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THE PHILOSOPHY OF MIND AND SOME ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS*
by
Jerome A. Shaffer

The most basic problem in the Philosophy of Mind is, naturally enough, what a mind is. This question, so typical of philosophy in general, seems so simple and yet is extraordinarily difficult to answer. I wish, in this paper, to take a look at some of the attempts to answer this question and see if we can make out the general outlines of a satisfactory answer.

Philosophy is divided into a number of fields, the philosophy of science, theory of knowledge, ethics, and so on. Usually philosophers specialize in one field or in a few fields, with the result that often there is no interaction between fields, no attempts to evaluate the effects of inquiry in one field or another field. I wish here to make a small attempt in that direction, to bring into some contact the philosophy of mind with another field of philosophy, ethics. I wish to see what ethical implications, if any, there are for certain theses in the philosophy of mind. I will attempt to show that certain doctrines in the philosophy of mind have unpalatable ethical consequences, and see what we are to make of that situation.

Let us start with our question, what is a mind? Now this question is so abstract that it is very difficult to deal with if the question is put so baldly. To make our question more concrete and, thus, more manageable, I propose to turn our attention to some specific cases of the mental, to what I shall call mental events. Suppose, for example, that you are sitting around, and you suddenly have the thought that you have a class in a few moments. That thought flashes through your mind, as we say; it suddenly occurs to you, dawns on you, or hits you. Your having of that thought is the kind of thing I would call a mental event. Or, to take a different sort of case, the having of a feeling: you suddenly feel a chill, or a surge of anger, or a sharp, stabbing pain. Here again we have what I would call a mental event.

Now if we ask what a mental event is, one very popular answer over the ages has been materialism, the view that the only things in existence are material: matter in motion, atoms and the void. How would a materialist deal with mental events?

There are two basic approaches which materialists have adopted, one which is usually called Behaviorism and the other which is usually called the Identity Theory (or Central State Materialism). The former consists in taking mental events to be particular kinds of behavior exhibited by particular kinds of material objects. Take pain, for example. The Behaviorist would claim that to be in pain is simply to behave under certain circumstances in certain sorts of ways, or at least be disposed to act in those ways. To say a person is in pain is to say he has a tendency to turn pale. writhe, cry out, etc. Part of this behavior is natural. Part of it is learned as is indicated by the familiar fact that cries of pain differ from one society to another. What of the report, “I am in pain”? Is this not a report of some inner, mental event? No, says the Behaviorist. This is just another kind of behavior, in this case, learned linguistic behavior.

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Behaviorism has a certain plausibility when we consider it as a theory about other people. For when we say of someone else that he is in pain, the images that come to our mind and the observations we expect to make are those of a person crying out, writhing, etc. But it has seemed to most reflective people that Behaviorism can hardly be applied to oneself. When I am in pain, I may very well behave or be disposed to behave in certain ways. But I know in my own case that something much more is involved; namely, some sort of internal, non-behavioral event, which we call the having of pain. It is for this reason that Behaviorism has been abandoned. The only place where it can be found at all is in certain areas of experimental psychology. Even there, Behaviorism exists in a very watered-down version as a rule for guiding research, a rule which says that only what can be manifested in behavior should be studied by psychology. Since this is a rule for doing psychology, this view is often known as Methodological Behaviorism to distinguish it from the Behaviorism we have been discussing. The latter is sometimes called Logical Behaviorism. It is not a proposal about what should be investigated in psychology, but is a metaphysical claim about the ultimate nature of mental events themselves, namely, the claim that mental events are nothing but dispositions to behave in certain ways.

A more plausible version of Materialism is that theory which is known today as the Identity theory. On this theory, mental events are identical with or nothing but bodily events, as it turns out, brain events. The essential feature of this theory concerns what is here meant by “identical.” Other examples of this sort of “identity” here intended would be the discovery that the Morning Star turned out to be identical with the Evening Star, that water turned out to be identical with H₂O, and that lightning turned out to be identical with a particular sort of electrical discharge. Such discoveries are empirical discoveries which for a long time remained unknown. Similarly, for mental events it is held that, although the identity of mental events with brain events was for a long time unknown and still is not certain, it is at least fairly probable that they are identical. In this sense the Identity theory rests upon certain empirical results, and could be overthrown by new empirical results. The actual empirical results that this theory depends upon are certain very close correlations between mental events and brain events. The philosophical aspect of the theory is that it proposes that these correlations be taken in the same way as the correlations of Morning Star with Evening Star, water with H₂O, lightning with electrical discharges; that is to say, that they be taken as the discovery of identity.

