

the
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argument

the
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argument

swapping
arguments

the
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argument

ARE THERE
IMMATERIAL
SOULS, AND
COULD YOU BE
ONE?

Our topic today is the dualist view that we are (either wholly or in part) immaterial things.

Last class we came up with two dualist answers to the identity question:

the combination view: I am a combination of a soul and a body

the soul view: I am an immaterial soul

Corresponding to these were two answers to the survival question:

combination survival: X is me just in case X is the combination of my soul and my body

soul survival: X is me just in case X is the same immaterial soul as me

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the combination view: I am a combination of a soul and a body

the soul view: I am an immaterial soul

combination survival: X is me just in case X is the combination of my soul and my body

soul survival: X is me just in case X is the same immaterial soul as me

For right now we're going to set aside the question of which of these views is better.

Instead, we're going to ask a more fundamental question: is there any good reason to believe in the existence of immaterial souls?

Most of us don't believe in fairies, there being no good evidence for their existence. Why should souls be any different?

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Most of us don't believe in fairies, there being no good evidence for their existence. Why should souls be any different?

We can turn this into an argument against believing in immaterial souls. Consider the following points:

We have no sensory experience of immaterial souls.

It is not self-evident that there are immaterial souls.

We have no good argument for the existence of immaterial souls.

But the following principle looks plausible:

If P is not self-evident and your senses don't tell you that P and you don't have a good argument for P, you should not believe P.

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You should not believe in the existence of immaterial souls.

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THE EVIDENTIALIST ARGUMENT AGAINST BELIEF IN IMMATERIAL SOULS

1. We have no sensory experience of immaterial souls.
2. It is not self-evident that there are immaterial souls.
3. We have no good argument for the existence of immaterial souls.
4. If P is not self-evident and your senses don't tell you that P and you don't have a good argument for P, you should not believe P.

You should not believe in the
existence of immaterial souls.
(1,2,3,4)

This might be called the 'evidentialist' argument against belief in immaterial souls, since it is based on the idea that we have no **evidence** for the existence of immaterial souls.

When we turn to the question of how we should determine what to believe, we'll ask whether 'rules of belief' like premise (4) are true. But the premise looks at least initially plausible; so it puts some pressure on the believer in immaterial souls to respond to the argument by rejecting premise (3).

But then we need an argument for the existence of immaterial souls.

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We're going to look at two. The first turns on the idea that immaterial souls are needed to explain the nature of **consciousness**.

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Properties related to conscious experience include the property of feeling an itch or a pain, or the sensation of seeing red or hearing a loud noise. These properties are sometimes called **phenomenal properties**.

Human beings (obviously) have phenomenal properties — we experience all kinds of sensations.

Suppose that we were wholly physical things (as both the organism view and the brain view say). What would that imply about the nature of our phenomenal properties?

The following principle seems plausible:

Wholly physical things have only physical properties.

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Suppose that we were wholly physical things (as both the organism view and the brain view say). What would that imply about the nature of our phenomenal properties?

The following principle seems plausible:

Wholly physical things have only physical properties.

But then it seems to follow from the fact that we have phenomenal properties that

If we are wholly physical things, then phenomenal properties are physical properties.

We'll now look at an argument that phenomenal properties are **not** physical properties — which, given the above, would show that we are not wholly physical things.

