

The Nature of Mind, Descartes's Dualism

1. What is (a) Mind?

Descartes. 'I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks [*res cogitans*]; that is, I am a mind [*mens*], or spirit [*animus*], or intellect [*intellectus*], or reason [*ratio*]' (*Med.* II ¶6, cf. Reading [1]). 'But then what am I? A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions' (*Med.* II ¶8).

- thinking *substance*, but 'intermingled' with a body; human being is a composite
- consciousness: 'we cannot have any thought of which we are not aware at the very moment when it is in us' (*Fourth Replies*, AT VII 246 CSM II 171)
- against Aristotle (again): the soul (*psyche*) is the principle of life, or the form of a body having the potential for life (cf. *De Anima* 412a20)
- hierarchy: *plants* have vegetative souls (*threptikon*) that enable replication and self-maintenance; *animals* have sensitive souls (*aisthetikon*) that enable sensation and appetite, and the *kinetikon*, which enables them to move around; *humans* also have rational souls or minds (*noetikon*) that enable intellectual powers and reason.
- narrow the role of the *soul* from vital principle to purely mental function, but expand the conception of *mind* from reason to all conscious mental activity.

Spinoza. 'The first thing which constitutes the actual being of a human mind is nothing but the idea of a particular thing that actually exists' (*Ethics* IIP11). 'The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the [corresponding] body, or a particular mode of extension that actually exists, and nothing else' (*Ethics* IIP13).

- mind is an *idea* (or collection of ideas) in God/Nature: 'From this it follows that the human mind is part of the infinite intellect of God [or Nature]. Therefore, when we say that the human mind perceives this or that, we are saying nothing but that God [or Nature ...] has this or that idea [...].' (*Ethics* IIP11C)
- modes of thought represent 'their' body, and every mode of extension has a corresponding mode of thought (idea); in Nature, there's an idea of every extended object/process. Remember: total representationalism.
- 'mentality extends everywhere' (Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, p. 110): panmentalism.
- parallelism (see Handout 10)

Leibniz. '[I]t is important to distinguish between *perception*, which is the internal state of a monad that represents external things, and *apperception*, which is *consciousness*, of the reflective knowledge of that internal state. [...] Cartesians went wrong by regarding unperceived perceptions as nothing, just as people believe imperceptible bodies to be nothing' (*Principles of Nature and Grace* §4).

- new key concept: consciousness; we know we are monads in virtue of the *unity* of consciousness; but some perceptions are unconscious (*petit perceptions*)

- Mill thought experiment (cf. Reading 10 May [6]): explanatory gap, no mechanical explanation of perceptions (or mental phenomena generally)
- minds are monads, the only true substantial (immaterial) units
- return to Aristotle: forms; Descartes's view is too exclusive (e.g., animals)

2. Descartes: Epistemological Argument for the Real Distinction¹

- (1) *Definition.* If *A* can exist apart from *B*, and vice versa, *A* is *really distinct* from *B*, and *B* from *A*.
- (2) Whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive (CDP) can be brought about by God (in exactly the way) as I understand it. *Whatever is conceivable is possible.* (This is shown in *Med.* IV.)
- (3) If I CDP the possibility that *A* exists apart from *B*, and *B* apart from *A*, then God can bring it about that *A* and *B* do exist separately.
- (4) If God can bring it about that *A* and *B* exist separately, then *A* and *B* can exist apart, and hence, by (1), *A* and *B* are really distinct.
- (5) I can CDP the possibility of *A* and *B* existing apart from each other, if: there are attributes *H* and *Q*, such that I CDP that *H* belongs to the nature of *A*, and that *Q* belongs to the nature of *B*, and that $H \neq Q$, and I CDP that something can be a complete thing if it has *H* even if it lacks *Q* (or has *Q* and lacks *H*). (Remember: 'complete thing' = substance.)
- (6) Where *A* is myself and *B* is body, thought and extension satisfy the conditions on *H* and *Q* respectively. (This is the result of *Meds.* II, V, and VI.)
- (7) Hence, I am really distinct from body and can exist without it.

3. Descartes: Metaphysical Argument for the Real Distinction²

An (elegant) alternative interpretation does not rely on the 'conceivability-entails-possibility' thesis:

- (1) Thought is the attribute (principal property, essence) of thinking substance (mind); and extension is the attribute of extended substance (body) (*Med.* II).
- (2) A substance cannot have more than one attribute (*Principles* I §53). "As for the attributes which constitute the natures of things, it cannot be said that those which are different, and such that the concept of the one is not contained in the concept of the other, are present together in one and the same subject; for this would be equivalent to saying that one and the same subject has two different natures—a statement that implies a contradiction [...]" (*Comments on a Certain Broadsheet* AT VIII B 350 CSM I 298)
- (3) Mind and body are two substances: mind and body are really distinct (*Med.* VI).

1 Cf. Wilson, M. (1976). Descartes: The Epistemological Argument for Mind–Body Distinctness. *Nous*, 10, 3–15.

2 Rozemond, M. (1995). Descartes' Case for Dualism. *Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 33, 29–63.

