

Article

What I Am and What I Am Not: *Destruktion* of the Mind–Body Problem

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Abstract: The German word *destruaktion* is used here in the sense that philosophy should destroy some ontological concepts and the everyday meanings of certain words. Tradition allows the transmission of knowledge, but it can perpetuate certain prejudices. According to Heidegger, tradition transmits, but it also conceals. Tradition induces self-evidence and prevents us from accessing the origin of concepts. It makes us believe that we do not need to return to that origin. Making tradition transparent dissolves the concealments it has provoked. Here, I apply this idea to the mind–body problem, which has inherited occultations that are born from Descartes himself. As a result, a new philosophical framework for research on consciousness emerges: that, as an individual cognitive being, I cannot avoid splitting reality into *what I am* and *what I am not*, extending then the individual duality to a collective error transmitted culturally.

Keywords: mind–body problem; consciousness; *destruaktion*; hard problem; Heidegger; Descartes; Nagel; zombies; being; indexical concepts

1. Introduction

Heidegger said that tradition transmits but, at the same time, makes inaccessible and conceals what is transmitted. We take what comes to us through tradition as self-evident and cease to question it. Tradition prevents us from accessing the original sources of categories and concepts, since it makes us forget that they have had an origin and makes us believe that we do not need to return to these sources [1].

For Heidegger, in a general sense, *destruaktion* seeks to expose the implicit preontological *understanding of being* already fully operative in the pretheoretical “*Vollzug/Verhaltungen*” of Dasein from which certain fundamental concepts of philosophy originated [2]. In particular, here, I operationally apply *destruaktion* in the sense that philosophy can completely change the meanings of concepts that we use on a daily basis. *Destruktion* is the task of making tradition transparent and dissolving the concealments it has provoked.

In this article, I argue that we need to go back to the sources of the concepts of *the mental* and *the physical* and not let ourselves be carried away by what tradition takes for granted. This would serve to shed light on the mind–body problem that has its origin in Cartesian dualism. I propose that this problem has inherited hiddenness because of tradition that must be “destroyed”. This *destruaktion* of the problem would have consequences also in the science of consciousness since it could prevent scientific theories from carrying the burden of an erroneous philosophical approach and would allow such theories to put the focus on the real scientific problem.

In what follows, I address, first of all, what Heidegger said about Cartesian dualism (Section 1.1). In Section 1.2, I discuss the complex question of what is meant by the mind–body problem. I then expose the differences usually attributed to the mental and the physical (Section 1.3). In the next section, it is shown that throughout history it has been difficult to propose an explanation in a naturalistic, non-dualistic context that does not deny the mental. Thus, I review the difficulties in solving the mind–body problem that have accumulated centuries of history in a succession of proposed solutions that



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have always been met with serious objections (Section 1.4). Section 1.5 summarizes how duality is characterized in the different proposed solutions in order to highlight the contrast with what is proposed next. In Section 2, I address the *destruktion* of duality on the basis of foundational texts by Descartes. In Section 3, I present the philosophical framework resulting from *destruktion* in contrast with other proposals. Finally, I list a whole program of arguments and future research (Section 4).

1.1. Heidegger and Cartesian Dualism

The forgetfulness of being is a well-known idea that Heidegger develops in *Being and Time* [1], even if he does not yet choose the title of “forgetfulness of being”. According to Heidegger, philosophy has tended to think of being as if it were a substance and, in fact, we ask “what is being?” when we should ask “what is the meaning of being?”. In this context, Heidegger confronts the Cartesian subject–object split [3,4]. Descartes sought a basis for certain knowledge by methodically doubting everything and came to the conclusion that one can doubt the knowledge acquired through the senses and through reasoning, but one cannot doubt the very fact that we are doubting. From there, we arrive at the famous *cogito, ergo sum*—I think, therefore I am—in one of Descartes’ most quoted texts:

“And so, because our senses sometimes deceive us, I decided to suppose that nothing was such as they lead us to imagine it to be. And because there are men who make mistakes in reasoning, even about the simplest elements of geometry, and commit logical fallacies, I judged that I was as prone to error as anyone else, and I rejected as false all the reasoning I had hitherto accepted as valid proof. Finally, considering that all the same thoughts which we have while awake can come to us while asleep without any one of them then being true, I resolved to pretend that everything that had ever entered my head was no more true than the illusions of my dreams. But immediately afterwards I noted that, while I was trying to think of all things being false in this way, it was necessarily the case that I, who was thinking them, had to be something; and observing this truth: I am thinking therefore I exist, was so secure and certain that it could not be shaken by any of the most extravagant suppositions of the sceptics, I judged that I could accept it without scruple, as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking.” [3].

From this first principle of indubitable knowledge, Descartes builds his philosophical system. According to Heidegger, since Descartes, we have considered the subject–object distinction self-evident and on the basis of it we have developed the concept of *objectivity* and the scientific method [1]. Any question is posed *objectively*, opposing the rational self to the object to be investigated. And we do the same in the question of being: we place being before us as if it were an object, an entity to be explored objectively [5]. But for Heidegger, contrary to our ingrained beliefs, being is not an entity. From here, Heidegger develops his *fundamental ontology* while avoiding the assumptions imposed on us by tradition. He asserts that, in everyday life, things are not treated as objects but we interact with them more within a network of contexts. Only when the thing ceases to fulfill its function within the network do I look at it as an object, showing that it was not an object when it did fulfill its function. Heidegger does not really intend for us to abandon the subject–object division; instead, he only intends to show that Cartesian dualism derives from something more fundamental: what he calls *being-in-the-world*.

In a line with connections with the Heideggerian reflection, but developed independently of it, in this article, I use the framework of the Heideggerian idea of *destruktion* to expose hidden keys that help to clarify the mind–body problem. But first it is necessary to specify what is understood by this problem and to recall the difficulties in solving it.

1.2. Definition of the Problem: Philosophical versus Scientific Problem

The definition of the mind–body problem in the literature is multiple and not without some complexity. For example, the mind–body problem and the so-called problem of

consciousness may overlap without coinciding exactly. One can also consider problems, in the plural, and classify them into families [6]: (i) descriptive questions of the type “What is consciousness?”, etc., (ii) explanatory questions such as “How does consciousness appear?”, etc., and (iii) functional questions along the lines of “Does consciousness have a function and, if so, what is it?”, etc. Moreover, one can consider Chalmers’ hard problem [7] as a more-or-less novel reformulation of the classical problem. Finally, after decades of neuroscientific development, the problem has been renamed the “mind-brain problem”.

Once the multiplicity of the problem is admitted, it can take the form of a complex network of interconnected questions. I distinguish here between the two main hubs of this network: (a) the scientific core, which, for the most optimistic, will be solved in the future as we learn more about the functioning of the brain and/or develop successful scientific theories of consciousness, and (b) the philosophical core, which causes us perplexity and fascination, and which, for the most pessimistic, would even lead to the failure of the resolution of the scientific problem.

