**University of Johannesburg**

**Department of Philosophy**

**Honours Research Essay**

**Title:**

**Arguments for Substance Dualism as the most viable non-materialist theory of mind.**

**Supervisor:**

**Professor Velislava Mitova**

**Craig Thrupp**

**201316884**

**Table of Contents**

[1.1. Introduction 3](#_Toc465715080)

[1.2. The significance of the topic 5](#_Toc465715081)

[2. The Criteria for a satisfying form of dualism 7](#_Toc465715082)

[2.1 Distinct Entities 7](#_Toc465715083)

[2.2 Causal Interaction 8](#_Toc465715084)

[2.3 Moral Responsibility 11](#_Toc465715085)

[3. Evaluation of the theories 13](#_Toc465715086)

[3.1 Property Dualism 14](#_Toc465715087)

[3.2 Epiphenomenal Dualism 18](#_Toc465715088)

[3.3 Substance Dualism 23](#_Toc465715089)

[4. Defending Substance Dualism further 26](#_Toc465715090)

[5. Conclusion 29](#_Toc465715091)

[6. References 31](#_Toc465715092)

# **Introduction**

One of the most unpopular and underappreciated theories in contemporary philosophy of mind is the theory of dualism. Dualism enjoyed decades of popularity and acceptance in philosophical circles until the rise of the monistic theories of materialism and physicalism. These newer monistic theories completely overtook dualism in acceptance and popularity. This seems to have happened as a result of the science of ‘mechanism’ gaining popularity in the 19th century. Mechanism emphasised the importance of the laws of physics and held that the world was closed a system under these laws (Robinson 2016). The principle of a closed world in physics goes against dualistic theory as the mind cannot be part of such a world (due to the mind being completely nonphysical), which meant that people who sided with mechanism had to abandon dualism. While dualism is unpopular in philosophy, in modern day academia, I believe there is serious merit in studying and evaluating dualism. Studying dualism can help us gain a better understanding of one’s mind as well as one’s body. Dualism certainly should not be shunned as being outdated when there are very persuasive and compelling arguments that have been presented by dualists.

I examine the main forms of the theory of dualism and decide which type is the most satisfying form of dualism. I will discover this by judging each form of dualism against a set of dualistic criteria, which I have devised. My arguments will show that the superior form of dualism is Cartesian or substance dualism. It is very important to note that I will not be arguing for dualism being a better theory of mind than various forms of physicalism (which are the most popular theories of mind in modern philosophy). Arguing for dualism being a superior metaphysical theory than theories like physicalism and materialism, would require an entirely different argument than the ones I employ in this essay. A proper argument against physicalism or materialism may be achievable once a satisfying form of dualism is found. But for the purpose of this paper, I shall only be looking at which type of dualism is the most satisfying when judged against my criteria for assessing dualistic theories. I will use a set of criteria to find the most satisfying form of dualism, and I conclude from that criteria that Cartesian or substance dualism is the only satisfying form of dualism that could be adopted (if one were inclined to reject the most prominent theories of mind, these being physicalism or materialism).

While Plato laid the foundations for dualism, the more modern form of dualism was popularised by Rene Descartes himself. Descartes reintroduced the idea of dualism to the philosophical world of that time, and because of this, he is known to be the founder of substance or Cartesian dualism. Descartes develops his form dualism in his hugely influential book *The Meditations* (The Philosophical Works of Descartes 1911). In the book, Descartes goes about doubting everything he ever took to be true. He does this in an attempt to rebuild the foundations of his knowledge so that he could be certain that what he knows is unquestionably true. The first conclusion that he comes to is that the only thing which he cannot doubt is the fact that he himself is doubting his own existence. This leads to his conclusion that his mind (or soul) unquestionably exists and it is subsequently capable of doubting his existence. As a result of this discovery, Descartes adopts a stance that the mind and the body are radically different entities which act on one another through different methods (Robinson 2016).

For many years, Cartesian dualism was held in very high esteem and was widely adopted by many philosophers and people in general. But during the 19th century, the rise in popularity of science and physics lead to dualism falling out of grace with many philosophers and even some of the public at large. This emphasis on physics dominated the academic world, proponents of this way of thinking believed that everything in the world operates within a closed system under the laws of physics (Robinson 2016). This way of thinking contradicts and defies dualist thought, as dualism has a difficult task explaining how nonphysical minds communicate with physical bodying when they exist in a world closed under physics. As a direct result of these new ways of thinking, dualism has become the overlooked and outdated theory, which it currently is seen as today, at least in philosophy.

# The significance of the topic

I believe that the topic of possible alternative theories to the juggernaut that is Physicalism, and newer theories of dualism like property dualism and epiphenomenalism, is an important one due to substance dualism losing the popularity it once held. While it has not been completely abandoned (there are still philosophers who argue for substance dualism like Andrea Lavazza and Howard Robinson) I believe that substance dualism needs to be given a fair hearing instead of being left by the wayside. Substance dualism deserves to be studied in greater detail because it is a more satisfying form of dualism than the newer varieties. Dualism is an important theory to study as outside of the academic and philosophical world, the clear majority of people believe that there is a distinction between the mind (or soul) and the body. Due to its popularity in nonacademic circles, dualism should be investigated and evaluated for the best form, as an alternative theory of mind to physicalism.

