

SEPARABLE SOULS: A DEFENSE OF "MINIMAL DUALISM"*

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I. Introduction: Dualism and the Spirit of the Age

One must admit that dualism is not a fashionable stance in the philosophy of mind today. There are, of course, noted defenders of dualism, but the spirit of the age seems to crave some kind of materialism. Not all that many years ago the movement to behaviorism seemed inexorable. More recently the trend seems to be towards regarding the mind as identical with the brain and central nervous system. Even theologians and other religious thinkers seem to be abandoning dualism in large numbers, regarding it as an un-Hebraic "Greek" intrusion into the Judeo-Christian conception of man.

The rapidity of these shifts in opinion tends to produce in me a degree of distance from the latest intellectual fashions. Specifically, I am led to ask to what degree the abandonment of dualism is due to reason and to what degree fashion? Is dualism unpopular today because of new scientific discoveries? Has it been vanquished by newly-discovered philosophical insights and arguments? Is there a version of dualism which is rationally defensible today? I shall try to argue that dualism is indeed still a viable position.

II. Two Important Conceptual Distinctions

In order to explain the version of dualism I wish to defend I must first take a moment to reiterate two basic conceptual distinctions. The first is the distinction between substance and function. Roughly this is the difference between asking what something is and asking what something does. When asking a substance question, one asks about a thing's nature or what it is composed of. How many parts are there? What are those parts? When asking a function question, one asks about the roles something plays, the ends or purposes which it realizes or is supposed to realize. The difference between substance and function might well be illustrated by the automobile. One can describe an automobile as a physical, mechanical structure with a specific number of parts which are related in a definite way. Alternatively, the car might be described as the vehicle I use for conveying me to and from work, for taking my daughter to and from nursery school, etc. There are many interesting

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questions about the relations between substance and function which will not be discussed here.

The second important distinction I need to underline is the difference between “separate” and “separable.” “Separable” is a possibility word; hence this distinction involves the difference between what is the case and what could be the case. Two things which are separate in some manner or other exist independently, though, of course, they may be interdependent in any number of other ways. Two things which are separable do not necessarily exist independently. However, they are still “different” in the sense that they *could* exist separately in some sense of the word “could.” Neither of these two distinctions is perfectly precise, but both are distinctions we use all the time and have at least a rough, intuitive grasp of.

III. Separable Souls

My main thesis can now be presented. I shall try to defend a restricted position which I shall call “minimal dualism.” Minimal dualism is the claim that human souls (understood as selves or persons rather than as parts of persons or selves) and human bodies are related in the following way: *The soul is functionally separate from the body but as a substance it is only separable.*¹ Soul and body are distinguishable, and their separate existence is *logically* possible. Furthermore, both for theoretical and practical purposes, soul and body must be regarded as functionally separate. I am not claiming, however, that the human soul is in this life a separate substance from the body, at least on one natural reading of the terms “substance” and “separate.” However, since the soul is separable it could have been a separate substance and it is possible, at least logically, for it to *become* a separate substance.

Minimal dualism *is* a form of dualism, since if “substance” is defined as “that which is *capable* of independent existence” soul and body will still be *distinct* substances, even if not separate. Some will no doubt think that if two substances are distinct then they are automatically separate, and the distinction I have drawn between separate and separable souls will vanish. This may be true on some senses of the word “separate,” but there is surely at least one sense in which things which are not separate but are separable may nevertheless be distinguished and therefore regarded as distinct.

IV. Descartes’ Dualism

Aside from arguments against the truth of such a view, some might immediately respond by claiming it is not very interesting. This could be done in two opposite and incompatible ways. One response would be to wonder what else is new. That is, someone might claim that what I call minimal dualism is by no means original but simply is identical with what most dualists have always asserted. Since I hope that the view I shall defend is a recognizable dualistic theory, I willingly concede my

lack of originality to anyone who wishes to make this response.

The second, opposite, and more troubling type of response would be from someone who claims that a view which does not posit the existence of the soul as a separate substance is not really a form of dualism at all. To respond to this objection I wish to try to give minimal dualism an historical pedigree by showing that it is suggested by no less a dualist than Rene Descartes himself, in at least one highly significant passage in the *Meditations*.

In *Meditation VI*, Descartes begins his famous argument for the “real distinction between the soul and the body of man” with the following claim:

And firstly, because I know that all the things I conceive clearly and distinctly can be produced by God precisely as I conceive them, it is sufficient for me to be able to conceive clearly and distinctly one thing without another, to be certain that the one is distinct or different from the other, because they can be placed in existence separately, at least by the omnipotence of God; . . .²

Notice that in this passage Descartes carefully uses the terms “distinct” and “different” to refer to two things which are separable but not necessarily separate. His claim is essentially that two things which can clearly and distinctly be *conceived* as separate are really distinct, since God *could* cause them to actually exist separately, which obviously does not imply the two things actually do exist separately. He then goes on to argue that he does have a clear and distinct idea of himself as a mind different from the body and hence that “my mind, by which I am what I am, is entirely and truly distinct from my body, and may exist without it.”³ The claim is not that the soul and body do exist separately but that they *could*.

