

Evaluate the plausibility of Cartesian dualism

Within the pages of *Meditations on First Philosophy*, René Descartes works to find out what things, if any, can be known for certain, by first discovering what can be doubted. This leads to him coming to the idea that the only thing that can be known to exist for sure is the mind, as it is the only thing that he cannot cast doubt on the existence of, as it is his mind that is casting the doubt in the first place. Since his mind is proven to exist, while his body is not, it makes sense that the mind and the body are two distinct and separable entities.

The argument that the mind and the body are two separate entities requires the belief that the mind is able to exist completely without the help of the body, which goes against what modern biology tells us about how the human brain works. If it is the brain that creates our mind then our mind and body could be considered one in the same. I am unsure whether Descartes didn't make the connection between the brain and the mind, or he decided that since the existence of the body was doubtable, then the brain too cannot be proven to exist, and so must be a false reality.

This goes on to Descartes's Evil Demon hypothesis, which theorises that it is entirely possible that an evil demon is manipulating our perception of reality, and so the brain could be just an illusion created in order to cause us to feel tethered to our illusory bodies, and our false senses. If there was some form of being that has such control, it is plausible that it would use such power for evil, such as deceiving our minds into believing that there is no separation between our mind and body.

Obviously, this argument requires belief in some form of higher power, and so it would not seem as plausible for an atheist as it would for a theist, and so would hold less weight than the argument that the mind is held within the brain, which relies on empirical evidence. In the same vein, Empiricists would not be swayed by the idea of an all powerful being creating illusions, as they hold more value in the sensory experience of what they are able to see and hear.

Descartes began his meditations picturing his soul as some form of physical presence within his body, such as "a wind, or a fire, or a vapour", however during his second meditation, he comes to the conclusion that imagining himself in such a way runs counter to his theory, as nothing in the physical world can be undoubtable. This leads to the thought of completely removing imagination from his thoughts, for which he argues: "it would seem as foolish of me to say: 'I shall now use my imagination, in order to recognize more clearly what I am', as it would be to say: 'Now I am awake, and I see something true; but because I cannot yet see it clearly enough, I shall do my best to get back to sleep again so that my dreams can show it to me more truly and clearly.'" ¹ This doubt on the things that he is able to imagine further removes his mind from the physical world, and provides further defence of his dualism.

¹ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. by Michael Moriarty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 20.

To conclude, Empiricists wouldnt value this argument as much as those who believe in rationalism, and atheists would not be swayed while theists could be in this instance.

Bibliography

René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. by Michael Moriarty (Oxford: Oxford University Pres, 2008), p. 20.