

Dualism and determinism essay



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It is now 21st century and people are yet to conclude the debate over the ideas that Rene Descartes, the denizen of the French philosophers, raised in 17th century through his philosophical works like “ A Discourse on Method” or “ The Meditations”. Through them he set out to determine the limits of human reason as means of establishing precisely what sort of truth claims can be absolute, and in the process, laid the foundations for hot philosophical debates for the posterity.

His theories on the mind-body relationship, such as Dualism, Behaviorism, Central State Identity theory or Functionalism, are still proving on their efficacy all around the globe. Besides these, Decartes has virtually immortalized one of his statements- “ Cogito Ergo Sum” – meaning, “ I think, therefore I am”. This resolve has opened the lock gate for several other questions that are associated with Determinism, the core problem of philosophy that manifests itself through any manifestation of anything.

Thus this essay picks up Dualism as the best choice of Decartes theories to analyze and explores the avenues of Determinism through an argumentative journey. Dualism: the Best of the Pack There cannot be any doubt that Dualism and Monism are the Siamese twins of the mind-body debate till date. Dualism in fact forms the basis of any argument with its propagation about the two-fold existence of humans, of which one is matter (the body) and the other is mind. None could be discarded from a polemic point of view, while in the light of these ideas Decartes subtly addressed the subject of free will vs. determinism by presenting an allowance of there being a soul separate from the body, thereby distinctly categorizing physical actions from the mental ones.

Initially Descartes intended to ensure that truth statements could be demonstrated with assuredness and absolutism. He pursued for the truth that would reign beyond any suspicion. Up until that point, Descartes had found that what he had assumed to be reliable in terms of what he could say was true, upon close examination, was not as it appeared. The method that he used was to doubt everything and then proceed from where he could find an area of undoubted truth.

For, " I shall assume that everything I see is false, that none of the things presented to me by my deceptive memory has ever existed, that I have no sense, and that body, shape, extension and location are only fiction (Descartes, 63-64). " In this attempt by Descartes to find a firm foundation to stand against doubt, he was not convinced that those things associated with the physical world would do. In a similar vein as Plato, Descartes found that the sensual world was not the ideal realm for understanding. Descartes went beyond the physical, sensual world and focused on those things related to the mind.

He was confident that, although what the senses store is not appropriate fodder for knowledge, what is proper to thinking and mental states is reliable. But, this did not include any rational thoughts, save one; that one thinks. In referring to all that can deceive him, Descartes tells us " let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never cause me to be nothing as long as I am thinking that I am something (Descartes, 64). " So, the one firm foundation that Descartes can find is that he cannot be deceived in thinking that he is not. Therefore, one is assured in at least this, that one exists. But Descartes was not even content with this.

He went on to explore the nature of the self and what sort of being it was. Clearly the self was that thing which thinks. And not only that, but it does not have extension, like bodies do, nor is it subject to the laws of nature, it is not divisible, it is completely idyllic and without any of the features inherent to physical bodies. With this in mind, one can then deduce that the self is what one would call the 'soul.' This association of the self with the mind and with the soul is not merely accidental, but necessary. Perhaps they are modal or functional distinctions that differentiate what we call the mind or the person or the soul.

Nevertheless, there was a cloven nature to reality that was to be later referred to as dualism. Furthermore, Descartes' theories paved the way for alternative views on some of the classical debates in Philosophy, such as Universals vs. Particulars, Mind vs. Matter and the all too common Freewill vs. Determinism. Why these debates are related to the Cartesian dualistic perspective, we will explore. In order to understand this association it is necessary to explain the distinctions that Descartes made and what these distinctions represented.

As I have already mentioned, in Descartes view, the mind is distinct from the body in so much as it does not share the properties of extension, divisibility (for Descartes felt that all material objects could be divided, even if this is debatable in virtue of modern physics), and other sensual features. Those characteristics exclusive to the mind are such things as intellection, imagination, and so forth. If it goes on in your head, it is mental and thus relating only to the self. If it can be extended in space, it is the property of

the material world. As such, the individual is then not a body but a mind, or a mental thing.

This state of being offers a unique twist to some of the classical debates in Philosophy. For instance, as far as the debate over the Universal and the Particular (are universals real things or are only particular things real, or vice-versa), one could say, according to Cartesian doctrine, that they both exist in a sense. For if one were to point to a tree that is growing in one's garden, they could say that the 'tree' exists as a material thing and that 'treeness' also exists as a mental intellection of 'what' a tree is. The Counter Stance The commonest objection to the Dualism is based on the fact that it cannot describe the mind.

