Brie Gertler

“In Defense of Mind-Body Dualism”
Mind/Body Dualism:

– There are two ultimate and fundamentally distinct kinds of “stuff” (or substance) in the world:

  » Minds or “mental stuff”
    - Conscious beings
    - Non-spatial and non-material, and

  » Bodies or “material stuff”
    - Spatial, material beings, but
    - Non-conscious
“I defend naturalistic dualism”

- Naturalism
  - “mental states are just as much a part of the natural order as sticks and stones”
    » They can be the object of a “scientific approach to mind.”
      - This is basically just Descartes’ view stripped of any religious or spiritual implications.

- She rejects the identity theory,
  - i.e., the claim that mental states are ultimately identical to states of the brain and/or central nervous system.
Substance Monism
There is only one fundamental substance, one fundamental kind of stuff.

- **Materialism:**
  - 1) Everything that exists is material (*physical*), i.e., is composed of physical particles such as atoms, quarks, etc.

- **Idealism:**
  - Everything that exists is *mental*; i.e., is a mind (soul, spirit, etc.), or an idea that exists “in” a mind.
  - Gertler is not addressing this position.
Varieties of Materialism

- **The Identity Theory:**
  - Mental states (thoughts, sensations, etc) are identical to states of the brain and/or central nervous system
    - the way lightening is identical to a discharge of electricity.

- **Eliminative Materialism:**
  - There really are no such things as mental states (thoughts, sensations)
    - the way there really are no such things as ghosts and goblins.
The Identity Theory

- A variety of materialism (i.e., what Gertler will argue against)

- "every type of mental state is identical to some type of physical state."
  - For example:
    - Pain=C-fiber stimulation (or, for example, belief in God=brain state X)
  - Note: this is only an example—identity theorists are not committed to this—or to any—specific identity claim.
Pain=C-Fiber Stimulation

- If the identity theory is true (and, if, specifically, Pain is identical to C-fiber stimulation), then ...
  - Not only is all pain *in fact* the stimulation of C-fibers, but
  - Pain *just is* the stimulation of C-fibers, so every instance of pain there *could be* must likewise be the stimulation of C-fibers.
    - There could *never* be pain that wasn’t C-fiber stimulation any more than there could ever be water that wasn’t H₂O.
Identity Statements

- Concern what is *possible* and *impossible*.  
  - (If A=B, then it is *impossible* for something to be an A without also being a B.)

- Hence they cannot be established solely by empirical means (i.e., by observation).
  
    » Observation can only tell us what *is* the case, not what is *possible*—not what *could* or *could not* be the case.

  - So, they can be established only by *thought experiments*.  

Thought Experiments—*for thinking about what is possible or impossible*. 

- Could there be a book that is 100 ft. tall?
- Could there be an object that is (simultaneously) blue and orange all over?
- Could there be a married bachelor?

In each case, you can answer the question by consulting your thoughts. The first seems possible, the second two clearly are not.
Gertler’s Argument (First Draft): The Disembodiment Argument

1) I can conceive of experiencing pain without having a body.

2) Anything I can conceive of is possible.

3) So, it is possible to experience pain without having a body.

4) So, pain can’t be identical to any physical state of a body (such as C-fiber stimulation).

5) So, the identity theory is false.
Is something actually possible just because I can conceive of it?

- Can’t I conceive of water not being $H_2O$?
- Can’t I conceive of a triangle where the interior angles don’t add up to $180^\circ$?

- It seems that I can conceive of these things, even though they are *not* possible.
- So (contrary to Gertler’s argument), the fact that I can conceive of disembodied pain seems not to show that this is in fact possible.
Conceivability and Possibility

- Gertler (like Descartes) wants to claim that because I can conceive of having mental states without having a body, I know that it is possible to have mental states without having a body.

- But not everything I can conceive of is possible, so it seems that conceivability doesn’t always imply possibility.

- Gertler now proposes criteria for when it does.
Conceivability and Possibility

- Gertler claims that conceivability proves possibility as long as I my conception (i.e., the thoughts employed in my conceiving of something) uses only “Sufficiently comprehensive concepts.”

- So, what is a “sufficiently comprehensive concept?”
“Sufficiently Comprehensive Concepts”

- My concept of bachelorhood is sufficiently clear for me to conceptually grasp everything that is included in this concept, and so I can conclude that married bachelors are impossible because I can’t conceive of them.

- But my concept of water is not sufficiently clear for me to conceptually grasp everything that is included in this concept, and so I can’t claim that it’s possible that water might not be H₂O simply because I can conceive of it.
Premise 1) Revised

- Anything I can conceive of using concepts that are sufficiently comprehensive is possible.
  - “Sufficiently comprehensive concepts” is Gertler’s version of Descartes’ “clear and distinct ideas.”

- Because my concept of bachelorhood is sufficiently comprehensive, I know that all possible bachelors are unmarried.

- Are my concepts of “pain” and “physical” sufficiently comprehensive for me to know that it is possible to be in pain without being in a physical state?
My Concept of Water

- Water is that “liquid stuff” (whatever exactly *that* is) that –
  - naturally occurs in lakes, rivers, and rain;
  - turns to ice when frozen;
  - turns to steam when boiled;
  - quenches thirst, etc.
“That liquid Stuff—whatever that is”

- Water has a “hidden nature” (in fact, a molecular structure) that explains the properties above.

- So, my concept of water tells me that is has a “hidden nature,” but it doesn’t tell me that that hidden nature is.

- My concept of water is that it has specific properties (a “hidden nature”) that are not specifically included in my concept of water.
For water (and other substances), how it *seems* (how I experience it) and what it *is* (its true nature) are two different things. This is part of my concept of them.

» I.e., my concept of water tells me that the true nature of water is independent of how I experience it.

So, my concept of water is *not* sufficiently comprehensive for me to conclude that it is possible that water might really be something other than $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ just because I can conceive of this.
My Concept of Pain

- Is my concept of pain sufficiently comprehensive for me to grasp everything that is included in this concept?

- Consider:
  
  - Can you be wrong about being in pain?
    
    » (i.e., about what you feel, not about what causes this.)

    “All day long, I thought I had a headache, but I just realized I was mistaken.” !?!!??
If you *think* you are in pain,
   – If it *feels like* you are in pain,
     » You *are* in pain!

For pain, there is no distinction between how it *appears* and how it *is*.
   – That is, pain *has no* “hidden nature.”

So, Gertler argues, my concept of pain is sufficiently comprehensive for me to conclude that if I can conceive of pain independently of any physical state, then it is possible for pain to exist independently of any physical state.
1) Using concepts that are sufficiently clear, I can conceive of experiencing pain without having a body.

2) Anything I can conceive of using concepts that are sufficiently clear is possible.

3) So, it is possible to experience pain without having a body.

4) So, pain can’t be identical to any physical state of a body (such as C-fiber stimulation).

5) So, the identity theory is false.
A standard criticism of dualism is that there is no way to explain causal interaction between minds and bodies if they are distinct substances.

– How can a non-spatial, non-physical *thought* make a spatial, physical object *move*?

But bodies and minds (whatever “minds” *really* turn out to be) *do* causally interact.

So (according to the critic of dualism), minds and bodies can’t be two distinct substances—

– i.e., dualism must be false.
Gertler’s Response: *But What About Physical Causation?*

- The criticism of dualism notes that we do not understand mental-physical causation. Let us grant this.

- But what makes you think we *do* understand physical-physical causation?
  - Gertler: we don’t.

- So, the criticism is baseless because it applies equally to dualism and to physicalism.