

24.00: Problems of Philosophy  
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## Mind-Body Dualisms

### 1. The Mind-Body Problem

Sometimes the things that are closest to us are hardest to understand. The self is no exception: although closest of all, it is exceedingly hard to make sense of. How odd that we find it easier to answer “what is a rock” than “what am I”?

Why is this question so baffling? Perhaps we should start with an inventory of some of the properties we exhibit. On one hand there are material properties, properties we share with rocks and the like: size, weight, shape... On the other hand there are mental properties that seem more or less peculiar to certain forms of animal life, some of them peculiar to humans: consciousness, sensation, desire, belief, pain, pleasure, intention. The mind-body problem, put roughly is: how can features as different as these hang together in a single object?

Rene Descartes is one important philosopher who answered that maybe these features *don't* hang together in a single object. Maybe a person is made of two distinct things: a *spiritual* thing and a *material* thing. Our mental properties could then be properties of the spiritual thing and our physical properties could be properties of the material thing. Then a person, such as you or me, is a complex entity composed of a spiritual thing and a material thing as parts. This idea, broadly speaking, is called *dualism*.

Dualism can be contrasted with *materialism* which holds that there are only material things, and in particular, persons are wholly material things, and *idealism* which holds that there are only spiritual things, so persons are wholly spiritual.

Although dualism has some advantages, it seems to deepen rather than solve the problem, for the heart of our puzzlement about mind and body lies not only in the fact that the properties we exhibit seem so different, but there seems to be a close interaction between them. The mind and the body are about as closely coordinated as two things can be: in perception the body is affected by the external world at the same time that the content of our consciousness represents some aspect of what's around us. In action we form desires and intentions to act, and often without hesitation our bodies move in accordance with our ideas. But how could a material thing and a spiritual thing interact? Isn't the physical universe a closed system in which there are only physical causes of physical events? And how could something physical bring about an effect on an immaterial thing? What would the mechanism be?

### 2. Material and Spiritual Things

Is everyone familiar with Data? Data is an android on Star Trek, that is, a very fancy robot composed of wires, silicon chips, etc. Now it is very very tempting to think that Data has mental states. Certainly those of us watching the show find it natural to think that Data is capable of reasoning, that he has beliefs and desires. Most of us even suppose that that Data is conscious, that he has sensations of color and sound, that he feels pain, etc. But Data is, in his innermost structure, simply a machine. He just consists of a lot of metal and plastic and other inert materials (along with some electricity). Do we still want to say that Data has a mental life?

Think now about the Energizer Bunny...that pink bunny beating the drum who waddles across the screen on fake TV ads. (He keeps going and going...). The energizer bunny is also a kind of

robot; he is a machine that moves around and beats a drum. But we don't think that this bunny has mental states. He doesn't have thoughts, he doesn't feel pain, he doesn't have any experiences at all. He is just a toy. But it seems that in terms of their composition, there isn't much difference between Data and the Energizer Bunny. Both are just machines (consisting of a bunch of metal, some electricity, etc.), but Data is a more complex machine.

Now think of human beings. Human beings are not made of metal and silicon chips; we're made of bones and blood. But there is a similar problem, because from the point of view of the physical sciences, our bodies are ultimately made up of basic elements and some electrical impulses too. Sure, our bodies have a different chemical composition than Data's or the Energizer Bunny's, but like theirs, it seems to be governed by physical laws. But we certainly have mental states; we have hopes and dreams, sensations, thoughts. So here too we might ask, how shall we understand our mental life? How is this stream of consciousness related to this bag of bones?

Perhaps it would help to get clearer on what a spiritual thing is supposed to be. Supposedly, spiritual things are immaterial, i.e., they are *not* composed of the material elements, and are *not* subject to material laws. Are there any positive features we can attribute to spiritual things? Possibly: location, consciousness (or capacity for consciousness), intentionality.

