

# Self-Reference, Self-Knowledge and the Problem of Misconception

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## I

What is it for a person to be self-conscious? A familiar neo-Kantian response to this question has been to claim that for a person to be self-conscious she must at least be capable of ascribing different thoughts and experiences to herself, and of grasping the numerical identity of that to which those thoughts and experiences are ascribed.<sup>1</sup> I will refer to this claim as the *self-ascription requirement* on personal self-consciousness.<sup>2</sup> This requirement is not uncontroversial, but I will not question it here. What will be in question here is this thesis: a necessary condition of personal self-consciousness as the neo-Kantian understands it is that one conceives of oneself *qua* subject as a 'corporeal object among corporeal objects' (Strawson 1966, 102). This may be described as the *embodiment requirement* on personal self-consciousness. I will take it that to conceive of oneself in this way is to regard that to which one ascribes one's thoughts and experiences as shaped, spatio-temporally located, and solid. This formulation is intended to make it clear that it is not sufficient for personal self-consciousness that one conceives of oneself as embodied in the Cartesian sense. For the Cartesian, one is embodied to the extent that one's thinking self 'has' a body, but this is supposed to be compatible with maintaining that one's thinking self is itself incorporeal. In contrast, the neo-Kantian embodiment requirement requires one to accept not just that one's thinking self is associated with a corporeal entity but that it is a corporeal entity in its own right.

Why should one accept the embodiment requirement? According to what I will call the Identity Argument, the point of this requirement may be brought out by reflecting on Strawson's remark that 'it is a quite general truth that the ascription of different states or determinations to an identical subject turns on the existence of some means of distinguishing or identifying the subject of such ascriptions as one object among others' (Strawson 1966, 102). This truth, which I will refer to as the *discrimination requirement*, may be seen as drawing upon an even more general truth to the effect that in order to make a judgement about something one must know which thing one's judgement is about, and so must have the capacity to distinguish or discriminate the object of one's judgement from all other things.<sup>3</sup>

The next stage of the Identity Argument is this: to know or understand which thing a judgement is about is to know or understand what kind or sort of thing it

is about. I will call this the *knowing what requirement*. A familiar gloss on this requirement is that to know what kind or sort an object belongs to is to know its criterion of identity. The claim is not that singular reference depends upon an ability to tell in every case whether some arbitrary object is or is not the same as the object referred to. The claim is only that 'knowing what' involves an understanding of what constitutes the singularity and identity of the object of reference.<sup>4</sup> On one view, the connection between the discrimination requirement and the knowing what requirement is the following: to know which thing a judgement is about is to be able to single it out, to distinguish it from other things of different kinds and other things of the same kind. In order to distinguish a given object from other objects of the same kind one must know how objects of this kind are individuated, and to know this just is to grasp its criterion of identity.

The Identity Argument exploits this point in the following way: when a person self-ascribes an experience using 'I' she must be able to discriminate that to which she ascribes the experience from all other things. *Ex hypothesi*, that to which the experience is ascribed is a person. Since the ability to single something out requires knowledge of its criterion of identity, it would seem to follow that grasp of the self-ascription requires an understanding of the criteria of *personal* identity. The claim is not that the self-ascriber must actually invoke criteria of personal identity in ascribing experiences to herself. The claim is rather that the self-ascriber must know or understand what the criteria are and regard herself as a point of application for such criteria. This, presumably, is the point of Strawson's frequently quoted remark that '“I” can be used without criteria of subject-identity and yet refer to a subject because, even in such a use, the links with those criteria are not in practice severed' (Strawson 1966, 165).

The final stage of the Identity Argument turns on a certain view of the nature of persons and personal identity. Suppose that persons are in fact entities such that '*both* predicates ascribing states of consciousness *and* predicates ascribing corporeal characteristics, a physical situation &c. are equally applicable to an individual entity of that type' (Strawson 1959, 104). On this view of persons, the criteria of personal identity are not the same as those for bodily identity but nevertheless 'involve an essential reference to the human body' (Strawson 1966, 164). If a person is, in this sense, a corporeal object among corporeal objects, and the comprehending self-ascription of thoughts and experiences requires knowledge of what one is, then self-consciousness requires the conception of oneself *as* a corporeal object among corporeal objects. This is the Identity Argument for the embodiment requirement on personal self-consciousness. In brief, self-consciousness requires a capacity for the self-ascription of experiences, the ability comprehendingly to self-ascribe experiences presupposes knowledge of what one is, and self-knowledge in this sense requires an accurate self-conception, and hence the conception of the subject of one's thoughts and experiences as corporeal.

Perhaps the most obvious objection to the Identity Argument is that it appears to say virtually nothing in support of the conception of persons and

personal identity upon which the entire argument turns. Remarkably, Strawson confines himself to observing in this connection that 'The topic of personal identity has been well discussed in recent philosophy. I shall take the matter as understood' (Strawson 1966, 164n). In fact, the impression that it is simply a matter of stipulation for the Identity Argument that the criteria of personal identity involve an essential reference to the human body is not entirely accurate. For at least some versions of the Identity Argument, the criteria of subject-identity required for personal self-consciousness must be 'empirically applicable' (Strawson 1966, 102). In other words, it must be possible for sensible intuition in Kant's sense to 'offer us an object which satisfies those criteria' (Strawson 1966, 162). This suggests that the conception of personal identity required by the Identity Argument may rest upon the idea that this is the only conception which yields empirically applicable criteria.

I will not be concerned here with the plausibility or otherwise of this idea, although it should be said that the demand for empirical applicability is itself highly controversial.<sup>5</sup> Instead, my question is this: suppose that the Strawsonian view of persons is correct and that persons are in fact corporeal objects among corporeal objects. Yet is it not the case that there are actual persons who meet the self-ascription requirement on self-consciousness but who do not conceive of that to which they ascribe their thoughts as shaped, located, or solid? Presumably, this is precisely the position of those who are convinced of the truth of Cartesian dualism. Even if Cartesian dualism is false or even incoherent, it still appears to be a conception of the self to which a genuinely self-conscious subject might be genuinely committed. If the claim that someone might genuinely believe that her thinking self is incorporeal seems doubtful, one need only reflect on the great religious or ethical significance which this belief has for many who are still recognizable as self-conscious persons.

