

Introduction to Philosophy

Philosophy 110W
Spring 2012
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Class #18 - Cartesian Dualism
Descartes, "On the Nature of Mind"
Arnauld and Descartes on the Mind

Blade Runner and This Course

- The question of whether the replicants in *Blade Runner* are persons will guide the rest of the course.
 - Are replicants persons?
 - Are replicants producing their behaviors as a result of conscious, inner experience, or as a result of the “chance fall of symbols.”
 - Do they have minds?
 - What is a mind?
 - May Deckard kill the replicants?
- First, we will look at the nature of mental states and conscious experience.
- Then, we will look at the moral question of what makes a person.
- A large part of the answer to that question involves the nature of consciousness.



Liberals, Chauvinists, Solipsists

- Liberal view of minds
 - ▶ minds are just information processors
 - ▶ Defenders of artificial intelligence
 - ▶ “Saying Deep Blue doesn’t really think about chess is like saying an airplane doesn’t really fly because it doesn’t flap its wings” (Drew McDermott).
- Chauvinistic view
 - ▶ only humans have minds
- Solipsism
 - ▶ An even narrower view
 - ▶ I have good reasons only to believe that I have a mind.

Do Animals Have Mental States?

- Smart Chimps
- Painting Elephant
- What we say about the nature of mental states will be general.
- It will apply to all sorts of things: humans, robots, aliens, and animals.

Cartesian Dualism

Dualism and Monism

- Dualism: there are minds and bodies.
 - ▶ Bodies are mechanical, extended, physical things.
 - ▶ Minds, or souls, are essentially thinking and non-physical.
 - ▶ Descartes: We can doubt the existence of our bodies, but we can not doubt the existence of our minds.
- Materialist monism: there are no immaterial minds.
 - ▶ Thomas Hobbes
 - ▶ Pierre Gassendi
 - ▶ Many contemporary philosophers and scientists
- Idealist monism: there is no material world, no bodies at all.
 - ▶ Berkeley

Descartes and the Mind/Body Distinction

We are, essentially, thinking things

- “Simply by knowing that I exist and seeing at the same time that absolutely nothing else belongs to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing, I can infer correctly that my essence consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing” (AT 78).
- Descartes provides two arguments, though most attention gets paid to the first.

Descartes's Main Argument for Dualism

MB1. I have a clear and distinct understanding of my mind, independent of my body.

MB2. I have a clear and distinct understanding of my body, independent of my mind.

MB3. Whatever I can clearly and distinctly conceive of as separate, can be separated by God, and so are really distinct.

MBC. So, my mind is distinct from my body

Clarity and Distinctness

Descartes's Rule

- Any idea I conceive clearly and distinctly must be true.
- Derived from the *cogito*
- Used throughout the *Meditations*

The *Meditations*: An Overview

- Three destructive arguments for doubt.
 - Let go of our beliefs in the evidence of our senses
- The *cogito*
 - We are essentially thinking things.
 - The *cogito* is perceived clearly and distinctly.
 - “Something is clear when it is present and apparent to an attentive mind, in the same way as we assert that we see objects clearly when, being present to the regarding eye, they operate upon it with sufficient strength” (Descartes, *Principles* I.45).
- Descartes struggles to find another belief that is resilient to doubt.
 - But, the deceiver
- Two arguments for the existence of a benevolent God.
 - Causal argument
 - Ontological Argument
- I can be sure of the truth of clear and distinct perceptions because of the goodness of God which ensures that the deceiver is not fooling us in cases where we are most certain.

The Major Premise

MB1. I have a clear and distinct understanding of my mind, independent of my body.

MB2. I have a clear and distinct understanding of my body, independent of my mind.

MB3. Whatever I can clearly and distinctly conceive of as separate, can be separated by God, and so are really distinct.

MBC. So, my mind is distinct from my body

- MB3 is especially contentious.
- The ability of an omnipotent God to separate two objects may not be relevant to the nature and relations of those objects.
- Even if there were a God who could separate my mind from my body, perhaps my mind is, in fact, just a part of, or an aspect of, my body.
- We could weaken the premise to remove reference to God.
 - MB3*. Whatever I can clearly and distinctly conceive of as separate are conceptually distinct.
 - MB3* supports a weaker conceptual dualism.

Conceptual Dualism

We have distinct concepts for the mind and the body.

- Conceptual dualism is a semantic thesis, not a metaphysical one.
- In contrast to substance dualism, conceptual dualism is not very controversial.
- We might express the original MB3 as saying that conceptual dualism entails substance dualism.
- The question is whether that inference is valid.

Substances and Essential Characteristics

- MB1 and MB2 rely on characterizations of the mind and body.
- “To each substance there belongs one principal attribute; in the case of mind, this is thought, and in the case of body it is extension. A substance may indeed be known through any attribute at all; but each substance has one principal property which constitutes its nature and essence, and to which all its other properties are referred. Thus extension in length, breadth and depth constitutes the nature of corporeal substance; and thought constitutes the nature of thinking substance. Everything else which can be attributed to body presupposes extension, and is merely a mode of an extended thing; and similarly, whatever we find in the mind is simply one of the various modes of thinking” (*Principles of Philosophy* 53).
- The core characteristic of thought is consciousness.
- Bodies are mere machines.

