

## **Persons and their Properties**

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### **Abstract**

According to what I call "The Asymmetry Thesis", persons, though they are the direct bearers of the properties expressed by mental predicates, are not the direct bearers of properties such as those expressed by "weighs 135 pounds" or "has crossed legs". A number of different views of persons entail the Asymmetry Thesis. I first argue that the Asymmetry Thesis entails an error theory about our discourse involving person referring terms. I then argue that it is further threatened by consideration of the grounds we have for self-ascribing mental and physical predicates.

### **Introduction.**

Neo-Lockeans about personal identity typically do not give explicit definitions of personhood. Rather, they supply contextual definitions, definitions of the form "For any  $x$  and  $y$ ,  $x$  is the same person as  $y$  if and only if  $x$  bears psychological relation  $R$  to  $y$ ". So, in an important sense, neo-Lockeans do not say what persons are. But whatever entities persons turn out to be, if the neo-Lockean is correct, they must satisfy the neo-Lockean contextual definition.

Since the contextual definition given by neo-Lockean theorist invokes only psychological relations on the right hand side, and entities occupying different bodies

can nonetheless stand in the relevant psychological relations to one another, the neo-Lockean contextual definition is inconsistent with the thesis that persons are (non-contingently) their bodies.<sup>i</sup> The neo-Lockean contextual definition is nonetheless consistent with different positions on the relation between persons and their bodies. For example, with David Wiggins, one might hold that persons are constituted by their bodies. But one very natural view of the relation between persons and their bodies to which one might be led by neo-Lockean considerations is the view that persons are in some sense the occupants of their bodies; either the brains which inhabit those bodies, or primitive entities each of which bears an embodiment relation to a body.

Call a *mental property* a property which is expressed by a mental predicate, and call a *physical property* a property which is expressed by a physical predicate. According to this latter class of views, persons, though they are the direct bearers of mental properties, are not the direct bearers of their (non-brainy) physical properties.<sup>ii</sup> Rather, they only derivatively have the physical properties they do, in virtue of standing in some relation to a body which has these properties. In other words, advocates of views in this latter class accept what I shall henceforth call the Asymmetry Thesis:

The Asymmetry Thesis:

Persons are the *direct* bearers of their mental properties, and only *derivatively* have the physical properties they do.

I believe that the Asymmetry Thesis is a fairly widely accepted, though less often explicitly defended, thesis about persons. My purpose in this paper is to show that, on any natural construal of "directness", it is false. This threatens all views of persons which entail it.

I will argue that an advocate of the Asymmetry Thesis (AT), whom I will henceforth call an asymmetry theorist, faces the following two obstacles. First, we often utter true sentences which seem to ascribe physical properties directly to persons, such as "I weigh 135 pounds". An asymmetry theorist must explain how such sentences could be true. Secondly, it seems that the grounds we have for self-ascribing physical predicates are no less direct than the grounds we have for self-ascribing mental predicates. This suggests that there is not the sort of epistemological asymmetry between mental and physical predicates of the sort one would expect if AT were true. I will argue that neither of these obstacles is easy to surmount.

I begin by considering two strategies for explaining the truth of sentences which appear to ascribe physical properties directly to persons which would be amenable to the asymmetry theorist. In Section I, I argue against the first of these strategies, and in Section II, I argue against the second. Finally, in Section III, I argue that the prospects for forging an epistemological asymmetry between mental and physical predicates are dim.

## **Section I.**

AT, construed semantically, is a thesis about all expressions which purportedly refer to persons. Since bodies are the direct bearers of physical properties, according to the thesis, such expressions do not, or do not in their central uses, refer to bodies. For the purposes of this paper, however, I will confine my discussion to the term 'I'. The first linguistic thesis about sentences containing the term 'I' which is attractive for the asymmetry theorist is that 'I' is ambiguous. For instance, it is sometimes argued that, in

sentences such as "I am out of gas", 'I' is shorthand for 'my car'. Analogously, in sentences such as "I weigh 135 pounds", 'I' is taken to be shorthand for 'my body'. In sentences such as "I am thinking about penguins", on the other hand, 'I' refers to a person, something which is not directly the bearer of physical properties such as that expressed by "weighs 135 pounds". This section is devoted to a discussion of this proposal.

According to the view that 'I' is ambiguous, in physical self-ascriptions, such as:

(1) I weigh 135 pounds.

'I' it is shorthand for 'my body'. In mental self-ascriptions, such as:

(2) I see a canary.

it refers to a person, which is not a body. I henceforth refer to this view as "the ambiguity thesis".

