


Research Article

Cartesian Dualism: Bridging Descartes' Mind-Body Dichotomy to Contemporary Psychology and Mental Health

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Abstract: René Descartes' Cartesian dualism, which separates the mind (*res cogitans*) and body (*res extensa*) into two distinct substances, has been a foundational concept in Western philosophy. This dualistic framework has significantly influenced the development of modern psychology and approaches to mental health. However, as contemporary psychology shifts towards more integrative and biopsychosocial models, questions arise regarding the continued relevance of Descartes' dichotomy. This study explores the philosophical underpinnings of Cartesian dualism and critically examines its influence on the historical and current understanding of mental processes and disorders. By analyzing key developments in psychological theory and mental health practice, the research investigates how Cartesian thinking persists in certain models and is rejected or reinterpreted in others. Additionally, the study evaluates the practical consequences of maintaining a dualistic mindset in therapeutic settings, particularly in cases where psychological and physiological symptoms intersect. The research proposes a framework that bridges classical philosophical insights with contemporary scientific understanding, aiming to promote a more holistic view of the human person in mental health discourse. Ultimately, this study contributes to the ongoing dialogue between philosophy and psychology, advocating for an approach that honors both the distinctiveness and interdependence of mind and body.

Keywords: Cartesian dualism, *res cogitans*, *res extensa*, Rene Descartes, substance, mind, body

1. Introduction

The doctrine of dualism had begun even before the days of Rene Descartes. It started during the ancient times in the history of philosophy. The philosopher who is believed to have pioneered and formulated this dualism was Plato. He had his two-world theory which presents to us two worlds – the ideal world and the phenomenal world. For him, this ideal world refers to the world of ideas. By the term ideas, he didn't mean the "idea" which we commonly learn in school which means image in our minds; rather, he meant the ideal forms. These ideal forms imply perfection. To exemplify, the ideal form of a square is a perfect square, beauty, perfect beauty and so on. For Plato, this world is the real world because he believed the eternity and immutability of these ideas or forms. Hence, he concluded that this world is the ultimate reality. On the other hand, there also exists the other world, the phenomenal world, or the empirical World. This world, for him, is the world which is in constant change – the world of becoming. However, he didn't mean that this world is unreal. For him, this world is just less real than the former because the latter world displays mutability and temporality which forfeits the nature of the ideal world. Hence, this world, for Plato is just a mere copy or shadow of the ideal world.

After establishing this metaphysical view of the world, Plato then speculates that the nature of man lies in this two-world view or dualism. Plato assigned the human body to the phenomenal world while the soul, the ideal world. Same principle could be applied to the body and soul. The human body being in the phenomenal world is material, temporal, subject to change and it cannot live and move apart from the soul. On the other hand, the soul which belongs to the ideal world is immaterial, immutable, eternal, and can exist apart from the human body. It is only that the soul is being imprisoned in the body temporarily.

The successor/student of Plato who was Aristotle denied the former's theory. He

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proposed a new theory which explains that everything is a composition of matter and form. These two exist complementarily. This means that this 'form' cannot exist without the other thing which is the matter and vice versa. Hence, this has led Aristotle to explain the union of body and soul, the physical and spiritual, respectively, and that the soul is the form of the body (Boeri, 2018). The two different teachings have created the dilemma in the world as to which is which. However, different those may be, those metaphysical views still point out to one certain thing and that is it affects how man is viewed.

What does such metaphysical view imply in the field of anthropology, anyway? Its implications would point out that man is a composition of material and spiritual substances. Plato's dualistic view had greatly influenced Rene Descartes in his view of man. However, Descartes' dualistic view had some sort of modification. Who is Rene Descartes, anyway and how did he modify the dualism of Plato?

Rene Descartes, a proponent of rationalism, was a French mathematician and philosopher. He was known as the Father of the Modern Philosophy because he was the one who pioneered it. It was during his time that the great shift from Theocentric to the Anthropocentric happened.

Rene Descartes started an intellectual revolt asking if a man can know if a man has a basis of knowledge, and if a man can know that he knows – putting it simply, he sought the truth. Why did he come up to ask these questions? By the advent of industrialization, as history teaches, man now begins to question the credibility of Scholastic thought. Thus, this man, named Descartes wanted to move away from the traditional teachings and started to find his own answers through the aid of his reason. This would tell us that Descartes had rejected all the thoughts which have preoccupied his mind and which had pervaded society during his time. Basically, he rejected them. However, through the method he discovered, he realized that there were also truths discovered by his preceding philosophers. He gave them credit for that. Among those truths that he believed to be acceptable is the existence of substance. However, to prove the existence of substance, Descartes sought a method that brought him to further realizations and deepened his understanding of the world, about man, and, more importantly, about his own existence.

This study aims to provide an exposition of Descartes' dualism by exploring its foundational concepts and philosophical implications. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the fundamental principles of Descartes' mind-body dualism?
2. How does Descartes justify the distinction between the mind and body?
3. How does Cartesian dualism persist in Contemporary Psychology and Mental Health?

2. Materials and Methods

This study employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary research design that merges philosophical inquiry with contemporary psychological theory and practice. The research is rooted in a philosophical approach to understand the foundational concepts of Cartesian dualism, while simultaneously engaging with modern psychological frameworks to explore their relationship with Descartes' ideas. The study adopts a theoretical approach grounded in historical and comparative analysis, aiming to trace the evolution of mind-body theories from Cartesian dualism to more integrated models found in contemporary psychology. By examining both historical texts and current psychological practices, the research synthesizes these disciplines to propose a framework that bridges classical and contemporary perspectives on mental health.

The first phase of the study involves philosophical analysis. In this phase, the researcher will conduct a textual and conceptual examination of René Descartes' seminal works, such as "Meditations on First Philosophy" and "The Passions of the Soul". This examination will focus on identifying and clarifying Descartes' central dualistic principles – the distinction between the mind (*res cogitans*) and body (*res extensa*). The researcher will explore how these principles were revolutionary in the history of philosophy and set the stage for later discussions of consciousness and human nature.

