

A New Look at the Mind-Body Problem: How the Evolution of Language Created the Mind-Body Problem

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WHAT IS THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM?

It was mainly during the second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries that the mind-body problem reached a fever pitch. With our current highly advanced technologies that are used to study the human brain, we began to believe we could understand the “mind.” However, over the last decade this belief has been questioned. The question, “What is mind?” cannot be scientifically answered because it is not a scientific question—it is a philosophical one. This monograph will attempt to explain how the evolution of language created the split between our objective and subjective experiences, leading to the mind-body problem.

Defined by Wikipedia (February 7, 2013), “The mind–body problem in philosophy examines the relationship between mind and matter, and in particular the relationship between consciousness and the brain.” The problem was famously addressed by René Descartes in the 17th century, resulting in Cartesian dualism, and by pre-Aristotelian philosophers, in Avicennian philosophy and in earlier Asian traditions. A variety of approaches have been proposed. Most are either dualist or monist. Dualism maintains a rigid distinction between the realms of mind and matter. Monism maintains that there is only one kind of stuff, and that mind and matter are both aspects of it.”¹

There is a fundamental difference between our objective experiences that are conveyed to us by our externally based perceptions such as seeing, hearing, touching and so on (body), versus internally based subjective experiences such as desire, hunger, fear, dreams, intuitions and the like (mind). The first involves our observations of objects, events, and actions in the external world, while the second involves our subjective experiences—the thoughts and feelings that arise within us. Some of us are aware that there are two sources of our experiences—the external world of objects and events, and our inner world of thoughts and feelings. Our perceptions are the basis for our objective experiences, while our sensations are the basis for our subjective experiences.² Table 1 outlines this basic distinction between mind and body.

To give a practical example of the difference between objective and subjective experience, let us say that you and I are looking at a single-family house perhaps twenty or so feet in front of us. We can both agree as to the colors of the house as well as the number of windows and doors it has. If we have a tape measure, we can also agree as to its physical dimensions as well as the size of the lot that it sits on.

¹ My reason for using Wikipedia was to obtain a recent consensus regarding the use of subjective words, expressions, and concepts, the definitions of which may vary greatly from one author to another.

² The word, “objective” is defined throughout this work “as not influenced by personal feelings or opinions in considering and representing facts.” and as “not dependent on the mind for existence; actual.” Conversely, the word, “subjective” is defined as, “Based on or influenced by personal feelings, tastes, or opinions:” And as dependent on the mind or on an individual’s perception for its existence.”

Body Our Objective Perceptions are the Basis of Our <i>Physical</i> Experiences	Mind Our Subjective Sensations are the Basis of Our <i>Mental</i> Experiences
Seeing	Feelings
Hearing	Thoughts
Touching	Memories
Smelling	Intuitions
Tasting	Dreams

Table 1
The Two Sources of Experience

These objective, physical attributes are both clear and obvious and about which there is likely to be little disagreement.

However, if someone were to ask us what our feelings—our subjective impressions of the house were—it is almost certain that we would have different responses. One of us might find the house appealing while the other might not like it at all. For one of us, the house might bring up positive memories from our past while it might be quite the opposite for the other. Although we would agree on the colors and number of windows and doors, it is likely that we would differ about how much we liked the colors or number of openings. So while we can readily agree on its physical attributes, our subjective impressions regarding these attributes are going to be viewed quite differently by each of us based on our personal likes and dislikes. Clearly, the house creates two quite different experiences—objective and subjective.

Accordingly, the basis of the mind-body problem is our experiencing the world in two distinct ways. First, our perception of the world leads us to believe that it is made up of real objects and events. Then, coexisting with these externally based experiences are thoughts, feelings, and other internal sensations that we also take to be real. In other words, our objective experiences seem to *feel* different from our subjective experiences, in that the latter seem to be more internally based and personal. Put a bit differently, our objective experiences appear to have their basis in the physical world, while our subjective thoughts and feelings appear to have their basis in our consciousness. That is, within our self, or what we call our “mind.”

Many people do not recognize the existence of the mind-body problem. This is because they have not given much thought to the difference between *the source* of their objective experiences versus their subjective ones. As a result, they take this difference for granted and do not see it as a philosophical problem. However, philosophers and some scientists do see this conundrum, which is based on the belief that mind represents or constitutes an internal, personal, subjective reality, while body represents or constitutes an external, physical, objective reality. But how can reality be both physical and objective as

evidence from the external world clearly indicates, as well as nonphysical and subjective as our self-awareness unquestionably demonstrates? The mind-body problem is the result of viewing consciousness as being *a different kind of reality* from material, physical existence. The difficulty of being able to see reality in any way other than split in this fashion seems inconceivable, thereby having made the mind-body problem seemingly impossible to resolve.

