OBJECTIONS TO CARTESIAN DUALISM

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DESCARTES’ MODAL ARGUMENT FOR DUALISM

1. I can understand a scenario where I exist but no material objects exist.
2. Every understandable scenario is possible.
3. If it is possible for X to exist without Y existing, then X is not Y.
4. I am not a material object.

➤ Re (2): God is omnipotent, so…
➤ “everything which I understand is capable of being created by God”
➤ Re (3): Descartes says that “two things are distinct” if “they are capable of being separated.”
➤ “separated” = one exists without the other
➤ Follows from “It is impossible for a single thing to both exist and not exist.”
1. I can understand a scenario where I exist but no material objects exist.

2. Every understandable scenario is possible.

  ➤ Counterexample(?): geometry ignoramus who supposes a triangle has angles $\neq 180^\circ$

  ➤ D’s reply: ignoramus lacks clear and distinct understanding
Cartesian interactionism: mind and body interact through pineal gland
IT IS DIFFICULT TO RECONCILE THIS VIEW OF THE SOUL WITH THE AMPLY DOCUMENTED FACTS ABOUT THE DEPENDENCE OF MENTAL EVENTS ON THE STATES OF THE BRAIN. IF THE SOUL IS THAT WHICH IS CONSCIOUS AND ENGAGES IN MENTAL ACTIVITY, HOW CAN WE EXPLAIN THE WAY THAT MENTAL FUNCTIONING IS INVARIABLY IMPAIRED BY, SAY, THE EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL ON THE BRAIN, OF PHYSICAL DAMAGE TO PARTICULAR AREAS OF THE BRAIN?
WHILE THE SOUL MUST BE SUSCEPTIBLE TO CAUSAL INFLUENCE BY THE EXTERNAL WORLD IN ORDER FOR PERCEPTION THROUGH THE SENSE ORGANS TO BE POSSIBLE, IT IS MORE DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND HOW ITS BASIC CAPACITIES FOR COGNITION, IMAGINATION, EMOTION, AND SO ON COULD BE IMPAIRED OR EXTINGUISHED BY SELECTIVE DAMAGE TO CERTAIN AREAS OF THE BRAIN.

Jeff McMahan, pg. 17
What can the mind do?
Perception: prosopagnosia after damage to occipital or fusiform areas
What can the mind do?
Emotion: Phineas Gage’s personality changes after accident
PERCEPTION
EMOTION
MEMORY
IMAGINATION
LANGUAGE
REASONING

What can the mind do?
Memory: Henry Molaison’s anterograde amnesia after brain surgery
What can the mind do?
IMAGINATION: CHARCOT-WILBRAND SYNDROME AFTER STROKE
What can the mind do?
Language: Receptive aphasia after damage to Wernicke’s area
What can the mind do?
Reasoning: Cognitive decline in dementia
What does the mind do?