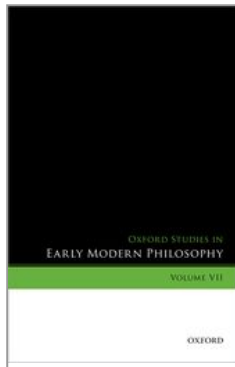


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# Descartes on the Mind-Body Union

## A Different Kind of Dualism

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## Abstract and Keywords

What does the mind-body union consist in for Descartes? At a minimum, causal interaction between mind and body. But also in a certain experience of the body with which we're united, which inclines us to locate bodily sensations as occurring in it, not in the mind. Hence, we mistakenly identify ourselves with that body. The phenomenology of mind-body interaction, also manifested in the mind's control of the body, explains Descartes' doctrine that the whole of the mind is united with the whole body. The chapter takes the principal alternative interpretation to be the view developed by Paul Hoffman that Descartes accepted the scholastic theory that the soul is the substantial form of the body. It argues that Hoffman's view misunderstands the texts, and fails to appreciate how untenable Pomponazzi's treatise *On the Immortality of the Soul* had made an Aristotelian interpretation of the mind-body relation.

*Keywords:* mind-body union, mind-body interaction, phenomenology, bodily sensations, immortality, soul, René Descartes, Pietro Pomponazzi, Paul Hoffman

Let's begin with a few things we should be able to agree on when we talk about Descartes's view of the mind-body relation. In one important sense Descartes is a dualist: he thinks the mind and the body are really distinct substances, each capable of existing without the other.<sup>1</sup> Establishing this is crucial for his project of defending the immortality of the soul. Although Descartes may not wish to claim success in demonstrating immortality, he does claim that forming a

maximally clear concept of the soul, ‘completely distinct from every concept of body’, is the chief prerequisite for knowing that the soul is immortal.<sup>2</sup> Consistently with this dualism, he frequently identifies himself—the thing he refers to by using the first person pronoun—with the mind or soul which is supposed to survive the destruction of the body.<sup>3</sup>

**(p.84)** Nevertheless, in spite of this distinction, and in apparent tension with it, Descartes also insists, repeatedly, that he has a body which is ‘very closely joined’ to him, so much so that he and his body ‘compose one thing’.<sup>4</sup> He is ‘not merely present in his body as a sailor is present in his ship’.<sup>5</sup> What does *that* mean? What is Descartes rejecting when he rejects that comparison? How is the relation between mind and body different from that between a sailor and his ship? And what is it like? When Descartes tries to characterize it in positive terms, he does not seem able to find language he is happy with. He writes that he is ‘as it were [*quasi*], intermingled with’ his body, and that the bodily sensations ‘are nothing but certain confused modes of thinking which have arisen from the union and, as it were [*quasi* again] intermingling of the mind with the body’ (AT vii. 81 (1–14)). It’s easy to see why he is uncomfortable about using this language: it makes the composition of mind and body sound like the mixing of two physical substances.<sup>6</sup> But it’s not so easy to see how he might explain that relation without having to qualify his language with a *quasi*. What does the mind-body union consist in?

### 1. The Mind-Body Union as Consisting in Causal Interaction

There’s not much consensus about this. But one thing scholars seem agreed about is that whatever else it may involve, the mind-body union in Descartes involves *at least* a causal interaction between mind and body. The mind acts on the body when its acts of will cause motion in the body (via motions in the pineal gland). The body acts on the mind when motions in the various parts of the body cause sensations or passions in the mind (again, via motions in the pineal gland). Does the mind-body union involve more than this causal interaction? Some Descartes scholars seem to have thought that it doesn’t—or at least, that if it does, Descartes never explained clearly what more is involved.<sup>7</sup>

Consider Margaret Wilson, who argued that Descartes has two incompatible conceptions of the mind-body union: one she called the ‘Natural Institution’ theory; the other she called the ‘Co-extension’ theory.<sup>8</sup> The first is at work when Descartes describes mind and body as interacting. It holds that when God created us he arbitrarily instituted the causal connections between mind and body described above. But there is no necessary connection between particular motions in the body and the mental events causally connected with them. God could have ordered things differently. It’s part of this theory that the interaction has a specific locus: the pineal gland. But it’s no part of this theory that we directly experience the unity of mind and body. Wilson thinks it *can’t* be:

Descartes may have been subject to the confusion of thinking he did have direct experience of the mind-body union in himself, while forgetting that on the Natural Institution theory, *no such experience is possible*.<sup>9</sup>

All we can experience are certain sensations (of hunger, thirst, pleasure, pain, etc.) which we are prone to refer to some part of the body.

**(p.86)** The second theory is at work when Descartes says that ‘the whole mind is united to the whole body’ and that the mind is ‘as if intermixed’ with the body.<sup>10</sup> This theory involves the idea that

we experience the co-extensiveness of mind throughout the body (the whole mind is united to the whole body), and (perhaps by this very fact) experience something called the mind-body union. (Wilson, *Descartes*, 216)

Wilson’s characterization of this second theory is vague and tentative, but she would probably have said that the vagueness lies in the view she’s discussing, not just in her account of it. She calls it ‘obscure’ and ‘seemingly almost ineffable’, whereas she thinks the Natural Institution theory is ‘philosophically resourceful and relatively intelligible’.<sup>11</sup>

Wilson acknowledges that many critics have found it problematic that two very different substances, one extended, the other non-extended, might interact. Bernard Williams called this ‘the scandal of Cartesian interactionism’ and thought both Malebranche’s occasionalism and Leibniz’s pre-established harmony resulted from the ‘insurmountable philosophical objections to any theory of this kind’.<sup>12</sup> This has been a common view. But Wilson doesn’t seem particularly troubled by the traditional objections to interaction,<sup>13</sup> and thinks the Natural Institution theory has a clear motivation in a combination of scientific and commonsensical considerations. Certain brain states are tightly correlated **(p.87)** with (both necessary and sufficient for) certain mental states, whereas the states of our peripheral sensory organs do not have a tight correlation with the mental states they indirectly cause. Descartes appeals to the phantom limb phenomenon to illustrate this. He once knew a girl who had had her arm amputated, but continued to feel pain in the lost arm. His explanation of this is that

the nerves which used to go from the brain down to the hand now terminated in the arm near the elbow, and were being agitated by the same sort of motion as must previously have been set up in the hand, so as to produce in the soul, residing in the brain, the sensation of pain in this or that finger.<sup>14</sup>

So long as the brain is in a state apt to produce the sensation of pain-as-if-in-the-hand, the soul will feel that peculiar kind of pain, even if the ultimate bodily cause of the sensation is not damage to the hand.

