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Coherence of Substance Dualism

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Abstract

Many contemporary philosophers of mind disagree with substance dualism, saying that despite the failure of physical theories of mind, substance dualism cannot be advocated, because it faces more serious problems than physical theories, lacking compatibility with philosophical arguments and scientific evidence. Regardless of the validity of the arguments in support of substance dualism, it is demonstrated in this article that this theory is coherent, with no philosophical or scientific problems. The main arguments of opponents of substance dualism are explained and criticized in this respect. Based on this, it becomes clear that the interaction of soul and body has a reasonable philosophical explanation, the problem of the pairing of soul and body, although it may not have a scientific explanation, it has a philosophical and theological solution, the principle of the physical causal closure lacks conclusive reasons and cannot reject the existence of the soul, the existence of the soul does not contradict the theory of evolution, the dependence of the soul on the brain is compatible with its independence, and finally, the principle of simplicity does not make any problem for accepting the substance dualism.

Keywords: Substance dualism; Soul, Mind, Philosophy of mind; The Interaction Problem.

Introduction

Substance dualism affirms that a human being is composed of two substances: the mental and the physical, and each one is interacting with the other. There are several contemporary philosophers asserting that the philosophical arguments affirm the theory of substance dualism. Though each of these philosophers may support a particular account of substance dualism, they all agree on the need for an immaterial soul distinct from the material body. Some of the leading figures supporting substance dualism in contemporary philosophy are Richard Swinburne (Swinburne 1997, 2013), William Hasker (Hasker 2018b, 2014), J. P. Morland (Moreland 2018), E. J. Lowe (Lowe 2018), Charles Taliaferro (Taliaferro 2018, 2014) and John Foster (Foster 2002).

However, most contemporary philosophers of mind oppose the theory of substance dualism, considering it a deficient theory involving several serious problems. Though these philosophers sometimes affirm the impotence of physical theories to solve some of the problems of the philosophy of mind, they consider substance dualism as a more problematic view surrounded by unresolvable difficulties.

I don't plan to discuss the justifications for substance dualism in this essay, nor am I trying to defend a specific interpretation of it. This article's goal is to address the most significant objections to substance dualism and demonstrate that this theory is a logical one with no philosophical flaws. The most significant issues that modern philosophers of mind have brought up against substance dualism will be outlined and then addressed in this paper in order to demonstrate its consistency.

1. The Interaction Problem

The interaction problem could be formulated in two ways:

A: It is impossible to have two utterly distinct substances, i.e., the body and the soul, interacting with each other.

B: Though the interaction between the body and the soul is possible, there is no experimental modal in the science accounting for it.

Both problems can be answered with the following explanations:

A: The first account is an ad hoc contention, lacking any strong argument. It is not conceptually impossible to assert the interaction between two distinct substances; nor has anyone yet provided any argument advocating the impossibility. Thus, it is a claim lacking any rational base.

Besides the lack of philosophical arguments, in terms of theology, theists believe that God interferes in the world and interacts with his creatures. God is immaterial, yet he has relations with his creatures. So, if God may interfere in the material objects of the world, why is it held that the soul cannot have such an interaction with the material body?! The main point here is not about the belief in God, but the issue is that, in terms of rational argument, no one can contend that this sort of interaction is impossible.

B: The second formulation of the objection concentrates on the lack of experimental models in science for the explanation of this interaction. There are two lines of replying to this objection:

The first way is the one expounded by the contemporary philosopher Richard Swinburne. He holds that it is obvious to almost everyone that brain events often cause sensations and desires, as our mental states can cause our bodily actions. Given that there is a very obvious causal relationship between mental and physical events, the lack of an explanation for these links does not even remotely support the idea that they don't exist. Given the reasons offered for the existence of the soul, it is obvious that humans do have souls, and as a result, they must have originated from the development of a fetus, which was in turn brought about by human sexual activity. Since ancient times, humans have been able to create new types of substances from older, very different types of substances, such as edible plants from seeds, without even the slightest reasonable explanation for how this works. Only with the development of chemistry in the early nineteenth century did anyone begin to have a plausible theory of how this happens; and even if no one had ever discovered the underlying chemistry, that would never have cast any doubt on the obvious fact that such things happen. But if we are justified in believing that brain events often cause pure mental events and that the development of a fetus causes the existence of a soul even though these are events of very different kinds, then it cannot be a good objection to the claim that pure mental events, understood as events in

souls, often cause brain events, that these are events of different kinds. (Swinburne 2018, 146-147).

The second approach, which is how I would solve the issue, is distinct from Swinburne's response. I would rather respond to the criticism by pointing out how inadequate science is for illuminating solely philosophical issues. The answer is that science shouldn't be expected to describe the connection between material and non-material substances. The problem is not that we don't know how two different substances could be connected. The objection presupposes that natural science can explain everything, but this assumption is deficient and flawed. There is a multitude of philosophical issues that can be accepted or rejected by mere philosophical reasoning. Most of the philosophical theories have not been derived from the experiment, even though they might be irrelevant to natural science and experiment. There are two sorts of explanations: natural and philosophical.

When researching the relationship between natural objects, it is naturally expected that the manner of the relationship between natural objects is explained in natural sciences, but when talking about the manner of the relationship between natural objects and immaterial ones, this issue is outside the scope of natural science, because the natural science can investigate the relationship between objects when both sides are natural and material, but when talking about the relationship between two different substances, one of which is immaterial, only philosophical explanation can be used. Because philosophy uses reason and is not limited to physical and biological laws, it can take into account the issues that are beyond the material object and then solve the problem. Therefore, if someone contends that no natural scientific explanation has yet been able to explain the interaction between the body and the soul, this contention could be affirmed, yet it does not make any problem for the substance dualism; the lack of natural explanation does not follow the lack of any explanation.

However, what is the philosophical explanation?

Different explanations may be given to this issue based on different philosophical schools. But here I use an explanation according to the view of Avicenna. He maintains that though a human being is an immaterial substance, he is connected and related to the body in his life. The relationship between the soul and body is such that the body serves as a vehicle for the soul's activity; as a result, the soul is reliant on the body for all of its activities and is unable to act independently. The body serves as the vehicle for the soul and is necessary for its activity. Consider a

carpenter who wishes to build something out of wood. He needs specific tools and equipment, just as the soul requires a body to carry out its functions. Accordingly, even though the spirit and the body are two entirely different substances, their relationship suggests that they do interact in some way and have an impact on one another (Avicenna 1996, 305).

However, it is possible to present other explanations based on other philosophical theories, but the important point is that the interaction between the soul and the body is not logically impossible, it has a philosophical explanation, and it does not need a scientific explanation based on experience.

2. The Pairing Problem

Jaegwon Kim has raised a difficulty for substance dualism called the "pairing problem". He asserts that we can explain the special relationship between a physical cause and effect by considering the location and the position they have. For instance, two guns, A and B, are simultaneously fired, and this results in the simultaneous death of two persons, Adam and Bob. What makes it the case that the firing of A caused Adam's death and the firing of B caused Bob's death, and not the other way around, is the direction of the gun. When the gun was directed at Adam he died, and when the gun was directed at Bob he died. The pairing relation between the cause and the effect in material objects is very clear. but here the problem arises: the soul has no spatial location and there is no physical explanation accounting for a particular soul to be paired with a particular body (Kim 2005, 78-80).

