

# Example of essay on the mark of the mental

[Health & Medicine](#), [Body](#)



## **The Mark of the Mental**

### Part 1

The problem of the mark of the mental is in determining what distinct features constitute the mind itself, what is unique about them, and what unifies them. Farkas proposes an answer to this problem by describing the mind as “ nothing but the subject matter of the cognitive capacity that endows me with special access: that is, the area that is known by me in a way that is known by no one else” (22). However, before determining that this special or privileged access is indeed the mark of the mental, Farkas demonstrates how she arrives at this idea.

The first item of importance in understanding privileged access and its relationship to the mark of the mental is the creation of a systematic list of mental features. Additionally, this list must be tested to verify what is included are truly mental features. Farkas refers to Descartes’s Second Meditation and his demon test as a method of developing this list. The demon test is, in short, that there is a deceptive demon who presents all of reality as an illusion, and his subject falsely believes she has senses, a body, and organs of perception. Descartes’s initial list of psychological faculties includes nutritive, sensory, locomotive, and intellectual powers, but when put to the demon test, only the intellectual faculties remain as an “ essential attribute of the mind” (9). Nutrition and locomotion are disqualified by the demon test, but thoughts, emotions, and perceptual experiences remain. A general idea of perception is discarded as part of the mind because in the demon test, the demon provides false information about reality and perception in this case is not to be trusted as providing a truthful version of

reality. Therefore, Farkas explains that “ sensory perception understood as the activity of my bodily sense organs is discarded; but sensory perception understood as a conscious event is retained” (11).

Special access, or privileged access, is then shown to be the concept unifying the mental features that pass the demon test. Farkas writes, “ what remains are the events or facts that are accessed by a certain cognitive faculty that places the subject in an exclusive position” (18). The faculty that remains is reflection or introspection. Farkas warns that complete skepticism using the demon test does not make sense because “ I cannot assume myself to be a creature without fundamental reasoning capacities and then see what else I could learn” (22). Memory is a mental feature that was not discussed before, but it can be considered available through special access because it can be recalled and reflected upon.

Introspection, or reflection, is identified as “ the only cognitive faculty that provides privileged access to its subject matter,” making it the mark of how the realm of the mental is known (28). Ultimately, this means that having a point of view is created by the unique cognitive faculty of introspection. Farkas writes, “ To be a subject is to possess a point of view,” in which is included the environment and self. The subject’s point of view is unique because of the special access she has to the environment and self through introspecting regarding them. Therefore, the mark of the mental is that the subject possesses a point of view through cognitive faculties allowing her to have a view of things shared by no one else.

## Part 2

Farkas argues that point of view is attained by having special access through mental faculties such as introspection, making it the mark of the mental.

However, there is a possibility that point of view is not altogether created by mental faculties alone, or at least that it is partially dependent on faculties other than those classified as mental.

Interaction with the environment may be an essential part of having a mind.

The famous double-slit experiment done by physicist Thomas Young at the beginning of the 19th century provides an example of how observation alone changes the environment. In his experiment, when a single electron was shot through a panel with two slits in it, when observed it behaved like matter and formed two lines on photo-reactive paper. However, when unobserved, the electrons instead behaved like waves and formed several more lines, or an interference pattern, on the photo-reactive paper.

It seems reasonable to infer that any action taken by a person has an effect not only on the environment, but also on herself. Therefore, it also seems reasonable that a demon test in which the mind is separated from its environment is not a good test for determining mental features, because of the essential effect that the mind and person has on the environment and that the environment in turn has on the mind and person.

A simple example would be to query whether students taking a test behave differently or not when an instructor is observing them; the answer is, of course they behave differently when observed. Some people perform at their best while being watched, while others crumble under the pressure of public scrutiny. The effect of the environment upon the mind may not be that

simple; even those things which a subject is not aware of may change the methods of thought or mind. The subject may not be aware of there being one or three clouds in the sky, but the fact that they are there is essential to the way her mind works. A fox watching from the woods as she drives past it would have its effect.

This argument implies that a selection of mental features based on the demon test is flawed because the mind is an essential part of the environment, affected by the environment, and cannot be separated from its environment or there would be no reality to perceive and think about. It is reasoning based on skepticism, which at its end completely discards reality.

### **Part 3**

The introduction of the physical world to Farkas's definition of the mark of the mental does not negate her conclusions. After all, the demon test is simply a method to come up with a list of mental features. She writes, " If we agree that the activities of the ' mind, reason and intellect' are mental phenomena, this exchange would make no sense if ' mental' meant something incompatible with the physical or corporeal" (34, emphasis hers).

Farkas also brings up the idea of " occurrent events," which is having perceptual experience and sensations, and " standing states," which are things such as beliefs about the past or future that are largely unconscious but may become part of consciousness. These ideas are meant to illustrate how the mind is affected by both conscious and unconscious things, events, environments, and so forth. Therefore, whether a subject is conscious or not of something perceived, known, or felt, it can still be part of her mind.

The demon test is not designed to separate the mind from reality, but to

eliminate features that do not belong to the mental realm. Using the demon test does not discard the importance of the physical world or bodies, because introspection or point of view survive as mental features regardless of whether the subject is faced with illusion or not. It does not deny that things a subject is unconscious of or that things beyond the body of the subject will have an effect on the subject. Its answer is that the subject has her own point of view based on introspection and that this faculty of introspection is what allows her special access to that knowledge and point of view, and that this is the mark of the mental.

## **References**

Farkas, Katalin (2010). *The Subject's Point of View*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.