Dualism

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What is Dualism

Dualism is one of the theories that evolved from thinking about the mind-body problem. The essence of the mind-body problem is the investigation of whether the mind and body are two separate entities, one conjoined entity or an entity and its extension. In the context of this question, substance dualism is the hypothesis that the mental and physical are entirely distinct substances with the former being immaterial and non-spatial.

Why Did Dualism Come About

The idea of dualism began during the time of the scientific revolution. In the mid 17^{th} century, it started becoming obvious how apparently different phenomena were manifestations of the same observation based, mathematically-derived laws. It was around this time that Descartes formulated his ideas on dualism sparking the debate of the mind-body problem.

Relevant Theories and Discussions on Dualism

Descartes

Descartes was the primary proponent of the idea of *Substance Dualism*, which draws the distinction between mind and body in terms of physical, conceivable differences between the two. Descartes elaborates on the idea of mental substances as being 'typified by thought'. Thought, as used by him, is an umbrella term encapsulating beliefs, inferences, desires, choices, sensations, perceptions, emotions, imagination and memories.

As for material substance, Descartes defined it as being public and explainable in physical or mechanical terms. It can not exist without physical extension in space and its features are represent-able through mathematical quantities.

He made the following arguments to defend his stance on the clear distinction between the mental and the material:

1. Qualitative Distinctness :- The idea that the mind is a non-spatial entity with an evaluable purpose and is epistemically private (a qualitative, subjective measure). whereas, the body is a space-consuming entity which is normatively inert. It is epistemically public (it is mathematically quantifiable and objective).

2. Conceivability - Possibility Principle :- One of the more debatable arguments made by Descartes wherein he states that he can clearly conceive 2 things as distinct so "God" must have made them as separate entities and that his essence was only in being a thinking thing.

3. Conceivability of Disembodied Existence :- Similar to the conceivability - possibility principle, this idea rests on the assumption that there is a clear, distinct conception of the existence of a body but not a mind. Whatever can be clearly and distinctly conceived by man must be "God's" creation, and thus the mind is different from the body.

4. Interactionism - An idea stemmed from Elisabeth of Bohemia's criticism of Descartes' work, interactionism proposes that mental substances and material substances causally interact in the *pineal gland*. To this, a valid criticism was raised by Elisabeth of Bohemia, who reasoned that if the mind were non-spatial and the body were spatial, where and how do they interact? To this, Descartes suggested that the pineal gland is only organ that exists as a singular, so must be the site where thoughts (also singular and discrete) must originate. However this explanation still did not address the concern of HOW the mind and body interact at the pineal gland.

Thomas Hobbes

During Descartes' era, Hobbes advocated for *materialism*. He believed that all thoughts and ideas are physical processes in the brain created by external and internal

stimuli and that "mental activity" was just neural interactions. His primary argument was that *Ratiocination* was just computation. The process of making judgements was based on sensible thought and logic and can be considered analogous to mathematical operations. He claimed that reasoning was nothing but reckoning - the addition and subtraction of consequences of agreed upon symbols for the purpose of marking (thinking) or signifying (demonstrating thought to others).

Arguments Supporting Descartes' Dualism

Dualism vindicates the intuition that the mind is separable from the body. This idea is consistent with several theistic commandments regarding the possibility of an afterlife. The idea of multiple realisability supports Descartes' idea of a distinct mind and body.

Multiple realisability is a counter movement to the reductionist idea that the relationship between mental states (like pain) and physical states (like the area of the brain) is injective (one-one). Multiple realisability advocates for the mind being a sort of software that can be implemented in a variety of hardware. Since different species experience the same mental state through different physical states, it is likely that mental states are multiply realisable, calling into question the notion that the mind is equivalent to the brain. Multiple realisability is amenable with dualism itself, however, Descartes believed that animals and lower life forms were not capable of intelligence. So his idea of dualism would not permit for multiple realisability. It is also contiguous with future theories like functionalism, but it does refute claims like the one made by the identity state theory.

Potential Criticisms of Descartes' Dualism

Hobbes

One of the earliest criticisms to Descartes was provided by Hobbes with his *paradox of mechanical reason*. Hobbes challenges Descartes' statement that "mentality is the rule-governed manipulation of meaningful symbols". His argument is that the very thought, to explain which we created linguistic symbols, is composed of those very symbols. But the thought originated from somewhere and had some original meaning. So where does meaningfulness originate from?

Elisabeth of Bohemia

Elisabeth of Bohemia rebutted Descartes' idea of interactionism by suggesting that simply claiming a causal interaction between the mind and body was not satisfactory without providing the specific location and mechanism of doing so.

Brain-state Theory

Smart's **brain-state theory** or identity theory states that sensations are nothing but brain processes. He proposes that there is a strong correlation between mental states and brain states. This could either be because one causes the other or that one *is* the other. The former of the two would be dualistic. The latter - as elaborated by Smart - is the explanation we should prefer because when we have two competing theories for the same problem, we should choose the simpler one (Occam's razor). Additionally, Smart's solution does not encounter the interactionism problem faced by Descartes, since there is no idea of "spatial" and "non-spatial" entities, so there is no question of the mechanism of their interaction.

Contemporary Ideas

Contemporary cognitive scientists like Andy Clarke step away from simplistic dualism, and gravitate towards ideas like the extended mind and embodied cognition. **Extended mind** is the use of reliable bio-external sources of support and structure to

complement human-made symbols and problems. There is also the prevalent theory of **functionalism** and the **representational theory of the mind**, which suggest that mental states are not defined by their composition but rather the function they perform. Thus, dualism is now becoming an archaic philosophy in the mind-body debate, but it is still meritorious in that it is responsible for having sparked the debate in the first place and hasn't yet been entirely disproved.