

## Peer Review

# Review of: "The Mind as a Particular: Why Cartesian Dualism Is True"

Paul Cunningham<sup>1</sup>

1. Department of Psychology, Rivier University, Nashua, United States

Cunningham, P. (2025). [Review of the article *The Mind as a Particular: Why Cartesian Dualism Is True*, by Alexandros Syrakos]. *Qeios*, 1–45.

**Overview/ Summary of Essay.** The author is attempting to build a case for Cartesian dualism based on the notion of “particularity.” The concept of particularity is held to be the foundational principle upon which the case is made and is defined as “the innate sense of personal particularity shared by all” (p. 35), which is the mind’s “deepest, most distinctive, defining characteristic” (p. 1) that is “independent from anything else in the universe” (p. 36). The essay takes 45 pages to make its case.

The author begins with a critique of materialistic/ reductionist ideas in the philosophy of mind and philosophy of persons, including a discussion of why “mind-for-itself” is incompatible with “mind-for-others” (pp. 1–8). Various “thought experiments” are then presented (“pairing problem,” “body duplication experiment,” “body swapping experiment,”) that draw upon logic and imagination to justify the thesis that “mind” (defined in a footnote) is indeed an independent entity separate from the body and that Cartesian dualism is “the only tenable conclusion” pertaining to a mind’s relationship with its body—a relationship that is never firm and always arbitrary (as any mind could theoretically be “swapped” with any body) (pp. 8–17). The author goes on to distinguish the “symmetry” (or similarity) among all people (i.e., all selves are the same) from the third-person perspective and the “asymmetry” (or dissimilarity, discontinuity, and uniqueness) of one’s own mind that distinguishes it from all others and which is accessible only from one’s own first-person point of view, but not another’s (pp. 17–21).

At this point, the author discusses the implications of his concept of “particularity” for our understanding of the “universal” nature of physical particles and “non-mental, impersonal” ordinary objects and bodies whose existence is “merely a shadow” of that which exists in persons (pp. 21–23).

He then explores the “composition” or “combination problem” of panpsychism and reductive physicalism and how there is no necessary “special” relationship of the self (or mind, person, ego) with the universe into which it was born, with its body, the parents who raised it, or the traits that characterize its personality (i.e., the memories, temperament, physiology, talents and abilities) that are “as foreign to me as anything else” because one can *imagine* a self that is without them or that they could belong to someone else (pp. 23-26). We are “so singular” and “so foreign” and “completely inaccessible” to the external universe and “necessarily independent of any external elements in the world” or “anything else in the universe” with a self “entirely private to me alone” that “it seems inconceivable” that our particularity could be produced or determined by that universe” (pp. 26-28).

Having established that the self is a “simple substance,” the author then asks the further question: “How, then, is it brought into existence?” (p. 29). He termed this “the creation problem” that involves another “thought experiment” in which one is a “creator of persons” in the sense of creating a person out of nothing but is limited in power by not having the ability to know how to go about creating a particular person who does not yet exist (pp. 29-32). Various logical solutions to this problem are explored and rejected as inadequate, which leads the author into a logical paradox, but which finds ultimate resolution in “the foundation and source of all reality to be a Mind, a Person—‘God’ in religious terminology” (p. 33). With one’s particular mind linked to the Universal Mind that is its source, one’s particularity also becomes linked to the particularity of other persons’ minds, which also find their source in the One Mind. In the end, though, it is all Mystery, the contingent nature of one’s existence being the most bewildering and mysterious of all. Various footnotes and references follow.

## **Specific Recommendations**

**1. This reviewer recommends that the essay be substantially shortened in order to improve the clarity and conciseness of its main thesis—“Cartesian dualism is true because minds are particular.” Eliminating wordiness and redundancies would be one way to do this. The continuity and flow would be improved by**

**avoiding abrupt and disjointed transitions that make the text choppy and disjointed in places. Connections of how the various arguments advance the thesis will need to be repeatedly made so that the essay's focus and meaning are not diluted. Some sections are overly detailed, and the dots need to be connected for the reader. A continual reading and re-reading of the essay will help the author do this.**

In other words, stay focused on your basic argument. Tell why “particularity” requires or implies a Cartesian universe and “why Cartesian dualism is the only tenable conclusion about [the mind's] nature” (p. 2). This is not always obvious. A great deal of time (and paper) is spent arguing against the physicalist theory of mind that would be better spent, in my view, by focusing on the thesis that is referenced in the title of the article (i.e., “Particularity” provides the necessary evidence to prove that Cartesian dualism is true). In this reviewer's opinion, too much time (and too many pages) is spent arguing why all counter-positions (such as physicalism) are inadequate to the task and not enough clarity and conciseness about why your position is the correct one. The critiques of counter-positions can form the core of other articles. Your aim and focus is not one “proving” why Cartesian dualism is true and why particularity, in particular (pun intended), is the foundational attribute of mind that makes Cartesian dualism a reasonable conclusion to all the arguments that are presented (and there are many). Otherwise, the author risks boring his audience and leaving the reader to wonder, “Now what is this paper all about?” “How does this specific argument or “thought experiment” support the author's thesis?”

2. Identify the hidden assumptions behind your claims, premises, and conclusions. This reviewer had difficulty with many of the author's claims because of the unspoken assumptions or auxiliary premises that lay behind them, with which he questioned and would have liked to see better justified. Sometimes an expert (e.g., teacher) in the subject matter assumes knowledge on the part of the reader (e.g., student) that the reader does not possess. Take the time to make implicit assumptions hidden behind the arguments explicit so that both you and the reader can assess their validity.