Neither it goes beyond the premise of 'thinking ability' of the mind. Another objection of the recent times evolve around the neurological activities that invoke the mental state or action, which according to its supporters establishes the fact that matter rules the roost. Response to the Objections There is no doubt that the recent findings of neurological activities in the human body can claim a fair share of its contribution in a person's mental state of being, yet that cannot diminish the importance of identifying the mind as a separate body and acting on its own.

Determinism and its Deterrents There is no dearth of staunch supporters of both determinism and its opposition camp, where one former subscribes to the thesis that the course of the future is entirely determined by the conjunction of the past and the laws of nature, while the other vehemently oppose to any idea of fixed future with fixed past and fixed present, and

since both the parties cannot prove themselves absolutely true, none so far could fix this problem.

The former believes that free will is possible even if determinism is true, while the later again opposes that by saying if the whole is shackled, how can the part of it be free? The former is known as compatibilist, and the later as incompatibilist, which, with time, divided themselves into two, where the one became known as “ hard determinists” and the other as “ libertarians”. Hard determinists believe in the determinism is true and thus free will is not possible, while the libertarians don’t subscribe to the idea of determinism and hence keep free will as free to anyone!

So far so good, but determinists also show their card to prove their point. The two factions of the incompatibilists don’t stand exactly opposite to each other, as both have a common chord in the belief, that it is necessary to prove determinism false if one wants to avail free will. Determinists Strike Back They don’t deviate from their claim that free will is possible even if determinism is true. They issue a rejection to the “ ultimacy condition” of free will by resorting to reasons-responsive view of the content of the will.

Incompatibilists Refute This Claim The incompatibilists refute this claim by saying that the truth of determinism would mean that we don’t cause our actions in the right kind of way. Accordingly it would then mean that we don’t generate our actions or we cannot control them. This points towards our lack of ability to determine the self! There is some more. When one applies Cartesian dualism to the issue of Freewill vs. Determinism, one finds a host of problems, and possibly solutions.

The first is this; what determinists point out when arguing their position is that all events have 'causal' explanations, to where, 'what' caused an event to occur, although the specifics can be indeterminable on some levels, is a prior event. Furthermore, if a prior event caused that event, then all events are contingent upon a predisposition concerning the schematic of all events. In other words, in analyzing any particular thing's actions one can be assured that there is a cause-effect structure that is analyzable from a purely empirical standpoint.

How this specifically relates to the subject of Freewill and Determinism is in its treatment of a person's behavior and actions? According to Determinism, whatever it is one does, it is done on the basis of preceding events that govern the course of those events. For example, if I pick up a pencil and lay it down on a table, I do so because the neurons in my brain, in concert with sensual input, 'wire' me to act accordingly. In other words, I could not have done anything other than pick up that pencil at that particular moment, since it was the schematic of causal events.

I was 'determined' by prior events to do as such. Incompatibility of Free Will
In contrast to this view, the Cartesian answer is simple. Since there are two types of substances in the universe, mental and physical, then things that are physical are governed by laws that are proper to them (i. e. a causal nexus). And likewise, things that are mental are governed by laws proper to them. However, the laws of the intellect work quite differently than those of the physical. For remember, mental entities are not divisible nor do they have extension.

It would do no good to produce a model to represent the mental acts that resemble something like a row of dominoes. Mental acts do not function like that. They neither move in or out of space, since they are non-spatial. So, the act of ‘choosing’ is not governed by previous sensations stored in a system of neurons that determine one’s actions, rather, one’s actions spring from the faculty of Freewill, that ‘chooses’ without a necessary connection to prior physical events. CONCLUSION In short, Descartes’ theories on the nature of reality bar on the issue of Freewill vs.

Determinism. By demonstrating that certain features of the universe are unique to physical properties and other features are unique to mental properties, Descartes developed a theory that is known in Philosophy as Dualism. Although not the first to suggest something like a cloven ontology, Descartes’ theory appeals to an argument for Freewill. Through illustrating that the mind is immaterial and thus not subject to the typical causal model that is used in empirical studies of the physical universe, he gave room for a tenable alternative to Determinism.