

The mind-body problem

Philosophy



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Here Here Here Here The Mind-Body Problem Rene Descartes popularized the concept of dualism when he proclaimed that some aspects of the mind couldn't be explained by physical means. The primary implication of dualism is that the brain and mind are separate types of matter. We could also interpret this as a statement about the fundamental nature of existence, one that precludes the possibility of the mind and body being reduced to the same material (the contrary belief is known as monism). Considered together, these implications pose a problem as they relate to finding meaning in life. The key issue is as follows: If the mind and body are separate, then the physical world ultimately holds no meaning for the non-physical mind. The mind-body problem has been discussed, examined, and has perplexed philosophers for most of our recorded history. Obviously there should be no expectation of "solving" the problem through this discussion, but won't stop me from trying. I intend to discuss the mind-body problem and its interpretation from one perspective, arguing against dualism but not for monism.

The concept of body-mind dualism has some attractive qualities. The differing characteristics of the brain as a material and the mind as an experience are undeniable, and the disconnection is ideal if one wishes to escape the obvious mortality of the physical body. Monism can also be viewed in a positive light, as it gives the physical world meaning and adequately accounts for many of the mind-brain correlations that have been identified in neurobiology. The main problem with the existence of both dualism and monism lies within their inability to account for scientific findings.

Any theory that attempts to explain the physical world should be relatively

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compatible with the findings of physics, psychology, and biology (physical world, the mind, and the body, respectively). Findings from neurobiological research have not added support for the existence of an engram (a neurological correlate of a cognitive process) (Sheena 221) and thus does not support either the dualistic approach or the monistic perspective as there has yet to be a meeting point or unity observed that can substantiate either theory. Similarly, physics research into fundamental particles has revealed ambiguity, as subatomic particles appear to exist in relational states (Wolfenstein and Silva 480) rather than as definite objects (the same or different) that can be account for by either philosophical theory of body and mind.

To conclude, I have presented two examples from science that disagree with both extremes of the mind-body problem. The mind cannot be reduced to a physical process, and it cannot be reduced to a mental process. We need to move away from polarizing concepts in order to evaluate all of the options available to our understanding. An alternative view places the body and mind in a relationship that is outside of our traditional understanding of objectivism, allowing for a malleability that leaves the two inseparable but does not preclude their independent operation.

Works Cited

Sheena, Josselyn, A. "Continuing the Search for the Engram: Examining the Mechanism of Fear Memories." *Journal of Psychiatry and Neuroscience* 35. 4 (2010): 221-8. Print.

Wolfenstein, Lincoln, and Joao P. Silva. "Exploring Fundamental Particles." *Contemporary Physics* 52. 5 (2011): 480-1. Print.