This example raises an important question about the epistemological framework employed by the Identity Argument. If self-consciousness requires knowledge of what one is, and knowledge of what one is is a matter of having true beliefs about what one's singularity and identity consists in, then what is to be made of those whose self-conceptions are fundamentally misguided? This is the problem of misconception. In the next part, I will set out five possible responses to this problem. In the final part I will defend the fifth of these responses. It will turn out that although the fifth response does not call for the abandonment of the entire framework employed by the Identity Argument, it does call for this argument to be modified in one very important respect. For even those who claim to believe that their thinking selves are incorporeal are still presented to themselves in perceptual and bodily awareness as shaped, located and solid. To be presented to oneself in this way is, to borrow Kant's terminology, to be intuitively aware of oneself *qua* subject as a corporeal object.<sup>6</sup> Just as, in familiar perceptual illusions, it is possible to see something as being thus and so without believing that it is thus and so, so the problem of misconception shows that it is possible to be intuitively aware of oneself *qua* subject as corporeal without believing that this is what one actually is.<sup>7</sup>

According to the fifth response to the problem of misconception, it is awareness of oneself as a corporeal object in the 'intuitive' sense that is a necessary condition of self-consciousness, and which makes it possible for those who claim not to conceive of themselves as corporeal to self-ascribe their thoughts and experiences in a way that satisfies a version of the discrimination requirement.

Before developing this line of thought, it would be worth relating the problem of misconception to a wider question concerning transcendental arguments. Suppose that *S* is a proposition which is the target of sceptical attack. On one interpretation, the aim of a transcendental argument is to establish that the truth of *S* is a necessary condition of something which is not and cannot coherently be doubted by the sceptic. Transcendental arguments in this sense are 'truth-directed' (Peacocke 1989, 4). In reply, it has sometimes been suggested that the most that a transcendental argument can hope to establish is that we must *believe* that *S* is true, not that *S* is actually true.<sup>8</sup> Transcendental arguments in this sense are 'belief-directed'.<sup>9</sup> The challenge which belief-directed transcendental arguments face, however, is that if *S* is a proposition which the sceptic herself claims not to believe, then she is hardly likely to concede that believing that *S* is true is a necessary condition of the possibility of, say, experience or language. It is, of course, always open to the transcendental arguer to argue that the sceptic's claims about what she believes are insincere or mistaken, but the latter response seems difficult to reconcile with the idea that we are authoritative with respect to our own beliefs. I will come back to this. At present, the important point is that it is not obvious that the shift from truth-directed to belief-directed arguments makes things much easier for the transcendental arguer.<sup>10</sup>

The significance of the problem of misconception in this context is that it is an excellent illustration of this quite general challenge to belief-directed transcendental arguments. The Identity Argument is just such an argument, on the assumption that to conceive of oneself as a corporeal object among corporeal objects is to believe that one is just such an object. If *S* is the proposition that the subject of thought and experience is a corporeal object among corporeal objects, then someone who claims that her thinking self is incorporeal is presumably going to want to deny that belief in the truth of *S* is a necessary condition of the self-ascription of thoughts and experiences. To the extent that the problem of misconception is an instance of a more general objection to belief-directed transcendental arguments, it is one which cannot be ignored by anyone with an interest in Kantian epistemology.

## II

One way of bringing out the full force of the problem of misconception would be to reflect on the fact that it appears to be a rule of the ordinary practice of personal reference by the use of personal pronouns that, as Strawson puts it, 'the first personal pronoun refers, on each occasion of its use, to anyone who

then uses it' (Strawson 1994, 210). It is a consequence of this reference rule that the use of 'I' to refer does not require knowledge of who one is. Even someone who is wholly deluded as to his own identity and who thinks, say, 'I wrote the *Tractatus*' does not fail to refer to himself. He has simply thought something false, but this is so precisely because 'the reference to himself is unshaken' (ibid.).

This mild version of the problem of misconception has no direct bearing on the question of whether conceiving of one's thinking self as corporeal is a necessary condition of self-conscious self-reference, since the deluded subject who believes that he wrote the *Tractatus* might still be conceiving of himself *qua* subject as shaped, located, and solid. On the other hand, once it is understood that a use of 'I' always refers to its user, then it must presumably also be granted that when a person P asserts 'I believe that my thinking self is immaterial', this use of 'I' refers to P. In making this assertion, P has self-ascribed a belief, but it would surely be unacceptable to insist that this self-ascription is underpinned by P's conception of herself *qua* subject as corporeal, since the self-ascribed belief is precisely the belief that she is *incorporeal*. In other words, it seems to be a consequence of the reference rule for 'I' that, as Campbell remarks, in first-person judgements 'I not use my self-knowledge to fix what I am talking about. Rather, uses of 'I' invariably refer to the person who produced them' (Campbell 1994, 127). If I do not use my self-knowledge to fix what I am talking about, then it is not clear why self-consciousness in the neo-Kantian sense should be thought to depend upon one's possession of such self-knowledge. The suggestion, then, is that it is the reference rule for 'I' that makes even extreme cases of misconception intelligible.<sup>11</sup>

It might be objected that this argument is too hasty. It is one thing to say that the comprehending self-ascription of thoughts and experiences is compatible with one's having *some* false beliefs about the nature of that to which these thoughts and experiences are ascribed, but there are limits to how much confusion and misconception can be made sense of if someone is to be credited with the capacity to think first personally.<sup>12</sup> Minimally, the subject must think of herself as the kind of thing to which it at least makes sense to ascribe thoughts and experiences. It might also be held to be necessary that she thinks of herself as someone to whom thoughts could be ascribed by others, and hence as a third person as well as a first person.<sup>13</sup> This might then lead on to the idea that someone who is capable of thinking first personally must regard herself as identifiable by an 'outer observer' (Kant 1929, A362),<sup>14</sup> and so must think of herself as a point of application for empirically applicable criteria of personal identity. The moral, in other words, is that self-ascribers must have, in the words of Carol Rovane, 'enough true beliefs about themselves in virtue of which they are quite clear about their identities even though they have some false beliefs as well' (Rovane 1987, 154). Hence, there is no objection in principle to the use of belief-directed transcendental arguments in theorizing about self-consciousness.

