

The Church as the Body of Christ: Mental Illness and Extended Care

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October 2019

The Science of Embodied Cognition



Outline

- I. Two views of persons/mind**
- II. Emergence of Mind**
- III. Embodied and Embedded Mind**
- IV. Natural-born Christian Cyborgs: The Extended Mind**
- V. Implications for Christian Life**

Disembodied Cognition: *The Computer Model*



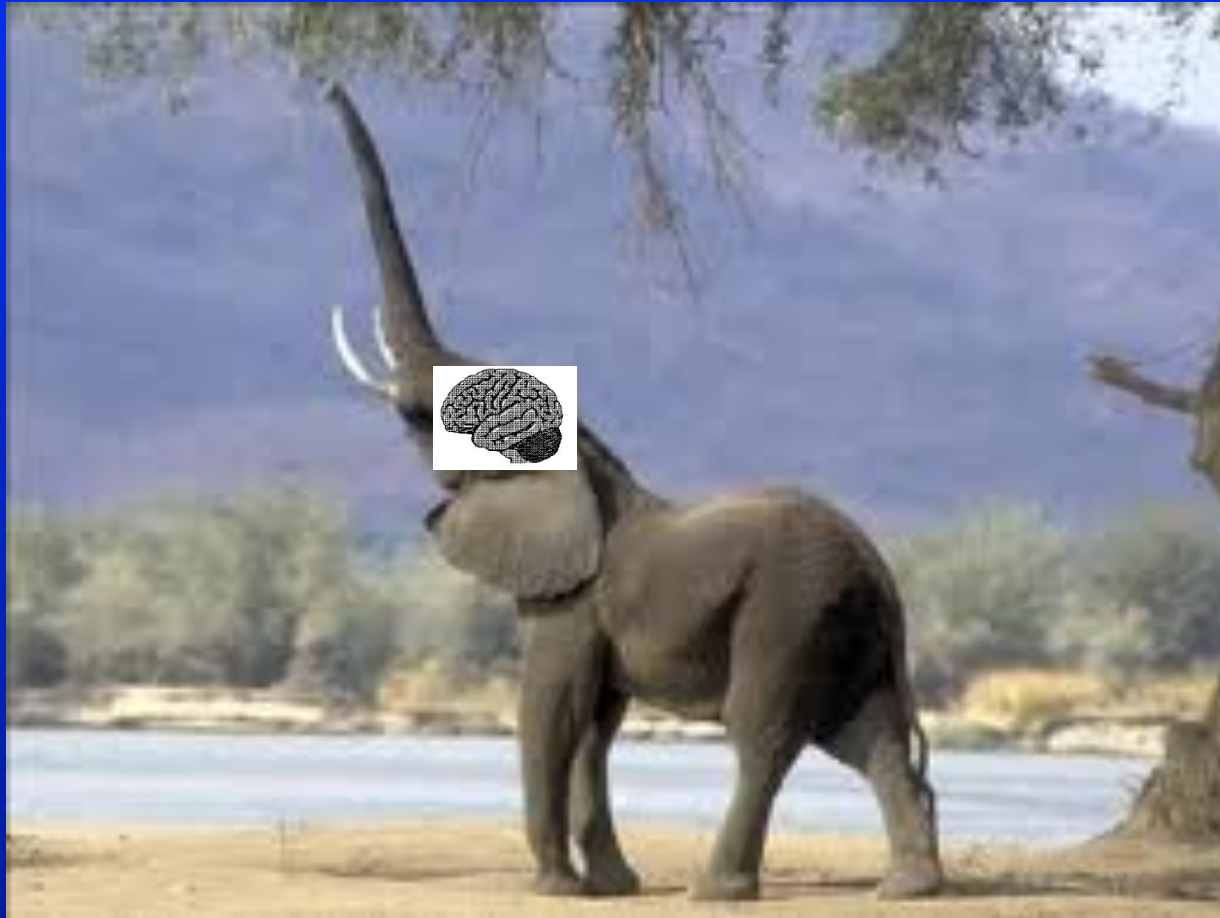
Sensory Input
(Keyboard, mouse, wifi)

Processing / Thinking

Motor Output
(Monitor, printer, wifi)

**The body is merely the input / output system
... all the good stuff is in the brain (computer).**

“If I were an elephant...”