Within the network of interconnected issues, the philosophical core of the problem is situated around the nature of mind or consciousness and the physical world and is strongly connected with ontological, causal, and functional issues. The scientific core of the problem can be characterized as the search for an understandable translation between what two different subjects observe when what for one is consciousness (first-person perspective) for the other is a brain (third-person perspective). In particular, it would be necessary to establish the necessary and/or sufficient conditions for a physical system to be conscious. This scientific core is most strongly connected with questions such as: (a) the determination of the level of complexity that a central nervous system has to reach so that in the evolution of life on our planet it could be affirmed that consciousness was reached, (b) the conditions to be able to affirm that artificial intelligence reaches artificial consciousness, and (c) which areas of a concrete brain are involved in a concrete conscious experience, i.e., which are the neural correlates of consciousness, etc.

In this article, I focus on the philosophical core of the problem—the nature of mind or consciousness and the physical world—in an attempt to undermine philosophical perplexity by the *destruktion* of the problem. I argue that, without knowing in detail what are, if any, the concrete neural correlates and mechanisms of consciousness, we can conclude that there are philosophical questions that are ill-posed. I also try here to clarify how a problem is generated which, ultimately, would be a false problem. That is, I argue that without having solved the scientific problem, we can make the philosophical problem transparent and, in some way, create a conceptual framework that avoids difficulties gratuitously added to those inherent to the difficult path of scientific questions.

Finally, when we confront the philosophical core, mind or consciousness can be characterized by focusing on its representational aspects, as do Rosenthal [8] or Dennett [9], or on its experiential or phenomenal aspects, as do Chalmers [7] or Nagel [10]. The former characterization is usually considered relatively more tractable in terms of cognitive explanations. Therefore, here, I specifically refer to the second characterization in order to directly address the perplexity involved in consciousness.

It is noteworthy that the scientific approach is often expressed in terms of a gradual continuum between non-conscious and conscious systems. This is reflected, for example, in studies of the transitions between different phases of sleep or in the gradual biological evolution from presumably non-conscious species to the indisputably conscious species *homo sapiens*. In contrast, the philosophical problem abounds in the alleged qualitative leap or break between the characteristics of the physical and the mental through arguments such as Levine’s explanatory gap [11], McGinn’s cognitive closure [12], Jackson’s epistemological [13], Nagel’s point of view [10], Chalmers’ zombies [14], or the inverted spectrum [14].

1.3. The Physical and the Mental Appear to Us as Different

The main differences in the way mental and physical phenomena appear to us are: (a) physical phenomena seem to take place in space, while mental phenomena do not seem to have spatial location, (b) physical phenomena appear to all, that is, they are public and can be shared, while mental phenomena are private, they appear to only one person at a time, and (c) mental phenomena seem qualitative—*qualia*—as opposed to the supposed quantitative and measurable nature of physical phenomena.

The words *appearance*, *seem*, and *supposed* appear in the previous paragraph suggesting that the destruction of the problem would lead us to rethink the usually accepted concepts of the physical and the mental. The idea that the mind–body problem is not a real problem but appears to us as a problem is not new and goes back to Locke [15]. However, in case it is a false problem, we have to answer the question as to why it appears to us as a real problem. Explaining why both types of phenomena appear to us in such different ways would be a way to undermine the perplexity associated with the problem. We consider in the next section that throughout history it has been really difficult to find an explanation in a naturalistic, non-dualistic, and non-denying mental context. A convincing explanation should clarify why, despite all previous attempts, the mental cannot seem to be reduced to the physical.

1.4. Some Proposed Solutions and Their Objections

In this section, I follow [16]. One can summarize the history of the mind–body problem by stating that all the proposed solutions have raised serious objections. Thus, for example, within the so-called dualism of substances, we have interactionism, epiphenomenalism, and parallelism. Regarding the interactionism between physical and mental substances defended by Descartes [17] and more recently by Popper and Eccles [18], it has been objected that physics shows us a self-sufficient physical world to explain natural phenomena—the principle of physical causal closure that, in particular, should also be applicable to the brain. Moreover, it is difficult to explain how two different and ontologically independent substances interact with each other [19].

According to epiphenomenalism, physical events are causal with respect to mental events but not vice versa. Epiphenomenalism, thus, respects the causal closure of the physical world by proposing that the mental accompanies the physical without influencing the latter [20]. But epiphenomenalism seems incompatible with our being aware that we have consciousness, since for us to know that we have it would have to produce some change in our brain. Nor does it explain the emergence of consciousness in biological evolution, since it would have no effect on an organism's adaptive capacity [21].

According to parallelism, the mental and the physical function synchronously without either interacting causally with the other [22–25]. But it requires belief in a deity that intervenes or programs in advance in a sort of *deus ex machina* [26].

Nor is the dualism of properties that usually accepts the supervenience of the mental in the physical—non-reductive physicalism—free of objections [27] since if we respect the closure of the physical domain and causal exclusion, i.e., that no event can have more than one sufficient cause, mental properties would lack causal efficacy and would be merely epiphenomenal [28].

The idealist school of thought claims that the physical can be reduced to the mental, since the supposed physical world is empirical and, therefore, a social construct created from shared subjective experiences. But even the originator of these ideas, Berkeley, was aware of several objections to his idealism. The first is the difficulty in distinguishing real things from imaginary ones. It also seems absurd to suppress physical causes and attribute everything to the mind, as, for example, not to say that fire heats, or that water cools, but that it is the mind that heats or cools. In addition, there is the question of the persistence of objects that seem to continue to exist when no one perceives them. Another objection is the difficulty in explaining how we distinguish error from truth when, for example, one thinks

that an oar is crooked because one of its ends is under water. Finally, it is difficult for idealism to explain why certain things seem the same to us all [29].

In neutral monism, ultimate reality is intrinsically neither mental nor physical, but neutral, and the difference between the physical and the psychological lies not in the object, but in the direction of investigation [30]. One objection to neutral monism is that it does not make concrete the nature of neutral entities. In some versions, neutral entities have *both* physical and phenomenal characteristics, rather than *neither* physical nor mental. Moreover, neutral elements seem rather mental since the way physical objects are constructed from the neutral is reminiscent of Berkeley idealism [18]. In the Russellian version of neutral monism, the fact that there are intrinsic properties that explain the phenomenal and extrinsic relations that construct the physical can be seen as metaphysical speculation to no practical effect [14]. Ordinary material objects must be constructed from the neutral, but neutral monism has not shown the method of construction [31]. It has also been objected that the alleged phenomenal qualities constitutive of fundamental neutral entities do not necessarily entail an associated conscious experience. This is a quality/consciousness gap, analogous to the physical/consciousness gap objected to physicalism. It is conceivable that these phenomenal qualities are instantiated without consciousness of them, and this casts doubt on whether consciousness exists in a truly neutral universe [32].

