

Against ‘Corporism’: The Two Uses of ‘I’

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Abstract: In his book *Individuals* P. F. Strawson writes that ‘both the Cartesian and the no-ownership theorists are profoundly wrong in holding, as each must, that there are two uses of ‘I’, in one of which it denotes something which it does not denote in the other’ (p. 98). I think, by contrast, that there is a defensible ‘Cartesian materialist’ sense, which Strawson need not reject, in which *I* (=df. the word ‘I’ or the concept *I*) can and does denote two different things, and which is nothing like the flawed Wittgensteinian distinction between the use of *I* ‘as object’ and the use of *I* ‘as subject’. I don’t argue directly for the ‘two uses’ view, however. Instead I do some preparatory work. First I criticize one bad (Wittgensteinian or ‘Wittgensteinian’) argument for the ‘only one use of *I*’ view. Then I offer a phenomenological description of our everyday experience of ourselves that leads to an attack on ‘corporism’ – the excessive focus on the body in present-day analytic philosophy of mind.

Keywords: self, corporism, two uses of “I”, self-consciousness.

1

When my father gave me a copy of his new book *Entity and Identity and Other Essays*, in February 1997, he wrote in the front ‘from a crypto-Platonist to a Cartesian materialist’. His ‘crypto-Platonism’ – realism about universals without any sort of heavy Platonic heaven – will be familiar to most of you. Its roots lie, I think, in his long and in my opinion successful campaign against the even longer-running Quinean project of ontological desertification.

‘Cartesian materialism’ is a more paradoxical phrase. I’d called myself a ‘Cartesian naturalist’ some years before, meaning someone who combined straightforward monist materialism with outright realism about consciousness, outright realism about the experiential-qualitative

character or 'what-it's-likeness' of conscious experience. By 1997 I'd gone further, as my father knew, adding the claim that the subject of experience, conceived of as something that is non-identical with the human being considered as a whole, is a proper object of reference.

Let us call the subject of experience conceived of as something that is non-identical with the whole human being 'the self', for short. I can then say that the self that I take to be a proper object of reference is a wholly physical entity. In fact it's a straightforwardly spatiotemporal part of the human being considered as a whole. So my title is extremely misleading until you know that my Descartes is a materialist Descartes. I won't go in to the deep reasons for saying that this may be the real Descartes, although Regius, Spinoza, the Vatican, and the whole of the eighteenth century realized this. For present purposes the Cartesian element in this paper is really just the idea that there are two proper objects of reference – the self and the whole human being. It's this that seems directly contrary to the account of the primitiveness of the concept of a person expounded by Strawson – as I will henceforth call him – in Chapter 3 of *Individuals*.¹

The conflict, though, may be less than it seems. In *Individuals*, Strawson was happy to grant what he called a 'logically secondary existence' even to a classical Cartesian mind, a 'pure individual consciousness' (1959, 115), so long this mind continued to experience itself as located in space, if only as a mere point of view, and continued to think of itself as having formerly had a body; and this concession (enlarged on in *The Bounds of Sense*, in the passage on criterionless self-ascription of experiences) can be developed in a number of directions that may allow us to make some sense of the view that the self is a proper object of reference that is non-identical with the whole human being.

When I do metaphysics, I usually do what Strawson called revisionary metaphysics, rather than the descriptive metaphysics he favoured himself,

¹ When I re-read Strawson's chapter last week (April 2009), at least 20 years after I last read it, I was startled to come across the sentence 'Both the Cartesian and the no-ownership theorists are profoundly wrong in holding, as each must, that there are two uses of 'I', in one of which it denotes something which it does not denote in the other' (p. 98). I agree that Wittgenstein's distinction between two uses of 'I' – the use 'as object' and the use 'as subject' (1958, 65 – 69) – is unsound, because there is a fundamental sense in which all uses of 'I' are 'uses as subject' (see Strawson 2009, 140, 150 – 151, 331 – 337), but think that the word 'I' does have two legitimate uses: that it can and regularly does refer to different things in the thought and speech of an ordinary human being.

and I could simply locate my claim that there is such a thing as the self firmly on the revisionary side, in such a way that it wasn't in any conflict with claims made on the descriptive side. I think, however, that the conception of the distinct self that Strawson challenged in Chapter 3 of *Individuals* isn't just a philosophical confection, a philosophers' error. It's arguable, in fact, that it is a part of the fundamental human conceptual scheme in such a way that a satisfactory descriptive metaphysics needs to accord it some real validity, and not just explain its existence as a form of error.

This is the idea behind what I'm going to say today.² But my aims are very modest and essentially indirect. I simply want to try to provide some background material that may be useful to those who think that the idea of the subject distinct from the whole human being should be allowed to have some respectability. I'll first defend the notion of the self against a broadly speaking Wittgensteinian attack. Then I'll give an account of some of the sources of our natural *sense* of the self. My main aim in so doing will be to criticize 'corporism', where by corporism I mean an excessive fixation on the body which is currently fashionable — almost to the point of hysteria — in the philosophy of mind. The argument for the primitiveness of the concept of a person was principally aimed at those who tended to overspiritualize the subject of experience. Now, I think, some corrective work needs to be done on the other side, against those who overcorporealize the subject of experience. The criticism of corporism will be nothing more than a collection of platitudes about our experience of mind in everyday life. So this is not a Homeric struggle, if I'm right. It's more of a turkey shoot — whether or not it involves some 'straw men'.

