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**CARTESIAN MYSTERY OF DUALISM: THE KEY TO EPISTEMIC ESSENCE**

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**Abstract**

*This research work was anchored on the Cartesian dualism. Descartes convincingly asserts that mind and body are two distinct entities and that the mind has the propensity to exist independently without the body. This view point of Descartes generates lots of questions and attracts criticism from different angles. A cognitive mind may ask; how can the two (corporeal and incorporeal) interact effectively since they are completely different from each other, having different nature? Can the mind cause effect (event) on the body? This research applied the methodology of comparative analysis, in other to conspicuously explore, identify and to make visible the point of interface to all and sundry. This work finds out that Descartes committed epistemic jump. He only identified the link that connect the two concepts at the spinal gland, located at the back bone that linked to the brain, but he hastily leaps to conclusion without stating categorically, the mode of discussion and understanding.*

**Key words:** Cartesian, Dualism, Epistemic and Essence, Mystery.

**Introduction**

Descartes was a famous scholar and widely known for his development and contribution on the cardinal relation between mind and body. In his Meditations, he denounced all his preconceived, presuppositions and prejudices that could prevent or becloud his mind from arriving at a valid judgment. He ignored (set-aside) any inquiry that concerns sense-experience; He was sceptical on the existence of basic material components. Thus, to comment more on the great influence of Descartes, (Moore and Bruder, 2008) note:

*Modern philosophy is usually said to have begun by Rene Descartes..., mathematician, scientist, and of course philosopher. Descartes' importance to Western intellectual history cannot be overestimated. Other thinkers we have mentioned may have equalled him in significance, but none has surpassed him. He made important contributions to physiology, psychology, optics and especially mathematics, in which he originated the Cartesian coordinates and Cartesian curves. It is thanks to Descartes that students now study analytic geometry; he introduced it to the world.(p. 107)*

One notable legacy that remains indelible mark in the consciousness of vibrant erudite scholars, is the thesis of Descartes' mind and body interaction which many referred to as dualism, while this research prefers to label as 'Cartesian mystery of dualism'. The reason for the aforementioned sticky label is not farfetched. It is because of the intellectual stress to incumbent idea and the purposeful implementation of Descartes' idea on how two independent, dissimilar entities can converge and interact without preference. Thus, (Prado, 2009) notes:

***Rorty characterized Descartes' misconceived understanding of mind as a representationalist view of awareness. The point of this characterization is that once we understand how Cartesian scepticism and the resulting epistemology are products of an inherently unworkable view of awareness of the world, we will dismiss both as not worth our time (Pp 149-150).***

Descartes convincingly asserts that mind and body are two distinct entities and that the mind has the propensity to exist without the body. This view point of Descartes kept some people in dilemma, while for some; it generates lots of questions and attracts criticism from different knowledgeable men and women with various temperaments across the globe. A common man (hoi-poloi) with a high sense of curiosity may ask: How can Descartes juxtapose the aforesaid thesis? How can he justify his claim with self-evidence proof? However, (Prado, 2009) comments;

***Rene Descartes is usually pictured in histories of philosophy and in books more focused on his work as an intellectual revolutionary. He is cast as someone concerned about introducing something novel to philosophical thinking, as Galileo introduced something novel to astronomical thinking (p. 36).***

Nevertheless, there has been a pressing need to investigate whether the mind really acts on the body (the animate) and whether the body really act on the mind which animates it. Can we say with assurance that a certain mind will be connected in an intimate way with a certain body under normal condition?

***At this point, the most pressing question is this: What makes Descartes think that all complex beliefs are analyzable into distinct components that can be individually tested for truth? And what makes him think that beliefs established as true are additive in the sense that we can string them together to constitute more complex belief? (Prado, 2009, 43).***

The above questions are hard-nuts to crack, before one can extract the juicy content of it. In natural law of 'cause and effect', for any effect to take place, there must be a cause. For the mind (immaterial substance) to cause motion (effect) on any part of the body (material), the two must have a bilateral agreement to work together by coming in contact before such plan can be executed. The argument that the mind causes the legs to be on motion will be an invalid argument if there was no meeting point between mind and body.