3. Once you decide on *what* you want to say and on *how* you want to say it, then decide *when* you want to say it. All this has to do with the flow of arguments so that one builds upon another in a meaningful, if not logical way. The essay's organization could be improved, in other words. In this way, "jumps" and "leaps" of reasoning will be better identified. One way to do this is for the author to use his own *associative* train of thought to "imagine" the reader's associative train of thought as he constructs one sentence after another, building argument upon argument. Otherwise, the reader loses interest or loses the point and is then less likely to take the time to read your article to the end.

4. The author covers a lot of territory in 47 pages, and it could easily be distilled into three or four articles, each of which arguably stands in need of being put to the test of further development. The section on the "Pairing Problem" (pp. 8-17), for example, could easily be expanded as a separate essay or considerably shortened. The chaff needs to be separated from the wheat, so to speak. There are so many alleyways, to use another metaphor, that the reader is forced to go through (or down), and then coming out the other side wonders if a more direct route might not be taken to the destination.

If the author *does* decide to keep the article at its present length (which I do not advise on the basis of a reader's typical attention span), then he *must* provide periodic summaries along the way, reminding the reader of what has been presented previously. Examples of such periodic summaries might begin with the words, "Up to this point, we have addressed...." or "So far, we have seen that..." The essay is a "long travel," so to speak, and creates quite a burden on working memory if one reads it in its entirety in one sitting. Periodic resting places where the reader is reminded of what has taken place so far will keep the essay focused on its main thesis as well. Also, good transition sentences will help connect in the reader's mind what would otherwise be a disconnected and fragmented article. I understand that the author has much to say and can't say it all at once. Reading and re-reading the essay will allow other "probable" versions to arise into awareness that can help in this process of happening upon the best organization for the essay. The author will notice where redundant sentences can be removed and what sentences and paragraphs can be re-arranged to better express the intent of what it is he really wants to say at *that* moment. Imagine that each word costs a nickel.

5. The term "mind" is such an important one that I recommend moving its definition to within the body of the paper rather than as a footnote. Since it is part of your title, make it more prominent and clarify its meaning more.

## Strong Points

The major strong point of this essay is the many questions that the author asks:

- “Why was it I that was brought into existence?”
- “What are we *really*?”
- “What is it that gives a person their identity?”
- “Why are you *this* person in *this* body and not another?”
- “What is it that endures throughout the comings and goings of the physical particles and biological cells that compose my body and allows me to say “This is me?”
- “Why is this particular mind paired with this particular body and what is the cause of that pairing?”
- “What determines which particular mind is paired with which particular body?”
- “Why is it that my body, and my body alone, gives rise to me?”
- “Why am I not experiencing life through your body, and you through mine?”
- “If my parents had not met and my current body had never been formed, would it then be possible for some other body to give rise to me?”
- “What is so special about my own body such that it gives rise to me specifically and not to someone else?”
- “*Who* is paired with a body?”
- “What is special about your body, in relation to you, that determines that it is *you* who emerges from it rather than any of the infinite other possible selves?”
- “How can a person’s existence be explainable solely with reference to factors external to it?”
- “Where does singularity, particularity, and uniqueness of a person come from?”
- “Why are there correlations between the activities of a person’s mind and the physics of their body?”
- “Why do I have the parents that I do?”

I would add a further question: “Why is there anything at all?” Any of these questions could arguably serve as useful organizational devices (i.e., “headings”) for ordering the sequence of arguments presented in the essay and demonstrate the power of those arguments to resolve or “answer” the important question(s) they raise.

Another strong point is the author's criticisms of reductive physicalism and science's and philosophy's tendency to overlook the importance of "particularity" (i.e., individuality, uniqueness) of the self and its conscious mind. While this reviewer agrees with much of what the author is trying to say, his main thesis often seems to get "lost in the bushes." The problem with the traditional formulation of Cartesian dualism that Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia first brought to Descartes's attention remains, and I am uncertain that this author has resolved it (e.g., how the matterless mind interacts with the mindless matter). The author's desire to emphasize the independence and separateness of the mind and the body and the world appears extreme to this reviewer and becomes overstated, in this reviewer's opinion, such that he ends up with an isolated, alone, privatized ego disconnected from the natural world, other people, and one's own body that is "a bridge (or un-bridge) too far," so to speak.

Another strong point of the essay, in this reviewer's opinion, is the author's recognition of the importance of a return to introspection as a method to gather evidence for his thesis that "particularity proves Cartesian dualism". The evidence must come through the correct channel. However, the author's "thought experiments" are not the traditional form of "introspection" in which consciousness is used as a tool to explore consciousness and not using the reasoning mind to weave its way in and out of imaginary scenarios. This reviewer is reminded of Hume's objection to introspection as a method to discover mind or self. Hume could not directly perceive the mind or self separately as a particular thing, and so concluded that either introspection was worthless as a method or the self does not exist. He believed his inability to localize the self or mind as an objective object that could be seen using the inner senses justified both conclusions. Nevertheless, the use of verbal reports as data in cognitive science has proven to be quite workable. But this is not the form of introspection that is utilized in the author's proposed "thought experiments," which are more in the way of exercises of reasoning ability than acts of "inner" (intro-) perception.

