

13 DUALISM DEFENDED

J. P. Moreland

J. P. Moreland (1948–) holds a master's degree in theology and a Ph.D. in philosophy, and currently teaches at the Talbot School of Theology at Biola University. As his academic credentials suggest, Moreland's interests include the philosophy of religion, but also ethics and applied ethics, especially euthanasia.

Moreland is a proponent of Cartesian dualism, which he calls 'substance dualism,' the claim that humans are composed of both an immaterial substance (mind or soul) and a physical substance (body). He begins his defense of dualism by attempting to make belief in immaterial souls more palatable to nonbelievers, while simultaneously attempting to discredit materialism. Moreland points out that persons actually (and routinely) believe in the existence of numerous sorts of immaterial entities. For instance, the existence of numbers, goodness, theories, universals, and the laws of logic are unproblematic even though all of these things are immaterial. Physicalism (or materialism), on the other hand, is problematic since it cannot explain the existence of numbers, theories, and so forth. Additionally, whereas physicalism maintains that the mind and the brain are one and the same thing, Moreland counters that there are distinct differences between minds (or mental states) and brains (or brain states). For instance, individuals have first-person access to their own mental states, but no one has first-person access to his or her brain states. Therefore, minds and brains are not one and the same thing.

Moreland concludes by defending dualism against another competitor, the emergent property view (EPV), a form of **epiphenomenalism**. Among other things, Moreland faults EPV for suggesting that the mental component of persons is a silent partner in the mind-body relationship: the body affects the mind, but the mind has no influence on the body. If this were true, reasons Moreland, then there would be no rational agent directing your actions—a view that runs counter to ordinary experience.

Reading Questions

1. Briefly explain physicalism in the context of the mind-body debate.
2. Explain the difference between property dualism and substance dualism.
3. Why does Moreland believe that physicalism is inadequate as a worldview?

4. Other than numbers, what entities are considered nonphysical?
5. Why does the falsity of physicalism not refute mind-body physicalism? Explain your answer.
6. Under what conditions can X and Y be considered identical?
7. What reasons are there for denying that thoughts are identical to physical events in the brain?
8. Does the subjectivity of experience count against physicalism?
9. What problem arises for the physicalist concerning personal identity?
10. What problems does Moreland identify with epiphenomenalism?

Dualism Defined

The mind/body problem focuses on two main issues. First, is a human being composed of just one ultimate component or two? Second, if the answer is two, how do these two relate to one another? Physicalism is one solution to the problem. As a general worldview, physicalism holds that the only thing which exists is matter (where matter is defined by an ideal, completed form of physics). Applied to the mind/body problem, physicalism asserts that a human being is just a physical system. There is no mind or soul, just a brain and central nervous system. Dualism is the opponent of physicalism and it asserts that in addition to the body, a human being also has a nonphysical component called a soul, mind, or self (words which will be used interchangeably for our purposes).

There are two main varieties of dualism—property dualism and substance dualism. . . .

Property dualists hold that the mind is a property of the body. As Richard Taylor puts it, “A person is a living physical body having mind, the mind consisting, however, of nothing but a more or less continuous series of conscious or unconscious states and events . . . which are the effects but never the causes of bodily activity.” This view is called *epiphenomenalism*. The mind is to the body as smoke is to fire. Smoke is different from fire, but smoke does not cause anything. Smoke is a byproduct of fire. Similarly, mind is a byproduct of the body which does not cause anything. It just “rides” on top of the events in the body. Body events cause mind as a byproduct. The mind is a property of the body which ceases to exist when the body ceases to function.

Though some theists have denied it recently, the historic Christian view has been substance dualism. The mind, distinct from the body, is a real substance

which can cause things to happen by acting and which can exist when the body ceases to function.

