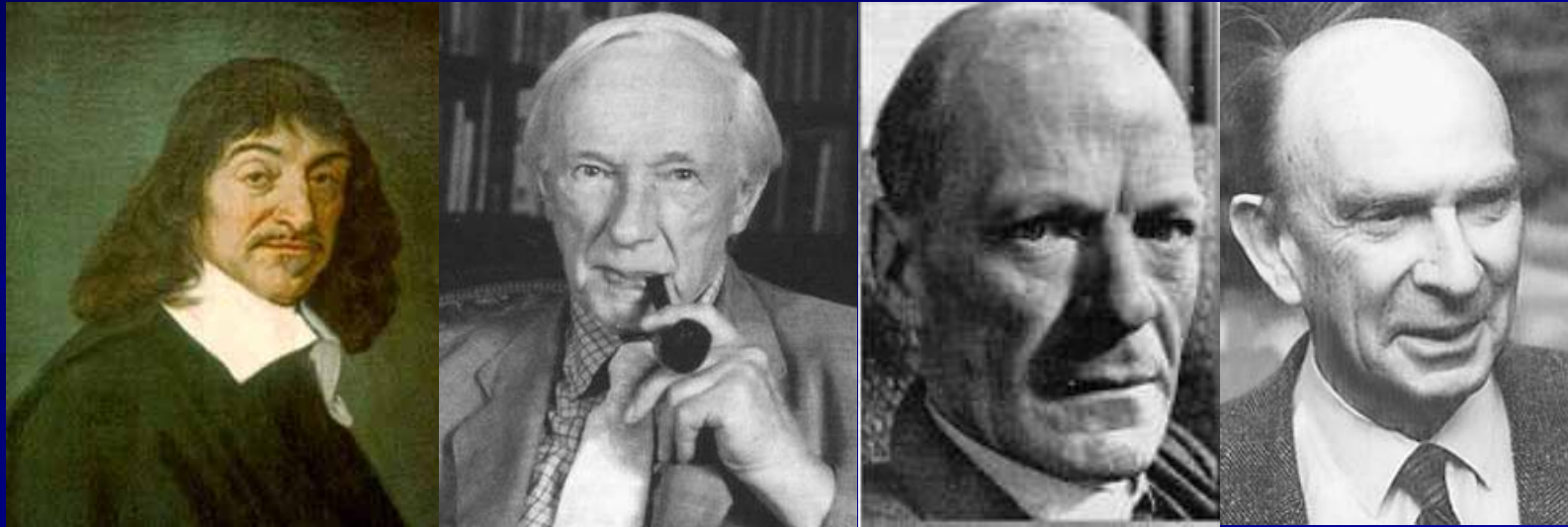


General Philosophy

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Lecture 4: Two Cartesian Topics



Scepticism, and the Mind

- Last Time ...

 - ... we looked at scepticism about INDUCTION.

- This Lecture ...

 - ... will move on to SCEPTICISM concerning the external world, most famously exemplified in Descartes' first *Meditation*, and his related claims about the nature of MIND AND BODY.

- The Next Lecture ...

 - ... will say more about modern responses to SCEPTICISM, and focus on KNOWLEDGE.

Two Kinds of Scepticism

■ Vertical Scepticism

- Inferring from one kind of thing to *a different kind* (e.g. inferring from one's sensations or appearances, to the existence of real physical objects that cause them).

■ Horizontal Scepticism

- Inferring things *of the same kind* as one has experienced (e.g. inferring from one's sensations or appearances, to expect similar sensations or appearances in the future).

External World Scepticism

- It can seem that (“vertical”) external world scepticism is far more worrying than (“horizontal”) inductive scepticism:
 - Maybe I am just dreaming, and there is no external world at all.
 - Maybe an evil demon is causing me to have illusions of an external world.
 - Maybe a wicked scientist has my brain in a vat, and is creating these illusions.

Descartes' Approach

- The only way to defeat scepticism is to withhold assent from anything that isn't completely certain.
- When I consider “I think, therefore I am”, it is quite impossible for me to be mistaken. So I am completely certain of this, at least.
- By contemplating this first certainty, I understand what makes it certain is that I *clearly and distinctly perceive it* to be true.

Descartes and God

- Hence I can establish as a general rule that *anything I clearly and distinctly perceive is true*.
- I clearly and distinctly perceive that God must exist, because only a perfect being could be the ultimate cause of such a perfect idea as my idea of God.
- A perfect God cannot deceive, so I know that my faculties are essentially reliable.