Mind comes about
by bodily interaction
with the world.

Therefore the
nature of the body
influences the
nature of mind.

...but had the brain of a human,
I would have a very different mind.

“Embodiment”

Mind is a bodily physical process.

“Embodied Cognition”

Mental processes are rooted in sensorimotor interactions of the body with the world.

All aspects of minding (cognition) are shaped by the nature of the body.

Emergent mind & Cognition is (4es)

- *embodied* – physical (involving the body as well as the brain)
- *enacted* -- present in action
- *embedded* – contextualized
- *extended* – can includes aspects of the current environment

The Science of Embodied Cognition



Power Poses



Reading Bodies

Low-Power Poses

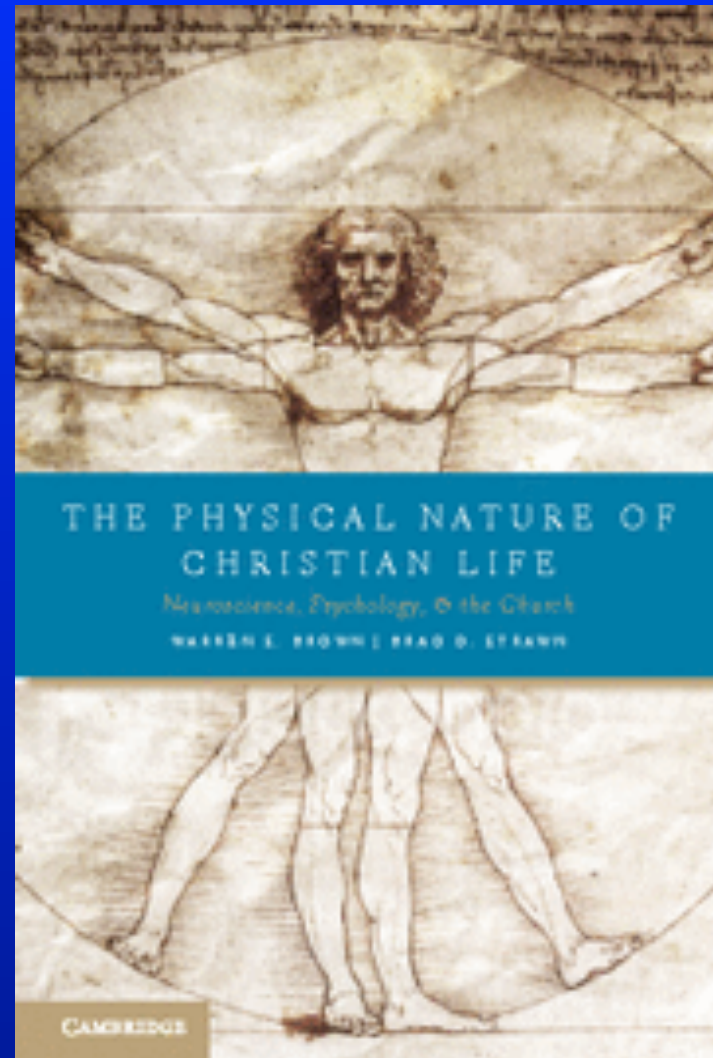


Low-Power Poses



**The Physical
Nature of
Christian Life:
Neuroscience,
Psychology &
*the Church***

Brown & Strawn



The Science of Extended Cognition Performance Artist Stelarc



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Extended Cognition

- Mental processes extend beyond the body to include aspects of the environment with which a person is interacting.
- We incorporate external artifacts, or other persons, into our ongoing cognitive processes such that they are **part of what constitutes mind**.
- Extended memory, knowledge, performance, and body.
- Extension enhances our capacities beyond our normal human limitations.



We are all Cyborgs

Cognitive Extension: Memory



Otto's notebook

Inga's brain



Cognitive Extension: Knowledge

“Excuse me, but do you know the time?”

“Yes!”



Cognitive Extension: Performance

“What is $56 + 78$?”



