

# Introduction to Philosophy

Philosophy 110W  
Fall 2014  
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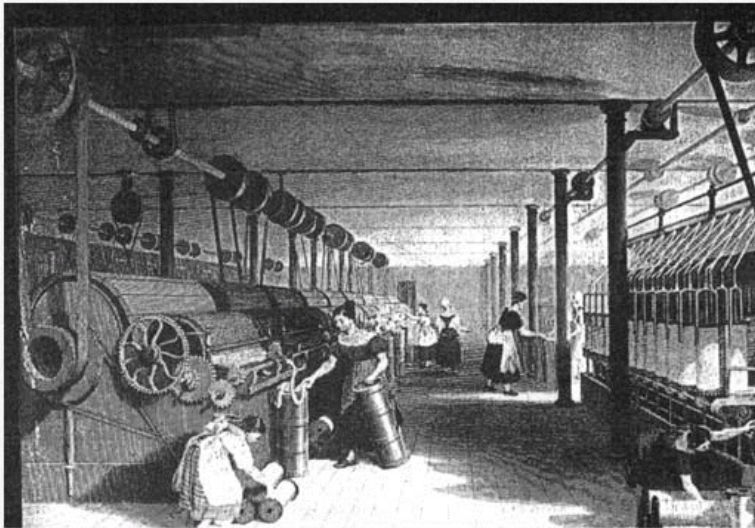
Class #19 - Cartesian Dualism  
Descartes, "On the Nature of Mind"  
Arnauld and Descartes on the Mind

# Business

- Comments are due now to the authors of the papers you read.
  - ▶ Each one of you should have received (electronically, on paper, or both) two sets of comments.
  - ▶ Thursday, I look to receive from each of you:
    - At least one copy of the first draft
    - The two sets of comments you received
      - So maybe the second copy of the first draft
    - The final draft
- Today: TJ and Allen on Descartes and Arnauld and Descartes
- Thursday: Henry on Behaviorism
- But first: More of an introduction to the philosophy of mind

# Dualism

- Until the last century, dualism was the most plausible option for a theory of mind.
- Leibniz's Mill
  - “*Perception, and what depends on it, is inexplicable in terms of mechanical reasons, that is, through shapes and motions...When inspecting its interior, we will only find parts that push one another, and we will never find anything to explain a perception*” (M17, AW 276b).



# 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

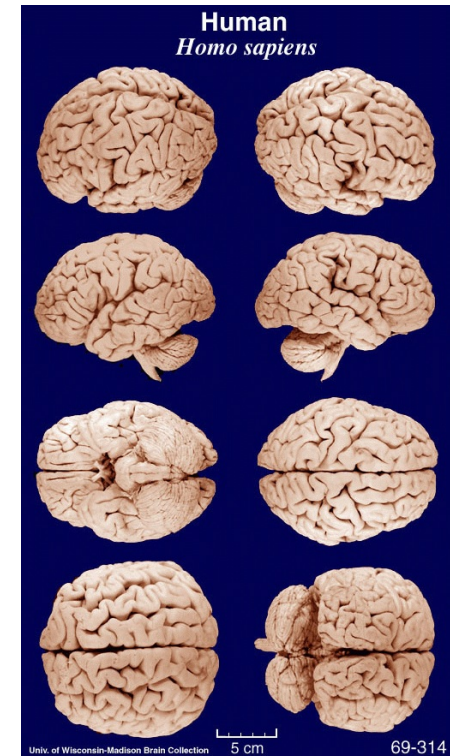
# From Dualism to Materialism

- Until recently, few philosophers took the possibility of a physical theory of mind seriously.
- Over the last century, philosophers of mind developed a variety of theories attempting to accommodate a materialist framework.
- We will look at four distinct theories of mind.
  - dualism (Descartes)
  - behaviorism
  - identity theory
  - functionalism
- At the end, we will look specifically at the problem of consciousness, which is at the center of the whole discussion.

# Two Problems of Consciousness

an easy problem and a hard problem

- The so-called **easy problem** involves determining the functions of the brain.
  - ▶ Neuroscience is essential
  - ▶ perceptual systems
  - ▶ attention spans
  - ▶ phenomena like staring
  - ▶ An understanding of the brain, and the rest of the body.
- The hard problem is to explain the connection between brains and conscious awareness.
  - ▶ The neural correlates of consciousness does not suffice for explaining what it is to be conscious.
  - ▶ Consciousness involves experience, rather than function.
- We don't know whether cognitive neuroscience can tell us anything, or everything, about who we are.
  - ▶ It seems obvious that a complete description of our bodies, especially our brains, will suffice to explain our minds, and thus who we are.
  - ▶ But the nature of conscious awareness seems to resist physical explanation.



# Locke on the Hard Problem

That the size, figure, and motion of one body should cause a change in the size, figure, and motion of another body is not beyond our conception. The separation of the parts of one body upon the intrusion of another and the change from rest to motion upon impulse, these and the like seem to have some *connection* one with another. And if we knew these primary qualities of bodies, we might have reason to hope we might be able to know a great deal more of these operations of them one upon another. But our minds not being able to discover any *connection* between these primary qualities of bodies and the sensations that are produced in us by them, we can never be able to establish certain and undoubted rules of the consequence or *coexistence* of any secondary qualities, though we could discover the size, figure, or motion of those invisible parts which immediately produce them. We are so far from knowing what figure, size, or motion of parts produce a yellow color, a sweet taste, or a sharp sound that we can by no means conceive how any *size, figure, or motion* of any particles can possibly produce in us the *idea* of any *color, taste, or sound* whatsoever; there is no conceivable *connection* between the one and the other (*Essay* IV.III.13).