I am not here concerned with the soundness of Descartes’ argument but rather its implication for the relation between soul and body. A simplified version of his argument makes those implications clear. The argument has three steps.

- (1) Whatever can be clearly and distinctly conceived as separate *could* exist separately.
- (2) Soul and body can be clearly and distinctly conceived as separate.
- (3) Soul and body could exist separately.

Whether sound or not this argument is unquestionably valid. What is interesting about it for our purposes is that it clearly implies that at least in this passage Descartes distinguished between the claim that the soul is separate from the body and the claim that it is separable. What he wishes to argue for is the latter, weaker claim. Probably, it is Descartes’ later comment that he is “joined . . . and indeed so compounded and intermingled” with his body that he forms “as it were, a single whole with it”⁴ that underlies his cautious reluctance at this point to claim that the soul and body are actually separate.

Of course, in looking at Descartes' argument we have done more than simply give minimal dualism an historical pedigree. We have explained the claim that it is both dualistic and minimal. It is the latter since any form of dualism, including stronger versions that claim that souls are actually separate from bodies, must certainly claim that souls are possibly separate. It is the former since Descartes' argument illustrates a reasonably clear sense in which two things can be distinct and therefore really two, without being actually separate. It must be stressed that minimal dualism is therefore compatible with the thesis that soul and body are in some sense united and not separate. Perhaps I could introduce as a technical concept the relation of being "identifiable," which is to be ascribed to objects which, though not separate, are not strictly identical either, since their separation is at least logically possible.

V. How to Show Dualism Is Credible: The Strategy Outlined

Assuming that minimal dualism, this theory that souls and bodies are substantively distinct but not necessarily separate, is a form of dualism, the most important question to be raised is: What can be said on its behalf? Why should someone accept this view, particularly as contrasted with some form of materialism?

It is my belief that the traditional arguments for dualism retain much of their appeal. One ancient but honorable argument rests on the claim that universal concepts are immaterial, and therefore the ability of the mind to form and conceive of universals is not within the capabilities of a physical substance. Other arguments claim that mental and physical substances possess different and incompatible properties and therefore cannot be identical. For example, mental events are intentional, some can be described as true or false, or morally praiseworthy or blameworthy—all characteristics which it is alleged physical states of the brain do not possess. Conversely, physical brain states have a definite spatial location, size, shape, and mass—all characteristics which it is alleged cannot be meaningfully attributed to mental states. Some argue that man possesses free will and that only dualism is consistent with this fact. Finally, there is our introspective awareness of mental states to consider. We seem to be aware through introspection of some "private" events with "phenomenal properties," a consideration which has led some would-be materialists to jump ship for epiphenomenalism.⁵

Of course, all of these arguments presuppose controversial theses; and both their validity and soundness have been challenged by materialists. But I shall not try to labor them or defend them at length, because I believe the real problem with dualism lies elsewhere. It is not so much the case that dualism has become less plausible today because the arguments for dualism have been criticized, as rather that the arguments for dualism are being criticized because dualism has become less plausible.

There are two major and inter-related reasons for the decline in dualism's appeal, I think. First, dualism appears to be unscientific. It is thought by many to be either inconsistent with new scientific discoveries about the brain or at least to comport poorly with those findings. Secondly, those same scientific findings are claimed to strongly support a form of materialism, namely central state materialism, or the mind-brain identity theory. As the plausibility of this rival theory increases, naturally the stock of dualism goes down. For this reason my defense of dualism will take the following form: Rather than rehearsing the familiar arguments for dualism I shall argue that one well known variety of central state materialism (henceforth CSM), propounded by J. J. C. Smart and others, at least on one natural reading of its proponents' claims, far from undermining dualism actually *is* a form of dualism. It is therefore questionable whether CSM is really materialism at all, and also, of course, questionable whether the identity which proponents allege holds between mind and body is actually identity. If this claim that CSM is really a type of dualism is true, then it follows that all of the scientific findings which support CSM, at least in one form, also support dualism, at least in one form. All of those findings must at the least be consistent with dualism, and the claim that dualism has been shown to be unscientific or has been made less plausible by scientific findings must be false.

It is of course true that the Smart version of CSM is not the only version of the identity theory of mind and brain, nor is the identity theory the only option open to the materialist. Nonreductive materialisms of the type espoused by Joseph Margolis must also be considered. Some consideration will be given to some other versions of materialism later, though it is obvious that a dualist cannot slay all his dragons in one paper. (I shall ignore in this paper so-called eliminative materialism.) The Smart version of CSM is an important, widely-held version of materialism. And it has the virtue of being especially closely linked to the developments in brain physiology which have been thought to discredit dualism. If these scientific findings which have been thought by some to support materialism actually do not, then this fact may have a more general significance.

