

## PART III: DISCUSSION

### SURVIVAL AND THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM

By John Palmer

#### **Offensive Ad Hominem Language**

Augustine begins his reply by chastising me for allowing Matlock to opine in his review that Augustine is a “paradigmatic thinker.” It seems to me that Matlock was simply claiming that Augustine is a rationalist (as opposed to an empiricist) and I don’t think most philosophers would consider that an insult, even if they disagreed with the characterization. I think it is significant that Matlock avoided the “wishful thinker” alternative, which *would* be insulting, and which both Larsen and Smythe used in their replies to characterize the opposition. Although mortalists probably don’t wish to die, they certainly wish their theories to be true, so the epithet could in principle be applied to them. For what it’s worth, I think both Matlock and Augustine are data-driven but they are driven by different data.

When deciding whether language is offensive, I pay more attention to tone than to content. Although both Matlock and Augustine adopted a harsh tone at times, Augustine more so, I think both stayed within the bounds of proper discourse. On the other hand, I found the sarcastic, condescending, and self-righteous tone of Smythe’s piece to be quite offensive, and she undercut the apparent attempt of Augustine to project a more sober and scholarly image. Alas, her tone is typical of what parapsychologists have to put up with from psi-skeptics.

Finally, although not exactly a matter of tone, I found Stokes’ speculation in his review that the *BP* authors didn’t cite his book because they couldn’t answer his arguments and then in his reply to in effect call Kelly a liar for claiming he was unaware of the book, to be unjustified, unfair, and whiny.

#### **The Psi Factor**

In both his review and his reply, Stokes doubles down in telling us that he does not accept the experimental evidence for psi because of “. . . recent revelations regarding the massive rates of experimenter misconduct and incompetence among researchers in orthodox psychology and biomedical research” (DS, p. 170). I assume he is referring primarily to the John, Loewenstein, and Prelec (2012) analysis of fraud in mainstream psychology. In addition to Kelly’s reply and my observations elsewhere about the hazards of such inferences (Palmer, 2016a), it should be noted that the percentage of experimenters John et al. estimated to be fraudulent is 9%. I suspect that even if you removed the 10% or so most evidential studies from the parapsychology database, what is left would still be sufficient to establish the case for psi. At least the burden of proof should fall on Stokes to demonstrate that is not the case. The recent “meta-analysis” of the ganzfeld database by Bierman, Spottiswoode, and Bijl (2016) was an (unsuccessful) attempt to contribute to the realization of that objective (see also Palmer, 2016a, 2016b).

#### **Survivalism Versus Mortalism**

I decided that from here on the most efficient and economical way to proceed would be to present my own position on the survival issue, which the other contributors have helped me to clarify. For the most part, the only points of theirs I will address explicitly are those that are relevant to my thesis. Even in these cases I will generally respond only to points of disagreement about which I have something substantive to say other than “I agree or “I disagree.” Despite this policy, there is plenty of reference to the other contributions in what follows.

### Consolidating the Ontologies

I want to begin with some terminological and conceptual housecleaning. I submit that there are four, and only four, fundamental, independent ontologies that are relevant to this discussion: the classic three (*materialism*, *substance dualism*, and *idealism*) and a fourth that I will label *semimaterialism* (and the substance, *semimatter*) because I am aware of no formal names for these in the literature. I will argue that the other relevant ontologies addressed in the debate are either equivalent to or versions of materialism or substance dualism.

I will first address those that reduce to materialism. The primary one is *neutral monism*, which is defined as follows: “Belief that both mental and physical properties are the features of substances of a single sort, which are themselves ultimately neither mental nor physical” (Kemmerling, 2011). Note that one can describe the identical substance in the following way: “Matter has mental properties” (materialism). Neutral monism as defined above is touted as parsimonious, and in comparison to dualism it is (as are all monisms), but in the more important sense it is unparsimonious, because, unlike my competing definition, it needlessly postulates a “new” type of substance. For this reason, it should be rejected. Adding psychological properties to matter is a legitimate move because it does not change the fundamental nature of matter; no intrinsic properties of matter must be denied to accommodate psychological processes. This is what most neuroscientists assume without batting an eyelash. Psychological properties have been implicit in the definition of matter at least since Descartes, because as a monism, materialism claims that there is nothing in the universe but matter, and thus matter has to account for the psychological functions that would otherwise be attributed to the Cartesian mind.<sup>42</sup>

My rejection of neutral monism as an independent ontology assumes that the “new” substance has *all* the properties of matter, which opens the door for a truly independent ontology whose substance has only some of the properties of matter. This is where semimaterialism comes in. This ontology appears in the debate primarily in the reference to subtle or astral bodies. In this context, the existence of ordinary matter is not denied, and in most theories the astral body is thought to house a mind (i.e., semimatter is seen as third substance, an unparsimonious move.)