Another strong point of the essay is the author's insight into how there is always something that remains the "same" or constant throughout all perceived change and growth. There is something that can more or less be counted on to remain stable through the incessant change in the atoms and molecules of the body or its constant metabolism of cells. One recognizes that somehow the child one once was is now the adult that one is. Identity may change (e.g., the identity or sense of "self" of the child is not the same identity or sense of "self" of the adult), yet each new identity or "self" is also the previous identity (and self) which has changed. The body retains its form, function, and identity

throughout the incessant metabolism and death of its underlying cells. The form, function, and identity of even so-called “dead” or inanimate objects are retained throughout the continuous replacement of atoms and molecules that compose them. What gives mind or self its form, function, and identity if not the underlying changeable matter that composes it? The author’s essay attempts to answer that question in the form of the self’s “particularity.” There is something that remains stable throughout the change, in other words, and the author identifies this as the self or mind. This theme of the underlying stability throughout change relates to the author’s discussion of the question of whether Theseus’s ship retains *its* identity as “Theseus’s ship” after a plank or nail or any other part is removed. In the context of the present discussion, mind or self or person may have changed; it is no longer “the same,” since it has extended itself and increased itself by experience. Yet it is the same mind, self, or person (or the same consciousness) since it is that which has extended or increased itself. What you were is still present in what you will by now have become.

The author’s discussion of particle physics and its relationship to personhood was interesting and could be a topic further developed (e.g., how the same body can physically exist in two different states as two qualitatively-quantitatively dissimilar things at the same time as a quantum system of fermions and bosons and as a Newtonian object and body). The author makes some good points in his discussion of the relationship between body and particle physics (e.g., pp. 14–15) that are scattered throughout the essay and would become more coherent if pulled together and discussed together.

### **Specific Feedback**

**Re: Need for Empirical Evidence.** I am sympathetic to the author’s disappointment that the role of the mind or self is not made more prominent or its substantive reality more widely recognized in treatises on the philosophy of mind. This reviewer believes that Descartes may have been on the right track but just didn’t have the tools to prove his thesis. The problem cannot be resolved by philosophy alone. The findings of empirical science, especially the psychological sciences, need to be brought into the philosopher’s room. If the author wishes to convince a modern audience of the truth of his thesis, then he needs to bring in some *empirical* research findings to buttress his case. For example: (a) apparent discrepancies between states of consciousness and correlated brain conditions, such as episodes of lucidity in dementia; (b) cognitive skills displayed without previous learning or experience, such as xenoglossy; (c) cognitive abilities retained when the brain is seriously compromised, such as hydrocephalus and hemispherectomy; (d) end-of-life experiences, such as near-death visions; (e) near-death experiences occurring under extreme physiological conditions; (f) perceiving information

from another person or about distant locations beyond the reach of the brain, body, and physical senses; (g) subliminal consciousness and the existence of secondary centers of consciousness; and (h) mental mediumship. The mind's independence from the body will not be "proven" by logic alone.

**Re: Definition of "Mind."** The author states, "The mind is fundamentally different from macroscopic physical phenomena" (p. 3). The further question arises: How is it fundamentally different? The issue was raised earlier, but it would be good to provide a definition of "mind" early in the body of the essay instead of tucking it in a footnote, given its prominence as a theme throughout. As the author correctly points out, Hume notwithstanding, the mind is not a macroscopic object that can be perceived as an ordinary object or body can be perceived because it is not a "thing" that can be perceived in that manner. *How* the mind is experienced or known via a felt sense (or intuition) as a process or a relationship or as a substantial "thing" would be a topic awaiting study.

On a related issue, a question arises: How does the phenomenon of telepathy relate to the nature of mind in the present discussion? This reviewer was amused by the statement "I am experiencing my own thoughts and nobody else's" (p. 7). My question is: How do you know? Perhaps telepathic reception of the thoughts of others is occurring all the time but is mistakenly interpreted as being nothing more than one's own thoughts. How can one tell the difference between telepathically received impressions and one's own thoughts? How do you know that telepathy does not underlie the basis of everyday language?

**Re: Use of the term "Particularity"**. It remains unclear to this reviewer whether the term "particularity" is a synonym for the word "individuality." In the mind of other readers, the term "particular" could also refer to the perceived individuality of ordinary objects and bodies that occupy their own particular space that is shared by no other object. There are *particular* objects and bodies, so to speak, when talking *empirically* rather than in abstraction. I understand this is not what the author means by the term, but the matter needs to be addressed more clearly.

The author uses the "body duplication experiment" and "mind-pairing experiment" as vehicles to argue for the particularity of mind. If "particularity" indeed rules, some readers may argue, then there are *no* duplicates. Particularity would seem to go "all the way down." Why stop at mind? Why the author does not consider memories, sensory experiences, rational capacities, etc. in *their* particularity (e.g., particular memories, particular sensory experiences, particular instances of reasoning that are different from another's) would seem to be an arbitrary exclusion not warranted by the simple *empirical* fact that other minds, other persons, other selves *do* also have their own special and unique



and particular memories, experiences, thoughts, feelings of grief, etc. Just because people have similar experiences does not mean they are necessarily not also *particular* in their ontological status. The author puts aside as “peripherals” that are outside the category of “particularity” and into the category of “universals” that stands in opposition to the particular, even though they may simply be two ends of the same stick, two poles of a magnet, or faces of a coin.

The author, I believe, is correct in arguing that “the particularity of a mind cannot be explained or deduced through any composition of that mind” (p. 1). Perhaps particularity only comes from a “top-down” approach which endows the mind with its individuality and consciousness, its specific form (human or nonhuman), and identity. Perhaps mind is created from the inside, not from the outside. However, I am uncertain whether everyone (whether they are cognitive neuroscientists or not) who reads this essay would agree with the author’s claim that the brain’s material organization and neural architecture and the body’s genome and genetic ancestry “cannot tell us anything about the particularity of the mind.” This reviewer believes that the author’s claims would be better served if further clarification of the evidence that the author presents to support his claim can be provided beyond the logic of his “thought experiments.” Personality psychologists, who study the self from a *psychological* individual difference perspective, would tend to view these physiological sources as valid contributors to explaining why different people think, feel, and behave differently in the same situation. How would the author address this matter beyond the logic of thought experiments?