VI. Central State Materialism as a Form of Dualism?

The central claim of the version of CSM we are considering is that the mind and brain are contingently identical. Though the identity between mind and brain is alleged to be a "strict identity,"⁶ the proponents of CSM are careful to insist that this does not mean that the identity is a logically necessary one. The identity between mental processes and brain processes is *not* like the identity between a brother and a male sibling or a bachelor and an unmarried male. Such identities as these are logically necessary identities, which hold by virtue of the logical relations between the concepts. The identity between the mind and the brain

is said to be like the identity between a cloud and a collection of water droplets, or the identity between a bolt of lightning and an electrical discharge. These identities are contingent. They have to be discovered empirically and do not hold simply because of conceptual relations. People who talk about lightning do not necessarily know they are talking about electrical discharges. In the same way, proponents of CSM claim that people who talk about mental processes do not necessarily realize that they are talking about brain events. The identity is one which had to be discovered, or at least its plausibility depends upon certain discoveries.

Now I do not claim to clearly understand this concept of contingent identity. Indeed, I suspect that it is a radically confused concept which is not clearly understood by those who employ it. But it seems to me that those who employ it mean to imply at least the following three things:

- (1) Statements about mental events and brain processes do not have the same meaning and are not necessarily translatable without change of meaning.
- (2) Claims that mental events are identical with brain processes are empirically founded or at least are based on empirical discoveries.
- (3) It is logically possible for mental events to be separate from brain processes.

Something rather surprising follows from this. CSM turns out to be a form of dualism! Surprising as this sounds, if one looks these assertions of the materialist square in the face and if one has the courage to say the emperor has no clothes, then it is clear that the central claims of *minimal* dualism are not only not contradicted, but are supported by this "materialism." For the minimal dualist is not committed to saying that minds are actually substantively separate from bodies, but only separable. The central state materialist, in admitting that talk of minds is not translatable into talk of brains, leaves wide open the possibility that a functional distinction between mind and body may be valuable or even necessary. And the claim of the central state materialist that it is logically possible for mental events to be separate from physical events turns out to *be* the minimal dualist's main thesis, and indeed is substantially similar to the key premise in Descartes' most famous argument for dualism. Perhaps this suggests that the materialist is confused or that he is not really a materialist at all, or that the concept of contingent identity is confused and may not really be identity at all. We will examine these suggestions momentarily.

VII. The Materialist Responds

How might a convinced materialist respond to this? Perhaps he might

claim that though he admits that the mind *could have been* something distinct from the body, as a matter of fact mind did turn out to be physical. Since the mind is as a matter of fact *identical* with the brain, it is not truly separable from it. The materialist means to say that though we can imagine the mind having *been* something different than what it in fact is, given what it is, it could not be different.

This reply seems to me to be either confused or irrelevant. If the materialist merely means to insist by this that as a matter of fact the mind and brain are not separate, or even to claim that it is not physically possible to separate them, then his contention may be sound; but it is irrelevant as an objection to our dualist thesis that it is logically possible for soul and body to be separate. If the materialist is claiming that it would have been logically possible for soul and body to have been separate had certain contingent facts been otherwise, then his claim seems seriously confused, and so far as I can understand it, false. For what is logically possible or impossible does not change because of a change in certain contingent facts. If it was logically possible for mind and brain to have *been* separate, then it is logically possible for them to *become* separate. They are therefore separable and not identical. And, of course, strongly emphasizing the word "identity" or stressing that the materialist means "strict identity" will not help, if the materialist says things about soul and body which imply that they are not identical.

VIII. Is "Contingent Identity" Identity?

At this point someone may wonder whether I have not demonstrated too much. For what I have said might seem to imply that contingent identity is not truly identity, which would seem to imply that all identities must be logically necessary. But, it is frequently claimed, there surely are many examples of identities which do not hold merely by virtue of the meanings of the terms, identities like that of lightning with electrical discharge, which have to be empirically discovered. If my argument implies there are no contingent identities and there are contingent identities, it would appear that something is askew with my argument.

I believe this objection can be met if we distinguish the modal concepts of contingency and necessity from the epistemological concepts of the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*. These concepts are often confused by the materialist, who seems to reason as follows: "There are many identities which cannot be *a priori* since they must be discovered in an *a posteriori* manner. Only what is *a priori* can be necessary. Therefore there are some identities which are not necessary."

This argument assumes that whatever is discovered or known *a posteriori* is a contingent truth. However, Alvin Plantinga, in *The Nature of Necessity*, argues convincingly that the modal concepts of necessity and contingency cannot be identified with the epistemological concepts of the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*.⁷ Insofar as we understand

these latter notions, there seem to be some things which are necessary which are not known *a priori*. When the necessary is distinguished from the *a priori* it is then possible to recognize that there are many identities which have to be discovered, without this entailing that these identities are contingent.

Are there any contingent identities? Before we answer this question we must first distinguish between contingency (and necessity) *de re* and *de dicto*. "Minds are necessarily identical with physical objects" is a *de re* assertion that minds and physical objects are necessarily in a certain relation. "Necessarily, minds are identical with physical objects" involves *de dicto* modality, in that the proposition in question is asserted to have the property of being necessarily true.

