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Cartesian Conceiving

Even amidst the heavy and sustained attacks, there remain some philosophers who believe that some version of Descartes' epistemological argument for the distinction between mind and body in the sixth meditation must be right.¹² In this paper I distinguish three senses of conceiving, two of which Descartes availed himself to show the distinction between mind and body and one of which he did not. Regarding the first two, I will show why they fall short of fulfilling Descartes' expectations. As regards the third, I explain why it provides the sense of conceiving that Descartes needed in order to *try* to show the distinction between mind and body, but why it would have failed to produce the desired result had he used it. I will begin with Descartes' ontological argument for the distinction between mind and body.

A version of Descartes' argument can be rendered as follows below. In and of itself the argument is neither purely epistemological nor ontological. Casting it as one or the other depends, in part, on how premise 5 is supported.

1. If A can exist apart from B and vice versa, then A and B are really distinct (by stipulation).
2. Whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive (or conceive) can be brought about by God as I perceive (or conceive) it (from God's omnipotence).³
3. If I clearly and distinctly perceive (or conceive) that I can exist apart from my body and vice versa, God can bring this about (from 2).

¹ See Hart, *The Engines of the Soul* (Cambridge University Press: 1998) pp. 52-53, and his recent paper 'The Music of Modality' in *Topoi* (2003), vol. 23, no. 2.

³ Nevertheless, Descartes writes that "The question of what kind of power is required to bring about such a separation does not affect the judgement that the two things are distinct. See the sixth meditation in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Vol. II*, trans. Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch (Cambridge University Press: 1984), p. 54.

4. If God can bring it about that A can exist apart from B and vice versa, then A and B are really distinct (from 1)
5. I clearly and distinctly perceive (or conceive) that thought belongs to the nature of mind and extension to the nature of body and that mind can exist with thought but not with extension, and that body can exist with extension but not with thought.
6. I clearly and distinctly conceive that mind can exist without body and vice versa (from 5).
7. God can bring it about that mind exists apart from body and vice versa (from 2 and 5).
8. Mind and body are really distinct (from 1 and 7).

For the moment I will not call premises 1 through 4 into question. The question I will begin with asks how we obtain 5. One way of obtaining 5 depends on using a type of conceivability found in Descartes' work. I call this type of conceivability Ontological Cartesian Conceivability (OCC) because it supports an ontological rather than an epistemological argument for the distinctness of mind and body.

Ontological Cartesian Conceivability

According to Ontological Cartesian Conceivability, what we can conceive about a thing X depends on our knowing X's essence or nature. Conceiving that X is P (or not P) is first and foremost a question of determining what is compatible with X's nature: On Descartes' view this is done by inspecting contents of one's own mind, whether the contents be the self or geometrical figures. In order to conceive that X is or is not P we must first know X's nature. We then build that knowledge into our act of conceiving. Suppose that in knowing X's essence we know that P is not part of X's essence. In that case we will be able to conceive that X does not possess P. Or, if we know that P constitutes (even partially) X's essence, then we cannot conceive of X's existing without its possessing P.

We can support premise 5 above using the following Cartesian givens and an OCC-style conceivability argument. The Cartesian givens, presented below, come from Descartes' definitions of mind and body.

- A. Mind is a substance whose essential attribute is thought (i.e., thought constitutes the nature of mind).⁴

⁴ In this context, an essential attribute of a substance is an attribute that *fully* determines the nature of that substance.

- B. Body is a substance whose essential attribute is extension (i.e., extension constitutes the nature of body).
- C. A substance can only have one essential attribute.
- D. If substances A and B have distinct natures then they are distinct.

