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## Hume as Dualist and Anti-Dualist

PHILLIP D. CUMMINS

Lorne Falkenstein's recognition in "Hume and Reid on the Simplicity of the Soul" of the importance of the section of *A Treatise of Human Nature* entitled "Of the immateriality of the soul" is as praiseworthy as it is uncommon. His suggestion that Reid's intentionalist account of representation was motivated by his desire to save the doctrine of the immaterial self from Hume's demolition of it in "Of the immateriality of the soul," though not proven, is highly provocative. Although I am going to offer a somewhat different reading of "Of the immateriality of the soul" and thereby imply that Falkenstein did not sufficiently appreciate Hume's version of mental-physical dualism, I regard his paper as both informative and insightful and consider my proposed corrections fully compatible with most, if not all, of his substantive claims.

Let me begin by contrasting two questions relating to mental-physical dualism. One is whether mental states or properties are irreducibly different from physical states or properties. Materialists generally acknowledge that there is an apparent, putative, or presumed difference between them, only to argue one way or another that the only genuine properties are material ones. Defenders of what I shall call Minimal Mental/Physical Dualism insist that the distinction between two fundamentally different kinds of properties remains at even the deepest levels of metaphysical analysis. One version of the second question is: Are there any immaterial beings? This question really concerns individual subjects, the items to which states or properties are assigned; it asks: do any individual subjects have only mental properties? To answer "yes" is to

hold what I shall call Strong Mental/Physical Dualism. Its opponents either answer “no” or take an agnostic stance.

The two questions are not completely unrelated.<sup>1</sup> As Descartes argued in the Sixth Meditation, an irreducible difference between mental and physical properties guarantees at least the metaphysical possibility of a disembodied mind.<sup>2</sup> Despite this, an affirmative answer to the first question does not secure an affirmative answer to the second question. Minimal Mental/Physical Dualism does not entail Strong Mental/Physical Dualism. If it is possible for the same individual subject to have both mental and physical properties, it may be the case that whenever an individual subject has a mental property it also has a physical property.<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, an obvious strategy for establishing Strong Mental/Physical Dualism is defending the impossibility of an individual subject’s having both mental and physical properties, that is, arguing that the two kinds of properties are essentially incompatible with one another. Call this the Incompatible Properties Thesis. If it can be secured, to discover an individual with a mental property is virtually to discover an immaterial thing. Descartes utilized this strategy, also in the Sixth Meditation, where he wrote,

The first observation I make at this point is that there is a great difference between the mind and the body, inasmuch as the body is by its very nature always divisible, while the mind is utterly indivisible. For when I consider the mind, or myself in so far as I am merely a thinking thing, I am unable to distinguish any parts within myself; I understand myself to be something quite single and complete. Although the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body, I recognize that if a foot or arm or any other part of the body is cut off, nothing has thereby been taken away from the mind. As for the faculties of willing, of understanding, of sensory perception and so on, these cannot be termed parts of the mind, since it is one and the same mind that wills, and understands and has sensory perceptions. By contrast, there is no corporeal or extended thing that I can think of which in my thought I cannot easily divide into parts; and this very fact makes me understand that it is divisible.<sup>4</sup>

John Locke was not impressed by arguments such as this. He held Minimal Mental/Physical Dualism. He even appealed to it as the starting point for his attempted demonstration<sup>5</sup> of God’s existence. Nevertheless, he insisted that humans cannot know that matter cannot think.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout his paper Falkenstein classifies Thomas Reid as a dualist without further qualification. If the distinction between Minimal Mental/Physical Dualism and Strong Mental/Physical Dualism is genuine, this characterization is imprecise since it leaves unsettled the question of whether Reid

was a minimal or strong dualist. It also invites the thought that Hume, Reid's opponent, opposed both Minimal Mental/Physical Dualism and Strong Mental/Physical Dualism and encourages the conclusion that "Of the immateriality of the soul" is essentially negative—an attack on dualism. In "Of the immateriality of the soul," as elsewhere, Hume did reject the category of substance; he also rejected a defence of Strong Mental/Physical Dualism formulated in terms of substance. It is tempting to conclude from this that he rejected both Minimal Mental/Physical Dualism and Strong Mental/Physical Dualism. Neither conclusion follows. As was noted above, one can consistently reject Strong Mental/Physical Dualism and embrace Minimal Mental/Physical Dualism. Moreover, rejecting a defense of Strong Mental/Physical Dualism based on the substance/inherence doctrine is compatible with holding Strong Mental/Physical Dualism. Putting aside for now the more difficult question of whether he held Strong Mental/Physical Dualism, let us consider whether Hume held Minimal Mental/Physical Dualism. Falkenstein is a good guide on this matter. In recounting Hume's attack on the Achilles argument, he points to evidence which actually shows that Hume drew a fundamental and irreducible distinction between two kinds of entities.<sup>7</sup> My contention is that it is not implausible to regard Hume's distinction as *his* fundamental and irreducible distinction between mental and physical properties. If this is so, it is seriously misleading to portray Hume as anti-dualist.<sup>8</sup>