Now, let's view it from another perspective; what if this Descartes thesis (interaction of the mind and body) is an apparent illusion of the mind (mental apparatus)? How does the mind relate to the other parts of the body in general? What is the possibility that the way my mind relates with my body is the same way other minds relate with corresponding bodies? Is the relation always end- up in peace or does it sometimes result to conflict? As we go down the memory lens, the truth will surely unveil itself.

**Cartesian:** Is the adjective form of Descartes. Cartesian is any philosophical idea that is attributed to Rene Descartes.

**Dualism:** Is from the Latin word duo (two). This theory holds that two independent entities or substances exist in the human nature.

**Epistemic:** Any aspect of research that relates to knowledge of an object whether veridical or hallucinatory approach that is in contrast to the ontological real object.

**Essence:** Is from the Latin word essential, esse means to be, the power of a thing, that which makes you what you are, that which makes one unique from another. Essence designates the essential solidarity between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge.

**Mystery:** Can be describe as an element of knowledge in which one lacks the explanation or rationalization to give account of the source of what he claims to know or to interpret the judgement based on the incomplete nature of man.

### **Historical overview of dualism**

Plato was the mouth-piece of Socrates, who argued that the form is the source of life. However, Plato asserts that the soul is not dependent on the physical body; he opines that the soul transmigrate to a new physical body. For Plato, man is the soul and the body is the prison.

Aristotle posits that the mind cannot be complete in existence without matter; neither can the matter exist without the form. Nicholas Malebranche comments that the interaction between mind and body cannot be linked with anything physical. He affirms that God is the cause of the interaction. David Hume and Bertrand Russell denied the idea that placed the mind as a separate substance which can exist independently of the body. For them, the mind was referred as series of perception which succeed each other in sequence. Benedict Spinoza sees mind and body as the principles which tresses its origin from one substance. Humanity is considered by him as a mode of extension that we express as body, and as a mode of thought that we express as mind. There can be no separation of the mind and body because they are aspect of the same thing. Spinoza acknowledged that the mind is the idea of the body which is his adopted way of describing the relationship between mind and body. The mind and the body operate in the same structure.

### **Types of dualism**

**Ontological dualism:** It makes a claim of the essential nature of being that exist in the universe to posses two necessary principles (mind and matter, good and evil).

**Substance dualism:** It is a philosophical school that share a cordial interaction with some theological thought on the immortality of the human soul. It plays a suitable role by adopting

the thought of mind–body problem. This school asserts that though the soul occupies or cohabits in the body as a tenant, it has the propensity to survive after the death of the body.

**Property dualism:** There are so many facets of property dualism. The approach we deemed fit to express in this research is to juxtapose primary properties that are inherent in the mind and that of the body. It tries to single out the interconnectivity in the human brain and the self-consciousness. They have a strong view that some mental properties are possible to emanate from a composition of organized life bodies. Property dualism spread its tentacles to accommodate different versions under it.

**Non-reductive physicalism:** is one of the versions of property dualism which asserts that any form of mental activity must derive its cause or is being factored by the physical states of things in existence. The backdrop of their argument was centred on their belief that any mental event has a physical resemblance with spatiotemporal object in experience.

Another group of this **physicalism** argued that although mental activities are ontologically irreducible to physical entities, but they must be reducible to a cause. When you look at their argument, you may be forced to affirm that their view is similar to that of the property dualists.

**Cartesian dualism** is the most popular type of dualism developed by a French philosopher called René Descartes. It states that two kinds of fundamental principles are in existence; mind and body. This thought went further to express that the mind can survive after the death of the physical body. It holds that the body has no reasoning faculty (it cannot think). Nevertheless, (Moore and Bruder, 2008) said that; “this view holds that what exists is either physical or mental ( “spiritual”); some things , such as a human person, have both a physical component (a physical body) and a mental component (mind)” (p. 105). This particular type of dualism is the power house of this research work.

### **Schools of Mental Causation**

This segment centres on the causation between properties and states of the thing under study. They are as follows;

**Interactionism** is of the view that all mental activities, such as beliefs and desires are caused by the interaction with the physical states. However, it might appear as a difficult task to proof it logically, since it appeal to common sense intuition.

