



McGill  
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Foundations & Philosophy of Science Unit

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Professor Sir Karl Popper  
Penn, Buckinghamshire

My dear Karl

Thank you very much for your letters concerning my criticisms of your world 3 hypothesis in my book Scientific Materialism.

I appreciate very much what you say about friendship and differences of opinion. Still, one cannot help wishing a better understanding. I remember you and Hennie very often and surprise myself arguing with you on a number of points. After all, you are the only living philosopher who says things interesting to me, although very often also irritating.

Before trying to reply to your complaint over my treatment of your world 3 let me hasten to deny the slanderous gossip that I attacked Eccles personally in Düsseldorf. I had been appointed to comment on his lecture, which was in two parts: one on neurophysiology, the other on interactionist dualism. (There was no psychology at all in it.) I started by praising him sincerely, clearly and loudly on the first half of the lecture, which I found truly splendid. Then I criticized his total lack of arguments, particularly from psychology, for his dualism and in particular for his view of the mind as immaterial yet, at the same time, unknowable. I said all this was a matter of faith, of theology, not of science. Everyone understood that I was attacking Eccles' theology not his personality.

On the other hand Eccles did attack me personally in his book The Human Psyche--again an awful mixture of science and 13th century theology sprinkled with denunciations of "liberal-left activities". Thus on p. 243 he writes of my criticism of his in Düsseldorf: "One can charitably assume that this behaviour is a cover-up for the weakness and illogicality of the determinist position. The subconscious recognition of this may be operating on them not at a rational, but at an emotional level!" If this is not ad hominem, and Freudian to boot, what is it?

And now to your arguments for world 3. It is possible that I have paid insufficient attention to them. If so it is because I believe you have not characterized your world 3 in a precise manner, or have offered evidence for its existence, or have even clarified the difference between conceptual and material existence. (In some of your texts world 3 is a bag of conceptual objects, such as theories, and material ones, such as books.)

I believe at bottom there is a deep disagreement on the proper manner of

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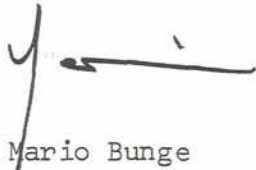
philosophizing--which is not surprising, as you have had a good philosophical training whereas I have had none. You value argument, in particular criticism, and believe that they are decisive. I too value argument, in particular criticism, but do not believe they are enough. I also demand (positive) evidence of some kind, particularly in the case of existence hypotheses. Let me explain.

You hypothesize the existence of world 3 and offer arguments for your hypothesis. In my view mere argument neither proves nor disproves existence--except of course in theology. In formal science existence is either postulated or proved from postulates with the help of logic. In factual science and technology existence conjectures are supported or undermined by both theory and empirical evidence. The former suggests, the latter establishes more or less conclusively. And in a science-oriented philosophy existence claims should be treated in like manner: they should be postulated or proved rigorously in the case of constructs, and supported by empirical evidence in case they concern concrete things. No matter how seductive an argument for the existence of deities, disembodied minds, propositions in themselves, and the like, it will cut no ice with me unless it can be supported by empirical evidence. I have never seen evidence for the hypothesis that there are ideas in themselves. All I know is that some individual brains are capable of thinking, and even of making the pretence that there are ideas in themselves--or, which amounts to the same, assuming that for certain purposes one may disregard individual differences among thought (brain) processes, and speak of ideas in themselves. There is no evidence for the existence of holistic entities such as Plato's realm of ideas or your world 3. In this I am the consistent individualist, you the holist.

There is more to this. By dis-separating brain and mind you and Eccles render neuroscience and physiological psychology powerless. (The whole point of physiological psychology is to explore the hypothesis that mind is nothing but a set of brain functions of a certain kind.) And by postulating that mind and brain interact, you and Eccles (a) use the term 'interact' in a metaphorical way, since it is elucidated in the sciences only with reference to concrete things, and (b) violate the principle of conservation of energy, and even open the door to parapsychology. (As you well know, Eccles has written several times that the mind moves neurons.) So, I believe that, in attacking psychoneural dualism, I am defending the scientific point of view. But I have not restricted myself to such attack: I have offered a materialist theory of mind in my book The Mind-Body Problem (Pergamon 1980). There is a resumé of this book in one of the chapters of my Scientific Materialism, which also contains a chapter on my view of the ontological status of conceptual objects.

So, there it is. But, frankly, I doubt whether you will pay any attention to my arguments. After all you never dealt with any of my ideas in your writings.

All the best and love for you and Hennie.



Mario Bunge

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