

*Sherborne School for Girls
Theology & Religious studies Department*

*A2 Religious Studies The Philosophy of Religion
The Body/Soul Distinction*



Some Theories of Body & Soul in Modern Thought

*Idealism
Dualism & Materialism*



Introduction

This study explores some theories of body and soul (or mind) that have emerged in what we term ‘modern thought’, that is to say, in philosophy and related disciplines since the contribution of Rene Descartes (1596-1650).

Through this period **THREE** main types of theory of body and soul have been in evidence:

1. The view that humans are physical organisms and so biological entities. Thus **all aspects of the human, including self-consciousness, memory and thought** are *functions of the body*. These are termed **MATERIALIST** theories of body and mind (or soul).
2. The view that humans are essentially **MINDS** (or **MIND**) and that the physical reality, including the physical reality of the body, is an illusion. These are called **IDEALIST** theories of body and mind (or soul).
3. The view that humans are composed of two distinct but related substances, *mind or soul, and body*. These theories are called **DUALIST** theories of body and soul or mind.

It is reasonably safe to assume that **ALL THEORIES** of Body and Soul/Mind will be **either MATERIALIST or IDEALIST or DUALIST** – or they will be some variation of one of these!

HOWEVER

There are few thinkers who will be encountered who will defend the IDEALIST view, although it is a view of stunning logical simplicity.

This is famously associated with George Berkeley (1685-1753), and it is as well to be acquainted with it. **For one reason, he defends a clear notion of the soul as something immaterial and immortal. (We need a sense of this idea!)**

To this end we need to become familiar with some very philosophical views in the area of what is termed ‘epistemology’ or theory of knowledge, namely

Representative Theories of Perception

Quite a few philosophers develop some variant of what is termed a representative theory of perception.

By ‘perception’ they mean the experience of having sensations on the basis of which you might make a judgment about what it is that you are experiencing.

Take a classical example:

The qualities found in perceiving what we can call 'the table at which we sit' - rectangularity, brownness, smoothness and so on - are perceived phenomenally in personal and subjective terms. We each have our 'perceptions', and these perceptions, termed 'qualia' by modern philosophers remain as fleeting, private transitory sensations constituting our sense-experience so long as we remain in 'this' perceptive state.

A good many philosophers adopt this representative theory, suggesting with a few but not many significant variations that in perception the subject is aware of his own 'ideas' (Descartes; Locke) 'sense' (Berkeley), 'impressions' (Hume) 'sense-data' (Russell) or 'sense-contents' (Ayer).

On all these variations the claim is that we have no direct apprehension of a world of external reality.

The objects of perception are at (at least) one remove from the perceptive subject.

This leaves a few questions, such as 'How can I know or say anything about the assumed world of desks, other students, teachers and irritating philosophers?'

Berkeley's Idealist Solution

Berkeley thought, and with good reason, that there was a problem in the earlier empirical philosophy of John Locke (1632-1704).

Locke thought that we had 'ideas' in and as our sense-perception, and via patterns of association in the mind and on the basis of ongoing experience, we inferred the existence and reality of eternal objects. These we then conceived as real, but as essentially unknowable substances.

Berkeley, as a very young man¹, thought that this was unsatisfactory. He did not think we could truly appeal to either reason or common sense to explain how an unknown reality is perceived via secondary qualities in and as sense experience. Berkeley thought it more coherent to conceive reality as that which is experienced in and as perception.

Thus Berkeley takes aspects of the representative theory of perception but in effect argues that in and as perceptive sense experience we know things, objects, states and relations as ideas!

We can illustrate Locke vs. Berkeley by contrasting their views about language.

¹ Berkeley set out his theories in *The Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710) and *Three Dialogues* (1713). His major original contributions were completed by the time he was 30 in 1715. Later he took holy orders and became in due course a Bishop.

Locke thought that words stood for ideas and that ideas represented unknowable material objects made of a mysterious and unknowable substance.

How does that seem to you?

Berkeley thought that this confounded the sense in Locke's empiricism that all ideas and thus all knowledge came through experience. If all we know is relative to experience as known as ideas, then it makes no sense to refer to matter that is said to be distinct from ideas. On the contrary, we must assert that there is no matter other than that known in and as ideas.

How about this?

Berkeley thus argues that the words and concepts we employ in and as our language have meaning through their association with particular ideas within perceptive experience.