There certainly is one sense in which it is contingent *de re* that some things possess the property of being identical (with themselves or anything else). The reason for this is that the *existence* of many things is contingent and thus it is also contingent that they possess whatever properties they possess when they exist, including identity. Propositions asserting that such entities are identical with themselves or other apparently different entities are therefore also contingent *de dicto*, if one takes such propositions to entail the existence of the object claimed to have the property of identity. At least for contingent entities, then, identity is not a property possessed in every possible world, and is thus not a strictly necessary property. However, it is still possible that objects might necessarily have this property in a weaker sense of necessity. That is, we might regard identity as a property which an entity possesses not in every possible world, but in every possible world in which it is actualized. We might term this sense of necessity, following Plantinga, "weak logical necessity."

It seems plausible to me to hold that whenever what appears to be two contingently existing entities are truly identical with each other then the identity is a *de re* necessary identity in this weak sense. Since any existing object X necessarily has the property of being identical with itself (X), if any object Y is identical with X, then by substitution Y is also (weakly) necessarily identical with X.

Many apparent counter-examples to this principle involve the above-mentioned confusion between the concepts of the *a posteriori* and *a priori* and the concepts of contingency and necessity. There are many identities, such as that of the evening star with the morning star, which had to be discovered, but this does not mean that the identities in question are contingent. If the evening star really is the same entity as the morning star then the two entities are not really two, but one necessarily self-identical entity. The identity is a weakly necessary *de re* identity, although many *propositions* asserting the identity (those employing definite descriptions) may be contingent *de dicto*.

Other apparent counter-examples involve a hidden confusion between a *de re* and *de dicto* reading of a proposition. "The number of the

apostles is 12" is obviously contingent *de dicto*, since there could have been 11 apostles. When, however, read *de re* as "The number which numbers the apostles is 12" the identity is necessary, since the number which numbers the apostles is 12, and 12 is necessarily identical with 12. Of course if there had been only 11 apostles, the proposition expressed by the sentence "The number of the apostles is 12" would have been false and then the number which would have in fact numbered the apostles would not have been 12. But the fact does not undermine the *de re* truth that the number which in fact numbers the apostles (12) is necessarily identical with 12. This truth may seem rather unsurprising, but it is no less true on that account. It seems sound therefore to hold that for all actual objects the property of identity is one which, if possessed, is (weakly) necessarily possessed.

That of course does not mean that all *propositions* asserting the identity of minds with brains (or some other physical object) are necessarily true if true, since, as we saw above, a proposition which asserts something which is necessary *de re* can itself be contingent *de dicto*. Propositions asserting that minds and brains are identical would certainly be contingent in one sense, if one takes such propositions to entail the existence of minds/brains, since it is not logically necessary for such things to exist. However, if we are right in claiming that such an identity would be *de re* necessary in the weak sense of necessity, then if there are any minds/brains and they are identical, then *some* propositions asserting their identity would also be weakly necessary.

According to Plantinga, *de re* propositions of the form "X is necessarily p," where X is an entity and p is a property, are equivalent, in a broadly logical sense, to a conjunction of the following two propositions: "X has p" and "'X has the complement of p' is necessarily false," where "X" and "p" are proper names for X and p.⁸ If this is sound, then if minds and brains are *de re* necessarily identical, then there is at least one *de re* proposition about the identity of minds and brains which is necessarily *false*. This will be a proposition in which "minds" and "brains" are functioning as proper names, and which asserts that minds have the logical complement of being brains. If there are any minds and brains, then the *negation* of this proposition will be (weakly) necessarily true. Many other propositions asserting the identity of mind and brain, particularly those involving definite descriptions, will still be contingent. I conclude that if minds and brains exist and are identical, then the identity must be weakly necessary *de re*, and at least one proposition asserting the identity must be necessary *de dicto*. Other *de dicto* propositions asserting the identity may be contingent.

If the contingency which the materialist claims to hold for the alleged identity of mind and brain is of this *de dicto* sort, then in ordinary language his position amounts to this: It *seems* or *appears* to us that minds could have been something different from brains. Thus the descriptive language we have developed to talk of these two apparently

different types of entities is non-synonymous, and some propositions employing this language of appearance to assert that minds and brains are identical are contingent. This contingency, however, is only apparent when construed *de re*. It is due to our prior lack of knowledge about the true character of the mind. If our knowledge of the mind were exhaustive, we would know that mental events were really physical events and hence see that they are *de re* necessarily physical, since as physical events they are necessarily identical with themselves. Because of our lack of knowledge about the true character of the mind, its identity with the brain had to be discovered, and therefore some propositions asserting it are contingent. The identity is, however, really a necessary one. Such a materialism would escape my criticism that it is really a form of dualism in disguise since it would not be logically possible (*de re*) in that case for the mind to be separate from the body. Souls would not be separable.

