REVIEW ARTICLE
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O'SHAUGHNESSY ON MIND AND BODY

It is not so long ago that those who, in the philosophy of mind, defended an ultimate ontological distinction between mental realities and bodily ones, or dualism as the term is normally used in this context, were straightway thought to be very naive and immature, altogether unmindful of considerable advances in recent philosophy which no one would be likely to reverse. Only very recently a young philosopher, reflecting what many have come to take for granted, opened his paper for the Aristotelian Society by disclaiming all association with Cartesian dualism - 'only a crank would wish to revive that'; it is a brush with which no self-respecting philosopher of today, familiar with the 'dark warnings from Wittgensteinians', would wish to be tarred.

There have in fact however been many modifications of the outright rejections of dualism, especially in the form of a severely reductionist behaviourism, and concessions of considerable importance to the insights we owe to Descartes and those who preceded him. Professor Richard Swinburne has done much in this vein, insisting upon the ultimacy of personal identity as we directly apprehend it. Professor Roderick Chisholm has done much in the same way in his own work, and so have Sir John Eccles and Sir Karl Popper. I had occasion to refer recently to the insistence by Mr John Foster of Oxford that 'The subject of consciousness is, as Descartes conceived him, a simple mental continuant, a pure ego, not requiring a body for his existence, but possessing that body with which his mind thus causally combines'. 'The person himself is essentially mental and only contingently corporeal.'

The ghost which it was thought had been finally laid to rest walks again. Even so, the concessions, substantial as they are, have also a lingering doubt about them. We must not go too far back to Descartes, the concessions need qualifications, and these may also be substantial; we have to walk warily if we go along again with the outmoded dualism. It may seem right in so many

3 J. Foster, 'In Self-Defence', in Perception and Reality, Essays in Honour of Professor Sir Alfred Ayer, edited by G. F. Macdonald (Macmillan 1979), p. 162. For my own discussion of this see chapter 7 of my The Elusive Self.
ways, but surely it cannot really be right any more. We must make certain that we draw back from the brink.

Thus it is that Mr Foster, for example, has to turn to Hume to redeem his position, to make it not ‘as radically dualistic as Descartes’ doctrine’, indeed in some ways very close to corporealism again. We are more at ease it seems in some sort of half-way house which shows that we have not forgotten the ‘deliberate abusiveness’ with which Ryle thought he had made an end of Descartes.

Mr O’Shaughnessy is certainly not half-hearted in the concessions he makes to what would normally be regarded as a dualist view. He is very explicit and open about them. The dualist will be very much heartened by what he says. He has little truck with any form of behaviourism, and he regards ‘the Domain of the Psychological’ as a proper ‘ontological novelty’ – ‘I am designating a real and irreducible something’ (vol. 2, p. 146). Something new appears at the level of animal existence and this is ‘primitive and indefinable’ (vol. 2, p. 145). Within this, moreover we can uncover a further ‘real ontological divide’ (vol. 2, p. 150) between the merely psychological (of which a sensation like pain would be an example) and ‘the properly mental’, such as ‘thoughts and listenings’ (vol. 2, p. 148) or, elsewhere, ‘thoughts, beliefs and desires’ (vol. 2, p. 192). The full purport of this, the ‘higher’ and the ‘lower’ within the psychological must wait for the moment. All we need note here is the alleged ontological distinctness of ‘the mental’.

We read also of certain things being ‘mentalistically immediate’ (vol. 1, p. 12) and of ‘a priori – given internally intelligible mental causes’ (vol. 2, p. 291) and of conditions to which ‘privileged access necessarily obtains’ (vol. 2, p. 78). There is even (but more later) ‘a givenness of the self to the self” (vol. 1, p. 148) and ‘the immediate self-awareness of the self-conscious agent’ (vol. 1, p. 147), and, in willing or ‘trying’ ‘we stand to bodily trying in the identical epistemological relation to which we stand to certain phenomena occurring in our own minds, viz. sensations generally’ (vol. 2, p. 88). This the author himself describes as a ‘Conditional Cartesianism’. Towards the end of the second volume the author also observes that he has brought himself ‘astonishingly close to volitionism’ (vol. 2, p. 259). His regard for Descartes is made unmistakeable in the declaration that Descartes, ‘along with Freud, must rate as one of the two great epistemologists of the mind’ (vol. 2, p. 80).

All the same, when O’Shaughnessy has done ‘as much as I can do for Descartes’ (vol. 2, p. 80), he presents, in the main body of his work, a thesis very far removed from that of Descartes or of those who have followed him in the main features of his dualism. While rejecting familiar forms of ‘the identity-thesis’, and certainly outright behaviourism, he comes to rest in a very ingenious and splendidly presented form of the dual-aspect theory.
Before presenting further how this comes about, let me pause to pay very readily to this study, in two substantial volumes and entitled *The Will*, the tribute which it richly deserves. The work in its entirety is a considerable achievement. It is a model of tough sustained presentation. The style is both agreeable and invariably clear. One has indeed to work very hard at this work, but certainly not because of avoidable obscurity or the too familiar exploitation of ambiguities. Every step is clearly made out and takes its place where it should be in the elaboration of an immensely detailed unsparing course of philosophical argumentation. There are lively and helpfully imaginative illustrations of various possibilities to be entertained, and those who, like myself, find themselves quite unconvinced at the end, will have learnt an immense amount about the subject which they are not likely to encounter elsewhere. It will be strange if this study does not take its place for a long time as a major work which all serious students of the subject must consider closely. It has more in it that is lastingly helpful, even when one disagrees most, than may be found in many other works that have been pre-eminent in the philosophy of mind in our time. There are also arresting allusions and trim idiomatic turns of style.

When presented with a tightly packed argument, it is not easy, without a sense of unfairness, to avoid the sort of detail that would take us far beyond the length of an article. The risk must be taken. I shall therefore from this point concentrate on those aspects of Mr O'Shaughnessy's themes which seem to me to put his main submissions to the greatest strain.

