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Natasha Mitchell: And hello, welcome to All in the Mind, Natasha Mitchell joining you, where this week on ABC Radio National we're celebrating a stack of 50th birthdays as part of our window on 1956.

Today we're toasting the greatest conundrum for all of us obsessed with matters mental. The Mind-Body problem.

Are they the same thing? Does one produce the other? Or should we, like Renes Descartes did, split the two - into a soul-like mind and a fleshy, material brain? His idea of a mind-body dualism.

Well, in 1956, a group of renegade Oxford graduates Down Under, now international stars in philosophy, launched a challenge. Consciousness and the brain were united and any talk of mental spooks, and ghosts in the machine was out. Two of those trailblazers, now in their 80s, join me today along with some of their contemporary kin.

Reading: *I am not lodged in my body merely as a pilot of a ship, but so intimately conjoined and, as it were, intermingled with it, that with it I form a unitary whole.*

Were not this the case, I should not sense pain when my body is hurt, being, as I should be then, merely a thinking thing, but should apprehend the wound in a purely cognitive manner, just as a sailor apprehends by sight any damage to his ship.

Renes Descartes - Meditation 6 Of the Existence of Material Things, and of the Real Distinction between the Soul and Body of Man.

Reading: *The problem is how any collection of cells could generate a conscious being...The problem is in the raw materials...It looks as if, with consciousness, a new kind of reality has been injected into the universe.*

How can mere matter generate consciousness?...If the brain is spatial, being a hunk of matter in space, how on earth could the mind arise from the brain? This seems like a miracle, a rupture in the natural order.

Colin McGinn 1999

Gerard O'Brien: The problem with dualism is that it is deeply unscientific, and is deeply unscientific in the following way: If you assert that the mind is non-physical then what you're actually doing is

you're throwing a kind of a veil around the mind and you're saying it's an arena that we will not be able to explain, that we're always going to have to leave mysterious.

Natasha Mitchell: Perhaps we like it that way.

Gerard O'Brien: And I think for a number of people they do, this is something that people in a way want, they don't want the science to encroach on the mind.

Natasha Mitchell: Our special-ness, it's our unique feature.

Gerard O'Brien: Exactly.

Natasha Mitchell: Gerard O'Brien, Professor of Philosophy at Adelaide University. Which is where the disembodied brain of the world renowned English philosopher, Ullin Thomas or U.T. Place who died in 2000 can be found on display. But why is it there? That's today's show.

Only in Australia for three years, it was here that U.T. Place penned his famous 1956 work, *Is Consciousness a Brain Process?* Jack Smart who'd brought Place out and influenced his ideas, grabbed the philosophical baton and wrote his famous paper a few years later, *Sensations and Brain Processes*.

They were to put Australian philosophy on the map and spark a revolution really in how philosophers view the nature of mind and consciousness. Their idea became known as *The Mind-brain Identity theory* - that the mind is *identical* to the brain - it just is the brain.

Now 86, Jack Smart is Emeritus Professor at the Australian National University, and Honorary Research Associate at Monash University.

Look, I gather your dear friend and colleague Ullin or U.T. Place as he's known donated his brain to Adelaide University where you were both at. It's on display there. What do you make of that?

Jack Smart: Yes, well I was head of the department then and the department couldn't import his brain because it was biological material. But the Professor of Anatomy had a license to import biological materials, so he imported it and it's in the anatomy museum with a nice picture of Ullin. I think the words he wanted on it were "Did this brain once hold the consciousness of U.T. Place?", something like that.

Natasha Mitchell: And that's the essence of his problem. He only spent a few years in Australia but clearly they were years that mattered to him for him to donate his brain to the university.

Jack Smart: Well, he was the one who first argued that the mind is identical with the brain roughly, so if he wanted to have his brain put anywhere it would be Adelaide.

