

Philosophy 1320: Theories of the Mind, Stern College - Yeshiva University, Spring 2007  
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Lecture Notes, February 12

(Note: We covered these topics in a different order in class. Also, I neglected to talk about Descartes' third and fourth responses to Arnauld. The fourth is probably worth a moment of your time. And there are bits at the end of §II of these notes that we did not discuss in detail.)

### I. Arnauld's criticism of Descartes' argument for the mind/body distinction, continued

We have been considering Descartes' argument for substance dualism:

1. I have a clear and distinct understanding of my mind, independent of my body.
2. I have a clear and distinct understanding of my body, independent of my mind.
3. Whatever I can clearly and distinctly conceive of as separate, can be separated by God, and so are really distinct.

So, my mind is distinct from my body.

Arnauld wonders if Descartes' clear and distinct knowledge of his mind is strong enough to support the argument.

If our knowledge of our minds is incomplete, the mind might be corporeal without our knowing it.

We traced Descartes' argument for the completeness of our knowledge of our minds to the second meditation's argument that we can doubt the existence of our bodies, while being sure of the existence of our minds.

Arnauld argues that we can doubt that the Pythagorean theorem holds of a right triangle, while being sure that the triangle is a right triangle.

I mentioned that Descartes provides four direct responses to Arnauld's triangle example.

The first response distinguishes between substances and attributes.

Descartes' argument for the mind/body distinction concerned two substances.

But, Arnauld's response concerns a substance (a triangle) and a property (the Pythagorean property).

Morton thinks that this is a successful response.

But, I noted that Descartes' argument can be taken as asserting that the mind has no corporeal attributes.

Then, Arnauld's response is exactly parallel.

Second, Descartes concedes that we can understand that the triangle is right-angled without understanding that the Pythagorean theorem holds, but claims that we can not understand that the Pythagorean theorem holds without understanding that the triangle is right-angled.

This claim just appears 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 us say that we are given the measurements of three sides of a 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, leaving  $\cos C=0$ .

From this, we might derive that C is a right angle.

But, before we do so, we need not recognize that fact.

Thirdly, Descartes insists, rightly, that some relationship must hold among the sides of a triangle. Thus, we can not have a complete understanding of a right triangle without an understanding that the sides have some extension, and that all extensions are neatly ordered.

This third response seems stronger.

It is just like Descartes' reply to Arnauld's criticism that the line, in reality, must have breadth and depth. To that criticism, Descartes denies the analogy, and agrees that we can not have a complete understanding of a line without breadth and depth; still, we can have a complete understanding of the mind without the body.

In both cases, the question is whether we can have a complete understanding of the mind without anything bodily.

It does seem that Descartes is correct that our mental concepts are in no way bodily.

But, it still seems to be an open question whether they are complete concepts.

It seems that Descartes is just asserting the completeness without justification.

But, what evidence could justify his claim that we have complete knowledge of the mind?

Lastly, later in his letter, he provides a fourth response to the triangle argument.

If we assert that something is a right triangle, while deny that the Pythagorean theorem holds of it, then we are contradicting ourselves.

But, if we assert that something is a mind, while denying that it has a body, no contradiction has been made.

Like the third response, this seems apt.

But, consider what someone who thought that the mind is a brain would say.

She would say that we have committed a contradiction, even though we do not know it.

## II. Additional support for Descartes' mind/body distinction

Descartes, returning to the *Meditations*, provides another argument for the distinction of mind and body, from the divisibility of body, p 86.

This argument highlights the different characterizations of mind and body implicit in the first argument.

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

2. The mind is indivisible.

3. The body is divisible.

So, the mind is not the body.

But, again, we might just not have noticed that the mind is in fact divisible.

There are other attributes of the mind and soul, which Descartes discusses in the omitted sections.

In his reply to Arnauld, Descartes mentions that these other attributes contribute to the argument for the distinction between the mind and the body.

The most important attribute, surely, is Descartes' argument that knowledge of God is innate, impressed on the soul of human beings like the mark of a painter on his work.

Also, Descartes discusses the distinction between willing and understanding, which helps account for the problem of error.

The way in which discussions of these attributes contributes to the main argument is that they serve as support for the claim that we have a complete understanding of the mind, without any material attributes.

### III. The soul and the mind

Note the disagreement between Arnauld and Descartes regarding the souls of animals.

Descartes argues that the body is just a machine, and the soul is just the mind, and responsible for pure thought.

Even the imagination is linked to the sensory apparatus of the body, and thus inessential to the mind.

Thus, since animals can not perform pure reason, they must not have minds.

Recall that for Aristotle, as for Plato, there were two functions of the soul: to give life and as the seat of knowledge.

On the Aristotelian view, there are plant souls, animal souls, and human souls.

Arnauld defends the Aristotelian view, p 107.

But this shift in extension of 'soul' makes the disagreement look semantic.

It looks as if Descartes and Arnauld are discussing different things, and not merely the different properties of the same thing.

Certainly, Descartes has limited the scope of the thing (mind or soul) at issue.

Note the variety of human activities which Descartes says occur independently of the mind, in his reply to Arnauld, p 112.

Plato and Aristotle would have attributed these activities to the soul.

For Descartes, the mind is limited to conscious reasoning; the body, by itself, accounts for not only locomotion, but also important aspects of sensation, and unconscious beliefs.

For Descartes, consciousness is the mark of the mental.

### IV. Locke's criticisms of Descartes' mind/body distinction: an introduction

Locke's work comes in large part as a response to Descartes' work.

In the *Essay*, from which the excerpt in Morton comes, Locke argues against Descartes' doctrine of innate ideas.

Descartes and Locke both defended the new science of the seventeenth century, and its method of experimentation.

The new science posits a world of material objects, which we think of through use of the imagination.

For Descartes, though, these images are confused; the only real properties are those we can understand by pure reason, through innate ideas.

For Descartes, ideas of the self, God, and mathematics are innate.

Locke points out that we do not know some of the ideas which Descartes alleges are innate.

He attempts to account for all of our knowledge on the basis of sense impressions.