

***More Than Matter?* by Keith Ward**

Mark Vernon asks 'what the matter is' with Keith Ward.

The notion that all that exists is material stuff is pervasive these days. From this idea follow various beliefs, not least that human beings are merely a product of genetic copying mistakes and enjoy no more free will than a rock. But it's an aberrant view when set against what most philosophers in history have held. They were mostly not materialists, but *idealists*.

Idealism is the theory that the type of things that exist are fundamentally mind-like in nature, such as the mental entities experienced as thoughts, feelings, etc. In his latest work of accessible but penetrating philosophy, characteristically laced with entertaining asides, Keith Ward seeks to defend a form of idealism.

The book is brief compared with the immensity of the subject, and often sketches a plausible case rather than filling it out, but it is also timely. **Ward believes the inadequacies of materialism are becoming increasingly apparent in areas of scientific investigation such as quantum physics and consciousness.** Further, there is a major intellectual battle underway about what it is to be human, and Ward is squarely on the side of a humanism which holds that "human persons are not accidental mistakes in a pointless perambulation of fundamental particles. They are a window into the inner reality, value, and purpose of the cosmos."

Professor Ward studied at the feet of the two leading twentieth century Oxford philosophers implicated in this debate, A.J. Ayer and Gilbert Ryle, and Ward uses them as reference points. In part the book is a respectful refutation of Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*, a classic critique of Cartesian dualism – the notion that mind and matter are distinct substances. Ryle famously characterised Descartes' view of consciousness as a "ghost in the machine." That said, Ryle was not a materialist: he was against *any* metaphysical theory, calling such theories "logical howlers." Ryle also thought it was possible to defend human freedom without having a belief about mind as somehow over or more than matter. Ward came to the conclusion that this is not possible to do. Ward argues that Ryle succeeded in providing a good account of the social reality of what it is to be human, but failed to provide an adequate account of the mental life of people, and also of what it means to act responsibly.

Further, Ward argues that Ryle's characterisation of Descartes did the Frenchman a major disservice. What's ironic is that Ryle claimed to be a commonsense philosopher, and yet he rejects many of the most commonsensical things about being human in order to critique Descartes. For example, Ryle objects to Descartes' notion that 'minds are not in space'. But, Ward asks, is it not obviously the case that memories, images, perceptions and the like are not located anywhere specifically [physically]? It might be retorted that that they are in the brain, but that'd be a mistake. What neuroscientists see in the brain is electrical activity and blood flows. These brain phenomena are no more thoughts and feelings than the current coming out of an electric socket is a

thought, or the blood that rushes from a cut is a feeling. The only entity that can directly detect the content of mental activity is the person experiencing it. Or, to put this objection another way, I know what I'm thinking (more or less), even though I've never once inspected my brain – and I hope I never have to. Ryle “had privileged access by introspection to his own thoughts,” Ward writes in one of his witticisms, “even when he was thinking that there was no such thing as introspection or privileged access. Yet that, it seemed to me, was a self-refuting thought to think!”

A.J. Ayer differed from Ryle, not least in believing that he did have private experiences, which he called ‘sense-data’. In fact, Ayer proposed he had nothing *but* sense-data. So, when he met other people, he gained new sense-data – concerning shapes, colours and sounds – and it was from the sense-data that he inferred that he was encountering other people. Ward argues that this stance makes a nonsense out of *Ayer's logical positivism*. Logical positivism holds that statements are only true when based on evidence, not theories; yet Ayer's convictions about sense-data meant that when he encountered other people, he had to make an inference that they were other people – which is to say, he had to apply a theory about his sense-data.

For such reasons, and although it is a bad word in contemporary philosophy, Ward makes the case for dualism over various versions of materialism. Unlike materialism, what dualism doesn't have to do, is explain away the experience of every human being. However, Ward doesn't stop with dualism, but moves next to the philosophy of idealism. **Immanuel Kant** is the key transitional figure here.

Kant was a ‘critical idealist’. What he showed, or claimed to show, is that far from mind being a material thing, it is in fact partly the creator of material reality, in that it creates the way material reality appears to us. For example, we don't hear discrete notes when the piano is played, but music; the interpretation of the sound-waves is done by a mind. Kant also implies that ‘naïve naturalism’ doesn't work, because underneath the way the material world appears to the mind is a deeper reality which is veiled and unknown to it. There's a third element of materialism which Kant undermines: he argues that human beings must assume they are free to act in the world if they are also to assume that they are genuine moral agents. We set ourselves moral goals, such as pursuing the happiness of others. According to Kant, goal-setting is done by reason. So if you believe that the happiness of others is a rational goal – as any decent morality surely does – then you must also believe that reason has a causal role in the world. To put it another way, our moral commitments, which are so much a part of what makes us human, proceed on the basis that although beyond-appearance reality is veiled from us, it is nonetheless rationally structured.

That said, Ward argues that Kant's view doesn't hold together. It leads to a separation between a deterministic *phenomenal* world of appearance, and a *noumenal* world of veiled reality which Kant takes to be free. But our free actions clearly take place in the phenomenal world. To Ward this implies that the Kantian description of reality is much more like the dualism Ryle so loathed than any dualism Descartes proposed. Kant's view “is worse than a ghost in a machine,” Ward concludes: the mind “is something completely invisible inside the appearance of a machine.”

Ward inclines, then, to an idealism which gives priority to mind – what he calls ‘dual-aspect idealism’: minds are the inner aspect of an apparently-material person, living in an apparently-material world. “What the reality underlying those appearances may be in detail we do not know,” he continues. “But since minds are the only sorts of reality we know to belong to the world of things-in-themselves, it is reasonable to think that reality does not exist without mind and consciousness, evaluation and intention, understanding and action ... Minds are not illusory ghosts in real machines. On the contrary, machines are spectral, transitory phenomena appearing to an intelligible world of minds.” This leads Ward to further reflections on issues such as whether the universe can be said to have purpose, the nature of what it is to be a person, and whether minds can exist in disembodied forms.

Critics of dualism will want to know how Ward links the (inner) mental and the (apparently) physical. The short answer is that he offers suggestive possibilities, often via process philosophy. His fuller response would first point out that there’s an assumption hidden in the search for such a linkage which could be a mistake. It’s the *reductive* assumption, that things need to be broken down into their smallest parts in order to be best understood, and then reassembled. What if, instead, simple elements are sometimes best explained in terms of the wholes of which they are part? On this view, the cosmos is more like an evolving organism than an assembled machine; and in the same way that a person is common-sensically thought of as a psychosomatic unity, so the universe is some kind of unity too. Only it’s (unsurprisingly) hard to describe exactly in what way it is a unity – and so materialist or dualistic language tend to be our default positions, in the modern West, at least.