If this is the metaphysical picture with which we *start*, and plug it into the argument presented above, then mind and body can be clearly and distinctly conceived as being distinct. Taking A and B together we see that mind has a nature body does not possess and vice versa. Thus, the distance we have to go in order to see that mind and body are not one and the same has been shortened considerably. But this might not be thought to be enough to say that we have *clearly and distinctly* conceived that mind and body are distinct. It could still be claimed, for example, that when we say that mind's essential attribute is thought and body's essential attribute is extension we are surreptitiously bringing into play *the way we think* about mind and body to bear on the matter, as we do when we claim that pains are essentially painful while brain states (e.g., C-fiber firings) are not, and from this conclude that pains are not identical to any brain state. If we were talking about visually seeing the distinctness between two objects this type of objection would probably not arise: When you see that two objects are not one in the same you also see that they are distinct. Not so for introspectively perceiving their distinctness. There remains the possibility that a certain type of perception can make it appear as though the subject of investigation is not identical to an object to which it really is identical. Therefore, we must, *in addition*, perceive the distinctness of the objects in question.

By adding C – a substance can have only one essential attribute – the distinctness of mind and body moves clearly into view: No matter how we think of mind and regardless of how we think of body, no substance can have more than one essential attribute. By introducing C we can now say: However we accessed mind and its essential attribute – thought – mind's *one* essential attribute *is* thought. Similarly, however we accessed body and its essential attribute – extension – its one and only essential attribute is extension. Therefore, no matter how we think of mind and body in order to determine their essential attributes, they must be distinct because, by C, a substance can possess no more than one essential attribute. Thus with the addition of C we not only see that mind and body are not one and the same, we see clearly and distinctly that they are indeed distinct. As for 4, most

philosophers who accept the idea of distinct kinds with distinct natures will find it uncontroversial.

As we have seen, premise 5 is supported by the Cartesian definitions of mind and body, and by the Cartesian assumption given in C. Subsequently, 6 through 8 follow.

A Problem with OCC-style Conceivability arguments

There is a problem for OCC-style conceivability arguments or conceivability arguments based on it (e.g., Cartesian subtraction thought experiments): They can be used only if we know the (full) nature of mind or body.⁵ Build in different premises about the nature of mind (or body) and the conclusion that mind and body are distinct may not follow. Build in premises that only provide *a partial description* of the nature of mind or body and we will be in *no* position to claim that we see clearly and distinctly what their natures are. Hence, we would be wrong to assert that we see clearly and distinctly that they are distinct. So with respect to the above argument, a way must be found to support the truth of A and B (not to mention C). Otherwise, we cannot claim to know the full nature of mind, in which case even if the argument were in fact sound, we would be in no position *to advance it* as a sound argument. And, of course, there is always the possibility that A and B (and C) are false.

Descartes is sometimes thought to have claimed that he clearly and distinctly perceived (or conceived) *the nature* of mind. It is far from clear that Descartes claims this, or that he should have claimed it if he did.

After stating that he is a thinking thing (in the 2nd meditation), Descartes goes on to ask what his nature is. Because the supposition that he does not have a body is still in effect he concludes that he is not body. But he then asks: “Yet may it not perhaps be the case that these very things which I am supposing to be nothing, *because they are unknown to me*, are in reality identical with the ‘I’ of which I am aware? *I do not know, and for the moment I shall not argue the point, since I can make judgements only about things which are known to me. . . .* If the ‘I’ is understood strictly as we have been taking it, then it is quite certain that knowledge of it does not depend on things of whose existence I am as yet unaware. . . .”⁶

⁵ Subtraction thought experiments involve subtracting a property P from an object O’s nature. If P can be subtracted without undermining O as the subject of the subtraction then P is not an essential property of O; otherwise it is.

⁶ Descartes, p. 18-19, emphasis added.

Here it seems that Descartes does not believe that he has clearly and distinctly perceived *all* that he is essentially. What he claims to be – a thinking thing – is what he is relative to what he *knows* himself to be. It is this object – Descartes-as-known – that is the genuine object of his investigation.⁷ Further, we mustn't forget that Descartes clearly and distinctly perceived this object – his self (or clearly and distinctly conceived *that* he existed) *while* rationally doubting the existence of all things corporeal, or while supposing or pretending that corporeal things did not exist.⁸ Thus,

