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## Commentaries in the Neurosciences

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### SELVES AND BRAINS

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#### Abstract

This commentary explores an alternative to the view of the mind-body relationship expounded by Sir Karl Popper and Sir John Eccles in their recent book: *The Self and its Brain*—*An Argument for Interactionism*.<sup>1</sup> It compares and contrasts their views with the “Emergentist Materialist”™ position outlined by Bunge in his commentary in *Neuroscience*, and outlines a third option which seems to fit with available data without entailing the more extreme conclusions of either side.

Taking the standpoint of information-engineering, this would argue that there is no more need to postulate interference with brain mechanics in order to recognize that thought can effectively determine action, than there is to postulate interference with the mechanics of a computer in order to recognize that its behaviour is determined by the equation it is solving. Taking our experience of conscious agency (rather than “matter”™ or “mind”) as primary, it would reject as incoherent the materialist equation of “mind”™ with “brain”. The suggestion offered is rather that if our conscious thinking is *embodied in* (i.e. neither identical with, nor alongside) our cerebral

processes, then we have a realistic scientific basis for mechanistic psychophysiological research which requires no rejection of the moral and spiritual significance of human nature.

The experimental findings adduced by Eccles in support of his interactionist hypothesis are shown to be open to alternative interpretations. It is suggested that the peculiar facts of our self-conscious experience should make us look for corresponding (self-modifying) features of the cerebral information-flow system, rather than any disturbances of its physical functioning.

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