

Name: [REDACTED]

Essay title: Outline and examine Descartes' views regarding the distinction between the mind and the body. Is he right in thinking that the two are fundamentally distinct?

Detailed comments (see marginal numbers)

1. Good introduction!
2. First of all, *foundationalism* is a position in epistemology, and we are doing philosophy of mind. Then, note that 'foundationalism' and 'fundamentally' mean different things. So you haven't really explained why you mention foundationalism here. My guess is that you do not need to.
3. Great! But you forget the important second claim of Cartesian dualism: that the mind can exist independently of the brain/body. Careful, because this is crucial. This claim is what distinguishes Descartes' dualism from weaker forms of dualism.
4. Great, but it would be better to spend a couple of sentences spelling out the descriptive terms you use. Don't be afraid to say the obvious! The examiner will not know that you know unless you tell him/her so, and the only way you can do this is often by stating the obvious. Also, the point here needs to be expanded fully. If you were to spell it out, it would give you the opportunity to show that the strong dualist has got good reasons to suppose that the mind is doing the important stuff. Do not waste it!
5. Now you have switched to the opposition case. Have you realised this? I think you have, but the examiner would not be sure because you have continued in the same paragraph. It is a new thought and a new viewpoint. Begin a new paragraph!
6. Again, an excellent point, but make it relevant to your argument: "If we cannot make the same claims about Tony and Tony's body, then 'Tony' and 'Tony's body' refer to different things, and we are dealing with distinct and different entities. In that case, the dualist has got it right: mind and body are distinct and separate entities". Say it, Brendan, say it!
9. Nice point! If bodily processes are deterministic, then it seems that when we talk in bodily terms we cannot be talking about persons, since persons make free choices. Some work is needed if you are going to use this point, but it is a good one!

General points

In the remainder of the essay you need to spell out your argument more. You think that dualism captures our commonsensical views about persons, whereas materialist views miss out important aspects such as choice, thought, and psychological attributes. But you need additional supporting evidence if you are going to push for the strong dualist view that the mind can exist independently of the body. Or you need to make it clear that you are not arguing for that view, in which case you would be arguing against both the materialist and Descartes. That would be OK, of course, but you have to make sure that your reader understands what you are arguing for. This bit would be answering the second part of your essay question.

All in all, you have developed a promising line of argument, but it is not set out clearly enough. You need to work on your writing. The way you express your thoughts is rather forced and bitty. Not to worry though! We will go through it together. And I suggest that for the moment you work more on this essay, drafting and re-drafting it, rather than moving on. Just do a flow-chart for the other essay. Please come and see me and we can discuss this more.

--Maria

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Detailed comments (see marginal numbers)

1. Excellent introduction! It is spot on! Well done! Just to clarify: D thinks that, given that he can conceive of himself and/or his thoughts existing independently of his physical attributes, then the following are true: (1) his mind is distinct from his body/brain, and (2) his mind can exist independently of his body. I know you know this, but you have not put it quite explicitly enough. Not to worry though, it will come with practice.
2. Careful! Not all monists are materialists in this sense. For example, idealism is a non-materialist monist view, and behaviourism is a monist view different from the kind of materialism you are discussing here.
3. There are some dualist views that happily accept that the mind is dependent on the brain for its existence, even though the two are essentially distinct. Materialism claims that the mind *is* the brain.
4. This reads as a mixture of your own views with bits from behaviourism and physicalism. Do you really need this bit? If you do, it needs tidying up.
5. Here you need to make use of the distinction between logical possibility and physical possibility. The materialist monist claims that it is not even logically possible for mind and body to exist apart, since they are the very same thing.
6. You argue that even though we have intuitions about particular mental attributes, such as the feeling of pain, which may not be captured by a physicalist account, still it is physically impossible for the human mind to exist independently of a body. This would rule out Descartes' strong dualism, but it is compatible with a weaker dualism on which mind-body separation is logically but not physically possible. You need to make it clear which option you want to go for and why.

General points

You have made some detailed points and the material is there. However, it is not set out as explicitly as it needs to be. I suspect this is the reason why you lose marks. So we need to work on this!

In particular, you may feel that you have answered the second part of the question, and in a sense you have, but the examiner may not realise this. Read your last paragraph again without reading the entire essay. If someone had to guess the essay title from that paragraph, would they guess that it was something like: 'Do you agree with Descartes or the monists'?

Not to worry though! Your philosophical skills are in place; you just need a bit of practice and a lot of drafting and redrafting. You will get there, like the rest of us! Would you redraft your essay, please, and hand it in again?

--Maria