

# The Principles of the most Ancient and Modern Philosophy

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## Chapter 8: Body and spirit:

1. My **fourth** argument, to prove that spirit and body differ not in essence but only in degree is based on the intimate union or bond that exists between spirits and bodies, by means of which spirits control the bodies they are united with, moving them around and using them as instruments in their various operations. If spirit and body are so opposite, with opposite attributes:

- if spirit is alive—a living and perceiving substance—whereas body is merely a dead mass, and
- if spirit is penetrable and indivisible, whereas body is impenetrable and divisible

then tell me: What is it that unites and joins them so much? What are the chains or ties that hold them together so firmly and for so long? Also, when a spirit or soul gets separated from its body and no longer controls it or has power to move it as before, what causes this separation? The philosophers I am opposing might reply:

The previous union of the soul with the body was caused by the vital fit between them; and when the body decomposes it stops vitally fitting the soul.

Then I ask them: what is this vital fit? If they can't tell us what it consists in, they are babbling, producing empty words, ones with sound but no sense. And they surely can't answer my question satisfactorily. In *their* understanding of what body and spirit are, they don't *fit* one another in any way at all; because in their view body is always dead matter, lacking life and perception, just as much when the spirit is in it as after it leaves. And if there were some fit between them, then it would of course remain the same whether the body was healthy or decomposed. My opponents may say:

Spirit requires an organized body to perform the vital actions of the external senses and to move the body from place to place; and organization is lacking in a decomposed body.

But this doesn't solve their difficulty. *Why* does spirit require such an organized body? Why, for example, can the spirit see only by means of such a wonderfully formed and organized corporeal eye as we have? Why does spirit need corporeal light-rays if it's to see corporeal objects? And why can't the soul see an object unless an image of it is transmitted through the eye? If it is totally spirit and in no way body, why does it need such a variety of corporeal organs that are so greatly and deeply unlike it?

And another thing: When one body x moves another body y, this involves y's being impenetrable and therefore resisting x; so how can a spirit move its body or any of its limbs if it is (as they say it is) of such a nature that no part of the body can resist it in any way? If a spirit so easily penetrates every body, why is it that when it moves from place to place it doesn't leave the body behind, since it can so easily pass through it without the least resistance? . . . Think about what happens with the sails of a ship. By means of them the wind drives the ship along, and the driving force is lessened in proportion as there are more openings, holes,

and passages in the sails. And if the sails were replaced by a giant net, the ship would barely move, even in a gale. This shows us the essential role of impenetrability in motion; if body and spirit were not mutually impenetrable, a spirit couldn't cause any body to move.

**3.** We can easily grasp how one body is united with another through the true fit between their natures. The most finely divided and spiritual body can be united with a very thick and lumpy body by means of certain bodies that are intermediate between the two extremes—intermediate, that is, on the spectrum from very fine-grained to very lumpy. These intervening bodies are the ties or links through which such a finely divided and spiritual soul is connected to such a lumpy body. When these intermediate spirits are absent, or stop work, the union is broken. On this basis we can we easily grasp how a soul moves a body, just as one finely divided body can move another thick and lumpy one. And since a body is itself is a sentient living thing, i.e. a perceiving substance, it is just as easy to grasp how one body can wound or bring pain or pleasure to another body, because things whose natures are the same or similar can easily affect each other. ...

**4.** I take the **fifth** argument from what we observe in all visible bodies such as earth, water, stones, wood, etc. What an abundance of spirits there are in all these things! For earth and water continually produce animals, as they did in the beginning; a pool full of water produces fish, without any fish having been put there to breed. Since everything else comes from earth and water originally, it necessarily follows that the spirits of all animals are in the water. That is why Genesis says that the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters, so that from the waters he would bring forth whatever was created afterwards. ...

## Chapter 9: Other philosophers. Light. Life

**1.** From what I have just said, and from various reasons I offered earlier for the view that spirit and body are basically one and the same, it plainly appears that the so-called philosophers, both ancient and modern, who taught otherwise were comprehensively wrong. They built on weak foundations, so that their entire structure of philosophical theory is shaky and is so useless that it is bound to collapse eventually. ...

**2.** Don't object that this philosophy of mine is nothing but Cartesianism or Hobbesianism wearing a new mask. My philosophy differs from theirs in much more than a 'mask'. ... **Firstly**, the Cartesian philosophy claims that body is nothing but *dead stuff* which not only *now does* but *for all eternity must* lack life and perception of every kind. Anyone must be guilty of this great error if he says that body and spirit are contrary things and can't change into one another, thereby denying bodies all life and perception. This is flatly contrary to the fundamentals of my philosophy. Far from being Cartesianism with a new mask, my philosophy's basic principles entitle it rather to be called anti-Cartesianism. Undeniably, Descartes taught many fine and ingenious things about the mechanical aspects of natural processes and about how all movements conform to regular mechanical laws. He depicts nature—i.e. the created world—as operating in accordance with the practised skill and mechanical wisdom that God, the source of all wisdom, has given it! That's all very well and good, but many of nature's operations are far more than merely mechanical. Nature is not simply an organic body like a clock, that has no vital principle [i.e. non-physical life force] of motion in it. It is a living body that has life and perception, which

are much more exalted than a mere mechanism or a mechanical motion.

**3. Secondly**, as for Hobbesianism, it is even more contrary to my philosophy than Cartesianism. For Descartes recognized that God is clearly an immaterial and incorporeal spirit, whereas Hobbes claims that God is material and corporeal, indeed, that he is nothing but matter and body. Thus he confounds God and creatures in their essences and denies that there is an essential difference between them. These and many other things are and have been called the worst consequences of the philosophy of Hobbes, to which one may add that of Spinoza. For he confounds God and creatures and makes one being of both, which is diametrically opposed to my philosophy.