Within physicalism we find, for example, theories of mind–brain identity that hold that the states and processes we call mental are states and processes of the nervous system. Its advocates argue that this is a reasonable scientific hypothesis, just as the statement “lightning is a movement of electric charges” is [33]. Thus, the mind–body problem disappears as the mental is identified with a region of the physical world and no interaction between two distinct things is necessary. However, it is often objected that they do not account for qualia [14]. A second objection is the multiple realizability argument which claims that if mental states can be realized in systems other than brains, identity theory would be false [34].

Anomalous monism attempts to reconcile three seemingly irreconcilable principles: (i) that at least some mental events interact causally with physical events, (ii) that where there is causality, there must be a law, and (iii) that there are no strict deterministic laws on the basis of which mental events can be predicted and explained. To make the three principles compatible, mental events must instantiate some other non-mental—physical—property to fulfill the second principle in spite of the third. Consequently, causally interacting mental events must be identical to physical events. But as a novelty with respect to identity theories, a distinction is made between type identity and token identity: although the class or type of mental events cannot be reduced to the class of neuronal events, each individual mental event—each case or token—is nonetheless identical to a physical event [35]. It is objected, however, to the anomalous monism that implies an absence of causal power of mental properties due to the causal closure of the physical. And if both the mental cause and the physical cause are sufficient, the physical effect is overdetermined. Moreover, the idea of overdetermination also seems to violate the principle of causal closure of the physical [36]. It is also seriously doubted that the identity of individual events is compatible with irreducibly different types or classes [37].

The most radical variant within physicalism is eliminativism, which denies the existence of the mental. In our daily lives, we attribute beliefs and desires to other minds—and our own—using what is often called folk psychology (FP). For eliminativists, FP is a false theory and its mentalistic vocabulary should be eliminated and replaced by neuroscientific vocabulary. One objection to eliminativist materialism is that if there really are no beliefs, then the eliminativists’ belief that there supposedly are no beliefs would not exist [38]. Furthermore, eliminativist reasoning is based on FP being an empirical theory subject to refutation but, for many, FP is nothing but a simulation our mind makes of what the other would do with the beliefs and desires we think they have [39]. Eliminative materialism should explain why FP has success in predicting human behavior comparable to the success of the natural sciences and even improving on that of recent psychological and neurobio-

logical theories. Finally, FP should not be reduced to a predictive capacity since, in addition to predicting, it justifies, evaluates, commends, and rationalizes [40].

But there is a more general physicalism that does not deny the mental but tries to explain it in physical terms. This physicalism must face objections such as those of Nagel for whom the mental or consciousness is nothing but the subjective character of experience, but this is only comprehensible from a particular point of view, and the objectivity that characterizes physics leads us in the opposite direction away from the true nature of the phenomenon [10]. A second argument against general physicalism is that of knowledge which claims that even if we had all the physical information about the whole physiology of the experience of color vision, we would miss the experience of color itself [13]. Other arguments against physicalism are the explanatory gap between particular experiences and their physical substrate [11], the cognitive closure towards the solution of the mind–body problem [12], that of the conceivability of the physical without the phenomenal [14], and that of the inverted spectrum [14]. All abound in the apparent disconnect between subjective experience and the physical world. Because that connection remains a mystery, all these arguments are called Mysterian arguments [41].

Emergentism argues that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts in the sense that a complex system has properties or behaviors that its components do not have on their own. In philosophy of mind, emergentism has been used to interpret the mental as an emergent property of the human brain, in which the components are physical [42]. We speak of strong emergence when the causal power of the emergent property is irreducible to that of the micro-properties in which it supervenes and, therefore, there must be downward causality from the macro to the micro. In contrast, weak emergence occurs when the macro-state can be derived from the microdynamics and external conditions by simulation [43]. Weak emergence is seen as simply reinforcing the main idea of physicalism by showing how all emergent phenomena are based on underlying laws [44]. Therefore, the real alternative to physicalism is strong emergentism with its top–down causation. In fact, the main objection to strong emergentism is related to top–down causal powers. The argument is an adaptation of those used against property dualism and anomalous monism. Consider the following principles that we do not want to give up: (i) emergent properties supervene on microphysical properties, (ii) emergent properties are neither reducible nor identical to microphysical properties, and (iii) mental properties have causal efficacy. If we add to these the principle of the closure of the physical domain (iv) and the principle of causal exclusion (v) according to which no event can have more than one sufficient cause, the conclusion is that all five principles cannot be true simultaneously. The weakest point is the causal power of emergent properties and the conclusion is that consciousness would be an epiphenomenon [28].

Functionalism holds that a particular mental state is characterized by playing a definite role in a particular chain of causal relations between perceptual inputs, other mental states, and behavioral outputs. Thus, what defines a mental state is the causal–effective role it plays. The best known objection to functionalism is the Chinese room argument [45] with which Searle dismantles the idea that following a set of syntactic rules can be equated with thinking. It is also objected to functionalism that a system could be functionally equivalent to the human brain with a total absence of *qualia*. Thus, it has been proposed to imagine the individuals of the Chinese nation working together in a way that is functionally equivalent to a human brain [46].

Panpsychism advocates that all physical systems have minds. A solution close to it is panprotopsychism in which it is sufficed that some fundamental physical entities (e.g., quarks or photons) have conscious experiences [32]. The main objection to panpsychism and panprotopsychism is the problem of combination. It is difficult to imagine how the conscious microsubjects of experience, with their microexperiences, come together to form a conscious macrosystem with its own macroexperience. For William James [47], for example, even if we group conscious experiences together, each will remain enclosed, ignorant of the other experiences.

Finally, I comment on dual-aspect monism, which historically was the first monistic response to Cartesian dualism [48]. Its different variants consider the mental and the physical as two aspects of an underlying reality. They usually combine an epistemic dualism with an ontic monism as an alternative to conventional physicalism [49]. But if there is a neutral underlying reality that we can understand as mental or physical, depending on the point of view from which we observe it, dual-aspect theory reduces to neutral monism. If the dual-aspect theory insists that the two aspects are fundamental and irreducible to each other, we would fall into panpsychism. And if not, it would be closely associated with emergentism [49,50]. Let these last reasonings serve to show how, once we accept the concepts of the physical and the mental as presented to us by tradition, the combinations to solve the mind–body problem seem limited and, in some way, a dead end is reached.

