without Xs, neither kind of entity could be claimed to depend on the other. It is better to claim that, in such cases, there is *interdependence*, with each kind of entity depending on the other.
20. P. F. Strawson, *Individuals* (London: Methuen, 1959), chap. 1.
21. I take these points from Bernard Williams, "Strawson on Individuals," *Problems of the Self*, 114.
22. I begin to discuss this relation in my "The Unimportance of Identity," in *Identity*, ed. H. Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). I hope to say more in a projected book *The Metaphysics of the Self*.
23. Christine Korsgaard, for example, writes: "When you deliberate, it is as if there were something over and above all your desires, something that is *you*, and that *chooses* which one to act on" ("Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* [Spring 1989], reprinted in Korsgaard's *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 370). Korsgaard argues that, because my view about persons reduces acts to things that happen, it misses the essence of agency. I cannot even start here to try to respond to this objection.
24. See Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, chap. 7.
25. Strawson, *Individuals*, 81.
26. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense* (London: Methuen 1966), 72–112.
27. "Persons and Their Pasts."
28. Thus Cassam writes, "in order to think of one's experience as including perceptions of objects . . . one must be capable of self-ascribing one's perceptions and of grasping the identity of that to which these perceptions are ascribed" (Quassim Cassam, *Self and World* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997], 36). See also Frederick Doepke, *The Kinds of Things* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1996), whose arguments I shall not try to answer here.
29. I take this example from my *Reasons and Persons*, 303.
30. As Strawson notes in *The Bounds of Sense*, 98.
31. Lichtenberg wrote "es blitzt," but since "it lightens" is archaic, I have substituted thunder.
32. *Reasons and Persons*, section 81.
33. Strawson, *Individuals*, 46.
34. See esp. Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, chaps. 2 and 3, and Galen Strawson, *Mental Reality*.
35. Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, 30.
36. See William Alston and Jonathan Bennett, "Locke on People and Substances," *Philosophical Review* (1988); Shoemaker, *Personal Identity*, 125, and Shoemaker's "Embodiment and Behavior" and "Immortality and Dualism," in his *Identity, Cause, and Mind*.
37. "Introspection and the Self," in his *The First-Person Perspective and Other Essays*, 10.
38. Noonan, *Personal Identity*, 87.
39. Shoemaker, "Introspection and the Self."
40. I take this example from Peter Carruthers, *Introducing Persons* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 53–54.
41. A point due, I believe, to David Pears.

42. Strawson, *Individuals*, chap. 3.
43. Ibid., 97.
44. A. J. Ayer, *The Concept of a Person* (London: Macmillan, 1964), 89–90.
45. Strawson, *Individuals*, 41.
46. As Peacocke writes: “[I]t is a substantive issue whether, when a particular thing or event is thought about, it must be thought about by thinking about what, metaphysically, individuates it” (“Demonstrative Content: A Reply to John McDowell,” *Mind* [1995]: 126).
47. *Reasons and Persons*, chap. 12. The example comes from David Wiggins, *Identity and Spatio-Temporal Continuity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), 40.
48. Peter Unger argues that, in the Single Case, half my brain would have to be destroyed, not after, but while it is being divided from the other half. See his *Identity, Consciousness, and Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), chap. 8. My remarks could be revised to cover this variant of the case.
49. *Reasons and Persons*, section 87. For a fuller discussion, see Thomas Nagel, “Brain Bisection and the Unity of Consciousness,” *Synthese* (1971), reprinted in Nagel’s *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
50. Christopher Peacocke, *Sense and Content* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 176–79.
51. McDowell, “Peacocke and Evans on Demonstrative Content,” *Mind* 99 (394) (1990): 23. McDowell continues: “And it is fully compatible with holding that this sort of application of the notion of a stream of consciousness is intelligible only parasitically on its application in the normal case, in which the centre of consciousness is a human being.” McDowell here implies that, whereas in normal cases the “centre of consciousness,” or “subject,” is the person, or human being, in the split-brain cases there are two different “subjects,” which are not the person, or human being.
52. Peacocke, “Demonstrative Content,” 127–28.
53. Ibid., 128.
54. John Campbell, “The First Person,” in *Reduction, Explanation, and Realism*, ed. Charles and Lennon, section 3; Susan Hurley, *Consciousness in Action* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), chaps. 3 and 5.
55. Cassam, “Reductionism and First-Person Thinking,” section 4.
56. Shoemaker’s objection is in part prompted by something else I wrote. To explain my referring to mental states as events, I mentioned the “misleading implication” that “a state must be a state of some entity.” That remark does suggest that there could be mental states without there being subjects whose states these were. But that was not what I meant. I preferred the word “event” because it is an open question whether events must be changes in the states of some independently existing substance. It would have been clearer to say that, while all mental states must be, grammatically, states of some entity, that leaves it open what kind of entity this is. (The state of being at war, for example, must be a state of some nation (or nation-state), but that has no ontological implications.)
57. Noonan, *Personal Identity*, 86.
58. Galen Strawson, *Mental Reality*, section 5.10.
59. Vasubhandu, quoted in Theodore Stcherbatsky, “The Soul Theory of the Buddhists,” *Bulletin de l’Academie des Sciences de Russie* (1919): 845.
60. The same applies, I believe, to the choice between two other descriptions: that on which what we are is persons, and that on which what we are is human beings, who are persons only for parts of our lives. If I used this second description, as I am now inclined to do, and I had also been a test-tube baby, I might point to the photograph of a fertilized ovum and say, “That’s me.” That should not be taken to imply that it would have been morally wrong, even at that early stage, to have killed me.
61. See, for example, Sperry’s remarks in *Brain and Conscious Experience*, ed. J. C. Eccles (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1966).
62. If this impersonal scheme were a mere notational variant of our scheme, it would be even clearer that, in thinking about my death, I could justifiably substitute (B) for (A).
63. Williams, *The Problems of the Self*, 81.