The second phase of the study is a thematic literature review. This phase examines scholarly works from various fields, including psychology, psychiatry, and philosophy of mind, to evaluate how Cartesian dualism has influenced the evolution of psychological models and mental health practices. The researcher will explore the transition from dualistic to integrative frameworks, such as the biopsychosocial model, which emphasizes the interaction

between biological, psychological, and social factors in understanding human health. The literature review will identify key psychological theories, such as cognitive-behavioral theory, neuroscience, and humanistic psychology, to assess how Cartesian assumptions about the separation of mind and body continue to inform or challenge contemporary psychological thought. The review will also identify areas where Descartes' influence has waned, as newer models adopt more holistic, interconnected views of the mind and body.

In the third phase, the study will employ critical comparative analysis. This method involves comparing dualistic and non-dualistic models of mental health, focusing on their theoretical strengths, limitations, and real-world applications in clinical settings. The researcher will assess how Cartesian principles manifest in various therapeutic approaches, such as psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, and pharmacotherapy, particularly in cases where psychological and physiological symptoms intersect, such as somatic symptom disorder or psychosomatic illness. This phase will involve the analysis of clinical case studies and psychological reports to identify how dualistic or integrative models have impacted treatment outcomes. By analyzing how theoretical assumptions influence clinical practice, the study will explore whether embracing a more unified view of the mind and body could enhance therapeutic efficacy.

Furthermore, throughout the research process, the use of AI and GenAI tools will be maximized to enhance the clarity, readability, and overall quality of the analysis. These technologies will assist the researcher in refining the presentation of complex philosophical and psychological concepts, ensuring that the final analysis is accessible to a broader audience. AI tools will be used to analyze large volumes of text for key themes, identify patterns in the literature, and assist in drafting and revising the final manuscript. By integrating AI into the research process, the study aims to improve both the quality of the research and its presentation, making it more relevant to contemporary academic discourse.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. *The Formulation of René Descartes' Dualism*

Being a philosopher, Descartes had a lot of realizations, some of which, because he was also a mathematician, were the certainty, clarity, and indubitability that mathematics could give us like for example $2+2=4$. However, mathematics is different from philosophy. Descartes wanted to apply mathematics to philosophy. Hence, Descartes sought for a way to attain such in matters of philosophy. Descartes moves us to doubt everything. Indeed, he also doubted all that he had known, his opinions, the things surrounding him, his own body, and to the extent, his own existence. This is so because Descartes believed that everything should be rationally proven. Thus, he has considered everything as neither true nor false and is ground for doubt (Mohammed, 2012). Having doubted all the things which are grounded for doubt, Descartes now would like to find something that is indubitable amidst the dubitable world.

3.1.1. On the Idea of Substance

The understanding of the concept or term substance is indeed essential in Descartes' dualism. By the term substance, Descartes would mean "anything that exists on its own"—independently or without dependence to any other existing things. Of course, Descartes does not deny that such concept is greatly influenced with that of the Scholastics specifically the Aristotelian's. In its strictest sense, such definition would disqualify all the beings – "created beings" – including man because man does not exist by himself but through Someone whom we call God; hence, leaving God, The Creator of all things, the only qualified to be called substance. However, Descartes furthered argued that there are two kinds of substance: finite and infinite substance. On one hand, an infinite substance is something that is not dependent on anything in the world, and it is believe that only God qualifies for this one. On the other hand, a finite substance, as Descartes contented, is one that which is created by God; hence, all other beings including man.

From here, Descartes contented that man, as a finite substance is both a thinking and an extended substance. In his own terms, he calls them *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, respectively. Now, we must be very critical here that Descartes' concept of man – one that which is constituted by two unique and distinct substances – is different from the pervading scholastic concept of man which is inseparable union between the body and soul – material and immaterial substance – that which makes man says the scholastics. Descartes, in his concept of man grounded on the very idea of substance, says each of which exists independently thus

denying the scholastic notion.

3.1.2. Descartes' Dualism of Mind and Body

How does one prove that the "I" or the consciousness or the mind or the soul exists? When Descartes began to doubt everything, he realized one certain thing: that he doubts. When we speak of doubt that would imply that he is thinking because doubting is under the umbrella of thinking – meaning when one doubts, he thinks. This would imply that if one thinks, then he exists because one needs to exist first before he could think and doubt. This would say that Descartes grounded his proof of existence on the fact that he doubts and that he thinks that if one ceases to think, he ceases to exist. Thus, this doubting is in one way or another indubitable.

Descartes now then remarked: "Cogito, Ergo, Sum." This line means "I think therefore I am (exist)." For Descartes, this line is an indubitable truth for any attempt to question its certainty would lead to the confirmation that he (Descartes) exists (Mohammed, 2012). Even when he said in his "Meditations" that he might be dreaming or perhaps be deceived by an evil-God, he now confirms that he exists because one cannot dream without existing first and the evil God cannot deceive him if he does not exist in the first place. From here, the foundation of his existence is now established, that is, a thinking thing (a mind or soul) and that remains to be such (Mohammed, 2012).

As he mentioned: "I do not now admit anything which is not necessarily true: to speak accurately I am not more than a thing which thinks that is to say a mind or a soul or an understanding, or a reason which are terms whose significance was formerly unknown to me. I am, however, a real thing and really exist; but what thing? I have answered: a thing which thinks." (Descartes, 1911)

Thus, for now, the only truth Descartes knows for certain, is that he is a thinking being who exists. Having a body is yet to be proven beyond all doubts. He is not yet sure whether anything else exists in the world apart from him as a thinking being. This also needs some proving. Could it be that all other things in the world are not different from him with his thinking characteristic? This must be proven as well. It must be noted, however, that Descartes uses 'methodic doubt,' for the aim of arriving at certain conclusions from the world of uncertainty (Mohammed, 2012). This is how Descartes proves that he exists at least, as a thinking thing. That he is a substance whose essence is to think and when he ceases thinking, he ceases to exist and that being a body is not part of his essence. (Kenny, 2006) The same goes for every other human being though that is, if they think that they think. After proving the thing which cannot be doubted, that is, the existence of his mind or soul as a thinking thing, Descartes now is moved to ask whether he has a body. This is now the point of Descartes' unsurety and thus must be proven.

