

Mind and World: Essay 2

Oliver Lack a1809024

What is dualism about the mind? Explain one or two objections to this view and decide whether it is a plausible account of human rationality.

This essay will address two objections for dualism and argue that materialism is a more plausible view for rationality of the mind and human consciousness. The first objection I will address is the causal interaction between mind and body. Second, I will address the flawed faculty of introspection and the origin of mind from evolutionary history. To conclude, I will explain why Dennett's avoidance of dualism, due to its antiscientific stance, is justified.

What is Dualism?

Dualists claim that the mind consists of non-physical mental properties or substance, unlike the physical substance that comprises the body. What defines something as physical may change over time due to the development of science. Therefore, one must define something physical as being within the reach of scientific explanation, to allow for future scientific discoveries. Materialism views everything in reality as physical and bound by physical laws, arguing that mental states of conscious experience and human rationality are indeed just physical states.

Dualists can mainly be divided into two kinds: substance dualists and property dualists. Substance dualism splits the make-up of reality into the physical and non-physical. For instance, Descartes argued the mind's essence or nature is to think; the mental substance that is one's mind is not dependent on a physical thing (Descartes, 1637). Descartes defined physical substance as having an extension in space and described the non-physical mind as a temporarily attached package, without a spatial position or extension. On the other hand, property dualism proposes that the brain has a special set of mental properties unique to physical objects. Churchland states, these non-physical mental properties of the brain account for conscious intelligence and cannot be explained using the physical sciences. (Churchland, 1988, pg. 10) So, property dualism claims the mind be exclusively made of non-physical properties, compared to substance dualism, which claims reality be split into two different substances.

Cause and Effect

Dualism is not widely supported, partly due to the inescapable problem of causal interaction between mental and physical substance, highlighted by Dennett (Dennett, 1991, pg. 33). Mental properties and substance are not associated with physical mass or energy, providing no possibility for a causal interaction between the mind and body. Dennett points out that the fundamental principle of conservation of energy is violated by dualism due to the assumed ability of causal interaction between the mind and body. A form of property dualism, *Epiphenomenalism*, uses one-way interaction between mind and body to partly explain the problem of causal interaction. (Huxley, 1874) This view assumes that non-physical mental states of one's mind are caused by physical states but are unable to interact with physical reality. The Epiphenomenalist theory of the mind can be compared to a shadow cast by a physical object, unable to have any interaction with the body. Although, if a two-way causal interaction between mind and body is impossible, all physical behaviour must be solely influenced by antecedent physical states of the brain. Therefore, if all behaviour is caused by physical states in the brain, the non-physical mind is idle and has no effect on anything. This can be challenged, as behaviour is shaped by the fundamental features of the human mind through one's conscious desires and beliefs. Without these aspects, one is unable to act rationally. For example, one's conscious desire to own a house causes behaviours such as saving money; if this conscious desire is unable to shape one's behaviour, one is unable to save money. The inability to behave in accordance with one's mind contradicts our ability to act rationally. Therefore, assuming that one's conscious desires and beliefs

are fundamental to one's consciousness, there must be a two-way interaction between mind and body. (Campbell, 1984, pg. 51-52) Dualists claim that the mind's non-physical features are irreducible beyond the reach of scientific explanation. Because of this fundamental aspect of dualism, a causal explanation between mind and body is not possible without a contradiction to the law of conservation of energy.

Evolution – origin of senses and mind

Using introspection, dualists would argue that features of one's subjective consciousness such as qualia (the feeling of individual human experience), appear inexplicable in physical terms. For example, cognitive science is unable to explain the feeling when staring at the flaming colours of a raging fire. From introspection, the unaccountable nature of the mind gives a compelling argument for the existence of non-physical properties or substance. However, Churchland suggests this argument is based on the assumption that one's faculty of inner observation shows the true nature of one's mind. (Churchland, 1988, pg. 15) Further, if introspection is shaped by perception, the inability of precise and accurate observation through one's senses must be overcome. One's flawed observation of reality is due to evolution, which has shaped human senses distinctly around fitness, not truth. (Hoffman, 2019) For instance, when different wavelengths of light hit one's retina, photoreceptors turn photons into electrical signals that are interpreted by one's brain; creating a representation of the object. When one looks at an empty wine bottle on the table, a tall cylindrical glass with a label that represents a certain brand of wine is represented in one's conscious mind; one does not see the interaction of particles that make up its chemical structure, or other physical aspects that more precisely describe the true nature of the object. Human brains have evolved to create representations of reality accurate enough for the purpose of survival and reproduction; not for true observation. Therefore, one's introspective sense of consciousness is not a true representation of one's mind. An argument for the distinction between one's faculty of introspection and other senses must be established if the case for one's inner sense of consciousness is to have any strength. (Churchland, 1988, pg. 15)

