

**The Subject of Experiences: The Significance of its Metaphysical Nature in the
Philosophy of Mind**

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Project leader: Prof. Martine Nida-Rümelin

Other team members: Dr. Donnchadh O’Conaill, Mr. Julien Bugnon

(research team is based at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland)

Summary of the research plan

This project will focus on the metaphysics of the subject of experiences, that is, on the nature of entities which can have experiences (including conscious animals as well as humans). There has been increasing attention paid to different issues relevant to this topic in recent years, but as of yet there has been no systematic study showing how these issues are interrelated and how they can be integrated into a substantive account of the nature of the subject. To fill this gap, we shall propose the following hypothesis: each subject is a substance, distinct from its body but necessarily embodied, and it is essentially a subject. We shall provide new arguments in defence of this conception, and also show how it can provide novel accounts of what it is for a subject to be embodied, to have a perspective on the world, and for its experiences to be unified. This conception therefore promises to provide a comprehensive and unified metaphysical account of the subject, which will have important ramifications for other issues in the philosophy of mind.

In the course of our work we shall address the following Research Questions:

RQ1. To which ontological category does the subject of experience belong, e.g., is it a substance, a bundle of experiences, a collection of mental capacities, etc?

RQ2. Are the entities which are subjects essentially subjects?

RQ3. What is the metaphysical nature of embodiment, i.e., what is it, metaphysically speaking, for a subject to be embodied?

RQ4. What is the nature of the subject’s first-person perspective?

RQ5. What is the metaphysical relation between the subject of experiences and the unity of experiences?

Investigating each of these questions is crucial providing an overall metaphysical account of the nature of the subject. The view we propose can only hold together if all five are discussed in detail.

The hypotheses we wish to defend regarding the research questions are as follows: the subject is a substance (RQ1) and each subject is essentially a subject (RQ2). A subject can be embodied to different degrees, and this can be accounted for on a view which takes each subject to be an emergent individual (RQ3). We shall distinguish several different senses in which a subject has a perspective and investigate their interrelation; for instance, we shall suggest that the sense of being located at a specific point in space and time requires having a unique perspective on one's own experiences in a way which does not allow for reduction in, e.g., functional terms (RQ4). A subject's experiences are unified in a significant way simply by belonging to that subject, and this unity cannot be reductively explained (RQ5).

Current state of research in the field

To understand the current state of research regarding the metaphysics of the subject, it will be helpful to briefly sketch how the field has developed over the last few decades. In the second half of the twentieth century, debates flourished concerning personal identity (see, e.g., the papers in Perry 1975, Rorty 1976). These debates were typically framed in terms of finding the correct criteria of personal identity. Such criteria can be understood in different ways, e.g., as epistemic principles about what justifies statements of the form 'Person A = Person B', as semantic rules governing the meaning of these statements, or as metaphysical conditions, e.g., what it is in virtue of which Person A is identical with person B.¹

One's views on personal identity will have implications for how one understands the metaphysics of the self.² For instance, theorists who think that personal identity consists in relations of psychological continuity are likely to regard the nature of the self as psychological; those who appeal to biological continuity are more likely to regard the self as essentially bodily in nature. But in much of this debate direct discussion of the nature of the self, including questions such as the ontological category to which it belongs, were not commonplace.³

The situation has changed since roughly the 1990s in two ways which have greatly shaped the current state of research. The first is an increased emphasis on the self as a subject of experiences rather than as a person.⁴ We understand the difference between subjects and

¹ For discussion of these different senses of criteria of identity see, e.g., Lowe 2009; Fine 2015.

² We prefer not to use the term 'the self', but in this literature this term is widely used.

³ This is not to suggest that no such work was published during this period (see, e.g., Chisholm 1976, Madell 1981, Foster 1991), only that it was not central to philosophical discussions of the self.

⁴ Two key developments were EJ Lowe's book *Subjects of Experience* (1996) and Galen Strawson's article 'The Self' (1997), in which the core characterisation of the self was a mental thing which is a subject of experiences. Strawson's article and various responses to it made up the influential collection *Models of the Self* (Gallagher &

persons to be roughly as follows: a subject is an entity which is capable of having conscious experiences, whereas a person is a subject whose mental life meets certain additional criteria (e.g., persons are typically thought to be rational agents capable of thinking thoughts using first-personal concepts such as ‘I’). Discussions of personal identity often tend to focus on humans, but we think this is potentially misleading. In this project we shall consider experiencing subjects in general, including conscious non-human animals.

The second development is an increasing focus on metaphysical and ontological questions concerning the subject; for instance, monographs such as Olson 2007, Dainton 2008, Strawson 2009, Ganeri 2012, Peacocke 2014 and Madell 2015, and collections edited by Strawson (2005), by Siderits, Thompson & Zahavi (2011) and by Loose, Menuge & Moreland (2018). Of course, many of these works discuss issues to do with personal identity (or the identity of subjects over time).⁵ What has changed is the emphasis: questions concerning the nature of the subject are now being directly addressed in their own right, rather than simply being considered in the context of debates about personal identity.

The result of these developments has been a proliferation of divergent views about the nature of the subject (for an overview see Ganeri 2012, chp 1). To classify these views, it is necessary to first distinguish a number of different questions which one can ask about the nature of the subject. The first is whether subjects of experience exist. So-called *no-self* or *eliminativist* views deny that they do; that is, they deny that there is anything which the term ‘subject of experiences’ denotes (Metzinger 2003, Benovsky 2019; see also recent work in Buddhist philosophy which can be understood as eliminativist, e.g., Albahari 2006, Siderits 2011). *Virtual self* theories characterise the subject as a mere intentional object, the object of *de se* representations (Bayne 2010, 289-294; Johnston 2010). These theories may also count as versions of eliminativism (for discussion see McClelland 2019).