According to Descartes, there are some things which are indeed dubitable, meaning, one must throw all the doubts he could throw into it whether such thing exists. Now, what are these things? Descartes would answer everything most especially the material things. One is called to doubt everything because he believes that the things that present themselves to our minds pass through first our senses which are deceptive. Indeed, he doubted whether he has a body (Descartes, 1911).

In his "Meditations" he then says: "How often have I dreamt that I was in these familiar circumstances, that I was dressed, and occupied this place by the fire, when I was lying undressed in bed? At the present moment ...I look upon this paper with eyes wide awake; ...but I cannot forget that, at other times I have been deceived in sleep by similar illusions; and, attentively considering those cases, I perceive so clearly that there exist no certain marks by which the state of waking can ever be distinguished from sleep, that I feel greatly astonished." (Descartes, 2017)

What is a body then according to Descartes? A thing which is composed of many parts – the eyes, hands, head, feet, and such like and thus occupies a certain space. Thus, for Descartes, a body is just an extended thing – an extension of his being whose accidents can clearly and distinctly be perceived by our bodily senses however remains dubitable.

"By the body I understand all that which can be defined by a certain figure: something which can be confined in a certain place, and which can fill a given space in such a way that every other body will be excluded from it; which can be perceived either by touch, or by sight, or by hearing, or by taste, or by smell: which can be moved in many ways not, in truth, by itself, but by something which is foreign to it, by which it is touched [and from which it receives impressions]: for to have the power of self-movement, as also of feeling or of thinking, I did not consider to appertain to the nature of body: on the contrary, I was rather

astonished to find that faculties similar to them existed in some bodies.”(Serendip, n.a.)

For Descartes, this extended body can obviously be measured, quantified, and can be represented by numbers. This is very evident in his remarks in one of his “Meditations”. He said: “To such a class of things pertains corporeal nature in general, and its extension, the figure of extended things, their quantity or magnitude and number, as also the place in which they are, the time which measures their duration, and so on.”(Descartes, 1911)

However, one cannot escape from asking how this body moves that the philosopher argues that this body as a substance can exist on its own apart from the soul by virtue of being substance. For Descartes, the body has in it the so-called Animal Spirits making it move according to its reaction to any stimuli.

3.2. *The Distinctness and Separability of the Mind and the Body*

Descartes, in his work Discourse, presented two key ideas: first is that every human being is a thinking substance and second is that matter is extension in motion. This explains the two clear and distinct substances that must be present in the formulation of the being ‘man’. How are we going to prove this?

It is evident that in his Discourse or even in the Principles, Descartes shows forth how his mind is distinct from his own body. However, he has made this crystal clear in his “Meditations” specifically during his sixth meditation in which he claimed that he has a clear and distinct idea of himself as a thinking non-extended thing, and a clear and distinct idea of a body which is an extended, non-thinking thing. This would affirm that a thinking, non-extended thing, and an extended non-thinking are different substances. Thus, Descartes argues that the (his) mind, a thinking thing, can exist apart from its extended body and therefore is a distinct substance, whose essence is thought. However, Descartes has made clear of his substance. What he meant of a substance is that which in a broad sense that God, as the Only Real Substance, is set aside. Hence, For Descartes, the body functions mainly in terms of the physical organization of the organic body for its survival; on the other hand, the mind, thus, is not a principle of life – as what the Scholastics claim – but a principle of thought, which involves reason (Antoine-Mahut, 2021).

3.2.1. *The Point of Unity Between Mind and Body*

The mind and body are distinct because they exist apart from the other. However, in this life they do not. Descartes observed that despite existing apart from each other, still, there is a point of reconciliation of the two substances (Descartes, 2017).

Here he said: “Nature likewise teaches me by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst, etc., that I am not only lodged in my body as a pilot in a vessel, but that I am besides so intimately conjoined, and as it were intermixed with it, that my mind and body compose a certain unity.”(Antoine-Mahut, 2021)

From these statements, one obvious thing can be seen is that one affects the other and vice versa. It is not that the body is driven only by the soul. Imagine a driver driving a car. When someone throws a stone into the car, the driver would not feel anything – that is of course setting aside the feeling of anger he might feel though. Instead, only the car, the outer part of the car will be damaged. If such might be the case though, the idea of man would be very vague, because Descartes believes in the unity of the two substances that when one is ill the other would be affected. An empirical example for this is this: One often skips his meals, because he is very busy in school as there will be an upcoming big event plus there are much paperwork to finish whose deadline is fast approaching plus final exams are coming thus studying is needed plus one cannot skip classes. What probably will happen? For sure, the student cannot think properly. His mind cannot function well because his body system is affected by skipping meals. His physical body is not nourished well so he does not have energy. This would show that his body affects how his mind or consciousness functions.

On the other hand, Descartes was wise then to tell everyone who questioned his notion of the unity of mind and body that the principle of its union is just as what the Aristotelians believed in Aristotle’s hylomorphism in the union of matter and form – the thing which we learn in school. However, Descartes made this clear in his letter to the Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia. In the letter, Descartes explained that such can be proven empirically that by experience, we can identify how our minds and bodies fully unite and interact (Antoine-Mahut, 2021). But how and perhaps, where? Or at what point? In the physiological body of the human being, the soul or the mind or the consciousness interacts with it in the pineal gland.