Richard Swinburne attempted to solve this problem by showing that the lack of knowledge concerning the relation between the soul and body does not make any problem, as we have no explanation of the number of material phenomena. He maintains that given that there is a law to the effect that the brains of human fetuses cause the existence of a soul, then that is the relation that determines to which soul a brain is related; it is related to whichever soul it originally caused to exist. But maybe no such law could determine which soul it was that a particular fetus's brain caused to exist. This is inevitable for both our subject and science. For instance, there could not be a scientific explanation of why the initial soup of matter energy produced by the Big Bang caused the existence of these particular electrons rather than any other ones. Science couldn't explain why some process caused the existence of this electron rather than that electron. If the lack of explanation in Bing

Bang makes no problem for science, the same could be held for the reason why a given soul was which a particular fetus's brain caused to exist (Swinburne 2018, 148-149).

The main point that Swinburne emphasizes is that if we do not know the reason why the body is paired with a certain body, there should be no problem because we also do not know the reason for their pairing in a number of the phenomena of the natural world. However, as it was asserted in the previous discussion, there is no need to compare natural phenomena with supernatural events; even if natural sciences can explain the reason why all natural phenomena are paired together, their scope is limited to natural phenomena; to explain the relationship between a natural and unnatural phenomenon, it is necessary to use a rational explanation, either philosophical or theological, that is beyond the laws of physics.

Given the theological framework, God can pair each soul with a particular body. The pairing of cause and effect does not necessarily need a spatial location. There is no logical incoherence in the pairing of the soul and the body; since it is a contingent action, the omnipotent God can simply interfere and pair them. God determines which soul joins to a given body and interacts with it.

In philosophy, various schools and theories can provide several answers to this problem. One way is to say that the special essence and properties inherent in each soul require that they be paired with a particular body and interact with it. Though the soul is immaterial, it has a special being and properties of its own. Thus, each soul is distinct from another one in terms of the particular being and properties it has, and if so, the particular being and properties of each soul would require to be connected to a special body.

In the Islamic world, there are two views about the creation of the soul:

A: Theologians in Islam hold that God made souls before physical bodies. Every soul was originally made by God for a particular body. As a result, the soul's pairing with a particular body is necessary because God has prior awareness of it from eternity and created it with the intention of pairing it with a particular body in the future (al-Saduq 1993, 47).

B: From the point of view of some Muslim philosophers like Mulla Sadra, when the body reaches a certain stage of perfection, the body is a preparatory cause for the

creation of a special soul related to it. Each body, as a preparatory cause, affects in the creation of its soul based on its perfection (Sadra 1981, 8, 333-334). This view is similar to the theory of dualistic emergence (Hasker 2018a, 65).

It does not matter, here, which of these two positions, or any other one, can be accepted. The main point is that according to each of these explanations, it is possible to suggest a philosophical or theological explanatory model for the interaction, and there is no explanatory gap in question.

3. The Contradiction with the Principle of the Physical Causal Closure

It is claimed that there is a physical principle all physicists would grant, namely "the causal closure of the physical domain". Roughly, it says this: any physical event that has a cause at time t has a physical cause at t . This is the assumption of all physicists that if we trace the causal ancestry of a physical event, we need never go outside the physical domain. If one denies this assumption, there can in principle be no complete and self-sufficient physical theory of the physical domain. But substance dualism presupposes two substances "the mental" and "the physical" both have casual relations with each other. This is against the principle of causal closure. (Kim 1993, 280).

In response to this objection, a distinction should be made between the following two propositions:

A: Physicists deal only with the physical causes.

B: physical effects have only physical causes.

The first claim is a tenet of physics. A physicist naturally works with physical causes and effects; he is unconcerned with non-physical causes. Although he has no relevance to non-physical causes in the realm of physics, being unimportant does not require him to necessarily reject them.

The second principal, however, is an arbitrary metaphysical assertion devoid of any supporting data. Physical laws can be used to describe how certain things happen physically; however, immaterial objects are not governed by physical laws. A physicist can discuss the physical laws governing tangible things, but they cannot assert a metaphysical claim that restricts the causation to tangible causes. The

principle of physical causal closure is never the presumption of physics, but the presumption of physics is only that it does not deal with non-physical causes, although it cannot deny or accept them. Therefore, the principle of causal closure seems a metaphysical principle having no evidence since physics cannot accept or reject any cause beyond physical objects.

