

INTERVIEW WITH SCIENCE AND RELIGION NEWS (2006) ON MIND-BODY DUALISM

You're one of the most well known philosophical defenders of a dualism of body and soul, which has become quite unpopular. Why continue to be a dualist?

I think that any scientific theory ought to explain all the relevant data. Data are events, that is the having of properties (characteristics) by things (substances). The data of psychology include people (substances) being characterised by images, pains, other sensations, thoughts, and beliefs; and to talk of these things is not to talk of goings-on in the brain. That forces on us what is called property dualism – the view that people have two sorts of properties – mental properties (pains, thoughts etc) and physical properties (electro-chemical patterns in the brain etc). Of course one could define having a thought that 'today is Friday' as the same event as the brain event associated with it. But if one did, one would then have to say that that event has two aspects – the aspect of neuro-chemical discharge, and the aspect of a thought. And that is just property dualism under another name.

But if you want to describe the world fully, you must also describe not merely which properties are instantiated, but which substances have these properties. But you could know the whole history of a person's body (and which properties, physical or mental, are connected with that body), and still not know how many persons have these properties. If a patient's corpus-callosum (the main nerve tract between the two brain hemispheres) is severed he behaves under certain conditions in a strange way. He can show knowledge of information conveyed to the right side of his eyes by limbs on the right side of his body but not by limbs on the left side of his body; and he can show knowledge of information conveyed to the left side of his eyes by limbs on the left side of his body but not by limbs on the right side of his body. There are two possibilities for what is happening here – either that severing the corpus callosum has created two persons; or that there is still just one person but he can now only express certain sorts of information in certain kinds of way. The person or persons concerned will be aware of which is the case (these things are data for him or them), but they are separate data from the data of the extent of interconnection remaining between the two brain hemispheres; and the datum of how many persons there are does not entail the datum of how much interconnection there is, nor vice versa. So truths about persons are not truths about brains or bodies. Since persons obviously include their bodies; these data entail that there is a separate non-physical part of the person – his soul (the essential part which makes that person who he or she is). If truths about persons were truths about their bodies, if we knew everything about their bodies we would know how many persons there are – but we don't! This forces on us substance dualism – the view that persons consist of two separate substances – body and soul.

I am not postulating dualism as an explanation of data, of which some other theory might provide a better explanation; I am putting it forward because it is a datum of experience that some person has a mental property; and that talk about persons is not talk about bodies and talk about mental properties is not talk about physical properties.

How does the split-brain experiment illustrate this point?

You take my brain out of my skull and you divide it into two, and you put one half into one otherwise empty skull and the other half into another otherwise empty skull. And if that's not enough to produce two conscious persons, you add bits to each of these brains from my identical clone and then you start these operating and you have two living persons with conscious lives. But you do not know which is me – it may be that number 1 is me and it maybe that number 2 is me and it maybe that neither are me. But one of these answers must be correct. And that again illustrates the point that you could know everything that has happened to bodies (what has happened to every atom of what was previously my brain) and yet no know what has happened to me. Hence being me must involve something else as well as my body, and that something else is not another property – it's not another mental experience; because you can know all about the thoughts and feelings of the subsequent persons without knowing which is me. It is having an essential part, a substance which is the essential part of me (and has properties), a soul.

Why is there a continuing attraction to physicalism?

I find this extremely puzzling. I just don't think that physicalists have seriously faced up to what are the data which need explaining. I suppose that they are thinking rather loosely that since physical science has been very successful in explaining physical events, all events must be physical events! But obviously that doesn't follow, and the arguments which I have just given are I hope conclusive to show that that is not the case.

What is emergence?

The claim that animals and then humans have 'emerged' from inanimate matter is a very loose one; and needs careful definition. It may mean that humans and animals and their properties are simply rearrangements of inanimate matter; and that what has happened in the course of evolution is just this rearranging of matter. That is clearly false – for reasons I've given above. But it may mean, slightly more plausibly, that there are psycho-physical laws which determine that certain arrangements of physical matter (which have been caused to occur in the course of evolution) cause the coming into being of something different – souls and their mental lives.

