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Mind-Body Dualism (Henceforth simply referred to as dualism.) is a philosophical concept that states that the mind and body are two entirely separate entities. Initially developed by the philosopher René Descartes, it has been subject to much debate by philosophers from the Renaissance to this day. While dualism has it’s merit in explaining the fundamental problems that arise while trying to explain consciousness, an equally viable concept has evolved called physicalism. This paper intends to explain the plausibility of dualism to explain consciousness, but in order to accomplish this it is critical to have an understanding of dualism vis-á-vis physicalism. This will be done by evaluating the pros and cons of both arguments and coming to a logical conclusion based off of evidence and thought experiments. Once both of these concepts have been thoroughly evaluated, it will be clear to the reader that dualism provides a thoroughly better concept of mind and body than physicalism ever could.

Dualism is the view that only the body has a presence in our physical world, while the mind is only an ethereal presence. The mind is considered to be an entity that exists outside of the fabric of space, and is only tethered to the body by some unknown means. An excellent analogy to this concept is to think of a phone call between two people. The mind and the body form a duplex relationship and are constantly relaying information to each other. However, upon death of the body the mind remains in tact. It would be as if this phone call had been disconnected. The mind would still exist, but would no longer have a line of communication to the body. While this succinct analogy provides adequate explanation of dualism, it would not sufficiently explain the concept of physicalism, as physicalists believe the mind and body are both of the physical world.

Physicalism starkly contrasts dualism because it conceives of the mind as being a product of the physical realm in which we exist. Physicalists believes that every single process that occurs in the universe can be explained away by sciences such as chemistry and biology. Due to the fact that physicalism is all inclusive in the belief that everything is physical in nature, it naturally collides with the concept of dualism. Physicalists believe that consciousness, and all feelings and qualia are directly caused by some physical processes inside the human body. Qualia is defined as “The qualitative feel of mental experiences”.(**Shafer-Landau 692**) For example, the color red or the scent of a rose would would be qualia. It is a feeling that cannot be described through words alone. To put it succinctly, physicalist believe that everything in the universe can be boiled down to mechanical processes. Pain is just the stimulation of nerves and love is nothing more than chemicals released in the brain. The aforementioned explanations for pain and love are what philosopher call an identity thesis. This means, according to Gertler, “…every type of mental state is identical to some type of physical state.”(**Shafer-Landau 312**) Furthermore, death to a physicalist would not be a terminated phone call, but more akin to the switching off of a computer. It becomes obvious that the friction between physicalists and dualists arises largely from the identity thesis. Now that a thorough explanation of both dualism and physicalism have been established, it is now possible to evaluate these conflicting ideologies and determine the plausibility of dualism, and it’s merits over physicalism.

One of the core arguments in support of dualism is the Argument from Possible Disembodiment. (APD) It is an *a priori* argument that states that it is at least *possible* to be distinct from our body. If it is possible for the mind to be distinct from your body, then it can be concluded that the mind *is* distinct from the body. Initially this logic may be rather hard to swallow, this is because the possibility of existence does not make it necessarily true. For instance, one can imagine unicorns, Zeus, and leper gnomes, but that does not will them into existence. However, by garnering a conceptual understanding of possible disembodiment, a door has been opened up that is difficult to shut; that is, that the mind cannot be relegated to a simple process of the body as physicalists state.

Now that sufficient justification for disembodiment has been established, one can easily take the next step towards APD by claiming that pain can be imagined without a physical body present. If pain can be imagined without a physical body present, then that must mean that there is a separate agent other than the body that perceives pain. Based off of this information, one can easily follow the argument set up by Brie Gertler on page 314 of Shafer-Landau. The following premises and arguments are very close to the argument given by Ms. Gertler in “*In Defense of the Mind Body Problem*”:

* 1. Even though I firmly believe that I have physical features, I can conceive of experiencing pain while processing no physical features. In other words, I can conceive of experiencing pain while disembodied.
  2. If I can conceive of this particular scenario occurring, then that scenario is possible.
  3. Therefore It is possible that pain occurs in a disembodied being.
  4. If pain was identical to some physical state, then it could not possibly occur in a disembodied state.
  5. Therefore, pain is not identical to any human state.

**In conclusion, the identity thesis, which states that every physical state is linked to a mental state, is false.**

APD appears to have covered all of its bases in order to prove that dualism is the most likely explanation for consciousness. Similarly to St. Anselm’s Ontological argument, it starts with *a priori* statement that we can at least conceive of disembodiment. To state briefly, St Anselm’s argument for God first inquires whether a supreme being is conceivable. Based off of the fact that this is indeed conceivable, he concluded that God definitely exists. APD provides similar premises to represent the duality of mind and body. Then in a step-by-step fashion it disproves identity thesis, which is the bedrock of physicalism. However, many physicalists remain unconvinced that the conclusion is satisfactory.