Our capacity for objective observation is the hallmark of science. However, the present idea of the mind or consciousness is clearly inconsistent with the picture of reality as conceived by science—namely, that the universe consists of nothing but physical objects and processes that physical laws can now or will ultimately explain. Science grew alongside our belief that our personal, subjective experiences could not be explained through science. This unnatural dichotomy or duality has remained a paradox of human existence for centuries. While the mind-body problem has been largely limited to the province of philosophers, psychologists, and neuroscientists, the attention that the origin and nature of consciousness has received in the popular press over the past several decades has made far more people aware of its importance. Hence, understanding the distinction between objective physical reality and subjective mental experience can have a considerable influence on how we see ourselves and the world.

HOW THE EVOLUTION OF LANGUAGE CREATED THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM

THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

To understand how the mind-body problem came into existence, we must go back several hundred years. It is well known that the 1600s was a time of rapid and profound development in the physical sciences, from astronomy to zoology. This period has been named the “Scientific Revolution” for good reason. The Scientific Revolution is defined by the rapidly increased developments in astronomy, physics, mathematics, biology, and chemistry. These advances greatly changed man’s view of nature and himself.

According to Wikipedia, (March 25, 2013) “the scientific revolution began in Europe towards the end of the Renaissance era and continued through the late 18th century, influencing the intellectual social movement known as the Enlightenment. While its dates are disputed, the publication in 1543 of Nicolaus Copernicus's *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres) and Andreas Vesalius's *De humani corporis fabrica* (On the Fabric of the Human body) is often cited as marking the beginning of the scientific revolution.

While existing religious and philosophical works focused on subjective states of mind, a rapidly growing literature on various scientific topics, fueled by Francis Bacon’s work in the early 1600s on the scientific method, marks the beginning of the Scientific Revolution. Bacon’s promulgation of empiricism and the inductive scientific method created an objective framework for studying the physical world. *Along with this development came a vast increase in the number of new words used to label, name, or represent, as well as and describe, define, or characterize the many observations and theories being made.* Newly developed methods of observation along with innovative measuring procedures and devices created a sudden increase in the number of new words used to name and define these methods, procedures and devices.

This incredibly powerful thrust of advances in science and mathematics in the seventeenth century is what forced the *linguistic* awareness or consciousness of subjective thoughts and feelings on the philosophers of that time—especially Descartes. Indeed, the focus on the use of careful observations,

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well thought-out experiments, mathematical analysis, inductive reasoning, and logical conclusions gave immense impetus to objective experiences. *In sharp contrast to this development was the simultaneously increasing linguistic awareness of philosophers' own subjective experiences. This increased focus on the external world that characterized the Scientific Revolution had the unintended effect of also calling attention to one's subjective thoughts and feelings. Hence, the subjective experiences which had been so inherent, so natural, unquestioned and invisible to humanity's thinking before the seventeenth century, now starting to become explicitly imposed upon our emerging linguistic awareness or consciousness.* The resulting explosion of language during the Scientific Revolution forced the most enlightened individuals to look at the world very differently. Not only did science, knowledge, and reason begin to replace religion, superstition, and myth, it made the thinkers of that time much more conscious of their own subjective experiences.

Wikipedia (March 25, 2013) notes that “(The Scientific Revolution) saw a fundamental transformation in (the) institutions supporting scientific investigation, and in the more widely held picture of the universe. The scientific revolution led to the establishment of several modern sciences. In 1984, Joseph Ben-David wrote: “Rapid accumulation of knowledge, which has characterized the development of science since the 17th century, had never occurred before that time. The new kind of scientific activity emerged only in a few countries of Western Europe, and it was restricted to that small area for about two hundred years.”

An example of how the Scientific Revolution was affecting the use of words was how metaphysics became redefined. Before this revolution, “scientific” matters were a part of metaphysics known as “natural philosophy.” It was only after the revolution was well under way that these matters began to be called “science” rather than philosophy. At this point, metaphysics was redefined as dealing mostly with philosophical issues.

RENÉ DESCARTES AND THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM

To understand the origin of the mind-body problem, we must first determine how we came to see reality as split between objective and subjective experience. The first indication that reality was seen as split in this way goes back to the time of Plato, where the soul or spirit was distinguished from the external world. This idea was not seriously updated and formalized as the mind-body problem until Descartes' writings more than fifteen centuries later. As we noted Table 1, reality is split between the two sources of our experiences; the many objects and events perceived in the external physical world, and the sensations emanating from within our body and brain. Although the difference between the source of our objective and subjective experiences is real, people did not always see things this way.

The egocentricity that was characteristic of early humans was manifested in their confusion between their outer and inner experiences. Such confusions were reflected in their frequently mistaking dreams for reality and words for actions. Their beliefs in totems as well as their superstitions and rituals attests to these confusions. What caused them? From the time of Plato, philosophers became increasingly aware that some experiences arose from the outside world and some from within themselves. René Descartes' statement, “I think, therefore I am,” brought this awareness to a head. Descartes' distinction between thinking and being was a result of his increased linguistic awareness which enabled him to view reality as split between what he perceived and what he sensed; between what he could see, hear, smell, taste, and touch versus what he could feel, imagine, decide, dream, and think—between his experiences of the world around him versus his experiences of the world within him.

