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<u>Dialectic at a Moving Standstill:</u> <u>The Neurotic Misadventures of Philosophy of Mind</u> Dan Ganin

Introduction

Relatively recently, numerous philosophers of mind have espoused the epistemic intractability and impenetrability of both the mind-body problem and the problem of consciousness. While past and present attempts to theoretically resolve and circumvent these metaphysical questions have assumed many forms and postulated numerous conceptual paradigms (substance dualism, property dualism, eliminative materialism, functionalism, mindbody identity theory, logical behaviorism, idealism, etc.), the fundamental problem of epistemic inexplicability has not substantially dissipated since the rationalist ruminations of Descartes and Leibniz. The nascent articulation of the epistemological insolvability of the mind-body problem that has so gravely and garishly confronted contemporary theorists of mind can, in fact, be found in the philosophical work of these two notable modernist thinkers. Thus, despite the curious anthropocentric tendency towards narrativizing human history as a teleological plot towards greater progress and enlightenment, in this paper I'd like to argue, by sketching out a historiography of the mind-body problem, however loose and inchoate, that the very philosophical problems, perplexities, and conundrums we still confront when addressing the link between consciousness and the physical workings of our neurophysiology haven't really changed nor been radically reconceptualized since the epoch of Descartes and Leibniz.

The seemingly primordial problem of epistemic inexplicability has been acknowledged and ascertained all along, far before the noumenal naturalism of Colin McGinn or principled agnosticism of Thomas Nagel. Regardless of the proposed solution, underpinning all of these theories of mind, whether implicitly or explicitly, is an acknowledgement that an epistemic gap or dissimilarity exists between the physical and phenomenological domains and, thus, infer from this failure of epistemic reduction, inference, or deduction that either consciousness is epiphenomenal, ontologically nonphysical, or that we are cognitively closed from intelligibly grasping the psychophysical relation between mind and body -- between conscious thought and physical extension.

Moreover, even contemporary arguments leveled against reductionist materialist thought, though superficially distinct and terminologically different, strongly mirror those arguments presented by both Descartes and Leibniz – particularly Descartes – against a purely reductive mind-body identity thesis. The problem of consciousness, the difficulties in giving a coherent and consistent philosophical account of how objectivity can give rise to subjectivity, of how subjective conscious experience can be reduced to the terms of an objective physical account without leaving residual phenomena unaccounted for, of how an objective process can have a subjective nature, and what it would mean to give an objective account of subjectivity have been explored and ascertained, however implicitly, all along.

Dialectic at a Moving Standstill – An Overview of Epistemic Inexplicability and Epistemic Intuition:

The history of philosophy of mind essentially reads like a dialectic at a moving standstill, exhibiting a recurring neurotic-like pattern based upon the polemical tension between the intuitive notion that our robust subjective phenomenological experience is real and the desire to render these intelligible in the objective universalistic terms of a scientific physicalism. Though most of us have an epistemically primary notion that there exists a fundamental psychophysical link

between mind and body, between our phenomenological experience and the workings of the brain, this connection seems inexplicable in and irreducible to purely physical terms and explanations. There seems, in other words, to exist an unsolvable, unbridgeable, irreducible epistemic or explanatory gap between the objective terms of physics and physiology and the subjective terms of conscious experience or *qualia*.

Both reductionist explanations of phenomenological consciousness and antireductionist accounts present flabbergasting perplexities. While the former generally seems to leave out subjective experience, *qualia*, and intentional semantic content – namely, what it is like to have a conscious experience – the latter seems somewhat antiscientific, eerie, and mystical in its epiphenomenal tendencies and marked inability to account for mind-body causal interaction without invoking supernatural forces or divine intervention. Either way, both philosophical tendencies and accounts seem to leave something we intuitively know and experience everyday out of the philosophical picture; namely, that there exists a psychophysical causal nexus between mind and body and that conscious experience and subjective *qualia* do actually exist.