While this form of CSM has the merit of really being a form of materialism and not a disguised version of dualism it has the disadvantage of being far less plausible than the sort of "materialism" which I have argued is really equivalent to the minimal dualism I am defending. For what the materialist must now try to show is not merely that mental and physical events are *identifiable* (in our technical sense), but that their identity is necessary. He must claim that it is logically impossible (*de re*) for minds to *be* anything non-physical. It is very hard to see how these stronger claims could be defended. The sorts of empirical discoveries concerning correlations between brain processes and mental events which the materialist usually appeals to (or hopes to be able to appeal to someday) would seem at most to be evidence that minds and brains are in fact identifiable, not that they are necessarily identical.

IX. Functional Separateness of Mind and Brain

All is not lost for the materialist. I have argued that a genuine materialist must hold that the identity of the person and his body is a necessary one, and that we have little reason to believe that such an identity holds. However, one might also claim that we have so far given no reason to believe that such an identity does not hold. If the materialist is willing to give up the empiricist dogma that equates necessity with analyticity, then there seems to be no reason why he should not re-group and claim that he was wrong in thinking that mind-brain identity was *de re* contingent. Persons are really identical with their bodies, and the identity is at least a weakly necessary one.

While I do not know how to demonstrate that such a strong materialist claim is false, I think there are some reasons to think that it is false. Perhaps unless we have a "clear and distinct" understanding of the mind of the sort Descartes claimed to have had in his argument we cannot conclusively refute the thesis that consciousness is necessarily identical

with brain processes. But the following sorts of considerations make it reasonable to suppose that consciousness is at most identifiable with brain processes.

First, the difference in meaning between mental concepts and physical concepts is at least *prima facie* evidence that it is logically possible for their referents to be separate. True, necessity does not imply analyticity. But one might still conclude that the burden of proof would be on those who would *deny* the contingency of the unity of mind and body.

Secondly, if the contingency of the unity between mind and body is only apparent and is relative to our lack of knowledge of their true character, then advances in our knowledge should make the necessary identity of mind and body successively more evident. The new discoveries about the brain which have been made do not in the least do this, however. Though some of these discoveries may make it plausible to assert that mind and brain are identifiable, none of them seem to imply that consciousness is necessarily a physical process and could not have been anything else.

Thirdly, and most significantly, recent work in cognitive psychology strongly suggests that mentalistic language, because of its functional value, is not eliminable from psychological theory. We describe mental events and operations as similar or dissimilar by virtue of similarities and dissimilarities of function. The mind is described primarily in terms of what it *does*; the mind is that entity which thinks, feels, wills, reasons, senses, etc. Now it is a commonplace that similar functions can be carried out by vastly different entities. Carburetors and fuel injection systems carry out the same functions; computers which are radically different physically could realize the same program. If the criteria for identifying mental events and operations are functional, then it is difficult to see how mental entities could be *necessarily* identical with particular physical states. For even if some particular physical realities were identifiable as the entities which in fact carried out these functions, it seems logically possible for other entities to carry them out. And if there are any non-material entities (and this possibility cannot be ruled out in an *a priori* fashion by the materialist without begging the question) it is hard to see why at least some of the functions of mind could not be carried on by these entities.

For example, assuming that the existence of non-material beings such as God or angels is even logically possible, it seems plausible to think that such beings might be able to carry out such mental functions as reasoning or believing a proposition. Since such functions *could* be carried out by non-physical entities, there is no reason to believe that it is logically necessary that the functions of the human mind could be carried out only by the sorts of entities (brains) which carry them out in this life.

It seems to be logically possible, though frequently denied by con-

temporary philosophers, even for such functions as perceiving to be carried out by non-physical entities. For example, many recent books contain stories of people who were temporarily "dead," who claim that while they were clinically dead they had disembodied experiences, including such experiences as observing one's own dead body from across the room. While these allegations may well be false, they do seem to me to be at least possible. Whether such experiences are actual would seem to be a matter of fact. The functional separateness of mind and body would therefore seem to be evidence for their substantial separability. I conclude that it is reasonable to hold that minds and brains are at most identifiable, not identical, and that minimal dualism is a viable position in the philosophy of mind.

X. Minimal Dualism and Nonreductive Materialisms

Despite my invocation of Descartes, it is possible that some will wonder whether minimal dualism is genuinely dualistic. Perhaps it will be claimed that though this theory may be dualistic in some sense, that it is not dualistic in any *significant* sense. That is, someone might claim that the practical implications of accepting such a dualism differ little, if at all, from the implications of a materialistic monism. In that case, it might be argued, to distinguish between minimal dualism and materialism may be to make a distinction which makes no difference.

This difficulty is made more acute by the existence of versions of materialism which differ from the identity theory, particularly so-called nonreductive materialisms. For example, Richard Taylor has argued for a materialism in which mental properties, though not reducible to or explainable in terms of physical properties, are simply unusual properties of bodies.⁹ Jerry Fodor, at one period in his thought, defended a "functional materialism," in which psychological states are identified with sets of functionally equivalent brain states.¹⁰ More recently Joseph Margolis has defended a nonreductive materialism which sees persons and bodies as distinct entities, though not separate entities since persons are necessarily embodied.¹¹ This last position in particular seems very close to what we have termed minimal dualism, a position which could be clearly discerned in one of Descartes' major defenses of dualism.