“The machine of the body is so formed that from the simple fact that this gland is

diversely moved by the soul, or by such other cause, whatever it is, it thrusts the spirits which surround it towards the pores of the brain, which conduct them by the nerves into the muscles by which means it causes them to move the limbs.”(Descartes, 2017)

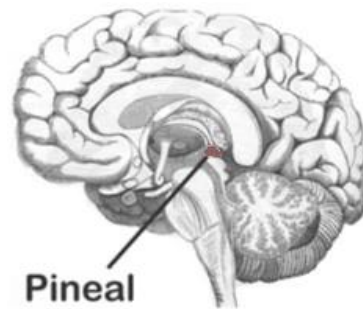


Figure 1. The location of pineal gland in the human brain.

Figure 1 shows the location of pineal gland in the human brain. This is where the interaction takes place. The soul has the power to move this part of the body – the pineal gland – and such would signal the brain to do motions. In the same manner, the sensory organs which are parts of the body send information to the pineal gland. However, because a human body cannot be considered as a body without the interconnection of its parts, it would follow that the soul is as well connected to the whole body (Antoine-Mahut, 2021). Moreover, for practical and empirical reasons, one would know and could testify then that the body is interconnected by the fact that even an acute bite of an ant would cause pain. Moreover, an object could be imprinted into one’s mind through the sense of perception.

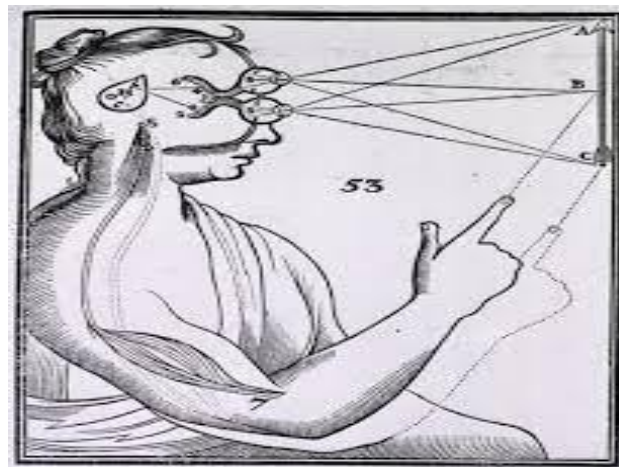


Figure 2. The link between the body (from Descartes’ work *De Homini Figuris*).

Figure 2 suggests the link between the body, specifically the vision and the conscious action. Such union and interconnectedness between the thinking substance which is the soul and the extended substance which is the body creates a whole new being – man. What now then is man? Is he just a thing that thinks, or is he just an extended thing occupying space? Man for Descartes is a composite of a thinking thing and an extended thing (Descartes, 1911). He is a union of the two – a union of two distinct, separable substances. He is a being so perfectly composed of a soul and a body with each substance affecting the other and vice versa. This soul makes man a thinking being and enables him to sense, ask, doubt, understand, and the like. On the other hand, this body he has is just an extension having parts and organs and organ systems.

3.3. Cartesian Dualism in Contemporary Psychology and Mental Health

This Cartesian dualism raises a fundamental distinction between the mind and the body as two different substances that interact but remain ontologically separate. Descartes encapsulated this dichotomy in his statement, “Cogito, Ergo sum” (“I think, therefore, I am”), highlighting the primacy of consciousness and self-awareness as essential components of human experience (Descartes, 2015). In contrast to the body, which is subject to physical laws

and empirical observation, the mind represents an intangible substance associated with thought, consciousness, and identity. This dualistic framework arose during a historical period marked by the flourishing advances in natural philosophy and the scientific revolution, positioning Descartes as a fundamental figure in the development of Western thought (Brown & Key, 2020).

Historically, Cartesian dualism has deeply influenced several fields, particularly psychology, where the implications of the mind-body relationship are fundamental for the understanding of mental health and disorders (Alanen, 2003). The distinction between mental and physical health, for example, can trace its roots to Cartesian thought, illustrating how dualism frames contemporary explorations of psychological well-being and the nature of consciousness. However, critics have highlighted the limitations within this framework, arguing that the strict separation of the mind and body underestimates the complex interdependence of physiological and psychological processes. However, the influence of Descartes persists, as the contemporary theories of consciousness continue to browse the dualistic paradigms that he established, dealing with concepts such as the nature of subjective experience, the emergence of consciousness and the biological basis of mental health.

Given this historical importance, it is essential to commit to Cartesian dualism as a fundamental construction in the evolution of psychological thinking. The ongoing discourse that surrounds Descartes' ideas not only illuminates modern research on consciousness, but also challenges researchers to reconsider dualities that shape our understanding of human nature, mental health and the intricate interaction between mind and body (Brown & Key, 2020). As psychology progresses, the dialogue that surrounds the implications of Cartesian dualism remains essential, encouraging a critical examination of how these classical ideas inform contemporary practices and theories in the field. The emergence of Cartesian dualism in the 17th century represented a fundamental moment in the philosophy of the mind, laying the foundations for subsequent philosophical investigations on the nature of consciousness and the relationship between mind and body. René Descartes introduced this dualistic picture in his fundamental works, in particular, "Meditations on First Philosophy," where he notoriously laid the distinction between the *res cogitans* (thinking substance) and the *res extensa* (extended substance) (Descartes, 2017). This bifurcation suggests that the mind and body are basically different from nature, with the non-material mind and the body being physical. The articulation of Descartes' dualism has basically challenged the prevalent school opinions of his time and positioned the mind as the object of rigorous philosophical investigation, thus influencing the trajectory of modern psychology.

Following Descartes, various philosophers have criticized and adapted the dualistic notions, revealing the complexity inherent in the mind-body relationship. Gilbert Ryle, in the mid-twentieth century, notoriously criticized Cartesian dualism through his concept of "ghost in the machine", claiming that the separation of Descartes' mind and body cannot understand the practical realities of human behavior and consciousness (Ryle, 1949). The author stated that mental states cannot be divorced by physical actions; Rather, they are intertwined in the fabric of behavior, leading to an understanding of the mind that underlines its operational qualities rather than treating it as a separate entity. His criticism has catalyzed further philosophical explorations that have contributed to the development of functionalism, a significant movement in the philosophy of the mind that shows the mental processes in terms of roles and functions rather than their substance.