Reading: *It seems to me that science is increasingly giving us a viewpoint whereby organisms are able to be seen as physico-chemical mechanisms. It seems that even the behaviour of Man himself will one day be explicable in mechanistic terms. There does seem to be, so far as science is concerned, nothing in the world but increasingly complex arrangements of physical constituents. All except for one place: in consciousness.*

J.J.C. Smart 1959 - Sensations and Brain Processes.

David Armstrong: There was an inner life, there's obviously an inner life. Most people, and most philosophers, since the days of Descartes at least, have thought of this as something extra to the body. That didn't seem to Place, or to Smart, or to me later, or to many others at all scientifically plausible. It did look as though the mind would have to be within, actually, literally within the head.

Natasha Mitchell: David Armstrong, former Challis Professor of Philosophy at the University of Sydney for nearly 30 years and head of school, and awarded an Order of Australia for his services to the field.

Like Jack Smart and U.T. Place he became an international star in philosophy for works like *A Materialist Theory of the Mind* and *The Mind-Body Problem: An Opinionated Introduction*.

(Question to David Chalmers) It's an age old problem that they were all stuck on wasn't it, it goes back to Descartes and well before. The Mind-Body problem, as it's called, just doesn't seem to want to vacate the premises. What is it and why does it persist so?

David Chalmers: The Mind-Body problem basically stems from the fact that we all have minds, we can all tell from the inside that we're conscious, we see, we think, we feel and so on. And we also know we have brains, that we've got all these neurons in our head - a hundred billion or so of them interacting. And it's pretty obvious that these have something to do with each other. But what do they have to do each other, how do you get from having a brain to having a mind? And that's the traditional Mind-Body problem.

Natasha Mitchell: David Chalmers is Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Centre for Consciousness at the Australian National University, and author of *The Conscious Mind*. As you'll hear he still contends, rather like Descartes, that the mind is something *more* than the brain.

David Chalmers: Descartes said there was just two separate things - the brain affects the mind, and the mind affects the brain, but it's a mistake to think of them as fundamentally one entity. That leads to problems - how does the mind affect the physical world? There'd have to be gaps in physics, that looks to be unscientific.

The alternative, another view is everything is mind, the physical world doesn't even exist in its own right. But then the third traditional view is Materialism, ultimately everything is physical, the mind just is the brain.

But then the mind doesn't seem to be a process in the brain; it seems completely different in its character. All these reds and blues and images and feelings and thoughts and emotions - they don't seem to be physical. So Place and Smart came along and said 'look, actually it's very simple'.

Smart and Place put it in a straightforwardly Australian way. The mind is the brain, mental states just are states of the brain and that's all there is to it. Now of course that didn't solve the problem immediately and make everyone roll over in agreement, but they got people talking about it from the 50s and the 60s, and basically it's never stopped since.

Natasha Mitchell: Your name along with U.T Place are two of the most recognised in Philosophy of Mind circles in the world today. A lot of Australians wouldn't know this necessarily but as with sport Australians punch above their weight in the international philosophy community. Why do you think that is?

Jack Smart: I think that Australians have a natural talent for philosophy. I mean, not all of them of course, some are the opposite, but I think they are down to earth and not liable to talk nonsense as the French do.

Gerard O'Brien: It is very interesting because when you consider the number of philosophers in Australia and then you consider the impact that Australian philosophy has had on the world, it is quite stunning.

Why that is - one view of it, and this is a view that comes from David Armstrong, he likes to talk about the fact that what's been important in recent years in philosophy over the last 50 years is an approach that can be called Realism. It's an approach that says we really have to take philosophy out into the world and understand the world the way it is.

And he said the trouble with when you study philosophy in other parts of the world, and here he is especially referring to somewhere like England, he says there's just so much fog and mist and so forth outside, people tend believe that the world is ethereal and they never really get out and do the hard work. Whereas in Australia, in the hard light....

Natasha Mitchell: We're on the beach..