By contrast, Wilson finds the Co-extension theory quite unmotivated. It's a theory Descartes 'slides' or 'drifts' into, possibly because he wants to avoid holding that man is a unity *per accidens* (a danger on the Natural Institution theory), possibly because he accepts the causal principles Elisabeth invokes when she objects to interaction, possibly because he anticipates the kinds of objection twentieth-century critics like Ryle would raise, but most probably because he realizes that the concept of a human being involves both mental and bodily features, a fact his early view of the mind-body relation does not readily allow for. None of these reasons, however, is compelling:

Descartes should have stuck to his guns. The attempt to accommodate Rylean intuitions within a dualistic system—if that is what is at issue—has resulted not **(p.88)** in an improved theory, but a self-contradictory and incoherent one. (Wilson, *Descartes*, 217)

'Sticking to his guns' here means sticking to the Natural Institution theory, which is his best account of embodiment. Only when he tries to combine that theory with the obscure and almost ineffable Co-extension theory does he wind up contradicting himself.

## 2. Not as a Sailor is Present in his Ship

Is Descartes's theory of the mind-body union as problematic as Wilson thinks? Some able scholars seem to agree with her in dismissing what she calls 'the Co-extension theory'.<sup>15</sup> But is Descartes's theory really that unmotivated and incoherent? Where, exactly, is the contradiction? There will be a contradiction if the Natural Institution theory holds that *direct* interaction between mind and body occurs *only* in the pineal gland, and the Co-extension theory holds that the mind interacts *directly* with *every* part of the body. But do Descartes's statements about the whole mind being united with the whole body really imply direct interaction between the mind and every part of the body? On the face of it, the answer is 'no'.<sup>16</sup> What, then, do they imply?

Again, is a theory of the mind-body union relying only on their causal interaction really adequate as an account of Descartes's intentions? A sailor interacts in many ways with his ship. If we focus only on interaction, can we account for Descartes's insistence that the mind is not related to the body as a sailor is related to his ship?

We shall argue that one key to answering these questions lies in the phenomenology of bodily sensations.<sup>17</sup> Here's Descartes, early in the **(p.89)**

Sixth Meditation, describing some of the things he had previously thought true on the evidence of his senses:

I sensed that I had a head, hands, feet, and other limbs making up the body, which I regarded as part of myself, or perhaps even as my whole self. I also sensed that this body was involved with many others, which could affect it in various ways, favorable and unfavorable. I measured the favorable by a certain sensation of pleasure, and the unfavorable by a sensation of pain. And in addition to pain and pleasure, I also sensed in myself hunger, thirst, and other appetites of this kind. (AT vii. 74 (17-25))

Shortly after this, there is a subtle shift in his description of his relation to this body. It is not that he regards this body as a *part* of himself, much less his whole self: rather, this body is the one ‘which by a certain special right I called mine’ (AT vii. 75 (30)-76 (1)). The justification for appropriating this particular body is that it ‘pertains’ to him more than any other: he can never be separated from it, as he can from other bodies; he feels all his appetites and affects ‘in it and on account of it’; and he is aware of pain and pleasurable stimulations in this body, but not in others located outside it.

According to the theory developed in the Second Meditation, any sensation, strictly speaking, is a form of thinking, and so, a state of the mind (AT vii. 29 (11-18)). But in the Sixth Meditation Descartes is impressed by the fact that we tend to locate certain kinds of sensation—paradigmatically: pleasure, pain, hunger, and thirst—as occurring in particular parts of the body.<sup>18</sup>

**(p.90)** When the nerves in the foot are moved violently and more than is usual, that movement of the nerves, passing through the medulla of the spine, to the inmost parts of the brain, there gives a sign to the mind to sense something, namely, pain as if [*tanquam*] existing in the foot.<sup>19</sup>

On Descartes’s view it’s a mistake to locate the pain as occurring in any part of the body. As a sensation, it’s a state of the mind, in particular, a confused judgment (or ‘proto-judgment’)<sup>20</sup> about what is happening in the body. The cause of that judgment is damage to my body. Perhaps I’ve cut my foot on a piece of glass. But I’m not aware of this cut *as a cut* or even *as damage to my body*. I’m aware of it simply as a painful state which seems to be in my foot.

It’s this confusion about where the pain is occurring which leads me to identify myself with my body. I’m in pain, and I correctly judge that the pain is in me. If it’s in *me*, then the correct inference to make would be that it’s in my mind, not my body. But I don’t make that inference. The pain *feels as if* it were in my foot. So I judge that the pain *is* in my foot. In judging the pain to be in my foot, I am doubly confused: I attribute something which is in fact a mental state to a

physical object; and I also conceive a thinking thing (myself) as if it were something physical, spread throughout the body.

Though Descartes emphasizes the confusion in these thoughts, he doesn't think they are totally erroneous. Just as our varying perceptions (**p.91**) of color are responses to real variations in the external objects (even if the varying features of the objects do not *resemble* the sensations they produce), so our bodily sensations are typically responses to things really going on in the body (even if they don't give a clear idea of those goings-on simply as features of an extended thing).<sup>21</sup> For Descartes one crucial difference between the mind-body case and the sailor-ship case is that because of the union between mind and body, the mind experiences bodily sensations which are both indicators that something is amiss in the body and also intrinsically painful:

There's nothing my own nature teaches me more vividly than that I have a body, and that when I feel pain, there's something wrong with the body, and that when I'm hungry or thirsty, the body needs food and drink, and so on... (AT vii. 80 (27-30))

It's by these sensations of pain, hunger, and thirst, Descartes says, that nature teaches me that I'm not merely present in my body as a sailor is present in his ship (AT vii. 81 (1-3)). Because these bodily sensations are painful or pleasurable, they motivate action:

My nature...does teach me to avoid what induces a feeling of pain, and to seek out what induces feelings of pleasure, and the like.<sup>22</sup>

When I have that pain which I locate in my foot, that's not an experience I want to have continue. It hurts. This motivates me to try to avoid having it continue, provokes me to seek, as far as I can, to remove the cause of the pain. And though the pain may be in the mind, the cause of the pain is damage to my foot.<sup>23</sup> So the tendency I have to (**p.92**) locate the pain as occurring in the foot generally motivates the right kind of remedial action. Similarly, the hunger I feel in my stomach—a sign generally that my whole body needs nourishment—moves me to seek food, as does the prospect of the pleasure I expect to derive from eating.

By contrast, the sailor might well be aware of damage to his ship, and seek to repair it. He might see that the wind has torn one of the sails loose from the mast and set about fixing it. But while this visual experience—combined with knowledge of the probable consequences of such damage—might lead him to fear pain to come, he doesn't find the visual experience itself painful, in the way he'd find it painful to be hit by a falling spar.

