

Mind-Body Dualism

When philosophy got started it was not known that the mind is located in the brain, so there were speculations that it resided in the whole body, or in the chest. The mind was not even sharply distinguished from the feeling of bodily vitality. Observation of brain injuries eventually confirmed the essential role of the brain. Religions were increasingly committed to the immortality of the soul, so the **dualist** view (that mind is ontologically distinct from body, even though it is closely related to the brain) became the default position. It was usually felt unnecessary to argue for dualism, until the materialistic attitudes of the new science offered a challenge.

If two things are identical they must share identical features, so if mind is distinct from brain it must have features which brains cannot have. The boldest claim is that while minds obviously **think**, brains couldn't do this, because they are made of inert matter. Our capacity to **reason**, in particular, has a universal character, which no physical object could achieve (so mind is a distinct 'substance'). However, we can't be sure that brains aren't up to it (and God might make it possible), so more distinctive mental features are needed. It is very striking that possessing a brain feels no different from possessing a liver, but possessing a mind is startlingly different. For example, brains can be divided into small pieces (and eaten), but treating a mind in that way seems absurd. Minds appear to us as perfectly **unified**, even when their capacities are diminished, and only non-physical existence could produce such unity. Similarly, we know exactly where our brain is, but the mind has no clear feeling of location, and attempts to measure its spatial volume are ridiculous, so the mind seems to be **non-spatial** (even though it exists in time, and is linked to the body). If you could walk around inside a hugely enlarged brain, it was said, you would see no sign of the non-spatial mind. Finally, in sceptical philosophy it is possible to **doubt** whether we have bodies, but doubting the existence of the mind produces a contradiction ('I think I'm not thinking!'), so mind and body must be quite different modes of existence. Unusual evidence, such as out-of-body-experiences, can also be cited.

Given that mind and body are therefore separate, an account is needed of how the two relate together. Some close connection is obvious (and strongly supported by modern neuroscience), especially for perceptions and appetites. For dualists the simplest answer is **interactionism**, which accepts the self-evident fact that mind and brain can interact. Since the brain appears to be normal organic matter, this power of interaction must mainly reside with the mind. At first it was suggested that interaction occurred at a single location in the brain, but modern research makes interaction throughout the brain more plausible. The interaction is observed in causal powers – as when bodily damage produces pain, and acts of will produce movement.

As soon as this interaction thesis became clear, it was seen to have problems. If the brain is matter, and the mind is entirely non-physical, they seem to have nothing in common. Brains might move arms, but how can they move minds? Minds might follow deductions, but how can they move neurons? We can only say that it is either beyond understanding, or a miracle. Critics also observe potential double-causation, where a neuron is moved by the mind, but also moved by events in the brain. If the two causes conflict, which one wins?

An early response ('**occasionalism**') was to embrace the role of divine intervention, and assert that God continually co-ordinates these two very different aspects of creation. Since this implausibly involved continual divine labour, an alternative view ('**parallellism**') proposed that the perfect harmony of unconnected mind and body resulted from God setting them running at the start, like two perfect clocks keeping exact time together. Modern dualists avoid giving God a role in dualism, but remain strongly impressed by the apparent non-physical character of consciousness. Since quantum theory has made matter rather mysterious, the interaction problem may be solved at that sub-atomic level.

If interactionism is true, it is a puzzle as to why one part of the material world (brains) interacts with minds, while the rest of matter seems to be intellectually inert. This extraordinary causal link seems to be unique to creatures on this planet. A bold response to this is to deny that mind-matter interaction is so local. The thesis of **panpsychism** says that all natural matter has some degree of mentality. This explains the very active character of nature, makes interaction a normal phenomenon, and makes brains much less weird. The emergence of mind in evolution also ceases to be puzzling, since it was there all along. Full consciousness is just a concentration of what already exists.

A possible response to the problem of unnatural double-causation is to make a concession to the critics, and admit that mind could not cause brain events and bodily movement. Since, nevertheless, minds obviously exist as a separate entity, the only dualist theory left is **epiphenomenalism**, which treats the mind as a startling side-effect of the brain. That is, the causation is one-way (brain to mind), and there is only one mode of causation within the brain, and thus no clash. This leaves the mind with no causal powers, and critics say that it therefore lacks all purpose. It is also hard to see how a person could report being conscious, if the brain could receive no evidence of it from the mind.

If the main thesis of substance dualism is a fundamental independence of mind and body from one another, this obviously supports the possibility of minds existing without the body (perhaps in immortality). Modern observers point out that this works both ways, because a body might lead a full human life with no mind present. So might I have a '**zombie twin**', a being who lives just as I do, but without the added consciousness that I experience? A claim that such a zombie is possible (at least logically) implies that mind is indeed a separate feature of existence, which can be added to the material world. The price of this admission, though, is a puzzle about the purpose of what is added.

The strong thesis of substance dualism has become a minority view amongst modern philosophers, particularly as more detailed knowledge of the brain has emerged. The critics find dualism implausible within evolution, contrary to causal theories in physics, incompatible with phenomena like blushing, and a misfit in modern space-time. They suspect that dualism is motivated by religious needs, or to give grounds for our belief in free will. Nevertheless, many find the extraordinary characteristics of mind and consciousness very persuasive, and look for modified forms of dualism (such as 'property dualism'), allowing closer integration between mind and brain.