

“The Answer a Philosopher Gives Determines the Entire Shape of his Metaphysics”: The Influence of Plato and Descartes on Rebecca Goldstein’s *The Mind-Body Problem*

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ABSTRACT

To date, Rebecca Goldstein’s *The Mind-Body Problem* (1983) has been mostly analysed from two points of view. On the one hand, the significance of Renee Feuer’s Orthodox Jewish background in addressing the/her mind-body problem; on the other, the implications of the Holocaust for Noam’s life and, therefore, for the Noam-Renee relationship. Surprisingly, this novel has not been studied from a purely philosophical perspective. For this reason, the present article attempts to shed some light on the protagonist’s mind-body problem by focusing on the references to René Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) and Plato’s *Republic*, Book VII.

I

Jewish-American female writers like Rebecca Goldstein (1950) and Allegra Goodman (1967), among others, often draw upon their Jewish Orthodox background to explore the role of tradition in the life of modern Jewish-American women. Typically, their characters—Renee Feuer in Goldstein’s *The Mind-Body Problem* (1983) and Sarah in Goodman’s *The Family Markowitz* (1996) to cite two examples—“struggle with their ethnic heritage and religious ambivalence, and seek spirituality and self-fulfillment.” (Ronell, 2007: 153). Inevitably, their efforts to integrate two different backgrounds lead

them to feel dissatisfied with their lives. Consequently, in order to come to terms with themselves, they end up sloughing off part of their Orthodox background.

From the beginning of *The Mind-Body Problem*, Renee posits a dichotomy which partly stems from the fact that she is split up between Judaism and secularism. Thus, Renee's most difficult task is probably her attempt to integrate Jewish traditional values, philosophy, science and, most important of all, mind and body. For this reason, there are studies that focus on the significance of an Orthodox Jewish background in a Jewish-American feminist like Renee (Furman, 2000; Jacobowitz, 2004). While Furman explores the tensions between Jewish Orthodoxy and feminism, Jacobowitz explains that the mind-body problem does not arise from the tensions between Renee's Jewishness and American secularism, but from the restrictions of traditional Jewish life. Other papers approach the significance of the Holocaust in this narrative, concentrating on the implications of Renee's Vienna trip for the story (Klingenstein, 1993; Budick, 1996; Nowak, 2004; Cappell, 2007)

Considering that Goldstein views herself as "a philosopher" and a "rationalist," (Lang, 2008: 5 and 20), it is surprising to find that this novel has not been addressed from a philosophical perspective. In the next section, I intend to focus on Renee's attempt to solve the mind-body duality from a Cartesian point of view, as explained in *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641); in the last section, I will mainly concentrate on the implications for the story of the myth of the cave in Plato's *Republic*, Book VII.

II

The Mind-Body Problem tells the story of the initiation of Renee Feuer, a young Orthodox Jewish youth, into the academic world. As in Rebecca Goldstein's case, who earned her B.A. in philosophy at Barnard College (1972) and her Ph.D. in philosophy at Princeton (1977), Renee has finished her degree in philosophy at Barnard and has earned a scholarship to Princeton. Like Goldstein, whose thesis *Reduction, Realism and the Mind* addresses the mind-body duality, Renee arrives at Princeton willing to write her thesis on the mind-body problem. As Burnstein explains, "Rebecca Goldstein considers the ways in which both contemporary and traditional cultural imperatives inflect the gendering and embodying of Jewish women. But her emphasis is philosophical: she shows us how the habit of thinking in binaries—male/female; body/mind; past/present; death/life; good/evil—both reflects traditional patterns of thought and restricts our awareness of the fullness of experiential reality." (2006: 163)

The fact that Renee's approach of philosophy is marked by the presence of dichotomies is obvious when, in an early conversation with the chairman of the philosophy department, Renee explains that

