

## Further Reflection on the Descartes dualism of "separation of mind and matter" tendencies

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**Abstract:** Descartes's dualism contains a new idea that spirit can be distinguished from matter. But if we uphold the view that spirit, the mind and matter are completely isolated, and it is difficult for us to explain in conjunction with the interaction of mind and body. After another angle analysis of its theory, we found out that the blame for Descartes in fact not true, because as a spiritual entity, it does not necessarily mean physical entity separate from each other, there is no relationship. Here, "independence from one another" should not be understood as "isolated from one another."

### 1. Introduction

Descartes's theory of the relationship between mind and body is considered a kind of "duality of mind and body." The reason is that Descartes made completely clear difference exists between something and something spiritual substance (body), and even in some text, Descartes direct that "the soul of the flesh can not exist." But this dual concept of mind and matter triggered a series of puzzling question: if mind and matter (body) is completely different, can be detached from each other, then the interaction between the two is how possible? And how in the reality of "I" which completed the combination? Faced with these difficulties, we need to analyze what theory led to the emergence of dualism problems. Furthermore, from this theory itself, can we respond to this problem?

We first need to examine how Descartes distinguishes mind from matter (the flesh). From Descartes' theory we can see a clear tendency that he advocates that mind and things are two different things: "On the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea about myself that I am just a thinking There is no extension of things, but on the other hand, I have a clear idea about the flesh that it is an extension of things that cannot be thought of. From Descartes' theory we can see a clear tendency that he advocates that mind and things are two different things: "On the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea about myself that I am just a thinking There is no extension of things, but on the other hand, I have a clear idea about the flesh that it is an extension of things that cannot be thought of. That is to say, spirit is a thinking without extension, which is different from the extended material.

Then is this kind of materialistic mind or soul, whether it is an attribute, a concept or an independent thing? Descartes's answer is: the spirit and the substance can be used as a completely different entity when discussing the mind, we are actually talking about a physical. This is crucial to his theory. Only when the spirit is determined and the mind is an entity distinct from the material can it be possible to show that the mind can exist independently of the material.

Descartes covered this issue in his second meditation. Here, Descartes established his conviction of existence by proposing "I think." Accordingly, he pointed out that he is an ideological being, and his essence is thinking, that is, "I am a thing in thinking."<sup>1</sup> In the sixth meditation, he further states that "I", or that th Descartes, *Meditations of First Philosophy*, translated by Pang Jingren, Beijing, Commercial Press, June 1986, p. 29.e essence of the mind lies in thinking. Thought is the spiritual, spiritual attributes. "I have not noticed anything other than my own nature or nature except I am a thought-being. I will take it for granted that my essence is merely the fact that I am an idea being. "<sup>2</sup> So the soul is not a species of property, but with the thinking of the property of things. This is clear

<sup>1</sup> Descartes, *Meditations of First Philosophy*, translated by Pang Jingren, Beijing, Commercial Press, June 1986, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Descartes, *Meditations of First Philosophy*, translated by Pang Jingren, Beijing, Commercial Press, June 1986, p. 85.

from the second and third sets of refutations and replies in the Appendix to this book. In the proof attached to the second set of refutations, he demonstrates how spirit can be an entity that can be separated from matter. An entity is "something that we know exists in it."<sup>3</sup> In other words, an entity is something in which a property or property that we recognize exists in which the mind is the entity to which the attribute of thinking belongs.

Of course, there is no lack of objections to this view. Hobbes made a counter-argument to this kind of spiritual entity theory. Hobbes first recognized the notion that "I am a thinking thing" at the outset. He thinks the theory "is very good, because from my thinking or I have a concept, I can deduce that I have thinking, because I think and I am thinking, both mean ..." Further, "From what I think, I come to existence; nothing more than thinking is nothing." But then Hobbes thinks Descartes confused the existence of one thing and its function: "Mr. Descartes Think of sensible things and reason for a moment. "He does not think we can deduce" we are thinking "from the assertion that" we can think. " He believes that thinking is a human attribute. Therefore, he thinks a thinking "thing" must be some kind of material thing. Because "in the absence of a subject, we cannot comprehend anything, just as there is not one thing in mind that we cannot understand."<sup>4</sup>

Here Hobbes did not sort out the concept of "spirit" and "thinking." For Descartes, "thinking" is an attribute of "spirit." In a fundamental sense, the most accurate formulation of Descartes' thinking should be "I am a thinking spirit." Descartes thinks that mind and reason are not just actions and functions. Of course, reason is not the same thing as understanding, but when we regard reason as "something we understand," then obviously they are the same thing.