In an extensive (pp. i–lxvi) introduction to the first volume O'Shaughnessy sets out for us his special concern with willing and, especially, with *bodily* action, not only because these are central issues in themselves but also, and primarily, because it is in bodily action that the inner world of thought and intention is most explicitly fused or 'bonded' with the world of nature such that these mental items are seen, in the ultimate account of them, to be themselves the brain. It is in this way that we have 'our commitment to the world' (p. xxxiv). It is in this way that there is 'a causally bonded circle that passes through mind and environment' (p. xxxv), 'a life line linking mind and world' (p. xxxix) whereby consciousness 'ramifies into wider horizons' (p. xxxvi). In bodily action the 'mind and body are incomparably wedded' (p. lv), so that 'the empire of the mind' 'spreads into nature, acting as a sort of colonising force' (p. lvii).

For this reason 'Epistemology takes second place to vitality' (p. xlv), the mind 'as vital', through bodily action as a 'physical-act mediator' is 'essentially tied to reality' (p. xliv) and provides in this way an 'index of our changing metaphysical theory of Man' (p. xlv). It is in this way also that 'a man can feel that he himself as a distinctive entity is likewise making his presence felt in the world (p. lv). This is not to think of a man merely 'qua' physical entity' – ('it is he, and not *his body* that wills' (p. li), he is willing
‘qua owner of consciousness’) and ‘the psychic force is itself a psychic phenomenon’, it is the man ‘as spirit’ (a word that is very deliberately chosen) ‘but in such a way that he is not inter-substitutable with “his body” or “his mind”’ (p. li). We shall have to note this later.

O’Shaughnessy lays special emphasis in this way on our involvement with the world, our environment, and thus with one another. He inveighs much against the retreat into our own interiority, ‘the pretence of “metaphysical immunity”’ (p. xxxiii), the ‘ageing interiorist conception’ (xxxviii) that drives us into behaviourism, on the one hand, and enervating solipsism on the other, ‘the headlong sceptical retreat into self and consciousness’ (p. xxxiii). This has great relevance all round, but especially in art and literature (and, if I were making the point, I would add ‘specially in religion’). This is also a most important aspect of ‘our vitally founded commitment to reality’ (p. xxxiv). It is ‘peculiarly appropriate to our present era’ and ‘the royal road to anything worth the having’ (p. xxxi).

I have some misgivings about the way the retreat in question came to its culmination in nineteenth century metaphysics, especially Absolute Idealism, and about the ‘innocence’ of Victorian attitudes to nature – ‘the flight to nature’. Generalisations, though perhaps in order or even unavoidable to make a major point on occasion, are also very dangerous and often misleading. It is certainly strange to single out Bradley from other idealists, British or Continental or others, in exemplification of ‘the diminished sense of reality’ and ‘the unwholesome relentless pride’ that led to ‘an estrangement from vital instinct’ (p. xxxii) in nineteenth century thought. T. H. Green might have been a better example, though hardly if we think of his social and political works. Bradley is the idealist par excellence who insisted upon the reference to reality, the response to the impact and the demands of the real upon us, the ‘terms’ without which relations are unintelligible, the ‘thisness’ in perception, the suprarational in its mysterious transcendence, ‘the other’, so close to Otto which is to draw us out of ourselves. There may be much at fault with this, and it may not give us always the realism we need, but by contrast with more tepid and exhaustive forms of rationalism, it brings us much closer to the frame of mind that O’Shaughnessy commends to us than he himself seems to appreciate.

To return, I readily share with O’Shaughnessy the concern over our proneness to retreat into an inner existence of our own or some bodiless intellectualism, and the relevance of this to art and religion1 is a matter with which I have been much concerned myself. Let us by all means be better realists, but we have also to be careful about the form of this and the price we pay. It is certainly too high a price, and altogether counter productive,

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1 See my H. B. Acton Lecture on ‘Solitude in Literature and Philosophy’, to be published in due course by the Royal Institute of Philosophy, together with other lectures on Philosophy and Literature given in the session 1981–82.
if the essentially inner psychic quality of our existence has to be strictly identified, in the final analysis, with our brains and bodies. As I understand it, the interiority has a vital part to play in the realism we need, the balance of inner and outer is essential and does not allow, least of all in our respect for one another, for any diminution of the essentially private inner existence of all of us to which O'Shaughnessy himself pays special tribute at times.

To be rightly attuned to the world around us, to be sustained by our environment, natural or personal, to be challenged or shaped by what is other than ourselves, we do not have to become that other. That would altogether defeat itself. It is just because we are distinct and sensitive individuals, set in a social and natural environment we need, that we do need this environment to draw from us the response that is appropriate to us and a true enrichment of life. If we melt into the environment we lose the point of the sensitive involvement which O'Shaughnessy himself is most anxious to preserve. It is as essentially mental or psychic beings that we do that.

For this reason, the instantiation of his own theme, by O'Shaughnessy, in a passing reference to literature, seems to put the emphasis misleadingly in the wrong place. We may be drawn out of the world of our private romantic fantasies in the harsh realism of *King Lear* or in viewing a Renoir sculpture. But it is something along these lines that matters, not the relatively trivial fact that ‘not merely Hemingway-esque “left hooks” and sparse mutterings but the writing of *King Lear* and *A Farewell to Arms* require ‘a hand clutching a quill’, or a pen, ‘moved repeatedly across sheaves of paper’. It is not very relevant to the present issue that, even when Renoir ‘in his later years sculpted by giving directions to assistants’, he was still just ‘switching the site of action from one bodily organ to another’ (p. xxxvii). This has not much to do with a healthy realism in art or morals. We are indeed warned by the author himself against ‘making a fetish out of bodily action’ (p. xxxvii), but he comes very close to it here, or, if not, he at least diverts attention from the main issues.