The Cartesian Circle

- Descartes seems to be “boot-strapping”:
 - proving the existence of God by relying on his mental faculties.
 - then appealing to the existence of God to justify reliance on his mental faculties.
- Isn't this viciously circular?
 - If my faculties might be defective, then how can I trust my proof of the existence of God in the first place? How can any anti-sceptical argument even get off the ground?

Moore's Response

- G.E. Moore famously claimed to refute this sort of scepticism by appeal to common-sense knowledge:
 - Here's one hand [he holds up a hand], and here's another [he holds up the other].
 - If this is a hand, then there is an external world.
 - Therefore there is an external world, and scepticism is refuted.

Two Arguments from “P implies Q”

■ *Modus Ponens*

P implies Q

P is true

therefore Q is true

∴

$P \rightarrow Q$

P

Q

■ *Modus Tollens*

P implies Q

Q is false

therefore P is false

∴

$P \rightarrow Q$

$\neg Q$

$\neg P$

One person's *modus ponens* ...

Deuteronomy 20:16-17 commands multiple genocide to avoid religious pollution.

- The religious fundamentalist might say:

Everything in the Bible is true.

Therefore genocide is sometimes desirable.

- The humane philosopher would say:

Genocide is never desirable.

Therefore not everything in the Bible is true.

- Which underlined premise is more plausible?

... is another's *modus tollens* ...

– If this is a hand, then there is an external world.

■ Moore says:

– We know this is a hand.

– Therefore we know there is an external world.

■ The sceptic says:

– We don't know that there is an external world.

– Therefore we don't know that this is a hand.

■ Moore will claim that his premise is more plausible than the sceptic's.

Internalism and Externalism

- We'd like to agree with Moore, but it seems hard to justify a claim to knowledge so crudely: don't we need some *philosophical argument* rather than a bare common-sense claim to justify knowing that this is a hand?
- But "internalist" arguments, like Cartesian boot-strapping, have difficulty doing the job. So many recent philosophers have moved towards externalism (next lecture, and compare Mellor's approach to induction).

Cartesian Dualism



- The view for which Descartes is now best known:
 - The body is *material*, composed of matter whose essence (i.e. fundamental property from which other properties follow) is *extension*.
 - The mind is composed of *immaterial substance* whose essence is *thinking*.
- This *substance dualism* is to be contrasted with *property dualism* (i.e. there are both physical and non-physical *properties*).

A Bad Argument for Dualism

- In his *Discourse*, Descartes argues like this:

I can doubt that my body exists.

I cannot doubt that I exist.

∴ I am not identical with my body.

- Compare:

I can doubt that Hesperus is Phosphorus. *

I cannot doubt that Phosphorus is Phosphorus.

∴ Hesperus is not Phosphorus.

* *Hesperus = the Evening Star; Phosphorus = the Morning Star; in fact both are appearances of the planet Venus.*

Leibniz's Law

- If a and b are the same thing, then any property of a must also be a property of b :

$$Fa, a=b \vDash Fb$$

- If F is the property of **being doubted by me to exist**, a is **me**, and b is **my body**, we get Descartes' argument from the *Discourse*.
 - Likewise F could be the property of **being doubted by me to be Prime Minister (etc.)**
- To simplest way to avoid the fallacy is to deny that these are genuine properties.

A Better Argument for Dualism

- Descartes' argument in *Meditation VI* is less fallacious, but has questionable premises:
 - I have a clear understanding of myself as (potentially) a thinking, non-extended thing.
 - I have a clear understanding of body as (potentially) extended and non-thinking.
 - Anything I clearly and distinctly understand could be created by God accordingly.
 - So I could exist separately from my body, and it follows that I am genuinely distinct from it.

From Doubt to Essence

- Even in the *Meditations*, Descartes tries to motivate his claim to know the essence of mind (as thinking) from his doubt argument:

“what shall I now say that I am [when I might be deceived by an evil demon, or dreaming]? ... At present I am not admitting anything except what is necessarily true. I am, then, in a strict sense only a thing that thinks; that is, I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason ... what kind of thing? ... a thinking thing.

Epistemology → Metaphysics?

- *The way in which we come to know, or be certain, of something need not reflect its ultimate nature (or why it is that way).*
 - From I am thinking, it plausibly follows that (in at least one sense) I am a thing that thinks.
 - But it does *not* necessarily follow that I am something whose essence is to think.
 - Nor does it follow that the thing that thinks could exist without being extended. (Imagine if a piece of matter were made able to think.)

Possibly Distinct → Actually Distinct?

- The final move of Descartes' argument seems more defensible, in a sense:

God could have created my mind and body as separate entities.