“What is 361×559 ?”

Extension of the Mind

Smart phones



Computers

Extension of the Body



Prosthetics

Tool Use



Extension as Incorporation



Stelarc's Extended
Body

Extended Information
Processing



Social Extension of the Mind



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Group Problem Solving (Brainstorming)



Who came up with the solution?

Family as Extended Mind

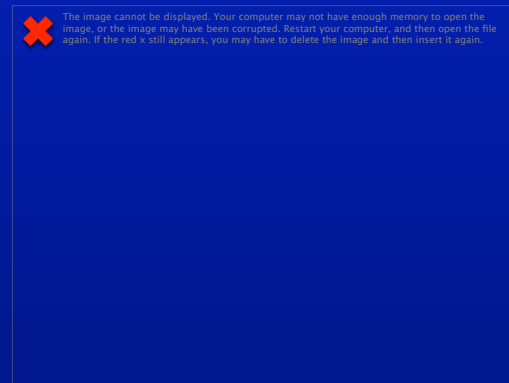
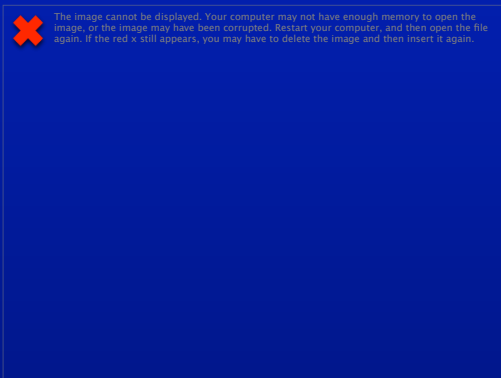


Psychotherapy



Mental Institutions as Cognitive Extension

- Mental institutions are culturally established procedures and practices that provide the framework for thinking in complex domains.
- They provide needed schemas
- They represent the cumulative work of many individuals
- Mental institutions extend the cognition of an individual by helping them to engage in situations in a manner beyond what solo cognition would allow.



Natural Christian Cyborgs and the Church

Is this church a true embodied,
embedded, enacted and extended
system, and thus a genuine body?

Or is this church a loose association
of the independently spiritual?

Christian Spirituality

- “Out of this tradition [classic Christian spirituality], we can say clearly what spirituality is not. It is not opposed to the body, it is not nonphysical. It is not removed from history, the ongoing flow of time. It is not asocial, a solitary activity or state of being. It is not primarily inward and invisible, a hidden affair of the private heart.”
- From: *Tortured Wonders: Christian Spirituality for People, not Angels*, Rodney Clapp

Christian Spirituality and the 4e's

- Spirituality is **embodied**, i.e., happens in and through bodies.
- Spirituality doesn't just happen to individuals in isolation, but is socially **embedded** and supported.
- Spirituality comes about by **enacted** formational activities of congregations.
- Spirituality is **extended** into practices, social relationships & mental institutions

Coming Soon!

*Supersizing Christian Life:
Extending Spirituality in the Church*

Intervarsity Press

Brad D. Strawn & Warren S. Brown

Extended Spirituality

Spirituality can/must be **extended** by interactions between persons (or between persons and congregations and practices), rather than existing exclusively within individual persons.

Such extension “supersizes” Christian life.

Implications of Extended Spirituality

- How we *worship* together
- How we *serve* together
- How we *do life* together
- How we *care* for one another

Extension and Mental Illness

Dependent Rational Animals
Alistair McIntyre

We all exist on a continuum of need

dependent ----- independent

We need one another!!