Even if inclined towards some kind of idealism, not all readers will want to follow Ward to his final conclusion, which defends a religious understanding of things. But, nonetheless, he offers a powerful challenge to the prevailing, although perhaps shaky, orthodoxy. The basic mistake made by materialists, following the explanatory successes of science, is to presume that science’s methodological materialism implies an underlying ontological materialism [ie, that all that exists is matter]. What is forgotten in this slippage is that science merely observes reality, whereas humans *participate* in reality, with values and purposes. Moreover, participation is, in fact, prior to the ability to make observations, as mind is prior to material appearances. All in all, it’s simply more commonsensical to hold an idealist view of reality, which includes values and purposes.

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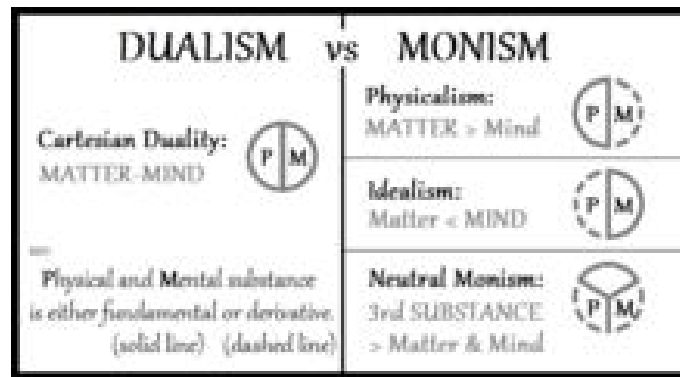
Double-aspect theory

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

For the Canadian constitutional theory, see [Double aspect](#)

In the [philosophy of mind](#), **double-aspect theory** is the view that the [mental](#) and the [physical](#) are two aspects of, or perspectives on, the same substance. It is also called **dual-aspect monism**.^[1] The theory's relationship to [neutral monism](#) is ill-defined, but one proffered distinction says that whereas neutral monism allows the context of a given group of neutral elements to determine whether the group is mental, physical, both, or neither, double-aspect theory requires the mental and the physical to be inseparable and mutually irreducible (though distinct).^[2]

Dual-aspect theory is akin to neutral monism. This diagram contrasts it with physicalism and idealism, as well as Cartesian dualism.



Double-aspect theorists include:-

- [Baruch Spinoza](#), who believed that the Existence had two aspects, Extension and Mind, which together were to be taken as two of an infinite set of attributes comprising God (or, Nature).
- There is a dual-aspect interpretation of [Immanuel Kant's noumenon](#).
- [Arthur Schopenhauer](#), who considered the fundamental aspects of reality to be Will and Representation.^[9]
- [David Bohm](#), who used [implicate and explicate order](#) as a means of displaying dual-aspects
- [Gustav Fechner](#)
- [George Henry Lewes](#)
- [Carl Gustav Jung](#)
- [Wolfgang Pauli](#)
- [John Polkinghorne](#)
- [Brian O'Shaughnessy](#) on the dual aspect theory of the Will
- [Thomas Nagel](#).^[4]
- [David Chalmers](#) who explores a double-aspect view of information, with similarities to [Kenneth Sayre's](#) information-based neutral monism.

Pauli-Jung conjecture

From the work of Wolfgang Pauli and Carl G. Jung has resulted in a philosophical approach, called by Harald Atmanspacher the *Pauli-Jung conjecture*, of dual-aspect monism which has a very specific further feature, namely that different aspects may show a [complementarity](#) in a quantum physical sense. That is, the Pauli-Jung conjecture implies that with regard to mental and physical states there may be incompatible descriptions of different parts that emerge from the whole.^[8] This stands in close analogy to [quantum physics](#)^[8] where complementary properties cannot be determined jointly with accuracy.

Atmanspacher further refers to [Paul Bernays'](#) views on complementarity in physics and in philosophy when he states that "Two descriptions are complementary if they mutually exclude each other, yet are both necessary to describe a situation exhaustively."^[8]

A Dual-Aspect Approach to the Mind-Body Problem

by Roger E. Bissell

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Down through the ages, numerous scientists, theologians, and philosophers have wrestled with the puzzle as to the ontological status of man's consciousness, or mind. It is a difficult, persistent, but fascinating problem; witness the volume of literature on the subject.

Two principal concerns of those who work in this area are what can be referred to as the problem of mentality and the problem of intentionality. The latter, which is beyond the scope of this paper, is the problem of the nature of the relation between man's consciousness and reality, especially that between knower and known. The former, also better known as the Mind-Body Problem, is the issue on which this paper focuses: the problem of the nature of the relationship between man's consciousness and his body.

The view of mind upheld in this paper is a particular version of the Dual-Aspect theory of mind, which may be briefly stated as

follows. Any given process of the mind is actually one and the same as some particular electro-chemical process of the brain, so that what appear to be two distinct processes are actually just two aspects of one and the same brain process. That is, they are actually just one and the same brain process viewed from two different cognitive perspectives.

This paper does not aim at a complete survey of all the various mind-body theories. Other theories of mind will be considered mainly in virtue of the problems they leave unsolved and which give rise to consideration of the Dual-Aspect theory. The primary task of this paper is rather a presentation of the Dual-Aspect theory of mind, the solution it offers to the mind-body problem, and defense of it against some major objections.

A second crucial thrust of this paper is a development of the implications of the Dual-aspect theory of mind for the free will problem, concerning the nature of human action. It will be shown that the Dual-Aspect theory leaves room for a conception of human action which is radically different in normative implications from that conception which is widely promulgated in the social sciences today.

I. The Duality of Mind and Body.

Throughout history, some sort of distinction between the mind and the body has been maintained by the vast majority of men. But there is and has been considerable difference of opinion about the nature of that distinction.

Some propose that we view mind and body as two radically different entities somehow coexisting and interacting in the same living person. This Cartesian view of mind as an irreducible primary, an immaterial sort of 'substance' or entity, fails to explain how such a substance and its interactions with the body can be detected, let alone how something immaterial can interact causally with something material, like the body.

Others propose that we instead view mind as process (or as a cohering group of processes). Some process theorists further assert that there is no such thing as an entity, that the body, like the mind, is instead a set of processes [1]. This view is based upon a straw-man conception of 'entity' as absolutely static and unchanging, and the consequent false dilemma which that sets up. [2]

Certain other process theorists, rejecting this extreme position, more plausibly maintain that the mind is a cohering set of mental processes, somehow distinct from physical brain processes, yet intimately related. A brief consideration of their respective difficulties will set the stage for the Dual-Aspect theory.