This immediate interest we have in what happens in our bodies is one thing Descartes has in mind when he denies that the mind-body case is like that of the sailor and his ship. When he rejects the sailor analogy in the Sixth Meditation, he writes that if he weren't so closely joined to the body he 'wouldn't feel pain when the body was hurt, but would perceive the damage purely by the intellect, just as a sailor perceives by sight if anything in his ship is broken' (AT vii. 81 (5-11)). The reference here to a 'purely intellectual' perception may be misleading. The point is not so much that the mind's hypothetical perception of damage to the body is devoid of all sensory content as that it lacks the affective aspect which characterizes so many of our bodily sensations and makes them an intrinsic reason for action. What the hypothetical perception has, and the characteristic bodily sensation lacks, is an accurate representation of the way the body, considered as a geometrical object, has been affected.

In a sense, the connection between mind and body results from an act of the divine will which is arbitrary. God could have ordered those connections differently. 'God could have made the nature of man such that this particular motion in the brain'—the one typically caused, say, by damage to the foot, which in turn causes the kind of pain I tend to locate as occurring in the foot—'indicated something else to the mind' (AT vii. 88 (7-12)). If God had so chosen, it could have been the case that, when my foot is injured, I would feel a pain which I would locate **(p.93)** as occurring in my hand. Or it could have been the case that damage to my foot would cause me to feel a pleasure which I would locate as somewhere else in the body.<sup>24</sup>

But though the connections may be arbitrary in the sense that they result from an act of God's will, a decision which could have gone differently, they're not arbitrary in the sense of not having a purpose.<sup>25</sup> They have the function of motivating us to do what we must to fix the damage. Because I tend to locate the pain as occurring in the foot, dislike the pain, and with luck can alleviate it by repairing the damage to the foot, I do what must be done for the well-being of my body. Indeed, Descartes claims that no other system of mind-body correlations that God could have established would have been as conducive to the preservation of the body as the one he did establish (AT vii. 88 (12-13))!

This account of the experience does not imply that there is a direct action on my mind by any part of my body other than the pineal gland. When I cut my foot, the cut initiates a causal series which proceeds through the nervous system to the brain. Only there does the series directly affect the mind. The causation of the pain is not direct or immediate. But the feeling of pain itself involves no awareness of that complex causal chain. It *feels to me* as if my awareness of my body were direct.



Later Cartesians articulated the contrast between the relation between mind and body and the relation between a sailor and his ship in ways Descartes did not, but which seem a natural way of developing his view. For example, where Descartes says briefly, early in the Sixth Meditation (AT vii. 76), that he could never be separated from the body he calls 'his', as he could from other bodies, Louis de la Forge formulates this thought in a way which makes it more precise. It's not strictly accurate, from Descartes's own point of view, for him to say that he can never be separated from his body. After all, the point of arguing for the real distinction is to show that the mind can survive the **(p.94)** destruction of the body.<sup>26</sup> In de la Forge, this becomes the claim that in the mind-body case the union is largely involuntary.<sup>27</sup> The human mind does not choose which body it will be united with, nor for how long; it cannot leave the body at will (except, presumably, by suicide), and it certainly cannot move at will to another body. Normally a sailor can easily leave his ship for another, or to take up life on shore. The mind's relation to this body binds it to live with it for as long as it is embodied, and obliges it to feel unity with it and to identify itself with it.

### 3. Scholastic Interpretations I: A Substantial Union

So far we've argued that the union of the mind with one particular body involves not only its interaction with that body, but also a very special kind of experience of that body: the mind's tendency, as a result of the 'feel' of a bodily sensation, to locate it in the body, and so to identify itself with the body; and the tendency of these sensations, because of their intrinsic 'feel' to move us to action. For the past quarter century, however, English-language discussions of Descartes have been dominated by a very different account of the union, one which seeks to interpret Descartes's theory by way of such scholastic concepts as those of a substantial union and a substantial form.<sup>28</sup> Some of this seems to us **(p.95)** defensible, and harmless enough, properly understood. Some of it seems to us indefensible, and quite harmful, encouraging a profound misunderstanding of Descartes's intentions in the *Discourse*, *Meditations*, and *Principles*.

We begin by defending what we can. In the *Fourth Objections*, addressing Descartes's argument that nothing belongs to his essence except that he is a thinking thing, Arnauld remarks:

It seems that this argument proves too much, and takes us back to the Platonic view (which the author nevertheless rejects) that nothing corporeal belongs to our essence, so that a man is merely a soul, and the body merely a vehicle for that soul—a view which gives rise to the definition of man as a soul using a body.<sup>29</sup>

**(p.96)** Arnauld sees that Descartes had tried to forestall a Platonic interpretation of his thought by rejecting the claim that the mind is related to the body as a sailor is to his ship.<sup>30</sup> But he thinks Descartes can't avoid Platonic dualism, given his view that nothing corporeal belongs to his essence.

When Descartes replied to Arnauld, he was at pains to emphasize that he believed the mind to be *substantially* united to the body (AT vii. 219 (18–20); 228 (1–3)). But he didn't explain what he meant by this language. Though he claimed to have proven this in the Sixth Meditation, he had not in fact used the scholastic terminology there. So scholars have disagreed about what he meant. Hoffman took him to mean, not merely that the union was a union of two substances, but also that the product of the union was a substance.<sup>31</sup> This sounds *prima facie* plausible, but we take Normore to have shown that in fact it's quite unlikely that Descartes thought this.<sup>32</sup> And as several scholars have noted, Descartes conspicuously does *not* call the human being a substance.

Other scholars have argued that the adverb adds nothing to the adjective it modifies. "The terms "substantially united" and "united" (p.97) have the same sense for Descartes."<sup>33</sup> *Prima facie* this is highly implausible. If 'substantially united' meant no more than 'united', why would Descartes repeatedly add this modifier in his reply to Arnauld? Why would he insist on its importance in his correspondence with Regius in January 1642?

A careful look at that correspondence will be helpful. Regius, a physician at the University of Utrecht, had incorporated Cartesian ideas into his teaching, and gotten in trouble by defending three theses: that a human being is an *ens per accidens*, that the earth moves around the sun, and that there are no substantial forms. As a result, the regent of the university, Voetius, tried to have Regius removed from his chair.<sup>34</sup>

Descartes had not publicly defended any of the propositions Voetius sought to condemn. His *Discourse on Method* hinted at his Copernicanism, but did no more than that.<sup>35</sup> His *Meteorology* did not explicitly deny the existence of substantial forms; it just claimed it as a virtue of his approach that he had not found it necessary to assume them in his explanations of meteorological phenomena.<sup>36</sup> Nothing Descartes had published had claimed that human beings are *entia per accidens*. But of course both the *Discourse* and the *Meditations* had argued that mind (or soul) and body are distinct. The *Meditations* was particularly clear that they are *really* distinct, which implies that each can exist without the other. When Descartes wrote to Regius in December 1641, he acknowledged that it followed from the real distinction between soul and body that '*in a certain way it is accidental for the body to be joined to the soul, and for the soul to be joined to the body*'.<sup>37</sup>

So Descartes recommended that Regius adopt the following defense: when he called the human being an *ens per accidens*, all he meant was that (p.98) *the process by which mind and body come to be united is accidental; something which is an ens per se can nevertheless come to be per accidens*.<sup>38</sup> He was *not* saying that the entity which resulted from that process was accidental. And when he said that body and soul, in relation to the whole human being, are

incomplete substances, he had shown that he thought the entity resulting from the process was an *ens per se*.

