

# Descartes' view of the mind and how it relates to the human being



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Through time, one of the ever-prevailing issues has been the mind-body problem and whether or not the two are inter-related. These assumptions both attempt to solve the age-old question of how the mind and the body interact with one another. The main problem in this is that it is a theoretical problem, and any metaphysical body is unable to be properly measured or tried. Both stances have drawn many followers through history, but both sides of the argument remain ambiguous, vague and often overlap the other.

Human perception, thoughts, intentions and anxieties directly affect the body and the way humans behave. States of the nervous system and brain are able to generate states of the mind. Unfortunately this logic involves a contradiction. The nervous system and brain were constructed under the laws of sciences and is part of the physical world. Thoughts, feelings and other states of the mind are a component of the abstract world. Using logic it is impractical for the brain to generate mind or the mind to affect the brain.

The mind is composed of abstract and non-conscious components involved in early brain processing of stimuli or in emotions not yet in consciousness. On the other hand the body is constructed under the underlying laws of physics, and its components obey the well-enumerated laws of physiology. It also includes what humans perceive of their own self image with their senses. The mind is not aware of its surroundings, and it is just the manifestation of the activity of the brain (Szasz 1996); it is driven to function by instinct and urges that are fed to it from the physical surrounds.

The mind is fundamentally just a collection of learned responses. The mind-body problem has been the topic of much heated discussion since the time

of Plato and Aristotle, and has formed itself into two main groups of followers. The dualists argued that the mind and body are of two separate distinct entities. One of the earliest dualist was Plato, but by far, the best-known supporter of the psychophysical dualism theory was Rene Descartes (1614). Descartes furthered the theory and helped its spread across time, and allowed it to gain a firm foothold into modern philosophy and science alike.

More specifically, Descartes stated that while they could interact, the mind and body have no relation to one another (Descartes R. , 1968). However, in stating this, the question arises of how the mind is able to interact with the body, as how can something that is immaterial control something that is of a physical existence. Many have tried to answer this question, even Descartes himself seems uncertain with its answer and when asked by Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia, "'how the soul (non-extended and immaterial) can move the body'; and how can 'body be pushed by something immaterial... hich cannot have any communication with it. '" answered in a vague manner and unknowing of the solution, as cited by Leahey (2004).

Leahey states that Descartes failed to reason how the immaterial mind could move a material, physical body, and so later followers of this theory denied that the mind and body interacted in anyway at all. This notion branched off into various attempted solutions to solve the Mind-Body problem. An idea branching from Dualism was Interactionism. Descartes believed that the pineal gland was the key to the interaction of the mind and body.

In more recent times, philosophical issues have brought about the idea of conservation. Energy is conserved from the brain so if something beyond the brain causes a change it disrupts the law of conservation. This does not make interactionism a viable solution as it does not follow the logic made from already set ground laws of physics (Descartes R. , 1968). Some of Descartes' followers, like Malebranche and Geulinx, agreed that interaction between the mind and body was impossible. Every time this impossible feat occurred it was due to the intervention of God, hence the notion of Occasionalism was formed.

It seemed hard to believe that every instance of interaction should be credited to a miracle, so this idea lost much credit over time (Schmaltz T. , 2002). On the other hand some philosophers have thought to believe that the mind and body are one with each other. This idea was called Monism (from monas, a Greek word meaning " one") which was first promoted by Parmenides in the 5th Century B. C.. This idea branched out to many sub ideas dependent on the philosophers understanding of each (Stanton, W. L. 1983). Physicalism, an example of monism, was the idea that everything was physical.

In the past, physicalism was identified with materialism, but it became difficult to call certain supposed physical features of the world " material" (like the force binding particles in a nucleus together). Physicalism is a metaphysical notion, although it is often associated with the so-called scientific approach. Physicalism provided a suggestion on how to approach the mind-body problem; " if everything is physical, then it is probably in physical theories that we'll find the answers" (Feigl, M. 1963). A form of <https://assignbuster.com/descartes-view-of-the-mind-and-how-it-relates-to-the-human-being/>

monism that differs significantly is idealism, in which it states that only minds and mental concepts exist.

The physical is just a concept explained by the mental. The most famous idealist was perhaps Bishop Berkeley. Idealism solves the mind-body problem with ease: there is only the mental, so the problem of the interaction between mind and body is not a problem at all. Many of the counter-arguments advanced against idealism failed, and one of the interesting rejoinders that Berkeley provided was to note that idealism was at least as efficient as physicalism, saying that anything that could be explained on the assumption of the physical could just as easily be explained by reference to mental concepts only.

Many people object to the notion of idealism on the grounds that the foundation of the idea just seemed to be inadequate. Although idealism is not a valid solution it is still the subject of much study today (Nagel, T. 1998). Descartes' correspondence with Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia began in May 1643 when he was asked to describe in detail the interaction of the substances between mind and body. Descartes stated that the mind and body are distinct and separate substances which could fundamentally interact with each other. (Descartes R. 1968).

For each attribute there was a defining characteristic, which could have nothing in common. The question that arose was how could two different attributes, (mind and body) interact with one another when there was nothing in common? He answered this by simply stating that the concept of the mind-body union is primitive and this can stand on its own and it would

be difficult to conceive that there is a distinctive relationship between the mind on the body dissimilar to those of other notions. He alleged that there were four basic notions.

General notions apply to all substances, the extensions to bodies, of thought to minds and that of the mind-body union to human beings. There is no one theory that is sound and proven as it is impossible to measure or examine the mind. Thus far, the solution to the mind-body problem remains mostly unsolved for many. Descartes' view of dualism, although thoroughly supported by followers such as Malebranche and Geulinx, doesn't solve the Mind-body problem at all as the ideas are unable to be backed by scientific evidence.

A solution would need to explain how the mental processes are able to be created by the physical processes and vice versa and then be able to be demonstrated by scientific methods. Over the course of time many theorists and philosophers have been led to believe that they have solved the mind-body problem, but only to be refuted by others a period of time later. The mind-body problem, I believe, may be far too complex for the simple human mind to comprehend at this moment.