In addition, the phenomenological tradition offered an alternative to Cartesian dualism focusing on the experience of consciousness. This approach underlined the embodied nature of perception and cognition, claiming that the psyche cannot be fully understood divorced by its physical environment (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). This shift away from the Cartesian model towards a more integrated understanding of the self has significant implications for contemporary psychological theories of consciousness. By refusing the rigorous dichotomy between mind and body, phenomenology invites a more holistic vision that resounds with modern empirical research in psychology, including neuroscience and incarnated cognition, which strive to understand the complexities of mental processes that occur within the physical contexts.

The dualism of Descartes has created an intellectual legacy that deeply influenced the panorama of psychological thought. His exploration of the mind-body relationship has pushed critical questions that led to both philosophical and empirical investigations into psychology. Although the criticisms of philosophers such as Ryle and representatives of phenomenology have illuminated the limits of dualistic thought, the fundamental ideas presented by Descartes continue to inform contemporary discussions on mental health and

the mechanisms of consciousness. While psychology is preparing with the understanding of complex mental phenomena, the branches of Cartesian dualism persist, suggesting that the historical development of these concepts remains vital in facing modern psychological challenges (Brooke, 2018; Nath, 2013; Urban, 2018). René Descartes' dualism postulates a clear distinction between the mind, characterized by immaterial thinking, and the body, consisting of physical matter. The center of Descartes' epistemological structure is the concept of interactionism, which suggests that mind and body exist not only as separate entities but also actively influence each other. This perspective of mind-body interaction has significant implications for understanding human behavior and mental processes in contemporary psychology, highlighting the complex relationship between cognitive states and physiological responses.

Descartes stated: "I think, therefore, I am" (Vinci, 2008), heading for his belief in the primacy of thought as fundamental to existence. This statement emphasizes the autonomous nature of the mind, which Descartes believed did not require a physical substrate to operate. However, he acknowledged that mental states do not exist in isolation; they manifest tangible effects on body actions. Descartes articulated this interaction through the pineal gland metaphor, which he placed as the place of interaction between the immaterial mind and the material body. As Curley (2015) notes that Descartes said: "The soul is able to control body movements through the environment of the brain," illustrating its concept of the mind's ability to influence the physical manifestations of emotion and cognition.

Modern cognitive psychology and neuroscience, as divergent from metaphysical dualism, reflect Descartes' fundamental information about the reciprocal relationship between mental processes and physiological functioning. For example, the growing field of psychoneuroimmunology investigates how emotional states can directly affect immune responses and overall health, reflecting Descartes' belief in the interconnectivity of thought and body experience. This research area provides empirical support to Descartes' interactionism, demonstrating that mental states such as stress or depression can result in observable physiological changes.

Moreover, Descartes' affirmation that "passions are all in the soul" reinforces the notion that emotions, perceived as mental states, have deep implications for our physical well-being. This perspective is echoed in modern mental health theories, which recognize the significant impact of psychological conditions on somatic health. The mind's ability to influence body health through concepts such as the placebo-alma effect, with Descartes' vision of mind-body interaction, plays a fundamental role in the formation of human behavior.

The implications of Descartes' dualism extend to therapeutic practices in psychology. Approaches such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) highlight the interaction between cognitive processes and behavioral responses, arguing that modifying dysfunctional thinking patterns can lead to changes in emotional and physical health. This echoes Descartes' interactionist model, as professionals recognize that, approaching the mind, significant changes in the body may occur.

Thus, while Descartes' dualism has a rigid dichotomy between mind and body, the emphasis he has placed in his interaction influenced contemporary psychological thinking. Recognition of this dynamic relationship serves as the basis for theoretical explorations and practical interventions in understanding consciousness and mental health, in the bridge effectively of the gap between philosophy and modern psychological science. Descartes' dualism, which postulates a fundamental distinction between mind and body, has significant implications for modern psychology, particularly in the formation of consciousness theories, and influences contemporary understanding of mental health disorders. At the center of dualistic thinking is the view that mental phenomena are non-physical and distinct from physical processes, which emphasizes the complexity of human consciousness. This perspective establishes the foundations for numerous psychological theories that try to elucidate the intricacies of thought, emotion, and human behavior. In current psychological practice, dualism manifests itself in many ways, particularly in relation to the treatment of mental health disorders. For example, the biopsychosocial model, which integrates biological, psychological, and social factors, can be seen as an attempt to reconcile the dualistic perspective, recognizing the interaction between mind and body in the manifestation of mental health problems (Burgmer & Forsmann, 2018).

In addition, modern therapeutic approaches reflect the remaining influence of dualistic thinking. CBT emphasizes cognitive processes arising from mental states, postulating that altering thinking patterns can lead to changes in emotions and behaviors. This perspective aligns with the dualistic view that cognitive processes, although rooted in neurological

functions, can be examined as distinct mental entities. The growing focus on full attention and incorporated therapies highlights a counter-mowing to integrate mind and body but still recognizes the dualism that characterizes the human experience. Leitan and Murray (2014) state that these therapeutic modalities recognize the mind-body relationship as they address the complex interaction between mental health and physical well-being, revealing that dualism remains relevant to understanding and addressing mental health problems today.

The impact of dualism extends to debates in progress around consciousness in contemporary philosophy of mind and psychology. The challenge of reconciling subjective experiences – usually called Qualia – with objective physiological explanations continues to stimulate discourse in neuropsychology and cognitive science. Such discussions are vital in understanding mental disorders such as depression and anxiety, which are often characterized by cognitive distortions and emotional deregulation. The dualistic perspectives cause investigations into the nature of self, agency, and personal identity, thus shaping therapeutic interventions that consider the self-remedied experiences of clients as treatment centers.

The implications of dualism are observable in how psychological research is conducted and interpreted. The emphasis on qualitative research methodologies, along with quantitative approaches, reflects a movement to appreciate the subjective experiences of individuals, aligning itself with the focus of dualism in the non-physical aspects of human existence. This dualistic base promotes the idea that mental phenomena cannot be completely reduced to neural correlates, thus encouraging a more holistic approach in research and practice that considers psychological, biological, and social factors in harmony.