Regius did not fully take Descartes's advice. He made some use of the proposed explanation, but also departed from it in some respects, and made the mistake of saying that mind and body are united by position or disposition. Descartes objected that not only was this liable to give offense to the theologians, it also had the disadvantage of not being true. When he replied in January 1642, he advised Regius to confess that he had misunderstood the meaning the phrase *ens per accidens* had among the scholastics; when he said that a human being was an *ens per accidens*, he did not mean to disagree with those scholastics who hold it to be an *ens per se*. Their apparent disagreement was merely verbal. He must assure them that he thinks the mind is united to the body '*really and substantially*, not by position or disposition' (AT iii. 493 (4-5), our emphasis). He must say that they are united '*by a true mode of union*, as everyone commonly admits' (AT iii. 493 (7-8), our emphasis).

What does this mean? Descartes comments that although everybody says this, 'nobody explains what it amounts to' (AT iii. 493 (9)). So Regius is under no obligation to explain it either. But then he adds:

Still, you *could* do so, as I did in my *Metaphysics*, by saying that we perceive that sensations of pain and all the others [i.e. all the other bodily sensations] are not pure thoughts of a mind distinct from a body, but confused perceptions of a mind really united to the body. For if an angel were in a human body, it would not have sensations like ours, but would only perceive the motions caused by external objects. By this it would be distinguished from a true man.<sup>39</sup>

**(p.99)** This is helpful in two ways. First, it explains how Descartes could claim, in his response to Arnauld, to have shown in the Sixth Meditation that the soul is substantially united with the body when he never used that language in that Meditation. What he *had* shown in the Sixth Meditation was that the meditator experiences certain sensations which tempt him to think (wrongly) of a certain body as a part of himself, but which still give him a right to identify that body as peculiarly *his* body, as the one body with which he has the unusually close relation described in the preceding section. And that's what he thinks is the best way to understand the scholastic talk of a substantial union. So though he had not explicitly used the scholastic language, he had shown that the mind and body were united in a very special way, which the scholastic language could be used to express. He offers Regius the phenomenology of the Sixth Meditation as a way of explaining language scholastic philosophers use without explanation—or at least, without any commonly understood meaning.

Second, this illustrates a strategy Descartes had recommended at the beginning of that January letter: it would be better for Regius never to put forward new opinions, keeping all the old ones 'in name', and contenting himself with offering new arguments for the old opinions. 'Those who understood your arguments would infer from them, of their own accord, the conclusions you want to be understood' (AT iii. 491 (11)–492 (2)). Descartes proposes a method of writing which will offer standard formulas, to reassure the traditionalists that nothing too radical is going on, and rely on those readers open to new ideas to see for themselves how they ought to interpret that language. Gilson was right to quote with approval Boutroux's remark about Descartes's skill in putting new wine in old wineskins.<sup>40</sup>

#### 4. An objection and a Reply

We interrupt this argument to consider an objection which may arise. Someone might argue:<sup>41</sup> you're offering us a theory of *the nature* of the **(p.100)** mind-body union, an account of *what it is* for the mind to be united to one particular body, for it to have that special relationship to that body which justifies the person in calling it *her* body. The text just cited from the January 1642 letter to Regius may support that reading. If what distinguishes the mind-body union from the relation of a sailor to his ship is that the mind is substantially united to the body, and if what it is for the mind to be substantially united to the body is for it to experience a certain kind of sensation as a result of what happens in and to that body, a sensation of the sort described in the Sixth Meditation (and in §2 of this chapter), then to give an account of that kind of bodily sensation will be to give an account<sup>42</sup> of what it is for the mind to be united to the body.

*But*, there are other texts to consider. Sometimes Descartes writes about the union in a way which suggests that the bodily sensations are just *a causal consequence* of the union, and hence, *evidence* for it, but not something which *constitutes* it, not even partially. There are passages of this kind even in the Sixth Meditation, for example, where Descartes writes that

those sensations of thirst, hunger, pain, and so on, are nothing but certain confused modes of thinking which *have arisen from the union*, and as it were, blending, of the mind with the body. (AT vii. 81 (11–14), our emphasis)

But perhaps the strongest passage in support of this reading occurs in Descartes's letter to Princess Elisabeth of May 21, 1643, where he enumerates four kinds of primitive notion, on the basis of which we form all our other conceptions: those which are most general, and apply to everything we can conceive (being, number, duration, etc.); those which apply to body in particular (extension, from which follow figure and movement); those which apply to the soul alone (thought, which includes both the perceptions of the intellect and the

inclinations of the will); and those which concern the soul and the body together, where

**(p.101)** we have only the notion of their union, on which depends that of the power the soul has to move the body, and the power the body has to act on the soul, causing its sensations and passions. (AT iii. 665 (21-4))

Here the union appears, not only as the cause of the powers of soul and body, but also as a primitive notion. Presumably this means it cannot be analyzed. In his next letter to Elisabeth Descartes will say that what belongs to this union

is known only obscurely by the intellect alone, or even by the intellect aided by the imagination, but is known very clearly by the senses. As a result, people who never philosophize, and who use only their senses, have no doubt that the soul moves the body, and that the body acts on the soul, but they consider both body and soul as one single thing. That is, they have a conception of their union. For to conceive the union between two things is to conceive them as one thing. (AT iii. 691 (26)-692 (10))

If it were possible to give an analysis of the nature of the union, an account which explained what the union consists in—say, by explaining that it involves not only a particularly tight kind of causal connection, but also the fact that the body is able to produce a certain kind of sensation (one satisfying the criteria enumerated in §2 of this chapter)—why would Descartes say that the union is a primitive notion? It appears from our account to be susceptible of analysis.

This seems to us a powerful objection. It looks as though Descartes was not consistent in the way he presented the role of bodily sensations. Is the fact that we have these peculiar sensations (partially) constitutive of the union, part of what it is for the mind to be united to the body? Or is our having these sensations a consequence of a mysterious ‘something we know not what’, which causes the sensations, and can never be adequately described, though the sensations do constitute good evidence for its existence? Call an affirmative answer to the first question a metaphysical interpretation of the union. Call an affirmative answer to the second an epistemological interpretation of the union. There seem to be texts which support both interpretations. And since these texts don’t fall into any neat temporal pattern, it doesn’t seem possible to say that the epistemological interpretation of the letters to Elisabeth represents a change of heart from the metaphysical interpretation of the letters to Regius. Texts supporting both interpretations are present in the *Meditations* themselves.

