

## Dualism Really Does Seem Natural

David N. Green, 2016

Early Greek philosophers and physicians contemplated and dissected both supernatural and natural elements of people; specifically the soul (or mind) and the brain/body. While Plato was a proponent of dualism – there is an ethereal soul and a separate physical body – his student Aristotle believed there was no soul, only the physical brain and its body. While Aristotle's monism, or "naturalism", is closer to current overwhelming scientific consensus, dualism really does seem to come more naturally to the way most people see their existence, as illustrated in the discussion later below.

Moving closer to modern times, we note that the Renaissance saw philosopher (and mathematician and scientist) Rene Descartes take up the discussion and support of dualism. He apparently was aware that the brain somehow received input from the senses, and caused movement of the body, however, he insisted that there was still a soul that dealt with things like language, and did all the higher reasoning. One supposes that the idea that complicated thought processes could be carried out in the meat of the brain just didn't seem plausible at the time. To make these two disparate elements work together, Descartes proposed that they had an interface in the middle of the brain, specifically at the pineal gland. It would indeed have been interesting for there to be such a soul-brain interface; modern technology loves interfaces (this could be the engineer in this author speaking).

Paul Bloom, in "Religion is Natural" [Developmental Science 10, no. 1, 2007], says that religion has generally been ignored, if not avoided, in many textbooks on developmental psychology, in part because it may be uninteresting, and in part because such analytical discussion is taboo. He suggests religion should be studied since it is important to so many people, and because aspects of it are now shown to be so fundamental to cognitive development in children. It seems there is a growing body of research that suggests core elements of typical religious belief come naturally to children, including the mind-body dualism we are discussing here.

Bloom suggests that there is a "common-sense dualism" in people, which starts at childhood, and perhaps wanes in the face of science as we mature and learn. It turns out from studies of children that while they may think the brain does, say, mathematics, some other more ethereal aspect of a person does the loving and imagining. When questioned about a dead mouse, children would often agree the brain must have died, but they still also insist that the spirit of the mouse would still be able to have lingering thoughts and desires; the separate mind or soul would continue on. Bloom points out that while this dualism of soul and body is not generally supported by science (it's all in the brain), it is however something that young and old feel quite comfortable with. In spite of the fact that many adults profess no religious belief, most mentally healthy people would seem to feel intuitively that their mental state (mind/spirit/soul) is something apart from their physical, aging and degrading body.

Descartes and Bloom both purport and describe a mind-body dualism. However, while Descartes would have us believe that there really are two separate but connected parts to the person, Bloom is more of a physicalist, suggesting a perceived dualism is really due to one's mind as an operation of the brain. However, one of Bloom's main points, in suggesting religion should be studied more in psychology, is that the mind-body dualism is still quite a natural phenomenon. It seems to make technical sense (to

this author) that the brain is where the mind resides, as a sort of a simulation of a soul, which would seem to be in keeping with the dualism of Bloom. However, it also seems (again to this author) that one cannot completely shake the innate feeling that there is something beyond this physical body, which would seem to be in keeping with the dualism of Descartes. Perhaps one can be a Dual Dualist.