2

Some philosophers think that the idea that there is such a thing as the self is an illusion that arises from an improper use of language; and it's true that the use of the word 'self' is unnatural in many speech contexts. But people (non-philosophers at least) aren't that stupid. The problem of the self doesn't arise from an unnatural use of language that arises from nowhere. Use of the word 'self' arises from a powerful, prior and independent sense that there is such a thing as the self. The word may be

² I am drawing on other work; see in particular Strawson (2009, 2.2 – 2.4).

unusual in ordinary speech, and it may have no obvious direct translation in some languages, but all languages have words or phrases that lend themselves naturally to playing the role that 'self' plays in English, and such words and phrases certainly mean something to most people.³ They have a natural use in religious, philosophical, and psychological contexts, and these are very natural contexts for human beings.

'Fine', says a philosopher:

the fact remains that the 'problem of the self' can be solved by brisk attention to a few facts about language, because if there's really such a thing as the self, one thing that's certain is that it's what we refer to when we use the word 'I'. So we must start by considering the behaviour of 'I' in some detail. To find out about the real or legitimate import or content of philosophically loaded words like 'I', and so about the nature of the things we use them to think and talk about, we must begin by paying close attention to the way in which we use these words in ordinary, everyday communication with each other. (Plainly this procedure won't help much in the case of words for natural kinds, like 'gold' and 'proton', whose nature is a matter for investigation by science; but it's vital in the case of all other words that raise philosophical problems.)

So to begin. We certainly use the word 'I' to refer to ourselves considered as human beings, embodied human beings taken as a whole, things that essentially have both mental properties and large-scale bodily properties. Even if there's some special use of the word 'I' to refer to the putative self, this use doesn't ordinarily stand out as distinct from use of the word 'I' to refer to the whole human being. When we're talking to other people we never think 'Aha! Now they're using 'I' with the special *inner-self* reference', or 'Now they're using 'I' with the standard *whole-human-being* reference'. Nor do we ever think this about ourselves when we're talking. It's *no* part of ordinary thought that 'I' has two meanings – that 'I' can have two different referents as used by a given single person either at a single time or at different times (I put aside cases of 'dissociative identity disorder'). We have no reason to doubt that it's univocal whenever it's used – no reason to think that it's ambiguous or indefinite in some way.

This is good news, because it follows that the so-called 'problem of the self' has a quick and complete solution. It doesn't require any high metaphysical exertions, because it's certain, as just remarked, that use of 'I' to refer (or apparently refer) to the putative self doesn't stand out as distinct from use of 'I' to refer to the human being in ordinary talk, and it follows from this that we don't in fact draw this distinction in ordinary thought unwarping by philosophy.

³ For the case of the ancient Greeks, see Sorabji (2006, 5).

More strongly, it follows that we can't legitimately draw it, and that we're talking a kind of nonsense when we think we do. But if this is so—and it is so—then we can prove that *my # self*, the putative inner self, is either nothing at all, or is simply *myself*, the living, embodied, publicly observable whole human being. For we've already established that the term—'I'—that allegedly refers to the putative former thing, 'the self', undoubtedly refers to the latter thing, the whole human being. But that means that either the self is the whole human being, or it's nothing at all. There is, by the logic of identity, no other possibility. So the self, considered as something distinct from the human being, 'is a mythical entity', in Kenny's phrase. 'It is', Kenny says, 'a philosophical muddle to allow the typographical space which differentiates "my self" from "myself" to generate the illusion of a mysterious entity distinct from... the human being.... Grammatical error... is the essence of the theory of the self... "The self" is a piece of philosopher's nonsense consisting in a misunderstanding of the reflexive pronoun.' The end.⁴

3

Well, I think this argument is worthless (a *reductio ad absurdum* of the principles on which it relies). The appeal to ordinary, everyday, public language use, in the attempt to solve a philosophical problem, is perhaps nowhere more inappropriate than in the case of the problem of the self, precisely because ordinary, public language use reflects the public, third-personal perspective on things. Suppose it's true that the referring term 'I' is rarely used in ordinary communication in such a way as to reflect any distinction between the putative self and the whole human being. What does this prove? All it proves is that the public, third-personal (non-first-personal) perspective on things is built into the everyday public use of language. And what does this fact about the everyday public use of language prove regarding the nature of reality and the scope of intelligible thought about it? Nothing. It may be true that the best thing to say, in the end, is that there's no such thing as the self, considered as something distinct from the human being, but this is certainly not the right way to try to show that it's true. Even if referring terms like 'I' were *never* used in ordinary communication, as opposed to private thought, in a way that indicated awareness or acceptance of a distinction between

⁴ Kenny (1988, 4), (1989, 87), (1999, 39 – 40).

the self and the whole embodied human being, this would have no consequences for the question whether or not there are such things as selves.

