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Why There is No Us in Consciousness: You Are Simple, a Bodily Soul

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Abstract: You and I are conscious. But *You-and-I*, a pair of subjects, cannot be conscious. Why? Because subjects of consciousness cannot have parts but are mereologically simple. Although most contemporary philosophers do not take the thesis that we are simple seriously, David Barnett has proffered an argument in its defense that has faced numerous objections but is yet to be defeated, or so I will argue. In responding to these objections, I expand and develop important ontological and mereological theses that strengthen Barnett's argument and others of its kind. I also argue that a significant body of empirical work supports Barnett's argument against a recent objection. Lastly, I show how, although not made explicit by Barnett, his argument is plausibly a defense of the immaterial self or a bodily soul.

Keywords: unity of consciousness; materialism; physicalism; substance dualism; combination problem; personal identity

1 Introduction

You and I are conscious. But a pair of subjects, for example, *You-and-I*, cannot be conscious because subjects of consciousness cannot have proper parts. This line of thinking traces back to Plato. His version argues from the unity of perception to the partless immaterial self or soul. Versions of this argument appear in every philosophical period (Section 5). Plausibly, the intuitive nature of this line of reasoning (or the core intuition) motivates the most influential thought experiments in contemporary philosophy of mind, including Huxley's Explanatory Gap, Putnam's Swarm of Bees, Block's Nation of China, and Searle's Chinese Room.¹ Numerous studies in cognitive science reveal the pervasive intuition and belief that you and I

¹ See David Barnett, "The Simplicity Intuition and Its Hidden Influence on Philosophy of Mind," *Noûs* 42(2) (2008): 308–335.

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are not identical to any physical thing but are simple embodied immaterial subjects or a bodily soul (Section 4.4). Yet, most contemporary philosophers do not take this thesis seriously although the tides are shifting.

David Barnett has proffered an argument for the simple subject that has faced serious objections but has yet to be defeated, or so I will argue. In responding to these objections, I expand and develop important Husserlian ontological and mereological theses that strengthen Barnett's argument and those relevantly similar. Lastly, I show that Barnett's argument defends the reality of the embodied immaterial self, what I call a bodily soul.

2 Barnett's Argument

Barnett argues that subjects of consciousness are mereologically simple from what he takes to be an uncontroversial claim:

DATUM: For any pair of conscious beings, it is impossible for the pair itself to be conscious.

According to Barnett, there are only six possible explanations for the **DATUM**.

NUMBER: Person-pairs lack a sufficient number of immediate parts.

RELATION: Person-pairs lack immediate parts capable of standing in the right relations to each other.

NATURE: Person-pairs lack immediate parts of the right nature.

STRUCTURE: Person-pairs are not proper structures.

COMBINATION: A combination of **NUMBER**, **RELATION**, **NATURE**, and **STRUCTURE**.

SIMPLICITY: Pairs of people are not simple.

Only **SIMPLICITY**, argues Barnett, explains the **DATUM**. Barnett's argument is formalized as follows.²

S1: The **DATUM**; for any pair of people, it is impossible for the pair itself to be conscious.

S2: Something must explain the **DATUM**; there is at least one non-trivial feature that no pair of people could itself have but which every conscious being must have.

S3: If no combination of **NUMBER**, **RELATION**, **NATURE**, and **STRUCTURE** explains the **DATUM**, then **SIMPLICITY** explains the **DATUM**.

S4: No combination of **NUMBER**, **RELATION**, **NATURE**, and **STRUCTURE** explains the **DATUM**.

S5: Therefore, **SIMPLICITY** explains the **DATUM**.

² David Barnett, "You are Simple," in Robert Koons and George Bealer (eds.), *The Waning of Materialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 172.

According to Barnett, (S1) and (S2) are obviously true, while (S3) is justified by the failure of the alternative explanations of the *DATUM*. Thus (S4) is the contentious premise.

Barnett's defense of (S4) pumps the intuition that *SIMPLICITY* is at least plausible. For my purposes, I needn't consider how Barnett executes his project. I intend only to show that the extant objections in the literature all fail.

3 Husserlian Ontology & Mereology

To be informative, arguments that use mereological simplicity require explicit and substantive parthood and simplicity theses. Edmund Husserl developed what many consider the most significant analysis of parts and wholes.³ Following Aristotle, Husserl adopted parthood pluralism.⁴ He specifies two kinds of parts: *pieces* and *moments*, or separable and inseparable parts.⁵

Separable parts can exist apart from the whole, *W*, of which they are a part, which, if separated from *W*, become independent wholes. Separable parts are "what they are no matter what goes on around them,"⁶ even if "everything outside it were annihilated."⁷ These parts are accidental to one another and their wholes, requiring external relations to bond into wholes (e.g., aggregates of separable parts). Thus, when part of a whole, separable parts are scattered throughout the whole of which they are parts. More specifically,

SEPARABLE PART: if *x* is a separable part of some whole *W*, then (i) *x* is a particular; (ii) *x* is a part of *W*, and (iii) it is possible for *x* to exist without being a part of *W*.