So evident was Descartes' linguistic awareness of his subjective thoughts and feelings as being distinct from his experiences of the external world, that he made it an indisputable, central principle of his philosophy—namely, that the one thing he could be completely certain of was his capacity to doubt and, therefore, to think, and that his ability to do so was the basis for his very existence. However, he mistakenly attributed his capacity to think to God, since in his time he was incapable of finding a more logical, rational, or scientific explanation. While his considerable awareness enabled him to discern this apparent split in reality, he did not possess the level of linguistic awareness that would have enabled him to explain his subjective thoughts and feelings in more objective or mentalistic terms. As we will see, it was the evolution of language—our growing capacity to label and describe our experiences—that made this distinction between objective and subjective experience manifest.

As powerful as the Scientific Revolution was becoming, Descartes' use of God to explain his subjective experiences was not unusual. Although really important developments in science and mathematics started their trajectory in the 1600s, most of the philosophers and scientists of that time continued to believe in the existence of an all-powerful deity, which they used to explain the subjective experiences of which they were becoming increasingly conscious. As such, the many rapid developments in science and mathematics facilitated their linguistic awareness of their subjective experiences, thereby intensifying their need to explain this newly emerging form of consciousness. It was as though light from a powerful yet mysterious source illuminated what had always been there from the time of our primate ancestors—as invisible to them as it was for these philosophers. As a result, they sought to explain their subjective experiences by using the idea of God. Indeed, “Despite some challenges to religious views, however, many notable figures of the scientific revolution—including Nicolaus Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, Johannes Kepler, Galileo Galilei, Francis Bacon, René Descartes, Isaac Newton and Gottfried Leibniz—remained devout in their faith.” (Wikipedia, Scientific Revolution, March 25, 2013.)

Descartes was alive at the right time to unwittingly drive what turned out to be a seemingly unbridgeable gap between objective and subjective experience—a divide that was not only created by the evolution of language, but became increasingly reinforced by its continued development. Over the last several centuries, we have added tens of thousands of new words to label and describe all the external perceptions and internal sensations of which we were becoming aware. *This further delineated and exacerbated the distinction between our objective and subjective experiences, making this split ever more pronounced as time went on and frustrating our most profound attempts to resolve it.* It was no surprise that we reached the twenty-first century totally stymied by the mystery of subjective experience or consciousness and our inability to solve what is at the heart of the mind-body problem.

What formally began in the sixteenth century and with which we are now grappling in the twenty-first century, began with our ability to create words to represent our objective experiences as well as our subjective ones. To better understand how this split came about and begin to solve the mind-body problem, we must address how the evolution of language led to two main types of vocabularies—reflective and introspective.

USING LANGUAGE TO LABEL AND DESCRIBE OUR EXPERIENCES

The first and most basic step and the foundation of any symbolic language is to create labels, names or words for our experiences and, in so doing, describe, define, or characterize our experiences. Furthermore, by defining, describing, or characterizing a word we automatically give meaning to that word. This first step of labeling and describing our experiences is essential if we are to then explain and communicate our experiences. This capacity greatly expanded over time, enlarged our consciousness and fed our growing tendency to represent and define still more of our experiences. While these labels and

descriptions were recorded in dictionaries, the number of closely related words also greatly expanded and were recorded in thesauri. It makes no difference as to which theory of language one subscribes as the creation and use of symbols to name and describe our experiences is central and universal to all languages.

By using words, we can label and describe the objects, events and actions that make up our objective experiences. However, symbolic language does more; it enables us to represent and define our subjective experiences—our visual images and auditory sensations as well as our feelings and thoughts. Theoretically speaking, for every thing that we discover, invent or create—indeed, for every experience we have—we can generate a label, a word, or a symbol, along with its description. The more of our objective and subjective experiences we can label and describe, the greater is our linguistic awareness or consciousness. As a result, our understanding of the world and ourselves becomes far richer.

Furthermore, because human language is a system in which symbols *for* symbols are created—as evidenced by the existence of dictionaries and thesauri—we have evolved from simple awareness to complex consciousness. Our ability to invent words for words is a natural extension of our ability to use words as substitutes for the various objects, events, situations, thoughts and feelings and so on in both our external and internal environments. In addition, given that a significant part of our language consists of words that refer to or describe other words, this reflects the inextricable bond between thought and language. Clearly the range of experiences that can be represented through symbolic language make it the most sophisticated form of communication to be found in any species.