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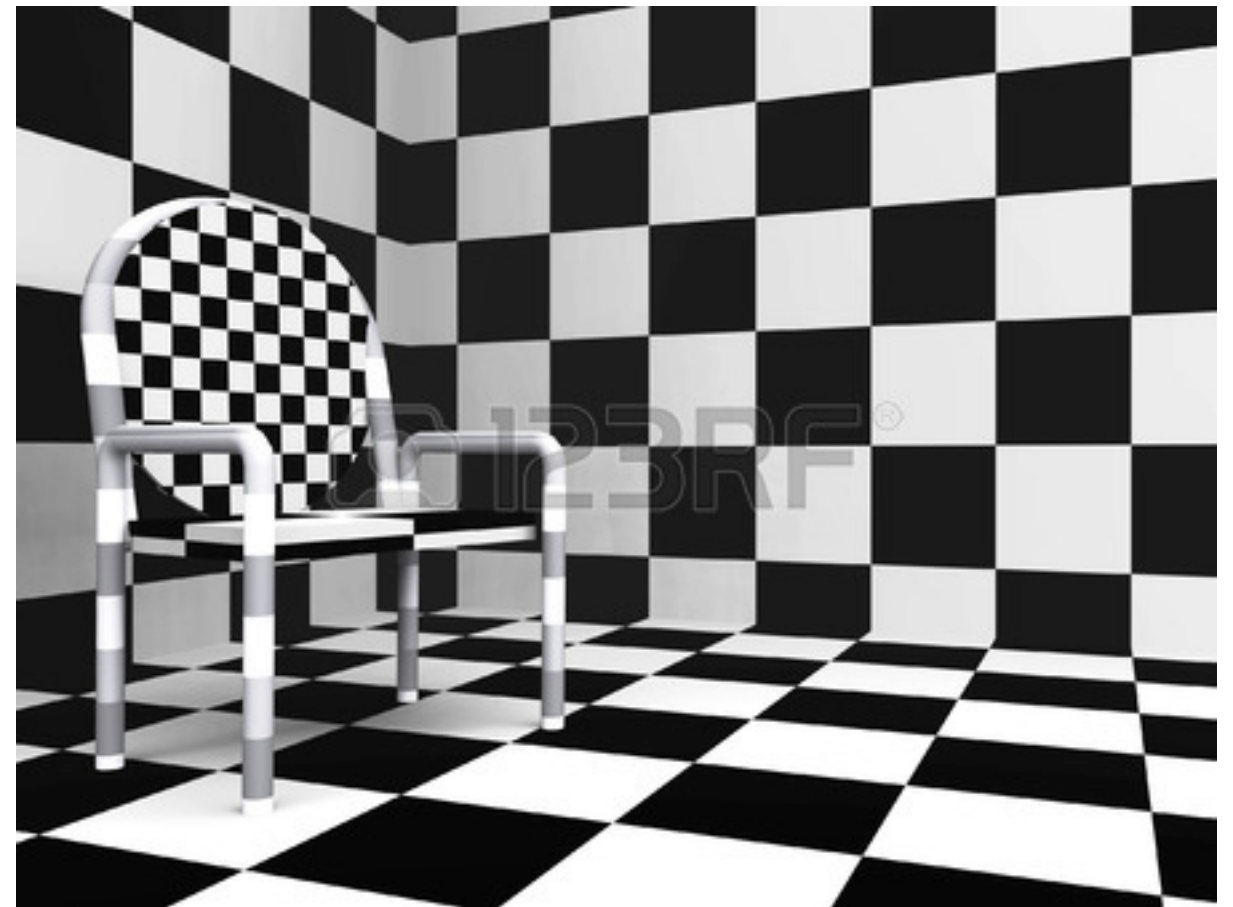
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We'll now look at an argument that phenomenal properties are **not** physical properties — which, given the above, would show that we are not wholly physical things.

This argument is due to the philosopher Frank Jackson, and is based on his example of Mary and the black-and-white room.

Mary is a brilliant scientist who has been confined her entire life to an environment in which everything is colored white or black.

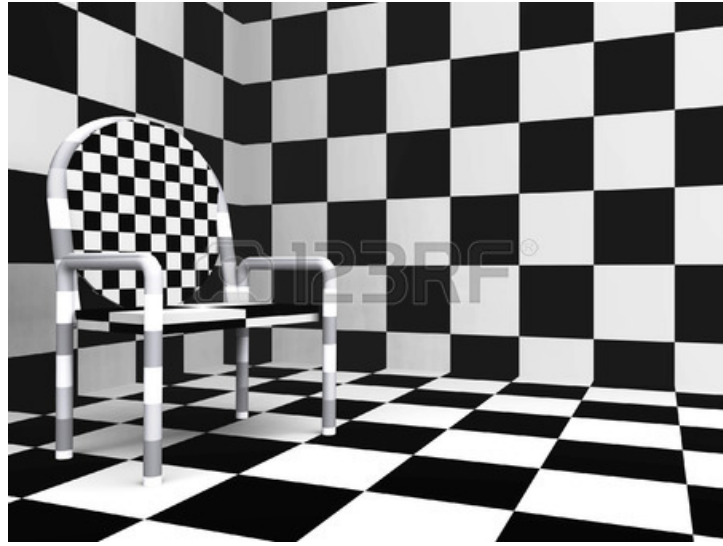


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Mary is a brilliant scientist who has been confined her entire life to an environment in which everything is colored white or black.