**Occasionalism** is a philosophical school of thought which holds the doctrine that created substances cannot be the efficient causes of events. On the contrary, God is the progenitor of all events that takes place in the universe. They went further to state that the efficient causes we observe in nature are apparent illusion that exists between earthly appearances of events that arises out of the constant alignment of two separate entities that God had instituted.

**Epiphenomenalism:** is of the view that all mental occurrences are derived from physical sensation and it has no after effect, or influence on the physical activities. For instate; if someone on a roadside sees a thousand naira note (1,000) on a pedestrian pathway and decides to pick it up and to pocket it. The act or the thirst to pick up the money is caused by some specific neurons in the brain. As the legs move towards the money, the arm and the palm (hand) bend to grab the money; such act of man is not caused by the preceding of the mental

occurrence. The material body maintains the causal principle of fundamental physics. This epiphenomenalism is one of the aspects of property dualism that shares the common view that mental activity has no link or connection with physical activities. They negate the view that mental activity is reducible to ontological state.

### **The Real Distinction**

Descartes position on the real distinction between mind and body can be clarified in three diverse views; (a). From antiquity, the mind has the capacity to exist as a sovereign substance. (b) The mind has self-evident confirmation of itself (clear and distinct), to understand without any further appeal for help from another substance. (c) God, who is an infinite Being Has the power to create any kind of mental substance without any appeal for help from other created substances. So, with all these strong arguments, Descartes was optimistic that the minds (souls) have the propensity to exist without bodies.

Nevertheless, to shade more light on Descartes position, one can describe a “real distinction” as what differentiates two or more substances, That which an object possess which another object lacks, the uniqueness of an entity over another. Real distinction could equally be seen as clear and distinct characteristics one can capture with ease without much stress. Whatsoever God caused us to understand in a particular way we are able to grasp it. This clear and distinct understanding is made explicitly known to us through intuition or the revealed power of God.

Real distinction from the point of view of mind and body is that; mind exists as a unique substance and that it is only God that can create a mental substance with such attribute. From the above arguments, one can drive to a conclusion that Descartes is of the opinion that the mind can comfortably survive without the body. He sees the mind as a thinking thing (rex cogitant) while the body is an extension (rex extensa). What this implies is that mind and body does not share the same nature. This idea may hastily drag one into logical conclusion that mind and body exist in unity and diversity.

### **The Body and Mind Problem**

The famous issue of mind and body is from the root cause of viewing the two as having diverse nature that is completely different from each other. This concept of dualism is the brain work of Rene Descartes. Dualism as one of the theories under epistemology is of the view that every human being is composed of two essential principles; mind and body (res cogitans, et res extensa) with different characteristic.

The essential point to grab on this account of mind and body problem is the argument raised by Descartes which this research work tags as ‘mystery’ that Descartes embarked to uncover. His idea is that the mind (immaterial entity), which is absolutely without any extension and the body (material or physical entity) which is entirely without any thinking faculty, interact to cause motion on some parts of the body (extension). To further explain this debunking idea of Descartes to be more explicit is that; the mind or soul which is invisible and the body which is visible, with differences in mode and substance can meet at a point of interaction.

However, (Prado, 2009) says:

*Rorty, who until his death in 2007 was North America’s leading postmodern philosopher, argued that Cartesian epistemological scepticism was a dead-*

*end, the fruitless result of a wrongheaded understanding of mind and its contents, and that the questions it prompted, tried to answer, and saddled us with are an intellectual sham (p. 149).*

This idea seems to pose as a puzzle. Can a finite being read the mind of an infinite being? Bearing in mind that the body possesses some characteristics modes, such as motion, shape, size, quantity and empirical in nature while the soul or mind possess the mode of will, understanding, remembrance and non-physical. Where lies there meeting point? What is the possibility that material and immaterial substances can merge together and generate idea that can trigger human being to action (act of man and human act).