In general, Descartes' dualism resonates in modern psychological structures and therapeutic practices, perpetually influencing the understanding of consciousness and treating mental health disorders. The philosophical implications of dualism invite continuous exploitation and debate, reinforcing their relevance in psychological theory and practice in contemporary society. As psychology evolves, the lasting questions raised by dualism about mind-body relationships will probably continue to shape future discourse in the countryside. The criticisms of Descartes' dualism have expressed important concerns concerning the feasibility and implications of its strict separation of the Spirit and the Body, particularly in light of the progress of psychology and modern neuroscience. A widespread criticism is based on empirical evidence emerging from neurological studies suggesting a complex interaction between mental states and physical processes. Mohammed (2012) maintains that Cartesian dualism, which poses the mind as a non-physical substance operating independently of the body, is inadequate for the nuances of human experience. Studies in neuroplasticity, for example, illustrate how psychological interventions can lead to tangible changes in the structure and function of the brain, which calls into question the idea that mental processes do not reside in the physical substrate of the brain. This perspective advocates a more integrative approach to understanding consciousness because it highlights the interdependence of cognitive functions and physiological states.

Mehta (2011) criticizes Descartes' dualism by exploring implications for mental health. The idea that mental illnesses result only from non-physical disturbances of the spirit undermines the understanding of mental disorders as conditions deeply linked to biological, social, and environmental factors. For example, depression can often be drawn not only to psychological states but also to neurochemical imbalances and genetic predispositions. Also, Mehta (2011) postulates that a dualist executive can lead to reducing treatments that neglect holistic interventions, which ultimately prevents effective mental health care that deals with the multifaceted nature of psychological well-being.

Mendie and Udofia (2018) also argue against dualism by emphasizing the progress of cognitive neurosciences that illustrate the monist nature of the mental-body relationship. Their research highlights how empirical results, such as functional magnetic resonance (fMRI) and other diagnostic tools, demonstrate that cognitive processes strongly correlate with specific neural activity models. These results support a more materialistic vision, saying that mental states are, at least in part, emerging properties of physiological processes in the brain rather than a separate and non-physical domain. This position encourages not only a reassessment of older philosophical doctrines but also promotes a more collaborative approach in psychology, where biological sciences continuously inform the understanding of consciousness and mental health.

In addition, the ideas of embodied cognition question Cartesian dualism by stressing that our physical interactions with the environment considerably influence cognitive processes. Research indicates that bodily states can shape cognitive functions, as illustrated by how posture, physical movements, and sensory experiences contribute to various cognitive tasks

(Mendie & Udofia, 2018). This conceptual change towards the vision of cognition as an embodied and located process aligns more closely with contemporary theories in psychology, moving away from the rigid demarcation of the mind and body, which has often led to fragmented views of mental health.

Therefore, the criticisms of Descartes' dualism reveal various limits inherent in a strictly dualist framework. Modern psychology and neuroscience advocate a more integrated understanding of the body-spirit, emphasizing the importance of biological, psychological, and environmental factors in forming human consciousness and mental health. These criticisms not only illuminate the need to evolve beyond Cartesian dualism but also to encourage an essential interdisciplinary approach to advance research and therapeutic methods in contemporary psychology. The advent of neuroscience has introduced a rigorous empirical framework to investigate the mind-body relationship, challenging and refining the dualism proposed by René Descartes. Historically, Cartesian dualism postulates that the mind and body are fundamentally different substances; This dichotomy implies that mental phenomena are not physical and operate independently of the physical world. However, as progress in neuroimaging and brain investigation has proliferated, a more integrated vision of the mind-body relationship has emerged, underlining the need to reevaluate the alleged Cartesians.

Recent neuroscientific findings argue that cognitive processes, emotions and other mental states are deeply rooted in the biological functions of the brain. For example, Hamilton and Hamilton (2015) expose neuroplasticity, the ability of the brain to reorganize, forming new neuronal connections throughout life, which demonstrates that psychological experiences can materially alter the structure and function of the brain. This perspective challenges the idea of the mind as a separate entity, instead of placing it within the biological substrate of the body, thus supporting a monistic vision where mental phenomena of physical processes arise.

Kirkeben (2001) advances this conversation by illustrating the implications of neuroimaging technology in understanding consciousness. Techniques such as fMRI have shown correlational data that visualize brain activity and specific cognitive tasks or emotional responses. These advances support the concept that mental states correspond to measurable brain states, inviting a reconsideration of Descartes' statement that the mind operates independently of the body. Identifying the neural correlates of consciousness thus dissolves the rigid limits between mental and physical states, facilitating a more nuanced understanding of mind-body interaction.

Integrating neuroscience with contemporary psychology has deep implications for mental health. The biopsychosocial model of mental disorders recognizes that psychological conditions are not only the result of mind-related problems but are also influenced by neurobiological factors. Research has revealed more and more that mental health interventions, such as psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy, can cause significant changes in the structure and function of the brain (DeRubeis et al., 2005). This correlational evidence is aligned with an opinion that emphasizes the interaction between psychological and biological processes, challenging the Cartesian dualistic framework and advocating a more unified understanding of mental health.

The phenomena, such as incorporated cognition, contribute to discourse by postulating that body interactions with the environment deeply influence cognitive processes. This emerging perspective suggests that cognitive functions cannot be fully understood without considering the underlying physiological processes, further blurring the lines between the mind and the body. Experimental studies that demonstrate how bodily states can influence emotional and cognitive results exemplify the failure of a strictly dualistic approach to explain complex human behavior (Niedenthal, 2007).