A second reason why dualism is an important theory to evaluate and study is due to the problem of responsibility in philosophy. I must preface this by explaining that this is an overly simplified version of an argument in favour of the importance of the study of dualism. All the same, it is a very commonly held intuition that people are responsible for their actions. By that I mean people chose to act in certain ways and are *thereby* accountable for their actions. Physicalist accounts of mind seem to be unable to explain how we as people can be held responsible for their actions. How exactly can one be held responsible for their actions if they are simply causally determined to act in certain ways? Physicalism leads one to the conclusion that one is not responsible for their actions as we are purely physical beings who cannot choose to act in any way other than the predetermined one we already have. If we are predetermined to act in certain ways, then we have no reason to be held accountable for any actions we may have committed. While physicalism fails to explain how we should be held accountable for our actions in this respect, dualism gives a very plausible explanation for our responsibility. Although this doesn’t amount to an argument for dualism, it leads to two conclusions. Firstly, part of the importance of defending any form of dualism lies in the connections between a theory of mind and ethical concerns such as how to account for our responsibility. Secondly, given that dualism is in a better position than physicalism in this respect, only a dualistic theory which adequately explains responsibility is acceptable. The only such theory, I argue in this paper, is substance dualism. It is for this reason that substance dualism is both a worthy subject of defence, as well as the most satisfying form of dualism one could adopt.

My study makes a contribution to this branch of metaphysics by giving a full critique of popular dualistic theories, specifically epiphenomenalism. My arguments will bring to light the flaws of some dualistic theories from the perspective of a dualist. I will give reasons as to why dualism is such a worthwhile theory of mind. While it is not the purpose of this essay to argue for the dualism being a superior theory to physicalism, it does open the door for future assessments. If a philosopher should decide to argue for a dualistic theory over physicalist one, it is vital that said philosopher use the strongest theory of dualism available. Which is why the goal of this paper is to discover which theory of dualism is most satisfying and consequently the strongest theory when compared to its peer theories.

A final, methodological, point is in order here. The texts that I shall be examining in this essay generally follow the format of discrediting physicalism (due to its widespread influence and acceptance in contemporary philosophy) and explaining why their preferred type of dualism is the best solution or explanation for that specific objection. As stated before, the purpose here is not to argue for the dualistic theory being superior to physicalism, but rather to examine dualism in order to find the best form of dualism. With this in mind, I shall not be focusing on each paper’s specific critiques of physicalism unless the critique is a large part of the central tenet of said theory (in which case I shall examine the theory as an argument for dualism rather than as an argument against physicalism). In other words, I will not be judging the paper on how well it counters the argument for physicalism, I will only be examining to what extent it meets the criteria for a satisfying form of dualism.

# **The Criteria for a satisfying form of dualism**

In order to properly evaluate each major type of dualism, I must first find a set of criteria on which to judge them. The three-separate criterion’s I shall use are issues which I believe highlight the essence of what a theory of dualism should be. My first criterion for a satisfying form of dualism comes from Howard Robinson’s entry to the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, where he claims that for dualism the mind and body are completely different entities. The other two criterions I will be using come from my own reasoning. The second criterion I will be using concerns the causal interaction between the two mind and the body. The third and final criterion I will be using follows a person’s moral responsibility for actions committed. I will be evaluating each type of dualism against the three criteria for a satisfying dualistic theory.

# 2.1 Distinct Entities

The first criterion I use to evaluate each theory of dualism is that any such theory must be committed to the idea that “the mental and the physical—or mind and body or mind and brain—are, in some sense, radically different kinds of thing” (Robinson, 2016). The first criterion, then, is that the mind and the body must be distinct enough to warrant there being a distinction in the first place. If the mind and the body are not completely separate and radically distinct things, then there is no reason for there to even be a distinction in the first place, as dualism by definition requires there to be two radically different entities. If you take the example of a glass of coke light and a glass of coke zero, the distinction between the two is minor and not at all radically distinct, but if one thinks of a glass of coke light and a glass of strawberry gelatine there is obviously a vast array of differences between the two, warranting their label of being radically distinct. In the same way, a strong theory of dualism must argue for a radical distinction between the mind and the body. If a theory does not have a strong enough distinction, then it seems logical to conclude that a monistic theory, be it physicalism or idealism, should rather be adopted.

The way I shall apply this criterion the theories of dualism is by analysing the texts written by prominent philosophers of mind, and evaluate how their arguments portray the distinction between the mind and the body. If the distinction is not strong enough to satisfy this criterion, then I will have no choice but to dismiss it in my search for satisfying forms of dualism. If a theory of dualism claims or leads one to the conclusion that the distinction is minor at best or non-existent, then it fails to live up to the prerequisite standards for a theory of dualism, and should, therefore, be discarded or revaluated by its proponents.

If a theory of dualism argues that the mind and the body are very similar to one side bringing little to nothing of value to the equation, then we must ask why is there even a distinction between the two? A claim that either the mind or the body has very little to no impact on the other may seem to be simple and logical in of itself. However, when evaluated against Robinson’s claim that entities need to be radically different, then the theory falters, since it easily collapses the mind and body into one thing, with no need for a distinction to even exist. This leads to the obvious conclusion that any theory which argues for such a thing is not a satisfactory theory of dualism, and should, therefore, be abandoned in favour of a more satisfactory theory.

# 2.2 Causal Interaction

The second criterion I apply to the theories of dualism is that of causal interaction. From our own experience, we can see that while the mind and body are radically different kinds of things, they must, at least in some way, causally interact with one another. If only one entity can interact and influence the other entity then a type of monistic theory of mind might be a better theory to which one could subscribe, as it would be far simpler to claim that there is only one entity than two separate entities, especially when one of the entities essentially contributes nothing to the equation. Meaning that if only the mind can affect the body to act in a certain way, or only the body can affect the mind to behave in a certain way then said theory is unsatisfactory.

When talking about the substances causally interacting, I mean that they can each affect one another. There should be a two-way street of interactions taking place. On the one hand, there should be instances of the body affecting the mind. An example of this would be if you put a finger on a hot stove and your body commanding you to move the finger off the stove before any conscious thought of moving your finger had occurred. Another example would be a person losing a limb and it affecting how he thinks and feels. The second type interaction is that of the mind affecting the body. An example of this would be one’s emotions affecting one’s health, in certain cases a person who has experienced the traumatic loss of a loved one, can experience severe health issues like heart attacks, even though they have no observable reasons to exhibit any symptoms. Another example would be a person believing themselves to be injured, possibly after being involved in a traumatic accident, when they have no medical reason to be limping or feeling pain.

