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Second Short Essay

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Meditations on Descartes' paper

Argument about the wax example from Descartes

Recently, I read Descartes's paper, *Meditations On First Philosophy*. I was surprised that the thinking he discussed in the paper turned out to be a question which I had thought about when I was young. However, for some reasons, I gave up discussing, but only had this thinking. the moment I read this paper, I was very glad that an experienced senior has thoroughly discussed this issue, so that I can now have a clear direction and reference when I want to rethink about this issue. furthermore, in this article, I want to explicitly argue one of Descartes' thinking about the example of the beeswax. In his paper, Descartes argues that through the senses, we know the wax is the same before and after it melts. However, upon meditating, I don't find this to be the case, and I will give my arguments for his conclusion.

First, the reason why I claim that the waxes in Descartes' example are not the same is because I have a different understanding or definition about what is the same. Here, I want to give my definition about what is the "same" or how can we judge that two things are the same ones. I suggest that two things can be judged as the same thing if and only if all of their properties are the same. More specifically, from my definition, if some of a thing's properties have already changed, the thing will become a new thing which is totally different from the thing before. I want to give an example in order to explain my definition more clearly. For example, I have an apple, and I bite it;

here is the question, are the apple before the bite is still there? Or, can we say that the apple is the same apple before? In my opinion, these are two quite different apples, because some properties are changes so that these two apples have different properties.

So, here I want to explain the property in my definition and give more detail explanations of my definition. Property refers to the relationship of nature of a thing; there are always many relationships in a specific thing, and we call the relationships which have connections with the nature of that thing as the properties of a thing. Property is a collective term to describe this kind of connection with the nature of an object. For example, the shape, colour, smell, good and evil, good and bad, use, etc. These are all the properties of things. However, it should be noted that these properties were determined when the thing was born, and extra properties that are not related to the original properties and are added due to external factors should not be counted in, which means you cannot stick a small sticker on your computer or embellish your phone with a brand new case, and then claim that they are no longer the previous computer and phone. However, if you replace the keyboard or other hardware of your personal computer; or you change a new screen for your mobile phone, then the computer and mobile phone are no longer the previous, because no matter hardware facilities or screen, they belong to the original properties when a computer or phone have been made, and the new keyboard and screen are different from the previous ones, so we can conclude that their properties have changed.

Now let us go back to the example of the apple, which I used in the previous paragraph. After I bit the apple, its properties of weight and shape have already changed: it lost the weight of the part I bit, and its shape becomes much more irregular. Because of these changes, I can confidently conclude that the apple is not the same apple which I have just had it. Here is another example: I take a piece of ice; it is solid, and it feels cold. Then, someone puts it above the fire, and the ice

melts. The ice turned into a puddle of water. We cannot say that the same ice remains. Since the state of that ice has changed from solid to liquid, and the feeling of touching them has also changed, temperature of the ice may also change, and all these places where changes take place are part of the properties of ice, the ice no longer exists.

After I have explained my point clearly, I will turn my attention back to the example of Descartes, and question his conclusion that the same wax still remains. For the wax that has just been taken out of the hive, it has not lost the sweetness of the honey it contains, and it still retains a little of the aroma it picked up from the flowers; its colour, shape and size are obvious; it is hard, cool, and easy safe to touch. In short, it has all the characteristics that you can make sure it is a wax, and every characteristic which can help you to make sure it can be counted as that wax's properties. However, when someone takes it to the fire: the flavour is gone, the aroma disappears, its colour changes, its shape becomes different from the original, its volume increases, and it becomes liquid. It is hot and untouchable, and despite knocking on it, it could no longer make a sound. Are these characteristics parts of the properties of the original wax? Certainly yes; the wax's properties have already changed such as colour, smell, and shape, so according to my definition, the wax does not remain anymore, instead, it turns to another different thing. The thing which can also be called as wax, but is totally different from the original wax we mentioned before.

When I reached the above conclusion, another question appeared in my mind: am I still the same as I was several seconds ago? Or could I mention that the old I is dead, and I become new person? The reason I have these questions is because I suppose that with every second that elapses, my life is reduced by one second. is this also a change in the properties of myself? While since this is not the main part of my paper, I do not want to argue it here; however, I will continue thinking about this question and record my thinking in my other papers.

In summary, I refuted Descartes' example of wax and explained in detail the reasons for my refutation. The main reason I refute is that I have different opinions on whether an object has changed, or how we determine whether an object still exists. Maybe someone will also question my point of view, this is normal, because I can not conclude that the point I put forward is 100% correct, or my conclusion is perfect enough and have nothing to refute.

Resource

Descartes, R. "Meditations on First Philosophy."