The implications of this are; that the only things we can say we know to exist are the ideas that we have in and as perceptive experience; and that we cannot talk meaningfully about anything existing in some other way as the terms used would not refer to an idea within experience.

Berkeley and the principle esse est aut percipi aut percipere

Berkeley thought that he had corrected Locke with a tighter and more coherent perspective. He felt his proposal showed that there really was no case for scepticism about how ideas or experience related to material reality. All was covered by the extensive use Berkeley made of the *esse est percipi* principle – ‘to be is to be perceived’.

Thus all matter is known as ideas through sense-experience to perceptive agents who sense, imagine and conceive. For there to be perception there must be minds as existent perceivers, so in full the principle Berkeley employs is that of *esse est aut percipi aut percipere* - 'to be is to be perceived or to be a perceiver.'

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There is no justification in assuming from what we experience that there is a really real world represented in and as experience. The idea that there is a real world distinct from but represented in and as experience is, Berkeley argues, invalid and unnecessary. All we encounter is experience and we cannot move beyond it. If there is an independent reality that is represented in experience we cannot know it as such and it thus makes no difference to us. All that we know and all that we can know to exist is experience, and it is in virtue of being experienced or perceived, that things have their being.

On the face of it this view might seem seriously threatening to our sense of how reality and we get along. For example:

Suppose someone wants to play 'Catch' with me and throws me a ball.

Doesn't it seem to me that the ball that is coming my way is a part of a material world independent of me?

If I close my eyes I will cease to experience the ball - but it will, will it not, still come my way and impact on me?

Notes:

Well, Berkeley isn't at all worried that such an example can harm his theory. What is the ball? Is it not the sum of its observed and thus experienced qualities? Is this not what everyone commonly understands? If we list all of the qualities of the ball and then ask 'what is the ball 'as such' as distinct from the ball as experienced, what could be said?

Perhaps Berkeley has a view that accords with common sense?!

Berkeley won't have it that we can infer and employ this world from our own private experience. No will he allow that the objects and states that comprise the external world can subsist as a stream of permanent possibilities - a phenomenological solution later found in Hume. But he accounts for there being a common field of

perceptive experience for my daughter and me by assuming the prior existence of God.

God, Berkeley assumes, is eternal and omniscient and thus he perceives everything eternally. Thus is a common field of experience held in being, whether we as individual minds are perceiving and existing or not.

Berkeley on the Self

Berkeley's view is that the proper status of apparently material objects is that they owe their being to perception. But for there to be perception and therefore a world of apparently material but actually immaterial objects there must be perceivers and therefore it is no surprise to find that Berkeley's doctrine of the self is that the being or reality of the self is as a perceiver. Berkeley (in contrast to Hume) thinks that there is a clear distinction between perception and that which perceives. There can't be ideas, sensation and the components of perception unless there is someone or something to have them.

For example, if I touch my desk, taste my food and am scratched by my cat, I am the 'me' having these perceptions. I am not (according to Berkeley) one more idea or the sum total of the ideas I have had or am having. I am that which has the ideas that are mine. This is - quite apart from any of Berkeley's other ideas - an interesting if controversial view. Hobbes would have argued that the self or mind is a reactive condition of physical processes. Hume and later Ayer see the self as no more than the stream of perception. Berkeley (like Locke for once) sees the self as an immaterial identity, a 'soul', 'substance' or 'spirit':

'This perceiving, active being is what I call MIND, SPIRIT, SOUL, or MYSELF, by which I do not denote any one of my ideas but a thing entirely distinct from them, wherein they exist.'²

Berkeley is mindful of the fact that such a view of the self is problematic for an empiricist. If the soul is that which has experience and therefore can't be experienced, it can't be a part of the empirical world where knowledge comes through experience - so how can we know that the self is so constituted, that it exists? Berkeley is very keen to maintain that language makes sense of there are impressions or ideas that we can name given through perception, but with the soul (or mind, spirit or self) is not experienced, how can it be named? Isn't the barrage of terms to denote the self a meaningless litany? Berkeley's response to this significant problem is somewhat Cartesian in that he thinks it a self-evident absurdity to doubt the existence of the self:

'If I should say that I was a nothing, or that I was an idea, nothing could be more evidently absurd than these propositions.'³