The reason why I believe this to be a good criterion on which to judge the theories of dualism against is because it is important for a theory of dualism to advocate for both entities being able to interact. If I were to go back to the first criterion for judging the dualistic theories, Robinson defines dualism as “the theory that the mental and the physical—or mind and body or mind and brain—are, in some sense, radically different kinds of thing” (Robinson, 2016). In line with this definition, if there is no causal interaction being employed by both entities, no give and take between the mind and the body, then the substances could easily just collapse into the other, and from a monistic theory like physicalism or idealism.

This is the second criterion that I will be using to compare the major incarnations of dualism against, in order to assess whether or not said types of dualism are satisfying. Once again I will use the relevant texts written by major philosophers of mind who argue for each different form of dualism, and ascertain from said texts whether or not the theory exhibits a satisfactory causal interaction. If the theory shows unsatisfactory causal interaction, I shall dismiss it for a different theory of dualism that does exhibit an adequate causal interaction between substances.

A big reason behind why I have included the causal interaction criterion into this paper comes from a discussion Descartes has with a princess he had been tutoring. In a letter to Princess Elizabeth (Descartes, 2003), Descartes writes about one’s outlook on life affecting the health of one’s body. He says a negative outlook on life can lead to poor blood circulation even in a person who should be healthy and vice versa for a person who should be sick but who's positive outlook keeps his blood circulation healthy. Now this was a common assumption in the days of Descartes writing and modern biology has come a great deal along since then, making this argument seem fairly archaic and without much merit. I am not going to say that this example given by Descartes is a flawless argument that should be taken as an infallible one, but I will say that his argument could be brought into the 21st century with some help. And beyond that, we intuitively know that one’s mind can have a powerful effect on their body.

Another example in a more modern setting would be a man holding a negative opinion of someone, who has given him no reason for this poor treatment, and this negative image of the person drives the man to act in a hostile manner to said person. Many of us have faced a similar situation to the man, where you have a baseless dislike for a person you hardly know which might lead to physical manifestations of this dislike through the form of insults or possibly physical assaults, it probably can be explained as an unconscious connection of that person to someone who has hurt us in the past. This unconscious thought is the inspiration for our unexplained anger towards this person who is undeserving of such poor treatment. This exemplifies the fact that one’s mind can have a very large effect on one’s body and thus justifies its inclusion into this paper. If a theory of dualism does not allow a two-way street of interaction between the mind and the body then it goes against the essence of dualism, and should subsequently be abandoned for a more suitable theory.

# 2.3 Moral Responsibility

The final criterion for judging which form of dualism is the most satisfying as a theory of mind concerns the implication what each dualistic theory implies about moral responsibility. Moral responsibility is all about cause and effect, to what extent do you cause an action and to what extent you experience an effect from your action. It boils down to the question ‘are you responsible for your actions?’ When someone performs an action, is it truly their choice to do that action? Or do they have no say in what they are doing? If they have no control over what they do or do not do, then how can they be held responsible for their actions.

The problem of responsibility is not a new one, it has been around since the earliest of philosophers like Aristotle. There are usually two main schools of thought on the issue, either you are causally determined to act in certain ways, or you have free will to act in any way you wish. Either you accept that you are responsible and the cause of the actions you perform or you have no say in the matter and are powerless to stop acting the way you are acting. While the issue of moral responsibility is not a simple cut and dry issue of either you are this or that, for the purposes of this paper it is not important to discuss all the grey areas of moral responsibility. Therefore, I will not be arguing for or against any particular theory of moral responsibility, I will simply look at what each theory of dualism argues for or implies with their arguments, and critique them accordingly.

The reason this is important to the topic of dualism is that the theory of dualism heavily implies that a person is responsible for their own actions. The essence of dualism leads one to believe that people are responsible for their actions, as if my mind has control over my actions (not in every case but at least some of the actions I perform) then I am responsible for the actions I perform. If my mind and all of my experience are dictated to me with no option to act in accordance with my own free will, then I may not be responsible for the actions I perform or commit. With dualist's, inherent responsibility of action in mind, a satisfactory form of dualism must lead one to believe that people are responsible for their actions. If a theory of dualism does not at least imply that people are responsible for their actions, then it should be abandoned for a more satisfactory theory.

Another reason why I believe moral responsibility in a theory of dualism is important is due to the implications it has on accountability of one’s actions. The theory of dualism is linked to the idea of moral responsibility and free will in that if one is able to perform actions through commands sent from one’s conscious mind then one must be held responsible for said actions. If one’s conscious mind has no bearing on actions committed, then an argument can be created which claims that they cannot be held accountable for their actions. The philosophical problem this raises is that, if a person (we will call him Joe) were to be put on trial for a crime he committed and the judge asked why he did the things he did, he could simply say “I had no say in my actions, I cannot be held responsible for what I have done”. If the judge agreed that he was predetermined to act the way he has, then there is no reason to punish him for what he has done. Just like a person who is being held at gunpoint and told to attack and injure another person, cannot be held fully responsible for their actions, so too can Joe not be held fully responsible for his actions.

Once again I will be using texts from relevant and influential philosophers of mind, to evaluate whether or not their theory of dualism leads to moral responsibility. If the theory contains signs that it leads to insufficient moral responsibility, then I will abandon said theory for a more satisfying theory of dualism. The problem with some types of dualism is that they have the effect of undermining the idea that the mind is a locus of responsibility and seem to entail that human beings have no responsibility for their actions. If one of these dualistic theories is to be accepted, then there will be serious philosophical implications for our responsibility for our actions. If a theory argues that the mind has no causal influence over the body, then a person cannot be held accountable for their actions, as the person has no choice in what they do.