She is so brilliant, in fact, that she has learned every fact that there is to learn about the physical world. In particular, she has learned all of the facts about the neurophysiology of color vision, and has studied extensively everything that happens to the brain when subjects are experiencing color.

So she knows all of the physical properties that brains have when the person whose brain it is is experiencing color. It seems like this should be possible; people who are color blind can still learn physics.

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One day, someone brings a new object into Mary's room:



Does Mary learn anything new when she sees the tomato?

Intuitively, yes: she learns **what it is like to experience red things**. It seems that she learns something about the phenomenal property of sensing redness.

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But this seems to show that phenomenal properties are not physical properties.

Here is one way in which the argument, which is sometimes called the **knowledge argument**, can be laid out.

Upon seeing the tomato, Mary learns a new fact about conscious experiences.

Before seeing the tomato, Mary knows all the physical facts about conscious experiences.

There are non-physical facts about conscious experience.

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Upon seeing the tomato, Mary learns a new fact about conscious experiences.

Before seeing the tomato, Mary knows all the physical facts about conscious experiences.

There are non-physical facts about conscious experience.

Phenomenal properties are not physical properties.

If we are wholly physical things, then phenomenal properties are physical properties.

We are not wholly physical things.

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THE KNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT

1. Before seeing the tomato, Mary knows all the physical facts about conscious experiences.
 2. Upon seeing the tomato, Mary learns a new fact about conscious experiences.
 3. There are non-physical facts about conscious experience. (1,2)
 4. Phenomenal properties are not physical properties. (3)
 5. If we are wholly physical things, then phenomenal properties are physical properties.
-
- C. We are not wholly physical things. (4,5)

If we are not wholly physical things, then presumably we are (at least in part) immaterial souls. So, if the knowledge argument is sound, there are immaterial souls.

THE KNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT

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One of the most popular responses to the knowledge argument from materialists involves denying that (2) is true.

Here's one way to make this seem plausible. Consider Lois Lane. She knows that Superman can fly; and she knows who Clark Kent is. But she does not know that Clark Kent is Superman.

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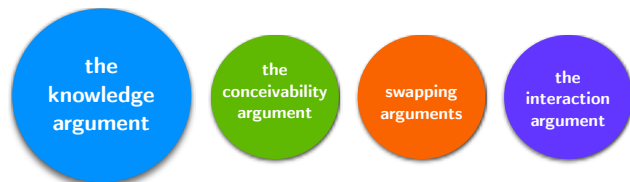
Suppose that one day she sees Clark don the Superman costume and fly away. She is surprised — just like Mary is surprised.

If you asked her why she is surprised, she might say, “I did not know that Clark could fly!”

But of course in a way she did. She knew that Superman could fly. And Clark = Superman. So isn't the fact that Superman can fly just the same as the fact that Clark can fly?

It looks like Lois is surprised, not because there is some new fact that she learns, but because (in some sense) she learns a new way of thinking about a fact she already knew.

Could the materialist say that, similarly, Mary does not learn a new fact, but instead learns a new way of thinking about a physical fact she already knew?



Let's turn to the second main argument for dualism. This argument is due to René Descartes.

Descartes was one of the most important philosophers who ever lived — a distinction which is especially impressive given that he devoted most of his energies to mathematics (in which he developed what is now analytic geometry) and natural science.

In 1649 Descartes moved to Sweden to join the court of Queen Christina of Sweden. After complaining that “men's thoughts are frozen here, like the water,” Descartes died in February of 1650, during his first winter in Sweden.





Descartes' argument begins with his thought that all of our beliefs about the existence of material things can be called into doubt:

“Every sensory experience I have ever thought I was having while awake I can also think of myself as sometimes having while asleep. Since I do not believe that what I seem to perceive in sleep comes from things located outside me, I did not see why I should be any more inclined to believe this of what I think I perceive while awake.”