Having established that materialism refers to matter with psychological properties, other ontologies can be seen as equivalent to or versions of materialism. The most obvious is *property dualism*, which maintains that “there is only one thing, the person, that has two irreducible types of properties, mental and physical” (Honderich, 1995, p. 207). This seems identical to my materialism except that it refers specifically to, presumably, the brain. *Panpsychism* is defined as “the belief that everything in the world has some mental aspect, and that there is some degree of consciousness—however small—even to apparently inert bits of matter” (Kemmerling, 2011), again the same as my materialism with the added stipulation that all matter has mental properties. *Physicalism* is “the belief that all mental properties, states, and events can be wholly explained in terms of physical properties, states, and events” (Kemmerling, 2011). This directly follows from materialism, and my other source says quite bluntly that it is “also called materialism” (Honderich, 1995, p. 679.) This useless redundancy could be made useful by adding “only of the brain” to the end of the longer definition, making it a complement to panpsychism: to wit, materialism is either panpsychism or physicalism.

Whitehead’s metaphysics is particularly interesting, both intrinsically and to me personally. My understanding of Whitehead comes almost exclusively from David Ray Griffin, with whom I had personal contact when I was living in California many years ago. I persuaded him to write a summary of Whitehead’s ontology from a parapsychological perspective for a parapsychology journal (Griffin, 1993). I wrote a review of it in which I expressed the opinion that the substance in Whitehead’s ontology (*occasions of experience*, which have mental and physical *poles*) was exclusively mental and that the ontology was a form of idealism (Palmer, 1993); Griffin objected that this attribution was misleading (Griffin, 1994a). Then several months ago I had an opportunity to revisit Griffin’s original paper in preparation for a conference

<sup>42</sup> This analysis ignores the logical positivists, who skirted the issue by proclaiming that psychological properties don’t exist. But if there is one thing I suspect all the contributors agree on, it is that logical positivism, which seems similar to what Stokes calls radical materialism, should remain in Stokes’ “dung heap” (DS, p. 178).

on Whitehead. Informed by the thinking described above, I concluded that the occasions of experiences are matter. But then in preparing this paper, I noticed that in his review Matlock (p. 201) cites Whitehead saying “that an individual’s experiential stream outlasted his death . . . (Whitehead, 1929/1978, p. 351),” which in turn implies that the occasions of experience must be semimatter. However, in his reply Matlock writes that Whitehead “did not believe that streams of experience remained active after death” (JM, p. 245), and Augustine proclaims that “Whitehead’s views entail mortalism” (KA, p. 224). So I turned to a paper by my authority Griffin (1994b), who cites Whitehead as saying he “. . . is entirely neutral on the question of immortality” (Whitehead, 1929/1957, p. 107). So I think it is safest to conclude that it is unclear whether the occasions of experience are matter or semimatter. Whitehead’s metaphysics also has a God construct, which qualifies it as panentheism, but God is declared to be “dipolar” (Whitehead, 1929/1957, p. 345), which seems to mean that it is of the same substance as the occasions of experience. Thus, Whitehead’s metaphysics is in fact monistic.

I will now turn to those ontologies that generally reduce to substance dualism. The most important of these for present purposes is *panentheism*, because it is the ontology advocated in *BP* and specifically by contributors Kelly and Stokes. What the various versions of panentheism seem to have in common is the postulation of a universal mind or supreme consciousness that seems to have the properties of a god (or God) and is sometimes explicitly identified as such. This of course fits the main theme or goal of *BP*, which is to reconcile science and religion.

