

Mind and matter study of cartesian dualism philosophy essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Mind-matter or Mind-body problem has been an unsolved issue in the philosophy of mind, the origins for the quest to answer this issue began as late as to Socrates philosophy. This problem contributed to the evolving of many sciences throughout the ages, Including Psychology, which as we know is the study of mind and behavior. This makes Psychology the closest sciences to the mind body problem.

Every human being is accordingly a composite of two objects: a physical body (matter) and a nonphysical object that is that human beings mind.

For centuries, there have been many answers to resolve this issue; these answers actually lead to the evolution of two schools of thoughts:

- Monism, which is the conclusion that mind and body are not ontologically different kinds of entities and
- Dualism, which is the conclusion that mind and body are ontologically different kinds of entities.

Dualism

Dualism is the view that mental phenomena are, in some respect, nonphysical. The best-known version is due to Descartes, and holds that the mind is a nonphysical substance.

Cartesian Dualism is a conclusion made by a French, marvel in Mathematics and Philosophy, Rene Descartes to find the answer to the Mind-body problem. The conclusion is known as the Cartesian Dualism.

Mind was un-extended, an immaterial but thinking substance and body was an extended, material but unthinking substance. The body was subject to mechanical laws; however, the mind was not (Descartes, 1952) . Therefore, as described by Ryle (1949), “ A person... lives through two collateral histories, one comprising of what happens in and to the body, the other consisting of what happens in and to his mind... The events in the first history are events in the physical world; those in the second are events in the mental world” (p11-12).

Dualism is composed of Mind and Body/Matter, /what is Mind and Matter and does it imply too?

Every human being is accordingly a composite of two objects: a physical body (matter) and a nonphysical object that is that human beings mind .

Dualism is divided into mental and material, which is then divided into Mind and Matter respectively. Mental is the study of abstract entities such as: thoughts and thinking in a mind, while material is the study of the extension of these abstract entities in a mind which are realized, applied or practised by body.

Descartes was concerned about how the nonmaterial could interact with the material and how the “ extended” substance of body could house the “ unextended” spirit called soul. He resolved the problem of the incompatibility of the two entities by his dualism; that is to say, by giving the problem a name. He held that the two components, which constitute man, had an independent origin and are of a fundamentally different nature. The body could be divided up by the removal of a leg or an arm, but the soul was

<https://assignbuster.com/mind-and-matter-study-of-cartesian-dualism-philosophy-essay/>

indivisible. The soul occupied the whole body in all its parts, but the reduction of the body in any way did not reduce the soul. The body was procreated, the soul was created. Though the two realities were of an entirely different nature, they could react upon each other, the soul on the body and the body on the soul. How this reaction takes place is a mystery nevertheless; only Descartes spelled it differently–dualism.

Descartes concerns can be explained by the following examples

1. Person A before leaving for a bookshop may have the following thought in his mind,

“ I want to read on History of Pakistan but I don’t have a book to read from, therefore go to a bookshop and purchase a book on the History of Pakistan”.

As of now, the thought has not been extended as Person A has not extended his desire into reality. Person A now goes to a bookshop to purchase the book on History of Pakistan, when Person A finds the Book and purchases and completes his motive – Now the thought has extended to physical reality or simply the extension of his mind.

2. Another good example that may explain Descartes concern is the science of Mathematics. Mathematics is the best example to understand Cartesian Dualism, Numbers as we know are an abstract entity if they are used in a way that they create an understanding about their associate connection, this phenomena makes numbers a distinct example for mental realization . i. e. Mind. Let us take an example of number four, four maybe anything four Cats, four Letters, four CGPA, now how we develop or extend number is another

understanding about how Matter influence extends the principle of thought and action in our lives.

Mental phenomena are strikingly different from all others, and the idea that they are nonphysical may explain just how they are distinctive. Moreover, physical reality conforms to laws formulated in strictly mathematical terms. But, because mental phenomena such as thinking, desiring and sensing seem intractable to being described in mathematical terms, it is tempting to conclude that these phenomena are not physical. In addition, many mental states are conscious states – states that we are aware of in a way that seems to be wholly unmediated. And many would agree that, whatever the nature of mental phenomena that are not conscious, consciousness cannot be physical.