Moving on to non-eliminativist theories, the first way they can be assessed is in terms of to which ontological category they see the subject belonging (this will be the focus of our work on RQ1). The best-known views regard the subject as either a substance which instantiates mental properties, or as a bundle of mental states, events or properties. Recent defences of the substance view include Zimmerman 2010, Madell 2015, Robinson 2016 and Moreland 2018; recent defences of the bundle view include Campbell 2006 and Dainton 2008. In each of these answers, the relevant ontological category can be understood in

Shear 1999). See also the book-length discussions of the nature of the self by Barry Dainton (2008) and Strawson (2009).

⁵ There is also ongoing work focusing directly on personal identity, e.g., the papers in Gasser & Stefan 2012a.

different ways. For example, traditional bundle theories regard the subject as a bundle of experiences, whereas Barry Dainton's view is that the subject is a bundle of powers to generate experiences (2008). In addition, a number of other ontological positions have been outlined in the recent literature. For instance, the subject has been identified with an experience or experiences (Strawson 2009), or with an invariant property or characteristic of experiences such as their subjectivity or first-personal character (Fasching 2009, Zahavi 2014).

In our work on RQ1, we shall outline a substance view of the subject and explore to what extent it can be justified. Much of this work will involve clarifying the notion of substance, and arguing against views which take a substance to either be a bare substratum, without any properties of its own (e.g., Benovsky 2009) or as identical with its essential properties (e.g., Madell 2015). On the view we shall consider, each substance has certain properties essentially, but is not identical with these properties; rather, it is that individual which has them. We shall also discuss a number of ways in which the substance view of the subject might be defended, developing previous work on this topic (Nida-Rümelin 2018; O'Conaill forthcoming).

A second way to distinguish different views of the subject is to ask whether each subject is *essentially* a subject (we shall focus on this in our work on RQ2). For instance, on a traditional Cartesian view a subject is essentially a thinking substance; it could not cease to be a thinking substance and survive. Now contrast this with *animalism*, the view on which a subject is identical with an animal, e.g., a member of homo sapiens.⁶ On many accounts a member of homo sapiens can exist without being a subject of experiences. For instance, it is highly implausible that a human foetus in the early stages of development is capable of having experiences (this capacity involves a functioning nervous system, which does not develop until later in the pregnancy). So according to animalists, human subjects are not essentially subjects.

In our work on RQ2, we shall frame this question by asking whether the concept 'subject of experiences' is a *sortal* concept, one which supplies principles for identifying or distinguishing the different entities to which it applies. For example, to grasp the concept 'cat' requires having some idea of the conditions under which it applies to one entity (e.g., the same cat seen at different times) and when it applies to several entities (e.g., to different

⁶ Or at least, each human subject is identical with an animal. Some discussions of some of the positions we mention confine their claims to human subjects, but for the most part this restriction is not relevant to the points we wish to make.

cats at different times). *Non-sortal* concepts do not supply such principles. Within *sortal* concepts we can also distinguish *ultimate sortals*; these are *sortal* concepts which are not restrictions of some other *sortal*. Using these distinctions, we shall explore a view which has not thus far received much attention; that the concept ‘subject of experience’ is an *ultimate sortal*. This will allow us to develop a new approach to the issue of whether or not each subject is essentially a subject.

A closely related issue concerns which entities, if any, the different views identify the subject with. In considering this issue, we can distinguish between physicalist and dualist views concerning the subject. Physicalists will typically identify the subject with some physical or biological entity, e.g., a brain (Tye 2003) or an organism (as in animalism – see Olson 1997, Snowdon 2014). Dualists about the subject will deny that the subject is identical with any such entity. This dualist denial leaves open what exactly the subject is (for example, dualism is in principle compatible with any of the different ontological categories mentioned above). It also leaves open exactly what relations obtain between the subject and its body. One well-known option is that the subject is *constituted* by its body, in much the same way that a statue is constituted by a lump of marble (Baker 2000). Other views hold that the subject *emerges* from certain arrangements of matter or neural activities, e.g. Hasker 1999.

In RQ3, we shall approach this issue in a slightly different way. Rather than starting with metaphysical questions, e.g., is the subject identical with or constituted by its body, we shall ask what it is, metaphysically speaking, for a subject to be embodied. To address this question, we shall consider plausible conditions on being embodied. These include the *Action Condition* (an embodied subject can act directly through its body); the *Knowledge Condition* (the subject can be directly aware of certain states of its own body); and the *Phenomenological Condition* (the subject’s sense of its body plays a crucial role in structuring its perceptual experiences). Each of these conditions can be satisfied to a greater or a lesser degree. This suggests that being embodied is a matter of degree; different subjects may be embodied to a greater or a lesser extent, and one subject’s degree of embodiment may differ at different times. If embodiment is a matter of degree, this should be reflected in the metaphysical account of what it is to be embodied. We shall develop this idea by considering whether specific metaphysical views, e.g., emergent substance dualism, can account for embodiment being a matter of degree.

The questions considered so far have been very general, concerning the nature of the subject as a whole. But recently there have also been discussions of more specific aspects of the nature of subjects. For instance, one idea familiar from the literature is that having a

perspective is essential to being a subject, or at least is essential to a subject's having experiences (Farkas 2008, 30-31; Bayne 2010, 269-270; Levine 2016, 354; Watzl 2017, 263-266). The metaphor of having a perspective, and the perspectivalness of consciousness, is clearly important in helping us to understand what it is to be a subject. However, the notion of the subject's having a perspective is used in very different ways in the literature. For instance, it can be used to express something about the way the world appears to the subject, or it can be used to express the subject's unique awareness of its own experiences, e.g., Sydney Shoemaker describes the first-person perspective as the "distinctive way mental states present themselves to the subjects whose states they are" (1996, 157). In our work on RQ4, we shall distinguish these and other senses of the subject's perspective. We shall also consider a topic which has not received much discussion thus far: how these different senses of having a perspective are related. For instance, we shall examine whether and how the perspectival way things appear to the subject in perception depends upon the subject's unique awareness of its own experiences, and indeed of itself.