The further question arises: The author claims that “universals” are not objectively real (or seems to). Why is “particularity” not a *universal* attribute, if it applies universally to all minds? This reviewer is taking the meaning of the term “universal” in its dictionary definition and is the way that most readers of this essay may understand the term. Some might argue that “particularity” does play a universal role in the workings of the physical world (p. 4); that is, we are individuals first, and male and female second, for example. Is “particularity” objectively real, or is objective reality limited to what is physical? This point may need to be clarified for some readers of the essay.

The author asks: “Why would it be impossible to duplicate any physical aspect of my body?” (p. 10). This is a good question. The answer may indeed lie in “particularity”—but in the particularity of one’s own body coupled with the particularity of one’s own mind that form together the further unity-identity-whole “particularity” that is “You.” Some may argue that the particularity of the mind does not need to limit itself to the mind alone, in other words. This author does, and it may seem to his readers to be an “extraordinary claim” that requires “extraordinary evidence.”

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**Re: Use of the term “Universal”.** Some readers may view defining what constitutes a “universal” as “a property of the body or produced by it” (p. 13) to be arbitrary and not the common sense, dictionary meaning of the term, that is, “universal” as something that is general, common, collective, widespread. Some readers may find this confusing. This reviewer had to keep reminding himself of the author’s “special” meaning of the term whenever he came across it in the essay.

Each mind is particular—yes. We each have our own mind and we each have our own body. Mind is private (and personal, as William James might say). It is unique. But is the mind not also subject to learning processes, such as conditioning, socialization, and enculturation? If so, then the mind becomes socially constructed in a way that makes it shared and “common” in certain respects such that intersubjective agreement is possible. If thoughts can be communicated, does that count as releasing a purely private mind from the strict bounds of its privateness? Are there any “windows” in this monad? What *fundamentally* distinguishes my mind from your mind, my body from your body? Are these qualia of mind—personal, private, unique, non-duplicable—also possessed by nonhuman, animal minds as well? If these qualia are shared by the minds of other human beings, does that not also make them “core” to being human?

**Re: Use of the Term “Objectively Real.”**

There seems to be an opposition or adversarial relationship set up between what is a “mental construct” and what is “objectively real” (p. 3), suggesting that an idea has no objective reality or capacity to indirectly influence the world. Darwin’s theory of evolution, Einstein’s theory of relativity, and Freud’s concept of ego and id have profoundly created and shaped the world, if only indirectly, causing people to cast their view of the world through its filter for generations. Numbers are a good example of mental constructs that arguably possess some objective reality.  $2 + 2 = 4$  is a mental construct that is real enough on our level, even though that reality may not be the reality of ordinary objects and bodies.  $2 + 2$  equals 4 on Earth and on Mars, yesterday and tomorrow, whether you want to believe it or not. Does the author believe that mathematics could have an objective, independent existence of any mind; that is, if there were no minds, would  $2 + 2$  still equal four?

**Re: Understanding of “Body.”** The author claims that it was his body that led to his “coming into existence,” suggesting that he views the body as *the causal force* that brought him into being. Further questions arise: Does this not imply the mind as emerging from or produced by the body, in some

respect? How does *particularity* dissolve (or resolve) this particular kind of bodymind bond (i.e., or “pairing” as the author puts it), leading to a Cartesian-like dualism?

The author states that there is “nothing inherently special” about his body “compared to the billions of other” and can “easily imagine” his body “belonging to another mind.” This may be true in imagination and abstraction, but does the fact that one can imagine it or conceive it make it *real* possibility or even a non-zero probability? Or a firm basis on which to build an argument? That is, is this *really* empirically true in the individual case? Brain surgeons recognize that not all brains are created equal and need to map individual brains before they do surgery so as not to damage circuitry that is “particular” to that patient. Brain scans are individual and require averaging to remove individual differences. The author is claiming that there is nothing *particular* about his *particular* body that makes it “special.” Yet others may argue that it is *your* body, after all, and not someone else’s, even though you may be able to imagine it as someone else’s. But does being able to imagine something make it so?

My point is that all this may be true in abstraction, but the lived experience of embodiedness would seem to make one’s body, like one’s mind, your own, private, unique, and non-duplicable. Experiencing life through another body is given in some accounts of children who remember recarnational lives, but this does not detract from the specialness of the life lived through the child’s body. Nor would the ability to imagine the body’s nonexistence diminish the specialness of its existence, or so others may argue.

The notion that one can conceive the *theoretical* possibility that “two or more minds could have identical bodies” or that “the matter constituting the body of one mind could be exchanged [without residue] with the matter of another mind’s body,” makes for an engaging abstract philosophical debate. This is a variation (I think) of the following scenario presented by astrophysicist Lawrence Krauss, who noted that there are roughly  $10^{28}$  (1 followed by 28 zeros) atoms of matter combined in a complex pattern to make up an individual human being and then asked the question: “Are we merely the sum of all our atoms? More precisely, if I were to re-create each atom in your body, in precisely the same chemical state of excitation as your atoms are in at this moment, would I produce a functionally identical person who has exactly all your memories, hopes, dreams, and spirit?” Krauss believed that “there is every reason to expect that this would be the case.”

This reviewer agrees with the author that it would not *necessarily* be so, but am unsure that the author’s discussion convincingly explains why. Such duplication or replication through experiments

may, however, be ignoring or overlooking the *empirical* nature of both matter and mind. Some readers of this essay may want their philosophy to be empirically controlled. For example, what is the evidence for the claim that “the mind’s mental state, beliefs, character, etc... could be exactly duplicated in *multiple* minds” (p. 2)? What is the evidence for this, or is this merely an exercise in creative imagination that has no footing in the “real” world?

