

Topic 4

The mind and the body seems inseparable connected too each others. But are they really? Does the soul or the mind, the consciousness of a person, live on after there death here on earth? Are our mind processes just physical processes in our brain that leads to our actions or is our mind made out of something more, something of a more metaphysical kind of existence?

Some philosophers suggest that the mind and the body are separate phenomenon. They claim that the two parts are only perfunctorily tied together with each others. Rene Descartes, for instance, is one of the philosophers who share this point of view. One of Descartes' arguments was the following: Everything can be doubted. Everything physical, like the chair I'm sitting on, can be claimed to not exist. We have no robust evidences that they are here, not just an illusion. We have no robust argument that proves the existence of any kind of physical substance. Descartes himself spoke about the possibility that it is some kind of evil spirit which makes us believe or see things that are not real. But one thing can not be doubted though: the mind. If we doubt our own mind, than we are thinking, and if we are thinking, than that, according to Descartes, is a proof of our minds existence. Corgito ergo sum. Descartes claimed that this proves our mind to be something other than the body, something other than physical matter. He claimed that the fact that we could doubt the existence of our body, but not the existence of our mind, proved that they are completely different and that the mind is not depending on the existence of the body.

Many later philosophers and thinkers have supported the ideas of Descartes, some of there arguments are new and some of them are borrowed from Descartes himself. For instance the "evil-spirit-theory" has been slightly changed into the "brain on tank-theory". This theory suggests that our minds are only parts of some kind of computer program, in a world outside this one, and that this computer program is fooling us into believing in the existence of our own body and the "false" reality around us. Pretty much the same as Descartes claimed. An old argument disguised as a new one.

But there are also new arguments that some people would say are supporting to the theories of Descartes. For instance: Imagine that some clever brain scientist have found a way to replace a

persons brain with microscopic computer chips. One day a man with severe brain damages comes to them and asks them for help. Of course the scientist says yes and hires a brain surgeon to do the operation. The only problem is that the brain can not be cut out and replaced in one shot. It is to be replaced bit by bit. One brain cell out, one computer chip in. The links between the different parts of the brain has to be replaced as well, but this is not a problem for the clever team of scientists and surgeons (Some other scientists have found a cure against ageing so the time is not a problem). The philosophical question in this term is the following: When in this process does the patient go from being a human to being a machine? It may be hard to see how this supports the theory of Descartes, but the link is that in the case with the patient it's hard to see *when* in the process he will loose his mind (literally). Actually, there is no proves that will loose it at all. So this suggests that the mind may not be depending on the existence of the body and the brain as it is created by nature, it suggests that our mind would be the same, even if it slowly, step by step, was to be replaced by computer chips. The logic in this example is the same as in a case where a man with 10 000 wisps of hair starts picking them of one by one. When can you call the man bald? When he has picked of one wisp of hair? Two wisps of hair? Or all the 10 000 wisps of hair?

On the other hand, the same example can maybe be used as an argument *against* Descartes. The example suggests that our mind may not be depending on our brain, and the brain processes as nature created them. Nevertheless, the mind is in this example still depending on something *physical*. The computer chips are made out of physical matter, and so the example can not be used as an argument to prove that the mind can exist outside the physical world. Another interesting question would be what would happen if you picked out the brain cells one by one *without* replacing them. In some way we already know the answer to that, because that is not very different from what is happening to patients suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Their brain cells die gradually, and in the end their body can not take it anymore, and the die. What happens before they die is that they loose some parts of their mind, like the memory. This can be used as an argument to show that we need the brain, or some other kind of physical matter (like the computer chips in the last example) at least as a *link* between the mind and the body, and that a fully working *brain* is necessary in order to have a fully working *mind*. So the mind and the body seems very tightly tied together. But what happens after these patients die? Does there mind live on damaged, like it was in the moment of, and in the time right before, there death? Does it live on as it was when they had all of their brain intact? Or doesn't it live on at all? Just disappearing as the life disappears from their body.

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A famous man (which I unfortunately don't recall the name of), let's call him Mr. X, once got an iron bar through his head as he was working with some kind of explosives. Luckily and miraculously he survived the accident. But Mr. X was changed. His family claimed that he was not the person he once had been, in many ways he was the complete opposite of what he had been. So, at least in Mr. X's case, the mind changed because the structure of his brain changed. Some philosophers would claim that this is one of many proves that the mind is depending on physical matter (the brain) and that as fast as this physical matter, preferably the brain, changes, then the mind also will change in all cases. Does this mean that when this physical matter, the brain within our skull, stops working when we die, then our mind will just stop existing too? Some says yes, others say no.

