

Descartes on Mind and Body

- Descartes asks: What am I *essentially*? (What are my essential properties?)

Essential property: property F is an essential property of X *if and only if*

it is necessary that if X exists, then X has F.

- Descartes: I am essentially a thinking thing.
- There is no possible way for the world to be such that I exist, but fail to be a thinking thing.

- **Question:** Am I also essentially an extended thing?
- Another way of asking: am I essentially a material thing? (Or, am I essentially a body?)
 - Material things are essentially extended.
 - The wax example.

- Descartes puts the Evil Genius scenario to another purpose (in Meditation VI), that of demonstrating the distinctness of mind and body.
- In doing so, Descartes assumes the following:

Conceivability entails possibility (CP): If it is conceivable that P, then it is possible that P.

The Existence Principle (EP): for all x and for all y, if $x = y$, then it is not possible that (x exists & y does not exist).

As the Evil Genius scenario illustrates, it is conceivable that I exist, but fail to be extended.

Thus, it is possible that I exist, but fail to be extended.

So, I am not essentially extended.

So, I do not have a body essentially.

- But I am essentially a thinking thing.
- So, I have a mind essentially.

- So, it is possible that my mind exists but my body does not.

- Thus, my mind is not identical to my body.
- So, my mind is distinct from my body.

The Conceivability Argument

- 1. It is conceivable that my mind exists without my body. (Evil Genius scenario)
- 2. So, it is possible that my mind exists without my body. (1, CP)
- 3. So, my mind is not identical to my body. (2, EP)
- 4. So, my mind and body are distinct. (3)

- The conclusion of D.'s conceivability argument is a statement of the thesis known as **Substance Dualism**.
- More precisely: **the thesis that mind and body are two distinct substances**.
- Descartes's version of Substance Dualism has an additional thesis: **that mind and body causally interact**, such that the mind affects the body, and *vice versa*.

- Contrast any version of Substance Dualism with any version of:
- **Substance Monism:** the thesis that there is only one substance; mind and body are not distinct substances.

Materialist Substance Monism: the thesis that every mind is identical to some material body.

An Objection to the Conceivability Argument

- The characteristic assumption of the argument (that conc. entails poss.) is **false**: conceiving that P is **not sufficient** for it being possible that P.

- **Counter-example 1:** true statements of numerical identity ($x = x$, $x = y$) are necessary truths (i.e., it is not possible for them to be false).

Lois Lane can conceive that Clark Kent is not Superman. But Clark Kent = Superman, hence it is not possible for Clark Kent to not be Superman.

– So, we have a case of conceiving that P, without it also being true that P is possible.

So, conceivability is **not sufficient** for possibility.

- **Counter-example 2:** true mathematical propositions are necessary truths.

Goldbach's Conjecture: every even number greater than 2 is the sum of two prime numbers.

I can conceive that someone will one day discover an even number greater than 2 that is not the sum of two prime numbers.

Suppose the conjecture is true. I'm thus able to conceive of something that is not possible.

Thus, conceivability is **not suff.** for possibility.

Another argument for substance dualism: The Divisibility Argument

- For the next argument, Descartes makes use of the following logical truth:

Leibniz's Law (LL):

$(x) (y) (\text{if } x = y, \text{ then } (x \text{ is } F \text{ iff } y \text{ is } F))$

For all x and for all y , if x is identical to y , then x and y share all the same properties.

The Divisibility Argument

- 1. My body is divisible.
- 2. My mind is not divisible.
- 3. Thus, my mind is not identical to my body. (1,2, LL)

An Objection to the Divisibility Argument

- **The argument begs the question:** premise 2 is defensible only if we already *assume* that the mind is not a material substance (which is what's supposed to be *shown*).

Descartes' opponent should not accept premise 2.

We can grant that it doesn't make much sense to speak of particular mental states (e.g., a belief, a desire, a pain) as being the kinds of things that are spatially divisible.

They can nevertheless all be *states of* a kind of thing that is spatially divisible (like a brain).

Objections to Cartesian Dualism

Cartesian Dualism: (i) **substance dualism:** there are two distinct substances—mind substance and material substance; (ii) these two substances **causally interact**—the mind causally affects the body, and *vice versa*.

- **The Interaction Problem:**

Cartesian Dualism is **internally inconsistent** (i.e., theses (i) and (ii) can't both be true).

We can easily understand how two material things can causally interact, for they are both the same *kind* of thing:

All material things are located in space and time, and, so, are governed by all the same natural laws.

- But how can a material thing (which is necessarily located in space and time) causally interact with a non-material thing (which is necessarily **not** located in space and time)?
- It appears that they cannot. Certainly, if they can, it is utterly mysterious *how*.
- The mind and body causally interact *only if* they are *not* distinct substances.