

**Philosophy 203**  
***History of Modern Western Philosophy***

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**Hamilton College**  
**Spring 2014**

**Class #7 - Hobbes**

# Business

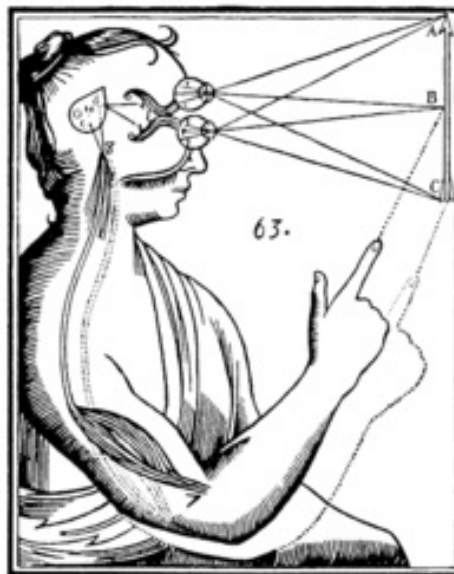
- Concentration declarations are due on Friday.
  - Advisers first
  - Philosophy: Carolyn Mascaro is in Root 116 in the ams and Philosophy in the pms.
- Anyone want to organize a life raft debate?
- Papers are due on Thursday, 9am
  - hard copy
  - Interpretation (~75%), Evaluation (~20%), Signage (~5%)
- Hobbes today
- Spinoza on Thursday and next Tuesday

# Monism and the Problem of Interaction

- Descartes is a dualist: minds and bodies are distinct kinds of substances.
- Two monists are on our schedule.
  - Thomas Hobbes
  - Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza.
- Monism is motivated largely by the dualist's problem of interaction.
- The problem of interaction is to describe how our bodies and minds interact if they are two independent substances.
- “Theoretical shuttlecocks” - Ryle
- Why does the mind get drunk when the body does the drinking?

# Descartes and the Pineal Gland

- Descartes located the seat of the soul in the pineal gland.
  - symmetry considerations
- This merely locates the problem.



# Monist Solutions

Deny the claim that the mind and body are distinct substances

- Two obvious monist options.
  - ▶ The materialist claims that the mind is really just the body.
  - ▶ The idealist claims that there are no bodies; there are only minds.



# Hobbes is a Materialist Monist

The world (I mean not the earth only, that denominates the lovers of it *worldly men*, but the *universe*, that is, the whole mass of all things that are) is corporeal, that is to say, body, and has the dimensions of magnitude, namely, length, breadth, and depth. Also every part of body is likewise body, and has the like dimensions, and consequently every part of the universe is body; and that which is not body is no part of the universe. And because the universe is all, that which is no part of it is nothing, and consequently nowhere (*Leviathan* §1.46, AW 133b).



What's wrong with this picture?

# Idealism

- Berkeley
- Leibniz is also an idealist, though he writes as if there is a material world.



# Spinoza

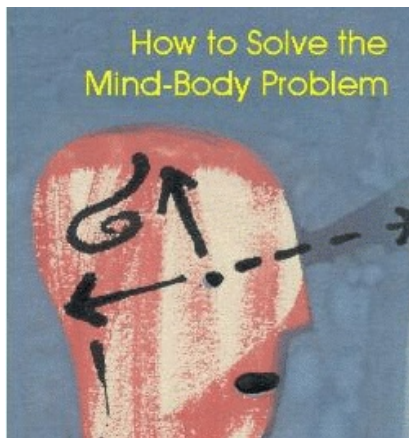
## Neither a Materialist Monist Nor an Idealist Monist

- For Spinoza, there is only one substance, which he calls God.
- You might prefer to think of that one substance as nature, or Nature.
- Spinoza's one substance, God, has many attributes, both mental and physical (and others!).
- So, there is just one kind of thing (monism), but it has many aspects, or properties.
- Most philosophers take minds and bodies to be substances.
- Spinoza takes them to be properties of a single substance called God, or Nature.