The same goes for the fear of solipsism which is almost paranoid in recent philosophy. O'Shaughnessy mentions it often in this context, and he clearly regards it as an implicate of the sort of interiority to which he objects. There is no justification for this. Descartes had a problem of sorts on his hands in the so-called ‘ego-centric predicament’, but this came about largely because of the peculiar way in which he thought he had established his own existence and, even more perhaps when we look at it closely, because of his views about perception and the status of secondary qualities. We can correct this without any invoking of the veracity of God. The dualist does not suppose, and is in no way committed to supposing, that he must stay in a private windowless world of his own. He is aware of a world of nature which is no mode of his own being presented, over-against him, whether in the style of Berkeley or in a more outright realist form. Berkeley copes well enough for his purpose.
with subjectivism; and within an objective order of nature we have an easy and dependable means of communication.

This does not take the derided form of analogues to our own movements in the behaviour of others, or at least not initially and primarily so. Nor does it, as has been so often thought, require some independent initial and immediate access to the experience of others to establish the required correlation. It is mainly and essentially a matter of what seems most plausible and natural in the explanation of some of the things we observe in the world around us. This has been made clear so often of late that it is hard to find it so consistently overlooked. The familiar jibe of Professor Ryle that, on a Cartesian view, ‘absolute solitude is the ineluctable destiny of the soul’ has no foundation whatsoever in the work of Descartes or his followers. The ghost of solipsism is itself a ghost, and it has been laid so often that it is amazing how philosophers of today continue to be frightened of it. It is time they forgot it.

But let us resume our main thread of the way O'Shaughnessy himself establishes the bridgehead which is required, in his account, in the world of nature. He begins with a lively account of ‘the logical limits of the will’. There is much to ponder here, and much about which I remain unconvinced. Among the logical limits are such things as ‘keeping on being married’, for while we can do much to sustain or enrich a marriage and also to bring it to an end, being married is as such a ‘reflexion of the legal system that we possess’ (vol. 1, p. 4). The order to keep on being married is a negative one, the marriage state itself not being ‘a continuant in time’. I am not sure that ‘being married’ might not be otherwise construed if broken up into our attitudes from moment to moment and the sense, in these terms, of seeking a divorce and thereby not keeping on being married. Likewise it may seem preposterous to tell someone to keep on being in space – how could we help that any more than being finite? But suppose disembodied existence were possible, not in the form of ‘out of the body’ existence somewhere else, but in some way along the lines of what I outlined in the chapter on ‘The world of thoughts alone’ in my _The Self and Immortality_, or suppose there were something corresponding to space but not space itself (another ‘dimension’ or attribute in Spinoza’s sense); and suppose it were possible, for some at least, to enter these states at will, it would then make sense to tell someone to do just that or not to do it. But I do not wish to deny that there are logical limits to the will. I only wish we were given better examples at the start, like willing to become (strictly) another person or God.

The author does however provide proper examples, and some very important ones, as he proceeds. We may, for instance, bring about a sensation, but sensations, pains for example, are not willings. They are just what they are. But swimmings are willings just because of what they are. The

1 _The Concept of Mind_, p. 15.
position would be different, it is held, if sensations could have immediate psychological origins. But they never have, the immediate origin is always physical. But what about self-induced pain, brought on either deliberately or, more plausibly, by a distraught or hysterical state of mind? One would usually say in such cases that the state of mind triggered off physiological conditions of pain; and deep empathy might do this. But might there not be pain, even extreme pain, for which no extra-mental cause can be found; in some forms of hysteria perhaps? O'Shaughnessy dismisses this by saying that, in such cases, they would be 'seeming pains'. I am not sure about this. Might there not be real pain in such cases, and not just hysterical pain behaviour? Could there not be real pain in a dream?

O'Shaughnessy thinks not. His position is quite stark at this point. 'We have no more than two conceptual niches ready; one for the psychologically originated merely seeming pain; the other for the psychologically originated but necessarily physically mediated pain' (vol. 1, p. 14). Perhaps some students of para-psychology might take a different view. We could not, to my mind, rule them out of court on a priori grounds without an initial and wholly unwarranted dogmatism. Is it absurd to suppose that the blind might come to have visual sensations without a repair of the damage that makes them blind? If they have not always been blind might they not dream of blue skies? Is there more than verbal usage that would rule this out as some kind of seeing?

I do not think however, that any of this affects what seems, at this stage, to be the main point, namely that the having of a sensation, be it vision or pain or any other, is not something that is itself a willing. It may happen because we will it. But in itself it just happens as what it is; and perhaps the point of stressing that may be more significant than appears at first. The same may be true of the insistence that, while one act may bring on another, no act brings itself about, a 'willing of' being thus an 'intrinsically novel, sui generis type of event' (vol. 1, p. 15). It is certain that 'many psychological events are not actions' (vol. 1, p. 16). Getting into a rage, whatever we may have done to induce it in ourselves or another, is not itself an action.

Two remaining major examples have certainly wide significance. The first is belief, for not only is belief not itself a willing, it is also the case that we cannot at a certain instant just 'install some belief in one's mind' (vol. 1, p. 21). We may do much indirectly to induce some belief in ourselves, by attending to evidence or exposing ourselves to certain influences. We may do much in the same way to rid ourselves of beliefs, for example by changing the company we keep. But we cannot simply summon up a belief (or an emotion) at will. We believe or we do not, and this has much relevance to those who hold, in various contexts, that we can will to believe. It is unfortunate, in my view, that O'Shaughnessy makes his case depend so much on the supposition that belief, while it is a continuant, is also 'non-processive'.
Do we not all the time actually entertain some thoughts which we take to conform to what is the case? Not all belief is dispositional. But this makes no difference to the main point at the moment. For, whether we think of belief as a live experience or as a disposition, it remains impossible to change what it is directly, though we can do much that may cause us, very quickly perhaps on occasion, to believe otherwise.