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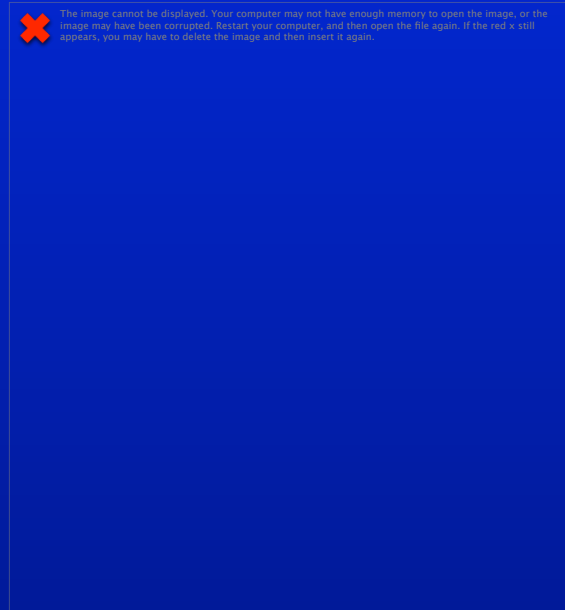
The Church as the Body of Christ: Helpful and Unhelpful Responses

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Extending our Cognitions

- Personality Disorders
 - Narcissistic
 - Borderline
 - Histrionic
 - Compulsive



Why Personality Disorders?

- There is growing awareness and discussions of disorders such as anxiety, depression, and trauma, but there is not much discussion of PDs.
- Depression, etc., hurt individuals, but PDs hurt others as much as the one suffering.
- While PDs are a small percentage of the population, these individuals are in our congregations.

Dimensional vs Categorical

- Categorical suggests you have it or you don't.
- Dimensional suggests that all of us are somewhere on a continuum
- These are aspects of personality, which suggests that we all have aspects of each one of these.
- Why does this matter? Empathy.

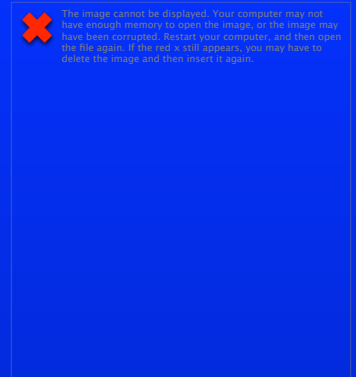
Helpful Book

- *Behind the Mask: Personality Disorders in Religious Behavior*, Wayne E. Oates



Narcissistic PD

- “The Mask of Self-Assurance”
- Central tension: inflation vs deflation of self-esteem
- Affects: shame, humiliation, contempt, envy
- Belief about self: “I need to be perfect to feel OK”
- Belief about others: “Others enjoy the good things in life, so the more of those I have the better I will feel”
- Defenses: Idealization, devaluation



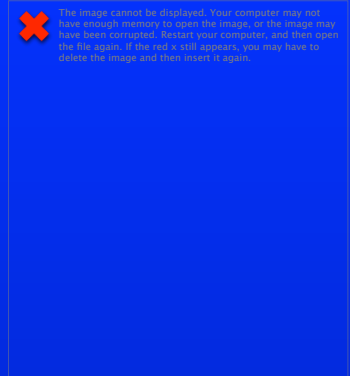
Narcissistic PD in the Church

- “God is at my beck and call”
- Claims of infallibility
- Lack of empathy or mentalizing
- Displaying empathy for them
 - seeing behind the mask
- Group treatment



Borderline PD

- “The Mask of Chaos”
- Difficulties with affect regulation, intensity, aggression, capacity to be soothed.
- Problems with self-cohesion and fear of being abandoned
- Intense affects, especially rage, shame and fear
- Belief about self: I don’t know who I am
- Beliefs about others: Others are defined by their impact on me
- Defenses: Splitting, denial, dissociation, acting out



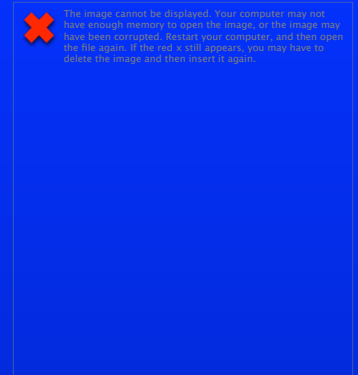
Borderline PD in the Church

- Normal events become catastrophes
- Take immense amounts of time
- Wear others out
- Love you and hate you
- Fear of abandonment is so high that they can make helping them difficult
- Help them find a safe place




Dependent PD

- “The Mask of Dependence”
- Tension: Keeping vs losing relationships
- Central affects: pleasure when securely attached; sadness and fear when alone
- Belief about self: I am inadequate, needy, if people really knew me they would not like me
- Beliefs about others: Others are powerful and I need their care
- Defenses: regression, avoidance, somatization




