

Mind-Body Problem and the Strategy of Conceptual Revision

Contemporary mind-body problem is dominated by two groups of views. Some philosophers defend reductionism: they believe that widely defined mental phenomena can be reduced to non-mental phenomena, e.g. to states of material brains. Others argue that it is impossible, because reduction leaves something out – something that is substantial for being a mind, like *qualia*, intentionality, rationality, etc. Disagreement between both parties seems to be so deep that it is widely held that the problem is extremely difficult to solve – if it is solvable at all.

While it may seem that reductive and non-reductive approaches are as different as they can be, they share a crucial assumption I call the Semantic Assumption. According to it, terms such as “the mental” and “the physical/material” are exclusive: “the mental” stands for “the non-physical” and “the physical” – for “the non-mental”. However, some philosophers have argued that this assumption – that can be traced back to René Descartes’ distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* – makes any effort to solve the mind-body problem futile. One way to avoid this grim conclusion is to adopt an approach I call the strategy of conceptual revision. Roughly speaking, the conceptual revision consists of rejecting the Semantic Assumption: while a fundamental distinction between the nature of our psychological life and the nature of the non-psychological world around us seem to be justified, the distinction should not be expressed in terms of the (non-physical) mental and the (non-mental) physical.

In my talk I would like to present the strategy of conceptual revision. In the first part, I will present a general sketch of the strategy and I will contrast it with its most popular competitors. In the second part, I will discuss how the strategy is applied by selected philosophers such as Gilbert Ryle (behaviorism), Bertrand Russell (neutral monism), John Searle (biological naturalism) and Galen Strawson (panpsychism). As I will conclude, the strategy of conceptual revision deserves more attention from those who are dissatisfied with standard solutions of the mind-body problem.