Descartes asserts that every human being possesses dual substances- thought (mind) and body (matter), (Stumpf, 1994,:246) notes: “a substance is “an existent thing which requires nothing but itself to exist”. They exist with unique attributes and principles of operation. The mind and body are studied differently without making references to one another. With this clear cut distinction of mind and matter, Descartes separates Theology and Science. Theology takes care of the spiritual aspect of man (mind) while science handles the empirical (physical) nature of man. “Rene Descartes, a French philosopher and mathematician. He provided a mechanistic basis for the philosophical theory of dualism and is regarded as the founder of modern philosophy (Harper, 2014)”. Descartes explicitly states that the ‘mind is the consciousness of the self. He then made a distinction between the mind and the brain. He identified the brain as the seat of intelligence. The brain is a warehouse where memories are stuck for reference purposes. While the mind or soul is an invisible substance that every human being feels it’s impart, just as one feels the presence of air, but cannot see it empirically. The absence of the soul causes lifeless to the body, which leads to decomposition of the body. It is on record that Descartes was the first to come up with mind and body problem in the form in which it exist at this present time.

The philosophy of dualism is of the view that the mental and the physical components of man are completely different and does not share common identical nature. However, Descartes disclosed his view that there exist symbiotic relationships that bring the two together. He expressed that the meeting point between mind and body is found at the corridor of the spinal gland, located at the back bone that links the body and the brain. It is there that the immaterial (soul) mingles with the material (body).

There is need to clarify some of these assumptions. Can the mind exist independently of the body? If yes!; Can the mind retain or remember some memories of conscious events that took place when the mind and body where together? Descartes needs to generate critical argument that can explain, expand and convince humanity beyond reasonable doubt on how the consciousness of the mind affects or controls the body reaction to event.

### **The role of Cartesian Dualism as a Machine**

Descartes laid a formidable argument on the composition of properties of the body and mind. He liken the body as a machine which operates within the ambience of physical law of nature, while he described the mind as an immaterial entity that lacks extension which also operates beyond the natural laws. He asserts that humans are the only creatures that possesses mind in which the two interact with each other in a way that the mind can influence the action of the body and the body to pull the mind into emotional lost and vis-vasa.

Rene Descartes placed a high profile assurance that body and mind are two distinct substances. He classified substance into two kinds; corporeal (body) and incorporeal (spirit). Thus, (Prado, 2009) comments:

*With respect to the second troublesome aspect of our Cartesian inheritance, conception of the mind as substantial, things are as conceptually untidy as with truth. Most contemporaries appreciate to a greater or less extent – that our consciousness is a highly complex product of neurological process and events. The mind, however, is more than consciousness. It is a storehouse of information, of behavioural dispositions, of language and whatever enables language, of a great deal that is unconscious but nonetheless affects our moods and actions, and of much else that we do not yet understand (Pp. 146-147).*

Descartes saw the two as independent of each other. If one needs the knowledge of the form, there is no need to refer to the body. To know something about the body, there is no need to refer the mind. He saw living bodies as substances that operate according to mechanical and mathematical laws that governs other things.

He saw no reason why we should attribute mental thinking to animals. He considered them as automata, that the greatest prejudices we have retained from infancy is by believing that brutes think. That a human being has two principles of motion is not enough reason to affirm that animals should have the same. He classified the human body and animals as mechanical.

There is no doubt if one comments that Descartes was influenced by the emergence of modern science of his time. He asserts that the movement of the body (corporeal) could not have originates in the human mind; rather it can affect the direction of the motion in certain parts of the body. The thought that should arouse critical question is; how then can the mind cause the movement of the body to take place since they are two independent entities? In other word, does the mind really act on the body (organism) and whether the body act on the mind (animate)?

### **The Interface between Mind and Body**

Here comes the nostalgic epitome of contention within the corridor of learning. The question that calls for debate is; Can the immaterial have something in common with the material? What is the possibility that mental event can cause physical event to be in motion? How can the body change the plans of the mind and vice versa? This point of interaction between the two concepts forms the source and summit of Cartesian dualism. Thus, (Lacey: 1976) notes: "Can the mind exist without a body at all? Can a mind animate several bodies, since it is immortal or does it animate only a body? Can several minds animate the same body?"(p. 131). Descartes gave a distinctive touch on *res cogitans* (mind) and *res extensa* (body). For him, animals can only fit- in at the class of *res extensa* (body), humans have the privilege to posses both mind and body. He considered the mind as the power house of thought. Since animals cannot think because they do not posses mind where thinking takes place. Thinking is strictly reserved for humans alone. The two been distinct substances (mind as immaterial and body as material) have a meeting point, irrespective of the fact that they are different substances.