It is well known that language changes over time. The words used during a certain era reflect the reigning thoughts that were common during that period. This fact has been especially well illustrated by Owen Barfield in his book, *History in English Words*, where he discusses the origin of various words from different historical periods. Another way that language changes over time is in the growth of our vocabularies. Hence, the *Encyclopedia Americana* noted that our “vocabulary has grown from the 50,000 to 60,000 words in Old English to the tremendous number of entries — 650,000 to 750,000 — in an unabridged dictionary of today.” Furthermore, in *The Story of English*, Robert McCrum, William Cran and Robert MacNeil state that “The compendious *Oxford English Dictionary* lists about 500,000 words, and that a further half-million technical and scientific terms remain uncatalogued.” The beginning of this rapid increase took place during the Scientific Revolution and continued to gain momentum as time went on.

New words come into our language from other languages, from new scientific and technological advances, and from individuals who experience sensations that others may not have experienced or been able to label or describe. To create new words, we not only have to experience a particular perception or sensation to represent and define it, we must also be able to acknowledge it as unique or at least somewhat different from other labeled and defined experiences. Comprehensive dictionaries list all the experiences—perceptions and sensations—that people have had, acknowledged, and labeled.

When a new word is coined, what determines how widely used it will be depends on how many people can relate to the experience it describes. For example, one cannot readily relate to and, therefore, understand a technical term if one knows nothing about the subject or field in which it is normally used. The fact that most people’s vocabulary is limited to just a few thousand words out of hundreds of thousands demonstrates (among other things) that there is a limited consensus regarding many of the experiences that others have labeled and described.

Our capacity to label and define our external perceptions is reflected in our reflective vocabularies and resulting objective experiences. Words that we use to represent and describe our internal sensations are reflected in our introspective vocabularies and resulting subjective experiences. Hence, the evolution of language results in the creation of two generally distinct vocabularies—reflective

and introspective. Reflective vocabularies are made up of words used to label and describe events, objects, people, places, and things in the external world. Introspective vocabularies are made up of words used to represent and describe our thoughts, feelings, emotions, dreams, intuitions, and other sensations within us.

REFLECTIVE VOCABULARIES

The dictionary defines the word “reflection” as involving “serious thought or consideration,” but does not specify whether the serious thought or consideration refers to things in the external world or our inner world. As defined here, “reflection” refers to serious thought or consideration regarding the *external* world, while the word “introspection” refers to “the examination or observation of *one's own mental and emotional processes*.” These are our thoughts, feelings, intuitions and so on that make up our subjective experiences sensations.

Reflective vocabularies are built by labeling and describing the various external perceptions that create our objective experiences. Hence, the origin of our reflective vocabularies are our perceptions of what occurs outside of us and includes the objects, events, and actions as well as the relationships between these objects, events, and actions. Examples are words that label and describe the design and construction of homes, factories, ships, airplanes, vehicles, engines, electronic circuits, models of atomic particles and their interactions, or of chemical molecules and how they bond to other molecules, and so on. Other examples are words that relate to the movements carefully orchestrated by a skilled dancer or athlete, to a chess player who thinks of the various possible moves that he or she might make and what moves his or her opponent might make in response to them. Examples of words that label and describe our reflective experiences are *water, telescope, dance, X-ray, molecule, labor, theory, ceremony, table, share, and games.*

Reflective vocabularies also include words that examine, interpret, evaluate, and so on, in the physical world as well as the ideas, formulations, generalizations, and theories about what takes place there. Reflective vocabularies encompass *how* things work and are largely the basis for the advances in the physical sciences and technology. While the use of such vocabularies may result in very high levels of linguistic abstraction, their focus and orientation are confined to the external, physical world. Reflective vocabularies are clearly essential to technologically advanced societies. This is considerably less so for the introspective vocabularies to which we now turn.

INTROSPECTIVE VOCABULARIES

Introspection involves observing and thinking about our own thoughts, feelings, emotions, moods, and other internal sensations which do not arise directly from the external world. Wikipedia (October 19, 2010) defines introspection as “the self-observation and reporting of conscious inner thoughts, desires, and sensations. It can also be called contemplation of one's self. This is contrasted with extrospection, the observation of things external to one's self. Introspection may be used synonymously with and in a similar way to self-reflection.”

Introspective vocabularies are created by labeling and describing the various internal sensations that produce our subjective thoughts, feelings and other internally based experiences. It is through introspection that we come to understand our personal selves—our thoughts, feelings, and actions. To be able to do this requires the ability to accurately label and define our feelings, dreams, moods, desires, emotions, motivations, attitudes, and other internal sensations. (For example, a pain might be described as dull, sharp, intermittent, burning, pulling—all of which are labels that identify what we may be feeling.) Such vocabularies are the basis for literature, the arts, and humanities, as well as some areas of

philosophy and psychology. Examples of words that describe our introspective experiences are *doubt, regret, amazement, guilt, hope, shame, gratitude, envy, disappointment, anger, worry, confusion,* and *confidence*. Clearly, our introspective vocabularies provide deep and rich descriptions of our personal, subjective experiences.