1.5. Dualities Proposed in the Different Solutions

All the proposed solutions, although not properly dualistic, propose to characterize the differences between the physical and the mental in different ways. Dualism of substances proposes an opposition between two different substances, while dualism of properties defends an opposition between two different types of properties. In idealism, we find the opposition between ideas and a construct based on the mental contents of individual observers. In neutral monism, the opposition is between different directions of investigation. In identity theories, ordinary processes of observation and scientific procedures are contrasted. In anomalous monism, we have events of different types or classes. In eliminativism, we have neurophysiological events versus falsely attributed attitudinal propositions. For antiphysicalists (and physicalists), the (non)opposition is between the physical and subjective experience. For (strong) emergentists, the opposition is between microscopic properties and emergent properties. For functionalists, the contrast is between the neurophysiological substrate and the causal role played by that substrate. For the pansychists, there would be a contrast between the relational structure of matter and its intrinsic nature. And finally, for dual aspect monists, there is opposition between aspects.

We can see that in all the proposed solutions, what is physical is physical regardless of the subject that enunciates it, and a thought of Shakespeare is a thought of Shakespeare regardless of who refers to it.

2. Destraktion of the Mind–Body Problem

If the reader were to reread the Cartesian text of *Discourse on Method* [3] cited in Section 1.1, she/he could see that Descartes mentions “I” fourteen times. In addition, he mentions other pronouns and possessive adjectives of the first person such as “we”, “my”, “our”, and “us” 7 other times, making a total of 21 mentions. And this is even surpassed in a text by the same author in *Meditations on First Philosophy* where the first person is mentioned 26 times:

“But what shall I now say that I am, when I am supposing that there is some supremely powerful and, if it is permissible to say so, malicious deceiver, who is deliberately trying to trick me in every way he can? Can I now assert that I possess even the most insignificant of all the attributes which I have just said belong to the nature of a body? I scrutinize them, think about them, go over them again, but nothing suggests itself; it is tiresome and pointless to go through the list once more. But what about the attributes I assigned to the soul? Nutrition or movement? Since now I do not have a body, these are mere fabrications. Sense-perception? This surely does not occur without a body, and besides, when asleep I have appeared to perceive through the senses many things which I afterwards realized I did not perceive through the senses at all. Thinking? At last I have discovered it—thought; this alone is inseparable from me. I am, I exist—that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking. For it could be that were I totally to cease from thinking, I should totally cease to exist. At present I am

not admitting anything except what is necessarily true. I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks; that is, I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason—words whose meaning I have been ignorant of until now. But for all that I am a thing which is real and which truly exists. But what kind of a thing? As I have just said—a thinking thing.” [4]

These mentions are mainly due to the fact that the subject being addressed is what I am and what I am not. Ignoring this fact, it is usually emphasized that texts such as those cited above express Descartes’ search for a solid truth on which to base his philosophical system and that they establish a distinction between two types of substances: mental and physical [51]. The physical substance or *res extensa* would be composed of the bodies, animate or not, that occupy extension in space, while the mental substance or *res cogitans* can be identified with the soul, the mind, or the consciousness of thinking subjects.

But the key in the process of *destruktion* that I propose is in statements such as “I am a thinking thing” or “I am a mind” [4]. In them, one is identifying *what I am* with *what is mental*. In identifications of this kind, the meaning of one of the terms is usually clarified by the fact that the other is sharper, less ambiguous, and/or less conceptually problematic. In “I think therefore I am”, Descartes [3] seems to take for granted that we all have a relation of familiarity with our consciousness and that we, therefore, know well what thought is. Thus, Descartes assumes thought—in a rational, restricted sense but which the subsequent historical evolution of the mind–body problem has extended to all mind and even to all phenomenal consciousness—as something known, self-evident, that we directly know what it is. In contrast, Descartes directs his inquiry to whether I am and what I am. That is what is in doubt, because before Descartes sees it clearly, it does not seem evident, when everything is methodically doubted, that I exist, and, if so, that I am a soul, a mind, or a body. And these doubts are dispelled by identifying the investigated *I* with the solid—clear, distinct, immediate, and acquainted—*thought*.

However, distracted, both by the search—in a skeptical context—for something solid and certain and by the discovery that “I am” and of what I really am, the origin of the meaning of the mental remains hidden and will remain hidden in the tradition: that *the mental is me*. That is to say, I propose that, in the Cartesian identification between mind and I, there is not a characterization of the *I as the mental*—more or less debatable according to one’s opinion—but a covert definition of *the mental as what I am*. I, therefore, use the expression *what I am* for what is currently known as phenomenal consciousness or subjective experience or, for the sake of clarity, the object of the hard problem [7] in clear allusion to the foundational moment in which Descartes concealedly defines the mental: “*novi me existere, quaero quis sim ego ille quem novi*” [4].

I argue that the consequence of this concealment, for the history of the mind–body problem, is that the mental and the physical remain irreducibly opposed in spite of all the efforts of physicalism. And this happens because the physical, in an even more surreptitious and hidden way than in the covert definition of the mental, is defined in opposition to what I am: what I am not. The physical is what I perceive through the senses, the reality of which is uncertain in contrast to the certainty I have regarding the reality of what I am. Thus, the certainty with respect to the mental comes from the fact that I am it, while the uncertainty of the physical, what I perceive through the senses, comes precisely from not being it. Behind the opacity of the Cartesian operation, there is an incommensurable and irreducible opposition between what I am and what I am not. Its origin concealed, the mental–physical opposition will produce perplexity and fascination for centuries. However, the opposition between what I am and what I am not, when reflected upon serenely, is inevitable and natural in each of us as parts of a greater whole. This is so, naturally, without posing any physical or metaphysical problem, except when it is disguised behind the categories inherited from the tradition of the mental and the physical.

3. The Proposed New Framework

I argue, therefore, that the apparent duality is a consequence of being a concrete cognitive system that is a part of a larger whole. And this seems inevitable. One would say that what is difficult is to conceive of a universe in which a concrete cognitive being can avoid splitting the universe between “what I am” and “what I am not”.

It is worth clarifying that the expressions “what I am” and “what I am not” are not a simple change of name with respect to the expressions “the mental” and “the physical” but rather a whole change of philosophical framework with respect to the tradition of the mind–body problem. In fact, the expressions “what I am” and “what I am not” concisely indicate a number of ideas that may go unnoticed. For this reason, it is convenient to break down this information into three successive points that can be called (a) *complementarity*, (b) *relativity*, and (c) *being*. These points are structured from the more general “complementarity” to the more specific “being”. That is, relativity is only understood within the framework of complementarity, and being is only understood within the framework of relativity. In turn, relativity clarifies what complementarity expresses, and being specifies what the idea of relativity expresses. And the circle closes because, once relativity is specified by being, complementarity acquires a deeper meaning.

