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HOW WELL CAN ONE GET TO KNOW A STRAWSONIAN PERSON?*

I shall argue that one cannot get to know a Strawsonian person, to speak in a popular way. To speak more philosophically, Strawson has a metaphysical theory of persons which involves serious epistemological difficulties. I shall begin by establishing that Strawson is committed to three claims: 1) the concept of a person is a priori, 2) persons are "items" or "things" which cannot be experienced, and 3) we apply the concept of a person to a particular Strawsonian person (subject of experiences and bodily characteristics) "via" his body. Then I shall argue that good reasons for this view are not provided and offer explanations of why Strawson does not recognize this difficulty.

I

Strawson's denial that we experience persons emerges in his discussion of the origin of the concept of a person. He does not explain at any length how he uses 'concept' and, on occasion, its equivalent (for him), 'idea.'¹ But he does present an argument when discussing the origin of the concept of a person which shows that he sometimes thinks about concepts and ideas in terms not unlike those of the proverbial empiricist: generally, concepts are "derived from" objects which we have experienced. *Minimally*, this implies that we would not have such concepts if we did not experience the appropriate, correlative objects. Strawson's concept of a person, since it does not meet this condition, is a priori. To be more cautious, this is what I shall mean by calling it a priori.

*An earlier version of this paper was read at the Eastern Division meetings of the American Philosophical Association on December 29, 1971. David Clarke, the commentator, made helpful criticisms which led to revision.

¹ The "Persons" chapter of Strawson's *Individuals* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1965) makes it clear that 'concept' and 'idea' may be used interchangeably. I shall talk mainly of concepts of persons, following Strawson's apparently preferred usage. For some incisive comments on this and related points, see C. W. K. Mundle's important book, *A Critique of Linguistic Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), passim.

The argument in question is:

. . . To have the idea of himself, must he not have the idea of the subject of the experiences, of that which has them? . . . To have the idea at all, it seems that it must be an idea of some particular thing of which he has experience, and which is set over against or contrasted with other things of which he has experience, but which are not himself. But if it is just an item *within* his experience of which he has this idea, how can it be the idea of that which *has* all of his experiences?²

I maintain that in this argument Strawson denies that we can and do experience persons. His thought seems to proceed as follows. In general, concepts meet the minimal condition mentioned: we do not have them unless we have experienced the appropriate objects. This leads to a kind of paradox in the case of the concept of a person, a subject of experiences. According to the argument, there is a single subject for each individual person or man, and in experiencing an object the subject having the experiences is not itself experienced. One cannot experience oneself because this would require a second subject. The existence of a second subject, in the case of experience of oneself by oneself, would contradict the assumption that a man is (or has) only a single subject of experiences. So we are left in the paradoxical position of maintaining that we have a concept which does not meet a minimal general condition for our having concepts because we cannot experience persons.³

Strawson does not conclude either that we do not have the concept of a person, or that in some sense we must experience persons, e.g., other persons. Rather, he concludes that we have the concept and that the question of how we can have it, given that we do not experience persons, must be faced. I conclude that for Strawson the concept of a person is a priori and that persons, viewed as subjects of experience, are "items" or "things" (Strawson's words) which

² Strawson, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89. Strawson suggests in this context a distinction between the concept of a person and the concept of some particular person, say oneself. It is the only place he suggests the distinction; elsewhere he blurs it.

It is also worth noting these remarks on p. 88:

" . . . Keeping before our minds the picture of an auditory world . . . may help to give us a continuing sense of the strangeness of what we in fact do; and this sense of strangeness we want to keep alive in order to see that we really meet it and remove it, and do not just lose or smother it." The strangeness, it becomes clear, is in our distinguishing a subject from all that we experience and yet ascribing experiences to this unexperienced subject. Thus he sees confronting and eliminating the *strangeness* of the relevant distinctions and ascriptions, not the distinctions and ascriptions themselves, as an important task.