Some hold that the force or content of the word 'I' in private thought can't possibly differ from the force or content of its use in public communication. They hold, further, for reasons already given, that the reference of 'I' in public communication can only be to the whole human being. Suppose, again, that they're right about this. Even so, there are no easy or guaranteed inferences from facts about ordinary public language use to facts about how we fundamentally – or really – think about things. Facts about ordinary everyday public language use and its typical interpretation can't establish that the ordinary everyday belief or feeling that there is such a thing as the self involves an illusion. Metaphysics is not that easy. And when we think in private, nothing stops us from doing what we (or vast numbers of us) naturally do: which is to think of ourselves, using 'I' in as much as we use language at all, as, primarily or fundamentally, inner conscious entities that are not identical with the embodied human beings that we are considered as a whole. Consistent and thoughtful materialists do this as much as anyone else; it doesn't involve any belief that anything non-physical exists. Clubbable assertions about ordinary public language use can't break in on our 'sessions of sweet silent thought'⁵ to tell us that we're not really doing what we think we're doing, not really thinking what we think we're thinking. To suppose that they can is to make the great Wittgensteinian (or 'Wittgensteinian') mistake about the nature of language and thought and metaphysics, the career-swallowing mistake that makes it look (for example) as if a word like 'pain' can't be what it so simply and obviously is – a word for a publicly unobservable or 'private' sensation, a word that picks out and means the private sensation considered just as such, i.e. entirely independently of any of its behavioural or other publicly observable causes and effects.⁶

So I reject the basic presupposition or procedure of the argument from the public use of language. It's arguable that it fails even on its own terms – that the distinction between 'I' the (inner) self and 'I' the human being is in fact clearly marked in ordinary thought and talk. People sometimes naturally and sincerely report their experiences to each other by saying things like 'I felt completely detached from my body', or 'I felt I

⁵ Shakespeare, Sonnet 30.

⁶ See e.g. Strawson (1994, ch. 8, esp. 219 – 225).

was floating out of my body, and looking down on it from above'. Experiences of this sort are particularly vivid and common in adolescence, occurring spontaneously in about 1 in 300 individuals. It doesn't matter that the floatings and detachings don't actually happen. What matters is that there are experiences of this sort, and that statements of this kind are natural forms of talk about real experiences in which the intended reference of 'I' is not to the whole human being and is understood not to be to the whole human being.⁷ There's plainly no difficulty – no problem of communication stemming specifically from the use of 'I' – in using language in this way to describe one's experiences to others. Defenders of the argument from the public use of language may dismiss these cases as marginal and 'degenerate', misleading and 'parasitic', but this is to beg the question.

It may be that when we listen to another person's report of an out-of-body experience we most naturally take the report to be about the whole human being in front of us, or at the other end of the telephone connection, in spite of its express content. Perhaps we nearly always apprehend or construe *each other* primarily or solely in this way – as Strawsonian persons, human beings considered as a whole – when we communicate with each other. The fact remains that the distinction between the use of 'I' to refer to the self or 'inner someone' and the use of 'I' to refer to the embodied human being is sometimes clearly marked in ordinary thought and talk.

I propose, then, that there are two natural uses of 'I': the *inner-self use* and the *human-being-considered-as-a-whole use*. If there's any parasitism, it's arguable that the latter is parasitic on the former, rather than the other way round. (I think this may be so even if there is a respect in which some grasp of the latter is a condition of acquisition of the former.) It's arguable, in other words, that the central or fundamental way in which we, or many of us, experience/conceive ourselves, much of the time, is precisely as an inner entity, an inner presence that isn't the same thing as the whole human being. This applies as much to sex addicts, manual labourers, athletes, and supermodels as to the rest of us – people may be more rather than less likely to experience themselves in this way if they are, for whatever reason, preoccupied with their bodies.

⁷ I consider this in more detail in my (2009, 7.2). The way we experience ourselves in dreams is also important – see p. 445 below.

4

Now it may be that a capacity for such inner self-reference is impossible without experience of oneself as located in an ordered world of relatively enduring objects. I don't think this Platner-Kant-Strawson view is right, in fact, but my main argument goes ahead even if it is so, so I won't pursue it here. Instead I'll turn to the corporists—those present-day philosophers and psychologists who, following and perhaps overextending Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Gibson and others, have come to find it hard to admit the innerness of so much of our experience. Many of them think that it's precisely such claims about innerness that give philosophy a bad name and direction, an ivory-tower problem, and skew it away from the truth of the everyday consciousness of real fleshly human beings incessantly engaged in practical intercourse with the world and each other. But it's these philosophers, I think, who are up in the blind tower (they certainly won't be able to hear what I'm saying right now). They are of course right to follow Platner in 1772, Herbart in 1816, Feuerbach in 1843, Wundt in 1874, Nietzsche, James, Peirce, Bradley, the Phenomenologists, and many others who preceded them (I omit the great Descartes from this list only because he's so widely misunderstood that his inclusion would be misleading) in drawing attention to and stressing the profoundly environmentally embedded, embodied, 'enactive', 'ecological', or (for short) EEE aspects of our experiential predicament as organic and social beings situated in a physical world, but they're victims of theoretical overreaction. The EEE character of our existence must be thoroughly recognized—the point is an old one—but there must be equal recognition of the entirely compatible fact that one of the most important things about human life is the respect in which one experiences oneself as an inner entity distinct from the whole human being.

