

Mind and Matter

Lecture 1: Dualism

1. Outline

The central question in the philosophy of mind is: What is the mind? The nature of mind poses a dilemma. If the mind is not a material or physical phenomenon, then how can it have effects in the physical world? But if the mind is a material or physical phenomenon, then how can we explain intentionality and consciousness?

2. What is the mind?

Descartes contrasted it with matter (extension): matter clearly is divisible, but the mind clearly is not divisible. Hence, matter and mind are different *substances*. Note, ‘substance’ is a technical term. Here it doesn’t just mean ‘stuff’. A substance is something that exists in its own right (contrast: attributes or properties).

3. Mental Phenomena

Descartes conceived of the mind as a unity: ‘a thinking thing’ (traditional: the soul). Many later philosophers conceive of the mind as a bundle of mental states, properties, events, or processes. Your mind consists of all mental phenomena that can be ascribed to you.

What makes something a mental state? Two kinds of criteria have been offered in recent philosophy:

- **Consciousness:** all mental phenomena are conscious phenomena; they are states or events in consciousness, conscious states or events, like sensations, perceptions, dreams, episodes of imagining, etc.
- **Intentionality** (mental representation): all mental phenomena ‘about’ something else. Examples are beliefs, emotions, desires etc.

4. What is matter?

Descartes claimed that no mental phenomenon is a material phenomenon. When mind is in this way contrasted with matter, what is it being contrasted with? Main feature of matter: extended. But in the early modern period matter was thought to have further features:

- solidity
- impenetrability
- conserved
- interacting deterministically
- interacting only on contact.

20th century physics has shown this conception to be wrong in every respect: not all matter is solid, it is not impenetrable, not always conserved, and can interact indeterministically and also at a distance.

5. The physical world

Philosophical discussions of matter since the 20th century have, naturally enough, tended to take their lead from physics in characterising the nature of matter. And in physics, the concept of matter has become much less central. Instead of identifying nature with the material world, it has become more common to identify nature with the *physical world*, i.e. the world described by physical science. This world contains much more than matter and its properties, since it also contains fields, forces, space-time and so on.

6. The relationship between mind and matter

Are mind and matter related in space? Do the one depend on the other? Can mind cause matter to change? And vice versa? Should we (contrary to what Descartes thought) think of mind and matter as identical? Separating mind and matter leaves these questions wide open.