**(p.102)** We prefer the metaphysical interpretation, because we think that in the Sixth Meditation Descartes really is trying to give us a positive account of what he means when he says that the mind is not merely present in its body as a sailor is present in his ship. He is trying to tell us what the metaphysical basis is for our pre-philosophic feeling that we have a special relationship to one

particular body, and not just how we know that it has an indefinable special relationship to that body.<sup>43</sup> We think the metaphysical interpretation has a certain explanatory power which the epistemological interpretation lacks, and shall try to make that claim good in what follows.

But in the meantime we grant that there's an aspect of the mind-body relationship which escapes analysis. The discussion of bodily sensations in the Sixth Meditation tells us a lot about these sensations: that they arise because of a certain kind of state of the body (damage which may interfere with its normal functioning, a need for nourishment, etc.); that we are prone to locate the sensations in a particular part of the body; that we are prone, as a result of these sensations, to identify ourselves with the body; that the sensations have an intrinsic character which motivates action (action to repair the damage, or to secure nourishment, etc.). But the Sixth Meditation discussion of the sensations is essentially functional. It tells us the role these sensations play in our mental life. It doesn't tell us what it is like to feel pain, or hunger, or thirst. That's something we can learn only from experience, not from philosophical analysis.

#### 5. Scholastic Interpretations II: The Whole Mind is United with the Whole Body

We return now to the discussion of scholastic interpretations. Consider the doctrine Margaret Wilson found so hard to understand, that the **(p.103)** whole mind is united with the whole body. If we could explain why Descartes says this simply by pointing out that some previous philosopher said the same thing, or something very similar, our task would be easy. We could just observe that similar language occurs among the scholastics. In his *Summa theologiae* Aquinas writes:

If the soul were united to the body only as its mover [only as a sailor in his ship?], then one could say that it does not exist in each part of the body, but only in one part, and that through this part it moves the other parts. *But because the soul is united to the body as its form, it necessarily exists in the whole body, and in each part of the body.*<sup>44</sup>

But observations of this kind don't have much explanatory value. If we're puzzled by Descartes's saying this, then we might be equally puzzled by Aquinas's saying it.

Hoffman counted passages in which Descartes claimed that the whole mind is (or seems to be) united to the whole body as evidence that Descartes accepted a hylomorphic account of the human being—took the soul to be the substantial form of the body—even though they make no use of the concepts of form and matter: 'That view is part and parcel of the scholastic hylomorphic conception of the relation between the soul and the body.'<sup>45</sup> Indeed, in the passage quoted above, Thomas does explain the formula in terms of the doctrine that the soul is the substantial form of the body. 'Because the soul is united to the body as its

form, it necessarily exists in the whole body and in each part of the body.’ But it’s not necessary—or even, perhaps, particularly helpful—to accept hylomorphism to give sense to this formula, especially if we state it as it is stated in the *Meditations*, where the claim is that ‘the whole mind *seems to be* united with the whole body’ (AT vii. 86 (4–5), our emphasis).<sup>46</sup> **(p.104)** An interpretation which emphasizes the phenomenology of bodily sensation can handle this much better. Old wineskins, new wine.

Recall first how, early in the Sixth Meditation, Descartes identifies ‘that body which by a certain special right I call mine’ (AT vii. 75–6). He feels all his appetites and affects ‘in it and on account of it’; and he is aware of pain and pleasurable stimulations in this body, but not in others located outside it. As Simmons puts it:

What most obviously determines the limits of my body along the [causal] chain are bodily sensations: where the bodily sensations stop, so does my body.<sup>47</sup>

If this is the way I determine the boundaries of ‘my’ body, then bodily sensation must unite me with *the whole of that body*. If I tended to locate pains and other bodily sensations as occurring only in certain parts of the body, I might think of only those parts of the body as being part of me. But I don’t. If I tended to locate pains and other bodily sensations as occurring in other bodies, I might think of those bodies as part of me. But I don’t. That’s why Descartes speaks of the mind as experiencing a union with *the whole body*, of the mind as thinking of itself *as if* it were extended throughout the body: it has (or can have) an apparently direct awareness of what is happening in (virtually) every part of the body, and it tends to think of what is happening in these different parts of its body as happening to itself.

## 6. The Mind’s Control of the Body

This, of course, accounts only for part of the scholastic formula. It does not explain why Descartes would say that it is *the whole mind* which is united with every part of the body. But let’s look again at one of the passages where Descartes says that (or something very like it):

When I consider the mind, or myself insofar as I am only a thinking thing, I cannot distinguish any parts in myself, but I understand myself to be a thing completely one and whole. And although the whole mind seems to be united **(p.105)** with the whole body, I recognize that if a foot or arm or any other part of the body is cut off, nothing has thereby been taken away from the mind. Nor can the faculties of willing, sensing, understanding, etc., be called parts of the mind. For it is one and the same mind which wills, senses, and understands. (AT vii. 86 (1–10))

This is interesting for a number of reasons. Bennett plausibly objects to Descartes's point about amputation that 'some removals of body parts *could* cause lessening of one's mind—the removal of brain tissue can extinguish memories, for example'.<sup>48</sup> He is cautious about making the empirical claim, but what he presents as a possibility is of course a fact.<sup>49</sup>

What Descartes has in mind, though, seems to be a different fact, mentioned in the letter to Plempius for Fromondus, that an amputee will often continue to feel pain in a part of the body which has been amputated. Descartes's description of the case he knew personally shows that he is aware that not all amputees suffer from phantom limb pain, and that in many cases that pain does eventually go away. Descartes writes that 'those whose limbs have *recently* been amputated *often* think they still feel pain in the parts they no longer possess' (AT i. 420, our emphasis).<sup>50</sup> So when he says 'nothing has thereby been taken away from the mind' by the loss of the limb, he can't mean that the sensations-as-if-in-the-lost-limb *always* continue. What he must mean is that *the capacity for that sort of sensation* continues (and will be actualized when the brain is in the appropriate state).

It seems to us unclear what Descartes would say about memory. Traumatic brain injuries are common enough in war that an old soldier like Descartes would probably have been aware that such injuries sometimes cause memory loss. If that were all, if such injuries never caused anything more serious than a loss of some memories, and if the capacity for memories always remained, then Descartes might well say about such cases what he says about amputations: that nothing has been taken from the mind. Unfortunately, some cases are more serious than **(p.106)** that. The capacity for memory itself may be completely destroyed, along with much of what we normally think of as a person's mental life. If we set aside the worst cases, where the patient is in a coma, seems to be completely unaware of his surroundings, and is certainly unresponsive and unarousable, he may be in a stupor, responsive to some stimuli, but only those which are very strong. In such a case, Descartes might prefer to say, not that something had been taken away from the mind, leaving it diminished, but that the mind which had previously been united with that body was no longer joined to it.

