

Example of mind and body debate critical thinking

[Health & Medicine](#), [Body](#)



Mind and Body Debate

Renowned philosophers Rene Descartes and John Searle are having a cup of tea in Descartes' living room. As expected, their discussion turns philosophical. Each of the two presents their arguments on the mind and body problem.

Descartes: I believe the mind and body are two distinct and separate substances.

Searle: Every time you postulate an opinion I know we are about to start a long argument. I heard you say the mind is independent of the body. How true is that? I applaud many of your opinions and theories in philosophy. However, I beg to differ on this one.

Descartes: My friend, I will take you systematically through my quest for certainty. I believe this will convince you to change your perception on the subject.

Searle: Undoubtedly, I will lend you my ears. However, you seem to forget I am always equipped with my own arguments and facts to prove them when we debate on philosophical theories. Go ahead and prove your standing.

Descartes: We have done this before. I will concentrate on the sixth meditation to nail my point down

Searle: Go ahead and state the first five steps in summary. I cannot seem to wait for my moment to counter your arguments and prove to you that the mind and body is one global causation.

Descartes: Okay, the first meditation as usual is methodical skepticism. The second step resolves this skepticism through the argument that though it is

doubtful ideas or sense images have objects, the absolute truth is man exists because he thinks. My third meditation points God is no deceiver. Hence, distinct ideas have objects corresponding to them. Fourth meditation revolves around human error. As long as man is restricted to distinct and clear ideas, he will never err. The fifth meditation demonstrates application of methodology to material reality in quantifiable dimensions. This is done to the extent materiality is an object of pure mathematics

Searle: Sorry for cutting you short. Let me sip my cup of tea before you embark on the sixth meditation that is paramount in the discussion we are having. (Sips tea)

Descartes: My argument lies on what am about to tell you. Kindly be attentive

Searle: Go ahead (Ponders)

Descartes: The sixth meditation explains the relation between the body and the human soul. I have considered attentively that I am. I have seen I can feign that I have no body and that the world is non-existent. However, I cannot feign that I am not. The mere fact that I am thinking of doubting my existence certainly follows that am existing. If I were unconscious, I would have no reason to believe I existed. I discover I am substance whose essence and nature is to be conscious, and whose being does not depend on material thing. Hence, this soul, by which I am what I am, is distinct from the body. There cannot be an absolute connection between a bodily machine and the free soul. This goes to the extent of proving religion and science can be compatible. We simply split the world into two substances: body and mind. Religious truths will revolve around the mind/soul while science is completely

true of the body. In summary, I can doubt my body exists, but I cannot doubt that I exist as a thinking thing. I, a thinking thing, am distinct from the body.

Searle: (Ponders) having heard your argument I now understand your views on the problem of mind and body. It is my turn now to defend my position that dualism of physical things and mental things does not exist.

Descartes: Go ahead. Your argument will have to be a good one for me to change my view.

Searle: Consciousness is a feature of the brain, controlled by brain processes. The soul/consciousness is not an extra entity but a feature of the whole system. Relationship between consciousness (soul) and the brain (body) is as summarized; consciousness is because of lower level neuronal processes of the brain. It is therefore a higher-level feature of a system made up of lower level neuronal elements. Relationship between consciousness and the brain is one of causation. Therefore, consciousness is a feature of the brain.

Descartes: You mean the soul is a product of electro-biochemical processes?

Searle: Exactly that is what I mean. There have been scientific advancements in neurology proving the commonly held notion during the past that consciousness was not part of the material world is wrong.

Descartes and Searle hold different opinions when it comes to the problem of the mind and body. As seen above, Descartes argues the mind is an independent substance existing separate from the body (Hatfield, 2011).

This comes out clearly during the sixth meditation of the Cartesian quest for

knowledge. His argument revolves around the idea that he is able to doubt the existence of the material world. However, he cannot do the same when he tries to doubt the existence of himself as a thinking thing. He goes ahead to conclude his thoughts belong to a non-spatial substance distinct from matter.

Contrary, Searle argues the mind is a product of the brain; therefore, the two are neither separate nor distinct as stated in Cartesian dualism (Gennaro, 1996). Searle explains that the body and mind is one global causation, meaning the two are inseparable. The one global causation is a system seen at macro level as consciousness and at micro level as neuron firings. Electro-biochemical processes produce consciousness. The mind is therefore as much a biological phenomena as digestion, enzyme secretion, and mitosis. Of the two arguments, Descartes' is more fallacious. He relies on the argument he can doubt existence of matter to conclude the mind is distinct from it. He ignores the possibility as a thinking thing; he could in fact be a complex material system. On the other hand, Searle's argument that the mind is a rule-based processing system is yet to be proved scientifically in neurological terms. I am of the view philosophy and religions are trapped by a false dichotomy: that consciousness is a subjective first-person experience initiated by physical processes of the brain, and on the other hand, the material world is made of particles in fields of force. Consciousness is a subjective experience influenced by physical processes of the brain.

References

Gennaro, R. J. (1996). *Mind and brain: a dialogue on the mind body problem*. Indianapolis: Hackett

<https://assignbuster.com/example-of-mind-and-body-debate-critical-thinking/>

Hatfield, G. (2011) Rene Descartes. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
Retrieved 30th July 2012 from <http://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=descartes>