The author asks, “If someone grasps the duplicate body’s arm, will you feel it?” and concludes, “No, you will not,” because you are two different persons (p. 12). This reviewer is reminded of the contrary instance of a rather fascinating *empirical* demonstration of how body sensation follows vision, called the “rubber hand illusion.” The person sees a rubber hand placed in front of them, while their real hand is concealed from view. The experimenter strokes both hands at the same time, and after some time, the person perceives the fake hand as if it were his own hand. [Botvinick, M., & Cohen, J. (1998). Rubber hands ‘feel’ touch that eyes see. *Nature*, 391(6669), 756-756]

**Re: Duplicates.** The author writes about the possibility of “identical chairs,” and “identical bodies,” and “identical minds” and so forth. Can two *real* chairs be *really* identical? Different atoms and molecules compose them both, and each occupies a different location in the spacetime manifold. Identical twins are not really identical. Two thoughts are never identical. These observations may be dismissed by placing them in the category of “peripherals” and “universals,” conceptually sequestering them away from the category of “particularity,” but that does not change the *empirical* fact that there are no *actual* duplicates in physical life. Some readers may be unconvinced that such truly identical duplicates *really* exist except in the imagination of “thought experiments.” Much of the bridging arguments and conclusions that are drawn on the basis of such “thought experiments” seem to require the reader to temporarily suspend disbelief that such duplicates do not exist and to believe they do for the sake of the argument. Realists would resist such “experiments.” After all, why bother to investigate or think about the reality of such fictions? The “pairing problem” (pp. 8-11) and “body duplication experiment” (pp. 11-14) are of this kind. For realists, such “duplications” are simply flights of reasoning that need to be empirically controlled if they are to be convincing, persuasive, or plausible.

The author proposes that “Bodily structure...are universals and duplicable; minds are particular” (p. 14). Yet, as some may argue, we each have our own body and we each have our own consciousness. What makes a body structure “universal” or “duplicable,” except as an abstract conceptual notion?

One can focus on the similarities and make them “universals” or focus on the differences and make them “particularities.” Readers may argue that it all depends on your perspective.

The author discusses the question “Why do two brains give rise to two selves?” (p. 11). He then goes on to explore physicalist explanations in terms of the anatomic differences between brains (i.e., “cortical variability”). He states, “it is not hard to see that this explanation is flawed,” without clearly explaining how (p. 12). He then carries the reader through a “thought experiment” that asks them to consider the logical consequences of theoretically duplicating bodies that have the same two minds and then reasoning to the conclusion that “they are not the same person” (pp. 12–13). What if existentially and empirically there are no duplicates? How does this change the thrust of the author’s arguments?

**Re: Use of Modern Physical Theory.** The author states that if physicalism is true, then “the undeniable fact that I perceive myself as bounded to this particular body and not some other...should be explainable in physical terms” (p. 11). Some readers may point out that this “boundedness” of self to body, which is certainly a part of our phenomenological experience of body consciousness, in other respects, is actually *refuted* by modern physical theory.

For instance, when physics claims that your body is fundamentally made up of the same “stuff” as all other objects in the universe, it is calling attention to the existence of a *material* unity that connects everything in the physical universe. Being made up of the very same matter as stars, rocks, microbes, flowers, tables, and other bodies makes us *physically* a part of any reality that we experience. The physical world rises up before your eyes, while your eyes are a part of the world they perceive. Interchanges between your body and the seemingly “empty” space outside it occur continuously—basic chemical interactions without which life as we know it would be impossible. We eat portions of the world in the form of animals, vegetables, and minerals and make them a part of ourselves, to be used by the body and then returned to the earth to be used again. Assimilating and using properties that would otherwise be called “alien” and “not-self,” through such methods your body nourishes and immunizes itself. Materially, then, your “embodied self” is composed of all these seemingly alien, unself-like elements. Combining and recombining many times to form other portions of the natural environment, the body’s matter becomes the cells of a plant or an animal, and vice versa. By hypothesis, this inner and outer physical transmigration of matter represents a natural method of communication that unites all species and all physical life. My point is that the self that you think you

are and the world that you think is detached, impersonal, and alien is not so from another point of view.

**Re: Kim's Pairing Problem.** Regarding the discussion of Kim's "pairing problem" (p. 9), it seems to require the reader to presume duality from the start. Not all readers of the essay "can easily imagine being paired to a different body" (p. 9) or "certainly imagine [oneself] experiencing life through someone else's body" (p. 11). The more embodied one becomes, the less easy it is to become dis-identified from one's own body (e.g., "I have a body. I am not my body; I have emotions, I am not my emotions"). Such imaginings may be used to make a point, but the lived reality of chronic pain and feelings of grief may make it difficult to truly grasp that point. Presuming a forced duality at the outset makes it easier to conceive such a state of affairs, but may simply be a trick of logic that bears little correspondence to lived reality. My point is that the usefulness of such "experiments" may be limited only to some readers and not others. A variety of approaches (e.g., empirical) will be needed to reach different readers.

Kim used the word "soul" to refer to something that is (a) nonphysical and is therefore (b) not located in space, (c) has no spatial connection between it and the body, and (by postulated definition) (d) cannot cause physical events in the body" (p. 9). An ordinary thought, a dream, and a feeling of grief would fulfill the first three characteristic features of Kim's "soul," but not the fourth (non-interaction). Nonphysical thoughts and emotions that do not take up space do indeed interact not only with the body, but with other thoughts, as placebos [the biology of belief], hypnotism [the power of suggestion], and multiple personality disorders [change the self and you change the body] demonstrate. Remove the last of Kim's attributes, and you have something similar to the soul by the qualia of ordinary thoughts and emotions and overcome the interaction problem that plagued Descartes's definition of mind. Where mind affects matter, consciousness is part of the causal nexus of the physical world. The author is correct when he says our inability to explain how the causal interaction between mind and body works (like our inability to explain how a TV works) does not prevent us from using either quite effectively. When mind (or soul) demonstrates empirically that it can interact with the world of matter, I think we've made some progress in resolving Descartes' error.