⁷ In footnotes to *Descartes: Oeuvres Philosophiques II*, Classiques (1999) ed. Alquié Garnier, p. 419-420, Ferdinand Alquié's position is in agreement with my mine. He writes: "*Descartes distingue ici l'ordre de la connaissance et celui de l'être. Il ne prétend pas encore décider de ce qu'il est, mais seulement de ce qu'il sait être. . . . on peut considérer que Descartes atteint ici, en ce qui concerne sa nature, un savoir à la fois certain et limité. Certain, car Descartes est assuré d'être une chose qui pense. Il peut être autre chose encore, et des réalités, rejetées hors de lui parce que non certaines, peuvent lui appartenir. On voit que, de toute façon, la véracité divine sera nécessaire pour établir la distinction réelle de l'âme et du corps, ou, si l'on préfère, pour établir que je suis «seulement» une chose qui pense.*"

(Translation: Descartes here distinguishes between knowledge and being. He does not claim to have yet determined what he is but only to have determined what he knows himself to be. We might consider that Descartes here attains knowledge that is both certain and limited as regards his nature. It is certain because Descartes is guaranteed to be a thinking thing. He can still be something else, and those realities, excluded from what he is because they are uncertain, could belong to him. In any case, it can be seen that divine truth will be necessary to establish the real distinction between the soul and the body, or, if you prefer, to establish that I am «only» a thing that thinks.)

Alquié's interpretation here differs from mine in that he focuses on the idea that Descartes knows for certain his nature, whereas, as will be seen further in the text, I will focus on the fact that Descartes knows for certain that he exists. On the other hand, even Alquié, at the end of the above citation, claims that God will be required in order for Descartes to know, for certain, his nature. I agree with this, but believe that it should be observed that this is not so, as I argue in the text, for Descartes' existence. His own existence is something of which he does have a clear and distinct perception, even without God's help.

⁸ On some interpretations of the relation between *cogito* and *sum*, the *cogito* argument is not a proof. Rather, Descartes' existence is recognized as something self-evident, in a simple act of mental intuition, where intuition is sometimes understood as an act of introspection. See Jacques Chevalier, *Descartes* (Paris: Plon, 1921), p. 218. In this case, Descartes' way of coming to know himself is by clearly and distinctly perceiving the referent of 'I' as uttered by him. Alternatively, we might say that he clearly and distinctly perceives *his existence*. In either case the subject of his perception is an object.

Descartes, in effect, was arguing (or should have been arguing) that *Descartes-as-known* cannot be bodily in nature, not because Descartes knows the full nature of the referent of 'I' as uttered by himself and thereby knows that *it* does not include body. Rather he knows that Descartes-as-known cannot be bodily in nature because this object is known to him to exist – it is *being* known to him to exist! – *while* he supposes the non-existence of body.⁹ In other words, even as he supposes the non-existence of body he remains in a state of awareness of the existence of himself or of the fact that he exists.

Therefore it is not true to say that Descartes has shown us through his method of radical doubt that he clearly and distinctly perceives the nature of the referent of 'I' as uttered by him. (And again, it does not seem that he claims to have done so.) Consequently, the ontological argument presented above does not get off the ground because Descartes' method does not support premise 5: Descartes has clearly and distinctly perceived (or conceived) that thought belongs to Descartes-as-known, but he has not clearly and distinctly perceived (or conceived) that thought *alone* belongs to his mind. Thus, while he may have clearly and distinctly perceived (or conceived) that Descartes-as-known exists without extension, he has not shown that he clearly and distinctly perceived (or conceived) that his mind exists without extension.

This being said, I think Descartes could still conclude that he clearly and distinctly perceives his existence apart from his body, or apart from any body for that matter. Or alternately, he could conclude that he clearly and distinctly conceives *that* he exists apart from body. In fact, there is a

However, other interpretations of Descartes' *cogito* argument have been offered according to which we should understand it as an inference from *cogito* to *sum*. Various difficulties, as well as ways of solving these difficulties have been raised for this interpretation. See Anthony Kenny, *Descartes: A Study of His Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 40-62; Bernard Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1978), pp. 72-101; and Margaret Wilson, *Descartes* (London, Henley and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 50-71.

In any case, if Descartes' *cogito* argument is interpreted as inferential then Descartes' way of coming to know himself would be through an act of conscious perception whose subject is a fact. Because of this we would then say that Descartes clearly and distinctly *conceives* (i.e., judges, understands) *that* the referent of 'I' as uttered by him exists.