The Connection of Philosophy of Mind-Body

Modern philosophy of science has been devoted largely to the formal and systematic description of the successful practices of working scientists. The philosopher does not try to dictate how scientific inquiry and argument ought to be conducted. Instead, he tries to enumerate the principles and practices that have contributed to good science. The philosopher has devoted the most attention to analysing the methodological peculiarities of the physical sciences. The analysis has helped to clarify the nature of confirmation, the logical structure of scientific theories, the formal properties of statements that express laws and the question of whether theoretical entities actually exist. It is only rather recently that philosophers have become seriously interested in the methodological tenets of psychology. Psychological

explanations of behaviour refer liberally to the mind and to states, operations and processes of the mind. The philosophical difficulty comes in stating in unambiguous language what such references imply .

In the past fifteen years, a philosophy of mind called functionalism that is neither dualist nor materialist has emerged from philosophical reflection on developments in artificial intelligence, computational theory, linguistics, cybernetics and psychology. All these fields, which are collectively known as the cognitive sciences, have in common a certain level of abstraction and a concern with systems that process information. Functionalism, which seeks to provide a philosophical account of this level of abstraction, recognizes the possibility that systems as diverse as human beings, calculating machines and disembodied spirits could all have mental states. In the functionalist view the psychology of a system depends not on the stuff it is made of (living cells, metal or spiritual energy) but on how the stuff is put together.

Functionalism is a difficult concept, and one way of coming to grips with it is to review the deficiencies of the dualist and materialist philosophies of mind it aims to displace .

Behaviourism

Behaviourism, Biological resolution of the mind body problem: Western Science cannot account for mental phenomena, therefore: Eliminate and problem by conflating the (immaterial) mind and body (use technology of modern biology to investigate mind). Biological resolution of mind body problem is necessarily eliminative. Theories such as: Mind Brain Identity theory can help eliminate the problem.

Mind Brain Identity Theory: The identity theory of mind holds that states and processes of the mind are identical to states and processes of the brain.

Mental States and Brain states have the same referents. Mental states just are brain states “-Herbert Feigl

Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis approach concerns with Sigmund Freud’s – Psychoanalytic resolution of the mind-body problem: Ignore the body (Freud 1896) – Their response is simply to mind and body interaction is a reality and mind controls the body. Freud’s, Id, Ego and Super Ego evolve from the extension of Descartes Dualism, which bring the role of mind through unconsciousness within a human being.

Humanist

Carl Rogers, a famous humanist, would also dispute monism. A Humanist believes that subjective experiences are the only way to study human behavior. Human not really deny the real world existence but they believe this to a micro level where it is each person’s unique subjective approach to defining reality that is important.

“ In the area of mental illness a Schizophrenic might not define their actions as ill, rather they would believe they had insight into some occurrence that no one else had. This is why humanists believe the study of how each person views themselves is essential”.

Cognitive

<https://assignbuster.com/mind-and-matter-study-of-cartesian-dualism-philosophy-essay/>

Cognitive psychologists have been a new entry; they have placed a new stress on this problem. They have taken up the computer analogy, and applied it to the answer the mind-body problem.

“ They argue that the brain can be compared to computer hardware that is “ wired” or connected to the human body. The mind is therefore like software, allowing a variety of different software programs: to run. This can account for the different reactions people have to the same stimulus.”

Descartes on Cartesian Dualism:

Rectifying the arguments aroused from dubiety, from lucid and distinct acuties and incoherent understanding of his logic, Descartes attempts, by pursuing simplistic notions in his book “ The Meditations” to prove that the mental state or the mind (in other words, the soul of the “ thinking thing” is different from the body (the protracted, unthinking thing). These modern understandings are now known as the Cartesian Dualism. This essay will set the framework for the main arguments set by Descartes, some of the criticisms of dualism and the opinion of the most convincing argument any why.