This is speculative. But for our purposes the most important aspect of the passage on the indivisibility of the mind is that it introduces an element which up till now has not been part of our discussion, the will.<sup>51</sup> This seems to be a relatively late development in Descartes's thinking about the mind-body union. On our reading, the claim that the whole mind is (or seems to be) united with the whole body is mainly a thesis about the mind's experience of the body. But it is also, we think, partly a thesis about its voluntary control of the body. If we've so far concentrated on bodily sensations, that's because they are what are most prominent in the Sixth Meditation. However, in describing to Elisabeth 'the



notion of the union which everyone always experiences in himself, without philosophizing', Descartes gives equal emphasis to the mind's control of the body. Everyone, he says, feels

that he is a single person, which has both a body and a thought, these being of such a nature that this thought can move the body and feel the accidents which happen to it. (AT iii. 694 (1-6))

Here being a person involves having both a mind and a body, which are united to one another in two different ways: the mind feels what happens in the body, and it controls the movements of the body (in each case within certain limits, of course). And presumably its exercises of control are influenced by, and in turn influence, what it feels to be happening. The indivisibility of the mind implies that when I cut my foot, it is not one subject which feels the pain in my foot, another which lifts up my foot to inspect the damage, yet another which sees the bleeding cut, and another which, recognizing what needs to be **(p.107)** done, decides on appropriate remedies. There is one unified center of consciousness which is both aware of what is happening in the different parts of the body and determining how the body will respond.

What's more, these two features of the mind's relation to the body have something quite important in common: in both cases the causal connections appear to the subject to be, but are not in fact, immediate. As far as my experience is concerned, my awareness of the body's ills and needs is immediate. Though there is a complicated causal process intervening between the damage and the pain I feel, I seem to experience the damage to my foot immediately. The same story can be told about pleasure and hunger and thirst. And the same is true of the mind's control of the body.

So far as we can discover, this is a part of the theory which Descartes develops only fairly late in his life. But we do find it in a letter he wrote to Arnauld in July 1648:

We are not conscious of the manner in which our mind sends the animal spirits into particular nerves; for that depends not on the mind alone, but on the union of the mind with the body. We are conscious, however, of every action by which the mind moves the nerves, insofar as such action is in the mind, where it is simply the inclination of the will towards a particular movement. The inflow of the spirits into the nerves, and everything else necessary for this movement, follows upon this inclination of the will. This happens because of the appropriate way the body is constructed, of which the mind may not be aware, and because of the union of the mind with the body, of which the mind is certainly conscious. Otherwise, it would not incline its will to move the limbs. (AT v. 211-12)

We do, of course, have voluntary control over bodies which are not our own. But when I raise a teacup to my lips, I do so by consciously moving my hand and arm. When I move my hand and arm, on the other hand, I do not, in the normal course of things, do so by consciously moving any other part of my body. I will to move my hand; this act of will sets off a series of events in my nervous system, which culminate in movements of my limbs. I'm conscious of the movements of my limbs, but not of the intervening motions in the nervous system.

So as we see it, there are three elements in the mind-body union: (i) the basic fact of causal interaction between mind and body; (ii) the fact (one aspect of that basic fact) that the mind has, through its bodily **(p.108)** sensations, a confused awareness of what is happening in each part of its body, though the complex process which results in those sensations involves details not present to its consciousness; and finally, (iii) the fact (a second aspect of that basic fact) that the mind has the ability to cause motions in the body of which it has that awareness, again, through a complex process whose details are not present to its consciousness. It is, Descartes might argue, a remarkable fact that the body of which we are aware through apparently immediate bodily sensations is the same body over which we have apparently immediate voluntary control.

### 7. Scholastic Interpretations III: The Mind as the Substantial form of the Body

In these first two cases, where the talk is of a substantial union between mind and body, or of the whole mind's being united to the whole body, it is possible to give an explanation of the scholastic language which relies mainly on the peculiar kinds of sensation which constitute the union. We can regard Descartes's use of scholastic language as an instance of giving a new, Cartesian meaning to traditional, scholastic language. Calling attention to the scholastic language is harmless, and even a constructive move, once the language is properly understood.

What of those passages where Descartes says—or has been alleged to say—that the soul is the substantial form of the body and the only substantial form? The two passages on which Paul Hoffman laid the strongest emphasis both occur in the January 1642 letter to Regius. When Hoffman first advanced his interpretation, he paraphrased these passages, but did not quote them (Hoffman, 'Unity', 349–50). In a later treatment he quoted fragments of them, but did not quote them fully enough to provide context (Hoffman, 'Union and Interaction', 392). The context matters, and its peculiarities seem to us not to have been adequately explored.<sup>52</sup>

**(p.109)** First recall that one of Voetius's charges against Regius was that he denied substantial forms. In the January letter Descartes complained to Regius that he was very unwise to do this. He also reminded him of how he, Descartes, had treated substantial forms in his *Meteorology*:

I remarked explicitly that I did not reject or deny them; I just didn't need them to set out my arguments. If you had done the same, none of your hearers would have failed to reject them, once they realized they were useless. And in the meantime, you would not have encountered such great indignation from your colleagues. (AT iii. 492 (5-11))

This was a sensitive point for Descartes. As a Catholic he could not openly reject *all* substantial forms without branding himself a heretic in the eyes of his church.<sup>53</sup> But consistently with the policy described earlier (p. 99), he was perfectly willing to say things from which he expected his readers to infer that substantial forms should be rejected. This is one of the strategies writers can use when they hold opinions for which they might be persecuted.

Descartes did not want to have his philosophy defended by a follower who, by being too open about the rejection of substantial forms, would get himself in trouble. But he evidently found it convenient to have one who could test the waters for him. Having found that Regius could not be trusted to say the right thing when left to his own devices, Descartes devoted several pages to drafting an open letter to Voetius, for Regius to use in his defense. Both the passages in which Descartes is alleged to endorse the view that the soul is the substantial form of the human being occur in this letter within a letter. So they are not passages in which Descartes is speaking in his own person. They are passages in which he is trying to help an overzealous follower get out of the trouble he has made for himself, a follower compromised by **(p.110)** positions he has already publicly taken, positions Descartes himself was careful never to embrace publicly.