But how is the mind tied to the brain? How does the brain insure that the mind is thinking and feeling what the brain commands it to do? The so-called "identity theories" tries to answer this question. One of the identity theories suggests that different kinds or different *types* of physical processes create certain feelings, intuitions, thoughts and ideas in the brain. So when we feel like crying or laughing, it's because of these different *types* of signals and processes in our brains. However, there are many problems tied to this theory. For instance: Human can feel pain, but so can most kinds of animals as well. So even though our brain is different from the brain of a giraffe, that doesn't mean that both the human-brain and the giraffe-brain can't create the same feeling in our body. A computer, a calculator and a human mind can all come to the conclusions that $2+2=4$, but this doesn't mean that it is the same process going on in all of these three cases, leading them all to the same conclusion. A human mind and a computer can both store information, even though they are not put together of the same pieces or leaded by the same processes.

Luckily, there is one "identity theory" left to explain how this can happen. The so-called "token theory" suggests simply that different kinds of physical processes can cause the same mental state in different peoples and animal's minds. However, as we can see, the theory still claims that the mind depends on *some kind* of physical process in order to work. In one way this is a very pessimistic point of view because in that case all living creatures are just machines, built up in different ways creating the same kinds of mental states.

But there are arguments also against this theory. The fact that we *feel* like the mind is something more than just physical processes is one of these, even if it's not a strong one. Imagine that a scientist put some electrodes on the head of a human in order to see which part of the brain was sending signals to each other when this person was looking on something red. The scientist would be able to explain which part of the brain was active and which were not. So he could literally *see* the processes in the brain when this person looked at the color. But what the scientist couldn't do was to look on a computer screen which showed the brain processes and then *share his feeling* of looking on this color. An Englishman, only speaking English wouldn't understand Chinese just because he saw which brain processes was going on when a Chinese person spoke or listened to Chinese. Our mind is something which is inaccessible for other human beings. But this last fact is not telling us the reason why others can't get access to our mind. It doesn't prove whether the mind is depending on something physical or not. It only shows that many feels that it is wrong when our mind is only reduced to something physical. But couldn't it be the case that our mind is inaccessible because our *brain* is inaccessible. No one can share our brain, so maybe that is why no one can share our mind as well?

Some other theories, which doesn't solve the problem about the link between body and mind, but rather gives us a different starting point is the theories which suggests that we should change our view on how the world is working in terms of the link between cause and impact. Some philosophers have suggested that there is no such link between cause and impact, that it's just an illusion. Or at least they claim that the link is different from what we traditionally think. Traditionally people look upon cause as something *leading to* an incident. For instance, a fire leads to smoke, a bullet through the brain leads to death (in most cases) and so on. But this may be only an illusion. What we see is only fire *followed by* smoke, a bullet through the brain *followed by* death. It's no way we can *see* the link itself. Imagine that we were trapped on earth with no science at all. We could see that day is always followed by night, so that would lead us to the conclusion that day causes night and the opposite way around. But we know for sure that this is not right, it's the rotation of the earth that "causes" night an day. This previous example is only meant to illustrate how we can draw wrong conclusions from the "right" principles. One way to look at the link between cause and impact, which is different from the traditional point of view, is to claim that the "cause" only is what "makes the difference". If a bunch of newspapers are lying on the table and someone throws a cigar at them, and a fire than starts, most people would say that the cigar caused the fire. But would the fire have started if the newspapers hadn't lied on the table? Probably not. This shows us that there in many cases are more than one thing that can be seen as "cause", and that what we traditionally see as

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“cause” is only *what makes the difference* between, in this case, fire or not fire. So many philosophers, among them David Hume, have claimed that a “cause” only is a process increasing the likelihood of an incident. So the processes in our brain don’t make us feel tired or angry or happy, they only increase the chance of these feelings in our mind. As I said, this example is only meant to change the starting point of the debate about the “mind-body issue” not solving the problem itself.

Not only philosophers have involved in the debate. There is an own scientific direction which, among other things, are doing research on whether thoughts and ideas are robust, solid things made out of physical matter or not. This shows us the reach of the debate. However, there is only *one* certain way to find out whether the mind is depending on the body or not. This way can only be explored by one individual at a time, and a certain answer to the question is definitely not worth the price: to leave our lives here on earth.