

Study guide

Riskin, Jessica. *The Restless Clock*. Chicago And London, The University of Chicago Press, 2018, pp. 44-76. In Chapter 2, Riskin discusses the theological challenges and disagreements raised by Descartes' view of the human being.

1. What was Descartes' view of man? In particular, how did Descartes hope to understand the processes of living organisms—from the pumping of the blood to passions like joy, sadness and love?
2. How did Descartes' approach to knowledge differ from the traditional approach? In particular, did Descartes's view of man include any of Aristotle's three souls: *vegetative, animal, or rational*?
3. What was Descartes' view of the animals, and how did it differ from his predecessors? Were they alive? Do they have souls? In what sense were they "like church organs"? In what way was Descartes' view of animals like and unlike the traditional (Aristoelian) view of animals?
4. How was Descartes' view of animals influenced by medieval and scholastic philosophy? In what sense was Descartes' view conservative? In what sense was his method revolutionary? In particular, what types of entities did he invoke in order to understand the working of animals? What, significantly, did he leave out? Has this approach rendered life *intelligible*?
5. Why did Descartes' view of the animal-machine finally give rise to a theological conflict? In particular, how did his rejection of the distinction between *substance* and *accident* challenge the doctrine of the Eucharist—specifically the doctrine of trans-substantiation?
6. What theological conflict attended Descartes' view of the human soul? In particular, why was his stark distinction between the body-machine and the disembodied rational human soul (Cartesian dualism) so controversial and dangerous? How, according to Riskin, did it conflict with the doctrines of the incarnation and resurrection?
7. Why are many protestants be more comfortable with Descartes' distinction between matter and spirit than many Catholics? Are you comfortable with the "division of labor" introduced by Cartesian dualism? Do you believe that it is possible for something to be alive without having a soul?
8. How was Descartes' view of man re-appropriated (or distorted) by subsequent thinkers? For example, what was Hobbes' idea of the Commonwealth? And how was it based on a brute-mechanistic view of man? How might the brute-mechanistic view of animals affect how we treat them?