

An essay to discuss

Why does the mind and body problem still exist?

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This essay will explore the different theories involved in the mind and body problem.

I will attempt to do this by firstly defining what the mind and body is secondly discussing what the mind and body problem is. Thirdly discussing the existing approaches to the problem and finally discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches.

The body is that which we perceive ourselves to be with our senses. It usually includes arms, legs a head and so on.

The mind is that which is responsible for one's thoughts and feelings, the seat of the faculty of reason.

What is the mind and body problem? We have a conception of at least 2 different kinds of things that exist in the world mental and physical here are a few examples:

Mental

Pain
Euphoria
Desire
Purpose
Belief

Physical

Mount Everest
Hydrogen
Mass
Size
Location

Any of us could generate a long list of things and we know that both these types of things are mental phenomena or physical phenomena and are part of our world. So how are the mental and physical related if at all.

The mind and body problem dates back at least to Plato (b427bce). By some accounts Plato was the first dualist with the first materialist Aristotle(b384bce) close at hand. Descartes (1596-1650) is perhaps the philosopher that most people reference when discussing the mind-body problem, for Descartes there are the two substances mind-matter each substance has a defining attribute in the case of mind it is thought in the case of matter it is spatial extension. It is important to note that for Descartes, substances can have nothing in common, otherwise they would not be fundamentally different things. The mind-body problem arises out of this view, because if mind-body have nothing in common, then in what way can they be said to interact.

One way is Dualism In philosophy of mind, dualism is a set of beliefs which begins with the claim that the mental and the physical have a fundamentally different nature. Dualism has been the driving force behind the mind-body problem and has been by far the majority view until recently partially due to the influence of Descartes he claimed that the pineal gland was the interface between the mind and the rest of the brain. Whether Dualism is correct one way to explain how the mental interacts with the material is dualistic interactionism which is also Cartesian dualism, arguably the most popular and widespread version, mind events can cause physical events and vice versa. This leads to the most substantial claim against Cartesian dualism- the Cartesian gap. How can an immaterial mind cause anything in a material body and vice versa. This is called the "problem of interactionism" Descartes himself struggled to come up with a feasible

explanation for the problem. One supporter of Dualism is David Chalmers He says “Human kind has grown up with dualism, we are all naturally dualists: the mechanistic basis of our thoughts is invisible to our introspection and casual powers of observation”. Arguments against dualism have been provided on the basis of both empirical evidence and on philosophical grounds, and clearly express the predominant view (Dennett, Damasio, Churchland).

One of the ways in answering or avoiding the “problem of interaction” comes under the name of Epiphenomenalism which is that physical events have mental effects, but mental events have no effects of any kind. It was Thomas Huxley (1895) who coined the term in an article he wrote for the fortnightly review of 1874. in so doing Huxley willingly sacrificed the notion of “free will” as an illusion despite its deep embedment in our language and common sense. For the epiphenomenalists the brain was a machine like everything in nature and the mind no more than a passive reflection of its activity. During the present century various attempts have been made to refine the epiphenomenalists formulation. Thus the so called ‘mind-brain identity’ theory associated with herbert Feigl in the USA and with bertrand Russell in UK which flourished during the 1950’s insisted that the mental events we associate with consciousness are just the relevant brain events but viewed, as it were from the inside rather than the outside. A supporter of epiphenomenalist is John Searle he said if your theory results in the view that consciousness does not exist, you have simply produced a *reductio ad absurdum* (reduction to the absurd) of your theory. Someone who challenges epiphenomenalism is David Chalmers.

Another theory is known as Materialism which is that everything is either made only of matter or is ultimately dependant upon matter for its existence and nature. One of the first materialists to emerge was Aristotle, later on Thomas Hobbes and Pierre Gassendi represent the materialists tradition in opposition to Rene Descartes. Later materialists included Karl Mark And Friedrich Engels, turning the idealists dialects of George Heigl upside down, provided materialists with a view on processes of a quantitative and qualitative change called Dillectual materialism and with a materialist account of the course of history known as historical materialism. In recent years Paul and Patricia Churchland have advocated an extreme form of materialism known as eliminative which holds that mental phenomena simply do not exist at all, that talk of the mental reflects a totally spurious ‘folk psychology’ that simply has no basis in fact, something like the way that folk science speaks of demon-cursed illness. Eliminative materialism is an extreme reductionist theory, which appears to discount the possibility of a scientific psychology. Materialism has neuroscience on its side most neuro scientists believe in the identity of mind and brain a position that may be considered related to materialism and physicalism.