REFLECTIVE AND INTROSPECTIVE VOCABULARIES COMPARED

As we previously discussed, we create words and symbols which represent, define, and describe the objects, events, and actions in the external world. However, it was not only the things in the external world that we labelled and described; over the centuries, we also became increasingly proficient at naming and describing our feelings, dreams, memories, thoughts, visualizations, and other subjective experiences. This means that language not only enables us to label and define the perceptions that make up our objective experiences, but the sensations that make up our subjective thoughts and feelings as well. Just as our growing scientific observations facilitated our reflective vocabularies, our growing awareness of our subjective sensations promoted our introspective vocabularies. This combination led to a considerable evolution in the linguistic awareness of both our objective and subjective experiences.

At this point, a few general observations about reflective versus introspective vocabularies need to be made. Since reflection deals with the external world and is about the practical matters on which our physical survival depends, it is more commonly used than introspection. As such, when we add all the things we discover in our natural environment together with everything we have invented and created, it is not surprising that our externally based experiences and reflective vocabularies greatly outnumber our internally based experiences and our introspective vocabularies. There are far more words used to name and define our external world than our inner one. This is demonstrated by the large number of specialized dictionaries developed by the physical sciences and technology as compared with the number that exist for the humanities. It is interesting that the word “nomenclature,” which means; “The devising or choosing of names for things, esp. in a science or other discipline,” came into being in the early seventeenth century.

The rapid evolution of our reflective vocabularies and thought in the seventeenth century led to an increased growth of our introspective vocabularies during the eighteenth century, resulting in the subsequent focus on the humanities and the development of the social sciences. As we will see, this evolutionary unfolding of greatly increased introspective thought and interest coming on the heels of the Scientific Revolution supports the present thesis.

In this regard, it should be noted that according to Wikipedia (April 14, 2013), “The Scientific Revolution is closely tied to the Enlightenment, as its discoveries overturned many traditional concepts and introduced new perspectives on nature and man's place within it. The Enlightenment (Age of Reason) flourished until about 1790–1800, after which the emphasis on reason gave way to Romanticism's (Age of Reflection) emphasis on emotion, and a Counter-Enlightenment gained force.[3].”³

It is well known that the Enlightenment of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries heralded a whole new way of looking at the world and ourselves. It represented a major shift in the intellectual and emotional evolution of those individuals who came to understand the new reality that this powerful distinction conveyed. Furthermore, this distinction between reflective and introspective language and

³ Casey, Christopher (October 30, 2008) “Grecian Grandeurs and the Rude Wasting of Old Time”: Britain, the Elgin Marbles, and Post-Revolutionary Hellenism.” Foundations. Volume III, Number 1. Retrieved 2009-06-25.

thought is reminiscent of C.P. Snow's essay, "The Two Cultures," in which he discussed the breakdown in communication between the two cultures of modern society—science and the humanities—and the inability of their practitioners to communicate with each other.

In summary, reflective vocabularies name and describe our objective experiences, while introspective vocabularies name and describe our subjective experiences. Hence, the distinction between these two vocabularies is based on our ability to create labels and descriptions for our external perceptions and internal sensations, respectively. *In other words, our perceptions led to our reflective vocabularies and objective experiences, while our sensations led to our introspective vocabularies and subjective experiences.* This process turned relatively simple awareness into complex linguistic awareness or consciousness.

It was only when our vocabularies reached a certain level of inclusiveness, diversity, complexity, range, and depth as happened during the Scientific Revolution beginning in the 1600s, that the split between our objective and subjective experiences became manifest. This created the idea that reality has two faces—the physical and the mental—and forced the mind-body problem into existence. In other words, as both our vocabularies grew, it was inevitable that we would eventually come to realize that our experiences were arising from two different sources. Let us examine this phenomenon.

HOW LANGUAGE IMPELLED US TO SEE REALITY AS SPLIT

We began this essay with the distinction between our objective experiences which are based on our perceptions of the external world versus our subjective experiences based on the sensations within us. However, this difference is, in practice, not as clearcut as I have portrayed. The reality is that our perceptions often become confounded with our sensations causing us to become uncertain about whether the source of something we experience is external or internal. In other words, is it occurring *to us* or *in us*?

The point here is that since perceptions and sensations exist on the same physical-biological continuum, we cannot always determine just where perception ends and sensation begins. This makes it difficult to distinguish between what is happening *to us* versus what is happening *within us*. While the basis of our objective experiences are what takes place in the external world, and the basis of our subjective experiences are our neurobiological sensations, both are represented within our brain. This explains why some external events are experienced as personal and subjective, while some internal sensations are projected outward.

