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The Mind-Body Problem

The *Mind-Body Problem* (aka David Chalmers' 'Hard Problem') is an expression of the intuition that the conscious mind is something of a **fundamentally different kind** from the human body, and there is therefore a philosophical problem in understanding the relation between the mind and the body.

The Mind-Body Solutions

The possible solutions to the Mind-Body Problem have been known for a long time, but there is no consensus on which one is right. The options are: **mental-physical dualism** (mind & body both real), **physical monism** (mind is illusory), **mental monism** (physical world is a fiction).

Physicalism

Theories in the group known as *physicalism* state that the physical world is our fundamental reality. The conscious mind is dismissed as an 'illusion' (which denies the raw data of our conscious existence), or *deemed to be* the same thing as something physical (which is not even an explanation) or *deemed to emerge* from physics (by magic, which has no explanatory power). Thus physicalism is clearly not going to solve the Mind-Body Problem.

Substance Dualism

Theories in the group known as *substance dualism* state that the physical world and the mental world are both co-equally real. But by hypothesis they are nomologically disjoint systems, so any interaction between them must happen by magic – which is an explanatorily bankrupt non-theory.

Property Dualism

Theories in the group known as *property dualism* state that there is one single reality but it somehow contains mental and physical properties. The trouble with this is that physical properties are topic neutral, while mental properties are not. So there is an ontological asymmetry between the two kinds of properties – an instability that collapses into mental monism (see below).

Mental Monism

Mental monism says that the mental world is our fundamental reality, and the physical world is a construct wholly derived from the mental world. This is the only theory that (a) resolves the original Mind-Body Problem, (b) does not deny the raw data of conscious experience, and (c) does not rely on magic as a substitute for explanation. The downside is that much work needs to be done to fill out the details ...

Panpsychism

People often despair that the philosophical part of the Consciousness Studies is going nowhere. But panpsychism is one of the few bright spots. A recent issue of the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* was given over to an extended discussion of Galen Strawson's version of panpsychism. This might be regarded as the first serious movement *forward* (as opposed to sideways or backwards) in the Mind-Body Problem since 1710.

For Panpsychism

The argument for panpsychism can be stated briefly: (a) we know by direct acquaintance that the conscious mind exists; (b) we know that it cannot emerge from a non-conscious physical system; so (c) consciousness must be associated with the most elementary constituents of the physical world. Those micro-experiencers are incomparably simpler than the human mind. But they are nonetheless conscious!

Aggregation

The unity of the conscious mind is a big problem for panpsychists. If each micro-physical entity is a micro-experiencer, how do those micro-experiencers aggregate to form a unified macro-experiencer? This is an insoluble problem as long as we think of an experiencer as a homunculus. But if we follow Hume in regarding the self as simply a set of experiences, then aggregating the micro-experiencers is just the set-theoretic union of the experiencers.

Sentient cutlery

If panpsychism is true, then inanimate objects such as spoons will also have some very rudimentary form of conscious mind. Many people find this so counter-intuitive that it is rebarbative. But, really, it is no more counter-intuitive than the sentience of a lump of tissue having "the consistency of cold porridge", namely the brain. (And it *might* provide a way to understand paranormal phenomena ...)

Conscious minds outside space

Since consciousness is non-physical, it cannot have coordinates in physical space. Therefore the constituents of conscious experience cannot be identified with the extended physical substance of the brain, which is what Strawsonian panpsychism requires.

Loose coupling

Panpsychism entails a tight coupling between physical entities and experiencers. An experiencer is an aspect or property of a physical thing. But the non-spatiality of the mind implies a loose coupling: experiencers map onto physical things in a non-identity relationship. One experiencer could map to more than one physical entity.

