

Second paper, worth 20%

Dominika Wiktor
PHI 205 – 003
March 30, 2001

An Analysis of the Theory of Dualism

Questions concerning the relationship of the mind to the body have perplexed philosophers for many centuries. This dilemma presents two opposing views. One side of the argument states that the mind and body are two separate entities. They exist in two different realms, a physical, reflected in the brain and its neurons, and a mental, reflected in emotions, desires, and sensations. The contrasting argument affirms that the mind and body are simply different terms referring to the same object. Mental states are nothing more than neurons firing in the brain. Through his meditations describing foundationalist epistemology, René Descartes also presents his arguments for a solution to the mind and body connection. His dualistic philosophy states that “there are two kinds of things in this world” (Sober 260), mental and physical. Although causal interactions are present between the two realms, the mind and body exist separately, in different domains.

The first argument made for a distinction between mind and body is based on the religious philosophy of the immortality of the soul. Many major religions in the world believe that even after the mortal death of the body, the soul is resurrected and lives for eternity. Since the soul is seen as part of the mind, if the soul is immortal, at least some part of the mind must also be immortal. Therefore, if the mind is believed to exist eternally, but the body is not, an argument for dualism can be made. However, this argument presents a type of circular reasoning. If a person does not already believe in dualism, he or she cannot believe in the immortality of the soul. Therefore, using the

immortality of the soul as a premise in the argument for dualism would not be convincing.

In his argument supporting dualism, Descartes attempts to provide a logical argument that the mind has a property which the body lacks, and as a result, the mind and body are different entities. His argument employs Leibniz's Law, which affirms that if two things are identical, they must have all the same properties. Leibniz's Law provides the following argument:

If a and b are identical, then they must both have property P
 a has property P
 b does not have property P

Therefore, a and b are not identical.

Since this argument is deductively valid, if the conclusion is false, at least one of the premises must also be false. In his Second Meditation, Descartes proves that a person cannot doubt the existence of his own mind. "I think; therefore, I am." In the same meditation, he affirms that a person can doubt the existence of his body as a result of being deceived by his senses. In this way, Descartes states that the mind has the property of "indubitable existence" (Sober 263), which body lacks. Following from Leibniz's Law, since the mind and body do not share all properties, then the mind and body are not identical.

One criticism of Descartes' argument discussed by Sober is that "psychological concepts like 'doubts' and 'wants,' and so on, can be deceptive" (Sober 263). He suggests that the property of indubitable existence is not the property of an object; instead, it involves the doubting or not doubting of a proposition. If a person states that his mind has the property of indubitable existence, then he is really stating that he cannot

doubt that he has a mind. Similarly, stating the dubitable existence of the body is the same thing as stating that a person can doubt that he has a body. Doubting and desiring describe propositions, whose truth can sometimes be uncertain. Gottlob Frege suggests that terms in a proposition have two parts. They have sense, which is the meaning of each word, and reference, which is the object referred to by the statement. Two statements can appear to be about different things in that the sense of the words may be different. However, if the reference of the two statements is the same, then they are describing identical things, and the truth of a statement is determined by its reference, not its sense. Descartes' propositions appear to be describing different objects, the mind and the body. His two propositions have different senses; however, the difference in the senses of the propositions does not imply that they refer to different objects. The mind and brain might be the same thing; therefore, Descartes' first argument for dualism is invalid.

Descartes' second argument for dualism involves the ideas of extension and divisibility of the mind and body. He asserts that physical things, such as the brain, have spatial parts and can be divided into different sections. However, Descartes believes that mental things, such as the mind, do not take up physical space and cannot be divided into parts. Following Leibniz's Law, the mind and body have different characteristics; therefore, they are not identical. If the body has the properties of divisibility and extension but the mind does not, then mind and body are different. Once again, by having the same logical structure as Leibniz's Law, Descartes' argument is a valid one.

In order to disprove the conclusion of Descartes' argument, one of the premises must be falsified. A question can be raised as to whether the mind really does have extension and divisibility. Since questions surrounding the mind have not been

completely answered by science yet, it is unusual to think that the mind may actually have parts and take up space. However, just because this concept is difficult to conceive, does not mean that it is not true. Enough may not be known about the mind to say for sure whether it has divisibility and extension. As a result, although Descartes' argument is a valid one, it begs the question. Unless a person already accepts dualism, he has no reason to believe that the mind is indivisible and lacks extension. Therefore, the premise that the mind is indivisible and lacks extension cannot be used in the argument supporting dualism.

A final criticism of dualism entails the causal interactions possible between physical and nonphysical things. According to dualism and Descartes, "physical events in your body can cause [nonphysical] sensations in your mind" (Sober 267). These sensations, along with all other mental processes, are indivisible and lack extension. As a result, a question arises concerning how the two realms interact. Dualism suggests that something spatial, such as the body, can interact with the mind, which lacks spatial location. Descartes answers this question by suggesting that the pineal gland serves as a bridge between the two realms. This hypothesis, however, does not explain "how causality can 'cross over' from the mental to the physical and back again" (Sober 268). The causal relationship between the physical and nonphysical once again questions the accuracy of dualism.

The theory of dualism attempts to prove that the mind and body are two distinct entities. By applying Leibniz's Law, Descartes attempts to prove that the mind and body have different characteristics and, therefore, cannot be identical. However, both of Descartes arguments prove to contain some possibly errors in logic; therefore, the

conclusions to his arguments may also contain errors. Another criticism of dualism questions the possibility of a causal relationship between a physical body and a nonphysical mind. The arguments presented by Descartes and their criticisms reflect the difficulty in determining an indisputable relationship between the mind and the body.