Granted that matter is indeed material, and if we assume that the universal mind is not, panentheism as a form of substance dualism follows naturally. I do not have space to comment on all the versions alluded to above, but I will offer some remarks on the version presented by Stapp in Chapter 5 of *BP*, for three reasons. First, he postulates in addition to a universal mind, which he calls *nature*, an individual mind, which he calls *ego*. The role of ego is to make a binary choice of whether or not to take an action and the role of nature is to actualize the choice. A construct such as ego is necessary if one is to propose survival of an individual personality and not all versions of panentheism postulate one. Second, Stapp’s theory is based on quantum mechanics, which has been discussed at length in the debate. Third, Stapp is the one author to explicitly identify his theory with dualism:

This quantum ontology is basically in line with Descartes’ idea that reality is composed of thinking entities and things that occupy space. That is, the classical-physics ontology is expanded from merely the collection of physically described things that occupy space to a psychophysical space that includes our psychologically described egos . . . (*BP*, p. 181)

Finally, I will comment on Matlock’s *processual soul theory*. He begins by defining mind as a “stream of consciousness” (JM, p. 200). It seems to me that this is really a process and a better term would be “*streaming* of consciousness.” I strongly adhere to the view that processes and properties should be treated as predicates, and they cannot logically exist on their own; properties must be properties *of* something. Thus, I was glad to see that later on Matlock supplies that something, which he calls *self* (JM, p. 201). Thus, self is Matlock’s term for an individual mind. IMO, consciousness should be construed as one of its properties.

There is some ambiguity about what kind of stuff the self is. In his reply, Matlock writes: “The problem with the Cartesian proposal, as I see it, is . . . that substance is supposed to be eternally unchanging, to lack *extension*, and to have no *location in space*” (JM, p. 244, my emphasis). This suggests that the self is semimatter, but elsewhere Matlock rejects the notion of an astral or subtle body (JM, p. 245), which is what the quote above seems to entail.

Matlock insists that the ontology of his theory is not substance dualism, but instead what he calls *idealist property dualism*: “The idea is that material objects, including bodies, and minds are *imbued with different grades of consciousness*. There is a dualism of mind and body here . . . .” (JM, p. 200, my emphasis). Note that the highlighted phrase is equivalent to my statement above that “matter has mental properties.” It follows that the two substances in Matlock’s theory are mind and matter, and that the theory actually represents substance dualism.

However, his invocation of idealism raises an interesting point. Another statement I could have made that describes the same substance as neutral monism is “Mind has mental properties” (idealism). Thus, it would be legitimate for Matlock to identify his theory even as idealistic substance dualism. I ignored the idealism option in my discussion of neutral monism because (a) I think attributing physical properties to mind violates the essence of idealism much more than attributing mental properties to matter violates the essence of materialism and (b) the important point for the present discussion is that the particular substance in question (the brain) has the material property of mortality.

### Substance Dualism<sup>43</sup> and Survival

I have always been under the impression that what dualists are saying is that the mind is the *indirect* cause of behavior and the brain is the direct cause (see Figure 1). I use “behavior” in a very broad sense to include—in addition to motor actions (e.g., writing)—cognitive processes (e.g., deductive reasoning) and physiological responses (e.g., electrodermal activity). This seems to be what Augustine is referring to as *interactive substance dualism* (ISD). In any event, I am going to borrow the term to label my version of substance dualism.

I have never understood why materialists keep citing brain-behavior correlations as evidence against dualism because dualists “predict” such relationships every bit as much as materialists do. When I was younger and more intellectually involved with this issue than I am now, I became so exasperated by this that I put a sign up in my office that read “Dualists believe in brains!” Thus, when I saw Augustine complain that survivalists pay no attention to such things as “degenerative mental disorders as patients approach the end of life” (KA, p. 208) as evidence for what he calls the dependence thesis, I had a profound sense of déjà vu.

mind → brain → behavior

*Figure 1.* Palmer’s ISD model.

Stokes’ discussion of the filter theory described by Edward Kelly in the first chapter of *BP* illustrates how the mind → brain part of the model might work (DS, p. 172). Stokes lists his three versions of his theory: the filter model, the transmission model, and the instrument model. The second two have nothing to do with filtering per se; they instead describe the processes that the filtering inhibits. The second two represent types of activation and can usefully be concatenated into one model, which might be called the activation model, and the filter model renamed the inhibition model to highlight the opposition of the filtering to the transmitting and instrumenting. It is important to recognize that these two mechanisms should not be considered mutually exclusive or that the processes they represent function all the time at maximum capacity. Stokes observes that if the filter were entirely incapacitated we would expect to see enhanced mental functioning in cases of brain damage, which we generally do not, because it is rarely entirely incapacitated. However, he goes on to discuss a case where we do see enhanced mental functioning, terminal lucidity. Survivalists would not see this as an application of Stokes’ transmission or instrument model, but rather of his filter model. Blackmore (1962, p. 65) offers an interesting materialistic interpretation of how the filtering might work in terminal lucidity cases, namely, that inhibitory neurons succumb to the effects of anoxia faster than excitatory neurons. She notes that this has been demonstrated in rat brains, but I am aware of no such evidence for human brains. To account for the rarity of terminal lucidity, it is necessary to assume that the timing differential is generally too short to create an experience long enough to be noticed, although I suspect terminal lucidity is grossly underreported.