Additionally, there is the following kind of part.

INSEPARABLE PART: if *x* is an inseparable part of some whole *W*, then (i) *x* is a particular; (ii) *x* is a part of *W*, and (iii) it is not possible for *x* to exist without being a part of *W*.

3 Kit Fine, "Part-whole," in Barry Smith and David Woodruff Smith, (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 463.

4 See, e.g., Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1034 b 34–1035 a 27; *Metaphysics* V.25; and *Metaphysics* Z, 2.2, 2.3, and 4.2.4.2.

5 Dallas Willard, "Mereological Essentialism Restricted," *Axiomathes* 5(1) (1994): 123–144; and Kevin Mulligan and Barry Smith, "Franz Brentano on the Ontology of Mind," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 45 (4) (1985): 627–644.

6 *Ibid.*, 2/449.

7 *Ibid.*, 2/445.

These parts are not merely connected; they blend and permeate each other and the whole of which they are parts.⁸ Thus, the unity or bonding of inseparable parts arises from the nature of these parts in relation to their whole.

It is widely assumed that x is mereologically simple *iff* x has no proper parts.⁹ However, as a parthood pluralist, Husserl provides a second thesis.

MEREOLOGICAL SIMPLICITY: x is mereologically simple $=_{\text{def.}}$ x has no separable parts.

Importantly, if x is mereologically simple, x can have *inseparable parts* but not separable parts.

Husserl's mereology informs his ontology of wholes and unity. It is in the essence of an inseparable part that it is united with its correlated whole as follows.

GENUINE WHOLE: W is a genuine whole *iff* (i) W is a whole, (ii) W has only inseparable parts, and (iii) W is unified intrinsically by, and only by, the nature of W 's inseparable parts.

Genuine wholes require no principle of unity. The same is not true of what Husserl calls aggregates.

AGGREGATE: an object O is an aggregate *iff* (i) O has at least two separable parts, and (ii) the separable parts of O stand only in external relations between each other and O .

Husserl points out that the most commonly employed notion of parthood assumes that all parts are separable parts.¹⁰ Certainly, any relevant entity to which I am identical on a physicalist view is (most plausibly) composed of separable parts (the body, brain, or subregion of the brain – understood according to a physicalist ontology) or (less likely) at least divisible (a physical simple if such there be). Accordingly, I will understand a person-pair as an aggregate and a mereologically simple subject of consciousness as a genuine whole.

The nature of a genuine whole and an aggregate determine the kind of unity each has accordingly. Genuine wholes possess holistic unity.

HOLISTIC UNITY: O is holistically unified *iff* (i) O is a genuine whole, and (ii) the parts of O cause some effect as a consequence of the internal relations among O 's parts.

In contrast, aggregates may possess a much weaker functional unity.

⁸ Ibid., 2/449.

⁹ An exception is Ned Markosian, "Simples," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 76(2) (1998): 213–228.

¹⁰ Husserl, §2, 437–38.

FUNCTIONAL UNITY: O is functionally unified *iff* (i) O is an aggregate, and (ii) the separable parts of O work together to cause some effect as a consequence of the external relations among O's parts.

Plausibly, a person-pair is an aggregate. Therefore, a person-pair can only possess functional unity. However, as a genuine whole, a mereologically simple subject can possess holistic unity. The relevant literature has failed to make these detailed ontological distinctions. Plausibly, it is the functional unity of aggregates that thought experiments, such as Block's *Nation of China* and Searle's *Chinese Room*, exploit.¹¹

4 Objections to Barnett's Argument

4.1 Elimination

Andrew Bailey argues that the **DATUM** can be explained just as well by the following thesis.

ELIMINATION: Persons-pairs are metaphysically impossible.

According to Bailey, **ELIMINATION** is superior to **SIMPLICITY** as it is more plausible given materialism. He rules out material simples as extremely unlikely.

Bailey motivates **ELIMINATION** by assuming that a person-pair must be a fusion of persons. Of course, if person-pairs cannot exist because the fusion of persons is impossible, this would explain the **DATUM**.

Bailey invokes the standard notion of mereological fusion.

MEREOLOGICAL FUSION: y is a fusion of the x s =_{def.} a thing overlaps y just in the case y overlaps one or more of the x s (where x is a proper part of y =_{def.} x is a part of y but is not identical to y , and where x overlaps y =_{def.} some one thing is a part of both x and y).