To see that his response to the Achilles argument involves his own version of Minimal Mental/Physical Dualism, recall, first, that Hume begins "Of the immateriality of the soul" by denying that the philosophy of mind is unavoidably fraught with contradictions.<sup>9</sup> A few things are known concerning our internal perceptions; much is obscure, but nothing is contradictory. If inconsistencies are found in philosophical accounts of the mind, they are due to the doctrine of substance, not the subject itself. This said, Hume develops his attack on substance. When finished, he introduces what he calls a "remarkable" argument for the immateriality of the soul. It is the Achilles argument. After stating it in its standard form, concluding with the words, "Thought, therefore, and extension are qualities wholly incompatible, and never can incorporate together into one subject," Hume wrote:

This argument affects not the question concerning the *substance* of the soul, but only that concerning its *local conjunction* with matter; and therefore it may not be improper to consider in general what objects are, or are not susceptible of a local conjunction. This is a curious question, and may lead us to some discoveries of considerable moment. (T I iv 5, 235)

This wording suggests that Hume was about to develop some positive views as the basis for his philosophical criticism of the argument.

This happens. Using material developed earlier in the *Treatise* concerning our ideas of extension,<sup>10</sup> Hume next argues that only impressions of color and solidity and the extended objects they compose can stand in spatial relationships. Only they, among our objects of experience, are capable of local conjunction. No other impressions, be they impressions of sensation or impressions of reflection, are extended or spatial.<sup>11</sup> These non-spatial impressions confirm the maxim "*an object may exist and yet be no where*" (T I iv 5, 235). One could hardly have a more fundamental distinction. Since extension was held to be the essence of the material by many philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and since, for Hume, only extended things and their indivisible unextended components are capable of standing in spatial relationships and local conjunction, it is not far-fetched to claim that Hume is implicitly here developing a fundamental and irreducible distinction between mental and physical entities.<sup>12</sup>

After defending his distinction and the controversial maxim, Hume explains why on his principles humans uncritically assign locations to items which strictly speaking can have no location. When two kinds of impressions have a close causal connection, the imagination unites them even more closely by attributing to them spatial contiguity. This process yields absurdity that can be avoided only by insisting that some beings, for example, the tastes of figs and olives, exist without having any location whatsoever. In defending this account of locationless entities, Hume offers an argument which parallels the Achilles argument in many respects: treating spatial and non-spatial entities as spatially contiguous yields absurdity. He expressly condemns the materialists, "who conjoin all thought with extension," before turning his version of the Achilles argument against its original authors, the defenders of immaterial minds who turn out on Hume's reading to be implicit micro-Spinozists (T I iv 5).<sup>13</sup>

Despite the apparent levity of this last finding, I agree completely with Falkenstein's contention that Hume's arguments in "Of the immateriality of the soul" were in the main intended seriously. One very serious and important argument, not discussed by Falkenstein, occurs just after Hume's critique of the position that immaterial minds perceive extended things. This extraordinary argument has been overlooked by most of those who write on the problem of mind-body interaction, Daniel Flage being a noteworthy exception.<sup>14</sup> It is Hume's rejection of the claim that material states are incapable of causing perceptions. Hume invokes his own analysis of causation, which has the corollary that "to consider the matter *a priori* any thing may produce any thing" in order to reject the *a priori* constraints used by philosophers to preclude material causes of mental states.<sup>15</sup> Whether or not physical things cause mental things is a factual question which can only be settled by ascertaining through observation whether or not any of the former are constantly conjoined with any of the latter. Hume claims that experience yields an emphatic

"yes." Since earlier, in order to explain our tendency to attribute location to items incapable of it, Hume had argued that spatial and non-spatial entities stand in causal relations, his rejection of *a priori* constraints on causal connections also strengthens that position, since it too might be opposed by dogmas concerning what types of things can enter into causal relationships.<sup>16</sup>

