

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN SOUL AND BODY IN DESCARTES

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Meditation VI'te Descartes maddi nesnelere varlığı ile zihin-beden ayrılığı problemlerini tartışır. Bu konuda şunları söyler: "Ve en azından şu an bilmekteyim ki matematiğin konusu oldukları sürece maddi nesnelere var olabilirler zira onları açık ve seçik olarak algılamaktayım" (para. 72). Bundan sonra O, zihnin, hayal gücü (imagination) ve duyular aracılığıyla kavranan maddi nesnelere ilgili fikirlerin kaynağı olamayacağını göstermek için hayal gücü ile duyu algısı problemlerine değinir. Bu bağlamda şunları ileri sürer: "Onların [duyularla kavranan fikirlerin] benden kaynaklanmış olması mümkün görünmüyor; bu durumda tek alternatif onların diğer nesnelere gelmiş olduğudur" (para. 75). Descartes'e göre, açık ve seçik olarak kavradığımız her şey, onları kavrayışımızla uyum içinde Tanrı tarafından yaratılmaktadır. Bu noktadan hareketle aşağıdaki yargıya ulaşır: Sadece düşünen, yani uzamı olmayan, olduğum sürece kendimle ilgili açık ve seçik bir fikre, ve uzamı olan, yani düşünmeyen, bir şey olduğum sürece bedenle ilgili seçik bir fikre sahip olduğum için kesin olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır ki, benim (zihnim) bedenimden gerçekte ayrıdır ve beden olmaksızın varolabilir (para. 78).

Descartes'in zihin-beden ayrılığı ile ilgili bu tezi çoğunlukla düşünmeden varlık (existence)'a nasıl geçilebileceği sorunu açısından tartışılmıştır. Ne var ki, Descartes için zihin ve beden bir diğeri için gözardı edilemeyecek şekilde kendilerine özgü alanlara sahiptir. Bu nedenle Descartes'in bu tezini filozofun Meditation I'de bilimlerin yeniden inşası ile ilgili niyeti açısından ele almak istiyoruz. Descartes bu niyetini şöyle dile getirir: "Bilimler için sarsılmaz bir yapıyı inşa etmek için yeniden temellerin kendisinden başlamak gerekir" (para. 17). Eğer, Kennington'un belirttiği gibi, "Kartezyen [metodik] şüphe, kuramsal

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cevher metafiziğine değil, bilim yapısının (edifice) kesinlik arzeden temellerine ulaştıran bir araç” ise zihin-beden ayrılığı ile ilgili açık ve seçik kavrayışın bilimlerin kuşku duyulmayan temelleri açısından önemi nedir? Bu çalışmamızda Descartes'e göre, zihin-beden ayrılığı tezinin bilim yapısını saf matematik (nicelik) üzerine dayandırmak için gerekli olduğunu göstermeye çalışacağız.

Descartes'e göre, 'şüphe' en kesin olana, yani 'düşünce'ye, ulaştıran bir araç olduğu için, o aynı zamanda bilimin kuşku duyulmaz temellerinin atılması için de bir araçtır. Zihin kendisini doğrudan kavradığı ve kendisini en kesin olan bir şey olarak bulduğu anda açık ve seçik fikirlerin biricik kaynağının kendisi olduğunu, yani onların dışarıdan gelemeyeceğini farkederek. Buna göre, 'şüphe' aynı zamanda zihin-beden ayrılığı tezine ileten bir araç durumundadır. Bu noktadan hareketle denebilir ki, zihin saf matematik prensipleriyle ilgili açık ve seçik bir fikre sahip olduğu için saf matematiği kuşku duyulmaz olarak algılar. Böylece zihin kendisini zorunluluk alanı olarak ifşa eder. Diğer bir deyişle, zihin bedenden ayrı var olduğu için zorunluluğu kendisinden almakta ve saf matematiği kuşku duyulmaz olarak algılamaktadır. Eğer maddi bir şey var olacaksa o zihnin açık ve seçik fikirleriyle uyum içinde olmalıdır, yani zorunluluğunu düşünceden almalıdır. Bundan dolayı, şayet bilim temel niteliği uzam olan maddi nesnelere ilgilenecek ve onlar hakkında kesin bir bilgiye ulaşacaksa o saf matematiğin (nicelik) kuşku duyulmayan ilkelerine dayanmalıdır. Saf matematiğin kuşku duyulmaz karakterini ve bilimin saf matematik aracılığıyla geçerliliğini göstermek için Descartes saf matematiği düşüncenin tümüyle formal zorunluluğuna dayandırmış ve düşüncenin formal zorunluluğunun yine düşüncenin kendisinden kaynaklandığını göstermek için de zihin-beden ayrılığı tezini gerekli görmüştür.