In our case, y is the conscious person-pair, and the x s are each of the two persons of the person-pair. Bailey notes that while there are principles governing the fusion of some objects, "No correct principles of this kind – no correct answer to the so-called special composition question – yields the result that there are or could be person-pairs."¹²

But why suppose, as **ELIMINATION** does, that x is a person-pair, *iff*, x is a fusion of two persons? And why suppose that each person of a person-pair is an immediate

¹¹ This insight strengthens Barnett's argument that the intuition that **SIMPLICITY** is true unknowingly motivates some of the most prominent thought experiments in the philosophy of mind.

¹² Andrew Bailey, "You Needn't Be Simple," *Philosophical Papers* 43 (2) (2014), 148.

proper or inseparable part of the fusion? Following Roderick Chisholm, I understand a person-pair as an AGGREGATE.¹³ A mereological fusion is not a case of two things becoming identical or identical with some other thing but rather a case of things becoming parts of the fused thing.¹⁴ Two persons become separable parts of an AGGREGATE, a person-pair, which can only possess FUNCTIONAL UNITY and not a GENUINE WHOLE.

As an aside, it may turn out that any attempted explanation of the DATUM that entails person-pairs being only functionally unified is only a version of a FUNCTION account.

4.2 Maximality

Bailey's second rival account is that because consciousness is a maximal property, a conscious person-pair cannot have a conscious subject as a part. Thus, the DATUM. Following Ted Sider, Bailey embraces PROPERTY MAXIMALITY.

PROPERTY MAXIMALITY: A property *P* is maximal *iff*, for any *x* that is a large proper part of an *F*, there is no *y* such that *x* is a part of *y* and *y* is *F*.

As Sider explains:

A large part of a house – all of the house save a window, say – does not itself count as a house. A large part of a cat – all of it save the tail, say – does not itself count as a cat. Otherwise in the vicinity of every house there would be a multitude of houses; in the vicinity of every cat there would be a multitude of cats.¹⁵

Maximal properties are thus boarder-sensitive extrinsic properties. That a maximal property *P* is instantiation by *x* depends, at least in part, on what larger things *x* is part of.

According to PROPERTY MAXIMALITY about being conscious,

C-MAXIMALITY: being conscious is maximal *iff*, necessarily, for any *x* that is conscious, there is no particular *y*, such that *x* is a proper part of *y*, and *y* is conscious.

Person-pairs cannot be conscious because they violate C-MAXIMALITY by attributing conscious persons as proper parts of a person-pair. That each person of the

¹³ Roderick M. Chisholm, "On the Simplicity of the Soul," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991), 172.

¹⁴ Roderick M. Chisholm, *Person and Object: A Metaphysics Study* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1979), 93.

¹⁵ Ted Sider, "Maximality and Microphysical Supervenience," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 66 (2003), 139.

person-pair has its own *what-it-is-like-to-be-a-person* entails that there is no *what-it-is-like-to-be-a-fusion-of-two-persons*.¹⁶

But why think that consciousness is a maximal property, especially given materialism? Imagine you are identical to a physical entity, an AGGREGATE or a MERELOGICAL FUSION of distinct components. You will consist of other physical particulars as your parts. Many intrinsic physical properties of these parts – such as mass, extension, charge, and gravitational attraction – could also apply to you. However, none of these properties can be considered maximal.

Moreover, if consciousness is a maximal property, then what partly determines that you are conscious is that you are not a part of any conscious thing, such as the person-pair *You-and-I*. This has a bizarre consequence. If being a cat is a maximal property, then when two cats come together, this “cat-pair” forms a new cat, and these cats are no longer cats. Likewise, if consciousness is a maximal property, when you and I form the conscious person-pair *You-and-I*, in an instance, each of us is no longer and cannot become a conscious subject, as only the person-pair *You-and-I* is.

Said differently, any conscious person would become a philosophical zombie merely by becoming a part of some other conscious thing. Consider Block’s *Chinese Nation* argument. If consciousness is maximal, when the individual conscious persons in China realize a function sufficient for consciousness, each citizen becomes a zombie as the nation becomes a consciousness subject. Likewise for the clerk in Searle’s *Chinese Room*. But that is absurd. Consciousness is not a maximal property.

4.3 Substance

Eric Yang argues that the following fact explains the DATUM.

