

The case FOR Mind/Body dualism

Dear Mr. Brand:

I notice in the latest CQ that you're holding a meeting to "formally dissolve the mind-body dualism" of Western culture. I'm writing to wish you luck, but also to indicate why I don't think you'll succeed. While it is true that for most practical purposes mind is body, and it's important for people to learn this, both human experience and recent scientific evidence indicate very strongly that mind is something else that is at least semi-independent if not capable of being fully independent of body.

I've been into humanistic psychology for a long time and put a lot of effort in my humanistic psychology course, letting the students get a feel for just how strongly their body affects their mental processes. It's easy to demonstrate with simple exercises like letting people walk around in a slumped posture and seeing how easy it is to feel depressed and how difficult it is to feel happy. There they see that while bodily posture does not totally determine mental processes, it certainly has a strong effect on them. Other exercises can demonstrate this even more strongly. The typical Western attitude of regarding yourself as some kind of "higher" intellect, with your body as a convenient servo-mechanism to move you from place to place, is clearly pathological, since it cuts you off from a highly important reality. As a day to day practical operating philosophy for dealing with your life, typical Western dualism is lousy.

In terms of a conceptual system that more adequately reflects reality, however, a strong case can be made for dualism. I'll briefly mention three lines of evidence. First, the direct experience of many people is that they have temporarily been in contact with things at a distance when our physicalistic view of the world says this couldn't be, and some have even had what is technically termed an out-of-the-body experience, where they temporarily experience themselves as being in another place than where their physical body is and yet feel a state of full, normal consciousness, not in some kind of dreamlike or pathological state. To those committed to a physicalistic philosophy, these kinds of experiences would most often be rejected a priori as due to hallucination, faulty memory, just plain lying, etc. To the people who have an out-of-the-body experience, however, the almost universal reaction is an absolute conviction that some part of them will survive bodily death, as they have experienced a functioning outside their physical body. Direct experience carries a lot more weight here than any kind of logic does. Some of these people also describe events at a distance which can be verified, and which they couldn't have known about normally.

The experience of perceptions at a distance and the like led to the scientific study of them by very small number of scientists, and today we do have a field of science called parapsychology, although, again, its findings are ignored by most orthodox scientists. Under laboratory conditions it has been shown beyond any reasonable doubt that occasionally people can pick up the thoughts of others (telepathy), get information about purely physical events that they are sensorially shielded from (clairvoyance), accurately predict the future when it can't be inferred from a knowledge of present events (precognition), and sometimes influence physical events, such as the fall of dice simply by wishing for a certain outcome (psychokinesis). All four of these basic phenomena seem incompatible with our current physicalistic world view, the same world view from which we ordinarily argue that mind must be totally reducible to electrical and chemical events within the brain, nervous system, and body. Thus they serve as a very good reminder that our present scientific ideas of the universe are very good theories for dealing with some aspects of reality, but hardly complete.

It took many years before parapsychologists were satisfied enough with the evidence of the four basic phenomena mentioned above, under stringent conditions, to start branching out again into the more exotic experiences like the out-of-the-body experience, but we have started and gotten interesting results. I began the trend back in 1968 by publishing an article, "A Psychophysiological Study of Out-Of-the-Body Experiences in a Selected Subject," in the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*.

I had met a young woman who regularly (once a week or so) experienced waking up during the night and finding herself floating above her body, near the ceiling. To make a long story short, she spent several nights in my sleep laboratory and showed a unique brain wave pattern while having these out-of-the-body experiences. I also wanted to check the reality of it, so each night I would put a different five-digit random number on a shelf up near the ceiling, readily visible from the ceiling, but not at all visible from down in the room. On the one occasion when she claimed to have been in the right position to see the number and memorize it, she correctly got it: with 100,000 to 1 odds, it argues pretty strongly that something was going on.

My own studies of transpersonal psychology, altered states of consciousness, and parapsychology have made me think that the best concept so far is that basic awareness may very well be of some "non-physical" (in terms of current physics) nature, but we very seldom have a direct contact with this direct awareness. Rather, we know the wholistic result of this basic awareness intimately merging, interacting with, trans-forming, and being transformed by the hardware of the brain, nervous system, and body. Some of these kinds of interaction in terms of altered states of consciousness are discussed in my recent books, *Transpersonal Psychologies* (Harper and Row, 1975) and *States of Consciousness* (Dutton, 1975), although I concentrate on the more "orthodox" side of things there as I don't want to scare off conventional scientists right away by pushing their buttons. On a personal level, I keep up my aikido training and other kinds of body awareness training, but my research work makes me more and more question our conventional notions of space, time, and body.

Again, good luck on your Conference. But until we begin to take these kinds of human experiences and the data of modern parapsychology into account, I don't think we'll do any more with the mind-body problem than talk about it.