⁹ Descartes is in a state of being immediately acquainted with the referent of his utterance of 'I'. Or he is experiencing the referent of his utterance of 'I'. It is *being known* in this sense.

sense in which he has done this. But an examination of this claim takes us to Descartes' epistemological argument, and the question emerges, How much metaphysical magic can Descartes pull out of an epistemological claim?

Descartes' Epistemological Argument

The version of Descartes' epistemological argument I will offer is like his ontological argument, except for premise 5*. Thus we have:

- 1.* If A can exist apart from B and vice versa, then A and B are really distinct (by stipulation).
- 2.* Whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive (or conceive) can be brought about by God as I perceive (or conceive) it (from God's omnipotence).
- 3.* If I clearly and distinctly perceive (or conceive) that I can exist apart from my body and vice versa, God can bring this about (from 2*).
- 4.* If God can bring it about that A can exist apart from B and vice versa, then A and B are really distinct (from 1*).
- 5.* I clearly and distinctly perceive (or conceive) that my mind exists while supposing or pretending that body does not exist.
- 6.* I clearly and distinctly conceive that mind can exist without body and vice versa (from 5*).
- 7.* God can bring it about that mind exists apart from body and vice versa (from 2* and 5*).
- 8.* Mind and body are really distinct (from 1* and 7*).

If we recall *how* Descartes argues for the epistemological claim that he can clearly and distinctly perceive that he exists apart from body we should come to see that it is not really such a strong claim after all. What it indicates is that Descartes could perceive his own existence (or perceive that he exists) while supposing that nothing corporeal exists. How does he accomplish this feat? If it is through introspection – a type of perception – then he is immediately aware of himself – not his nature.

Let's suppose it has turned out that Dodo birds exist. Suppose further that we do not know this; in fact, we believe that Dodo birds are extinct. We might go so far as to say that we know that the Dodo is extinct.

Now imagine that I am out in a forest and a dodo bird swoops down and perches itself on a branch directly in front of me. I have never seen this kind of bird before, but I do not suppose that it is a dodo. I emphatically suppose that it is not, even though I am intrigued by its resemblance to the depictions of dodos I have seen in the Museum of Natural History.

In the situation as described I am consciously aware of a dodo, while supposing that dodos do not exist. Using a demonstrative and pointing at the dodo I could say, 'I know that *that* exists'. And again I assert this while confidently believing that dodos are extinct. Let's put aside skeptical worries such as hallucinations, the possibility of an evil demon, and the like. We could then say that I have perceptual knowledge that *that* exists, referring to the dodo, while I believe that dodos are extinct.

Would anyone conclude from this that God or any power could make it the case that *the thing* that I have perceptual knowledge about could exist apart from dodos? I think not. It seems to me that the reason that Descartes can clearly and distinctly perceive himself while pretending or supposing that nothing corporeal exists is for pretty much the same reason that I can have perceptual knowledge of the Dodo while confidently believing that Dodos are extinct. He perceives something whose *existence* is undeniable to him given the perceptual experience he is consciously aware of having. He can have such a perception and know with certainty that the object of his awareness exists while knowing very little about the nature of the object of his awareness. In Dretsian terms, we might say that he has object awareness (of which is certain) without having fact awareness about that object. But not knowing the complete nature of the object of his perception, he also does not know *what it is not* and can therefore deny, without contradiction, that the object possesses properties it is not represented as having in his perception of it: Properties of the object that are not available to him through his perception of it, that is, properties that are not constituents of his perception.