From this point the discussion accelerates and gets closer to its central theme. We are asked to consider the nature of bodily willing, contrasted for example with trying to remember or imaging; and we start with the question whether the body is bound to be the limit of such action. We certainly assume, for all normal purposes, that it is so. Not even in extreme peril would I will to leap across a wide chasm, and it never occurs to me, however busy, to will the book to come from the shelf to my hand. But is all this inherently impossible? On the face of it not. Fairy tales, and much talk of miracles, involve just that. There seems to be no problem about understanding what is meant. It is not like willing that I should have a new supply of square circles, or that this page should become black and white all over at the same time. I can understand quite well what it would be for a distant chair to rise into the air, or a book to come to my hand. Why is it that we must of necessity rule this out when I just will it?

My own view is that there just is no necessity here; the only necessity we have is that which is found within the system and the coherence of the concomitant variations we find in the way things are. We find in practice that we can move our bodies but that we never seem able to move anything else in the same way. It becomes futile to try, however great the need. We may, out of sheer desperation, on occasion try something we know ‘in our hearts’ we cannot accomplish, like leaping across too wide a gulf or dropping unhurt from a great height to the ground. Usually this is just impulsive action – anything rather than the flames. We know the limits of what we can do only too well, even if we may on occasion exceed our expectations; and we never think seriously of seeking to move or affect things in the world around us without first moving our bodies. Outside the body what we will is virtually always instrumental.

But is there any reason for this other than our own, and everybody else’s, experience? Why should we try to accomplish what we find we can never do? It is just a waste of time and effort, and we become conditioned to think invariably in these terms. But is there more than that involved? We are certainly very sceptical when anyone claims to have supernormal powers of the kind noted. We will take a lot of convincing, for, as we might say, it just does not happen. We suspect fraud or some delusion. And yet, when seemingly sane and dependable and highly intelligent persons make such claims, what is our reaction? We just do not dismiss it all outright. There is already available a very vast body of thoroughly professional studies of such
alleged para-normal phenomena. Psychical research is a respectable long
established subject, and some very distinguished names are associated with
it. Not all of this involves ‘Causation at a distance’, in the familiar terms.
But much of it does – even Mr Geller’s fork did not bend under normal
pressure, or so it was alleged.

Now we may have a strong inclination to dismiss many such claims out
of hand. We assume they are silly, superstitious or fraudulent. But we do not
usually take this line about all of them. Some highly intelligent and cautious
observers have not been convinced. But whether we think there is something
‘in it’ or not, we do not usually take an \textit{a priori} sceptical stance. We simply
say, ‘let us put it to the test. We approach the test with extreme scepticism,
and many find themselves for this reason unable to take a serious interest.
But interest is at once aroused when the evidence seems, if only for a time,
to clinch the claim. That is, we are sceptical because of the paucity or
vagueness of the evidence, or the extremely unusual character of what is
claimed. When the evidence seems, if only provisionally, strong (and many
very gifted people think it is more than that now) considerable interest is
stirred up. The media take it seriously, and we are all, if it comes our way,
prepared to look at the facts. We may not think it as important as it seems,
but even the most sceptical or indifferent do not think it so preposterous that
it should never be put to the test.

In short, the more extreme scepticism comes from the strangeness of these
phenomena – they are so much out of line with all that we normally expect.
But that is very different from ruling them out on principle. We find that
we can do certain bodily things. Why is it that we cannot do more, indeed
bring it about that the chair as well as my arm should rise when I will it?
Why is the former inherently out of the question, or rather, in this context,
why is O’Shaughnessy so convinced that it is?

At this point we have to reckon with a strong linguistic strain in the
argument. The supposition that we can simply invoke an act of will to
account for physical change is thought to be a ‘misuse of language’, and in
this way there is a limit ‘to be drawn within the language’ (vol. 1, p. 38)
to ‘the exertion of the will beyond the body’ (vol. 1, p. 39). Why is this?
It is because our use of language, and thereby what makes sense, requires
a ‘matrix context’ within which there have been established, in the course
of evolution and our development certain ‘epistemological pointers’ (vol. 1,
p. 43) or ‘markers’ beyond the constraint of which we move at our peril.
It is not impossible that what goes ‘beyond’ in this way should make sense,
but the odds are that it will lead to a ‘philosophical misuse’ or disregard for
the ‘metaphysical limit’ for which only further philosophical reflection will
provide the cure (vol. 1, p. 89). That will take the form of leading us back
to a ‘finely meshed and properly developed conceptual framework’ (vol. 1,
p. 45) by which it becomes evident also, so it is insisted, ‘that science can
discover, not merely what is the sense of a term, but whether or not an expression has a sense’ (vol. 1, p. 48).

The main trouble when we move, in the way noted, beyond the proper ‘philosophical barriers’ is, it seems, that we shall say things that have no explanatory value. Nothing takes its place in an intelligible system, a feature incidentally which takes us back, in much recent philosophy, closer than is realised to the more severely rationalist forms of the idealism over which contemporary hands are held up in such horror. We thus come to assume too readily that, ‘if an expression has a sense, our understanding must immediately “deliver the goods”’ (vol. 1, p. 57). We forget how much ‘the novel usage must overlap with established usage’ (vol. 1, p. 77) and thus find ourselves seeking to ‘explain the familiar by the unexplained unfamiliar’, we pass beyond the ‘wholly explicable uses’ and come to ‘an ultimate novelty in the order of things’ by which ‘Explanation eventually lapses’ (vol. 1, p. 96). ‘All talk of explanation...comes to an end’ (vol. 1, p. 97). We fall foul of the ‘bedrock usage’ ‘crystallized out in the remote past of our species’ (vol. 1, p. 81).