³ It is, of course, pertinent that Strawson at no point asserts or implies that we experience other subjects either. Thus he does not avail himself of the possibility that we have the concept of a person as a result of experience of other persons.

cannot be experienced. (One could also say that the concept of a person which we have, on this view, is a priori because persons cannot be experienced.) These are two of the three claims I attribute to Strawson.

The question at the end of the passage is: how can the concept of a person be a concept of an unexperienced subject? The question is not a very clear one. But I think it is fair to say, on the basis of the "Persons" chapter as a whole, that Strawson is asking two questions: what is the origin of the concept and how do we apply it to subjects of experience?

With respect to the question of the origin of the concept of a person, Strawson is inclined to say two kinds of things. On the one hand, he repeatedly tells us that the concept is "primitive." Presumably, this is a way of saying it is a priori and that it is not derivable from experience: we simply have the concept. On the other hand, he accepts the question about the origin of the concept of a person as a question to be answered. But he is uneasy about his attempts in this direction, saying of them that they "*might* count as beginnings or fragments of an answer"⁴ which do not "*satisfy this demand at all fully.*"⁵ Because most of Strawson's efforts are devoted to dealing with the question of the applicability of the concept and because he is less uneasy about these efforts, it is sensible to return to this question.

How does the concept of a person apply to a subject of experiences? To answer this question on the basis of the "Persons" chapter it is necessary to describe what a person is for Strawson. He provides a useful summary of his views:

. . . Among the things we ascribe to ourselves are things of a kind that we also ascribe to material bodies to which we should not dream of ascribing others of the things that we ascribe to ourselves. Now there seems nothing needing explanation in the fact that the particular height, colouring, physical position which we ascribe to ourselves should be ascribed to *something or other*; for that which one calls one's body is, at least, a body, a material thing. It can be picked out from others, identified by ordinary physical criteria and described in ordinary physical terms. . . . It can and must seem to need explanation that one's states of consciousness, one's thoughts and sensations, are ascribed to *the very same thing* to which these physical characteristics, this physical situation, is ascribed.⁶

Several pages later he says:

. . . We do . . . ascribe certain corporeal characteristics not simply to the body standing in this special relation ["possession"] to the thing to which we ascribe

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 111. Emphasis mine.

⁵ *Ibid.* Emphasis mine.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

those thoughts and feelings, &c., but to the thing itself to which we ascribe those thoughts and feelings.⁷

These passages make two things clear. First, Strawson believes a person is not merely his body or his thoughts and feelings, etc., or even some combination of the two. A person is, at least in part, the "thing itself" which "possesses" both the body and the experiences.⁸ That is, a whole person (so to speak) is something in addition to his body and his experiences, something to which his body and experiences belong. Second, he also believes that a person's body is a material thing which can be identified by "ordinary physical criteria." For him this means there are descriptions in terms of relational and nonrelational properties such that for each body there is at least one unique description;⁹ put more briefly, bodies are subject to individuating descriptions.

We see, therefore, that in Strawson's view a person involves a body, a set of experiences and, in addition something which may be said to "possess" both. The subject of experiences is the same as that which "has" the relevant body.¹⁰ We saw earlier that Strawson denies that we can experience the subject of experiences. Consequently, we cannot experience the subject which possesses the body. With these essentials in mind, we may return to the question of how we apply the concept of a person to the subject of experiences.

One could rephrase the question as follows: how can we tell when and where there are persons, i.e., the "things themselves" to which the concept applies and which exist over and above human bodies and human experiences? We have already seen the key to what I think must be Strawson's answer: bodies ". . . can be picked out from others, identified by ordinary physical criteria and described in ordinary physical terms."¹¹ That is, bodies can be uniquely specified by means of unique descriptions. This may not look like an answer to our question because it tells us about bodies rather than subjects which have bodies and Strawson has distinguished the two.

Because Strawson believes subjects are unobservable or in-

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁸ The use of 'possesses,' with quotation marks, is Strawson's.

⁹ This is one of the main points of the first chapter of *Individuals*. By means of such descriptions, Strawson believes, we are able to make "identifying references" to things.