By *complementarity*, I want to reverse the tendency within the tradition to focus the problem primarily on consciousness: The expression “hard problem of consciousness” [7] is increasingly used as assuming that the physical is less mysterious and problematic than consciousness. In contrast, in the framework I advocate here, the problem of the mental is inseparable from the physical, and the solution must lie in a joint approach to both concepts. Complementarity, therefore, means that, at least in the context of the mind–body problem or hard problem of consciousness, the mental and the physical—what I am and what I am not—constitute complementary concepts that are inseparably linked. “What I am” implicitly refers to not being “what I am not”. And vice versa: “What I am not” implicitly refers to not being “what I am”. Therefore, they would not be two independent concepts but exactly the negation of each other.

Relativity means that, unlike the traditional concepts “mental” and “physical”, the concepts “what I am” and “what I am not” are relative to the subject that enunciates them. It makes no sense to speak of “what I am” and “what I am not” without first specifying the subject that enunciates them. In tradition, what is physical is physical irrespective of the subject that enunciates it, and a thought of Shakespeare is a thought of Shakespeare irrespective of who refers to it.

Finally, the idea of *being* is that the original duality from which the traditional mental–physical duality derives, besides being relative, is intimately related to the natural duality between what I am and what I am not. Thus, the contrast between the mental and the physical is a consequence of the contrast between what I am and what I am not. Therefore, this duality arises naturally when one *is* a concrete subject.

These “what I am” and “what I am not” correspond respectively to what, in tradition, are called the mental and the physical, but in tradition—in a way that has gone unnoticed—these concepts have been extrapolated into collective and absolute concepts in which the relativity has been forgotten. This has produced a problem that is not hard but impossible to solve. An analogy that serves to understand the consequences of forgetting the relativity of duality is that of left and right. For each concrete subject there is a left and a right. But it makes no sense to speak of an absolute left and right. What is left for you is right for me if I am in front of you. It is easy to imagine the hard problem that would arise if we were to insist that left and right are absolute and that the right is less mysterious than the left. We would ask questions such as “how to reduce the left to the right” in order to avoid that annoying duality in a preferably unitary universe. We would try to explain how the left emerges “from the right substratum”. We would have the problem of the other “lefts”. And we would postulate the left as proof that there are phenomena in nature that cannot be explained in terms of “rights”. All because of forgetting the intrinsic relativity of the concepts of left and right.

Critically of the proposal presented here, it can be argued that the great question of the mind–body problem—what is the relation between the mental and the physical?—now rephrased as the question “what is the relation between what I am and what I am not?” remains unaddressed. But the three characteristics that are implicit in what I am and what I am not—complementarity, relativity, and being—define a new proposal and make the difference with what would be a simple change of terminology with respect to tradition. The traditional duality between the physical and the mental is now reduced to a duality between what I am and what I am not, less problematic than the previous one as it is associated with being a concrete cognitive system that is a part of a greater whole. *Complementarity*, *relativity*, and *being* explain why there is *duality* without resorting to a traditional dualism and without falling into the errors of traditional monisms that fail to notice that there is a duality relative to being a subject. The difficulties in reducing duality to a unity are explained by the fact that I cannot dilute the duality between what I am and what I am not. But, on the other hand, it is a duality that only exists for me, from my perspective, because I cannot stop being, stop being a subject. Therefore, it is meaningless to speak of different substances or to attribute it to two different kinds of properties.

3.1. What I Do Not Propose and What I Do Propose

It should be noted that this article does not attempt to present a scientific theory of consciousness alternative to, for example, the theory of Integrated Information [52] or the theory of Global Workspace [53]. Nor does it attempt to elucidate the nature of the physical world. My intention here is to reflect on the traditional use of the words *consciousness*, *mental*, and *physical* in the context of the mind–body problem. Specifically, I propose that tradition has bequeathed to us a use of these concepts that makes it impossible to solve the problem. For example, to reduce the mental to the physical would be, in reality, to try to reduce what I am to what I am not. In fact, making the origin of these concepts transparent leads to a new vision of the problem. Thus, it is convenient to characterize this break with tradition as a new framework in order to avoid the otherwise inevitable inertia of thinking in terms of the mental and the physical as tradition has presented them to us.

There seems to be no reason in principle why new scientific theories of consciousness could not appear within this new framework or even why existing theories could not be adapted to it. What is discarded is the frequent attempt—uncritical of traditional concepts—to explain how consciousness “arises” from the “physical” substrate. Nor does it make sense anymore to postulate consciousness as proof that there are phenomena in nature that cannot be explained in “physical” terms.

The hidden definition of the mental as “what I am” has to be understood from a dual perspective. That is to say, it is not only the definition of the mental that has remained hidden after several centuries but also the essence of the criterion for distinguishing between the mental and the physical. It must be borne in mind that Descartes’ great achievement is in reducing all reality (except God himself) to only two substances. And, therefore, what is not mental is physical and vice versa. “Covert definition” here means that the key to distinguishing the mental from the physical is the distinction between what I am and what I am not.

It is worth clarifying that I am not arguing that Descartes defines the mental as what I am. Descartes is not aware that his duality is about “what I am” and “what I am not”. He also believed that the duality was between thought and extension. At the same time that he identifies “what I am” and “what is mental”, he separates them; he does not fuse or confuse them; they are not coextensive for him. Thus, the definition of the mental as “what I am” is concealed even from Descartes himself. The expression “hidden definition” does not mean that Descartes has been misunderstood but that his error is shared.

It can be argued that Descartes’ characterization of the mental and the physical is more elaborate than the simple “what I am” and “what I am not”. However, I search for the essence of the distinction between the mental and the physical. That is to say, it is a search for the minimum criterion to establish whether something is mental or physical. In

short, it is the search for the origin of duality. And I do this by using the criteria used by Descartes—which we all unconsciously apply when we distinguish the physical from the mental. He seeks answers to the questions “what kind of thing am I?”.

An analogy with the planet Venus may serve to clarify this point. Let us imagine the time when early astronomers wondered about the origin of the duality between the morning and evening stars. We can enrich the definitions with characteristics of the evening star and the morning star by specifying that in one, the horns point to one side and in the other, they point to the other, that the phase of one waxes and the other wanes, that one is seen in the morning and the other in the evening. But all this is distracting and does not help to understand the reason for the apparent duality of a single celestial object. The essence of the duality is that Venus can be found either east or west of the Sun as seen from Earth. That is the solution to the problem of star duality. The same is true of the characteristics “thought” and “extension” and when the essential point is the contrast between what I am and what I am not.

3.2. Specific Subject and Being

Reference to the concrete subject appears habitually in philosophy of mind and more intensely since Nagel associated consciousness with the first-person point of view [10]. For example, there are a whole series of philosophers [54–56] who defend a physicalism in which phenomenal concepts are related to indexical concepts such as *I* and *now*. According to them, just as there is a leap between objective and indexical concepts—for example, objective knowledge of the world does not imply knowing what time it is now or where I am—there is an epistemic gap between the physical and the phenomenal. Thus, phenomenal concepts refer to states of the brain but are presented in an indexical way [57].

