



RENE DESCARTES (1595-1650)

Mind–Body Dichotomy

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René Descartes, a famous mathematician and scientist turned philosopher, is considered to be the father of modern philosophy, who paved the path to certainty of knowledge through skepticism and said that all knowledge is the product of reasoning based on self-evident assumptions. Dichotomy of mind and body, as proposed by Descartes, was considered to be the turning point in the modern philosophy, which provided the basis of the certainty of knowledge and interventionist medical practice¹. Evidently, Descartes immortalized his method of doubting to achieve certainty of knowledge.

Descartes was born at La Haye (now called Descartes), France. He went to Jesuit College of La Fleche in 1606 where students were trained for career in military engineering, government administration and the judiciary. In the journey of his intellectual acquisition, Descartes embarked on the field of mathematics, science, law and philosophy. His mathematical and deductive methodological approach underlined the contours of philosophical reasoning and certainty of the knowledge. His first substantial work was the *Regulae or Rules for the Direction of Mind* written in 1628-29 and published in 1701, which reflected his interest in scientific methods. Issac Beechman, a contemporary mathematician, exerted immense influence on him and shared some common approach and methods in dealing with problems of science and mathematics.

Descartes was influenced by the deductive methods of mathematics and understood that key to the contemporary scientific advances is in the discovery of proper method. The thirteen books of Euclid's *Elements* was a model of deductive methods for him. However, Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), Descartes contemporary, was able to synthesize the experimental methods of deductive and inductive reasoning. Descartes' commitment to scientific methods and certainty of knowledge coincided with Renaissance skepticism rooted in Europe's religious crisis and protestant Reformation. However, Descartes postulated that "I think, therefore I exist", which proves that there is a thinking being which exists. Even though I doubt that I don't exist – I cannot doubt a doubter and his having sensory perceptions. While "I", the doubter, is a thinking and spatially non-extended soul, the body must also exist, which is a non-thinking and spatially extended substance responsible for sensory perceptions in that it is non-thinking and spatially extended. Descartes deductively postulated the existence of mind and body, and its interaction, and provided the basis of certainty of knowledge¹. His confrontations in Paris in 1628 with

Chandoux that science could only be based on probabilities brought him enormous applause. In 1628, Descartes moved to Holland and remained there for almost 21 years. During this period he wrote and published many books – *Rules for the Direction of Mind* (1628/29), *Le Monde or The World* (written in 1629), *Discourse on Method* (1637), *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), *The Principles of Philosophy* (1644), and *The Passions of the Souls* (1649). Descartes' *The Principles of Philosophy* was the manuscript of his mature Cartesian system in general on metaphysics and physics. Descartes' work on the *Passions of the Souls* was a combination of psychology, physiology and ethics, which contained his theory of two way causal interaction of mind-body in the pineal gland.

Cartesian dualism maintained that soul and body are completely different kind of substance but they are closely joined and intermingled². Descartes gave pain analogy to understand the dichotomous interaction of the mind and body³. The happiness and ecstasy felt in the mind on certain news is not the intellectual joy, but it sends sensations of joy from brain to heart and excite the small nerve there. Similarly, changes in the body can create sensations in the soul irrespective of its causation¹. By his mechanistic view of bodily functions, and interaction with the soul, though they being two separate entities, Descartes raised a pertinent question for the medical interventionists of today's modern world that – a resolution and/or correct understanding of mind-body interaction would provide the basis of the medical interventions. The answer is not simple – though Descartes would be considered pioneer and more close to modern biopsychosocial theory of medical intervention.

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