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Peer Review

Review of: "The Mind as a Particular: Why Cartesian Dualism Is True"

Iliyan Ivanov[1]

1. Psychiatry, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, United States

This is a well-written paper providing a lengthy and, for the most part, well-thought-out discussion on the subject of Cartesian dualism. The author makes several interesting and novel arguments in addition to putting these in historical and personal context. The paper is an interesting read and worthy of publication. I have some suggestions that the author may consider in order to hopefully improve the current state of the manuscript.

The main premise of the argument, as understood by this reviewer, is based on two notions: 1 - that each mind/self/person is unique and unreplaceable (as the author states it “particular”) and 2 – that the mind/self is not attributable to a particular physical object/body (due to the pairing problem); ergo, the two states (physical and mental) are independent and therefore Cartesian dualism is “true”. If that indeed is the core of the argument, it will be extremely helpful to state it clearly in both the abstract and the introduction of the paper. In the current state of the manuscript, it is inferred, but it takes quite an effort on the part of the reader to formulate the argument. On that note, both the abstract and the manuscript appear rather lengthy with redundancies, and it will be beneficial if these are shortened and made more to the point.

The second conceptual challenge is that the terms “mind”, “self”, “person”, and “consciousness” appear to be used interchangeably without being clearly defined as to what they mean. For the purpose of clarity, it may be beneficial to choose one term, define it at the beginning of the paper, and then use it throughout. For the purpose of this review, this reviewer will use the terms “physical” and “mental” entities.

One minor note – the manuscript has no pages, and this makes it difficult to point out particular sections.

This reviewer’s concerns are as follows:

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A big part of the argument is framed around the two-body thought experiment, which is interesting; however, it is potentially flawed – by the author's own argument, it will be unknowable if identical bodies will produce the same or different self. The argument lies on an assumption and does not follow a logical trend that is crucial for thought experiments to be seen as valid. From that perspective, the overall argument shifts from the objective outlined above to the question of primacy (namely, which entity - physical vs mental - comes first). In this reviewer's view, this question is only secondary to the main premise of the paper. The undeniable truth is that both physical and mental entities coexist, and when not identical, they are also not fully independent of each other. The "particularity" of the mental entity is well-discussed, but the overall argument that the particularity defines the primacy of the mental entity is not well justified, mainly due to two reasons. First, the relation between the physical and mental entities seems to be presented as rather simplistic, ignoring obvious interdependence (brain injuries are associated and probably produce notable changes in personality; on the other hand, non-physical factors like human language can change physical presentations like behaviors and even possibly brain connectivity). The concept of the mental entity (self/mind) is currently presented as if this entity exists a priori and is predetermined, which seems to be ignoring the fact that self/mind follows developmental trajectories – in that sense, one additional argument against some of the author's hypotheses can be related to the notion that these developmental aspects may partially explain particularity (i.e., different developmental paths may result in differences in characteristics of the self unless one accepts that these are predetermined and independent of developmental influences, which seems implausible). Also, the assumed particularity of each individual mind/self is strongly promoted by the author's assumption that one can know for certain that two identical physical bodies will be paired with different selves – however, if one can know exclusively their own self and no one else's, we can only assume that the author's proposition is correct, but it is not logical to say we will definitively know that, which in turn makes his two-body thought experiment less convincing.

Below are a few citations followed by the reviewer's comments to illustrate some of the above-outlined concerns:

Author (A): But, while it is a consistent proposition that macroscopic material objects exist as individual entities only relative to minds, the assumption that minds/persons also exist as individual entities only relative to the minds themselves that conceive them is again circular and problematic[13].

Reviewer (R): While this argument is accurate, I am left with the impression that when referring to observations from the surrounding environment, the author seems to refer mainly to perception (e.g., seeing red), which undermines the overall premise. When it comes to observations of another person's mind (as cited above), it is not mentioned that it will include more than perceptions. Gaining some understanding about the mind of another person is not limited to perception and, to a great extent, is based on verbal communication, which is unique to humans. It is known that there are aspects of reality which we cannot directly observe, but nevertheless, we know they exist both on the macro and micro levels. Further, Platonian and Kantian views stipulate that the true nature of any object is unknowable – another shortcoming of the argument that observation of macro objects provides sufficient knowledge about inanimate objects but cannot do the same for minds/persons.

