
THE MIND
AND MATTER:
UNRAVELING
PERCEPTIONS OF
CONSCIOUSNESS"

Is it not true that a great many of them believe:---- That the mind is in the body? That it acts and reacts with matter? That it is a substance with attributes? That it is nonextended and immaterial? I must remark at the outset that this collection of opinions is by no means something gathered by the plain man from his own experience. These opinions are the echoes of old philosophies. They are a heritage from the past, and have become the common property of all intelligent persons who are even moderately well-educated.

Their sources have been indicated in the preceding sections; but most persons who cherish them have no idea of their origin. Men are apt to suppose that these opinions seem reasonable to them merely for the reason that they find in their own experience evidence of their truth. But this is not so. Have we not seen above how long it took men to discover that they must not think of the mind as being a breath, or a flame, or a collection of material atoms? The men who erred in this way were abler than most of us can pretend to be, and they gave much thought to the matter. And when at last it came to be realized that mind must not thus be conceived as material, those who endeavored to conceive it as something else gave, after their best efforts, a very queer account of it indeed.

Is it in the face of such facts reasonable to suppose that our friends and acquaintances, who strike us as having reflective powers in nowise remarkable, have independently arrived at the conception that the mind is a nonextended and immaterial substance? Surely they have not thought all this out for themselves. They have taken up and appropriated unconsciously notions which were in the air, so to speak. They have inherited their doctrines, not created them.

It is well to remember this, for it may make us the more willing to take up and examine impartially what we have uncritically turned into articles of belief. The first articles, namely, that the mind is in the body and that it acts upon, and is acted upon by, material things, I shall discuss at length in the next chapter. Here I pause only to point out that the plain man does not put the mind into the body quite unequivocally. I think it would surprise him to be told that a line might be drawn through two heads in such a way as to transfix minds.

And I remark, further, that he has no clear idea of what it means for mind to act upon body or body to act upon mind. How does an immaterial thing set a material thing in motion? Can it touch it? Can it push it? Then what does it do? But let us pass on to the last two articles of faith mentioned above. We all draw the distinction between substance and its attributes or qualities. The distinction was remarked and discussed many centuries ago, and much has been written upon it. I take up the ruler on my desk; it is recognized at once as a bit of wood. How? It has such and such qualities.

My paper-knife is of silver. How do I know it? It has certain other qualities. I speak of my mind. How do I know that I have a mind? I have sensations and ideas. If I experienced no mental phenomena of any sort, evidence of the existence of a mind would be lacking. Now, whether I am concerned with the ruler, with the paper-knife, or with the mind, have I direct evidence of the existence of anything more than the whole group of qualities? Do I ever perceive the substance? In the older philosophy, the substance was conceived to be a something not directly perceived, but only inferred to exist—a something underlying the qualities of things and, as it were, holding them together.

It was believed in by philosophers who were quite ready to admit that they could not tell anything about it. For example, the English philosopher, holds to it stoutly, and yet describes it as a mere "we know not what," whose function it is to hold together the bundles of qualities that constitute the things we know. In the modern philosophy men still distinguish between substance and qualities. It is a useful distinction, and we could scarcely get on without it.

But an increasing number of thoughtful persons repudiate the old notion of substance altogether. We may, they say, understand by the word "substance" the whole group of qualities as a group—not merely the qualities that are revealed at a given time, but all those that we have reason to believe a fuller knowledge would reveal. In short, we may understand by it just what is left when the "we know not what" of the Lockian has been discarded.

This notion of substance we may call the more modern one; yet we can hardly say that it is the notion of the plain man. He does not make very clear to himself just what is in his thought, but I think we do him no injustice in maintaining that he is something of a Lockian, even if he has never heard of Locke. The Lockian substance is, as the reader has seen, a sort of "unknowable." And now for the doctrine that the mind is nonextended and immaterial. With these affirmations we may heartily agree; but we must admit that the plain man enunciates them without having a very definite idea of what the mind is. He regards as in his mind all his sensations and ideas, all his perceptions and mental images of things.