Dependent PD in the Church

- Generally likeable and highly compliant/submissive
- They need others to get what they want
- Feel weak and fragile
- Avoid conflict
- Isolation and fear of being alone

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Compulsive PD

- “The Mask of Too Many Scruples
- Tension: Submission vs rebellion against authority
- Affects: Anger, guilt, anxiety, shame, fear
- Belief about self: Most feelings are dangerous and must be controlled
- Beliefs about others: Others are less in control than I am so I have to control them, and resist their control
- Defenses: Intellectualizing, moralizing

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Compulsive PD

- Compulsively moral fueled by anxiety
- Stingy
- Perfectionistic control
- Work addiction
- Status preoccupation
- Tattling among sinners
- Grace vs Law: Scrupulosity



Let's Extend our Minds

- Have you run into any individuals with these traits in your church?
- If so, what kind (if any) of challenges have they created?
- What, if any thing, have you seen that has been helpful and unhelpful?

Remember We are the Body

- 1 Corinthians 12:12-27
- Is this a metaphor or something more?
 - Yes!
- No one person can do all things when it comes to the body and mental illness.
- “...the parts that we *think* are less honorable we treat with special honor.” vs. 23

The Church as the Body of Christ: Helpful and Unhelpful Responses

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Natural Christian Cyborgs: Extended Mind, Spirituality and the Church

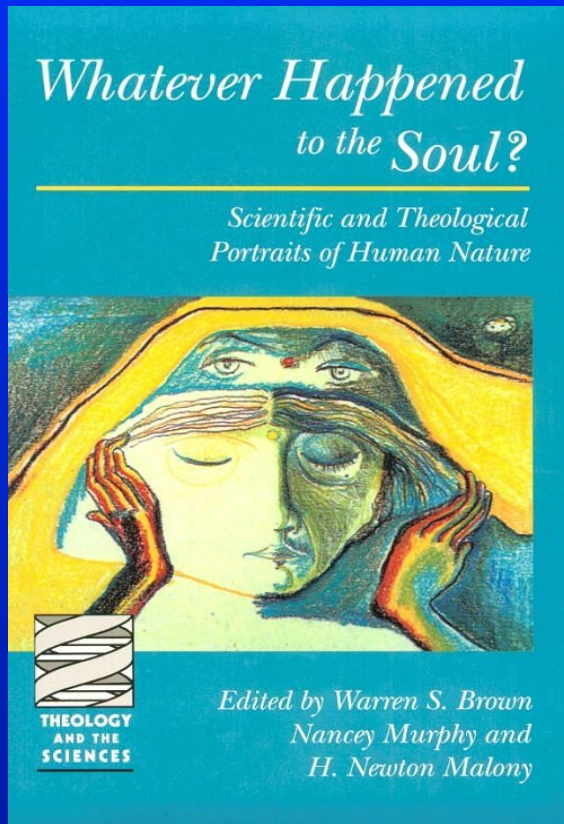
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Science and Religion Study Group
Trinity Episcopal Church
May, 2018

