

# The mind-body problem essay examples

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## Theories of Consciousness

The Mind-Body Problem:

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Part 1

The System Argument provides a non-functional theory of consciousness by claiming that “ all that is required is the experience be realized before its effect” (Antony 110). It argues directly against the functionalist idea of causation. It uses the example of a man named Sam who realizes pain in the “ pain region,” or  $t_1$ , in his brain. According to functionalist theory, the activation of pain at  $t_1$  must lead to further activity in Sam’s action-planning region, where he would do something like make a plan to obtain aspirin.

However, according to the System Argument, theoretically at a halfway point between  $t_1$  and the action-planning region of Sam’s brain is point  $t_2$ , connecting the two regions, and this point could be destroyed. Therefore, the signal to activate the action-planning part of Sam’s brain will not occur.

This would invalidate functionalist theories that require causation in order for a state to be realized. However, the System Argument does not require causation in order for a state to be realized. It “ generalizes over all types of conscious states and processes, and all types of effects” because it assumes causes precede effects, and therefore any conscious state is already realized and experienced at  $t_1$  before any action-plan, movement, reaction, or other result occurs (Antony 110).

Supporting the System Argument’s claim is intuition. Antony writes, “ Sam is in pain . . . not only before the incapacitation of his action-planning system at  $t_2$ , but also after it. Functionalism, however, must deny Sam is in pain after

t2” (113). Antony brings up the idea that so far, the example given restricts the System Argument to conscious processes and states involving neural activity (114). However, to generalize over different contingencies of different types of realizations, for example the token pains of Martians, intuition allows the argument to remain valid. Antony emphasizes that the areas affected or disabled by the System Argument are idle or unused, and this is another way to allow “ the System Argument to generalize across all possible realizations” (114).

## **Part 2**

A flaw of the System Argument is that it assumes that at t1, Sam realizes his pain. For example, imagine that Sam is undergoing a dental procedure, and this activates the t1 region in his brain. T1 may indeed be the pain receptor area of the brain, but it may not actually provide any conscious feedback to Sam that he is in pain. The System Argument does not mention the neural system running between Sam’s hands, through his arm, to his spine, and then to point t1 in his brain. It also does not account for the idea that there could be a t0 in the brain, where types of signals are sorted before they are sent to the correct area for processing, such as t1 for pain or p1 for pleasure. It does not account for the fact that even after the point t1, there could be further steps that must be realized in conjunction with other pathways in order for the pain to be fully realized. In another example, perhaps Sam is undergoing the same dental procedure but has received a local anesthetic to prevent pain. Therefore, in a sense, t2 has been disabled, just as The System Argument implies, but that does not mean Sam’s action planning region remains inactive. Sam may not feel pain now, but he knows that once the

anesthetic wears off, he will feel pain if he does not take the aspirin.

The System Argument, in the example, assumes the action planning region remains idle. As another example, imagine Sam is slicing some vegetables for a salad and cuts his hand. If  $t_2$  is disabled, according to the System Argument, this means that Sam will not realize his pain and therefore not stop cutting the vegetables in spite of his injury. However, it is reasonable to assume that Sam will observe other effects of the injury, such as bleeding, and his action planning section of his brain will still be activated by other means.

### **Part 3**

The System Argument expects that region  $t_1$  is the point at which Sam realizes his pain. It is irrelevant whether or not there is a  $t_0$ , because  $t_1$  is the arbitrary point at which consciousness occurs. What is true or false in our minds cannot always be demonstrated by causal factors. For instance, Jenny is in love with Greg but is in denial of that fact. Still, at  $t_1$  remains the feeling of love Jenny has for Greg, whether or not she chooses to acknowledge it. If her neural system is intact, in spite of her denial, the neural messages will proceed from  $t_1$  through  $t_2$  to her action planning center. She may do things like alter her route to work in order to run into Greg or ride the same bus as him, even if she claims she is not in love. However, if Jenny's  $t_2$  is disabled, she may not do any of these things. The causal effects are eliminated, but this does not change the fact that Jenny feels love for Greg. A physical demonstration is simply not necessary for consciousness to be confirmed.

## **References**

Antony, Michael V. (2 June 1994). Against Functionalist Theories of Consciousness. *Mind & Language* 9(2). 105-123.