Now, suppose I close my eyes and picture to myself a barber's pole. Where is the image? We say, in the mind. Is it extended? We feel impelled to answer, No. But it certainly seems to be extended; the white and the red upon it appear undeniably side by side. May I assert that this mental image has no extension whatever? Must I deny to it parts, or assert that its parts are not side by side? It seems odd to maintain that a something as devoid of parts as is a mathematical point should yet appear to have parts and to be extended. On the other hand, if we allow the image to be extended, how can we refer it to a nonextended mind? To such questions as these, I do not think that the plain man has an answer.

That they can be answered, I shall try to show in the last section of this chapter. But one cannot answer them until one has attained to rather a clear conception of what is meant by the mind. And until one has attained to such a conception, the statement that the mind is immaterial must remain rather vague and indefinite. As we saw above, even the soul was inconsistently material rather than immaterial. It was not excluded from space; it was referred to space in an absurd way. The mind as common sense conceives it, is the successor of this soul, and seems to keep a flavor of what is material after all. This will come out in the next chapter, where we shall discuss mind and body.

THE PSYCHOLOGIST AND THE MIND.—When we ask how the psychologist conceives of the mind, we must not forget that psychologists are many and that they differ more or less from each other in their opinions. When we say "the psychologist" believes this or that, we mean usually no more than that the opinion referred to is prevalent among men of that class, or that it is the opinion of those whom we regard as its more enlightened members. Taking the words in this somewhat loose sense, I shall ask what the psychologist's opinion is touching the four points set forth in the preceding section.

How far does he agree with the plain man? There can be no doubt that he refers the mind to the body in some way, although he may shake his head over the use of the word "in." As to whether the mind acts and reacts with matter, in any sense of the words analogous to that in which they are commonly used, there is a division in the camp. Some affirm such interaction; some deny it. The matter will be discussed in the next chapter. The psychologist—the more modern one—inclines to repudiate any substance or substratum of the sort accepted in the Middle Ages and believed in by many men now. To him the mind is the whole complex of mental phenomena in their interrelations. In other words, the mind is not an unknown and indescribable something that is merely inferred; it is something revealed in consciousness and open to observation.

The psychologist is certainly not inclined to regard the mind or any idea belonging to it as material or as extended. But he does recognize implicitly, if not explicitly, that ideas are composite. To him, as to the plain man, the image held in the memory or imagination seems to be extended, and he can distinguish its parts. He does not do much towards clearing away the difficulty alluded to at the close of the last section. It remains for the metaphysician to do what he can with it, and to him we must turn if we wish light upon this obscure subject.

THE METAPHYSICIAN AND THE MIND.—I have reserved for the next chapter the first two points mentioned as belonging to the plain man's doctrine of the mind. In what sense the mind may be said to be in the body, and how it may be conceived to be related to the body, are topics that deserve to be treated by themselves in a chapter on "Mind and Body."

Here I shall consider what the metaphysician has to say about the mind as substance, and about the mind as nonextended and immaterial. It has been said that the Lockian substance is really an "unknowable." No one pretends to have experience of it; it is revealed to no sense; it is, indeed, a name for a mere nothing, for when we abstract from a thing, in thought, every single quality, we find that there is left to us nothing whatever. We cannot say that the substance, in this sense of the word, is the reality of which the qualities are appearances.

we saw just what we may legitimately mean by realities and appearances, and it was made clear that an unknowable of any sort cannot possibly be the reality to which this or that appearance is referred. Appearances and realities are experiences which are observed to be related in certain ways. That which is not open to observation at all, that of which we have, and can have, no experience, we have no reason to call the reality of anything. We have, in truth, no reason to talk about it at all, for we know nothing whatever about it; and when we do talk about it, it is because we are laboring under a delusion. This is equally true whether we are concerned with the substance of material things or with the substance of minds. An "unknowable" is an "unknowable" in any case, and we may simply discard it.

We lose nothing by so doing, for one cannot lose what one has never had, and what, by hypothesis, one can never have. The loss of a mere word should occasion us no regret. Now, we have seen that we do not lose the world of real material things in rejecting the "Unknowable" .The things are complexes of qualities, of physical phenomena; and the more we know about these, the more do we know about real things. But we have also seen that physical phenomena are not the only phenomena of which we have experience. We are conscious of mental phenomena as well, of the phenomena of the subjective order, of sensations and ideas. Why not admit that these constitute the mind, as physical phenomena constitute the things which belong to the external world? He who says this says no more than that the mind is known and is knowable.