However, what I propose here is that it is duality itself that is associated with the concrete subject. Thus, not only phenomenal or mental concepts but consciousness itself or the mental is defined in relation to the concrete subject. And furthermore, the physical is also defined in relation to the concrete subject. The physical is characterized by our sensory and perceptual interactions with our concrete body and environment. The latter may not seem to be entirely novel since there is a whole series of *4E cognition* scientific approaches to consciousness from Varela and colleagues [58] that emphasize that the physical is characterized as an integral component of the enactive cognitive system. In this school of thought—whose origins can be traced back to Merleau-Ponty [59]—the body is not seen as a separate entity but as an extension of the mind, and the mind is thought to arise from this bodily engagement with the environment in a continuous and reciprocal interaction between an organism’s sensory perception and its motor actions. However, in this approach, the emphasis is more on overcoming duality through integration than on clarifying its conceptual origin.

I argue that it is duality as such that is inevitably associated with each particular subject. And this is the consequence of emphasizing an approach to the problem that seeks to explain the apparent differences between the mental and the physical while, in other approaches, it is usual to consider the physical as something less mysterious and problematic than consciousness, focusing the perplexity on the latter. This slippage from the mind–body problem to the problem of consciousness would contribute to making the solution unattainable.

As previously discussed, that the mental itself is defined on the basis of a particular subject is not really novel. But Nagel’s way of characterizing consciousness is that an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it *is like to be* that organism [10]. My proposal goes further and characterizes consciousness as what I am. I argue that this step from *like to be* to *being* is the key and allows us to not stop halfway through the proper reframing of the problem, because avoiding the question of *being* far from dissolving the problem makes the duality once again problematic. That is to say, I propose that instead of considering a first-person perspective—which is opposed to a third-person perspective—we consider a first-person being. Recall that there are proposals

such as (a) neutral monism, (b) dual-aspect monism, (c) physicalism that characterizes phenomenal concepts as indexical, and, in general, (d) all phenomenal concept strategies, among which the indexical one is [57], in which the apparent duality is characterized in epistemic terms, i.e., that the ways of accessing the mental and the physical are different. In contrast, in my proposal, one does not *access* the mental or consciousness but *is* the mental or consciousness.

Panpsychism accepts the traditional concepts of the mental and the physical and simply overlapping them. For the reader who may think that there is a closeness between what is proposed here and panpsychism, it is convenient to warn that what is fundamentally intended here is to correct a mistake committed by conscious beings who erroneously conceptualize the mental and the physical. It can be said that a prescription is administered here to wake up from a dogmatic slumber, to stop believing that there is a mind–body problem. But it does not seem necessary to administer that prescription to stones, electrons, or galaxies.

It may be that Nagel and all other authors prefer to avoid referring to being. In general, in science and analytic philosophy, references to being are avoided. Using Heideggerian language, one could say that this forgetfulness of being—specifically forgetfulness of first-person being—causes us to turn consciousness into an entity, and this makes the mind–body problem unsolvable. Thus, the problem is described as the difficulty in explaining that a physical substrate generates consciousness [7], placing the subject itself in its perplexity at an equidistance with respect to the physical entity and the consciousness entity. In fact, we usually say that we *have* consciousness, as a property or attribute, instead of saying that we *are* consciousness. The use of the expression *being* associated with consciousness seems restricted to humanistic psychology contexts [60–62]. However, there is the paradox that, when it comes to selling works related to scientific research on consciousness to the general public, it is easy to find expressions like “being you” [63], “the feeling of life itself” [64], “being a conscious, sentient being” [65] on the front and/or back covers. But when we look inside the book, we find no reference to being.

3.3. From the Individual Physical to the Shared Concept

Immersed in tradition, we all accept and assume a collective and absolute concept of the physical. A pending question is to comment on the process in which, starting from an individual experience of the physical, it ends up being conceptualized in a collective and objective way. How do we uncritically accept that the physical is a collective concept and forget that it comes from an individual experience? How can we forget that the definition of the physical starts from what I am not? The explanation within the proposed new framework is as follows: To the same extent that we forget the first-person being, we forget that the physical originates from what I am not. Forgetting what I am leads to forgetting what I am not.

My individual experience of the physical is a “what I am not” and each “what I am not” is the complement of a “what I am”. And the union of the complements of “what I am”—the union of the “what I am not”—of a collective of n individuals, constitutes the collective physical. It offers an appearance of completeness because nothing seems to be left out. In fact, if we forget the distinction between what I am and what I am not—as is usually done—the union of the individual physicalities of just two subjects is sufficient for an apparently complete description, since whatever I may leave out of my individual conception of the physical—a what I am that the other is not—is apparently covered by the individual physical of the other. That is, it does not seem important that I leave “what I am” out of the physical because the other’s concept of the physical seems to cover what I have left out. Additionally, what I am is a tiny part of the universe compared to what I am not. How important could it be to exclude what I am from a complete description of the universe? Most people would not care because, to them, I am a “what I am not”. And, as if that were not enough, the usual state of most people is one of total oblivion of the first-person being: so I probably would not notice the mistake either.

But this mistake has serious consequences because a whole without first-person being is constituted, in which any “what I am” is excluded. This is true for two individuals as well as for n individuals. Thus, we obtain a union of the complements of first-person being that can be called *everything-without-being*. It is true that the whole process of constituting the collective concept of the physical is not so simple. It is a complex process that includes a construct based on the “what I am not” of individual observers, but they are also part of the process the mathematization and conceptualization provided by physics in the form of theories, laws, principles, and physical–mathematical models with their search for concrete patterns and propensities of nature. However, the operation that excludes consciousness is prior to physics.

It is not a question here of discussing whether there is an objective reality independent of the observer, that is, whether the referent of the traditional concept of the physical exists. What I am asserting is that the collective concept of the physical is unconsciously constructed from an individual concept in which each observer excludes the mental.

3.4. *Zombie Universe and Physics*

Thus, when it is proposed to imagine a parallel universe that is physically equivalent to our own, but in which our twins have no conscious subjective experience [14], it is not difficult to conceive. In fact, it is the universe that derives from the traditional conception of the physical. That zombie universe precisely is that union of the “what I am not”, the *everything-without-being*. It is not only conceivable but it is precisely the universe that physics is showing us insofar as it inherits the tradition of the concept of the physical. Precisely the extent to which we can conceive it is a measure of the limitations of our knowledge of what we are not, showing the long way still to go for physics.

Physics could be the highest creation of the human spirit, even greater than arts, philosophy, mathematics, technology, or religions. But this does not prevent us from foreseeing a long way to go in the future for a science that has focused on what I am not, marginalizing what I am.

In fact, this divorce—to which the traditional conception of the physical induces us—between the real universe and the one shown to us by physics is untenable. And as a consequence, physics itself reacts by opening windows to the inevitable presence of the concrete subject. The theory of relativity and quantum theory can be interpreted as examples of this.