Process-Epiphenomenalism, or one-way process interaction, is the view that mind or mental processes have no "causal efficacy" with regard to the body (that the mind cannot contact the body). The mind is merely a passive by-product and concomitant of brain activity, like the shadow of one's body or the echo of one's voice. [3] This theory is caught in the cross-fire between Interactionism and Parallelism. If either part of its thesis is true, then its other half cannot be. It thus reduces to one of the other two theories: (a) If the evidence supports the claim that physical brain processes cause (contact) mental processes, then it also supports the claim that mental processes have a reciprocal causal power with respect to physical brain processes, as maintained by Interactionism; (b) If on the other hand, one denies the causal efficacy of mental processes, the same reasons also support a denial of the ability of brain processes to cause (contact) mental processes, as Parallelism contents. [4]

Process-Interactionism, or two-way process interaction, is the view that there are mental processes distinct from all other bodily processes, and which cause physical brain processes, and vice versa. [5] In literal form, this view meets two fundamental problems: (a) First, it asserts that a process causes another process, which is based upon the logically untenable mechanistic model of causality as a relationship between actions. [6] Instead, causality is the cause-effect relation between substances (or entities) and their activities [7] All processes are processes of entities, being carried out by an individual entity as a whole, by part of an individual entity, or by part or all of a number of individual entities. And whenever entities (or parts, or groups of them) act so as to produce by their actions a change in some other entity (or part, or groups), they are said to be causally interacting with the other one.

Actually, then, Interactionism is properly concerned with a human organism whose various parts interact so as to cause a physical brain process, and interacting with other parts of the organism, consequently cause a mental process; and vice versa. In other words, Process-Interactionism collapses into Substance-Interactionism, albeit a more plausible variant than the Cartesian view, since both substances here are of the same type (viz., material parts of the same living organism). But, short of identifying the mind with the body or brain, this new position has nothing to say about interaction of mind or mental process with the body or brain. (b) Secondly, the Process-Interactionism view contends that a process located in space (the physical brain process) causally interacts with a process not located in space (the mental process). The difficulty lies in the fact that processes do not have spatial locations, except in a secondary sense, owing to the fact that the entities undergoing those processes themselves possess spatial locations. [8] Thus, the question arises: Where is the part of the human body or brain which undergoes a mental process, separate and distinct from all physical brain processes? This location apparently has not yet been found, nor is it clear how it might be. The high degree of correlation established between these allegedly distinct processes by neurophysiological experiments seems to indicate that perhaps they are generated by one and the same part of the brain, for any given pair of mental and physical brain processes. [9] If so, then to view them as actually distinct processes is not the simplest explanation of their relation.

Process-Parallelism is the view that there is no causal interaction between mental and brain processes, that they co-exist parallel to one another in the same person without acting upon each other in any way. [10] But this view is not more likely to be true merely because processes are not the kind of things which can interact. Demonstrating the conceptual error in Process-Interactionism does not thereby establish the existence of such distinct processes occurring parallel to one another. It only proves that if such distinct mental processes exist, they do not interact with physical brain. If they do exist, furthermore, they must be processes of some part of the human body which does not interact with the part carrying out the physical brain process--at least at that moment in time. And again the problem of how and where to locate the part of the brain carrying out the allegedly distinct mental processes seems insurmountable.

The way out of this impasse is to reject the common premise of Interactionism and Parallelism: that there is any such thing as a mental process, distinct from any and all physical bodily processes, or a mind distinct from the body. This is the central point of the Dual-Aspect theory. A mental process and the physical brain process correlated with it are one and the same brain process, as viewed from different cognitive perspectives; i.e., the mental and the physical are but two distinct aspects of one and the same process, as viewed through two different cognitive modes.

Despite their common rejection of the claim that there are actually two distinct entities, organs or processes involved in the mind-body relationship, Dual-Aspect theories differ considerably as to which aspects (of an entity, organ or process) share the duality. In the section that follows, a clear distinction will be made between the version of the Dual-Aspect theory this paper supports and earlier, more vulnerable forms of that theory.

II. The Dual-Aspect Theory.

The simplest version of this theory maintains that mind and body are not two distinct entities, as Cartesians claim, but rather two aspects of one underlying entity, the human organism, or human being. [11] A second, similar version holds that mind and brain are two aspects of one and the same organ of a human being. [12]

Both the mind-body and mind-brain Dual-Aspect theories, however, are open to the same objection. What evidence is there for the existence of this mysterious "underlying" organism or organ? Merely postulating its existence in order to provide its attributes with a metaphysical "foundation" is insufficient. If we are not directly aware of this organism or organ, but merely of its "aspects" (the mind and body, or brain), and cannot prove that it exists, then we have no logical right to assert that it exists. [13]

Such a dilemma is fostered by the ontological and epistemological pre-suppositions of Locke's representative realist theory of knowledge. With the medievals and the naive realists, Locke held the position that an entity is a unitary, unknowable substance, external to and supporting its various qualities. This assumption that an entity must be ontologically simple in its nature was built

upon an illicit interpretation of observations about the logically simple subject of which many different properties were predicated. [14]

The error was to hypostatize this logical relation between a unitary subject and its many predicates, and thus to assume that the epistemological distinction between an entity and its properties was actually an ontological distinction between a unitary, simple entity and its numerous properties. [15] The direct unknowability of such a unitary, simple entity follows once it is pointed out that no such simple-natured entity is presented to our perception: if it exists and "supports" its properties, it must be external to them and beyond the range of our direct awareness.

Thus, because of a confusion between language and logic on the one hand and reality on the other, Locke is led to assert his representative realist theory. We are not directly aware of entities in the external world; we are only directly aware of their aspects or qualities which we apprehend as mental contents or 'ideas.' To gain knowledge of the external world, Locke maintained, it was necessary to proceed by inference from one's 'ideas' to their unseen sources.

Berkeley's idealism is thus not so radical a departure from Locke's position as it might appear. Idealism accepts the Lockean premise of our having direct awareness only of 'ideas' and of the necessity of inferring the external world's existence from those 'ideas.' It merely denies the possibility of such an inference and, consequently, the existence of an external world.

Hume's skeptical position grants that we are directly aware of the external world, in opposition to both Locke and Berkeley. He placed external reality not in entities, however, but in aspects or qualities, which somehow "bundle" together to form the material objects we encounter. Hume viewed entities in the same way Berkeley viewed the external world: as unnecessary, unjustified, unjustifiable notions. We are directly aware only of aspects, not entities, Hume says; and since inferring the existence of entities from their aspects is impossible, entities do not exist.

This "bundle" theory of things in the world has application to the mind-body problem, too, particularly to the versions of the Dual-Aspect theory now under scrutiny. To repeat (and Hume and Berkeley would probably concur): if we are not directly aware of this organism or organ, but merely of its "aspects" (the mind and body, or brain), and cannot prove that it exists, then we have no logical right to assert that it exists. But now, with Hume, we face a fundamental mystery: how do the mind and body manage to cohere in a "bundle," if there is not some entity tying them together, so to speak, of which they are both aspects?

The way out of this blind alley is to reject the premise shared by Locke, Berkeley, Hume, the Dual-Aspect theories just discussed, and many of the key figures in modern philosophy: the assumption that we are not directly aware of the organism and organ "underlying" the mind, body and brain. Quite the contrary, we are directly aware of the organism and the organ: the organism is the human body with all its processes and other aspects, including the mind; the organ is the human brain with all its processes and other aspects, including the mind.

One is no longer compelled, as Locke, to claim the existence of an indivisible, mysterious, directly unknowable organism or organ, in order to satisfy his metaphysical bias as a reality, who holds that entities are in some sense the primary existents. Nor is one saddled with the form of direct realism known as "naive realism," which fails to account for the physical and physiological processes mediating between the known object and the knowing subject, and which fails to distinguish between object and content of cognition.