The author is probably aware that there are cases in psychiatry where "one would be two persons at once, each body having its own memories, stream of perceptual inputs, etc." (p. 10), such as multiple personality disorder as described in books such as *The Three Faces of Eve*. It is an evocative empirical demonstration of Kim's thought experiment that suggests a different conclusion or outcome to the

logic of his “thought experiment” that this reviewer finds much more compelling because it is *real*, in both the physical and nonphysical sense.

**Re: The Idea of Cartesian Dualism.** The issue of the relationship between body and mind does not seem to be completely resolved in the author’s present rendition of Cartesian’s original model, except for making it more extreme in its separation of mind and body. Some readers of this essay may consider that it all depends on how one conceives what it is like to be “a body” in abstraction and what it is like to be one’s “own body” in lived experience. “Body” as an abstract construct considered as one object among others or “my body” as a living organism—take your pick. Some may view the relationship as more intimate, more like a marriage than a divorce, and without reducing one into the other. Some people may postulate that the mind or spirit speaks with a physical voice and that the physical body is a creation of a mindful spirit. Some readers may even believe that our body is paired with our particular mind because it “grew” it.

The author states, “To the best of my knowledge there is no compelling arguments against dualism” (p. 9). This reviewer would argue that the author needs to acknowledge that compelling arguments *have* been made against the dualism of the Cartesian variety, and this is why not everyone is on board with that variety of dualism. Some would argue that Descartes’ error was not that he recognized a nonmaterial mind and a material body, but that he failed to recognize the material aspects of mind and the nonmaterial aspects of brain.

Although the author does not frame his thesis within the framework of monism vis-à-vis dualism, I think it may be important to do so for those readers who understand this way of framing the problem. In its modern-day incarnation, monism assumes that mind is all matter, while dualism assumes that mind has no matter, and both assert that matter has no mind — only mind experiences, not matter. Monism fails to fully acknowledge the nonmaterial reality of thought, while dualism fails to fully acknowledge thought’s physical reality. The problem with monism is not that it recognizes the unity of mind and body, but that it fails to properly acknowledge their differences. The problem with dualism is not that it recognizes the differences between mind and body, but that it fails to properly acknowledge their unity. The virtue of monism is its recognition of the physical reality of thought. The virtue of dualism is its recognition of the basically independent and separate nature of mind (or consciousness). The failure common to both monism and dualism is their inability to recognize that the body and its brain possess their own distinctly real and unique consciousness that is as alive and vital, valid and significant as the ordinary waking consciousness of the mind.

How to understand the interaction of a matterless mind and mindless matter does not seem to raise a problem for the author. Some readers, though, may see that it raises a problem only as long as the ideas of a purely insentient brain and a purely nonphysical consciousness are maintained. If it is a metaphysical, scientific, and creative error to separate matter (or brain) from mind (or consciousness) and mind from matter, then an adequate explanatory strategy of how the brain transmits mind and why brain functioning is accompanied by conscious experience would not commit this error. It would recognize consciousness both as the agent that initiates and directs the transduction of energy into matter and matter into energy and as a quality intrinsic to matter itself. The author argues against a particular version of panpsychism that does indeed have its problems, being as reductive as the physicalism that it opposes. This reviewer is unsure whether the author's modern version of Cartesian dualism moves much beyond the problem that plagued the older one.

**Re: Assumptions Behind the Research** This reviewer finds many question-begging assumptions sprinkled throughout the article. For example,

- “The purpose of the inanimate world is to be subservient to the development of finite persons” (p. 34). [The word “subservient” has all kinds of negative connotations, as if the purpose of the world was to serve human persons’ needs and desires. This seems to be the implication here. Some may view this as anthropocentric and an egoism of the most pernicious kind that is a view of the world partly responsible for the world’s current ecological crisis].
- “The concept of the self is the most fundamental and familiar concept that we innately have” (p. 8). [What about concepts such as Body? Others? World? Time?].
- “The particularity of a mind is something completely private to the mind itself and can be found nowhere else in the universe” (p. 2) [How do you know this? If the particularity of the mind can be communicated to others, as the author is attempting to do, and others agree, does this not mean that it is then shared and no longer completely private? Do some nonhuman animals have minds; that is, does “particularity” extend beyond the human species?].
- We live in a detached universe, the author claims. This assumption is one beginning point in the author’s edifice that needs to be reexamined. The issue of nonhuman animals and whether they have selves or personhood or minds and how they figure into all of this is not addressed in this essay, although it would give clarity to what human personhood is supposed to be.

This reviewer also perceived a number of “jumps” or “leaps” in reasoning throughout the article that require additional bridging in order to make the arguments coherent. Here I only note a few: “This



possibility seems unlikely...” (p. 15). “Some contemplation should reveal...the core of the person, the owner of these traits, to be an independent substance” (p. 13). “A person is not correlatable to any universal aspect of their body” (p. 13). “Everything about the two minds that is correlated to physical structures in their bodies is the same. But there is a crucial difference: they are not the same persons” (p. 12).