The foremost argument in the Cartesian Dualism is that of doubt. Descartes starts by stating that he may conceive the probability that his discernment of his physical self may be false but he cannot imagine the possibility that he is without a mind. This is significant because for the act of doubting that is a thinking thing, there has to be something there to do the doubting and hence no doubt can exist if there is no one or nothing to doubt it. Descartes

then proposes that the mind and body are two distinct entities, his argument says:

I am certain that I am a thinking thing

I am not certain that I am a physical thing

Therefore, I am not a physical thing

Another critic of Descartes, Antoine Arnauld has paraphrased this statement to:

“ I can doubt whether I have a body. Yet I cannot doubt that I am, or exist. Therefore I who am doubting and thinking am not a body. For, in that case in having doubts about my body I should be having doubts about myself”

In this statement Arnauld has clearly changed the connotation of what Descartes has stated which shows the multiple contexts that the statement can form. Arnauld further negates the statement by drawing a comparison of this and the idea of a right-angled triangle. He says that a simple fact such as the equality of the length of the hypotenuse and the sum of the square of the two sides can only be questioned by someone who has no more knowledge on the matter himself. However, this does not claim the statement to be incorrect.

In the Second Meditations, Descartes replied to this argument by saying, “ I did not mean to exclude anything physical from my essence.” He did not mean to reach a deduction that was empirically the case but instead to use the argument of doubt to come to the origin of conceptualizing himself which

excludes all body. Hence, Descartes himself arrived at the theory that he could not negate the plausible component of materiality to the spirit.

The following argument is from clear and distinct acuties and is the part where Descartes, in his book *The Meditations* tries to attest that the mind is for sure, divergent from the body. After suggesting that all humans are thinking things and not physical things, Descartes says that not only the mind is separate from the body but can also live without it as a separate entity. This pays heed to the suggestion that if two subjects can exist without any relation to them, they must be distinct subjects. And if it is possible to imagine the concept of the existence of these two things apart, then surely God must be able to bring it about. This again signifies that if God can bring them about as existing separately, then they must be distinct from each other. If this concept is applied to mind and body, it becomes probable for the two of them to exist as separate entities as they both attain qualities that might not be common because the mind has thoughts to itself there the body has protraction. Bringing forth the argument of Descartes that if the mind is in fact distinct from the body, then it is possible for the mind to exist on its own without the body.

Another question that arises from this explanation is that even though one fully understands and perceives the mind and body to be discrete, does it actually makes them? Metaphorically speaking, a statue that is made of metal, when in its statue-form, the metal and statue may be considered to be a single entity but what happens when that statue is melted? The metal is retained whereas the statue ceases to exist. By applying the same argument to the body and mind, can both the entities survive when detached from

<https://assignbuster.com/mind-and-matter-study-of-cartesian-dualism-philosophy-essay/>

each other? Descartes, in his attempt to refute the argument put forth by Arnauld also explains the aforementioned question that neither the triangle nor the Pythagorean property can be fully understood on its own and both of them should be complete entities to be considered distinct from each other.

The third and final argument emerges from simplicity, this argument is rooted in the idea that everything extended is divisible in to components. The body is extended and that is why it can be divided in to parts i. e. arms, legs etc. Descartes however, does not believe that the mind is divided in to components. Even though in biological terms they are divided and labeled in to parts and attached to different cognitive procedures, Descartes believes that the driving force behind all these parts is a single unit. Hence, if the mind cannot be divided and extended, then it is not an extended thing at all. This further proves that the mind is different from the body and so should be considered a separate entity.

It is known through medical history that by marring any one part of the brain, the entire brain can become prone to detriment. Descartes does not disagree with this; he agrees that the brain does play some part in mental activities but it the sheer aspect of “ thought” that remains untouched by anything physical, it holds no account for psychological events. Building up on this, Descartes states that even when the body is in deep sleep, the soul continues to think, even when the human is undergoing fetal development, the soul continues its thought process. But if Descartes is believed and we agree to the principle that we are constantly thinking, that our thoughts are transparent to us, this would make us aware of our thoughts that occur during our sleep.

<https://assignbuster.com/mind-and-matter-study-of-cartesian-dualism-philosophy-essay/>

“ Thus, methinks, every drowsy Nod shakes their Doctrine, who teach that the soul is always thinking. Those, at least, who do at any time sleep without dreaming, can never be convinced that their thoughts are sometimes for hours busy without their knowing of it...” – John Locke

Descartes blames the memory and says that the thoughts that occur during sleep are forgotten. This idea seems vague because if this is the case, then how do we forget so much when we are sleeping and our mind is not divided in to multiple tasks. The mind should forget more when we are awake because that is when the mind has multiple strings of thought.

