I hope you feel comfortable, Herr Professor, looking out of the portrait I have of you on my desk. (You used to be up there on the wall with Professor Husserl and Professor Wittgenstein and many others. But that was before I learnt so much about Heidegger the Little Man.) The framed photograph was cut out of one of my many books on or about you. The frame is a cheap thing that I bought in an indoor market when I was on holiday a few years ago. (I thought you might appreciate the concreteness of specification.) It is a strange portrait. Your generous domed forehead cannot erase the resemblances, created by your period moustache, between your face and that of Mr. Oliver Hardy. You are wearing a little skull cap to keep your head warm (at the right temperature for thought, perhaps). I can just see the top of a jacket whose velvet lapels enable one to guess the Tyrolean rest. (‘He usually dressed,’ so reports one of your ex-pupils, ‘in knickerbockers and a folksy Black Forest peasant coat with wide facings and a semi-military collar, both made of dark brown cloth.’) It is cut off just below the neck, so I am spared the spectacle of your shortness clad in shorts, for that would make serious conversation more difficult. There is just your face and it is – despite what I have just said – a remarkable face! Beneath the banker’s brow there are deep, dark, tragic, unsmiling eyes, at odds with the mouth that is doing its best to smile for the camera. (Your full smile is unfortunate. It is reproduced on the cover of Richard Polt’s book. When both eyes and mouth are smiling, there is a falsity, which I cannot quite pin down: a contrived mischievousness, a failed twinkle, like that of an inexpert uncle trying to engage his nephews at their own level; or a sly pixie; or even something maidenly and demur. Or, again, in its falsity, something *gemütlich*. I am reminded of Karl Löwith’s observation that your ‘natural expression was one of cautious peasant-sly mistrust’.)

R. Tallis, *A Conversation with Martin Heidegger* 
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So there it is: your physical appearance, among the impedimenta, the paraphernalia, the ready-to-hand, on my desk. You look out from your frame into my spacious, rather empty, booklined study, with its vast picture window, which in turn looks across the garden to the tree-filled valley and the Pennines beyond – mere hillocks compared with the mountains around your wooden hut in Todtnauberg, which we shall, in due course, visit.

That is enough distraction. Let us go at once, Herr Professor, to what is for me the heart of the matter. I am talking about your peremptory solution to the mind–body problem. This was the earliest problem that bothered me and has caused me the most enduring trouble – and delight. It opens on to everything else; most importantly on to our sense of what we are and what we might be and what we could one day become. It concerns our place in nature; or, if that is already to foreclose part of the discussion, our place in the wider scheme (or schemelessness) of things. It is key to our notion of how our (human) being relates to Being.

The mind–matter problem (or consciousness–matter problem or subject–object problem) has preoccupied me in many ways and at many levels. At the most superficial level (where it has detained me longest), it is a puzzle about the relationship between our minds and our brains. I won’t go over the arguments that I have set down in too many pages over too many years. Nor will I try to e-mail the disks where those pages are stored to the unplace where I suspect you are not-@ or not-quite-@. Suffice it to say that I have proved to my satisfaction that the activity in our brains cannot explain why or how we are conscious, or how we are conscious, and separately and distinctly conscious, both of objects outside of ourselves and of ourselves; that consciousness (of things) cannot be accounted for by the interaction between things – between, for example, a human body or brain and other things in the world – or more generally by material objects rubbing up against or banging into one another; that there is nothing in the brain, more specifically in nerve impulses, to explain the presence of one thing to another or (to use your excellent term) the ‘disclosedness’ of things in the world – either in the form of the web of significances that constitutes the unified world of things that are ready-to-hand (of which more presently) or in the form of the objective presence of the merely present-to-hand. At the same time, however, I am absolutely certain that the fate (and content and the very possibility) of my consciousness is bound up with the function of my brain and the body upon which my brain depends. Let me put this another way...