There is also another thesis about 'I' which is related to the ambiguity thesis, one which it is standard to attribute to Ludwig Wittgenstein. This is the thesis that 'I' does not refer in mental self-ascriptions.<sup>iii</sup> This thesis, as Strawson has argued, is related to the ambiguity thesis, because "...if we try to think of that to which one's states of consciousness are ascribed as something utterly different from that to which certain corporeal characteristics are ascribed, then indeed it becomes difficult to see why states of consciousness should be ascribed to, thought of as belonging to, anything at all."<sup>iv</sup> My arguments in this section work equally well against this thesis.

It is worth noting that, in any case, the two theses are not as distinct as might at first glance appear, as the Wittgensteinian thesis might collapse into the other ambiguity thesis for the following reason. A proponent of the Wittgensteinian view must maintain

that, in physical self-ascriptions, 'I' is replaceable by 'this body'. But surely the only plausible account of why a body counts as *this* body in a physical self-ascription I make is that it is *mine*.

One powerful motivation for the ambiguity thesis comes from examples such as:

(3) I am out of gas.

On first glance, it might appear that the best analysis of the use of 'I' in such sentences is as elliptical for an expression such as 'my car'. By analogy, it may be held, the use of 'I' in (1)

is elliptical for 'my body'. But this argument fails. The premise of the argument, that uses of 'I' such as that found in (3) are elliptical for expressions such as 'my car', is false. For consider the following two sentences:

(4) \*/? Both Bill's car and I are out of gas.

(5) Both Bill's car and my car are out of gas.

(4) is very odd. Yet (5) is completely well-formed. But, if the sort of occurrence of 'I' as found in (3) were elliptical for 'my car', then (4) and (5) would be on a par. Since they clearly are not, it is false that the occurrence of 'I' in (3) is elliptical for 'my car'. Similarly, to modify an example from Nunberg (1993, p. 39), (6) is acceptable, but (7) is clearly not:

(6) My car, which is a phantom grey Honda Civic, is out of gas.

(7) \* I, which is a phantom grey Honda Civic, am out of gas.

Again, if the sort of occurrence of 'I' as found in (3) were elliptical for 'my car', then (6) and (7) would be on a par.

It is worth noting that the ambiguity posited by the ambiguity view is nothing like that

between the two meanings of 'bank' in English. 'Bank' is ambiguous between 'riverbank' and 'financial institution'. Now, consider the following sort of context, where two verb phrases have been conjoined:

(8) The bank was open for business and filled with swimmers.

(8) can mean either that the financial institution was open for business and filled with swimmers, or it can mean that the riverbank was open for business and filled with swimmers. It cannot mean that the financial institution was open for business, and the river bank was filled with swimmers.

If the ambiguity posited between the two meanings of 'I' were anything like the ambiguity posited between the two meanings of 'bank', then the following sort of sentence should be unacceptable:

(9) I am thinking about Descartes and being pushed on a swing.

(9) should be unacceptable, under this supposition, because the predications would require 'I' to be taken in two different senses, which, as (8) demonstrates, is disallowed in such contexts. But (9), and sentences like it, are perfectly acceptable. Therefore, the ambiguity posited by the ambiguity view cannot be like the ambiguity between the two meanings of 'bank'.<sup>v,vi</sup>

Another possibility is that, in sentences such as:

(1) I weigh 135 pounds.

the occurrence of 'I' has a shifted or a deferred reference. The phenomenon of shifted reference is exhibited by examples such as the following. Suppose a waiter rushes into a kitchen, and utters:

(10) The ham sandwich is flirting with me.

In this case, the descriptive phrase 'the ham sandwich' refers, on accounts which explain such reference shift semantically, not to a unique salient ham sandwich, but rather to the person who ordered the ham sandwich.<sup>vii</sup> Analogously, it may be held, the occurrence of 'I' in examples such as (1) is a case of shifted reference. Such uses of 'I' would then refer, not to the person who utters the sentence, but rather, via shifted or deferred reference, to her body.

However, this account is implausible in the light of the acceptability of sentences such as (9). For such constructions are not, in the main, acceptable where the subject has a shifted reference. Consider, for instance, an utterance of:

(11) \* The ham sandwich is flirting with me and has chips next to it.

Unlike (9), (11) is completely unacceptable in any context. But if the same mechanisms are at work in (9) as in (11), the difference in acceptability becomes a mystery. Appeal to shifted reference thus does not aid the ambiguity thesis.

Here is another argument against the ambiguity thesis, involving a different class of examples, what linguists call 'control structures'. Consider sentences such as:

(12) I want to be pushed by John.

According to the ambiguity thesis, the occurrence of 'I' in the subject position of 'wants' either refers to a mind, or is non-referring. But, since it is a body which is pushed by John, the understood subject of 'to be pushed by John' must be something different than the referent (if such there be) of the first occurrence of 'I'. Thus, the understood subject of 'to be pushed by John' must be unrelated to the first occurrence of 'I'.

