Descartes, Leibniz, And Spinoza Essay, Research Paper

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If these great thinkers (Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz) were to discuss instead the soul?s connection to the body, what might each say (both on his own behalf and in response to the other)? Would they find any places where they might agree? If not, why not? (These are, after all, smart guys!)

Though this sort of meeting would strike me as a debate with as furiously disparate and uncompromising ideals as one would find in a meeting of Andrew Weil, Jerry Falwell, and David Duke, I expect that the philosophers would find some surprisingly common ground. Descartes, the Christian outcast, Spinoza, the Jewish outcast, and Leibniz, the creative mathematician all acknowledge that what we know better than anything is the mind. Given this, we can deduce that any knowledge we acquire of our perceived bodies does not necessarily relate to some external reality, physical substance, or biological bodies. However, from this point on the three scholars meander off in separate definitive arguments.

Descartes reasons in ?Meditations on the First Philosophy: In Which the Existence of God and the Distinction Between Mind and Body are Demonstrated? that mind and body are real, extant, and separate products of God. He does this by suggesting that if the body were not real, then God would be deceiving us, which is unlikely from a perfect god. He also arrives at a proof for his mind?s existence by postulating the famous cogito, ergo sum ? he could not be mistaken about thinking (for that would involve thought), and the mind must logically exist in order for it to think. Although Descartes? claims of the body?s necessary existence follows from the cogito ? if the mind exists, then it must exist in contrast to other, external things – I presume that both Spinoza and Leibniz would take the opportunity to point out that Descartes presupposes the existence of the god that necessarily created his body and mind before speculating on whether or not his body and mind exist. Nice claim, bad explanation.

Spinoza?s staunch, pantheistic monist view of the world establishes that the mind and body are not separate entities in themselves, but only two of an infinite amount of attributes of the same and only substance in existence ? God. One can relate this reasoning to two attributes of a red-hot poker ? red and hot. Does this entail that red and hot are always dependent on a poker and that they are in essence the same thing? Although this is not a likely conclusion, Spinoza raises the important question of how far we can analytically separate parts of a world that are always interacting with each other. Try getting a metal poker to glow red without heating it, or heating a poker without eventually having it glow red. This is improbable, albeit possible in theory. The mind and body may be two separately identifiable things, but one will more than likely find the two cooperating with each other as attributes of the natural world.

Such cooperation takes a dose of adrenaline in the mind of Herr Leibniz. With the infinitely varying and thinking Monads constituting all of existence, this math prodigy claims that substance (and therefore the body) exists, but only as reflections of the mind. The human mind, he proposes, is but aggregations of clever Monads working closely together. If substance is a reflection of all the Monads, we can conclude that mind and body are not separate in the sense that they can exist independently, but rather together and stemming from the same source, in the Spinozian sense. Stretching this further, we can see that Leibniz does not permit the knowledge of an external reality (or therefore bodies), but holds that everything we learn is applicable only to our human perspective ? ??external cause can have no influence on the inner being of a Monad.? However, this of course says nothing about the possibility of an external reality or living body until we state that the perceived human body does affect our minds ? we hurt, get hungry, and so on. Following the quote, only minds are real, and bodies only exist within.