There are two objections which are currently being made to the Identity theory. Both seem to me to be conclusive objections. (1) Brain events occur in a particular spatial location, whereas it is nonsensical to say that mental events occur in any particular spatial location. What would it mean to say that I had just had a thought which occurred two inches behind the bridge of my nose, or that I had just had a sensation of fear midpoint between my ears, or that I had just had a sense-datum of a red patch two inches behind my eyeballs. Since it makes no sense to give mental events this sort of spatial location, they cannot be identical with events which do have that sort of spatial location, namely, brain events. So, the identity cannot hold. (2) Brain events are public events, in principle observable by anyone whatsoever,
whereas mental events are private events, in the sense that the person to whom a mental event occurs stands in a very special and privileged position with respect to that event. The special position is this: that if he firmly believes he has that mental event, then he cannot be mistaken in that belief, the belief must be correct. Necessarily, if a person firmly believes that he is feeling pain, then he is feeling pain. Here mental events differ from brain events. If a person firmly believes that he is undergoing some brain event, he may still be mistaken about it. Since mental events have this element of what is currently called “privileged access” and brain events lack this element, they cannot be identical.

How are we to account for these two differences between mental and physical events? We postulate that they are separate and distinct events, both occurring in the same time series, perhaps, but the latter occurring in the spatio-temporal world while the former do not. This view seems quite plausible once the differences between the mental and the physical have been called to our attention. Imagine your being hit on the head in such a way that you have the visual experience we call “seeing stars.” Now we would all agree that the blow to your skull is a purely physical event. It is clear that this has an effect on your brain, which involves various sorts of shakings and jarrings of various parts. This may lead to certain electrochemical changes in that part of your brain which is known as the visual cortex. All of this is physical in a perfectly straightforward way, and a physiologist might be familiar with the sorts of changes that might be going on. If your brain were magnified a thousand times, or if we had special high-powered microscopes, we might be able to observe all of these changes in great detail. But one thing we could not observe, and one thing which you are directly aware of without having to make any observations through microscopes, etc., is that flash of color and light which we call “seeing stars.” We may infer that that event took place, and you may, by your later behavior, indicate that it took place, but that particular event is a mental event and utterly different from any physical event we might observe. And no Materialistic theory, however ingeniously defended, will convince us otherwise. It looks as though we must admit the existence of mental events as something different from physical events. To admit this is to admit the need for some sort of a dualistic theory; that is, a theory which allows both mental events and physical events. We might note that Berkeley’s Idealism, in allowing the mental but not the physical, is not dualistic. However, as we have seen, Idealism is in its own monistic way as implausible as the extreme Materialism is in its monistic way.

Some philosophers have admitted the distinction between the mental and the physical but have held that each is simply a different aspect of some one underlying thing. Hence, such theories are sometimes called Double Aspect theories. The most famous Double Aspect theorist was Spinoza, who held that a man had two quite different aspects of himself, his physical and his mental aspect. The analogy is sometimes used of an undulating line, which at any particular time might be concave from one point of view and convex from the other point of view; each of these would be a different aspect of one and the same thing, namely, the line. Double Aspect theories have some serious difficulties. For one thing, there is the question of the nature of this underlying thing which has the two aspects. In Spinoza’s case, it was extremely obscure. He called it “Substance,” and he held that
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Substance had infinitely many aspects, of which the mental and the physical were the only ones we knew. He also called it "God or Nature." How obscure this notion of Substance is can be brought out by the fact that to this very day there is great controversy as to whether Spinoza was an atheist or, as a later commentator called him, "a God-intoxicated man." Another Double Aspect theorist, Herbert Spencer, put his cards on the table in referring to this underlying reality simply as "the Unknowable." In recent times, some philosophers have suggested that the underlying unity might be taken to be "the person." But when one inquires what a "person" is, it looks as though the most that can be said is that it is the sort of thing which has both a physical and a mental aspect. And this puts us back at the beginning, so far as trying to find out what the underlying reality is.

