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## An alternative theory of mental causation: invoking EJ Lowe's (Self-Body) Substance Dualism to account for intentional action IE: Do "you" exist? And can "you" act by thinking?

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2.

**The prevailing view about the Self held by many different types of academics: "You" don't exist**  
Many neuroscientists currently claim that there is no such 'thing' as the self. For example, Bruce Hood, neuroscientist and experimental psychologist, in his recent highly acclaimed book, *The Self Illusion* (2012) writes, p viii "*We see ourself in a mirror. This is who we are... yet brain science shows that this sense of our self is an illusion. We all certainly experience some form of self but what we experience is a powerful deception generated by our brains for our own benefit.*"

Many analytical philosophers of mind also agree with this idea that the self does not exist, for example, Derek Parfit. Parfit argues that "*We are not separately existing entities, apart from our brains and bodies ... Our existence just involves the existence of our brains and bodies.*" p 194, Parfit (1984).

Many scientists eschew the idea of the self too. For example, Peter Atkins in his recent book *On Being* (2011) states clearly, p 89 "*The brain is the centre of the production of the sense of self, of the conscious determination to survive, and great acts of creativity, all of which components we term, for ease of discourse, the 'human spirit'. But that is all it is: the 'human spirit' is a portmanteau word for that package of intentions and achievements: there is no substance beyond the verbal packaging*".

3.

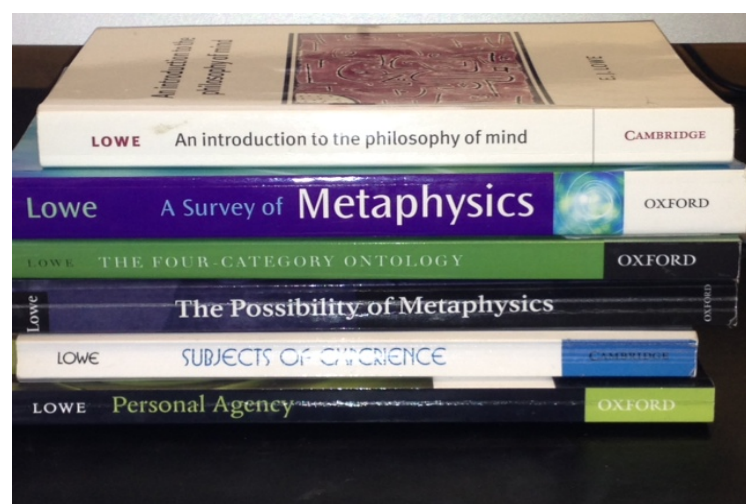
**The purpose of this presentation is two-fold:**

- to assert that the view that the self is an illusion or does not exist, expressed in sections 1 and 2, is wrong and
  - to recommend an ontological account of human beings which postulates a new form of (Non-Cartesian) Substance Dualism and provides the answer **YES** to the questions: Do you exist? And can you act by thinking?
- This new form of Substance Dualism is a Non-Cartesian Substance Dualism; it is a Self-Body Dualism, defended by E J Lowe (1996, 2006, 2008).

4.

**Some background first:** Why are the views expressed in sections 2 and 3 expressed in such a confident manner and by such eminent individuals? The reason I think is because they reflect a world view which many traditional scientists and philosophers wish to adopt: Physicalism. Roughly, this is the view that everything that there is, is physical, or can be reduced to the physical. Physics is widely regarded as the "most successful science" as far as giving us knowledge about the world. But how do mental states such as thoughts and desires - how can they fit into the physical world? It used to be thought that mental states literally were just physical (=brain) states, however, this was soon concluded to be an untenable theory (because if you see a squid in pain, and you see a person in pain, you imagine that they must have something of the same sort of qualitative experience, and yet their brain physiology is different, therefore mental state ≠ brain state). However, now the "name of the game" for most philosophers of mind, is to try to work out how mental states either *supervene on* or are *multiply realized* by brain states. (*Supervenience* and *Multiple Realization* are philosophical terms, but basically they refer, in this context, to the nature of relationship between mental states and brain states). Most of them want to come up with an account where the upshot is that all that exists in the world is physical stuff, because this will be a straightforwardly scientific account, which will seem like the right answer.

6.



E J Lowe's Self-Body Dualism is an ontological theory which I claim, but do not comprehensively argue for here (as my goal is to present the view, as a viable alternative to other doctrines) which provides the best theoretical account of the human beings, well equipped to deal with the problem of mental causation. **On EJ Lowe's account, selves are substances in their own right.** They have independent causal powers. A self is a bearer of both mental and physical states and it plays a crucial role in mental causation, which I detail in sections 7 and 8 below. (For more information on his account, see his *Subjects of Experience* and *Personal Agency*. For my defense of his view, see <http://glasgow.academia.edu/RenéeBleau/>)

7.