SUBSTANCE: a subject of consciousness must be a substance, and a person-pair isn’t a substance.¹⁷

Yang’s view entails that a conscious subject must be substance, which explains the DATUM. I agree that subjects of consciousness must be substances. However, not all theories of substance are equal, and not all theories of substance will rival SIMPLICITY as an explanation of the DATUM. For example, on the Husserlian mereology above, anything without separable parts is a mereologically simple substance. Consequently, any theory that conditions substancehood on having no separable parts can explain the DATUM, which includes substances with numerous inseparable parts.

¹⁶ Bailey, 15.

¹⁷ Eric Yang, “Persons, Simplicity, and Substance,” *Philosophical Papers* 47(2) (2018): 299–311.

Examples include versions of hylomorphism, according to which a substance cannot have proper (separable) parts but does have components that are not proper (separable) parts.

So, SUBSTANCE is not a rival but an instance of SIMPLICITY. Of course, Yang might offer a precise theory of substance that does rival SIMPLICITY. The difficulty will be avoiding SIMPLICITY while maintaining a theory of substance that does not either (i) fall into one of Barnett's rival explanations of the DATUM or (ii) provide only the functional unity of a bundle.

Perhaps some will not be satisfied with my treatment of SUBSTANCE. The reply in the next section is similar to Yang's. Thus, my replies in the next section apply to Yang's SUBSTANCE reply.

4.4 Integrity

Rory Madden has advanced the most detailed objection to Barnett.¹⁸ According to Madden, Barnett misidentifies the explanation of the DATUM as a purely mereological requirement (SIMPLICITY), while the actual explanation is topological.¹⁹ Accordingly,

INTEGRITY: Our naïve conception of a conscious subject demands that conscious beings be topologically integrated.

Topological integration is a technical notion, which Madden understands as follows.

TOPOLOGICAL INTEGRATION: *W is topologically integrated* =_{def.} (a) *W* is a whole, and (b) a path can be drawn between any pair of *W*'s proper parts without exiting through an exterior surface or boundary of *W*.

Madden's examples of topologically integrated wholes include eggs, an intact cup, and human organisms.

Conversely, *topologically scattered* objects are wholes that are not topologically integrated. Madden's examples include a circle of stones and a dismantled watch. According to INTEGRITY, person-pairs cannot be conscious because they are more like a dismantled watch than an intact cup. I have four replies.

18 Rory Madden, "The Naïve Topology of the Conscious Subject," *Nou's* 49(1) (2015): 55–70.

19 TOPOLOGICAL INTEGRATION is only a variation on the structural explanation of the Datum. One could argue that Madden fails to offer an alternative explanation of the DATUM. Moreover, one could argue that Madden's version of the structure argument fails against Barnett's treatment of structure. I suspect both responses are promising. Due to lack of space, I leave these arguments unexplored.

4.4.1 Cognitive Science of Consciousness Attribution

First, Madden claims that INTEGRITY is a better explanation than SIMPLICITY because “we have no resistance whatsoever to ascribing consciousness to things which manifestly have proper parts – things like human organisms, cats and dogs – which have feet, heads, eyes, and the rest.”²⁰ Perhaps, but we certainly do resist ascribing consciousness to Madden’s other examples of Topological Integration, such as eggs and intact cups. The empirical evidence shows that we normally resist attributing consciousness to topologically integrated objects.²¹

Numerous cognitive science studies show that anti-materialist beliefs – that we are not identical to our body, brain, or anything physical – are psychologically and phenomenologically persuasive at a base commonsense level. While detailing these studies is not necessary for my argument, it’s clear that anti-materialist/physicalist intuitions have been widespread throughout human history,²² across cultures (including non-religious ones),²³ and at all stages of psychological development.²⁴ While these intuitions are expressed in terms of anti-materialism and pro-substance dualism, these intuitions favor SIMPLICITY. That is, cognitive science provides strong evidence against INTEGRITY.²⁵

²⁰ Madden, 57.

²¹ See, e.g., K. Inagaki and G. Hatano, “Constrained Person Analogy in Young Children’s Biological Inference,” *Cognitive Development* 6 (1991): 219–231; and S. Johnson, “The Recognition of Mentalistic Agents in Infancy,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 4 (2000): 22–28. For a meta-analysis of these studies, see Joshua Knoke and Jesse Prinz, “Intuitions about Consciousness: Experimental Studies,” *Phenomenology and Cognitive Sciences* 7 (2008): 67–83.

²² See, e.g., Raymond Martin and John Barresi, *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006).

²³ See, e.g., Jesse Bering, and David Bjorklund, “The Natural Emergence of Reasoning about the Afterlife as a Developmental Regularity,” *Developmental Psychology* 40(2) (2004): 217–33. Jesse Bering, Carlos Hernandez Blasi, and David Bjorklund, “The Development of ‘Afterlife’ Beliefs in Religiously and Secularly Schooled Children,” *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* 23 (2005): 587–607.

