

“...it would be easier for me to concede matter and extension to the soul, than a capacity of moving a body and of being moved, to an immaterial being.”
—Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia

Apparent Mental–Physical Interaction

Question today: If there are two distinct kinds of substances—mental and physical—how, if at all, do they *interact*?

Basic evidence for interactions between mind and body:

(I) The mental seems to affect the physical:

- you *feel* an itch so your *hand* moves to scratch it.
- you *intend* to jump, and your *body* moves accordingly.
- you *think* about something scary and get goosebumps on your *neck*.
- you *feel* a pain and your *mouth* shouts to stop.

(II) The physical seems to affect the mental:

- someone tickles your *feet* and you *feel* an itch.
- someone hits your *toe* with a hammer and you feel *pain*.
- you put a strawberry on your *tongue* and you get a nice sweet *sensation*.

Dualist Views of the Causal Relations between the Mental and the Physical

Two ("Parallelist") views we *won't* be discussing:

Occasionalism - The mental and physical do not directly interact. Whenever there "should" be an interaction, God (or some other suitable mediator) affects mental or physical substances in a way that makes it appear that there is interaction. Every change in physical substance is an "occasion" for God to intervene with the mental substances, and vice versa.

Pre-established Harmony - The mental and physical do not directly interact but, fortunately, the mental and physical realms "line up perfectly" in a way that makes it seem that they interact.

Two views we *will* be discussing:

Interactionism - The physical and the mental can affect each other.

Epiphenomenalism - The physical can affect the mental but *not the other way around*.
(The mental realm is like a "shadow" of the physical realm.)

Problems for Interactionism

(A) The physical world seems to be **causally closed**: every physical event has a purely physical cause that explains it completely.

This is more or less a scientific manifestation of the very concern that Princess Elisabeth had for Descartes' view. Sometimes interactionists respond to this by claiming physical events could have *two causes*: one mental and one physical. That is, there is **causal overdetermination**: a case where an event has at least two causes, each of which would have been sufficient to generate the event. (As, say, when each of two bullets would be sufficient to kill someone).

But this route looks even trickier.

(B) The way in which the overdetermination occurs must not change the *way* the physical event happens in any way. That kind of overdetermination is very hard to come by.

(C) We might have to posit a "pre-established harmony" of causation, anyway: a strange parallelism between numerous pairs of causal sources and their effects.

Problems for Epiphenomenalism

(A) This seems to leave the apparent examples of the mental affecting the physical (see the examples under (I) above) completely unexplained.

(B) It seems to make the mental life, which the dualist was trying to secure as essential to who we are, in fact become completely irrelevant to anything we do.

These reflections are often used by materialists in the following argument against substance dualism.

Suppose substance dualism were true. Then either

- (i) interactionism is true, or
- (ii) epiphenomenalism is true.

If (i) interactionism is true the world would not be causally closed. But we have every reason to believe that it is. On the other hand if (ii) epiphenomenalism is true, mental states cannot explain physical ones, and so (e.g.) when we think we are reporting mental states we are not. That is implausible. Whether we accept (i) or (ii) we are led to unacceptable conclusions. So substance dualism is false.

What kind of argument is this?

There's a kind of hidden premise here. What is it? Does it adversely affect the argument?

Why aren't these issues a problem for physicalism?