One of the clear examples of the causation of non-physical causes on physical objects is the influence of God in the world. God is not a material entity, yet affects all objects indirectly or directly (through miracles). Correspondingly, it is never impossible that a soul, as an immaterial substance, affects the material body. Thus, the principle of physical causal closure is an arbitrary and unfounded claim.

Considering the effect of the soul on the brain, two partial causes affect a physical action. In the first stage, the immaterial soul has an effect, and then the brain is effective as a material mediative in causing an action. This means that both physical and non-physical causes are effective in causing an effect. Kim criticizes this opinion, saying: "This surely is an absurd thing to say, and in any case, it violates the causal closure principle in that it regards the mental event as a necessary constituent of a full cause of a physical event" (Kim 1993, 280).

Kim's argument begs the question. He holds that partial causality of two physical and non-physical causes is absurd and violates the law of physical causal closure, but he provides no reason why the violation of physical causal closure is absurd, and what the arguments support this principle. Therefore, this objection is question-begging.

4. The Incompatibility with the Evolutionary Theory

It is alleged that according to the fossil record, comparative anatomy, and the biochemistry of proteins and nucleic acids, there is no longer any significant doubt about the evolution of the human being. The theory of evolution can explain what we need to explain for the origin and the evolution of the human body, but, it is claimed, there is no room to fit any non-physical substances or properties into our theoretical account of ourselves (Churchland 1999, 18).

Assuming the validity of the Darwinian theory of evolution, there are two lines of responses to this objection:

The first way is to appeal to the theory of "dualistic emergence" developed by William Hasker. This theory is utterly compatible with the theory of evolution. The basic idea of emergence is that, through evolution, when certain elements are assembled and related to each other in a certain way, something new can appear – something we would not have anticipated, merely based on some elements. Yet the new thing is not “added from the outside,”; rather, it appears as a natural consequence of the elements in their combination and relationship. This theory fits with an evolutionary account of the history of life on earth. Genetic changes which lead to a more highly developed brain lead in turn to the emergence of a more sophisticated mind, a mind which has a more accurate grasp of its environment and responds in ways that enhance survival and reproduction (Hasker 2018a, 65).

The soul is given to the body by God and joined to it when it evolves biologically to a unique level of complexity, which is the second way to explain the role of the soul in the process of evolution. The belief in the soul is therefore not incompatible with the theory of evolution, despite the fact that it cannot account for how the soul emerged.

After all, whether the theory of dualistic emergence or any other theory is accepted, the important point is that the existence of the soul is not incompatible with the theory of evolution.

5. The Neural Dependence of all Known Mental Phenomena

The objection called "the argument from the neural dependence of all known mental phenomena" is that the substance dualist attempts to draw a sharp distinction between the unique 'mental' capacities proper to the nonmaterial mind, and the merely mediative capacities of the brain. But if there is a distinct entity in which reasoning, emotion, and consciousness take place, and if that entity is dependent on the brain for nothing more than sensory experiences as input and volitional executions as output, then one would expect reason, emotion, and consciousness to be relatively invulnerable to direct control or pathology by manipulation or damage to the brain. But the exact opposite is true. Alcohol, narcotics, or senile degeneration of nerve tissue will impair, cripple, or even destroy one's capacity for rational thought. All of this makes perfect sense if reason, emotion, and consciousness are activities of the brain itself. But it makes very little sense if they are activities of something else entirely. (Churchland 1999, 20)

This is a weak case. Since the majority of the activities of the soul rely on the brain, and the brain serves as the required medium for the soul while it is joined to the body, according to substance dualism proponents, it is only reasonable to assume that any harm to the brain will render the soul inoperable. Take note of this illustration: If we use a telescope to view distant galaxies and stars, we are the viewer, not the telescope. However, any harm to the camera could make it impossible for us to observe. Similar to the brain, the soul serves as the seat of awareness, but any harm to the brain can impair the soul's ability to function.