In reaction to the above questions raised, Descartes came up with concrete confirmation of the possibility of both to cause changes and to interact. Descartes asserts that the point of interaction occurs at the pineal gland which is located at the back bone of every human being. Inside the pineal gland there is a small gland that connects to the brain which contains spinal fluid. This fluid is what unites or connects the two hemispheres (immaterial and material).

### **Critic against Rene Descartes' Dualism**

**Leibniz** identified weak argument from the ones raised by Descartes. He saw the causal interaction between the physical and the mental (brain) as a pre-established mutual harmony, which is ontologically created by God. . For Leibniz, mental causes can only have mental effects, while physical causes only have physical effects. The two are parallel and their causes and effects are equally parallel. Malebranche stated his view that the interaction between material and immaterial is not possible. This led him to proffer occasionalism.

Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia made a critical attack against the position of Descartes and his approach on philosophy of mind. In her critics, she raised vibrant counter claims that the human soul plays the role of thinking, how can it cause voluntary action to the body? She argued that before any part of the body can be on motion, three things must be examined; The first is a push, The second has to do with the way it was pushed and the third centres on the nature of what were pushed. She notes that if the mind causes the body to move, there must be contact of the two. Descartes response to her was in form of metaphor by using a rock and its weight. He asserts that the weight of a rock cause a rock to move downward.

### **Evaluation and Conclusion**

Descartes made some significant impact on what Bernard Williams called the project of 'Pure Enquiry' to discover certain, indubitable foundations for knowledge. Descartes mediations are based on the epistemological theory of rationalism: that is, if someone truly knows something, then that person could not possibly be mistaken or fall into error. He provides solid arguments for what his meditations stand for. In his meditations, he exposed the existence of the mind as the thing that thinks and the body as an extension.

In the person of Rene Descartes, one sees a radical and critical thinker, who takes nothing for granted as long as establishing a philosophical system free from controversies and uncertainties associated with any philosophical acumen within the ambient of Epistemology. There are several things we believe out of naivety to be true, but upon critical investigation and evaluation based on Descartes approach they are been proved apparently false. Descartes invented some of his concept to criticize human modes of thought in a constructive manner, in other to be sure of what we claim to know. Thus, this work deemed it fit to state categorically that Descartes meditations is reducible to test of reliability and criteria for certainty.

Descartes made several attempts to address the issue of mind and body interaction to cause motion (event) on the body, but he could not hit the harmer at the head of the nail. One should not run unto conclusion based on the premises earlier raised that Descartes was influenced by scientific evolution of his time. He asserts that the movement of the body could not have originates in the human mind; rather it can affect the direction of the motion in certain parts of the body. How can the mind carryout this work? He did not provide detailed



explanation. He was left with the difficult problem of explaining how the mind interacts with the body. He only disclosed the point of contact at the pineal gland. He failed to explain further the mode of communication, whether verbal, contact touch, sign, spiritual or mystical means. Descartes, having negates the possibility of mind having extension. Corresponding substances can comfortably act on each other in other to cause change or to create an effect. For a motion to take place in any part of the body there must be physical contact. It is a hard truth to believe this theory of Descartes on mind and body interaction to cause motion. I think, the knowledge of their mode of interaction was either given to man in form of hallucination or it was not given to man at all. The key to the place (point) of contact between mind and body is with God, the progenitor of life. That is why we tagged it Cartesian mystery.

It takes a mind of faith to believe without doubt on the true condition of two parallel entities to have a meeting point. The only one we can appeal to get a verdict judgment to the answer we crave to know is the Chief prototype or progenitor of man (God). He has the key to unlock the mystery of Cartesian dualism.

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