One way to explicate this thesis is to argue that sentences such as (10) are shorthand for sentences such as (13):

(13) I want [I to be pushed by John].<sup>viii</sup>

If so, then the first occurrence of 'I' could have a different referent than the second occurrence of 'I'. However, sentences such as (12) are demonstrably not shorthand for sentences such as (13). For instance, consider:

(14) Every man wants to leave.

According to the proposal we are considering, (14) is shorthand for (15):

(15) Every man wants [every man to leave].

But, of course, (14) does not mean what (15) means. So, structures such as (12) and (14) are demonstrably not shorthand for structures such as (13) and (15).

Control structures also can be used to show that the ambiguity theorist cannot exploit the notion of shifted reference. For instance:

(16) The ham sandwich wants to have chips next to it.

only permits a reading which ascribes mental states to sandwiches. The understood subject of 'to have chips next to it' must be the very same object as the referent of 'the ham sandwich'.

According to standard linguistic theory, the understood subject of 'to be pushed by John' in (12) is an invisible anaphoric element which picks up its reference from the first occurrence of 'I'. But, if this is correct, then it is not possible that the understood subject of 'to be pushed by John' differs from the understood subject of 'want' in (12), *contra* what is required to save the ambiguity view.

Thus, a standard motivation for the ambiguity view fails. Furthermore, it is difficult to see how to make sense of the required ambiguity. We are stuck with the claim that the referent of 'I' is the bearer of two different classes of properties. But there is another



version of the thesis that mental self-ascriptions differ in some substantive sense from physical self-ascriptions which remains unaffected by this line of critique. For all we have said, it may be that although we are bearers of both mental and physical properties, the former are ascribed more 'directly' than the latter. In the next section, I turn to the remaining linguistic attempt to explicate this proposal.

## **Section II.**

In the last section, I argued against the thesis that only in mental self-ascriptions does 'I' refer to my 'real' self. According to the thesis considered in this section, 'I' unambiguously refers to something describable solely with mental predicates, an 'occupant' of a body. But, according to this thesis, the true logical form of physical self-ascriptions reveals them as primarily ascribing physical properties to bodies, and only derivatively to the occupants of those bodies. Mental self-ascriptions, in contrast, wear their logical form on their sleeves. They both appear to, and do in fact, ascribe mental properties 'directly' to the referent of 'I'. The most obvious way of explicating the thesis in question is to construe a predicate like "weigh 135 pounds" as 'shorthand' for something like "stands in the embodiment relation to this body, and this body weighs 135 pounds". However, this position is easily refuted. For consider a sentence such as "My legs weigh 135 pounds". If this proposal is correct, then this sentence is short for "My legs stand in the embodiment relation to this body, and this body weighs 135 pounds". But, of course, this is not what an utterance of "My legs weigh 135 pounds" asserts.

A more defensible position is that physical predicates themselves are ambiguous.

When 'I' occurs with nominative case, as in "I weigh 135 pounds", then the correct predicate is "stands in the embodiment relation to this body, and this body weighs 135 pounds".<sup>ix</sup> However, when 'I' occurs with genitive case, as in "My legs weigh 135 pounds", or with a non-person involving subject, then the occurrence of "weigh 135 pounds" should be taken at face-value. So, the position is not that all physical predicates are shorthand for some longer expression, but rather the thesis that each physical predicate is ambiguous between a predicate which is to be taken at 'face-value' at logical form, and a predicate which is shorthand for some longer expression.

The reason this position is dubious is as follows. According to it, the predicates in (1) and (17) are different:

(1) I weigh 135 pounds.

(17) That rock weighs 135 pounds.

The predicate in (1) is, on this view, "stands in the embodiment relation to this body, and this body weighs 135 pounds". The predicate in (17), on the other hand, is to be read at face value. However, consider (18):

(18) Both that rock and I weigh 135 pounds.

(18) is perfectly acceptable. However, there is only one predicate in (18). If "weigh 135 pounds" is ambiguous, which meaning does it have? If it means the same as "stands in the embodiment relation to this body and this body is 135 pounds", then (18) expresses the same proposition as:

(19) Both that rock and I stand in the embodiment relation to this body, and this body is 135 pounds.

But this is absurd. Conversely, suppose it has the face-value reading. Then, there is no

reason to suppose that in (1), the predicate cannot simply be taken at face-value.

One might reply by maintaining that (18) is shorthand for (20):

(20) That rock weighs 135 pounds and I weigh 135 pounds.

If so, then one could allow the predicate to mean one thing in its first occurrence, and another in its second occurrence. However, this reply is false. Constructions such as (18) are not shorthand for constructions such as (20). For instance, (21) is clearly not shorthand for (22):

(21) John and I went to the bank.

(22) John went to the bank and I went to the bank.