Gerard O'Brien: ...it just exposes everything, we're forced to look at the world as it really is and it means that we can be honest about that and we can really get down and do some important work.

Natasha Mitchell: We're good at baking our ideas in sun!

Gerard O'Brien: Yes, yes.

David Chalmers: I think a lot of it goes back to people like Place, Smart, David Armstrong who got a really vigorous tradition for doing philosophy in the 50s and 60s. Also perhaps the way we do philosophy in Australia, we do it socially, we do it over a beer, argue out the points with no holds barred. We're drinking a beer and we're drinking another, and everyone is still the best of friends afterwards. And I think this has really been good spirit for encouraging the development of some pretty serious thinking at the same time.

Natasha Mitchell: It's all about beer...

David Chalmers: It is.

Natasha Mitchell: Professor David Chalmers on ABC Radio National, Radio Australia and for many thousands now via podcast, this is All in the Mind, I'm Natasha Mitchell.

Today as part of Radio National's 1956 celebrations the great Mind-Body problem - are the mind and the brain the same thing? In the 50s a group of brash philosophers Down Under took it on with flair.

Associate Professor Gerard O'Brien.

Gerard O'Brien: This is a very personal view and I think it wouldn't be shared by many people but I think philosophy had kind of lost its way by the mid 20th century. Philosophers had instead of looking outwards to the world and trying to consider problems associated with the world, I think they'd started to focus a lot on the language we use to describe the world. This is sometimes called the 'linguistic turn' in philosophy. And so when it came to the Philosophy of Mind, philosophers said for some while, instead of thinking about the nature of mind as such directly, they were thinking more about the language we use to describe the mental realm.

Natasha Mitchell: Gerard O'Brien it all got very tangled up in language though didn't it. What did U.T. Place's paper, and the title was *Is Consciousness a Brain Process?*, really try and do, and how did it bring the *brain* back into this story?

Gerard O'Brien: So what Place came along and did was he said, 'Actually this claim that has been made in the past that one cannot identify consciousness with brain processes'...And the thought was one can't do that because to assert that identity must be wrong because one could logically hold that one could have a certain kind of conscious experience, such as a pain, without having brain processes occurring. And so they thought it was conceivable that one of these things could occur in the absence of the other, and therefore one couldn't identify those two -...

Natasha Mitchell: And for example, to say that consciousness *equals* the brain, equals a brain process, then if you're saying 'oh well I'm having the sensation of green at the moment' - then there

was all sorts of debate about, well, does that mean then the brain itself is green? - if you're saying the two are equivalent.

Gerard O'Brien: That's right. A lot of philosophers just thought that this was absurd to suggest that what you're asserting is a brain process. If your conscious experiences of something green and having a green image of some sort, then you claim that consciousness is a brain process then by what's called 'logical transitivity' you must also be able to claim that brain processes are green.

Philosophers had a field day with these claims, they thought now this is just obviously false and so one cannot simply assert that consciousness is a brain process.

Natasha Mitchell: So there was no sense that the mind could equal, directly, the brain?

Jack Smart: Well they thought that was just absurd, and in a sense they got the odd point. I mean, they might say that a certain undergraduate has a very 'good brain' and will get a first class or even that he had a very 'good mind'. But they would say his 'brain' weighed so many ounces but they wouldn't say that about his 'mind'.

Reading: *Popular theologians sometimes argue against materialism by saying that you can't put love in a test tube... Well, you can't put a gravitational field in a test tube but there is nothing incompatible with Materialism, as I have defined it, in the notion of a gravitational field...*

Even though love may elude test-tubes, it does not elude materialistic metaphysics, since it can be analysed as a pattern of bodily behaviour or, perhaps better, as the internal state of the human organism that accounts for this behaviour.

A dualist who analyses love as an internal state will say that it is a soul state, whereas a Materialist will say that it is a brain state.

J.J.C. Smart - 1963 - Materialism.

