

**IPO2021 Essay**
Word count: 2208

Topic 3

In Topic 3 one can read a short extract from the letter of Princess Elisabeth to Descartes. The Princess raises one of the most important problems of Descartes' philosophy, namely, the problem of the connection between body and soul. This interface problem is very prominent in Descartes' philosophy since he draws a strict distinction between body and soul, he defines them as two different substances, that is as two different types of entities and as such it immediately follows, that they cannot make any connection with each other. The soul is a thinking substance (*res cogitans*), while the body is an extended substance (*res extensa*), they have different attributes and because of the difference of their attributes they belong to completely different ontological realms. It seems to be obvious that some medium is needed for the connection of body and soul. Yet, Descartes does not say anything of this medium, thus the interface problem remains the most unclarified part of his theory. In the following essay, I will argue that the interface problem is the subcase of a more general kind of philosophical problem. I will call this kind of problem the two world problem. In short terms this problem is the following: if we suppose that there are two worlds (and worlds must be understood here in the loosest possible sense), then how can these two worlds be connected to each other. How can we explain the connection between our two worlds? As I will argue this problem is hard to be solved in any kind of philosophical discussion which posits two different worlds. On the other hand, it is almost impossible in my view to imagine a philosophical theory which is not based somehow on the supposition of two worlds. To make the two world problem clearer, I will firstly analyse one of the paradoxes which are raised in Plato's *Parmenides*. As it is well known, in the *Parmenides* the young Socrates meets with the old and famous philosopher, Parmenides, and he offers the theory of Forms as a possible solution to those problems which were raised by Parmenides himself and by his disciple, Zeno, concerning the plurality of what there is. Parmenides is attracted by the vigour of Socrates' mind, but he warns the young philosopher that he is not mature enough to see the importance of the problems he raised. After this, he sets out six paradoxes which are unsolvable from the point of view of the theory of Forms. The last of these paradoxes is interesting now for us. Parmenides explicitly asserts that this paradox is a more general one than the other five. The paradox is that of the lord and his servant. If we suppose that there is a world of Forms and there is a world of sensible things that is if we suppose that there are two worlds (in the case of the theory of forms these are the afore mentioned ones, in the case of Descartes' theory these are the body and the soul) and if we suppose that these two worlds are independent of each other, then the one world cannot be known, even it cannot be supposed to exist from the other. Parmenides shows this by way of an example. Suppose, that there is a relation in the sensible world and let this relation be that between the lord and his or her servant, now, it is agreed by Socrates that such a relation exists in the world of Forms too because the sensible world is an exact counterfeit of the world of Forms. However, these are two different worlds, these are independent of each other, only, the one is an exact counterfeit of the other. Since this is the case the relation between the lord and his or her servant in the world of Forms remains within the world of Forms, that is it is impossible that a lord there has a servant here or the other way round. From this it follows, that the relation between the lord and his or her servant must be indexed with the name of one or the other world, there exists no relation whose one member is present in the one world, while its other member is present in the other. This is true for any relation, thus this is true for knowledge as well, if one knows something in the one world, then the object of his or her knowledge must be within that world, and this makes it

