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PATHWAYS TO PHILOSOPHY PROGRAM A - DIFFICULTIES OF THE
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The human brain is one of the most complex biological machines known to man. However, how does it relate to the mind? Are they one and the same? There are several schools of thought among philosophers as to what makes up the mind, the two notable ones are: The materialistic and the dualist views. In this essay, I will argue that there are certain difficulties with the materialistic view of the brain. The difficulties that I raise, will demonstrate that the mind may be a separate entity which is more in line with a dualist view of philosophy.

Before commencing with the discussion itself, several key terms require definition. The first is what is the mind? According to Merriam-Webster, the mind is the element or complex of elements in an individual that feels, perceives, thinks, wills, and especially reasons.¹ The mind is where thoughts take place and decisions are made. It is where the consciousness resides either as an independent or dependent element of the brain, either some ethereal form or simply a process of the brain. It is interesting to note that, the dictionary definition does not differentiate between the mind as being an independent or dependent element. Therefore, it must be within the purview of philosophers. Next, what is materialism? In materialism, the mind is said to be solely a chemical and electrical processes taking place within the brain. For the materialist, the mind does not exist outside of the brain—it is the brain. Therefore, for the materialists, consciousness depends upon the brain. Lastly, what is dualism? In the view of dualism, the mind and matter are two separate things.² For the dualist, the mind and brain may be separate things but, they work together to give us our personalities. They believe that the mind has two components to it: The thinking and analytical component dependent upon the brain and an

¹ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 09 March 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mind>

² Ted Honderich ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 221.

independent component which inspires and causes the brain to function as it does. It is in the independent element that the true self resides—consciousness.

For the materialist, the mind is analogous to a machine, specifically a computer. The brain functions are driven by and dependent upon an electrical-chemical process. This process depends upon the data inputted in the form of sensations received by the body such as sight, sound, smell, taste and feel. These inputs are received and analyzed by the brain and outputs are generated. These outputs end up as actions taken by the body, thoughts, and memories. In this view, there is no independent consciousness, merely the physical process of the brain. Unfortunately, this view does not appear to allow for the appreciation of what is perceived by the body and analyzed by the brain.

For the dualist, the mind and the brain exist as two separate entities both of which are dependent upon one another. The mind, as a separate entity, appears to drive the brain in its activities as they relate to the external world. The brain gathers the information regarding the external world through the body which uses its sensory detectors (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin) to gather data. The brain analyzes this information and then uses it to interact with the world. The mind however, takes the information from the brain and further analyzes it, making moral judgements, determining aesthetics, and then stimulating the brain to release electrical-chemical stimuli thus rewarding or punishing the body. The rewards are what give us joy, pleasure, satisfaction, contentment and so on whilst the punishments are the contrasting feelings of sadness, discomfort, dissatisfaction, unease, and so forth.

In the materialistic view, beauty seems to lack depth. It seems to be distilled into separate elements that are coldly analyzed against some fixed parameters that the brain determines that it needs to use as a guide in order to define what it is to be “beautiful”. This leaves no room for the appreciation of aesthetic value, that intangible value that seems to be defined by an individual’s consciousness found in the dualistic view. A materialistic view begs the question: What does this piece of art, scenery or perception mean?

In the dualist view, a camera takes a picture and a supercomputer “sees” the uploaded image. It then defines and gives a detailed description of what it sees. However, the supercomputer does not have a “feeling” for what this image means. In the same manner the brain analyzes what the eyes see. However, it may be the ethereal mind that puts the image into

perspective by defining what it means to the individual by activating the brain's electrical-chemical process thus giving the "feeling" for the object.

In a similar manner feelings such as joy and grief for the materialist are dependent upon the brain. At first glance this appears as a valid observation in that a person can enjoy the elation of endorphins, eliminate the grief of depression via medication, as well as medicating other feelings. However, is this always true? Consider this, although an individual taking medications for certain feelings mitigates certain feelings, is the underlying cause eliminated? Look at grief when someone dies. An individual will cry for the departed, wishing once again to be with him or her. At times that grief is unbearable and the individual is medicated. The medication balances out the chemicals within the brain and the individual will seem to be happier. However, are they truly happier? The happiness comes from the dulling of the senses. The medicated individual is still required to undergo some form of psychological therapy in order to address the underlying grief. This is more in line with the dualistic view.

The materialists also have a problem with identical twins. Consider that identical twins share the same DNA which, in theory, would mean that their brains should be the same in structure and form. Further, consider that identical twins are raised together thus sharing the same experiences thus forming synaptic connections that should be the same thus thinking and acting the same—having the same minds. Now, are the minds of the two the same? I would argue that they are not. Each thinks separately, forming his or her opinions and memories that are distinct from and unique to each one. For the materialists, the twins should be carbon copies of one another. They would have the same likes and dislikes but this is not always the case. There appears to be something beyond the physical in this case, a non-physical mind—a pure ethereal consciousness. This ethereal consciousness gives each twin his or her unique mind. This is more in line with the dualist view where both the brain and mind work together.

There is more to the mind than a process within the brain that is found in the materialistic view of the mind. There appears to be more of a duality. Not only does the physical brain exist, but there also exists a spark that goes beyond the electrical-chemical process within the physical brain. An intangible and almost ethereal entity that works in conjunction with the brain to live in and interact with the world. This is the dualistic view where, there is more to the mind than the just the physical brain functions found in the materialistic view of the mind.