Descartes is saying that we can imagine any sensory experience we have occurring in sleep rather than waking life. But in sleep our seeming sensory experiences do not reflect the reality of the material world around us; so, we can imagine all of the sensory experiences we have failing to reflect the world around us. That is, we can coherently imagine a scenario in which there are no tissue boxes, cats, planets, or other material things, even though in our experience it seems to us that there are such things.

Now let's ask another question: when we conceive of the possibility that there are no material things, are we conceiving a situation in which **nothing at all** exists?



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“I have convinced myself that there is absolutely nothing in the world, no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies. Does it now follow that I too do not exist?

No: if I convinced myself of something then I certainly existed. ... This proposition - *I am, I exist* - is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind.”



Descartes here seems to be saying that, when I imagine a world in which there are no material things, I am still imagining that I exist. This suggests the following claim:

I can clearly imagine a scenario in which I exist, but no material things exist.

Suppose that this claim about imagination is true. What could this have to do with the question of what I am? We aren't, after all, interested in what we can imagine about ourselves; we are interested in the question of what sorts of things we really are.



The answer to this question comes in the following passage:

“I know that everything which I clearly and distinctly understand is capable of being created by God so as to correspond exactly with my understanding of it. Hence the fact that I can clearly and distinctly understand one thing apart from another is enough to make me certain that the two things are distinct.”



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Descartes seems to be saying that if I can clearly imagine something to be the case, then God could make it the case: God could bring it about. It seems to follow from this that Descartes would endorse the following principle:

If I can clearly imagine something being the case, then it is possible for it to be the case.

Is there any reason to think that this is true?



I can clearly imagine a scenario in which I exist, but no material things exist.

If I can clearly imagine something being the case, then it is possible for it to be the case.

It is possible that I exist and no material things exist.

If it is possible that I am an immaterial thing, then I am an immaterial thing.

It is possible that I am an immaterial thing.

I am an immaterial thing.



THE CONCEIVABILITY ARGUMENT

1. I can clearly imagine a scenario in which I exist, but no material things exist.
 2. If I can clearly imagine something being the case, then it is possible for it to be the case.
 3. It is possible that I exist and no material things exist. (1,2)
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-
- C. I am an immaterial thing.
(4,5)

This is sometimes called the **conceivability argument** for dualism, since it rests heavily on a claim about what we can conceive of, or imagine.

Suppose that you have the combination view, and accept combination survival. Could you endorse this argument?

It seems not; it looks like you would have to reject (3), and hence also either (1) or (2).

This looks like one advantage of the soul view over the combination view: the former, but not the latter, can defend her position with the conceivability argument.

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We've talked about all of the premises of this argument other than premise (5). Why think that this is true?

Here's the basic idea. Take some material thing, like the lectern. Would it be possible for that lectern to be an immaterial thing? It seems not — it seems like no immaterial thing could be that particular lectern.

But if this is true in general, then no material thing could be an immaterial thing. And if that is true, anything which is possibly immaterial must actually be immaterial.

Let's consider an objection to the second premise of Descartes' argument:

2. If I can clearly imagine something being the case, then it is possible for it to be the case.

Here is a possible counterexample to this premise:

The barber

Deep in the Indiana countryside, there's a small town; and in this town there's a barber. Some of the men in this small town - the industrious ones - shave themselves every morning. But others (the lazy ones) don't; and the barber shaves all of them. (There's no one else around who will do it.) Moreover, he (the barber's a man) never shaves any of the industrious ones - he never shaves any of the men that shave themselves.

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Can you clearly imagine this small town? Is it possible for there to be a town of this sort?



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Does the town's barber shave himself, or not?

No.

But then he does shave himself, because he shaves every man that does not shave himself.

Yes.

But then he doesn't, because he doesn't shave any man that shaves himself.

So if he shaves himself, then he doesn't, and if he doesn't, he does.



This is thus an example of a scenario which, at first glance, seems possible, but then turns out, on closer inspection to be impossible, because it contains a hidden contradiction. Might the materialist plausibly say the same thing about Descartes' scenario - the imagined scenario in which I exist, but there are no material things?

This is an appealing thought, if you are a materialist. But you should ask yourself: what contradiction could this be? What could be impossible about you existing in the absence of any material things?