Dualism Defended

Problems with Physicalism as a General Worldview
Physicalism as a worldview holds that everything that exists is nothing but a single spatio-temporal system which can be completely described in terms of some ideal form of physics. Matter/energy is all that exists. God, souls, and nonphysical abstract entities do not exist. If physicalism is true at the worldview level, then obviously, mind/body physicalism would follow. But is physicalism adequate as a worldview? Several factors indicate that it is not.

X First, if theism is true, then physicalism as a worldview is false. God is not a physical being. **S** Second, a number of people have argued that numbers exist and that they are abstract, nonphysical entities (e.g., sets, substances, or properties). Several arguments can be offered for the existence of numbers, but two appear frequently. For one thing, mathematics claims to give us knowledge. But if this is so, there must be something that mathematics is about. Just as the biologist *discovers* biological truths about biological objects (organisms), so the mathematician often *discovers* mathematical truths (he does not invent them all the time) and these truths are about mathematical objects. If one denies the existence of numbers, then it is hard to rescue mathematics as a field which conveys knowledge about something. Without numbers, mathematics becomes merely an internally consistent game which is invented.

S Some have argued that values, in addition to God and numbers, exist and are not physical. Certain objects (persons, animals) and certain events (helping a stranger, for example) have a nonphysical property

of worth or goodness. Furthermore, moral laws are often held to be absolute, objective realities (e.g., one should not torture babies). But if certain objects possess goodness, and if certain moral laws are objective realities, then physicalism must be false, because the property of goodness and the nature of moral laws are not physical. For example, it makes no sense to ask how much goodness weighs, or to ask where a moral law exists. Such realities are not physical.

4 [Additionally], if physicalism is true, it is hard to see what one should make of the existence and nature of theories, meanings, concepts, propositions, the laws of logic, and truth itself. . . .

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The entities listed have caused a lot of difficulty for physicalists. They have spent a good deal of time trying to do away with numbers, values, propositions, laws of logic, and universals by reducing them to notions compatible with physicalism. But these reductionist attempts have failed and physicalism as a worldview cannot adequately handle the existence of these entities. Theism can embrace them, however, by holding that God created these nonphysical entities and sustains them in existence. The falsity of physicalism as a worldview does not refute mind/body physicalism. One could hold to the existence of numbers and values but deny the existence of the soul. But much of the motivation for mind/body physicalism has been the desire to argue for physicalism at the worldview level. If physicalism at that level is false, then part of the reason for holding to mind/body physicalism is removed. For example, just because one cannot see the soul, weigh it, or say where it is, it does not follow that the soul does not exist. One cannot see, weigh, or locate numbers or values, but they still exist.

Problems with Mind/Body Physicalism In order to facilitate an understanding of some of the arguments against mind/body physicalism, we must first examine the nature of identity. Suppose you know that someone named J. P. Moreland exists and that the author of this book exists. Assume further that you do not know that J. P. Moreland wrote this book. If someone asked you whether J. P. Moreland is identical to the author of this book, how would you decide? How would you determine that the "two" individuals are identical instead of being two different people? If you could find something true of

J. P. Moreland which is not true of the author of this book or vice versa, then they would be different people. They could not be identical. For example, if J. P. Moreland is married to Hope Moreland but the author of this book is not, they would be different people. On the other hand, if everything true of one is true of the other, "they" would be one person.

In general, if "two" things are identical, then whatever is true of the one is true of the other, since in reality only one thing is being discussed. However, if something is true of the one which is not true of the other, then they are two things and not one. This is sometimes called the indiscernibility of identicals and is expressed as follows:

$$(x) (y) [(x = y) \rightarrow (P) (Px \leftrightarrow Py)]$$

For any entities x and y , if x and y are really the same thing, then for any property P , P is true of x if and only if P is true of y . If x is the mind and y is a part or state of the body (e.g., the brain), then if physicalism is true, x must be identical to y . On the other hand, if something is true of the mind which is not true of some part or state of the body, then the mind is not identical to the body and physicalism is false. This would be true even if the mind and body are inseparable. . . .