Why is it that Descartes and Margolis say similar (though not necessarily identical) things but call their position by such radically different names? Part of the reason may simply be that dualism is not considered to be a serious option in the twentieth century, so that even thinkers who are defending positions which sound remarkably non-materialistic go to great lengths to wrap themselves in the respectable cloak of materialism. However, I believe that a more substantive reason can be found. Although many recent discussions of the mind-body problem seem remarkably detached from larger metaphysical concerns, the mind-body problem continues to be the world-knot, as Schopenhauer and Wilfred Sellars have termed it, wrapping up a host of philosophical

problems. One's position on the mind-body problem cannot be isolated from larger metaphysical concerns.

The point is simple: contemporary materialists, even nonreductive materialists, are usually metaphysical naturalists who do not believe that any spiritual realities exist. Hence it is natural and reasonable for them to believe that the possibility that persons or minds could be separate from their bodies is a purely logical possibility, not a real one. This lack of real possibility is signaled and emphasized by designating the position as "materialism." Descartes, however, was a theist who held that the embodied soul (which here means the self, not a part of the self) exists from moment to moment because of God's creative activity. Since God can do whatever is logically possible, it was equally natural of Descartes to think of the possible separation of soul and body as a real possibility, to be signaled and emphasized by designating soul and body as distinct substances.

Now this does not mean that the usage of either Margolis or Descartes is unreasonable, or that there are not genuine differences in their positions in the philosophy of mind which might serve to justify the differences of usage as well. But it should be noted that nonreductive materialism is dualistic in some senses of the word, as the similarity to Descartes makes evident, and as even Margolis admits.¹² At the very least, my hope is that my defense of minimal dualism will contribute towards a re-opening of the question as to what "dualism" and "materialism" in the philosophy of mind really amount to. It is possible that the defenders of nonreductive materialism will be able to clearly distinguish between their view and minimal dualism. If so, that is gain. But the distinction is one which needs to be made, and the fact of the need casts some doubt as to whether the view is genuinely materialistic. In effect, to the opponent who charges that minimal dualism is really just nonreductive materialism in disguise, I ask, "What does the fact that nonreductive materialism can display itself as dualism imply about nonreductive materialism?"

My own suspicions are that nonreductive materialism in the philosophy of mind may turn out to be metaphysically neutral; compatible, that is, with metaphysical positions which are comprehensively materialistic and with those which are not, compatible with positions which allow for the possibility of survival of death and positions which do not. It follows from this that a philosopher who holds such a view in the philosophy of mind, whether he calls it nonreductive materialism or minimal dualism, but rejects the possibility of survival of death does so for reasons which are not specific to the philosophy of mind but are drawn from more general metaphysical convictions. If true this is a point which deserves to be clearly recognized.

XI. Implications of Minimal Dualism

To underscore the possible significance of the position of minimal

dualism, I would like to append some admittedly sketchy and speculative thoughts about the implications of the position. Specifically, I want to stir the waters by asking what the position might imply for such issues as survival of death, interaction between mind and body, freedom, and the unity of the sciences debate. I am not claiming that my sketches represent the only way a dualist might view these issues, nor am I claiming that it is not possible for a materialist to give reasonable treatments of these areas. The areas to be discussed are obviously too complex to be settled in such a short manner. My sole purpose is to stimulate further imaginative discussion about what the implications of minimal dualism in the philosophy of mind might be.

If someone thinks that minimal dualism is really nonreductive materialism, my hope is that these remarks will unsettle him enough to re-open the question as to what materialism is. For if I am right in sketching out some of the possible implications of such a position, and this position is really a form of materialism in disguise, then materialism may have some really interesting and surprising implications. Of course it may be possible that materialism really does have some surprising implications, or that I am mistaken in my thoughts about what those implications might be. Because of the sketchy and speculative nature of what follows, however, let me add a further disclaimer: I do not think the soundness of my preceding argument is at all affected by the soundness of these remarks.

(1) Life After Death

On this issue it seems clear that minimal dualism does differ significantly from reductionistic materialism. The core of minimal dualism is the claim that it is logically possible for the mind to be separate from the body. This implies that the death of the body does not automatically entail the cessation of mental activity. Though one might think that there is little evidence that this possibility is actualized, it would seem possible for the functions of consciousness to continue after death, being carried on either by a new body of some kind, as John Hick has suggested, or in a pure disembodied state, as some religious thinkers and philosophers have believed.

It would seem to me that those who wish to claim that these possibilities are actualized might seek to justify their beliefs in two ways. First, there is the empirical evidence which might be provided through psychic encounters, mediums who claim to receive information from dead souls, etc. Or such a belief might be shown to be rational if it were clearly taught by a revelation, which one had good reason to believe was authentically inspired by God and was therefore reliable. Presumably if there is a God and he wills the continued existence of persons after their death, they will continue to exist.