Lowe's straight-forward argument for the truth of his Self-Body Substance Dualism which is deductively valid (which means, to use the philosophical jargon, that if the premises are true, then the conclusion must be true).

**Premise 1: I am the subject of all and only my own mental states**  
**Premise 2: Neither my body as a whole nor any part of it (such as my brain) could be the subject of all and only my own mental states.**

**Conclusion: I am not identical with my body or any part of it. That is, I am an entity which is distinct from my body, which is another entity.**

The philosophical doctrine relied on here is known as the Indiscernibility of Identicals (Leibniz), formally:

$$\forall x \forall y [x=y \rightarrow \forall F (Fx \rightarrow Fy)]$$

That is: if selves and bodies do not have exactly the same properties, then they cannot be identical.

9.

If this account by Lowe strikes you as being consistent with common sense – that is, the claim being made by E J Lowe that we are something over and above our bodies and brains - then that is all to the good. He writes in his seminal book *Subjects of Experience* p ix "*I defend a substantial theory of the self as an enduring and irreducible entity, essentially a self-conscious subject of thought and experience and source of intentional action*".

**Why does this matter for psychologists?**

Well if Lowe is right, then the idea that neuroscience will eventually explain everything about us because we simply "are" our brains, is wrong. And psychologists will have a crucial and separate role to play in making sense of the self, an entity which Lowe claims is a **psychological (non-physical) substance**.

5.



[Photo: Tuomas E. Tahko, [www.ttahko.net](http://www.ttahko.net)]

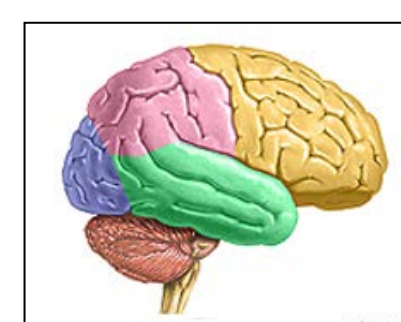
For a recent interview with EJ Lowe on his metaphysical views and how they fit with science – see [www.3ammagazine.com/3am/metaphysical-foundations-for-science/](http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/metaphysical-foundations-for-science/)

**Why this obsession with the physical?** Well, since the time of René Descartes, there has been a quest to come up with a theory that meets the objections that are levied against Mind-Body Dualism. Cartesian Mind-Body Dualism is the view that the Mind is an immaterial thing and the Body is a distinct material thing. This view, albeit one that is often implicitly adopted by many psychologists (carrying with it the belief that minds are real entities, distinct from bodies) is one that is rejected by most contemporary philosophers and scientists. Descartes' claim that the mind is immaterial and body material, makes a mystery out of mind-body interaction: how can something that is not wholly immaterial have an impact on something which is wholly material? Many people have presented objections to the Cartesian view, but perhaps most famous of all is Gilbert Ryle (1949) in his publication of *The Concept of Mind* when he introduced the phrase "*the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine*" (p 13). Ryle categorically rejected Descartes' theory of the relation between mind and body and there are few who would defend a Cartesian dualist theory nowadays. Instead as I have indicated in section 4, there is an almighty effort to come up with a way which means that Physicalism explains everything in the natural world. However we are still left with the problem of mental causation, the intuitive notion that if I think I will do something, that this thinking plays a causal role in action.

8.

Utilizing these two distinct entities, a self, which is a non-physical entity, and a body (which has a brain as one of its parts), **Lowe's theory postulates radically different causal profiles for each entity in mental causation.** Take as an example when I wave with my arm. There is the mental decision to wave with my arm (attributed to the self – depicted as "I" below) and the bodily action of arm-waving (obviously involving neural events and other bodily events – depicted by the brain below). What is involved in the case of arm-waving? On Lowe's account it looks like this (using Barack Obama as the example 'subject'):

"I"



Thanks go to Dr Tom McClelland for permission to use this Waving Obama from his Philosophy of Mind PowerPoint slides from Sem 2 of 2012-13 at the University of Glasgow, and also for his helpful answers and suggestions to my questions in preparing this Poster. Thanks are also due to Professor Fraser MacBride, Dr Frederique Janssen-lauret and Dr Chris Lindsay for their comments and feedback on the text.