There is a third alternative, which is neither the indirect, intuitive apprehension of a copy of external reality (as held by representative realism), nor the direct, intuitive apprehension of external reality itself (as held by naive realism). Instead of these, we must use as the basis for the Dual-Aspect theory the direct, referential awareness of Critical Realism. To quote Roy W. Sellars, an outstanding proponent of this form of realism: "Knowledge should not claim to be being, nor like being. It is ofbeing and reflects being." [16]

That is, our cognitive contents should neither be confused with the objects of cognition, nor should they be regarded necessarily as being copies of the objects of cognition. Instead, they should merely be regarded as having been causally generated from the object of cognition, and thus bearing some discoverable correlation to that object, a correlation which permits us with sufficient justification to cognitively identify the contents with the object of cognition. [17] With such an epistemological foundation, we can proceed beyond these more naive forms of Dual-Aspect theory.

A problem arises, however. If we accept the view of the mind as an aspect of the brain (and of the body), the simple dual-aspect view being considered has dissolved, leaving only a single aspect, the mind. We now must find some other aspect to pair with the mind, if we are to formulate a Dual-Aspect theory, involving the mind as one of two aspects. There is such an aspect and such a theory, but they can be discussed more coherently after first considering individual processes. [18]

In this context, consider the solution to the apparent impasse at which we arrived in the previous section. This Dual-Aspect theory holds that a so-called mental process, and the physical process of the brain with which it is intimately associated, are not two distinct processes, but rather are two aspects of one and the same brain process. The two aspects of that brain process are the mental aspect and the physical (electro-chemical) aspect.

Such a formulation avoids the error of many of the Identity theorists, [19] whereby the two aspects held to be identical are the mental process and the brain process, a view which entails the same difficulties as the previously discussed Dual-Aspect theories. How do we know that there is a single, underlying process? The process in question is in fact the brain process, so it cannot be one of the aspects.

We are aware of the brain process extrospectively when we view its physical aspects scientifically, and we sometimes equate it with those aspects. But the term "brain process" contains different information from the term "physical process of the brain

The former refers to a process in terms of the part of the entity which carries it out, while the latter refers to a process carried out by that entity in terms of the kind of process being carried out. Thus, it is the term "physical process of the brain" (or "physical brain process") which is properly paired with the term "mental process" (or "mental brain process").

It is true that we are unable to view the mental aspect of brain processes by extrospection, just as we are unable to grasp the physical aspect of brain processes introspectively. We shall never be able to do these things, any more than we could ever see the length of a table with our hands, or feel the length of a table with our eyes.

Yet, just as a child identifies seen length with felt length, through a combination of evidence and (at least implicit) reasoning, so too does the Dual-Aspect theory propose that we identify mental processes and physical brain processes (though by a more explicit reasoning process). The common factor here is the presence of data which are correlated across different cognitive modes, and the decision to economize by regarding the data as coming from a single source.

A good question to ponder at this juncture is this: If a child's seen-and-felt length identification is so similar to our introspected-and-extrospected brain process identification, then why has the latter identification taken so long to suggest itself, and even then, to adults, not children?

The answer appears to lie in the location of our cognitive organs, and the practical importance in obtaining correlated information about them. The sensory organs being located on the periphery of our nervous system, provide us our first cognitive contact with reality. They are of crucial importance in our learning how to deal discriminatively with the world in our locomotion of body or limbs (to run, to grasp, etc.). From a very early age, the coordination of these senses is simply vital.

On the other hand, even though men have for ages utilized their organs of conceptual extrospection and, to a lesser degree, introspection (which we may reasonably presume to be certain parts of the brain), the study of the physical processes of the brain has begun only recently in history. For only recently have the religious taboos and the inadequate conceptual and technological

developments in psychology been successfully overcome to permit the inauguration of such studies. Furthermore, once the study of these processes did get under way, along with the study of the introspective reports of mental processes, it was for highly specialized purposes (medical, neurophysiological, etc.). To this point at least, such studies have been held to be of far less than universal practical importance to men.

It is these special circumstances which suggest that only within the past century or less has the possibility of a mental-physical Dual-Aspect theory, and the ontological parsimony it provides, seemed a scientifically and philosophically tenable alternative to the traditional Interactionist and reductionist theories. The fact that the Dual-Aspect theory is a genuine alternative to reductionism, however, needs further clarification.

III. The Non-Reductive Status of the Dual-Aspect Theory.

There are a number of interesting consequences following from the acceptance of the Dual-Aspect Theory. Conclusions that once seemed absurd or wrongheaded now take on a new light, in view of the thesis that a mental process and a physical brain process are actually both merely aspects of one brain process.

One such conclusion is that a mental process is actually a physical process. That is, since the term "mental process" actually refers to a mental brain process also possessing physical (electrochemical) aspects, a mental process is also properly referable to as a "physical brain process."

A number of philosophers have rejected this conclusion in the past, for it was previously associated with a position referred to as "reductive materialism." As did the Dual-Aspect theorists, the reductive materialists maintained that a mental process is actually a physical brain process; but here the resemblance between reductionism and the Dual-Aspect theory ends.

The reductive materialists seek above all to deny the reality of anything other than "matter" (material entities) and actions and interrelationships thereof. As such, they maintain that spiritual or mental phenomena do not really exist, that they are illusory, mere appearance, a distortion, etc.; and that what appears to be a mental phenomenon is really nothing but a physical phenomenon. They seek to strip away the illusory, to shrink or reduce our view of reality so that it excludes the realm of mental or spiritual "appearances." [20]

As a logical corollary, the reductionists also seem to obliterate the distinction between different species of physical brain processes. Since there is no real basis upon which to distinguish certain brain processes from other brain processes (except the "unreal appearance" of their being "mental"), the reductionists have reduced the number of conceptual classifications we must retain when thinking about brain processes. They have said there is not really a separate group of brain processes that we call "mental processes." We are mistaken if we fail to realize that they are really nothing but brain processes. [21]

In neither of these senses is the Dual-Aspect theory guilty of reductionism. Like other anti-reductionists, the Dual-Aspect theorists maintain that mental phenomena are real, and that there is no illusion or "mere appearance" involved. And they also share the belief that mental processes are a special subcategory of natural processes, distinguishable from all others by some valid (reality-derived) criteria. In short, they agree that mental processes are not simply nothing but physical processes. But here again is where the similarity ends.

First, the Dual-Aspect theory holds that mental processes are actually certain physical brain processes as we are aware of them introspectively, i.e., that "mental" refers to the fully real, introspectable aspects of those particular physical brain processes. Our awareness of them is the form in which we are aware of certain brain processes introspectively, just as our awareness of the physical aspects is the form in which we are aware of those brain processes extrospectively.