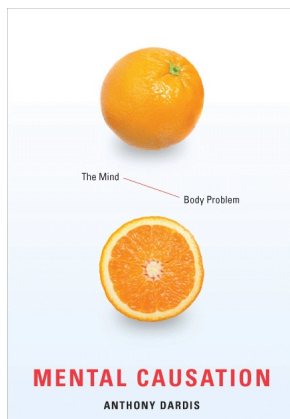
# The Problem of Interaction: No Problem

- The problem of interaction seems to require magic, which appears to debar a solution.
- But positing a non-corporeal soul already commits you to a kind of magic.
- Once you are committed to magic, the problem of interaction just requires more of the same.
- The problem seems to be with the dualism, not with explaining the interaction between the body and mind.
- Put this objection aside.



# The Problem of Mental Causation

- The challenge for any materialist is to account for mental phenomena, especially mental causation.
- While my conscious states may not be thought of as real qualities of external objects, they are real qualities of my conscious mind.
- They seem to affect my actions.
  - If I am in pain, I will act in ways that I will not act if I am not in pain.
  - I judge whether to eat one apple over another on the basis of the sense qualities they appear to me to have.
- But mental states like pain or color or texture seem to resist physical explanation.
  - They are private and privileged.
- The problem of mental causation is to explain how thoughts can have causal powers.



# Hobbes's Solution to the Problem of Mental Causation

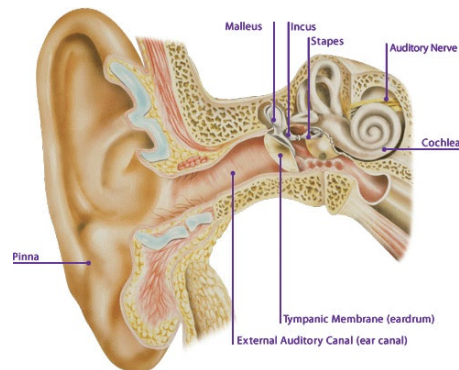
- Hobbes claims that mental phenomena are motions in the nerves and brain.
  - paradigmatic physical phenomena
- Galilean science: all that exists are particles in motion.
  - Interactions of particles are limited to transfer of momentum.
  - Nothing could be given to us by external objects, except their motions.
- “The cause of sense is the external body, or object, which presses the organ proper to each sense, either immediately, as in taste and touch, or mediately, as in seeing, hearing, and smelling; this pressure, by the mediation of nerves and other strings and membranes of the body, continues inwards to the brain and heart, causes there a resistance, or counterpressure, or endeavor of the heart, to deliver itself; this endeavor, because *outward*, seems to be some matter without. And this *seeming*, or, *fancy*, is that which men call *sense*... All...qualities called *sensible* are in the object that causes them but so many several motions of the matter, by which it presses our organs diversely. Neither in us that are pressed are they anything else but diverse motions (**for motion produces nothing but motion**)” (*Leviathan* §1.1, AW 116; bold emphasis added).

# The Veil of Perception, Again

- Objects as we experience them may be thoroughly different from how they are in themselves.
  - ▶ fundamental principle of the new science
  - ▶ Descartes' wax
- With Descartes, Hobbes embraces the veil of perception.
- Both philosophers ascribe a profound error to those, like Aristotle, who hold a resemblance hypothesis.
  - ▶ “The third [cause of absurd assertions] I ascribe to the giving of the names of the *accidents of bodies without us* to the *accidents of our own bodies*; as they do who say the *color is in the body; the sound is in the air, etc.*” (*Leviathan* §1.5, AW 127b)

# Descartes, Hobbes, Conscious Experience, and the Galilean World

- Descartes and Hobbes agree that the material world is Galilean.
- For Descartes, conscious experience occurs out of the world, in the soul.
  - Descartes thus accommodates the Galilean view with the reality of our sense experience.
  - The cost is substance dualism and the problem of interaction.
- Hobbes denies that we must posit a non-physical substance to account for conscious experience.
  - Our conscious experience just is the motion of particles.
  - Yellow is just retinal stimulation and neural firing.
  - The symphony really is the vibrations of my tympanic membrane (and neural firings)



# Hobbes's Account of Mental States: A Metaphor

All fancies are motions within us, relics of those made in the sense, and those motions that immediately succeeded one another in the sense, continue also together after sense, inasmuch as the former coming again to take place and be predominant, the latter follows, by coherence of the matter moved, in such manner as water upon a plain table is drawn which way any one part of it is guided by the finger (*Leviathan* §1.3, AW 119b).



