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## *Is there a solution to the mind-body problem?*

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By Damian E M Milton

The mind-body problem can be said to be one of the oldest of philosophical issues and has remained as such. The origins of modern philosophy are often traced to the meditations of Descartes (1596-1650 cited in Law 2003) who is associated with 'Cartesian Dualism', the idea that the mind and body were two separate substances. Yet this led to the problem of explaining how mind and body interacted with each other. Spinoza (1632-77 cited in Robinson and Groves 2007) in contrast to Descartes proposed a monist philosophy proposing only one substance, being 'God' and that mind and body were identical as they were different properties of this one substance. This essay looks at a number of arguments before concluding that a predicate or property dualist position seems the most plausible, yet the mind-body explanatory gap and thus the debate itself may be an intractable one.

Monism suggests that there is no distinction between mind and body, thus relying on a notion of one mind (Idealism) or one body (Physicalism). Idealism, associated with the work of Bishop Berkeley (1685-1753 cited in Robinson and Groves 2007) proposed that experiences were a giant illusion caused by God, and so everything is a product of the mind, which is a product of God. This notion is thus unprovable, yet does not stand up well to Ockham's Razor, assuming that external phenomena causes experience is more plausible than an ever-busy deity.

Epiphenomenalism suggests that mental properties do not act upon physicality. This explanation however, fails to give appropriate reasoning for the intentionality of actions or that consciousness can inhibit action.

Strong evidence for the physicality of consciousness comes from those who have acquired brain damage and have lost certain cognitive abilities, or who are born with biological disability/diffability such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder. These examples show a strong indication of an 'essential' difference of mind that comes directly from physical reality and that has not been trained into people by socialisation. If mind and body are truly separate than why does not the mind rise above physical damage? In the case of ASD why is there a difference of mind, if not biologically based? Therefore, all subjective experience is dependent on that particular brain being operational. Thus arguments for a substance dualism between mind and body are based upon weak foundations. At first thought this may suggest that all properties of the mind can be reduced to empirically measurable phenomena, yet unfortunately for eliminative materialists, this seems 'much easier said than done'.

A classic problem for eliminative materialists is presented by Jackson (1990 cited in Law 2003) of an individual who has never seen the colour blue, yet given 'all the information' about the colour blue, yet when seeing blue for the first time experiences something new.

The sensory information was irreducible to physical descriptors and hence if not a different substance, a different kind of information or a different way of measuring information.

The problem of the qualia of experience seems impossible for an eliminative materialist to explain away. Seeing, hearing, cutting and smelling are all sensory physical information reducible to a physical thing outside of the body followed by a physical reaction within the body (separate physical events, yet one causing a reaction in the other), yet physical descriptors can not describe what it is to see 'blue' or to feel 'pain' in an accurate way. More complex emotions may also one day be reduced to combinations of physical events, yet empirically describing what it is to 'fall in love' would not give an indication of what it is to 'be in love'. John Locke (1632-1704 cited in Robinson and Groves 2007) would call these 'secondary' qualities that are subjective and relative.

If it were not for conceptual dissatisfactions with the theories proposed by Psychologists, one would perhaps be able to be more confident of an Eliminative Materialist conclusion that subjective experiences will one day be able to be reduced to objective descriptions. It is the unique character of the 'mind', especially in the sense of 'being' (Nagel 1981) that seems irreducible to physical descriptors. It is the strange properties of the 'mind', consciousness and perceptual awareness that continue to inspire endless debates between philosophers and social scientists alike. Psychological theories such as Behaviourism attempt to reduce all mental experiences to observable and measurable behaviour patterns, yet have been greatly criticised for missing out that which can not be observed and hence the intentions which affect the behaviours in the first instance.

I would argue that experience can be seen as a measuring/interpreting device for sensory information that stores and links data, thus perhaps the closest thing to records of experiences are memories and brain scans. Thoughts are single physical events that can not be repeated in exactly the same conditions. To objectify this 'physical thought' would be to create a new 'physical thought' out of an attempt at analysis or simulation, yet a 'physical thought' can be seen as an electrical/chemical reaction never to be repeated in the exact same conditions. This physicalist position however would not want to say that subjective experiences can be reduced to objective empirically measurable descriptions, yet being a physicalist position would deny that there are separate kinds of entity in the mental and physical and hence would not agree with substance dualism, and thus would still leave open the possibility of a physically determined mental identity? Of course this would mean that an artificial intelligence with similar physical states theoretically should be able to produce a similar mental 'efflux', yet this has yet to be proven.

The 'what-it-is-likeness' qualia of experience according to this argument would originate from the unique unrepeatable nature of physical thoughts. Intentionality coming from genetic predisposition, an animalistic instinct to survive rather than die and the cultural conditioning of a culture (influencing the shaping of these unrepeatable physical phenomena), which is also unique to any individual and thus not repeatable in exactly the same way. To me, people are biologically and culturally conditioned embodied individuals

(although many would disagree), yet an empirical understanding of brain processing will unfortunately give us little understanding of what it is to 'live that thought' subjectively.

The explanatory gap seems too large to be fully/perfectly bridged due to the uniqueness of a subjective thought and the strangeness of consciousness and the qualia of 'being'. Therefore I would agree with a Predicate Dualism, similarly to that of Donald Davidson (2006) that the predicates used to describe mental phenomena cannot be reduced to physical predicates of language without something fundamental to the nature of experience being lost.

In conclusion to answering this question, one could make a strong argument for some form of predicate or property dualism as the theoretical 'solution' to the mind-body problem. Substance Dualism has lost much credibility, yet will undoubtedly be defended by theists to explain the existence of immortal souls. Eliminative Materialists on the other hand will continue to try and reduce all experience to verifiable data and will continue to be criticised for missing a fundamental property from their conclusions. It is due to the fact that neither the mind nor the body as concepts can neatly be reduced into the other and that the explanatory gap does not look any closer to being crossed that this debate may well remain an intractable one.

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