

Minds, bodies, and causation

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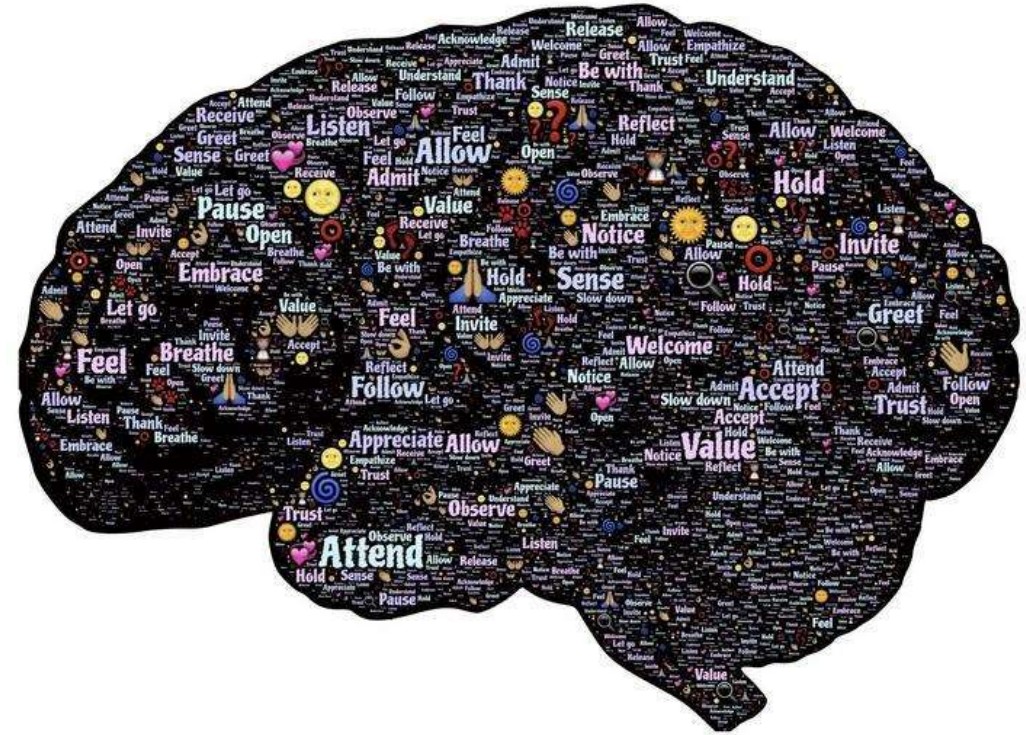
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Humanities Study Day Philosophy Lecture

12th April 2022

The Mind-Body Problem

- How does **the mind** relate to **the body** (and the rest of **the physical world**)?
- What is the relationship between **mental** phenomena and **physical** phenomena?
 - ***Mental:*** e.g. thoughts, desires, perceptions, feelings, sensations...
 - ***Physical:*** e.g. bodily movements, brain processes...



The Mind-Body Problem

- **Mind-Body Dualism**
 - Minds and bodies are distinct *substances*.
 - Minds are immaterial/nonphysical entities.
- Various arguments by **René Descartes** (1596-1650)
 - Knowledge of minds vs knowledge of bodies;
 - The conceivability of a “disembodied” mind
 - ...



Elisabeth's Objection

- **Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia (1618–1680)**
- **The problem:**
- Our minds causally interact with the physical world (e.g. cases of bodily actions).
- But if Descartes' mind-body dualism is true, it is not clear how that could be the case.



Elisabeth's Objection

- Elisabeth asked Descartes to **explain**
 - “how the mind of a human being, being only a **thinking substance**, can **cause** the nerves and the muscles in producing **bodily actions**.”
 - “For it appears that all determination of movement is produced by **the pushing of the thing being moved**, by **the manner in which it is pushed by that which moves it**, or else by **the qualification and figure of the surface of the latter**.”
 - “**Contact** is required for the first two conditions, and **extension** for the third. But you entirely exclude the **latter** from the notion you have of the mind, and the **former** seems incompatible with an immaterial being.”



Elisabeth's Objection

- If minds are immaterial entities, they are not **extended** in space, and they cannot be in **contact** with physical entities like bodies. Causal interaction requires extension and contact.
- Elisabeth:
 - “I admit that it would be easier for me **to concede matter and extension to the mind** than it would be for me to concede the capacity to move a body and be moved by one to an immaterial thing.”
- In other words:
 - The view that **minds are physical entities** is more plausible than the view that non-physical entities can cause physical effects.
 - **Materialism (aka physicalism)**: Minds and mental phenomena are “nothing over and above” bodies and physical phenomena.

The Causal Argument for Materialism

- This is possibly the first **causal argument for materialism**:
 - **(1)** If minds are nonphysical entities, then they cannot causally interact with the physical world.
 - **(2)** Minds do causally interact with the physical world.
 - **Conclusion:** Minds are not nonphysical entities.

Elisabeth's legacy

- Mind-body dualism has been abandoned mainly due to the problem of causal interaction.
- But there are other forms of dualism.
- **Property dualism:** Mental properties (thoughts, desires, perceptions, sensations) are **non-physical properties**.
- Property dualism does not imply that minds are non-physical entities. For all we know, there are no non-physical substances.
- The view that minds are not non-physical entities, but mental properties are non-physical properties seems to be a plausible option.

The Causal Argument Strikes Back

- Does property dualism fare better?
- **Jaegwon Kim** (1934-2019) and others have powerfully argued that property dualism faces a new version of the causal argument.
- **“The causal exclusion argument”**
- If mental properties are not reducible to physical properties, then they are “excluded” from causal relations.



The Causal Exclusion Argument

- **(1) Mental Causation:** Mental properties are often causes of physical events.
 - *e.g. My **desire** to drink water causes me open the water bottle.*
- **(2) The Causal Closure of the Physical:** If a physical event has a cause, it has a sufficient physical cause.
 - *... a working assumption in the physical sciences?*
- **(3) The Exclusion Principle:** In general, our actions do not have more than one simultaneous sufficient cause.
 - *... a plausible assumption about causation?*
- **Conclusion:** Mental properties are physical properties.
 - *Property dualism cannot be true!*

Mental causation

- The causal exclusion argument is widely debated in contemporary philosophy of mind.
- Not everyone accepts it! See:
 - Baysan, U. “Rejecting epiphobia”, *Synthese* (2020) <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-020-02911-w>
 - Baysan, U. “Mad Qualia”, *The Philosophical Quarterly* (2019) <https://doi.org/10.1093/pq/pqy065>
- Nevertheless, in general, it is a working assumption that a plausible answer to the mind-body problem should find a way of explaining how our minds and mental properties can be causes of our actions.

Questions?