

## Interview:

### Erhan Demircioğlu

Erhan Demircioğlu is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at Koç University. He received his Ph.D. from University of Pittsburgh in 2011. He's interested in epistemology, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of language. His book, *Makinedeki Hayalet: Zihin Felsefesine Giriş*, was published by Fol Kitap in 2021.

*1. Although you study in various fields of philosophy, your main interest seems to be the philosophy of mind. What makes philosophy of mind interesting to you?*

Actually, I am mainly interested in two different areas of philosophy: epistemology and philosophy of mind. My most substantial works are on issues in these areas.

It seems to me that your question has two different aspects. One is about philosophy in general, the other about philosophy of mind in particular. I want to say "philosophy is interesting *in itself*, and thus interesting to me." This answer is, I think, correct but not really helpful because it probably wouldn't motivate anyone to study philosophy if she does not already have that motivation in the first place. As for philosophy of mind, the same answer seems basically correct to me, but again without much persuasive power. My general strategy is to list some philosophical questions about the mind (e.g., how is the mind related to the brain? What is it for a mental item to be about things out there? Are you and your mind two different things?) and hope that people will automatically find them interesting.

*2. Some people - even some philosophers - think that science illuminates the properties of the mind and there is no need for philosophy. Do you think that neurological developments make philosophy of mind unnecessary?*

No, science cannot render philosophy obsolete. Philosophical questions about the mind are those questions that cannot be answered through empirical observation and hypothesis construction on the basis of empirical observation. Neuroscience – as the core of cognitive science – is mainly in the business of discovering what regions of the brain are correlated with what mental

states/events. And, knowledge of correlation tells us almost nothing about the nature of the mind-body relation.

**3. *Do you think the mind-body problem will be solved one day? Or, as Colin McGinn said, is this an issue that we are epistemically closed to?***

I don't think the philosophical mind-body problem can be solved, if by "a solution," we mean something like a philosophical theory of the mind achieving a status similar to that of Einstein's Theory of Relativity among physicists. Does this mean that McGinn is right that the solution to the philosophical mind-body problem is beyond our cognitive reach? Yes, McGinn is right about this. But, as I read him, McGinn also claims that there is a *scientific* solution to the philosophical mind-body problem. And, I don't agree with this.

**4. *Recently, Panpsychism has been very popular in both academia and popular culture. Do you think Panpsychism is a successful position that does not fall into the problems of physicalism and dualism?***

Panpsychism is a crazy view. It says that consciousness is a fundamental feature of the universe and it is instantiated even at the micro-physical level. This view is at least as unbelievable as physicalism and (substance) dualism, if not more. Panpsychism owes its current popularity mostly to the fact that it has proved itself more defensible than hitherto assumed, but that clearly does not mean that it is defensible. In fact, I believe that the popularity of panpsychism will be very short-lived.

**5. *What do you think about Philosophical Zombies?***

I can conceive them. I don't see any incoherence in the idea that there might be a physical object that is molecule-by-molecule identical to my body but that lacks a conscious mind. Philosophical zombies are conceivable. A further question is whether that they are conceivable entails that they are possible. I believe that the answer is yes. This means that I believe that physical properties might be instantiated while mental properties are not, which entails that mental properties cannot be identified with physical ones.

6. *Do you think that quantum mechanics can unravel the mysteries of consciousness? Or is this an attempt to explain one mysterious thing with another mysterious one?*

I don't see how quantum mechanics can tell any informative story about the mind.

7. *Some philosophers think that there is no problem of consciousness that needs to be explained because there really is no such thing as consciousness. Might consciousness be just an illusion?*

Consciousness feels very real. It very much looks like I have experiences of various sorts, perceptual experiences and bodily sensations. The thing about consciousness is that there is no appearance-reality gap that applies to it. There *is* pain insofar as there is a subject that *feels* pain. And, if there is no appearance-reality gap, and if consciousness *appears* to exist, then consciousness *does* exist. Illusionism about consciousness is one of those crazy views, along with panpsychism, that has been advanced recently, which attests to the chaos philosophy of mind finds itself in.

8. *Finally, what advice would you give to undergraduate students interested in this field?*

Remember that philosophy of mind is not restricted to being an investigation into the nature of the relation between the mind and the body. There are many other interesting questions that fall within the scope of philosophy of mind. Here are a few: Is a perceptual experience structured as a combination of two logically different constituents, the act of experiencing and the object of experiencing, or is it monadic? Are subjectively indistinguishable experiences necessarily the same kind of experience? Do experiences have non-conceptual content? Do expectations shape experiences? What is the relation between the qualitative nature of experiences and their being about things out there? What is a belief? What is a desire? Are there such things as innate ideas? There are so many other interesting questions to ask within philosophy of mind even if we temporarily set aside the question regarding the mind-body relation.