

24.119 Minds and Machines

Handout 3: Dualism

Dualism comes in two varieties: *substance* dualism and *attribute* (or property) dualism (see the handout on properties and particulars).

According to the *substance* dualist, minds are non-physical "immaterial" things that are (somehow) connected with brains and bodies.

According to the *attribute* dualist, mental properties (e.g. the property of being in pain, the property of believing that snow is white, the property of wanting the lecture to end) are not identical to physical properties.

But what is a "non-physical" (or "physical") thing? What's a "non-physical" (or "physical") property? For our purposes, we can take the notion of a physical thing/property to be sufficiently well-illustrated by paradigmatic examples (stones, iron bars, drops of water, etc. etc./being made of iron, being square, etc. etc.); non-physical things and properties are things and properties that aren't physical.

Three arguments for substance dualism.

Argument A

1. I cannot doubt that my mind exists.
2. I can doubt that my brain exists [or that anything physical exists, come to that].

Therefore:

3. My mind is not my brain.

(An argument like this is suggested in the passage on p. 11 that begins "I am not that structure of limbs..." and ends "for all that I am still something". But the next few sentences seem to take it back.)

Argument A is not valid. Compare:

Argument B

1. I cannot doubt that the masked man is before me.
2. I can doubt that my father is before me.

Therefore:

3. The masked man is not my father.

The problem is that expressions like 'I cannot doubt that ___' create *intensional contexts*. An intensional context is a sentence S containing a referring expression N such that replacing N with a co-referring expression M does not necessarily yield a sentence that has the same truth value as S. So even if 'My mind is my brain' is true, and 'I cannot doubt that my mind exists' is true, it does not follow that 'I cannot doubt that my brain exists' is true.

NB: Do not confuse 'intensional'/'intensionality' with 'intentional'/'intentionality'. Verbs for propositional attitudes, like 'believes', 'hopes', and so on, create intensional contexts, and of course the propositional attitudes are representational mental states and so are intentional. But there are intensional contexts that have nothing to do with intentionality - see example 2 below.

Example 1: 'Lois believes Superman will save the world' is an intensional context, because replacing 'Superman' with 'the bespectacled Daily Planet reporter' takes a truth to a falsehood (or so we may suppose).

Example 2: 'It is necessary that nine is nine' is an intensional context, because replacing the first occurrence of 'nine' with 'the number of planets' takes a truth to a falsehood (the number of planets might have been eight).

Argument C

1. I cannot truly think: I am not thinking.

Therefore:

2. I cannot exist without thinking, i.e. the property of thinking is one of my *essential properties* (see the handout on properties and particulars).

3. The property of thinking is not an essential property of any *physical* thing.

Therefore:

4. I am not a physical thing (a brain, for example).

Premise 3 might be questioned, but the main difficulty is the step from (1) to (2). I cannot truly write 'I am not writing', but (I hope!) I continue to exist when I stop writing.

The most powerful dualist argument is something along these lines:

Argument D

1. If I can clearly and distinctly conceive a proposition **p** to be true, then **p** is possible. ("[E]verything which I clearly and distinctly understand is capable of being created by God so as to correspond exactly with my understanding of it" (p. 16).)

2. I can clearly and distinctly conceive that the proposition that my mind is not identical to my brain is true.

Therefore:

3. It is possible that my mind is not my brain (there is a "possible world" in which my mind is not my brain).

Therefore:

4. My mind is not my brain.

This argument might be attacked on two fronts. First, why is conceivability a good guide to possibility? (I.e., why is premise 1 true?) Second, why does (4) follow from (3)? After all, surely there is a possible world in which George W. isn't the elder son of George H. W. (Jeb could have been the first-born, for example.) But that hardly shows that George W. isn't in fact the elder son of George H. W!

These problems with Argument D will be addressed when we discuss Kripke's objection to the identity theory.