Descartes's Second Argument for the Mind/Body Distinction

based on the divisibility of bodies

DB1. Whatever two things have different properties are different objects.

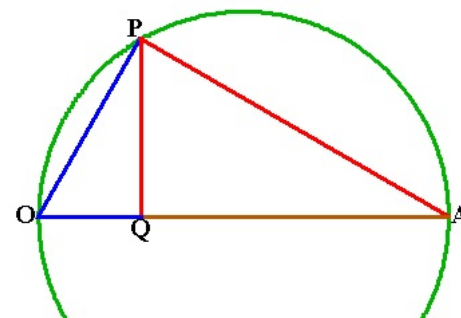
DB2. The mind is indivisible.

DB3. The body is divisible.

DBC. So, the mind is not the body.

- In response, we might just not have noticed that the mind is in fact divisible.

Arnauld's Triangle



- We can be certain that the triangle is right-angled.
- The certainty of our knowledge of our right triangle persists, even if we doubt, or fail to recognize, that the sum of the squares of the legs is equal to the square of the hypotenuse.
- Thus, if Descartes's reasoning about the mind and body is sound, it follows that the Pythagorean theorem must not be essential to the triangle.
- But, we can prove that the Pythagorean theorem holds necessarily of the triangle.
- Descartes's reasoning must thus be unsound.

In the Spirit of Arnauld's Objection

- AO

AO1. I have a clear and distinct understanding of Clark Kent, as someone who can not fly.

AO2. I have a clear and distinct understanding of Superman, as someone who can fly.

AO3. Whatever I can clearly and distinctly conceive of as separate, can be separated by God, and so are really distinct.

AOC. So, Clark Kent is not Superman.

- The conclusion of SC is clearly false.

- But, the form of SC is the same as the form of MB.



A Cartesian Reply to Arnauld

- Descartes should respond by finding a difference between the two arguments such that AO is unsound while MB remains sound.
- He could insist that we do not have a clear and distinct understanding of Clark Kent.
 - Our knowledge of him is inadequate.
- Denigrating our knowledge of Clark Kent solves the problem with the Superman argument.
- But, that solution might rebound on the first premise of Descartes's original argument.
- We have to wonder whether our knowledge of the body is also inadequate.
- Perhaps, if our knowledge of the mind were adequate, then we would understand that the mind is the body, and not distinct from it.

Descartes's First Response

Distinguish between substances and attributes

- Descartes claims to have understanding of two complete substances.
- Arnauld presents one substance (a triangle) and one property (that the Pythagorean theorem holds of it).
- Still, Arnauld can hold that Descartes is claiming that the mind, a substance, lacks any bodily properties.
- So, this distinction will not help Descartes.

Descartes's Second Response

We can understand that a triangle is right-angled without understanding that the Pythagorean theorem holds, but we can not understand that the Pythagorean theorem holds without understanding that the triangle is right-angled.

- Isn't Descartes's claim false?
- The Pythagorean theorem is just a general case of a more general theorem, the Law of Cosines.
 - ▶ In any triangle ABC, $c^2 = a^2 + b^2 - 2ab \cos C$.
- Let's say that we are given the measurements of three sides of a right triangle (e.g. 5, 12, and 13) and told to solve for the measure of angle C.
- We could notice that the three terms other terms drop out, that $c^2 = a^2 + b^2$, leaving $\cos C = 0$.
- So the Pythagorean theorem holds.
- Then, we derive that C is a right angle.
- But, before we do so, we need not recognize that fact.

Descartes's Third Response

- In Arnauld's case, we don't have a clear and distinct understanding of the triangle.
- But we can know, just by introspection, that the body is inessential to the mind, since I can understand, in some special way, the mind, without the body.
- Arnauld's point is that we must wonder if the way that we know the mind is insufficient to rule out an essential link to the body.
- Descartes believes that our knowledge of the mind is complete, so that his argument for the mind/body distinction succeeds.
- Arnauld wonders if our knowledge of the mind is incomplete.

The Problem of Interaction

- The main problem with the Cartesian theory of mind
- Our bodies affect our minds; our minds affect our bodies.
- Why does the mind get drunk when the body does the drinking?
- If they are independent substances, it is hard to see how they could do so.
- Ryle: “theoretical shuttlecocks” transfer information from one domain to the other.
- Monism is motivated mainly by the problem of interaction.

The Pineal Gland



- Descartes claimed that interactions between the mind and body take place in the pineal gland.
 - the seat of the soul
- This does not solve the problem of interaction.
- It merely locates the problem.
- Contrast with a chip in our brains.
- If the controller is no kind of physical object, it is difficult to see how it could have any effects on physical objects.

Materialism

- Hobbes and Gassendi denied the existence of a non-physical mind.
- But their accounts of thought were far too thin to be plausible.
 - Hobbes thought that memory was explained in terms of inert particles stimulated by experience and continuing to move in the brain.
- It is natural to think that motions in the brain (neural firings, say) cause our conscious experience.
- It is far less-plausible to assert that conscious states are just motions of particles.
- Motion is not color.
- Sound is not the motion of air.

Up Next

- Behaviorism
 - Ben
 - Andrew S.