From this we can see that Descartes treats the spirit as something different from the material, not just as something attached to the material. This idea is bestowed upon him by a clear understanding of his understanding that he is nothing other than thinking. In particular, it is important to emphasize Descartes's attempt to make the spirit an entity. Descartes advocates that spirit is a thinking entity, and that this thinking nature does not necessarily require a material entity. Therefore, the spirit must be established as an entity.

## 2. Question of Descartes dualism

From this we can see that Descartes explained the substance of spirit based on the concept of "I think". In this sense, the spirit and the body do make a difference. However, if we really think that the spirit and the flesh will be independent and non-interfering, we will immediately face many difficult problems. First, if we really support this assertion, then we must verify the existence of a mindlessness in reality. Even if we advocate that there is no theoretical problem, the crux of the problem lies in the fact that the spirit is always "physically in one form." If the mind and the object are two completely different entities, then how are they combined with "me"? If "I" is just a matter of thinking, does this mean that we can integrate this thinking into any body? As a result, human self-identity has received enormous challenges.

Further, if we insist that there is no relationship between the two, how do the two interact? For it is entirely plausible to suggest that the influence of the state of mind upon the body and the influence of the body on the state of the mind, although perhaps not conclusive, are all clear to me. What I do not understand is that if the two are different from each other, how are these effects possible? In fact, Descartes himself noticed the interplay between mind and body: "I believe this object [the flesh] ... is more real and more closely than mine to any other object ... I am physically and physically, Feeling all my appetite for food and my emotions. "<sup>5</sup> But his response to the question today seems to have failed. It is also very difficult for philosophers who persist in mind-matter dualism after Descartes to give a comparatively satisfactory explanation of the causal relationship between psychological and physical phenomena.

To sum up, we can simplify this dualism problem. We have encountered a difficult problem based

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<sup>3</sup> Descartes, *Meditations of First Philosophy*, translated by Pang Jingren, Beijing, Commercial Press, June 1986, p. 166.

<sup>4</sup> The contents of the above refutation and defense can be found in the appendix of "The First Philosophical Contemplation", "The Third Set of Refutations: A Famous British Philosopher and Writer's Responses."

<sup>5</sup> Descartes, *Meditations of First Philosophy*, translated by Pang Jingren, Beijing, Commercial Press, June 1986, p. 83.

on the insistence on two premises. Our preconditions are: First, the essence of mind and object is different, there is no identity and they are isolated from each other. And we have no reason to understand how such two different and isolated things can cause causation. In this case, the challenge we face is that under these premises, the combination of heart and object in "me" may seem incomprehensible. In addition, mental interactions will not be possible, and we often seem to see these effects.

Then we need to test whether there is a problem with our observations or whether there is a problem with our theory of dichotomy.

The possible answers to the above questions are: First, according to Descartes' theory, the difference between the minds does not mean the two are fragmented. Second, if we do not accept Descartes' premise and do not discuss the relationship of mind and body within the theoretical framework of Descartes, then our censure of Cartesian dualism is practically meaningless.

We first return to Descartes theory itself. When Descartes talks about the mind and the objects, he first takes them as two different forms of ideas. That is to say, when we describe "mind breaking away from the object," we mean that we can establish our understanding of the mind and mind without relying on our knowledge of the notion of the object. If we can understand clearly and clearly an entity, and in this process we understand that the activity does not depend on another entity, in which case the two entities are truly distinguished. In other words, if we understand two things clearly and clearly as two different entities, we can say that there is some difference between the two.<sup>6</sup> In the appendix to "The First Philosophical Contemplation," Cartesian proofs the actual distinction between mind and body in a geometrical way, as evidenced in his statement: "We are not concerned with the spirit of the flesh It is quite clear to us that we also understand very clearly the spiritless spirit, and that such separation is due to the omnipotence of God and can be clearly understood by me."<sup>7</sup> This means that two things can be separated from one another To open (at the level of understanding), so there is a real difference between the two.