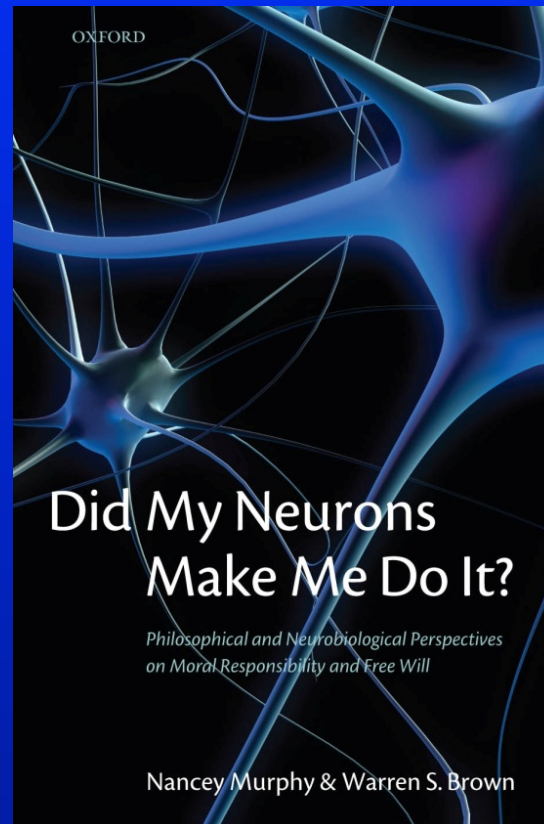
Wittgenstein

“If we want to know if a man knows how to play chess, we aren't interested in anything that goes on inside him.”

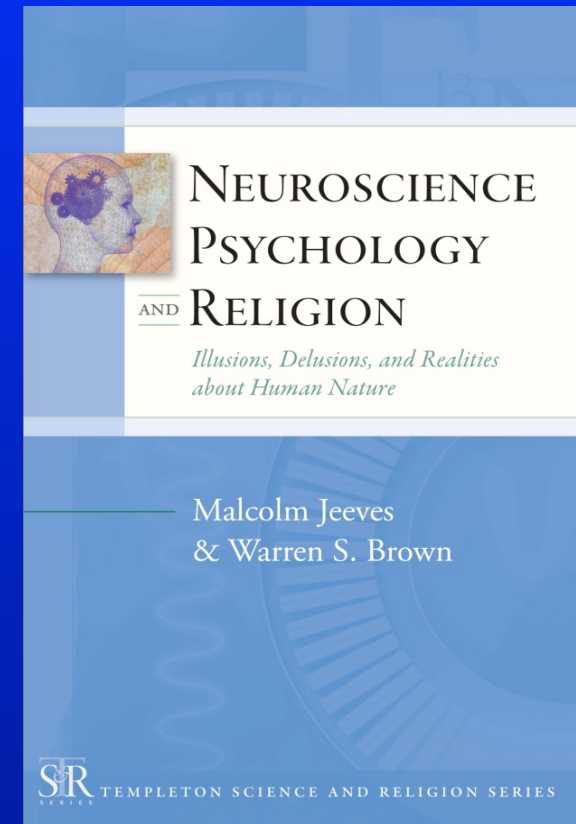
Reflections on Neuroscience, Human Nature, and Free Will



Whatever Happened to the Soul?
Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy
and H. Newton Malony (1999)



**Did My Neurons Make
Me Do It?**
Nancey Murphy and
Warren S. Brown (2007)



**Neuroscience, Psychology,
and Religion**
Malcolm Jeeves and
Warren S. Brown (2009)

“Is what goes on inside our heads just a deterministic physical process? If so, are we all, no matter how idiosyncratic and sparkly, nothing but slaves to rigid laws governing the invisible particles out of which our brains are built? Could creativity ever emerge from a set of rigid rules governing minuscule objects?”

(From Douglas Hofstadter,
I am a Strange Loop. Basic Books, 2007)

Nicaraguan Sign Language



Interactively emergent and self-organizing language

Properties Necessary for Development of a Complex Dynamical Systems

- Complexity: very large number of elements (e.g., neurons)
- Maximal interconnectivity (e.g., a very large number of synapses per neuron)
- Two-way interactions between elements (recurrent connections; feedback loops)
- Nonlinear interactions that amplify small perturbations and small differences in initial conditions
- Open, i.e. interact with their environments
- Operate far from equilibrium.

Characteristics of a Complex Dynamic System

“The higher level of organization, whether thermodynamic, psychological, or social, possesses a qualitatively different repertoire of states and behaviors than the earlier level, as well as greater degrees of freedom.”

Alicia Juarrero, *Dynamics in Action*, 1999 (p. 145)

General Characteristics of a Complex Dynamical System

- A complex system self-organizes when pushed far from equilibrium.
- Elements entrain (bind) each other into larger patterns of interactivity that interface with the environment.
- Large perturbations of the system cause reorganization (adaptability).
- Continued reorganization creates more complex and nuanced forms of organization and adaptability.
- Complex systems have a history.

