

What is the philosophical significance of the idea of disembodiment and/or the idea of a 'zombie'?

### Of Zombies and Mind

By using the word "zombie" in our philosophical argument we are not intentionally evoking the zombies of George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, but are instead engaging in a thought experiment whose foundations arise from an inquiry into the existence of the soul (mind) and its connection to the body. In our thought experiment the zombie represents the possibility of the existence of a body without a conscious state. Unlike Romero's zombie the philosophical zombie functions, in body at least, as a "normal" human would by appearing to make conscious decisions. The key difference here is that the zombie, in our thought experiment, would be an empty shell, a soulless automaton.

What is the significance of this philosophical zombie? Our zombie reacts as if it has conscious thought, but in reality it is a thoughtless being. We are engaging in speculative doubt, as opposed to real doubt, as a means of getting at the source of mind, which is synonymous with soul. Therefore the philosophical significance of the zombie lies in the desire of knowing the mind of others, in being able to identify the core, the "I" which may or may not live in the physical brain of another human being. We desire to know *where* the mind is.

What are the mechanisms by which the mind exists? Does the mind exist within the body (the brain) or as a nonphysical entity which, upon death, flies away from the body as a non-corporeal soul? Here we will consider two ways of thinking: materialist and Cartesian mind-body dualist. Materialists believe we experience consciousness and psychological phenomena because of a physical-chemical process centered on the brain. Contrarily, the Cartesian dualist's believe that we are essentially the same "inside" and that the mind and body exist separately; and in some cases that the brain is a conduit for the nonphysical mind to the body.

For the materialist much can be explained by the mechanisms of the body. We have various genetic differences yet our body's basic structure and function remain the same. There are evident differences on the outside of course (hair, eye and skin color) but internally we appear at first glance to be functionally the same. However, mutations, deformity or other malfunctions of the body or brain provide an additional filter, one which alters the mind's perception if not the outward appearance of mind to others. Physical and mental illness provide solid, empirical evidence as to these mind altering states, to such an extent that if there remained an unchangeable kernel of the mind it is difficult to perceive because of the mind's shell--the brain and body. Everything that we know of the mind comes through the body, making the body a prism through which we perceive the mind.

If we could identify a body, a zombie, which responds normally to outside stimuli, we would therefore seemingly have discovered a model that directly conflicts with the materialist's vision of the mind-body state. We might then have cause to believe that the mind, the kernel self, is a free floating, nonphysical entity functioning outside the body. A Cartesian would argue that the mind is disembodied and that the brain is a relay station between the mind and body. This would also, incidentally, marry with many religious beliefs.

As a thought experiment let us try to imagine a man going through his daily routine. He gets up in the morning, takes a shower, brushes his teeth, eats breakfast and steps out the door on his way to work. Suddenly, he finds himself stepping back inside his apartment having completed his day's work but having been consciously unaware the entire day. Any action he had taken that day occurred without his knowledge. Would we therefore suggest he go on vacation, admit him to a mental hospital or welcome him to the ranks of zombiedom? Is it otherwise possible that the man had a mental lapse? That his consciousness escaped from him upon setting foot outdoors? We could argue that losing consciousness is not an indicator of disembodiment. There are many examples of individuals functioning without being aware, or more precisely remembering, what they were doing. The evidence in favor of a materialist explanation is quite overwhelming once we look for examples within the sciences of neurology and psychology.

In summary, disembodiment and the thought experiment of the "zombie" is used as a means to conjecture on the whereabouts of the soul. The two main groups of thought are the materialists, who think the mind is a physical phenomenon, and the dualists, who see the mind as a nonphysical entity. Our speculative doubt is useful in testing our understanding of reality about the mind and body, but not entirely useful in the real world. There are times in which individuals appear "mindless," as if on "autopilot," but these situations are in reality rather different from the sort of mindlessness we imagine in our zombie. This is not the end of the argument, but merely the beginning.