The argument with the most weightage, in my opinion is Descartes' simplicity argument. With the world converging in to newer avenues of medical advancement, more techniques are introduced that that give evidence that it is the brain that controls thought. Even then, Descartes' is at liberty and seems unaffected by medical technology when he states that thought is not measurable by psychology. The main query that arises is a derivation of Locke's proposal of how can we be constantly thinking while sleeping yet not remember any of it when we awaken. Descartes replies to this by saying, “ we just forget what we have dreamt and does seem a quick way out, but not entirely without merit. If we can forget things that have happened in the past whilst conscious, then it is not so big a step to believe that we can forget what we have thought when asleep.”

There are however, other anomalies in the Cartesian Dualism; some of the arguments proposed in the dualism are only successful if they are based on Cartesian conjectures. As suggested by Nietzsche, the assumptions of

humans as being “ thinking things” is only based on perception which is always presupposition, this as a domino effect is based on the assumption that argument of doubt is valid. Steven J. Wagner, in his essay “ Descartes’s Arguments for Mind-Body Distinctness,” backs this point when he says:

“ Descartes’s procedure only makes good sense once we see it as a product of his system...Too much in Descartes depends on things that are far too wrong!”

The most problematic association that Descartes’ dualism explained is the interaction of the mind and body. If what Descartes said about both of them being two separate entities is indeed true, then how does the mind that is considered to be immaterial communicate with the body that is material? Descartes first explained that the soul is the binding force between the two and it is the soul that unites the material and the immaterial, the soul being the force of gravity (metaphorically speaking) and how gravity can work on one or any part of the body at the same time. However, later in his theory, Descartes mentions the Pineal Gland and the significance of this gland being that particular point in the brain where the soul interacts with the body through the mind. What Descartes failed to do was, even though he mentions where the communication takes place, he is unable to explain how the communication between the two may occur. Another example used by Descartes to explain the relationship between the body and the mind was the relation of the pilot and ship when he is steering it. This example seemed far-fetched and vague as the connection drawn in this was not even remotely close to the relationship between that of the body and the mind.

When any part of the ship breaks, the pilot will feel no pain at all but when any part of the body breaks or is harmed; the person will feel the pain.

Descartes' conclusion that the mind is independent from the body, invited another critic in his opposition; Strawson. Strawson wanted to know what force was there that stopped multiple minds dwelling one body, whether at one point or in progression, what was there that individuates the mind and makes it unique?

In my opinion, when Descartes has been writing and compiling, there had been many external influences that mold his research and his conclusions. During the time he wrote, the Church had been in conflict with science and so Descartes tried to be diplomatic by pleasing both but ended up in making nebulous and murky inferences. By bringing both the mind and body at a credible position, he alleviated the chances of opposition. The Church would have been more than happy with the mind being purely immaterial as it dealt with the mind and its working whereas science deals with physicality and tangibility so making the body material would have not opposed science. Descartes may not have composed his studies solely by the influence of these two entities but a small portion of them may have been stimulated by them and that is what creates contradictions in his studies.

Studies on Dualism

Mackay (1986) writes:

“ When Freud discusses the mind-brain issue it is almost always in the context of another and, for Freud, closely related issue: that of the relationship between the mental and the conscious”. (p. 390)²

“ In this chapter, reference is made to the development of the Freudian theory of consciousness with respect to four major Freudian papers: The Project for a Scientific Psychology, The Interpret action of Dreams, The Ego and the Id and An Outline of Psychoanalysis. Our intention is to expose the view that consciousness is a sense organ with two surfaces -one directed towards the external world and the other towards the internal- for the perception of mental processes and, that affect is the primary sensory modality of the internal surface of consciousness. Affect as a sensory modality of consciousness will be extensively discussed in the next chapter”. Mackay (1986)

Ryle' critique on Cartesian Dualism:

Dualism, as observed by Descartes is related to the distinction of the body and the mind. According to Descartes, dualism is a domain where the mind and body are considered to be two discrete entities and therefore, the classifications that emerge from them are fundamentally dissimilar.

