Robert Lawrence Kuhn:
Dan, I’ve heard this philosophers’ expression the mind/body problem my whole life, and it’s been r fascinating, but I’d love you as a philosopher to describe literally what is the mind/body problem.

Daniel Dennett:
The mind/body problem arises because we behave in the world. If we discovered that mountains somehow resisted our attempts to run bulldozers up them and make mountains -- make roads on them--, if we found that plants did more than just catch the occasional insect, then we’d have the mountain/mind/body problem, the mind/mountain problem and the mind/plant problem. It’s animals, and more particularly human beings, who have bodies that are incredibly adroit and resourceful and behave in clever ways. That’s where the mind/body problem comes in, because we want to know how on the earth this works. It seems to be different from everything else we see in nature. And the other amazing thing is that each of us seems to know about himself or herself just exactly how it works, because we know what we’re doing and why, and we know that we can see and that we can hear and that we can plan ahead, and if we decide to raise our arm, we raise our arm; if we decide to reach for that apple, we reach for the apple. So, from the inside, we seem to know our minds not just well, but even perfectly. There seems to be nothing hidden from view.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn:
And no doubt it’s there.

Daniel Dennett:
No doubt it’s there, and it’s the most natural thing in the world to think that well, everyone else must have one of these too. And so, now you’ve got a mind, I’ve got a mind; how on earth do these relate to our respective bodies? If we open up your skull and look inside, we’re going to find a brain. It doesn’t look much like what we thought the mind was going to look like. Not that we had much of an idea of what the mind would look like. But that’s the mind/body problem; how can this thing that I know so well from the inside govern this body, and do you have one too?

Robert Lawrence Kuhn:
Now, most of the solutions, until science became in its current form, imagined there were – there had to be some sort of dualistic approach. There had to be some non-physical spirit or soul, the immortal soul, and the brain, sure, and they sort of worked together or worked the part or however—however they function. With the advent of science, we now see a—a complexification of that dualistic view.

Daniel Dennett:
Yeah, in fact if you go back and look at Descartes, René Descartes, who was the -- really the father of Dualism, he -- he did a very interesting thing. He said, first of all, “Only human beings have minds.” Animals didn’t have minds, they were just fancy clockwork. And we’re a lot of flan -- fancy clockwork too. There’s lots of just mechanical processes going on in our body. But then addition to those fancy processes, there’s -- there’s a special and, even to him, mysterious link to an immaterial mind. Now, both halves of this were problematic for his contemporaries. One of his critics, Arnauld, famously said, you mean that the light bounces off the head of a wolf into the eye of a sheep and causes the sheep to recognize the wolf and flee, and this is just a mechanical explanation for this? He said yes, yes. Yes, there can be a clockwork, if you like, explanation of that phenomenon. That isn’t so wonderful that there couldn’t be a mechanical explanation. The one thing that Descartes said could not be done mechanically is what we’re doing right now: having an intelligent conversation. What he realized, and it’s since been confirmed by linguistics if -- if there was ever any doubt, is that there’s as good as an infinity of sentences that you and I can effortlessly understand.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn:
Um-hum.

Daniel Dennett:
He didn’t see how anything mechanical could do that. Today I think, now that we have computers and we can now, for the first time, take seriously a -- a machine with a trillion moving parts --

Robert Lawrence Kuhn:
[Laughs.]

Daniel Dennett:
-- All bets are off on that. But in his day, given what he thought machines were capable of, it's not surprising that he thought that no machine could do this.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn:
Hum. Alright, let’s -- now we have the mind/body problem, and we see some of the historical origins, and we know science has developed enormously in terms of understanding the brain, what are some of the methodologies that we can use -- the contextual ways of thinking about the mind/body problem?

Daniel Dennett:
Well I’ve put forward a, a neutral way of thinking about the problem, saying, “Alright, so -- so what is the problem? What are the data? Let's, let's have a catalogue.” And the data are what we do. Well, we can record that, we can use video and sound recording and we can wire people up and gets of data about what's going on in their brains and their bodies. And then we can talk to them and we can get them to tell us what it’s like, and to talk about what they see and hear and feel and smell and so forth. And now that’s -- how do we use that data? I call this, by the way, by very the unignamly term, hetero-
phenomenology. This is phenomenology of the other as opposed to auto-phenomenology, which is introspection, which is phenomenology of yourself.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn:
Phenomenology being the things that we feel and sense and -- ?

Daniel Dennett:
Phenomenology in its original meaning was just a catalogue of the things -- of the phenomena that had to be explained.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn:
[Overlapping.] Yeah, right.

Daniel Dennett:
So -- a -- a -- Gilbert did the phenomenology of magnets. He didn't have much of a clue about what magnets really were. But he studied what they did. And he got a lovely catalogue of magnet behavior --

Robert Lawrence Kuhn:
[Overlapping.] So that's what we should do for the behavior of the mind, etc.

Daniel Dennett:
[Overlapping.] We should do that for the mind too. And of course we already have the term phenomenology being used by -- by a school of thought. And I would say, "Right, they want a theory pure, theory neutral catalogue of the things that need to be explained." These are the data that have to be encompassed by any good theory of the mind.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn:
Now by you calling the methodology or proposing neutral sort of indicates that other people might have used a methodology that's not neutral, which seems to be a -- a critical thing for people to do that. What are some of the other approaches that are contrasted with a neutral approach?