² Principles of Human Knowledge - hereafter P – p2

³ P p139

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So with some relief I can take it from Berkeley that if I sit at my desk typing away I can't doubt or deny my own existential (not a term he would have understood) state and condition. This is me and I am existing over and above the ideas I have of this and that - my daughter, books, cat and pictures etc. I am that which has those experiences, as well as those of getting tax bills, essays to mark and sundry others. So Berkeley sees 'soul', 'spirit', 'mind' and/or 'self' as that which has those experiences - and so in a real sense the terms have an empirical significance and reference. The key thing that Berkeley is impressed by is that all of the ideas I have, I have in virtue of their being perceived, it is thus that they have their being - but this would be a meaningless condition if there wasn't a perceiver. Thus 'soul', 'spirit', and 'substance' for Berkeley 'do not mean or signify a real thing which is neither an idea nor like an idea, but that which perceives ideas, and wills, and reasons about them.'⁴ And this reasoning soul is the self - 'what I am myself', as Berkeley puts it. The self is thus active, willing, thinking, reasoning about the ideas which are in virtue of being perceived. Thus the self as perceiver is logically and ontologically prior to ideas - ideas are the passive objects of perception by the active perceiving self.

Not only does Berkeley think he has a meaningful understanding of the self, he also thinks that he can demonstrate the immortal nature of the self or soul. Selfhood is simple not complex - things which are complex can break down into their parts and thus change, decay and rot! But the self/soul has no parts, no dimension and cannot be assailed by any natural means - it is 'indivisible, incorporeal and unextended'.⁵

The immaterial soul is thus immortal. Berkeley is here assuming once more the validity of his notion of the divine as the supreme immortal creative perceiver - the merits and demerits of which we cannot examine here. What we can note is that Berkeley addresses a very significant and troubling question: what is selfhood? What is it to be a person? What is the self? In more recent discussions of these questions the greatest influences come - as noted - from Hume through to Ayer in the form of the self phenomenised in and as the stream of perception. Berkeley, as ever certain that he is offering a view wholly accordant with common-sense, presents the self as a conscious, individual subject with a perspective on an external world from which it is distinct and yet a part. We have this status thanks to divine perception - and this is of course the most heavily criticised aspect of the view.

What snags do you see in Berkeley's view?

This is something to research via a visit a Library.

Make notes on what you find below and on the next page.

⁴ P p139

⁵ P p141

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Research Berkeley's Idealism: *What are the objections to his view? How damaging are they?*

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One main snag for Berkeley is the view that material reality, including the body, is illusory or unknowable.

That individuals are embodied is assumed to be a given by pretty well all theorists. We might have minds or souls that are distinct from the body we are in, but we do have a body – as dualists say - or we just are self-aware bodies – as materialists argue.

HOWEVER

Idealism reminds us that our knowledge of the world comes via the mind, soul or brain that does the business of organising sensations into concepts on the basis of a prior – we might say, *apriori* – capacity. As a classical illustration runs, if you are stabbed in the leg it is not your leg that feels the pain. *You* feel it!

Idealism also links in with view that we do not just ‘see’ a world, or a text, or another person, ‘as such’. Rather, we ‘make sense’ of the world, text or person through the powers of interpretation, imagination and judgement that are mind-dependant. Philosophically we are here much more akin to Kant’s theory of knowledge, or, to take a more recent thinker John Searle.

What do Materialists and Dualists think?

Suppose we take the idealist view as a platform and then see how the other views differ?

Idealism says we are essentially minds. Matter is constructed by mind and does not have a separate existence.

<i>Dualism</i>	<i>Materialism</i>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humans are composed of distinct but related substances – body and soul/mind • I am seen by others and I see myself as having a body. • But I am aware of myself as a mind/soul, self-aware as a thinking and feeling entity. • The body is subject to change and decay – and death. • The soul/mind is considered by many dualists to be eternal & immortal. • Mind/Soul explains human self-consciousness, individualism, personal identity and so on. • Mind/Soul and Body explains the existential condition of being a person, or being embodied, of being ware of so being, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no soul or mind distinct from the body. • The brain is part of the body and the organ that produces thought, consciousness and the like. • The brain is a sufficient explanation for the activities of thought, self-consciousness and so on – so theories of a distinct mind or soul are irrelevant – on the principle of Ockham’s Razor! • We can use the terminology of mind and thought to express certain types of brain activity, but we must not be misled into thinking there is ‘a mind’. • Thoughts, feelings, ideas, memories are real – they are the expressions of certain types of brain function. If someone is ‘good’, ‘goodness’ is not a quality of the person, not a non-natural property, as G E Moore suggested. ‘Good’ just stands for a type of activity of a material being. • This view can be termed ‘epiphenominalism’, i.e. mind is seen as the product the body and of the brain in particular, but mental activity occurs over and above bio-chemical and electrical brain activity, upon which it nevertheless depends
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Descartes' Dualism

