

## **The Two Sides of Being: A Reassessment of Psycho–Physical Dualism**

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This book presents a rich and detailed defense of mind–body substance dualism. Meixner's aim is not to win the day outright for dualism, but to show that the position remains a respectable account of the relationship between mind and body. *The Two Sides of Being* is impressive in its ambitions, and covers an appreciably large amount of ground.

In chapters 1 and 2, Meixner characterizes mind–body dualism and outlines motivations for both dualism and its chief rival: physicalism. Chapter 3 is taken up with Meixner's neo-Cartesian argument for substance dualism. In chapters 4–6,

Meixner canvasses 17 arguments for dualism already present within the literature and offers replies to some key anti-dualist arguments. In chapter 7 Meixner defends dualism against the charge that it is unscientific. And in chapters 8–10, Meixner outlines a dualistic account of consciousness, agency, and the evolutionary origins of selves (agential and conscious nonphysical substances).

The chapters of Meixner's book are lengthy and thorough; they deserve far greater critical engagement than this review allows. Here I will focus on what I take to be the book's three most central and engaging themes: the neo-Cartesian argument for dualism, Meixner's account of mental causation, and the relationship between dualism and the scientific study of consciousness.

Meixner's neo-Cartesian argument, insofar as it is a modal one, treads familiar dualist territory. It can be summed up as follows:

Take any self; being a self, it is a subject of consciousness, and it could be a subject of consciousness in the absence of all physical entities (even subject of that very same consciousness it is actually the subject of); but if this can be, then the self is not a physical entity. (p. 393)

The key premise in Meixner's argument is its third one (P3): 'There is a [logically] possible world in which there exist no physical entities, but in which I exist' (p. 87). With the addition of a few fairly innocent modal premises Meixner reaches the conclusion that 'I am a nonphysical substance' (p. 98).

As Meixner points out, physicalists won't be convinced by this argument. (P3) is quite obviously a denial of strong mind–body supervenience, and so its truth is fundamentally at odds with physicalism. But it seems to me that Meixner sells short his argument when further characterizing the potential debate between physicalists and dualists over (P3). He claims that dualists are in their right to assume the truth of (P3), whilst physicalists are in their right to assume its negation (p. 93). Presumably, then, any debate between physicalists and dualists as to the status of the neo-Cartesian argument will quickly result in a stalemate. Meixner might have avoided this situation and strengthened the neo-Cartesian argument by suggesting that if we find (P3) conceivable, then we have modal intuitions that, to physicalism's detriment, run *contra* strong mind–body supervenience. Although the physicalist may remain defiant, the above strategy would at least prevent the dialectical situation from stagnating quite so instantaneously.

The particular variety of substance dualism Meixner argues for is a hybrid of interactionism and parallelism. The resulting position he aptly dubs *interactionist parallelism*. Defenders of interactionist varieties of substance dualism, such as Descartes, hold that mental events are causally related to physical (bodily) events. Defenders of parallelism, a position often associated with Leibniz, hold that mental and physical (bodily) events do not causally interact; rather the two run in parallel, making it seem *as if* they interact. Combined, interactionist parallelism amounts to the claim that for every mental event  $y$  there exists a simultaneously instantiated physical (presumably neural) event  $x$  that is  $y$ 's 'causal representative' (i.e.,  $x$  and  $y$  share an identical causal profile) and that, moreover, no mental event is a

physical event. On this model, every token mental event is a nonphysical event that exists *parallel* to—supervenes nomologically upon—some token physical (bodily) event (p. 313). Interactionist parallelism says that mental events still causally *interact* with physical (bodily) events however; specifically in their systematically overdetermining such events.

It is often claimed that substance dualists are poorly placed to vindicate mental causation—mental to physical causation in particular—and it is not obvious that Meixner's dualism fares particularly well in this respect either. For suppose we were to grant as unproblematic the widespread overdetermination of physical bodily events by both prior physical bodily events on the one hand, and their parallel supervening mental events on the other. On this model, mental events are nevertheless at risk of being causally superfluous when it comes to bodily action. For if mental events lack unique causal power with respect to the physical domain, then such events might as well not exist when it comes to causally explaining bodily action; everything that needs explaining can be accounted for by the physicochemical story alone. This can surely only count against interactionist parallelism. Moreover, Meixner's position now looks to be a prime target for Jaegwon Kim's causal exclusion argument (cf Kim, 1998, ch. 2). The problem is that if, as Meixner allows, physical bodily events have sufficient causes in the form of prior physical bodily events, then many will want to claim that there is simply no more room for nonphysical mental events to play any causal role here. Such events are at risk of being causally screened off by their physical causal representatives. This is a well-known worry in contemporary discussions of the mind–body problem, yet it is one that Meixner fails to adequately address.

A common complaint against dualism is that it is unscientific, or worse—*antiscientific*. For insofar as the dualist believes consciousness is entirely nonphysical, she presumably holds that it is not the sort of thing apt for scientific study. Meixner claims that nothing could be further from the truth. He argues that, in studying consciousness, the methodology adopted by the brain sciences is one that is fundamentally dualist. Meixner believes that cognitive neuroscientists, for example, because they are interested in correlating a subject's states of consciousness on the one hand with observed behavior, brain states or more global states of the nervous system on the other, thereby treat conscious states as *distinct* from such data. Thus, Meixner writes that 'methodological dualism is a necessary prerequisite for there being a science of consciousness in the world at all' (p. 266). If this is right, then full blown *metaphysical* dualism (the real deal, so to speak) will be more than compatible with a science of consciousness. The scientific study of consciousness, if Meixner is right, is not only compatible with mind–body dualism, but positively requires it.

The above argument is not particularly convincing. It is true that cognitive neuroscience looks for correlations between states of consciousness and physical data—the search for the so-called 'neural correlates of consciousness'. And it is also true that dualism, Meixner's interactionist parallelism in particular, may explain why such a correlation holds. But what Meixner fails to appreciate is the ontological *neutrality* of cognitive neuroscience's methodology. For the correlation of conscious states and brain states, although compatible with dualism, is consistent with a whole

host of other metaphysical positions as well. For example, the correlation in question could be explained, as the nonreductive physicalist believes, by mental events being *strongly supervenient* upon neurological events. Alternatively, it could be explained, as John Searle (1992) holds, by the former being *caused by* the latter. The correlation of neural and conscious states may even be explained by supposing that mental and neural events are, as the reductive physicalist holds, *identical*. In fact it is frequently argued by the latter that psychoneural type-identities provide the best, most robust explanation as to why there is correlation between conscious states and brain states in the first place (cf Hill, 1991; McLaughlin, 2001). Cognitive neuroscientists then, *contra* Meixner, do not proceed as if dualism is true; rather, they proceed with ontological impartiality. So Meixner is right, I believe, to claim that metaphysical dualism is compatible with the practice of cognitive neuroscientists. But he is wrong to claim that their practices implicitly rely upon a methodology that presumes the truth of dualism (or any other metaphysical position for that matter).

These criticisms aside, *The Two Sides of Being* has much to recommend it. Meixner's book is admirably rigorous and has an enormous scope. However, the book is occasionally let down by its tone. Running throughout *The Two Sides of Being* is a sometimes impassioned, but mostly overtly aggressive attack on contemporary physicalism, a thesis Meixner refer to as a 'dogmatic and oppressive orthodoxy' (p. 83); one that has contributed only 'destruction' to world culture (p. 82). In looking past such remarks, though, one finds a book on the mind–body problem that, considered against the background of the current literature, is written from a novel and exciting perspective.

## References

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