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MIND & BODY:
DESCARTES AND WITTGENSTEIN

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How should we respond to the question: are emotions and sensations conditions of the mind or of the body?

Cartesian dualism has been a powerful and influential philosophy since Rene Descartes highlighted this distinction in his search for undoubtable truths. In this paper I am going to be looking at the distinction he made between the mind and the body, and I will argue in favour of Ludwig Wittgenstein's stance against this distinction. Further, I will be analysing both of their responses to the question given. Finally, I will offer my reasons as to why I stand in favour of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

Before viewing different philosophies in response to the question of whether emotions and sensations are conditions of the mind or body, it's important to note that the question itself is presented with a Cartesian outlook. This means that the question assumes a clear distinction between the mind and the body. Initially, you would think that there would only be the following answers: either the mind, or the body, or both the mind and body. However, there is a fourth possible answer that does not conform to any of the answers previously mentioned, and it is also the way in which I would answer the question. Emotions and sensations are conditions of the human being, one single entity. This answer would refute the Cartesian split of mind and body, and it is more aligned with Wittgenstein's philosophy and his criticisms of Cartesian dualism.

In his paper titled 'The Mind, the Brain, and the Face', David Cockburn explains that when we accept the notion of 'the mind' in either dualist or materialist terms, we are conforming to the idea that mind and body are two distinct entities. For example, if I say that 'John is kind,' the general understanding would be that it is a description of a part of John that is immaterial, hence it is about his mind (Cockburn, 1985). I will argue why this should not be the case. Cockburn goes on further to explain that because the human body is a material thing, it would be bizarre to ascribe thoughts and feelings (immaterial attributes) to it. This goes to show that most philosophies readily have this distinction of the mind and the body as two separate entities (Cockburn, 1985). However, we should not overlook how deeply involved the body is in carrying out the actions that make a person 'kind'. So, it should not seem as odd as it does to describe a person's body as 'kind' for example, because the body is the way in which this characteristic is manifested.

To Descartes, the mind and the body are two separate entities, and the *real* person is the mind, not the body. He believes that it is entirely possible to imagine oneself without the body, and according to him the same cannot be said when we try to imagine ourselves without a mind. Descartes explains in *Meditations on First Philosophy* that the body is something that can be divided. He illustrates this by saying that one can exist without, for example, an arm or a leg. However, the mind according to Descartes is indivisible; all mental activities such as thinking, willing, and understanding happen not in parts of the mind, but in the entire entity of the mind. This has many implications on the way we understand the mind and the body. Descartes'

philosophy on the relationship between the mind and the body is discussed in the following excerpt:

Nature also teaches me, through these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst and so on, that I (a thinking thing) am not merely in my body as a sailor is in a ship. Rather, I am closely joined to it—intermingled with it, so to speak—so that it and I form a unit. If this were not so, I wouldn't feel pain when the body was hurt but would perceive the damage in an intellectual way, like a sailor seeing that his ship needs repairs. And when the body needed food or drink I would intellectually understand this fact instead of (as I do) having confused sensations of hunger and thirst. These sensations are confused mental events that arise from the union—the intermingling, as it were—of the mind with the body. (Descartes, 2008)

When viewed with Descartes' other writings there seems here to be a lot of confusion about the relationship between the mind and the body. From the paragraph cited above we can infer that Descartes believes that the mind and the body are closely joined, and I think this complicates his fixation on the mind and the body existing as two distinct entities. According to him, one might feel a pain in their foot, and because of the way that the mind and the body are almost—but not quite—a unit, one would not be able simply to perceive the pain without feeling its effects. However, he goes on further to explain that the mind is not entirely affected by all parts of the body and that only a portion of the brain (the pineal gland), effects the mind. Nevertheless, I would strongly argue that he does believe that sensations (*not* emotions) such as pain, thirst, and hunger are confused conditions of the mind. Descartes writes in the Sixth Meditation:

Similarly, when I feel a pain in my foot, this happens by means of nerves that run from the foot up to the brain. When the nerves are pulled in the foot, they pull on inner parts of the brain and make them move; and nature has laid it down that this motion should produce in the mind a sensation of pain as though occurring in the foot. (Descartes, 2008)

Because Descartes philosophy has underlying tones of Christianity, it does not go unnoticed that his views of the body are influenced by the religion, which is why there seems to be an amount of disdain towards the body as opposed to the mind. In his book *The Absent Body*, Drew Leder explains that to Descartes the body is prone to miscalculations and errors, and that intellect (an immaterial thing) lies in the mind (also immaterial) and is where *true* knowledge rests. Leder further explains that although Descartes validates some bodily perceptions because God does not deceive, he believes that the body is a hinderance and that it can stand in the way of the mind in one's search for scientific knowledge. If the body was not feeling well, it would be difficult for one to think clearly. Leder also explores Descartes' account on other bodily moral errors (Leder, 1990). Leder writes:

For a "passion" of the soul, in Descartes' primary usage, is a feeling or emotion principally caused, maintained and fortified by the body." (Leder, 1990)

According to Leder, one might say that to Descartes feelings that arise from the body are cues for the measures that should be taken for the betterment (I use this term loosely) of the body—we feel hunger when the body needs food, for instance. So, if the body was not in an optimal state, this causes the mind to register that the body is lacking in a certain area (Leder, 1990). This

comes with a certain amount of confusion caused by our senses, because the things that might give us temporary pleasure might be bad for us (for example: the high that comes from methamphetamine use), and the things that do not appeal to our senses might be beneficial to us (for example: getting a vaccination shot). There is a similar verse from the Qur'an that states the following:

But it may be that you hate something while it is good for you, and it may be that you love something while it is bad for you. (The Qur'an, 2:216)

It is rare for me to agree with Descartes' philosophies, yet I find this to be somewhat true; a lot of people chase fleeting pleasures that may be detrimental to them in some way. Thus, Descartes thinks the body again is a hinderance to living a 'good' moral life, similarly, to hindering one's search for scientific knowledge. It can be deduced that to Descartes emotions are conditions of the body. The way I would analogise this is by saying Descartes thinks of the body, and therefore emotions, as, for example: a dog, and the mind, where virtue and morality lie, is the person holding the leash. To explain my analogy, I would go on further to say that to Descartes, emotions are not a bad thing to experience, but he does think that they should be, in some sense, controlled. One should not act out on emotions without intellectualizing them first. Leder states the following:

"Descartes was not an antiemotionalist or as extreme as certain of his religious predecessors. He regards the passions as "all good in their nature," insofar as evil uses and excesses are avoided. Many are pleasurable, can incite within us positive thought, and even act to fortify our virtues. However, this proper utility is realized only under the direction and mastery of the soul. Reason must continually monitor the reactive tendencies to which the body is heir and counteract its deceptive pulls." (Leder, 1990)

Although I do agree with the fact that many people chase temporary pleasures, I do not think emotions should be intellectualized, because more often than not our emotions do not arise without reason. Therefore, it can be argued that Descartes is still somewhat extreme in his view of our constant need to monitor our emotions. Nevertheless, there is no denying that in some cases, emotions must be tempered by reason. For example: if someone were to be blinded by anger, it would be in their best interest not to act out violently. Whenever an emotion would lead us to deviate in unvirtuous ways then they must be moderated by reason. In her paper 'Emotion: The Self-regulatory Sense', Katherine Peil suggests that emotions are a sense, just like hearing, seeing, or smelling. Our emotions give us necessary information about the situations and environment we are in (Peil, 2014). For example: if I were scared, that would be my way of sensing that I am in an unsafe environment. Even in the case that I were not in an unsafe environment, the emotions a person is feeling are meant to be felt and understood, but I would not say that they should be 'monitored with reason'. I would argue that emotional thinking is not the opposite of logical thinking. We should try to find the cause of the emotion we are feeling, or at the very least we should acknowledge what the emotion is and sit with it, and this goes to show that the application of rationality to our emotions is not the opposite of emotional thinking but can work in tandem with it.