In the *Meditation VI*, Descartes discusses the problem of the existence of material things and the distinction between mind (soul) and body. At the beginning, he remarks that “and at least I now know they [material things] are capable of existing, in so far as they are the subject-matter of pure mathematics, since I perceive them clearly and distinctly (para. 72).¹ From this point on, he gives attention to the problem of imagination and sense-perception in order to show how mind itself cannot be the

¹ Rene Descartes, “Meditations” in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch, vol. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 3-62.

source of the ideas of the material objects which are present to imagination and sense-perception. At this level, he remarks that "it seemed impossible that they [ideas perceived by the senses] should have come from within me; so the only alternative was that they came from other things" (para. 75).

Descartes tries to show the validity of this alternative, i.e., the possible existence of the external things by arguing that I know that "everything which I clearly and distinctly understand is capable of being created by God so as to correspond exactly with my understanding of it" (para. 78). From this starting point, since I have a clear and distinct idea of myself so long as "I am simply a thinking, i.e., not extended thing and have a distinct idea of body in so far as this is an extended, non-thinking thing" (para. 78), it is certain that I am really distinct from my body and can exist without it. This argument for the distinction of mind from body in Descartes has been discussed mostly from the question of how a transition from thought to existence is possible. It seems that for Descartes since there is a distinction between mind and body, both the concept of mind and of body should have their own scopes which cannot be disregarded in favor of one another. For that reason, we want to discuss the question of how we should understand the distinction between mind and body in terms of the foundational intention which is stated at the beginning of the *Meditation I*, "[to] start again right from the foundations" (para. 17) in order to build a stable edifice of science. Said more clearly, if "Cartesian doubt is a means to indubitable foundations of the edifice of science, and not to a theoretical metaphysics of substance,"² what is the significance of the clear and distinct (i.e., indubitable) understanding of the distinction between mind and body with respect to indubitable foundations of the edifice of science? In this paper, I hope to show that for Descartes the distinction between mind and body is required to base the edifice of science on pure mathematics (quantity).

In order to find an indubitable foundations of science, Descartes used 'doubt' as a means. After eliminating the ideas received by sensation and imagination, since they are not certain and indubitable knowledge in themselves, he realized that 'thought' alone manifests itself as indubitable. In other words, 'thinking itself is certain because it is the inner reality itself. Descartes remarks that "At last I have discovered it—thought; this alone is inseparable from me. I am, I exist—that is certain" (para. 27). For Descartes, thinking is certain since it shows itself as the most inner source

² Richard Kennington, "The 'Teaching of Nature' in Descartes' Soul Doctrine," *Review of Metaphysics* 26, no. 1 (September 1972), p. 101.

of knowledge, i.e., an 'act' itself: "I am thinking . . . I am, then in the strict sense only a thing that thinks" (para. 27). Since "I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason" (para. 27) I have an immediate self-consciousness. Therefore, direct and immediate access to the soul and the self is "independent not only from the perception of external objects but also from the perception of one's own body."³ This is because, the 'I' which is a thinking thing is "real and . . . truly exists" (para. 27). According to Descartes, the knowledge of the fact that 'I know that I exist' does not depend on things of whose existence 'I' is not aware.