²⁴ See, e.g., M. Forstmann, and P. Burgmer, “Antecedents, Manifestations, and Consequences of Belief in Mind-Body Dualism,” in C. Zedelius, B. Müller, and J. W. Schooler (eds.), *The Science of Lay Theories: How Beliefs Shape Our Cognition, Behavior, and Health* (New York, NY: Springer, 2017); M. Forstmann and P. Burgmer, “Adults are Intuitive Mind-Body Dualists,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 144 (2015): 222–235; V. A. Kuhlmeier, P. Bloom, and K. Wynn, “Do 5-Month-Old Infants See Humans As Material Objects?” *Cognition* 94(1) (2004): 95–103; Henry M. Wellman and A. K. Hickling, “The Minds ‘I’: Children’s Conception of the Mind as an Active Agent,” *Child Development* 65 (1994): 1564–80; and David Estes, Henry M. Wellman, and Jaqueline Woolley, “Children’s Understanding of Mental Phenomena,” in Hayne Reese (ed.), *Advances in Child Development and Behavior* 22 (New York, NY: Academic Press, 1989).

²⁵ Some may dismiss these studies. This mistake overlooks the significance of what David Chalmers calls the “meta-problem of consciousness” and what I’ve introduced as the “hard meta-problem of consciousness”. The meta-problem of consciousness is the difficulty of explaining why

The fact that we resist attributing consciousness to nearly all topologically integrated objects suggests that INTEGRITY does not explain the DATUM. Suppose our naïve conception of a conscious subject demands that conscious beings be topologically integrated. In that case, it is not because of INTEGRITY but because of the pervasive and strong intuition that SIMPLICITY is true. This alone means that INTEGRITY loses what Madden takes as its explanatory advantage over SIMPLICITY.²⁶

4.4.2 INTEGRITY is No Rival to SIMPLICITY

Secondly, it's not obvious that INTEGRITY is a rival explanation to SIMPLICITY. Neither Barnett nor Madden explains what they mean by 'part.' For reasons already mentioned, I think it safe to assume they mean a SEPARABLE PART. Clarifying parthood provides a way of arguing that INTEGRITY does not rival SIMPLICITY.

To clarify this point, I need to say more about the nature of inseparable parts. First, an inseparable part cannot be conceived of nor exist as unchanged and independently from the whole of which it is a part – secondly, the inseparable parts of a whole permeate each other. In contrast, separable parts are separate and scattered within a whole.

Given the nature of MERELOGICAL SIMPLICITY, if any whole W has only inseparable parts, then W is necessarily topologically integrated. This is because a continuous path can be traced between any two inseparable parts of W without exiting through an exterior surface or boundary of W. The fact that W is topologically integrated is determined by the fact that W is mereologically simple. Therefore, INTEGRITY is not a competing explanation of the DATUM but a consequence of SIMPLICITY.

4.4.3 The Irrelevance of INTEGRITY

INTEGRITY seems less and less plausible the more fine-grained one's analysis of the human body or brain becomes. Consider again Madden's examples of topologically integrated wholes: an egg, an intact cup, and the human organism. A cup, for example, has a multiplicity of separable parts, especially at the atomic level. Suppose it is true that the intact cup is topologically integrated. It is still the case that

we have recalcitrant pro-dualist intuitions (e.g., in explanatory gap cases, while the hard meta-problem of consciousness. The difficulty of explaining *why it seems to us* that dualism and or SD are true. See David Chalmers, "The Meta-Problem of Consciousness," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 25(9–10) (2018): 6–61, and Brandon Rickabaugh and J. P. Moreland, *The Substance of Consciousness: A Comprehensive Defense of Contemporary Substance Dualism* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2023), 83–92.

²⁶ For a detailed treatment of the cognitive science of dualist beliefs in relation to substance dualism, see Rickabaugh and Moreland, 84–90.

the parts of the cup are not topologically integrated as they are *separable parts*. By focusing on the cup's micro-composition, the less plausible it seems that the cup could be conscious, likewise, for the body and brain. The fact that x is topologically integrated might explain why we intuitively think of x as one object, but it does not explain why we think that x is possibly a subject of consciousness. Nor does it explain why we think that x is not a subject of consciousness when all we know about x is that it is a person-pair.

Consider the following case, modified from a consideration of Madden's:

Conscious Cup. You and I function as the right and left hemispheres of McCartney's brain. While doing so, we fall into a vat at a cup-making factory only to emerge as parts of a cup, although we continue functioning like McCartney's brain.

Is the cup of which we are parts conscious? If the person-pair we form is not conscious, then likely neither is the cup.