This being said, while these sub-groups are radical units on their own, on the other hand they are also sub-components of a single bigger entity; that of entity of causal power. Gilbert Ryle mentions in his famous book, The Concept Of Mind, that this explanation is a crucial error made by Descartes and further goes on to refer to it as a ' category mistake'.

Ryle is of the notion that the fundamental misconception of Descartes is that he misconstrues the mind to being an entity that interacts with the body in a causal fashion. According to Ryle, the mind should not be considered a 'causal agent' or 'entity with causal powers'. Moreover, the mind should not be considered just an entity. The rationale of the mind will have to be remodeled in order to reach a better understanding of mental situations, mental status, mental phenomena, mental practice, mental faculties etc. and through that to reach a closer and lucid understanding of the mind than what is mentioned in the Cartesian Dualism.

In order to have a cogent understanding of the mind, it is essential, for Ryle, to explain what he considers being a category mistake. Ryle's own examples of such mistakes are highly effective in explaining what category mistakes are. Assuming there is a table that consists of different rows where each row signifies a different type of category mistake. The mistake lets the items in the second column to be assumed as items in the first column. The error arises when the items in the second column are devalued and not paid heed to the fact that they are composed by the items in the first column itself. They are either nonfigurative or deviated forms of them and occur only because of their co-existence and unison.

With the understanding of what a category mistake is, it is easier to understand Ryle's criticism of Descartes in a better light. Ryle believes that the Official Doctrine is a myth created by philosophers, much like the dogma and the tenet of the Ghost in the Machine. The Official Doctrine is a result of a repetition or a 'family of radical category mistakes'. Gilbert Ryle has stated to have said, "Descartes had mistaken the logic of his problem.
<https://assignbuster.com/mind-and-matter-study-of-cartesian-dualism-philosophy-essay/>

Instead of asking by what criteria intelligent [i. e., mind-driven] behavior is actually distinguished from non-intelligent [mindless] behavior, he asked ‘ Given that the principle of mechanical causation does not tell us the difference, what other causal principle will tell it us?’

By accepting the credence that the Mind and Matter are poles apart, one accepts the idea that both these terms are of corresponding logical form which then makes the statement by Ryle, ‘ terms for entities that can causally interact’ plausible to this notion.

When asked about Mind and Matter, most people reply by relating it to the concepts of Idealism and Materialism, which in this context are erroneous. By reducing and converging the material world in to just two ideas; mental states and mental procedures and also reducing by reducing mental states and procedures to physicality; physical state and processes, it becomes unequivocal to give rise to a disjuncture (which is legitimate due to the unambiguity of the explanation given by Idealism and Materialism) that either these exist bodies or there exist minds but the existence of both is not clearly defined. To say, in a logical tone, that there exists the mind, and in another tone that there exists bodies would create no doubt and would be a perfect way to put it. But saying that there co-exists the mind and the bodies and that there is causal relationship between the two, this can be easily apprehended.

Descartes’ thought process can be said to be the origin of the category mistake. There can be found, in his thinking, two conflicting motives that: to explain how the mind works; but doing so without making a variety of the

mechanical in the mental. Ryle wrote in his book “ The differences between the physical and the mental were ... represented as differences inside the common framework of the categories of ‘ thing’, ‘ stuff’, ‘ attribute’, ‘ stage’, ‘ process’, ‘ change’, ‘cause’ and ‘ effect’. ... The repudiators of mechanism represented minds as extra centers of causal processes, rather like machines but also considerably different from them. Their theory was a para mechanical hypothesis. Minds are not bits of clockwork; they are just bits of not-clockwork.”

According to Gilbert Ryle, this perception contains three subsequent complications:

- The accountability of Freedom of the Will or most commonly known as Free Will
- The recognition of the dissimilarity between rational and irrational statements, and also between instinctive and purposive behavior.
- The correlation between mental powers and behavior.

The Cartesian Dualism gives no evidence on how to tackle such difficulties and in order to grapple these; an alternative concept needs to be created that comprehends the mind even more microscopically.

