

# The Mind-Body-Problem and Score-Keeping in Language Games

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## I. The problem

Maybe to no other problem in philosophy so much time and attention has been dedicated in recent years than to the mind-body-problem. Enjoying a personal, subjective, first-person-perspective from which we undergo experiences with a certain phenomenal feel appears like a mystery in a world being fundamentally physical. The objective perspective of physical description lacks all the characteristic features of first-person-perspective.

Purported solutions to the problem tend to assume either a physicalistic-minded or a dualistic-minded form. According to Chalmers, each of these views has its promise, and each view seems to make some ad-hoc assumptions which are hard to spell out in more detail. Take, for instance, type-B materialism and type-D dualism.

Type-B materialism is the view that there is an epistemic gap between the physical and the mental but there is no ontological gap. Saying that there is no ontological gap implies stating identity between the mental and the physical. But how shall identity be stated in the light of the strong intuition that there are the properties of the brain, objects of perception, laid out in space, and, conscious states, defying explanation in such terms? According to Chalmers a type-B materialist is forced to accept the identity between physical states and consciousness as fundamental; it is a sort of primitive principle in his theory of the world (Chalmers 2003, 254).

Type-D dualism is the view that mental states can cause physical states and vice versa. A very challenging objection to type-D dualism is that the interaction between mind and body is unexplainable. How should anything non-physical be able of interacting with physical things? Dualists have a straightforward answer. They don't know but ignorance should not be taken as decisive argument against their theory: "We should just acknowledge that human beings are not omniscient, and cannot understand everything." (Swinburne 1997, xii; for a similar argumentation, see Foster 1991, 161). In light of the observed connection between physical and phenomenal states it is an inference to the best explanation to assume that there is a psycho-physical nexus, though we are not able to render intelligible how it works.

What does this discussion show? Both, type-B materialism and type-D dualism refer to observed connections between physical and phenomenal states. The conclusions they draw, however, are very different: identity on the one side, psycho-physical interactionism on the other. The reason we cannot go on to investigate such notions in more fundamental terms is that the bottom of the theory in question has been reached. If this characterization is correct, then the various accounts in philosophy of mind seem to result ultimately in an impasse.

In what follows, I would like to ask how we could possibly explain why we permanently seem to end up into such an impasse. In giving a possible explanation I will refer to the concept of 'score-keeping in language game'.

## II. Score-keeping in language games

The term 'score-keeping in language games' was introduced by David Lewis. He argues that in a communication process terms and concepts often are partially governed by certain implicit, context relative, parameters. These parameters define the score of a communication, that is, its running well or not. We can compare these parameters with rules in games: The rules define the score of the game. Thanks to the rules it can be told whether a team is doing well or not – whether the score of the game is for or against it. Something similar, according to Lewis, goes on in communication, even though the score is more flexible than the one in games. (Lewis 1979/1983, 240) If Lewis' analysis is correct, then during a communication process we tend to adapt continuously the applied parameters in order to modify the score of the discourse in such a way that its current status is still considered to be successful. A good example to illustrate such continuous adaptations of the conversational score is vague terms such as "bold", "flat" or "big". What is bold at one occasion, is not bold on another, what is flat at one occasion, is not flat on another and what is big at one occasion, may not be considered as big on another: „The standards of precision in force are different from one conversation to another, and may change in the course of a single conversation.“ (Lewis 1979/1983, 245)

Generally it can be said that our use of standards defining the score is broad and not very restrictive. We could imagine a situation in which subliminally parameters from different contexts are introduced into a single discourse (Horgan 2001 and 2007 argues that the agent exclusion problem is the consequence of such a situation). Thereby an atypical discourse context is created for it is unclear which score which is in use in such a situation. According to which standards should we judge whether a satisfactory score has been reached if the various context parameters in practice do not overlap? Probably we would end up in a kind of discursive cul-de-sac.

## III. Application to Philosophy of Mind

Is it plausible to assume that the mind-body-problem is the consequence of such a scenario? Let us focus at possible parameters in the mind-body-problem first. Physical concepts, as we have seen, are developed in a context of objectively accessible phenomena, that is, phenomena generally accessible to science. Normally these phenomena are quantitatively definable, in terms of material and structural composition.

Mental concepts, on the contrary, are qualitatively determined. They are characterized as essentially subjective in the sense that every mental property is principally accessible only from a certain subjective point of view (Nagel 1974, 442).

The mind-body-problem arises out of the tension between concepts apparently as different as the mental and the physical. If someone approaches the mind-body-problem one tends to undergo a series of cognitive steps (I model these steps according to Horgan 2001). A physicalistic-minded person may undergo something like the following:

1. The starting point: The world consists ultimately of nothing but bits of matter distributed over space-time behaving according to physical laws. (Kim 2005, 7)
2. An automatical and subliminal accommodation to the parameter appropriate to this kind of discourse, that is, (micro-)physical explanation takes place.
3. It is not acknowledged that such an accommodation has occurred and that parameters stemming from (micro-)physical explanation are applied to notions such as world, reality or nature.
4. The question: How can there be something such as a conscious experience in a physical world like this?
5. There is, however, no shift in the accommodation of parameters. The discourse continues under the parameters installed at the beginning.
6. It is realized that what is called 'consciousness' or 'the mind' is hard to integrate in the kind of approach under consideration.
7. As a result, the mind appears to be 'special', 'mysterious' or even 'unreal'.
8. Thus, it is intuitively plausible to assume that the mental has a place in our world only if it is identical with something physical. Though the assumption of this identity cannot be illuminated any further, it seems to be the inference to the best explanation.