It would certainly be difficult to dispute the suggestion that there are limits to

the extent to which a genuinely self-conscious subject can be confused about the kind of thing she is; beyond a certain point, say in the case of a subject who claims that she is a steam locomotive,<sup>15</sup> it would perhaps be more appropriate to raise questions about her sanity than to see it as confirmation of the thesis that self-conscious self-reference does not require an accurate self-conception.<sup>16</sup> I will come back to this. In the present context, however, the important question is whether the true beliefs required for self-consciousness must include the belief that that to which one ascribes one's thoughts and experiences is shaped, located and solid. If not, then the conclusion of the Identity Argument is still in doubt. If so, then the question of what is to be made of the Cartesian remains unresolved, since proponents of the Identity Argument are presumably not in the business of raising questions about the sanity of Cartesian dualists. Indeed, there is no reason for the sophisticated dualist to deny that she is a third person as well as a first person, and recognizable by others on the basis of bodily criteria. What the dualist wishes to deny is that any of this commits her to the conception of herself *qua* subject as a corporeal object among corporeal objects. So *this* version of the problem of misconception continues to pose a threat to the Identity Argument.

I now turn to the task of outlining five responses to the problem of misconception which, unlike the responses considered so far, address themselves directly to the threat posed to the Identity Argument by self-conscious subjects with allegedly Cartesian self-conceptions. The first response, anticipated above, would simply be to deny that the dualist actually believes that her thinking self is incorporeal. There are two points that might be made in this connection. The first is that in ascribing propositional attitudes to others, there must be a presumption against the attribution of beliefs that are manifestly false or incoherent, such as the belief that  $2 + 2 = 5$ .<sup>17</sup> The second is that while it may be true that the Cartesian assents to *sentences* in which the subject of her thoughts and experiences is said to be incorporeal, the sentences to which someone assents are not an infallible guide to what she believes. What people actually believe about the nature of the self is not settled by what they are willing to *say* when in the grip of philosophical reflection; rather, it is to be conceived of as determinable by reference to their ordinary, unreflective use of personal pronouns as well as their non-linguistic behaviour. The fact is that in ordinary discourse, 'we can and do ascribe to one and the same individual human being things as various as actions, intentions, sensations, thoughts, feelings, perceptions, memories, physical position, corporeal characteristics, skills or abilities, traits of character and so on' (Strawson 1974, 169). As long as the dualist continues to speak in these ways, there are good grounds for insisting that she does in fact conceive of herself *qua* subject as corporeal in the sense that matters for the Identity Argument. More generally, it is never enough to undermine a belief-directed transcendental argument simply to observe that there are actual subjects who do not believe what the argument claims they must believe, for if the argument is independently plausible then such subjects do not believe what they claim to believe.

Earlier it was objected that this line of argument is incompatible with the idea that we are authoritative with respect to our own beliefs. The suggestion is presumably that the Cartesian believes that she believes that that to which she ascribes her thoughts and experiences is incorporeal, yet if the first response to the problem of misconception is correct then this second-order belief is false and so incompatible with first person authority. Those who are sympathetic to the first response are, however, unlikely to be moved by this line of argument. They will insist that the very considerations which support the denial that the Cartesian believes in the immateriality of herself *qua* subject also support the denial that she believes that she believes this.<sup>18</sup> In this way, the first response can be reconciled with the phenomenon of first person authority.

The question of whether or not this reconciliation is successful will not be pursued here since there are other difficulties with the first response that seem more decisive than the objection from first person authority. Firstly, the general presumption against the attribution of manifestly incoherent beliefs is of little value in the present context, given that the incoherence of Cartesian dualism is, to say the least, not as transparent as the incoherence of the idea that  $2 + 2$  might be 5. Secondly, it is not obvious what kind of non-linguistic behaviour is supposed to manifest the Cartesian's (alleged) belief that the subject of her thoughts is corporeal. As for the significance or ordinary ways of talking in this connection, it can hardly be appropriate to take these as providing decisive evidence one way or another in view of the fact that the Cartesian regards these ways of talking as disguising the real nature of the subject.<sup>19</sup> Even if there are cases in which there is, as it were, a mismatch between the sentences to which people are prepared to assent and the propositions which they actually believe, it must surely be accepted that what people say provides the best evidence for what they believe. The fact that some of what is said is said in the context of philosophical reflection is not a good reason for attaching less significance to it than to other forms of discourse whose status is very much at issue. When this point is combined with the earlier observation concerning the religious and ethical implications of immaterialism, the suggestion that the best neo-Kantian response to the problem of misconception is to deny that the misconception is genuine begins to look increasingly unattractive.

This might prompt the following suggestion: suppose that a particular belief-directed transcendental argument aims to show that for a subject *S* to have a certain conceptual capacity *C* she must also have a certain belief, say the belief that *p*. The first response tries to deal with examples in which *S* supposedly has *C* without believing that *p* by arguing that they are cases in which the *S* does in fact believe that *p*. An alternative response would be to argue that they are cases in which *S* does not actually have the capacity *C*. This is the second response to the problem of misconception. Thus, in connection with the Identity Argument, what needs to be shown is that examples in which a subject genuinely does not believe that she is a physical thing are also examples in which she is incapable of grasping her own identity as the subject of different thoughts and experiences.

One way of developing the second response would be to draw upon Evans'

remark that 'the central concept is not that of *making* a reference of such-and-such a kind, but that of *understanding* one' (Evans 1982, 143n). The significance of this remark is that neo-Kantian self-consciousness is to be understood as requiring a capacity for the *comprehending* self-ascription of thoughts and experiences, and a thoroughly confused 'subject' who does not know which thing or what kind or thing she is cannot properly be said to be in a position to understand thoughts whose conventional expression would require the employment of the first person pronoun. If someone who is not in a position to understand such thoughts is not self-conscious in the neo-Kantian sense, then the question of whether her self-conscious beliefs about herself are misguided simply does not arise, since she has no such beliefs.

