

Substance Dualism

What you need to know:

Minds exist and are not identical to bodies or to parts of bodies.

- The indivisibility argument for substance dualism (Descartes).

Responses, including:

the mental is divisible in some sense
not everything thought of as physical is divisible.

- The conceivability argument for substance dualism (expressed without reference to God) (Descartes).

Responses including:

mind without body is not conceivable
what is conceivable may not be metaphysically possible
what is metaphysically possible tells us nothing about

the actual world.

The Indivisibility Argument for Substance Dualism

P1: My mind is indivisible.

P2: My body is divisible.

P3: Leibniz Law: If an object has a property another lacks, they must be different objects.

C: My mind is not identical to my body

Possible Exam Questions

What is meant by substance dualism? (3 marks)

Briefly outline Descartes' indivisibility argument. (5 marks)

Outline Descartes' conceivability argument for substance dualism. (5 marks)

Briefly outline three types of dualism, their similarities and differences. (5 marks)

Briefly outline Descartes' indivisibility argument for substance dualism and the issues related to it. (12 marks)

Outline Descartes' conceivability argument for substance dualism and the issues related to it. (12 marks)

Are dualists right to say that minds and/or their properties are non-physical? (25 marks)

The Conceivability Argument for Substance Dualism

P1: If I can conceive of the essential natures of two things separately, it must be possible to separate them.

P2: I perceive myself (my mind) to be essentially a thinking thing and an unextended thing

P3: I perceive my body to be essentially an extended and unthinking thing.

C: It must be possible for mind and body to be separated in reality, meaning they are distinct substances.

The Masked Man Fallacy

P1: I am aware that my best friend has blue eyes

P2: I am not aware that the man in the mask has blue eyes

C: Therefore the man in the mask is not my best friend.



Substance Dualism

Evaluation

- Problems of causal interaction
- Physicalism makes mental states empirically discoverable by science and so solves the problem of other minds
- There is an explanation for the physical origins of human beings (evolution), but there is no explanation of origin of an immaterial mind.
- There is evidence for the neural dependence of all mental phenomena. The effects of drugs and brain damage, MRI of the brain is best explained by supposing that minds are brains
- Successful reductions in the history of science (eg sound to compression waves of air), give us reason to believe that an equivalent reduction is possible for minds.
- Ockham's razor suggests physicalism is to be preferred over dualism as it requires fewer entities, so long as it explains the phenomena (at least) as well as dualism

Evaluation of the Indivisibility Argument

- The mental is divisible in some sense. When patients have a severed corpus callosum (splitting the two hemispheres of the brain) they also experienced split mental states. For example, one patient described how no sooner had her right hand taken something from the shelf, the left hand put it back!
- Hume argues that there is no real self. We are only having a series of experiences, we are not aware of a single thing having these experiences. I does not exist, over and above a series of experiences. Thus, the mind is divisible.
- Some physical states are indivisible. E.g. running and thinking are indivisible. Just because something can't be divided, doesn't imply it's a different kind of thing.

Key terms

Substance dualism: The idea that minds exist and are not identical to bodies or to parts of bodies.

Extended: to exist in space.

Conceivable: It means that something is possible. We can't rule out its existence through reasoning.

Physicalism: Everything is physical or supervenes upon the physical (this includes properties, events, objects and any substance(s) that exist).



Evaluation of the conceivability argument

- Just because it is conceivable, doesn't make it possible. Antoine Arnauld pointed out that an ignorant person might conceive of a right-angled triangle that did not follow Pythagoras' theorem. But, it wouldn't follow from this, that it was possible. Descartes responded by saying that if he conceives "clearly and distinctly" the mind and body as separate, then it must be possible.
- The masked man fallacy