In response to Cartesian dualism, Wittgenstein has tried to provide a solution to the problematic view of the mind and the body existing as two distinct entities. According to him, consciousness is not distinct from the body. It could be argued that Wittgenstein believes that they are a unit, and I say this because of the way that he speaks of our behaviours being manifested in our bodies. Wittgenstein says:

Consciousness in another's face. Look into someone else's face, and see the consciousness in it, and a particular shade of consciousness. You see on it, in it, joy, indifference, interest, excitement, torpor and so on. The light in other people's faces. Do you look into yourself in order to recognize the fury in his face? It is there as clearly as in your own breast. (Wittgenstein, 1967)

In contrast to Descartes, Wittgenstein tackles the mind and body problem, not through inner reflection but through our experience of other people. He illustrates the way that consciousness is manifested through the body, on several occasions. He makes it a point that the distinction between mind and body does not exist. We even see that Descartes struggles with the concept of the mind and the body being distinct. According to Descartes:

'The mind is proved to be really distinct from the body, even though the mind is shown to be so closely joined to the body that it forms a single unit with it.' (Descartes, 2008)

Descartes seems to be contradicting himself in the previous quote; one might wonder how two entities can be distinct and yet form a single unit. There are surely a lot of complications that arise when he tries to justify and explain that the true self is an immaterial thing that can somehow interact with the body, an entirely material thing. His explanation that the pineal gland is the hub of this interaction cannot be proven, but the issue lies within the fact that this leaves one feeling unsatisfied. Something can be scientifically true and still leave one feeling unsatisfied, because it might not align with one's experience of life. An example of this would be that, scientifically speaking, Descartes is not wrong when he says that the feeling of pain happening in a body part actually takes place in the brain. However, I am certain that a lot of people would find this scientific fact to be irritating, and unsatisfactory, because it feels very reductive to condense a person to merely a piece of meat inside a skull. Another perspective on this would be that, according to our experience of pain, we do not feel it take place in the brain, but in the body. The degree to which our states and our consciousnesses overlap is still intensely debated to this day, even with the development of scientific technology since Descartes' time. It is odd for one to ascribe themselves to the mind entirely, and not the body. We can see that even Descartes struggles to commit himself fully to this view.

What should be appreciated from Wittgenstein's views on the mind and body relationship is the reclamation of our bodies, especially after Descartes' strongly influential text. Wittgenstein's approach to the mind and body relationship is a lot more humanizing. The body is redeemed as a manifestation of the human experience, shifting away from the medieval Christian teachings of the body being impure, the location of sin. Wittgenstein says: "the human body is the best picture of the human soul." (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1953). By this it is meant that the human body is not a distinct, separate entity. It is the way in which we move,

talk, feel, and more. Furthermore, this picture of the human body is truer to experience than Descartes' label of the body being a machine, something alien that to him is not even a part of who we are.

According to Michael F. Mascolo, to Wittgenstein emotions are an 'embodied process' meaning that they cannot be experienced without the body (Mascolo, 2009). Emotions are not a private experience; they are manifested through our bodies. In the passage above ("Consciousness in another's face..") we see that Wittgenstein argues that a person's emotions are shown in their faces. Cockburn writes:

Why does the face have this special place in our thought? An answer which we might be tempted by is this: 'We have noticed that the face is much more expressive of emotions than are other parts of the body...' (Cockburn, 1985)

This captures Wittgenstein's writing on emotions and the way that they are displayed on the face—that is, a body part—quite well. Wittgenstein places a lot of importance on the face. He argues that it emits a certain kind of emotion that a person is feeling. Nevertheless, in response to whether Wittgenstein would argue that emotions and sensations are conditions of the mind or the body, it is evident that to him the distinction of the mind and the body should not exist. In her paper titled 'An Examination of Wittgenstein's Approach to the Mind-Body Problem', Sandra Baker writes that in Wittgenstein's later works he came to denounce traditional views of the mind and the way that it works. She goes on further to mention that:

Wittgenstein attempts, by criticizing the works of others in an apparently disorganized way, to get people to understand that the idea of a mind 'inside' themselves reflecting and representing a world 'outside' themselves, is fundamentally flawed (Baker, 2015).