(22) could be used to express the proposition that John went to the financial institution, and I went to the riverbank. But (21) has no such use. So, the acceptability of (18) poses serious difficulties for the thesis that predicates such as "weighs 135 pounds" are ambiguous, meaning one thing when conjoined with 'I', and another when conjoined with other subject terms.

One might try to provide motivation for reinterpreting physical predicates by adverting again to locutions such as:

(3) I am out of gas.

According to this train of thought, in such locutions, the predicate "am out of gas" only derivatively applies to me, applying in the first instance to my car, or my airplane, or whatever vehicle I am in when I utter the sentence. By analogy, it is supposed, physical self-ascriptions apply only derivatively to me, applying, in the first instance, to my body. In the previous section, I considered a similar argument, which failed because the premise was false. In contrast, I believe the premise of this argument to be true.

However, as I now argue, the analogy fails.

As we have seen, examples such as:

(18) Both that rock and I weigh 135 pounds.

provide good reason to believe that physical predicates do not apply derivatively to the referent of 'I'. But similar examples fail to show that predicates such as "out of gas" do not apply only derivatively to the referent of 'I'. On such an account, "am out of gas" in "I am out of gas" is shorthand for some longer predicate, such as 'am standing in the relation F to a vehicle which is out of gas'.<sup>x</sup> Consider again (4):

(4) \*/? Both Bill's car and I are out of gas.

(4) is the correlate of (18). But, whereas (18) is perfectly well-formed, (4) is quite odd. This provides strong evidence for the claim that "out of gas" is a different predicate in the sentence "Bill's car is out of gas" than it is in the sentence "I am out of gas".

So, there is no semantic difficulty in accounting for the truth of sentences such as (3). The predicate in (3) is elliptical for a more complex predicate, as evidenced by the unacceptability of (4). But the fact that sentences such as (18) are perfectly acceptable removes the possibility of giving a similar analysis to physical self-ascriptions.

Here are two final strategies the asymmetry theorist could exploit to explain these facts. According to the first, "weighs 135 pounds" is a positive adjective. Such adjectives, such as "tall", express relations between objects and properties. For instance, "tall", in "That man is tall" expresses a relation between that man and a comparison class which is supplied by context. The asymmetry theorist could then construe "That man weighs 135 pounds" as elliptical for "That man weighs 135 pounds for a human", in much the same way as certain treatments of such adjectives take

"That man is tall" as essentially elliptical for "That man is tall for a man".<sup>xi</sup>

But this is not an option. For such adjectives are conceptually related to comparatives. Whether it is true or not, it is coherent (and indeed intuitively plausible) to say that to be tall for a man is to be taller than most men, or to be comfortable for a chair is to be more comfortable than most chairs.<sup>xii</sup> But it makes no sense whatsoever to say that to weigh 135 pounds for a man is to weigh 135 pounder than most men. No conceptual relation to a comparative exists in the case of "weighs 135 pounds", and so such predicates are not positive adjectives.

There is a final strategy available to the asymmetry theorist. This is to deny that any reinterpretation of sentences such as:

(18) Both that rock and I weigh 135 pounds.

is required.<sup>xiii</sup> The rock weighs 135 pounds in the way rocks do, that is, by weighing 135 pounds, and I weigh 135 pounds in the way humans do, that is, by standing in the embodiment relation to a body which weighs 135 pounds. The rock and I both have the property of weighing 135 pounds, but in different ways.

I do not mean to deny that there are certain sentences of the form (18) in which the two conjoined noun phrases satisfy the predicates in what might be called 'different ways'. For instance, in the sentence:

(23) Both John and Bill are over five feet tall.

Bill might satisfy the predicate "is over five feet tall" in virtue of being five foot eight, and John might satisfy it in virtue of being six foot two. But there is a qualitative difference between the relation John and Bill bear, in this example, to the property of being over five feet tall, and the different relations the rock and I bear to the property of weighing

135 pounds, according to AT. The difference lies in that the over-five-feet-tallness of both John and Bill supervenes on intrinsic properties of John and Bill. According to AT, in contrast, whereas the weight of the rock supervenes on intrinsic properties of the rock, my weight supervenes on properties of some object which is not me. Thus, the existence of examples such as (20) fails to support this defense of AT.

There are, however, examples which are more favorable to this strategy:

(24) Both the mayor and his advisory committee believe that it would be immoral to build a jail.<sup>xiv</sup>

Presumably, the predicate "believes that it would be immoral to build a jail" is true of the mayor in a singular way, whereas it is true of his advisory committee in a plural way.