Nietzsche shows penetration in 1883 when he writes that

I am body entirely, and nothing else; and 'soul' is only a word for something about the body. The body is a great intelligence.... Your little intelligence, my brother, which you call 'spirit', is... an instrument of your body.... You say 'I' and you are proud of this word. But greater than this—although you will not believe in it—is your body and its great intelligence, which does not say 'I' but performs 'I'.... Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a mighty commander, an unknown sage—he is called Self. He lives in your body, he is your body ...

(1883-1885, 61 – 62)

for reasons that have become increasingly apparent in the century since he wrote. He follows Feuerbach, writing forty years earlier in the sophisticated tradition of German materialism that followed German idealism:

whereas the old philosophy started by saying, 'I am an abstract and merely a thinking being, to whose essence the body does not belong', the new philosophy, on the other hand, begins by saying, 'I am a real sensuous being and, indeed, the body in its totality is my self (*Ich*), my essence itself'.

(1843, 54)

but neither questions the present claim that we regularly figure or experience ourselves primarily as inner conscious entities or selves. Their remarks take their point precisely from the fact that it is true.

5

Why—how—do we come to experience ourselves in this way, given the EEE aspects of our existence? Part of the answer seems plain. It's a consequence of something I've already noted, something that has become so strangely hard for some to see in recent analytic philosophy of mind. I mean the way in which awareness of ourselves as mentally propertied is, to varying degrees, constantly present when it comes to our overall apprehension of ourselves. It's not just that we're often expressly taken up with our own conscious thoughts, living with ourselves principally in our inward mental scene, incessantly presented to ourselves as things engaged in mental business, even while aware of our external surroundings. This point now needs considerable emphasis, given the current body-heavy, 'corporist' climate of discussion, but the further and larger point is that awareness of our own conscious mental goings on is very often—arguably always—present, to varying degrees, even when we're thoroughly taken up with our bodies, or, generally, with things in the world other than our own mental goings on.

It's instructive to watch people in the street. Russell Hurlburt et al. made random samplings of the character of ordinary people's experience as they went about their daily life, by activating beepers that they carried with them: 'it was striking that the great majority of subjects at the time of the beep were focused on some inner event or events, with no direct awareness of outside events at that moment'.⁸ Such intuned

⁸ See Hurlburt et al. (1994, 387). For more experimental evidence see also Baars (1996); Hurlburt and Schwitzgebel (2007).

thoughts may be almost exclusively concerned with external matters; they may, for example, be memories of past events or anticipations of future events. The present point is simply that their occurrence involves an experienced contrast between one's inner mental goings-on, on the one hand, and one's external surroundings, of which one usually remains more or less aware, on the other hand. The experience of this contrast is rarely in the focus of attention: it's rarely 'thetic', in the Phenomenologists' (and in particular Sartrean) sense of the term. It is none the less there.

Plainly we can be the subjects of conscious mental goings on without being expressly aware of them considered specifically as such; our attention can be intensely focused outward. But even then we have a constant background awareness of our own conscious mental goings on (it's usually inadequate to say that it is merely background awareness) and a constant tendency to flip back, however briefly, to some more salient, non-background sense of ourselves as minded or conscious. (It isn't as if there isn't enough mental space – or time – for this. Conscious apprehension is extremely fast and rich. 'Thought is quick', as Hobbes says (1651, I.iii).) What is the 'lifeworld', the *Lebenswelt*? There's a fundamental sense in which it is primarily an inner (or mental) world, even when one is preoccupied with the outer world, sailing a yacht, climbing a mountain, using a hammer, jogging, or running for one's life.⁹ Silent thoughts hit people in a roaring football crowd, and they're aware of this happening (and of the strange detachment – but unarguable reality – of the 'place' in which this thought is present), not just of the content of the thought. What is the shepherd on the hill thinking about, or the woman at the loom, or the child lying awake in the dark? Writing this, I can see a man collecting garbage from the side of the road with tongs. He's not locked exclusively on the details of his immediate task and surroundings and bodily feelings. It's not as if there is nothing more to the content of his current experience than the external environment which he directly perceives, plus awareness of his bodily state. There are many things going on in his (conscious) mind, and he's not only aware of their content. He's also aware, however non-thetically, of himself as minded. This is not just the view of a dreaming philosopher.