Another important issue regarding the nature of subjects is what role they play in unifying consciousness. It has become common to see claims that experiences are necessarily unified in various respects, e.g., *object unified* (unified in presenting a single object of awareness), *subject unified* (unified in belonging to a single subject), or *phenomenally unified* (unified by there being something it is like for a subject to have different experiences together) (Bayne & Chalmers 2003). It has been claimed that the unity of experiences belonging to a subject can be explained in a reductive way, in terms of relations between different experiences rather than their relation to the subject (e.g. Bayne 2010; Benovsky 2019). In our work on RQ5 we shall question this view, drawing on previous work (Nida-Rümelin 2017; O'Conaill forthcoming) which suggests that what it is for a subject to have different experiences is neither ontologically nor conceptually reducible. We shall also address the phenomenal unity of experiences, exploring the prospects for explaining this unity also by appealing to the subject who has the phenomenally unified experiences.

In addition to work on each of the individual research questions, our proposed project will substantially build on existing work on the metaphysics of the subject in two ways. First, we shall outline a coherent overall position on the nature of the subject, considering its main strengths and weaknesses and assessing to what degree it can be defended. On this view, the subject is a substance distinct from its body but necessarily embodied; it is essential to it to be a subject, that is, to be able to have experiences; its identity both at a time and over time is primitive (that is, it does not have non-circular or informative identity-conditions); and it

unifies its experiences in a primitive manner (that is, there is no non-circular or informative account of what it is for a subject to have different experiences, at a time or over time). Aspects of this position are familiar from the existing literature, but we shall work out the whole package of views in greater detail than before.⁷

Second, in this project we shall bring together various strands in debates on the metaphysics of the subject in a systematic and unified discussion of the theoretical landscape, relating relatively abstract metaphysical topics such as the ontology and essence of the subject to more specific issues such as embodiment and the unity of consciousness. In order to develop the field in this way, we plan to edit a handbook or companion on the metaphysics of the subject, providing the first comprehensive and systematic overview of the field.

While there has been a great deal of research by individual philosophers on different issues concerning the metaphysics of the subject, there are few if any research centres or large-scale projects dedicated specifically to this topic. The proposed project would thus break new ground, being one of the first of its kind to systematically explore the metaphysics of the subject.

Detailed research plan

In this project we shall put forward the following hypothesis: each subject is a substance, distinct from its body but necessarily embodied, and it is essentially a subject. In developing this hypothesis we shall consider five interrelated research questions, each of which concerns a specific topic which is crucial for the metaphysics of the subject. By ‘subject of experiences’, we mean any entity which can have or can undergo experiences – this includes conscious non-human animals as well as humans.⁸ An experience is an event, state or process which has a phenomenal character, i.e., it is like something for a subject to have or undergo it. Examples of experiences include bodily sensations, emotional feelings, perceptual and agential experiences and perhaps conscious cognitive states such as consciously thinking about a philosophical problem (see, e.g., Strawson 1994; Bayne & Montague 2011).

⁷ We do not expect every member of the team to agree with every part of this package. The most important thing is that they are willing to take these views seriously and critically assess them in a fair but rigorous manner.

⁸ This characterisation is intended to pick out the subject matter of the discussion; it is not put forward as a statement of the essence of a subject of experience (see RQ2 for further discussion). ‘Entity’ refers to any existing thing of any ontological category (e.g., substance, event, property, etc).

Research Question 1: to which ontological category does the subject of experiences belong?

The problem of the nature of the subject can be introduced by asking the following question: is there anything more to the existence of a subject than its having experiences?

One answer (or one group of answers), is that there is nothing more to the existence of a subject than this. That is, a subject is nothing over and above or reducible to its experiences, the properties of these experiences and the relations between them. Accounts of this kind adopt a *deflationary conception* of the subject. Hume is commonly thought to have advanced a deflationary conception of the self when claiming that the subject is “nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions” (*Treatise*, 252; though for a different interpretation see Strawson 2017). More recently, a number of different deflationary accounts have been proposed, for instance that each subject is identical with an experience (Strawson 2009) or with a property of experiences, their subjectivity or first-personal givenness (Zahavi 2014). A further recent development is to regard the subject as a *virtual entity*, a merely intentional object as opposed to something existing independently of any cognitive system (Bayne 2010, Johnston 2010). It is unclear whether this counts as a form of eliminating the subject or as providing a particular kind of reductive or deflationary view.⁹

Non-deflationary conceptions of the subject hold that the subject is something over and above its experiences and cannot be reduced to them. One prominent recent theory of this kind is defended by Dainton (2008). Dainton regards the subject as a bundle of mental states or properties, but these are not experiences; rather, they are capacities to produce experiences. Such bundles can exist without actually producing experiences, in which case the subject which they make up would not have experiences.

In this project we wish to explore the prospects of a different non-deflationary conception of the subject: the view that the subject is a *substance*. This view has a venerable history and more recently has been defended by John Foster (1991), EJ Lowe (1996), William Hasker (1999) and Geoffrey Madell (2015). Our aim is twofold: to clearly outline this conception of the subject and to assess it by contrasting it with recent rival views.