# Hobbes's Account of Mental States

- Hobbes relies on the Galilean/Newtonian concept of inertia.
- Once our ideas are set in motion by sensation, once they enter our imagination, they remain in motion.
- The physical effects of our sense experience, fancies, continue in our brains, slowing down only when impeded by other fancies.
- Hobbes's account takes sense experience as paradigmatic of mental states.
- But he also must account for mental states which are not obviously caused by transfers of momentum from objects to our senses.
  - ▶ Memory
  - ▶ Fantasy
  - ▶ Our ability to deduce new ideas by reasoning
- For memory, Hobbes claims that we associate ideas as we experienced them, remembering a sequence as we first sensed it.
  - ▶ Memory is imagination in time.
  - ▶ It fades as we accrue more experiences.
- For reasoning, we need language.

# Hobbes, Sense Experience, and Language

- Hobbes defines truth and falsity in terms of the correspondence of language to the world.
  - ▶ Terms of language stand for our ideas.
  - ▶ Ideas are images left by sense experience in our brains.
- Absurdity arises from using words with no origins in the senses.
  - ▶ “The first cause of absurd conclusions I ascribe to the want of method, in that they do not begin their ratiocination from definitions, that is, from settled significations of their words, as if they could cast accounts without knowing the value of the numeral words, *one*, *two*, and *three*” (*Leviathan* §1.5, AW 127a).
  - ▶ ascribing a sense property to an external object
  - ▶ the concept of an incorporeal body, like a spirit or angel
    - God would have to be a material object.



# Hobbes on Language

- The goal of language is human flourishing.
  - ▶ “Without words there is no possibility of reckoning of numbers, much less of magnitudes, of swiftness, of force, and other things, the reckonings of which are necessary to the being, or well-being, or mankind” (*Leviathan* §1.4, AW 123b).
- Hobbes rejects metaphysical approaches to science.
  - ▶ “In many occasions they put for cause of natural events, their own ignorance, but disguised in other words, as when they say, fortune is the cause of things contingent - that is, of things whereof they know no cause - and as when they attribute many effects to *occult qualities* -that is, qualities not known to them, and therefore also (as they think) to no one else -and to *sympathy, antipathy, antiperistasis, specifical qualities*, and other like terms, which signify neither the agent that produces them, nor the operation by which they are produced. If such *metaphysics* and *physics* as this be not *vain philosophy*, there was never any; nor needed St. Paul to give us warning to avoid it” (*Leviathan* §1.46, AW 136b).
- We should clean up our language.
  - ▶ “In reasoning a man must take heed of words, which besides the signification of what we imagine of their nature, have a signification also of the nature, disposition, and interest of the speaker -such as are the names of virtues and vices, for one man calls *wisdom* what another calls *fear*; and one *cruelty*, what another *justice*, one *prodigality*, what another *magnanimity*; and one *gravity*, what another *stupidity*, etc. And therefore such names can never be true grounds of any ratiocination. No more can metaphors, and tropes of speech; but these are less dangerous, because they profess their inconstancy, which the others do not” (*Leviathan* §1.4, AW 125b)
  - ▶ We’ll return to this view with Hume.

# Hobbes's Empiricism

- We have been looking at Hobbes's metaphysics and his philosophy of mind.
- But we started with an epistemological problem, the problem of interaction.
- Hobbes's work is not merely motivated by the desire to avoid substance dualism.
- He believes that much of both the medieval, scholastic philosophy and Descartes's work is nonsensical.
  - Descartes's innateness claims
- Like Locke and Berkeley later, Hobbes wants to explain all knowledge by sense experience alone.