It has been the error of reductionists to grant a cognitively monopoly to extrospection. In correcting this error, we must realize that one must be aware of reality (viz., brain processes) in some form, but may be aware of reality in any form (and not just some one

particular form exclusively). [22] Just as both visual perception and tactual perception are different but equally valid forms for apprehending real aspects of entities (such as their length), which can be correlated with one another, so too the Dual-Aspect theory maintains, are extrospection and introspection different but equally valid forms for apprehending real aspects of brain processes.

Secondly, the Dual-Aspect theory holds that mental processes are actually mental physical brain processes. As such they are not merely nothing but physical brain processes, but rather physical brain processes of a certain special kind, distinguished from all other physical brain processes by virtue of their introspectable, mental aspect. Since this mental aspect is a real aspect of those brain processes, it provides a valid basis for making the distinction, a basis derived from reality.

Thus it is that the Dual-Aspect theory avoids the stigma of reductionism. Even as it insists that mental processes are actually physical processes, it equally steadfastly denies that they are nothing but physical processes. The Dual-Aspect theory is thus basically opposed not only to traditional anti-reductionist alternatives, but to reductionism as well.

In pushing the claim, however, that mental and physical brain processes are identical (i.e., one and the same brain process), Dual-Aspect theorists (and Identity theorists) have invited attacks which point out that the equation of perception or thought with the brain activity accompanying them is unempirical and illogical. [23]

In response to such attacks, this much must be granted: it is unempirical and illogical to equate the mental and physical aspects of a given brain process, to say that they are one and the same aspect of that brain process. But the Dual-Aspect theory does not do this. It says merely that a mental process and an electrochemical brain process, however different they may appear, are actually one and the same process.

The reason why a single process can be presented to our awareness in two forms so radically different is provided by the Dual-Aspect theory. In the one case, we see its mental aspect, because we are apprehending it through introspection; and in the other case, we see its physical aspect, because we are apprehending it extrospectively. [24] Since, however, the mental process and the physical process are the same process, and in that sense are identical, we are aware of the same unique process in both cases.

What we are actually saying is that a given brain process, which happens to be both physical and mental in character, is itself. This is far from a failure to recognize the basic difference between the two aspects of that brain process' identity.

As for the relationship between a mental process and a brain process, they too may well be one and the same process. That is, there is no absurdity in identifying them, any more than in saying that a given moving physical entity and a given physical entity are identical. Here, as before, we are merely seeking to affirm the fact that when we apprehend the process' (or entity's) identity, we are apprehending the process (or entity) itself.

People who reject the identity of mental processes with physical brain processes often do so because such a Dual-Aspect or Identity theory seems to entail reductive materialism. Admittedly, such materialists do maintain some sort of Dual-Aspect or Identity theory, but that is not the essential part of their theory. The component of reductive materialism distinguishing it from the Dual-Aspect theory is its view that anything other than physical aspects of reality is unreal, particularly, mental aspects. This, together with the consequent rejection of introspection as a valid means of knowing reality, is its essential characteristic.

Thus it is not necessary to deny the identity of mental processes and physical brain processes in order to reject the reductive materialist hypothesis. All one need to is reject the view of the physical as the sole reality, and the view of introspection as a distorting, noncognitive form of awareness. This is precisely what the Dual-Aspect theory does.

If the Dual-Aspect theory is clearly a non-reductionist theory, however, it is still far from clear in light of earlier remarks whether a view of man as a non-deterministic free agent can be consistent with it. The remaining two sections will deal with objections to and implications of the fact that mind and mental processes lack the causal efficacy often ascribed to them by those maintaining a

doctrine of freedom of the will.

IV. The Causal Inefficacy of Mind.

The non-Humean conception of causation developed earlier in this paper provides a clear justification for maintaining that mental processes and mind have no causal efficacy. Even if mental processes and mind actually were processes and process-complexes distinct from physical brain processes and complexes of such processes, they could not cause physical brain processes, any more than physical brain processes could cause them.

The only causal agent involved in the human organism--specifically, its organ, the brain--more specifically, those parts of the brain which interact, engaging in processes, some of which have conscious or mental aspects. Only entities, or parts thereof, may be said to cause actions or processes. And mental processes (i.e., mental brain processes) and "mind" (the complex of mental brain processes, as viewed introspectively) are simply not entities.

But if, in fact, the Dual-Aspect theory is correct, mental processes and mind are not processes and process-complexes at all, distinct from the physical brain processes and complexes of such processes. They instead are one and the same as the physical processes and process-complexes. They are those physical processes and process-complexes as known introspectively; our awareness of them is our awareness of the mental aspect of those physical processes and process-complexes.

How, then, shall we understand the seeming causal interaction between mental processes and other brain processes below the level of conscious awareness? Simply by recognizing that various parts of the brain carry out processes by which they interact with each other. One part of the brain, carrying out a processes which may or may not be of sufficient complexity and/or intensity to possess a mental aspect, causes another part of the brain to carry out a process, which itself may or may not possess a mental aspect.

Thus, it is not the conscious or mental aspect of any such brain processes which causes other brain processes, or vice versa. It is the various parts of the brain carrying out processes possessing those aspects, which are the causal agents. (Similar remarks can be made regarding what seem to be mind-body interactions.)

This causal inefficacy of mental processes and of mind has led many people to protest in the following manner: What if consciousness (or mind) never existed? How could you claim human history would have been the same without consciousness or mind? How can you claim that consciousness has no role to play in the course of human events? [25]

The error in such an objection is what I call the "what if" fallacy, or the fallacy of "logical possibility." Its proponents ask us to imagine what a phenomenon would be like without certain of its attributes. [26] The reply is that there simply is no evidence that it is possible for conscious-level brain processes to exist without the attribute of consciousness.

Brain processes and their attribute of consciousness are metaphysically inseparable. Consciousness is a necessary aspect of brain processes at a sufficiently high level of complexity and/or intensity. It can no more exist apart from those processes than can the color, mass, or volume of the human body, or the incandescence of an iron rod of certain high temperature; [27] nor can those brain processes exist apart from consciousness.

Thus, to speculate on how such brain processes might proceed without the attribute of consciousness is an exercise in futility. Consciousness is a natural, necessary attribute of those brain processes at or above that particular level. Those brain processes would not be those brain processes, were they not also possessed of their attribute of consciousness. Had consciousness never existed, it would be because brain processes of a sufficiently high level of complexity and intensity had never existed--otherwise, consciousness would have to have existed.

Without consciousness, human history could not have been the same, simply because humans would not have been able to carry

out brain processes of a sufficiently high level to direct actions we would characterize as "human" (let alone, as "animal"). But the course of human events is not directed by consciousness per se. It is directed by conscious human beings, i.e., by human beings whose brains engage in processes possessing the attribute of consciousness.

Thus it is that consciousness (or mental processes) and mind are causally inefficacious. Moreover, they are uncaused as well (except in the derivative respect whereby the brain processes of which they are aspects, are themselves caused). What remains to be established, though, is whether man, whose mind is impotent with regard to his actions, can be said, in any meaningful sense, to be "free."

