Response to review of *Mental Monism Considered as a Solution to the Mind Body Problem*

Peter B. Lloyd

School of Computing, University of Kent, Canterbury, England

peter@peterblloyd.com

Abstract

This document comprises (a) a review by Professor William Seager (2006) of my essay 'Mental monism considered a solution to the mind-body problem' (Lloyd 2006), (b) a review by Arkady Plotnisky, and (c) my response to Seager's review.

Contents

1. Review by Professor William Seager

<< Peter Lloyd's essay audaciously attempts to resurrect Berkeleyian idealism. The attempt faces a number of traditional difficulties that Lloyd addresses with ingenuity but not complete success. In order to answer the objection that our language is very largely about a non-mental reality independent of our subjective states Lloyd advances a neo-verificationist and phenomenalist account of language: 'the information I actually convey [with my utterances] is about my sensory impressions, not about the unobserved putative substrate' (p. 107) and 'the meaning that is intended to be conveyed by the utterance is not the set of truth conditions but rather the set of truth-tests' (p. 107). The example given to bolster this bracingly 'retro' view is that of a virtual reality setup something like that in the Matrix films in which one can seemingly truthfully report that one is 'in the training room' even while one's body remains back in the grubby real world. But it does not follow that utterances express phenomenal 'truth-tests' instead of truth conditions. Truth conditions might be contextual, utterances might be elliptical with an unspoken 'in the virtual reality' added in appropriate circumstances, or it may be that falsehoods can be part of pragmatically successful speech.

Although Lloyd is happy to say -- with Berkeley -- that the world is a construction of real and possible sensory impressions, he does not address the classic objection that this construction presupposes an independent world. All general claims about sequences of sensory impressions can be undermined by a *physical* hypothesis, and no refinement of the laws of association amongst sensory states will eliminate this possibility. Thus, the experience of seeing a match struck (granting one can give a purely experiential rendering of descriptions like this that seemingly make reference to non-sensory items) is followed by the experience of the match lighting … unless the match is wet. This is in stark contrast to a host of claims about sequences of physical events which cannot be undermined by a merely experiential proviso. The gravitational force between two objects is given by Newton's equation (close enough) and no fact purely about what experiences someone might be having serves to undermine this claim, although of course the physical content of some experiences might serve as evidence against the physical generalization itself.

Lloyd forthrightly accepts that the sort of phenomenalist idealism he endorses requires semantic resources which are purely internal yet powerful enough to ground

reference to the foundational sensory impressions. Obviously, this courts the notorious private language argument of Wittgenstein. Lloyd constructs an interesting social reductio of Wittgenstein's argument. If the private language argument is valid then an equally damaging version of it can be constructed against any public language, since the community of language users has no way to guarantee that the world and 'social memory' is not changing in ways strictly analogous to the way Wittgenstein supposed that an individual's memory and impressions could not be changing in ways invisible to the subject. Such an argument is not original with Lloyd but he does not consider other formulations or any responses to it.>> (Seager, 2006)

2. Review by Arkady Plotnisky

<< Peter Lloyd's 'Mental Monism as a Solution of the Mind-Body Problem' is the longest essay in the collection, and takes advantage of this to offer an especially detailed discussion of a number of actual and possible approaches to the problem of consciousness. Ostensibly, the essay centres on the significance of George Berkeley's philosophy for the mind–body problem, and is commendable for directing our attention to notions that may well deserve more attention that they usually get. I am not convinced, however, about the possibility of a satisfactory Berkeleyan solution of the mind body problem or, more generally, about the 'failure of materialism'— to cite the title of the last essay (by J. Kenneth Arnette). Lloyd's essay, however, allows us to view Berkeley's thought in the light of contemporary consciousness studies and, reciprocally, to better understand the problems of consciousness through Berkeley's thought. >> (Plotinsky, 2006)

3. Response to Seager, by Peter B. Lloyd

Referring to the Berkeleyan claim that "the world is a construction of real and possible sensory impressions", Seager's central argument appears to be "the classic objection that this construction presupposes an independent world." I did not explicitly address that objection in the essay, because it seemed to me to be quite unnecessary. This is because I believed that my example of an immersive virtual reality, namely the Matrix (Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999), was an adequate counter-example to the 'classic' claim that the reduction of the physical world to the phenomenal world presupposes a physical world. I did not imagine that that 'classic' objection would have any serious adherents, or that they would still adhere to the

objection in the face of the counter-example of a virtual reality. Seager proved me wrong.

The 'classic' objection runs as follows. The naïve interpretation of Berkeley is that if I say, "I saw a match being struck", then this is supposed to mean a vast conjunction of actual and counter-factual propositions about sense experiences. But nobody can actually think any such a vast conjunction, therefore that conjunction cannot be the meaning. Instead, we have to accept that it is simply a statement of my having the experiences produced by my watching a physical match being struck.

It seems to me that this is a straw-man argument. Obviously nobody, including Berkeley, believes that the sentence "I saw a match being struck" means such a vast conjunction. But equally it is obvious (I contend) that the meaning is wholly grounded in experiences.

This argument can be explicitly defeated by saying that (a) the meaning of "I saw a match being struck" is a state of affairs in a 'construct', and that (b) all facts in the construct are grounded in sense experiences. This is an approach advocated by Foster (1982).

In my later essay, *Panpsychism and Mental Monism: Comparison and Evaluation* (Lloyd, 2019), I have been prompted by Seager's comment to develop a more extended and detailed account of what I have called the 'physical construct'. I would hope that this extended treatment will refute the 'classic' objection that Seager refers to.

I would also mention in this connection that Chalmers (2003) put forward a defence of a position similar to the one that I presented in the target essay (Lloyd 2006). Chalmers differentiates the 'sceptical' claim that the world is unreal and the 'metaphysical' claim that the substrate of our experience need not be physical. He uses the same illustration of the Matrix. If I assert that I am, say, in a noodle bar within the Matrix, then that assertion can still be true even though my perceptions of the noodle bar are ultimately furnished by a computer system and not by a physical noodle bar. The statement that the noodle bar is 'unreal' or 'illusory' is thus shown to be fallacious: the noodle bar is indeed real, but its ultimate nature comprises data rather than parcels of matter. Chalmers does not expand this is into the linguistic analysis that I propose (Lloyd 2003, 2006), but it is very close in intention.

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