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Derician Trialism as a Solution to the Mind-Body Problem, the Hard Problem of Consciousness, and the Molyneux Problem

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Abstract

Derician trialism is a concept which states that a human is composed of three substances which are the mind, the submind, and the body. I put forth this concept as a proposed solution to the mind-body problem of Cartesian dualism, by introducing the submind as a substance, which acts as an intermediary between the mind and the body substances. I think that the submind is a hybrid substance that has both immaterial and material properties, which permits it to interact with the immaterial substance; the mind and the material substance; the body. I also believe that the submind is involved with functions such as memories, sensations, emotions, and reflexes, which suggests a proposed non-existence of the hard problem of consciousness, in which subjective experience (qualia) is the product of the submind and not the body. Also, I think that the functions of the submind, permits to resolve the Molyneux problem, due to the phenomenon of cross modality among the different functions of the submind.

Keywords

Mind, Submind, Body, Qualia, Consciousness

1. Introduction

In the 20th century, Cartesian trialism which states that a person is composed of a mind, sensation, and body substances, was introduced in philosophy of mind by John Cottingham as a solution to the mind-body problem raised by Cartesian dualism of Rene Descartes (Cottingham, 1985). Due to the limitation in functions and the lack of specific properties of the substance sensation of Cottingham, I introduced the concept of Derician trialism, which states that human is composed of a mind, submind, and body substances as a proposed reinforcement solution

to the mind-body problem (Njikeh, 2019). I introduced the submind as an intermediary second substance to replace the sensation substance of Cottingham because, I think that the submind is a hybrid substance that has both immaterial and material properties, which permits interaction between the immaterial substance; the mind and the material substance; the body. I also think that the submind is involved with functions such as memories, sensations, emotions, and reflexes, which lead to the non-existence of the hard problem of consciousness for, qualia are a product of the submind and not the body. Also, I believe that the functions of the submind undergo cross modality which explains the Molyneux problem.

2. The Mind-Body Problem

The mind-body problem came into existence due to Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia's letter to Rene Descartes in which, she questioned on how can an immaterial substance like the mind interact with a material substance like the body in cartesian dualism (Clarke, 2006; Stencil, 2023). Descartes answered the question by proposing that, there is a primitive notion of union between the mind and the body, which should not be understood through the rout of physical contact and he gave an analogy on how gravity moves physical bodies (Clarke, 2006). He also talked of the existence of an animal spirit; a fluid which flows through the nerves in the entire body, that connects the mind and the body. He said that the point of contact between the mind and the body is at the center of the brain in a structure called the pineal gland for that is where the mind is located (Erik-Jan, 2017).

In later centuries, many philosophers have disregarded cartesian dualism but have instead adhered to monism, which states that humans are made up of one substance with different properties instead of two distinct substances of Cartesian dualism (Edward, 1998). In the 20th century, John Cottingham who is a proponent of Descartes proposed Cartesian trialism, which states that human is composed of three substances; the mind, sensation, and body substances, as a solution to the mind body problem. He states that sensation is a separate substance which acts as a union between the mind and the body, which Descartes himself has attributed as a function of the mind. Cottingham did not give the properties of the substance sensation, which permits interaction with the mind and body.

Going in line with the trialism of human nature, I proposed Derician trialism which states that human is composed of the mind, submind, and body substances (Njikeh, 2019). I think that, the submind acts as a means of interaction between the mind and the body, for it is a hybrid substance which has both immaterial and material properties. I think that the immaterial properties of the submind include; dimensionless, non-space occupying, and intangibility presenting in the form of energy. Meanwhile, the material properties of the submind include; measurability, and visibility presenting in the form of impulses. I also think that the submind is important in humans, because it permits humans to undergo out of body phenomenon in which the mind separates from the body such as during; visions, dreams, astral projections, comatose states and death.

Just like Descartes, I believe that the mind is located in a structure in the middle of the brain; probably the pineal gland, and that it is where the interaction between the mind and the submind occurs, followed by the command and control of the body by the submind in the form of nerve impulses. I think that, just like Descartes' animal spirit, the submind substance originated from blood in the form of a particular energy and it is transferred during the embryonic period of gestation from the mother to the embryo. It is then transported to the pineal gland where it is transformed and enters the nerve fibers in the form of nerve impulses.

3. The Hard Problem of Consciousness

In the 20th century, the philosopher David Chalmers brough forth the hard problem of consciousness, which seeks to know why and how a material body produces subjective experiences such as feelings, which he called qualia (Chalmers, 1995). This problem came into existence due to the fact that some philosophers such as Crick and Koch, and Baar, believed that human is comprise of a single physical substance; the body, which is responsible for consciousness in what is known as physicalism. They proposed theories on how the body produces consciousness such as the neurobiological theory of consciousness and the global workspace theory of consciousness respectively (Chalmers, 1995; Seth & Bayne, 2022). Chalmers himself who is not in favour of physicalism and Cartesian dualism, proposed naturalistic dualism as an answer to the question.

I think that with Derician trialism, there is no need of the hard problem of consciousness. This is because the submind substance which is a form of energy, is involved with low-level consciousness, which qualia are part of and other aspects of emotions, sensations, memories, and reflexes. The subjective experience of qualia is not involved neither with the body nor the mind but, with the submind. So, I propose that the hard problem should be dissolved and declared non-existent, just like mentioned by Seth (Seth & Bayne, 2022). I do believe that other animals comprise of a submind and body substances without the mind substance, which make them to possess low-level consciousness involved with qualia and other functions of the submind as stated.

4. The Molyneux Problem

In the 17th century, the philosopher William Molyneux, proposed the philosophical though experiment asking whether a person born blind, who can distinguish a sphere and a cube by touch alone, could immediately distinguish those shapes by sight alone if their vision were suddenly restored; in what is known as Molyneux's problem (Ehli, 2020). Some philosophers such as Locke, Berkeley, and Molyneux himself responded with "no" as an answer to the question. They argued that all knowledge and sensory associations originates from experience. So, since the person has never had visual experience of the shapes, the person cannot distinguish both shapes through vision alone. Also, a study carried out on congenital blind individuals whose visions were restored, revealed results which suggest that the answer

to Molyneux's question is likely negative (Held et al., 2011). Other philosophers such as Leibniz responded with a "yes" as answer to the question. He argued that the mind possesses an innate or logical understanding of geometry that transcends individual sensory modalities, allowing for rational identification (Ehli, 2020).

I believe that from Derician trialism, the response is "yes". I think that with perceptions such as touch and vision, and memories for objects occurring in the submind, there is cross modality among the different modalities in the submind forming a unified functional system. This mode of recognition of the two shapes, do not involve reasoning nor imagination since the mind is not implicated.

5. Conclusion

I think that Derician trialism can become an important concept in philosopher of mind if complements and criticism are done on it. From my arguments, I believe that the presents of a submind, which is a hybrid substance, helps to propose solutions to major philosophical questions such as the mind-body problem, the hard problem of consciousness, and the Molyneux problem.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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