Is the immaterial soul itself an emergent property, as some have suggested?

A soul is not a property. It is a substance (the essential part of the human person) which has properties (e.g. has thoughts). So I must rephrase your question as the question whether the immaterial soul is an emergent substance. It is only in the second sense of emergence delineated above, that this is remotely plausible. On this view it is already built into the nature of atoms that when they assemble in a certain way, that will give rise to something very different from the atoms. I don't see any reason to suppose that that is how it is, but it just could be.

I should add that my arguments show that every conscious animal (that is perhaps every vertebrate) has a soul; but obviously the powers of animals are far less than the powers of humans. Hence we must follow the medieval terminology and talk about animals having animal souls, and humans having human souls. As I don't think that atoms have inbuilt powers to produce souls (or in other words that the laws of nature

determine that atoms will produce souls under certain conditions) as a theist, I hold the creationist position of God creates anew each new soul. But, if I came to believe that this position was mistaken, then, as a theist, I would hold the view that God had already built into atoms their propensity to produce souls.

Are you skeptical about efforts to correlate brain function and mental activity?

I certainly expect science to discover innumerable causal correlations between kinds of brain events (narrowly described) and kinds of mental events (narrowly described). Scientists will discover that when the brain is in this state it gives rise to the thought that 'today is Friday', and when it is in that state it gives rise to the thought that 'Russia is a big country'. But the discovery of innumerable causal correlations of this kind is not the discovery of a scientific theory. For a scientific theory we need more general laws indicating why certain sorts of brain event give rise to certain sorts of mental event – why this brain event gives rise to that thought, and the other brain event gives rise to the other thoughts. I don't think there can be such a theory. My reason is that physical events vary from each other only in respect of a few measurable parameters – location, velocity, mass, spin etc. Mental events however vary from each other in innumerable non-quantifiable ways. There isn't a quantifiable difference between a red image and a blue image, although of course there is a quantifiable difference between their causes. There isn't a quantifiable difference between the thought that 'today is Friday', and the thought that 'Russia is a big country'. Yet to have a scientific theory you need general functional laws determining how a certain sort of variation will give rise to another sort of variation; that is only possible if the variations are variations in quantifiable respects – otherwise we are just left with a collection of separate causal connections. That's why I don't think that atoms have built into them at an early evolutionary stage powers (if combined with other atoms) to produce souls and their mental lives- because this would be to say that there are laws of nature determining these things. To have reason to believe this, we would need reason to believe that these powers are integrally connected with the ordinary physical powers of atoms. And the evidence of this would be that one could construct an integrated psycho-physical theory of laws explaining how that was the case. But for the reason I've given I don't think there can be such a theory. And so I am forced to postulate that combinations of atoms gave rise to souls and their mental lives, without that causal activity arising from the previous powers of atoms.

Given science's explanatory power, why should we accept that it can't explain consciousness and the self?

For the reason which I've just given. But here is an additional supporting argument. It is characteristic of the advance of science that different branches of science have become integrated with each other, such as optics with electromagnetism. But the way in which such integrations have been achieved is by supposing that the subject matter of optics and the subject matter of electro-magnetism are (despite appearances) really the same sort of thing – physical particles or waves. That involves that supposing that the secondary qualities by which we originally identify the subject matter (the colour of the light, and the feel of the heat) do not really belong to the physical thing, but are an effect of the physical things in us. But when you try to explain mental things and properties themselves, obviously you can't siphon off the

mental aspect of them! And so it is the very success of science in explaining physical events , which makes it immensely unlikely that it will be able to take the final step to explain the very different kind of events which are mental events. Souls and their mental lives of thought and sensation are so different from waves and particles that you cannot have an integrated theory which explains their interaction.