

**René Descartes (1496-1650)**  
**Letter to Mesland, 9 Feb. 1645**

First of all, I consider what exactly is the body of a man, and I find that this word 'body' is very ambiguous. When we speak in general of body, we mean a determinate part of matter, a part of the quantity of which the universe is composed. In this sense, if the smallest amount of that quantity were removed we would *eo ipso* judge that the body was smaller and no longer complete; and if any particle of the matter were changed we would at once think that the body was no longer quite the same, no longer *numerically the same*. But when we speak of the body of a man, we do not mean a determinate part of matter with a determinate size; we mean simply the whole of the matter joined to the soul of that man. And so, even though that matter changes, and its quantity increases or decreases, we still believe that it is the same body, *numerically the same body*, provided that it remains joined in substantial union with the same soul; and we think that this body is whole and entire provided that it has in itself all the dispositions required to preserve that union. ...

I do not think that there is any part of our bodies which remains *numerically* the same for a single moment, although our body, *qua* human body, remains always *numerically* the same provided that it is united with the same soul. In that sense, it can even be called indivisible; because if an arm or a leg of a man is amputated, we think that it is only in the first sense of 'body' that his body is divided – we do not think that a man who has lost an arm or a leg is less a man than any other. ...

**Letter to Princess Elisabeth, 28 June 1643**

But, since Your Highness notes it is easier to attribute matter and extension to the soul than to attribute to it, when it has no matter, a capacity to move a body and be moved by one, I ask her to please freely attribute this matter and this extension to the soul; for that is nothing but to conceive it united to the body.

And having conceived that well, and having experienced it in herself, it will be easy for her to appreciate that the matter she shall have attributed to this thought is not thought itself, but rather that the extension of this matter is of another nature than the extension of this thought, in that the first is determined to a certain place, from which it excludes every other extension of body, which the second does not. And thus Your Highness will not fail to return easily to the knowledge of the distinction of the soul and the body, notwithstanding that she has conceived their union. ...