It is what it is perceived to be; and the more we know of mental phenomena, the more do we know of the mind. Shall we call the mind as known a substance? That depends on the significance which we give to this word. It is better, perhaps, to avoid it, for it is fatally easy to slip into the old use of the word, and then to say, as men have said, that we do not know the mind as it is, but only as it appears to us to be—that we do not know the reality, but only its appearances. And if we keep clearly before us the view of the mind which I am advocating, we shall find an easy way out of the difficulties that seem to confront us when we consider it as nonextended and immaterial.

Certain complexes of mental phenomena—for example, the barber's pole above alluded to—certainly appear to be extended. Are they really extended? If I imagine a tree a hundred feet high, is it really a hundred feet high? Has it any real size at all? Our problem melts away when we realize what we mean by this "real size." I have distinguished between apparent space and real space. Real space is, as was pointed out, the "plan" of the real physical world. To occupy any portion of real space, a thing must be a real external thing; that is, the experiences constituting it must belong to the objective order, they must not be of the class called mental.

We all recognize this, in a way. We know that a real material foot rule cannot be applied to an imaginary tree. We say, How big did the tree seen in a dream seem; we do not say, How big was it really? If we did ask such a question, we should be puzzled to know where to look for an answer. And this for a very good reason. He who asks: How big was that imaginary tree really? asks, in effect: How much real space did the unreal tree fill? The question is a foolish one. It assumes that phenomena not in the objective order are in the objective order. As well ask how a color smells or how a sound looks. When we are dealing with the material we are not dealing with the mental, and we must never forget this. The tree imagined or seen in a dream seems extended.

Its extension is apparent extension, and this apparent extension has no place in the external world whatever. But we must not confound this apparent extension with a real mathematical point, and call the tree nonextended in this sense. If we do this we are still in the old error—we have not gotten away from real space, but have substituted position in that space for extension in that space. Nothing mental can have even a position in real space. To do that it would have to be a real thing in the sense indicated. Let us, then, agree with the plain man in affirming that the mind is nonextended, but let us avoid misconception. The mind is constituted of experiences of the subjective order.

None of these are in space—real space. But some of them have apparent extension, and we must not overlook all that this implies. Now for the mind as immaterial. We need not delay long over this point. If we mean by the mind the phenomena of the subjective order, and by what is material the phenomena of the objective order, surely we may and must say that the mind is immaterial. The two classes of phenomena separate themselves out at once.

IS THE MIND IN THE BODY?—There was a time, as we have seen in the last chapter , when it did not seem at all out of the way to think of the mind as in the body, and very literally in the body. He who believes the mind to be a breath, or a something composed of material atoms, can conceive it as being in the body as unequivocally as chairs can be in a room. Breath can be inhaled and exhaled; atoms can be in the head, or in the chest, or the heart, or anywhere else in the animal economy.

There is nothing dubious about this sense of the preposition "in." But we have also seen that, as soon as men began to realize that the mind is not material, the question of its presence in the body became a serious problem. If I say that a chair is in a room, I say what is comprehensible to every one. It is assumed that it is in a particular place in the room and is not in some other place. If, however, I say that the chair is, as a whole, in every part of the room at once, I seem to talk nonsense.

This is what and those who came after him said about the mind. Are their statements any the less nonsensical because they are talking about minds? When one speaks about things mental, one must not take leave of good sense and utter unmeaning phrases. If minds are enough like material things to be in anything, they must be in things in some intelligible sense of the word. It will not do to say: I use the word "in," but I do not really mean in. If the meaning has disappeared, why continue to use the word? It can only lead to mystification. Descartes seemed to come back to something like an intelligible meaning when he put the mind in the pineal gland in the brain.