⁹ Moments of crisis can precipitate extraordinary innerness. For an extreme example of this, see Oliver Sacks's description of his mental state as he ran down a mountain in Norway, fearing pursuit by a bull (1984).

Which stand out most for us, in daily life: our mental features or our bodily features? Most of us find that our moods and emotional feelings are a great deal more present to our attention than our bodies, most of the time.¹⁰ These mental conditions profoundly colour our experience of outer things, and we're not so fiercely world-focused as to be generally unaware of this fact. Why is it important for philosophers to stress the EEE aspects of existence? Precisely because of the dominant position of mental as opposed to non-mental¹¹ features in our overall experience of ourselves.

So it's not a fatal philosophical aberration, then, as some have supposed, to focus on the mind as opposed to the body, when considering the human condition; it's not an aberration at all. Even if it were an aberration, it wouldn't be a distinctively philosophical aberration. It would, rather, be an aberration intrinsic to the human condition. We are, in a sense, strangely—astonishingly—rarefied creatures. We don't make any mistake in being this way or in experiencing ourselves in this way. We are what we are. Our mentality is a huge, absorbing, and utterly all-pervasive fact about us. It's a natural object of attention for us. We're constantly aware of it even when we're not focusing on it. We live constantly at or over the edge of express awareness of our own mental goings on considered specifically as such. Those who think that in normal human experience the external world wholly occupies the field of consciousness in such a way that we normally have no sort of awareness of the phenomenon of our awareness, those who think that the sensations and feelings that give us experience of the world are like invisible glass, so that we are generally wholly unaware of them, utterly falsify the extraordinarily rich, rapid, nuanced, complexly inflected, interdipping flow of everyday experience. In their fury to be 'anti-Cartesian', or 'street', or something, they completely forget what it is like to live an ordinary human life. They forget the profound and constant innerness of so much of everyday experience, its felt hiddenness and privacy. They forget that inner mental goings on *experienced as such* are constantly present in all our engagement with the world, however little

¹⁰ Their causes may lie in our bodies in such a way that representationalists as different as Descartes and Tye want to say that they are about our bodies, but that is a separate point.

¹¹ I use 'non-mental' where many would use 'physical' for reasons set out in Chapter 6.6 of Strawson (2009; see also Strawson 1994, 57 – 58). Briefly, materialists hold that everything is physical, so if they admit the existence of the mental the only relevant distinction available to them is between the mental physical and the non-mental physical.

they're dwelt on—as we move around thinking of this or that, swim, take a bath, play a fast sport, or argue with someone.

6

Note in passing that there's no conflict between this point and 'direct realism' about the perception of objects in the world. Direct realism states, correctly, that when one sees a desk in normal conditions, one is in 'direct perceptual contact' with the desk, and not merely in indirect perceptual contact with it, via some mental representation of it. There is, of course, and necessarily, a conscious mental representation of the desk involved in one's seeing the desk, a conscious mental representation with a distinctively visual qualitative character. No conscious mental representation, no sensation, no seeing. Seeing is a conscious mental thing! (Although we can also give sense to a notion of unconscious seeing.) But having the right sort of conscious mental representation just is seeing the desk. It's what being in direct visual perceptual contact with the desk is. You don't see the desk 'through' the mental representation. Having the conscious mental representation, in the normal veridical perceptual case, just is—again—seeing the desk. And there is, as direct realists insist, a fundamental respect in which one's sense experience is in the normal case entirely 'transparent' or 'diaphanous' for one, when one perceives the world: that is, one's sense experience is not taken into account considered specifically as such.

This is particularly apparent when one considers vision (it's much less compelling in the case of the other senses, where awareness of the medium by which one perceives the world is often more patently present, although not in the focus of attention). But even in the case of vision it doesn't follow, and isn't true, that one isn't aware of the sensory-qualitative character of the sensory experience—as Thomas Reid points out. One is always and necessarily aware of the sensory-qualitative character of the sensory experience. Otherwise one wouldn't see the desk! This said, one needn't have any significant sense of the sensory experience *specifically as a process of sensory experience*.

But nor is this excluded: I can directly see—be in 'direct perceptual contact' with—the desk while also being clearly non-thetically aware of my awareness of the desk. Direct realism doesn't involve the false claim that one has to be entirely unaware of the occurrence of the process of

experience, and many very ordinary everyday circumstances bring awareness of it to the fore. Awareness of awareness is built into such simple things as changing positions to see something one cannot see from where one is.

In general, our experience is saturated with experience of ourselves as experiencing. Aron Gurwitsch is very accurate when, speaking of perception, he says that

consciousness... is consciousness of an object on the one hand and an inner awareness of itself on the other hand. Being confronted with an object, I am at once conscious of this object and aware of my being conscious of it. This awareness in no way means reflection: to know that I am dealing with the object which, for instance, I am just perceiving, I need not experience a second act bearing upon the perception and making it its object. In simply dealing with the object I am aware of this very dealing. (1941, 330)

His closing formulation in this passage, 'In simply dealing with the object I am aware of this very dealing', is less likely to mislead than the earlier 'I am ... aware of my being conscious of [the object]', because the phenomenon in question doesn't require any thought of oneself as such, i.e. as subject considered as such. This is indeed Gurwitsch's main point, which he has already made three pages earlier: 'the subject in his dealing with the object, aware as he is of this dealing, is nevertheless in no way aware of his ego, much less of his ego's involvement in his dealing' (1941, 327). He is none the less aware of the dealing, the mental going on, and — of course — of the sensation that it involves.

