

**THE PARALLELISM OF MIND
AND BODY FROM THE
STANDPOINT OF METAPHYSICS;
A DISSERTATION, PP. 3-61**

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STANDPOINT OF METAPHYSICS.

It is not likely that any psychologist of the present day, whatever view he may hold as to the field which his science occupies, would be inclined to deny that it has at any rate a very intimate connection with the nervous mechanism of the body, and particularly with the brain. Physical conditions, as everyone knows, are all the time exerting an important influence on the conscious life, and it is an easy matter to prove that brain activity is the precondition, indispensable, so far as we can see, of at least a considerable number of conscious processes. It is natural that psychologists should hesitate about setting any arbitrary limit to this interconnection, and should be anxious, in view of the fruitful results that have already been gained, to extend the application of physiology to psychology as far as the facts will warrant. Without dogmatizing about the relation between mind and body, the cautious psychologist conceives himself justified in saying: I have found the hypothesis that conscious processes are accompanied by nervous changes a helpful one within certain fields, and therefore I will assume that the same thing holds good throughout the conscious life, and will see whether this throws any additional light on psychological problems.

Taken in this undogmatic way, the principle of psycho-physical parallelism would be accepted, I suppose, by most modern investigators. All it purports to be is a working hypothesis, which expressly refuses to bother itself with the further metaphysical questions involved. And in this, as a special science, psychology is within its right. But in the form which parallelism has taken perhaps quite as commonly, ultimate questions cannot be so readily avoided. For in this form parallelism starts out, not from the demands of the subject-matter of psychology, but from a highly metaphysical doctrine brought in from a different field. Modern science, from a complicated mixture of metaphysical postulates and experimental evidence, has built up the doctrine of the conservation of energy. According to this doctrine, energy in the material world is neither lost nor gained, and events consequently follow upon one another with such a mathematically determinable connection that the intrusion of any influence in their production

which is not represented by preceding physical events is rendered out of the question. But consciousness is not a material fact, and so would seem somehow to lie wholly outside the chain of physical processes, without causal influence upon them. The common belief, therefore, that our thoughts and desires in any way influence our actions is a delusion; instead of its being true that mind affects body and body affects mind, what in reality we have is two independent series, each corresponding in a way to the other, but neither influencing the other in any degree.

No one, probably, who has been at all touched by the scientific spirit, can avoid the feeling that there is a good deal of force in this argument. It is true that the conservation of energy is not something that has been demonstrated, and probably it never will be demonstrated; and the alarming picture of the effects on science in case a slight exception to it were to be found in some corner of the brain seems to the lay mind a trifle overdrawn. Scientists who, with Professor Clifford, call the hypothesis of a causal effect of mind on body "not untrue but nonsense," and who declare that there is no more reason for thinking that a new influence enters in connection with the brain than at any other point in the universe, are certainly forgetting their scientific modesty. Surely there is more evidence for asserting that our vision of a falling stone makes us move out of the way than for saying that the stone falls through some occult force that is unknown to physics; and if the evidence cannot be expressed in mathematical terms, it shows a somewhat provincial spirit on that account to deny it any value whatever. Then, again, the argument that the whole idea of causation comes up originally in connection with the action of the will on the external world, and that therefore the finished concept cannot wholly exclude this interconnection, while it may not be very conclusive, is not without weight.¹ And yet, in spite of this, the scientist will not feel convinced. His whole temper of mind points him in the direction of a strictly physical explanation of all natural processes, and to give up such an explanation in this case is only possible at the expense of an unpleasant wrench, and an abiding sense of intellectual uneasiness. It is not an easy thing for the psychologist with scientific training to imagine a molecular motion suddenly stopping without further physical effects, to give place to a sensation or memory, or to imagine a movement setting up in another part of the brain, inex-

¹ Ladd, *Philosophy of Mind*, pp. 218 ff.

plicable from any preceding physical cause. It should be said that the first of these suppositions is not necessarily implied in a causal relationship between mind and body; we can think of the physical effect as going on according to physical laws, at the same time that there is an additional by-effect in consciousness, outside the physical world. But there is implied of necessity a beginning of motion, or a change in the direction of motion, which is not accounted for by physical laws, and to this science cannot help but have an instinctive objection.