Daniel Dennett:
Well that's a good question because I've been challenging those who disagree with my claim that my method is neutral to describe for me a phenomenon or a method, which is not part of hetero-phenomenology, which they endorse.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn:
Yes [Laughs].

Daniel Dennett:
And it's not clear that they can do this. Once they think about it, they usually end up reinventing hetero-phenomenology because they --

Robert Lawrence Kuhn:

Daniel Dennett:
-- by a neutral way. Because, after all, uh, you can sit there by yourself doing what I call "lone wolf auto-phenomenology" and just try to record what -- what's going on in your head and -- and think about it, and reflect on it, and perhaps keep a diary. "Okay, now, how good are those data? Well let's see if other people come up with the same sort of diaries." You -- you're only going to take your data and throw them into the hetero-phenomenological mill.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn:
Now you've called this -- is a -- like a third person, because it's a third person looking at the data.

Daniel Dennett:
[Overlapping.] Yeah, that's right. That's right.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn:
Now other people say, "That's fine, Dan. But unless you do a first person analysis, the internal of the auto, unless you do that you are missing what consciousness is really all -- You're missing the fundamental core of consciousness. And you can do third person for the -- all eternity and you learn everything, but you won't get the point because you're not doing first person."

Daniel Dennett:
[Overlapping.] [Laughs.] Yes, uh, and you've done that very well. That's an excellent John Searle imitation that you've just done. And he -- he, among others, uh, uh, make exactly this criticism. And -- but if you look closely at -- at what they're calling for, of course I don't say, "Don't you dare introspect." But I'm saying, "When you introspect, you have to treat your own introspections with the same circumspection, the same caution that you treat everybody else's." You can be wrong. You -- those are -- the data are your -- are your convictions. Stop there. Don't assume that your convictions are true. Maybe they're true. Maybe usually they're true. Maybe almost always they're true. But the data are the convictions, the beliefs. Not the punitive objects of the belief. If you believe with all your heart and soul that your visual world is detailed all the way out, you're just wrong.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn:
[Overlapping.] -- wrong. [Laughs.]
Daniel Dennett: And so we don't want science to try to explain all that detail because that detail doesn't exist. You're just wrong.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn: So what you're saying is that unless you can take that first person experience and subject it to the third person neutrality --

Daniel Dennett: -- that's it.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn: -- it's not science.

Daniel Dennett: That's right. Now, why should we do science then? That's a good question. But I think most of the people who are interested in the mind/body problem accept that that is the mind/body problem. What is a scientific? How can we unify our everyday introspective personal, first personal sense of ourselves with a world that science tells us is there? Science has an account of you and of me as material bodies. How do we put that into registration with all of this data we gather by just being alive and awake? I say there's a neutral way of doing it. You have to pass it through the third person sieve.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn: You've talked about the need to have, what you call, an intentional stance versus a physical or design stance. So how -- how does that help us?

Daniel Dennett: Well if you've got a human subject sitting there, you've got a physical object, and it's -- say it's making noises. Well you can treat those just like -- just like a squeaky door or -- or -- or the sound of the wind in the leaves. Or you can treat them as meaning something. Now we really have to -- we have to treat those -- those sounds coming out of the mouth as, by and large, meaning something. So we have to treat them as speech acts. And speech acts are intentional utterances. And they are the expression of convictions or beliefs on the part of the subject. Now not always -- sometimes people tell us lies. So if we're going to use people as subjects, we have to treat this very carefully. We have to, first of all, make sure that they don't know what we want to hear too much, because then they'll tend to give us what we want -- we don't want them to have too many beliefs about what our goal in this research is. But we want them to desire to tell the truth. And so we treat them as having beliefs and desires. Now when chemists work with or -- inorganic or organic chemists -- chemicals, they don't have to worry about attributing beliefs or desires to the things in the test tubes. But -- but when you're working with people, you do. That's adopting the intentional stance. It's treating them as agents that have minds, that have beliefs and desires and you can -- you can, uh, entrain behavior, you can encourage behavior, you can limit behavior by thinking of them in this way, and saying, "I'll pay you 15 dollars an hour if you'll do this. [Laughs.] But don't do that, please, because that would not be productive to my interest." Now the reasons that works is that you -- you've correctly judged that this is a person who wants the 15 dollars an hour, understands the rules that you've given, and, will make an honest effort to abide by the rules.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn: So you're taking intentional stance towards that person?

Daniel Dennett: [Overlapping.] All of that -- that's taking -- that is taking the intentional stance towards the person. It is just a fancy way of saying, "treating them as a person. Treating them as a -- as having a mind." Now it's neutral still because maybe they don't have a mind. Maybe they're just a robot. Maybe they're just a computer. But still you would treat them from the intentional stance because that's the way you get the data. So if you're -- if you're interacting with a -- with a computer and you don't know it, you're still using the intentional stance. And if -- if -- if you want to find out whether you're talking to a computer rather than a human being, the best thing to do is to push the intentional stance as hard as it will go and see if you can make the thing crack. That's the way to unmask something that isn't something with beliefs and desires.