Alternately, we might say that Descartes clearly and distinctly perceived or conceived the fact *that* he exists. But then we must acknowledge that being aware – even clearly and distinctly aware of the fact that something exists – does not entail that one knows anything about the nature of the thing that the fact is about. Thus, analogously to the case of perceptive knowledge discussed, I can clearly and distinctly conceive that *that thing* exists without knowing what it is. Therefore, once again, I can deny, without contradiction, that properties $P_1 . . . P_n$ can be predicated of the object of

my awareness if those properties are not available to me in my act of conceiving.¹⁰

Descartes' problem may be that he confuses matters of nature (essence) and existence. It might seem that because we can latch on to a thing in a way that allows us to know that it exists that it follows that the *nature* of the thing – like the thing itself – is available for use in our acts of conceiving or that the nature of the thing – like the thing – is a constituent of our act of conceiving. One might think this because the nature of a thing is supposed to provide its existence conditions. From this one might reason that if an object is a constituent of an act of conceiving so too must be its existence conditions be. There is a similar kind of confusion in the contemporary literature because, in the fashion of Kripke, we tend to assert *identities* between objects and their essences rather than viewing, after the manner of Putnam, an object's essential essence as a property of that object, not as something that the object is identical with. If we assert an identity between an object and its essence, then if the object is a constituent of an act of a conceiving so would its essence. From this it might seem that the essential properties are available to us in an act of conceiving. Of course, we will not be tempted to reason this way if the object – the logical subject of an act of conceiving – is not identical to those properties that provides its existence conditions.¹¹

Whatever the reason for the confusion, knowing through some type of perception that a thing exists, or knowing of its existence, does not bring it about that the thing's *nature* is available for use in an act of conceiving. We might perceive that a thing exists, and this might be sufficient for our *thinking* about the thing in various ways. Looking at a dodo bird I might think to myself, What is *that*? I might daydream about it or have a nightmare about it. And in these cases, the object of my perception, the Dodo,

¹⁰ Descartes would not be able to respond to my criticism of his argument in the way that he responded to Arnaud's objection that in conceiving of his mind, he (Descartes) did not have a complete understanding of his mind. Descartes had replied that what was required was not that he conceive completely what mind is, but rather, that he conceive a complete thing or substance. On my reading of Descartes, in perceiving of himself without body he did conceive of a complete thing's existence. But not having clearly and distinctly conceived of the nature of this complete thing, he did not clearly and distinctly perceive that the full nature of his mind is distinct from body. This, however, is what he needed.

¹¹ Descartes most likely did not make the latter mistake since he did not assert an identity between the referent of 'I' as uttered by himself and the nature of that referent. Rather, the nature of the referent, on Descartes' view, is predicated of the referent.

would be a constituent of my thoughts (i.e., my wondering, my daydream, my nightmare). But if we do not know the nature of an object then *its nature* cannot be a constituent of our conceivings, even though the object itself – whose existence we have apprised ourselves of through some type of perception or act of conceiving – is a constituent of our conceivings. On the other hand, if the nature of an object is not a constituent of an act of conceiving, then not only is that nature unavailable for our use in a positive way (i.e., for conceiving what further properties the object possesses) the nature of the object cannot *constrain* what we can conceive about the object.¹²

Without the nature of a thing, all that is available to us is the thing (and those properties we apprehend through our perception of it). But when the thing itself – and not its nature – is the subject of our conceiving, we can conceive almost anything about it we fancy. Perhaps the only things that we cannot conceive about the object are those things that we cannot conceive about *any* object in virtue of its being an object (e.g., that it exists and does not exist, that it is red all over and yellow all over at the same time, that it is not identical to itself, etc.)

So, yes, Descartes can clearly and distinctly conceive that he exists without anything corporeal existing. That is, he can give a *self-consistent* account in which he knows that he exists while rationally doubting that anything corporeal exists. The story *is* about Descartes, but in no way is it *about* his nature. His full nature is not a constituent of the story. It is not available for use in his account; it is not available for constraining his account. This does not mean that Descartes cannot clearly and distinctly perceive his existence apart from body, or that he cannot clearly and distinctly conceive that he can exist apart from body. He can do both. It does mean, however, that nothing about his *possibly existing* without anything corporeal existing follows from his being able to clearly and distinctly perceive or conceive their existential separation in this way. For even though Descartes' nature is not available for use in his act of conceiving, his nature is still what provides the conditions necessary and sufficient for his existence. Therefore, what he needs to show is that he can clearly and distinctly perceive or conceive the full nature of his mind while supposing the non-

¹² Of course, in the case of an OCC-style conceivability argument (or a subtraction argument) without the nature of the object in question these types of conceiving do not get off the ground to begin with. Therefore, whether or not the nature *constrains* what we could conceive about the object would be a moot point.

existence of body. Given what Descartes says (above) even he should not claim that he has done this.