(2) Interaction Between Mind and Body

Most dualists have been interactionists who have believed that mind

and body are involved in causal transactions both ways. This has been both a strength and a weakness to dualism. It is a strength because it makes sense of the apparent interaction between the mind and the body in our experience. It is a weakness because it has been frequently alleged that the separateness of mind and body makes this interaction mysterious or even inconceivable. I shall argue that minimal dualism preserves this strength while avoiding the alleged weakness, if it is a weakness.

Minimal dualism holds that mental events, though functionally separate and substantively separable from the body, are not separate from the body but are rather identifiable with certain bodily states and processes, or parts. With what aspects of the body can mental states be identified? I think the question is one for empirical investigation to answer, ultimately, and I am not sure what the answers will turn out to be. Perhaps the answers will be different for different sorts of mental states or perhaps even vary with the individual. (There is some evidence that in different persons the same intellectual operations are carried out by different aspects of the brain.) My hunch is, however, that at least some mental processes will be identifiable with wholistic, gestalt-type, global states of the brain and central nervous system, or at least broad sub-sections of these, or perhaps even with whole states of the body.

If the mind can be identified with such wholistic, gestalt-like states, it seems to me that interaction between the mind and the body will not be particularly mysterious in any metaphysical sense, nor would such interaction be threatened by scientific investigation of the brain as a physical organism. No "shadow of physiology" hangs over such interaction. To the neuro-physiological observer this physical interaction would appear as interaction between a physical state or system considered as a whole and the parts of that state or system. Yet this physical interaction could truly be described as an interaction of mind and body since the wholistic physical states could truthfully be described in two ways. They are, understood functionally, mental events, yet they are also physical events. Hence the two events can properly be described as identifiable or united, even though separable. It is interesting to note in this context that Margolis' nonreductive materialism also leaves open the possibility that persons may causally produce changes in their own bodies.¹³

(3) Freedom

The next issue I propose to discuss is whether minimal dualism is consistent with or congenial to the claim that human persons are free in the strong libertarian sense. This is the sense that entails that a person who freely chose to perform an act could have chosen another action, even if nothing in the chain of events preceding the act had been different. This issue is not so obviously relevant to the viability of minimal dualism, since not all dualists have been libertarians, nor all

libertarians dualists. However, many dualists have been libertarians, and some of them have even employed the alleged freedom of man as an argument for dualism in the following manner. Assuming that all physical entities are completely causally determined and that the human self is not completely causally determined, it follows that the human self cannot be simply identical with any physical entity. Both premises in this argument may be open to question, but regardless of its soundness or the soundness of similar arguments, the close historical connection between dualism and libertarianism would make it desirable that minimal dualism be at least consistent with libertarianism, though I do not think it necessary or desirable for dualism to entail libertarianism.

This is a puzzling issue, and I am not sure of the wisdom of my view. Nevertheless, it seems to me that minimal dualism is consistent with libertarianism. The libertarian view of the will is puzzling and mysterious regardless of one's ontology of the self. For it includes the claim that a necessary condition for a free act is that it is causally undetermined by any prior event or set of events. A free act is one which is originated by the conscious *self*, which may have reasons for its actions but which is not determined by those reasons. However, the fact that the conscious self may be identifiable with a body or united with a body does not make these free actions any more or any less mysterious. If libertarianism is credible, it remains credible if minimal dualism is true.

Perhaps someone will object that if mental operations are identifiable with physical states, and if those physical states of affairs are causally determined, then the mental operations must also be causally determined. Two responses to this are possible. First, it is not obvious to me that the argument is valid. If the criteria for identifying mental events are functional, and if therefore the same mental act could be carried out by and hence identified with differing physical states, then even if all physical events *qua* physical events can be causally explained via deterministic laws, it is not obvious that there must be deterministic laws which suffice to explain all *mental* activity.

The second possible response is to question whether all physical events are necessarily explainable deterministically. One might wonder whether the kind of part-whole interaction which we discussed as the physical form of mind-body interaction will necessarily be explained by deterministic laws. Certainly we are far from discovering such laws. What I am suggesting is that the actions of a conscious self or mind could have some measure of autonomy, even if this self is identifiable with the body, especially if the self is identified with wholistic states or patterns of organization of the body. Empirically this would appear as another instance in which a whole could not be reduced to the sum of its parts. This suggests some limits to the ability of neuro-physiology to predict human behavior purely on the basis of micro-analysis of the brain, but we have no strong empirical evidence that these limits are not a real possibility, at least for complex, intelligent behavior.

(4) Scientific Methodology for Studying Man

The relationship between the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of the social sciences is an important area. It has been maintained (rightly in my opinion) that dualism puts up a road block to the unity of science. If man is a purely physical creature, then it seems logical to think that the scientific methods which have proven successful in studying other aspects of the physical realm will prove successful in explaining human behavior as well. Conversely, if man is a unique type of entity then perhaps the study of man will be in some important ways unique. This sense that dualism stands in the way of a complete scientific world-picture was certainly an important motive historically for the development of behaviorism as a philosophy of mind.