**Re: The Absence of Counterarguments.** The author states: “No one has publicly presented any substantive arguments against it [i.e., the possibility that minds are fundamental independent entities]” (p. 6). This reviewer believes that the author is overstating his case here since substantive arguments have been made by cognitive neuroscientists in this respect that can arguably be found by a more thorough review of the literature] (e.g., William Uttal’s *Mind and Brain* (2011)).

The author declares that it is “impossible to explain [various mental processes of ‘phenomenal’ consciousness] with reference to the physical properties of the body” (p. 3). Again, this reviewer finds that this is done all the time in cognitive neuroscience. Apparently, others do not think that it is “impossible to explain” consciousness in this manner (e.g., Dennett), and although the author makes a valiant attempt to show how such attempts are not reasonable, such claims of “impossibility” need to be more circumspect.

**Re: “Thought Experiments” – Thought Divides what is Undivided in Nature.** This reviewer’s primary problem with the “proofs” for the particularity of mind that the author presents is that they are mostly arguments that rely on abstractions from experience and what some may regard as fanciful counterfactual imaginings (“thought experiments”) rather than on empirical evidence. This reviewer would encourage the author to consider a more empirically controlled approach to his arguments that grounds itself not in logical reasoning alone or in thought-experiments that have the character of counterfactual abstract, imaginary, conceptual scenarios. The treatments of self, personhood, mind, and so forth that are grounded in empirical research rather than the circumlocutions of logic or imaginary “thought experiments” of duplicate bodies and duplicate minds, switching bodies and swapping minds, seem more *believable* to this reviewer and are more in line with his own lived experience in the world. This reviewer has taught a course in Theories of Personality for many years, and perhaps this is a reason why, in the end, I remain unconvinced of the author’s thesis.

The notion of “mind” advocated in the present essay seems to be more private, isolated, and alone in the world than Descartes’s “mind” ever was. If reasoning capacities (“I think, therefore I am”) are

“peripheral” and the sense of “I am-ness” or “particularity” is core, then it is not “I think, therefore I am” but “I am, therefore I think” or better yet, “I *feel*, therefore I am.”

Some readers may find the question “Why am I not experiencing life through your body, and you through mine?” (p. 10) to be not particularly interesting, important, or compelling. It is one of those “What if...?” questions that are fun to imagine and conceive and play with its logical implications, but that is ultimately what Wittgenstein called a “language game” that bears little fruit. The author should be aware of this and not ground his thesis so much in such “mind games.”

**Re: A Separate Reality and Detached World.** The concepts of “mind,” “person,” “self,” and “ego” are treated as synonyms by the author (p. 38, n3), yet they can be distinguished, and those distinctions are important ones. Whatever these notions may ultimately refer to, this reviewer found the author’s characterization of them to be a “substance” that is isolated, alone, entirely separate from the material world, which takes the form of Leibnitz’s “windowless” monad that can only look upon itself. As the author put it, the self itself “is necessarily independent of any external elements of the world...singularly different from each other...visible, accessible, and palpable only from *within* that self...something entirely private.... To the rest of the universe, it is alien and detached, inaccessible and unknowable to any external perspective...the particularity of that self, his/her first-personal perspective, an entirely new, unique, inaccessible, private inner world, unrelated to anything else...entirely independent of anything else in the universe” (p. 28).

Elsewhere, the author states: “I find me, my selfhood...within my own self alone...Its boundary with the rest of the universe is discontinuous...it is singular...completely inaccessible to the rest of the universe...entirely private to me alone... This unique essence of you, your particularity, is knowable you alone, and something that the rest of the universe is devoid of, it is inaccessible to it...all other selves are equally foreign and inaccessible (p. 27).

This picture of the world reminds me of the writings of the great Existentialists of the last century, such as Camus and Sartre. As Sartre put it in his novel *Nausea*, “We are born without reason, we prolong ourselves out of weakness, and we die by chance.” This was a feeling I was left with by the end of the essay. Then, as a “solution to the problem,” enters “Mind, a Person—‘God’ in religious terminology” (p. 33) as a *deus ex machina* to put everything back together again where all the king’s horses and all the king’s men had failed.

This reviewer would argue that there are reasons why one thing exists and not another. The contingency of being does not make asking the “why” question of the existence of ordinary objects

and bodies a “nonsensical” one. Yes, the question “Why was it *I* that was brought into existence” is a deep question that has a profound meaning, but I remain unconvinced that asking that question about the existence of anything else has no real meaning or that that meaning is to be found only in the mind’s *particularity*. That construct is spread too thin to do the job that is required of it.

The author states: “The existence of objects [is] merely a shadow of the existence of persons” (p. 22). “A single person is incomparably more valuable than the entirety of the vast, impersonal material universe” (p. 33). “What is truly existent in all of reality are persons, selves, whereas the vast inanimate universe has only a relative existence” (p. 35). These propositions imply a view of the self that looks upon the world in its own terms, a world whose existence is only to serve the needs of human personhood. Is this correct? What are the implications of such a view, and what assumptions lie hidden behind it?

**Re: We are all the Same.** The author claims that the third-person point of view reveals all selves to be the same, even though every third-person perspective always involves someone’s first-person perspective—a point the author acknowledges somewhere but does not sufficiently examine its implications for his thesis. A third-person perspective still involves *someone’s* first-person perspective. The author makes the further claim: “From the third-person perspective of the rest of the world, there is no difference [between two individual selves] at all” (p. 30). Really? How does the author know this? Elsewhere, the author states, “This innermost self, divested from all peripheral qualities, including gender, is exactly similar for all of us; we are all the same” (p. 40, n11).