Materialist theories of the mind first emerged, in part, as a philosophical attempt to circumvent and resolve the problems of mind-body interaction raised by Cartesian dualism. With its disjunctive split between an immaterial mind and a material body, Cartesian dualism, or substance dualism, presented the following problematic question, one addressed to Descartes himself by Princess Elizabeth¹: How can an immaterial mind, free-floating and unanchored in the physical realm, be causally efficacious in a physical world governed by a closed system of physical causal laws? Rejecting Cartesian dualism as incoherent, inconsistent, and antiscientific in our current physical world picture, rejecting the reality of mysteriously and ineffably immaterial mind "stuff", materialist theories of the mental thus hoped to resolve the problems of mind-body interaction and mental causation. However, whether they were reductionist or antireductionist in form, despite their ardent hopes and wishes, materialist theories of the mind were largely unable to philosophically grapple with issues of mental causation and phenomenological conscious experience.² Thus, though reductionist theories of mind, attempting to dispense with the notion of the mental and consciousness as largely internal and ineffable, have principally had to deal with issues of subjectivity and subjective qualia, antireductionist theories, embracing a kind of property dualism rather than substance dualism, have had to grapple with the issue of how consciousness and mental events could exert a causal effect upon a physical body spatiotemporally situated in a physical world. As a result of either the counterintuitive absence of subjectivity or the relegation of mental properties to the status of epiphenomena (disregarding the assertion of supernatural phenomena and divine intervention), as John Searle compellingly argues, a curious neurotic-like pattern thus emerged in the history of philosophical materialism. Namely, a recurring urge to offer a credible account of mental phenomena that makes no reference to anything irreducibly or intrinsically mental.³

Searle however attributes this repetitive neurotic-like pattern to materialism being held implicitly captive to a certain conceptual dualism, to being continually informed by the conceptual categories and polarities of Cartesian metaphysics. Yet, as some of Searle's peers have argued, the polar dichotomy between mental terms and physical terms may lie beyond our

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¹ Atherton, Margaret (ed.). (1994) "Selections from Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia's *Correspondence with Descartes*." Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, pp. 11-12, 16-17, 20-21.

² For edifications sake, reductive materialism is the claim that all mental phenomena are ultimately physical and that all mental events and terms can be completely reduced to physical events and terms (i.e. pain event X = physiological event X). Similarly, anti-reductive materialism claims that all mental phenomena are ultimately physical in origin, nevertheless, mental events and terms cannot adequately and completely be reduced to physical properties and terms without leaving out some aspect of our subjective phenomenological experience. Thus, pain X is not strictly identical to physiological event X; there exists an irreducible subjective element to the experience of pain that no amount of knowledge of the physical properties and processes can adequately convey.

³ Searle, J.R. (1992) *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

cognitive capabilities to bridge. ⁴ Though Searle thinks that transcending or collapsing the conceptual dualism of Cartesian thought is epistemically possible, that the psychophysical link between the mental and the physical can be rendered intelligibly without simply positing an inexplicably irreducible primary notion, this appears unlikely.

Ironically, the very arguments enumerated by Searle that have historically been leveled against the reductionist attempts of materialist thought, can be leveled against Searle's theory of biological naturalism or emergentism.⁵ For even if consciousness is ultimately physical, even if mental properties and events are causally emergent system features from our biological basis, the problem of giving a coherent and consistent explanation of the psychophysical link, without neglecting certain qualitative aspects of conscious experience, remains a deep and intractable problem. And these fundamental epistemological difficulties stem from the fact that the character of this epistemic gap, or dissimilarity, with regard to consciousness differs from that of the gaps in other domains of physical, natural, objective scientific inquiry. One cannot reduce, deduce, explain, or infer the perceptual phenomenological appearance and experience of redness, water, lighting, heat, pain, etc., from the brute physical truth of the material world. Principally, the idea of moving from appearance to reality makes no sense in the case of consciousness for its appearance is its reality.

As Thomas Nagel demonstrates, it is logically impossible to exclude the phenomenological aspects of conscious experience from a reduction in the same way that one excludes phenomenal features of material substances – by explaining them as effects on the mind of a conscious observer. With other phenomena in the material world, the distinction between appearance, between the phenomenological features it presents to a conscious spectator, and reality hold; yet, with consciousness the phenomenological experience is, at least in part, part of the phenomenon's reality. With lighting, heat, water, or any other external, physical phenomenon the distinction holds and a necessary identity can be posited with its underlying physical structure and causal functioning. However, because the subjective element cannot be cleaved from the qualitative conscious experience of pain, itchiness, or seeing red, a reductive identity of the same sort cannot be established. A reduction of this sort, of heat to the physical movement of physical molecules, can only succeed if a specific subjective point-of-view is omitted from what it is to be reduced. But with the phenomenological aspects of consciousness, because every subjective phenomenon is essentially connected with a specific vantage point which a physicalist theory would inevitably omit or abandon in its quest to intelligibly explicate phenomena from a single objective point-of-view, transcending the phenomenological appearance of mental events would omit the very phenomenological reality of conscious experience.⁶

Historical Mirror (Part I) – Descartes Epistemic Primitive:

Searle (1992), et al.