Whatever the attractions of the second response in the context of other transcendental arguments, in the present context there seems little to be said for it. In the first place, denying self-consciousness to dualists is simply not an option. Indeed, the suggestion that someone who conceives of herself *qua* subject as incorporeal must be incapable of the comprehending self-ascription of thoughts and experiences is not just implausible but also profoundly paradoxical. For on a neo-Kantian view of self-consciousness, someone who is incapable of the comprehending self-ascription of thoughts and experiences is not self-conscious, but how can self-consciousness be denied to a subject who has the ability to think thoughts about the nature of the subject of her thoughts? According to the second response, however, those who do not satisfy the self-knowledge requirements on self-conscious self-reference can only try to think of themselves as incorporeal. Since, strictly speaking, their attempts at I-thinking 'fail to net any object at all' (Evans 1982, 253), there is no question of denying self-consciousness to a subject who can actually think about herself *qua* subject.

The suggestion that the so-called dualist fails to think of herself as incorporeal is reminiscent of the first response to the problem of misconception, but results only in the substitution of one paradox for another. Instead of the paradox of a non-self-conscious subject engaging in thought about the nature of the subject of her thoughts, there is now the paradox of a subject trying but failing to think first personally. There are two points to be made in this connection. The first, which will not be pursued here, is that there might be an objection in principle to the idea of a subject trying but failing to think first personally. The second is that the denial of self-consciousness to alleged dualists remains extremely difficult to swallow. This should come as no surprise when it is recalled that belief-directed transcendental arguments such as the Identity Argument are, after all, concerned with the necessary conditions of forms of self-consciousness our possession of which is especially secure.

At this point, it would be worth exploring the suggestion that the preceding discussion of the problem of misconception is based upon a straightforward misunderstanding of what belief-directed transcendental arguments set out to achieve. So far it has been assumed that the sense in which, according to the Identity Argument, a self-conscious subject must conceive of herself as a corporeal object is that this is a belief which self-conscious subjects must actually



have. I will call this the 'actual belief' reading of the Identity Argument. According to the third response to the problem of misconception, this reading of the argument is incorrect. On the face of it, there are at least two alternatives to the 'actual belief' reading, a dispositional and a normative alternative. According to the dispositional alternative, the point of the Identity Argument is to insist that a subject who is self-conscious in the neo-Kantian sense must be *disposed* to think of herself *qua* subject as corporeal. The fact that some self-conscious subjects do not actually think of themselves in this way therefore poses no threat to the Identity Argument as long as they have the disposition to regard the subject of their thoughts and experiences as shaped, located and solid. According to the normative alternative, the force of the Identity Argument is not even that self-conscious subjects must have this disposition; the point is rather that they are *rationally committed* to regarding themselves as corporeal in the neo-Kantian sense. Since people are not always rational, they do not always believe what they are rationally committed to believing, but it is a mistake to suppose that belief-directed transcendental arguments make no allowance for irrationality or eccentricity. As long as the conclusion of the Identity Argument is understood as being essentially normative, it is not undermined by the fact that some subjects do not believe what they ought to believe about themselves.

Unfortunately, the 'actual belief' reading of the Identity Argument cannot be so easily dismissed. In the first place, the assertion that even a committed dualist can be said to be disposed to regard herself *qua* subject as shaped, located and solid lacks any independent basis and so is in danger of trivializing the dispositional version of the Identity Argument. Secondly, and more importantly, it will be recalled that the fundamental basis of the Identity Argument was the idea that in order to make and understand a judgement about something one must know which thing one's judgement is about. If 'knowing which' requires 'knowing what', then it is difficult to see how one can be said to be in a position to delineate that to which one ascribes one's thoughts and experiences simply in virtue of being disposed to have a certain belief about oneself, or in virtue of the fact that this is a belief to which one is rationally committed. The epistemological framework employed by the Identity Argument implies that self-consciousness requires actual knowledge of what one is, and this is the force of the 'actual belief' reading. If one does not actually regard oneself *qua* subject as a corporeal object among corporeal objects, then the Identity Argument must surely insist that one does not know what kind of thing one is.

This might prompt the thought that the problem of misconception only seems so intractable because the epistemological presuppositions of the Identity Argument have not been subjected to the critical scrutiny which they deserve. According to the fourth response to the problem of misconception, the obvious moral of the discussion so far is that these presuppositions are unacceptable. Instead of denying the possibility of misconception, the fourth response concludes that this possibility shows that self-reference is not subject to the discrimination requirement. If first person reference does not require knowledge of which thing one is or of the criteria of personal identity, then there is simply

no reason to try to explain away cases of misconception. At the same time, however, the abandonment of the discrimination requirement also amounts to the abandonment of the Identity Argument. For one version of the fourth response, the very fact that uses of 'I' invariably refer to the person who produced them means that the 'I'-user's self-conception has no work to do in fixing the reference of such uses.<sup>20</sup> Another version of the fourth response takes things a step further and argues that since genuine reference is subject to the discrimination requirement, 'I' is not a genuine referring expression.<sup>21</sup> Either way, self-consciousness does not require the conception of the subject of one's thoughts and experiences as corporeal.

On the face of it, both versions of the fourth response are problematic. Contrary to what the first version suggests, it does indeed appear to be a quite general truth that in order to make a judgement about something one must be able to discriminate the object of one's judgement from all other things. In the absence of a detailed account of how first person judgements are able to escape this apparently compelling requirement, the first version of the fourth response will remain unattractive. As for the suggestion that 'I' is not a referring expression at all, the fact that something along these lines has frequently been attributed to Kant is at least one reason for taking it seriously, but this is not the place for a detailed consideration of what is, on the face of it, an extremely counter-intuitive proposal. For what drives the second version of the fourth response is often the thought that there is no convincing alternative to it, but according to the fifth response to the problem of misconception, which is the response to be defended here, it is possible to deal with this problem without having to deny that 'I' is a referring expression. So if the fifth response can be made to look plausible, this would remove one of the major motivations for the fourth response.

