

Postscript to 'The Nature of Mind' by D M Armstrong

This paper was first printed in 1966, but I still think it was on the right track. Two years later I published a rather long book *A Materialist Theory of the Mind* that developed my position further. One thing still evaded me. Why did so many philosophers reject the materialist theory out of hand? Was this just conservatism when presented with new ideas? That was a little hard to believe. But shortly afterwards, too late to go into the book, I came on what I think answered my problem. The new idea was published in the journal *Analysis* under the title: 'The Headless Woman and the Defence of Materialism' (1968, 29, 48–49).

The Headless Woman was an illusion that conjurers used to set up. A woman (it could have been a man, of course!) was presented with a black cloth over her head against a uniform black background. Properly done, the effect (so I am told) was very striking. It seemed for all the world as if the woman had no head. Unsophisticated persons might even have been deceived.

Now to apply this to the defence of materialism about the mind. There is an argument that appears to have some force and I think influences philosophers, consciously or unconsciously. Call it 'The Argument from Introspection'. Materialists have no business to

deny that there is such a thing as introspection, though they will have to give a materialist account of what is going on, perhaps as a self-scanning system in the brain. Introspection gives us an ability, limited and fallible no doubt, to be aware of some of our own mental processes and states. But what we are never aware of in turning our gaze on our own mental processes and states is brain processes and states. So, is it not natural to assume that the mental and the physical are *not* identical?

But phenomena such as the Headless Woman show us that our natural idea that introspection makes it plausible that the mental is not physical could be an illusion, a metaphysical illusion as Jack Smart has recently called it. In this illusion, the materialist can say, we pass from something that is true, that in introspection we are unaware that the mental is a brain process to something false. What is false, the materialist can say, is that the mental is not a brain process. The situation is just the same as in the Headless Woman illusion. In that illusion we pass from being unaware of the woman's head to an impression that she has no head.

This, of course, does not for one moment show that the materialist's theory is true. But it does neutralize the psychologically attractive argument from introspection.