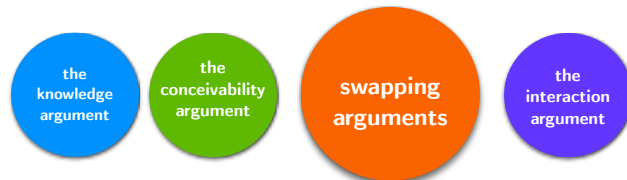


We've now encountered the main arguments for the view that you are, either entirely or in part, an immaterial thing.

We have already encountered two kinds of arguments against that view.

The first are the “easy arguments” for materialism. The second is the evidentialist argument against belief in immaterial souls (which might be countered by either the knowledge argument or the conceivability argument).

We are now going to look at two other arguments against the idea that we are, either wholly or in part, immaterial souls.



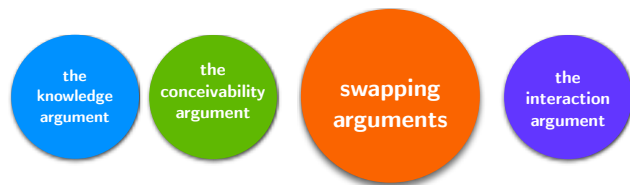
I'll call the first class of arguments against dualism
swapping arguments.

Let's suppose that dualism is true. Then your roommate
is (either wholly or in part) an immaterial soul.

Here is something that seems possible: last night, the
soul connected to your roommate's body could have
been swapped out for a different one which has exactly
the same apparent memories and personality.

You would, it seems, have no way of telling whether this
happened. So you have no evidence that it did not
happen. So, you do not know whether you have the same
roommate as you did yesterday.

But of course you **do** know this. So dualism must be
false.

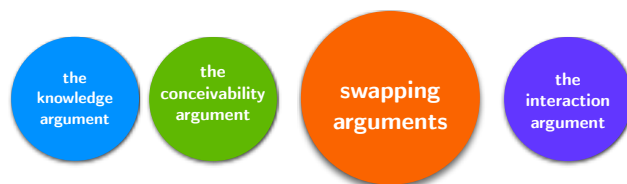


But of course you **do** know this. So dualism must be false.

More dramatically, the soul attached to your own body could have been swapped out last night. It seems that you would have no way of knowing whether this happened. After all, the new soul (which you are) could have been given the same personality and apparent memories as the old soul.

So you do not know whether you have been attached to this body for more than a day. But of course you do know that you have been attached to this body for more than a day. So, dualism must be false.

Call this the **argument from soul-swapping**. Let's lay out the roommate version.



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THE ARGUMENT FROM SOUL-SWAPPING

1. If dualism is true, then it is possible that your roommate's body was attached to a different soul this morning than it was last night.
2. You have no evidence which rules out the possibility that the soul attached to your roommate's body was swapped out last night.
3. If dualism is true, you have no evidence which rules out the possibility that your roommate this morning was a different person than yesterday. (1,2)
4. If you have no evidence which rules something out, you should not believe that it is not the case.
5. If dualism is true, you should not believe that your roommate this morning was the same person as yesterday. (3,4)
6. You should believe that your roommate this morning was the same person as yesterday.

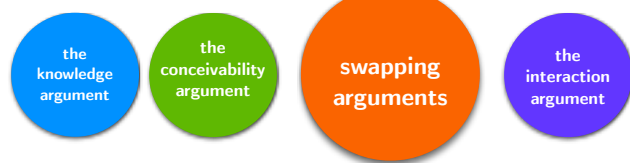
C. Dualism is false. (5,6)

Here is a somewhat related argument.

Psychology-swapping

Ferdinand is a combination of a soul and a body. Suppose that Ferdinand suffers an accident which entirely changes his psychology. He has none of his former memories, and none of his former personality traits. He used to be very selfish; he's now very generous. He used to be best friends with Jane; now he finds Jane annoying, and prefers to spend time with Maria.

Let's call Ferdinand before the accident "Ferdinand-" and Ferdinand after the accident "Ferdinand+".



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Let's call Ferdinand before the accident "Ferdinand-" and Ferdinand after the accident "Ferdinand+".

Suppose that Ferdinand- used to occasionally take some cash from your wallet. Ferdinand+ would never do this. Would you be right to blame Ferdinand+ for the actions of Ferdinand-?

It seems plausible that you would not blame Ferdinand+ for these actions. Remember: he has complete amnesia, and his behavior and attitudes now are entirely different.