# Assessing Hobbes's Materialist Monism

- In order to accommodate thoughts about God, mathematics, and physics, Descartes distinguishes between thought and sensation, denigrating the latter.
- Hobbes rejects Descartes's opposition of sensing and thinking.
  - Hobbes is a reactionary.
  - He wants to return to the materialism of Aristotle while accommodating the mechanics of the new science.
    - An Unhappy Marriage
- Hobbes's materialism has parsimony in its favor.
- He provides a plausible account of mental causation.
  - Since all mental phenomena are physical phenomena, the laws of mental causation are the same as the laws of physics.

# An Anemic Account of Consciousness

- Hobbes's account is most plausible for occurrent mental states.
- But even the claim that conscious states are just motions of particles seems nearly incomprehensible and impossible to take seriously.
  - Why do we see yellow lemons, instead of just extensions in motion?
  - How could the sound of the concerto just be the motion of air, or the vibration of the tympanic membrane?
  - What could be more different than motion of air and sound?
- 'p causes q'  $\neq$  'p = q'
- When we consider memory and fantasy, Hobbes's account of mental phenomena is even less compelling.
  - It is true that our memories fade.
  - But it does not seem that they do so in proportion to time, alone.
  - Still, no one really understands how memory works.

# Ockham's Razor

- William of Okham (1287-1347) encouraged philosophers not to multiply entities beyond necessity.
- For occurrent sensory states, we might favor Hobbes's materialism over Descartes's dualism on Ockhamist grounds.
  - Hobbes only posits one kind of thing.
  - Descartes posits two.
- Hobbes's account of my occurrent sensory states seems preferable just for being less profligate.

# Materialist Alternatives

- Dispositions
  - ▶ We might say that the lemon has a dispositional property which makes us see it as yellow.
  - ▶ The dispositional property is not yellowness, which is a property only of my experience.
- Mysterianism
  - ▶ Locke remains mysterian about conscious experience.
  - ▶ It is equally a mystery why conscious experiences should attach to minds or to bodies.
  - ▶ Berkeley is unsatisfied with this kind of giving-up on the problem.

# Hobbes's Science

- The central problem with Hobbes's account of mental phenomena is that it is tied too closely to an outdated physical theory.
  - “Hobbes's general account of thought was rather hamstrung by his obsession with mechanics” (*Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. IV, p 38).
- Hobbes's empiricism relies on the claim that we passively receive and orderly manifold.
  - But no.
- We pick out items based on our desires and preconceptions.
  - Attention blindness
  - Change blindness
  - False memory
- Despite his naive psychology, Hobbes's work is precedental for the kind of theory that contemporary scientists want.
  - Much of Descartes's work on the mind appears untestable.
  - Hobbes provides a scientifically testable theory, a research program.
    - “The longer the time is, after the sight or sense of any object, the weaker is the imagination” (*Leviathan* §1.2, AW 117b).

# Up Next

- Spinoza
- *The Ethics* is difficult, written in the synthetic method; take your time.
- Focus on the propositions and the scholia.
  - “The deductive apparatus masks Spinoza’s philosophy. For certain of his deepest and most central doctrines he offers ‘demonstrations’ that are unsalvageably invalid and of *no philosophical use or interest*; it is not credible that he accepts those doctrines because he thinks they follow from the premisses of those arguments” (Jonathan Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers*, vol. 1: 113, emphasis added).
- Nietzsche on Spinoza:
  - Not to speak of that hocus-pocus of mathematical form in which, as if in iron, Spinoza encased and masked his philosophy...so as to strike terror into the heart of any assailant who should happen to glance at that invincible maiden and Pallas Athene - how much personal timidity and vulnerability this masquerade of a sick recluse betrays (*Beyond Good and Evil*, §5).
- The appendix to Part I, AW 160-4, is worth reading, even if you have to skim some of the later propositions in Part I to get to it.