Where does this leave Descartes? Well, premise 2* is not correct. Neither God nor any other power can bring about *whatever* Descartes clearly and distinctly conceives.¹³ What God or some lesser power can effect is the existential separation of two things whose *full* natures have been clearly and distinctly perceived or conceived as diverse. Therefore, Descartes' epistemological argument does not go through.

The question now becomes: Can Descartes show us that he can clearly and distinctly perceive the *full* nature of his mind thereby making *the nature* of his mind a constituent of an act of clear and distinct conception? Alternatively we can ask: Can Descartes show that he can clearly and distinctly conceive that the full nature of his mind exists while supposing that body does not exist? If he can do either, then he can use the result, together with the premise pertaining to God's omnipotence, to show the possibility of the distinctness of mind and body.

As we have seen neither an OCC-style act of conceiving (nor a subtraction thought experiment on which it is based) will work. Both require that *we begin with* the full nature of the subject of the conceiving in order to get the act of conceiving *off the ground*. We have also seen that conceiving *that* – where the goal is to provide a self-consistent account of some state of affairs – did not get Descartes his desired result because he did not provide a self-consistent account of *the kind of state of affairs* required to establish the distinction between mind and body.

I submit that what Descartes needs to do, prior to trying to conceive that his mind is distinct from body, is *conceive of* his disembodiment. This would allow him to clearly and distinctly perceive that body does not belong to his nature, rather than merely clearly and distinctly perceiving that body does not belong to the object *Descartes-as-known* (by Descartes). Then he could use this perception – whether factual or objectual – as data in an act of clearly and distinctly conceiving *that* mind is distinct from body. The self-consistent account he could give would then be about Des-

¹³ I want to stress that I am *not* calling into question Descartes' claim to have clearly and distinctly perceived his existence apart from the existence of body. In fact, the argument that I am advancing is very much in the spirit of Malebranche, who believed that we can gain certainty of our own existence through consciousness, but, who, at the same time, not only disagreed with the idea that we could clearly and distinctly conceive the nature of our own minds, but thought that we do not have any idea *of* the nature of our minds, let alone a clear and distinct one. See Malebranche, *The Search After Truth* Bk. VI, Pt. ii, ch. 6, 480 and Bk. I, ch. 13, IV, 62-63.

cartes' (full) nature existing without body, and in this case it would be possible for God to pull the two apart.

But in order to accomplish the feat of conceiving his disembodiment Descartes would have to be able to conceive of his disembodiment, which is a far cry from *perceiving* himself and simultaneously denying or disbelieving his embodiment. The problem with this strategy is that its success depends on being able to imagine one's disembodiment (or imagine that one is disembodied), and this, I think, cannot be done. Below I will explain my view on this matter by first distinguishing three cognitive acts: *imagining*, *conceiving of*, and *conceiving that*.

Imagining, Conceiving of, and Conceiving that

The following 'imaginative' acts can be distinguished: *imagining of*, *imagining that*, *conceiving of*, and *conceiving that*. Here I will focus primarily on *imagining of*, *conceiving of*, and *conceiving that*. These different acts can be further qualified. Thus, we have: *sensuous imaginings of*, *sympathetic imaginings of*, and *perceptual imaginings of*. *Imaginings that* can be similarly qualified. Further, we can distinguish *sensuous*, *sympathetic*, and *perceptual conceivings of*. But *conceivings that* are not so qualified because their mode of presentation is not part of their content.

Sensuous imaginings of occur when we use our sensory imagination (e.g., visualization, auralization, tactilization, etc.) to imagine properties, objects, and events. Thus, a sensuous imagining of blueness is the visualization of blueness.

Sympathetic imaginings of occur when we use the sympathetic imagination to imagine conscious states of an individual or phenomenal states and properties of an individual. We do this by putting ourselves in conscious states (or phenomenal states) resembling the conscious states (or phenomenal states) of the individual we are sympathetically imagining.

