

What makes me the individual i am philosophy essay



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It is a pretty logical explanation to suggest that humans have two potent elements that make them human: mental and brain states. Young suggested that mental states are the mind and brain states are the more basic functions of the brain, such as chemicals and neurons firing. Brain states are a more quantifiable element to study because they are observable for example in fMRI scans, compared to mental states which are not characteristically easy to find. Therefore this poses the question of who are we? Are we the brain, the mind or both? This is referred to as the mind body problem. There are many different explanations that have tried to comprehend this concept and this is what this essay will discuss along with references to reductionism, free will and determinism.

However firstly it is important to recognise the famous work of Rene Descartes (1596-1650). During the scientific revolution he coined his radical method of "I think therefore I am" (Young, 1996). This could be interpreted as meaning that Descartes' thinking was independent; meaning the mind and the brain are separate. The mind is immaterial and cannot be connected to the material body (Young, 2010). Even though this theory may have some theoretical understanding it does not explain the interaction between the two systems (Young, 2010). Although Descartes suggested that the Pineal Gland was the interaction point (Young, 2010). However, Young (2010) explains that this does not say how it interacts it merely says where. Thusly this does not give any more relevance to the mind body problem.

A more conceptual issue within psychology is the element of reductionism. Reductionism refers to the ability reduce a complex system to its basic elements (Young, 2010). This theory suggests that the mind acts in the same

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manner of the brain E. G. The feeling of love is just a chemical reaction.

Young (2010) suggests that reductionism is a viable explanation because if humans are made of the same products that applies to the laws of physics

then surely this analogy could be used to explain who we are. Consequently Sorem (2010) suggest that there is a simple explanation of this problem. He

suggests that the mind is just a neurophysiologic procedure. Although how can consciousness be explained via simple brain processes (McGin, 1989).

Nevertheless Sorem (2010) explains consciousness using Searle's biological naturalism. He states that consciousness is a feature that can be reduced

just too low level interactions of the brain. Therefore suggesting that the

brain is the mind. However, Kron (2012) states that if the brain and the mind are the same thing then surely because of evolution there should be the

potential of teleportation and this aspect is nowhere near completion. These theorists take a reductionist point of view by explaining an individual as just

a brain state and it fails in explaining certain issues, for example the physical condition of Blindsight. Cowey (2004) suggests that Blindsight is when

people are blind in some areas of their vision. This could be because of certain damage to the primary visual cortex (Cowey, 2004). However

Danckert & Goodale (2000) suggest that the patients do not lose the ability to respond to their visual field, as they can name what is in their visual field.

Even though they say they cannot see it. Therefore it could be suggested

that there are two different pathways for visual processing. One path way is conscious as the person cannot see the image and thusly could symbolize

the brain as it a physical deficit. The other pathway could be unconscious and may represent the mind. Therefore more must be going on within the

brain for there to be a supposedly unconscious pathway. This scientific

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approach towards psychology has obvious benefits such as: it is quantifiable; it looks for falsifiability and it has high reliability. However as the nature of science is to reduce an action to a neural level (Young, 2010) it excludes other major questions that cannot be explained.

One of the major questions that science misses is the element of context, for example Young (2010) suggested that there is not much difference between a squiggle and a signature if a neuroscientific analogy is taken as this deep differentiation cannot be explained via low level processes. Also it does not explain how humans distinguish the difference in intention, E. G.

manslaughter and murder (Young, 2010). It can be considered that a creative personality is what makes a person (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). If a reductionist perspective of brain states is taken to explain personality, and then this experiences more problems. There has to a more in depth explanation to why a person acts in a certain manner than just neurons and chemicals. Therefore, there is another theory that explains how the mind helps in behaviour and consequently personality. As Skinner (1984) states that a person is a go-between among the environment and action. When desired actions are conducted they are reinforced and therefore this leads to a personality. Although again this is a reductionist perspective as it states that a person is nothing but a stimulus. However it does explain mind relating aspects that can explain behaviour better than the brain. However Seligman (1970) suggested that inherited elements from parents is a highly strong influencer and needs to be considered. Therefore, does a reductionist theory really help the understanding “ what makes me the individual I am” if it has so many discrepancies and entities that they cannot explain.

As a result, another conceptual issue relating to psychology which may improve the explanation of “ what makes me the individual I am” is the concept of free will. It can be suggested that people are defined via their beliefs and desires, which cannot be explained by low level neurons (Young, 2010). This element takes a folk psychological perspective as beliefs and desires are seen as the reasons of people’s action. This does have high face validity as it makes sense (Young, 2010). For example, the participant wants to leave the study because they are not happy with the questioning. They have chosen to leave, they have free will. Also Brysbaert et al (2009) found that people define themselves in terms of their feelings, experiences and beliefs not neuronal function. Therefore there must be another entity along with the brain. Theses theorists are the anti reductionists. The idea of free will is potent within humans as they have the choice of whom to act; what degree of intention they want to have and what goals they want to achieve (Brysbaert et al, 2009). The element of free will relates to the notion of consciousness, and it may be the focal point of the mind and humans control it (Churchland, 1981). However, Libet (1985) found that using cognitive neuroscience that when the participant performed an act there was brain activity before the participant consciously thought of it. Morris (2009) believes that if neuroscience means anything, it gives a deeper understanding of people’s actions. This folk psychology is fundamental in reinforcing the concept of meaningfulness in behaviour (Young, 2010). However, not all aspects of life have free will. Sometimes people are determined to carry out an action, E. G. OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder). People with OCD are restricted to certain behaviour (Top, 1996), they have no free will. Therefore how much does the mind have control

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suggesting “ what makes me the individual I am?” if for example the right nucleus accumbens, which is a primary area for OCD, is removed the behaviours consequently reduce (Strum et al, 2003). Therefore free will does not better explain “ what makes me the individual I am” if the brain maybe has overarching control.

To conclude, this question may never come to a conclusion as other people will either state that it is the brain acting on the mind or the mind controlling the brain. Although these main conceptual issues within psychology have helped in the expansion of the mind body problem as they look deeper within the problem and attempt to give an explanation. The anti reductionist’s make a stronger argument for individuality; they accept the neural functions have grounding but they also recognise other more important aspects that an individual has. I agree with this perspective, as inherent elements are potent but my personal free choice is what ultimately made me who I am today. Therefore the main conclusion that can be drawn from this essay is that reductionist perspectives do not aid the understanding of “ what makes me the individual I am” as much as anti reductionism. However, without this reductionist perceptive there would not be anti reductionism. So possibly they are both needed.