Jack Smart: I wanted a metaphysics which was plausible in the light of total science. But that only made it plausible, one had to argue against the opposition of Oxford philosophers, some of who were very good at refutation by means of the raised eyebrow! And one of them said about me, "Has he gone mad, do you think it's the sun in Australia?"

David Armstrong: And philosophers are rather conservative and they also thought they had some rather good arguments against any other position.

My aunt, a very intelligent woman who'd once been a headmistress of a school and she asked me what I was working on at one point and I said, "I'm working on the mind". And she said, "what do you think

about the mind?" I said, "well I think it's actually identical with the brain". And she looked at me and she said, "well what else could it be?"

Lots of ordinary people in the street, and lots of scientists I think, had got to the idea that there must be an inner story for the mind.

Natasha Mitchell: It became dubbed the Australian materialism didn't it.

David Armstrong: Yes it did. Well that was a bit of a joke. Bernard Williams a very good English philosopher thought he had a good joke when he said, "Well, maybe the mind is the brain...in Australia".

Natasha Mitchell: So, the Australians - you got quite a reputation - yourself, your good friend and colleague Jack Smart and Ullin Place?

David Armstrong: Well, Ullin was the centre of it, he started it.

Gerard O'Brien: You know we're talking in the 1950s that Ullin Place and Jack Smart were developing some of these ideas, and I was at Oxford in the mid 80s.

When I got there, there was still this view at Oxford that the Australian Materialism, as it was called by then, was a very naïve position and the attitude was that it was really only held by colonialists out there in Australia, who really hadn't thought in a very deep way about these ideas.

Natasha Mitchell: If it's not in the brain, where the hell is it? Is it some sort of ghost in the machine, is it a sort of spook in the body?

Gerard O'Brien: This is a very curious thing and in general it's very difficult for people to accept that our minds, that the rich vivid experiences that we have, that compose our minds, that those experiences are in some sense to be reduced to that electrochemical activity that we know takes place in the brain.

Natasha Mitchell: Is it all Descartes fault from the 17th century? I mean, as you suggested he saw the mind as something spiritual, ethereal, not of the flesh. Nevertheless though he did think that the mind acted on the body.

Gerard O'Brien: That's right. I mean Descartes had this problem, he knew that there were interactions between the physical world and the non-physical world - the world of the mind. And in the end, because he knew a little bit about neuroanatomy he located the interface at an interesting point in the brain and what's called the pineal gland.

Natasha Mitchell: Just at the base of the brain there.

Gerard O'Brien: Yes, and what's interesting about the pineal gland it hangs down over a quite large ventricle in the brain which we today know is filled with cerebrospinal fluid. But at the time Descartes developed this really interesting hydraulic theory about the way that the mind could affect the pineal gland and in doing so it caused the pineal gland to vibrate in certain ways, and these vibrations set up perturbations in this fluid which he called 'animal spirits'. And the result was - that as a result of these animal spirits moving through the body in a kind of hydraulic fashion - that we were able to behave in the way that we do.

Natasha Mitchell: Because there was a tendency to consider the mind as something spookily non physical, that there's something ineffable about consciousness. You called it a sort of infection from magic and myth.

Jack Smart: I've become rather keen on a view held by a good many philosophers nowadays that consciousness is awareness of awareness.

Natasha Mitchell: So a sort of second order of awareness?

Jack Smart: Yes a second order awareness. There might be a third order of awareness or even further up but not far, because the brain's finite. And the question is do kangaroos, for example, have only awareness. They bound away when you come near them, but are they conscious, are they aware of their awareness?

Natasha Mitchell: What do you think?

Jack Smart: I think that's something that could be tested actually, by neuroscience.

Reading: *It may be asked why I should demand of a tenable Philosophy of Mind that it should be compatible with Materialism?*

...How could a non-physical property or entity suddenly arise in the course of animal evolution? A change in a gene is a change in a complex molecule, which causes a change in the biochemistry of the cell...But what sort of chemical process could lead to the springing into existence of something non-physical? No enzyme can catalyse the production of a spook!