That these are deep metaphysical commitments is indicated by a modification Hume made in his analysis of causation. He altered the analysis developed earlier in the *Treatise* in order to accommodate his position that spatial and non-spatial entities stand in causal relationships. Hume initially asserted (T I iii 2) that the relationship, *X causes Y*, implies that X is spatially contiguous to Y, temporally contiguous to Y, prior to Y, and necessarily connected with Y.<sup>17</sup> However, he immediately notes:

We may therefore consider the relation of CONTIGUITY as essential to that of causation; at least may suppose it such, according to the general opinion, till we can find a more proper occasion to clear up this matter, by examining what objects are or are not susceptible of juxtaposition and conjunction. (T I iii 2, 75, note omitted)

The "proper occasion" is "Of the immateriality of the soul."<sup>18</sup> When in "Of the immateriality of the soul" Hume explained our tendency to spatialize inherently non-spatial things in terms of their causal connections with spatial things, the initial analysis of *X causes Y* generated a problem. Unless he took back the requirement that cause (X) and effect (Y) be spatially contiguous, Hume could not claim spatial entities can cause non-spatial ones and so could not explain our tendency to assign spurious spatial locations to the latter on the basis of the causal relationship. Hume did what you would expect of one who seriously intends a distinction between spatial and non-spatial things and claims they can causally interact. He changed his analysis of causation. The spatial contiguity requirement was dropped. If this is correct, Hume in "Of the immateriality of the soul" developed an extremely important positive theory, according to which there is a fundamental distinction between physical and mental entities. This distinction was so central to his philosophy that it required him to rethink the nature of causal connection.

These results lead me back to the question I set aside earlier. Does Hume endorse Strong Mental/Physical Dualism? Before it can be addressed, a preliminary point must be argued. It is that just because one and the same property cannot be both mental and physical, it does not follow that one and the same individual subject cannot have both a mental and a physical property. Let us stipulate, in order to illustrate this thesis, the non-Humean definitions that a state or property is *mental* if and only if it involves intending and that a state or property is *physical* if and only if it does not involve intending.

Obviously, on these explications no state or property can be both mental and physical. However, this result does not by itself entail that an individual thing having a mental state or property cannot also have a physical property. The latter is a separate issue. This point is important with respect to Hume. He holds that no perception is both capable and incapable of local conjunction. If "physical" and "mental" are defined in terms of spatiality (local conjunction) and non-spatiality, respectively, it follows no perception can be both mental and physical. It does not follow, however, that mental and physical perceptions are incompatible in the way required to secure Strong Mental/Physical Dualism.

For the substance theorist, the incompatibility of two properties is understood as the impossibility of their jointly inhering in a single substance. But what can it mean for Hume, who rejected substance and inherence? In criticizing substance materialists and substance immaterialists, Hume substitutes local conjunction for inherence and not too surprisingly finds both of the competing positions incoherent. This leaves open both (i) the obvious question of how Hume is to explicate bundles on his alternative account of individual subjects and their states, and (ii) the more subtle question of whether mental (non-spatial) and physical (spatial) perceptions can co-exist in the same subject (bundle). Hume clearly is barred from explicating co-existence in a bundle as co-existing in the same location or being locally conjoined. Perhaps, though, he can explicate it in terms of causation, provided, that is, that causation without spatial contiguity can be made intelligible. If it can, then, although a mental perception cannot co-exist in a bundle with a physical perception in the local conjunction sense, they could be parts of a single causally inter-connected bundle.<sup>19</sup> The significance of this is two-fold. First, it emerges from this analysis that Hume's account of causation, his distinction between mental and physical phenomena, and his bundle theory are closely linked. Second, it could be said that although Hume held Minimal Mental-Physical Dualism he did not endorse Strong Mental/Physical Dualism. Clearly, these topics require far more discussion than has been given them here.

## NOTES

1 The distinction between Minimal and Strong Mental/Physical Dualism is neutral with respect to many other philosophical issues and distinctions which equally are neutral with respect to them. For example, a nominalist and a realist with respect to the ontological analysis of properties might both accept or reject Minimal Mental/Physical Dualism and accept or reject Strong Mental/Physical Dualism. Equally, they might disagree regarding either or both kinds of dualism. It is not immediately obvious that all deep ontological disagreements are completely neutral with respect to Strong Mental/Physical Dualism, since at least one such issue concerns the nature of individual subjects and their relationship to properties, which in turn might have implications for the claim that mental and physical properties are essentially incompatible. Some possible connections among seemingly distinct metaphysical or ontological issues are noted briefly at the end of the paper.