¹⁰ Usually, when I talk of persons, I have in mind Strawson's subjects. But when I speak less technically, as in the preceding sentence, I rely on the context to make my meaning clear. Numerous relevant distinctions not drawn by Strawson are drawn by Locke in his *Essay* in the chapter "Of Identity and Diversity."

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 111.

capable of being experienced and that for each (living, human) body there is a single subject, he apparently believes that one can apply the concept of a person "via" a person's body, as it were. That is, he seems to claim that we can know when and where persons are because we can locate one of their "possessions," their bodies, in space and time. To believe this is to believe that the occurrence of certain patterns of physical characteristics, viz., those constituting the body of a living human, entitles us to assert the existence of a person. More pointedly, it is to believe that there is a guide to things we do not experience among the things we do experience: certain kinds of patterns of physical characteristics entitle us to say there exists an unobserved kind of subject, viz., persons.

Our main question has been: how does the concept of a person apply to the Strawsonian subject? *If* one allows that our knowledge that there are certain kinds of bodies licenses us to say there are persons, or, in other words, that one can apply the concept of a person "via" someone's body, *then* there is no problem in knowing the existence of such subjects. I believe that while Strawson does not assert this conditional and its antecedent, he is committed to it. Some more direct textual evidence of his commitment comes from his book on Kant, *The Bounds of Sense*.¹²

In that book Strawson repeatedly emphasizes that the concept of a person must have empirical criteria for its applicability.¹³ Sometimes he says that the concept of a person is empirical. Since he does not also say we experience subjects of experience,¹⁴ saying the concept is empirical is, presumably, a way of alluding to the empirical criteria, the locating of human bodies, which we employ in applying the concept. Thus this claim does not tell against the concept's being a priori in the sense I spelled out above: the concept is not derived or obtained from an experience of a subject. Further, Strawson maintains that the necessary, but not sufficient, criteria for identifying persons have to do with human bodies. He says that Kant

. . . barely alludes to the fact that our ordinary concept of *personal* identity does carry with it empirically applicable criteria for the numerical identity

¹² P. F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1966). Hereafter I shall refer to this as *BOS*.

¹³ See, for example, *BOS*, p. 166.

¹⁴ Strawson mentions this possibility several times. See, for example, *BOS*, pp. 105-6 and p. 164. In the latter context, he comes close to saying subjects of experience are experienced. But since he does not distinguish between a person's body and "his" subject of experiences, one may read him as saying that a person's body is what is experienced.

through time of a subject of experiences (a man or human being) and that these criteria, though not the same as those for bodily identity, involve an essential reference to the human body.¹⁵

Later in the same context, he says:

. . . We may talk, confidently, of an undeniably persistent object, a man, who perceptibly traces a physical, spatiotemporal route through the world and to whom a series of experiences may be ascribed with no fear that there is nothing persistent to which they are being ascribed.¹⁶

The first passage suggests the insufficiency and at the same time the necessity of identifying a body for identifying a subject. The second passage emphasizes the perceivable, physical traces of a person. I have argued that Strawson distinguishes a person from his body (and his experiences) and claims that we identify a person "via" his body. These passages are compatible with, and the first passage encourages, this interpretation. Because one's body is not identical with the subject, bodily identity is not by itself sufficient for *personal* identity. Some additional principle, such as the sufficiency of one's knowing that there is a human body for saying there is a person, is needed. This principle, I submit, Strawson takes for granted in both *Individuals* and *The Bounds of Sense*. It is the third claim I wanted to attribute to Strawson.

Thus far I have argued that Strawson's a priori concept of a person is applied to a subject which cannot be experienced "via" a certain (kind of) body. I think that there are serious difficulties with this position and some philosophically interesting reasons why Strawson does not recognize them. Both the difficulties and the reasons for failing to see them will be presented next.