It must be granted, then, that metaphysical parallelism has a good deal in its favor. But because it does involve ultimate questions so nearly, its metaphysical bearings cannot be simply thrust to one side and neglected, as if they did not matter. As I have said already, parallelism in its strictly theoretical form is not a doctrine irresistibly demanded by psychological facts; rather there are a multitude of facts which apparently point to a mutual influence between mind and body. Indeed, the theory is generally recognized as a paradox; and if it is taken as anything more than a working hypothesis, then the plea is not admissible that, as a scientist, the investigator is not bound to consider the philosophical bearings of his doctrines, particularly as he usually manages to imply a pretty definite philosophical creed. It is hardly fair for the scientist to force us to follow him, under pain of being judged incompetent to appreciate self-evident truths, into regions where contradictions surround us on every side, and then to abandon us there with a few words about "ultimate identity," and "twofold aspects of reality," which, as we may guess, he leaves so general simply because he is unable himself to think out what they mean. As involving a metaphysical position already, which, moreover, in the most violent way splits up the universe into two seemingly independent halves, a theory of parallelism can be considered as at all successfully established only when the possibility has been shown that it can be adjusted to some tolerably consistent world view.

It is the object of this essay to examine the logic of the situation, and to discover into what different forms the doctrine of parallelism will work out, and whether any of these forms is ultimately tenable. I shall precede this with a slight historical sketch of the doctrine. This historical sketch, as involving really the whole relation between mind and body, might easily become elaborate; but I shall attempt

only an outline, leaving it to the more critical exposition to go into greater detail. And, finally, I shall try in a tentative way to offer the solution of the problem which suggests itself to me, in the hope that the critical part of this essay will have pointed out certain considerations that may give the solution some degree of probability. Already in Descartes most of the elements of the modern problem make their appearance. Matter and mind are at last clearly distinguished, so clearly that it now becomes a serious question how they are ever to be related again. In the world of matter mechanism has all but triumphed completely. Animals, at least, are automata, and if we except a very few activities, notably that of speech, the same thing is quite conceivable as regards the human body as well.¹ Indeed, man as purely sensitive and appetitive is seemingly regarded by Descartes as a machine, though the matter is a little complicated by the vacillating position which he adopts in reference to sensation, which he assigns now to the mental, and now to the physical world.² But at any rate in the case of man he stops short of pure mechanism, for the mind, as a thinking and active substance, has the power to break into the physical series, which it does through the medium of the pineal gland, where body and soul come into contact.

The difficulty of making intelligible this mutual influence between heterogeneous substances led, in the Cartesian school, to a gradual undermining of their substantial character, and an insistence on the ultimate reality, God, as the explanation of their interaction. The fact of interaction, however, of a change in the physical series finding at least its occasion in the mental, was still undisputed. Spinoza carried out this tendency to its conclusion. Descartes himself had recognized that mind and matter must be substances only in a secondary and derived sense; Spinoza drops the term substance altogether as referred to them, and they become merely attributes of the one eternal substance, God. But with this the problem of their interaction at once assumes a different aspect. As each attribute expresses the eternal and infinite essence of God, there can no longer be any question of their influencing one another, for they are not two things, but at bottom one. The one reality manifests itself in two different forms, which must therefore both absolutely correspond, and be absolutely complete, each in itself. For each mode

¹ Œuvres, IX, p. 424.

² Cf. K. Fischer, Descartes und seine Schule, Dritte Auflage, Pt. I, p. 429.

of extension there is a corresponding mode of thought, but extension is modified only by extension, and thought only by thought, never the one by the other. This conclusion Spinoza goes on to fortify by various empirical examples of what mechanism can accomplish without the aid of intelligence,¹ but this is by the way; the real basis of his parallelism is metaphysical throughout.

Leibnitz, no more than Spinoza, can conceive of a mutual interaction between soul and body, but in endeavoring to account for the relationship he strikes out into an entirely new type of theory. Mind and matter no longer stand on a metaphysical equality, but the only ultimate reals are immaterial beings. Such beings, or monads, exist, each shut up within its own nature, and developing of itself, without being influenced directly by any other monad. But the nature of the monad depends finally upon God, and in determining that nature God took due account of all other beings; and so it happens that, without the necessity of any influence passing from one monad to another, all develop harmoniously together, and each by the very unfolding of its own nature reflects the course of the entire world, from its particular point of view.