J. J. C. Smart 1963 - Materialism.

Natasha Mitchell: Jack Smart, why do you think we're so threatened, in a sense, by the prospect that our mind is simply our brain? That everything about humans can be explained by our biology?

Jack Smart: Well if you want to go heaven you need a soul. I suppose if you don't want to go to hell it's not so good, but if you want to go to heaven when you die your soul would be handy, if your mind was a soul and could fly off.

So religious people may be threatened but Buddhists wouldn't. Buddhism in its pure form as was propounded by Buddha is completely compatible as far as I can see with modern science and neuroscience. There's a Tibetan Buddhist about nearly 1500 AD who, I've been told that he actually anticipated the higher order theory of consciousness. So Materialism is no trouble for the Buddhists. Except one thing - reincarnation.

Natasha Mitchell: Interestingly though many philosophers of mind aren't religious and certainly weren't religious when you and U.T. Place got onto this in the 50s. And many people listening to our conversation, Jack, will be saying well of course the mind and the brain are one. Why did it take, and why has it taken philosophers of mind so long to feel comfortable with this?

Jack Smart: Well, as I say a lot of hard headed people such as medical students who have not read philosophy - they won't know the arguments that philosophers have brought up against Materialism and these have to be refuted or shown not to work.

Natasha Mitchell: So can we be sure the mind and the brain are the very same thing as U.T. Place, Jack Smart and David Armstrong argued in the 50s and 60s?

The fact is that most philosophers and scientists remain unsettled by the very same major unanswered questions that plagued them all then?

(Question to Gerard O'Brien) We haven't nailed an explanation, a neurological explanation for consciousness. And one of the biggies is how do we account for the qualities, the deeply subjective qualities of our conscious experience, like the redness of red, the sensation of eating a cream bun? And they've been dubbed The Hard Problem of consciousness.

Gerard O'Brien: The Hard Problem, that's right, by our very own David Chalmers. Many people believe that this is the greatest challenge of all facing not just the mind sciences but facing science in general.

There's a lot of work going on in the neurosciences that seeks to isolate those parts of the brain that we know are intimately connected with various kinds of conscious experiences. But it's not enough, and this is very important and neuroscientists are aware of this, it's not enough simply to be able to point to particular patterns of activation in the brain and say that these are the activation patterns that are associated with particular kinds of conscious experiences. It's not enough because we need an explanation that somehow connects the two together. We need to be able to see why, or how those patterns of activation are the qualitative experiences that we're all familiar with.

Natasha Mitchell: And the feeling of being an 'I', or a 'Me'.

Gerard O'Brien: That's right indeed. I mean when we move up to the level of the Self and how complicated it is for a brain to construct a self. And until I think we really start to make headway on that Hard Problem, as it's called, we will always have this legacy of dualism.

Natasha Mitchell: Interestingly enough, though these two fellows were, in a sense, mentors for your own lively and international career as a philosopher of mind - you've been one of the great dissenters of their thinking about the relationship between, or the equivalence of the mind and the brain. Why?

David Chalmers: Yeh, it's a bit sad in a way, growing up in Australia in this great tradition of Australian Materialism.

Natasha Mitchell: Professor David Chalmers is head of the Centre for Consciousness at the Australian National University.

David Chalmers: So I actually ended up giving up on Materialism and becoming I guess an Australian dualist, holding that the mind is something over and above the brain. Very closely connected mind you.

Natasha Mitchell: Yeah, I mean you're well known for arguing you don't necessarily think the qualities of conscious experience are necessarily ever going to be explained by the brain. Or that they're even a physical phenomenon of flesh - you think they're a *non-physical* phenomenon of the flesh or the brain.

