

Brain Report – Attachment II
Philosophical views of Mind and Body
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Before Thales, explanations of the universe were mythological, and his concentration on the basic physical substance of the world marks the birth of scientific thought.

Socrates taught that every person has full knowledge of ultimate truth contained within the soul and needs only to be spurred to conscious reflection in order to become aware of it.

The extent to which Aristotelian thought has become a component of civilization can hardly be overestimated. To begin, there are certain words that have become indispensable for the articulate communication of thoughts, experiences, and problems. Some words still carry their Greek form, whereas others have become established in their more important meanings as Latin equivalents of Aristotle's own words.

Thomas Aquinas adhered to the Aristotelian philosophical views and developed a theological system, the mind form of the body. Although for Aristotle, the form of an object is inseparable from the matter of which it is made, the Thomists (Aquinas' followers) held that the human soul is a "substantial form" that is miraculously able to exist independently of matter and thus to survive the death of the body.

Because the mind is material, it is capable of causing bodily motions in response to sensory stimuli; and because ideas are material, they can resemble, and thus represent, material bodies.

Descartes has made the following contributions to the philosophy of mind: One of the first to abandon scholastic Aristotelianism, because he formulated the first modern version of mind-body dualism from which stems the mind-body problem, and because he promoted the development of a new science grounded in observation and experiment, he has been called the father of modern philosophy.

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Descartes developed a theory of mind as an immaterial, non-extended substance that engages in various activities such as rational thought, imagining, feeling, and willing. Most Cartesians believe that the mind and body interact. Human beings experience the interaction, and God can and does make it take place, even if we cannot understand how. God can make ideas represent material bodies without resembling them; no further explanation is necessary. In both of these replies, the Cartesians can be seen to abdicate philosophy for mysticism and theology.

Descartes, by contrast, contended that the notion of substantial form is contradictory, because it assumes the separate existence of something that by definition can exist only in unity with matter. For Cartesians, the mind or soul is a substance existing in itself, independently of matter; thus, they were able to explain immortality without having to rely on the dubious assumption that the soul-form is a kind of substance. This view, however, creates a serious problem concerning the ultimate nature of human beings.

Pineal gland: He concluded that the pineal was the seat of the soul. A corollary notion was that calcification of the pineal caused psychiatric disease, a concept that provided support for those who considered psychotic behavior to be rampant. Modern examination techniques have revealed that all pineal glands become more or less calcified.

Descartes' apparent knowledge based on authority is set aside, because even experts are sometimes wrong. His beliefs from sensory experience are declared untrustworthy, because such experience is sometimes misleading, as when a square tower appears round from a distance.

Descartes also described the circulation of the blood but came to the erroneous conclusion that heat in the heart expands the blood, causing its expulsion into the veins. Descartes argues that all ideas that are as "clear and distinct" as the cogito must be true. If they were not, the cogito also, as a member of the class of clear and distinct ideas, could be doubted. Since "I think I am" cannot be doubted, all clear and distinct ideas must be true.

According to Descartes, dismissed apparent knowledge derived from authority, the senses, and reason and erected new epistemic foundations on the basis of the intuition that, when he is thinking, he exists. This he expressed in the dictum "I think, therefore I am."

Descartes distinguishes radically between mind, the essence of which is thinking, and matter, the essence of which is extension in three dimensions. Descartes implied that mind and body not only differ in meaning but refer to different kinds of entities.

Matter, or extended substance, conforms to the laws of physics in mechanistic fashion, with the important exception of the human body, which Descartes believed is causally affected by the human mind and which causally produces certain mental events.

Among the difficulties of dualism is the inherent obscurity in conceiving of what sort of thing a mental substance—an immaterial, thinking "stuff"—might be. Such criticisms have led some thinkers to abandon dualism in favor of various monistic theories. On the basis of clear and distinct innate ideas, Descartes then establishes that each mind is a mental substance and each body a part of one material substance. The mind or soul is immortal, because it is un-extended and cannot be broken into parts, as can extend bodies.