The fifth response accepts that the comprehending self-ascriptions of thoughts and experiences is subject to a discrimination requirement but questions the idea that the ability to discriminate the object of a judgement from all other things requires substantive knowledge of the kind of thing it is. So the possibility to be considered is that although there is indeed a sense in which someone who conceives of the subject of her thoughts as incorporeal does not meet the 'knowing *what*' requirement, she might still count as knowing *which* thing she is. The sense in which she knows which thing she is need not involve the *belief* that the subject of her thoughts is corporeal but must nevertheless be bound up with *intuitive* awareness of that to which she ascribes her representations as shaped, located and solid.

One way of developing this suggestion would be to explore an analogy with perceptual-demonstrative reference. Given the discrimination requirement, a necessary condition of grasp of the perceptual-demonstrative judgement 'That is F' is the ability to delineate or single out the object which is being judged to be F. To single out an object *x* is, in the words of David Wiggins, to 'isolate *x* in experience; to determine or fix upon *x* in particular by drawing its spatio-temporal boundaries and distinguishing it in its environment from things of like

and unlike kinds' (Wiggins 1980, 5). What is it, then, to 'isolate' a physical object in experience? Since physical objects are shaped, solid and located, one possibility is this: the judger is able to isolate the object judged to be F in virtue of her perceptual or sensory awareness of its shape and location. In perceiving the solid shape and location of the object, she literally *perceives* the boundary between it and other objects in the environment,<sup>22</sup> and it is this awareness of the object *as* an articulated physical unity which enables her to delineate it in thought and predicate something of it. The point of using the Kantian label 'intuitive' to describe this awareness is simply that it is direct or immediate and involves the exercise of sensibility.

It is an important feature of this account that it does not require the assumption that the subject knows what kind of thing she is judging to be F. For example, it makes sense to suppose that the object judged to be F is, say, a tadpole and that the judger is completely unfamiliar with tadpoles. She has no idea that a tadpole is the larva of a frog or toad and lacks a proper understanding of the criterion of identity for tadpoles. The judger is in a state of 'sortal ignorance' (Hirsch 1982, 107) with respect to the object, and may even have an inaccurate conception of it, but this will typically not prevent her from perceiving it as a persisting physical unity.<sup>23</sup> As long as she is sensibly aware of the location and spatial boundaries of the tadpole, she counts as being able to discriminate it from other things, despite her mistaken or impoverished conception of the kind of thing it is.<sup>24</sup> By the same token, it might be held that in bodily self-awareness one is presented to oneself, *qua* subject, as shaped, located and solid, and so as a bounded corporeal object among corporeal objects. Again, the suggestion is that it is in being intuitively aware of one's solid shape and location that one has a sense of one's own boundaries and so is able to delineate that to which one ascribes one's thoughts and experiences. The fact that one has a mistaken self-conception need not deprive one of a concrete sense of where one ends and the rest of the world begins.<sup>25</sup>

As anticipated above, the fifth response does not call for the abandonment of the entire framework of the Identity Argument, since it aims to respect the discrimination requirement, but it does call for the Identity Argument to be modified in one important respect. The idea that neo-Kantian self-consciousness requires the conception of oneself *qua* subject as a corporeal object might be described as the *concept version* of the Identity Argument. To the extent that the fifth response to the problem of misconception suggests that intuitive awareness of oneself *qua* subject as shaped, solid and located is a necessary condition of neo-Kantian self-consciousness, it might be described as amounting to an *intuition version* of the Identity Argument. In drawing this distinction, one is not committed to the thesis that intuitive awareness in the neo-Kantian sense is non-conceptual.<sup>26</sup> On the Kantian assumption that knowledge requires both intuitions and concepts, one would scarcely count as knowing which thing one is in virtue of one's intuitive self-awareness if such awareness is conceived of as non-conceptual. The important point for present purposes is that intuitive awareness of oneself as corporeal need not be a matter of believing that the

subject of one's thoughts is corporeal, any more than experiencing the lines in the Müller-Lyer arrow illusion as being of different lengths is a matter of believing, or being disposed to believe, that they are of different lengths. Indeed, one way of understanding Descartes' own insistence that one is not in one's body as a pilot is in a vessel would be to understand him as making the point that the boundaries of one's body are experienced as one's own boundaries. For Descartes, the distinction between mind and body is drawn at the level of philosophical reflection rather than at the level of ordinary self-awareness,<sup>27</sup> and the fifth response maintains that this point holds the key to understanding how someone who believes that she is incorporeal can still satisfy the discrimination requirement on first person thought.

### III

I will conclude by considering three objections to the intuition version of the Identity Argument, and comparing this argument with McDowell's account of self-awareness in *Mind and World*. The first objection is, quite simply, that there is no such thing as intuitive awareness of the self as corporeal. The failure of this objection may be brought out by considering what is involved in the perception of the solid shape and location of other objects in the world. For example, an extremely important aspect of the perception of solidity by touch is the way in which it is bound up with a sense of the spatial properties of the perceiver. Solidity is typically felt as an impediment to one's movements,<sup>28</sup> and to experience a solid object as an impediment in this sense is at the same time to be immediately aware of that which is obstructed – the subject of tactile perception – as shaped and solid.<sup>29</sup> As for location, it is a familiar point that the content of spatial perception is egocentric; in spatial perception, the objects of perception are experienced as standing in various spatial relations to the perceiver, and in experiencing other objects as spatially related to one, one is at the same time aware of oneself as located in the perceived world.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the perceiving self which is experienced as being spatially located is a *bodily* self, the very same bodily self as the one whose solid shape manifests itself to itself in tactile perception. Thus, spatial perception is bound up with a sense of the perceiving self as shaped, solid and located, and to have a sense of oneself as shaped, solid and located is to have a sense of oneself as corporeal.<sup>31</sup>