Physicalists maintain that there is a fundamental problem with the conclusion that APD proves that the identity thesis is false, even assuming that the premises are true. Assuming that what the dualist claim is true, then that would mean that mental actions have no bearing on the physical realm. This can be explained by saying that there has to be some fundamental link between body and mind that begs explanation; and this required explanation is not satisfactorily explained by APD. For a real world example, let us say that an unfortunate person is struck with a baseball. According to the physicalist, the ball strikes the person’s head, and the impact causes stimulation of C-Fibers, (The part of the body that is stimulated during pain.) and thus causes pain. The physicalists will say that the C-Fibers and pain are in principal the *the exact same thing*. This provides plausible explanation to the concept of pain.

Physicalists go on to claim that the dualists provide no fundamental link between mind and body, thus establishing that the pain this person endured has no effect on the physical realm. By no effect on the physical realm, that means nothing that is done in this world is a direct result of the emotions we feel, but only from the physical effects. For anybody who has ever had or witnessed an emotional outburst, this is clearly not the case. Unfortunately, this cavalier assumption by physicalists does not hold much weight. This is because the very nature of causation is a hotly debated topic. The true nature of cause and effect, that is, exactly when something is caused is not entirely understood. As Gertler states, “Physical causation is largely a mystery, and so we should be hesitant to use our limited understanding of physical causation to rule out the possibility of non-physical causation.”(**320**) The idea that APD relieves the mind of the burden of causation is inconclusive at best. Now that the protest against APD’s conclusion has been quelled, I will present a thought experiment that further discredits the concept of identity thesis.

In order to discredit the physicalists presumption, let us delve into a scenario of a race of aliens that are very similar to humans. These beings are almost identical to humans, but different enough to have a separate set of pain receptors. Instead of C-Fibers, we will say they have A-Fibers. Assuming that the physicalist was right, then that means there is no way these aliens would feel pain. This is because identity thesis claims that there is a *fundamental* link between pain and C-Fibers. They are forward and backwards entailing. That means according to a strictly physicalist’s view, an alien cannot feel pain. This is clearly an absurd proposition. By ruling out the identity thesis, the only plausible explanation for consciousness is dualism.

While APD is a convincing argument for dualism, it is not the only argument that exists. René Descartes, the establisher of dualism, brought up the principle of creativity. Through observation, it can be concluded that all objects in the physical realm have clear resemblance to machines. According to Descartes, even animals are simply complex machines with no consciousness. This leaves human beings in a unique position, because only we are credited with the ability to be creative. To further clarify, the idea of spontaneous creation without external influence is a uniquely human endeavor. However, if everything on Earth is mechanical in nature, then all causes should have predictive effects; yet epiphanies and the creativity of the human mind are inherently unpredictable. Based off of this argument, Descartes can accurately claim that there must be a higher power, such as an ethereal mind that controls the flow of consciousness. This must mean that there is some sort of consciousness that is disassociated with the body.

However one particular objection that can be brought up to Descartes’ argument was discussed in lecture. That is, how can a mind that does not exist in the physical universe cause the body to move and make decisions? It is commonly known that we generally think about something before we do it. For instance, before I move my arm, I think about it before it happens; however quickly the thought occurs, it does happen. What exactly would be the first cause, i.e the catalyst between the mind and body? To make it more clear, it is impossible for a feather to move a cannonball, just as a spiritual mind would have no physically plausible way of moving a human body. This directly violates a basic law of physics: That every actions requires an equal or opposite reaction. This could be considered a challenging objection to concept of Cartesian Dualism, as it becomes difficult to discern a catalyst between mind and body.

Dualism and physicalism are both fundamentally different concepts to explain consciousness. However dualism ultimately seems to possess a better explanation to the phenomena of consciousness. Neither the Argument from Creativity nor APD prove the existence of a separate mind, but they provide enough well thought out arguments to establish a strong sense of plausibility. Before wrapping up, I would like to mention a brief caveat: it should be clear that dualism does not deny fundamental scientific concepts such as chemical reactions in the brain, nor evolutionary fight-or-flight systems inherent to the human body. Dualism in only asserting that fundamental concepts such as feelings of pain and love cannot be described solely through identity thesis as physicalists claim, and that the consciousness is a distinct presence. While it is true that many emotions humans are afflicted with have definitive neuro-chemical explanations, correlation by no means implies causation. While the possibility of dualism currently only exists within the realm of conceivability tests, the same can be said about physicalism.

Work Cited

Gertler, Brie. "In Defense of the Mind-Body Problem." *Reason and Responsibility*. 15th ed. Boston, Mass: Wadsworth, 2013. 312-24. Print.