

## Descartes on Mind and Body

### 1 Bodies

A body is bounded by a shape, is enclosed in a place, excludes other bodies from the space it occupies, can be perceived by the senses, can be moved in space. (Second Meditation, 44L)

The essence of material things: extension, quantified in length, breadth, and depth. Bodies have parts, sizes, shapes, positions, and they can move in space. (Fifth Meditation, 58R)

### 2 Minds A (Second Meditation)

What about thinking? Here I make my discovery: Thought exists; it alone cannot be separated from me. I am; I exist — this is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking; or perhaps it could also come to pass that if I were to cease all thinking I would then utterly cease to exist. At this time I admit nothing that is not necessarily true. I am therefore precisely nothing but a thinking thing; that is, a mind, or intellect, or understanding, or reason — words whose meaning I was previously ignorant. Yet I am a true thing and am truly existing; but what kind of thing? I have said it already: a thinking thing. What else am I: I will set my imagination in motion. I am not that concatenation of members we call the human body. Neither am I even some subtle air infused into these members ... For I have supposed these things to be nothing. The assumption still stands; yet nevertheless I am something. But is it perhaps the case that these very things which I take to be nothing, because they are unknown to me, nevertheless are in fact no different from that me that I know? This I do not know ... I know that I exist; I ask now who is this “I” whom I know? Most certainly, in the strict sense the knowledge of this “I” does not depend upon things whose existence I do not yet know. (Second Meditation, 44R)

### 3 Minds B (Sixth Meditation)

(1) I know that all the things that I clearly and distinctly understand can be made by God such as I understand them. (2) For this reason, my ability clearly and distinctly to understand one thing without another suffices to make me certain that the one thing is different from the other, since they can be separated from each other, at least by God. The question as to the sort of power that might effect such a separation is not relevant to their being thought to be different. (3) For this reason, from the fact that I know that I exist, and that at the same time I judge that obviously nothing else belongs to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing, I rightly conclude that my essence consists entirely in my being a thinking thing. (4) And although perhaps (or rather, as I shall soon say, assuredly) I have a body that is very closely joined to me, (5) nevertheless, because on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, insofar as I am merely a thinking thing and not an extended thing, and because on the other hand I have a distinct idea of a body insofar as it is merely an extended thing and not a thinking thing, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it. (numbers added) (Sixth Meditation, 64L)

### 4 Minds C (Sixth Meditation)

there is a great difference between a mind and a body, in that a body, by its very nature, is always divisible. On the other hand, a mind is utterly indivisible. For when I consider the mind, that is, myself insofar as I am only a thinking thing, I cannot distinguish any parts within me; rather, I understand myself to be manifestly one complete thing. Although the entire mind seems to be united to the entire body, nevertheless, were a foot or an arm or any other bodily part to be amputated, I know that nothing has been taken away from the mind on that account. Nor can the faculties of willing, sensing, understanding, and so on be called "parts" of the mind, since it is one and the same mind that wills, senses, and understands. On the other hand, there is no corporeal or extended thing I can think of that I may not in my thought easily divide into parts; and in this way I understand that it is divisible. This consideration alone would suffice to teach me that the mind is

wholly diverse from the body, had I not yet know it well enough in any other way.  
(Sixth Meditation, 67L)

## 5 Objection from Princess Elisabeth

tell me how the soul of a man can determine the bodily spirits to make voluntary actions (the soul being only a thinking substance). For it seems that all determination of motion occurs through the impulsion of the thing moved in such a way that it is pushed by the thing that moves it, or else, by the particular qualities and shape of the surface of the latter. Contact is required by the first two conditions, and extension by the third. You exclude entirely the latter from the notion you have of the soul, and the former appears to me incompatible with an immaterial thing. (Elisabeth, Princess of Bohemia, 94L)