

# Preface

In a recent article entitled ‘The Mind-Body Problem at Century’s Turn’,<sup>1</sup> one of the leading thinkers in contemporary philosophy of mind, Jaegwon Kim, observes that ‘[t]hrough much of the twentieth century, especially during the second half, debates over the mind-body problem were shaped by physicalism’, that is, the metaphysical belief that ‘all things that exist in this world are bits of matter and structures aggregated out of bits of matter’. Once this metaphysical framework is accepted, Kim goes on to say, then ‘the foremost metaphysical problem about the mind is where in the physical world our minds fit – in fact, whether minds have a place in such an austere physical world at all’ (129).

Kim has his own view as to how minds can be accommodated within a physical universe. His suggestion is that the most salient features of consciousness – cognitive intentional states like belief, desire, or memory – can be coherently integrated within a physicalist worldview by means of functional reductions, that is, by re-conceptualising them in terms of the causal work they are supposed to do. To illustrate: part of the causal work of my belief that fire burns is to keep my body at a reasonable distance from it; thus, a capability to perform this function would be an essential part of any definition of what it is to believe that fire burns. Kim has little doubt that such reductions are possible in principle, even though they may be very difficult to achieve in fact. He also frankly admits, however, that there are aspects of consciousness – specifically, its qualitative, *phenomenal* aspects – that cannot be functionally re-conceptualised and are therefore physically irreducible: ‘Qualia...’ – he remarks – ‘are the “mental residue” that cannot be accommodated within the physical domain’ (143). According to Kim, the existence of this mental residue is not a serious threat to physicalism; as he has it, ‘[p]hysicalism is not the whole truth, but is the *truth near enough*, and *near enough* should be *good enough*’ (146).

This is a striking statement. Drawing on his deep knowledge of the philosophical debate over the mind-body problem in the last decades, Kim constructs a powerful argument in support of reductive physicalism. But a theory of consciousness that fails to account for those

<sup>1</sup> *The Future for Philosophy*, edited by Brian Leiter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 129–52.

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aspects of it that we most cherish and care about (surely, it is the *painfulness* of pain that we seek to avoid!) has failed to grasp something essential to its object of investigation. One does not need to be an old fashioned Hegelian or a Bradleyan idealist to recognise that ‘*Das Wahre ist das Ganze*’ or that ‘no partial truth is really quite true’: unless *all* aspects of a given phenomenon (consciousness or anything else) are accounted for, we can’t be sure that we have explained it correctly. Hence, there is at present still room open for arguing that the future for the philosophy of mind cannot be just that of labouring the details of a physicalist theory of the mental, but it must also be that of inquiring further into the very nature of consciousness and the metaphysical reliability of the physicalist framework.

The papers collected in this volume provide in depth-explorations of the nature of subjectivity, the phenomenological structure of the self, its status as a metaphysical entity, its mode of interaction with, and existence within, a physical universe. As it should be, they display a variety of different perspectives and basic philosophical commitments. Taken together, they reflect not solely the systematic but also the *historical* complexity of the issue. The names of, among others, Plotinus, René Descartes, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Immanuel Kant, William James, and Edmund Husserl figure prominently in several of the following discussions as those of thinkers who still have much to contribute to the contemporary debate: as masters to be learnt from rather than, as is too common in the analytical literature, as sparring-partners who can be easily defeated.

The articles were originally presented at a conference organised at the University of Edinburgh to honour the work and philosophical legacy of Timothy L. S. Sprigge (1932–2007), former Professor of Logic and Metaphysics (1979–1989) in that same University and author of insightful works in the philosophy of mind and in speculative metaphysics. His original combination of panpsychism and absolute idealism – the theory that reality is a single whole that appears in the guise of a plurality of monad-like centres of experience – is a nice alternative, if not an antidote, to the scientistic physicalism that, as Kim observes, ‘shaped’ the debate over the mind-body problem in the last decades and that threatens to become the default position in contemporary philosophy of mind. Systems of revisionary metaphysics run counter to established assumptions, and rightly so; at the very least, they are an invitation and a challenge to further inquiry.

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