Charles T. Tart, Ph. D.
Professor of Psychology
University of California
Davis, California

Unusual energy report

I've seen portions of a report being prepared for the Energy Research and Development Administration by Stanford Research Institute titled, "A Preliminary Social and Environmental Assessment of the ERDA Solar Energy Program 1975-2020." It looked so good (critical, conservative, insightful) I wrote to the ERDA Project officer, James Benson, for details. He replied:

Dear Stewart,

This letter is in response to your request for information about the study being performed under me by Bill Harman at the Center for the Study of Social Policy at the Stanford Research Institute, Menlo Park, California 94025.

The study is an assessment of the major social and environmental implications of the national solar energy program as outlined in document ERDA-49. The study examines the required social implementation steps and potential environmental effects of several energy scenarios through the year 2020. The energy supply scenarios vary from 85 to 180 quadrillion BTUs in 2000, compared with about 70 quads this year.

The study also discusses the increasing public demand for small scale decentralized energy sources, different societal paradigms and a variety of social policy issues which will have to be confronted before our energy situation is resolved.

The final report is due by the end of this September.

James W. Benson, Program Manager
Environmental and Resource Assessments
Division of Solar Energy

People interested in seeing the report should request copies from: Division of Solar Energy, ERDA, Washington, D.C. 20545.

—SB

January 25, 1977

Dr. Gregory Bateson
University of California
Santa Cruz, CA 95064

Dear Dr. Bateson:

I was greatly puzzled by your response (CQ Winter 76/77) to my letter about the scientific case that can be made for some kind of mind/body dualism (CQ Fall 76). Your criticism seems to assume that I have taken a metaphor about being "out" of body and concretized it as some kind of "thing." This was not my point at all. Let me state it another way.

A scientific approach to understanding the world gives first priority to data/observation/direct experience. We create theories to "explain" or order that data, but the theories must fit the actually observed data, and must continue to fit new data, otherwise the theories go.

For ordinary affairs, the concept of "location" is very useful. My immediate experience is that I am located in front of my typewriter in my study as I write this. While the words I use to describe this experience of being located somewhere are not the experience, they are very close to it. I presume you would also find it useful to note where you are located as you read this.

Datum: many people have had a direct experience of looking around and finding they are "located" at a place that is not where their physical body is. Concurrently, they assess the condition of their consciousness and find that, except for the extraordinary shift in mind/body relationships, their consciousness seems as normal and rational as it ever is. They sometimes have long, rational arguments with themselves as they try to talk themselves out of their ongoing, direct experience, that is, as they try to ignore their immediate experience in order to protect their investment in a conceptual scheme that says mind is always where body is, except in "irrational" states like dreaming or other "hallucinatory" states. They don't win this argument, for their ongoing out-of-the-body experience is as real as their ordinary in-the-body experience. The conviction that this out-of-the-body experience was real stays with most people who have it. We are not dealing with concretization of a metaphor, any more than my experience of being in my study right now is a metaphor, or your experience of being wherever you are right now is a metaphor (unless you want to up-level this discussion considerably and see both "in" and "out" the body experiences as conceptualizations of something more fundamental).

1/25/77

The point of my letter was that: (a) using out-of-the-body experiences where the experiencers perceive verifiable facts about distant events that they could not have sensed or inferred in terms of our current physical conceptions of the world; (b) plus the general findings of more than 700 scientific experiments on paranormal phenomena like telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis (the four investigated thoroughly enough to be adequately established); and (c) continuing to assume the usefulness of the idea of location, then a model of consciousness which assumes it is totally identical to body/brain/nervous systems' functioning is scientifically inadequate. It cannot account for important data.

As I pointed out in my original letter, the fact that scientific findings require considering some broader theory we can generally call "dualism" does not justify people abusing their bodies because they think they are somehow different from them. We are in complete agreement on the need to pay attention to and learn from our bodies. Nor does it justify concretizing abstract concepts about anything. One of the main reasons I find science a satisfying discipline is that there is a built-in protection against such concretization, namely the rule that your concepts' theories must constantly be checked back against data, regardless of how attached you are to the concept. In the human practice of science, of course, this checking can often be put off for a long time, perhaps centuries, if a theory has a lot of cultural support. The almost total ignoring of the data of parapsychology by many proponents of mind/body identity simply because it does not fit their position is an example of such invalid application of scientific method.

Incidentally, I was very disturbed by the implications of point 9 in your position paper for the mind/body dualism conference (CQ, Fall 1976):

"About 'miracles'- insofar as telling stories of 'little things to be wondered at' tends to divide epistemology, splitting 'mind' or 'spirit' from 'body,' such stories will be regarded as irrelevant interruptions. Insofar as such stories enrich or modify a synthesis, they will be welcome."

This is to easily read as a statement that your mind is made up about mind/body identity and you will not listen to any data to the contrary. As a scientist, I'm sure you did not intend to imply this, and you may want to correct the implications of your statement.

I hope this clarifies the point of my original letter. I would be pleased to hear any further comments you might have on the implications of parapsychological data for the question of mind/body dualism.

"Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water.
After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water."
-Zen saying-

Sincerely yours,

Charles T. Tart, Ph. D.
Professor of Psychology

CC: Stewart Brand, CoEvolution Quarterly

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Gregory

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Box 428
Sausalito 94065

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