

Vs. Substance Dualism



My discussion of objections to substance dualism uses 3 main sources:

- Habermas & Moreland, *Beyond Death*, ch. 4.
- Paul Churchland, *Matter and Sense*, pp. 18–21.
- William Lycan, “Giving Dualism Its Due.”

I will discuss 5 objections.

Objection 1: The interaction problem

- How can physical substances (brains) and nonphysical souls *causally interact* since they’re so different?
- We have *no model* for physical/nonphysical interaction. It’s utterly mysterious.

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Objection 2: It violates physics

- Physical conservation laws (or energy and momentum) imply that the physical universe is *causally closed*. In other words, *no physical event can have a nonphysical cause*.
- Substance dualism contradicts this if it asserts that nonphysical souls can cause physical effects.

Vs. Substance Dualism



Objection 3: Neural dependence

- All known mental phenomena depend in very detailed ways upon brain function.
- Churchland, p. 20:
“If there really is a distinct entity in which reasoning, emotion, and consciousness take place, and if that entity is dependent on the brain for nothing more than sensory experiences as input and volitional executions as output, then one would expect reason, emotion, and consciousness to be relatively invulnerable to direct control or pathology by manipulation or damage to the brain. But in fact the exact opposite is true.” (italics removed)

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Objection 4: Evolutionary history

- Churchland, p. 21:

“[T]he important point about the standard evolutionary story is that the human species and all of its features are the wholly physical outcome of a purely physical process. . . . Our inner nature differs from that of simpler creatures in degree, but not in kind. If this is the correct account of our origins then there seems neither need, nor room, to fit any nonphysical substances or properties into our theoretical account of ourselves. We are creatures of matter. And we should learn to live with that fact.”

Vs. Substance Dualism



Objection 5: Explanatory superfluity

- There's no reason to posit immaterial souls. Not only are they “spooky,” but they are not needed to explain any public facts.
- Ockham's razor: Don't multiply explanatory entities beyond necessity.

Let's pause. What do you think at this point? Has substance dualism been thoroughly refuted? Are there any plausible replies?

Replies



Objection 1: The interaction problem

- How can physical substances (brains) and nonphysical souls *causally interact* since they're so different?
- We have *no model* for physical/nonphysical interaction. It's utterly mysterious.

Replies:

- The “how” question is misplaced. It asks for a causal mechanism, but in the nature of the case there isn't any. Physical/nonphysical action is immediate and *sui generis*.
- Physical/physical causation is also mysterious, especially in light of the weirdness of quantum mechanics.
- Counterfactual theories of causation are applicable here: *If I hadn't willed to hit him, then I wouldn't have. If he hadn't hit me, then I wouldn't be feeling pain right now.*
- We can reduce the gap between the physical and the nonphysical by supposing that souls are spatially located.

Replies



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Reply:

- Conservation laws are *conditional* upon physical causal closure. They say that *in a closed physical system* energy (or momentum) is conserved. Hence, if a system is *in fact* causally open, as substance dualism insist the mind–brain system is, then in that context the conservation laws simply don't apply.

Replies



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Reply:

- The underlined assumption is false. No substance dualist denies the dependence of reasoning, emotion, and consciousness on the brain.
- The brain is like a transducer. It has to do a lot of processing before it can “uplink” information to the mind.

Replies



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Replies:

- This is question-begging.

Replies



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Reply:

- Minds are not explanatory posits. They are known directly from the “inside,” and there is nothing obscure or spooky about that.