

Mind or body philosophy paper

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Alexandra Williams Philosophy 1100 The Mind and/or Body Argument For thousands of years philosophers have acknowledged a boundary between our physical selves and our mental selves. However with the passing of time and the advancements of science whether we are governed by our minds or just our bodies has been debated more and more. There are a long line of ancient thinkers who contemplated the mind-body relationship issue starting with Plato and Aristotle (Waller, 2011). Without knowing what we are run by we can never truly reach our full potential because we may be limited by our physical or mental selves.

The mind or body argument consists of arguments for the existence of only the mind, the body, and a combination of the two. Many philosophers put faith in the idea that our bodies are separate entities than our minds. Because they are absolutely certain that we do think they feel they can be sure that we are our minds. Bodies just happen to be our anchors and we can surely live without them. Rene Descartes once stated “ I exist as a thinking thing. What then is it that I am? A thinking thing. What is a thinking thing?

Is it a thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, abstains from willing, that also can be aware of images and sensations? ... It is certain that I am truly distinct from my body, and I can exist without it. ” (Dr. Bob Zunjic, University of Rhode Island). The idea of our existence truly being only our minds we could very well leave our own bodies and without needing to feed our bodies or be weighed down by the frailty of them who knows how long we could live or how much we could learn?

While materialists believe that everything is made of matter Aristotle had an argument against this “ if the intellect were material then it could not receive all of the forms. If the intellect were a specific material organ (or part of one) then it would be restricted to receiving only certain kinds of information, as the eye is restricted to receiving visual data and the ear is restricted to receiving auditory data. Since the intellect is capable of receiving and reflecting on all forms of data, then it must not be a physical organ and, hence, it must be immaterial” (Waller, 2011).

While many philosophers believe that the mind is the ultimate power house others believe that the body is. For the last hundred years or so materialism has been the dominant theory in metaphysics. With the rapid advances of science the ideas that our existence is merely physical have been more prominent. Materialism or physicalism is the idea that everything that exists is no more extensive than its physical properties, meaning that there is nothing that exists that isn't tangible.

Because scientists have been able to explain things that many accounted to the work of a higher power before many have come to believe that existence is simpler to explain than it was previously. The idea of Ockham's razor is used to argue against arguments of the mind. Ockham's razor basically says that simple explanations are typically the best (Waller, 2011). Why try to argue that God made the planets orbit the earth with no proof when it is easier to say and prove that all planets revolve around the sun? Materialists believe that we can only be sure of the things that we can touch or see so there is only one substance in the world: matter.

Many people have an issue with materialism and the argument of body over mind however because it leads to moral issues. If the only things that exist are physical, things that we can see, touch, etc. then how can there be religion? We cannot see God therefore, in a materialist's opinion, he cannot exist. There are obviously philosophers that believe in both mind by itself or matter by itself, but there are those who believe in a combination of the two as well. While some philosophers choose to believe that either the mind or the body is superior to the other many philosophers believe that both mind and body are what we are made of.

According to Bertrand Russell “ the stuff of which the world of our experience is composed is, in my belief, neither mind nor matter, but something more primitive than either. Both mind and matter seem to be composite, and the stuff of which they are compounded lies in a sense between the two, in a sense above them both, like a common ancestor. ” (The Analysis of Mind, 1921) To philosophers who believe this, beings are a combination of their physical and mental actions and abilities.

Rene Descartes is closely associated with the idea of dualism, which is the idea that mental occurrences are non-physical and that the mind and the body are distinct. He associated the mind with consciousness and self-awareness and differentiated it from the physical brain of a person. Descartes is known as the first philosopher to note the difference between the mind and body. Dualists make their points with such examples as when they body is injured it causes pain to the mind and that at times, even when they body is hurt the mind postpones pain in the form of shock.

If the body or the mind simply existed by themselves then we wouldn't feel pain because it's a physical action with a mental response. You need both in the equation to get pain as the result. Dualism also has an advantage because it is consistent with our experiences. When we have ideas or feelings we don't think of them in concepts of size, weight, color, shaper, etc. We think of them in terms of good, bad, wise, immature, or otherwise. It also helps explain certain things like human abilities. Things like the ideas of freedom, morality, ethics, and other things that make us discernibly human.

Now on top of dualism, Descartes proposed a theory called interactionism, believing that the body and the mind had an actual point where one began and the other ended. He believed it to be where the pineal gland is because at the time they didn't know what it did. However with the explanation of the pineal gland's real purpose came the expulsion of interactionism (Waller, 2011). Also dualism came under skepticism because of it's tendency to be a more complex explanation of things than was needed. Metaphysical issues such as the mind or body dispute are one of the most debated subjects in the philosophical world.

So many great minds have been stumped by this issue. To label existence as purely physical means the dismissal of the idea of a higher power. To say that life is purely mental fails to explain how radically different realities interact, such as sensations like pain. Even the idea that both interact together can be challenged because there is no way to fully explain how the two connect and are translated into each other. Sadly this is a question unlikely to have a solution ever, or at least no time in the near future.

This can almost be frightening because until we have an answer to these inquiries we won't be able to truly know ourselves or the things around us. In agreement with Thomas Nagel " What is needed is something we do not have: a theory of conscious organisms as physical systems composed of chemical elements and occupying space, which also have an individual perspective on the world, and in some cases a capacity for self-awareness as well. In some way that we do not now understand, our minds as well as our bodies come into being when these materials are suitably combined and organized.

The strange truth seems to be that certain complex, biologically generated physical systems, of which each of us is an example, have rich non-physical properties. An integrated theory of reality must account for this, and I believe that if and when it arrives, probably not for centuries, it will alter our conception of the universe as radically as anything has to date. "(The View From Nowhere, 1989). Works Cited Nagel, Thomas. The View From Nowhere. N. p. : n. p. , 1989. Print. Waller, Bruce N. Consider Philosophy. N. p. : n. p. , n. d. , 2011. Print. Zunjic, Bob. University of Rhode Island. N. p. , n. d. Web. 24 Apr. 2012.