Every time something happens in the mind (someone has a thought of an ice cream cone), some event may be going on in the brain which could be described by a neurophysiologist. In general, brain events may always have mental events that correlate with them and vice versa. They may be inseparable in that one does not occur without the other in an embodied person. But this does not mean that the mental thought is identical to the brain event.⁵ The redness and roundness of an apple, though inseparable, are not identical. The property of having three sides (trilaterality) and the property of having three angles (triangularity) always go together. They are inseparable. But they are not identical. Physicalists must not only show that mental and brain phenomena are inseparable to make their case. They must also show that they are identical. With this in mind let us turn to some arguments for dualism.

The Distinctiveness of Mental and Physical Properties Mental events include thoughts, feelings of pain, the experience of being a person, or a sense image or picture of a ball in my mind. Physical events are events in the brain or central nervous system which can be

described exhaustively using terms of chemistry, physics, and (for now) biology. The difficulty for physicalism is that mental events do not seem to have properties that hold for physical events. My thought of Kansas City is not ten centimeters long, it does not weigh anything, it is not located anywhere (it is not two inches from my left ear). Nor is it identical to any behavior or tendency to behave in a certain way (shouting “Kansas City” when I hear the name *George Brett*). But the brain event associated with this thought may be located inside my head, it may have a certain chemical composition and electrical current, and so forth. My afterimage of a ball (the impression of the ball present to my consciousness when I close my eyes after seeing the ball) may be pink, but nothing in my brain is pink. Mental events and properties have different attributes and therefore they are not identical.

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6 *The Experience of First-Person Subjectivity* The subjective character of experience is hard to capture in physicalist terms. The simple fact of consciousness is a serious difficulty for physicalism. To see this consider the following. Suppose a deaf scientist became the world’s leading expert on the neurology of hearing. It would be possible for him to know and describe everything there is to the physical processes involved in hearing. However, something would still be left out of such a description—the experience of what it is like to be a human who hears. As Howard Robinson puts it:

The notion of *having something as an object of experience* is not, *prima facie*, a physical notion; it does not figure in any physical science. *Having something as an object of experience* is the same as the subjective feel or the *what it is like* of experience.

Subjective states of experience exist. My experience of what it is like to be me, to hear a bird or see a tree, exists, and I have a first-person subjectivity to it. Such first-person experiences of my own self or “I” which has experiences cannot be reduced to a third-person “he” or “it,” because the latter do not describe the experience itself or its first-person standpoint. A physicalist, scientific description of the world leaves out this character of subjective awareness. Such a description characterizes the world in impersonal, third-person terms (e.g., “there exists an object with such and such properties and states”) and leaves

out the first-person, subjective experience itself (e.g., “I feel sad and food tastes sour to me”).

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7 *Personal Identity* Imagine a wooden table which had all its parts removed one by one and replaced with metal parts. When the top and all the legs were replaced would it still be the same table? The answer would seem to be no. In fact, it would be possible to take all the original wooden parts and rearrange them into the original table. Even when the table had just one leg replaced, it would not literally be the same table. It would be a table similar to the original.

Losing old parts and gaining new ones changes the identity of the object in question. But now a question arises regarding persons. Am I literally the same self that I was a moment ago? Are my baby pictures really pictures of *me* or are they pictures of an ancestor of me who resembles me? I am constantly losing physical parts. I lose hair and fingernails; atoms are constantly being replaced, and every seven years my cells are almost entirely replaced. Do I maintain literal, absolute identity through change or not?

Substance dualists argue that persons do maintain absolute identity through change, because they have, in addition to their bodies, a soul that remains constant through change, and personal identity is constituted by sameness of soul, not sameness of body.