The first passage addresses Voetius's concern that denying substantial forms in purely material things will lead to doubting whether there is a substantial form in man. That, Voetius complained, might make it difficult to rebut a variety of heretical views.<sup>54</sup> Descartes's recommended response follows the principle that the best defense is a good offense:

On the contrary, from the opinion affirming substantial forms it is very easy to fall into the opinion of those who say that the human soul is corporeal and mortal. But when the soul *is recognized as the only substantial form, while the other forms consist in the configuration and motion of parts*, the very privileged status it has compared with other forms shows that it differs from them in nature. And this difference in nature opens the easiest route to demonstrating its immateriality and immortality, as may be seen in the recently published *Meditations on First Philosophy*. So it's not possible to devise an opinion more favorable to theology concerning this matter.<sup>55</sup>

We've italicized the portion of this passage which Hoffman quoted in his 'Union and Interaction'. Given the official position of the Church, it would not be too

surprising for someone generally hostile to substantial forms to make an exception for the soul.<sup>56</sup> But note that the **(p.111)** proposition that the soul is the only substantial form occurs in a subordinate clause which does not clearly commit Descartes/Regius to the truth of that proposition. Does Descartes actually assert here—or even recommend to Regius that *he* assert—that the soul is the only substantial form? Or does he—taking into account the context of the italicized words—merely recommend that Regius point out the consequences of asserting that the soul is a substantial form?

The immediately preceding sentence had said that affirming the existence of substantial forms might easily lead to a denial of immortality. The argument which follows presents Voetius with a dilemma. Suppose the human soul is the only substantial form. If, like the other forms Voetius assumes, it is material, then the natural conclusion will be that it is also mortal. On the other hand, if it differs from the other forms by being immaterial, it may be possible to demonstrate its immortality; but that would only be because the soul is assumed to have a nature quite different from that of any other substantial form. The conclusion seems to be that we can affirm both the soul's immortality and its being a substantial form only by using the term 'substantial form' to refer to something whose nature is quite different from that of any other substantial form. We might wonder, then, whether, if that is the case, it could perform any of the functions substantial forms are supposed to perform, such as accounting for the unity of the entity whose form it is.<sup>57</sup>

The second passage from the January letter offers no better support for Hoffman's reading. Voetius had complained that Regius needed to demonstrate, philosophically, the arguments which are usually brought against substantial forms, in such a way that an intellect eager for the truth might be satisfied (cf. AT iii. 515 (7-9)). Descartes recommends that Regius make the following response:

'The arguments', or physical demonstrations, 'against substantial forms', which we think 'completely force an intellect eager for truth' [to abandon them] are **(p.112)** chiefly these a priori metaphysical or theological arguments. It is completely contradictory that a substance [begin to] exist *de novo*, unless it is created *de novo* by God. But we see daily that many of those forms which are called substantial begin to exist *de novo*, although the people who think they are substances do not think they are created by God. So they are mistaken in this [i.e. in thinking that the forms they call substantial are substances]. This is confirmed by the example of the soul, which *is the true substantial form of man*. For this is thought to be created immediately by God for no other reason than because it is a substance. And therefore, since the other [forms] are not thought to be created in the same way, but only to be brought forth from the potentiality of matter, it must not be thought that they too are substances. From this it is evident

that it is not those who deny substantial forms, but those who affirm them, 'who can be forced by solid arguments to become either beasts or atheists'.<sup>58</sup>

Once again we've italicized the portion of this passage which Hoffman quoted in his 'Union and Interaction'. Although the sentence from which the quote comes looks in isolation like an assertion that the soul is the substantial form of man, the passage as a whole makes a point very similar to the one made in the first passage. Once again Descartes advises Regius to argue that the doctrine that the soul is the substantial form of the body avoids reaching unpalatable theological conclusions only if the soul is thought of as unlike any other substantial form—in this case, by being created by God *de novo*, instead of being brought forth from the potentiality of matter. So we can continue to use the language of substantial forms only if we give it a new meaning. Again we have a substantial form in name only.

That this reading of the January letter is correct is confirmed by the letter Descartes sent Regius at the end of February (or perhaps early in March) 1642, after he had published his reply to Voetius:

As far as I hear from my friends, everyone who has read your reply to Voetius praises it greatly. Moreover, very many people have read it. Everyone is **(p.113)** laughing at Voetius and says he has lost hope for his cause since he needed the aid of your magistrates to defend it. Moreover, everyone is denouncing substantial forms and saying openly that if all the rest of our philosophy were explained in this way, no one would fail to embrace it. (AT iii. 528 (2-9))

As this passage shows, Regius's victory was not total. Voetius successfully appealed to the magistrates to suppress the publication of Regius's reply and to prohibit him from teaching anything except medicine. But notice what counts as victory here: everyone (apart from Voetius and his friends, presumably) is denouncing substantial forms and laughing at their defenders. There is no suggestion of an exception for the soul.

## 8. The Larger Context

There is something profoundly ironic about the popularity of the interpretation we've been discussing in the last section. Its advocates often stress the importance of understanding Descartes in his historical context, and particularly in the context of the late scholastic philosophy in which he was educated, against which he often rebelled, but some of whose doctrines he nevertheless accepted. Yet one aspect of the historical context has largely been missing in recent discussions: the Italian Renaissance debates about the immortality of the soul.<sup>59</sup>

Earlier we mentioned the decree of the Fifth Lateran Council, which among other things had reaffirmed the doctrine of the Council of Vienne, making it a heresy to deny that the intellectual soul is the form of the body. We suggested, gently, that the existence of this decree might, to some degree, have constrained what Descartes felt he could say, openly, about the nature of the soul, and about substantial forms in general. Without being hard-core Straussians, we think there are issues here which need a deeper discussion. We propose to show, not merely that the Friends of Substantial Forms have misunderstood **(p.114)** the texts, but that they have done so in a way which makes Descartes take a position the polar opposite of the one he wished to defend.

Julius II called the Fifth Lateran Council in response to a group of rebel clerics who had challenged his authority by convening a council he had not authorized and declaring him suspended from office.<sup>60</sup> Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the Council Julius then called found that the rebel group had no legitimate claim to be a church council: only the Pope has the right to call a council. For our purposes, the Council's most important decree was the bull *Apostolici regiminis*, issued by Julius' successor, Leo X, which dealt with various controversies about the nature of the soul then current in Italy.<sup>61</sup> In addition to reaffirming the earlier teaching that the soul is the form of the body, it also condemned the doctrines that the intellectual soul is one in all men and that it is mortal—or that this is at least 'true according to philosophy'. So its targets included both Averroists in the strict sense, and more generally, Aristotelian philosophers who may not have been strict Averroists, but who at least agreed with Averroes in denying the possibility of personal immortality within a genuinely Aristotelian framework.<sup>62</sup> The most interesting of these, and the one now generally thought to have been the primary target of *Apostolici regiminis*, was Pietro Pomponazzi, whose *Treatise on the Immortality of the Soul* (1516) did seem to argue that it is 'true according to philosophy' that the soul is mortal.<sup>63</sup>

**(p.115)** Some might think chronological considerations would exclude the possibility that Pomponazzi was a primary target of *Apostolici regiminis*. The bull was promulgated in 1513; Pomponazzi did not publish his *Treatise* until three years later. But even before then his views were well known in Italy from his teaching at various Italian universities.<sup>64</sup> This is not the place to give a full account of the argument of the *Treatise*. But we shall try to say enough here to explain why the controversy he stirred up might have made Descartes think it would be a good idea to develop an anti-Aristotelian theory of the soul.