What is the relevant topological difference between a person-pair and the hemisphere-pair of a neurotypical brain? The brain's right and left hemispheres are connected by roughly 200 million myelinated nerve fibers – the corpus callosum – stretched across the brain's midline under the cerebral cortex. Suppose that you and I form a person-pair by being connected to each other by one million myelinated nerve fibers. Is the person-pair of which we are parts by virtue of being connected by millions of myelinated nerve fibers?

What explains the cup's non-conscious state is that the person-pair we form (even when connected by a corpus callosum), *You-and-I*, is not conscious. The fact that the cup is topologically integrated is irrelevant.

4.4.4 SIMPLICITY Explains What INTEGRITY Cannot

Lastly, INTEGRITY, at least insofar as it is compatible with physicalism, assumes that the body or brain is topologically integrated. But this seems false, at least on standard physicalism (as opposed to what Robert Koons calls "staunch hylomorphism" or perhaps some version of emergentism).²⁷ Clouds do not seem topologically integrated. As Peter Unger has pointed out, the boundaries of brains, like the boundaries of clouds, are fuzzy.²⁸ It isn't clear that you could draw a line between any of the parts of a cloud without exiting through an exterior surface or the boundary of a cloud. This isn't an epistemological but a metaphysical issue brought to light by

²⁷ Robert Koons, "Staunch vs. Faint-Hearted Hylomorphism: Toward an Aristotelian Account of Composition," *Res Philosophica* 91(2) (2014): 151–177.

²⁸ Peter Unger, "The Mental Problems of the Many," in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, vol. 1, edited by Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 195–222.

a fine-grained look at clouds. There just isn't a boundary. Examining the brain's complex aggregated structure, what initially appeared as boundaries become fuzzy and eventually disappear.

Consider the number of neurons in a typical human brain and their synaptic gaps. Neuroscientist Daniel Levitin explains,

It is difficult to appreciate the complexity of the brain because the numbers are so huge, they go well beyond our everyday experience (unless you are a cosmologist). The average brain consists of one hundred billion (100,000,000,000) neurons.²⁹

At chemical synapses, where one neuron communicates with another, neurons do not communicate through bridging channels but by an action potential in the presynaptic cell that leads to the release of a chemical transmitter. There is no structural continuity between the presynaptic and postsynaptic neurons, resulting in a *synaptic cleft* measuring 20–40 nm wide between the axon (presynaptic neuron) and the dendrite (postsynaptic neuron). The vast number of the brain's separable parts (e.g., neurons) and their separations (e.g., synaptic clefts) reveal the brain's extreme aggregation and associated lack of HOLISTIC UNITY.

Madden will respond that the problem is not the brain's seeming mereological complexity but that the brain appears as a *topologically scattered* object.³⁰ So, INTEGRITY, not SIMPLICITY, explains the DATUM. Madden makes this argument from the claim that Integrity can make a more discerning diagnosis than SIMPLICITY. But that isn't the case with Husserlian MEREOLOGICAL SIMPLICITY, which specifies the nature of the path between any pair of W's proper parts and the nature of W's exterior surface or boundary.

The only truly topologically integrated object is a MEREOLOGICAL SIMPLE – an object lacking separable parts. SIMPLICITY explains the DATUM.

5 You Are a Simple Embodied Immaterial Self

Like many arguments in contemporary philosophy of mind, Barnett's argument echoes arguments for the soul going back to Plato.³¹ In *Theaetetus*, Socrates argues

²⁹ Daniel J. Levitin, *This is Your Brain on Music: The Science of Human Obsession* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2006), 85.

³⁰ This is Madden's response to Barnett's analogy between the composite natures of the universe and the brain (63).

³¹ For a detailed discussion of the historical development of the unity of consciousness argument for the soul, see Brandon Rickabaugh, *The Conscious Mind Unified* (Baylor University, 2020); Mark Textor, *The Disappearance of the Soul and the Turn against Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); Thomas M. Lennon and Robert Stainton (eds.), *The Achilles of Rationalist Psychology*

that our eyes do not see, and our ears do not hear, but they are that with which we see and hear.

It would be a very strange thing, I must say, if there were a number of perceptions sitting inside us as if we were Wooden Horses, and there were not some single form, soul or whatever one ought to call it, to which all these converge – something with which, through those things, as if they were instruments, we perceive all that is perceptible.³²

Many consider this the first clear statement of the unity of consciousness argument for the soul.³³ As mentioned in the introduction, arguments in the philosophy of mind, such as Block's Nation of China, echo Plato's wooden horse. Aristotle presents a similar argument.³⁴ However, Plotinus first develops the argument in detail.³⁵

Although it appears in the Medieval era, the argument gained significant attention among numerous early modern philosophers.³⁶ Kant referred to this argument as "the Achilles of all the dialectical inferences of the pure doctrine of the soul," describing it as "an inference that seems to withstand even the sharpest testing and the greatest scruples of inquiry."³⁷ Although some call this the simplicity argument, to avoid confusion with Barnett's argument, I will, following others, refer to arguments for the soul from the simplicity of self as Achilles arguments.