Yet, as we have seen, he clung to the old conception. He could not go back to the frank materialization of mind. And the plain man to-day labors under the same difficulty. He puts the mind in the body, in the brain, but he does not put it there frankly and unequivocally. It is in the brain and yet not exactly in the brain. Let us see if this is not the case. If we ask him: Does the man who wags his head move his mind about? does he who mounts a step raise his mind some inches? does he who sits down on a chair lower his mind? I think we shall find that he hesitates in his answers. And if we go on to say: Could a line be so drawn as to pass through your image of me and my image of you, and to measure their distance from one another?

I think he will say, No. He does not regard minds and their ideas as existing in space in this fashion. Furthermore, it would not strike the plain man as absurd if we said to him: Were our senses far more acute than they are, it is conceivable that we should be able to perceive every atom in a given human body, and all its motions. But would he be willing to admit that an increase in the sharpness of sense would reveal to us directly the mind connected with such a body? It is not, then, in the body as the atoms are. It cannot be seen or touched under any conceivable circumstances. What can it mean, hence, to say that it is there? Evidently, the word is used in a peculiar sense, and the plain man cannot help us to a clear understanding of it.

His position becomes intelligible to us when we realize that he has inherited the doctrine that the mind is immaterial, and that he struggles, at the same time, with the tendency so natural to man to conceive it after the analogy of things material. He thinks of it as in the body, and, nevertheless, tries to dematerialize this "in." His thought is sufficiently vague, and is inconsistent, as might be expected. If we will bear in mind what was said in the closing section of the last chapter, we can help him over his difficulty. That mind and body are related there can be no doubt. But should we use the word "in" to express this relation?

The body is a certain group of phenomena in the objective order; that is, it is a part of the external world. The mind consists of experiences in the subjective order. We have seen that no mental phenomenon can occupy space—real space, the space of the external world—and that it cannot even have a position in space As mental, it is excluded from the objective order altogether. The mind is not, then, strictly speaking, in the body, although it is related to it. It remains, of course, to ask ourselves how we ought to conceive the relation. This we shall do later in the present chapter. But, it may be said, it would sound odd to deny that the mind is in the body. Does not every one use the expression? What can we substitute for it? I answer: If it is convenient to use the expression let us continue to do so. Men must talk so as to be understood. But let us not perpetuate error, and, as occasion demands it, let us make clear to ourselves and to others what we have a right to understand by this in when we use it.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE INTERACTIONIST.—There is no man who does not know that his mind is related to his body as it is not to other material things. We open our eyes, and we see things; we stretch out our hand, and we feel them; our body receives a blow, and we feel pain; we wish to move, and the muscles are set in motion. These things are matters of common experience. We all perceive, in other words, that there is an interaction, in some sense of the term, between mind and body.

But it is important to realize that one may be quite well aware of all such facts, and yet may have very vague notions of what one means by body and by mind, and may have no definite theory at all of the sort of relation that obtains between them. The philosopher tries to attain to a clearer conception of these things. His task, be it remembered, is to analyze and explain, not to deny, the experiences which are the common property of mankind. In the present day the two theories of the relation of mind and body that divide the field between them and stand opposed to each other are interactionism and parallelism.

I have used the word "interaction" a little above in a loose sense to indicate our common experience of the fact that we become conscious of certain changes brought about in our body, and that our purposes realize themselves in action. But every one who accepts this fact is not necessarily an interactionist. The latter is a man who holds a certain more or less definite theory as to what is implied by the fact. Let us take a look at his doctrine. Physical things interact. A billiard ball in motion strikes one which has been at rest; the former loses its motion, the latter begins to roll away. We explain the occurrence by a reference to the laws of mechanics; that is to say, we point out that it is merely an instance of the uniform behavior of matter in motion under such and such circumstances.

We distinguish between the state of things at one instant and the state of things at the next, and we call the former cause and the latter effect. It should be observed that both cause and effect here belong to the one order, the objective order. They have their place in the external world. Both the balls are material things; their motion, and the space in which they move, are aspects of the external world. If the balls did not exist in the same space, if the motion of the one could not be towards or away from the other, if contact were impossible, we would manifestly have no interaction in the sense of the word employed above. As it is, the interaction of physical things is something that we can describe with a good deal of definiteness. Things interact in that they stand in certain physical relations, and undergo changes of relations according to certain laws.