Although the seat of consciousness is universally accepted to be the central nervous system, and in particular the brain, it seems impossible that a material object like the brain could give rise to the mental experiences that human beings have when they are said to be conscious.

According to Cartesians, sensible ideas arise from the union of mind and body for the sole purpose of preserving the body by presenting harmful things as painful and beneficial things as pleasurable. Human beings learn by experience what to seek and to avoid, and the memory of these experiences is preserved in the brain.

Once the body dies, however, both the need for sensible ideas and their memory traces in the brain are destroyed. All the soul knows of matter after death is the general idea of extension. Because all bodily associations and memories are eliminated, however, individual personality is lost. Each human being survives death only as an impersonal soul, identical to all other bodiless souls. Like the notion that animals are mere machines, the Cartesian conclusion that the sensible manifestations of this life are neither continued nor remembered in the next was unpopular.

Contributions by Other Philosophers:

Descartes was correctly accused of holding the view of Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609), an anti-Calvinist Dutch theologian that salvation depends on free will and good works rather than on grace. By contrast, the English materialist philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) did away with mind as a mental substance by asserting that only matter exists. For Hobbes, the mind is the same as the brain, and thoughts or ideas consist of nothing more than motions of brain matter.

Nevertheless, against this claim it is still possible to raise the skeptical objection that, because mental and material substances are radically distinct, and because all ideas are mental, no idea, not even an idea of a primary property, can resemble a material object.

Pascal (1623-1662) trembled when he looked into the infinite universe and perceived the puniness and misery of man. Descartes exulted in the power of human reason to understand the cosmos and to promote happiness, and he rejected the view that human beings are essentially miserable and sinful.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) also gave a parallelistic answer to the problem of mind-body interaction. Each monad reflects, or perceives, the entire universe from its own point of view. Leibniz saw mind and body as two perfectly correlated series, synchronized like two clocks at their origin by God in a pre-established harmony. Leibniz also gave a parallelistic answer to the problem of mind-body interaction. Each monad reflects, or perceives, the entire universe from its own point of view.

Another response, also heroic, is that of the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–76), who accepted skeptical conclusions and contented himself with attempting to explain the psychological origins of our unjustifiable belief in an external world, in the continuity of past and future, and in an enduring “self” that is the unchanging subject of mental experience.

George Berkeley (1685-1753) managed to avoid the problem of mind-body interaction by taking the extreme step of denying the existence of matter. Bodies, according to him, are only collections of sensible ideas that are presented to the human mind in lawful order by God. Because there is no material world, there is also no skeptical problem about whether ideas truly represent physical reality. Instead, all ideas are known directly.

Sartre also upheld the Cartesian position that the self is essentially conscious by rejecting the theory of the unconscious proposed by the Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). The German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1939) attempted to establish a science of sensible ideas, which he called phenomenology.

American philosopher John Searle, believed that consciousness, like digestion, is a biological phenomenon (albeit a very complex one) that can in principle be fully explained in scientific terms.

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) suggested that both mind and matter could be constructed out of what he called “neutral monads.”

Gilbert Ryle (1900-1976) dismisses the Cartesian view as the fallacy of “the ghost in the machine,” arguing that the mind—the ghost—is really just the intelligent behavior of the body.

Eccles and the Austrian-born British philosopher Karl Popper (1902–94) advocated a species of mind-matter dualism, though their tripartite division of reality into matter, mind, and ideas is perhaps more Platonic than Cartesian.

The Nobel Prize-winning Australian physiologist John C. Eccles (1903–97) and the British primatologist Wilfred E. Le Gross Clark (1895–1971) developed theories of the mind as a nonmaterial entity.

Daniel Dennett and Paul Churchland have made valiant attempts to develop strictly materialist accounts of consciousness, but their efforts so far have not been widely accepted.