My point about the history of the Achilles argument is twofold. First, it reveals how intuitive it is to infer the reality of the immaterial self or soul from the mereological simplicity of consciousness. Second, the fact that the Achilles argument has not gone away, even over the last decade, reveals both the recalcitrance of the intuition that we are simple and the fact that the simplicity of the subject has always been understood as a serious problem for materialist theories of consciousness and its subject.

Even those who reject substance dualism recognize that it is the most successful explanation of the phenomenal unity of consciousness because the soul is a unified, simple subject. Galen Strawson expresses the prevailing sentiment:

(Springer, 2008); and Ben Lazare Mijuskovic, *The Achilles of Rationalist Arguments* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974).

³² Plato, *Theaetetus*, 184^{C–D}, in *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 1997), 204.

³³ Myles Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, translated by M. J. Levett (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Press, 1990), 58.

³⁴ See Aristotle, *de Anima* II.2, 426b8–22, III 2 and 7, and *de Sensu* 7.

³⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.7.6). Barnett's argument is very similar to Plotinus's in content and structure.

³⁶ Notable examples include Gottfried Leibniz, Thomas Reid, Joseph Butler, Henry Moore, Ralph Cudworth, Samuel Clark, John Smith, Hermann Lotze, and Pierre Bayle.

³⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Translated and Edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A 351, 417.

“Cartesian souls are unbeatable examples of strong unities, even if they’re ruled out by materialism.”³⁸ David Chalmers divides credence fairly equally between substance dualism and Russellian monism. One of the reasons he finds substance dualism compelling is that the simplicity of the soul avoids the combination problem (and any possible analogs), the problem of combining subjects of consciousness into one unified subject.³⁹

One way to see the intuitive plausibility of the Achilles argument is to consider how one must reject the move from the simple subject to the soul. That move would posit a view briefly entertained by Roderick Chisholm: a material simple, “something of a microscopic nature, and presumably something located within the brain.”⁴⁰

Nearly every materialist has rejected the idea that a subject of consciousness is a material simple. Richard Taylor comments,

This is, of course, not a conception of a person to which anyone would naturally be drawn. Indeed, Chisholm is probably the first person in the history of the world to suggest it, and he conceded that it invites ridicule.⁴¹

Almost no one has considered a mereologically simple material subject, much less found it plausible.⁴² Bailey rejects the material simple subject view as “inconsistent with (any plausible form of) materialism.”⁴³ Peter van Inwagen, a materialist, calls the view “absurd on both empirical and conceptual grounds.”⁴⁴

One reason, in addition to those given by others, is that the simple material subject view requires either arbitrarily singling out one physical particle among the many trillions in the brain as conscious or assigning it a special status. Moreover, a variant of the interaction problem arises. The simple material subject view requires singling out one physical particle among the many trillions in the brain, assigning

38 Galen Strawson, “Fundamental Singleness: How to Turn the 2nd Paralogism into a Valid Argument,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 67 (2010), 69, fn.7.

39 David Chalmers, “Panpsychism and Panprotopsychism,” in Godehard Brüntrup and Ludwig Jaskolla (eds.), *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 39–40.

40 Roderick M. Chisholm, “Self-Profile,” in Radu J. Bogdan (Ed.), *Roderick Chisholm* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1986), 75.

41 Richard Taylor, “Chisholm’s Idea of a Person,” in Lewis Edward Hahn (ed.), *The Philosophy of Roderick M. Chisholm* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1997), 45–46.

42 See, e.g., Trenton Merricks, *Object and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 111; Philip L. Quinn, “Tiny Selves: Chisholm on the Simplicity of the Soul,” in Lewis Hahn (ed.), *The Philosophy of Roderick M. Chisholm* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1997), 55–67.

43 Bailey, “You Needn’t Be Simple,” 147.

44 Peter van Inwagen, *Material Beings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 189.

it the power to control one's body. It isn't easy to see how a single particle makes such a metaphysically significant difference.