A second difficulty for a Double Aspect theory is to clarify the meaning of "aspect." In the case of the moving line which is convex and concave, it is quite clear what "aspect" means; it means spatial viewpoint or place from which the line is observed. But this simple sense, spatial viewpoint, is not applicable to the underlying reality of which the mental and the physical are supposed to be aspects, so it is not clear what "aspect" means in that case. Some contemporary philosophers suggest that we talk of the physical as the thing as seen "from the outside," and the mental as the thing as seen "from the inside." But presumably this is not meant to be taken literally. I am not sure how things would look from inside my brain, but presumably things would be pretty dark, to say the least. If we are not to take "from the inside" and "from the outside" literally, if we are to take these expressions in some metaphorical way, then this still remains to be clarified.

A third difficulty emerges if we turn our consideration to objects, such as rocks. Now, Spinoza held that rocks also had two aspects, a physical and a mental, as do all things in the universe. Spinoza thought that every physical entity had a corresponding mental aspect; this view is called "Panpsychism." It has never struck very many philosophers as a plausible position. But what is the alternative? If we say that a rock is merely physical, then we will be committed to a basic difference between the bodies of things which also are thinking things and all other bodies. So far as conscious things are concerned, their being physical will only be an aspect of something else. Let us call it a "person." But in the case of a rock, its being physical will be a basic characteristic of it. So rocks and persons are in principle quite different sorts of things. This has the result of treating the human body as something quite different from other bodies and, therefore, it would follow that we could not apply the same laws to both. We would then need two physical theories, one a physics concerning bodies proper, and the other, concerning the material aspect of persons. Such an asymmetry would be quite awkward for the development of natural science.

We have considered various materialistic attempts to identify mental events with material events, with either certain sorts of behavior of material objects or with particular sorts of events in those material objects. These theories have all had serious defects. It seems reasonable to think that mental events cannot be construed as material. We must think of them as something separate and distinct from, something over and above, the body. If so, we are forced to raise two questions: How are these events related to the body, and how are they related to each other?
Three theories have gained prominence as accounts of how mental events are related to the body. The first of these, Epiphenomenalism, takes mental events to be mere by-products of bodily activity, particularly brain activity. This can be taken to be a Materialist theory in a somewhat extended sense of that term, since the claim is that the material world is the basic world, and that mental events are mere causal results of material changes. The French physician, Cabanis, gave expression to this view when he said that brain secretes thought just as the liver secretes bile. Less pungent analogies that have been used by Epiphenomenalists are the relationship between a body and its shadow and between a steam locomotive and the steam that issues from its funnel. On this view, thoughts, sensations, sense-data, and the like have no effects on anything; they are mere consequences of what happens in the brain.

A somewhat different theory is known as Interactionism. The Interactionist admits that in many cases mental events are mere consequences of things that happen in the body. For example, when a trunk falls on my toe, the various changes that go into my body result in that mental event which we call pain. Again, when light reflected from the moon affects my visual system, there results the mental event we may call seeming to see the moon. To this extent, the Interactionist agrees with the Epiphenomenalist. But the Interactionist holds that in some cases at least mental events are able to produce effects on the body. Thus, he would hold that when a man winces from pain, the occurrence of the mental event which is the having of the pain affects the body in such a way as to produce the wince. Again, if I have a thought of which I am ashamed, this may cause my cheeks to turn that characteristic reddishness which we call blushing. Again, excessive worry may produce changes in the body which result in the pathological condition we refer to as ulcers. Descartes was an Interactionist, and he even had a theory of what part of the brain was the crucial point at which mental events and the brain interact. Because it was at the center of the brain, the pineal gland was chosen as the point of interaction; although there is no evidence that Descartes was right about this, to this very day the function of that particular part of the brain is still a mystery.

One important way in which mental events are supposed to affect the body on the Interactionist theory is found in the case of volitions or acts of will. It is held that when I make up my mind to do something, for example wink at the girl across the table from me, the mental event of deciding to wink has the effect of producing that particular facial change we call a wink. It is here that room is left for “free will,” since no information about the body will be sufficient for us to be able to predict that the wink would occur. The cause of the wink is not some prior bodily state but a mental event. So the wink would be considered, from the point of view of the physical world alone, a random, i.e., uncaused, change. But, of course, it would have a cause, namely, a mental cause. Someone who believed in “free will” might find this a reason for preferring the Interactionist theory.