We shall argue that two widespread views of the subject as a substance are in fact misconceptions. The first is to treat the subject as either identical with or partly composed by a *bare substratum*. That is, one might think that the original question – is there anything more to the existence of a subject than its having experiences? – could be answered by metaphysically analyzing a subject into its experiences on the one hand, and something

⁹ Eliminativists hold that the term ‘subject of experiences’ does not denote anything; deflationists hold that it does, but what it denotes is experiences, their properties, etc.

underlying those experiences on the other. This underlying something is often regarded as having no properties in itself, hence the name ‘bare substratum’ (on the substratum approach in metaphysics see Loux 2006; on this view as applied to subjects see Benovsky 2009, though he terms ‘substance’ what we would term ‘substratum’).

We prefer to focus on a different view which we believe to be more promising, on which a substance is *metaphysically irreducible*; that is, it cannot be analysed into constituent parts (this leaves open whether or not the subject has parts, but if it does it cannot be reduced to them). Furthermore, on our preferred view a substance is not bare in the way that the substratum is often conceived of being. Rather, it has its own *nature* or *essence*. For example, each substance belongs to a kind (e.g., it is an electron, or an organism of a certain species, etc.), and there are certain properties which each member of a kind essentially has. We can describe the nature of each substance by describing the kind to which it belongs and the essential properties of members of this kind.¹⁰

A second error, in our view, is to identify a substance with some of its properties. This view has been attributed to Descartes, who claimed that the attributes “Thought and extension [...] must then be considered as nothing else but thinking substance itself and extended substance itself – that is, as mind and body” (*Principles* 1.63; for defence of this interpretation of Descartes see Rodriguez-Pereyra 2008; for applications of this interpretation to the metaphysics of the subject, see Strawson 2009, 339-348; Madell 2015). We think this identification involves a categorical error. A substance cannot be identical with any of its properties, even properties it has essentially. In the case of subjects, Descartes held that their essential property is thought, which is roughly what we would term consciousness: a thinking thing is “a thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, imagines also and senses” (*Second Meditation*). But a subject is not identical with its ability to have experiences; a subject is that which has this ability, and when this ability is exercised it is the subject and not the ability which has or undergoes the experience.

The view of substances we shall work with regards them as *non-predicable* (they do not characterise any other entity); each substance belongs to a kind and has properties essential to members of that kind; and the identity of a substance is not determined by the identity of its parts or its properties (for defences of this view of substance see Loux 1978, 2006; Lowe 2006; Wiggins 2016). Applied to subjects, this suggests the following

¹⁰ The nature of a substance understood in this way is *general*; it is a nature common to all members of a specific kind (e.g., a nature common to all electrons). This leaves open whether each substance also has an *individual essence*, a nature unique to that entity alone (for criticism of this view see Nida-Rümelin 2012). On the distinction between general and individual essences see Lowe 2008.

conception: a subject is not a property or characteristic of something else (e.g., a body, or experiences); it is not a bare substratum; and its identity is not determined by the identity of its experiences or other mental states or capacities.

It is important to stress that this conception of the subject does not commit us to a traditional form of substance dualism, on which the subject is an immaterial entity capable of existing independently of any physical entities. We shall develop an alternative version of substance dualism in RQ2 and RQ3.

We shall consider a number of different ways in which the claim that the subject is a substance can be motivated. One way is to claim that this view is best able to explain certain key claims about subjects and experiences:

- (a) a subject can persist through changing experiences;
- (b) a subject could have failed to have at least some of the experiences it actually had;
- (c) a subject could have had experiences other than those it actually had;
- (d) the identity of each subject is not determined by the experiences it actually has;
- (e) the identity of each token experience is partly determined by its subject.

Not all of these claims are uncontroversial, but each can be defended, and together they place substantial limits on which theories of the subject are defensible. We shall explore the prospects of the following argument: the self as substance can clearly meet each of these desiderata, whereas rival accounts of the subject cannot. For example, a bundle theory which identifies the self with a bundle of experiences arguably has difficulty accounting for (b) or (c). Dainton's theory, on which the subject is identical with a bundle of capacities to produce experience, can accommodate each of (a)-(c), but has difficulty explaining the combination of (d) and (e) (see O'Conaill forthcoming and Nida-Rümelin 2018 for preliminary work).

Research Question 2: are the entities which are subjects essentially subjects?

Another issue an account of the nature of subjects must take a stance on is whether an entity which is a subject is essentially or necessarily a subject. That is, if x is a subject, is it necessarily true of x that it must be a subject at any moment it exists?¹¹

This question can be developed in different ways, using different metaphysical or conceptual tools. One could ask whether the property *being a subject* is an essential or a necessary property; in that case, any entity which has this property could not exist without having it. The property *being negatively charged* is essential to being an electron, in that for

¹¹ In work on the project we shall distinguish between the notions of essence and necessity (see, e.g., Fine 1994, Koslicki 2012) but for the purposes of this research plan we need not explore this distinction.

something to be an electron is, in part, for it to have this property. Nothing could be an electron and fail to have this property. In contrast, the property *having spin-up* is not essential to electrons.

A more precise way to develop the question involves appealing to a distinction between *sortal* and *non-sortal concepts*, and then to a further distinction within sortal concepts. A sortal concept is a concept which supplies principles for identifying or distinguishing the different entities to which it applies (Sattig 2015, 15). For example, the concept ‘cat’ is a sortal concept; to grasp it is to have some idea of the conditions under which it applies to one entity (e.g., the same cat seen at different times) and to several entities (e.g., to different cats). In contrast, ‘red thing’ is not a sortal concept; one can grasp it without understanding the conditions under which it applies to one entity as opposed to several.

An *ultimate sortal* is unrestricted; whatever it applies to cannot be an instance of that sortal at one time and not be an instance of that sortal at another. In contrast, a *phased sortal* is a restriction of some other sortal (Wiggins 2001, 30; see also Sattig 2015, 15-16). The concept ‘kitten’ is a restriction of the concept ‘cat’. A kitten can cease to be a kitten without ceasing to exist. But it may be that this very entity cannot cease to be a cat without ceasing to exist. In that case, ‘cat’ would be an ultimate sortal.