Ultimately, Chisholm may well have rejected the view, arguing instead that the subject of consciousness is a monad, an immaterial, indivisible, simple substance. It is more likely that he left the matter undecided.⁴⁵ Either way, the view is not intuitive or attractive to those who wish to reject the Achilles argument. The most plausible and simplest account of a simple subject is substance dualism. If the subject of consciousness is mereologically simple, as Barnett has successfully shown, then we have an argument for substance dualism. One that stands in the long tradition of Achilles arguments from the simplicity of the subject of consciousness to the soul.⁴⁶

5.1 Objection: A Category Error?

My use of mereological concepts, such as proper part, separable part, inseparable part, and genuine whole, assumes that the subject of consciousness is, in some way, a substance. One might invoke Anthony Kenny's objection that this assumption is a category mistake.⁴⁷ On Kenny's view, the mind is not a substance. Rather, as Kenny explains,

In its primary sense, the human mind is the capacity to acquire intellectual abilities... It is a second order capacity... the ability to acquire abilities such as the knowledge of a language.⁴⁸

From this, Kenny concludes, "The possessor of human mental capacities is neither the mind nor the brain but the human being."⁴⁹ Similarly, one might argue that analyzing the mind with mereological concepts commits a category error because capacities do not have parts.

I have two thoughts. First, if one takes the argument of this essay as merely a defense of Barnett's argument against extant criticisms, the category mistake objection doesn't apply. I am simply responding to objections that assume mereological concepts meaningfully apply to the subject of consciousness.

Secondly, this objection rests on the assumption that if a subject of consciousness *S* is a mereologically simple bodily soul, then *S* is identical to a mind. If the mind

⁴⁵ Chisholm, "Self-Profile," 73, 77.

⁴⁶ For a book-length defense of new versions of the Achilles argument, see Brandon Rickabaugh, *Simply Conscious: Unity of Consciousness Arguments Contra Materialism and for the Soul* (Bloomsbury, forthcoming).

⁴⁷ This objection was raised by a reviewer.

⁴⁸ Anthony Kenny, *The Metaphysics of Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 20.

⁴⁹ Anthony Kenny, "Myths of the Mind and Myths of the Brain," *Philosophical Inquiries* 1(1) (2013), 70.

is not identical to the simple subject of consciousness, then mereological concepts can apply to the subject as I have assumed. However, neither Barnett's nor my arguments assume or entail that the mind is a substance, not a process. The conclusion is that the subject of consciousness, not the mind, is, in some sense, a substance.

Perhaps the confusion is caused by the term "mind-body dualism," which, like "substance dualism," is unfortunately misleading. "Mind" and "soul" can be said in many ways and have been said in many ways by those labeled "mind-body dualists" and "substance dualists." The popular, albeit false, assumption that Descartes owns the definitions of "soul" and "substance dualism" is false.⁵⁰ The real issue is whether a subject being a mereologically simple bodily soul entails that the mind is a substance.

I see no incompatibility between the mind being a process and the subject of consciousness, the person who has a mind, being a substance. One might hold that "mind" refers to the collection of mental capacities understood as modes of the person, the subject that has them. A mind would be a subject's capacities of thought, imagination, memory, sensation, intention or will, desires, and beliefs. I am unaware of any dualist who takes any one of these to be a substance. Perhaps, as Richard Swinburne holds, desires and beliefs are ongoing mental states, while sensations and thoughts are conscious episodes. I prefer to distinguish between mental acts and the intentional content of mental acts. Neither an ongoing mental state, a mental act, nor a conscious episode is identical to the person who is its subject. On this view, the mind is not a substance but a state of the subject – the mereologically simple bodily soul – who is a substance. Thus, the category error objection is avoided.⁵¹

6 Conclusions

Barnett says that you and I – any subject of consciousness – are mereologically simple. He is correct, and the objections to his argument fail. I say there is more to

⁵⁰ Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Reid, and many others significantly disagreed on both the nature of the soul and the body-soul relation in comprising the subject of consciousness. See, e.g., Brandon Rickabaugh, "Alistair McGrath's Anti-Mind-Body Dualism: Neuroscientific and Philosophical Quandaries for Christian Physicalism," *Trinity Journal* 40 (2019): 215–240.; and Rickabaugh and Moreland, 312–316.

⁵¹ I do think that Kenny's argument, when applied against mind-brain identity theory, according to which every type of conscious property *C*, there is a type of neural property *N*, such that *C* is identical to *N*, is pointed in the right direction, and is strengthened by John Haldane. See John Haldane, "Kenny and Aquinas on the Metaphysics of Mind," in John Cottingham and Peter Hacker (eds.), *Mind, Method, and Morality: Essays in Honour of Anthony Kenny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 119–139.

the story: *there is no us in consciousness* because each subject is a mereologically simple, holistically unified, immaterial self, a bodily soul.⁵²

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■ Q6
■ Q7

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