Physicalists have no alternative but to hold that personal identity is not absolute. Usually they argue that persons are really ancestral chains of successive “selves” which are connected with one another in some way. At each moment a new self exists (since the self or physical organism is constantly in flux, losing and gaining parts) and this self resembles the self prior to and after it. The relation of resemblance between selves plus the fact that later selves have the same memories as earlier selves and the body of each self traces a continuous path through space when the whole chain of selves is put together, constitute a relative sense of personal identity.

So substance dualists hold to a literal, absolute sense of personal identity and physicalists hold to a loose, relative sense of personal identity which amounts to a stream of successive selves held together into “one” person by resemblance between each self (also called a person stage), similarity of memory, and spatial continuity. For the physicalist, a person becomes a space-time worm (i.e., a path traced through space and time).

The person is the entire path marked off at the time and place of his birth and death. At any given moment and location where "I" happen to be, "I" am not a person, just a person stage. The person is the whole path. So there is no literal sameness through change.

But now certain problems arise from physicalism. First, why should "I" ever fear the future? When it gets here, "I" will not be present; rather, another self who looks like me will be there but "I" will have ceased to exist. Second, why should anyone be punished? The self who did the crime in the past is not literally the same self who is present at the time of punishment. Physicalism seems to require a radical readjustment of our common-sense notions of future expectations and past actions because both presuppose a literal identity of the same self present in past, present, and future.

Third, physicalists not only have difficulty handling the unity of the self through time, but also cannot explain the unity of the self at a given time. As Harvard philosopher W. V. O. Quine puts it, according to physicalism the self becomes a sum or heap of scattered physical parts. The unity of the self is like the unity of an assembly of building blocks. If I have a pain in my foot while I am thinking about baseball, each is a distinct experience involving different physical parts. There is no self which *has* each experience. The self is merely a bundle or heap of parts and experiences. It has no real unity. The dualist says that the soul is diffused throughout the body and it is present before each experience. The soul has each experience. The unity of the consciousness is due to the fact that the same soul is the possessor of each and every experience of the consciousness. But the physicalist must say that each experience is possessed by different parts of the body and there is no real unity. However, my own experience of the unity of my consciousness shows this unity to be genuine and not arbitrary. *I* have my experiences. They are all *mine*. Physicalism does not adequately explain this fact.

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THE ORIGIN OF MIND

We have seen that there are good reasons for holding that strict physicalism is false. But most physicalists are recalcitrant. If they embrace dualism at all, they embrace epiphenomenalism. . . .

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[But] there are . . . serious difficulties with epiphenomenalism. To see these we must first clarify what epiphenomenalism involves. The view is also called holism, and when mind is seen to emerge through the coming together of the matter in a certain way (for instance, through the evolution of the central nervous system and brain) the position is called the emergent property view (EPV). Here are four main features of the EPV.

The Emergent Property View

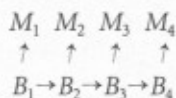
Wholes and Parts In nature, wholes are often greater than the sum of their parts. Nature exhibits a hierarchy of systems—subatomic particles, atoms, molecules, cells, organs, whole organisms. Each level has properties of the wholes at that level which are not properties of their constituent parts. For example, water has the property of being wet, but this property is not true of either hydrogen or oxygen. Similarly, the mind is a property of the brain.

Levels of Explanation and Complementarity Each level in the hierarchy can be explained by using concepts appropriate at that level. Further, all the levels are complementary. For example, an explanation of a person's behavior could be given at a psychological level which used the concepts *beliefs*, *desires*, or *fears*. The same behavior could be given an explanation at the neurophysiological level using the concepts *neurons*, *synapses*, and so forth. These two levels of explanation are not in competition; they complement one another by offering descriptions of the same behavior at different levels.

Causation between Levels Lower levels in the hierarchy cause things to happen at higher levels but not vice versa. When it comes to persons, events at the physical level can be characterized in terms of physical laws which make no reference to the causal efficaciousness of future events (e.g., the purposes of the agent) or higher levels of organization. The events at the physical level obey deterministic physical laws and mental events are mere by-products.