Principles of Embodied Cognition

1. Cognition is for action
2. Cognition is situated
3. Cognition is time-pressured
4. Action (and therefore cognition) is enmeshed in recurrent situational feedback
5. Meaning of language is rooted in recall of sensory-motor experiences
6. Off-line cognition is body-based (simulation)
7. Some cognitive work is off-loaded into the environment

Enacted Cognition

1. Cognition is for action
2. Cognition is situated
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Embeddedness

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7. Some cognitive work is off-loaded into the environment

Dis-Embodied Cognition (within Physicalism)

Mental life is based on the inner manipulation of abstract symbols

- Sensory and motor systems are merely input and output buses.
- Information, to be processed, must be converted into abstract / amodal representations (like strings of bits in a computer).
- Thinking can be distanced from perceiving or doing.

Language as Cognitive Extension

- Language supersizes thinking.
- Labeling modifies selective attention.
- Language allows us to think about our thoughts, and also to reflect on and guide action.
- Sets of linguistic structures sculpt actions that constitute expertise.

Outline

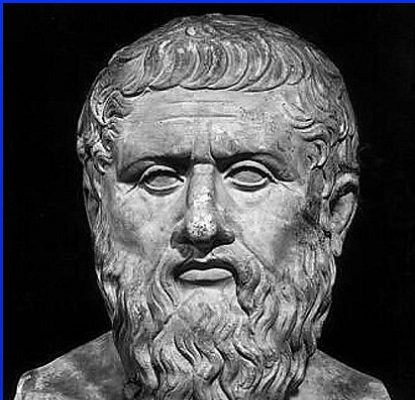
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- II. **Emergence of Mind**
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Theories about the Mind



Dualism

- Body / Soul
- Body / Mind



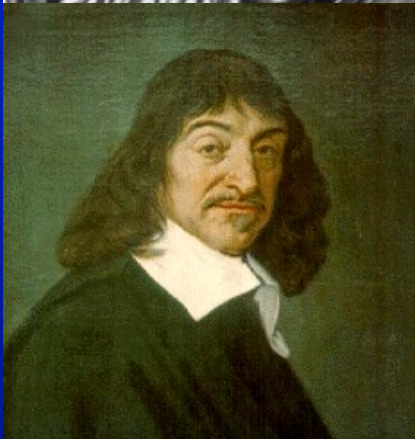
Plato (428-348 BCE)

Reality exists in the non-material realm of the forms.



St. Augustine (354-430 CE)

Linked Platonic dualism (material vs non-material) to a spirituality of inwardness.



René Descartes (1596-1650 CE)

Strong distinction between the rational mind (soul) and the physical body.

Possible Consequence of the Cartesian View of Mind

- All of the important events and all that is essential about persons are inside and private.
Mind > Body
- Since the hierarchically privileged inner soul (mind, self) is private, persons are isolated and essentially independent of their outward behavior and community.
- This may foster a commitment to inwardness and individuality.

Dualism in a World of Neuroscience

It is becoming increasingly difficult to find an area of human cognitive, affective, social, or religious functioning that has not already been shown to have correlates in identifiable patterns of brain activity.

If the brain does all of this, what does a “soul”, “mind”, or “self” do that the brain/body is not doing?

