

Dualism: What's at stake?

Dualists posit that reality is comprised of two fundamental, irreducible types of “stuff”: Material and non-material

Material Stuff:

Includes all the familiar elements of the physical world
-Tables, chairs, electrons, bodies

According to *Cartesian* dualism (sometimes called *substance dualism*), the distinctive characteristic of material stuff is that it exists *in space* (it has extension and position)

Dualism: What's at stake?

Dualists posit that reality is comprised of two fundamental, irreducible types of “stuff”: Material and non-material

Non-material Stuff:

Includes the stuff responsible for human consciousness and reasoning

-Traditionally, this kind of stuff has been given names like “mind” or “soul”

Descartes claims that this stuff has no spatial extension or position, and that it can't be accounted for in terms of material stuff.

Dualism: What's at stake?

So what? Why should we care about whether dualism is true or not?

If dualism is false, then we have to relinquish the independent existence of either the material world or the immaterial mind/soul.

If you want to continue believing that you have a mind/soul independent of the physical world, or that physical matter exists apart from the mind, then you're likely committed to dualism.

But it's a tough position to defend.....

Arguments in Favor of Dualism

D1: The argument from religion

Dualism is compatible with the notion of an immortal soul. Materialism (the view that there is only one, physical type of stuff in the universe) cannot make sense of this notion. Since immortal souls exist, dualism must be true.

Is this persuasive?

Arguments in Favor of Dualism

D2: The argument from different properties

There are key properties held by physical stuff that aren't held by immaterial stuff

- 1) Physical stuff can be *described in physical terms*; immaterial stuff can't

Can we say a soul weighs 3 lbs?

- 2) Mental events are *immediately known*, but physical events aren't

I can be wrong about what's on my dinner plate, but I can't be wrong about what there seems to be on my plate

- 3) Mental events are *about* something, but physical events aren't

By Leibniz' Law, different properties mean you have different things—the mind simply can't be identical with any physical entity

Arguments in Favor of Dualism

D3: The argument from irreducibility

Mental phenomena such as reason, mathematical calculation, and the ability to use language cannot be explained by any purely physical account of the world.

Is this true?



With continuing advances in neuroscience, might we not eventually explain reason, language, and the like?

Arguments in Favor of Dualism

D3: The argument from irreducibility

Second try: What about the introspectible qualities of our sensations? Could a purely physical account of the world explain the *way a red ball looks*?

This is a better candidate for a defense of dualism. If there's a problem, it's that the dualist has a hard time establishing that a reduction of sensory qualities to physical phenomena is *impossible*.

Arguments Against Dualism

AD1: The argument from simplicity

Monists argue against dualism by appeal to a principle known as “Occam’s Razor”:

“Do not multiply entities beyond what is strictly necessary to explain the phenomena.”

This means that we (rationally) should prefer the *simplest* available explanation for anything

Monism postulates only *one* kind of stuff, while dualism postulates two. Since monism is at no explanatory disadvantage, we should rationally abandon dualism in favor of monism.

Can a monist theory really explain as much as a dualist theory?

Arguments Against Dualism

AD2: The argument from immaterial-material causation

This kind of argument may take two forms.

- 1) The causal relationship between the mind and the physical world is utterly mysterious.

How could an immaterial mind have any influence on physical matter?

- 2) If the mind really is a non-physical thing, and needs the brain only for input and output, then there's no reason to think that damage or manipulation of the brain would directly affect or compromise mental processes.

But we know that precisely the opposite is the case. This makes sense if emotions, reasons, and other 'mental processes' are functions of the brain itself. It makes much less sense if they are functions of some immaterial substance.

IDEALISTIC MONISM: A philosophical look

The most common contemporary alternative to a dualist account of the universe is *physicalism* (also called *materialism*), according to which material stuff is the only stuff there is.

There is another kind of monist theory, however, that poses an intriguing alternative: *Idealistic Monism*

“According to idealistic monism, all existing things are modes or expressions of a single essence or substance which is essentially mental or spiritual in nature.” (Baur 14)

IDEALISTIC MONISM: A philosophical look

First, let's distinguish between *metaphysical* idealistic monism and *epistemological* idealistic monism:

Metaphysical IM:

Only one (immaterial) type of stuff *exists*

Epistemological IM:

Only one kind of stuff can be *known* about

Which view *entails* the other?

IDEALISTIC MONISM: A philosophical look

Why might metaphysical IM be attractive?

It allows us to deny that the external world exists in the way we perceive it, while “believing in the existence of some kind of reality that can be truly known and communicated to others.” (Baur, 17)

Are there any good reasons to think IM is *true*?

IDEALISTIC MONISM: A philosophical look

Josiah Royce “argues that anyone who adopts a realistic (non-idealistic) position in epistemology is implicitly committed to a non-monistic position in metaphysics.” (Baur 17)

Let’s think about this for a minute:

A realist position in epistemology states that we can know about material objects directly. Why would Royce think that this position necessarily involves a commitment to a non-monistic metaphysical view?

Is he *right* about this?

IDEALISTIC MONISM: A philosophical look

Royce also argues “that just as the consistent espousal of realism entails the rejection of monism, so too the consistent espousal of idealism [in epistemology] entails the acceptance of monism.”

(Baur)

If this is right, it means that all idealists must be monists, and all monists must be idealists.

Should we accept this doctrine?

IDEALISTIC MONISM: A philosophical look

For the sake of argument, let's suppose that IM is true.

Is there any way for us to *experience* the underlying unity of mind and world?

Can we achieve “ocean consciousness”?

Here's a potential problem: If this consciousness involves a true destruction of individuality/selfhood, then there will be no *bearer* of ocean consciousness.

If ocean consciousness involves the “death of the individual self”, then it's conceptually impossible.

IDEALISTIC MONISM: A philosophical look

Is there any way for us to *experience* the underlying unity of mind and world?

The plot thickens: Consciousness is *intentional*. There's always something that we're conscious *of*, and that something is never consciousness itself.

“[I]f consciousness—by virtue of being intentional—always involves consciousness of the *difference* between itself and its object, then it would seem that it is systematically impossible to achieve *consciousness* of the *unity* of all things.” (Baur 21)

It's starting to look like ocean consciousness is impossible.

IDEALISTIC MONISM: A philosophical look

How might we rescue the possibility of ocean consciousness?

Here's a proposal: Realize that the *objects* of consciousness are really just comprised of the same immaterial substance as consciousness itself.

How does this avoid the problem? *Does it* successfully avoid the problem?

“The lesson is that what is blind, unconscious, unintended, or without purpose is—after all—not essentially different from what is deliberate, conscious, intended, and purpose-driven.” (Baur, 24)