Therefore, the evolution of neuroscientific research has deep implications for Cartesian dualism and its interpretation in modern psychology. Through the lens of contemporary neuroscience, we are advancing towards a more integrated understanding of the mind-body relationship, where cognitive, emotional, and physiological processes participate in a dynamic interaction that shapes our behaviors and mental health. While Descartes laid the foundations for philosophical research on consciousness, it is through the advances in neuroscience that we can refine, challenge, and further expand their concepts to better address the complexities of human experience. The omnipresent influence of Cartesian dualism is easily observable in modern therapeutic practices in psychology, particularly in frameworks that emphasize the interdependence of mental and physical health. CBT, for example, is based on the understanding that cognitive processes (thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes) have a significant

impact on emotional states and, by extension, physical well-being. Descartes' assertion of a distinct separation between the mind and the body led to exploring how cognitive interventions can modify emotional responses and behaviors, ultimately affecting physiological results (Correll, 2022). Due to CBT, therapists provide customers with structured methodologies to identify, question, and modify unsuitable thinking patterns, thus attacking the psychological and somatic states that accompany various mental health problems.

Incorporating mindfulness practices in therapeutic frameworks reflects a Cartesian heritage, although with a modern reinterpretation of the body-spirit. Mindfulness, which encourages individuals to cultivate awareness of their thoughts and experiences in the present moment, includes recognition of visceral links between psychological and physiological states. As Berrios (2018) notes, mindfulness creates a bidirectional commitment where mental attention can lead to changes in bodily sensations, while bodily consciousness can modify emotional experiences. This duality underlines how contemporary therapy methods increasingly recognize the limits of a purely dualist interpretation, pushing practitioners to mix cognitive strategies with a somatic consciousness to promote holistic healing.

The integrative approaches to health psychology embody the heritage of Cartesian dualism by actively considering the interaction between mental and physical dimensions. Recognizing that psychological disorders are often manifested with significant somatic symptoms, therapists are increasingly adopting biopsychosocial models that summarize and approach the complexities of individual experiences. These models resonate with the pioneering delimitation of Descartes from two distinct domains while stressing that true therapeutic efficiency stems from their complex interrelation (Correll, 2022). Thus, the practical implementations of theories and psychological practices illustrate not only the residual influence of Cartesian dualism but also illustrate an understanding of the evolution of the consciousness that strives to fill the historical fracture it proposed.

Overall, while Cartesian dualism has been criticized for its rigid separation of mind and body, its fundamental concepts continue to inform contemporary psychological practice. Using Descartes-derived ideas, modern therapists are now equipped to approach the duality of human existence, evolving towards a more integrated mental health model that resonates with the complexities of human experience. The continuous evolution of therapeutic modalities demonstrates a lasting interaction between the ideas of early philosophical thought and the innovative strategies used to promote psychological and physical well-being. The phenomenology of consciousness presents a critical intersection in which Cartesian dualism and contemporary theories converge, differ, and finally get involved with each other. Descartes' dualism, which postulates a clear bifurcation between mind and body, serves as a fundamental touchstone in exploiting consciousness but also opens avenues for criticism, mainly through phenomenological lenses. Phenomenology, as a philosophical movement emphasizes the lived experiences of individuals and articulates a more integrative perspective on the mind-body relationship (Heinämaa & Kaitaro, 2018).

Contracting markedly with Descartes' affirmation that the mind is a non-material substance distinctly separated from the body, the defenders of phenomenology to a synthesis of these elements. He postulates that consciousness cannot be properly understood in isolation from the incorporated experiences of the individual. This change of perspective invites a review of how physical sensations, perceptions, and cognitive processes are intertwined to produce a holistic understanding of human consciousness. Urban (2018) notes that phenomenological approaches foreground the intentionality of consciousness, where mental states are always directed to something in the world. Here the mind is inextricably linked to its body counterpart, suggesting a more subtle and interconnected model than the Stark division proposed by Descartes.

In contemporary psychological discourse, this phenomenological synthesis resonates with various theories of consciousness that prioritize the incorporated experience. For example, the perspective of incorporated cognition highlights how cognitive processes are rooted and shaped by body interactions with the environment. This point of view emphasizes the need to consider mental and physical dimensions when addressing issues of perception, decision-making, and emotional regulation. Such an integrative approach challenges the Cartesian structure, emphasizing that mind operations cannot be totally unfortunate from the influence of body states and sensory experiences.

Moreover, the implications of abandoning Cartesian dualism extend to modern interpretations of mental health. In contrast to Descartes' view, which relegated psychological phenomena to a separate kingdom from physiological processes, contemporary structures

encourage a biopsychosocial approach to understanding mental well-being. These structures recognize that mental health is influenced by a complex interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors – reflecting the phenomenological affirmation that experiences of consciousness emerge from existence incorporated within a social context. Thus, therapies that meet cognitive and somatic dimensions, such as full attention practices or somatic therapies, can be understood through this phenomenological lens as they seek to harmonize the mind-body relationship.

The examination of consciousness through the lens of phenomenology, therefore, not only highlights the limitations of Cartesian dualism but also emphasizes the importance of the experience incorporated in informing contemporary psychological theories. This reconception serves to enrich our understanding of consciousness, illustrating that the exploitation of mental states must explain their lively body dimensions and the contexts in which individuals operate. By integrating ideas of phenomenology and challenging the Cartesian segregation of mind and body, modern psychology is to forge a broader understanding of human experience that recognizes the profound interdependence of these two kingdoms. Descartes' dualism, postulating a fundamental distinction between mind and body, remains a central influence in the fields of medicine and psychology, particularly in contemporary approaches to the treatment of mental health. This division has significant implications for the way professionals conceptualize mental disorders and methods employed for their treatment. In essence, Cartesian separation from mind and body has generated divergent paths in medical systems: one emphasizing biological explanations and interventions for mental health problems, while the other is based on psychological understanding and therapeutic modalities.

