

Tamás Pavlovits, Dániel Schmal:

The Union of Body and Mind in Early Modern Philosophy

In the cognitive sciences the problem of the union or unity of the soul and the body is in the focus of contemporary research. Questions concerning the connection between the soul and the body appeared in antiquity and have been present in the history of Western philosophy ever since. Reflections on the interaction of the two poles of human nature were radically rearticulated in the 17th century, at the beginning of modernity. Descartes' dualistic theory in terms of which the soul and the body are two different substances provoked strong reactions from his contemporaries. Debate about the Cartesian theory did not subside in the classical age, and is still in the forefront of research on the mind today. Neurobiologists and cognitive psychologists often claim that the famous Cartesian dualism is a major obstacle to understanding the true nature and functioning of the human mind. Numerous studies are devoted to combatting dualism by vigorously criticising Descartes. It must be noted, however, that in Cartesian thought the union of the soul and the body is no less important an issue than dualism. Besides, the problem of the union of the soul and the body appears not only in Descartes' philosophy, but also in other thinkers' of the time. Hence, we cannot fully understand Cartesian dualism without considering Descartes' theory of the union of soul and body and the response to that issue provided by his contemporaries. The studies in this volume take this general thesis for their starting point. Thus, they aim to supplement reflections on and criticisms directed at, dualism by focusing on the relatively neglected issue of the union of soul and body in the classical age.

The *History of Early Modern Philosophy Research Group* in Hungary actually focuses on the Cartesian mind situated between cognition and extension¹. The preposition "between" refers to something more than an accidental union between two completely different and self-contained substances. It is true that according to Descartes' metaphysical approach, the mind is a pure substance

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whose existence in itself is independent of its presence in a body; it is also true that *cogitatio*, which is the essential attribute of the mind, has many functions that are strictly attached to the body (Descartes speaks of “bodily memory”, of imagination as a faculty intimately linked to the body, of sensibility, etc.). Nevertheless, the same is true of almost all dualist theories from Plato to the Cambridge Platonists and beyond. What makes Descartes’s conception unique is his insistence on a purely mechanical notion of life. To assert that life does not depend on the vivifying operation of the soul is tantamount to a conceptual shift that profoundly alters the question of unity too, as it calls for explanations that go beyond the bodily activity of the soul. A new focus on the refined partnership between a cognitive system and a merely physical one in the same being, as well as the novel emphasis on the phenomenology of one’s bodily existence broke new grounds in understanding the mind-body union. So much so, that in addition to being the representative of substance dualism, Descartes can be considered as an early precursor of the embodied-mind theories as well, even if modern representatives of this view insist on defining themselves as ‘anti-Cartesian’.

The authors of the articles contained in the current special issue of *Különbség (Difference)* reconsider certain interpretative patterns regarding the distinction between soul and body by emphasising their union not only in Descartes, but also in Spinoza, Leibniz, Pascal, Hobbes, Locke and other philosophers of the time. What exactly does Descartes’ “sentiment” of the union of soul and body mean and how is it related to the natural light of understanding? Why does Spinoza speak of the union of soul and body in his *Ethics*, while he believes that the body and soul are one thing considered under two different attributes? To what extent is it justified to state that Leibniz is a theorist of the “parallelism” of soul and body? Can the union of soul and body be overlooked in Pascal’s apologetic project? These are just a few examples from a wide range of questions the authors of the current issue address.

Pierre Guenancia focuses on the union of soul and body as it is experienced, according to Descartes. He raises the question of determining the status of the “sentiment” by which the mind experiences its union with the soul. The author argues that this sentiment is not opposed to clear and distinct knowledge based on understanding, but refers to a certain way of understanding and acting in the world, where things are not purely intellectual but also sensible. This

feeling is also well rooted in the body, surrounded by other material and human bodies.

Chantal Jaquet's central question is why Spinoza speaks of the "union" of soul and body instead of their "unity". Obviously, Spinoza thinks that the body and soul do not need to be unified to be one thing. They are the same thing considered under two different attributes. The author shows that when, in the *scolie* of proposition XIII of *Ethics* II, Spinoza states that what is meant by the union of mind and body is sufficiently explained, the union refers to one and the same thing. The soul and the body are one and the same being in so far as the body is a formal being, while the mind is the same formal being objectified as an idea. The author underlines that their identity is not a strict $A=A$ identity of mind and body but a differential unity: while being one and the same thing, they do not exclude a form of otherness.

