

Against dualism essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Can one reasonably be a dualist in this day and age? Thomas Nagel is correct to argue that, ' dualism.... is usually adopted on the grounds that it must be true, and rejected on the grounds that it can't be. ' Such a seemingly paradoxical statement, which exists within what I will call the ontological common-senseness of the human experience, represents my position with regard to dualism, as will be argued within this essay.

Acknowledging but notwithstanding the natural attraction to some sort of dualism, I will i) state that my case rests on two suppositions, ii) argue that the problem of causal interaction deals a fatal blow to Cartesian dualism, iii) argue that other types of dualism have inherent difficulties and iv), briefly, bring attention to an argument contending that the mind-body problem might actually be beyond solution due to the ontological apparatus borne by the human being.

There are two important contextual considerations which are pertinent to my argument. The first inescapable condition is that of what I will call the problem of arguing from within. The verb ' to be' appears within the very title of this essay, and it is the case, as Searle might argue, that any position on the mind/body problem cannot help but be advanced from within that very mind/body ontological perspective. Whilst Churchland is anxious to dismiss such introspective judgement from having ' any special status', it is difficult to ascertain what privileged external position he has been able to find from where to make such a statement. Thus it is that I have some sympathy with the Cartesian project which posits the internal as being the only place within which knowledge is certain. However, it is precisely because of the limitations of the way in which this internal field just ' is', that

critique of substance dualism has to be given on scientific grounds, as arguing only from within the complex mind/body seems precisely to beg the question about the complex mind/body problem. Thus, the second necessary consideration is that the critique I will make of Cartesian dualism rests on scientific and not philosophical ground.

I would argue that the scientific explanation of a closed physical world is valid, and, under a Kuhnian-type move, contend that there are enough anomalies within the Cartesian position for it to be replaced, which allows a move towards attempting a better, as in more explanatory, model or models. I am prepared to accept that this is a scientific and not necessarily philosophical shift. This is a case where the knowledge gained within physics has provided useful ground for a movement within metaphysical understandings, but I contend that philosophical statements wishing to affirm any more than that are beyond reach. And thus to Cartesian dualism. In a radical shift away from both the Aristotelian tradition of the soul as *de anima*, and from the view of religious authority as the source of truth, Descartes, through the process of hyperbolic doubt, concludes that the only knowledge of which he can be certain is the fact that he is a thinking thing. He cannot doubt that he is thinking as such doubts actually cannot be in place if he were not in the process of thinking; he can, however, doubt he has a body as this is not necessary to the thinking process and thus exists separately to the mind. Accordingly, Descartes posits the mind and body as 'substances', which have very different properties. The mind, the indubitable seat of certain knowledge is immaterial, indivisible, eternal, non-extended;

the body is that which is corruptible, material, sensory, divisible and extended in nature.

Descartes argues that these two substances interact with one another and in doing so the mind controls the body, but the body can influence the mind, through such things as the passions. I want to stress here that the juxtaposition yet interaction of the substances as the sine qua non of the entire argument, and thus criticism of substance dualism has to be concerned with this essential element. And it is at this point that the project fails. As Descartes has been so very careful to emphasise the differences between the substances, interaction between the two modes, under his own terms, becomes impossible. To outline this problem thus: p1) Mental substances are outside the physical domain. P2) ' No physical event has a cause outside the physical domain. ' c)Mental substances cannot cause physical events.

c2)Substance dualism is invalid as a paradigmatic solution to any interaction and causal relation between mind and body. I contend that other dualist positions also suffer under this fatal stress. As the epiphenomalist position still depends on causation for it to succeed, even if that is only physical to mental, why is it any less problematic to accept one-way causality between domains? Substance dualism may circumvent the problem by speaking of emergence of mental states from the physical, but because of the characterisation of supervenience as no mental change without a corresponding physical change, I fail to see how this is anything more than epiphenomalism, which fails for the reason stated.

In fact, property dualism may render mental causation superfluous if all causal laws are subsumed under the physical, and this actually runs the very strong risk of collapsing into physicalism. Having argued against dualist positions, can any theory salvage two-state ontology? Briefly, and with the aid of McGinn, I contend that this question is unanswerable and the mind-body problem unsolvable, because, as I have argued, ' we are cut off by our very cognitive constitution from achieving a conception of that natural property of the brain (or of consciousness) that accounts for the psychophysical link. I agree with McGinn here that the cognitive closure might well be the cause of the problem being found baffling to us, and we can never hope to escape this ontological position. The best we can do is to accurately critique theories that postulate arguments that cannot work due to empirical (in this case causal) failures, under which program one cannot reasonably be a dualist in this day and age. Quoted unsourced by Phelan, J. , *Philosophy Themes and Thinkers*, p. 72.