Conway’s criticism on Cartesian Dualism:

Conway has criticized the Cartesian Dualism in a total of six arguments, which are better known as the convertibility of matter and spirit. According to Conway, the matter and spirit are not two polar opposite entities; they are

but mere substances that can interchange in to each other. Material subsistence and change in to spiritual subsistence and vice versa. These modules of the mind and spirit not only give her theory but also simultaneously argue against the concepts of dualism as dualism denies any likelihood of convertibility. Conway's arguments are extensive and intricate and hence only the ones contrasting the concepts of Dualism will be explained henceforth.

In Conway's third argument against dualism, she debates that dualists are inconsistent. Dualists reason that there is absolute distinction between the body and soul but on the other hand they say that the body and soul must have certain qualities in common.

Furthermore, dualists are erratic because on one hand they strongly extricate the concepts of body and spirit, the permeable and the non-permeable, the divisible and the non-divisible, the protracted and the non-protracted, the locatable and non-locatable etc. yet they inculcate 'undualistic' concepts to explain the spiritual entity. As quoted by Conway, according to dualists, spirit can be traits as "extension, mobility and figurability" which are all traits of penetrable bodies. According to dualists, spirits are locatable in the view that spirits can be seen as residing in the same location that the body resides in, which gives it the ability to observe what happens inside and around the body itself. Spirits have mobility; they are able to move around. As Descartes himself explained, one can imagine himself to be in another place. Spirits have figurability in the sense that they have a physical figure, they have an appearance in the form of an aura or a ghost for example. By agreeing to this, the dualists agree that the spirit is

<https://assignbuster.com/mind-and-matter-study-of-cartesian-dualism-philosophy-essay/>

divisible, moveable and locatable and thus, Conway explains, that it should also be penetrable. This is to say that it must be sharing vital qualities of matter. Conway ponders over this colliding thoughts that the Dualists put forth, "...the Extension of Body and Spirit, as they [dualists] understand it, do wonderfully differ..."

In another argument, Conway says that when Descartes separates the notion of matter and spirit, consequently the notion of bodies that are dead or lifeless are spirit-less becomes highly plausible. Conway argues that if in principle, all substances can change form and become other things then the animate objects may come forth from inanimate ones, giving rise to the argument that one cannot divide reality into lifeless and spiritless matter on one side and non-material spirit on the other.

According to Descartes' studies, animate creatures are machines that move themselves but Conway contradicts this by saying that because this body is made up solely of matter, it is lifeless. This contradictory statement is put forth because for Descartes, the materials of which the animals' bodies are made up of do not contain anything spiritual.

For this argument of Conway's to signify that Descartes' theory of the body being "dead matter" it is vital to see it in the context of the Aristotelian discussion of Vitalism vs. Cartesian mechanism, this discussion dates back to the 17th century. The vitalists considered the soul to be the same as the form of the body, pursuing that body as the epicenter of vital functions of the body, which is to say the somatic, sensitive and cogent functions. However, the mechanists thought that all the vital functions of the body could

eventually be explained by the laws of physics which was considered to be the ultimate science of the quantifiable world. Descartes believed that the bodies of animals were machine-like substances and that their workings could be explained through mechanical laws. Similarly, the human body was also mechanical and hence could be explained so, with the only exception that it bore an eternal soul.

Conway does not completely negate the idea of mechanism as explained by Descartes, “ although it cannot be denied that Descartes taught many excellent and ingenious Things concerning the Mechanical part of Natural Operations, and how all Natural Motions proceed according to Rules and Laws Mechanical, even as indeed Nature herself, i. e. the Creature, hath an excellent Mechanical Skill and Wisdom in itself, (given it by God, who is the Fountain of all Wisdom).” However, she does go on to say that there is an alteration between mechanical motion (the workings of a clock) and of a vital motion (the movement of a living body or any human organ) and she signifies these arguments by saying that the vital is more sublime and transcendent than the mechanical.

The dualists believe that the body and spirit or soul has no qualities in common and hence according to Conway, they are unaccountable for the interaction and “ vital agreement” between these entities. This notion of “ dead matter” is what Conway believes to be ultimate error of the dualists.

Conway says that there might be logicians who would contradict her statements by asking about the relevance