[...] It's the essential problem of metaphysics, about both the world out there and the world in here. In fact, the dichotomy between the two worlds—the outer public place of bodies and the inner private one of minds—is exactly what it's all about. Are both these realms real, and if so how do they fit together? Can one of them be absorbed into the other? The answer a philosopher gives determines the entire shape of his metaphysics. Idealists reduce

in the direction of mind, materialists in the direction of body, and dualists heroically assert the separate and equal reality of both. One after another of the great philosophical systems have attempted to untie the world-knot, pulling out some threads but leaving others impossibly entangled. What is the world? What am I? This is the mind-body problem.²

Renee, however, does not take a long time to feel disillusioned with a department that seems to be more concerned with linguistics than with metaphysical truths. Thus, “[...] Withdrawal was excruciating. My tautly constructed self crumbled. I thought, therefore I was. If I was not a thinker, what was I?” (*MBP* 16). These words, which echo her namesake René Descartes’ (1596-1650) “*I think, therefore I am*”⁴ (italics in original) and “I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time I pronounce it, or that I mentally conceive it”², are Renee’s first statement of existential despair in Princeton.

Somehow marginalised by her colleagues because she does not share their approach of philosophy and ignored by the chairman because her view of metaphysics is “marginal, very marginal” (*MBP* 25), Renee begins to deal with the mind-body problem from the viewpoint of a beautiful, philosophically-ambitious woman whose expectations are curtailed by a hostile male environment that sees her as a mere beauty. Renee, who confronts the ‘incompatibility’ of beauty and intelligence, is opposite of her friend Ava Schwartz. Ava does not have to face up with this problem because her intellectual ambitions are not hindered by any concern for physical beauty: “[a]nd you know this uglification is intentional, in the sense that compulsive hand-washing is intentional. There’s a need behind it. I don’t really want to look pretty. I don’t want to look feminine. You know why? Because feminine is dumb” (*MBP* 193-194). Appropriately, Furman points out that “[...] Goldstein’s female protagonist never quite finds a hospitable American niche for the intellectual woman who refuses to suppress her femininity” (2000: 88). It seems that Renee’s only way to tackle the mind-body duality from a Cartesian perspective is to find the right answer to the question of whether there is a relationship between the external (physical) and internal (intellectual) worlds.

Descartes’ approach of this problem basically consists in presenting the duality as a relationship between the mind—i.e. mental processes—and the body—i.e. physical sensations. Clearly, human beings’ experiences from the outer world are perceived through various sensory organs that affect their mental states. The mind-body dichotomy inevitably results in the dualist approach to this question. Although this issue can be traced back as early as Plato, it is Descartes who in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* speaks for the first time of the mind as the *res cogitans*:

What of thinking? I find here that thought is an attribute that belongs to me; it alone cannot be separated from me. I am, I exist, that is certain. But how often? Just when I think; for it might possibly be the case if I ceased entirely to think, that I should likewise cease altogether to exist. I do not now admit anything which is not necessarily true: to speak accurately I am not more than a thing which thinks, that is to say a mind or a soul, or an understanding, or a reason, which are terms whose significance was formerly unknown to me. I am, however, a real thing and really exist; but what thing? I have answered: a thing which thinks. (*MFP*, Med. II, 52-53)

Although Descartes finds that the human being is in essence “a thing which thinks”, it would be erroneous to claim that the human mind is distinct from his/her body. In order to explain the *res cogitans*, Descartes identifies the mind with the individual’s consciousness, which he distinguishes from the brain, the seat of intelligence.

Renee’s satiric reference to Descartes’ *res cogitans* (“If I couldn’t find any affirmation of my worth in the mind, I would seek it in the body. There are other faculties of the person besides those of the *res cogitans*” *MBP* 16) anticipates one of the novel’s central philosophical issues, the one explained in Meditation VI of *Meditations*, where Descartes claims that the senses and appetites function in the human being to preserve health and well-being.