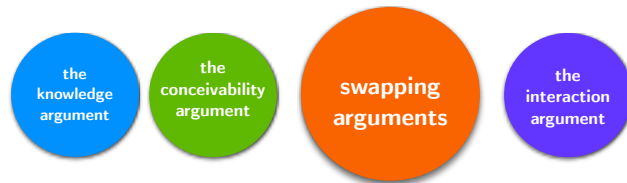
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It seems plausible that you would not blame Ferdinand+ for these actions. Remember: he has complete amnesia, and his behavior and attitudes now are entirely different.

But if you would not hold Ferdinand+ responsible for the actions of Ferdinand-, that suggests that you are treating Ferdinand+ as a different person than Ferdinand-.

But if they are different people, it looks like our dualist answers to the survival question are incorrect. For there is no obvious reason why the numerically same soul could not be attached to Ferdinand's body throughout this process.

Call this the **psychology-swapping argument** against dualism.



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THE ARGUMENT FROM PSYCHOLOGY-SWAPPING

1. Ferdinand+ has none of the memories of Ferdinand-, and they have completely different personalities.
2. You should not hold Ferdinand+ responsible for the actions of Ferdinand-. (1)
3. Ferdinand+ is not the same person as Ferdinand-. (2)
4. If dualism is true, it is possible that the body which Ferdinand+ and Ferdinand- each have attached to the same soul throughout both of their lives.
5. If dualism is true, then Ferdinand+ and Ferdinand- are the same person. (4)

C. Dualism is false. (3,5)

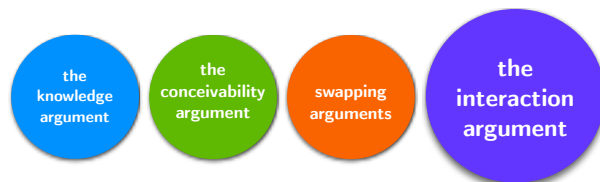
This argument relies on the idea that sufficient differences in psychology are enough to make for a difference in personal identity. Is this true?

Let's set the swapping arguments to the side. The historically most influential argument against dualism is one originally raised by Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia.

Elisabeth was one of the leading intellectuals of the 17th century. She worked in mathematics and physics as well as philosophy, and was active in German politics. She was known by her siblings as 'The Greek' because she mastered ancient Greek at such a young age.



Today Elisabeth is best known for her correspondence with Descartes, in which she raised the question of how an immaterial soul and a material body could interact.



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Elisabeth pointed out that, if dualism is true, then it must happen quite often that the body causes effects in the soul, and that the soul causes effects in the body.

What might be some examples of your body causing effects in your soul?

How about examples of your soul causing effects in your body?

Consideration of examples show that, if dualism is true, then interactions between soul and body must happen all of the time. But Elisabeth argued that these kinds of causal interactions were entirely mysterious.



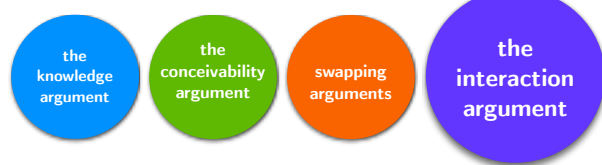
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This gives rise to the **interaction argument against dualism**.

“it seems every determination of movement happens from the impulsion of a thing moved, according to the manner in which it is pushed by that which moves it ... Contact is required for [this]. ... contact seems to me incompatible with the idea of an immaterial thing.”



What's her argument here?



“it seems every determination of movement happens from the impulsion of a thing moved, according to the manner in which it is pushed by that which moves it ... Contact is required for [this]. ... contact seems to me incompatible with the idea of an immaterial thing.”

What’s her argument here?

Elisabeth here is considering a special case of causation: putting something in motion. For something to push something else, it seems that the two things must be in contact; and for two things to be in contact, both must occupy space (since being in contact is just a matter of occupying adjacent spaces). Since immaterial minds don’t occupy space, it seems that they can’t set things in motion — so, for example, my mind’s desire for coffee can’t be what sends my body down the hallway in search of some.