A third important theory in accounting for the relation between mental events in the body is Parallelism. The Parallelist repudiates the notion that there could be a causal connection between mental events and the brain, either going only from brain to mental events or going both ways. How could events so utterly dissimilar, he asks, possibly affect each other? Deciding that causal connection is impossible.
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The Parallelist holds that every mental event is merely *correlated* with some physical event in such a way that whenever the one occurs the other occurs also. Leibniz offered the analogy of two perfect clocks which are so synchronized when they are constructed that they remain forever in phase without any further adjustment. Thus, whenever one strikes midnight, the other strikes midnight. There is no causal connection, because each has its own inner works, but the states of each mechanism are always correlated with particular states of the other mechanism. Thus, to take some of our earlier examples, whenever my brain is in that state produced by a trunk falling on my toe, then my mind is in the parallel state of feeling pain; similarly, when my mind is in the state of having decided to wink at the girl across the table, my brain is always in the parallel state of starting the chain of events which will eventuate in my winking.

So far as deciding between these three theories is concerned, I believe we can pretty easily eliminate the last of them, Parallelism. There does not seem to be any explanation to account for the constant conjunction of the mental and the physical, and to take it as a mere accident seems too farfetched to take seriously. But whether we incline towards Epiphenomenalism or Interactionism depends upon whether or not we take the brain to be a relatively closed system whose changes can be fully explained in terms of prior physical events. If we were to extrapolate from the recent history of physics, with its trend toward encompassing wider and wider ranges of phenomena, we might give the edge to Epiphenomenalism. But if we hold that changes occur in the brain which cannot be explained in terms of prior physical events but which require the postulated intervention of mental events, then we are opting for Interactionism. The sad fact is that it is still too early to tell. We will just have to wait about a hundred years before the outcome is more decidable. And if, at the end of that time, we still do not have a general theory of the brain which will, in principle, explain all, we still will not have settled the matter, for the Epiphenomenalist can still say we must continue to search for such a theory. Or he can say that some brain events just occur at random. So we cannot expect much in the way of decisiveness here, unless we do come upon a general theory of the brain which will explain all, in which case Epiphenomenalism will have triumphed.

So far, we have seen that there exists a series of mental events, thoughts, sensations, sense-data, and so forth, which are connected with the body, either causally or by regular correlations. These mental events not only are related to the body, however; they are also related to each other. For it is correct to describe these mental events as all mental events of the same mind. It still remains for us to discuss the question, what the nature of the mind is, the *I*, which is the subject of Descartes’ “I think therefore I am.” What is this “mind” that all these mental events belong to? One theory, going back to Plato, is that these mental events are events which happen to one and the same, underlying, enduring nonphysical thing. This view is often called the Mental Substance theory. It is the Mental Substance which allegedly undergoes the mental events and is related in some manner to the body.

It is very hard to give any sense to this notion of a Mental Substance. If I look inwardly, and search the contents of my mind, I don’t seem to find any such thing there. Nor could I find such a thing there, since all I can find are mental events and...
this thing is presumably the thing which is having the mental events. So it cannot be itself observed. It is the thing which thinks. And it seems that nothing more than that can be said. It seems doomed to lie in permanent obscurity, lurking in the background, never appearing.

Because of the obscurities in the notion of a Mental Substance, some philosophers have been attracted to the view, first put in its modern form by Hume, that the mind is not some underlying thing which produces thoughts, but rather simply the bundle or collection of thoughts themselves. This theory is, therefore, sometimes called the Bundle theory of the mind. Your "mind" would simply be the collection of mental events you have had in your lifetime, and not some mysterious, underlying, unobservable thing. You are not, of course, any particular mental event but the whole collection of them. Since the collection extends over time, so you extend over time. When the collection ceases to have new members added to it, that is to say when you cease having mental events, that will be the end of that collection, and so the end of you.