According to Descartes, a person’s sensations and appetites are manifestations of the mind-body interaction. If there was no union between both, the mind would feel nothing when it receives information about the state of the body. Obviously, this is not the case. When the human being feels pain, it is because his/her body is suffering. Descartes, who thinks that one can establish certain identification between both, compares the mind-body relationship to that of a captain in his ship, explaining that the mind is not like a captain who simply stays in his ship (the body). Mind and body form a whole: “Nature also teaches me by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst, etc. that I am not only lodged in my body as a pilot in a vessel, but that I am very closely united to it, and so to speak so intermingled with it that I seem to compose with it one whole (*MFP*, Med. VI, 93). Vinci thinks that the mind-body dichotomy “is centered on sensations—[...] a class of ideas whose origin lies in naturally instituted correlations rather than the special cognition of brain images; but notice that what is ‘centered on sensations’ is the epistemic basis for the union—how we *know* that there is a union.” (2008: 484). In other words, sensations do not carry out the body-mind union by themselves, but they show it. To Vinci, what permits that union is “the special cognition” which is shown through bodily sensations. This is possible because the special cognition depends somehow upon them. Therefore, the mind-body union only occurs through a close relationship with each other, without a third element.

After conveying the significance of the mind-body problem, Descartes says that, as bodies—i.e. matter—exist, it is obvious that other bodies exist near us, and that some of these are sought after and others rejected, avoided or detested: “Moreover, nature teaches me that many other bodies exist around mine, of which some are to be avoided, and others sought after.” (*MFP*, Med. VI, 93)

In effect, Descartes considers the human body in its relationship to other bodies, explaining it and its relationships from a mechanistic perspective. Since human beings are social animals, they must necessarily be part of a larger group on which they depend for their own survival and well-being. Human beings, a composite of body and mind, are joined to all sensible things through their bodies. In *The Mind-Body Problem*, Goldstein shows that a person is a flesh-and-bone creature who has needs that must be fulfilled. This is parodied in “Other Bodies, Other Minds” (*MBP* 199-255). After Renee’s disappointment with academia and subsequent disillusionment with her marriage, she realises that her only way out is to find elsewhere the love she needs. As

soon as Renee stops having sexual intercourse with Noam, she begins to daydream about seeing her ex boyfriends again or meeting new men.

At this stage, it is worth noting that Renee Feuer is a very appropriate aptronym for a character like her. Renee, from the German 'reine' meaning 'pure', points to the incorruptible part of the human being, the mind; and Feuer, which in German means 'fire', points to her other half, the corruptible body, the one subjected to passions. Renee's attempt to find an answer to the mind-body problem through a series of (bodily) encounters is a satire of Descartes' explanation of human beings' relationships with one another. One of the 'bodies'/'minds' that she gets to know is a professor in Noam's department, Leonard Schmerz. This extramarital affair fills her with an intense desire to live again. Thanks to this affair, she can feel "wonderful excitement, with born-again ecstasy. My body was alive once again, could give and feel pleasure" (*MBP* 209). She is somehow *renée*—reborn—again. In this way, she gives up her *reine* half for the physical world. However, she eventually realises that this affair cannot last because, as it is only focused on one of the two halves, it cannot solve her mind-body problem.

After breaking up with Leonard, she begins to date a German Jew called Daniel Korper. (Korper, meaning 'body' in German, points to his corporeality, which contrasts with Noam's 'incorporeality.' As explained below, Noam Himmel is closer to Plato's world of Ideas than to the physical world.) Unlike Leonard, Korper is not only interested in the body but also in the mind. What Renee loves in him is that "[the qualities of his mind] were in such contrast to the tyrannical purity of Noam's intellect, always intent on the purge of the trivial. Nothing was ever dismissed by Dan as too trivial for consideration, and nothing ever was trivial when he considered it. His mind enlarged and deepened everything" (*MBP* 243). Unlike Leonard, who can only quench her sexual appetite, Daniel can help her come to terms with the mind-body problem because he can combine both. Renee does not only feel her body alive again but also her mind. From a Cartesian point of view, one can claim that Renee's mind and body are united with his help.

In Meditation VI, Descartes maintains that the mind is united to the body on the basis of the body's capacity to feel:³ "[...] I easily conceive that if some body exists with which my mind is conjoined and united in such a way that it can apply itself to consider it when it pleases, it may be that by this means it can imagine corporeal objects [...]" (*MFP*, Med. VI, 87-88). In Renee's case, her mind and body are united because she can combine her *reine* half with her bodily half. In this way, she can be in physical and spiritual tune with Daniel. Daniel, however, does not seem to be very enthusiastic about sharing his life with Renee and decides to abandon her.

