

Edited by

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JUST THE ARGUMENTS

100

**of the Most
Important
Arguments
in Western
Philosophy**

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In Memory of Mark Bruce (1961–2001). Never Forget.

nature always divisible, and the mind is entirely indivisible. For, as a matter of fact, when I consider the mind, that is to say, myself inasmuch as I am only a thinking thing, I cannot distinguish in myself any parts, but apprehend myself to be clearly one and entire; and although the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body, yet if a foot, or an arm, or some other part, is separated from my body, I am aware that nothing has been taken away from my mind. And the faculties of willing, feeling, conceiving, etc. cannot be properly speaking said to be its parts, for it is one and the same mind which employs itself in willing and in feeling and understanding. But it is quite otherwise with corporeal or extended objects, for there is not one of these imaginable by me which my mind cannot divide into parts, and which consequently I do not recognise as being divisible; this would be sufficient to teach me that the mind or soul of man is entirely different from the body, if I had not already learned it from other sources. (Descartes, 196)

- P1. My body has the property of being such that it is divisible, capable of being divided into like self-subsistent parts that are also component physical bodies (bodily divisibility).
- P2. My mind does not have the property of being such that it is divisible in the comparable sense as that above into self-subsistent parts that are also component minds (mental indivisibility).
 - C1. My mind \neq my body (Leibniz' Law, P1, P2).
- P3. Only entities constituted by like parts are capable of being destroyed (concept of destructibility).
 - C2. My mind, unlike my body, is indestructible; from which it further follows that the mind or soul, unlike the body, as religion teaches as an article of faith, is immortal (P2, C1, P3).

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Princess Elisabeth and the Mind–Body Problem

Jen McWeeny

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The mind-body problem exposes the inconsistencies that arise when mind and body are conceived as ontologically distinct entities. Human experience clearly shows that our minds interact with our bodies. When we will to walk, our legs usually move in the intended direction; when we become ill, the sharpness of our cognitive capacities is often compromised; when we are sad, we are frequently moved to tears; and so on. Philosophers who reject the identity of mind and body or mind and brain face the task of explaining these relations by illuminating the precise manner in which the mind moves the body and the body affects the mind. It is unsurprising, then, that the mind-body problem was first articulated as a response to René Descartes' dualistic philosophy. For Descartes, mind¹ is *res cogitans*, a nonextended, immaterial substance whose essential nature is to think, and body is its conceptual opposite – *res extensa*, a material substance with a particular shape that is extended and located in space. In its Cartesian form, the mind-body problem asks how an immaterial thing can move a material thing.

Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia (1618–80), also known as “The Princess Palatine,” was the first philosopher to articulate the mind-body problem in the form of an argument and the first to elicit Descartes' serious attention to the matter, although the mind-body problem is rarely attributed to her. Princess Elisabeth lived most of her life in Holland, after her father had lost the throne of Bohemia and her family was exiled from their Palatinate lands and residence in Heidelberg during the Thirty Years' War. She was renowned for her knowledge of classical languages and her intellectual precision. As Descartes writes in his dedication to Princess Elisabeth at the beginning of *The Principles of Philosophy*, “You are the only person I have found so far who has completely understood all my previously published works” (Descartes *Philosophical Writings*, 2: 192). For the last years of her life, Princess Elisabeth served as abbess at a convent in Herford, Westphalia, and had wide jurisdiction over the surrounding territories.

A few scholars – most notably Pierre Gassendi – expressed their doubts about the possibility of mind-body interaction to Descartes shortly before Princess Elisabeth did (Gassendi, 1: 238). However, Gassendi's criticism was raised through a series of questions rather than an argument, and Descartes did not think that these questions were enough to produce a true “objection” to his philosophy (Descartes *Philosophical Writings*, 1: 266). Princess Elisabeth formulates the mind-body problem in her very first letter to Descartes, which is dated May 16, 1643. The general strategy that she employs is to use Descartes' understanding of motion as expressed in his *Optics* to show the impossibility of the mind's moving the body as long as

¹ In his discussion of the mind-body relation, Descartes makes no conceptual distinction between “mind” (French *l'esprit*, Latin *mens*) and “soul” (French *l'âme*, Latin *anima*).

the mind is conceived of as nonextended and immaterial.² In response, Descartes admits that Princess Elisabeth's criticism is justified in light of his previous writings because he has said “nearly nothing” of the union between body and soul that enables the two to act and to suffer together (Descartes and Princess Elisabeth, 107). He thus sets about this task in his ensuing correspondence with her and even devotes his final work, *The Passions of the Soul*, to devising a solution to Princess Elisabeth's query. All three of his “solutions” – the question has been improperly posed, the union of the mind and body cannot be known by the intellect, and “the seat of the soul” is the brain's pineal gland – have been deemed largely unsatisfying by the majority of commentators, including Princess Elisabeth.

