

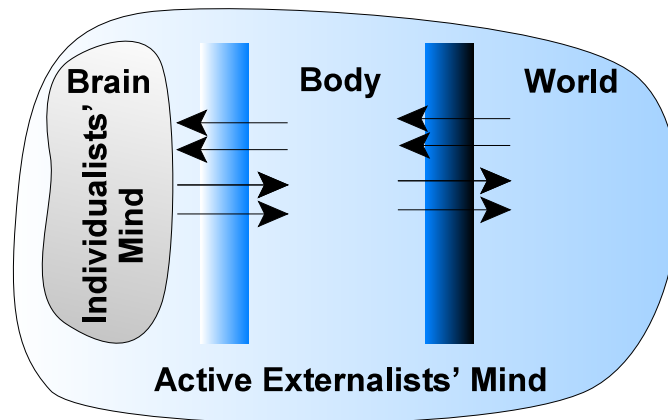
Where is the problem of “Where is the mind?”?

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We propose that the discussions about “where the mind is” depend directly on the metaphysical preconception and definition of “mind”. If we see the mind from one perspective (individualist), it will be only in the brain, and if we see it from another (active externalist), it will be embedded in the body and extended into the world. The “whereabouts” of the mind depends on our $\langle \text{concept} | \text{definition} \rangle^1$ of mind. Therefore, we should not ask if the mind is *somewhere*, but if it is *somehow*.

Many people, such as Clark (1997) and Chalmers (1998), Haugeland (1995), Maturana and Varela (1987), Chiel and Beer (1997), have defended that the mind and cognition is not only in the brain, but it extends to the body and the environment. They can be considered “active externalists”. On the other hand, we could name “individualists”, such as Butler (1998), Adams and Aizawa (2001), who have argued that the mind is only in the brain, even when it is strongly related with the body and environment. There is no discussion about the relevance of studying the brain, body, and world in order to understand the mind. The disagreement lies only on $\langle \text{where} | \text{what} \rangle$ is the mind. But they all think that they speak about the same thing, just because they use the same word to describe it. When we look more closely, they really mean different things with their use of the word “mind”.



For example, we can all agree that it is much harder (and sometimes impossible) to do large multiplications without the aid of pencil and paper. But individualists would see the paper and pencil, the writing hand and perceiving eye, as *tools* of the mind, but not part of a cognitive process. On the other hand, active externalists see the processes so coupled, that they *define* them as *part* of the mind.

At the bottom of the discussion, what lies is just a semantic problem: it depends on which meaning we give to “mind”, that will lead us to consider the body and the world as part of it or not. If we take a $\langle \text{restrictive} | \text{limited} \rangle$ definition of mind, then we would agree with the

¹We use the notation $\langle A | B \rangle$ to mean the conjunction of A and B.

individualists, considering that the mind is composed only of “rational thoughts”. If we take a broader notion of mind, considering behaviour and perception as *mental*, we would give the reason to active externalists.

So which one is the “correct” definition? Well, it all depends on what for we are using it for. In different cases, one should be more appropriate than the other (or even another definition of mind). We cannot say that a definition is “absolutely better” than other. We could say that one is **less incomplete** than another, if the first contains the second. But what if we are interested only in a specific situation? The less incomplete definition could bring too much generality and undesired noise. We can see, that the value of a definition depends directly on the *context* where it is used.

This does not mean that all definitions are valid since we can find a context where they can be valid², and therefore we are not falling into a “radical relativism”. The specific conditions of a problem, and our experience of it, will determine which contexts are useful and which are not. But the fact that for different conditions we can have different definitions, leads us to be alert of the context whenever we are using a definition. Also, while *arguing* about a definition, we should be aware of the context(s) in which the argument takes place, since it is very common (as with the <“mind” case> ^ 2³) that the argument precisely takes place because the people are not aware of the differences of context, and they assume that everyone is speaking about “the same thing”, when their context makes things completely different. Therefore, they will be arguing about different things, and of course the ideas of the arguers will not be congruent with the others’ context. This makes that the argument will not be able to have a conclusion more satisfactory than a sophism.

We believe that by adopting a *contextual* approach, many “problems” in philosophy stop being problems, because we can see them from different perspectives (contexts) at once, without arguing without a sense of <location|context>. In this spirit, the “problem” of “where the mind is” is not a problem at all. Enlarging our context, we can accept both notions of mind, each one useful for their particular subcontext (individualist or active externalist). So, if someone would ask “where is the mind?” we would answer: “it depends on the context you are interested in”. If they are confused and demand “just tell me if it extends to the body and world”, we would say “yes AND no... it depends on the context”.

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²This can be seen as a version of the “silly theorem problem” (Gershenson, 2001): for any silly theorem, you can define infinite sets of axioms so that the silly theorem is consistent with the axioms.

³We use the notation <A> ^ n to indicate that “A” has n different meanings at the same time. In this case, we use “mind case” as in ~“mind instance” AND as in ~“mind box”.

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