Personality psychologists and psychologists who have studied individual differences would beg to differ. Personality psychologists would argue that so-called “peripheral” qualities are not peripheral at all, but deemed quite essential to the person whose aspects they are. They are also essential to understanding why one person or “self” is not the same as another. They may be “peripheral” and “universal” in abstraction, but ask a person “Who are you?” and these non-essential peripherals come to the forefront. Some readers may argue that it is the “particularities” of the “core” self that gives rise to these peripherals in the first place. One’s talent at math is not merely a “universal” or “peripheral” that does not find its origin in the external environment, but a “particularity” that finds its origin and source in the person or self whose talent it is.

The author claims that from the third-person point of view of an impersonal universe, then, every person is exactly the same as all other persons. The claim is also made that “the singularity, particularity and uniqueness of a person can be found only within that person itself and nowhere else

in the universe” (p. 21). What evidence does the author have for these claims? How do you know what the point of view of the rest of the universe is? Some readers may argue that the physical universe gave birth to personalities such as you and me. How can it be impersonal? Perhaps the so-called “impersonal” universe is the creator of individuality and particularity, not its great destroyer. It is true that all trees are “the same” when viewed in abstraction and similarities are conceptually focused upon, while empirically each tree is unique and individual. Which is a true representation of the facts depends on the level of analysis. Can the mind be both independent of the body and yet dependent upon it at the same time? Can singularity, particularity, and uniqueness also be found in nonhuman animals? Does personhood extend to species other than our own?

In the present essay, everything that makes a person different from others, besides their self and mind, is cast aside as “peripheral” or “universal” and therefore not a part of the particularity of a person. “We are all different in many ‘peripheral’ or ‘universal’ respects,” the author states, “however, at their core, all persons are fundamentally exactly alike” (p. 17). How do you know this? There are hidden assumptions behind the author’s logical arguments that need to be made more explicit.

**Re: One Self.** An exploration of multiple personality disorder (MPD) and secondary centers of co-consciousness in the psychiatric literature might flesh out the idea of how a self could possibly be an aggregation of selves. In multiple personality disorders, for example, a change of self changes the body (i.e., the body can be allergic in one self-state and non-allergic in another). One detects that a replacement has occurred by what the secondary self says and how he/she behaves. The dual inner and outer sense of alienation with which this species has become involved and that appears to be further emphasized in the present essay is one way to go. But there are other options, I believe.

The author states that, “if we concede that [one’s] perception of [oneself] and [one’s] body as separate entities is just an illusion, and in fact I and my body are one and the same, that illusion still deserves explanation nonetheless” (p. 10–11). This reviewer agrees. One explanation may be that it is an illusion that has a reality of its own. Illusion and reality cannot be separated in those terms. Look within and beneath the illusion, and then one may find the underlying prime reality that is its source—a source that may not be the most obvious one. Another explanation may be that both states of affairs are true, but at different levels.

**Re: Innate notions of Self.** The author writes about the “innate notion of subject or self” (p. 8). This reviewer would encourage the author to include a discussion of how he would address Eastern notions

of “no-self” as being more innate and fundamental than the constructed “self” of Western personality theories. Others declare that such innate notions of self are instead illusions and that the concept of “self” is not needed in psychology. There is a substantial amount of psychological literature on the matter, and the author would do well to demonstrate his knowledge of it if he desires his argument for Cartesian dualism to “win the day,” so to speak.

The author states: “All people have an innate understanding, an intuitive grasp of [their] fundamental identity” and that “the deeper, fundamental quintessential identity that is the subject of this paper is not an abstract concept or convention but is objectively real and known by experience through introspective acquaintance” (p. 31). The further question arises: If this is absolutely true, then why is the question “Who Am I” such a persistent one and so difficult to answer? If one’s identity were so innately understood and intuitively grasped and so objectively real and known through simple introspection because of people’s deep knowledge of it, then perhaps there would be no need for an essay such as this one to try to convince people of its true Cartesian nature. It would be obvious....or would it?

**Re: God as a Solution to the Creation Problem.** It appeared that the author’s logic eventually boxed him into the “creation problem” (e.g., “How would you go about selecting a particular person that did not exist?” p. 29). Although one can imagine one has mysterious godlike powers to create any person one wishes, I was surprised that such “godlike” powers did not extend to the ability to decide or determine who that person is to be because “the essential ingredient for your creation does not exist prior to your creation” (p. 31). The author’s logic “renders the creation of a self impossible” (p. 32), leading him to the God hypothesis (pp. 33-34), by which all aloneness, isolation, and separateness of the self from the universe and other selves is healed and resolved. As the author put it by the end of his long essay, “The fact that God created me means that I am not actually the only one who has direct access to my own self. I am not really completely isolated and my inner world is not completely private... Therefore, no one is ever really alone...God is the ultimate connection that transcends the privateness barrier and indirectly links us to one another as well” (p. 34). The further question arises: Why would such a God create a world of singular particularity described in the paper (a self, private, alone, isolated from other selves and the natural world) in the first place?

## **Conclusion**

The author concluded his extended essay with a quotation from his teacher and mentor, John Knox. I leave the author with a quotation from one of my own mentors and teachers, Alan Watts:

“Man thinks in terms and therefore divides in thought what is undivided in nature. To think is to categorize, to sort experience into classes and intellectual pigeonholes. It is thus that, from the standpoint of thought, the all-important question is ever ‘Is it this, or is it that?’ Is the experience inside this class, or is it outside? By answering such questions, we describe and explain the world; we make it explicit. But implicitly, in nature herself, there are no classes....It is thus the imaginary, abstract, and conceptual character of these divisions that render them polar. The importance of a box for thought is that the outside is different from the inside. But in nature, the walls of a box are what the inside and the outside have in common” (Alan Watts, *The Two Hands of God* (1963, pp. 45-46).

## **Declarations**

**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.