V. Mind, Self, Will, and "Freedom."

We have established that the mind, considered as activity or process, is not a set of mental processes distinct from a set of accompanying physical brain processes. Instead, it is that set of physical brain processes, viewed introspectively.

From the standpoint not of activity, but of capacity to act, we also employ the term "mind" in common parlance, as if it were a capacity distinct from the capacity of the brain to carry out its processes. But the mind, qua mental capacity, is merely the capacity of the brain to carry out mental brain processes. As such, it is one and the same as the brain's capacity for carrying out physical brain processes of a sufficiently high degree of complexity and/or intensity that they take on a mental aspect.

The direct experience of the brain's capacity to carry out mental brain processes is the awareness of one's ego. That is, one's ego is one's capacity to carry out mental processes, as viewed introspectively. One is aware of a feeling that one can carry out certain mental brain processes.

From such direct, introspective data--the awareness of one's ego--one eventually infers conceptually that there is a persisting, abiding capacity of the organism to carry out such mental processes. This inference is how one arrives at the concept of mind qua capacity.

Entailed by the awareness of the ego, moreover, is the awareness of self--i.e. of one's self. The concept of 'self' per se does not necessarily imply a self-conscious being. It merely implies a being which is the object of some action which that same being has taken.

When the action is introspection, a mental brain process that is cognitively directed toward another mental brain process in the same organism, then that organism is being aware of its self. It is aware that, as an organism, it is introspectively viewing that same organism while it is carrying out another mental brain process.

So self is not some mysterious personalizing accompaniment of the human organism. It is the human organism, considered insofar as it is both the agent and the object of some action. Self-awareness (awareness by an organism of that same organism) occurs when that action is introspection.

One's conscious self is the human organism that one is, considered insofar as it is both the agent and object of consciousness (mental brain processes). Thus, one's ego is to one's conscious self as a human organism's mental capacities are to that organism--namely, in a relation of capacity to organism, known directly in the former instance, and inferentially in the latter.

Like the ego, the will also exists in a specific relation to one's conscious self, and more generally to oneself as a conscious, minded organism. This can best be seen by considering the nature and cause of human action, in the context of the specific way in which it exemplifies the action-principles common to all living organisms.

Like all living organisms, a human being "...is a complex integrate of hierarchically organized structures and functions...controlled in part by their own regulators and in part by regulators on higher levels of the hierarchy." In order to remain alive, an organism's

component parts must "function in such a way as to preserve the integrity of that structure..." This function is self-generated, generated by the organism and its components--not by the outside physical factors impinging upon it. [28]

The continued life--i.e., the continued structural and functional integrity--of the organism, is the principle which is the ultimate regulator and director of the organism's life functions. In other words, an organism's actions are self-regulated toward its continued existence. [29]

Thus, life is an attribute of certain entities: the capacity to engage in self-sustaining and self-generated (and regulated) activity--activity which results in the continuance of the structural-functional integrity of those entities, and which is caused by those entities (and directed toward that end).

A distinction is implicit here between the capacity to act so that a certain goal is achieved, and the capacity to direct that action, monitoring it and correcting for deviation from (or obstacles to) the goal of that action. These capacities for self-generated and self-regulated action are not, however, separate capacities for separate types of action, but rather two analytically distinguishable aspects of one and the same capacity and action. (This in turn indicates how the nature of the will is to be characterized shortly.)

The higher the complexity of the function carried out, the higher the complexity of structure needed to carry it out, in order that all the subunits required to participate in the function have the necessary regulation. A network to carry signals to "trigger" activities on lower levels and to "monitor" data from those lower levels, a network including the brain and nervous system, is needed. The higher the level of complexity and/or intensity of brain processes involved in organismic activity, the more likely that they will take on a mental, or conscious aspect. [30]

At the perceptual level of consciousness, one is aware of alternatives on the range-of-the-moment, but one is bound by one's pleasure-pain mechanism, in the selection from among those alternatives. At the conceptual level, though, one is aware of long-range as well as short-range alternatives and their consequences. One is able to deliberate on the merits of the various alternatives beyond just the immediate pleasure or pain they yield, and to make one's choice on such a basis.

One is also aware that one has the power or capacity to make such a deliberative (rather than merely appetitive) choice. One is aware of a feeling that one can regulate certain brain processes--i.e., make a choice of which action to take. This direct experience of the brain's capacity to regulate mental brain processes, and related bodily actions, is referred to as one's will.

One's will, then, is one's capacity to regulate one's mental processes viewed introspectively. One's will is the regulative aspect of one's ego. The awareness of one's ego is inseparable from the awareness of one's will. For every consciously directed action that a man is actually capable of taking, he implicitly or explicitly is aware that "I can do this, if I want to (will to)."

From such direct, introspective data (the awareness of one's will), one eventually infers conceptually that there is a persisting, abiding capacity of one's organism to regulate its mental processes. This is how one arrives at the concept of volition (qua capacity). Volition is the regulative aspect of mind.

It was noted above that one's ego was to one's conscious self as mind was to a "minded" organism--the relation being capacity to organism (as known directly and by inference, respectively). The same is true from the standpoint of the regulative concepts just discussed. One's will is to the conscious, willing self as volition is to a volitionally "minded" organism.

From this, the relation of the will to other aspects of the mental realm is clear enough. But what bearing does this have upon the problem of free will? Does it conclusively prove or disprove free will? What, in fact, can it mean for a man's will to be "free"?

The doctrine of free will maintains that man is capable of himself causing certain actions, no antecedent conditions being sufficient for his causing just that action. What this means is that man's will allows him to cause certain actions (or make certain choices)

without anything else external or internal causing him to do so. [31]

"Free will," thus formulated, appears to be simply the principle present in all living organisms--namely, the principle of self-generated (self-caused) actions--as found on the level of self-conscious human beings. All living organisms are self-determining and in this sense are "free;" but only man has a will, so only man's self-determination may properly be referred to as the possessing of "free will."

The difference between man and the lower animals is not that man alone is self-determining. All living beings are self-determining; i.e., all living beings generate their own actions themselves. Man's distinction in this respect is that he is self-determining psychologically.

Man has the ability, by virtue of his capacity for self-awareness (introspection) to integrate his consciousness into the top of his organismic hierarchy, allowing it to be more than just an automatic system of signals of danger and safety, pain and well-being, etc. With the awareness of future consequences and alternatives, with the awareness that he is a being who can weigh the alternatives and choose the one he thinks best, a man's consciousness becomes subject to his control. He is able to use it actively, instead of automatically responding to its data.

It may be asked whether there is not in fact some antecedent condition causing a man to choose to direct his consciousness rather than abandon the controls. This is tantamount to suggesting that perhaps man and all other living organisms do not choose or select their actions at all, perhaps instead they are merely manipulated in ways too subtle to detect by the casual observer. What is being questioned here is essentially whether there really is any form of causation operative in living organisms other than action-reaction, mechanistic causation.