At this point, Kennigton remarks that this fact does not exclude "the possible dependence of the existence or being of thinking on the existence or being of bodies."⁴ This is so because 'to think,' for Descartes, includes also 'to imagine' and 'to feel' (para. 28), and "to imagine is nothing else than to contemplate the figure or image of a corporeal thing" (para. 72-73). In this context, we should realize that the essential point Descartes refers to is that even though the objects which are present to sense-perception and imagination can be easily doubted, the existence of the source of the cognition is indubitable. As Descartes remarks, the 'I' is a thing that thinks, i.e., a thing that doubts, affirms, denies, and also which imagines and has sensory perceptions, even though the objects of sensory experience and imagination may have no existence outside it. Nonetheless, the modes of thinking as cases of sensory perception and imagination, so long as they are simply modes of thinking, exist within the 'I' (para. 35).

Since the "subjectivity of thinking"⁵ in Descartes is nothing else but the act or active and in no respect passive, i.e., 'acted on' by anything without,⁶ it is the basis for clear and distinct understanding. What does Descartes mean by 'clearness' and 'distinctness' of understanding? In the *Principles of Philosophy* I: 45, Descartes remarks:

I term that clear which is present and apparent to an alternative mind, in the same way as we assert that we see the objects clearly when, being present to the regarding eye, they operate upon it with sufficient strength. But the distinct is that which is so precise and different from all other ob-

³ Therese-Anne Druart, "The Soul and Body Problem: Avicenna and Descartes" in *Arabic Philosophy and West: Continuity and Interaction*, edit. Therese-Anne Druart, (Washington, D. C., 1988), p. 35.

⁴ Kennigton, "The Teaching of Nature," p. 106.

⁵ Ivor Leclere, "The Ontology of Descartes" *Review of Metaphysics* 34 no. 2 (December 1980), p. 311.

⁶ Ibid.

jects that it contains within itself nothing but what is clear.

It seems that, as Gilson notes, clearness comes to ideas from the fact that we ascribe to them all that belongs to their nature, distinction comes to them from the fact that we deny to them all that does not belong to their nature.⁷ However, when we recall the fact that mind or soul is the act of thinking and the most certain, we can say that 'clearness' and distinctness' of the ideas should stem from the formal principles of thought which are the principles of identity and of non-contradiction. In this context, Gilson remarks that "for Descartes, however, this principle [the principle of identity] merely expresses an abstract and purely formal necessity of thought... In other words, the principle of identity remains in Cartesianism an abstract principle and formal regulator of thought."⁸ Precisely because the source of the clearness and distinctness of the ideas (together with the principles of identity and of non-contradiction) is the mind itself, for Descartes, 'being' or 'existence' is in turn added to 'thought' in order to give us a 'thinking being.'

Therefore, for Descartes, the immediate access to the soul can take place thanks to these formal principles of thought itself. Descartes puts this fact in the following manner:

I know that even bodies are not strictly perceived by the senses or the faculty of imagination but by the intellect alone, and that their perception derives not only from their being touched or seen but from their being understood; and in view of this I know plainly that I can achieve an easier and more evident perception of my own mind than of anything else (para. 34).

This fact also explains why 'certainty' of thought does not presuppose knowledge of bodies. Since the principle of identity and of non-contradiction and clearness and distinctness of ideas emanate from the act of thinking itself, thought finds 'certainty' within itself and therefore does not need anything outside so as to establish its identity and certainty. At this point, can we suppose any relationship between the fact that mind, as an act of thinking, is the source of clear and distinct ideas and that, in Descartes, the doubt exempts mathematics?

⁷ Etienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), pp. 152-160.

⁸ Gilson, *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, trans. M. A. Wauck (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), p. 97.

As Kennington observes, the specific list of dubitables does not include mathematics, arithmetic's, or geometry. Instead, in the first part of dubitables Descartes considers 'the heaven, air, earth, colors, figures, sound, and all external things; in the second part, he regards himself as having "no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, no senses" (Meditations I and II).⁹ It seems that since arithmetic and geometry deal only with the simplest and most general things, regardless of whether they really exist in nature or not, "they contain something certain and indubitable" (para. 20). We should also remark that for Descartes the simpler and the more universal things are real (para. 20).