# **Evaluation of the theories**

David Chalmers gives detailed descriptions for most of the major types of dualism as well as the major types of physicalism in the recent debate. I use David Chalmers’s paper; “Consciousness and its Place in Nature” to get definitions for the various theories of dualism. Chalmers describes three types of non-physicalist theories. Type-D dualism is the theory that claims that microphysics is not causally closed and phenomenal properties play a causal role in affecting the real world. This is also known as interactionism (the theory that physical and phenomenal states causally interact with one another). This can also be seen as substance dualism, yet Chalmers does explain that interactionism could also be compatible with property dualism. Chalmers says that this theory could indeed be a viable theory of mind but there is still room for improvement. Type-E dualism claims that phenomenal properties are distinct (ontologically) from physical properties, with the added stipulation that mental events are incapable of causing physical events. It is known as epiphenomenalism, which holds that only physical states can cause physical states. It is because of this text that I have decided to focus on substance dualism, epiphenomenalism, and property dualism, to evaluate against my criteria.

# Property Dualism

Property dualism is the philosophical theory of mind which claims that there are two distinct metaphysical categories which constitute all of the reality; the two categories are physical phenomena and mental states (Lavazza & Robinson, 2014). While there are two types of categories or properties, there is only one kind of entity. This means that mental properties reside in physical substances, like brains. Property dualists go on to argue that mental states cannot be reducible to neurobiological states, the mental is distinct from neurobiological states. In other words, mental phenomena are non-physical properties of physical phenomena, but they are not properties of non-physical substances themselves. Defenders of such a theory claim that there is more to human beings than just the purely physical aspects of them, there is an experience of thoughts, feelings, and emotions on top of the physical aspects of one’s life. In the property dualists estimation, there are physical properties that people have like Jim being heavier than Sally, but at the same time, there are non-physical properties that people possess, like Jim liking olives when Sally cannot stand the taste or Sally feeling sad after watching a movie which left no impact on Jim whatsoever.

Property dualists argue that physics is not at a level in which it can accurately describe everything. In other words, “the ontology of physics is not sufficient to constitute what is there” (Robinson, 2016). What this means is that physics cannot account for the mind being part of our being. Physics cannot explain certain phenomena which we strongly believe exist. There is more to us as human beings than simply being a collection of atoms which make up our physical bodies, there is something unique that we possess, this being consciousness. For this reason, property dualists argue that we possess a nonphysical mind which is the property of our physical bodies. While property dualists believe that our minds exist, they still argue that they are properties of our physical bodies and not separate entities like what substance dualists propose. In essence, property dualists are physicalists who believe that there is something more to our physical bodies, there is some nonphysical quality which they possess along with a physical quality. With this rational property, dualists argue that the mind cannot affect the physical world.

How does property dualism fare against my criteria for an adequate form of dualism? We begin with the first criterion, that being does the theory claim that the two entities are radically distinct from one another. With property dualism claiming that the mind is just a property of our physical body, a question must be raised; is there a need for the distinction to even be there? Why not adopt a physicalist argument if you believe that there is only one kind of entity (that being the physical)? or on the other side why not adopt a substance dualist argument if you feel that the mind is necessary to explain reality? It appears that property dualism is basically a theory which sits on the fence instead of picking a side. This greatly devalues the theory and subsequently means that there is no need to adopt the theory in any way. David Skrbina (2014) makes a claim that the structure of the theory of property dualism, leads to the obvious conclusion that there is no need to adopt property dualism as the theory lends itself to being inconsequential. When explaining how the mind is able to exist the property dualist has to either hold that the mind emerges miraculously from a nonmental basis or they must adopt a virtual substance dualism (whereby the mind has always existed separately from the physical) in order to explain where the mind originates for property dualism (Lavazza & Robinson, 2014: 227). With such great lengths needed to satisfy how the mind has come into being it seems as if a theory like substance dualism would be preferable as there is no need to explain where the mind comes from, it has always been there separate yet connected to the physical.

The second criterion for judging property dualism is that of causal interaction. The criterion of causal interaction states that there should be a two-way interaction between the mind and the body (the mind should be able to affect the body and the body should be able to affect the mind). The basic notion of this criterion is that there should not be one-way traffic of either the mind only affecting the body or the body only affecting the mind. There should be interaction being caused by both the mind and the body. In his “Dualism, Dual-Aspect, and the mind”, David Skrbina (2014) gives a good critique against Property dualism. He claims that property dualism is too one sided as physical things cause both physical and mental properties to act in certain ways, but mental properties cause neither. As this criterion states, there needs to be a two-way street of interaction between the mind and the body. This is a problem for property dualism as there is no causal interaction coming from the mind to the body, only from the body influencing the mind. Without any kind of two-way street of interaction between the mind and the body, there is no reason for them both to exist. Since the theory of property dualism put more emphasis on the body instead of the mind, the need not even be a mind in the equation in the first place. Property dualism has clearly failed the second criterion and is, therefore, an unsatisfactory theory of dualism, and leads on to question why this theory doesn’t become a physicalist theory of mind with its over-emphasis on the body.

Another problem with property dualism comes from Robinson (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Dualism 2016), who claims that both entities (or things) need to be distinct from one another, which property dualism is not adequately exhibiting. By this Robinson is not assuming that substance dualism is the superior form of dualism. Rather he claims that entities (or things) need to be radically distinct in the sense that they are entirely different to one another, and as a result, these entities (things) should not be easily collapsible to one thing, otherwise this undermines the entire theory. In other words, if the theory stresses that the entities (things) are very similar in nature with there being little to no distinction between the two, then said theory is not worth adopting as it is making the objective overly complicated for no real reason.

The problem comes in from the lack of radical distinction between the mind and the body for property dualisms theory. This evident by the fact that property dualism emphasises the body over the mind, which makes having a nonphysical mind be there in the first place seem entirely unnecessary. Property dualism claims that the mind cannot affect the body in any way, which leads one to the seemingly obvious conclusion of ‘why is it necessary that there even be a distinction between the mind and the body. Surely it would be more logical that one adopts a monistic theory rather than a property dualistic theory. In short, property dualism fails to meet the criteria for a satisfying theory of dualism. This theory has much in common with epiphenomenalism, as they both claim that the mind cannot influence and affect the body.