It might be argued that this misses the point of the first objection. This objection can concede that spatial perception requires a sense of one's *body* as shaped, solid and located, while insisting that this is not at all the same as intuitive awareness of the shape, solidity and location of oneself *qua* subject. This argument calls for an account of what it would be to be aware of anything '*qua* subject'. It is plausible that intuitive awareness of something *qua* subject of one's perceptions must at least be (a) intuitive awareness of it as one's point of view on the world,<sup>32</sup> and (b) a form of awareness on the basis of which it is

possible to make first person statements which are immune to error through misidentification relative to the first person pronoun.<sup>33</sup> On the face of it, the forms of bodily self-awareness involved in spatial perception meet both conditions. With regard to (a), the fact that one's living body functions as what Husserl calls the 'zero point' (Husserl 1989, 166) of spatial perception, 'the absolute point about which spatial relations are experienced as orientated' (Bell 1990, 210), provides at least one good sense in which it presents itself to one as one's point of view on the world. As for (b), there is a strong case to be made for the thesis that some self-ascriptions of bodily location and orientation are immune to error through misidentification, although I will not attempt to argue the case here.<sup>34</sup>

The proposal, then, is that in at least two important respects, the bodily self qualifies as the '*presented* subject of experience' (Ayers 1991, 286). If this seems paradoxical it is only because philosophical discussions of the body tend to employ what McDowell aptly characterizes as a 'philosophically generated concept of a *human body*' (McDowell 1982, 469), conceived of as a 'merely' material object rather than as a point of occupancy for psychological properties. In response, the intuition version of the Identity Argument needs to insist that what it characterizes as the presented bodily subject of perception could equally well be characterized as a living human being. Since there is arguably nothing mysterious about the idea that living human beings are, and are experienced as being, points of occupancy for both psychological and physical properties, the first objection to the intuition version of the Identity Argument is less threatening than it seems.

At this point, proponents of the first objection will no doubt protest that talk of the bodily self as the presented subject of perception still leaves open the question of whether it is the presented subject of *thought*. From this perspective, all talk of the role of bodily awareness in spatial perception is beside the point, for thinking, unlike perceiving, lacks spatial content, and consciousness of thinking has nothing to do with consciousness of one's body. In reply, it needs to be pointed out that this objection is difficult to reconcile with the ways in which thought and perception interpenetrate. Consider the case of perceptual-demonstrative thoughts. When a subject judges, say, that 'That monument is ugly' in connection with a currently perceived monument, the object perceived *is* the object thought about. In this sense, the judgement spans and, as it were, unifies thought and perception; the thought to which the judgement gives expression is both based upon and made available by the perceptual experience. Although the fact that the *object* of a demonstrative thought is the object of the perceptual experience upon which the thought is based is not conclusive proof that the presented *subject* of the thought is transparently the same as the presented subject of perception, it certainly makes it unappealing to suppose that consciousness of oneself *qua* thinker can be detached from consciousness of oneself *qua* perceiver. In being intuitively aware of oneself *qua* subject of perception as shaped, located and solid, one is at the same time aware of one's thinking self as a bounded physical entity in a world of such entities, and is

thereby in a position to delineate that to which one ascribes particular thoughts and particular perceptions.

The second objection to the intuition version of the Identity Argument accuses it of underestimating the differences between demonstrative reference and self-reference. Demonstrative thought depends upon an ability to keep track of the object of reference over a period of time, but first person thought does not depend upon 'identifications of oneself that are grounded on observed similarities between selves observed at different times, or on a perceptual tracking of a self over time' (Shoemaker 1994b, 131). This suggests that the intuition version of the Identity Argument faces the following Shoemakerian dilemma: either bodily self-awareness does depend upon a perceptual tracking of the bodily 'self' over time, in which case the Identity Argument is guilty of confusing self-identification with demonstrative identification, or it does not, in which case bodily self-awareness no longer deserves to be characterized as awareness of the self 'as an object'.

The idea that first person thought, properly so-called, does not depend upon an ability to keep track of oneself in Shoemaker's sense is certainly one which the intuition version of the Identity Argument should aim to respect. To this extent, there is no question of this argument assimilating self-reference to demonstrative reference. On the other hand, it is not clear why Shoemaker's 'no tracking' requirement should be incompatible with the thesis that in bodily self-awareness one is presented to oneself 'as an object', in the sense that one is presented to oneself as shaped, located and solid. The most that can be concluded from the 'no tracking' requirement is that bodily self-awareness is not awareness of oneself as a *mere* body, but it has already been argued that this is not something which the intuition version of the Identity Argument would wish to dispute. The second objection fails, therefore, because it is committed to an unacceptable Schopenhauerian dualism of subject and object,<sup>35</sup> according to which nothing can present itself to one both as the subject of one's thoughts and representations and as an object among others in the world. Reflection on the peculiarities of bodily self-awareness helps to explain why this dualism is unacceptable.

The third objection to the intuition version of the Identity Argument is this: it is one thing to argue that bodily self-awareness might provide someone who has a misguided self-conception with a sense of her own boundaries, but it does not follow that bodily awareness is a necessary condition of self-consciousness in the neo-Kantian sense. This may be brought out by remarking that someone in a state of total sensory deprivation would still be capable of self-ascribing thoughts. *Ex hypothesi*, the deprived subject would not be intuitively aware of herself as corporeal, so such awareness cannot be a necessary condition of first person thought.

Despite its popularity in discussion of self-consciousness,<sup>36</sup> the sensory deprivation objection is far less compelling than it is often presented as being. In the first place, in cases of temporary sensory deprivation, it might be held that the subject's continuing ability to think first personally is parasitic upon her

intuitive awareness of herself as corporeal at other times or upon the fact that she may still be conceiving of herself as corporeal. As for the idea that one would still be capable of the comprehending self-ascription of thoughts even if one has *never* been presented to oneself as corporeal, and therefore also lacks the conception of oneself as a bodily being, this seems to represent a recognizably Cartesian illusion about the requirements for first-person thought, and, indeed, thinking generally. For even if one were willing to grant the dubious assumption that a being with no history of sensory or bodily awareness would be capable of 'thinking' in some sense, it is plausible that in the absence of any concrete sense of its boundaries its so-called 'I-thoughts' would merely be an expression of what might be described, in Kantian terms, as 'consciousness in general'. The sensory deprivation objection seems to rest upon nothing more than an appeal to brute intuition in the ordinary, non-Kantian sense, yet, as is clear from discussions of personal identity, intuitions in this sense about far-fetched cases are not always reliable,<sup>37</sup> and may need to be rejected in the light of broadly 'theoretical' considerations. This point, taken in conjunction with the theoretical considerations which underpin the intuition version of the Identity Argument, makes it difficult to believe that this argument is threatened by the third objection.