2 As he put it in the Sixth Meditation, since God has the power to create whatever one can clearly and distinctly conceive exactly as it is conceived and one can clearly and distinctly conceive a mind, a thinking thing, without thereby also conceiving of a body, God could bring into being an unembodied mind. See René Descartes, *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, translated and edited by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), vol. 2, 54.

3 It might even be the case that an individual's having one or more physical properties is a contingent but indispensable condition for its having any mental properties whatsoever. One holding this might be styled an individual subject causal materialist.

4 Descartes, vol 2, 59. If the same individual subject cannot have both mental and physical properties, yet a human being is a bodily thing capable of thought, two important consequences follow: (a) a human being must be a heterogeneous composite including at least one substance which thinks but is unextended and at least one extended unthinking substance; (b) causation or some connection other than inherence must be the basis for the unity of the composite, i.e., provide the ground for there being a composite substance rather than a mere class of distinct specifically different substances.

5 John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, edited by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), IV.x.8–19.

6 IV.iii.6. Despite illustrating that one can hold Minimal Mental/Physical Dualism without holding the strong version, Locke did not differ significantly from Descartes in how he drew the distinction between mental and physical properties. His concerns were epistemological; he questioned whether humans could know *a priori* that the Incompatible Properties Thesis is true. Alternatively, two minimal mental-physical dualists might disagree regarding Strong Mental/Physical Dualism because, although they agree there is an irreducible difference between mental and physical properties, they disagree regarding what constitutes being one or the other and therefore disagree regarding the Incompatible Properties Thesis.



7 Falkenstein is interested in Hume's destruction of the Achilles argument as a challenge to Reid's immaterialist account of mind and offers an insightful account from that perspective. I am attempting to show that his perspective made it difficult for him to grasp the possibility that Hume's critique had a dualistic basis and that Hume was developing his own version of Minimal Mental/Physical Dualism.

8 The clearest and most systematic defense of Hume's mental/physical dualism is to be found in Daniel Flage, *Hume's Theory of Mind* (London: Routledge, 1990). See chap. 6, especially 113–129.

9 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. revised by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), I iv 5, 235; hereafter cited in the text as T.

10 T I ii 3, 33–39.

11 It is worth noting, perhaps, that the same positive views about the composition of extension had provided the basis for Hume's critique of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities in T I iv 4. In denying at the beginning of "Of the immateriality of the soul" that there are contradictions regarding the mind comparable to those which arise concerning body, Hume has in mind the problems raised about that distinction in the preceding section. Compare T 231 and 232.

12 Thus in developing his doctrine of spatial and non-spatial entities Hume has provided a new basis for Minimal Mental/Physical Dualism. A physical entity is whatever is capable of local conjunction with other entities. It either is extended or can compose extensions. A mental entity is whatever is incapable of genuine spatial location; it is neither extended nor capable of composing an extended thing by local conjunction. Every impression and idea is either capable or incapable of spatial relationships and no perception is both. Materialists, who hold that whatever exists is in space or that whatever exists is extended, are wrong. So are those who resist Strong Mental/Physical Dualism by claiming that perceptions exist in (are conjoined with) extended things. Of course, immaterialists who assign both kinds of perceptions to finite minds are equally wrong.

13 The quoted material is from T 239. The argument against the micro-Spinozistic theologians runs from T 239 through T 246. Spinoza held, according to Hume, that both physical states (modes of extension) and mental states (modes of thought) inhere in the same infinite substance. The theologians (micro-Spinozists) hold, given Hume's terminology, that both physical states (spatial beings) and mental states (non-spatial beings) exist in the same perceiver. Note, incidentally, that one who thinks that the way to secure dualism, either Minimal Mental/Physical Dualism or Strong Mental/Physical Dualism, is to insist that mental states are intentional acts which require an agent/substance should be aware that Hume denies that appealing to acts permits one to make the doctrine of thinking substance intelligible. See T 244–246.

14 Flage, 125.

15 This corollary was first introduced in T I iii 15, 173. The quoted material is from T 247.

16 Hume's critique of the argument that a material thing cannot cause mental things is given at T 246–250.

17 I am among those who maintain that the "necessary connection" turned out to be quite different from what Hume's reader might have anticipated from his initial comments about it in T I iii 2. See T I iii 14.

18 Note the citation in the footnote on 75.

19 Thus the issue raised earlier about how one secures composite substances on Descartes's version of Strong Mental/Physical Dualism has an analogue for Hume's bundle theory. See note 4 above.

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