Because of the incomprehensibility of the exact character of the psychophysical connection between bodily events and phenomenal experience, neither perceivable by directing the senses towards the brain nor behavior that seemingly expresses conscious thought, it seems that any explanation "will always require explanatorily primitive principles to bridge the gap

⁴ See McGinn, Colin. (1989) "Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem," in David Chalmers (ed.) *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings.* New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 394-403, Nagel, Thomas. (1974) "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?," in David Chalmers (ed.) *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings.* New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 219-225, or Chalmers, David. (2002) "Consciousness and Its Place in Nature," in David Chalmers (ed.) *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings.* New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 247-272.

⁶ Nagel, Thomas. (1974) "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?," in David Chalmers (ed.) *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 219-225.

from the physical to the phenomenal". Interestingly, this contemporary assertion against the reductive attempts of materialism almost precisely echoes Descartes answer to the difficulty of mind-body interaction raised by Princess Elizabeth and others; namely, that the substantial union between mind and body is "one of those self-evident things which we only make obscure when we try to explain them in terms of others."

Descartes, like numerous contemporary philosophers of mind, seems to have arrived at the conclusion that the substantial union between mind and body, the intuitive idea that there actually exists a psychophysical link between mental events and physical events, cannot be clearly and distinctly conceived or explained through the pure understanding of scientific inquiry. Rather, the union constitutes a primary notion that is very clearly presented in daily experience. Though "all this is unintelligible," though the causal connection between mind and body, the mental and the physical, conscious thought and material extension, cannot be adequately comprehended in terms of a pure physical theory, in terms of a causally closed physical universe, it nevertheless is taught to us by nature and inner experience. As Lilli Alanen asserts,

Descartes' notion of the human person as a union of mind and body may be incoherent and unsatisfactory – his insistence that human experience requires a specific, primary notion however expresses the important insight that the terms in which we describe and account for it in daily life are not reducible to terms used in the successful account of either physical nature or purely intelligible matters.¹⁰

Descartes, much like the noumenal naturalists, the principled agnostics, and other contemporary philosophers of mind seems to have viewed the mind-body union as both substantial and imbued with "some truth." However, as an epistemically primitive, intuitive fact of lived experience it cannot be coherently explained by a reduction to other, physical terms and proofs. If everything physical has a purely physical explanation and understanding, then consciousness stands inexplicable in the terms of any scientific, physicalist theory. More importantly though, Descartes' assertion of the epistemic inexplicability of the mind-body union in the terms of pure understanding does not seem to merely represent an *ad hoc* and unsatisfactory attempt to silence his objectors. Rather, his conclusion in the *Meditations* seems to reflect a deep and subtle understanding of the very epistemic gap between the physical and phenomenological realms; a gap which seems to logically entail some form of dualist conception of mind.

Historical Mirrors (Part II) - Main Arguments for Epistemic Inexplicability

David Chalmers has identified three main sorts of arguments against materialism's attempt to reduce phenomenological features of conscious experience to a purely physical account; all of which establish an epistemic gap between physical properties and consciousness.¹²

First, there's the knowledge argument. The knowledge argument asserts that one could know all the physical facts of neurophysiology, physics, etc., and still be unable to know or epistemologically deduce all the facts about consciousness on the basis of that very knowledge of physical properties and processes. For example, as Nagel argues, one could know all about the

⁷ Chalmers, et al., pp. 254.

⁸ Alanen, Lilli. "Reconsidering Descartes's Notion of the Mind-Body Union." *Synthere*, 1996. pp. 16, ft. 6. ⁹ *Ibid.*. p. 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid* n 15

^{101.,} p.13.