impossible to know anything of the other world, even, to know its existence. This way, Parmenides rules out the possibility of supposing two different worlds, since there must be no connection between them and thus they cannot be known at the same time. There is an immediate question: what is the case if I suppose that the two worlds are interconnected, that is if I suppose some medium between the two worlds? Does this not eliminate Parmenides' paradox? My answer is: not. If there is a medium between the two worlds, then from the point of view of this medium, the two worlds are not two, but one. I have no strong basis to suppose that two things which are joint together are two, if I speak of them as two, then I consider those features of them which are not common, which are not joint together, that is I do not consider their being joint together. If I suppose some medium between, say, the world of Forms and the sensible world, then Parmenides has a complete right to object: "what is your reason for distinguishing between the two worlds? Why do not you speak of one by the way? If you speak of two, then you do not consider that they are joint together, you pick up those features which are not joint together, and then my previous problem is to be raised, for you must either acknowledge that there is no connection between them from the aspect of their being two and then you must acknowledge that they cannot be known, or you must suppose some medium and then my opening question is to be asked again." The epistemological problem concerning the two worlds is also a hard one. Since if we suppose that there are two worlds and by this we suppose that they are not connected to each other, then we will inevitably reach the conclusion that they cannot be known one from the other, if I am in the one world and I know that world, then the other is completely unknown to me, I do not even know its existence and I will be unable to know anything of that world for I cannot reach the one world from the other there being no connection between the two and the similar problem will raise if I posit a third world for there cannot be any connection between this third one and the other two either. This way, if I suppose that there are two worlds, then I will get an enormous and insolvable paradox. At the start of my essay, I remarked that worlds must be understood in the loosest possible sense here. They can mean any two entities, that is they can mean anything which is not the same. This is an important point for one could ask: "this is a nice objection, but what is its bearing on the interface problem in Descartes' philosophy?" As I shall argue, the interface problem is in many ways related to the paradox raised in the Parmenides. The beginning of the story is quite similar by Descartes as in the case of the sensible world and the world of Forms. There are two different entities, the body and the soul, and they are independent of each other. Moreover, there are (it is evident) parallels between the body and the soul. To take one brief example, if I was brought to the dentist, but I am terrified by the strange noises there and I run away, then there is an evident parallelism between the speedy motion of my legs (that is my running) and my terrified condition of my mind. So the beginning is quite similar and the outcome of the two problems is parallel too, Descartes cannot say anything of the connection between the body and the soul. There are two different worlds in the case of Plato's Socrates (the sensible world and the world of Forms) and there are two different entities in the case of Descartes (the body and the soul) and nothing can be said of their connections, moreover it seems that unsolvable paradoxes can be raised by trying to make some connections between them. Note, that Descartes does not treat epistemological paradoxes concerning the connection of body and soul, yet, these paradoxes can be raised in his case equally. If all what happens in the body is wholly independent of what happens in the soul, then it is just one further step to say that the soul cannot be known from the body, even its existence is not knowable from there and it is equally true for the soul. Nothing, Descartes says, can make us avoid such a conclusion. The case of Descartes and Plato's Socrates were two famous examples of the two world problem. Yet, it is not needed to treat so monumental theories to see that the two world problem is present in every case where we distinguish between two entities. There are two trees in my garden, the fact of their being two means that they have many different features and there is a point of view from which they can be treated as wholly different, in another case, I would

not be able to see them as two and not one. What is the connection between these two trees? I cannot say that they have some connection because then I treat them as one and not two, if I treat them as two, then I am unable to define any connection between them. I can go even further, since there is no connection between the two trees, if I know the one tree, then it immediately follows that I cannot know the other. If I knew both, then there would be some connection between them, namely, that there is a person (me) who knows both of them. This is not a slippery slope, it is true that my knowledge of the trees is an extrinsic property of the trees, but this does not make any difference that they are interconnected in my knowledge, and this way, they are in some sense one and not two. From this it follows, that if I know that there are two trees in my garden, then I do not know it at all. The two world problem can equally be applied in any case where we speak of different things and one possible way of avoiding it is to say that there is no difference, everything is one. A Parmenidean conclusion of a problem raised by Parmenides (even if by the Platonic Parmenides). My view is that such a way of avoiding this problem is unattainable. It is not the task of this essay to describe those problems and difficulties which are raised by the hypothesis that all there is is one. However, it can be assured that there are many. Just look at the second part of Plato's Parmenides to see their number and intricacy. Thus, if we suppose that all there is is one, that is, that we cannot speak of two things at all, then we get similarly unattainable conclusions. In my opinion, there is so strong a reason in our senses and in all our ways of thinking to suppose that there are many things, that we cannot accept the negative conclusions of the two world problem. (However, it is questionable whether Descartes' view of body and soul or Plato' theory of Forms can be accepted as well, but the analysis of these topics needs other types of investigation than the one followed by this essay.) On the other hand, we can give a Platonic and not Parmenidean answer to the two world problem as well. Such an answer is that although we cannot know that there are things which are two, yet, by means of some lower ranks of cognition we can make this supposition acceptable. It is not beyond all doubt that there is difference among the entities, though our system of thinking and our senses are built in such a manner that they immediately suppose difference and manifoldness, thus in the most cases we must plainly accept this as an axiom, a premise which cannot be questioned. We cannot resolve the two world problem, but in most cases we do not and must not take it into account, otherwise our intellectual systems would cease to work. In some occasions we can go through the steps of this problem in order to fulfill the preliminary philosophical training which is recommended by Plato's Parmenides and in order to see that neither our most basic assumptions in our life are unproblematic. This essay was for such a training.