The third criterion for judging the theory of property dualism is that of moral responsibility. Moral responsibility concerns itself with the issue of responsibility for performing actions, is a person responsible for the actions they have performed or are they not. As I have explained in the section on the moral responsibility criterion, the main issue is that of which theory of dualism hold to the essence of dualism, that being people are responsible for their own actions. The obvious conclusion that is reached when looking at property dualism is that according to its arguments, people are not responsible for their actions. Property dualism claims that only the body can affect the mind, which means that our mind and our conscious choices to act in the ways we wish, are flawed and we cannot choose to perform any actions. Essentially we are in the cockpit of an aeroplane that is flying itself, we can view and have ideas about what is going on outside, but our minds have no effect on the plane in any way. With this stipulation in place for the theory of property dualism, it is obvious that we have zero control over any actions we may have performed. This then leads one to the inescapable conclusion that property dualism once again fails the criterion of moral responsibility, and should subsequently be abandoned for a more satisfying form or dualism.

What must be seen from the argument and evidence I have discussed in this section is the obvious conclusion that property dualism is not a strong form of dualism. Property dualism had no answer to any of the three prescribed criterions it needed to face. And as a result of this failure to address and answer all three criterions, property dualism is without question an insufficient form of dualism. As I have explained in this section, it seems as if property dualism want the best of both worlds. Property dualism is a physicalist theory with some dualist tendencies. This act of sitting on the fence is incredibly bad for the theory as neither physicalist nor dualists will look particularly favourably upon the theory as a direct result of this noncommittal fence sitting stance they hold. It must therefore be acknowledged and admitted that property dualism is a particularly weak form of dualism and must subsequently be abandoned for a better theory or it need serious reinvention in order to answer each of my criterions.

# Epiphenomenal Dualism

Epiphenomenalism is a dualistic theory in which the mind and body are separate entities. But this theory contrasts substance dualism as epiphenomenalism argues that the body can affect the mind, but the mind cannot influence the body. In other words, there is a one-way causal interaction between the mind and the body. Epiphenomenalists often liken the relationship of the mind and the body to that of a steam train and the steam. The steam appears as a result of the train moving, even though it is created as a direct result of the trains movement the steam has no power over the train. If the steam wanted the train to go slower it has no way to make the train go slower, it is somewhat like the passengers on the train as it can only go along for the ride. In the same way that the steam has no power over the train so too does the mind hold no influence over the body, it is a passenger along for the ride. Frank Jackson wrote several influential papers on epiphenomenal dualism, which provide a better understanding of epiphenomenalism. In these papers, Frank Jackson attempts to refute physicalism in order to allow room for more dualistic thought. Although in his later papers, he rejects his original position and some of his arguments (Jackson, Postscripts on Qualia 1998) his earlier work is still highly influential to the theory of epiphenomenal dualism. I will be using most of his papers, aside from the latter critiques of his older work, in order to define epiphenomenal dualism.

Frank Jackson argues that physicalism cannot provide a complete understanding of how the world in which we live functions. The flaw in physicalism is captured in the ‘knowledge argument’, which Jackson develops through his hypothetical story of Mary. Mary has acquired complete knowledge of every physical discipline, including everything about colour; the wavelengths of colours, and what the colours are constituted of, inside a monochromatic room (a room devoid of colour aside from black and white). Once she has been released from the room and comes across something red, she comes to a realisation that other people have all along experienced something that she had never known. This, Jackson argues, shouldn’t be possible if physicalism is true. This is a particularly interesting claim as it has shaken up the established norm of philosophers believing that physicalism is the best theory of mind (Jackson, What Mary Didn't Know 1986). This paper written by Frank Jackson is an important one for the world of dualism as it provides a new talking point from which to consider the mind-body problem. Although Jackson eventually started arguing against epiphenomenal dualism (and dualism as a whole), I still find use in his earlier work and his thought experiment to find out the arguments as well as the flaws of epiphenomenalism.

Now I move on to the criteria I shall judge epiphenomenalism against in order to find out if it is an adequate form of dualism. The first criterion I am using to evaluate epiphenomenalism is that of the how radically distinctive the entities are. The criterion asks the question; are the entities in question distinct enough to warrant there being a distinction in the first place? If a theory of dualism fails to have a distinct and different set of entities, then there should be a concern as to why there should even be a distinction in the first place. Now it is evident when studying epiphenomenalism that the theory greatly favours the body to the mind (similar to property dualism) yet it does claim that the mind and the body are completely separate entities. One would have a tough time arguing that the distinction between the mind and the body is not necessary for the epiphenomenalists theory. As I explained earlier, epiphenomenalists liken the relationship between the body and the mind to that of the relationship between a steam train and the steam being released by the train. Only the train can influence the steam and not the other way around. While this may lead to problems a bit later on in this paper, for the distinct entities criterion it certainly helps. No one could confuse the steam train for the steam it releases, in the same way, no person can claim that epiphenomenalism advocates that the distinction between the mind and body is not warranted. Epiphenomenology clearly argues that the distinction between the mind and body is warranted and impossible to collapse into one entity, and therefore succeeds against the first criterion.

The second criterion I use to evaluate epiphenomenalism is the criterion of causal interaction. The basic notion of this criterion is that both the mind and the body should cause the other to perform an action or do a certain thing. The mind should be able to affect the body and the body should be able to affect the mind. It seems very clear that epiphenomenalism fails to comply, as it claims that the body can influence the mind but the mind cannot influence the body. As I explained earlier, the metaphor of the steam train and the stream it releases which epiphenomenalists use to explain the distinction between the mind and the body may help its pass the distinction entity criterion but certainly not the second criterion. Epiphenomenalism argues that the mind cannot affect the body in any way, only the body can affect the mind. This means that there is a one-way street of interaction going on, instead of the two-way street which is needed for a satisfactory theory of dualism. With this severe lack of giving and take between the mind and the body in place, it becomes clear that epiphenomenalism does not satisfy the first criterion, and is subsequently and unsatisfactory form of dualism, which should be abandoned for a superior form.

