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PHIL 100 7830 – Intro to Philosophy

“Mind-Body: Truth Without Certainty”

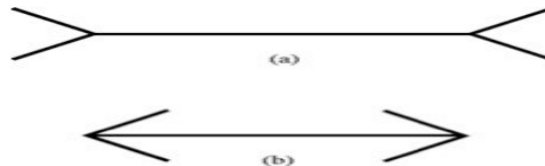
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Today, we have Universities in which we learn about such exciting subjects such as Computer Science, Aerospace, and Biotechnology. For the most part most of our education comes from other humans. So a question that can be raised is it possible that we were misinformed or lied to. There is a perfect analogy in the comical film, Water Boy, starring Adam Sandler. Here, he plays the role of Bobby who is brought up by an overprotective mother that teaches him everything in life. When he explains how the world is, he begins by saying, “Momma says...” and then gives some ludicrous explanation. So, if it is possible that we can be misinformed or lied to, how can we be sure what is true or not? What does it mean for something to be true? An argument is that truth is not necessarily about certainty but what we believe to be true is just our best explanation that is available (Shelly Kagan). After all, we believe in atoms, yet we don’t see them.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, René Descartes also faced this dilemma. To find truth, he needed to find the foundation of all knowledge. That is, what could not be divided into more parts? From there he could build. However, Descartes came to a revelation that he was relying on his senses to determine what was true or false. There was a serious flaw in this. He came to the realization that our senses were capable of deception and couldn’t be trusted. For example, the two lines below appear to be of different lengths but if you look closer, you will see that they are the same length.



So, if he couldn’t trust his senses, he needed a better solution to finding the truth. From this premises, he came up with the Method of Doubt. In his conjecture, he stated

that if you doubted something, then it couldn't be true. Well there is one thing he did not doubt; that he existed. He famously said, "Cogito ergo sum" – I think, therefore I am. However, this couldn't explain the physical world in which he perceived. Although he may doubt that a physical object could exist, such as a dream where he sees two trees, but when he awakes, the trees no longer exist; he couldn't doubt that it maintained certain physical properties, such as their height, location, and quantity. Thereby, using his method of doubt, a physical world must exist.

This was complicated. Although he found that the physical world existed, the physical world couldn't explain the non-physical properties such as emotion or free will. That is, it doesn't take up space. So, if two things have two different properties then they must be different. This led to Cartesian Dualism in which Descartes proposed that there existed a mind that is made up of non-physical properties and the body that is made of physical properties. To see how he could think this, imagine your self without your body. It is imaginable to perceive yourself without a body, but it's not logical to imagine a mind without a mind (Shelly Kagan).

However, it is important to note that we must reflect the time and place that Descartes lived. Christianity had a strong impact on his life and arguably the basis for his position regarding Cartesian Dualism. Throughout history, religious beliefs have made false assumptions of the world, such as the Earth being the center of the Universe. So, could it be that religion clouded Descartes' judgments? Would Descartes think differently with the knowledge we have now of the world?

Today, many scholars have abandoned this position and mainly take on the monist position that "mind and matter are formed from, or reducible to, the same ultimate

substance or principle of being” (Houghton). However, Cartesian Dualism still remains debatable today, mainly from theologians. This is easy to understand as dualism offers an explanation for causality.

Dualists argue that there must be an initial move, or as Descartes explains, the “mover”. For example, what came first – the chicken or the egg? Simply stated, something just cannot be created by nothing. This is an excellent point to consider. However, it does leave ambiguity. How can something with non-physical properties move a physical object? If there was such a force that we have yet to discover, then this would contradict Descartes’ notion of the mind and body being separate. If the mind and body are separable, then should it be possible that the mind could move to other bodies, like in the movie “Ghost” with Whoopi Goldberg.

Dualists also argue, that the physical world cannot explain the metaphysical properties of emotion, pain, and fear. Today, neuroscience has come a long way and does seem to offer an explanation by providing empirical evidence that chemicals can affect the mind, such as pain killers to suppress pain, or anti-depressants that make us happy.

The strongest argument that the Dualists have, that can be personally sympathized with, is the fact that we have free will. Almost everyone believes we have free will. After all, if society doesn’t believe in free will, how can we sentence people to death for crimes in which they had no control over?

For starters, what is free will? If it’s acting based on past experiences, then can’t it be assumed that robots could have free will. But aren’t mechanical objects just moving purposely. For example, wasn’t there an initial program that the robot operated on? That is, there was a programmer giving it purpose? However, monists argue that quantum

mechanics, the foundation of all physical matter, is actually based on probability and without purpose (Churchland).

So this brings us to the conclusion that neither the dualist nor the monist can explain free will. However, just as stated in the beginning, what we believe to be true is not necessarily certainty but what position offers the best explanation. Since, Dualist cannot explain exactly what conscious is made of, or its parts, and is just a blanket explanation, it seems that monist theory will hold. Only time and a strong commitment to knowledge will reveal certainty.

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