Because our perceptions of the external world are turned into the sensations of internal, personal experience, it is often impossible to say where the environment ends and the where the self begins. *In other words, we cannot always determine the source of many of our experiences.* The inability to make this distinction is especially common among young children who are often confused between their perceptions of the external world versus the sensations of their inner world. It is also unlikely that our early ancestors were able to readily make this distinction. What made later generations aware of this distinction was the natural development of language. Hence, this early lack of linguistic awareness could only be overcome by our growing use of symbolic language. *It was our evolving vocabularies that created a heightened awareness between our objective and subjective experiences. Without language there is an immutable constraint on our ability to unravel ourselves from our physical and social environments.* Clearly, the greater our linguistic ability to distinguish between the *source* of our objective versus our subjective experiences, the more likely we are to distinguish between what is happening *to us* versus what is happening *in us*. In other words, our capacity to name and define our external perceptions creates our objective experiences while our capacity to do the same with our internal

sensations creates our subjective experiences. This amplifies the distinction between what happens *to* versus *in* us, making us linguistically aware of these two sources of our experiences.

This increasing ability led to the growth of our reflective and introspective vocabularies which in turn facilitated our linguistic awareness that the source of some of our experiences were external while others were internal. Hence, the evolution language was the key factor enabling us to distinguish between our external and internal experiences—between what happens *to* us versus *in* us. As common sense would tell us, our capacity to make this distinction varies from one person to another and is based on the diversity and depth of each person’s reflective and introspective vocabularies.

Because our objective experiences are based on our perceptions from the external world, their source is much more visible than that of our subjective experiences. In other words, since our subjective experiences are internally based neurobiological events, their source is largely invisible and, therefore, regarded as mysterious. Hence, it is easy to place them on a pedestal as phenomenologists have done and regard them as scientifically impossible to explain. However, the reason that the source of our subjective thoughts and feelings has been invisible is because we did not possess the reflective and introspective vocabularies that would eventually enable us to clarify and objectify these experiences, let alone expand on them. The fact that we can now make this distinction is due to our ability to label and describe both types of experience, thereby becoming conscious that their source is different.

Language enabled us to determine—often with great accuracy—the difference between our external perceptions and internal sensations and to express our awareness of this distinction, resulting in the objective versus the subjective. In other words, the growth of language allowed us to increasingly see our subjective experiences from an objective perspective. This enabled us to question the *source* and *nature* of our subjective experiences—something that previously had been impossible. As a consequence, knowledge in the 1600s began to split into two spheres—science and technology versus religion and philosophy. This forced us to see the world in dichotomous terms, thereby making the mind-body problem inevitable. *In other words, the significant increase in our awareness about the source of our experiences created the dichotomy between mind and body.* Hence, it was the evolution of language that eventually gave us this perspective. Only through our capacity to label and describe our objective and subjective experiences could we then become linguistically aware of these two types of experience and of the intellectual dichotomy and resulting quagmire it created.

It was, therefore, our evolving creation and use of language that created the gap between our objective and subjective experiences. As our exploration, knowledge, and understanding of the world and ourselves increased, so did this divide. Ironically, the more conscious we became of the external world, the more conscious we became of our inner world. This resulted in confusion about which was more real—the external world of objects and events—or the internal world of feelings and thoughts. However, regardless of how it appears through our language-based eyes, there cannot be a natural dichotomy between physical and mental events since both exist on the same physical continuum. *In other words, the distinction between what happens to us (objective reality) versus what happens in us (subjective reality) is a distinction created by the natural development of language.* As this distinction became increasingly apparent, it widened the divide between the world and ourselves to such an extent that we inadvertently found ourselves—at least when we thought about it—living in what seemed to be two separate realities.

As our introspective vocabulary grew, many previously unlabeled subjective sensations came to the surface and became labeled and described. While this contributed to the qualitatively rich distinction between our objective and subjective experiences, this dichotomy also created an inevitable rift in our picture of reality. Before this, any *significant* linguistic awareness of our subjective experiences was unimaginable. The ideas of physical versus mental, external versus internal, and objective versus subjective, were alien to the people of earlier cultures who did not possess such extensive and

comprehensive vocabularies. *However, the downside of our expanding vocabularies was that the more experiences we became linguistically aware of, the greater the divide became between our objective and subjective lives and the deeper we sank into the quicksand of dualism that is the mind-body problem.* What makes the mind-body problem a philosophical one is that it was the evolution of language that created this dichotomy. We will now take a closer look at how our increasing capacity to name and define our experiences locked the distinction between objective and subjective reality into place.

THE ORIGIN OF THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM

As we have seen, it was the Scientific Revolution that made us linguistically aware of the difference between our objective and subjective experiences. In so doing, it opened up a whole new world of subjective experience that had been largely invisible to us because we previously had little or nothing to compare or contrast it with. However, as our linguistic awareness of our objective experiences increased, it called attention to how different our subjective experiences were. In other words, if it had not been for the huge leap in scientific terminology, we would have remained locked into subjective thinking, and not realize it.

