



20.3.1978

My dear Karl,

I have been intensely promoting the sales of the P-E volume THE SELF AND ITS BRAIN, in a number of symposia and lectures. Not, however, praising it but, on the contrary, criticizing it. I find the following faults with your part of the book, which is the one that interests me most:

1. You do not formulate the theses of psychophysical monism and dualism as clearly as one wishes, and this because you remain on the level of ordinary language. It is like discussing physics or chemistry in ordinary language terms.
2. By refusing to define in any way the concepts of mind, consciousness, mental state, and mental event, your discourse remains imprecise. Of course one does not define explicitly his main concepts in mathematics or in science: one lets postulates do this job. But I see no clearly formulated postulates in the book, so no concept in it is characterized with any precision.
3. By identifying materialism with the doctrine that men are machines, you erect a straw man. This was not the view of Epicurus or Lucretius, nor that of Diderot or d'Holbach or Darwin. You favor emergence but do not discuss emergentist materialism.
3. You do not take into account the many arguments for materialism proposed by eminent physiological psychologists of the Donald Hebb school, which is the closest to neurophysiology.
4. You pay no attention to any of the many neural mathematical models proposed over the past 20 years. Some of them are capable of explaining certain brain functions as brain processes. Of course there is so far no comprehensive satisfactory theory of this type. However, people are working on it and some results are promising. Dualism makes nonsense of all this: it stops research along this line.
5. You are as soft on the ESP charlatans as you are hard on materialists.

I agree of course that the so-called identity theory, as proposed by philosophers (in particular Feigl), is fuzzy. However, dualists have no theory (hypothetico-deductive system) either. And in any case dualism has been barren or worse, by leaving the whole subject in the hands of theologians and philosophers. On the other hand materialism is the philosophy behind physiological psychology, psychochemistry, neurology, etc.: it is fertile where dualism is barren.

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So, now it's out and you'll be angry with me. But I had to say it.

Love to you both.