11 Descartes, Rene. (1641) "Meditations on First Philosophy...," in Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins (eds.)

Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, p.17.

¹² Chalmers, et al. pp.248-251.

objective behavior of a bat and the functioning of its neurophysiology, both structurally and causally, yet still not know, either through the physicalist understanding or the imagination, what it is like to be a bat from its own subjective point-of-view. From this epistemic gap between the physical understanding of bat physiology and understanding the bat's phenomenological point-ofview. Nagel first concludes that physical explanation cannot fully capture, without residue, the qualitative aspects of subjectivity and, thus, is led to surmise that materialism is an unintelligible position because we don't understand how the psychophysical relation between consciousness and the physical properties of the brain could be rendered coherently in naturalistic terms. Similarly, Frank Jackson argues that though someone (i.e. Mary) may know all about the physical facts underlying sensation and perception (i.e. the neurophysiological structures and processes that underpin the sensation of seeing red) without knowing all the facts about consciousness; namely, the qualitative experience of consciously experiencing red. Jackson, thus, concludes from this epistemic gap, from Mary's failure to deduce the qualitative features of phenomenological consciousness from a complete physical understanding, that consciousness is irreducible and, thus, inexplicable in purely physicalist terms. Moreover, from this epistemic gap he inferentially concludes that facts about consciousness are in some sense nonphysical facts and, subsequently, that the mind is simply epiphenomenal.¹³

It is important to note, as these examples highlight, that the epistemic gap between facts of consciousness and physical facts does not necessarily entail candidly relegating mind as epiphenomenal; rather, one could just as easily claim agnosticism, posit an ontological gap between mind and body, inferring that mind is immaterial, or infer that consciousness is physical yet noumenal with regard to our cognitive and epistemological capabilities. Thus, Colin McGinn implements the knowledge argument to posit an irreducible epistemic gap, claiming that no concept needed to explain the workings of the physical world would suffice to explain the character of consciousness, and then arguing that though the brain naturalistically gives rise to consciousness, we are cognitively closed - terminally - from intelligibly grasping the psychophysical relation. Thus, though Descartes ultimately inferred the existence of a stark ontological gap between an immaterial mind and a material body, though he explicitly argued from what he took to be the essential natures of both entities to the contingency of their connection, and Leibniz, likewise, posited the notion of pre-established harmony from the failure to intelligibly explicate the attribute of thought in terms of a causally closed physical universe, their respective solutions to the mind-body problem underscore a perception of an irreducible epistemic gap between mind and body, thought and extension, features of consciousness and physical states of the body. However, since their epistemic and causal arguments cut across all three arguments delineated by Chalmers, further discussion will be temporarily postponed.

Secondly, there's the explanatory argument against physicalism. The explanatory argument asserts that physical accounts only explain the world in terms of spatiotemporally situated structures and causally efficacious functional states and, thus, that from these facts one could only deduce further facts about structures and functions. However, explaining causally relevant functional states and physical structures doesn't fully suffice to explain consciousness; in particular, these facts cannot adequately deal with the subjective character of mental events (i.e. the qualitative experiencing of seeing red, feeling pain, having a semantic understanding of Chinese rather than merely giving the functional appearance of understanding, etc.).

And thirdly, there is the modal argument against any form of reductive physicalism. It argues that the relation between conscious states and bodily physical states appears fundamentally contingent and, thus, since it is at least metaphysically possible that their could exist a world that is physically identical to this one yet lacks consciousness or the attribute of thought, then consciousness must be a further component of our universe. Essentially this argument exploits

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¹³ Jackson, Frank. (1982) "Epiphenomenal Qualia," in David Chalmers (ed.) *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp.273-280.

modal notions of possibility and necessity to establish a conceivable disjunction between consciousness and physical processes and, thus, to affirm the metaphysical possibility of dissociation.

Kripke's modal argument against materialism is possibly the most well known and best articulated in contemporary philosophy of mind. He argues that since any statement identifying a pain with a brain state would have to be necessarily true, it would exclude the possibility of being in pain and yet not being in this particular brain state. But this seems wrong since an organism with a different physiology might well be capable of feeling pain. Moreover, mental states could not be necessarily physical for to identify anything mental with anything nonmental would ultimately leave out the mental. In other words, since the subjective element and phenomenological quality of pain cannot be subtracted from the concept of pain, since the conscious perception of pain cannot simply be reduced to a particular brain state without eliminating the subjective meaning of pain, it cannot be considered a necessary identity. Thus, if mental states cannot be identical to physical states, then one can imagine the metaphysical possibility of mental states without physical states and vice versa, whether this occurs in possible zombies or Martians.

