

Philosophy of Mind and Metaphysics

Lecture VIII: Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind

Tim Black
California State University, Northridge
Spring 2004

I. SUBSTANCE (OR CARTESIAN) DUALISM

- a. **THE VIEW:** According to Substance Dualism, there are two sorts of substance, mental and material (or physical). Descartes claimed further that each of us is a union, made up of a material substance – the body – and a mental substance – the mind. (By ‘substance’ here, we mean something that can exist independently, and have properties and enter into relationships with other substances.)
- b. **PROBLEMS:** Substance Dualism seems unable to explain the possibility of mental causation, that is, the possibility that mentality makes a causal difference in and to the world. “For,” as Kim puts it, “it simply does not seem credible that an immaterial substance, with no material characteristics and totally outside physical space, could causally influence, and be influenced by, the motions of material bodies that are strictly governed by physical law” (p. 4).
- c. Kim often talks about souls as if they are minds. But, of course, many people think that souls are different from minds. How so? The idea of a soul “usually carries with it various, often conflicting, religious and theological associations” (p. 4). We set souls aside here, not because religion and theology are to be avoided, but rather because in answering certain questions about the mind and about mentality, we also want to account for the mentality of things like non-human – and hence soulless – animals.

II. THE ONTOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

- a. We will presuppose that there are in the world *things*, for example, people, computers, giraffes, and trees.
- b. We will presuppose that the things in the world have *properties*, for example, the property of being stubborn, the property of being made of plastic, the property of being an animal, and the property of being green.
- c. We will presuppose that the things in the world stand in certain *relations* to one another, for example, the relation of being the sister of, the relation of being newer than, the relation of being taller than, and the relation of being to the left of.

- d. We will also distinguish between events, states, processes, and facts. “A process can be thought of as a causally connected series of events and states, and events differ from states only in that they suggest *change* whereas states do not” (p. 6). Events include earthquakes and sneezes; states include the state of being in pain; processes include erosion and evolution; and facts include the fact that this tree is green and the fact that there is a library on CSUN’s campus.

III. QUESTIONS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

- a. What are the conditions for having a mind? (We pick up this question in Section VI below.)
- b. How are mental properties (or states) related to other mental properties (or states)?
- c. How are mental properties related to physical properties? How, in particular, can we make a place for mind in a physical world?
 - But why should any such question trouble us? Because “the mental seems so utterly different from the physical and yet the two seem intimately related to each other” (p. 7).

IV. BASIC CONCEPTS AND ASSUMPTIONS

- a. **MIND-BODY SUPERVENIENCE:** The mental supervenes on the physical in that any two things (objects, events, organisms, persons, etc.) exactly alike in all physical properties cannot differ in respect of mental properties. That is, physical indiscernibility entails psychological indiscernibility.
- b. **THE ANTI-CARTESIAN PRINCIPLE:** There can be no purely mental beings. That is, nothing can have a mental property without having some physical property and hence without being a physical thing.
- c. **MIND-BODY DEPENDENCE:** What mental properties a thing has depends on, and is determined by, what physical properties it has. That is to say, the psychological character of a thing is wholly determined by its physical character.
 - This claim is stronger than Mind-Body Supervenience (MBS). For, according to MBS, two creatures who are dramatically physically different might nevertheless be exactly alike in respect of their mental properties. In this sense, then, MBS is consistent with the claim that the

psychological character of a thing does *not* depend on its physical character.

- d. **MINIMAL PHYSICALISM:** This is the thesis that Mind-Body Supervenience, the Anti-Cartesian Principle, and Mind-Body Dependence are all true. (We might think of this as equivalent to the following claim: Each and every property of a thing is either a physical property or is determined by its physical properties, and that there is nothing in the world that is not a physical thing.)

V. **VARIETIES OF MENTAL PHENOMENA**

- a. **SENSATIONS:** These phenomena have a phenomenal or qualitative aspect; that is, there is a way that they *feel*, or a way that they *look* or *appear*. Sensations include pains, itches, tickles, seeing a red patch, smelling a rose, tasting coffee, and hearing the screeching of car tires.
- b. **PROPOSITIONAL ATTITUDES (AND INTENTIONAL STATES):** These are mental states that are normally attributed to creatures by using a 'that'-clause, for example, Tim *hopes that* the strike will end soon, Turing *believes that* machine functionalism is true, and George *fears that* the trouble in Iraq will continue indefinitely. To be in such a state – that is, to be in a state of hoping that..., or believing that..., or fearing that..., or the like – is to be in an *intentional state*. (We might also think of *volitional states* as falling into this category. Volitional states include the state of intending, the state of deciding, and the state of willing.)
- c. **FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS:** These include anger, joy, sadness, guilt, depression, elation, embarrassment, remorse, regret, and the like.

VI. **IS THERE A MARK OF THE MENTAL? (That is, is there a criterion (or set of criteria) that distinguishes mental from non-mental phenomena?)**

a. **EPISTEMOLOGICAL CRITERIA**

- **DIRECT (OR IMMEDIATE) KNOWLEDGE:** Knowledge of mental properties or phenomena is direct or immediate, in the sense that such knowledge is not based on evidence or inference. (But don't I have direct or immediate knowledge of some non-mental facts? For example, don't I know directly that there is a computer screen before me?)
- **PRIVACY (OR FIRST-PERSON PRIVILEGE):** Direct epistemic access to any given mental occurrence is enjoyed *only by the subject of that mental occurrence*. Thus, the mental is

that to which subjects have such access. (But this seems to apply only to a subject's *current* mental occurrences.)

- **INFALLIBILITY (AND SELF-INTIMACY):** One's knowledge of one's own current mental states is infallible, in the sense that I cannot be mistaken about whether I am in such a state: If I *believe* that I'm in pain, for example, then I *am* in pain. (But let's say that I believe that I am remorseful. Does that mean that I *am* remorseful? Might I not instead be feeling guilt? Suppose too that I believe that I have an itch in my left shoulder. Does that mean that I *do* have an itch in my left shoulder? Might it not instead be a tickle?)
- b. **NON-SPATIALITY:** A property *M* is a *mental* property just in case the proposition that *x* has *M*, where *x* is not an abstract object, does not logically entail that *x* is spatially extended. (But it seems that those who accept this claim are committed to Cartesian mental substances, and that they'll therefore encounter all the problems associated with Substance Dualism.)
- c. **INTENTIONALITY:** Mental states have, or are directed toward, some object or other; mental states have an "aboutness" in that they are *about* something or other. For example, I think *of rain*, and I see *flowers in the field*. (But do *all* mental phenomena exhibit intentionality? Toward what are pains, for example, directed? What are itches or tickles *about*?)