II

There are two serious difficulties with the view expressed by the three claims attributed to Strawson. One is that there seems to be no direct empirical basis for the claim that there are Strawsonian persons. The other is that Strawson's arguments for the claim do not succeed.

The lack of direct empirical basis, at least according to Strawson, is established by his denial that we experience subjects and the additional denial that such subjects are any series of bodily and/or mental states. According to these denials, we cannot experience subjects either (directly) in a single experience or (indirectly) in a series of experiences of the relevant states of a person. Indeed, as we saw above, our knowledge that there are persons is a matter of conclud-

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

ing, by inference, that certain things (viz., subjects which "have" experiences and bodily characteristics) exist, on the basis of observing the existence of the appropriate bodies and/or psychological states *and* the claim that where there is the appropriate body and/or psychological state, there is a subject. Thus there is no direct empirical basis for saying there are Strawsonian persons.

That Strawson's arguments do not show there are such persons I shall argue here in a very limited way¹⁷ by considering his answer to a central question: how do we know that there are Strawsonian persons at all? We now know the answer will *not* be: by appeal to experience alone. We are given a different sort of reply:

... We do ... ascribe certain corporeal characteristics not simply to the body standing in this special relation to the thing itself to which we ascribe those thoughts and feelings. For we say 'I am bald' as well as 'I am cold', 'I am lying on the hearthrug' as well as 'I see a spider on the ceiling'.¹⁸

The answer is a linguistic one: because we use a single pronoun in ascribing both physical characteristics and experiences to ourselves, there is a single thing which has both. The argument is not very persuasive.¹⁹ It turns on assuming, among other things, that the pronoun is a designating term and that it designates a single thing. Not only does the so-called family resemblance argument show that the unqualified one word-one thing assumption is dubious, or, at least, requires justification, but in addition others such as Hume have suggested that such pronouns designate a whole set of things.²⁰ Strawson gives us no adequate reason for opting for his view of the referents of personal pronouns rather than the Humean kind of view that they refer to complicated series of items related in various ways.

Because Strawson's argument is not very persuasive, and because direct experience of persons is unavailable, there is little reason provided to believe that there are persons in his sense, viz., unobservable subjects.²¹ Thus there is to a certain extent good reason for

¹⁷ For further support, see my "Strawson on Persons," *The Modern Schoolman*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 3 (1971), pp. 237-262. I do not argue against so-called transcendental arguments as such; I argue against Strawson's specific arguments.

¹⁸ *Individuals*, p. 93.

¹⁹ Strawson has other arguments (see footnote 17). I cite this one because it is central. About the persuasiveness of this argument I shall say more later.

²⁰ I refer to the discussion of personal identity in Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*.

²¹ For a recent argument which aims at showing, in effect, that Strawsonian selves are observable, see R. Chisholm, "On the Observability of the Self," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. XXX, No. 1 (1969), pp. 7-21. Both it and a discussion of mine appear in Paul Kurtz, ed., *Language and Human Nature* (St. Louis: Warren H. Green, Inc., 1971).

not accepting (though not necessarily for rejecting) the view that we (may) apply concepts of persons to subjects of experience "via" living human bodies. If this conclusion is justified, one wonders why Strawson does not see it. I shall suggest three reasons. The first is that although he confronts the issue of the lack of experiential confirmation in *The Bounds of Sense*, he sees it as directed against a view different from his own. The second is that the nature of descriptive metaphysics as he sometimes describes it does not involve the kind of existential assertions he wants to make elsewhere. Finally, he sometimes approaches, but only approaches, saying that we have the concept of a person but that there is no object proper for it. I shall take these up in order.

