

Cartesian compromise

Experience, Human Nature



Cartesian Compromise: Bridging Psyche and Soma Fiona Larcom History and Systems of Psychology Cartesian Compromise: Bridging Psyche and Soma Introduction In 1995, Blaine M. Yorgason published the true story of his adopted daughter, Charity. *One Tattered Angel* captures the Mind/Body Problem, proclaiming the existence of the spirit (mind) and challenging the connection to the body. On August 31, 1988 the Yorgason family was asked whether they would foster a newborn who “ has some health problems.” (Yorgason, 1995, p. 8) Yorgason’s first impression description of Charity is that of a tiny, adorable infant, who was perfect - at least on the outside. The family agreed to take her into their home - following some medical tests ordered by social services. The nature of Charity’s health issue was revealed accidentally by a family friend. When Kathy told her we had a new foster baby, she began waxing eloquent over a tiny baby that had been born at her hospital a couple of days before. “ She was so cute! ” she exclaimed. Even though she didn’t have a brain, she was the most alert baby in the nursery, holding her head up and looking around just like she knew what she was doing. ” (Yorgason, 1995, p. 34) Charity had been born without a brain but with an intact brain stem. The autonomic nervous system, used exclusively by newborn babies, is controlled by the brain stem. This was what gave Charity the illusion of normality; an illusion which would shatter in a few short weeks when function control would shift to the two hemispheres of the brain.

Philosophical Mind- Body Dualism From the Materialist perspective, a perspective that denies the existence of a psyche, Charity’s physical limitations would suggest no mind, thus no spirit, no personality; Yorgason

would disagree. In her seven years of life, Charity defied the medical assertion that she “ has very little potential for development beyond the infant stage. ” (Yorgason, 1995, p. 43).

In her own small ways; her music preferences, her joy at taking a bath, and the radiant smile that attracted strangers, Charity echoed Descartes claim that “ I exist” (Descartes, n. d.). Descartes concluded that his existence “ did not require any place, or depend on any material thing” therefore, his existence (mind and consciousness) existed on a plane outside of his physical body. The Principle of Nonidentity of Discernibles subscribes to the basic principle that “ if two things do not have exactly the same properties, then they are not identical. (Lanhead, 2006, p. 209) While this may seem a reasonable premise, closer analysis finds that adherence to “ this strict definition of identity, [allows that] so-called identical twins are different persons who have some very basic similarities, if nothing else, they differ (or are discernible) because they occupy different portions of space. ” (Lanhead, 2006, p. 209) Psychological Mind-Body Dualism The mind/body problem has evolved and diversified since the time of Descartes.

One source of confusion - and ultimately contention between the differing concepts of dualism - is the inability to test nonphysical properties using the scientific principles of the physical world. While Philosophy has the luxury to entertain beliefs not yet supported by science, Psychology is not as flexible. In its quest for scientific validity, the ‘ field’ of Psychology is in constant danger of neglecting the unique and unpredictable nature of human behavior.

This danger has escalated in recent years as a result of advances in neuroscience and brain functionality but also from the blending of psychiatry and analytical psychology, i. e. psychoanalysis. W. W. Meissner addresses this blending in his 2007 article, *Mind, Brain, and Self in Psychoanalysis*, adding the psychological perspective to J. B. Martin's *The Integration of Neurology, Psychiatry, and Neuroscience in the 21st Century*. Martin comments: "A conjoined effort of neurologists and psychiatrists is necessary to understand how a disease of the brain results in an illness of the mind. Clinical attempts to categorize diseases as 'organic' or 'functional' become somewhat arbitrary" (p. 698) analysts can take this to imply that psychoanalytic efforts to envision pathogenic processes as exclusively mental and not simultaneously neurobiological are not only arbitrary but also increasingly obsolete, and this is not merely in areas of research and theory, but in the clinical work with patients as well. Meissner, 2007) Meissner and Martin may believe it arbitrary to source a diagnosis from the scientific perspective, however a clear understanding of whether an issue is based in the body or the mind is invaluable when it comes to treatment, thus the enduring question of dualism. Isomorphism The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology and Behavioral Science asserts that "there is [a] general agreement that having a body is at least a part of the nature of being human. It is the mind (psyche, soul) - the question of whether such an entity exists, and how to define it - that is the crux of the mind/body problem. (Reuder, 2001, p. 961) The Berlin School of Gestalt Psychology chose not to define the mind, but rather ascertain the physical properties associated with actual somatic experiences compared with the cognitive (thought) experience, for

example, the perception of being in motion while not actually in motion. What they found was that the form and structure of the biophysical and electrochemical processes of the brain were identical; the 'brain' in the physical sense could not tell the difference. Nonphysical Law

The Mind/Body Problem is puzzling, granted, however from the psychological point view - the non-therapeutic point of view, there is no difference between the mind and the body. The body will react whether the stimulus originates in the physical or nonphysical realm. The challenge comes in the form of true objectivity. It is easy to dismiss that which cannot be explained, it is also easy to believe that physical law is somehow superior or has more validity to its mysterious nonphysical counterpart. For Blaine M. Yorgason, a tattered angel opened his 'mind'.

References Reuder, M. E. (2001). The Mind-Body Problem. In Craighead, W. E. & Nemeroff, C. B. (Eds.). The Cosini Encyclopedia of Psychology and Behavioral Science (3rd Ed). New York: John Wiley & Sons. Lanhead, W. F. (2006). The Philosophical Journey: An Interactive Approach (3rd Ed). New York: McGraw-Hill Meissner, W. W. (2007). Mind, Brain, and Self in Psychoanalysis: Therapeutic Implications of the Mind-Body Relation. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 2007, Vol. 24, No. 2, 333-354. Yorgason, B. M. (1995) *One Tattered Angel*. Utah: Gentle Breeze Publications.