It would be appropriate to conclude by comparing the account of self-consciousness proposed here with McDowell's account in *Mind and World*, since they are similar in certain respects. McDowell's central claim is that 'continuity of "consciousness" is intelligible only as a subjective take on something that has more to it than "consciousness" itself contains: on the career of an objective continuant, with which the subject of continuous "consciousness" can identify itself' (McDowell 1994, 101). To identify oneself with an objective continuant is to understand that the continuing referent of one's uses of 'I' is also a third person, 'a substantial continuity in the objective world' (McDowell 1994, 102). At some points, this is taken to imply that a self-conscious subject must '*conceive* of itself, the subject of its experience . . . as a bodily presence in the world' (McDowell 1994, 103, my emphasis). Elsewhere, McDowell simply refers to the importance of 'the sense of self we actually have, as a bodily presence in the world' (McDowell 1994, 104), but the relationship between these two formulations is not entirely clear.

If having a 'sense' of oneself as a bodily presence in the world is just the same as conceiving of the subject of one's consciousness as bodily then the problem of misconception is as acute for McDowell's argument as it is for the concept version of the Identity Argument. As has already been remarked, the self-conscious dualist who denies that her thinking self is corporeal is certainly not in the business of denying that she is a 'substantial presence in the world' (McDowell 1994, 102), a third person as well as a first. If, on the other hand, having a 'sense' of one's bodily presence is a matter of one's being *presented* to oneself *qua* subject as corporeal, then this is an aspect of McDowell's account with which the intuition version of the Identity Argument is in whole-hearted agreement. The important point is that there *is* a difference between the two

senses of 'bodily presence',<sup>38</sup> and it is the intuitive sense to which the neo-Kantian must appeal in responding to the problem of misconception.<sup>39</sup>

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The 'neo-Kantian' approach to self-consciousness which is the focus of this paper should not be confused with what is more familiarly known as 'neo-Kantianism'. For a theory of self-consciousness to be 'neo-Kantian' in my sense is for it to be inspired by P. F. Strawson's reading of Kant's account of the unity of consciousness. Strawson writes that 'the condition under which diverse representations may be said to be united in a single consciousness is precisely the condition, whatever that may be, under which a subject of experiences may ascribe different experiences to himself, conscious of the identity of that to which these different experiences at different times belong' (Strawson 1966, 95–6). I refer to this as a *neo-Kantian* conception of self-consciousness, since it is related to, but not the same as, Kant's account in the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories. Kant does say that 'it must be possible for the "I think" to accompany all my representations' (Kant 1929, B131), but he also characterizes this 'I' as 'the mere form of consciousness' (ibid., A382), an 'entirely empty expression . . . which I can apply to every thinking subject' (ibid., A355). These remarks make it doubtful whether attaching an 'I think' to a representation is a way of ascribing it to one particular subject rather than another.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase 'personal self-consciousness' is Strawson's. He takes self-consciousness in this sense to involve the satisfaction of 'the full conditions for ordinary self-ascription of experience' (Strawson 1966, 107), and contrasts it with 'transcendental self-consciousness', which is simply a matter of thinking of experience as experience. For further discussion of the relationship between transcendental and personal self-consciousness, see Cassam (1995a) and Strawson (1995).

<sup>3</sup> Evans calls the principle that a subject cannot make a judgement about something unless he knows which object his judgement is about 'Russell's Principle' (Evans 1982, ch. 4). An important difference between Evans and Strawson is that Strawson bases the discrimination requirement upon a verificationist 'principle of significance', the principle that 'there can be no legitimate, or even meaningful, employment of ideas or concepts which does not relate them to empirical or experiential conditions of their application' (Strawson 1966, 16). In contrast, Evans presents the discrimination requirement as a substantial version of Russell's Principle, and rightly denies that this principle can be sustained only by some form of verificationism. For an earlier formulation of the discrimination requirement, see Woods (1968, 573).

<sup>4</sup> See Wiggins (1980, 53) for an account of the distinction between constitutive and evidential criteria of identity.

<sup>5</sup> In Strawson's discussion, this demand is motivated by his 'principle of significance'. See n. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Kant defines 'intuition' as that through which a mode of knowledge is in 'immediate relation' (Kant 1929, A19/B33) to objects. In humans, intuition takes place only in so far as an object is *given* by means of sensibility.



<sup>7</sup> In Evans' terminology, perceptual content is 'belief-independent' (Evans 1982, 123).

<sup>8</sup> See Stroud (1982, 128).

<sup>9</sup> As Strawson puts it, the most that transcendental arguments in this sense can establish is 'a certain sort of interdependence of conceptual capacities and belief' (Strawson 1985, 21).

<sup>10</sup> For further discussion of this point, see Cassam (1987, section I).

<sup>11</sup> cf. Campbell (1994, 220).

<sup>12</sup> This point is emphasized by Carol Rovane in Rovane (1987), but she is primarily concerned with the use of 'I' in communication.

<sup>13</sup> cf. McDowell (1994, 102).

<sup>14</sup> This aspect of Kant's position is emphasized in Strawson (1987).

<sup>15</sup> I owe this example to John Campbell. He writes that 'the most radical mistakes about oneself are possible, consistent with the continued use of the first person. I may think that I am made of glass or that I am a steam locomotive, and my experience may really seem to confirm this but these hallucinations would not deprive me of my use of the first person' (Campbell 1994, 126).

<sup>16</sup> I am indebted at this point to discussion with Naomi Eilan.