One of the implications of the first part of the paper is that Strawson has a variant of a substantialist view of selves: there is a single, enduring subject of experiences and bodily states. Another conclusion was that, on Strawson's own word, we do not experience such subjects. Therefore, one might say, as I just did, that there is no direct empirical confirmation of such a view. Strawson is well aware of this kind of criticism. Indeed, he says that Kant in his attack on a kindred view did not develop it sufficiently. Strawson approaches the alleged error in the following way:

We *have* criteria of singularity and identity for subjects of experience (people, men). If we are to talk of individual souls or consciousnesses as well, we *need* criteria of singularity and identity for them. The only way to guarantee a consequence which must surely rate as an adequacy condition for an admissible concept of an individual soul or consciousness—viz. that a normal man, in the course of a normal life, has at any time just one soul or consciousness which lasts him throughout—is to allow that the notions of singularity and identity of souls or consciousnesses are conceptually dependent on, conceptually derive from, the notions of singularity and identity of men or people. The rule for deriving the criteria we need from the criteria we have is very simple. It is: *one* person, *one* consciousness; *same* person, *same* consciousness. Acceptance of this rule of derivation, however, is the suicide of rational psychology.²²

Why is it "suicide" to accept such a rule according to which one may say there is a single "soul" or "consciousness"?

. . . We are tempted to think that we have knowledge of a continuing, identical subject, as such, knowledge which is independent of any empirical criteria of identity. We try, as it were, to abstract the force of "I" from the background of empirical criteria which give it its power of referring to a continuing subject and yet still view it as possessing that power. But if we do perform this abstraction, there is nothing for the word to express except consciousness in general, or the general conditions of the possibility of experience. Thus we confound the unity of experience with the experience of unity; and thus there arises the illusion of knowledge of the soul as a persisting immaterial thing. But it is only

²² BOS, pp. 168-9.

an illusion; and if we succumb to it, we are powerless to defend such a view of the soul against rival and less flattering theories, since no empirical means of decision between them is available.²³

The suicide of rational psychology occurs, then, when one uses a “rule” which permits one to say, on grounds not wholly empirical, that there are “souls” or “consciousnesses.” Strawson misrepresents somewhat the view in question. The view is not that we have no empirical criteria for identifying a “soul,” but rather that the criteria for identifying “souls” are only partially empirical. They are the criteria involved in identifying people or men. In addition to these criteria, a “rule” saying (roughly) that where there is a person, there is a “soul” is involved. He goes on to say that the view confounds the unity of experience with the experience of unity and intimates that we have only the unity of experience available. His saying this indicates once more both his concern with the issue of direct experience of persons and his apparent denial that we experience persons (in his more strict use of the word). What bothers him about the “rule” is that it licenses inferences about the existence of “items” or “things” which cannot be experienced. Thus these passages indicate how well aware Strawson is of the *kind* of critique I have made of his own view. One cannot help asking, therefore, why he fails to see its applicability to his proposal.

A reason is not hard to find. Strawson sees, rightly, that such an attack was directed against a view different in certain respects from his own, a view involving “souls” or “thinking substances” which lack physical, and especially spatial, characteristics.

The doctrine to be attacked is the doctrine that each of us, by the mere fact of conscious experience, knows that he exists as a Cartesian thinking substance, i.e. as an immaterial, persisting, non-composite, individual subject of thoughts and experiences, capable of existence in total independence of body or matter.²⁴

Strawson’s view is: knowledge of bodies, not merely of conscious experience, is necessary to knowledge of a subject of experiences; such a subject is material in that it has physical characteristics (M-predicates are applicable to it); such a subject is not capable of existence apart from body or matter — as we have seen it is because Strawson assumes they are dependent upon one another that he can say human bodies enable us to know when and where there are subjects of experience. My suggestion is that because Strawson views the Kantian critique in the context of a view different from his own, he fails to question, and in turn recognize, its applicability to his own

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

view. That is, because the critique is against views involving “souls” rather than Strawsonian persons, he can sympathize with it without recognizing its implications.

One could make the point somewhat differently. The “rule of derivation” which is the “suicide of rational psychology” is that where there is one person, one may claim there is one consciousness. Thus the “rule” involves persons *and* consciousnesses. (This alone shows that the view is different from that of Strawson.) One may take advantage of the formulation to state the “rule” Strawson accepts; one living human body, one person (subject) or, what comes to the same thing, same living, human body, same person. To be sure, the rules are different. So one might focus on the former rather than the latter; Strawson obviously does so. But because the criticism of the former is equally applicable to the latter, the difference makes no difference.