This three-way distinction between non-sortals, phase sortals and ultimate sortals allows us to contrast three possible answers to the question with which we started. The concept ‘subject of experience’ might not be a sortal concept at all, or it might be a phased sortal, or an ultimate sortal. Wiggins himself denies that ‘subject’ is a sortal term; he regards it as a determinable predicate requiring specific sortal determination, e.g., ‘human subject’ (2001, 195-196; see also Cassam 1997, chp 4). To put this in more metaphysical terms, Wiggins would deny that there is a kind *subject of experience*; rather, on his view the phrase ‘subject of experience’ picks out individuals from several different kinds (see also Baker 2003).

This position is questionable. To describe something as a subject is far more determinate than calling it a space-occupier, an entity, or a substance, to use Wiggins’s other examples of nouns which are not sortal terms (2001, 69). Subjects seem to satisfy Wiggins’s conception of forming a kind, in that all subjects have a common principle of operation or activity (2001, 72); specifically, each subject must be capable of having experiences. It has been suggested that the identity- and persistence-conditions for subjects can be formulated precisely in terms of phenomenal unity and continuity, i.e., the continuing of a stream of consciousness or of the ability to have experiences. This is the *phenomenalist conception* of a

subject's identity (Dainton 2008). Alternatively, one can hold that the identity of subjects is *primitive*, in the following sense: it is not possible to provide an informative non-circular statement of the conditions under which subject S1 is identical with subject S2.¹² (This is closely related to the claim that subjects of experience are *perfect individuals* – see Nida-Rümelin 2012.) The primitive view of the identity of subjects is compatible with the concept 'subject' being a sortal, though it would be a sortal of a special kind, one which would not involve non-circular and informative principle for identifying or distinguishing between different subjects (see Lowe 2009, 22-23).

It has also been suggested that 'subject' is a phased sortal. On this view, an entity which is a subject at a certain time might not have been a subject earlier, and might cease to be a subject later on. This is one way of understanding *animalism*, the view that each human subject is identical with a member of the species *homo sapiens* (Olson 1997, Snowdon 2014). On this view, each of us existed (e.g., as embryos) before we became subjects, and it is possible that some of us might cease to be subjects but continue to exist (e.g., if we suffer severe but not life-ending brain damage).

We shall explore the prospects of a different view, one which has not been explicitly defended in the literature: the concept 'subject of experiences' is an ultimate sortal. That is, subjects are members of a kind such that members of that kind could not exist without being members of that kind. On this view, each of us did not come into existence until a certain foetus developed certain capacities (roughly, the capacity to undergo experiences, which is thought to happen in the second trimester or later). And if one loses the capacity to undergo experiences (as opposed to having this capacity but not exercising it), then one would cease to exist.

A corollary of this view is that the concept 'person' is a phased sortal. We understand persons to be subjects who meet certain cognitive constraints, e.g., of rationality. That is, each person is a subject, but not all subjects are persons; and a subject can cease to be a person but still exist, whereas it could not cease to be a subject and still exist. The concept 'subject' denotes a fundamental kind, one which determines the identity-conditions of its members. 'Person' denotes a kind to which each of us belongs, but it is not a fundamental kind.

¹² It is worth comparing this view with the *simple view of personal identity*, on which there are no informative non-circular persistence conditions for persons (Gasser & Stefan 2012b, 2-3). The primitive view of subject identity applies to synchronic as well as diachronic identity-claims, and it applies to the identity of all subjects, not just persons.

Research Question 3: what is the metaphysical nature of embodiment, i.e., what is it, metaphysically speaking, for a subject to be embodied?

The metaphysical question of embodiment is the question of what, metaphysically speaking, it is for a subject to be embodied.¹³ In considering this question, it is helpful to distinguish a subject's body from what might be termed its 'physical base', i.e., those physical entities, processes, etc. on which a subject's experiences supervene, or which nomologically determine a subject's experiences. On some views, a subject's base is partly constituted by entities beyond its body; more specifically, the base of certain experiences is partly constituted by environmental features (see, e.g., Vold 2015).¹⁴ Furthermore, it might even be possible for a subject's base to cease to include a body. A possible example of this would be a brain being surgically removed from its body and kept artificially alive in a vat of chemicals. This brain might be able to sustain a subject, and this subject could enjoy experiences, but the subject would not be linked to a body in the various ways which, as we outline below, are characteristic of being embodied. This proposal is obviously speculative, but it indicates that being embodied is not the same thing as being determined by the physical.¹⁵

One approach to the metaphysics of embodiment would be to appeal to one or another of a group of widely accepted identity claims: each subject is identical with a body (or an organism, if that is different to a body), or with part of a body or part of an organism, e.g., a brain (Tye 2003; Snowdon 2014). This approach allows for a straightforward answer to the metaphysical question of embodiment. However, there are various reasons to question this approach. One argument is that each subject seems to have different identity-conditions to either its body or any parts of its body; there are various apparently possible scenarios in which a particular subject can survive without its body or any parts of its body.¹⁶ A related argument is that while it is possible to provide informative, non-circular statements of the conditions under which body A = body B, this is not possible for subjects, i.e., their identity is *primitive* (see, e.g., Nida-Rümelin 2010, 2012).

¹³ This question has rarely been explicitly discussed in the literature, though there has been some consideration of a related topic, what it is for a particular body to belong to a subject (Lowe 1996, 37-38; Cassam 2011, 140).

¹⁴ This is the so-called Extended Conscious Mind view, which builds on the Extended Mind Hypothesis (Clark & Chalmers 1998).