Historical Mirrors (Part III) – Descartes and Leibniz's Arguments for Epistemic Inexplicabilities to Epistemic Intuitions

Descartes' thought, which ironically shares the naturalistic assumption of all materialist theories of mind that the physical universe is governed by a closed system of causal laws, exhibits a particularly keen understanding of the irreducible epistemic gap from which he, like contemporary reductionists and antireductionists, has inferred counterintuitive, mysterious, and supernatural conclusions about the nature of the psychophysical link. Based upon his causal assumptions and principles, Descartes either argued from the epistemic gap or dissimilarity between conscious thought and physical extension to the inexplicability of an irreducible mind-body union or to the counterintuitive thesis of the universal innateness of all ideas. Since the perceived epistemic gap and his subsequent attempts at resolution appear to hinge on his causal principle and its correlative assumptions, it seems important to first elucidate them.

Assuming the common notion that nothing can come from nothing and that what is more perfect (i.e., what contains in itself more reality) cannot come into being from what is less perfect, Descartes maintained that causes are necessarily similar to their effects in the sense that a cause must contain (formally or eminently) whatever is contained (formally or objectively) in its effect. To clarify, the Cartesian principle of causation holds that a cause contains a perfection formally if it actually exemplifies or embodies it while a cause contains a perfection eminently if the cause can somehow produce the objects that contain them formally or objectively (i.e. representationally). Moreover, the Cartesian notion of eminent containment also requires that the cause must hold at least a similar level of reality or perfection to those exemplified by its effects.¹⁴ And it seems to be precisely this causal principle that eventually leads Descartes to assert that the interaction between thoughts and the mechanistic movements of physical bodies cannot be conceptually explicated in a clear and distinct manner and, later, to the supposedly rational conclusion "that sensory ideas are not transmitted to him from external things, in spite of our natural propensity to believe that they are." ¹⁵ Moreover, he seems to arrive at these very philosophical conclusions through invoking the three arguments (i.e. the knowledge argument, the explanatory argument, and the modal argument), generally together, mentioned above.

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¹⁴ Descartes, et al. pp.36-37.

¹⁵ Gorham, Geoffry. "Descartes on the Innateness of All Ideas." *Canadian Journal of Philosphy*. Vol. 32, No. 3, Sept. 2002, p.383.

In mediation two of his *Meditations*, while contemplating the epistemic relation between a physical fragment of wax and its intellectual understanding, Descartes notices that there is a certain explanatory gap between knowledge of the physical properties of the wax and knowledge of its essential nature of waxness. Partly from this observation, he thus concludes that while its' essentially extended, corporeal nature can be manipulated and changed, no matter what physical color or shape the material body assumes its fundamental nature as wax remains in and can be grasped by the pure intellect of the mind. He states, "for whatever came under the senses of taste, smell, sight, touch, or hearing has now changed; and yet the wax remains." Descartes' reasoning thus reflects a number of intuitions: (1) that the epistemic relation between physical properties and the intellectual understanding of them in conscious thought is felt to be somewhat contingent, (2) that knowledge of the truth about the wax cannot simply be deduced from its physical properties and the changes they undergo, and (3) that explaining the physical structure of the wax doesn't appear to conceptually account for all the properties felt to be contained in the phenomenon (i.e. the waxness of the wax – the subjective experience of the wax). Of course, if we disregard panpsychism, and claim that there is nothing that it is like to be the wax, that the physical fragment of wax has no conscious experience, then, though Descartes' own phenomenological experience of the wax cannot be smoothly reduced to the physical workings of his brain, we can render the wax itself in the objective, universal terms of physicalism as a certain configuration of physical and chemical properties and causally efficacious functional relations. However, as explained earlier, this reduction cannot be coherently enacted in the case of consciousness itself. And in meditation six Descartes seems to stumble upon this very fact in his two proofs for dualism, both of which involve a reflection on the epistemic differences between the mental and the physical and, consequently, lead to the ontological inference that mind and body represent two fundamentally distinct entities.

