

Philosophy of Mind: Lecture One

1. Two Senses of Identity (recap from KRB)

First distinguish two senses of 'is'. There is the 'is of numerical *identity*'

The man who is Prime Minister of Britain is identical to Gordon Brown.

Then there is the 'is of qualitative identity'

The two pencils are identical.

The first 'is of identity' is represented in logic by '='. Let a be the name of the prime minister and b be the name of Gordon Brown.

$$a = b$$

The second type of 'is of identity' is (slightly) more complex. Let a be the name of one pencil, and b the name of another.

$$(Fa \leftrightarrow Fb)$$

You are well acquainted with the difference between the two!

Example: Stealing from the Sofa Shop.

Only the confused would mistake qualitative identity for numerical identity.

Example: Dying by growing bigger.

You can remain *numerically* the same whilst not remaining *qualitatively* the same. Don't let the English language, which conflates the words 'is' and 'the same', mislead you!

2. Substance Dualism

You might be some physical object. Say your entire body, brain or central nervous system. Call that position physicalism. Instead the dualist identifies you with some *non-physical thing*: your soul, if you will. So you have a physical body and there's this ghostly mind that connects to it and moves it around like a puppet. This type of dualism comes in two forms: Cartesian and Popular.

Cartesian Dualism is usually attributed to Descartes. It holds that you are a non-physical thing that is in time, but *not* in space. As we shall see, some have held there are problems if the mind is spatially unlocated. So they claimed that you were a non-physical thing in time *and* space. Say, for instance, an ectoplasmic goo that permeated the medium inside your skull. Think 'Slimer' from *Ghostbusters*. But it's difficult to see how popular substance dualism would work. In what way is it non-physical? Why is that goo not a physical object (albeit a strange one)?

Example: Undiscovered cranium gas.

So I shall stick, mainly for exposition, with the crude definition I've given of Cartesian dualism.

3. Possibility Arguments for Dualism

Modal Arguments

Possibility arguments work on the principle that you might not be identical to your body. Earlier forms of this argument are found in Descartes.

- It's logically possible that you exist and your body does not.
- If it's logically possible for a to exist without b then a and b are distinct.
- Conclusion: You are not your body.

Temporal Arguments

My *body* will outlast *me*.

Example: When I die.

So it has properties (persisting for 90 years) that I do not (persisting for 85 years). So we *can't* be identical. Unfortunately, these arguments don't get *dualism*. Similar concerns apply to objects like statues and lumps of clay. Serious problems indeed! There is a cottage industry of philosophical responses as to how to solve this. But *no-one* has ever dared to suggest that *statues* are non-spatially located ectoplasmic lumps of dualistic goo! So, presumably, the same should be said of us – there

might well be philosophical problems concerning identifying me with my body, but Cartesian dualism won't help.

Finally, there is an argument by Plantinga that you can exist with *no* physical body whatsoever in the actual world. I shall leave you to read his argument, and discuss it in seminar.

4. Impossibility of Thinking Matter

Isn't it *weird* to think that matter can *think*! For instance, we have sensations. How can a physical object have sensations? We have thoughts *about* things. How can an object, by the arrangement of particles, end up being *about* other things?

Leibniz put it this way. Imagine you were miniaturised and could walk around inside someone's brain. You'd see the physical neurons, and that kind of thing. But nothing you saw there would demonstrate any sign of *consciousness*. How could these things you see appear to be conscious?

Or try it another way. If I told you the exact layout and spread of certain atoms, and the laws governing them, you could predict certain things. So you can predict that balls will bounce off objects composed of tightly knit atoms. Now imagine that you know *everything* about the fundamental laws of physics. You could predict the motions of every object; the nuances of every interaction. But *still* there's no reason to predict that *any* of those things would have sensations, or have beliefs *about* other things in the universe. There's no reason to predict that anything is *conscious*. Our best understanding of the world seems to *ignore* mental properties. So says the dualist, this is because they don't *belong* to the physical world.

This argument runs *throughout* the course. We will see how physicalists attempt to respond to this problem in a variety of ways. As well as seeing how that problem – which is given here in a vague format – is refined and polished in many different ways.

5. The Causal Interaction Problem for Dualism

People historically had problems with one substance interacting with a totally different *type* of substance. How does the ectoplasmic goo interact with the physical body and make it do things? This proved of great interest to the modern philosophers of Descartes time, and spawned a wide variety of responses that you can read about in the Heil. Descartes tried to solve the problem by claiming that the *pineal gland* was the point of entry for the mind. So the ectoplasmic goo would twiddle your pineal gland, which affected the rest of your body. But then how does the goo affect the physical pineal gland? The problem is the same!

Others resorted to God. Either God sits there and reads your mind, effecting changes in the physical world (occasionalism). Or God, in his omnipotence knowing exactly what everyone was going to do, set the physical world at the very beginning to be exactly in synch with your mental choices (parallelism). Parallelism seems odd though. What's the physical world *doing* in this scenario? We could ditch it. So there are *no* physical objects, just interacting minds that cause sensations in one another (idealism). Or deny that the mental does effect the physical – instead, we just get the *illusion* that this is going on (epiphenomenalism).

All very odd choices, to be sure. But perhaps the problem of causal interaction just isn't a problem. Maybe it's a *non sequitur*. Why should one think there are any problems with the mental goo affecting the physical world? We can apply a *tu quoque* to make the point clear. The question phrased is 'How does the non-physical substance causally effect the physical substances?' Here's a similar question: 'How does a fast travelling ball shatter glass?' What kind of answer would one *want* for that last question?

So perhaps it's just a brute fact that Cartesian souls can interact with the physical world, in the same way that it seems to be a brute fact that particles can push one another around (or what have you). Arguments along similar lines have been suggested. For instance, some have said that physics says there can be no 'action at a distance'. If there's no 'action at a distance' and you have to be 'next to' something to causally affect it, then dualism – where the soul isn't *next* to the body – has a problem.