¹⁵ Note that the subject in this scenario would not be 'disembodied' in the traditional sense. This fits with a point we shall make below, that being embodied is not a binary condition, i.e., it is not that one is either embodied or disembodied. Note also that our view of disembodiment does not entail the possibility of the subject being an immortal soul.

¹⁶ This argument dates back to John Locke's classic discussion of the prince and the cobbler (*Essay* II.xxvii.15), and has been extensively discussed in the literature on personal identity.

An alternative approach which we shall adopt is to consider some plausible conditions on being embodied. These include the *Action Condition*: an embodied subject can act directly through its body. That is, for an embodied subject some bodily movements are *basic actions*; the subject can initiate and control these bodily movements without doing so by way of performing some other action (Wong 2018). Another condition is the *Knowledge Condition*: the subject can be directly aware of certain states of its own body. This knowledge may concern certain bodily movements (O'Brien 2007), it may be based on proprioceptive or kinaesthetic feedback (Recanati 2007), or it may concern how the body contributes to shaping the subject's perceptual field, e.g., via its body schema (Gallagher 2005). A third condition is the *Phenomenological Condition*: the subject's sense of its body plays a crucial role in structuring its experiences (see, e.g., Legrand 2006; de Vignemont 2011; Bermúdez 2017). Our suggestion is not that these conditions constitute what it is to be embodied; rather, they are non-metaphysical conditions on being embodied, which constrain what a correct metaphysical account of embodiment can look like.

Two important points are worth noting about these conditions. First, they each involve *degrees of satisfaction*. That is, a subject can to a greater or lesser degree be said to satisfy each of these conditions. For instance, a subject may have a greater or lesser range of bodily movements it can directly initiate and control. Suppose that all the nerve endings in one's left arm were severed. In that case one could still lift one's left arm (for instance, by raising it using one's right arm), but one could not directly lift it. One would still be able to act directly through one's body, but to a lesser degree than is typically the case.

Second, the degrees of satisfaction of these conditions can to some extent vary independently of each other. For example, one might satisfy the Knowledge Condition to a high degree but the Action Condition to a lower degree, or vice-versa (see Wong 2018).

These two points suggest the following: being embodied is not, as one might have thought, an all-or-nothing matter. Rather, it is a *matter of degree*. Typical adult humans have very high degree of embodiment, in that they satisfy each of the three conditions to a high degree. But there are cases where subjects satisfy some or all of these conditions to a much lower degree. Some cases are very familiar (newborn infants, comatose patients); others involve specific pathologies. For instance, a patient suffering from *asomatognosia* will be unable to feel or recognise certain body parts as her own (for a summary of different forms of this condition, see Dieguez & Annoni 2012). Or consider the widely-discussed case of IW, a patient who has no sense of touch or proprioception from the neck down (see, e.g., Gallagher & Cole 1995). IW is able to act through his body, but he knows what he is doing only by

visually monitoring his body's position and movements. He lacks the direct knowledge of his own body which we take for granted in everyday life.

If embodiment is a matter of degree, this should be reflected in the metaphysical account of what it is to be embodied. For instance, one well-known view of the relation between a subject and its body is the *constitution view*: each subject is constituted by its body, in much the same way that a statue is constituted by a lump of bronze (Baker 2000). Though this view has many attractive features, it faces the following problem: for one material entity to be constituted by another (in specific circumstances) is usually understood as an all-or-nothing affair. The lump either constitutes a statue (given the circumstances in which each exists) or it does not. Likewise, either I am constituted by my body or not; I cannot be constituted by it to some degree. But if what we have said about embodiment is correct, then it does come in degrees. This suggests that the constitution view cannot as it stands adequately account for embodiment.

One option would be to adjust the constitution view; another would be to develop the possibility that embodiment is a *sui generis* relation. We shall explore this option in the context of thinking of the subject as an *emergent substance*. Traditional versions of emergence regard certain properties, e.g., experiential properties, as *ontologically novel*: as different in kind from other properties, and as bestowing novel causal powers on their bearers.¹⁷ These novel properties are held to emerge from instantiations of other properties; hence the need for special laws of nature governing the relations between, e.g., experiences and neural activity. On *emergent substance dualism*, it is not only certain properties which are ontologically novel; the entities which bear them are novel as well. These entities themselves emerge when various physical entities are arranged in certain ways, and their emergence is also governed by special laws of nature (see Hasker 1999; Zimmerman 2010; Moreland 2018; for a related view see Madden 2015).

In considering this research question, we are not concerned to defend emergent substance dualism, but to explore whether and how it can be used to understand the metaphysics of embodiment. On the one hand, for a subject to emerge from its physical base is not the same as for that subject to be embodied. As noted earlier, a subject's physical base is not necessarily identical with its body. But the physical base of an embodied subject is typically identical either with its body or with some part of its body (e.g., the brain). This allows for the following picture: the laws of nature governing the emergence of the subject

¹⁷ Experiential properties are roughly such that there is something it is like for a subject to instantiate them.

are such that certain changes to the physical base will affect the degree to which the subject is embodied. And this is just what we should expect: for instance, it is specific changes to the brain which produce asomatognosia. Emergent substance dualism thus provides a framework within which we can make sense of embodiment as a matter of degree.

Research Question 4: what is the nature of the subject's first-person perspective?

Experiences and the subject are often characterised in terms of the subject's having a perspective, what is often referred to as the first-person perspective (e.g., Nagel 1974; Eilan 1995; Shoemaker 1996; Zahavi 2005; Farkas 2008; Ninan 2009; Ganeri 2012). This perspective is often seen as essential to the subject, or at least essential to its having experiences: "To be a subject is to possess a point of view. For a minded being, things do not just surround one, but they appear to one in a certain way" (Farkas 2008, 30-31; see also Bayne 2010, 269-270; Zahavi 2011, 327; Baker 2013, 128; Levine 2016, 354; Watzl 2017, 263-266; Moreland 2018, 199).