Despite her repeated efforts to solve the mind-body problem through her several relationships, Renee is unable to come up with a satisfactory theory. Descartes scholars like Withers and Alanen recently talked about the impossibility or insolubility of the Cartesian mind-body problem as follows: "It may well be that future ages come to regard our culture's unhappiness in the face of material prosperity and its epidemic of psychosomatic illness as symptoms of a collective failure to reintegrate mind and body"

(Withers, 2008: 706). And “[our knowledge of the problematic mind-body union] *can be distinctly known neither through imagination and mathematical reasoning—the main cognitive instruments of physics—nor through the pure intellect or understanding exercised in metaphysical meditation. There is no other cognitive access to these things—the mind-body union and the phenomena that pertain to it—than the senses, and their employment in daily life*” (Alanen, 2008: 475, emphasis added). As explained in the next section, this is exactly why Noam Himmel cannot help Renee solve her dilemma: he is lost in mathematical abstractions that are useless for her. Unlike Noam, an idealist living in Plato’s world of Ideas, Renee, like her namesake, is a rationalist. When she recalls her philosophical conversations with her friend Fruma Friedbaum, Renee remembers that they used to read and have endless conversations about Spinoza, Nietzsche, Russell and Hume, among others. With certain nostalgia she tells herself: “Can you imagine, then, what it was like to turn from the spirit of religion to the spirit of philosophy, or, as I liked to call it in those days, the spirit of rationality?” (*MBP* 174)

III

Closely modelled on American logician and philosopher Saul Kripke (1940)—a child prodigy who had solved complex problems in algebra, calculus and geometry by age 9, a mathematician who became a Princeton full-professor at the age of 37, and is at present a genius in mathematical logic and mathematics, among other fields—Noam Himmel was a prodigy child⁵ who at age 13 came up with a new category of numbers, the “supernaturals” or the “Himmel numbers” (*MBP* 11). At the outset of the novel, he is introduced as a 38-year-old, newly hired mathematics genius at Princeton. Noam is a reputed mathematician and a philosopher of the mind. Unlike Renee, who moves between the Scylla of the mind and the Charybdis of the body, Noam Himmel—etymologically it means ‘pleasant heaven’—does not only aspire to live an unearthly life but he also longs to dwell in Plato’s Ideal world. In an interview with Jessica Lang, Goldstein explains her interest in individuals like Gödel and Noam who only wish to live in upper realms: “Gödel, for me, was the perfect character because he was so heroic. He could see math that nobody else could see, and his sense of exile could only be relieved when he was in this world of pure ideas. In a world of people he was ridiculous; he was completely helpless. My Noam Himmel is somewhat like that” (2008: 11). Like Gödel, Noam, who has the Platonic vision of mathematics as something perfect, pursues the Idea of Beauty in them: “[...] beauty is what math is all about, the most pure and perfect beauty” (*MBP* 30). Later on, when Renee tells Noam that he is only interested in “[t]ruth and beauty, beauty and truth” (*MBP* 94), he answers: “[y]es, exactly. The truth of science, the beauty of art. Math exceeds all” (*MBP* 95). Probably here lies the greatest disagreement between Renee’s and Noam’s respective concepts of beauty. While she likes to contemplate a beautiful painting and appreciate its artistic merit, he is not interested in any art-related discipline (“[...] he has no interest in visual aesthetics, in art or nature itself” *MBP* 48) because he is a Platonist who regards the arts as copies of the world of Ideas. Consequently, Noam is likely to

share Socrates' view of the arts as explained in Book VII of the *Republic*: "[...] all the arts, with few exceptions, are wholly addressed to the opinions and wants of men, or else concern themselves about the production and composition of bodies, or the treatment of things which grow and are put together. And as for the few exceptions, such as geometry and its accompanying sciences, which, according to us, to some extent apprehend what is. [...]"⁶ While Socrates thinks that the world of Ideas—the being—can only be discovered through "geometry and its accompanying sciences", Noam believes that the being can only be discovered through his supernaturals. Again, Noam's and Renee's opposing views of the arts are obvious again when he tells her that "I'll have to take your word for it. If that's art, I can see why it's never interested me at all. I'm just not interested in the qualities of appearances, mine or anybody else's." (*MBP* 50)

