

How souls move bodies

Philosophy



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How Souls Move Bodies

Elisabeth asks Descartes to clarify the interaction problem. The problem constitutes dualism as a central point of controversy. The fact that something, which does not have physical property, interacts causally with physical objects is the central theme of conflict. Elisabeth inquires why thoughts in the mind can cause action in the physical body. She argues that anything that affects the physical body must also be physical and have extension and mass.

In responding to Elisabeth's prompt, he attributes the existing confusion to the use of notions that differentiate the mind and the body to explain the interaction between the two aspects. He uses an analogy of an individual who considers heaviness an actual thing that causes an object to fall. From this analogy, Descartes derives his conclusion that people are misapplying a concept. In the second reply, he says that Elisabeth should feel free to attribute extension and matter to the soul. He continues to argue that she will conceive of the union of the body and the mind if she does so. In summary, he avoids giving a precise answer to the prompt.

Descartes' reply is unsatisfactory. It leaves more prompts than answers. Without the extension of the soul, how will people's perception of it in that context explain the problem of interaction? Additionally, if people are to conceive of the union of the soul and body, it will mean that we perceive some casual connection. Therefore, it is harder to conceive of it as instructed by Descartes.

Work Cited

Atherton, Margaret. *Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period*. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1994. Print.

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