This is, of course, along the lines of Paul Churchland's ' folk psychology'. It is not the case that all we are left with when removing this folk psychology is eliminativism, due to McGinn's position briefly outlined in the conclusion of this essay. Churchland, P. , *Eliminative Materialism and the Propositional Attitudes*, p. 569, and McGinn, C. , *Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem*, pp. 394-405, in Chalmers, D.

, ed. *Philosophy of Mind*. Searle, J.

, Beyond Dualism, series of lectures as posted on youtube, year unspecified.

Churchland, P. , Eliminative Materialism and the Propositional Attitudes, in Chalmers, D. ed.

Philosophy of Mind, p. 569. Of course, in arguing that the Cartesian paradigm is ruled out on scientific grounds, because of the difficulty of mental causation in a closed physical world, I acknowledge that I am arguing to best explanation from inference, as no causal law has yet been found. It is acknowledged that there are difficulties with Cartesian dualism that might be defined as more philosophical in nature, such as the knowledge divide between the certain internal and the potentially false external. Many scholars have addressed this, most notably, in my view, Heidegger in Being and Time. Further, the difficulty in defining a thing that is thinking with the 'I' that Descartes wants to posit is also one not addressed in this essay due to a brevity-enforced careful selection of subject matter. If I am being consistent with what I have stated here, it might be that Popper's falsification paradigm is useful in being able, on scientific groundings, to dismiss (as false) the pineal gland as the causal link between mind and body.

However, saying no more than this, as to what is the case with regard to the mind/body relation (as opposed to what isn't) would be true to Popper's project and to the claim of this essay. Kim, J. , from [http://www. iscid.](http://www.iscid.org/encyclopedia/)

[org/encyclopedia/](http://www.iscid.org/encyclopedia/). The problem of causal interaction between the mind and body was raised with Descartes at the time of his Meditations. Descartes' lack of concern at this difficulty is due to what he thinks is a misunderstanding of the nature of the union between mind and body.

<https://assignbuster.com/against-dualism-essay/>

' A human being, that is, a soul united with a body, would be a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. Accordingly, the mind or soul is a part with its own capacity for modes of intellect and will; the body is a part with its own capacity for modes of size, shape, motion and quantity; and the union of body and mind or human being, has a capacity for its own set of modes over and above the capacities possessed by the parts alone. On this account, modes of voluntary bodily movement would not be modes of the body alone resulting from its mechanistic causal interaction with a mental substance, but rather they would be modes of the whole human being.

Hence, the human being would be causing itself to move and would have sensations, and, therefore, the problem of causal interaction between mind and body is avoided altogether. ' [http://www. iep. utm. edu/descarte/](http://www.iep.utm.edu/descarte/). See this document further for scholarly response to Descartes' position noted here. Such scholarly understanding contends that the understanding of the real distinction between mind and body is believed not to be one, whole thing, ' but two substances that somehow mechanistically interact.

'It is problematic at such a stage because if new causal powers were to emerge, mental states would, ' be capable of acting independently of the physical states that had given rise to them', which is not supervenience as understood. Jackson, R. , et al. , (eds.), *Understanding Philosophy AQA*. Further problems are reiterated by McAdoo, who comments that substance dualism ' fails to explain how non-reducible properties actually form consciousness, or why these properties might be facts that cannot be empirically verified. ' McAdoo, O.

Property Dualism on www.arrod.co.uk McGinn, C. , Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem, p. 395, in Chalmers, D. , ed.

Philosophy of Mind. Bibliography Chalmers, D. , (2002), Philosophy of Mind Classical and Contemporary Readings (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.) Jackson, R. , et al (eds.

), (2005), Understanding Philosophy for A2 Level (Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes) Kenny, G. , (2009), The Mind/Body Problem (La Trobe University: Lecture notes) Phelan, JW. , (2005), Philosophy Themes and Thinkers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) University of Oxford, (2009), Philosophy of Mind Online Course notes (Oxford: University of Oxford) Warburton, N. , (2006), Philosophy: The Classics (Routledge: Abingdon, Third Edtn.) Author and year unspecified, www.utm.edu/descarte/

(10/12/09) Kim, J. , (2009), ‘ Substance Dualism’, www.iscid.org/encyclopedia

(10/12/09) McAdoo, O. , (2009), ‘ Property Dualism’, www.arrod.co.uk

(12/12/09) Searle, J. , (year unspecified) ‘ Beyond Dualism’, www.youtube.com (July, 2010, content now removed)