In this section, I will resort to Book VII of Plato's *Republic* in order to address the issue of true knowledge in the Ideal world. This book, which opens with Socrates' and Glaucon's descent from Athens to the Piraeus, shows the two characters' trip from the sunlight into the cave of shadows "that represents the subpolitical nature of the human soul." (Rosen, 2005: 19). When Socrates and Glaucon are inside the cave, they see that its dwellers are bound by chains on their necks and legs. The chains allow them to see only what is in front of them. What the dwellers see is a light coming from a burning fire that is behind them and produces shadows. The shadows they see and the noises they hear come from a group of puppeteers that are moving several implements and statues which they take to be the real world (*R* 514b/c-515b). At a certain point, one of the prisoners is released from his enchainment and can see the sunlight. As soon as the ex-prisoner becomes accustomed to the sunlight, he begins to acquire an accurate picture of the outer world. After being exposed to the real world, he has no wish to go back to the cave and, if he returns, it is to free his mates from their chains and, therefore, from their ignorance. Far from feeling happiness for the discovery, however, the prisoners, afraid of being liberated from their bondage, do not only refuse to leave their domain but they also try to kill their freed mate. (*R* 515c-d)

It is clear that Goldstein resorts to this story to compare it with academia. To my mind, Noam's academic life story runs parallel with Book VII. Like Socrates and Glaucon, Noam descends into the cave—university—to later ascend from the sensible world to the Platonic Ideas—supernaturals—that are to be found somewhere beyond the heavens. Once there and as soon as he loses his mathematical gift, Noam falls into the sensible world again.

University is described as an unreal world where professors would feel lost like the prisoners if liberated or removed from their milieu. No wonder that Goldstein makes a satiric allusion to Plato's world of Ideas when she depicts Graduate College as a copy of a copy. Clearly, university is presented as a world of error and confusion: "([Graduate College] is the great cathedral dorm for unmarried graduate students that was built when Woodrow Wilson, who had wanted to model Princeton after Oxford, the Platonic Form of all universities, had been president of the university.) The world outside the campus gates surrendered itself to the senses, and so did I" (*MBP* 16). Later on, and still

within the boundaries of Graduate College, when Renee recalls that two students were laughing at Noam's expense, she compares them to Plato's cave dwellers. (*MBP* 27)

As in the case of the ex-prisoner, whose discovery of the real world is not appreciated or recognised by the other mates, Noam's mathematical ability is not only misunderstood but also mocked by the two students. Like the image of the cave, which "has been constructed to emphasise the radical discontinuity between wisdom and everyday life" (Rosen, 2005: 272), this scene evinces a similar discontinuity between the mathematician's knowledge and Princeton everyday life. This reference to Plato's myth is an appropriate metaphor to criticise academic ignorance. (Later in the novel, Noam and Renee are talking about reincarnation⁷ on their Vienna trip and she recalls Plato's explanation of the cave again. *MBP* 107)

Plato's metaphor of the cave then points to the impossibility of accurate knowledge outside the world of Ideas and mathematical entities. As Gill puts it, "it was [Plato's] distrust of perceptual experience as a source of knowledge that moved him to adopt abstract and immutable mathematical knowledge as his cognitive paradigm" (1994: 100). Like the freed cave dweller who refuses to return to the darkness of the cave, Noam attempts to escape from the 'darkness' of academia in search of the upper realm of Ideas.

