

**THE INFLUENCE OF
THE MIND
ON THE BODY**

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The Influence of the mind on the body by Paul Dubois

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PAUL DUBOIS

**THE INFLUENCE OF
THE MIND
ON THE BODY**

The Influence of the Mind on the Body

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WHATEVER may be the opinions which one professes in the matter of philosophy, whether one is a spiritualist or a scientific materialist, each one recognizes the reciprocal influence which the spirit and the body, the moral and the physical, exert upon each other.

It will certainly be interesting to attempt a precise definition of these words which one employs so frequently, and to show the transformations which the notion of the soul undergoes when one passes from the dualism of religions to the unity of natural philosophy.

But that will not be the object of my conference to-day, and I shall content myself, for the moment, with a **summary**

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definition. When I speak of the mind, of morality, of the soul, if you will, I understand by that the ideas, mental representations, sentiments, all these things which we do not see, of which we take cognizance only through the conscience.

The physique of man is the entire body, comprising in it the brain with its thousands of cells and fibers, with the organs of feeling, these delicate antennæ which put it in communication with the outside world. This body exists; we can see it, can touch it. We have no doubts of its reality, its materialism, in spite of the specious reasoning of some philosophers who have pushed idealism to the extreme.

To say that the physical has an influence over the moral is then to affirm that the state of our body can modify our ideas, our sentiments, the condition of our soul.

Inversely, if we admit the influence of the mind over the body that is declaring that the mental representations which we make,

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the feelings which animate us, can influence the body and modify the functions of its organs.

My object is, before all, to show the influence of the mind over the body, but to understand it better, it is necessary to examine the matter inversely and analyze fully the influence of the physical over the mental.

The dependence of the soul upon the body commences in the cradle and finishes only in the grave.

By the fact of heredity and of atavism we are born already influenced in a certain direction; we enter this world more or less well endowed. That is a heritage which we are obliged to accept without liability to debts beyond the assets inherited and during all our existence we shall live only on this capital and the interest which we shall know how to draw from it by a wise administration.

There are unhappy beings who are

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born idiots; their brain is arrested in its development, deformed, and it is with infinite trouble that the devoted educators succeed in developing in these poor creatures some manifestations of intelligence.

In a less degree the cerebral malady is shown by imbecility. Less advanced still it produces these states of mental want of balance which often become more exaggerated in successive generations and tend to a degeneracy of the family.

One willingly recognizes that our intellectual faculties are controlled even by the formation of our brain. We say of a man who manifests a superior intelligence that he has a well-organized head. We suppose him to have a well-developed brain, working easily, capable of regular work, of logical reflection. There are people who have memory, others who have imagination; some work with facility, others distinguish themselves by their perseverance.

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We fully understand that if it is possible for us to cultivate these qualities to a certain extent or to allow them to become useless from want of practise, they are given to us after all at birth.

One forgets too often that it is absolutely the same with moral qualities.

From the first years of life; before educational influences have been able to exert themselves; before the powerful contagion of example has been felt; we surprise in children the germs of future moral qualities and faults.

One child is, from the beginning of his life, docile and sweet, sensible and good; another is rebellious and hard, indifferent, or even cruel. Egotism and tendency to falsehood often manifest themselves very early. The child can not yet reason, we dare not speak to it of responsibility yet, and already we see in him the often indelible taint of heredity, the innate moral blemish.