We need to keep these sorts of facts very clearly in mind if we are to resist body-fever or 'corporism'. The particular evil of corporism is that it recruits all sorts of interesting, reasonable and indeed true thoughts — direct realism, all the EEE points, the so-called object-dependence of perceptions, the fact that the experiential-qualitative character of our experience is standardly 'transparent' for us in the sense just described — to back up a view to which they give no support at all, according to which we're so utterly engaged with the world that the world itself is all we have in our heads, so that we have, as it were, no mental life at all, as traditionally understood, and no sense of having a mental life. The result is an astonishing misrepresentation of the actual character of human life, with its constant innerness. Having a vivid and constant sense of having a mental life *is itself an essential and constitutive part of having a human mental life*. (Here also we find excessive forms of 'disjunctivism', and 'representationalism',

where the term 'representationalism' is used to mean exactly the opposite of what it used to mean—an excessive version of direct realism that is a kind of covert, reversed-out form of functionalism—and amounts in its strong form to a denial of the existence of consciousness.)

7

Returning to the main point, consider next the fact that awareness of one's own hidden, inner mental goings on is one of the most salient, unremitting features of human communication. Bargaining, negotiating differences, making plans for cooperation, playing chess—these activities provide one vivid set of cases. Awareness of the possibility of concealment, deception, hypocrisy, both on one's own part and on the part of others, is integral to our communication and ancient in our psychological phylogensis.¹² Humans are full of hidden conscious intentions to keep secrets or omit details, both when they seek to cheat and betray and when they seek to surprise, or exercise tact, or avoid upsetting others. They're constantly thinking things that they decide to say or not say. All this feeds a pervasive and ever-present awareness of the fundamental privacy of mental life, a sense of privacy that we must clearly recognize, and allow to be in certain fundamental respects accurate, even as we also recognize that many aspects of our mental lives are directly observable to others in our eyes, facial expressions, and larger-scale observable behaviour. (Whatever is morally negative in what we hide, there is much that is morally neutral or positive; we hide feelings of love or sadness, or conceal kind intentions behind sharp words.)

Note, though, that this vast arena of intentional concealment from others, good or bad, is only a tiny part of what feeds the sense of the innerness of mental life when communicating with others. When one describes a remembered scene, one is aware of a great deal that is present to one's mind—some of it in sketchy, fleeting, quasi-sensory form—but unavailable to one's interlocutor. There is conscious experience of selecting from material that comes to mind. One is routinely aware of what one is not saying because one has to keep things short. There is, in conversation, the experience of one's thought wandering off the other's

¹² It is one of the fundamental grounds of our intelligence, for reasons well set out by Trivers (1985) and Frank (1988) among others.

words, of something else coming vividly and privately to mind. There is the experience of realizing in a flash *in foro interno* what one wants to say in reply to someone while he or she is still speaking, and so on. All these things are real, concretely existing phenomena of which we are aware, just as we're aware of phenomena in our external environment. We're built to be aware of many things going on around us, and this, unsurprisingly, includes our own mental goings on. Heideggerian cobblers absorbed in their work, nails in mouth and hammers in hand, are bathed in the reality of their mental innerness.

8

Why has it become hard for some philosophers and psychologists to give these facts their proper weight? Many, as remarked, are so anxious to dissociate themselves from a view they call 'Cartesianism', when discussing the nature of mind, that they tend to throw out everything that is right about Cartesianism along with anything that is wrong; attraction or habituation to the idioms and ways of thinking of experimental psychology is also influential. But there's no conflict here, no either/or. Our background awareness of our bodies is important, but this is wholly compatible with our regularly experiencing ourselves primarily or centrally as inner conscious presences who are not the same thing as human beings considered as a whole; and although background awareness of body is indeed experience of the body, this doesn't prevent it from feeding or grounding experience of oneself as an inner mental presence distinct from the body, a sense of self, which I'll call self-experience, that presents the self primarily as a distinctively (and [indeed] in some sense purely) mental entity. Granted that background awareness of body is indispensable to a sense of the self in creatures like human beings, indispensable to what Damasio calls 'the feeling essence of our sense of self' (1999, 171), indispensable both to its development in each individual and to its continuing existence, it doesn't follow, and isn't true, that any such sense of the self must figure the self *as* embodied in any way. This, after all, is precisely Wundt's point, and Nietzsche's, and Dewey's, and Feuerbach's before them, and arguably Fichte's before Feuerbach, and Platner's in any case before Fichte.¹³ Bradley has no doubt that the inner core