Crucial components in such a process of reasoning are steps 1, 4 and 5. The question posed at the very beginning introduces parameters which shape decisively the following discourse. Talk about the physical world, bits of matter, space-time and physical laws introduces parameters conforming to scientific discourse where quantitative and structural explanations of reality do not provide any room for subjective and qualitative aspects.

In step 4 a concept with another parameter is introduced. Paying attention to the mind and its characteristic features comes along with parameters pointing towards another score than parameters of a physical context. The parameter-setting under which an entity counts as mental are, for instance, (i) being qualitative and (ii) enjoying a subjective perspective.

In step 5 the way is paved for the puzzlement arising in step 7: It remains unnoticed that talk about the mind goes hand in hand with parameters different from those shaping the overall score of the entire discourse. As long as this conversational score is in use mental phenomena will always fall short of being fully appreciated for there is no way how they can adequately be integrated in a context framed by such parameters.

The same applies to dualistic thinking:

1. The starting point: Physical objects are not conscious; they do not have thoughts and sensations. Men and animals, on the contrary, do enjoy thoughts and sensations. Having a thought or a sensation is not just having some physico-chemical event occur inside one of greater complexity than the physico-chemical events which occur in physical objects. It is not the same sort of thing at all for it is rich in inbuilt colour, smell and meaning. (Swinburne 1997, 1.)

2. An automatical and subliminal accommodation to the parameter appropriate to this kind of discourse, that is, a clear distinction between sentient and non-sentient, conscious and non-conscious takes place.
3. It is not acknowledged that such an accommodation has occurred. The parameters applied to notions such as 'animal', 'man' and 'nature' divide everything up into something mental or physical.
4. The question: How can we explain our experience of mind-body-interaction in the light of the assumption that the mental is so different in nature from the physical?
5. There is, however, no shift in the accommodation of parameters. The discourse continues under the parameters installed at the beginning.
6. It is realized that what might be called mind-body- and body-mind-interaction is hard to integrate in the kind of approach under consideration.
7. As a result, mind-body-interaction appears to be 'special' and 'unexplainable' (dualistic interactionism) or even 'unreal' (epiphenomenalism).
8. Thus, interactionists will argue: It is intuitively plausible to assume that mind-body-interaction takes place. It is just one of the most obvious phenomena of human experience. Not being able to explain how it occurs does not back up the epiphenomenalist conclusion that it does not occur at all or the much stronger claim that the theory is false in principle.

Is it plausible to assume that the mind-body-problem arises out of such scenarios? Let me start with some thoughts from Strawson's *Individuals*. Strawson argues that there exists a categorical framework of our factual everyday thinking which is the realm of meso-scope entities containing person-like and non-person-like individuals. Person-like individuals enjoy physical and mental properties. If we describe human persons we describe them as a single entity with physical and mental features.

Taken this analysis as a matter of fact we can aim at developing precise theories about mental and physical properties. We can ask how mental and physical properties are to be described more accurately, whether they can consist out of smaller parts, what their differences are. In other words, we can start to reason theoretically about the various features we rather vaguely describe in everyday thinking. Theories in philosophy of mind, according to this story, are theories developed for and framed from a specific theoretical context. In such contexts preciseness, clarity and analyticity are the standards amounting to the score of the discussion. This score, however, is a very different one from the score valid in everyday interaction. As Lewis remarked, in everyday communication we generally tend to be very permissive for we have an interest that communication goes on. In a theoretical setting, on the contrary, we probably are less permissive for communication is judged according to precise definitions and clear argumentation.

If this is correct, then the categorical framework of our factual everyday thinking is open for different theoretical interpretations because the conversational score in everyday thinking is broad and not sharply defined. Saying that human persons have physical and

mental properties, for instance, or that human organisms in contrast to other organisms can reason and think leaves it open how these statements are to be spelled out in a more precise way. In such statements the apparently profound differences between mental and physical properties are not thematised any further. From theories in philosophy of mind, however, accurate definition of these aspects is demanded.

I suggest that impasses in philosophy of mind stem from the fact that the variety of our factual categorical framework of everyday thinking is given up in favour of a possible theoretical precision of certain aspects. For instance: What does it mean that biological organisms such as human beings can reason and think? Does this mean that the substance of mental properties is a biological organism? Or does a new entity come into existence, a 'someone' having these experiences? Trying to answer such questions comes along with negligence of other aspects being part of our common categorical framework as well. If a theory is blamed for being counter-intuitive or for not taking into consideration certain aspects of reality adequately enough, then, I guess, the different conversational scores of everyday parlance and theoretical inquiry come into conflict. The widely shared impression that neither physicalistic nor dualistic theories of mind are fully satisfying might have its roots in the fact that the ample categorical framework of our factual everyday thinking cannot be fully integrated into the narrow and specialised frameworks of theories in philosophy of mind. Due to the precision required in philosophical thinking and the lack of precision in everyday communication a theory of mind overlapping in its score with the score of our commonly assumed categorical framework will hardly be available.

#### IV. Conclusion

This leads to the conclusion that theories of mind will always have an unsatisfying smack. There will always be the feeling that something has not been integrated or that some feature has been turned into something other than what it is.

Physicalistic and dualistic theories are on a pair then – compared with the categorical framework of our factual everyday thinking. Why do philosophers nevertheless have either physicalistic or dualistic tendencies? Following Hardcastle I would argue it is a matter of attitude. (Hardcastle 2004, 801) These divergent reactions turn on antecedent views about what counts as explanatory and what does not. Thus, problems identified in philosophy of mind depend heavily on the perspective out of which we approach the examination of the mind-body-problem. These remarks are not a solution to the mind-body-problem but they explain how the problem arises and why remedy is hard to find.

#### Literature

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