But how is it possible for the mind to interact with the brain? This of course raises the classic objection to dualism, namely, that it isn’t possible. As Augustine puts it: “Cartesian dualism [requires] ap-

<sup>43</sup>From here on I will refer to substance dualism simply as “dualism.”

parently inconceivable causal contact between completely nonspatial minds and spatial brains, ostensibly requiring violations of physical law” (KA, p. 225). This phrasing conveniently signals the problem with the materialist’s objection with its reference to physical law, which implies that all mechanisms in the universe must be physical, which assumes the validity of the very proposition that is in dispute. In a related vein, the word “inconceivable” in the quoted sentence brings to mind another slogan of mine, which I dubbed the rationalist fallacy: “If I can’t think of an explanation for it, it can’t be real.”<sup>44</sup>

From a parapsychological perspective, the mechanism by which the mind influences the brain is psi, virtually by definition. Augustine appeals to the fact psi is negatively defined to point out that calling the mechanism psi doesn’t explain anything. But one does not need to explain a mechanism to justify its possible reality, a point that Augustine makes in a different context with the following metaphor: “. . .one doesn’t need to know *how* one’s hardware enables a computer program to run on one’s computer in order to know *that* it does so” (KA, p. 214n12nx). On the other hand, IMO the most important contribution of quantum mechanics to our debate is the fact that it provides a potential explanation of mind/brain interaction that *is* physical in the sense that it conforms to currently accepted theory in physics (see Stapp’s chapter in *BP*).

So where does survival enter the picture? In my ISD model (and the theses of many survivalists, including Matlock) it is proposed that the discarnate mind expresses itself by interacting with the brain of another living person. This is what happens in both mediumship and reincarnation, for example. The mechanism by which it does so is the same mechanism that it used with its “own” brain when alive, namely psi, so in this sense the thesis is parsimonious. Note that the mind is independent of the brain only with respect to its *existence*, not with respect to its *process*, which I like to refer to as *function*. To put it another way, the fact that behavior is dependent on the brain in no way precludes the independent existence of the mind, as should be clear from Figure 1.

But this is where the touted brain-behavior interactions come back into the picture, for it would be unparsimonious to propose that the mind can perform these functions on its own, because why then would it bother using a brain? One good thing that behaviorism accomplished was to remind us that as scientists we can draw firm conclusions only from what we observe, which is behavior in the narrow sense of the term. However, I think it is reasonable to draw inferences from our observations to the cognitive operations and physiological processes that I incorporate in my broader definition of behavior. For example, if a brain-damaged person cannot report the correct answer to a math problem, it is reasonable to infer that he or she was unable to perform the cognitive operation that would have led to the correct answer. Strictly speaking, this means that functions that have been demonstrated by empirical research to be directly caused by the brain should be excluded from the list of functions that the mind can perform independently. However, I have a somewhat more relaxed criterion: I attribute to the brain any functions that we can plausibly expect a very “intelligent” computer to perform either directly or through attachment to the human body. What that leaves, in my view, is subjective experience, which I consider the only function mind can perform on its own. Since by “subjective” I mean conscious, I consider consciousness to be a property of mind. This issue, of course, is Chalmers’ famous “hard problem,” and I must confess that I have a hard time articulating why I believe that conscious experience cannot *in principle* be performed by a computer, which I guess has something to do with why Chalmers calls the problem hard.

Re the “causal loop” and correlation versus causation, the important point is that in my model mind-behavior and brain-behavior relationships are all totally causal in the billiard ball sense. This creates no problem whatsoever for substance dualism and in fact is the position taken by most survivalists. The one notable exception is quantum indeterminacy. I have yet to encounter an intelligible or convincing explanation for how indeterminacy at the micro level becomes determinacy at the macro level, so I was delighted to see physicist Stapp in his *BP* chapter challenge the conventional QM notion that “nature’s choices are purely ‘random’” (*BP*, p. 186). In any event, what happens at the macro level seems to me to be what is important for the survival question.