¹³ Dewey inveighs famously against the 'spectatorial' conception of the knowing human subject (see e.g. 1929, 215). Fichte's argument is indirect: I cannot have self-awareness

of feeling, resting mainly on what is called Coenaesthesia, is the foundation of the [sense of the] self.¹⁴

He follows William James, who writes that 'the nucleus of the "me"' that the present thinking subject takes itself to be 'is always the bodily existence felt to be present at the time'; 'the "I" meaning' for the present thinking subject is 'nothing but the bodily life which it momentarily feels':

We feel the whole cubic mass of our body all the while, it gives us an unceasing sense of personal existence. Equally do we feel the inner 'nucleus of the spiritual self', either in the shape of physiological adjustments, or (adopting

without awareness of an external world, and by implication a body for the world to act upon (see Beiser 2002, 309 – 313, 325 – 333; for Platner 1772, see Thiel, forthcoming). Wundt is worth quoting at some length:

In this development (of consciousness) one particular group of percepts claims a prominent significance, namely, those of which the spring lies in ourselves. The images of feelings we get from our own body, and the representations of our own movements distinguish themselves from all others by forming a *permanent* group. As there are always some muscles in a state either of tension or of activity it follows that we never lack a sense, either dim or clear, of the positions or movements of our body.... This permanent sense, moreover, has this particularity, that we are aware of our power at any moment voluntarily to arouse any one of its ingredients. We excite the sensations of movement immediately by such impulses of the will as shall arouse the movements themselves; and we excite the visual and tactile feelings of our body by the voluntary movement of our organs of sense. So we come to conceive this permanent mass of feeling as immediately or remotely subject to our will, and call it the *consciousness of ourself*. This self-consciousness is, at the outset, thoroughly sensational,... only gradually the second-named of its characters, its subjection to our will, attains predominance. [As this happens] our self-consciousness begins both to widen itself and to narrow itself at the same time. It widens itself in that every mental act whatever comes to stand in relation to our will; and it narrows itself in that it concentrates itself more and more upon the inner activity of apperception, over against which our own body and all the representations connected with it appear as external objects, different from our proper self. This consciousness, contracted down to the process of apperception, we call our Ego' or self. But this 'abstract ego...', although suggested by the natural development of our consciousness, is never actually found therein. The most speculative of philosophers is incapable of disjoining his ego from those bodily feelings and images which form the incessant background of his awareness of himself. The notion of his ego as such is, like every notion, derived from sensibility, for the process of apperception itself comes to our knowledge chiefly through those feelings of tension which accompany it (1874, quoted in James 1890, 1.303 n.).

¹⁴ (1893, 68). Coenaesthesia (pron. *seeneestheesia*) is 'the totality of internal sensations by which one perceives one's own body', 'the general sense of bodily existence; the sensation caused by the functioning of the internal organs'.

the universal psychological belief), in that of the pure activity of our thought taking place as such.... The character of... warmth and intimacy... in the present self... reduces itself to either of two things—something in the feeling which we have of the thought itself, as thinking, or else the feeling of the body's actual existence at the moment,—or finally to both.¹⁵

Nearly everyone, perhaps, agrees that background interoceptive or somatosensory awareness of one's body is the foundation of self-experience, whatever place they also rightly give, with James, to 'the feeling which we have of the thought itself, as thinking'. It's a further point that background awareness of one's mind, of one's experiential goings on, is no less constant than background awareness of one's body. Background awareness that experiential goings on are going on is as much part of the overall field of experience as background somatic awareness. The notion of background awareness may be imprecise, but we can for the moment sufficiently define it as all awareness that is not in the focus of attention, all awareness that is not 'thetic' in the Phenomenologists' sense of the term. It then seems plausible to say that there is never *less* background awareness of awareness or experience than there is background awareness of body. I suspect there is more; that so far one's overall awareness of oneself is concerned, background awareness of awareness predominates over background awareness of body.¹⁶

When we're fascinated by the outer scene, our awareness of ourselves and our mental lives may seem dim. The outer scene may seem to flood consciousness. But even in these cases we're likely to be as aware of ourselves as mentally aspected—our fascination is itself such a property, and we feel it—as we are of ourselves as embodied.¹⁷ When we have sufficiently digested the old Platner-Wundt point that somatosensory

¹⁵ James (1890, 1.400, 1.341 n., 1.333). Note that James uses 'thought' in the Cartesian way as a completely general word for conscious experience (1890, 1.224). In the first quotation I've put 'present thinking subject' in place of James's capitalized 'Thought' in accordance with his explicit terminological provision (1890, 1.338, 400 - 411); see further Strawson (2009, 7.5).

¹⁶ C. O. Evans traces the sense of the self to 'unprojected consciousness' which 'can only be experienced as background', and consequently identifies this unprojected consciousness as the best candidate for the title 'self' (1970, 149).