Theories about the Mind

Monism

Idealism

Physicalism

Dualism

- Body / Soul
- Body / Mind

Theories about the Mind

Monism

Idealism

Physicalism

**Eliminative
Materialism**

Dualism

- Body / Soul
- Body / Mind

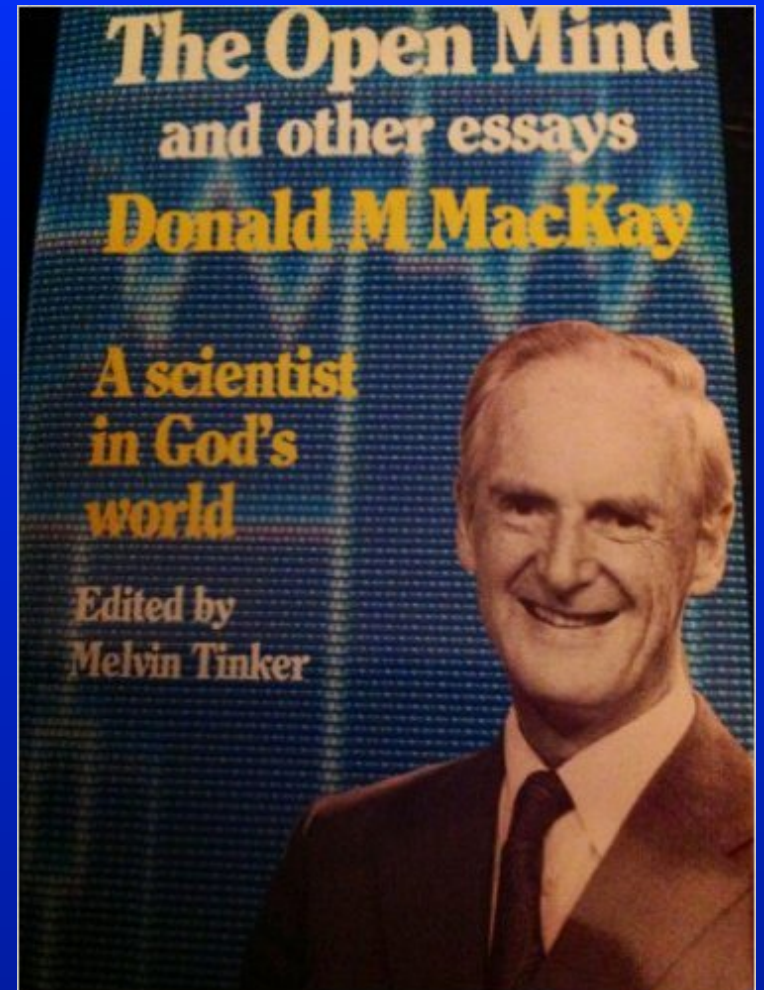
Logic of Eliminative Materialism

- Physical processes are subject to the deterministic laws of physics.
- The brain (a physical object) is the basis of all thought and behavior.
- Thus, brain processes and resulting behavior are governed by the laws of physics and determined at some lower level.
- Therefore, conscious mental life is epiphenomenal – not a cause of behavior – and can be eliminated from consideration.

= “*nothing but*”

Donald M. MacKay

“According to this view, only where physical explanation was impossible could any other account be taken seriously in its own right. Otherwise, the whole thing could be explained away as ‘nothing but’ the mindless motion of molecules.”



A Critical Question:

Is there an alternative to eliminative materialism other than Cartesian dualism that is:

- consistent with modern neuroscience
- in which mental life plays a causal role
- in which human beings have genuine interpersonal relationships, moral agency, and religious life and experiences?

Theories about the Mind

Monism

Dualism

- Body / Soul
- Body / Mind

Idealism

Physicalism

**Eliminative
Materialism**

Emergence

- Nonreductive physicalism
- Emergent Monism
- Dual Aspect Monism
- Pluralistic Holism
- Dualistic Holism
- CEDLRN

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Theory of Dynamical Systems

Ant colony as a dynamical system:

- Functions as a unified system
- Colony actions and characteristics are not due to the decisions of individual ants
- Actions of individual ants are entrained by the system
- System properties are due to self-organization in response to the environment



Theory of Complex Dynamical Systems

...gives a plausible account of the emergence of high-level causal properties in complex interactive systems

i.e., how complex, nonlinear, highly interactive aggregates become systems through adaptive self-organization,

and how patterns of organization in systems are causal in their own right.

Emergence: Ants versus Humans

- Ant brain: 250,000 neurons
- Ant colony: up to 700,000 ants
- Ants communicate via pheromones
- Human brain: 100 billion neurons
(equivalent in total neurons to an ant colony of 400,000)
- Human brain: 100 trillion synapses
- Difference in what emerges: richness of interconnectivity

Alternative to the Cartesian Mind

Human personhood arises as an emergent property of a hyper complex organism as it interacts with a physical and social environment. (Complex dynamic systems)

“Mind”, “soul”, “spirit”, and “self” describe *aspects* of whole persons.

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