

Mind and Matter Lecture 2

1. We saw in the last lecture that there seemed to be an argument for dualism based on the impossibility of imagining oneself without any thoughts. We also saw how this argument failed. But the invalidity of an argument does not show the falsity of its conclusion. Still, there are reasons for dissatisfaction with dualism.
2. Probably the most obvious is the Interaction Problem. In fact there are two versions of it. One version says that dualism makes it impossible to see how mental events can have a causal impact upon the physical world as they clearly do e.g. in the case of action. Mental events are unextended, physical events extended. But how can an unextended event cause an extended one? By itself this is easy to answer. There is no more difficulty in saying that an unextended event causes an extended one than there is in saying that a match causes a fire. The fact that cause and effect differ over other properties never causes trouble; why should the fact that they differ over *spatiality* cause a problem?
3. The other version is more difficult to answer. Probably every physical event *does* have a physical cause. So either (a) mental events that have physical effects are themselves physical or (b) our physical acts are causally overdetermined or (c) the mental is causally inert. Dualism denies (a) so must accept (b) or (c).
4. The overdetermination doctrine (b) makes physical behaviour like the death of a man struck by lightning whilst falling off a cliff at the bottom of which a grizzly bear and a mountain lion wait to mutilate him: any one of these events might be said to bring about his death—but if any of them had not happened then the death would still have occurred. Similarly, (b) says that when you cried out after being stung (say), it is still true that if you had not felt the pain then you would still have cried out. Whilst there is nothing inconsistent about overdetermination we do not often observe it in our world. As a rule in our world an event typically has many *effects* but only *one* cause. It is hard to believe that, and harder to see why, our mental lives should violate this rule.
5. Option (c) comes in two versions: (c1) psychophysical parallelism and (c2) epiphenomenalism. (c1) It often happens that events are correlated without either causing the other, for instance whenever Big Ben strikes the hour so does St Martin-in-the-Fields. The reason for this is typically that both have a common cause. So too with the mental and the physical: your mental and physical histories are as it were causally sufficient unto themselves but run along parallel tracks (see Leibniz *Monadology*). But what could the sufficient cause be?
6. (c2) The alternative is that mental events are effects of some physical events without being causes of any—notice that this view faces the supposed difficulty arising from the first version of the interaction problem; but it evades the real difficulty arising from the second. (Are

you clear as to why?) On this view our mental lives are in Ryle's memorable phrase like the smoke above the factory. This dualistic response makes mental life an inert commentary on the real action and is therefore hard to believe. But the Libet experiment may show that it is (at least in some cases) inescapable. See D. Wegner, *The Illusion of Conscious Will*.

7. In any case there is plenty of reason to want an alternative to dualism. Let us go back to the Interaction Problem. It seems that if anything is a case of causation, it is the relation between our mental states and subsequent bodily movements or reactions. Combining this with the idea that all physical events have physical causes, we get the conclusion that all mental events of both types are *identical* with physical states or events. Theories that assert this are called *identity theories*. Proponents of this theory typically regard the identity between, say, pain and the firing of a certain nerve, as being a matter of scientific discovery. Science does discover identities between things that appear different. For example, heat has been discovered to be identical with molecular motion; water has been discovered to be identical with H₂O. This is quite compatible with the fact that they do not *appear* to us like this e.g. heat does not *feel* like molecular motion, though that is what it is. Similarly the fact that pain does not *appear* like the firing of a nerve does not rule out that that is what it is. (An outstanding example of this approach is the paper by Smart in *Philosophical Review* 1959).
8. There are in fact two basic versions of the identity theory: type identity and token identity. The first says that instances of the same *kind* of mental state are identical with instances of the same *kind* of physical state; the second denies this. So for example, a type identity theorist would say that a belief that it is raining is always instantiated by the firing of the same type of nerve; the token identity theorist would say that they might be different. In the case of theoretical identifications in physical science we usually have type-identities. And this seems to be especially plausible for those mental states that have characteristic physical expression e.g. typically the phenomenal ones. But for propositional states you might be more dubious.