This is a very attractive view, since it avoids the metaphysical obscurities of the Mental Substance theory. But there are some problems still to be worked out here. The main question is how we are to describe the relations between these events which make them all members of one and the same collection. After all, there are many more mental events occurring in the world than those that go to make up your mind. By what right do we rule those others out as not being proper members of the collection that go to make up your mind? One suggestion is that the contents of each individual mind are related by memory, in the sense that if any particular mental event is a member of the collection, then the collection will contain subsequent memories of the earlier mental events. This as it stands is inadequate since there are many mental events which I have which are never remembered later on. So we must say something like this: that an event is a member of a collection if it could be remembered later on. But now one problem here is the sense of the word "could." For example, suppose that I have some unpleasant experience in my childhood which I have repressed, so that in some sense or other I "cannot" remember it. Surely, this is not the relevant sense of "could." How about some of the early experiences of my childhood which occurred when I was so young that no matter how hard I tried and no matter how much psychoanalysis I had and even perhaps no matter how much hypnosis or drugs I had, I still could not remember them? Would they still count as mental events in my mental life? And what is a memory, anyhow? Suppose it is simply a later mental state which resembles some earlier mental state and perhaps has the added feature of "this is familiar" or something like that (as Hume held). Then we run into the following difficulty. Take the familiar experience of deja vu, the experience in which it all seems quite certain that we have been through this before, although it is unlikely we have. Now suppose someone else had had that experience before; presumably someone else has been in that room before. Then are we remembering his past experience? In which case his experience is a part of our mind. But that is absurd. So there are difficulties in the notion of memory here. At any rate, this is a matter with which the most recent philosophical work has concerned itself, and still nothing very clear has been forthcoming. Let me say that the Bundle theory does seem like the most reasonable line of approach to try to work out.
Finally, one last account may be suggested. Some philosophers hold that the unity of the mind consists not in any relations between the mental events themselves or in their relations to some mental substance but simply in their relationship to the body. Now, we do have a pretty clear idea of what it is for a body to be one and the same body for some length of time. Of course, it is not exactly the same: I don't have exactly the same body I had ten years ago or even ten minutes ago. But we have some idea of what we mean when we say it is the same body, namely a certain continuity of change and a certain relatively unchangeableness. So why not say that a series of events belongs to the same mind, if all of these events are connected with the same body? The exact form of the connection would depend upon which theory we accepted of the relationship between mind and body. That is, we might say they were the mental events of the same mind if they were the effects of or correlated with one and the same particular brain. Thus, we would be able to find the unity of these mental events in their being related to a single enduring physical body. Such an account has seemed very attractive to philosophers, because we then do not have to seek the unity of the mind in some mysterious mental substance, nor do we have to face the baffling problem of specifying the relations between mental events which make them events of the same mind. We already know about the body and its relative unity, so that it becomes convenient to use the body as our peg on which to tie the bundle of mental events.

This attractive theory has the following consequence, however, which we must go on to discuss: It has the consequence that it rules out and renders utterly meaningless two possibilities, the possibility that the mind might continue to exist after the death of the body and the possibility that the mind might move from one body to another. Since each mind gains its existence as a unity from its connection with some particular body, it no longer can exist as a unity when that connection is severed. So the very notion of a mind existing without that particular connection to that body is unintelligible. To say that Jones' body was destroyed but his mind continued to exist would be to contradict oneself, since Jones' mind is defined as those mental events connected with particular events in his body.

But the notion of survival of the self after the death of the body is not unintelligible or self-contradictory. You can imagine the following situation, namely, witnessing your own funeral. Imagine that you suddenly have a terrible pain in your chest, everything grows dim, and then there is blackness. The next thing you know you are presented with a scene in which a body which looks very much like yours is sprawled on the floor. People are rushing around, calling for doctors, wringing their hands and shouting your name. Finally, after a lot of confusion, the doctor stands over the body, shakes his head, and says, "I have done my best but he is gone now." You see and hear all of this from what seems to be a point near the ceiling, but you get no visual appearances of your own body directly beneath that point nor do you have any of the bodily sensations you usually have. You find yourself having all sorts of thoughts and emotions, and finally the thought flashes through your mind that you are dead. But, remembering Descartes, you quickly utter a few *Cogitos* and prove that, although your body is dead and you no longer are connected with it, nevertheless you *still* exist.
Do such things happen? Well, it must be admitted that we do not really know whether they happen or not. We have shown that it is not self-contradictory to assert that they happen but whether they do or not is an empirical question. My own view is that they most probably do not occur. The evidence I would cite is the already known intimacy of connection between mental events and brain events. We know that when certain parts of the brain are damaged this produces a pathological mental condition and, if particular parts of the brain are totally destroyed, there may well be a total loss of mental function of a particular sort. All of this makes it likely, by inductive extrapolation, that when the brain is totally destroyed the mind is destroyed with it. However, this sort of empirical argument is not as yet very strong. There are enormous numbers of things we are in ignorance about concerning the brain and its correlated mental functions. We know that large portions of the brain can be affected (and even removed) with hardly any noticeable difference in mental functioning. We know that in some cases of brain damage there is temporary loss of mental functioning which then, astonishingly enough, is regained. Even memories lost on removal of a part of the brain may come back again in time. So any arguments about the degree of correlation of mind and brain based upon present knowledge is not going to be very strong. It is entirely conceivable that when the brain is destroyed, in death, there is a temporary loss of mental functioning, but not a permanent one. So survival of the mind after the death of the body still remains to some degree an open question.