Descartes (1596-1650) argues as follows:

- Reflection shows us that via reason we can find certitude, as in mathematics.
- '5+5' '=' '5' ('5+5 =' cannot not be 10)
- Reflection shows us that our knowledge of the world is sense-dependent.
- I sense the world I assume to be around me via sight, sound, touch, taste and hearing. I have impressions, raw sensations... I infer an exterior world I don't confront directly....
- But our sense-impressions are open to doubt.
- Our senses can deceive us...
- The argument from illusion....
- Logically, if our sense can deceive is some of the time, they could deceive us all of the time.
- Therefore, we have reasons to doubt our senses
- Logically we could also doubt reality, our body, our existence and so on.
- We dream... We could be dreaming now – it is logically possible.
- It is logically possible that the whole of reality could be trick deliberately constructed to deceive us by a malicious demon.
- Thus we can doubt everything.
- Almost everything!
- However, we can't doubt that we doubt.
- Doubt is a mode of thought.
- Therefore we can't doubt that we think.
- If we think, then we also know with certainty that we exist – we exist as thinking minds.
- As Descartes puts it:

- *Cogito ergo sum* – ‘I think, therefore I am.’

Descartes thinks that the mind is self-evidently a certain entity of a non-physical type, of a non-material type, because it has no extension.

The body has extension in space and time, but the mind has no material existence – the mind is a mental phenomenon.

Descartes’ dualism then goes as follows:

<i>Mind</i>	<i>Body</i>
A mental reality. A mental substance. Known via reflection and introspection. Has no extension and no physical existence.	A physical reality. A physical substance. Known via the senses. Extended through time and space.

Descartes main problem with this view is to explain how the two distinct substances interact.

He needed to do this because it is obvious that we can act in accordance with intentions that are mental. And according to the physics of his day, for one thing to affect another, it must be able to act on it. Isaac Newton was to show later that influences could be indirect, but in Descartes’ day this had not been discovered. Descartes solution (which was incorrect) was that the agent for interaction was the pineal gland, a small gland in the brain that Descartes could find no other purpose for. In fact, the gland produces the very handy hormone *melatonin* which helps the pattern and rhythms of waking and sleeping!

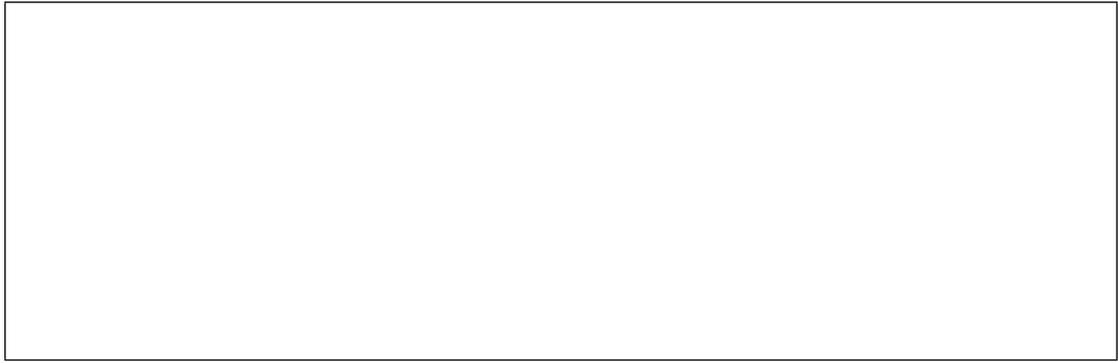
Despite problems of explanation, Descartes’ dualism – which linked with the Christian idea of a body possessing an infinite immaterial soul – proved extremely influential.

Gilbert Ryle, in *The Concept of Mind* (1949), is a major critic of Cartesian Dualism, and you need to check his ideas from the notes on *Death and Eternal Life 2* and from Vardy and Arliss *The Thinker’s Guide to God*, -133.

Summarize Ryle’s criticisms of Descartes’ dualism below:

Ryle vs. Descartes

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The Materialist View

One way of explaining the materialist view is to contrast it with the dualist view.

