THIRTY FIVE YEARS ON — IS CONSCIOUSNESS STILL A BRAIN PROCESS?

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This is a shortened version of a paper entitled "Thirty years on — Is consciousness still a brain process?" which I wrote some two years ago in the celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of the publication, in February 1956, of my paper¹ "Is consciousness a brain process?" which is generally accepted as the primary source for the Australian version of the mind-brain identity theory. The paper prepared in 1986 appeared earlier this year in the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*.² But since the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* is probably not very widely read in Austria and Yugoslavia, and since the paper deals quite extensively with a number of themes from Professor Davidson's philosophy, it seemed not altogether inappropriate that I should present a version of it on this occasion.

The paper begins with the observation that whereas in 1956 every philosopher you met was quite convinced that whatever answer to the mind-body problem, if there is one, is true, materialism must be false, today it is almost as difficult, at least in the English-speaking world, to find a philosopher who is prepared to defend any other position. Contemporary philosophical materialism, however, is a horse of a very different colour from the thesis for which I was arguing in 1956. Two striking differences stand out.

(1) The thesis which I was arguing for in 1956 was restricted in its application to mental events, to sensations, mental images and

1. U. T. Place, "Is consciousness a brain process?", *British Journal of Psychology* 47 (1956), 44-60, manuscript received 30 November 1954.
thought occurrences and the associated activities of thinking, imagining and paying attention in as far as they are covert or hidden from the view or hearing of another person. Mental states, I assumed following Ryle\textsuperscript{3}, are dispositions to talk and behave in a variety of publicly observable ways, and as such present no special problem from the standpoint of an objective psychology. Contemporary materialists by contrast have followed David Armstrong in his 1968 book \textit{A Materialist Theory of the Mind}\textsuperscript{4} in rejecting the Rylean analysis of dispositions in general and mental dispositions in particular, in favour of the view that mental states in general and propositional attitudes in particular are identical with some state of the brain microstructure.

(2) In 1956 the mind-brain identity theory was presented as a scientific hypothesis which would stand or fall on the empirical evidence of psycho-physical correlation. Contemporary philosophical materialists, by contrast, have taken their cue in this respect from Professor Davidson in holding

(a) that the “token” identity between mental states and their “physical” counterparts in the brain can be deduced \textit{a priori} from principles which are either self-evident or, at least, intuitively plausible, and

(b) that, since on Davidson’s view there are and can be no “psycho-physical bridge laws”, empirical evidence of psycho-physical correlation is irrelevant to the truth of this form of materialism.

In the paper, I argue for a return to the 1956 position both with respect to the restriction of the identity thesis to the case of mental processes and with respect to its status as an empirical scientific hypothesis. With respect to the first of these, I argue that the relationship between a dispositional property and its so-called “categorical basis” in the microstructure of the entity which possesses that property is a relation, not of identity, but of causal dependence on the