In this literature there are in fact several different uses of the metaphor of a subject's perspective. It is important to distinguish between these, and to distinguish between the different claims they are used to make.¹⁸

The notion of a perspective or a point of view is sometimes used to describe features of perceptual experiences and of other experiences based on perception (e.g., visual imagination or thoughts expressing perceptual experiences). In this sense, talk of the subject's having a perspective or occupying a point of view is often literally true. The role of a perspective in this sense can be understood in terms of *perspectival information*, e.g., x is to the left of y when seen from here. Perspectival information is indexed to a specific point of view. Therefore, what information is available when one perceives is partly a matter of the point of view from which one perceives. However, it would be misleading to speak of perspectives in this sense as belonging to (let alone being essential to) subjects, since the perspectival information available to each subject is available to other subjects if they occupied the same point in space (Biro 1991, 119-121).

But perceptual experiences are perspectival in a more important sense. Each such experience presents the subject with *egocentric space*, i.e., objects are given as occurring relative to the perceiving body, as to the left, straight in front, etc. (Recanati 2007; Chen

¹⁸ There is a long tradition of appealing to the first-person perspective to argue against physicalism or naturalism in the philosophy of mind (e.g., Nagel 1974, Baker 2013, Madell 2015). We shall not directly engage with these arguments. However, our work on this research question may be important in helping to clarify some of the background presuppositions of these arguments.

2008; Horgan & Nichols 2016). Furthermore, this space is *behavioural*: that is, objects are experienced not as, say, one metre away, but as within reaching distance or too far away to reach (Gibson 1979, Evans 1985). The perspectival information is thus integrated into the subject's capacities for activity. A similar point applies to temporal awareness. Perceptual experience is *temporally egocentric*, in that events are presented as occurring right now, and the subject typically has a sense of which events have just occurred and of what is about to occur (Kiverstein 2010; Gallagher 2013). Furthermore, the temporal aspect of perceptual experience is also closely linked to the subject's behaviour, in that the temporal position of events relative to the now-point is a crucial part of our experience of acting and being ready to act (Grush 2006). These spatial and temporal dimensions of perceptual experience constitute a perspective which belongs to the subject in a more substantial sense.¹⁹ It is in virtue of having a perspective in the sense that the subject can experience being *situated*, perceiving and acting from a specific location.²⁰

A different sense of 'perspective' is involved in the distinction between the so-called first-person and third-person as different modes of access to a subject's experiences (this distinction is sometimes drawn in terms of being aware of experiences 'from inside' as opposed to 'from outside'). It is widely thought that each subject necessarily has a unique access to or awareness of its own experiences, and indeed a unique awareness of itself as the subject of these experiences (see Nida-Rümelin 2017). This unique access is sometimes described as the subject's *first-person perspective*; as Sydney Shoemaker describes it, this perspective is the "distinctive way mental states present themselves to the subjects whose states they are" (1996, 157; see also Howell 2006). It is important to distinguish the subject's perceptual perspective, its unique vantage-point on the world, from its unique access to itself or its own experiences (Watzl 2017, 270-271).

Having distinguished these different senses of the subject's perspective, it is worth asking whether there is any substantial connection between these different senses; in particular, are there substantial connections between the temporal and spatial egocentricity of perceptual experiences and the subject's unique access to its own experiences? We shall explore the following line of thought: in order for the subject's perceptual perspective to

¹⁹ As stated this over-simplifies things, since there are circumstances in which a subject's different perceptual systems will present objects in distinct egocentric frames of reference (Alsmith 2017). However, for ease of presentation we shall continue to speak of each subject having a single perceptual perspective.

²⁰ The subject's perspective in this sense is similar to what Baker terms the *rudimentary first-person perspective* (2013, 40-47). Baker contrasts this with the *robust first-person perspective*, in which a subject can conceive of and refer to itself in the first person (*op. cit.*, 31-39).

locate the subject in the world (i.e., to give the subject a sense of being located at that point in space and time), the subject must have a unique awareness of itself and its own experiences.

To see how this line of thought might be developed, consider again the subject's perceptual perspective. We described this as a matter of perceptual experiences presenting the subject with egocentric and behavioural space and time. But within this description, we can distinguish two conceptually distinct elements:

- space and time are presented relative to a certain location;
- space and time are presented relative to the subject of these perceptual experiences.²¹

In ordinary perceptual experience these two elements go together: the location relative to which space and time is presented just is the location of the perceiving subject. But the conceptual distinction is important, since it suggests that experiences which are perspectival simply insofar as they present space and time relative to a certain location may not suffice to locate the subject who has those experiences. More generally, if a subject is in a mental state with content indexed to a certain spatial or temporal point, but the subject was not aware of this state or aware of itself as being in this state, the content of this state would not be enough for the subject to have a sense of being itself located in the situation represented. What is needed is a sense of oneself as being the subject of these experiences; this would be sufficient to 'place oneself' at the location relative to which things are presented. And this sense of oneself as the subject of these experiences is precisely what the subject's unique awareness of its experiences, and of itself, can provide.

Research Question 5: what is the metaphysical relation between the subject of experiences and the unity of experiences?

In work on the unity of consciousness (e.g., Bayne & Chalmers 2003) it is common to distinguish between different kinds of unity: e.g., *objectual unity* (the unity characterising experiences which present a single unified object of awareness); *subject unity* (the unity of experiences belonging to a single subject); and *phenomenal unity* or *experienced togetherness* (there being something it is like for a subject to have different experiences together). As an example of phenomenal unity, if one hears traffic while tasting coffee, typically there is not only something it is like to have each of these experiences individually; there is something it is like to have them together (there is something it is like to hear the traffic while tasting the coffee).