The possibility proof of mind-body dualism, much like Kripke's modal argument against mind-brain identity statements, principally notices a deep explanatory gap between the mental and the physical. Beginning with the notion that mind and body could be separated in thought, since one can clearly and distinctly understand one without the other, Descartes, based on a perceived epistemic contingency between mind and body, infers the metaphysical possibility that at least God could completely separate mind and body. Thus, he ultimately concludes that disembodiment is, at least, metaphysically possible.

Despite the fact that Descartes seems to momentarily indicate that mind could possibly exist in a disembodied state, his argument mirrors that of Kripke's, though with an inverted conclusion. For Kripke's modal argument, and similar zombie thought-experiments, also highlight the fact that the relation between conscious states and physical bodily states seem fundamentally contingent and, thus, it seems at least metaphysically possible, that a physically identical body to our own could exist yet lack consciousness. Hence, the psychophysical connection is not explicable in a reductive, necessarily true identity statement. Analysis of consciousness in terms of physical nature, or in terms of the attribute of extension for Descartes, for all the modal arguments seems to underscore the thought that the subjective character of conscious experience cannot be captured by a reductive analysis of the mental, since this seems logically compatible with its absence. Or rather, analysis of the mind in terms of physical features could logically be ascribed to robotic automata that behaviorally exhibit consciousness (or as-if intentionality), though actually lacking any intrinsic consciousness or intentional content. Conversely, a similar materialist analysis could logically ascribed mind to non-conscious aliens who, though physically identical to human beings, lack similar conscious experiences.

Nevertheless, it still seems absurd to try to dissociate the two entirely, to let mind float completely free of the body. Thus, despite the felt contingency between mental states and physical states, between the attributes of conscious thought and extended matter; despite the fact

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¹⁶ Descartes, et al. p.32.

that the link between mind and body seems inexplicable, without invoking the benevolent honesty of God, Descartes explicitly rejects that mind is accidentally united to the body. For though he cannot intelligibly explicate the psychophysical causal link in terms of pure, mathematical-like understanding, he nevertheless concedes that the link is an epistemically primitive notion engendered by everyday experience and inner sensation. Thus, he writes, "there is nothing that my own nature teaches me more vividly than that I have a body, and that when I feel pain there is something wrong in my body..." Similarly, Descartes divisibility proof of mind-body dualism, though it again posits an irreducible epistemic gap between mind and body, he nevertheless maintains that the mind-body union represents an irreducible primary notion. The Cartesian mind isn't merely like a sailor disembodied and completely separate from the corporeal being of her body-ship.

Otherwise, the Cartesian divisibility proof is not just another modal argument against reductionism. Rather, like the explanatory arguments previously outlined, it exemplifies the notion that because physical accounts fundamentally account for extended matter situated spatiotemporally, they cannot therefore explain aspects of conscious experience, for their perceptual reality is not spatially situated. If it is generally granted that our perceptual senses, whether in the act of perception or introspection, are geared toward representing a spatial world, to presenting objects in space with spatially defined properties like finiteness and divisibility, then Descartes' characterization of the mind as unified and indivisible seems tantamount to asserting its non-spatiality. Obviously, he already posited the non-spatial nature, or appearance, of the mind when he characterized it as an ontologically immaterial, non-extended entity. Thus, his argument that bodies are by nature divisible substances while minds are naturally indivisible seems to emerge from the non-spatial character of introspective phenomenological experience. Put differently, his argument underscores a certain epistemic distinction between the non-spatial, nonphysical, and thus seemingly indivisible nature of mind and the spatially situated, physical, and thus divisibility of bodies.