Resultant View of the Self The self is not some mental substance added to the brain from the "outside" when the brain reaches a certain level of

complexity. It is an emergent property which supervenes upon the brain. The self becomes a discontinuous series of mental events when mental properties are instantiated in different brain events. The self is a series of events which “ride” on top of the brain. Consider the following diagram:



Suppose M_1 is the mental state of seeing an apple from a distance of five feet. It is a *mental* state since it involves the conscious awareness of seeing the apple, and conscious awareness is something true of minds and not matter. Now suppose M_2 is the mental state of seeing the apple from one foot, M_3 the state of feeling a pain on the toe, and M_4 the state of hearing a plane fly overhead. B_1 through B_4 are brain states which are associated with each mental state.

Three things stand out immediately. First, B_1 through B_4 stand in rigid physical, causal relations with one another. B_1 causes B_2 and so on. There is no room for a rational agent to intervene in this causal sequence. Mental agents do not act here. The physical level determines all the action. Mental states are mere byproducts of their physical states as smoke is a byproduct of fire.

Second, there is no unified, enduring self at the mental level. According to substance dualism, the self is not identical to its states; it *has* its states. The mind *has* its thoughts and experiences and the same mind can have two experiences at the same time (hearing a plane and seeing an apple) or it can

have one experience followed by another. The *self* is present at both experiences and underlies the change of experiences.

When a leaf goes from green to red, green does not become red. Rather, green leaves and is replaced by red *in* the leaf. The leaf is the same substance present at both ends of the process. When a substance gains or loses properties, it remains the same while properties come and go. They are replaced. Red replaces green. The EPV says that M_1 through M_4 are properties of the body. There is no enduring mental substance which has them. There is just one mental property at one time which leaves and is replaced by another mental property at another time. The “self” is a series of mental events where mental properties are had by physical states.

Third, it is hard to see what sense can be given to intentionality. How is it that M_1 is of or about an apple? M_1 is just a dummy, a free rider on B_1 . At best, B_1 would just be a state caused by light waves from the apple but it is hard to see how this would cause M_1 to be really a state *about* that apple. Even if it were, what difference would it make? Any further body states (the act of touching the apple or eating it) would be caused totally by brain states and make no reference to mental states at all.

It should now be clear why epiphenomenalism was ruled out as an inadequate account of the necessary features of rationality. It cannot account for the existence of intentionality, it leaves no room for genuine rational agency to freely choose mental beliefs, and there is no enduring “I” to be present through the process of thought. . . .

Discussion Questions

1. Is it possible that God is a physical being? In other words, are theism and physicalism compatible? If physicalism is true, must God necessarily not exist? Why or why not?
2. Do numbers exist? If so, in what sense? Is the question of whether or not numbers exist relevant to the mind-body problem? Explain your answer.
3. Suppose that destroying a particular piece of your brain meant that you would forever lose a particular memory. Is this relevant to the mind-body problem? How would it affect your views?
4. Do you believe in near-death experiences? What about out-of-body experiences? Why or why not? If these experiences are real, do they support dualism? Could there be some physical explanation for these experiences besides substance dualism?

For Further Reading

For an introduction to the mind-body problem, see *Metaphysics* (1991), by R. Taylor; *The Mind-Body Problem: A Guide to the Current Debate* (1994), edited by R. Warner; and *Mind and Brain: A Dialogue on the Mind-Body Problem* (1996), by R. J. Gennaro.

The classic defense of dualism is Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641). For other defenses of dualism, see *The Case for Dualism* (1989), edited by J. R. Smythies; *The Self and Its Brain: An Argument for Interactionism* (1983), edited by Popper and Eccles; and *Objections to Physicalism* (1993), edited by H. Robinson. For two critiques of dualism, see *A Materialist Theory of Mind* (1993), by D. M. Armstrong, and *Body and Mind* (1970), by K. Campbell.