

Mind-Body Unity: Beyond an Ethical Approach

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Mind-body unity is one of the central concepts in Unificationism. It is often construed within ethical contexts as the control of bodily desires by reason/will, or sometimes as a formation of virtuous character. There is great value in other approaches to mind-body unity beyond the dominant rationalist ethical model. I discuss two valuable ones, the Depth Psychology of Carl Jung, who tackled psychic problems, and from Flow theory by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a pioneer of positive psychology.



Ethical Approach

Mind-body unity is commonly understood as an ethical issue. The most popular perspective is to understand the unity of mind-body as control of bodily desires by rational understanding of moral principles and/or the will. Faith is often added to enhance moral commitment. When one places the mind-body issue within a traditional ethical framework, one is led to interpret the issue within the framework of dichotomy between reason/will and the rest. The task of “unity” is understood as how to subordinate non-rational elements of the self (bodily desires and emotions) to reason/will. Within this framework, the problem is construed as a lack of or weakness of will or reason. The remedy is consequently understood as having stronger commitment or will and clearer understanding of truth.

However, the biggest problem is this framework itself. Within this framework, love, which is central to the unity of mind-body in Unificationism, loses its core role. Overemphasis of reason/will in dominant ethical traditions tends to devalue love as an “irrational” element that is hostile to reason.

Some recent theories, such as Care Ethics, which developed out of the feminist movement, attempt to build an ethical system upon love. Nevertheless, dominant ethical theories (such as Kantian and utilitarian ethics) view the human being as rational, independent, and autonomous. Care Ethics views the human being as a caring (loving; emotional) and interdependent (parents-child; husband-wife; elderly-young, etc.) being.

In my reading of Unificationism, mind-body unity is the fullness of being, realized by full manifestation of love (heart), reason, and creativity in their synergetic dynamic unity. Although ethics is an important aspect of life, unity of mind-body means more than the ethical element. One must be aware of the

limitation of the ethical framework when approaching the mind-body unity issue.

Unity of Mind-body as the Integration of the Self: Carl Jung's Approach

Mental illness is one of the most difficult problem areas in psychology. Depth Psychology developed out of the task of dealing with pathological problems. Within the framework of Depth Psychology, unity of mind-body can be interpreted as the integration of the self. In this framework, one's conscious ego is only a part of the vast realm of mind. There are layers of selves from ego-driven conscious self to the selves rooted in the unconscious realm. The term "Depth" comes from its exploration of the unconsciousness. Jung's psychology is called Analytic Psychology, a branch of Depth Psychology.

In Jung's view, besides ego-consciousness (conscious efforts driven by reason/will), there are multiple social identities ("persona") defined by social roles (occupation, mother, wife, community member, and others); suppressed identities or the unwanted self ("shadows"); bodily desires and energies driven by pleasure principles ("libido") and more. When the self is disintegrated by conflicts among those layers, pathological problems arise.

This perspective presents physical, social, and religious (Jung has extensive studies about archetypal affinity among world religions) dimensions of the self. The problem of mind-body unity can be seen as the disintegration of selves. The task within this model is to integrate the pleasure principle-driven libidinal desires, the suppressed shadow self, social selves based upon one's multiple social roles, and acts of ego-conscious. Diverse methods such as dream analysis, counseling, and other healing techniques were developed to deal with the problem.

Unity of Mind-body as Joy: Approach from Flow Theory

One also can approach mind-body unity from the perspective of positive psychology. Rather than taking the "negative" aspect of mental disorders as the issue, positive psychology explores how one can develop one's potentials to realize such "positive" aspects of life as happiness, hope, and joy. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is one of the pioneers of positive psychology and is best known for the concept of Flow.

Csikszentmihalyi wondered why people such as mountain climbers so enthusiastically undertake such arduous and agonizing tasks without external rewards. He found that they "enjoy" challenges and overcoming them. This autotelic (purpose and process are one) characteristic is common to the works of artists, athletes, scientists, and other creative people. Flow is the descriptive term of a kind of state of being when one is totally involved in what one does in joy. Forgetfulness of ego is also a characteristic of Flow. It is an experience of the oneness of mind and body.

In the experience of Flow, work become like play. Just as children enjoy playing, one deals with work just like play. In Unificationist terminology, work-as-play lifestyles are called "leisure (hobby) industry" and "hobby life." It implies that one enjoys work and life like a hobby. For the kind of mind-body unity described as Flow, passion (love, fascination) and creativity are integrated. Sports, artistic activities, yoga, and meditation may fall under the broad category of Flow.

Conclusion

In my reading of Unificationism, mind-body unity is a descriptive term for the fullness of being in an individual. It is more than non-violation of moral codes. If it is a description of the fulfilled ("perfected") individual, it should be a concept that describes caring, truthful, and creative aspects of the individual. Partly because of the limitation of ethical theories, ethical interpretations of mind-body unity tend to focus on taming and transforming a lively, passionate, and creative child-like human being into an unattractive, rigid, rule-driven individual.

Reason/will is certainly an indispensable element and the ethical interpretation of mind-body unity has its merit. The task is to develop integral approaches. I hope this article stimulates readers to explore diverse approaches to the question of mind-body unity.