David Chalmers: That's right I think that there're really close correlations between the qualities of consciousness and the qualities of the brain, and that science ought to be studying these, and in fact is, we're getting quite a good study of those correlations. But the basic question is: does this show that consciousness *just is* the brain? And I think there's reason to say that the properties of consciousness are just different. They're something over and above the properties of the brain.

Natasha Mitchell: Now you know that people have said of you now, look David, you're just being spooky and kooky here.

David Chalmers: Oh I think there's nothing particularly spooky about it. When it turned out for physicists back in the 19th century they couldn't explain electromagnetic charge and so on, in terms of existing mechanical theories, they said 'OK we have to introduce it as a further quality, bring electromagnetic charge into our theories and we'll say there are further laws of electromagnetism'. So I think we should just take more or less that attitude towards consciousness.

Natasha Mitchell: Look I want to come back to the neuroscientists because it seems that neuroscientists are now taking up the quest with fervour, this question about consciousness and how

we locate the mind very much in the flesh of the brain. Do you think that there's room for Philosophy of Mind any more, perhaps the neuroscientists should take on the task?

Jack Smart: Well you've got to head off these people who argue, often quite plausibly at first sight anyway, that that won't do. David Chalmers for example. There's still philosophical work to be done, it's technically quite a complicated business giving an account of all our mental concepts.

Gerard O'Brien: This will be somewhat controversial I think to philosophers, but I think philosophy had a very important part to play in the whole development of these ideas. But I think the fact is that future progress and understanding is only going to come from the neuroscience, from the neuroscientists working away with their tools.

Natasha Mitchell: Shooting yourself in the foot there.

Gerard O'Brien: I am in a way. And in some ways it's sad, but I feel that so sophisticated, so complex is this problem, it's not enough to simply to think long and hard about it in the way the philosophers have. One has to get down and dirty with the neurons in the brain and poke around and look at what they're doing and analyse what they're doing, and come up with an explanation of how they generate consciousness. That's where the real work is going to be done in the future.

Natasha Mitchell: Jack, how do you reflect on the legacy of your work and the work that you did with Ullin Place, U. T. Place? Did you think that some of those people in the northern hemisphere that said that you'd had a touch of the sun were a bit rude?

Jack Smart: Oh well, philosophers are often rude but we all quite enjoy that. The philosophical discussions after a paper are very lively and even sometimes a bit rude, but nobody minds. If philosophers didn't tolerate disagreement we'd be out of job, because philosophers always disagree!

David Chalmers: Oh, I mean I see the sort of Materialism of Smart and Place as the starting point from which almost all work in this field takes off, including my own work. I mean in philosophy we pay homage to our forefathers so to speak by disagreeing with them, there's no more sincere form of flattery in philosophy. But they're the people who brought consciousness back into philosophy, they got people talking about consciousness at a time when people hadn't been talking about it for years.

David Armstrong: You know of course that philosophy is the profession if you go into it which you die not knowing whether what you've said is true. There are very real difficulties about the Materialist theory of the mind. I espouse it, I think it's right, but I have to agree every theory of the mind faces considerable difficulties. We all have dreadful problems in philosophy, and if you've not got a dreadful problem you're not a philosopher.

Natasha Mitchell: Emeritus Professor David Armstrong - and today you've also heard from Emeritus Professor Jack Smart, Professor David Chalmers Director of the Centre for Consciousness at the Australian National University and Associate Professor Gerard O'Brien from the University of Adelaide.

Thanks also to the resourceful John Sutton who heads up Philosophy at Macquarie University, and to Keryn Kelleway in the ABC library this week. Lots of references and links for today's show on our website which is where you'll also find the audio and podcast additions and a transcript too later in the week.

We're at abc.net.au/rn./allinthemind and go on, email us from there too.

Thanks this week to producer Abbie Thomas, and sound engineer Jen Parsonage, I'm Natasha Mitchell and next week - the elusive nature of chronic pain. Bye for now.