<sup>17</sup> cf. Quine (1960).

<sup>18</sup> One way of defending this response would be to argue that in such cases the content of the second-order belief is, in Burge's terminology, 'logically locked' (Burge 1994, 75) on to the content of the first-order belief.

<sup>19</sup> This aspect of the Cartesian position is emphasized in Strawson (1974, 170).

<sup>20</sup> This appears to be Campbell's view. See Campbell (1994, chs. 3–4).

<sup>21</sup> This is Anscombe's position in Anscombe (1994).

<sup>22</sup> This account of perceptual individuation draws upon the work of Michael Ayers and Eli Hirsch. See Ayers (1974) and Hirsch (1982, ch. 3).

<sup>23</sup> As Ayers remarks, 'when a man is presented with some quite strange thing, a simple creature, say . . . he does not need a preformed concept, none at least less general and primitive than "thing", in order to decide, become aware or guess that he is confronted by a thing with some sort of synchronic unity' (Ayers 1974, 115). It might be objected that the account of demonstrative identification being proposed here is undermined by what Wiggins (1980) calls the thesis of the 'sortal dependency' (Wiggins 1980, ch. 2) of individuation. The point of Ayers' discussion is, however, to call this thesis into question. In any event, even Wiggins is prepared to concede that 'it is perfectly possible for a thinker to qualify as singling something out, as being in the right *rapport* for that, without *knowing* what he is singling out or having any in the context informative answer to the question what he has singled it out *as*' (Wiggins 1980, 218). In such cases the thesis of sortal dependency seems to reduce to the claim that when a strange thing is singled out, its perceived unity and persistence cannot help but provide the thinker with the assurance that the item is a member of 'a well defined thing kind' (ibid.). It is difficult to know what work this assurance is supposed to be doing in enabling one to isolate something in experience.

<sup>24</sup> Evans concedes that 'it does not appear to be true that demonstrative identification must be accompanied by a *sortal* which sets the boundaries of the thing in space and time' (Evans 1982, 178). On the other hand, he insists that in order to identify something demonstratively one must know how to *discover* what sort of thing has been identified. It is not clear, however, what this demand comes to.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Martin also emphasizes the role of bodily awareness in providing one with a 'sense of our limits and boundaries with the rest of the world, some sense of the contrast

between what is oneself and what is other' (Martin 1993, 211). Martin's account of the aspects of bodily awareness which are important in this connection is, however, somewhat different from mine.

<sup>26</sup> Much depends, of course, on what it would be for the content of intuitive or perceptual awareness to be 'non-conceptual'. As has already been remarked, the intuition version of the Identity Argument is certainly committed to the 'belief-independence' of perceptual or intuitive awareness, but it is not obvious that those who think that intuitions without concepts are blind and that perceptual content is conceptual need to dispute the thesis of belief-independence. See McDowell (1994, 60–63).

<sup>27</sup> See Descartes' letter to Princess Elizabeth, dated 28 June 1643, in Cottingham, Stoothoff, Murdoch and Kenny (1991, 226–229).

<sup>28</sup> cf. Joske (1967, 18).

<sup>29</sup> My account of the role of bodily awareness in the perception of solidity by touch owes much to Joske (1967, ch. 2) and O'Shaughnessy (1989). According to O'Shaughnessy, for example, 'the space and solidity of our bodies provides the access to the space and solidity of other bodies' (O'Shaughnessy 1989, 38).

<sup>30</sup> The egocentricity of spatial perception is emphasized in Husserl (1989, 165–167) and Evans (1982, 151–170). There is a useful discussion of the idea that perceptual experience is self-locating in Brewer (1992).

<sup>31</sup> As O'Shaughnessy puts it in a wonderful passage, 'the intuitional given-ness of the world to one is dependent upon one's sometimes veridically seeming to oneself to be a determinately shaped, determinately sized, determinately hard-or-soft something . . . Unless the self sometime know[s] itself in the physical mode, it will not in the same mode know reality. And without the latter, it will have no mode of access, whether through the thought or in perception, to reality. In short, no body-ego then no world!' (O'Shaughnessy 1980, 244–245).

<sup>32</sup> Something along these lines is suggested by Strawson's remark that 'the history of a man, we might say, is – among much else – an embodiment of a temporally extended *point of view on the world*' (Strawson 1966, 104).

<sup>33</sup> Following Shoemaker, I take it that to say that the statement 'a is F' is immune to error through misidentification relative to the term 'a' is to say that the following is not possible: the thinker knows some particular thing to be F, but makes the mistake of asserting 'a is F' because, and only because, she mistakenly thinks that the thing she knows to be F is what 'a' refers to. See Shoemaker (1994a, 82).

<sup>34</sup> See Evans (1982, ch. 7) and Cassam (1995b) for a discussion of this issue.

<sup>35</sup> Schopenhauer is reported to have described the idea that the subject should 'become object for itself' as 'the most monstrous contradiction ever thought of' (quoted in Janaway (1989, 120)).

<sup>36</sup> The influence of the sensory deprivation objection is due to Anscombe. See Anscombe (1994, 152).

<sup>37</sup> See the illuminating discussion of this point in Snowdon (1991).

<sup>38</sup> It might be objected that this difference cannot be as important for McDowell as it is for the intuition version of the Identity Argument, since McDowell is committed to the view that conceptual capacities are already operative in experience itself. There are, however, at least two closely related reasons for thinking that even someone who agrees with Kant and McDowell that intuitions without concepts are blind should still recognize a distinction between concept and intuition versions of the Identity Argument. The first is that the point of insisting that conceptual capacities are already operative in experience itself is not to collapse the distinction between intuitions and concepts. The second is that

the intuition version of the Identity Argument is not committed to the thesis that the content of intuitive awareness is 'non-conceptual', unless this is simply a way of giving expression to the 'belief-independence' of such awareness. See n. 26.

<sup>39</sup> I am grateful to Michael Ayers, Naomi Eilan, Sydney Shoemaker, and Wayne Waxman for their comments on an earlier version of this paper, and to John Campbell and P. F. Strawson for a number of helpful discussions.

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