That Descartes himself was unable to produce a viable solution to the mind-body problem is indicative of its significance to his own thinking and to that of those philosophers who would follow him. Indeed, many of modern philosophy's innovations after Descartes, such as Spinoza's monism, Malebranche's occasionalism, Leibniz' monads, and Hume's skepticism, can be read as responses to this seemingly intractable problem generated by the Cartesian system. Moreover, the persistence of the mind-body problem has given rise to the area of contemporary analytic philosophy known as “philosophy of mind.” Today, philosophers of mind most often frame the mind-body problem in terms of finding a physical explanation for mental phenomena, although some have preferred the term “nonmental” to “physical,” because current physics makes it difficult to specify adequately what we mean by “physical” (see Kim and Montero). Still others have conceded that the problem cannot be solved (see McGinn). Whereas most contemporary philosophers of mind answer the mind-body problem by ascribing to some form of physicalism, they disagree as to what mental states actually are. In recent years, lively debates have developed as to whether mental states consist in behavioral dispositions, functional processes, neural states, or something else besides. Such disputes indicate that Princess Elisabeth's call for an explication of the manner in which the mind moves the body is far from answered. The mind-body problem therefore remains one of the most influential and long-standing arguments in the history of Western philosophy.

I beseech you tell me how the soul of man (since it is but a thinking substance) can determine the spirits of the body to produce voluntary actions. For it seems every determination of movement happens from an impulse of

² Since Princess Elisabeth only refers to Descartes' *Meditations* in this early correspondence, there is some question as to whether she was indeed familiar with his physics when she wrote this letter. See Tollefson for an interpretation that indicates that Princess Elisabeth was referencing a passage in the *Optics*.

the thing moved, according to the manner in which it is pushed by that which moves it, or else, depends on the qualification and figure of the superficies of the latter. Contact is required for the first two conditions, and extension for the third. You entirely exclude extension from your notion of the soul, and contact seems to me incompatible with an immaterial thing. That is why I ask of you a definition of the soul more particular than in your Metaphysic – that is to say, for a definition of the substance separate from its action, thought. (Elisabeth, qtd. in Blom, 106)

- P1. If movement of a thing occurs, it must have been caused by one of the following: (a) self-impulsion, (b) being pushed by something else, or (c) the quality and shape of its surface (e.g., a marble).
- P2. Descartes defines the soul as nonextended and immaterial.
- P3. If movement of a thing occurs and that movement is caused by self-impulsion or being pushed by something else, then contact is required.
- P4. Nonextended and immaterial things (souls) cannot make contact with other things.
- C1. Nonextended and immaterial things cannot move themselves by self-impulsion and cannot move a thing by pushing it (*modus tollens*, P3, P4).
- P5. If movement of a thing occurs by the quality and shape of its surface, then extension is required.
- P6. Nonextended and immaterial things (souls) do not have extension.
- C2. Nonextended and immaterial things cannot move themselves by the quality and shape of their surface (*modus tollens*, P5, P6).
- P7. If (C1) and (C2), then the soul (as it is defined by Descartes) cannot cause the body to move.
- C3. Nonextended and immaterial things cannot move themselves by self-impulsion and the quality and shape of their surface and cannot move a thing by pushing it (conjunction, C1, C2).
- C4. The soul (as it is defined by Descartes) cannot cause the body to move (*modus ponens*, P7, C3).

Implication: If the soul does cause the body to move, then Descartes' definition of the soul is incorrect.

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Kripke's Argument for Mind–Body Property Dualism

Dale Jacquette

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Saul A. Kripke offers a much-discussed argument against mind–body identity theory, supporting some type of property dualism, in his 1970 Princeton University lectures on *Naming and Necessity*. The argument purports to explain the relation between mind and body, solving the mind–body problem at a comparatively high level of abstraction within the context of a comprehensive philosophical treatment of the nature of transworld identity conditions and the theory of reference in logic, semantics, and philosophy of language. Kripke fashions an interesting argumentative methodology with important metaphysical conclusions based on independently defensible distinctions in modal logic and referential semantics. As such, Kripke's