That this dichotomy or duality emerges after symbolic language reaches a certain critical level is strongly reinforced by the fact that infants and young children receive a continuous stream of stimuli from both external and internal sources, but initially make no distinction as to their source. They simply experience all of them subjectively. Just as with the infant and young child, for endless millennia, all of humanity's experiences were registered subjectively. As we previously discussed, this was because our perceptions of the objects, events, and actions in the external world are processed as sensations within our nervous systems. In other words, while the source of our experiences differs, the experiences themselves are always represented internally and therefore experienced subjectively. This means that we would be one with our environment and that we would always "live in the moment."

As such, there is a continuous melding between dreams and reality, words and what they represent, and thoughts and actions. This leads to the externalization of one's sensations by projecting them on to objects, animals, events, and other people, or the internalization (introjection) of the feelings and actions of others. *At this point, the realization that one's experiences comes from two different sources—internal and external—is impossible to grasp or even imagine. All that exists is subjective experience.* While it is obvious to us today that the source of our objective and subjective experiences are different, this is not apparent to the young child, nor was it to our ancestors only a few generations ago.

While the evolution of our reflective vocabularies during the Scientific Revolution led to a greater refinement, objectification and expansion of our objective experiences, it also greatly increased our linguistic awareness of our subjective experiences in that they could be put in contrast and comparison with our objective ones. In other words, it was our expanding consciousness of our objective experiences that enabled us to become much more linguistically aware of our subjective ones.

There can be little question that before the Scientific Revolution we had been conscious of the relatively simple subjective experiences such as joy, sadness, fear, and so on. However, the expansion of our reflective and introspective vocabularies led to a greater clarification, objectification and expansion of both types of experience and a much better understanding of our personal experiences. Hence, after the Scientific Revolution, we had many more words to represent and describe our subjective emotional experiences. Indeed, words such as *nostalgia*, *ennui*, *somber*, and *empathy* led to a deeper understanding of ourselves.

Hence, as we became more linguistically aware of our objective experiences, we became more linguistically aware of our subjective ones. It is much like the contrast between light and dark—one can

only be defined and understood in terms of the other. Without both, all we would know is one and that one would be so taken for granted that it would be invisible to us, just as our subjective experiences had been previously. Another metaphor is what a fish might experience when it is momentarily taken out of the water and then develops a newfound awareness of the water once returned to it. In other words, as we continued to label and characterize all our experiences, our subjective ones became recognized as being categorically different when compared and contrasted with our objective experiences, which were being increasingly delineated by our reflective vocabularies. Hence, the clarification, objectification and expansion of our *subjective* experiences is what led to dualism. Chart 1 shows this unfolding process from objective perceptions and subjective sensations to dualism.