On this stage, we can suppose that if the simplest and the most universals are the real, this is because they are the objects of pure thinking which is the most certain. Stated differently, pure mathematics is exempted from the list of dubitables because they are not present to the sense-perception and imagination but only to the mind itself. In that context, Descartes writes as a preparatory remarks that "for whether I am awake or asleep, two or three added together are five, and a square has no more than four sides. It seems impossible that such transparent truths should incur any suspicion of being false" (para. 20). After accepting that "whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true" (para. 35) as a general rule, Descartes tries to explain the reason why thinking thing, as a source of clear and distinct ideas, plays a role in the exemption of mathematics from the list of dubitables. He remarks that through habitual belief he thought that there was something that he perceived clearly, although he did not in fact do so. For Descartes, the origin of this fault was the belief that there were things outside him which were the sources of his ideas (para. 36). However, by means of doubt, he realize that "it is now true that I exist" (para. 36) and that the only source of clear and distinct ideas is the thing that thinks and exists. Based on this fact, Descartes argues that "[I] bring it about that two and three added together are more or less than five, or anything of this kind in which I see a manifest contradiction" (para. 36).

It seems that the least doubt on the pure mathematical principles leads mind to a contradiction. In other words, since mathematical principles are clear and distinct ideas of the mind, to cast them into doubt is for thought to contradict with itself. At this point, the close relation between 'clearness' of the ideas and the principle of identity and between distinctness of ideas and the principle of non-contradiction should be recalled.

⁹ Kennington, "The Finitude of Descartes' Evil Genius" in *Eternal Truths and the Cartesian Circle*, edit. W. Doney (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1987), p. 132.

Henceforth, for Descartes, the principles of pure mathematics find their validity in the abstract and purely formal necessity of thought. If this is the case, what is true and necessary for mathematics should be clear and distinct though and vice versa. This standpoint helps us understand better the parallelism between the case of pure mathematics and the state of thought. Just as, since having immediate access to itself, mind does not presuppose knowledge of body (i.e., certain of itself), so pure mathematics which deals only with the simplest and most general things, regardless of whether they really exist in nature or not, contains something certain and indubitable.

Now, we should ask the question of how Descartes can explain that the certainty of pure mathematical principles and purely formal necessity of thought are valid also for the corporeal things even though external world could not be taken into account for the validity of these principles. What is the significance of the air, earth, colors, figures, sound, eyes... etc., which are itemized in the list of dubitables before, with respect to formal necessity of thought and indubitable principles of pure mathematics? Can we argue that since Descartes stated second intention to seek an indubitable foundations for the sciences and then found the thinking thing as the most certain and did not cast mathematics into doubt, he presupposed that the necessity and certainty of mathematical principles correspond with the knowledge of corporeal things? In this context, Descartes notes that "I know that everything which I clearly and distinctly understand is capable of being created by God so as to correspond exactly with my understanding of it" (para. 78). As is well realized, Descartes does not say here that 'I know clearly and distinctly that...' For that reason, it is not obvious whether or not this starting point of the argument is certain and indubitable. Nevertheless, it is clear that the main point he wants to refer to is that 'if there will be any corporeal thing outside the mind, it should exist in accordance with the purely formal necessity of thought.' Stated differently, nothing corporeal deserves to be thought of as 'existent' unless it corresponds with the clear and distinct understanding of mind. If all necessity and clarity of ideas belong only to the realm of thought, anything which exists cannot have any necessity by itself and then has to take its necessity from thought itself. Therefore, existence depends on the clear and distinct thought: "I think, therefore, I am."

From this point of view, mind or thought seems to be necessary but insufficient condition for the existence of body and the external things. It is necessary condition because if and only if mind has clear and distinct understanding of anything, it (a thing) can be said to exist. Mind is insufficient because "everything which I clearly and distinctly understand is ca-

pable of being created by God" (para. 78), i.e., can take its existence from God. If this is the case, "since I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is a simply an extended thing, non-thinking thing" (para. 78), this distinct idea of extension should stem from the thought itself. Precisely because of this fact, Descartes invokes imagination and sense-perception in order to refer to the existence of the body and external things. In this context, Kennington remarks that "only by reliance on sensation, hitherto always dubitable in the work, does Descartes succeed in making the only argument in the *Meditations* for the unity of mind and body. This de facto unity is accompanied by acknowledged ignorance of the mode of interaction of mind and body."¹⁰

