

Mind body
relationship according
to descartes
philosophy essay



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Mind and what it connotes is the battered offspring of the union of psychology. At some deep level we dearly love and cherish it and see behind its surface great potential but, because of our own inadequacies, we continuously abuse it, harshly and abruptly pummeling it for imagined excesses, and occasionally even lock it away in some dark closet where we cannot hear its insistent whines.

The history of the use of the term reveals two conflicting impulses: the tendency to treat mind as a metaphysical mechanistic system, and the tendency to view it as convenient biological metaphor representing the manifestation of the, still not understood, neurophysiologic processes of the brain. The following are the more important and common uses of the term and this basic conflict can be seen in all.

Mind as the totality of hypothesized mental processes and acts that may serve as explanatory devices for psychological data. In recent years this has become the dominant use of the term. Here, mental components are hypothesized because they have, in the proper theoretical frame, considerable explanatory power. Of interest here is the reluctance, even refusal, of about the neurophysiological structures to which it might relate. The focus is typically on the effectiveness of the hypothesized model of mind to explain- not merely studies. The most frequent users of this meaning are workers in artificial intelligence, modern cognitive psychologists and several schools of philosophy, e. g. functionalism.

Mind as the totality of the conscious and unconscious mental experiences of an individual organism (usually although not always, a human organism).

Actually, this use represents an effort to avoid the above-mentioned metaphysical problem but it produces a because of the confusion over how to characterize consciousness. Often even those with a behavioristic approach will “back door” themselves into speculating about mind in this fashion but they will invariably replace consciousness with behaviors and acts.

Mind as a collection of processes. Probably the next most commonly held view, the argument here is that the several processes generally studied under the rubrics of perception and cognition collectively constitute mind. Here, there is no real effort to define; only to enumerate and to seek to understand those processes enumerated.

Mind as equivalent to brain. This position which goes back to William James must in the final analysis be true. Its major liability, about brain function. As a result, it is philosophical position.

Mind as an emergent property. The argument here is that of emergentism, that when a biological system reaches a point of sufficient complexity and organizational structure mind emerges.

Mind as a list of synonyms. For example, psyche, soul, self etc. Nothing is gained by this use and the definitional problems are compounded.

Mind as intelligence. Really only a colloquial use of the term as in phrases like, “She has a good mind”.

Mind as a characteristic or trait. Also used nontechnical as in phrases like, “the mind of an artist”, or “the Northern European mind”.

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'The Brain', no discussion can be complete without mentioning the experiment of Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936). Ivan Pavlov and his followers showed, unconditioned and conditioned reflexes of the brain underlie mental activity. When external objects act on the nerve endings of the sense organs, strictly determined bioelectric impulses are sent to the brain via the nervous system. They evoke a number of complex physico-chemical changes during which the impulse (signal) received is changed and evokes a response reaction of the organism. The brain, on the basis of this signal, sends a response impulse to the corresponding internal organs or locomotory organs, causing the most purposive action. When an animal sees food it secretes saliva, when a human touches a very hot object, he instantaneously withdraws his hand. The process is known as an unconditioned reflex or instinct.

2. DUALISM:

One of the classical metaphysical issues concerning the relationship between that which is mental and that which is physical. The issue has its origins in the ancient dualism of Plato and since then many "solutions" to the problem have been offered; the major ones, classified according to whether they are dualisms, monisms or compromises, follows;

Dualisms;

Interactionism, where in mind and body are assumed to be separate acting and mutually influencing each other.

Psychophysicalism (or parallelism), wherein mind and body are treated as two distinct, independent, but perfectly correlated elements.

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3. WHO ACCEPT DUALISM :

Despite the obviousness of this problem, and the amount of attention given to it, Descartes himself never took this issue very seriously. His response to Gassendi is a telling example:

These questions presuppose amongst other things an explanation of the union between the soul and the body, which I have not yet dealt with at all. But I will say, for your benefit at least, that the whole problem contained in such questions arises simply from a supposition that is false and cannot in any way be proved, namely that, if the soul and the body are two substances whose nature is different, this prevents them from being able to act on each.

So, Descartes' response to the mind-body problem is twofold.