Physics has long ago rejected the "closed system" view of living organisms, in favor of an "open system" view, where the organism has a natural tendency to build up greater and greater levels of complexity in its structure and function, and to maintain the integrity of structure and function thus achieved. [33] This integrative tendency, directing the actions of the organism, would seem to be the basic physical paradigm for not efficient causation, but final causation, or goal-directedness, which is organism-centered and directed.

Thus, upon the currently available psychological, biological, and physical evidence, it would seem that man's free will, his capacity to direct his actions as an organism (especially his conscious actions), is a fact. It certainly cannot be dismissed so easily as some are willing and anxious to do.

Most importantly, in this context, man's freedom of will is thoroughly compatible with the Dual-Aspect theory of mind. It is not the mind, nor the will, which chooses man's actions. These are merely man's capacity to act mentally and to choose those actions. The cause of man's actions, according to the Dual-Aspect theory, is man, as a minded, willing organism.

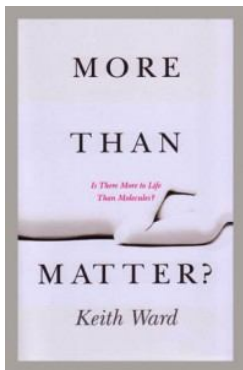
Ward situates himself towards the latter end of the spectrum, in a form of idealism which can also be accurately categorized as a form of *monism* and as a form of *dualism*. It could be called "dual aspect idealism" (p.103). Ward's argument is not that there is a spiritual substance, but that consciousness is the "inner aspect" of matter, especially in particular configurations of matter (drawing here on process philosophy). And so it is monistic in the sense that he does not view consciousness as rooted in a separate substance which belongs to or resides in a separate world from matter. But it is dualistic inasmuch as consciousness and qualia are not reducible to material entities or describable in material terms, but have a genuine existence. And so, while many of us may have thought along similar lines and considered ourselves non-reductive physicalists, Ward argues that the viewpoint he advocates should not be considered "physicalism" at all in the sense that there is no way to describe thoughts, feelings, or perceptions in physical terms.

Ward argues the case powerfully and, in my view (at least for the moment) persuasively. The central point of his case is that the experience of seeing red (literally, but also metaphorically) is not reducible to any sort of physical description – whether wavelengths of light or firing of neural synapses. Enjoying the beauty of a symphony is a different sort of thing than any description of the frequencies of vibrations. Consciousness is its own sort of thing, it is real, and it adds properties to the universe, such as values and meanings. Far from being things that ought to be disputed based on scientific analyses, consciousness and its properties are in fact the things that we can be most certain of, because we experience them most directly. And so inasmuch as one understands his talk about the soul not as a spiritual “substance” but in terms of consciousness and spiritual “properties” not reducible to (even if inseparable from) physical things, Descartes can indeed be defended and rehabilitated.

Against the Ghost in the Machine: An appreciation of Keith Ward’s ‘More than Matter’

March 18, 2014 Kyle Projects

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In his book *More than Matter*, Keith Ward offers a conversational but thorough defense of idealism, focusing particularly on philosopher Gilbert Ryle’s critique of Cartesian dualism from his book *The Concept of Mind*. To put it briefly, Ryle believed Descartes to have created a myth about a “ghost in the machine,” [1] a myth in which “the mind is a separate, hidden world connected arbitrarily to the body.” [2] Professor Ward thinks this an unfair reading of Descartes and sets out, in part, to correct it. It’s worth quoting at some length a late passage that summarizes Ward’s position and demonstrates the way he chooses to consistently frame it. He writes,

When the Aristotelian philosophy was replaced by the more mechanistic approach of classical science, it became difficult for philosophers to integrate personal values and purposes into the increasingly influential world view of natural science. Cartesian dualism was one symptom of this difficulty, separating mental substance from material substance in such a way that it was difficult to see how one could interact with the other. As I have emphasized, Descartes believed in such integration, but did not find a plausible way of formulating it. It was to take the discovery of evolution to do so, with the picture it opened up of a gradually more complex and emergent process leading to the development of mind as an increasingly autonomous inner aspect of matter. [3]

So for Ward, mind and matter are separate but integrated aspects of reality. Thus he calls his position “dual-aspect” idealism, because “it stresses the importance of the material aspect as a means of allowing the potentialities of mind[, the mental aspect,] to be expressed.” [4] I was reminded in this philosophical discussion of William Temple’s theological claim about the sacramental character of the universe. Temple writes, “the order ... is spirit first and spirit last, with matter as the effectual expression or symbolic instrument of spirit.” [5] So it is for Ward with matter and minds. Material reality is essential because it provides a medium in which minds can find their fullest expression. That it took, we think, billions of years for finite minds to arrive on the scene does not necessarily

undermine this primacy of mind. We must allow that the *intention* for the development of minds has been around since the beginning. But back to that in a moment.

Ward is clear about the stakes of this argument; he believes it is part of “a major intellectual battle” with materialists over the “distinctive reality and value of human minds.” [6] His motivation derives in large part from concerns about the person. For instance, if we believe a mind is different from a brain, we must carefully account for the continuity of “experiences” and “actions” that give minds “their unique identity.” [7] And if we believe a mind is more than a sophisticated computer program, then we must account for human consciousness and moral freedom to make clear why purpose and intention belong in our metaphysical speculation even as they have been excluded, and rightly so, from scientific discourse. Indeed Ward’s ambitious goal is to develop an account that is consonant with the picture of physical reality that twentieth-century science built up *without* discarding the concept of mind as illusory or superfluous.

I find Ward’s picture of the individual human mind to be quite compelling. His preferred language, drawn from Whitehead, [8] of mind as inner nature that gives meaning and purpose to our lives provides an evocative and, I think, reasonably satisfactory answer to the mind-body problem. I think Ward argues that the error with Ryle’s “ghost in the machine” is essentially false analogy. The brain doesn’t throw a series of discrete mental levers to animate the body’s arms and legs; rather the mind, as inner nature of the body, simply realizes its purposes through, among other things, physical movement. If the connection is mysterious for lack of a mechanism, then so be it. Action, no less than volition, is continuous, says Ward: “The mistake is not in positing mental acts. The mistake lies in thinking of mental acts as countable, discrete episodes.” [9] We find that we simply cannot expect the concepts and language of mechanics to give adequate account of mind and body at work together; we need an integrative, not a reductive, picture.

Where I find myself in the weeds with this book is those places where we move from minds as the unseen inner nature of persons to minds as “more real than matter” [10] and as “the basic character of reality.” [11] What I appreciated about Ward’s move from microcosm to macrocosm was the argument’s analogical consistency. Consider the following passage:

Whereas an older generation of scientists and philosophers thought the universe was rather like a watch, many now regard the universe as more like an organism. It grows and develops, and its first stages can only be properly understood when its completely developed state is perceived ... [C]onscious personal life and the material structure of the universe fit together in a coherent way if we suppose that the physical universe has the purpose of producing personal consciousness as the natural realization of its inherent and original capacities. [12]

So just as human minds are the natural and ultimate movers and shakers of our bodies, so a personal Cosmic Mind or Hegel’s impersonal Absolute Spirit may be at work animating the material universe toward the ultimate purpose of conscious life. The “fine-tuned” nature of universal physical constants are just one example of how the results of physical science provide some support for this view, though of course in a speculative way.