What this example shows is that the same predicate can be true of the referent of one term in a singular way, and true of the referent of another term in a plural way.<sup>xv</sup>

However, there is a sharp distinction between a case of non-singular reference such as (24), and (18), according to an asymmetry theorist. The mayor's advisory committee believes that it is immoral to build a jail because of facts about the beliefs of some appropriate majority of its members. But, on an asymmetry theorist's reading of (18), I weigh 135 pounds because some other object does, to which I happen to be related. What the asymmetry theorist requires to defend her view is an acceptable example of the form of (18) in which one of the conjoined noun phrases in subject position has the property expressed by the predicate in virtue just of properties of it, whereas the other object has the property expressed by the predicate in virtue of it being related to some object which has that property. In (24), by contrast, the second noun phrase has the property in question in virtue of properties of the things which constitute it.

The asymmetry theorist might protest that the burden of proof has unfairly been placed on her shoulders to produce such an example. But the situation here is worse. For wherein *could* the unacceptability of sentences such as (4) lie, except in the fact that a predicate is being misused in precisely the way envisaged? In other words, the unacceptability of (4) seems to be due to the fact that natural language does not allow constructions of the form "Both X and Y are F", where X is F in virtue of intrinsic properties of X, and Y is F in virtue of bearing relation R to an object Z which is F.<sup>xvi</sup>

Surely, if AT is correct, (18) and (4) *should* be on a par. That is precisely why it is often explained by appeal to examples such as (3). The unacceptability of (4) should lead us then to question the plausibility of this strategy for accounting for the truth of sentences containing the first-person pronoun.

### **Section III.**

There is thus no way of representing the alleged derivativeness of (non-brainy) physical properties linguistically. The asymmetry theorist must locate the derivativeness in some other aspect of our practice, for instance, in the grounds we have for self-ascribing such properties. In this section, I evaluate attempts to forge such an epistemological asymmetry between mental and physical self-ascriptions. I argue that there is no evidence that there is such an asymmetry.

I first give an epistemological construal of the notion of a direct self-ascription of a property. Then, I explain why the thesis that mental self-ascriptions are direct in this sense, and physical self-ascriptions are not, is false. I then turn to other attempts to establish that physical self-ascriptions are less epistemologically fundamental than

mental self-ascriptions. I will argue that these, too, are problematic.

The first thesis which offers some promise as a means to distinguish mental and physical self-ascriptions on the basis of their grounds involves Sydney Shoemaker's notion of Immunity to Error through Misidentification (henceforth, IEM). A judgment Fa is immune to error through misidentification just in case, if it is defeated, its grounds do not survive as grounds for the existential generalization, that something is F. Here is a judgment which does not meet this criterion, and is hence not IEM. Suppose I hear someone walking down the stairs, and, thinking it is Sally, judge that Sally is walking down the stairs. Then, I turn around, and bump into Sally, who all the while was standing behind me. My judgment, that Sally is walking down the stairs, has been defeated, but my grounds survive as grounds for the judgment that someone is walking down the stairs. Thus, the judgment that Sally is walking down the stairs is not IEM.

The reason my judgment that Sally is walking down the stairs is not IEM is because it was "based on an identification". I identified Sally as the person who was walking down the stairs, and the judgment's defeat was due to the failure of this identification. Judgments which cannot be defeated in this manner are those which are immune to error through misidentification.

Immunity to error through misidentification is the best way of explicating the idea of a predicate being directly ascribed to the subject of a judgment. The predicate in a non-IEM judgment is not directly ascribed to the subject of the judgment, but rather first ascribed to the reference of some other singular concept, which is then identified with the subject of the judgment. In a judgment which is IEM, on the other hand, the predicate is directly ascribed to the subject of the judgment.



The most obvious way of using IEM as a way of explicating the thesis that mental predicates are directly self-ascribed, and physical predicates only indirectly self-ascribed, would be as the claim that mental self-ascriptions are IEM, and physical self-ascriptions are not IEM. For instance, if I judge that I weigh 135 pounds, I would first ascribe the physical predicate to the occupant of this body, which I would then identify with myself. However the claim is false. First of all, there are mental self-ascriptions which are not IEM. As Gareth Evans writes:

Consider a case in which I have reason to believe that my tactual information is misleading; it feels as if I am touching a piece of cloth, and my relevant visual information is restricted to seeing, in a mirror, a large number of hands reaching out and touching nothing, and one hand touching a piece of cloth.<sup>xvii</sup>

If I judge, on this basis, that I feel a piece of cloth, my judgment is not IEM, because if it is defeated, my grounds remain as grounds for the existential generalization that someone is feeling a piece of cloth. Similar examples can be constructed to show that sentences such as "I am seeing a piece of cloth" can be used in judgments which are not IEM.<sup>xviii</sup>

The second point is that, as Shoemaker pointed out in his 1968 paper, "Self-Reference and Self-Awareness", there are many physical self-ascriptions which are IEM.<sup>xix</sup> For instance, if I am receiving proprioceptive information in the normal way, then the judgment that my legs are crossed is IEM. If the judgment is defeated, if I find out that my legs are not in fact crossed, then my grounds do not survive as grounds for the existential generalization that someone's legs are crossed.