Hence, according to the logical rule of non-contradiction that a single entity cannot synchronically exist with two separate properties (i.e. as both indivisible and divisible), Descartes infers from the epistemic distinction and dissimilarity between introspective sensibility and external perception that the mind and body are wholly diverse. That is, since mind and body can only be clearly and distinctly conceived, conceptually, in separation from one another, since it would be logically absurd and impossible to conceive them as a unified identity containing two diametrically opposed terms, Descartes infers that they are wholly diverse ontologically. Again, the Cartesian argument seems to betray the epistemological notion that, because of the existence of an irreducible and inexplicable epistemic gap between mind and body, establishing an identity between the mental and the physical not only seems logically absurd, but the very reduction leaves something out - namely, the phenomenological experience of consciousness as a nonphysical, non-spatially situated, indivisible phenomenon. Like contemporary thinkers, Descartes' theoretical ruminations thus allude to the fact that sense qualities cannot be, at the least conceptually or epistemically, reductively translated into the quantitative terms of physical explanation. Yet sadly, the dialectical desire, or neurotic compulsion, of Descartes' materialist leanings to account for both the reality and the causal efficacy of the mental, to find a place for mind in a causally-closed physical universe, seems to have later led him to counterintuitively reasoning that all of our sensory ideas are innate.

As Geoffrey Gorham convincingly argues, as a result of his causal assumptions, Descartes argued for the universal innateness of all ideas based upon the marked epistemic dissimilarity he ascertained between the intentional/representational contents of those ideas and

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.17.

"their putative external causes." Since the ontological hierarchy of Cartesian metaphysics places infinite entities like mind on a higher plane of perfection or reality than finite substances, Descartes assumed that their exists nothing in our ideas that is contained formally and eminently in bodies. Thus, according to his causal principle, he concludes that bodies and bodily sensations cannot logically exert a causal effect upon the production of our ideas. Rather, bodies and bodily sensations merely provide a coincidental occasion for an already innate idea to come to the forefront of consciousness, without possessing any real or direct causal impact upon the innate and formerly dormant mental event. Moreover, in order to account for the law-like correlation between corporeal motions and mental ideas in the absence of an ontically real causal relation, Descartes' asserts that this simply arises from the fact that God has established a law-like succession, or constant conjunction, between two causally unrelated events. Thus, according to the universal innateness thesis, when Descartes stubs his toe, the physical event does not causally impact the mental impression of pain; rather, it merely provides an occasion for the already innate idea of pain to assert itself in consciousness. And further, the constant conjunction of the two events is merely a reflection of the law-like succession established by God to ensure his bodily preservation. As Descartes' writes, "The ideas of pain, colors, sounds and the like must all be innate, if on the occasion of certain corporeal motions, our mind is to be capable of representing them to itself, for there is no similarity between these ideas and the corporeal motions," Again, as the remark highlights, this movement of reasoning from epistemic dissimilarity to the noncausality of body-on-mind seems to underscore a felt explanatory gap and contingency between the mental and the physical.

Descartes' assertion that no idea could have its causal origin in observation, nor that the "faculty of thought must rely on the sense organs," reveals a felt contingency between mental events, states, and intentional content and the physical sense organs of the body. Like Kripke's logical argument against mind-brain identity theses, it reveals the irreducible epistemic gap between any idea X and any neurophysiological event Y. Thus, as a result of this apparent contingency, as a result of the epistemic dissimilarity that exists between an account of a brain state and a mental idea composed of irreducible intentional/representational content, their psychophysical causal connection seems somewhat arbitrary and the physical state itself cannot seem to account for the idea. Put more generally, because the mere perception of the physical body cannot reveal certain irreducible qualia (i.e. the intentional content of ideas), according to his causal principle, Descartes must either posit an epistemic primitive, that something can come from nothing, or that physical bodies and bodily sensations do not cause our ideas. While the first appears to be a kind of theoretical cop-out, the second physically impossible, and the third counterintuitive, Descartes chose the third option. Yet, in a curious metaphysical maneuver, one mirroring the parallelism of Leibnizian philosophy, he still gives into the aforementioned intuitive feeling that there actually exists a fundamental, law-like psychophysical relation between bodily states and mental states; one wholly inexplicable in physical or causal terms. In this respect, one can see a certain affinity between Descartes' thesis of the universal innateness of all ideas and Leibniz's conception of a pre-established harmony between the attributes of thought and extension.