3.5. *The Dialectic of Points of View*

As discussed above, it is usual for the mind–body problem to be expressed in terms of the opposition between the first-person and the third-person points of view [10]. But since the problem is always posed from the first person—whether Descartes, Nagel, Chalmers, or the reader—there is no other relevant point of view here. The tradition of the first–third-person dialectic induces us to take it for granted that there are two possible points of view for the same phenomenon, when in fact each of us always has the same point of view throughout our lives.

That is to say, for an observed entity or phenomenon or object, we cannot change our point of view at will—first and third person—but we have only one pertinent point of view, that of the subject who poses the mind–body problem, who can observe, yes, multiple objects. Thus, while it is correct to keep the subject fixed—in practice we cannot stop being who we are—and vary the observed object, on the contrary, it is impossible in practice to leave the object fixed and vary the point of view or subject. This is precisely how we originate the false problem. Therefore, instead of defining the scientific core of the mind–body problem in terms of a translation between a first-person perspective and a third-person perspective, it is better to express it as a translation between the observations of two different subjects.

In reality, there is no mind–body problem. At the individual level, there is no overlapping duality; what I am and what I am not are differentiated for each concrete subject.

But when Descartes and the whole later tradition occultly extend these individual–relative concepts to collective–absolute concepts—the mental and the physical as they have come down to us—the problem arises that what is mental for a given subject A would be physical for another subject B and vice versa. Thus, an overlapping of collective concepts and the consequent mind–body problem arise as a consequence of wanting to extrapolate concepts that are originally individual and relative to the collective and absolute level.

That is to say, if we continue to think in absolute terms, there is a mind–body problem. There are bodies and there are minds from the privileged point of view of the absolute. But that privileged absolute point of view disappears in my proposal. In the new philosophical framework that I propose, a concrete subject must be chosen before speaking. From a concrete subject, it is no longer possible to speak of minds and bodies but of “what I am” and “what I am not”.

Proving that the mind–body problem does not exist is somewhat akin to trying to prove that the Pegasus does not exist. While we cannot prove definitively that it does not exist, we can show that the horse exists, that the bird exists, and that the Pegasus is a combination of the two created by our imagination. In the same way, we can show that there are individual points of view, relative to a particular subject, and that the mind–body problem arises from the juxtaposition we make of several individual points of view. For the specimens of each biological species, it seems reasonable to establish whether they have wings or not. For each of the concrete subjects, it seems reasonable to establish “what I am” and “what I am not”. But it is the traditional and unjustified absolute point of view, which amalgamates various relative points of view, that creates the myth of the mind–body problem.

3.6. *The Minds of Others*

Expressions such as “other beings with minds” are common in the tradition, where the usual concept of “mind” is accepted. In the tradition, “minds” are accepted as “entities” that some beings have, such as people, etc. In the proposal I present here, mind is replaced by a “first-person being”, something one is, not something one has. Thus, to defend or attack the idea that other beings have minds is to remain within the philosophical framework of the tradition. In the new framework, every conscious being can affirm from its first-person self “that which you call the mental or consciousness is simply what I am”. In the tradition, one can speak of the minds of others, but in the framework proposed here, the “mind” of, for example, J.S. Bach, is replaced by being J.S. Bach. In the new framework, the “minds of other” are substituted for “being other”. Since it is impossible to be other—I will always be me—the only real possibility is to imagine being other.

The *problem of other minds* is another brick wall that traditional solutions to the mind–body problem hit against. There is a problem with other minds because everyone can doubt the existence of the minds of others. One argument in favor of the existence of other minds is that of analogy: since others are similar to me in the appearance they present, they must possess minds. However, it can be retorted that there is no way of proving this and that it is an induction from a single case—that of the subject himself [66]. Another argument in favor is that of the best explanation. This is a common type of reasoning in science: it is that the most rational thing is to believe the hypothesis that provides the best available explanation. This argument, applied to accepting the existence of other minds, can avoid the objections raised by the analogy argument [67].

But despite these arguments in favor of existence, absolute certainty does not seem possible. Within the tradition, one can come to think that others neither think nor feel. This leads to *solipsism*: the school of thought according to which I am alone in the universe.

In any case, from an early age, human beings develop the ability to attribute thoughts and sensations to other human beings. This is what is known as *theory of mind* [68]. However, traditional solutions to the mind–body problem, such as *eliminativism*, admit our ability to attribute minds to others by means of a theory of mind but, at the same time, cast doubt on the actual existence of such minds.

In the proposal presented here, there is a natural explanation for the difficulties in establishing the mind of the other: the mental is, in reality, what I am, and the difficulties in establishing the existence of the mind of the other are a natural consequence of the fact that I am not the other. Since the other belongs to “what I am not”, its “physical” nature is that which is shown to me *prima facie* in the same way that that of a table and that of all that I am not is revealed to me. Finally, since I cannot be the other, the only option left to me is to imagine myself to be the other. Thus, a subset of the *qualia* that make up what I am are those that I imagine make up the being of the other, for example, their desires and beliefs, in the traditionally termed theory of mind.

4. Discussion

4.1. Summary

Within the collection of problems related to consciousness, I distinguish two cores: the scientific and the philosophical. The philosophical core of the problem revolves around the nature of the mental and the physical. The scientific core of the problem focuses on the translation between what two different subjects observe. I attempt to confront the philosophical core of the problem and I argue that, without claiming to solve the scientific problem, the philosophical problem can be made transparent. A conceptual framework that avoids difficulties in addition to those inherent in the scientific path can be created. The aim is to show that there are philosophical questions that are badly posed and also to show how a false problem is generated. Moreover, I emphasize that the perplexity produced by the philosophical problem comes from the supposed qualitative leap or rupture between the characteristics of the physical and the mental.

Let us imagine that the core of the philosophical problem is solved, but the scientific one is not. It would be almost inevitable that objections to the solution of the philosophical problem would focus on the unanswered questions. And many of those unanswered questions would be directed towards the scientific problem. But this should not obscure the fact that the core of the philosophical problem has been solved. To avoid this, the boundary between the philosophical and the scientific problem was clarified.

It should be stressed that my proposal argues that we had mistakenly conceptualized the very elements with which we were constructing the problem. In this journey to the origin and true meaning of the concepts, we discover that some concepts we had assumed are not valid and that we have to start from scratch. Having clarified the core of the philosophical problem (that the true nature of the mental and the physical is what I am and what I am not) to go on to ask about the relation between mind and body in the proposed new framework is to ask about the relation between what I am and what I am not. The problem is that “what I am not” I can only know through the mediation of the senses. And for that which is not immediate, we depend on science. We, therefore, move on to the scientific problem. We will have answers when science clarifies that which we are not. But the core of the philosophical problem would have ended with the clarification of how we have been unconsciously using the terms “physical” and “mental”.