These suppositions are linked up very closely to a further rather curious claim which discloses still further just where O’Shaughnessy wishes to take his stand. He holds that when we decide to do a physical act we know that we actually will do it. This is not ‘merely surmised’. There is a ‘knowledge of the future that characteristically follows upon any firm decision to there and then execute an intention’ – ‘I would normally insist that I knew’ (vol. 1, p. 93). If I am ‘asked how I know I will raise my arm’ I ‘at first treat this as an absurd question’, and if someone persists, I simply say ‘Look, I just know’ (vol. 1, p. 93). There is a very special ‘absence of surprise at the occurrence of the desired effect’ (vol. 1, p. 92). This is centrally important for O’Shaughnessy’s view, and we must therefore stress that the absence of surprise is not just that which we would all normally posit coming from our normal understanding of what we can actually do, and what it is therefore worth attempting to do. I am not in the least surprised when I normally get up to open the door to find that I can do so. I assume that, in my normal state of health, this is one of the many things I can do. There are some feats which would surprise me if I accomplished them, but walking about is not one of them. I can always do that if I am well.

But O’Shaughnessy wishes to insist that the knowledge of the future, involved in physical action, is very special, it is immediate. And thus, ‘the absence of surprise is likewise not to be explained through appeal to evidential considerations. These characteristics are part of the concept of physical action’ and are thus ‘a priori true’ (vol. 1, p. 95). In this way, ‘if I actually reach a firm decision to there and then raise my arm, then generally at that precise instant I come to know that I am going to raise my arm’ (vol. 1, p. 95). But what is the force of ‘generally’ here, and how does it fit with the
a priori character of the claim, and the admission that ‘this (immediate) knowledge is so to say fallible knowledge, in as much as the motor apparatus can let us down’?

There seems to be a real Achilles heel here. O'Shaughnessy is able to his own satisfaction at least, to get by with the priviso of my ‘knowing that my arm and body are in working order’ (vol. i, p. 99). But how often, if ever, do we strictly know this? We may be struck with paralysis at any moment. The only way to avoid being surprised in that way would be to have the health of one’s body exhaustively monitored from moment to moment, a feat which could hardly ever be properly accomplished. Most of the time at least we have only a strong presumption. In practice it seems always possible to set ourselves to do something and fail. So that all that O'Shaughnessy can properly claim is, not that we ever strictly know that we can do, in bodily action, what we decide to do, but that we can always be sure of this provided the bodily ‘mechanism’ is in working order; and that is something we know in an empirical and not an a priori way.

But what of the alleged a priori knowledge itself? How am I sure that, if my arm and body are in working order, I can raise my arm? We certainly do take this for granted, and with every justification. But is not that in its turn, however confident (and rightly) we may be, an empirical matter also. It has always happened that way and as part of a highly intricate system, indeed ultimately of the whole order of nature of which our bodies are part. Within this order we can determine with great precision how things will go, and with full confidence. But there is nothing in the nature of it which inherently requires that it should be the order that it is. We simply find that fortunately that is how things are, and those who believe in miracles seem to suppose that there may even be exceptions. There seems certainly no inherent reason why my deciding or setting myself at some instant to effect a bodily change should bring this about. We simply find that it happens, subject to concommitant variations as the conditions change. There is no other inherent a priori necessity or an immediacy which is not dependent on what we find to be the case.

But it is to this sort of claim that O'Shaughnessy is most sharply opposed. He calls it, not inappropriately ‘volitionism’, and while severely critical, he readily admits that it is attractive in some ways. He wishes to concede what he can to it, and he does insist himself, as we have seen, that at the psychic and mental level we do have novelty and a distinct ontological grade. Above all there is the genuine ‘striving’ or ‘trying’ or ‘willing’ ensuing upon, but with a sui generis character of its own, certain beliefs and intentions and all that is involved at the strictly mental level. Why, then, granted the distinctiveness of the ‘trying’, is he so concerned to challenge the view that we simply find that the trying does bring about the appropriate effect in the further radically, ‘ontologically’ different physical or bodily mode of being?
What is so unacceptable about the view to which his own insinuations seem to impel us, why stop short so sharply of that which much that he himself explicitly says, and stresses, seems to require?

The answer is that volitionism, in the sense indicated, offers no explanation of that which it notes. It leaves us with an ultimate or radical mystery on our hands, as indeed it does. It posits a limit to explanation, it does not tell us how or why the ‘trying’ brings about the desired effect, it leaves us with a bare recognition of the fact, it explains nothing, but, on the contrary, invokes the mysterious, ‘the occult’, ‘the magical’, ‘the mystical’ (the latter term being incidentally used in a sense very far removed from its use in serious professional thought). We are left with an inexplicable datum, ‘something beyond scientific investigation: a metaphysical fact’ (vol. 1, p. 107). We are in ‘the realm of the miraculous or magical’ and need to be returned forthwith to the domain of the causally explicable in which ‘a finger movement’ is ‘neither a magical nor miraculous occurrence, and falls full square within the province of physics’ (vol. 1, p. 109).

The Cartesian alternative to this position is very explicitly noted on pages 110–111. I shall at this point quote the appropriate passage in full:

One familiar and illusory way out of this difficulty is the following. It might be claimed that when I move my head, two distinct yet causally related events happen nearly synchronously: the first affirmed by ‘I willed my head to move’; the second by ‘My head moved’; and both are affirmed by the complex assertion: ‘I moved my head’. Moreover, the first mentioned event, willing-of-the-movement-of-the-head, is exclusively susceptible of explanation in terms of purpose; whereas the second event, head movement, is entirely explicable via mention of the causal role of muscular and neural events. Accordingly, the resolution of the problem is simple. We first of all provide a logical analysis of ‘He moved his head’; into ‘His head moved’ and ‘He willed that’ (or some such); and interpret these two sentences as asserting the occurrence of distinct events. Then noting that these two events (that are) asserted by (the complex) ‘He moved his head’ have different types of explanation, we recognise that to apply both explanatory types to the moving of the head would be tantamount to making the erroneous assumption that there exists an automatic explanatory transfer from the constituent events of a set of events onto that set itself. Thus, our explanatory troubles have been born of this simple confusion. Herewith, the problem vanishes: head movement has its physiological-type explanation; willing of head movement has its immediate mentalistic explanation; and moving the head can look after itself. And that is that.

