

京大過去問 2009年 第1問

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One day I was struck by the admittedly obvious but also incredible realization that, ever since Homo sapiens evolved, every single member of the human race must have possessed a completely unique brain, never duplicated in over tens of thousands of years. How else could each human being have been unique? As every single one of our predecessors have lived out their particular life story, a variety of experiences have literally left their mark on each and every brain. (1)And as each of our predecessors have followed their own particular narrative, so the accumulation of events has in turn acted as an ongoing frame of reference for evaluating whatever comes along next. Could this be the key to unlocking that most controversial of issues: the physical basis of the mind?

Sometimes human beings lose their minds — be they drunk, drugged, ecstatic or simply mad. All are very different conditions, but with this one crucial factor in common: something very special is missing. But what is it exactly that has vanished? Certainly not consciousness, that first-hand, subjective experience of the world. (2)After all, in mindless moments our brains still function: all senses are present if not entirely correct, as the final perspective on what is happening around you is a little distorted compared with ‘normal’. Not only that, but you can move your muscles, even if with a little less control or with greater hesitancy. So ‘loss’ of mind is not the same as loss of the most basic brain functions of senses-input, movement-output. And the converse holds: a paralyzed patient still has a mind comparable to that of anyone else, even if crucial brain functions for interfacing with the outside world are not operational.

What then is this ‘mind’, which is so bound up with the physical brain but so intuitively distinct from it? In the past philosophers, indeed most people, liked to think separately of the generic ‘brain’ as though it was a very different entity from ‘mind’ — a ‘physical’ thing as opposed to a ‘mental’ something. (3)So while no one has ever had a problem with what and where the brain was, and with perceiving it as an obvious physical object, the very concept of ‘mental’ events has caused unresolved intellectual conflict for centuries.

From I.D.: The Quest for Meaning in the 21st Century by Susan Greenfield