This would mean that to Wittgenstein we would understand the world more efficiently not through isolation and inner reflection, but through our social experiences with others and investigations. One might learn to identify the emotions that they are feeling, by observing someone feeling that same emotion.

Although we have seen that Wittgenstein and Descartes are often not in agreement and that Wittgenstein refutes Cartesian dualism, one might wonder how we could still retain the use of the word 'mind', especially since it is embedded in the way that we talk daily. According to Baker, to Wittgenstein its use is contextual; nevertheless, it should not be used to describe "a kind of inner monitor of brain activity". Furthermore, the word should not be used to reference a 'part' of us that is distinct from the rest of us.

When it comes to Descartes and his philosophies, there is no denying that his works are a staple in more fields than just philosophy: such as sciences and mathematics. For the period he was writing in, there is a lot to be appreciated from his works, such as his quest for undoubtable truths. However, it is also evident that in his search for truths he was influenced by religion, which is not necessarily a negative thing. The issues arise when you let your beliefs cloud your judgment, and that takes place in the way that he talks about the body, and assigning himself—and therefore, other people—to something entirely immaterial. It has been discussed

that even he has a hard time committing to this view, which is one of the reasons it can be argued that it is flawed. There are many holes in Descartes arguments of us being entirely immaterial beings, and our bodies not being who or what we really are. Even if one were to believe that there must be something about us that is immaterial, we should not in any case minimize the body's role in our lives. Descartes says it is possible to imagine oneself without a body, but it can be argued that when he says this, he is not thinking logically. Wittgenstein was critical of Cartesian dualism and argued that it was based on a flawed understanding of the relationship between mental states and physical states. Wittgenstein's refutation of Cartesian dualism and his writings on consciousness being manifested through the body, led us to a more compelling view on human beings. His view on the 'mind', which he often refers to as consciousness, is much more complex and refined in comparison to Cartesian dualism. Wittgenstein argued that we are limited in our understanding of consciousness and its relationship with our physical selves, because of the use of our language. We speak of consciousness as if it were separate and distinct from our bodies. In *The Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein wrote: "The limits of my language are the limits of my world" (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, 1998).

The way we should respond to whether emotions and sensations are conditions of the mind or of the body, is with careful consideration on the way that the question is posed. We do not have to terminate our use of the words 'mind' and 'body'. However, we should not keep the belief that they exist distinctly, especially since there are so many cases in which it is clear that our mental and physical lives are interconnected. Furthermore, we should be a lot more mindful of the way we speak of our bodies. Many of us have come a long way from seeing the body as something distinct from who we really are and the view that it is something impure. The body, similar to the mind, should be treated with equal priority and respect. We should reclaim the body and acknowledge the outdated concept of it being impure. As Wittgenstein says: "the human body is the best picture of the human soul." (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1953). Everything we do, and say, and who we are, is constituted by the body.

In conclusion, the mind and the body are not two separate distinct entities but are two aspects of one entity: the human being. This paper has analysed the way in which we should respond to the question: are emotions and sensations conditions of the mind or of the body? The question has been posed in the Cartesian dualist view. I have argued that Wittgenstein's view of the mind and body, and his reclamation of the body has opened many doors in the way that we understand ourselves and others. It allows us to overcome the vilification of the body, as well as realize that we are not distinct from our bodies. Finally, we must come to terms with the fact that the mind and the body are interconnected. We should not say that emotions and sensations happen in either the mind or the body, but that they happen to the human being.

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