A: Despite the wide diversity of beliefs about what a mind or person is (e.g., that it is one and the same with the brain or body, it is an emergent property of the brain, it is constituted by the body, it is a compound of body and soul, it is a bundle of conscious experiences, it is nothing at all, etc.), deep inside, we all have, perhaps unconsciously, a natural understanding of selfhood which is both innate and reinforced by personal experience of our own existence.

R: In this statement, the terms are used somewhat interchangeably – it is unclear if the author makes a difference between the three and how they may differ from each other.

A: Throughout history, most people have believed or hoped that a person survives biological death and the destruction of their body, and even those who reject this idea find it intelligible. Similarly, the idea of metempsychosis, where a person is reborn in a new body – human or animal – without any memories of their previous life, is universally conceivable.

R: These beliefs often refer to the soul – again, interchangeable use of terms. In addition, consciousness is also linked to selfhood/mind but without distinction about what type of consciousness is being considered. Animals other than humans most likely have some sort of consciousness – however, human consciousness is categorically different, which is not explained by the author.

A: I am experiencing my own thoughts and nobody else's, and nobody else has direct access to my own thoughts. In theoretical discussions, we may abstract mental experiences from the subjects experiencing them – for example, we may refer to a "sense of pain" – but in reality, it is unintelligible that such experiences could exist without a subject. An experience is a mode of a conscious subject. This innate notion of subject or self is what we instinctively identify a person with, and to track a

person through changes such as the aforementioned is to recognize that these changes were experienced by the same subject.

R: In this last sentence, the author uses subject, self, person, and subject seemingly referring to the same construct – unclear, though, what the construct is. When the notion of privacy of thought is true, it is not true that others have no access to one's thoughts – humans have the option to withhold and hide their thoughts but also have the choice and ability to verbalize them and make these available to other humans. This is illustrated by the sentences following this citation when the author suggests that they can assist the reader in the process of self-exploration – in other words, the author is sharing intimate knowledge, making it accessible to other selves/minds.

A: Of course, from a third-person point of view, you and the other person are completely similar, completely symmetric. But from your (or the duplicate person's) point of view, there is a remarkable difference between yourself and the other person, a striking asymmetry. Both the third-person symmetry and the first-person asymmetry are real facts, so physicalism should account also for the asymmetry: physics should explain why one body gives rise to one phenomenal perspective, while the other body gives rise to a different one; but obviously, there cannot be any physical explanation for this, since the physical arrangements of the two bodies are identical. The structure of the body cannot, therefore, be mapped onto the person; it doesn't tell us who is who. A person/self is not correlatable to any universal aspect of their body.

R: It is known that personalities change as a result of physical injuries to that person's brain, so this argument is not sound. The overall challenge of the Pairing problem, as discussed by the author, is based on the assumption that a physical entity (e.g., body) is paired with an already formed mental entity (e.g., self), ignoring the obvious knowledge that self emerges through development (it is hard to argue that a newborn has a self). While the mental abilities of humans are unique, it is not unique that these are definitely associated with the functions of the human central nervous system – in other words, the human biological system is unique in its ability to support human consciousness and the development of individual mind/self. The more appropriate question might be – what makes it possible for the human biological system to either give rise to or to host a mind/self.

A: If one thinks that the identity/particularity of the person given rise to by a brain is not dependent on the brain itself, but that the brain is only responsible for the peripheral, universal traits of that person, such as their sensory experiences, their memories, their rational capacity, etc., then some

contemplation should reveal to them that they in fact assume (perhaps unconsciously) the core of the person, the owner of these traits, to be an independent substance.

The structure of a brain is perhaps responsible for endowing the mind with which it is paired certain abilities, such as memory, reason, perception, etc., but has nothing to do with the question of *who* that mind is; rather, this question has to do with which specific particles make up that brain, not with how they are organized.

R: When this is sensible, self/mind is intimately linked to the body/brain physical characteristics and seems to me these relationships are best accounted for by a form of dualism – in general, I agree with the author's skepticism about the physicalism view, but some of the inaccurate statements seem to undermine the argument. Limiting the discussion to physical organization as the main determinant of the self seems to ignore the obvious knowledge that a combination between unique brain/body structure and unique life experiences is thought to give rise to different selves.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.