Let us briefly consider the possibility of transmigration, the movement of the mind or self from one body to another. Let us see if we can imagine a case. Suppose two men are pruning a tree, and the tree is suddenly hit by lightning. Both men are knocked unconscious and, when they come to, each with great astonishment cries out that his body is a completely different one from the one he used to have. We find that from each body issue forth claims about the past of the other and knowledge of faces which only the other person could have had. We also find a complete exchange of personality traits. If this exchange were carried out in complete detail, would we not be inclined to say in such cases, despite the irregularity of it all, that the two persons had somehow exchanged bodies? I think we would. So transmigration also is not self-contradictory. So far as the question whether it ever occurs is concerned, here I should think it is almost certain that it never has occurred. In the few cases where it was claimed to have happened (for example, the “Bridey Murphy” case), more plausible explanations, have always been found, such as repressed memories, hysterical changes of personality, and even fraud. So while transmigration of this sort remains a possibility, it almost certainly never happens. Still it is not self-contradictory or unintelligible to say that it has happened, and that shows that if someone presents a good deal of evidence that it has happened we are obliged to consider the matter with care.

What the possibility of such cases does show is that the unity of the mind cannot be located in the unity of the body. They show that, in Descartes’ words, “it is certain that this I is entirely and absolutely distinct from my body, and can exist without it” (sixth Meditation). This forces us back to the earlier question, What is this I or self which can exist separately from the body? It seems so simple and transparent and unquestionable to be able to say, “I think, therefore I am.” Such a
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statement may well be true, perhaps even certain, but its sense may well be extraordinarily difficult.

So far we have been considering some of the basic problems in the philosophy of mind. Now I wish to turn to some related matters in the field of ethics, that field of philosophy which treats of right and wrong, good and bad, praise and blame, reward and punishment, the moral and immoral, the ethical and unethical. For our purposes, we need to take a typically moral judgment about which there would be comparatively little disagreement among us. one that most of us would find wholly acceptable. I think that the following will do: it is intrinsically wrong to inflict great pain on another against his will for the fun of it. To make this judgment appeal to as many as possible, I specify that the pain must be great (since some might believe that there is nothing wrong if the pain is minor and the fun enormous, perhaps in certain practical jokes or teasings), that it must be against his will (since some might believe that inflicting pain on a masochist, who welcomes it, is not wrong), and that it must be just for the fun of it (since there may well be cases in which it is not wrong to inflict great pain on another against his will if there are very good reasons to do so — for example, it may be necessary in order to save his life). Finally, I am thinking of an act that is intrinsically wrong, that is, wrong in itself and not wrong because of any further consequences of the act. If the judgment is understood with these points in mind, I would think that the vast majority would accept the judgment as true.

It is another matter, and a terribly difficult matter, how we know the judgment to be true. It is so simple and basic a judgment that it is unlikely that it could be deduced from some other judgment or judgments; and, even if it could be so deduced, that would just leave us with exactly the same problem, how do we know the judgment or judgments from which it is deduced? The theist might say we know it to be true because God tells us it is true. But how do we know God really tells us it is true? And, more important, so what? Suppose some supernatural being told us it was all right to inflict great pain for the fun of it? We would say that such a being was evil! In other words, we already know the judgment to be true and would not call a supernatural being "God" unless that being also assented to the judgment.

Perhaps the best that can be said for the judgment is that it is self-evident. If by this is meant, however, that anyone who considered it would assent to it, then it must be admitted that it might well not be self-evident to everyone. There are people, sadists for example, who do inflict pain for the fun of it; and, while some of them might admit it was wrong of them to do so, others might see nothing wrong in it and we might not be able to succeed in persuading them that there was anything wrong in it. Suppose we said, "How would you like us to do it to you?" The sadist might admit that he would not like that at all, but still claim that there was nothing wrong in it. (I might not like you to beat me at tennis, but I could not say it would be wrong of you to beat me at tennis.) So we cannot say that such a judgment would seem self-evidently true to everyone. Now the sadist is usually thought to be suffering from an illness, a behavior disorder — he is a psychopath. So the best we could say, and perhaps not even this is true, is that the judgment is self-evident to any normal person. But now we would still need a definition of "normal" which does not involve begging the question by calling someone abnormal just because he
does not find such judgments self-evidently true. And that is not easy to provide.