In this way, it is necessary to answer the question of whether it is possible to answer the real distinction between the spiritual (mind) and the physical (physical) body and to answer the question of whether we can understand the matter without knowledge of the spirit. Descartes believes this is achievable because both are clearly and clearly understood, in other words, both entities are gifted and have totally different properties. So we can understand each of them clearly and clearly.

In this way, we can actually find out that in Descartes, the distinction between mind and body does not mean that they are completely separated and different from each other, but merely mean that we can separately establish the two Concept. There are differences between the two entities, but these differences are based on clearly understood concepts and exist as two different forms of ideas. So in the theory of Descartes itself, the relationship between the soul and the object is not isolated, but "distinction." From this point of view, therefore, there is a difference between the mind and the object, which can be understood independently of one another and can be recognized from each other, but the two do not necessarily exist from each other.

That is to say, we must accept Cartesian notions of "clear understandings" and "single minds" to illustrate the distinction between mind and body. The "Clear Understanding" guarantees the distinction between the two as different forms of perception. From this premise, it seems that we can not deduce from Cartesian theory "the dualism that causes mental isolation", though he himself may be inclined to this view.

On the other hand, Descartes's analysis of the nature of the mind does have some places worth reflecting on. In his sixth meditation, Descartes talks about the spiritual as an indivisible reality that corresponds to an object of extensibility and divisibility. But the point is that the indivisibility of the mind is extremely questionable. Descartes assumes that the mind is an object, claiming that the mind is not one or a group of attributes. But this is not well argued. We know that mental entities have the attributes of thinking, but the attributes of thinking must be attributed to a single entity? According to the Descartes definition of entities we mentioned earlier, we can see that entities necessarily have

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<sup>6</sup> Descartes, *Meditations of First Philosophy*, translated by Pang Jingren, Beijing, Commercial Press, June 1986, p. 79-85.

<sup>7</sup> Descartes, *Meditations of First Philosophy*, translated by Pang Jingren, Beijing, Commercial Press, June 1986, p.175 .

some kind of attribute, but is it necessary for an attribute to be connected to an entity? This anti-push set up it? We set the spirit of material entities were A, B, the corresponding thinking, the extended attributes were a, b. In Cartes, where a is an attribute of A, and a can not be an attribute of B, then A is different from B, can it be deduced that A itself is an entity that is different from everything else, including B? Descartes only refers to a series of opposite properties, a and non-a, b and non-b, then the question is if we add to the outside attributes in this sequence? Descartes argues that a is the only attribute of A. That is to say A is a single thing. But in fact we may attribute other attributes a1, a2, etc. to A, then what we mean by A is different from A by Descartes. In other words, if according to Descartes's assertion: A only a property, then a can only belong to A. The key is to examine the connection between A and a, A and a concept of what are. Are they really the same concept of mind and mind as we are referring to? In Descartes the mind is single, just thinking. Is it the single heart that Descartes calls Descartes when we talk about relationships? If we give other attributes to the mind, then there is no point in discussing Descartes' separation of heart and soul, for we have given up the mind of that single attribute.

I think this is the central issue we have in our relations with Cartesian mind-body dualism. The core of Descartes' theory is not to regard spirit as attribute, but thinking as attribute. This property, attributed to an entity, so that we can clearly understand the difference between the two. Therefore, in fact, Descartes is going to explain only the independence of "I think," and other doubts about dualism are "by-products" caused by this purpose. So we see a lot of vague arguments. So perhaps the root cause of the dualism problems we mentioned earlier may be that we mistakenly equate what we understand as the "mind" concept with Descartes's concept of mind as "entity." The censure of Descartes under such conditions did not in any way respond correctly to Descartes' problems

So, as far as the conclusion is concerned, what Descartes is talking about is just a conceptual entity that is based on a clear understanding of the separation from other entities. In other words, this separation can only be established in a system that Descartes himself has built. In Descartes' own system, we can not say with certainty that the two are isolated, because the real difference between the mind and the body does not necessarily lead to the isolation of the two according to our previous view. And once we get out of the theoretical framework of Descartes to discuss dualism, we are no longer talking about the binary relations Descartes talks about. Therefore, when we label Descartes with a "dualist" label, it is necessary to examine the exact content of Descartes' doctrine in more detail.

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