Another theory is functionalism which is if an object is created under the style of functionalism that means that its artistic beauty cannot be separated from its function. Functionalism is the dominant theory of mental states in modern philosophy. Functionalism was developed as an answer to the mind-body problem because of

objections to both the identity theory and logical behaviourism. According to functionalists the mental states that make up consciousness can essentially be redefined as complex interactions between different functional processes. Because these processes are not limited to a particular physical state or physical medium they can be realized in multiple ways, including theoretically within non biological systems. This affords consciousness the opportunity to exist in non human minds. It has been shown that the human brain has “functional plasticity” such that people with as much as half their brains removed during early infancy apparently can develop into adults whose behaviour cannot be distinguished from other adults with their original brain intact. Functionalism is similar to behaviourism but differs from it in allowing the existence of mental states. From a functionalists viewpoint consciousness and intelligence is a matter of the patterns and structures that are formed by complex physical processes, such as can go on in a brain or a computer memory. One thinker who has been particularly influential in presenting mental processes as being computational and formal is Jerry Fodor (b1935). In general the functionalist approach sees mental operations as being like the software that is running on the computer, while the brain itself is the hardware. This is known as the “computational model of mind”. This view was attacked by John Searle in his well known ‘Chinese room’ thought experiment, his argument is that with suitable programming instructions it would be possible for the correct answers to be given to the questions without the person who gives those answers actually understanding anything other than the application of the programmed rules.

Strengths and weaknesses of Dualism. Some strengths are that it is a very common sense view, half the mind is (or resides in) the immortal soul. Traditional Christianity actually believed in the binding of the soul and body in ones redemption. Another strength is if dualism is false we should be able to reduce mind or matter or vice versa, or to reduce both to a neutral third “substance”. Some weaknesses of Dualism are it is not clear where the interaction would take place. E.g. Burning my fingers causes pain, right? Well apparently there are a chain of events leading from the burning skin to the stimulation of nerve endings. Another weakness is the principle of parsimony (Ockham’s razor) is often invoked against dualism. As John Heil explains, “Ockham’s Razor bids us not to ‘multiply entities beyond necessity.’” Given two accounts of the same thing, people should prefer the ones that are simpler, that is, “accounts that refrain from introducing new kinds of entit[ies] or process[es].”

Strengths and weaknesses of Epiphenomenalism. One strength is that it has an advantage over cartesian dualism in that it explains human behaviour as entirely the product of physical, material brain states. As such, it is compatible with the dominant scientific consensus currently finding confirmation in neuroscience. One weakness is that it sacrifices the concept of free will, most epiphenomenalists argue that while we perceive ourselves to be free to think as we please and act as we choose, this is actually a delusion.

It also appears unsatisfactory as there is simply no mechanism through which mental states can interact with the body.

Strength and weaknesses of materialism. Some strengths are that it accepts the scientific evidence of origins especially the similarities between living things. Also experiments have shown subjective feeling and thoughts and experiences can be manipulated and can be entirely fictitious. One of the weaknesses is 'the mental causation problem'. Some mental states appear to have autonomy from bodily states and act as a cause of action. E:g the thought 'I think i will go to the gym today' causes the physical action of going to the gym. It is difficult to see how this thought is reducible to brain activity. It also fails to offer a convincing analysis of our knowledge of our thinking and of the content of our thought.

Strengths and weaknesses of Functionalism. One of the strengths is that Functionalism emphasizes the importance of analyzing societies as systems, and that systems do give rise to distinct phenomena. In particular our attention is directed towards the ways in which social institutions are integrated with each other. For example, social class and education. Another weakness is that it is by no means clear that the series of mental events, unlike the series of brain events, cause a continuous, self contained sequence. It also denies the private experience of qualia which is things cannot be communicated, or apprehended by any other means than direct experience.

To conclude it has been the purpose of this essay to explain why the mind-body problem still exists. For the present, and in all probability for a very long time to come. It must remain a matter of philosophical opinion whether mind is for anything, and if so what precisely is it for, or whether mind is merely an aspect of matter which, by the grace of nature as it were, happens to be associated with the workings of our brain. Psychology as we have known it so far could teach us only about behaviour and experience of the unified psychological organism. It might be however, that the mind science of tomorrow when paranormal as well as normal phenomena has been taken into account will be able to return an unequivocal answer to the question. So the debate continues.

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