

## Debunking Cartesian Dualism

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In Descartes' sixth meditation, "Concerning the Existence of Material Things and the Real Distinction between Mind and Body," he states his belief that the mind is a separate entity from the body, residing inside the brain and controlling the imagination. Scientific developments, such as correlating neurological machines with brain tests to chart each part of the brain's functions, have made it possible to debunk these claims. Through these developments that have allowed us to fully understand our physical bodies, scientists and psychologists have made discoveries about the physical brain's connections, drawing the conclusion that the metaphysical mind and the physical brain are the same entity.

Descartes holds a very strong argument for believing that the mind exists separately from the body. His initial claims supporting this dualism are based around mathematical logic and mental perception of this logic. "...when I imagine a triangle, I not only understand that it is a figure bounded by three lines, but at the same time I also envisage with the mind's eye those lines as if they were present; and this is what I call 'imagining'" (Descartes 40). Through imagination and sensory perception, he concludes that his body is, in fact, his own. He says he senses all feelings, pain and pleasure, but doesn't feel that on behalf of others, and he also doesn't really know anything through intellect that he hasn't previously discovered through his senses. While he recognizes that sensory perceptions can be deceptive (such as having Phantom Limb Syndrome, [Descartes 43]), he is certain that he is "really distinct from [his] body and can exist without it" (Descartes 44). He recognizes the combination of sensory perception and the human body. With this, he states that other 'bodies,' such as colors, odors, sounds and textures, can have a huge effect on his body and mind (Descartes 46). These bodies can cause a person to have sensory pain or pleasure. While Descartes' argument is well thought out and backed by his strong beliefs, when held to a scientific viewpoint, it becomes inconceivable and obsolete.

Cartesian dualism seems to suggest that a person's existence is set up like a cheap Ponzi scheme. The metaphysical soul exists, which includes the metaphysical mind, which controls and resides within the physical brain that may or may not exist, which controls the body through the nervous system, which breaks into thoughts, emotions, intellect, moving fingers in such a way to type essays correctly, etc. This doesn't seem logical or practical. I am arguing that the metaphysical mind, as defined by Descartes, doesn't exist outside of the brain and once the body dies, the mind dies

as well. While I can't argue for the existence of a soul, since I do not know and Descartes defines his beliefs very strongly upon its existence, I am going to focus solely on why the mind is the same as the physical brain.

By arguing that the mind and the body exist as separate entities and work together, Descartes does not recognize the possibility of the physical brain controlling every part of the body's functions, emotions and thoughts. Many studies have shown the correlation between sensory perception and intellect, which Descartes recognizes. The example he uses is the body's natural reaction to a dry throat, or to a bodily injury (Descartes 49, 50). He does not recognize, however, the brain's ability to focus away from that thirst or injury, to prioritize and to tell the body what to do consecutively and fairly effortlessly. If there is no water available to quench thirst the body is feeling, the body can keep going without a drink. If there is an injury on a body's foot, the brain can draw attention away from the foot by focusing on distractions, such as having a conversation with someone or reading a book. The physical brain, as seen scientifically, is full of extreme complexities that make it impossible to suggest the existence of a mind controlling it.

The structure of the body's Central Nervous System connecting to the brain is solid scientific proof that the brain controls every aspect of the body. The argument that we breathe effortlessly and that our hearts pump blood through our bodies effortlessly is also explained by science. The human body's biological makeup is comprised of the Central Nervous System (controlled by the physical brain), the respiratory system, the circulatory system and many others like the skeletal system. When they all work together, the body can do incredible things. The brain is what controls the nerves to move each part of the body. It is like the hard drive of a computer that sends out orders, controlling everything. In this explanation, there is no need for a metaphysical mind. An objection to this argument would be that no metaphysical mind would mean there is no metaphysical soul. I disagree on this basis: If a soul exists, which I have no reason to believe it does not, then after a body's death the soul can still exist and find another body (with a physical brain to control it) to inhabit. The difference between a soul's existence and a mind's existence is the question of whether or not we still exist after our physical bodies die. It is entirely possible that we do through our souls, not our minds.

The existence of mental disabilities proves that the metaphysical mind is actually the physical brain, and is not a separate entity that controls everything. For example, today, I am able to think clearly and coherently. If I head to the grocery store later this afternoon and get in a nearly fatal car accident that causes severe brain damage, I may

not be able to communicate, not know how to breathe without assisted oxygen, not feel any pain, or reject fluids even if I have extreme thirst. Once the vital parts of my brain are impaired or incapacitated, I begin discarding what I have known and done beforehand, possibly not thinking anything of substance or doing much more than existing in my physical state. An objection to this theory would be that people in that state are very capable of having thoughts, emotions and feeling sensations, but cannot communicate these to others without assistance, much like Helen Keller or Stephen Hawking. My argument for this objection is that these people are physically impaired, and have nothing wrong with their minds. If people are mentally impaired, they cannot fully develop thought as they previously could, and they may suffer from not being able to fully physically function. If this were the case, take this into consideration. If I were to recover from this tragic car accident, regaining most, if not all of my mental capabilities, I would likely not remember a single thing that happened during the event, but I would be able to start new and still have productive thoughts. In this example, the mind doesn't operate outside of the brain, because as soon as the brain is injured, the mind cannot do its work either. An objection to this would be that the brain operates as a bridge between the mind and the body. The problem with this objection is the lack of proof that the brain isn't the substance causing thought and controlling all action in the first place.

Since there is no proof that a mind exists apart from the body, I follow Descartes' thoughts in his first meditation and dismiss that which I doubt. With no scientific proof, I cannot accept something as fact. Therefore, the claim that a mind exists apart from the body is null and void, and can only be an active part in a body's functions.