It seems clear that the resolution of the scientific problem is a long way off. Much remains to be scientifically understood about the brain and better scientific theories of consciousness need to be developed. Progress is being made, but we do not understand many of the details of what goes on in the brain. In the new framework, what remains unanswered is a scientific problem that consists in making a comprehensible translation between what two different subjects observe: what for one is a consciousness (what I am) for the other is a brain (what I am not). But this comprehensible translation requires two phases: first, learning to translate and, second, that the translation is comprehensible, that is, that it does not seem arbitrary to us and that the correspondences established between what A observes as certain configurations of B’s brain activity and certain subjective experiences of B make sense. But until we know the brain well enough, we cannot get to that point. We are limited by our current neuroimaging techniques that have low spatial resolution in some cases or low temporal resolution in others. A translation is, therefore, impossible,

let alone a comprehensible translation, when we cannot read one of the two languages to be translated well. We see “paragraphs” as fuzzy blobs (voxels) without discerning the “words” and “letters” that make them up.

My proposal is that the nature of the relation between the mental and the physical is the nature of the relation between what I am and what I perceive by the senses. I have used the expression “what I am not” for what I perceive by the senses in order to underline the complementary, relative, and being-associated nature of that relation. My proposal tries to solve the philosophical core of the problem. To understand the contrast between the mental and the physical is to understand the contrast between what I am and what I am not. Admittedly, philosophy will never stop asking questions on the subject, but the main outstanding question, the core of the philosophical problem, would be solved. The key is to realize that I as a subject cannot avoid separating the universe into what I am and what I am not. “What I am not” I know precariously, and this brings me to a scientific problem that is currently far from being solved.

My proposal underlines the fact that we always pose the problem from an individual point of view and that we are actually defining concepts that refer to the concrete subject that defines them: relativity. One must keep in mind that the starting point is the perplexity produced by the differences between the physical and the mental. When one realizes that these differences are, in fact, due to the difference between—on a personal level, for me specifically—what I am and what I am not, the difference no longer produces the perplexity it has produced.

It must be emphasized that, in the proposed new philosophical framework, there are statements that are opposed to tradition. That which we used to call “physical” and which we thought was independent of the concrete subject that designated it is, in fact, something relative to the subject itself: what I am not. The idea that there is a “not being it” component to the physical is radically novel. The concept of the physical, especially for the physicalists, had an all-encompassing aspiration. But here, it is proposed that there has been a “blind spot” in the physical for the last four centuries: The traditional concept of the physical excludes the mental. And whatever discoveries we make about the brain in the future will have a “non-being it” component, and this will be a limit to the comprehensibility of the translation we make between two observers.

Finally, it is worth remembering that we inevitably continue to think in traditional terms, for example, when we say that the mind depends on the body or that the body depends on the mind. In the tradition, there are two things in absolute terms, the mental and the physical, and, therefore, the inertia of that tradition produces a yearning to explain how one arises or depends on the other. The mind–body problem in its usual approach is presupposing absoluteness with respect to the physical and the mental. In the new proposal, there is only one reality that we call consciousness if I am it and physical if I am not it. We can no longer expect a relation between two different things but only a translation (which in traditional terms was called “psycho-physical laws”) between the observations of two different subjects.

4.2. *Outlined Arguments*

I have argued here that when we refer to the mental, we are actually referring to “what I am” without realizing it and also that when we refer to the physical, we are actually referring to “what I am not” without realizing it. It is to be expected that arguments for and against these ideas will be developed in the future. But some possible arguments have already been noted in this paper. Some of them are listed below, together with other suggested arguments to be developed:

1. Duality is characterized in a simpler way than in other proposed solutions to the mind–body problem. It is an argument from parsimony, Occam’s razor. “What I am” and “what I am not” seem more parsimonious than generating different substances, different kinds of properties, ideas vs. a construct based on the mental contents of individual observers, different directions of investigation, ordinary processes of

- observation vs. scientific procedures, different types or kinds, neurophysiological events vs. falsely attributed attitudinal propositions, microscopic vs. emergent properties, neurophysiological substrate vs. the causal role played by that substrate, the relational structure of matter and its intrinsic nature, etc. (see Section 1.5);
2. It points to a simple solution to the problem of reductionism because I cannot reduce what I am to what I am not, nor vice versa. This solution is simpler than those proposed, for example, by traditional substance dualisms—in all their interactionist, epiphenomenalist, or parallelist versions—which are absolute and require a duplicity of substances. In the relative dualism, I propose, the duality is only relative to a concrete subject A, because it is the duality for A between “what I am” and “what I am not”. But for other subjects B, C, etc., there is no substantial difference between what A is and what A is not;
 3. It points to a simple solution to Levine’s explanatory gap problem [11] because, for each of us, there is a gap between “what I am” and “what I am not”;
 4. It suggests an explanation of why we have not been able to solve the mind–body problem after four centuries in a more parsimonious way than that proposed by McGinn [12];
 5. It points to an explanation of why Chalmers’ zombie universe [14] is conceivable (see Sections 3.3 and 3.4);
 6. It suggests an explanation of why there is a succession of ideas close to “what I am” in the last decades of traditional philosophy of mind: “what is like to be”, “first person perspective” [10], “acquaintance” [69], or “indexicality” [54–56];
 7. It points to a simple solution to the problem of other minds (see Section 3.6);
 8. An argument can be developed about the inconceivability of a universe in which a particular cognitive being can avoid dividing the universe into “what I am” and “what I am not” (see Section 3).

4.3. Future Directions

If a new framework is really to emerge from here, it is understandable that everything remains to be done. In particular, it is necessary to answer questions such as whether it is valid to reason from a particular subject—as I am asking here—and to draw general conclusions. Do we need an impersonal point of view for complete reasoning? We must also delve into the inconsistencies that arise when we start from a particular point of view and then abandon it. Is the error in focusing on subjectivity and then wanting to objectify it? In how to characterize this error? In how to conceptualize the point of view when we can actually never change it?

Is the way in which the mental and the physical have been characterized here sufficient in explaining the differences usually observed and described in Section 1.3? Why are *what I am* and *what I am not* so radically different? Is what I am a kind of transcendental self or essential indexical, or am I, for me, an essential singularity?

Is the body a part of what I am? It is only after distinguishing thinking from extension, and restricting the “I” to the thinking thing, that the “what I am/what I am not” division can coincide with Descartes’ distinction. Is there any overlap between what I am and what I am not, or are they mutually exclusive? How exactly does a particular cognitive system split the universe into two parts? How does one define more precisely the boundary between what I am and what I am not? From within my consciousness—and there I have lived and will always live—it is impossible to reach a boundary and get out of it. Despite everything I have argued for in this article, would it be licit to adopt the objective point of view to express the limits and then throw away the ladder?

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