Since there are mental self-ascriptions that are not IEM, and physical self-ascriptions which are, the claim that a distinction between the two kinds of self-ascriptions can be forged with the use of the notion of immunity to error through misidentification cannot be as straightforward as the thesis that mental self-ascriptions are IEM, and physical self-ascriptions are not. A more promising way of using IEM to distinguish between the two kinds of self-ascription is by arguing that when physical self-ascriptions are IEM, they are so because they have inherited the status from related mental self-ascriptions (and not vice-versa).

One philosopher who has provided such an account is Colin McGinn. According to McGinn, "...I' is used as subject only in judgments asserted on the basis of incorrigible self-ascriptions of subjective states."<sup>xx</sup> That is, according to McGinn, any self-ascription which is IEM is asserted on the basis of an incorrigible mental self-ascription. Indeed, on McGinn's view, any judgment which is IEM has, as its *grounds*, an incorrigible mental self-ascription.<sup>xxi</sup>

McGinn's proposal is difficult to evaluate. Certainly, it is inconsistent with the phenomenology of physical self-ascriptions that they have, as grounds, corresponding mental self-ascriptions. For instance, if I judge that my leg is trembling, I certainly do not seem to go through a process of inference from the judgment that it feels as if my leg is trembling, to the judgment that it is. Either McGinn is suggesting that the inference in question is unconscious, or he is recommending his proposal as a rational reconstruction of our ordinary practice.

If the first interpretation is correct, then McGinn's proposal has the problematic consequence that anyone who makes a physical self-ascription which is IEM possesses

appearance concepts. That is, McGinn's proposal, thus interpreted, entails that anyone who, for example, makes the first-personal judgment that she is in front of a table must understand what it is to seem to see a table, or to have the appearance of a table. This consequence is worrisome, and not just because it requires a relatively high degree of conceptual sophistication on the part of the person making the judgment. Rather, it is problematic because it reverses the natural order of conceptual priority.

To understand appearance concepts, one must first understand concepts of how things in fact are.<sup>xxii</sup> Roughly: to grasp the concept of how something appears to one, it is necessary to know that it is possible that the appearance is not true to how the thing actually is. Thus, to grasp the concept of how something appears to one, it is necessary to grasp concepts involving how the thing actually is. But the latter sort of concepts do not involve in their analysis subjective appearance concepts. Hence, to grasp the concepts involved in making a judgment about how things are, one need not grasp the concepts involved in making a judgment about how things appear to one. But since the converse is the case, McGinn's analysis, interpreted as a description of our unconscious practice, is objectionable. On the other hand, if what McGinn is suggesting is a rational reconstruction, rather than a description of ordinary practice, then his proposal cannot be used as evidence for what our ordinary concept of a person is.<sup>xxiii</sup>

The key to establishing the thesis that physical self-ascriptions are only ever derivatively IEM is to argue that there is some epistemologically privileged class of judgments which enable physical self-ascriptions to be IEM. According to McGinn, the epistemological privilege is incorrigibility, and the enabling relation is the relation a judgment bears to its grounds. Shoemaker, the other philosopher who has tried to

argue that physical self-ascriptions are only ever derivatively IEM, is more interested in drawing a distinction between mental and physical predicates. Hence, he cannot avail himself of incorrigibility, because there are many mental predicates, such as "seeing a canary", the self-ascriptions of which are not incorrigible.<sup>xxiv</sup> Instead, Shoemaker defines a class of judgments which he calls 'absolutely' IEM. He then maintains that physical self-ascriptions are never absolutely IEM, but are rather only 'circumstantially' IEM, and are only ever IEM in virtue of some absolutely IEM judgment:

It would appear that, when a self-ascription is circumstantially immune to error through misidentification, this is always because the speaker knows or believes it to be true as a consequence of some other self-ascription, which the speaker knows or is entitled to believe, that is absolutely immune to error through misidentification; e.g. in the circumstances just imagined the proposition 'I am facing a table' would be known or believed as a consequence of the proposition 'I see a table in the centre of my field of vision'.<sup>xxv</sup>

To establish the thesis that physical self-ascriptions which are IEM are parasitic on mental self-ascriptions, Shoemaker must discharge two obligations. First, he must demonstrate that the class of absolutely IEM judgments is all and only the class of the relevant mental self-ascriptions. Secondly, he must explain how it is that the absolutely IEM judgments enable the physical self-ascriptions to be IEM.

Judgments which are absolutely IEM are such that the sentences which are give their content only can be used to give the content of judgments which are IEM. Judgments which are circumstantially IEM are such that the sentences which are used to give their

content can also be used to give the content of judgments which are not IEM.