O’Shaughnessy rejects ‘this dissolution of the problem’ (vol. 1, p. 111), I accept it. ‘Moving the head can look after itself’ may not be the best way to put it, but I have no quarrel with what is intended. We have no explanation beyond that supplied of the two distinct events, and that is what they plainly seem to be, other than noticing what happens, and its consistency. However tantalizing (or should we say ‘wonderful?’) that is just as far as we can get, call it (misleadingly) ‘occult’ ‘magical’ or what you

1 My italics.
will. It is the case, it is what, fortunately for our being the beings we are, that we find.

O'Shaughnessy is unhappy with it. It leaves us in the air. It explains nothing at the crucial point, there is this irreducible surd or ‘datum’ which is itself left unexplained.

Very well, then, let us go along with him. What explanation does he offer? Can he bridge the gap, or what? Ryle had long ago complained that the dualist most inadvertently had neglected to tell us anything about the purported ‘transactions’ between the alleged two distinct events of mental willing and the physical effect; and a host of the most influential writers on the subject have followed him in this without question. Compare Passmore’s observation that minds persuade, bodies push.¹ If we leave it at that we seem to be throwing up the sponge where it is most important that some explanation should be forthcoming.

The quest becomes very exciting just here. Like the lively group in The Republic (Book iv, 432 B) we are now closing in on our quarry in the thicket. What can O'Shaughnessy produce? He rejects behaviourism and all that goes with it. The psychological and mental are intact, the ‘trying’ is real and processive. It is an ongoing occurrent event in ‘the novel’ psychological domain; if there is an explanation of how the physiological event comes about, let us have it; we are agog, the mystery is to be unravelled at last.

Alas for these hopes. There are no ‘transactions’, no intermediary, and rightly so; for what could they be that would not, as Ryle indeed was not slow to point out, just push the problem further, with the almost certain postulation of mythical entities. But if, rightly, nothing of this sort is provided, what can the philosopher have in his hat for us? Alas, nothing other than the bold, in the light of much that seemed to be said to the contrary, defiant insistence that there just are not two distinct events here, they are one. ‘After all, is it not certain that arm raising both encompasses arm rise and is itself a psychological event of the type of willing’ (vol. 1, p. 111). ‘I do not oppose the efficacy of an agent and of the physical means he employs; On the contrary, I suppose them to be one’ (vol. 1, p. 113). So that when the much vaunted requirement of explanation is pressed, and becomes urgent, what we are offered, and all that we seem to require, is the physiological story, familiar enough in itself already, ‘it is nerves and muscles and suchlike that occur in the explanation of the movements of our limbs’ together with all that science can tell us ‘concerning the detailed structure and function of the brain’ (vol. 1, p. 104). For ‘while there exists the neurological and muscular equipment that permits certain select brain events to cause arm rise, nothing comparable exists in the case of the lobe of the ears. And this fact is truly explanatory’. Some cases, reflex and voluntary for example, ‘may differ psychologically only at the level of the brain events’ (vol. 1, p. 109). But in

¹ Chapter III of John Passmore, Philosophical Reasoning, cf. chapter V of my The Elusive Mind.
none of this are we taken beyond the brain, the spinal cord, nerves, muscles, the complete physiological system in short. And while this is obviously explanation, it is a limited explanation in terms of the physiological factors which we know already. It is made to do duty as all the explanation we have, or need, by the simple expedient of identifying the physiological event and the willing. The one explanation suffices for both.

Much stress is placed, in the present context and in the remainder of this work, on the alleged identity of the will and the physiological change involved, the ‘mechanism’ as it is frequently called. It will be well to make this as explicit as possible. Thus we read as follows (on p. 112, vol. 1)

I do not oppose the efficacy of an animal and its musculature; which is to say, that I endorse the concept of mechanism. Therefore while it is true that my arm rose because the muscle contracted, this does not make the muscle contraction the source of the movement in opposition to me. And to resist that claim is not to suppose that I and my muscles were jointly responsible causally'. There is ‘no need of a bolstering further causal contribution from me the agent’. ‘For the concept of mechanism is explicitly such that act mechanism and act agent cannot be independent and mutually competing causal forces’. ‘That is, a mechanism’s effecting something is an agent’s effecting something.

Again:

Now we will soon see that the type of mechanism, and the character of those attendant facts or circumstances, which consist in the obtaining of certain conditionals, can be brought into a unity. That is, they prove to be different aspects of the one reality; For what they manifest and what the mechanism is, are one [vol. 1, p. 118].

It is within the ambit of these assumptions that further very central issues in the philosophy of mind are examined. The extension of the will beyond the body, for example, is precluded because the physiological system, the ‘mechanism’, with which the will must itself be identified to explain its efficacy, does not extend to extra bodily entities. I can only move those instrumentally, as when my arm pushes the chair. I cannot will the chair to move; and this is not something we normally find to be beyond us, or highly improbable because of all we know about the actual restriction of immediate bodily efficacy to the brain and the neurological and bodily structure it activates, but rather because it is conceptually impossible that there should be the willing of physical change that is not itself expressly one with the operation of our normal physiological mechanism. The para-normal, in this context (levitation for example and other bodily feats which run counter to physical expectation) are ruled out from the start in this a priori fashion.