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We might represent this argument simply like this:

THE INTERACTION ARGUMENT

1. The only things that causally interact with physical things are other physical things.
 2. If there are immaterial souls, they causally interact with physical things.
-
- C. There are no immaterial souls. (1,2)

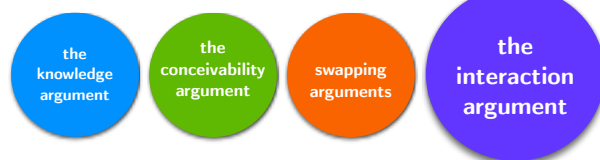
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The dualist seems forced to reject premise (1). Descartes argues that while some causation does work through contact, not all does. He gives the example of gravity. The earth interacts with all of us via its gravitational force. But this interaction does not require contact — so why, in general, should we think that contact is required for causal interaction?

Elisabeth was skeptical about the idea that the example of gravity could provide a model for the interaction between mind and body. And many philosophers since have been on Elisabeth's side. Let's consider one way of developing her argument further.

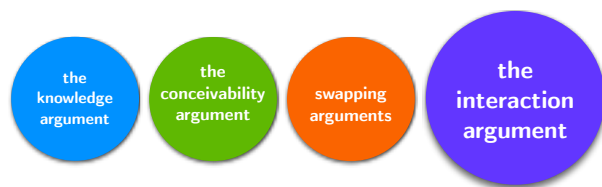


Elisabeth was skeptical about the idea that the example of gravity could provide a model for the interaction between mind and body. And many philosophers since have been on Elisabeth's side. Let's consider one way of developing her argument further.

If there are such things as souls, and those souls have phenomenal properties, then there must be some laws of nature which connect what happens in brains with the phenomenal properties of souls. Let's call these laws of nature **psychophysical laws**.

It seems that, if you believe in immaterial souls, you have to believe in the existence of psychophysical laws.

The problem is that it seems that these laws would be quite different from any other fundamental laws of nature with which we are acquainted.



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Laws of nature typically relate fundamental physical properties to other fundamental physical properties. Consider, for example, Newton's equation

$$F=ma$$

This law relates force, mass, and acceleration — all quite fundamental physical properties. But what would our psychophysical laws look like?

Consider the psychophysical law governing having a reddish sensation. It will presumably be of the form

RED. If x has physical property P , then x 's soul has a reddish sensation

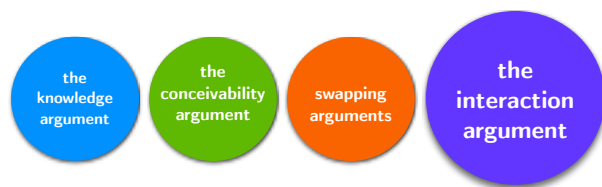
Consider the psychophysical law governing having a reddish sensation. It will presumably be of the form

RED. If x has physical property P , then x 's soul has a reddish sensation

But what is physical property P ? It is not going to be any remotely natural physical property. It is going to be a massively complex physical property involving the more than 100 million neurons in the human visual cortex.

This already makes “laws” like RED way different than the kinds of laws we typically seek in physics.

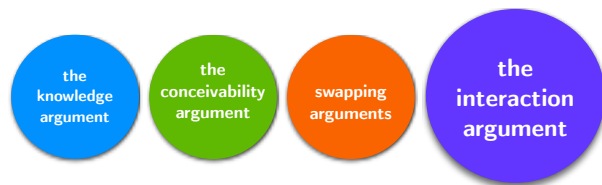
The above statement does not look like a fundamental law. It looks more like a generalization which needs to be explained by more fundamental laws. In this sense it looks more like the equations which predict the movement of the tides. Precisely because those equations are about massively complex physical systems, we think that they must be explained by more basic laws.



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The problem is that it is hard to see how the dualist can try to explain RED in more basic terms.

And note that the dualist won't have to just accept one or two weird laws of nature like RED. Humans can discriminate about 10 million different colors; so it looks like we will need 10 million different fundamental laws of nature, one corresponding to each type of sensation. And that's just the beginning. We will also need fundamental laws for all of tastes, smells, itches, pains, and other sensations we are capable of feeling.



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By contrast, the non-dualist can say that phenomenal properties just **are** complex physical properties. There's thus no need for fundamental psychophysical laws.

This seems to show that the dualist is committed to a much more complicated view of the laws of nature than the materialist.