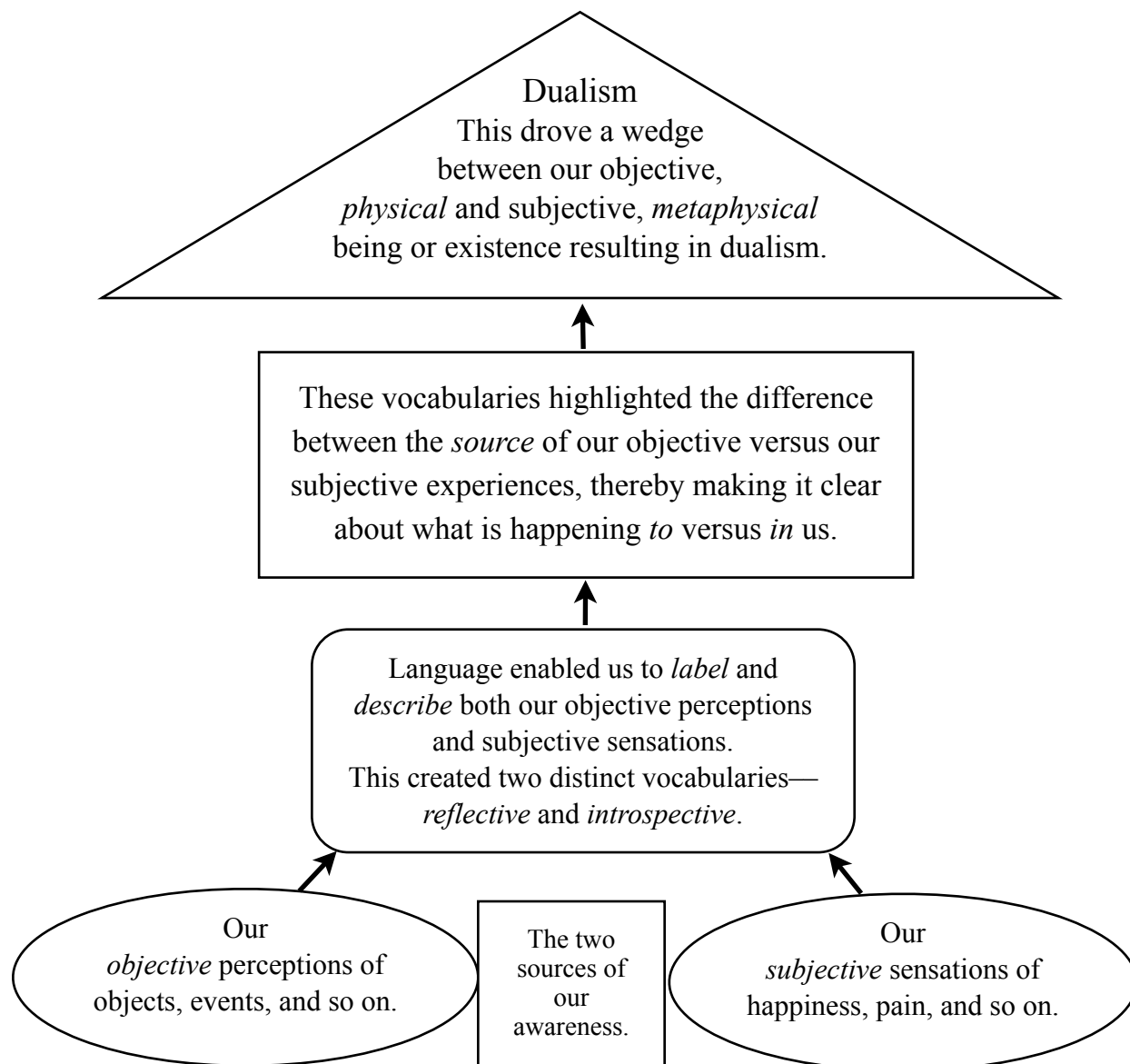


Chart 1
How the Evolution of Language Created the Dualism of Mind and Body

The rapidly evolving process of labeling and describing our experiences led to their clarification and objectification, thereby greatly expanding our overall consciousness. *This linguistic process allowed us to “step out” of our normally perpetual subjective state and finally see our subjective thoughts and feelings for what they are.* This is what Descartes did when he declared, “I think, therefore I am.” As the subjective nature of our personal experiences was becoming clarified and objectified through language, we were becoming increasingly aware of the difference between these two types of experience. *However, without our growing capacity to label and describe our experiences, raw subjectivity is all we can experience. However, with the ability to represent and define our subjective, phenomenological sensations, our linguistic awareness greatly expanded. This drove the emerging difference between our objective and subjective experiences deeper thereby creating the mind-body problem.*

Because our capacity to label and describe our subjective sensations enabled us to clarify and objectify them, we came to believe that they were qualitatively different from our objective experiences—a belief that we saw is accurate. Since the source of our objective and subjective experiences is different, we could say that this difference is an illusion created by the evolution of language. However, the real illusion is **not** that our experiences come from two different places—for indeed they do—the illusion is in thinking that the *source* of our subjective experiences is metaphysical or nonphysical. This led to two possible explanations. One, that reality is dualistic—both physical and metaphysical—which is unscientific; or two, that reality is monistic but that we have not yet been able to explain the physical source of our subjective experiences.

Furthermore, just knowing that the source of our subjective experiences lie within us is sufficient to make them feel strange and even mystically different from our objective experiences, thereby reinforcing this seemingly unbridgeable dichotomy. Although subjectivity is our natural state of being, it was the development of language that created our linguistic awareness of this state. This not only generated dualistic explanations, it guaranteed them.

As our capacity to represent and more fully describe our experiences grew, this split between what was objective and what was subjective widened, creating the mind-body problem. *In other words, once we became linguistically aware that the source of our subjective experiences were different from our objective experiences, the mind-body problem was inevitable.* This problem was the result of the natural, evolutionary unfolding of language. Specifically, it was the increase in the nature, size, and sophistication of our vocabularies that created our belief in dualism.

To summarize, what eventually brought our linguistic awareness of our subjective experiences into existence was our rapidly growing awareness of the physical world as created by our increasing ability to label and describe what was in it. This relatively rapid growth in science was in sharp contrast to our emotionally based vocabulary, thereby greatly increasing our awareness of the difference between our objective and subjective experiences. In other words, our previously and largely unacknowledged linguistic awareness of our subjective experiences was now brought into clear focus when compared with our objective experiences. *This was made possible by our expanded vocabularies which enabled us to explain both our objective and subjective experiences. This practically forced us to distinguish between what happens to us versus in us, thereby setting the stage for dualism.*

The present duality between our subjective mind and our physical body means that we are no longer the purely subjective creatures we once were, but are now emotional, spiritual, and subjective as well as practical, scientific, and objective beings. The evolution of language therefore created a situation where we became compelled to see ourselves in dualistic terms. By seeing how the growth of language led to dualism, we can now transcend it. Hence, our next objective is to replace dualism with a physical monistic, scientific understanding of reality.

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Dear Reader,

Thank you for taking the time to read this article. I would much appreciate any questions, comments, or suggestions you might have. I can be reached at jack@adeeperintelligence.com or by fax at 480-837-7169 or phone at 480-837-4329.

Sincerely,

Jack Friedland