It is understood that through evolution the human species acquired all of its traits from the purely physical process of natural selection. Assuming this is the correct account of our origin, from an evolutionary perspective there is no use for non-physical mental properties that do not interact with the body. (Churchland, 1988, pg. 21) Dualists may argue that consciousness is a side-effect of traits that directly enhance fitness. Similar to the reflective green colour of plants being a side-effect of the chlorophyll needed for photosynthesis. However, the fundamental elements of the mind such as rational thought, social interaction and complex problem solving have fitness value. For instance, the development of technology and science (only possible due to these fundamental aspects of mind) have increased one's ability for survival and reproduction. Therefore, if evolution is a purely physical process which has developed the mind's fundamental aspects around fitness, one must accept the complex neural network of the brain as the origin of one's mind. If to accept evolutionary theory, the dualist must assume a specific point in evolution between the arrangement of micro-organisms and the human species when non-physical properties attach to one's body. Churchland suggests, one's inner nature differs from less intelligent organisms not in kind, but by degree. (Churchland, 1988, pg. 21) Dualists must assume that at a specific point in arrangement of one's neural network there must be a minimum threshold of complexity that allows for the attachment of non-physical mental properties or substance. Thus, an account for the level of complexity a neural network must have to attain such properties and the point at which non-physical properties or substance become attached to one's body, has yet to be established by a dualist theory.

One's flawed faculty of introspection gives the illusion of distinction between the physical nature of one's brain and the conscious mind. This distinction may be due to the extreme complexity of the brain and our lack of understanding of its processes, causing one to represent the mind as a separate attachment. For example, a software interface allows for more practical use of a computer without the need for an understanding of the complex background processes. Many people may perceive the software interface that uses representations such as folder symbols or the application dock as its true nature, due to the complexity and lack in understanding of the background processes involved. The

perception of one's human interface (consciousness) being dissimilar to the brain and its processes, causes the illusory distinction between mind and body that incites dualist theories. To paraphrase Saint Augustine, the phenomena of consciousness is not contrary to the physical nature of reality, but contrary to one's knowledge of the physical nature of reality. (Augustine, 1470)

If the mind is constructed of non-physical properties or substance, it remains out of the explanatory reach of science, as it does not allow one to construct an account or theory of its position, processors or structure. Dennett suspects the most attractive feature of dualism is the unexplainable mystery of its non-physical properties. (Dennett, 1991, pg. 37) He believes a dualist stance must be avoided due to the inability to give any further explanation of the mind, effectively ensuring it will remain a mystery. The failure to account for the period and level of complexity at which the mind is attached to the body is avoided by dualists due to the assumed lack of causal interaction. The contradiction to the law of conservation of energy does not allow for an account of the mind and neither does one's flawed faculty of introspection. When you run into a cliff (dualism) that blocks your path to the beach below (a more accurate and precise explanation of the mind), should you give up on getting any closer, or do you find a new path to the beach? The cliff is antiscientific, which is why Dennett adopted the rule to avoid it at all costs. Although, if one does take the position of a dualist, the burden of proof to offer an explanation for non-physical mental properties or substance is on them.

Word count: 1580

References

Augustine, H, 1470, *The City of God*, Book XXI, Chapter 8

Bechtel, W, 1988, *Philosophy of Mind*

Campbell, K, 1984, *Body and Mind*

Churchland, P. M, 1988, *Matter and Consciousness*

Dennett, D, 1991, *Consciousness Explained*

Descartes, R, 1637, *Discourse on Method*

Hoffman, D, 2019, *The Case Against Reality* <http://cogsci.uci.edu/~ddhoff/GBT-7-30-17>

Huxley, T. H, 1874, *On the Hypothesis that Animals are Automata, and its History*