Another reason why Strawson may not see the force of this line of criticism has to do with the nature of so-called descriptive metaphysics. Sometimes Strawson makes statements suggesting that he is not concerned so much with what “exists” as with “existent-talk” or “existent-thought.” I am thinking of such statements as “descriptive metaphysics is content to describe the actual structure of our thought about the world” and that “up to a point, the reliance upon a close examination of the actual use of words is the best, and indeed the only sure, way in philosophy.”²⁵ Suppose, for example, one viewed the question “What kinds of things exist?” as a question about what kinds of talk we engage in, what kinds of things we are willing to *say* exist in our ordinary discourse. If one did not incorporate into this question the issue of what and how what we observe *justifies* such ways of talking, it would follow that one could answer the question what exists by looking just at our uses of language. The question of whether there are, for example, subjects, becomes in this way of proceeding, the question of whether we talk as if there are subjects: whether we use personal pronouns, whether we talk of a person as

²⁵ *Individuals*, p. xiii. In the first chapter and elsewhere, Strawson talks about how we talk and think about the world. In addition, he considers how our talk and thought is related to various observable things and situations. For example, he says: “If, then, there are any basic particulars in the sense I have indicated, it seems that the sense in which they must be observable is not merely this: that it should be correct to *speak* of observing them. It seems likely, rather, that they must be public objects of perception, particular objects of such kinds that different people can quite *literally* see or hear or feel by contact or taste or smell the same objects of these kinds.” (*Individuals*, p. 45. Emphasis mine.)

something more than his various states, etc.²⁶ Such an enterprise could presumably be called descriptive metaphysics: it involves both a kind of description and a kind of concern with existential questions. It is this enterprise which gives an argument considered earlier considerably more plausibility:

. . . We do . . . ascribe certain corporeal characteristics not simply to the body standing in this special relation to the thing to which we ascribe thoughts and feelings, &c., but to the thing to which we ascribe those thoughts and feelings. For we say 'I am bald' as well as 'I am cold', 'I am lying on the hearthrug' as well as 'I see a spider on the ceiling'.²⁷

If what is being said here is that our way of talking suggests that we talk (and think) in terms of subjects and characteristics, that is one, perhaps true, claim. To conclude, as I think Strawson does, that subjects and (their) characteristics form different categories of existents is to make a very different and insufficiently warranted claim. It is to assume that ordinary language embodies the kind of "picture of reality" usually associated with so-called ideal languages. It is, as Austin puts it, "to fall once again into the error of reading back into the world the features of language."²⁸ I submit that Strawson does not distinguish carefully and consistently enough between talk about *talk* of what exists and talk about what exists. Hence if he thinks primarily in terms of our "linguistic commitment" to subjects, he

²⁶ That Strawson may be sensitive to this way of proceeding is suggested by his comment that ". . . we may still want to ask what it is in the natural facts that makes it intelligible that we should have this concept, and to ask this in the hope of a non-trivial answer, i.e., in the hope of an answer which does not *merely* say: 'Well, there are people in the world'." *Individuals*, p. 111.

S. Shoemaker, in *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963) also illustrates what I have in mind. On pp. 43-44 he says: "If one says that a person is *essentially* something that thinks, experiences, and so on, or that a person is something that thinks, experiences, and so on . . . it would seem that at least part of what one is saying is an obvious truism, namely that a person is *at least* something that thinks and experiences, something that has 'psychological features.' For what is this but to say that persons think, have pains, desire things, and so forth? . . . The claim that a person is a substance is sometimes expressed by saying that a person is a subject of thought and experience. It is difficult to see what can be meant by the expression 'subject of thought and experience' if it does not mean 'something that thinks and experiences (has experiences).' But if it means this, and if persons think and have experiences, it follows that a person is a subject of thought and experience, and therefore a substance. To say that a person is a substance in this sense is but another way of expressing the truism mentioned above."