Perceptual imaginings of require theoretical knowledge, though the content of this knowledge is not part of the content of the imagining. Thus, for example, someone might have a perceptual imagining of pain if, first, he knows what brain state pain is identical with. He might *then* have a perceptual imagining of pain by visualizing that brain state.

Sensuous conceivings of first require the sensuous imagining of some object, event, or property. But the content of this type of act will not be fully given unless the sensuously imagined object is identified in some way

or other. So, for example, in order to conceive of blueness, it will not suffice to visualize blueness. The conceiver must *recognize that* the property visualized is blueness. In other words, he must identify it. The same is true of *sympathetic conceivings of* and *perceptual conceivings of*, though they differ from *sensuous conceivings of* with respect to the kind of object they take. Thus, a *sympathetic conceiving of* will take as its object a conscious state or property. But sympathetically imagining pain is not sufficient for sympathetically conceiving of pain. The conceiver must recognize that the imagined state is pain. As regards the perceptual conceiving of pain, on the assumption that pain is identical to with a brain state, we might perceptually conceive of pain by visualizing the brain state. But the act of conceiving of is completed only when we have identified the brain state with pain. Hence, for all types of *conceiving of* concepts must be applied to whatever is sensuously, sympathetically, or perceptually imagined.

Further, regarding *sympathetic conceivings of*, concepts must be applied from the first-person perspective. To sympathetically *conceive of* being in pain I must describe a state of affairs in which I recognize that the concept of pain, understood *from the first-person point of view*, applies to pain, for it is the first-person perspective that makes the sympathetic concept of pain possible.

But let us, for a moment, suppose that pain is identical with some brain state, C fiber firings. If I sensuously or perceptually imagine a situation in which C fiber firings occurs but I am ignoring my pain and am unaware of it from the first-person perspective (perhaps because I am competing in a game that I cannot win if I focus on the feeling) I have not *sympathetically* applied the concept of pain. Therefore, I have not sympathetically *conceived of* pain.

On the view that I am advancing, we do not *sensuously imagine* pain, for it is not through our sensory organs that we have the experience of pain. That is the task of the sympathetic imagination. We should also observe that we do not sensuously *conceive of* pain. Doing so would require that we be able to *sensuously imagine* pain. By contrast, we do sensuously imagine seeing blue and sensuously conceive of blueness.

Now in order to clarify the distinction between *conceiving that* and *conceiving of* let's begin with two of its cognitive cognates: *perceiving that* and *perceiving of*. I might correctly say that I perceive that the lamp is on in the following circumstances: I see that the light switch is up, I know that all electrical connections are working, I know that a working light bulb is placed correctly in the lamp, and I know that the lamp cord is plugged in

the socket. But it would not follow in these circumstances that I perceived of the lamp's being on. For this to follow my perceiving would need to take on a sensuous aspect or mode of presentation involving sensory information received from the lamp's glowing light bulb, for example. I think something quite similar is going on with respect to *conceiving that* and *conceiving of*.

When I say that I conceive *that* the lamp is on I can do so merely by *describing* a situation in which that state of affairs obtains: The light switch is up, the electrical connections are working, a light bulb is placed correctly in the lamp, etc. What is described is not sensuously presented. Whether I succeed in conceiving *that* the lamp is on will depend on things such as whether the description I offer is self-consistent, whether the physical laws, implicit in the description, are correct (or could be correct). On the other hand, if I say that I conceive *of* the lamp being on, as in the case of perceiving, my conceiving must take a sensuous shape. Because of this the sensuous imagination is implicated.

Application of Distinctions to Conceiving One's Disembodiment

First of all, as regards Descartes' using the imagination to perceive the full nature of his mind it is well known that he would have repudiated this strategy, believing, as he did, that the imagination was the kind of mental operation that necessarily introduced corporeal elements. Imagining a square had to do with visualizing it. The reason we cannot imagine a chiliagon, according to Descartes, is because we cannot visualize all of its sides. He makes no room for imagining conscious or phenomenal states of individuals – imagining being angry, imagining being happy, imagining being in pain, imagining being in a state of wonderment or a state of hopefulness or a state of despair – imaginings that are not *obviously* tied to sensory experiences and the sensory concepts they give rise to, but are rather connected to imaginings whose realization depends on phenomenal experiences and the phenomenal concepts they give rise to.