Argument from excision

Any extended physical body can be dissected. E.g. a conscious brain can be dissected while it is having conscious experiences. But the conscious mind exhibits an instantaneous multi-sensory unity. **If the mind were localized in a physical body, this would entail a paradox, as follows.** Consider two simultaneous experiences E1 and E2 in different faculties (eg visual & auditory). They are co-conscious, ie

they are in the same mind at the same instant. Suppose they have physical correlates P1 and P2. (In panpsychism, E1 would be a property of P1 etc.) Let PC be the physical correlate of the fact that E1 and E2 are co-conscious. PC must be a spatially extended process that causally links P1 and P2. Now, let us surgically introduce an electronic device that puts a delay in PC. If the delay is set to zero, the situation is normal. If the delay is long (eg 5 minutes) we have a paradox, as E1 and E2 become co-conscious long after they have occurred. This *reduction ad absurdum* proves the mind is non-spatial.

Panpsychism versus idealism

Because physical properties are topic neutral, panpsychism is really just a particular form of idealism (despite the vehement denial of its advocates). So: according to panpsychism, the intrinsic nature of each thing is phenomenal, but it has extrinsic physical properties. According to idealism, the intrinsic

nature of each thing is phenomenal, but it does not necessarily have extrinsic physical properties. The case for the intrinsic nature of things being phenomenal is very strong, but panpsychists need an additional argument to show that the extrinsic properties are physical. In fact, the Argument from Excision is a strong argument *against* that claim.

Mental monism

In mental monism, reality comprises a number of distinct experiencers. Some are human minds, with which we are familiar. Some are animal minds. And some are the rudimentary minds of inanimate objects. (In George Berkeley's version, the latter are collectively referred to as 'God'.) Our perceptions of the external world are generated by communications between the experiencers.

Vedanta

In the 8th Century CE, the Indian scholar and mystic Shankara formulated a theory of mental monism much deeper than that of George Berkeley. In this Vedantic philosophy, each mind is regarded as a subset of the single universal mind, bounded by access. (That is, each mind can ordinarily access only itself.) This provides a comprehensive account of the place of mind in nature. But it leaves lots of details to fill out

Conscious minds are non-physical

It is a known fact that the conscious mind is not physical. We can see this intuitively from a variant of Jackson's black-and-white Mary. Suppose that Mary is born without the ability to see colours. She takes a career in neuroscience, and gains a comprehensive knowledge of every physical fact about the visual cortex. She then submits to an experimental

surgical procedure that gives her colour vision. Before the experiment is executed, she can predict all physical facts that will result from the experiment, **but she cannot predict what outcome she will observe** (because she was no idea what the experience of colour is). Therefore the facts of conscious experience of colour are additional facts, over and above the physical facts of the brain. Likewise for all other conscious experiences. *Ergo* the conscious mind is not physical.

Proof of non-physicalism

George Berkeley provided the definitive proof of non-physicalism with his semantic argument (1710). Each term in a discourse in physics is defined analytically, in terms of undefined fundamental quantities. Each term in the mental realm is defined by private ostensive definition. So the vocabulary of physics and that of consciousness are disjoint. The propositions of physics can entail only propositions

expressed in analytical terms. Therefore no facts about the contents of consciousness can ever be entailed by physical facts. In other words, the conscious mind is necessarily non-physical.

Prehistoric animism

Modern philosophy forces us to accept the theory of mental monism (see the compelling arguments above). But this philosophy is very similar to the animism that seems to have had wide currency in prehistoric times. Although dismissed by archaeologists as a mistaken pre-scientific myth about the world, it might well be true.

Entheogenic mentation

Studies of entheogens such as ayahuasca (see eg Benny Shanon) show that some psychotropic plants lead to a direct acquaintance with other, non-ordinary worlds within a general model of reality founded on consciousness. This could be regarded as an experimental tool for exploring mental monism.

Metageum

To explore the consciousness of Neolithic people, their use of altered states of consciousness, and the application of this in shamanism, the inter-disciplinary conference Metageum '07 (Malta, 3rd-11th November 2007) will be bringing to together philosophers, psychologists, archaeologists, and independent researchers, as well shamanic practitioners and artists and musicians.

**For more information, see
www.metageum.org.**