The above considerations concern the question how we know the judgment that it is wrong to inflict pain for the fun of it. From the fact that it is very difficult to say how we know, it does not follow that we do not know. It seems to me that we do know this judgment to be true, even if we cannot say how we know it. Imagine someone inflicting considerable pain on a child just for the fun of it — isn't it so clear and obvious, can't you just see that it is wrong? I think we do indeed have here a moral judgment that would gain the assent of most readers, despite the epistemological difficulties involved.

Now to consider the relevance of such a judgment to metaphysics. Earlier we considered some theories concerning the nature of such mental events as the feeling of pain. One such theory was labeled “Materialism”, the view that all events in nature are physical (atoms and the void) and that so-called mental events are, therefore, nothing but purely physical occurrences. On the view called Behaviorism, they are items of physical behavior or dispositions toward such items of behavior; on the Identity theory, they are brain events, the firings of neural cells, waves of electrical energy, or the like.

Now let us consider our moral judgment concerning pain in the light of these materialistic theories. For Behaviorism, a feeling of pain would be the exhibiting, under the appropriate circumstances, of pain-behavior: groans, grimaces, paleness of face, clenching of the teeth, writhings, etc. Our moral judgment would come to this — that it is intrinsically wrong to induce in another person groans, grimaces, etc., just for the fun of it.

But is the judgment true under the Behavioristic interpretation? I, for one, cannot see that it is. What is wrong about inducing that sort of behavior in another? Of course, one might hold that it is wrong to induce any sort of behavior in another against his will just for the fun of it. But that would be a different principle, although one which would also command the assent of most of us. But the principle we are concerned with holds that it is particularly wrong to induce groans, grimaces, etc. And I do not believe that this is the case. To see this, consider giving our victim curare prior to torture. A sufficient dose of curare leaves a person fully conscious and able to feel everything — but, temporarily, completely paralyzed and unable to respond behaviorally. On the behavioristic account, we can erase the wrongness of the act by administering curare before tightening the thumb screws or turning on the electricity. If what is intrinsically wrong is eliciting that behavior, then the use of curare would make everything all right. But, of course, it does not. For it is not the dispositions to behavior which are intrinsically undesirable. If that is all there were to pain, our moral judgment would not be true. If our judgment is true, there must be more to pain than the behavior to which we are disposed. If Behaviorism is true, our moral judgment loses its validity. Our moral principle and Behaviorism cannot both be true (though they could both be false). Which are we to give up?

Even if we did not have our prior arguments against Behaviorism, I believe we would accept the moral principle and reject Behaviorism, if forced to choose between the two. The moral principle seems intuitively quite certain and undeniable, whereas Behaviorism has a considerably lower degree of likelihood. If
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forced to choose, it is reasonable to pick the more likely one.

Do similar considerations apply to the Identity theory? It would seem so, but it is not as clear a matter in this case. On the Identity theory, our moral principle comes to this, that it is intrinsically wrong to produce certain events in a man’s brain. Put that way, the principle is certainly no longer obvious or self-evident. It is even doubtful whether it is true. Many of those who accept the original principle as true would reject this principle as false.

But now the Identity theorist would claim that it is because of our ignorance of the identity that we would accept the original principle yet reject the Identity version of it. After all, he would argue, if infliction of pain is wrong and pain is identical with stimulation of a particular part of the brain, then that stimulation is wrong.

One might grant the Identity theorist this logical point, but still question his line of reasoning. Does he not beg the question? The logical point is relevant on the assumption that we already know the identity. But we are trying to decide whether there is an identity of brain states and mental states. We can appeal to the fact that pain has a moral undesirability whereas the corresponding brain state does not have this moral undesirability; this fact, if it is a fact, would show that pain and the brain state are not identical. And when we add this argument against the two most popular forms of materialism, Behaviorism and the Identity theory, to those considered earlier, we have even more reason to reject it. It would seem, then, that some form of dualism is the most plausible view to take. There is more to nature than matter in motion. There is also the mind.¹

¹ Parts of this are reprinted from the author’s REALITY, KNOWLEDGE AND VALUE, New York, Random House, Inc., 1971.