∴ It is possible for my mind and body to exist separately.

∴ My mind and body are in fact distinct things.

- But “could have” must be *metaphysical* possibility, not *epistemology* (“might have for all I know”). So this begs the question.

The Distinct Substances Problem

- “How can two such distinct substances interact at all?”
 - A problem for Descartes, who takes causation to be ultimately *intelligible*.
 - Not a problem *in principle* on a Humean view of causation: causation is a matter of lawlike correlation rather than intelligible connexion.
 - But it’s hard to see what such “laws” could be like, so a difficulty remains (cf. the “explanatory gap” between physical and mental).

The Causal Closure Principle

- The *causal closure principle* is that physical events (or their probabilities) are determined entirely by physical causes.
 - Also called “the completeness of physics”.
 - In this form, the principle is compatible with physical events’ being to some extent *random*.
 - Casts doubt on *non-physical* causation.
- Commonly believed, though its evidential base is not so clear.

Problems Explaining Interaction

- The causal closure principle seems to leave no room for a distinct mental substance capable of influencing the body.
- Even if we deny the principle, mind/body interaction seems mysterious.
- It's hard to see how an immaterial mind could have *evolved* alongside the body.
 - Do animals have one too?
 - Is having a mind “all or nothing”?

Mind and Body: Different Views

■ Interactionism

- The mind can causally influence the body (e.g. movement), and *vice-versa* (e.g. pain).

■ Epiphenomenalism

- The mind is an “epiphenomenon” – caused by events in the brain, but itself causally inert.
(this account is particularly hard to square with evolution – how could such a mind evolve?)

■ Physicalism

- Only physical things exist, hence there is nothing to the mind beyond the physical brain.

The Knowledge Argument (Jackson)

- Imagine a scientist (Mary) who learns all the physical facts about colour and colour perception, but who can see only in black, white, and shades of grey.
- If she then acquires normal sight, when she sees colours she learns what they look like, something she didn't know before.
- Hence these phenomenal colour properties cannot be physical. We are forced into *property* dualism, if not *substance* dualism.

What is a Physical Cause?

- What are the properties of physical matter?
 - If matter is just inert, extended (and possibly impenetrable) stuff, then it's hard to see how it could possibly be the causal basis of thought.
 - But quantum “matter” has all sorts of weird properties: charge, spin, “charm”, “strangeness”.
 - Could matter have some proto-psyched property too (*panpsychism*: mind is a fundamental feature of the universe)? Would this then be *physical*?!?
 - Physicalism generally shuns such “spooks”.

Non-Physical Explanation

- Even with “non-spooky” physicalism, it doesn’t follow that everything in the world can be explained in physical terms.
 - Why does my calculator show “132” when I type “11 x 12 =” ?
 - Answer: because 11 x 12 is equal to 132. The explanation appeals to *mathematical* facts, not just *physical* facts about the calculator.
- Likewise evolutionary explanation etc. (e.g. in terms of the logic of game theory).

The Hardware/Software Analogy

- It is tempting to see the relation between brain and mind as analogous to that between hardware and software.
 - This treats the mind as clearly *distinguishable* from the body, but not a *distinct substance*.
- Explains away another Cartesian argument:
 - Body is divisible.
 - Mind is not divisible.
 - ∴ Body and mind are distinct.

Ryle and Category Mistakes

- The classic category mistake:
 - “I’ve seen all these colleges and offices, but *where is the University?*”
 - Supposes the University to be a separate thing.
- “Mind” as a category mistake:
 - “People behave in these various ways, so *they must have a mind* distinct from their body.”
 - Instead, “having a mind” just is a matter of how one behaves. It’s not a separate *thing*.

Strawson and “Many Minds”

- If one does think of the mind as a separate thing from the body, an “entity” in its own right, then this raises the question of how such entities are to be *individuated*.
- How can I know my brain isn't linked to lots of different minds thinking in unison?
 - Possible answer: I can't be certain, but it's an extravagant and arbitrary hypothesis.
 - However Strawson would probably see even the possibility as a *reductio ad absurdum*.

The Hard Problem

- Physicalism can comfortably accommodate:
 - Non-physical explanation (e.g. in terms of purposes, as with a chess computer);
 - A notion of “mind” analogous to software.
- But the “hard problem” (Chalmers) remains:
 - Why is all this accompanied by *phenomenal consciousness* (i.e. conscious experience)?
- Can this justify substance dualism after all?
 - Or should we rather admit that we simply don't (yet) understand it? Maybe we never will!