In Plato's ideal city, philosophers are educated in such a way as to abstract them from any concern with human affairs. Education in this city is carried out through a rigorous selection of the best 'natures', which are the potential philosophers. The best natures are originally described as lovers of all learning, attracted to intellectual pleasure. This is probably the case with Noam Himmel. Shortly after marrying Renee, he begins to neglect her in order to devote himself more fully to his mathematical research. For instance, during their Italian trip, Renee explains that, while she is trying to enjoy the pleasures of Florence with him, Noam is in the world of Ideas: "And I had been peeved about not getting off at Florence while Noam was off in Plato's heaven. I must remember, I told myself fervently, that Noam is not always where his body is" (*MBP* 93). Noam is more focused on behaving like the ideal (philosophical) learner than on being a good husband. As explained in the *Republic*, the ideal learner must have a strong memory, a capacity to work hard and be fully committed to his task, as is the case with Noam. His intellectual and working skills prove it. Renee acknowledges his "[r]emarkable memory" (*MBP* 28) and, on their trip to Vienna, she explains that "[f]or the first four hours Noam worked. (Four hours of creative work a day is the limit for a mathematician, Noam always says.)" (*MBP* 91)

There is a contrast between his living in the world of Ideas and his inability to cope with simple everyday things, which Renee calls "his adorable ineptness in dealing with the mundane world" (*MBP* 21). Not long after getting married, Noam is advised by Ted Berliner, a colleague of his, to buy a house instead of renting a flat. Noam answers that "[a] house [...] I've never really considered it. It would be a burden, tie me down" (*MBP* 129). Eventually, he changes his mind, but leaves Renee the responsibility of the house. And on the day of their first anniversary, Noam tells her that "you are an

essentially trivial woman. You have a lovely face and body, but in essence you are very trivial.” (*MBP* 188)

While Renee lives in a physical world—at least in the eyes of Noam—he strives to dwell in a purely spiritual realm, in line with what Plato explains about the role of sciences. According to Plato, the sciences help human beings transcend, enabling them to move towards the light of truth so that they can discover truth. In this way, “[t]he sciences provide the means to this end” (Natorp, 2004: 201). Plato considers that gymnastics and music are no longer adequate. Number and calculation are more appropriate because they are the most elementary element of education: “Again, have you ever noticed that those who have a natural bent for calculation are, with scarcely any exceptions, naturally quick at all studies; and that men who are slow, if they are trained and exercised in this study, even supposing they derive no other benefit from it, at any rate progress so far as to become invariably quicker than they were before” (*R* 526b). This is probably the only way to transform individuals into human beings. (“[...] we must employ [maths] in the education of the best natures” *R* 526c)

It might be true that pure mathematics helps man/woman be in the world of Ideas, but, as happens with Noam Himmel, this also creates the danger of transforming him/her into a less humane being. Ironically, mathematics, a discipline that has shaped Noam’s nature, has dehumanised him, secluding him in a world of ideas and forcing him to lose some contact with reality. This is clear in a conversation with Renee, when Noam makes an allusion to his preference for the world of Ideas in detriment of the sensible world: “[...] *I discovered early on that I liked ideas much better than people, and that was the end of my loneliness.* For one thing, ideas are consistent. And you can control them better than people.” And “[...] Logical relations are transparent and lovely. *Human relations, from what I can tell, always seem pretty muddy*” (*MBP* 29, emphasis added). Apparently, Renee’s gloomy confession announces the end of his loneliness and the beginning of hers. (One of the ironies in *The Mind-Body Problem* is that the Platonist Noam never felt at home with dialogue, a key form in Plato’s philosophical system.)

Like Plato’s Socrates, Noam tries to escape human relations living in the contemplation of Ideas. Also like him, Noam seems to think that mathematics is so important to learn philosophy and to learn about what is real—the being—that he places arithmetic and calculation at the centre of his curriculum.