A 'substance dualist like Descartes thinks what makes a person is that for every living body that can reflect, reason, be self-conscious and so on, there is a distinct, non-physical substance, mind or soul.

Thus, my body is one thing, a physical thing.

My mind is something else – an independent and non-physical substance.

My body is a complex of bits, extended time and space.

My mind is simple; it does not have bits.

For Descartes, Plato and religious dualists the mind or soul is interacts with the body, but it's possible for the soul to go on existing even after the body is destroyed. In principle, souls can exist independently of any bodies or other physical things.

The materialist agrees with the dualist that humans can reason and think and that this is critical to what it is to be human.

But materialists say there is only one kind of substance:

The **materialist** view is that MATTER is all that there is!

Originally this meant that reality was thought to be made up of very, very small basic stuff that could combine or aggregate into larger things.

Modern materialists have a wider sense of how reality does not in fact distill down to basic stuff, but rather to dynamic states of affairs and relations, with gravitational fields, black holes and curves in space-time.

To see how the materialist view works we can take one of the most famous philosophical thought experiments:

The Falling Tree in the Forest.

Imagine a forest.

Imagine a lot of trees.

Imagine a clearing in the middle of the forest.

A tree on the edge of the clearing falls



If there is no one there to see or hear the tree fall, does it make a sound?

What do you think? What do you think the materialist will think?

The Falling Tree – Reactions:

Materialism ?	Ma	Idealism ?	Ide
<p>The tree DOES make a sound even if there is no one there to hear it.</p> <p>Sound is a physical phenomenon and sound waves exist and are in principle measurable or hearable, even if there is no one to hear them.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">?</p>		<p>The tree DOES NOT make a sound.</p> <p>Sound is what a perceiver experiences, so it has to be experienced to occur. If there is no one to hear it, then it can't be a sound.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">?</p>	

Who would the dualist agree with – and why?

In contrast to dualists, materialists think that reality as a whole can be explained with reference to natural, physical material organic phenomena.

Materialists do not think that any realities are wholly mind-dependent, if that were to mean in any way that ‘mind’ was a non-physical reality.

Thus materialists do not think that there are non-physical ‘souls’

Here is the major distinction between the dualists and materialists.

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Materialism on ‘Soul’

In case we are not too sure the materialist will usually argue along the following lines.

People may speak of their ‘soul being troubled’ or of ‘having something on the mind’, but either way the materialist thinks that what is being referred to is the brain and some of what it does. Some of the activities of the brain gives rise to what we can call mind. Mind is thus a function of the brain and mind is brain-dependent. The brain is a part of the body and so is matter, so mind is matter –never mind!

There is no need and case for the non-physical mind or the spiritual soul of philosophical or religious dualism.

The materialist might want to say that the mind is the same as the brain and is thus a physical thing. Materialists like this are favouring *naturalistic realism*

BUT a clever materialist will favour the line of thinking sketched above, and see mind as a sort of no-thing!

Here the materialist takes a ‘non-realist’ stance. (Look up and make notes on *non-realism* and *anti-realism*).

According to this we should not think of thought – i.e. of mind – as any sort of physical or spiritual thing. Rather, ‘thought’ is a type of activity, a process of a kind, with linguistic, social and conceptual aspects.

Great!

To explore this let’s embark on another illustrative sequence of scenarios and questions:

Read and think about the following exchange:

Sam rings Jo to see if she would like to come out for a drink.
 ‘No thanks, I’m going to take a shower and then catch *The Matrix* on Sky Gold,’ she says.
 ‘OK,’ Sam replies, ‘I’ve a mind to stay in as I’ve got a cold anyway.’

Write notes on the following:

Jo is going to ‘take’ a shower and ‘catch’ a film	Sam has ‘a mind’ and ‘a cold’ - or does he?
Notes:	Notes:

Reflection:

When we say that we have ‘a mind’ to do something, or worry in case we might ‘catch a cold’ – or ‘a film’ we are using language in what is sometimes a very expressive manner.

I might have to catch a kitten that has escaped into the garden...

I don’t catch a film in quite the same way!

I am playing another ‘language game’, Wittgenstein might say!

I might ‘take’ another book from the shelf, or another piece of cheese, or another cup of coffee. But when I ‘take’ a shower I don’t nip up to the bathroom to dismantle and relocate the whole shower!

In this sort of comment I am not referring to a substance, an entity, a material thing.