The third criterion is that of moral responsibility. Moral responsibility denotes the issue of how responsible one is of performing certain actions. Is one responsible for hurting another person and if they are not then why exactly are they not responsible. This criterion concerns itself with whether or not a theory of dualism allows for the argument that we are responsible for any action we may have performed. If a theory of dualism implies that people are not responsible for their actions, then it is firstly going against this criterion and secondly, it is going against the essence of dualism. The essence of dualism clearly implies that people are responsible for their actions and should subsequently be held accountable for said actions. Therefore, any theory which could lead one to deny that a person cannot be held accountable for their actions must be a deficient dualistic theory. When looking at the texts written on epiphenomenalism, it becomes very evident that the theory fails to comply with this criterion. Epiphenomenalism argues that the body can influence the mind but the mind cannot affect the body. From this, we can see that we have no conscious ability to act in certain ways since only the body can affect the mind and not vice versa. If we cannot act in the way our mind wants to, then we are causality determined to act in certain ways. If we have no ability to perform an action we wish we could, then we cannot be held responsible for the actions we do performing. Since epiphenomenalism fails to allow for the possibility of moral responsibility, it fails this criterion and should be abandoned for a better theory of dualism.

Dualistic theories like epiphenomenalism do not allow for one’s mind to affect their physical body. This is a fatal flaw for epiphenomenal dualism, as there clearly are instances of the mind affecting the body. Take the example of a person experiencing a traumatic event, like a car accident, and that person developing a limp as a result. The problem with this seemingly simple situation is that there is no physical reason to have any limp at all, there is no damage to the leg (no clots and no internal damage of any kind). This person develops a psychosomatic limp (a limp which has no physical reason to exist in the leg, the pain and limp itself is completely caused by the mind). Epiphenomenalism offers no reason for this situation to exist while Cartesian dualism does. Epiphenomenalists may counter my argument by claiming that we are mistaken that our minds are influencing our bodies. This argument may go along the lines of, just because we appear to be in control of our actions and we have a strong belief that we are causing the physical actions with our non-physical mind, does not necessarily mean that we are in fact causing the actions. Instead of understanding that our minds are basically spectators of our physical actions. In short, the counter argument is proposing that we are simply misguided in our understanding of how our actions are caused. This is not a strong enough claim to undermine my theory, as one could argue the exact same thing back at the epiphenomenalists. I could ask the epiphenomenalists how they can know that we are not in fact in control of our actions, and they invariably would be unable to give a satisfactory answer to the problem.

One argument that epiphenomenalists give as a response to my criticism comes from John Lachs (1963). He argues that just because we are aware of a psychological causal sequence, this awareness does not entail mental causation. Lachs likens this awareness, to one’s awareness of the sequence of shadows a moving car casts. In essence what Lachs is saying is that although we are aware of some kind of causal sequence, and we believe that we are in control of our actions, we have no more control over what we are dong than we do over affecting the car's shadow, the car will continue to act in the way it does regardless of our belief in our own mental causation of the cars shadow movement. I argue that this objection poses no genuine threat by considering Lachs’s articulation of it. I would refute this claim as unsubstantiated because it is clear that we are not simply aware of these sequences, we take active participation in these behaviours and actions. Yes, we do have an awareness of our everyday lives and actions, but simply having an awareness of this would not lead us to believe that we are causing the actions with our minds. Take as an example our awareness of watching a movie. Let’s say for the purpose of this essay the movie in question is movie Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back. Even though I have a distinct awareness of watching the movie and experiencing everything that went on in the movie, at no point did I ever believe that I was driving the Millennium Falcon spacecraft with Han Solo, or battling Darth Vader with a light sabre. This shows that having an awareness of something does not necessarily lead one to believe that one is causing those actions. In other words, the example given by Lachs does not hold, as we are not simple observers trapped in a body believing what we see to be our own actions, caused by our minds. If this were the case then whenever we observe something, we should believe that we are causing the actions in question. From the example, I give of myself watching a movie, it is clear that simply observing and experiencing visual and audio stimuli, is not justifiable to make one believe that they are performing the actions in question. Rather I would liken our experiences to that of a video game, if one is playing Halo on an Xbox, while seeing and hearing the game as time passes we cannot know anything other than we are controlling the protagonist to fight against the aliens. Like the shadows cast by the moving car, we view and hear the game, but we are definitely controlling ourselves at least we are controlling our character in the game.

From the arguments, I have presented, it seems very straightforward that epiphenomenalism is in no way the most satisfactory theory of dualism. The theory fails two of the three criteria for a satisfying incarnation of dualism. With epiphenomenalism favouring the body over the mind to such an extent it seems like there is very little reason for the mind to even be part of the theory, as it brings almost nothing to the theory. In my estimation epiphenomenalism fails not only to be a satisfying form of dualism, it seems to indicate that a monistic theory of mind may be a better choice.

# 3.3 Substance Dualism

The theory of substance or Cartesian dualism that I shall be focusing on will come from a combination of the older texts written by Rene Descartes’s in his book entitled *Meditations on First Philosophy* (The Philosophical Works of Descartes 1911) along with the more modern defenders of substance dualism, like Andrea Lavazza’s and Howard Robinson’s in their book “Contemporary Dualism: A Defense” (Contemporary Dualism: A Defence 2014). I use both original manuscripts for dualism alongside the newer works on the theory as a basis for understanding the theory and testing it against my three criteria.