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

²⁸ J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), Second Edition, p. 125.

may not see clearly the force of objections to the view that persons are genuine "things" or "items" (to use his words once again).²⁹

Finally, Strawson approaches asserting but does not seem fully willing to assert that we have the concept of persons but that there are no persons (viewed as "things"). In other words, he does not seem willing to assert that we have a concept but that there is no object proper for it. We saw at the outset of Part I that an empiricist demand regarding the origin of concepts is mentioned as well as accepted and that this demand gives rise to a paradox. The paradox arose because he accepts three claims: we have the concept of persons, we do not experience persons, and concepts are "derived from" the appropriate objects. Kant once posed a very pertinent question, viz., how do concepts which we have but which do not derive or arise from what we experience apply to what we experience:

But pure concepts of understanding being quite heterogeneous from empirical intuitions, and indeed from all sensible intuitions, can never be met within any intuition. For no one will say that a category, such as that of causality, can be intuited through sense and is itself contained in appearance. How, then, is the *subsumption* of intuitions under pure concepts, the *application* of a category to appearances, possible?³⁰

Kant's answer to this kind of question is difficult. Fortunately, for present purposes we need not consider it. But it deserves mention that part of his answer involved giving up the claim that there is an object for every concept that we have. Equally important was the twist Kant gave to empiricism. He emphasized that while concepts we have and employ need not "come from" experience, they must, if they are to be other than "empty," be applicable to experience. Strawson approaches, without accepting, this position by emphasizing the "empirical criteria" needed to apply our concept of a person. To call attention to these criteria is to call attention to what we can and do "directly" experience and, at the same time, to direct attention away from that all-important (to Strawson) component of human beings, the subject of experiences and bodily characteristics. This emphasis on the observable rather than the unobservable aspects of humans may be another reason why the objections I have raised do not seem forceful to him; indeed, they do not occur to him.

Were Strawson willing to say in a Kantian vein that persons need not exist as "items" or "things" in order for us to talk in an empiric-

²⁹ E. B. Allaire, in "Bergmann's Ontologies" in *The Ontological Turn* (eds. M. S. Gram and E. D. Klemke), The University of Iowa Press, 1974, develops this notion of what I call "linguistic commitment."

³⁰ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), translated by N. Kemp Smith, B 177, A 138.

cally significant way about them, my objections would not be applicable. But Strawson's saying that would entail, if my earlier arguments are sound, a major revision of his view. It would entail saying that although we *talk as if* there are existing persons or subjects in addition to human bodies and experience, there are no such subjects. Or, at least, there need not be such subjects.

I shall conclude by rehearsing some of the central points. Strawson's attachment to empiricism is such that he does not want to admit the existence of objects we cannot experience directly. Subjects of experience and bodily characteristics, or, in other words, persons in his strict sense of the word, are such objects. The intellectual tension which these conflicting tendencies cause is in part relieved by Strawson's ability to distinguish his view from others. No less important is his ability to specify, in effect, a "rule" by which we may locate persons or say where they are. This "rule" is never put to the kind of empirical test he urges; if it were, he (if consistent) would have to revert to the paradoxical position of demanding direct experience of persons and denying that there is such experience. By directing our attention to linguistic evidence which shows, from one perspective, that we speak and think as if there are persons, and by emphasizing that part of the answer to the question of where persons are which *does* involve empirical criteria, namely the location of human bodies, Strawson avoids confronting the lingering paradox.³¹

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³¹ Fred Korn, in conversation, suggested that one think of Strawson as a "reluctant phenomenalist." On the one hand, Strawson is interested in attempts to describe objects, including persons, in terms of their (in principle) observable characteristics or qualities; on the other hand, he is inclined toward insisting that things and persons consist of an additional element not "caught" by such descriptions, however, complex and complete. Both tendencies are clearly present in the first chapter of *Individuals*; also, see footnote 25.