According to Shoemaker, then, mental self-ascriptions fall into the former category, and physical self-ascriptions into the latter.

The first point Shoemaker must establish requires demonstrating that mental self-ascriptions are absolutely IEM. Evans has objected to this point, on the already mentioned grounds that many of the relevant mental self-ascriptions, such as "I see a canary", or "I feel a piece of cloth", can be used in judgments which are not IEM. In order to respond to this objection, Shoemaker must add something to the characterization of absolute immunity to error through misidentification. This addition must exclude the counterexample cases from showing that judgments which are IEM whose contents are given by sentences such as "I see a canary" are not absolutely IEM. That is, he needs to produce some feature F of the counterexample cases, such that a judgment which is absolutely IEM is one in which the sentence used to give its content can only be used to give the content of judgments which are IEM, except under conditions in which those judgments have the feature F. The worry here is of course that any such feature will count as absolutely IEM some of those judgments which Shoemaker hopes are only circumstantially IEM, such as physical self-ascriptions.

Shoemaker's first obligation appears difficult to fulfill. However, the central issue is not whether there is a characterizable class of absolutely IEM judgments. Rather, the crucial issue involves the second of Shoemaker's obligations. If mental self-ascriptions are not grounds for physical self-ascriptions, then in what sense are physical self-ascriptions which are IEM parasitic on them?

As the previous quote from Shoemaker suggests, his belief that physical self-

ascriptions which are IEM are parasitic on mental self-ascriptions is due to his acceptance of the following thesis:

The Grounds Thesis

The grounds of a physical self-ascription which is IEM lie always in a mental self-ascription such that, if the subject possessed the relevant concepts, and were to judge it, the subject's judgment would be IEM.<sup>xxvi</sup>

The Grounds Thesis does not of course imply that I must infer from, say, the judgment that I now feel that my legs are crossed to the judgment that my legs are crossed. The Thesis is perfectly consistent with the non-inferential character of my current knowledge that my legs are crossed. Its central claim is rather that the reason it counts as *knowledge* is that I now feel that my legs are crossed.

If the Grounds Thesis were true, then it might be thought to establish an asymmetry between mental and physical predicates. For, on this line of thinking, my knowledge that, say, it feels to me as if my legs are crossed is not due to any (non-brainy) physical fact. I do not know that it feels to me as if my legs are crossed because my legs are in fact crossed. So, if the Grounds Thesis were true, then we might seem to have an asymmetry between mental and physical predicates. I would know self-ascriptions of the latter class of predicate in virtue of satisfying predicates of the former class.

Even if one could rest a plausible asymmetry claim upon the Grounds Thesis, I am not sure it would establish the *sort* of asymmetry between mental and physical predicates which AT requires. Be that as it may, I doubt that the Grounds Thesis is true. For it conflicts with standard reliabilist accounts of non-inferential knowledge. According to the reliabilist, x's non-inferential knowledge that p is justified by the fact that x's belief

that  $p$  is a reliable indicator of the truth of  $p$ . What a reliabilist would say about the example of my non-inferential knowledge that my legs are crossed is that its justification lies, not in the fact that I feel that my legs are crossed, but rather in the fact that my belief that my legs are crossed is a reliable indicator of the (physical) fact that my legs are crossed.<sup>xxvii</sup>

There are, of course, those who would hold that the fact that my experience is only causally responsible for the reliability of my belief does not preclude it from being part of its justification. But this position is again of no help to the person who bases an asymmetry claim on the Grounds Thesis. For causal explanations of the reliability of my experiences involve non-brainy physical facts, for example, about the positioning of my body. For instance, that I have a (veridical) perceptual experience of a computer screen in front of me is due in part to the fact that my body is positioned in a certain way relative to the computer screen. Thus, both mental and physical predicates would enter into the justificatory story for cases of non-inferential knowledge, on a causal account of the justification of such beliefs. This is incompatible with the use of the Grounds Thesis to forge an epistemological asymmetry between mental and physical predicates.

I have argued that physical self-ascriptions which are IEM cannot be based on inferences from mental judgments, even if such inferences are unconscious. I then argued that such judgments do not count as an expressions of knowledge, when they do, in virtue of having the truth of mental self-ascriptions as their central grounds. This removes the possibility of forging the sort of epistemological asymmetry between mental and physical self-ascriptions which would be amenable to the asymmetry theorist.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that AT is difficult to reconcile with our linguistic and epistemological practice. If it is correct, then how we speak, and how our epistemic practice reflects our relation to our various properties, is misleading as to the metaphysical facts of personhood. I suspect, however, that some philosophers will not be moved by these results. According to such philosophers, AT is a product of metaphysical inquiry, a project guided by a priori intuitions into essence, which may reveal that our self-conceptions, as reflected in the ways we *ordinarily* talk and reason, are deeply misleading. To refute such a theorist on her own grounds is a tricky and difficult matter, and one which I have certainly not attempted here.