The Leibnizian notion of a pre-established harmony theoretically establishes that "bodies act as if there were no souls (though this is impossible); and souls act as if there were no bodies;

¹⁸ Gorham, *et al.*, p.361. Obviously the interpretive claim that Descartes' did not subscribe to a doctrine of interactive dualism in the *Meditations* would appear highly irregular and controversial. However, Gorham's article deals with Descartes' later recantation of body-on-mind causal interaction as explicitly put forth in his *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet (1648)*. With regard to this later work Gorham's interpretation is neither new nor particularly controversial. Rather, his paper explicitly attempts to undermine revisionist interpreters unhappy with the thesis' recent unpopularity.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.358.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.360.

and both act as if each influenced each other."21 Much like the Cartesian thesis of universal innateness, arguably for similar causal and epistemic reasons and difficulties, it claims that there is a certain degree of illusion to mind-body causation. I say a certain degree for Descartes' theory only claims that body-on-mind causation is an illusion, where as Leibniz gives up on the notion all together. Yet, it seems that Leibniz's own intuitive feeling and desire to salvage the irreducible and otherwise inexplicable facts of everyday experience, may have also led him to a fantastic conception of his own; namely, the lucky parallelism of his pre-established harmony thesis. Moreover, this particular supernatural solution to the problem of mind-body interaction also seems to result from his own epistemic difficulty in intelligibly explicating consciousness in purely physical terms. As Leibniz explicitly and emphatically remarks regarding consciousness, "the perception, and what depends on it, is inexplicable in terms of mechanical reasons, that is, through shapes or motions."²² Subsequently providing a near-emblematic thought-experiment, Leibniz offers a, though simple, argument which highlights the inexplicable epistemic gap that lies between physical knowledge and our everyday experience of being conscious. Like numerous contemporary thought-experiments, from Ned Block's China Body to Nagel's bats, Leibniz's enlarged mill experiment revolves around the gap between objectively perceiving the brain, between perceiving physical structures and functions, and understanding how its' physical properties and processes could give rise to and account for conscious experiences like phenomenological perception. Leibniz remarks that if upon internal inspection one only found physical properties and processes, "parts that push one another," one would "never find anything to explain perception, 23 that is, the irreducible phenomenological character of conscious experience.

Conclusion – A Return to Epistemic Gaps and Epistemic Intuitions

As the present paper has attempted to show, it seems as if both Descartes and Leibniz, like a multitude of contemporary philosophers, appeared to apprehend the epistemic gap that continues to lie like a traumatic kernel at the heart of philosophy of mind. Moreover, it also appears that the two philosophers' particular attempts to resolve the epistemic and causal difficulties raised by the mind-body problem and the problem of consciousness, again like many contemporary theorists, ultimately resulted in seemingly fantastic, mysterious, even somewhat comic metaphysical claims. Philosophically, it seems that the psychophysical link between mind and body may only be explicable in the irreducible facts of lived experience; that it cannot be explained by any reduction to simpler proofs beside God or as the mysterious orphan by-product of evolutionary development. So the dialectic at a moving standstill runs itself static, and the neurotic misadventures of philosophy of mind go on. However, as McGinn writes: "a happy side benefit is that I feel no temptation to deny the existence of things that are terminally puzzling. I can now, for example, see my way clear to believing in free will again after twenty-five years of denying its' very possibility - on the ground that neither the random nor the determined could accommodate." ²⁴ The other, non-neurotic, non-static side of the dialectic's coin – the transcendence to freedom and free will.

This is not, however, to argue that neuroscientific inquiry into the psychophysical should cease all together. Though we may be cognitively closed from ever fully and intelligibly explicating the link between consciousness and the physical brain in rigorous philosophical terms, though the epistemic gap between the physical and phenomenological domains may be

²⁴ McGinn, *et al.*, p.71.

²¹ Leibniz, G.W. (1714) "The Principles of Philosophy or the Monadology," in Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins (eds.) *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*. Indianapolis: Hackett Prublishing Company, p.242. ²² Ibid., p.236.

²³ Ibid., p.236.

irreducible, we can still postulate constructive theories about how the brain and consciousness interact and how different features of consciousness supervene upon certain physical properties and processes in the brain. We can still postulate detailed links and correlations between the mind and the body that are both illuminating and enriching without perfectly capturing phenomenological experience in purely physical terms. Ultimately, though the objective, universalistic point-of-view of the physical sciences may terminally fail to capture the subjective experiences of consciousness, this does not necessarily undermine the physicalist endeavor to detail the specific physical properties that causally subserve conscious phenomenological experience.