First, Descartes contends that a response to this question presupposes an explanation of the union between the mind (or soul) and the body.

Second, Descartes claims that the question itself stems from the false presupposition that two substances with completely different natures cannot act on each other. Further examination of these two points will occur in reverse order.

Descartes' principles of causation put forward in the Third Meditation lie at the heart of this second presupposition. The relevant portion of this discussion is when Descartes argues that the less real cannot cause something that is more real, because the less real does not have enough reality to bring about something more real than itself. This principle applies on the general level of substances and modes. On this account, an infinite

substance, that is, God, is the most real thing because only he requires nothing else in order to exist; created, finite substances are next most real, because they require only God's creative and conservative activity in order to exist; and finally, modes are the least real, because they require a created substance and an infinite substance in order to exist. So, on this principle, a mode cannot cause the existence of a substance since modes are less real than finite substances. Similarly, a created, finite substance cannot cause the existence of an infinite substance. But a finite substance can cause the existence of another finite substance or a mode (since modes are less real than substances). Hence, Descartes' point could be that the completely diverse natures of mind and body do not violate this causal principle, since both are finite substances causing modes to exist in some other finite substance. This indicates further that the " activity" of the mind on the body does not require contact and motion, thereby suggesting that mind and body do not bear a mechanistic causal relation to each other. More will be said about this below.

The first presupposition concerns an explanation of how the mind is united with the body. Descartes' remarks about this issue are scattered across both his published works and his private correspondence. These texts indicate that Descartes did not maintain that voluntary bodily movements and sensation arise because of the causal interaction of mind and body by contact and motion. Rather, he maintains a version of the form-matter theory of soul-body union endorsed by some of his scholastic-Aristotelian predecessors and contemporaries. Although a close analysis of the texts in

question cannot be conducted here, a brief summary of how this theory works for Descartes can be provided.

Before providing this summary, however, it is important to disclaim that this scholastic-Aristotelian interpretation is a minority position amongst Descartes scholars. The traditional view maintains that Descartes' human being is composed of two substances that causally interact in a mechanistic fashion. This traditional view led some of Descartes' successors, such as Malebranche and Leibniz (who also believed in the real distinction of mind and body), to devise metaphysical systems wherein mind and body do not causally interact despite appearances to the contrary. Other philosophers considered the mind-body problem to be insurmountable, thereby denying their real distinction: they claim that everything is either extended (as is common nowadays) or mental (as George Berkeley argued in the 18th century). Indeed, this traditional, mechanistic interpretation of Descartes is so deeply ingrained in the minds of philosophers today, that most do not even bother to argue for it. However, a notable exception is Marleen Rozemond, who argues for the incompatibility of Descartes' metaphysics with any scholastic-Aristotelian version of mind or soul-body union. Those interested in closely examining her arguments should consult her book *Descartes's Dualism*. A book arguing in favor of the scholastic-Aristotelian interpretation is entitled *Descartes and the Metaphysics of Human Nature*.

4. DESCARTES' VIEW ON DUALISM:

Rene Descartes' theory of Dualism is the most important dualistic theory in the history of philosophy. According to Descartes mind and body are totally
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different from each other. Body does not depend on mind and also mind does not depend on body. One's nature does not present on other. The necessary nature of the body is extension and body is passive. But the necessary nature of the mind is consciousness, active and independent.

According to Descartes' consciousness is present only within human mind. It does not present in stone, wood like this kind of matter and not even animal also. Descartes' thinks that human mind and body can never mix with each other. Mind lodged in body as a totally separate substance . And for this kind of lodged -relationship human can control their bodily movement as they want.

According to Descartes' body is like a machine and mind is like a controller of that machine.

Here Descartes gives an example ,,

The relation between mind and body is not like the relation between ship and the captain of the ship. Mind -body relation is a very close relation. Because if the ship damage or destroy, the captain does not feel any pain. But if there is any kind of pain in the human body, then it is painful for human mind also. So, we have to accept that mind body relation is a very close relation.

Now Descartes' talking about interactionism.