This prescribes the treatment of further central and perplexing issues in the ‘mind-body problem’, the place, for example, of bodily feeling in our awareness and control of our bodies. For although it may be said of sensations, pain for example, that ‘they feel as they feel’ (vol. 1, p. 154), ‘that no pain can exist without an owner, that any pain that anyone has cannot
be had by another' (vol. 1, p. 154), it is far from being the case that ‘All
that is originally given is: feeling, feeling, feeling’ (vol. 1, p. 155); this itself
cannot be known as ‘Just oneself and certain feelings’ (vol. 1, p. 152); and
the self which owns the feelings and the admitted ‘givenness of the self to the
self’ is not the immediate givenness of some immaterial something to the
self, e.g. a Transcendental Ego’, it is ‘the givenness to the self of that of which
the material parts of the body are likewise material parts, viz. the material
entity that is oneself’ (vol. 1, p. 148). The feeling, pain in this example,
although it ‘feels as it feels’, is also something we only know in its fullness
as also physical reality and with its location ‘set in the body where it is’ (vol.
1, p. 155).

I am well aware that there is an awkward problem for dualists in the
location of bodily feelings, such as pain. Some are apt to slough this off lightly
on the basis of associations set up over the years, especially in infancy. But
this is also a little hard to take. When I have a pain in my right toe I know
at once that that is where I have it. It is not in my left toe or my thumb.
But I could have exactly the same sort of pain in my left toe. The quality
of the pain does not seem to have much, if anything, to do with where I find
it to be or feel it – as O'Shaughnessy himself stresses. At the same time the
pain seems to be firmly and exclusively something I feel. No one else can have
it, and no one can observe it. The cause may be seen or perceived in some
other way, but not the pain itself. This seems to be irremovably on the
experiential side of the divide, however easy it may be to observe the swelling,
the cut finger or whatever the doctor may note more precisely or his devices
record.

It would be helpful if dualists addressed themselves to this problem with
more of the ruthless precision with which O'Shaughnessy marshals his
arguments. Even so I see no way in which the pain itself could be other than
a private unextended sensation. And there, not too happily, I must leave it
for now. But that is not to deny the importance of the elaborate mental and
physiological framework (so well set out by O'Shaughnessy) in which the
pain occurs. A bodily sensation in indeed ‘putatively set in the body’ (vol. 1,
p. 164) and is part of a ‘unitary whole’ but not such as makes it itself in
any way properly physical. That seems to go against all that we find it to
be.

We return to the main theme, the crux in these studies, in the central parts
of Volume 2. The distinctive nature of ‘trying’ or willing, its relation to
desire, belief and sustained intention (and its irreducibility to them) is well
set out. The impression may be left on the unwary at times that acts of will
are the occasional isolated eruptions that Ryle lampooned. But this is just
a hazard of the topic and in no way seriously intended. We will what we
do all the time as we do it. But it is also firmly and consistently held that
bodily action is one whole which essentially ‘encompasses’ indivisibly within
itself the trying and the physical change. There is no action if my limbs are simply galvanized by some device affecting my nerves or my brain. There must be a trying. But neither is there any walking unless my legs move.

This could be just a matter of language. It would be odd to say that a man had been walking if a log had fallen on his legs and pinned him down the instant he set out to do so—or if he was suddenly paralysed. We would say he had only meant or tried to walk. This would be fine for day-to-day purposes. But in fact the man would have done all that he himself could strictly be said to have done if he had been walking.

This is well reflected in moral appraisal, and as far as it can be in law as well, though the law is not always able to take full account of moral niceties. We distinguish between murder and attempted murder, and the punishment, whatever its nature, is modified thereby. But that has no bearing on properly moral guilt. Morally, and ideally in law, a person's guilt is not lightened because his finger failed in its pull on the trigger, or because a clever surgeon managed unexpectedly to save the life of his victim. The activated intention is all that matters. It would be different if the agent had faltered when the moment came to shoot, but that too would depend on why he faltered. Unexpected failure to do what we set out to do has no moral relevance.

It seems strange to me that O'Shaughnessy is so little troubled by this issue. He is fully aware of the close relevance of his topic in some respects to ethical and legal questions, and in proceeding to his central account of voluntary action he makes clear his concern, in just this context, with 'acts for which in a certain special sense the subject must bear full responsibility' or 'the paradigmatic examples of responsible behaviour' (vol. 2, p. 302). We need to be clear in what precise sense 'responsible behaviour issues from decision' and how 'the need in question is met by the concept of doing something by choice' (vol. 2, p. 302). One of his main complaints against strict volitionism is that it is not adequate to 'the sense of "responsible", not identical with but underpinning many examples of moral responsibility' in which 'I can be said to be responsible for' what is done (vol. 2, p. 242).

But, in the event, he deals with this issue entirely in terms of the relation of the volition, notwithstanding its distinctness, to my reasons and intentions and everything that 'intelligibly links present action with the preceding cogitational procedures that culminated in the crystallisation of decision', 'its crucial link with the past' (vol. 2, p. 339). On this score he has much to say in the course of several chapters, and it is most illuminating, though I shall have one reservation of importance to make about it shortly. But of the major troubles that arise, in this particular context, from the union of the 'trying' with the actual physical enactment, hardly any note is taken.

On the union of the willing with the actual physical enactment there is no relenting in the course of a treatment of the subject that is too long to follow in detail here. Much prominence is given to 'subintentional sets', and
especially ‘idle unnoticed tongue moving’. As these, and the like, are thought to be as properly bodily acts as the fully intentional bodily action, notwithstanding the radical difference between the mental and the ‘merely psychological’, which includes much (sensations, for instance) besides willings, – ‘Is not the thought the most astonishing phenomenon contained by the entire Universe?’ (vol. 2, p. 201), – ‘the subintentional act is I think equally revelatory of the ontological status of the bodily act as such’ (vol. 2, p. 200). And ‘This strongly suggests – without actually proving – that the ultimate ontological type of all bodily acts is the ontological type of the most primitive and least garnished instance, viz. the subintentional act’ (vol. 2, p. 200).