Paul Rateau carefully examines the use of the term "parallelism" in Leibniz's works and points out that Leibniz uses it very rarely. While commentators understand parallelism as the manifestation of the pre-established harmony in the relation of soul and body, the author argues that in Leibniz there is only one occurrence that allows for this interpretation. Instead of opposing the soul and the body on a metaphysical level, Leibniz envisages a symbolic relationship between the two and defends a "methodological" parallelism, which implies that in the explanation of a phenomenon efficient and final causes are not to be confused, nor the reigns of Nature and Grace, while positing their exact concordance and convergence.

Tamás Pavlovits discusses the significance of the union of soul and body in Pascal's apologetic thought. He argues that the union is more important for Pascal than most interpreters take it to be. It is the source of cognitive and affective feelings, playing an important role in the argumentative strategy of the *Pensées*. The author points out that the significance of the union of soul and body must be interpreted against its theological background in terms of which the body will resurrect just like the soul after death, and beatitude is achieved through the true union of soul and body. The apologetic arguments based on the union of soul and body aim at preparing this true and real union.

Eric Marquer puts imagination at the centre of his discussion, which is the most corporeal of the faculties of the mind. Starting from the functioning of imagination, he makes a comparison between Descartes, Hobbes and Locke in

order to understand what they mean by “mind”, which can be alluded to by these authors as “wit” as well as “mind.” He argues that this term has different meanings in empiricist philosophy, which also changes the interpretation of the union and unity of soul and body.

Roland Breeur addresses the problem of “idiocy” in Descartes’ thought. He defines idiocy as natural or voluntary ignorance and distinguishes between two kinds of ignorance in Cartesian thought. One is the result of methodical doubt, the other is that which Descartes asks of Elisabeth in order for her to be able to approve of the union of soul and body. The author argues that according to Descartes we must cultivate a form of idiocy before we can stimulate our cognitive power. For Descartes, thinking about nothing is an exercise in thinking in order to get rid of ideas that complicate and disrupt our vision of things.

Philippe Soual leaves the framework of the early modern age in order to propose an interpretation of the relationship between the soul and the body in the context of incarnation. Rather than assuming that the soul and the body are different substances, complete without each other and then trying to put them together, he conceives of their original unity as a dynamic unity, that is to say, in terms of their identity and difference, or their becoming-one paradoxically linked to their becoming-two. The study describes the different forms of union according to ages (childhood, maturity old age), in order to argue that the spiritual soul is what is capable—of its given Nature and due to its body and intellect—of incarnating itself through giving rise to a spiritual world.

Gábor Boros examines the *Discourse on Method* in the context of the union of soul and body, raising the question of whether this text might be conceived of as an intellectual autobiography. He discusses two twentieth century authors, Dilthey and Georg Misch: the former defines the concept of “autobiography”, the latter (Dilthey’s disciple), considers Descartes’ *Discourse* as the most important example of autobiography in the seventeenth century. Gábor Boros demonstrates, on the one hand, the importance of the relationship between soul and body in the *Discourse*, on the other hand, refuses to accept Misch’s interpretation, claiming that this text cannot be read as Descartes’ intellectual autobiography.

József Simon, a specialist in early modern philosophy and its influence on Hungarian culture at the time, discusses the Cartesian theory on the relationship of the soul and the body as it features in theological debates within the

Reformed Church in Transylvania. He demonstrates that Cartesian philosophy was an important factor in the cultural politics of Transylvania in the second half of the seventeenth century. Behind the scene of public discussions and conflicts he detects an intensive process of introducing Cartesian thought into the curricula provided by the main colleges in Transylvania.

The studies contained in this volume are the proceedings of a colloquium organised at the University of Szeged in Hungary on March 20–21 in 2020. The symposium took place on the eve of the announcement of the pandemic, which has profoundly changed everyday life as well as intellectual life in Europe and the world. The colloquium was supported by the Department of Philosophy, the Centre Universitaire Francophone, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Szeged and the Institut Français de Budapest. The Organising Committee and the participants are profoundly grateful for the support of these institutions. We would also like to thank the Centre d’Histoire des Philosophies Modernes de la Sorbonne (HIPHIMO) for its contribution. The research, the organisation of the conference and the publication of the proceedings have been carried out within the framework of the research project entitled “The Cartesian Mind between Extension and Cognition,” funded by the OTKA/NKFI (Hungarian National Scientific Research Fund) Project n°125012. We dedicate this issue to the memory of our francophone colleague András Dékány.