Depending on one's perspective this situation can be seen as a strength or weakness to dualism. To those inclined to think that man is unique in some way, for example in possessing the power of free choice, dualism will seem congenial in that it provides at least a *prima facie* reason for thinking that the kinds of deterministic explanations employed by some physical sciences will not be appropriate to the study of man. To those who believe in the unity of science and want to see human beings and human behavior as simply more complex forms of physical interaction, dualism is likely to appear as an obscurantist attempt to delay the progress of science.

Once again it appears that minimal dualism can retain some of the strengths of dualism while avoiding some of the weaknesses. If I am right in my contention that minimal dualism is consistent with libertarianism, then it would seem that a scientific account of human actions would have to take into account the unique features of actions if humans are free. For example, explanations of actions might need to be non-deterministic and normative or value laden in character. The unique functions of the human mind would certainly seem to be one of the conditions for this uniqueness, and hence minimal dualism can be seen as an attempt to maintain the uniqueness of man.

In emphasizing the uniqueness of man, however, no obscurantist road blocks are placed in the path of any science. Scientists are perfectly free to explore the human body and bodily movements in any fashion they recognize as profitable, so long as they recognize that such bodily movements are not identical with thoughts or actions. Nor is such scientific work necessarily unimportant or insignificant in understanding and explaining thoughts and actions, since thoughts and actions are identifiable with bodily events. The dualist has every reason, therefore, to encourage such study in the hope that a knowledge of the physical mechanisms which carry out or realize thoughts and actions will increase the autonomy of the person.

XII. Conclusion: Minimal Dualism and the Historical Tradition

I should like to conclude by urging once more that minimal dualism is

indeed in the mainstream of traditional dualistic thought. The assertion that mind and body, though distinguishable, are not separate, is not historically odd. Most classical dualists have insisted that the soul and body are in some sense a unity.

I suspect that the most damaging blows to dualism in the twentieth century have been the caricatures which opponents have foisted on the view. Ryle talks of "the ghost in the machine." J. J. C. Smart talks of an unperceivable "ghost-stuff" which dualists allege lurks in the body. These caricatures, in addition to being crude, betray a tendency to think of dualism in an overly Platonistic manner.

Minimal dualism is different. When challenged by a Ryle or a Smart to say where and what the soul is, the minimal dualist does not look for a ghost-substance inside the human body. He simply points to the human body. The soul is the self and the self of a human being is, in this life at least, embodied. It is identifiable with a body. The minimal dualist does not see this embodiment as undesirable or un-natural, but he does not see it as logically necessary either. He can agree with a comment I believe Wittgenstein once made, to the effect that the best picture of a human soul would be a picture of a human body.

It should be remembered that the history of dualism includes Aristotelians as well as Platonists. Aristotle is usually, and correctly I believe, regarded as a monist in his view of the mind and body. Despite this, there are elements in Aristotelian thought which could with profit be appropriated by dualists, as was done in the past by such Aristotelians as Aquinas. While I do not wish to disparage the Platonic tradition and its contribution to dualistic thought, I believe that dualists today would do well to ponder the contributions of nonreductionistic monists such as Aristotle, as well as contemporary thinkers like Merleau-Ponty and Margolis. Insights from such perspectives may be helpful in avoiding the caricatures which have been foisted on dualism, caricatures which I doubt would be recognizable by Plato himself.

NOTES

* An earlier version of this paper was read at the University of Rhode Island as the William Oliver Martin Memorial Lecture. My thanks to that university for the invitation.

¹ I use 'soul' and 'mind' as synonyms in this paper.

² Translation taken from *Discourse on Method and Other Writings*, Penguin (Baltimore, 1968), p. 156.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁵ See Keith Campbell, *Body and Mind*, Anchor Books, Doubleday (Garden City, New York, 1970), especially chapters 5 and 6.

⁶ See J. J. C. Smart, "Sensations and Brain Processes," in *The Mind-Brain Identity Theory*, ed. by C. V. Borst, Macmillan, St. Martin's Press (London, 1970), p. 56.

⁷ Clarendon Press (Oxford, 1974), pp. 6-9.

⁸ Stated in this form the principle obviously holds only for named entities and properties. Plantinga amends it slightly to cover yet un-named entities and properties. See p. 32 in *The Nature of Necessity*.

⁹ See Richard Taylor, *Metaphysics*, Prentice-Hall (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1974), pp. 31-37.

¹⁰ See Jerry Fodor, *Psychological Explanation: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Psychology*, Random House (New York, 1968), pp. 118-120.

¹¹ See Joseph Margolis, *Persons and Minds: The Prospects of Nonreductive Materialism*, D. Reidel Publishing Co. (Dordrecht, Holland, 1978).

¹² See pp. 5-6 in *Persons and Minds*.

¹³ See p. 25 in *Persons and Minds*.