According to the *Republic*, arithmetic and calculation should be part of every art and science because these two disciplines can take the human being away from the corporeal world and help him/her reach the being. Following Rosen’s line of argumentation (2005: 290ff), in arithmetic and calculation, we need to distinguish between theoretical—pure—numbers and counting numbers. The latter are to be used to count objects, to see the *oneness* of such and such thing; the former show the objects’ *oneness* itself, different from the formal properties by which objects or individuals are differentiated (*R* 529-531). In *The Mind-Body Problem*, this is reflected in Noam’s discovery of the supernaturals, “a new category of mathematical existence, to be counted amongst the naturals and integers, the rationals and irrationals, the reals and

inaginaries and surreals and surds, the cardinals and ordinals, transcendentals and transfinites.” (*MBP* 11)

‘Noam’s discovery of the supernaturals’ is not an accidental phrase. Like his Greek mentor, Noam considers that there is a mathematical realm that is not constructed but simply discovered by the mathematician. In effect, mathematical Platonism consists of “the *discovery* (not the stipulation or construction) of properties and relations of mathematical objects—objects that have a timeless and necessary existence that is independent of the physical, material world” (White, 2006: 239). Renee confirms this when she remembers that “[a]ctually, Noam regards [mathematics] not as creations but as discoveries. He holds, as so many great mathematicians have, the Platonist point of view” (*MBP* 46-47). Later on, Noam tells Renee that, thanks to the supernaturals, he enters “[a] whole new realm, beyond any of the others” (*MBP* 47). This is a parodic reference to Plato’s explanation of arithmetic and calculation as entities existing in the realm of Ideas.

In sum, the significance of arithmetic and calculation lies primarily in the fact that they can help individuals move towards the being. Noam’s supernaturals are probably Plato’s counterpart of what Rosen calls “purely theoretical numbers or monads” (2005: 290). Each of these numbers or monads, attached to the Platonic Ideas, is a *one* which can be grasped by pure thinking. These theoretical numbers are not attached to bodies because their units are homogeneous monads that cannot be divided, separated or multiplied into many. If these monads were heterogeneous, they could be used to compose any number.

One of the problems of Plato’s numbers that inhabit in the world of Ideas is that it is not viable for the human being. Rosen explains that the ideal world is rejected by ordinary man: “The historical irony of the fate of the *Republic* is that it illustrates Plato’s conception of the cyclical nature of human life: a work intended to found a new mode of political life by bringing philosophy down from the heavens and allowing it to walk in the cities of humankind is the first step on the road that leads finally to the repudiation of Platonism and the rule of poets and those whom Plato would have regarded as sophists” (2005: 6). The same happens to Noam, who inevitably moves from the Ideal to the physical world. At the end, as soon as Noam thinks that he has lost his mathematical gift, he begins to regard maths not from a purely abstract perspective but from a realist viewpoint. The world of Ideas has once separated Noam from his wife, but, after he leaves it, he can dwell in the physical realm with Renee. Finally, Noam’s descent into the physical world facilitates his coming to terms with her. Undoubtedly, this is a *sine qua non* condition to provide a satisfactory theory of the mind-body problem.

Notes

1. Rebecca Goldstein, *The Mind-Body Problem* (New York: Penguin Group, 1993 [1983]), p. 152. Hereafter abbreviated *MBP* followed by page number.
2. René Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, trans. Valentine Rodger Miller & Reese P. Miller (Dordrecht, Boston & Lancaster: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1984 [1644]), Part I, Art. VII, p. 5.
3. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, ed. Stanley Tweyman (London & New York: Routledge, 1993 [1641]), Med. II, p. 51. Hereafter abbreviated *MFP* followed by Meditation and page number.
4. For a detailed explanation of the term ‘interactionism’—the idea that the mind-body union only consists in their interaction—see Marleen Rozemond, *Descartes’s Dualism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998).
5. For a discussion of Noam’s precocity with numbers, see David Brauner, “Brilliant Jewish Boys and Gifted Jewish Girls: The Child Prodigy in Bernice Rubens and Rebecca Goldstein,” in Ulrike Behlau and Bernhard Reitz, *Jewish Women’s Writing of the 1990s and beyond in Great Britain and the United States* (Mainz University Studies in English, 2004), pp. 221ff.
6. Plato, Republic, ed. Andrea Tschemplik (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 533b; hereafter abbreviated as *R* followed by section.
7. For the Platonic concept of the transmigration of the soul, which is outside of the scope of this article, see Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995), 256a-e. For references to this concept in *The Mind-Body Problem*, see pp. 100-101 and 108.

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