A host of immaterial beings, however, whose nature consists in perceptions, does not by itself account for the material world. That which lies at the basis of matter is the fact that the monad is not pure activity, but has a passive side as well.² And this passivity is not a mere limitation, but an essential part of its being; it means that the monad is not in reality a thing standing by itself, but that it has a relationship to the whole universe.³ In so far as it is pure activity, it sets up the law for other monads; their activity has to be adjusted to it. But, on the other hand, in so far as the law of its nature is determined with reference to the activities of other beings, it feels itself relatively passive, it fails to find within itself the full explanation of its act, and so its perception is confused.⁴ Such confused representations are what lie at the bottom of our ideas of matter; and since their basis is passivity, it is natural to apply the term matter especially to those monads which are most passive, and whose representations are most confused, while the higher monads are distinguished as souls. What, therefore, we ordinarily call matter, the thing which we suppose

¹ *Eth.*, Pt. III, Prop. 2, Schol.

² *Philosophische Schriften* (ed. Gerhardt), Vol. 7, p. 530.

³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, p. 546.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, p. 138.

to exist in the external world, is due to the confused way in which the soul represents the activities going on in other monads. The representations themselves, accordingly, are phenomenal, but they point to actual realities in the shape of collections of immaterial beings, each with its own inner life. Every finite monad, then, by the very fact of its inclusion in the life of the universe, must have a body. It must mirror, that is, the surrounding monads more or less confusedly, and still more confusedly the remoter ones; and since there are certain monads with which it is more closely connected than with others, these form for it a body, and through this body, which is affected by every movement in the universe, it gets a confused perception of the entire world.⁷ The soul gives laws to the body simply by the fact that its representations are more distinct, and so have to be taken account of in the inner life of the monads of which its body is made up. There is no force transference. The soul acts according to final causes, the body according to efficient;⁸ neither requires the other to explain it, and yet both act in harmony because they have been adjusted at the start.

It probably is apparent already that there is an ambiguity in this statement, which, however, Leibnitz himself never fully clears up. It may perhaps be put in this way, that the preestablished harmony in the inner development of the monads is not altogether equivalent to a preestablished harmony between the development of one of the monads, the soul, and the actions, not of other monads, but of collections of monads, phenomenal bodies. Granting that those ideas in souls which represent the quantitative relationships of physical science, the series of efficient causes, are distinct, and so that they point to a reality, yet they cannot represent real relations between bodies, since bodies themselves are phenomenal and not real, and they evidently do not directly represent inner activities of other monads, which are not material facts but perceptions, and exceedingly confused perceptions at that. What we must suppose, accordingly, is this. Our perceptual experience has a certain relation to, stands in some way as a sign for, that vast system of relationships which make up the body of science. The vaguest and most confused feeling of the lowest monad stands in a definite connection with the physical influences which are raining in upon its body from the entire universe, so that the monad can be said

⁷ *Philosophische Schriften* (ed. Gerhardt), Vol. 6, p. 599.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, p. 599.

to mirror, though confusedly, all that is going on in all its fellow-monads. But this physical universe of science, again, is not the actual world; it only points back to the ultimate reals, the units of force whose actual life is a life of representation, of mental activity, and whose relationships it somehow stands for. But these relationships *between* monads evidently have no real existence in a world in which the individual monads, shut up within themselves, are the sole reality; and therefore, if they are to refer to any reality at all outside their actual appearance as representations, it can only be because they point to something which exists within the mind of God. We accordingly are led to this conception: that the inner life of the monads is arranged by God to fit in with, correspond in a way to, a certain set of symbols which he has in his mind, and which it is a part of the arrangement should be reproduced on occasion in the mind of finite monads, which by this means are able, not indeed to know the reality of the world, but to know certain relations which themselves have a relation, more or less symbolic, to that reality. It is doubtful whether this approximation to ideas in the mind of God ought strictly to be called preestablished harmony in Leibnitz' sense, and it is perhaps still more doubtful whether the translation of the relations between representative states in the monads, most of them inconceivably obscure, over into the definite quantitative relationships of science, can really have any meaning for us. At any rate we are left in the somewhat awkward position of having two external worlds on our hands, one made up of monads, and one in the mind of God; and how we are to bring these together is far from being clear. Unfortunately Leibnitz never attempted to work out the consequences of his theory in a systematic way, and his answer to the questions which suggest themselves here is necessarily imperfect.

With Kant there begins a new philosophical development which, in the German Idealists, shifts the standpoint from which the whole question is approached in so peculiar a way that, while the term parallelism may still be used, it is doubtful whether we really are dealing with the same problem. This came about through the transference of interest by Kant away from the relation between experience and a reality beyond it, to the distinction and the functional relation of elements within experience itself. For Kant, indeed, the problem of a *Ding-an-sich*, of a noumenal reality back of the phenomenal world, still remained, and he makes the suggestion that the reality which underlies