One might ask that substance dualism considers the soul as the fundamental part of a human being and the center of thoughts and feelings. If so, how can the soul be dependent on the body? Is the belief in the fundamentality of the soul compatible with its dependence on the brain?

The response is that what the dualists insist on is that the soul needs the body when they are joined together and connected, but it is metaphysically possible for them to get disconnected and disjoined at death or any other time; thus, the soul is not necessarily dependent on the body and the brain. However, as long as this connection exists between the soul and the body, the soul cannot do some actions without the mediation of the body.

6. The Contradiction with the Principle of Simplicity

Two objections could be combined. The first one is the Explanatory Impotence of Dualism. The objection summarizes that "many explanatory resources are available to the neurosciences. We know that the brain exists and what it is made of. We know much of its microstructure: how the neurons are organized into systems and how distinct systems are connected, to the motor nerves going out to the muscles, and to the sensory nerves coming in from the sense organs. We know much of their microchemistry: how the nerve cells fire tiny electrochemical pulses along their various fibers, etc. now what the neuroscientist can tell us about the brain can be compared with what the dualist can tell about spiritual substance, and what he can do with those assumptions. The dualist cannot tell anything about the internal constitution of mind-stuff, of the nonmaterial elements that make it up, of the laws that govern their behavior, and of the mind's structural connections with the body. The dualist can do none of these things" (Churchland 1999, 18-19), thus it could be asserted that there is no need for to soul to explain mental states; no explanatory resources are available for the belief in the soul.

The second criticism is that the principle of simplicity is in conflict with it. According to the argument, it is a "principle of rational methodology that, if all other factors are equivalent, the simpler of two competing hypotheses should be favored. This rule is occasionally referred to as "Ockham's Razor" after the medieval philosopher William of Ockham, who first articulated it. It can also be stated as "Do not multiply entities beyond what is strictly necessary to explain the phenomena." The dualist postulates two types of matter and two classes of properties, as opposed to the materialist, who only postulates one kind of substance (physical matter) and one class of properties (physical properties). And to no explanatory advantage, charges the materialist. There is no doubt at all that physical matter exists, while the spiritual matter is a tenuous hypothesis that must be abandoned by the principle of simplicity". (Churchland 1999, 18).

The problem with the above objections is that the principle of simplicity could be used only when there is no need for an additional entity, but despite the arguments showing the need for the soul, the principle of simplicity does not run. Therefore, if there were no argument establishing the existence of the soul, one could deny the existence of the soul in terms of the principle of simplicity, but there are a variety of arguments advanced to establish its existence. These arguments show that though neuroscience can explain the mysteries of the material brain, some significant issues could never be explained by neurosciences, like personal identity and free will. The matter is the essential impotence of the neurosciences, and the power of substance dualism, to explain these facts.

Since the subject of this article is not to address the arguments for substance dualism, no further explanation is given about these reasons. But the explanations that have been presented now can show the significant point that if arguments in favor of substance dualism are successful, the principle of simplicity can no longer be raised. Likewise, assuming the validity of these arguments, there is a kind of essential impotence of the neurosciences in explaining facts such as free will and personal identity. This article does not deal with these arguments, but this extent of explanation is enough to show the coherence of the theory of substance dualism.

Conclusion

Despite the failure of the physicalist theories in explaining things like freedom of will, personal identity, and consciousness, there is a tendency among a large number

of philosophers of mind that substance dualism is not a solution to these problems, because it encounters deeper problems. However, the explanations presented in this article showed that substance dualism has sufficient coherence and is not incompatible with philosophical or scientific achievements. Therefore, the philosophers of mind must pay more attention to it, and more research and investigation be done on it, as a solution to the serious problems raised in the contemporary philosophy of mind.

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