Augustine cites the absence of “interactive traces” as evidence against the independence thesis. But what does he mean by interaction? In my ISD model, interaction is what occurs all the time. I suspect what

<sup>44</sup> See Palmer (2011) for another example of the fallacy, this one involving psi and evolution.

he is referring to instead are those rare instances in which mind either bypasses the brain to affect behavior directly or interacts with the brain of another person. These are the cases that parapsychologists claim as empirical evidence for survival, which means that Augustine is simply saying that he rejects that evidence. Note that these cases require a revision of my ISD model to allow the mind, on rare occasions, to affect behavior directly. This makes the model unparsimonious, but as I noted above, data trumps parsimony.

I am probably the loudest of the parapsychologist critics of Bayesian analysis that Augustine refers to, and my main point was that a priori factors, especially “the extent to which a hypothesis is consistent with background knowledge that has been independently established by conventional science and history” (KA, p. 217), which I call the coherence principle (Palmer 1987), should have zero weight in determining the evidentiality of an empirical finding (Palmer, 2011). Thus, I was glad to see him assign prior probabilities of .5 to the dependence and independence theses in his Bayesian analysis. He is nonetheless able to get the desired result by entering a higher posterior probability for the dependence thesis because of the brain-behavior relationships. This is an illegitimate move because these relationships are “predicted” by both theses. However, in this case I do think that the survival hypothesis’ incompatibility with both the coherence and parsimony principles justifies the claim that the burden of proof falls exclusively on the survivalists. The other side of that coin is that the *only* way the critic can effectively attack the survival hypothesis is to address the empirical evidence for it.

### **Empirical Evidence for Survival**

The best way to demonstrate the independence of mind is to establish the occurrence of cognitive activity when the brain is totally incapacitated. This is what survivalists claim for the famous Pam Reynolds case, in which Reynolds reported that she had an NDE during a window of time during surgery when physiological measures indicated she was effectively “brain dead” (Sabom, 1982). The problem is that the claim that the NDE occurred during that specific period is based on Reynolds’ obviously unreliable memory. There was also evidence of anomalous information acquisition during the surgery; for example, she reported hearing a saw which sounded very much like the real one. The problem here is that the mechanism for the acquisition must be ESP, and ESP doesn’t always occur in real time; in other words, she could have precognized the saw buzzing before she was actually brain dead. I see no way around these objections in this or any other such cases, past (Alexander, 2012) or future.

The most common approach in recent years has been a weak version of the above, to point to the demonstration of phenomena that are claimed to exceed the known capacities of a compromised but not “dead” brain (mostly enhanced cognitive functioning in NDEs) or a normal brain (e.g., ability of savants, genius, stigmata), a major theme of *Irreducible Mind*. There has been extensive, and IMO inconclusive debate, as to whether the NDE phenomena can be accounted for by conventional physiological mechanisms. As for the others, it should be noted that they are extreme cases of phenomena already linked to the brain or other physical causes. Even if mainstream scientists were to accept that current theory cannot explain these manifestations, their response would be to modify the theory without abandoning the underlying ontology; this is what normally happens when scientists confront new data that “don’t fit.”

A phenomenon that does not fall in the extreme case bin is psi. I am not among those parapsychologists who believe that psi per se is evidence against materialism, and May and Depp (2015) have recently proposed a materialistic model of ESP. Ironically, until recently survivalists have viewed (super)psi as a problem rather than a solution. An even greater irony is that mortalist critics may have to appeal to psi to fully explain away the Reynolds case.

Finally, I have suggested an approach grounded in the admittedly not very plausible assumption that the mind can do things when it occupies someone else’s body (after death) that it cannot do when it occupies its own—but again, data trumps the a priors. The prediction is that certain anomalous phenomena are found only in what I call survival-related contexts (e.g., mediumship, reincarnation). A class of phenomena that seems to fit this bill are anomalous skills (e.g., the ability to compose music like Litz) but it has to be established by research that such feats do not occur in nonsurvival contexts.

I don't believe any of these approaches have provided, or ever will provide, decisive "proof" of survival. However, I think that some of them (especially those represented in *Irreducible Mind*) are awkward for mortalists. I strongly believe that evidence is a matter of degree, and thus this evidence does increase my subjective probability (no, I won't give you a number) that we do survive death. However, for me the most persuasive "evidence" is Chalmers' hard problem, and my suggestion to survivalists is that they pay more attention to this in building their case.

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