

Philosophy of Mind

PHIL 255

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The Traditional View: Dualism

- A healthy body is a guest chamber for the soul: a sick body is a prison. (Francis Bacon)
- We are bound to our bodies like an oyster is to its shell (Plato)
- John Brown's body lies a mould'ring in the grave, His soul goes marching on (Thomas Brigham Bishop)
- One who sees the Supersoul accompanying the individual soul in all bodies and who understands that neither the soul nor the Supersoul is ever destroyed, actually sees. (Bhagavad Gita - Hindu religious text)



Parallelism



Interactionism



Epiphenomenalism



Pre-established Harmony



Occasionalism



Materialism (Idealism)

- Parallelism: Minds and bodies are very different substances. The essence of minds is thinking. The essence of bodies is extension. These may or may not interact in various ways. Including...
- Interactionism (Descartes): Minds and bodies are independent substances, which influence one another causally.
- Epiphenomenalism (T.H. Huxley): Psychological states exist, but have no causal powers. They can only be caused -- hence they are epi- (besides) phenomena (observable events or facts).
- Pre-established Harmony (Leibniz): This is an explanation for parallelism in which God has set up the parallel histories.
- Occasionalism (Malebranche): Moment to moment mental life is caused directly by God, who ensures that that life is in correspondence with what happens to the body.

Modern Day Dualism

- Most modern philosophers and scientists are (working) materialists.
- However, dualism of other kinds are still around, e.g.:
 - function/structure
 - subjective/objective
 - low-level/high-level descriptive dualism

Monism

- Ancient Greeks: Democritus, Epicurus, and arguably Aristotle: “We must no more ask whether the soul and body are one than ask whether the wax and the figure impressed on it are one.”
- By 16th and 17th century there were three distinct views:
- Materialism (Hobbes): The denial of idealism. All that exists is matter, or physical-stuff.
- Idealism (Berkeley): The denial of materialism. Idealists claims that all that exists is mind-stuff. That is, experience, or simply minds themselves.
- Double aspect theory (Spinoza): Mind and body are two aspects of one underlying thing (‘God’).

Materialism

- Hobbes one of the first moderns to adopt this ontological position.
- As simple, straightforward and uncontroversial as this answer may seem, it is anything but.
- Science is methodologically materialist. But what of minds, souls, spirit and varieties consciousness/mental phenomena?
- When materialists try to answer questions regarding such mental phenomena, they are often said to be 'naturalizing' the phenomena (i.e. fit it into the 'natural order').

- Hobbes was not the first materialist. Democritus and Leucippus, the ancient Greek atomists, preceded him.
- Hobbes, however, had a more modern view so he is a good historically representative materialist.
- Hobbes was convinced that we are complicated machines: like (but also unlike) Data from The Starship Enterprise.
- What is it about certain complicated machines (us) that distinguish them from other complicated machines (computers)?
- And, what about responsibility? The materialist thinks we can give good neurophysiological descriptions. Don't forget, we can explain almost all the behavior of some organisms in this way, why not us? For many, this is a troubling idea. Why?

- The most hotly debated objection to the materialist position is the consciousness objection (formulated convincingly by Thomas Nagel in his article "What it is like to be a bat") - recently dubbed the 'hard problem'.
- Of course, those who adopt this position must provide an alternative explanation of consciousness - we start as a zygote, when is consciousness infused? Is it always there? Why are some things conscious and not others? How do you argue against Hobbes without resorting to dogma?
- More problems: Is there anything true of me that is not true of my body and vice versa? E.g. Is my body responsible? Can physical objects be the subjects of moral predicates? Are bodies intentional (i.e. have beliefs, desires, wishes)?

Question du jour

- Name and distinguish two forms of parallelism