In the field of psychiatric practice, dualism manifests itself in the persistence of a dichotomous view of the origins and the treatment of mental illness. This perspective can be tracked until Descartes' statement that the mind operates regardless of the physical kingdom. Consequently, the biomedical model of mental health dominated much of contemporary psychiatric theory and practice, defending an mainly physiological understanding of mental disorders. Several neurotransmitter imbalances, genetic predispositions and structural anomalies in the brain are increasingly implicated in the etiology of conditions such as depression, anxiety and schizophrenia (Raese, 2015). These ideas lead to a dependence on pharmacological interventions, seeing medication as the main tool for restoring mental balance, aligning itself closely with the mechanistic body operating disposal paradigm.

However, the Cartesian structure also generates challenges to holistic treatment approaches. Critics argue that such a narrow focus on biological reduction often ignores the psychosocial dimensions of human experience. This reductionist view disregards the interaction between cognitive, emotional, and socio-environmental factors and physical health. The research supports that greater therapeutic efficacy usually results from integrative methods that address psychological and somatic components of health (Grankvist et al., 2016). The growing recognition of psychosomatic connections led to treatment modalities incorporating mind-body approaches, such as CBT, full attention practices, and somatic experience. These therapies recognize the interconnectivity of mental and physical states in order to cure psychological suffering, promote awareness of body sensations and emotions, and echo a more holistic understanding of the mind-body relationship.

In addition, the dualistic perspective informs the emergence of somatic therapies that focus on the physical manifestations of psychological suffering. Professionals increasingly advocate techniques that involve various aspects of human experience, emphasizing the need to treat patients as integrated beings rather than a mere collection of symptoms. This change is evident in modern psychological practices that prioritize an understanding of the lived experiences of patients, cultural origins, and interpersonal relationships, thus challenging the rigid limits articulated in Cartesian dualism.

While Descartes' dualism continues to shape the structures in which mental health is understood, it brings contributions and limitations. The ongoing debate around the mind-body relationship serves as the basis for evolving psychiatric practices. These developments reflect a growing recognition that mental health treatment must transcend disciplinary boundaries to promote a broader understanding of the human condition, encouraging an integrative approach that fills the mind and body within medical systems. In summarizing Descartes' lasting influence on modern psychology, it becomes evident that his conception of the mind-body relationship continues to model contemporary theories regarding consciousness and mental health. Descartes has placed a clear distinction between the intangible mind and the material body, a dichotomy that has paved the way for significant

philosophical and empirical investigations in psychology (Brown & Key, 2020). Contemporary theorists often face the implications of dualism, striving to reconcile the subjective experiences of consciousness with neurological and physiological processes. This interaction remains central in the discussions on the nature of mental health and the disease, in which psychological phenomena are questioned through both mentalistic and physical framework.

4. Conclusions

Descartes considers doubting everything – all his knowledge and opinions, the external things around him inclusive of the plants, the people, the brutes, and the like – including his own existence and his body. Then he asked himself what he is (What am I?). Because of this Universal Methodic Doubt, Descartes has come up to a remarkable shift. He has contended something different from the thoughts of the earlier philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. For him, gone were the days of the Platonic and Aristotelian teachings about man, about himself. At last, he has known what he is, what man is – that he is a thinking thing and an extended thing. He termed these as the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*, respectively. The former term refers to the soul of man which for him is the spiritual substance and whose essence or nature is to think. Because of this, it cannot be attributed to any material reality and that it is independent of the material world because such cannot have properties. The latter term refers to the body of man. By the term body, Descartes means anything that has figure and is confined to a particular space and time. This so-called body is as well sensible, tangible, measurable, and has color; to be brief, the material substance. Moreover, the essence of this substance according to Descartes is extension.

From there, one can establish the distinctive properties of the two. What is now puzzling is that how come such two distinctive and separable substances create a single unit called man? One now would come to ask whether this soul, as a spiritual substance, is the principle of life – that this soul makes the body move as what the Aristotelians and Socratic teach. Descartes would answer that it is exactly not. For Descartes, this soul is not the principle of life but rather it is the principle of thought or a thing that gives the body consciousness. Such body, according to Descartes can be considered as a machine which is composed of parts. This can have life and motion not because of the soul but because of automatic motion that is inherent in it. Descartes, following the teaching of a Roman Physician Galen, calls this the Animal Spirits or the “Spiritus Animales”. These spirits are generated by the blood and its warmth causing the body to move. Only that the soul influences the body in the tiny gland of the brain that is the pineal gland. When these two clear and distinct substances unite, man, being a thinking thing and an extended thing exists.

Descartes’ legacy is particularly salient in the field of cognitive psychology, in which the exploration of conscious thought, intentionality and self-awareness continues to inform our understanding of mental processes. And Cartesian dualism informs various therapeutic methods, including cognitive-behavioral therapy and awareness practices, which reflect an awareness of the interaction between mental states and physical well-being. As mental health problems increasingly incorporate a biopsicosocial model, the fundamental distinctions of Descartes challenge researchers to consider how mental and physical experiences intersect and influence therapeutic results.

The future research paths that emerge from this dualistic paradigm involve a deeper investigation of the neurobiological correlates of consciousness and psychological well-being. The development of neuroimaging technologies offers unprecedented insights on how brain activity corresponds to subjective states, thus filling the Cartesian division in new ways. Explore as various states of consciousness – as altered states deriving from meditation or clinical interventions – interface with cognitive and emotional processes could produce valuable information on the effectiveness of mental health treatment. In addition, the implications of the integration of phenomenological approaches with neuroscientific data present fertile soil to review the complexities of the mind and body interaction.

Furthermore, exploring cultural variations in the perception of the mind-body relationship could enrich the speech surrounding mental health practices. Since global perspectives on psychological disorders continue to evolve, comparative studies can reveal alternative paintings that challenge Cartesian dualism or complete it by offering holistic understandings of consciousness and mental well-being. Hence, while Descartes’ dualism has faced substantial criticism and revision since its beginning, its fundamental influence remains a critical point of reference in the current psychological investigation. Philosophical concepts

and empirical investigations may present an opportunity for researchers to further clarify the complexities of the mental-body relationship, improving the collective understanding of consciousness and informing future approaches to mental health.

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