In *Meditations on First Philosophy* (The Philosophical Works of Descartes 1911) Descartes wrote the iconic phrase "Cogito ergo sum" meaning “I think therefore I am”. With this phrase, Descartes emphasised the distinction between the mind (that which can doubt its own existence), and the body (whose existence is to be doubted). With this distinction in place, Descartes starts to question the interaction of these substances, as well as to evaluate what each substance is. In this text Descartes argues that we cannot know our body as well as we can know our minds, emphasising the importance of the mind and the unreliability of our body. While Descartes argues that there is a fundamental difference between the two types of substance, this does not mean that they are causally unrelated. Descartes claims that they can causally affect each other: the mind can affect the body and the body can affect the mind. It is here that I find a conception of dualism that is the best fit to the true essence of dualism as captured by the three criteria for a satisfying form of dualism I outlined in Section 2 (The Criteria for a satisfying form of dualism).

In line with some of Descartes’s arguments is the famous article by Thomas Nagel, titled "What is it like to be a bat?". This article is an attempt to explain that a materialistic theory of mind is faulty, due to not being able to explain the phenomenon of consciousness. He does this by setting up a thought experiment in which we must attempt to imagine what it is like to be a bat. This is an impossible task, Nagel argues, as we cannot imagine what it is like to be another person, let alone a bat. Nagel explains that even if a person had complete knowledge of how a bat acts and sees things (through echolocation), that person could never understand what it is like to be a bat from the bat’s perspective. Even if this person had the ability to put his brain inside the head of the bat, he could never have the same mindset as the bat in question (Nagel 1974). This theory places emphasis on the fact that consciousness is not transferable (one’s consciousness cannot be moved to a different host’s body), the brain and consciousness are not identical to one another.

Now it is time to evaluate substance dualism against the same criteria that seem to have severely taxed the other dualistic theories. We being with the first criterion, that being the distinctiveness of each of the substances. This criterion concerns itself with whether or not the theory advocates each substance to be radically distinct from one another. If the mind and the body are not radically distinct substances, then it would lead to the conclusion that there is no reason for the distinction to even exist. Substance dualism has the most powerful distinction between the mind and the body. According to the theory, the mind and the body are completely separate from one another. The body is only physical in nature, and the mind is completely nonphysical in nature. Neither theory is given explicitly large precedence over the other (the mind is seen as slightly superior to the body but not to the extent that it is almost the only substance in the argument). Is evident from the arguments that substance dualism complies with this criterion of distinct substances.

The second criterion for evaluating the theories of dualism is the criterion of causal interaction. Causal interaction claims that both the mind and the body should cause the other to perform an action or do a certain thing. The mind should be able to affect the body and the body should be able to affect the mind. It should not be the case that only the mind affects the body, or only the body affects the mind. Now substance dualism argues that the mind can affect the body as well as the body can affect the body, there is a two-way street of interaction occurring. With this in mind (if you will excuse the pun), it seems obvious that substance dualism complies with the criterion of causal interaction, as there is no bias towards either the mind or the body, both can affect each other. Since substance dualism advocates a two-way street of interaction between the mind and the body, it satisfies the criterion of causal interaction.

The third criterion is that of moral responsibility. Moral responsibility concerns itself with the issue of responsibility for performing actions, is a person responsible for the actions they have performed or are they not. This criterion argues that for a dualistic theory to be satisfactory, it must advocate that people are responsible for their actions, rather than having no reason to accept responsibility for their actions. Unlike the previous two theories, substance dualism argues that the mind can affect the body, and vice versa. With this knowledge that one’s mind can affect one’s body, it seems evident that substance dualism conclusively allows people to be responsible for their actions. With this knowledge, substance dualism clearly succeeds in satisfying the third and final criterion for finding the most satisfying theory of dualism.

After the evaluating substance dualism against the three criteria for finding the most satisfying theory of dualism, it is clear that substance dualism succeeds against all of the criteria. Substance dualism advocates distinct substances, it allows for two-way causal interaction between the mind and the body, and it accounts people’s moral responsibility. From this evaluation of each type of dualism against the criteria for the most satisfying theory of dualism, clearly substance dualism is by far and away the most satisfying. In conclusion, substance dualism has beaten its competition and has proven itself to be the best and most satisfying theory of dualism that is available right now.

# **Defending Substance Dualism further**

I have so far briefly shown how property dualism and epiphenomenalism do not meet all three criteria for a satisfying form of dualism while substance dualism does. In this section, I strengthen the case for substance dualism by showing that the most popular objection against is not as compelling as people believe it to be.

I have argued that substance dualism is the only form of dualism which allows for the mind and body to interact causally. But, ironically, Causal interaction has been a thorn in the side of Cartesian dualists, as Cartesian dualism does not seem to have a very good explanation of *how* it occurs. In my estimation, causal interaction takes place through means immeasurable to current sciences. Descartes made the faulty claim that the interaction took place in the pineal gland, which resides within one’s brain This theory seems highly implausible in light of modern scientific research. While Descartes was definitely wrong on the pineal gland, I argue that he was not completely wrong about the interaction taking place. I argue that the whole brain acts as a receiver and transmitter of impulses to act in certain ways.

To illustrate my argument, take as an example a civilisation untouched by the outside world. These people live in their town called Krikkit (they can amazingly speak a language almost identical to that of the language people of the outside world speak). One day several Krikkiters come across a bird native to their area, a particular kind of eagle. Normally the sight of this eagle would not be particularly noteworthy, but this bird is acting quite strangely, flying in erratic patterns and emitting a pecular noise. After some investigation, they find several scientists, holding a strange device. The scientists are controlling the eagle with a sophisticated wireless remote control. These Krikkiters would find it inconceivable that the scientists who are standing at a distance are somehow controlling this bird, even though it is acting differently to the other eagles of the area. The scientists could attempt to explain to the Krikkiters, that they are making the eagle move through radio waves emitting from the remote, and conversely the eagle is transmitting its camera feed to the remote so the scientists can see everything the eagle sees. The scientist’s explanation of how the remote controls the eagle is not entirely straightforward as the people of Krikkit have never encountered nor investigated most of the terms used by the scientists, and as a result, the people of Krikkit continue to reject the explanation offered by the scientists. If by some chance the scientists convince one of the native people that they are controlling the eagle, it would be difficult to explain that only his remote control affects the only that specific eagle. Even if the scientists could convince the Krikkiters that they really are controlling the eagle, the scientists would struggle to explain that only their remote affects the eagle, and only that eagle can be affected by that remote control. If there is a similar remote nearby, the scientist would find the task of explaining how only the original remote control affects the eagle, to be incredibly challenging.