Here he says that, in our daily life we can realize sometimes mind effect on body and sometimes body effect on mind. Sometimes mental activities causes bodily changes and sometimes bodily activity causes mental changes.

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Like , if mind is upset or disturb the strength of the body is down. And if mind is happy the strength of the body is grown up. Here mind is the cause of bodily changes. Likewise, if the body is ill then the thinking power of the mind is down automatically. And if the body is well then the thinking power of the mind will grow automatically.

To describe all of these kinds of actions we need to accept the theory of interactionism.

But if we follow Descartes' dualism and take mind and body as a separate and opposite substance then this kind of interactionism is never possible. Because if there is no similarity between two things then no relation can possible between them. Because there must be a quantitative balance and qualitative resemblance between cause and effect.

Descartes' first take mind and body separate and opposite substance. And break all the relation between them. But after that he himself again mention about interactionism.

Descartes' has to face many problem for this kind of thinking. Because how can it would be possible to create any relation between two opposite kind of substance?

Here Descartes' solve the problem in two different ways. -

1. In case of mind-body relation Descartes' talking only about the ' relation of coexistence' and the constitutive unity but not the ' unity of nature'.

According to Descartes' - if there is any constitutive unity then body and

mind do not interact through their nature, the interact as an attachment of <https://assignbuster.com/mind-body-relationship-according-to-descartes-philosophy-essay/>

two separate object and through this interaction their distinctness do not change.

2. in the book of ' the passions of the soul' Descartes' says that, the relation between mind and body is not with the each and every part of the body. This relation is only with the pineal gland of the brain. This pituitary gland or pineal gland is the main and only gland for the relation of interactionism. Physical changes directly effect to the pineal gland and it is the cause of mental changes. Likewise mental think or mental will directly effect to the pineal gland. And this is the cause of physical changes. In the book of ' the passions of the soul' Descartes' tell this small gland ' seat of animal spirit'. Body and mind effect on each other through this gland.

So, according to Descartes' the interactionism between two opposite kind of objects can happen indirectly with the help of the pineal gland.

5. CRITISISM AGAINST DESCARTES' :

There are many criticism of Descartes' interactionism.

Descartes' mention ' constitutive unity` , but in this unity the nature of mind and body does not change- this solution is not acceptable. Because if there is any constitutive unity between two separate substance, then there must be some changes in their nature.

Descartes' accept the relation between mind and pineal gland. But the acceptance of only pineal gland without body could not solve the problem. It only replace the proble from one place to another. Mind influences pineal

gland directly. This implies mind influences body because pineal gland is the part of the body.

According to the casual rule of natural science interactionism or cause - effect relation is not possible between two opposite kind of things like mind and body. The rule is that there must be some kind of quantitative balance and qualitative resemblance between cause and effect.

The theory of interactionism about mind and body ignore ' the law of conservation of energy'. According to this law the total energy of this material-world is constant. It only change from one form to another.

But if we follow the interactionism we have to accept that when body effect on mind, some sort of bodily energy store into mind and total bodily energy (material energy) decreases and vice-versa.

So, it ignore the rule of ' the law of conservation of energy'.

If we take mind as a separate substance from material body, we have to face those two problems —

- a) The problem of identification.
- b) The problem of individuation.

Because if conscious mind is invisible and untouchable, then how can we identify mind ? (As conscious mind can not be situated in space).

And identification is not possible then individuation is also not possible .

So, it is totally meaningless to accept mind totally separate from body.

If there is nothing like mind except body, the problem of interactionism about mind and body will be a meaningless problem.

Descartes' says that extension is the ' necessary nature' of matter. But it is not acceptable by modern scientist like, Lord Belfour, James jeans, Eddington and others. In modern science immaterializing the matter become possible. Matter is not a mere, extensive, solid substance.

If we analyze matter, we will get some kind of energy like – electron and proton at the last part of the division. And if energy is the main thing of the world then Descartes' dualism is not acceptable. Because there s nothing like extendable matter.

Conclusion:

We can never deny the existence of mind. Only mind can deny mind, so that mind s establish. And we cannot deny the relation between mind and body in a very simple way. In our everyday experience we can feel that there is a cause-effect relation between mind and body.