I am describing a mode of action, an intended activity. I am describing what I might do not a thing that is there and that I might literally ‘take’.

Another example:

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- i. 'Sam had stout *walking boots* for the *expedition*
- ii. 'Jo had a speedy *bike* for the *race*'.
- iii. 'Sam had a *sense of humour*'.
- iv. Jo has a *hangover*.

Think about the terms in italics. What do they stand for? What do they denote?

Which refer to substances? What do the others refer to? Do you see any noun-abuse here?

Jot down your thoughts (if you can...)

<i>walking boots expedition</i>	<i>sense of humour</i>
<i>Bike race</i>	<i>Hangover</i>

Some more examples:

Sam has a compass	Sam has a good eye for detail.	Sam has a good mind
Jo's ride involved an easy route.	Jo was easy about when to stop for lunch.	Jo has an easy manner.

How do the examples in the third column work?

Notes:

Remember – or ‘bear in mind’ if you prefer, that **dualists** say

- The mind *is* a kind of substance, a special kind of non-physical substance.

The strict **materialist** thinks that

- The mind is a physical thing or substance, like the brain.

PERHAPS BOTH VIEWS ARE WRONG:

Having ‘a good mind’ or an ‘easy manner’ is like going on an expedition or taking part in a race...

The race is nothing apart from the various activities that make it up; nor is the expedition distinct from the various components that make it up.

So a good mind or an easy manner does not mean that there is an extra something in the world, an extra substance; it means to represent a way of operating. Dualism is wrong!

To have ‘a hangover’ is to be in a bio-chemical condition that the term denotes. To have a ‘good mind’ is not the same as having a ‘good car’. It means that the mind of this person is capable of a range of complex functions which involve thinking, choosing, judging, discriminating, and so on. Mind can be distinguished from simply having a brain – so the strict materialist isn’t right either.

However, this idea of the mind is a modified kind of materialism because it assumes that the only substances there are material, physical or organic substances.

Thus the claims are

- There are physical objects like planets, mountains, desks, chairs, pens, bodies and brains....
- There are no additional non-natural or non-physical substances.
- When we use the term 'mind' and refer to 'thought' or to 'thinking' we are referring to activities and experiences humans undertake.

Dualists disagree!

Cartesian substance dualists don't think that brains *and* bodies *can* do these things together as a whole.

To the dualist only *souls* or *minds* are able to think, have experiences, and so on.

The brain and body are physical and organic systems but they do not have 'experiences' or 'thoughts'.

The dualist says that it is mind or soul that injects the animating consciousness of thought to enable mental activity and feelings. Without a mind/soul, there is no thinking or consciousness or any sort of mental life going on.

What do materialists and dualists agree on?

They agree

That there are **these special kinds of states and processes** that only thinking, feeling creatures can have.

Some examples are:

Feeling pain

Feeling fear

Noticing an itch

Being aware of 'seeing blue'

Remembering it is Monday

Materialists and dualists AGREE that only certain sorts of creatures, humans are one sort, are able to have conscious thoughts, experiences, and other mental states – like introspection, reflection, speculation, self-awareness.

Whenever a creature *is* able to have these mental states, we say that the creature 'has a mind.'

So you will be relieved to know that if you have a belief, or experience any emotions, or have memories, then you 'have a mind,' on everyone's view.

Both the dualist and the materialist agree that we 'have minds.'

Having a mind is what distinguishes humans from the desk, chair or pen.

You can think

You are conscious.

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The desk, chair and pen lack conscious and can't think. They do not have minds and have no mental life.

The dualist and the materialist disagree fundamentally on about what 'having a mind' involves:

The dualist view

To have a mind, you *have to have some thing*, a soul, connected to your body. The soul is what really does the thinking and feeling. If you have a backache it is really *your soul* that feels it. If you think about Sherborne it's *your soul* that does the thinking. 'Having a mind' is having one of these non-physical things, a soul.

The materialist view

According to the materialist, all there is to people is their physical body, their brain, the electrical patterns in their brain, and so on. If these are arranged the right way, the materialist thinks you will have beliefs, and emotions, and memories, and so on. The brain and the body are able to have thoughts and experiences *all by themselves*, because of the complex way they have developed, without any involvement from a non-physical soul. The only substances involved are your physical brain and body. When they are arranged correctly thoughts and feelings take place, and we say that you 'have a mind.'