

The "Life" missing since Descartes

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A framework of thinking based on Aristotelian either/or logic emerged in the West in the 17th century and it still shapes our society today. With Galileo we require everything to be measured, with Descartes everything has to be broken down into its smallest elements and, with Newton, a cause has to be found for everything. This leads to a way of thinking which attempts to understand everything through mechanisms. Descartes divided the world into matter (res extensa) and mind (res cogitans); Descartes' implication that animals are essentially no different from mechanical models and therefore are unable to feel pain, for example, shows that this division is too simplistic. "Life" (res vivens) has been missing from between mind and matter since Descartes first propounded his theories. Consequently, in our world, we do not make a distinction between interaction (physics) and communication (biology). "Biology, the science of life, is defined by the effort of reducing the living to the dead." (Reinhard Löw, Philosophie des Lebendigen [Philosophy of the Living]). Although quantum physics revealed in 1926 that this framework of thinking is not adequate for matter, it still determines our way of thinking (and acting) today, even within medicine. If it is used to condemn legitimate methods of healing, which cannot be reduced to this framework of thinking, then it becomes a threat to our society.