This paper has rather been directed at those who either are unwilling to advance an error theory about our discourse involving the term 'I', or who take seriously the symmetry between mental and physical predicates as embodied in our epistemic practice. To such readers, the moral should be that no view of persons which entails AT is tenable.<sup>xxviii</sup>

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## Endnotes

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i. The neo-Lockean thesis is inconsistent with the claim that persons are their bodies unless, with David Lewis (1976), one reinterprets body-talk in terms of the language of temporal parts (c.f. Thomson [1997, Section IV] for discussion). I take Lewis's view, however, to be a formal variant of a contingent identity view.

ii. I have added the modifier "non-brainy", because most philosophers are committed to the thesis that mental properties are realized in brain states. I will drop it in what follows, and by "physical property" will mean "non-brainy physical property".

iii. The exact thesis, advanced by Wittgenstein (1958, pp. 66ff.), is that 'I' does not refer

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when used as 'subject'

iv. Strawson (1959), p. 98.

v. See Schubert and Pelletier (1987, pp. 389-390) for an argument with this same structure against the view that bare plural Noun Phrases are ambiguous between generic and existential readings. However, the examples discussed there are significantly more marginal than (9).

vi. It is unclear that even type-token ambiguities can be systematically reflected in contexts such as (9):

(\*) July 16th's New York Times has many readers and is coffee stained.

(\*) is definitely odd, and certainly much less acceptable than (9). There are, however, examples which do allow for this, such as:

(\*\*) The book which has changed Western Civilization is lying on my kitchen table.

It is not clear to me what mechanisms are operative which rule (\*\*) acceptable, but not (\*).

vii. See Nunberg (1977) and (1993) for discussions of such examples. See also Sag (1981) for a discussion of how to incorporate shifted reference into an intensional semantic framework. Some philosophers, I imagine, would be inclined not to account for shifted reference semantically; according to them, examples such as (10) are false, but communicate true propositions. Though such an account is possible for examples

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such as (10), I take it that it is not available for examples such as (1).

viii. In the 1960's, it was maintained by some linguists that sentences such as (12) were transformationally derived from sentences such as (13) by a transformation called equi-NP deletion. I use the classic arguments against this account of control structures in what follows.

ix. For a discussion of the embodiment relation, see Shoemaker (1984a).

x. 'F' would be, then, a place-holder for contextually supplied relational concepts such as that expressed by "occupancy".

xi. e.g. Ludlow (1989).

xii. Issues here are, of course, more complex (e.g. Kamp (1975)), but the details do not affect my argument.

xiii. I owe this strategy to discussion with Sydney Shoemaker.

xiv. Thanks again to Sydney Shoemaker for the example.

xv. It is, of course, a central topic in contemporary semantic theory just what "a plural way" is.

xvi. Unless Z is a part of Y, as in the case of plural and group reference.

xvii. p. 219, Evans (1982).

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xviii. c.f. p. 51 of McGinn (1983).

xix. p. 8 of Shoemaker (1984b). See, also, section 7.3 of Evans (1982).

xx. p. 52, McGinn (1983).

xxi. *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

xxii. Two related points occur, in order of their temporal relations, in H.A. Prichard's critique of Russell's idiosyncratic version of phenomenalism ("...if some one did not understand what was meant by 'a body', he could not possibly be brought to understand what was meant by 'an appearance'." (Prichard (1915), p. 176) and section 12 of Sellars's classic (1956).

xxiii. Since it is not McGinn's purpose to provide an analysis of our concept of a person, this is not an objection to him. Rather, it is an objection to a possible use of his view.

xxiv. Self-ascriptions of what linguists call individual-level predicates, such as "is highly intelligent", or "is five feet tall", which reflect some standing disposition or feature, are never IEM, and can be set aside for present purposes. In what follows, "mental self-ascription" will be used so as to exclude such predicates.

xxv. (1984b), p. 8.

xxvi. Thanks to Carl Ginet for this formulation.

xxvii. In fact, what a reliabilist *does* say:

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Suppose A knows non-inferentially that his legs are now crossed. This simply means that he truly believes that his legs are crossed, and that he empirically could not have had that belief unless his legs were crossed in physical fact. (Armstrong (1993, p. 189))

xxviii. My major debts in this paper are to Sydney Shoemaker and Susanna Siegel, who provided extensive and incisive criticisms of many different drafts. Neither, I am sure, is content with the final product, so they certainly are not responsible for any errors. Nonetheless, much of what is positive about this paper is due to their input. Carl Ginet, Jim Pryor, Peter Smith, Roger Squires, and Judith Jarvis Thomson also helped with constructive suggestions. Thanks also to Mandy Simons and Daniel Stoljar for discussion.