²¹ This distinction is drawn in Alsmith 2017; see also Peacocke's distinction between Degree 0 and Degree 1 of self-representation (2014, 30-37).

In investigating this research question we shall primarily address subject unity and phenomenal unity. Of these, subject unity is the more fundamental, since it is required for phenomenal unity but the reverse is not true (experiences occurring at different times can be subject unified without being phenomenally unified). The most important issue regarding subject unity is what explains it. One view is that the experiences which belong to a subject are unified in virtue of belonging to that subject: the fact that different experiences belong to this subject is ontologically and conceptually irreducible (Nida-Rümelin 2017, 76, 79). A rival view denies that experiences are united, either synchronically or diachronically, by belonging to the subject. On this view, the experiences belonging to each subject are united by their own properties or by relations between them; it is these which explain their belonging to the one subject (Dainton 2008; Zahavi 2011; Benovsky 2019).

We shall explore the prospects for defending the first view, drawing on and developing work by Nida-Rümelin (2017) and O’Conaill (forthcoming; in progress). This view can be defended by considering both what an experience is, and what it is for an experience to be had by a subject.

A paradigmatic type of experiences are those in which the subject is (or seems to be) presented with an object, e.g., a visual scene or a piece of music. We shall suggest that such experiences cannot be conceptualised without accepting that they belong to a subject; and they cannot obtain without being for a subject. More generally, we shall propose that each experience is essentially *for* its subject, in that it is like something for its subject to experience it (e.g., it is like something to feel a headache or to be distracted by noise outside your door).²² Because of this, it is not possible to conceptualise what it is for an experience to occur without thinking of it as occurring to a subject. We shall further suggest that metaphysically speaking, it is essential for each experience to belong to its specific subject.

Furthermore, we shall put forward the idea that in experience each of us has a basic awareness of ourselves as being able to simultaneously have multiple experiential properties, and to have experiential properties at different times. This awareness is the basis for our basic conception of ourselves as experiencing subjects (this claim is defended in Nida-Rümelin in progress). We shall develop the idea that this conception of ourselves is *nature revealing*; that is, it reveals what it is for a single subject to have various experiential properties, simultaneously or at different times (on nature revealing concepts, see Nida-Rümelin 2007,

²² The locution of experiences being like something for their subjects was made famous by Thomas Nagel (1974). On the distinction between *what* each experience is like and its being like something *for* its subject, see Levine 2001, Kriegel 2009; see also Guillot 2017 for a useful distinction between for-me-ness and related aspects of subjectivity.

Goff 2017). This conception of ourselves therefore provides the basis for arguing that what it is for a subject to have different experiences, both simultaneously and at different times, is ontologically and conceptually irreducible.

Turning to phenomenal unity, it is widely thought to be necessary in the following sense: necessarily, each of a subject's experiences at any one time will be phenomenally unified (Bayne 2010, 16). Different theories have been posited to explain this necessity, including a primitive relation of *co-consciousness* holding between experiences (Dainton 2008), a *mereological account* on which experiences are phenomenally unified iff they are parts of a single overall experience (Bayne 2010), and an account which appeals to the subject's *activity of consciously attending* (Watzl 2017, 266-270).

A different solution has recently been proposed by JP Moreland (2018; see also Hasker 1999, 125-144). On this account, what explains the phenomenal unity of experiences is that they belong to a single subject: simultaneous experiences had by subject S are phenomenally unified because they necessarily belong to a single *phenomenal field* which is an essential structure of S. This account is very interesting, but it requires more detail (for related critical discussions see Schechter 2013; Bayne 2018).

In this argument, it is claimed that the subject is the single entity which simultaneously instantiates the different phenomenal properties associated with its different experiences; and it is claimed that because of this, the experiences are phenomenally unified. What needs to be made clearer is why the first of these claims explains the second. Moreland suggests that "the various phenomenally conscious modes of the self are unified into one totalizing phenomenal mode (state) by being modes of the same simple self" (2018, 202). But this assumes that different experiential properties instantiated by a single subject will automatically form a single overall experiential property, corresponding to the subject's overall experience (that is, it assumes that experiential properties are closed under co-instantiated conjunction – Bayne & Chalmers 2003). And it is not clear why we should assume this, or why it happens if it does. Closure under co-instantiation is not obviously true of many properties (for instance, if a ball is red and round, it is not obvious that it must instantiate a single property, *being red & round*).

One line of thought which we shall consider returns to two conceptions mentioned earlier in discussing this research question. The first is the conception of what it is for an experience to occur, in terms of the experience being like something *for* its subject. It has often been suggested that each subject has a unique pre-reflective awareness of its occurrent experiences; indeed, it has been argued that this awareness just is the for-me-ness of

experiences, their being like something for their subject (e.g., Zahavi 2005, 15; Kriegel 2009, 8; O’Conaill 2019). When one has multiple simultaneous experiences, one will not only be aware of what each experience is like; one will be aware of what it is like to have them all simultaneously: “not only are you in fact simultaneously having and primitively aware of having these various experiential properties, rather you are also aware of simultaneously having them” (Nida-Rümelin 2017, 75). This awareness is the basis for the conception of ourselves as experiencing subjects mentioned earlier.

The suggestion, therefore, is that phenomenal unity consists in the subject’s being aware of having multiple simultaneous experiences. This unified awareness of one’s simultaneous experiences is provided by the conception of what it is for a subject to have experiences defended earlier. Therefore, there may be a way to defend the claim that the phenomenal unity of consciousness can be explained by the subject’s awareness of its own experiences.

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