Is there any reason to believe in the existence of spiritual things distinct from material things? (It seems quite clear that there are material things and that our bodies are material, so we can grant this...) There are several kinds of argument supporting dualism:

- a. *Category arguments*: mental states and physical states have very different sorts of properties, and properties of the mental aren't coherently attributed to a physical thing and properties of the physical aren't coherently attributed to a mental thing. So they must be fundamentally different sorts of things.
- b. *Mental object arguments*: there are mental images that have no material counterpart, i.e., there is nothing turquoise in the material world corresponding to a turquoise afterimage. So the afterimage must be immaterial.
- c. *Modal arguments*: it is *possible* for my mind to exist in an immaterial world. It is *not possible* for my body to exist in an immaterial world. So my mind and my body are distinct things, and my mind is not a material thing.
- d. *Lack of empirical evidence for the mental*: we gain information about the material world through our senses. But by using empirical method we find no evidence of minds. We do have evidence of minds through introspection and reflection. We don't learn about the material world this way. So there must be a realm of spiritual things distinct from the realm of material things to which we have non-empirical access.

## **2. Forms of Dualism**

### A. Interactionism:

There are two way causal relations between the body and the mind: perception: outside world causes physical changes in our bodies which bring about ideas in our minds; and action: we form intentions that cause our bodies to move.

### B. Epiphenomenalism

The body can affect the mind, but the mind cannot affect the body. (One way causal interaction)

### C. Parallelism

There is no causal interaction between the mind and the body; they are like parallel trains running down parallel tracks; or like synchronized clocks. (Pre-established harmony a version of this.)

### D. Occasionalism

God uses the existence of things as the occasion for putting ideas of the things in question into my mind.

Most of these are pretty implausible; so let's use interactionism as the paradigm dualist view.

## **3. Concerns about Spiritual Things**

Other Spiritual Things/Other Mind: Assume as Descartes does that my mind is something totally distinct from my body, and that my mind is where my mental life takes place. With that in mind, what is it that you perceive about me when you look in this direction? Do you perceive my beliefs, my desires, my emotions, my suffering? No, they're hidden away in my invisible mind, and all *you* can see is this body. But then, what makes you think I *have* any beliefs, desires, emotions etc.? As far as you can tell, the lights are on but nobody's home. So the problem is, how do you know that there are any other minds besides your own?

Maybe it goes like this. You know that *you* have mental states, and you know that in your case such states are associated with certain kinds of behavior. So for example when you're in pain you tend to grimace, nurse the affected area, withdraw from the source of the pain, and so on. Doesn't it make sense to assume that when *I'm* grimacing, nursing the affected area etc., that I am feeling what you feel? This is called the *argument from analogy* for other minds: in my own case, certain behaviors are indicative of pain, so probably in all cases these behaviors are indicative of pain.

Such an argument is open to question though. Usually when we reason by analogy we have a lot of cases where one thing is associated with another. But this case is different: for in this case we have only a single example to infer from. After all, it isn't as though I've found grimacing to be associated with pain in anyone but me!!

### Mind/body causation

*Where is the spiritual thing located?* The spiritual part of me is supposed to lack all physical properties, including spatial properties (at least on some accounts). But then how can it exert causal influence on any particular point in the brain? Likewise, how is the mind supposed to be influenced by what goes on at that very point? Wouldn't it have to *be* at that point to exert or suffer influence there?

*Individuation:* How do we individuate things that are not located in space and time? Consider twins who are mentally alike, how many spiritual things are there? Moreover, if spiritual things are not located, how are they associated with a particular body? What makes one spiritual thing "mine", i.e., part of the complex thing that is me?

*Physical system is causally closed:* Science tells us that the physical universe is causally closed. So for every physical event E there is a prior physical event E' given which E could not have failed to occur (or which necessitated E). But if the prior *physical* event was sufficient for my arm's going up, what is the role for the mental event? How could my intention be the cause?

*Mystery of interaction:* It is mysterious how something non-physical could affect something physical. How could a desire affect the movement of an electron? But if the mental cannot affect electrons, how can it affect my body?

*Evolution.* When did spiritual things get tacked on to bodies? What natural mechanism could explain how they emerged?

*Dispensability:* Even if we want to allow that there are mental states and mental events, why think they must be attributable to spiritual *things*? Why not say that mental states are a distinct sort of state from physical states, but are nonetheless properties of bodies, i.e., of physical *things*, not spiritual *things*?