# Eliminativism about Minds

## A Physicalist Solution

- **Eliminative materialists** believe that our ordinary language will be abandoned in the future for a more precise language about our brains and bodies.
- There are no minds, as traditionally conceived.
- “Paul feels pain differently than he used to: when he cuts himself shaving now he feels not “pain” but something more complicated - first the sharp, superficial A-delta-fibre pain, and then, a couple of seconds later, the sickening, deeper feeling of C-fibre pain that lingers. The new words, far from being reductive or dry, have enhanced his sensations, he feels, as an oenophile’s complex vocabulary enhances the taste of wine... One afternoon recently, Pat burst in the door, having come straight from a frustrating faculty meeting. “She said, ‘Paul, don’t speak to me, my serotonin levels have hit bottom, my brain is awash in glucocorticoids, my blood vessels are full of adrenaline, and if it weren’t for my endogenous opiates I’d have driven the car into a tree on the way home. My dopamine levels need lifting. Pour me a Chardonnay, and I’ll be down in a minute.’”” (The *New Yorker* profile of the Churchlands, February 12, 2007).



# Can Machines Think?

- If we had physical explanations of consciousness, then in theory we could construct machines that think.
  - ▶ Not just by procreating
- Machine Abilities
  - ▶ menial tasks
  - ▶ chess
  - ▶ Jeopardy
  - ▶ poetry
  - ▶ art
- But the idea that a physical machine could think is uncomfortable, for many of us.
  - ▶ “Not until a machine can write a sonnet or compose a concerto because of thoughts and emotions felt, and not by the chance fall of symbols, could we agree that machine equals brain, that is, not only write it but know that it had written it. No mechanism could feel (and not merely signal, an easy contrivance) pleasure at its successes, grief when its valves fuse, be warmed by flattery, be made miserable by its mistakes, be charmed by sex, be angry or depressed when it cannot get what it wants” (Jefferson Lister, in Alan Turing, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” *Mind*, 1950).



# Distinguishing Persons from Mere Machines

- Standard View
  - The abilities of machines to perform even complicated tasks are due to our intelligence, our minds, and not their own.
  - Machines can only do what we tell them to do.
  - Real intelligence involves internal processes that cause those behaviors or products.
  - What we can see of the Internal processes of machines (levers and dials and circuits) seems to lack any consciousness.
  - Leibniz and Locke, again, and Lister's claim
- What would it mean to see the intelligence of a machine?
  - How does one see a mind?
- How do we see the intelligence of another person?
  - Inferring the existence of other minds
- How about animals?
  - 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.

# 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.

# Cartesian Dualism

# Allen on Descartes

# 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 as being independent of my body.

MB2. I have a clear and distinct understanding of my body as being 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 as being independent of my body.

MB2. I have a clear and distinct understanding of my body as being 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.

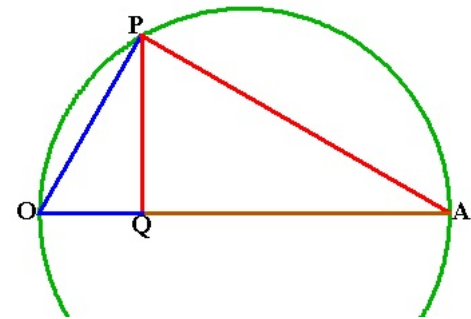
DB2. The mind is indivisible.

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.

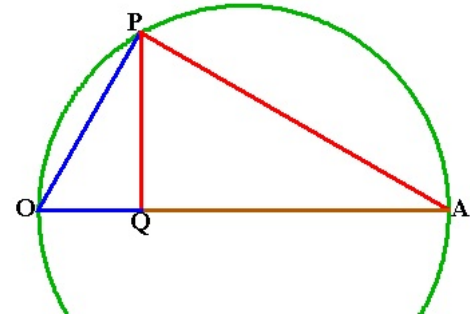
# Arnauld's Triangle



Suppose someone knows for certain that the angle in a semi-circle is a right angle, and hence that the triangle formed by this angle and the diameter of the circle is right-angled. In spite of this, he may doubt, or not yet have grasped for certain, that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the squares on the other two sides. Indeed he may even deny this if he is misled by some fallacy. But now, if he uses the same argument as that proposed by our illustrious author, he may appear to have confirmation of his false belief, as follows: "I clearly and distinctly perceive," he may say, "that the triangle is right-angled. But I doubt that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the squares on the other two sides. Therefore it does not belong to the essence of the triangle that the square on its hypotenuse is equal to the squares on the other sides."

Even if I deny that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the square on the other two sides, I still remain sure that the triangle is right-angled, and my mind retains the clear and distinct knowledge that one of its angles is a right angle. I clearly and distinctly understand that this triangle is right-angled, without understanding that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the squares on the other sides.

# How Arnauld's Triangle is a Counter-Argument



- 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

- Some early modern philosophers (e.g. 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.
- Still, pressure increasingly mounted against the Cartesian view through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.