

How successful are Descartes' arguments for the real distinction of mind from body? Upon which would you put the most weight?

Descartes argues has three main arguments for minds and bodies being two different distinct types of substance. These are known as arguments for substance dualism and are as follows.

- The Argument from doubt : Descartes argues that while he could pretend or think that he had no body and therefore did not exist in any place, he could not think or pretend he had no mind, as merely having a doubt that he had a mind proves that he does.
- The Argument from Clear and distinct understanding: Descartes argues that if two things can be separated even if only by god then they must be two different things. Descartes says that as he can perceive minds and bodies clearly and distinctly from each other they must be two separate things we just don't know how to separate them.
- The Argument from simplicity: Descartes argues that bodies can be divided into parts whereas minds cannot meaning that the two must be different things.

For our minds to be separate from our bodies first of all we have to exist otherwise there is nothing about which to argue and no stand point to argue from. Also we must be able to believe that things of which we think in this case minds and bodies exist and that if we perceive something as correct it must be true. So it is important to all of Descartes's arguments to establish not only that we exist but also that we can be certain of what we claim to know. The cogito is Descartes's claim "that I thinking therefore I exist" Descartes says that as he can convince himself of something he must exist, as even if he is being deceived by some supernatural power as long as he is still thinking that he is something then he is. Furthermore the mere doubt that you exist is proof that you in fact exist as how can you doubt something unless you are existing. "I assuredly existed, since I was persuaded. But there is I know not what being, who is possessed at once of the highest power and the deepest cunning, who is constantly employing all his ingenuity in deceiving me. Doubtless, then, I exist, since I am deceived; and, let him deceive me as he may, he can never bring it about that I am nothing, so long as I shall be conscious that I am something. So that it must, in fine, be maintained, all things being maturely and carefully considered, that this proposition (pronunciatum) I am, I exist, is necessarily true" (Descartes *Meditations*, II, p16,17). Descartes also says that clear perception, clarity and distinctness are present in the cogito, he says that these qualities are essential in being sure of anything. Clearly perceiving something might mean that you think you are sure of it but you could be wrong, Clarity and distinctness of perception means that you recognise the reasons for the claim made by clear perception for what you believe to be true being true, Descartes called this the mark of knowledge. Together the cogito and the mark of knowledge set a firm foundation for all of Descartes's conclusions by showing that he and all of us exist and that we can be certain about things we are perceiving Therefore the cogito and mark of knowledge must be taken into account in all of Descartes's arguments.

The argument from doubt is I believe the weakest of Descartes arguments a view I think i share with the father of modern philosophy himself "These very things which i am supposing to be nothing, because they are unknown to me, are in reality identical with the I of which i am aware? I do not know, and for the moment I shall not argue the point as I can

only make judgments about things are known to me" (Descartes, *meditations*, p18)
The argument from doubt at first appeared very strong to me as it is true that while i can imagine not having a body or a world for me to exist in, i could not think that i did not exist as is shown in the cogito. This would suggest that minds and bodies are two different things as "I" that is my soul or entity is a thinking thing and my body is merely a vessel from which "I" could be separated. However there is no proof that the body is a vessel for the soul which the mind can survive without in Descartes's argument, only that there is uncertainty that it is part of the "I" whereas there is certainty that "I" is the mind. Yet Descartes concludes that if he is a thinking thing he is not a physical thing and therefore minds and bodies are separate "this "I" - that is, the soul by which i am what i am - is entirely distinct from the body, and indeed is easier to know than the body, and would not fail to be whatever it is, even if the body did not exist." (Descartes *Discourse IV*, p127)
I think that the premises of th argument are true but the conclusions drawn from them appear to be false, as if you are certain th at A is A and uncertain that A is B that doesn't prove A is not B.

Descartes's argument from clear and distinct understanding is I feel the most valid of his arguments. If it could be proved that minds and bodies could be separated from each other and still work then surely this would mean that the two were separate things. I think that this argument is quite sound as you can damage the body but the mind be completely ok and damage the mind but still have a completely fine body albeit without anything to work it. So it is possible to damage two distinct parts of ones self separately from each other so that only one works in affect separating them. Whether this means that minds and bodies are completely separate from each other though or simply an extension of each other is a more difficult matter. The opposition to this argument mainly opposes the fact that Descartes's requires a god to separate minds and bodies, a point in the argument which obviously leads to far more complicated questions. I thi nk that if you forget about Descartes idea of god doing the separating and just think about what is and isn't possible in our understanding as the limiting factor then there is perhaps more strength to the argument. At the moment we cannot begin to even co mprehend how minds and bodies could be separated, the workings of the brain that give rise to thought and our "mind" are so complicated they have created a substance that is in a way a different type of matter altogether. But that does not mean that the tw o could not be separated if it was known how. Obviously it is also not known how the mind could then continue to exist separately from the body another issue which could be perceived as a flaw in Descartes argument.

In the argument from simplicity Descartes says that while bodies can be divided into parts minds cannot, even if you count the different faculties of the mind as different parts this is not really truly separating it as the mind functions as a whole. Descartes also says that as a thinking thing he is "unable to distinguish any parts within myself" (Descartes, *Meditations*, VI, p59). At first this seems like a very flawed argument as is not everything divisible and surely the mind can be separated into parts as if parts of the brain are damaged does this not damage a part of that person's mind? If one part of the brain being damaged causes one part of the mind to be damaged then surely minds and bodies are both equally divisible? However if damage to a brain just stops the body being able to u se the mind, perhaps blocking part of what is in fact still a whole mind. Then maybe Descartes is proving that the mind must be a special type of substance. If the mind is indivisible then maybe the argument from simplicity does make a valid point in tryin g to better define what a mind actually is. All matter we know of is divisible, raw elements are divisible into protons and electrons etc which are divisible into quarks etc, which one day to will probably be divisible into something else. If Descartes is right then maybe the mind is not making it a different type of substance distinct from the body.

In conclusion i think that Descartes arguments approach an answer but really it is only with a better definition of what a mind entails that he could truly prove bodies and minds are separate. If we know bodies are a physical thing that can be examined, separated and destroyed and we know for sure that minds are not a physical thing but can be broken so therefore and along with the cogito must exist, then the mere fact that the two things are made of a different substance ,i.e. matter and something we are as of yet unable to explain, makes minds and bodies two separate things.

References

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