¹⁷ It depends what we're doing. If we watch athletics we may tense up empathetically and may be to that extent more aware of the body. If we're walking by the sea or watching shooting stars, we're more likely to be aware of our mentality.

awareness has a foundational role both in our acquisition of self-consciousness and in our continuing sense that there is a self, we need to register—or re-register—the obvious but fashion-occluded point that awareness of one's mind and mental goings-on is no less important.

Dreams are also important, when it comes to understanding the naturalness of the sense of the self as a mental entity. When one dreams one often has no particular sense (or no sense at all) of oneself as embodied, although one's sense of one's presence in the dream-scene is as vivid as can be. Such dream experience is part of our experience from infancy, and persists throughout life. It isn't necessary to appeal to it to make the present case, but I suspect that it contributes profoundly to our overall susceptibility to experience of ourselves as being, in some sense, and most centrally, conscious presences that are not the same thing as a whole human being (an alternative is that the susceptibility is independently grounded, ease of dream disembodiment being just one manifestation of it). As Shear remarks, the experiential character of such dreams shows 'how discoordinated a basic aspect of our deeply held, naive commonsensical notions of self [is] from anything graspable in terms of body, personality, or, indeed, any identifiable empirical qualities at all'.¹⁸

To say that one central way (arguably the central way) in which we conceive of or experience ourselves is as an inner conscious entity that is not identical with the whole human being is certainly not to say that we're ever right to do so, although I think we are. And to think of oneself in this way is certainly not to adopt any sort of dualist or immaterialist position; one can and does naturally think of oneself in this way even if one is an out-and-out materialist. Nor is it to deny that we also have a strong natural tendency to think of ourselves as human beings considered as a whole, 'Strawsonian' persons indeed, essentially unified, indissolubly mental-and-non-mental single things to which mental and bodi-

¹⁸ Shear (1998, 678). This is not to say that one could dream in this way if one didn't have (or hadn't once had) normal experience of embodiment, nor (as Shear stresses) that there is any sense in which one is or even could be independent of one's body. One possibility is that the experience of disembodiment in dreams might have something to do with the decoupling mechanism that ensures that we do not actually make the movements we make in dreams (this might be so in spite of the fact that this decoupling is necessary precisely when we are experiencing ourselves as embodied in our dreams).

ly predicates are equally and equally fundamentally applicable.¹⁹ Nor is it to deny that the primary way in which we ordinarily think of people other than ourselves is as Strawsonian persons. The point is simply this: whatever else is the case, the sense that there is such a thing as the self, and that it is not the same thing as the whole human being, is one of the central structuring principles of our experience. The Strawsonian conception of persons as nothing more than essentially unified single things that have both mental and bodily properties is stamped deep into our ordinary apprehension of others and our normal use of language in communication, but it is not similarly stamped into the fundamental character of our private thought about ourselves—even though we standardly express our thought to ourselves in language.

It's a merely phenomenological remark—to say human beings naturally have a sense that there's such a thing as the self, and that it isn't the same thing as the whole human being. Once again, nothing follows about whether this sense of things is metaphysically reasonable or correct. I think that it is reasonable, and indeed correct. But if I'm going to argue for this I'll have to move on from the claim that our natural dual use of 'I' (to refer to ourselves both as Strawsonian persons and as inner mental selves) reflects the way we often think, to the stronger claim that it reflects the way things are.

Well, I won't attempt this now. Instead I'll conclude with a brief remark about the two uses of 'I', using *I* to refer indifferently to the word or the concept. It seems to me that the reference of *I* can contract inwards or expand outwards in a certain way in normal use. *I* is often compared with *here* and *now*, but it's not like *here* and *now* in this particular respect, because they expand and contract in a more or less continuous fashion (it's a familiar point that 'here' can denote this room, this villa, this city, this country, 'the West', the planet, and so on). *I*, by contrast, clicks between two more or less fixed positions, and bears comparison in this respect with *the castle*. Sometimes *the castle* is used to refer to the castle proper, sometimes it's used to refer to the ensemble of the castle and the grounds and buildings located within its outer walls. Similarly, when I think and talk about myself, my reference sometimes extends only to the self that I am, and sometimes it extends further out, to the human being

¹⁹ P. F. Strawson (1959, 101 – 110). These are also Cartesian persons, in fact, but current misunderstandings of Descartes make the point opaque.

that I am. Often my thought or semantic intention is unspecific as between the two.

Note that this claim is not the same as Wittgenstein's suggestion that there are two legitimate uses of 'I': the use 'as object' and the use 'as subject' (1958, 65 – 69). It is, rather, the proposal that there are two uses 'as subject': the use to refer to oneself considered as a whole human being and the use to refer to oneself considered as a self. The claim is that both are legitimate because there really are two distinguishable things in question (there's really no such thing as the use 'as object').²⁰

This, now, is an outright metaphysical claim, and it brings me to the brink of the outright metaphysical project of arguing for the existence of an entity that is properly called 'the self'. This, though, is a task for another time.

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²⁰ More mildly: 'the use "as object"' is a misleading name for what it is used to denote. See Strawson (2009, 3.16).

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