

What am I? Virtual Machines and the Mind/Body Problem

Pollock, John (2007) What am I? Virtual Machines and the Mind/Body Problem.

Full text available as:

[PDF](#) - Requires a viewer, such as [Adobe Acrobat Reader](#) or other PDF viewer.

Abstract

When your word processor or email program is running on your computer, this creates a "virtual machine" that manipulates windows, files, text, etc. What is this virtual machine, and what are the virtual objects it manipulates? Many standard arguments in the philosophy of mind have exact analogues for virtual machines and virtual objects, but we do not want to draw the wild metaphysical conclusions that have sometimes tempted philosophers in the philosophy of mind. A computer file is not made of epiphenomenal ectoplasm. I argue instead that virtual objects are "supervenient objects". The stereotypical example of supervenient objects is the statue and the lump of clay. To this end I propose a theory of supervenient objects. Then I turn to persons and mental states. I argue that my mental states are virtual states of a cognitive virtual machine implemented on my body, and a person is a supervenient object supervening on his cognitive virtual machine.

Keywords: virtual machine, mental state, mind/body problem

Subjects: [Specific Sciences: Cognitive Science](#)

ID Code: 3341

Deposited By: [Pollock, John L.](#)

Deposited On: 19 June 2007