This is analogous to how the mind and body interact with one another, the eagle being the body, the scientist being the mind, and the remote and the radio waves being the interaction. The radio waves are almost unknowable and unidentifiable unless one has had access to modern scientific practices which allow us to more easily discover and understand such ‘invisible’ things. I argue that the mind and body interact through a means that are immeasurable in modern science and probably too complicated for us to understand in our current state. This example illustrates that in the future, we may be able to study this interaction, but as for now, we simply do not have the ability. If our modern scientific understanding of the world does not encompass everything about our brains and how they operate, how can one explain in terms of science something that is completely nonphysical? To clarify, I am not arguing that a being like God is the cause of this interaction but rather that there is a causal link between one’s body and mind, that we are not aware of yet.

While some people may believe that this problem which is given against dualism is an insurmountable one. And yet I would argue that physicalism shares this exact problem. The reply given by physicalists as an answer to the question of how Mary is able to learn anything is that our science has not yet become advanced enough to give her the full physical description of how colour perception works. These proponents of physicalism claim that if science advances Mary would not have learnt anything new. This argument in favour of physicalism is exactly the same as the argument I propose for dualism, that we are currently not able to know or even understand exactly how the mind and body are able to interact with one another. Therefore, the standard physicalist answer to the problem of how Mary can learn anything in the thought experiment contains the exact implication that my argument seems to be suffering from.

While I may give a good thought experiment of how the body and mind interact, there is still a problem hanging over substance dualism’s head. This criticism of how a nonphysical thing can interact with a physical thing is constantly levelled at substance dualism and is often seen as the definitive point against dualism. While this criticism is definitely warranted it should be noted that the other theories to which the authors of this criticism subscribe are hardly without fault. Neither physicalism nor epiphenomenalism provides a definitive answer to the problem of responsibility. I am not saying that any of these criticisms are better or worse than the other, but I do assert that each theory comes with a cost when accepting and practising a method. Accepting any theory comes with drawbacks, it all depends on which theory’s problems you can live with, and I certainly think substance dualism is acceptable, even with its criticisms. I would far rather adopt a theory with a metaphysical mystery like substance dualism, that possibly could be resolved with further research and work, than begrudgingly accept a more popular theory of dualism that is plagued with moral criticisms that can never be solved.

# **Conclusion**

In this essay, I have described each criterion for a satisfying theory of dualism these criteria being; distinct entities, causal interaction, and moral responsibility, I have also explained what each of these entail, as well as why I feel that each of these criteria are important in evaluating each theory or dualism. In the following section, I discussed the three most prominent theories of dualism; them being Property dualism, epiphenomenalism, and substance dualism, I also applied the criteria of satisfactory dualism to each of the theories. I concluded from that section that substance dualism is clearly the most satisfying and subsequently best form of dualism. In the final section I looked at arguments for and against my earlier arguments, as well as some criticism experience by proponents of substance dualism, and concluded from that section, that substance dualism is still the most satisfactory form of dualism which allows for the best platform on which to argue against other theories of mind, like physicalism an idealism.

From this research essay, I have discovered that substance dualism is the most satisfying theory of dualism. It would provide the best platform on which to attack the monistic theory of physicalism. While I concede that there definitely are several flaws with substance dualism as a theory, I hold that it is still the best and most satisfying form of dualism in the world today. Not only does substance dualism adhere to all criteria judged against it, but it also satisfies the lingering intuition that we have district nonphysical minds which interact with our physical bodies. Substance dualism was the only theory which adequately answers or addresses each of my three criterions. While property dualism and epiphenomenalism fall into the trap of being very monistic in nature, substance dualism succeeds. Although it may have been the oldest theory of dualism I believe that this paper has shown the merit to studying and favouring the theory of substance dualism.

In closing, substance dualism is by far and away that strongest and most satisfying form of dualism that one could argue for. My goal was to evaluate and discover which type of dualism is the most sufficient form. One consequence of finding out which form of dualism is the strongest, is that now future work can be done in which a philosopher can perhaps ague against the immensely popular theory of physicalism, as they would have a very strong platform on which to stand.

1. **References**

Descartes, Rene. 1911. *The Philosophical Works of Descartes.* Translated by Elisabeth S. Haldane. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Robinson, Howard. 2016. “Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Dualism.” 29 Febuary. Accessed March 10, 2016. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dualism/.

Descartes, René. 2003. “The Principles of Philosophy .” In *Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings*, translated by Desmond M. Clarke, 105-145. London: Penguin Books Ltd.

Chalmers, David. 2003. “Consciousness and it's Place in Nature.” In *Blackwell Guide to Philosophy of Mind*, by T Warfield S Stich. Oxford.

Lachs, John. 1963. “The Impotent Mind.” *Review of Metaphysics* (17): 187-199.

Nagel, Thomas. 1974. “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” *The Philosophical Review* 83 (4): 435-450.

Jackson, Frank. 1986. “What Mary Didn't Know.” *Journal of Philosophy* 291-295.

Lavazza, Andrea, and Howard Robinson. 2014. *Contemporary Dualism: A Defence.* New York: Routledge.

Jackson, Frank. 1998. “Postscripts on Qualia.” In *Mind, Method, and Conditionals*, by Frank Jackson, 76-79. London: Routledge.