Now it might be the case that some phenomenal experiences and sensory experiences (and phenomenal concepts and sensory concepts) are so intimately linked that one cannot have certain phenomenal experiences without simultaneously having certain sensory experiences. Nevertheless, it might still be the case that one could possess and apply a certain phenomenal concept, PC, without possessing the sensory concept, SC, linked to the sensory experience, SE, necessary for the existence of the phenome-

nal experience, PE, which in turn is necessary for the possession of PC. On the other hand, suppose that some sensory concept, SC, is necessary for the possession of a phenomenal concept, PC. Even so, it might be the case with respect to some particular *conceiving* that SC does not apply to the object of the conceiving while PC does because the object of the act of conceiving does not include a sensorial element as a constituent (i.e., the sensorial element is not available for use to the conceiver).

Let's suppose, for the sake of argument, that Descartes can imagine being disembodied, where this precludes the introduction of anything corporeal into his act of imagining. We can suppose that he does this by imagining being in certain conscious phenomenal states with no sensorial element as a constituent of the imagining. Still, Descartes would not be home free. In order to *assert that* he has imagined disembodiment – in order to use imagining disembodiment to argue for a between mind and body – he must identify his imagining, from the first-person point of view, *as* an imagining of disembodiment. This means that he will have to apply a concept to his imagining, from the first-person perspective, which distinguishes it as an act of imagining disembodiment. That is, he will have to go from merely imagining his disembodiment to *conceiving of* his disembodiment. In other words, Descartes will have to be justified in believing that he has imagined being disembodied, and in so doing apply the concept of imagining disembodiment. By achieving this he will have conceived of being disembodied. The question is whether or not he can so conceptually identify his imaginative act. I will argue that he cannot.

The most promising course open to a Cartesian is to conceive of an experience that is the analogue of experiencing her disembodiment. That is, to conceive of an experience that resembles the experience one would have if one were disembodied. The two possibilities I will consider are these. First, the Cartesian may suppose that she has out-of-body experiences (OBEs) in which she seems to view her body from an external vantage point; these experiences are the bases of her imaginative acts of disembodiment. She will then go on to apply the concept of disembodiment to what she has imagined. Second, the Cartesian may suppose that she is in a state of complete sensory deprivation. She would then use her experience of such a state to construct an imagining of her disembodiment, subsequently applying the concept of disembodiment to what she has imagined. I will now argue that neither of these strategies could work for the Cartesian.

In the case of the type of OBEs described above, the content of the experience *essentially involves* an experience of one's body. As Descartes acknowledges, if one *distinctly* conceives (perceives) of oneself as an incorporeal substance, then one must do so without conceiving (perceiving) of anything corporeal. Hence, a Cartesian cannot conceive (perceive) of her disembodiment by imagining OBEs.

In the case of total sensory deprivation, it would not be obvious that the Cartesian's body was not implicated (necessarily) in the experience of her sensory deprivation. In other words, there is nothing in the experience itself which makes it evident that she is not a *body* in a state of sensory deprivation. Therefore, the Cartesian cannot conceive (perceive) of her disembodiment by imagining an experience of complete sensory deprivation.

There may well be other ways of attempting to imagine one's own disembodiment. However, as far as I can see at present, they are no more promising for the Cartesian than the ones I have discussed. I conclude that there is no reason to think that a Cartesian can clearly and distinctly perceive (conceive of) her disembodiment.¹⁴

ABSTRACT

In this paper I examine Descartes' argument for the distinction between mind and body by distinguishing three senses of conceiving, two of which Descartes availed himself to show that mind and body are distinct, and one which he did not use. Regarding the first two, I show why they fall short of fulfilling Descartes' expectations. As regards the third, I explain why it provides the sense of conceiving that Descartes needed in order to *try* to show the distinction between mind and body, but why it would have failed to produce the desired result had he used it.

¹⁴ I would like to thank Gary Rosenkrantz for his very helpful comments on this paper.