

CONTRAST THE MAIN FEATURES OF INTERACTIONIST and EPIPHENOMENALIST VERSIONS OF MIND BODY DUALISM

Third essay for the course in Philosophy of Mind

For Dr Klempner

The nature of the relationship between mind and body seems to be causal. There is a two-way interaction. I step barefoot on a tack. Unless my foot is numb, I will feel a pain where the tack has entered. The tack is distinct from the sensation of pain caused by stepping on it. Stepping on the tack precedes the feeling of pain. Such things happen regularly and predictably. Is there something wrong about speaking this way?

It appears both that mental events cause physical events and that physical events cause mental events. My beliefs and desires, for example, which are mental states, cause me to act in certain ways. Similarly, what happens to my physical body often has an effect on how I think and feel. This common sense view is called interactionism.

Going in the other direction, imagine waiting for your partner/spouse at the station. The whistle of the approaching train makes your heart beat faster in anticipation. This would probably stop if an old (but dull friend) got off instead. Our thoughts, desires and feelings are regularly followed in time by changes in body chemistry and neural activities. We can learn to predict what effects having certain thoughts seem to have on our bodies.

The problem of mind-body interaction is a problem faced by adherents of substance dualism. If, as dualists claim, the mind and the body are two distinct substances, then the question arises as to how the two interact. Answering this difficult question is the problem.

From a common sense point of view, there is nothing wrong with talking about physical events causing mental events, or vice versa. Philosophically, however, the theory that mind and body interact is difficult to maintain. One reason may be that the problem arose in the context of Descartes' dualism.

His argument might be as follows:

- (1) Mind and a body are distinct substances.
- (2) I am a mind.
- (3) I have a body.
- (4) I experience the thoughts of my mind causing the movements of my body.
- (5) I experience the movements of my body causing the thoughts of my mind.

---> My mind and my body are distinct substances that causally interact.

But, it is hard to see how there can be any interaction between mind and body, since they do not share any properties. Descartes' own solution is hard to accept, since it requires entities called 'animal spirits' that somehow run messages from the mind to the body (and vice-versa) using the pineal gland.

So Descartes provides no convincing explanation how it is that a mind, an immaterial substance, not in space or time, can influence a body in this way, neither does he explain why it is that a mind can only affect one body (indeed, only one part of a body) and not any other body (or indeed, any other part of the body).

Why cannot the mind causally interact with other minds, but only with one body, whilst the body can causally interact with other bodies?

Expressed more formally, the objections to interactionism are as follows;

There is no "Causal Nexus" to allow mind and body to interact

The "Pairing Problem" Suppose there are two minds $M1$ and $M2$ which are qualitatively identical and the bodies $B1$ and $B2$ to which they are "attached", that is, the bodies with which they directly causally interact. Why are they paired with these bodies and no other?

The completeness of the physical. Why, say physicalists should we look for mental causes when physical causes can always be found ?

The principle of conservation of energy. Allowing interaction between the mental and the physical would breach this; if causation were from mental to physical then energy would increase, whilst causation from physical to mental would decrease it.

Can we solve the problem of mental – physical interaction by relaxing the requirement that mind be a separate kind of thing to body? There is one such modified version of dualism around, called property dualism. There are no different substances; however, mental properties do exist and cannot be reduced to the structural properties recognized by the physical sciences. If property dualism is correct, then a case can be made out for mental causation. However, it should be acknowledged that physicalists can attack property dualism by claiming that all mental properties "supervene" on the physical, and that any attempt to show mental causation can be interpreted as overdetermination.

If we are persuaded by the arguments of the physicalists for the closure of the physical world under causation, then we are left with only the position of epiphenomenalism to stand between us and complete mind – brain identity. According to epiphenomenalism, mental states like my pleasurable experiences in eating a chocolate cake—or, at any rate, their distinctive qualia—are just epiphenomena; they are side-effects or by-products of physical processes in the body. I, according to some interpretations of epiphenomenalism, might as well be a robot or a zombie. Conscious mental states do not affect my behavior. If I take a second bite of the cake, it is not caused by my pleasure from the first; If I say, "That was good, so I will take another bite", my speech is not caused by the preceding pleasure. The conscious experiences that accompanying brain processes are causally impotent. The

weakness of the epiphenomenalist position is that allowing the existence of purely mental processes whilst disallowing them any part in influencing our actions seems counterintuitive.

Does using the language of mind-body interactions require a commitment to a metaphysical dualism of substance between mind and body? Possibly not. When we speak of mind and body, we may not be thinking of two separate things. How, then, can there be mind-body interaction if mind and body are really one? It is misleading to speak of them interacting as if they were different things. However, it is difficult, if not impossible, to describe in any other way the ordinary cases of what we pre-reflectively call 'mind-body interactions'. Looking at how we experience the world, it seems that identity theories of mind and body make it harder to say what we want to about common appearances of mind body interactions. We find it useful to distinguish 'things' from 'consciousness of things'.

We should not feel embarrassed to speak loosely of mind-body interactions. On the contrary, it is for those who hold that mind-body interactions are either senseless or impossible, to explain why it appears that mind-body interactions seem to happen all the time,

Despite the criticisms, it may be possible to argue the case for some kind of property dualism, which would solve the embarrassing problem of having to argue for separate "substances", whilst allowing a strong presence for mental qualities, or "qualia". We also do not fully understand the process of causation, so that the participation of consciousness, in some way in the causal nexus, cannot be ruled out. However, if we are to seriously talk about mind and body, we must rely on something else, other than the intuitive common sense mention at the beginning of this essay. But what?

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