This disposes us all the more readily to the view that the physical movement as such is an actual ingredient in the physical action itself, that there is no ultimate divide within bodily action. This is precisely what O'Shaughnessy wants to maintain. He does speak in one place of ‘a part event’ – ‘But kicking analyses into leg movement – and – whatever remains when leg movement is subtracted from kicking’ (vol. 2, p. 208). One part event is ‘psychological’, the other ‘non-psychological’. The kicking thus divides into two part-events, one (the leg movement) which is non-psychological and another ‘earlier part’ ‘that is both psychological and non-identical with kicking’ (vol. 2, p. 208). This idea of a ‘part-event’ (analogous, it is noted to the way our progress half way into a skid is part of just one skid) (vol. 2, p. 287) seems to me to give much away. When one part-event is so different in nature from the other is it not more plausible to speak of two events?

I remain a little perplexed also about ‘idle tongue movements’ and the like, though much is made of them. They seem certainly different from the sort of things that go on in one’s internal organs, a liver or kidney. But can we in any proper sense speak of them as actions, much less the revealing paradigm of what action really is?

Some recourse is had also to the effortfulness that is peculiarly marked in bodily striving – to drag a heavy object or push hard against a door that is stuck. But it seems to me that we must here also distinguish between the strain imposed upon the body as such and the strain on the person to persist in his ‘trying’ when this becomes unpleasant or painful. There can be intense mental efforts when little is involved in a physical way, as in a game of chess or solving a difficult problem ‘in one’s head’. Nor is this itself properly the effort of will as involved in persisting if we dislike this activity.

There certainly seems to be nothing in the nature of effortful physical activity to justify the claim which is central to the main theme of this book ‘that the act of opening the door is the bodily act of giving a push that manages to cause door opening’ (vol. 2, p. 102), or that basic (as distinct from instrumental) acts ‘cannot be distinct from limb movements’ (vol. 2,
p. 103) – or ‘event identity’ (vol. 2, p. 105). It may be tautologically true, in one way, that ‘the successful attempt is the doing of what one tried to do’ (vol. 2, p. 101), but this in no way justifies equating the attempt with the successful outcome. Nor is it quite fair to put the alternative in the terms that ‘the act of walking must cause the movement of the legs’ (vol. 2, p. 128), much less involve this in the supposition that ‘liftings’, ‘swimmings’, etc. ‘must take place exclusively in the brain’ (vol. 2, p. 128). The trouble with all this is the initial persistent assumption that we have in such cases only one event which ‘encompasses’ the trying and the bodily effects, these being ‘bonded together in the one event’. Yet this remains the vital issue around which everything else revolves.

What we have therefore is ‘one intrinsically essentially active event’ and a firm refusal ‘to drive a causal wedge between the act of will and the willed phenomenon’. ‘The act of the will is the voluntary bodily action’, giving us thus a dual-aspect theory’ (vol. 2, p. 264). At all costs we must avoid ‘the major vice of introducing a mind/body split into physical action’ (vol. 2, p. 288). We must not put bodily action ‘on a par with the evocation of mental images’. We find, on the contrary, that we ‘seem actively to appear in the very midst of physical nature’. If it were not so ‘we would be locked within our minds and split off from our bodies’ (vol. 2, p. 288). But the dual-aspect view proposed ‘imports’, as noted earlier, an alleged ‘intelligibility into the mind-to-body causal relation which otherwise would be absent’ (vol. 2, p. 332).

It is in these features of physical action, then, that we find ‘the centre piece of the very phenomenon of animal consciousness’ which ‘serves a crucial bridge function between mind and body, not unlike that allotted by Descartes to the pineal gland’, ‘the mental pineal’ as it is also put, ‘the psychic promontory that openly juts into the physical world’ (vol. 2, p. 352). This is the ‘unique role’ of bodily action, ‘one end so to say immediately flush with the mental intention, the other end lodged amidst the bric-à-brac of the merely physical realm’ (vol. 2, pp. 208–209).

It is implied in all this also that the one ‘bonded event’ encompassing the trying and the observable movement, has its core in the initial brain event which activates the subsequent neurological and total bodily event. The cerebral event becomes the very core of our existence, and this, as is noted, ‘takes us far from Cartesianism’ (vol. 2, p. 351).

A further consequence of the position on which O'Shaughnessy takes his stand is that the union of inner and outer, as he presents it in the ‘crucial bridge’ or ‘promontory’ noted, extends itself inescapably backward into the more overtly mental antecedents of action, our thoughts as they lead us from desire to the intention that is implemented when the time comes. The physicalism envisaged is thus not limited but is bound to cover also all those features of our existence which seemed at so many stages to be given so
distinctive an ontological status and the recognition, the ready concession, of those matters which the dualist is peculiarly concerned to preserve. We find that we have, alas, been driven very far indeed from our Cartesian harbour.

I have no quarrel with the account which O'Shaughnessy gives in general of the course of self-determination as this leads from desire to intention and action. But it is, in the first place, not very easy to adjust to the universal physicalism which it seems very difficult for O'Shaughnessy to avoid in the final account. It seems also to leave no room for that genuinely open choice which some notable ethical writers (Nicolai Hartmann, Broad, Campbell, Ewing, Mabbot, Maclagan for example) take to be the basic inescapable condition of moral accountability. Not all our choices are of this sort. The genuinely open alternatives appear when the intention as normally shaped (‘inclination’ as moralists put it) is at odds with what seems to be our duty. This is a theme in itself, but it is also one which, notwithstanding the concessions to a dualist and volitionist view, is likely to trouble so rigorous an eventual physicalist as O'Shaughnessy very little.

My final impression of this work is one of regret. It is, as I have noted, a work of exceptional skill in presentation and the marshalling of subtle arguments. It is most enjoyable to read. But if I am right in my own impression that the distinctness of mental and physical reality, taking the former in the broadest sense, is ultimate and irreducible – and initially seen to be so –, it seems unfortunate that ingenuity and resourcefulness of the highest philosophical grade should be committed to so forlorn an enterprise. Might it not be wiser now to abandon the attempt and, bravely admitting that in essential matters on this topic Descartes was right, set these gifts of presentation and imaginative insight to the exciting creative philosophical tasks that open out for us once this important shift is effectively made.