What somehow rubbed me the wrong way in this discussion was to say that all this shows that mind is *more real* than matter. I can understand, as he says elsewhere “more basic, more causally efficacious,” [13] given the primacy of the mental aspect over the physical in their interplay as described above. But more real seems to me to undermine that essential mutuality. I am not convinced that because minds influence reality-in-itself we should therefore create a hierarchy of realness. That seems to me to needlessly antagonize the physical scientists Ward wants to be in conversation with.

Allow me now a short digression to introduce a final thought experiment that I hope might be helpful for some. I just returned from a long weekend in Philadelphia with my oldest friend. Carl was the one who introduced me to the work of British humorist Douglas Adams, who became a shared passion and who gave us much to laugh, cry, and think about for the roughly twenty years we’ve known each

other. Apparently I couldn't finish reading *More than Matter* in Carl's home without putting Ward's ideas in concrete conversation with Adams's famously materialist perspective. In my imagination, Adams, and sometimes his friend Richard Dawkins, play the interlocutory roles for me that Ryle, and sometimes Wittgenstein, play in the book, for Ward.

Among many possible critical apparatus from Douglas Adams's two major literary worlds, the one that occurred to me as most relevant to Ward's discussion is the Total Perspective Vortex, a device that appears in Adams's novel *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*. The Vortex forced its victims to see "in one instant the whole infinity of creation and [themselves] in relation to it." [14] Adams playfully proposes that the experience would be fatal, given the utter insignificance of any individual being against so vast a cosmic backdrop.

I had to wonder what Ward's idealist philosophy might make of the Vortex. "Space," Adams famously writes, "is big, Really big. You just won't believe how vastly, hugely mind-bogglingly big it is." [15] And so of course the Vortex is a bit demoralizing, because the seven octillion atoms, roughly 10^{28} , in one human being [16] still make for a puny numerator when dividing by, say, 10^{82} , the high end of the estimate of the number of atoms in the known universe. [17] Any individual is a zero in such a framework, but idealism tells us that this materialist calculus is all wrong. A snapshot of the intergalactic night sky, however detailed, can never offer Total Perspective if we believe that all we see is not all there is.

If matter is *not* all of what there is, *not* all of who we are, then our relative size in the snapshot changes. Ward writes, "We should not think that it took the birth and death of millions of star-systems and the extermination of millions of extinct organisms just to produce one man drinking beer in a pub. However, in one sense that man is more valuable than all those galaxies, because there was no one to appreciate their beauty, whereas at least he enjoys his pint." [18] So an idealist Total Perspective Vortex might well weight an individual's significance by his or her ability to realize the universal purposes of consciousness, beauty, love, and maybe sacrifice, and to continue their development. Thus, the little "you are here" dot grows, becoming bigger than the sum of our body parts. Ward again: "We may think we exist on the last half-page of the many-volume book that is the history of the universe. But if there are even more volumes still to come, that changes the picture entirely." [19]

Eerdmans March 9, 2011 [Author Guest Posts](#)

“Debunking Simplicity” by Keith Ward



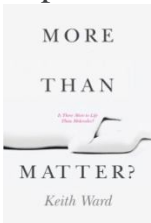
Keith Ward

*Keith Ward is a fellow of the British Academy, a professorial fellow of Heythrop College, London, and an Anglican priest. He is the author of more than thirty books, including *The Big Questions in Science and Religion*, *Why There Almost Certainly is a God: Doubting Dawkins*, *Is Religion Dangerous*, and the soon-to-be-released *More than Matter? Is There More to Life than Molecules?**

I have taught philosophy in British universities for over forty-five years, and it still seems to me that the main job of philosophy is not to make things clear but rather to show how immensely puzzling even the simplest human beliefs are — and how little the human mind understands even the most basic truths we tend to accept.

Aligning with this purpose, I wrote *More than Matter?* not to prove some theory about the human mind but to show how very difficult it is to decide what human persons really are. People frequently hold one of two opposing and simple views: (1) that humans are just complex material organisms and that consciousness is a by-product of the brain, and (2) that persons are purely spiritual beings whose brains are instruments for expressing thoughts and feelings.

More than Matter shows that these simple views are by far *too* simple. They do not suffice because they do not answer the problem of consciousness, which asks how inner experiences and responsible actions relate to our physical brains and bodies.



More Than Matter?

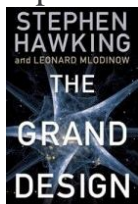
I believe that we all have uniquely personal experiences and that we are free and to some extent responsible for shaping them and the world around us. If this is true, persons *must* be more than bundles of physical particles acting solely in accordance with the laws of physics. Particles, even in huge, organized bundles, have no experiences and do not decide for themselves how they are going to act.

Materialism — the theory that only the physical is truly real — is quite widely accepted among philosophers and scientists. But it entails that human lives have no objective purpose or goal, that human values are subjective matters of taste, and that no one is really responsible for their actions. I think that a general acceptance of this view leads, when it is fully thought through, to a sense of

personal futility and social irresponsibility. Thus an argument for materialism is not only an intellectual argument, but it is also a spiritual argument.

Idealism — the theory that matter depends upon consciousness — provides a goal for human life, affirms that there are objective values (the goal is to realize those values), and holds people responsible for many of their actions. If idealism does this, deciding if it is true becomes very important. But is an assertion of its truth just wish fulfillment?

In my book, I have tried to produce a set of cumulative arguments for the reasonableness of what I call “dual-aspect idealism.” This view suggests that the physical universe depends on a cosmic consciousness, which produces human minds as products of material evolution. This process generates a new form of reality — human consciousness, closely tied to its physical basis and expression but capable of existing in differing forms of “matter.”



Some materialist arguments come surprisingly close to idealism. Stephen Hawking, for example, holds that the physical cosmos originates from a nonphysical realm that is mathematically elegant and consists of a set of quantum laws and energy in its vacuum (lowest quantum) state. This nonphysical realm is not “nothing.” It is supernatural (beyond space and time), intelligible, and dynamic, and it produces universes by inner necessity (see Hawking’s book [The Grand Design](#)). Idealists would say that what the materialist argument is missing is consciousness — the mind in which quantum laws exist and which is the source of the intelligibility and energy of the cosmos. Maybe such a consciousness is even necessary for a physical cosmos to be realized, as John Wheeler, John von Neumann, and other quantum theorists have suggested many times.

For me, modern physics and moral considerations tip the balance of the argument and make idealism a serious reasonable candidate for belief. Belief in God (“the cosmic mind”) is, then, not just a matter of blind and irrational faith but, instead, a fully rational and increasingly plausible philosophical belief. The puzzles surrounding the origins and nature of human consciousness remain, but at least idealism is no more puzzling an explanation than its alternatives.
