

Singular mind

Pećnjak, Davor

Source / Izvornik: **Disputatio philosophica : International journal on philosophy and religion, 2003, 4, 173 - 176**

Journal article, Published version

Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:261:625120>

Rights / Prava: [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-07-23**



Repository / Repozitorij:

[Repository of the Institute of Philosophy](#)

SINGULAR MIND

Davor Pećnjak — Zagreb

UDK 1:572

The most popular solution to the mind-body problem, i. e. of ontology how our mind is realized, or, to put it in the most recent discussed specific term, of how our consciousness is realized, is the materialistic one. This does not mean, however, that there is a single form of materialism and that adherents of materialism argue for it in the same manner or even in the same direction. There is a variety of forms of materialism. But what is more or less common to them all is that nothing beyond material stuff of which the brain and the central nervous system are composed and the physical laws or lawful connections which govern the functioning of the aforementioned parts have to be invoked to have a full understanding, description and explanation of the mind and mentality. Mind would be, according to materialists, identical to some form of the working brain. It means that it is composed of the same basic stuff as any other object in the world and is subjected to the very same laws which govern them. Thus, naturalization of the mind would be completely done. It would be completely material thing.

Though the most number of philosophers and all kind of theoreticians about the mind subscribe to some form of materialistic view, there is a small minority which keeps dualism alive. But, surely, there is no one kind of dualism. There are a few different versions of dualism: epiphenomenalism, parallelism, naturalistic dualism, interactionism, to mention only the popular ones. The common denominator for all dualists, despite vast differences in arguing for a certain version of dualism, is that they all hold that human mind, or mind generally, and, of course, consciousness, is not material only or not at all, and not physical or not entirely physical or at least that parts of our mind are not realized materially, but that we have to invoke something non-material or immaterial in solutions to the mind-body problem and of the realization of our mind or of the consciousness.

In this short paper, I would like to suggest a possible line how we can, perhaps, save the interactionistic version of the dualist approach to the mind against just one type of objection. I will not go here into thorough defense of interactionistic dualism.¹

1. Excellent thorough defense of interactionistic dualism can be found in John Foster, *The Immaterial Self*, London and New York: Routledge, 1991.

Interactionism is the view that the mind in fact consists in the interaction of material (physical) and immaterial states, events and processes. Brain states, events and processes cause immaterial states, events and processes and *vice versa*, these immaterial states, events and processes in turn can cause brain states, events and processes. Interactionist dualists hold that without this immaterial part we cannot explain all the varieties which our mind shows in its overall mentality and mental activity.

The main objection to such kind of dualism is that interactionism violates the conservation laws of physics which are among the basic laws of physics, very well confirmed (they are at the very foundations of our world). With this objection, interactionism is easily dismissed in only a few lines in recent literature. How could something material like brain and something physical like brain process, cause something immaterial and how or where does the energy of the brain process go? And how can something immaterial, which is not subjected to conservation laws of our universe insert influence on something material which is subjected to these laws and cause it to start moving or operating in a physical way? Now, posed in this way, it really seems that this question is death for interactionism.

But, fortunately, there could be way out. Moreover, the way out could be provided by modern physics itself! In modern physics there are so called *singularities* — e. g. “spots” where conservation laws do not hold. For example, singularity is postulated in some versions of Big-bang theories of the beginning of the universe as well as in Big-crunch theories of the end of closed universes. Complete sum of mass and energy in the universe is vast but finite though before beginning or at the end, these magnitude goes to infinity. So there is obvious difference between finite amount of mass-energy and infinite amount. It means that conservation is not preserved. Moreover, in some versions, mass and energy could be created or annihilated at the singularity.

So, perhaps, we can postulate some kind of singularity or singularities for our minds or for brains. If it could not be straightforward kind of singularity as in the cosmological theories it could perhaps be something similar; maybe we would not need singularities where amount goes to infinity but something which would allow small fluctuations (non-conservation or annihilation on some small scale) of mass-energy. It would mean that brains/minds could contain some kind of “singularity” which would allow the energy of brain processes to be “annihilated” to cause immaterial part and the energy needed to cause brain physical processes would be created from this singularity. For the brain, then, there will be no strict conservation laws. Singularity, or something similar to it, would be a connection between material and immaterial part of the mind.

Since I am not a physicist I could only speculate here a bit. Perhaps a theory could be formulated which could be, in part, of precise nature as theo-

ries in physics are; namely it could contain a mathematically formulated part. So here arises another point for a brief discussion. Could we succeed to formulate explanations of the working of mind (and consciousness) in a precise way which would contain mathematical account in its part? To explain the mind and consciousness in this way I do not mean formulation of explanations of physical and chemical working of the brain. We would need some explanations about the immaterial part, if interactionism would be true. So we would need some formulations which would not refer to anything physical or material (like the chemistry and physics of the brain are) but something which would still directly refer to mind properties. Regarding consciousness, for example, we would need something which would refer to phenomenal aspect and from which we would be able to understand this phenomenal aspect directly. At present, materialistic theories do not succeed to give us understanding of the phenomenality of consciousness because nobody provided a plausible way how objective chemical and physical processes in the brain would be identical to our vivid phenomenality. From such formulations we could even proceed to make a connection with formulations of physics and chemistry which apply to brain functioning; which we would need in the case of precise formulated theory of interactionistic nature.

But is this possible?

If someone succeed in the formulation of, for example "the smallest ingredient of consciousness"² (whatever it would be) which would be mathematical in nature, would it be, whatever it is, subsumed into physics? Because physics formulates its explanations and solutions in quantitative mathematical way. And, especially if we invent some method how the consequences of this formulation could be measured. Well, not necessarily — not everything which has a precise quantitative account is then physical — namely, pure mathematics is also very precisely formulated though the entities about which mathematics is (and to which mathematics refer) are abstract entities, not physical or material entities. I do not want to suggest that if mind is, or part of it, immaterial, then it is an abstract entity like mathematical entities, but I just want to point that if something is mathematically formulated it could still be of immaterial nature since abstract mathematical entities are one kind of immaterial entities. Mind, or at least a part of mind, could be as well immaterial but of another kind of immateriality than abstract entities.

I am aware that this what I say is highly speculative and that I have made highly speculative claims which are even empirical in part of their nature³,

2. It could be perhaps a basic unit from which we could assemble more and more complex structures as sensations or elaborate perceptions and even the conscious aspects when thinking in propositional form; together with an understanding how these expressions are about conscious (phenomenal) experience or processings.
3. This comment I owe to Tim Crane.

but it still seems to me that it could be a possible line or prospect for some investigations. Some things which I have thrown here do not seem initially self-refuting or straightforward impossible. Of course, something or even all what I say here *could* fail in the end. But this is to be seen. And even if these suggestions fail, that would not automatically mean that interactionistic dualism is indefensible. Some other arguments are also on offer or can be put forward, regarding this and other problems concerning interactionism.

So, I only made one suggestion against one kind of problem for interactionistic dualism. I am aware that this was not an attempt to establish interactionism thoroughly⁴.

4. I would like to thank Tim Crane for criticism, very helpful comments and suggestions made after reading a part of this text. It does not mean, of course, that he agrees with what I say here. I would also like to thank Kristijan Krkač for his encouragement and patience.