Here it can be supposed that Descartes puts 'thought' and 'sensation' on a diametrically opposite places in explaining the distinction and then the unity between soul and body: from the standpoint of thought, there must be a distinction, but, from the standpoint of sensation, there should be a unity between them. Therefore, since there is a distinction between soul and body, mind has a clear and distinct ideas on the one hand, and since the unity of mind and body is perceived by the senses, there arises some "teleological [i.e., the natural, non-scientific] judgments"¹¹ which are never understood clearly and distinctly, like good and bad. However, if the clearness and distinctness of the ideas and then the validity and necessity of mathematical principles belong to realm of thought itself, how can Descartes concede that body is a machine and corporeal things depend on their physical laws (mechanism)? If mathematical principles are certain regardless the things outside of thought and physical things cannot be the source of distinct and clear ideas, how can we argue that physics (together with astronomy and medicine), which is necessarily concerned with things which exist, is based on the laws of corporeal things?

Thinking logically, if corporeal things have their own laws (mechanism), they should be the origin of the clear and distinct ideas of themselves, and if there is a distinction between mind and body, there should be a gap between the rules of thought (together with the principles of mathematics) and the corporeal things. Descartes might reply to these possible objections in the following way: Physics is dependent on the image to attest the existence of its corporeal objects, but geometry and arithmetic are not. Hence the distinction between physics and mathematics

¹⁰ Kennington, "The Teaching of Nature," p. 114.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 116.

refers to the distinction between imagination and pure understanding. "When the mind understand, it in some way turns towards itself and inspects one of the ideas which are within it: but when it imagines, it turns towards the body and looks at something in the body which conforms to an idea understood by the mind or perceived by the senses" (para. 73).

In this context, we should realize that since both pure understanding and imagination are the modes of thought, they stem from the same origin: 'thought.' Besides this, imagination depends also on sensation because "corporeal nature which is the subject matter of pure mathematics" (para. 74) is perceived by means of the senses. Therefore, through senses and imagination, the mind perceives or understands the existence of corporeal nature and, by turning towards itself, it realizes the necessity and laws of the external things. Since it is necessary condition for the clear and distinct understanding of corporeal existence, the mind finds itself as distinct from the body on the one hand, and, since it is insufficient condition for the existence of body and external things, the mind finds itself as depending on the sensation and imagination so as to establish the edifice of science. However, if the science of physics will be valid as being subject matter to mathematics, and mathematics manifests its indubitable characteristics in the purely formal necessity of thought, thought (mind) should have an immediate access to itself, i.e., be distinct from the body.

If this is the case, since the human mind can exist apart from the human body, the science of physics can take its necessity from the clear and distinct ideas of mind, i.e., be valid by means of pure mathematics, and since the human body can exist as a living body apart from the human mind, i.e., human body is understood distinctly—because it is simply an extended, non-thinking thing—the science of physics can consider the human body as its own subject matter. This is because when we accept human body only as an extended thing, there disappears the distinction between the human body and the other living things.

In conclusion, for Descartes, since 'doubt' is a means to discover the most certain which is 'thought,' it is also a means for establishing the indubitable foundations of science. As soon as mind has an immediate access to itself and finds itself as the most certain, it realizes that the unique source of distinct and clear ideas is itself, i.e., they (ideas) cannot be originated from anything outside itself. Accordingly, 'doubt' becomes a means to the distinction between mind and body. From this standpoint, since mind has a clear and distinct idea of pure mathematical principles, it grasps pure mathematics as indubitable. Therefore, mind manifests itself as the realm of necessity. If anything corporeal is to exist, it should be in

correspondence with the clear and distinct ideas of mind, i.e., take its necessity from thought itself. Stated differently, since mind exists apart from body, thought takes its necessity from itself and finds pure mathematics as indubitable. Therefore, if the science is to deal with corporeal things of which the basic attribute is 'extension' and has a certain knowledge of them, it should be based on the indubitable principles of pure mathematics (quantity). Accordingly, in order to show the indubitable characteristics of pure mathematics and the validity of science in terms of pure mathematics, Descartes based it (pure mathematics) on the purely formal necessity of thought and so as to show that thought takes its formal necessity from itself, he saw necessary to make a distinction between soul and body.

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