Pomponazzi begins by recounting a visit from a former student, who reminded him of what he had once said when he was lecturing on Aristotle: that though he was certain Aquinas was right about the immortality of the soul, he also thought it did not agree at all with what Aristotle held (Cassirer et al., *Renaissance Philosophy*, 281). The student wants to know what Pomponazzi thinks—'leaving aside revelation and miracles and remaining entirely within natural limits'—

about these two questions: is the soul immortal? and what did Aristotle think about immortality?

The dominant theme of Pomponazzi's reply is that reason and Aristotle both hold that the soul is too closely tied to the body for an individual soul to survive the death of the body. Pomponazzi is sharply critical of Averroism in the strict sense. He writes that

though this opinion [the Averroist doctrine that the intellective soul is one in all men] is widely held in our time, and almost everyone confidently takes it to be that of Aristotle, it nevertheless seems to me that not only is it in itself most false, it is also unintelligible and monstrous and quite foreign to Aristotle. Indeed, I think Aristotle never even thought of such nonsense, let alone believed it.<sup>65</sup>

**(p.116)** Still, Pomponazzi does seem to agree with the Averroists that the idea of personal immortality conflicts with the Aristotelian doctrine that 'the multiplication of individuals in the same species is possible only by a certain quantity of matter'.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, he argues that the intellect is too dependent on the imagination to be able to function without the body, citing *De anima*:

If knowing [*intelligere*] is either imagination [*phantasia*] or not without imagination, it is impossible for it to exist without a body.<sup>67</sup>

Since Pomponazzi agrees with Aristotle in holding that the human intellect is never wholly freed from the imagination, he concludes that if we follow Aristotle, we will hold that 'the human soul...must be declared to be absolutely mortal' (Cassirer et al., *Renaissance Philosophy*, 318). Since he tends to identify the teaching of Aristotle with the teaching of reason, his conclusion is that

it seems more rational that the human soul, since it is the highest and more perfect of material forms, truly is that by virtue of which something is an individual, and in no way is truly itself an individual. So it is truly a form beginning with, and ceasing to be with, the body, which cannot in any way operate or exist without the body. (Cassirer et al., *Renaissance Philosophy*, 321-2)

Pomponazzi never claims that this conclusion is *certain*. The most he claims is that it is *the most probable* (if we set aside revelation), and closest to Aristotle's view (Cassirer et al., *Renaissance Philosophy*, 324).

In the end Pomponazzi does not even claim that it is *true* that the soul is mortal. In his final chapter he declares that the sounder (*sanior*) view is that the question of the immortality of the soul is 'a neutral problem', concerning which 'no natural reasons can be adduced which *compel* the conclusion that the soul is immortal, still less *proving* that it is mortal' (Cassirer et al., *Renaissance*

*Philosophy*, 377, our emphasis). The neutrality of the problem from the point of view of reason allows Pomponazzi (p.117) to declare in favor of immortality on the ground that God has revealed our immortality to us in Holy Scripture, by threatening the wicked with eternal fire and promising the good eternal life:

If any reasons seem to prove the mortality of the soul, they are false and merely seeming, since the first light and the first truth show the opposite. But if any seem to prove its immortality, they are indeed true and illuminating. But they are not truth and light. So this way alone is most firm, unshaken, and lasting. The rest rise and fall like the waves.<sup>68</sup>

This is quite a turn around. After fourteen chapters in which the issue seemed to be ‘which doctrine about the soul’s surviving the destruction of the body is most probable?’ Pomponazzi dramatically lowers the bar for neutrality. It will be sufficient to show a problem to be a neutral one if neither the proposition nor its denial can be rationally demonstrated, even if one position is substantially more probable than the other according to reason and Aristotle. In this way we can follow faith without overriding reason.

It’s difficult not to feel that by ending with this pious conclusion Pomponazzi was just trying to protect himself against condemnation by complying with the dictates of the Fifth Lateran Council. If so, his attempt ultimately succeeded. His book did, of course, stir up a storm.<sup>69</sup> The bishops attacked it in Mantua and Bologna. In Venice, under prodding from the Dominican friars, the Patriarch condemned his book, forbade its sale, and ordered that it be publicly burned. The Patriarch also sent it to Rome for further action, with the result that in 1518 Leo X warned Pomponazzi ‘to bring his teaching into accord with the doctrine of the Fifth Lateran Council or face trial’ (Pine, *Pomponazzi*, 127). Fortunately for Pomponazzi, he had friends in high places. Pietro Bembo, Leo’s Secretary, was a former student of his, and Bembo thought his book was not heretical. His intervention persuaded Leo to halt formal proceedings on the allegation of heresy before they could start. Sometimes, it seems, the Church, for whatever reasons, is satisfied with merely formal obedience.

### **(p.118)** 9. Our Hypothesis About Descartes

We need not suppose that Descartes was fully familiar with the story we’ve told in the preceding section. Maybe he was, maybe he wasn’t. But it’s clear from his letter dedicating the *Meditations* to the Theology Faculty at the Sorbonne, that (i) he knew some of this story. For example, he knew about the decree *Apostolici regiminis*, and the problem it had addressed, namely, that

many people have judged it not easy to discover the nature of the soul, and some have been so bold as to say that human reasons persuade us that when the body dies, it dies, and that the contrary can be maintained only by faith. (AT vii. 2 (31)–3 (4))



It's also clear from that Dedicatory Letter that (ii) Descartes knows the Council had asked Christian philosophers to refute the arguments of these bold mortalists. He presents himself as attempting to fulfill that request. So it seems likely that (iii) he would have felt he needed to know something about what those arguments were, and (iv) would have made himself familiar enough with the controversies in Italy to know that many people there thought there was a conflict between an Aristotelian theory of the soul and the doctrine of personal immortality.<sup>70</sup> If he was aware of the popularity of Averroist views, and knew how incompatible those views were with the doctrine of personal immortality, that much must have been evident to him. We suppose, further, that (v) he may well have thought that, whatever the truth about Averroism strictly construed, it would not be easy, on Aristotelian principles, to defend the doctrine of personal immortality. Whether or not he was intimately familiar with Pomponazzi's arguments, we suppose he probably knew enough about the controversy to reach that judgment.

**(p.119)** If this last supposition is correct, and if Descartes was serious about attempting to justify the belief in immortality by natural reason, we think (vi) he would have felt he had a strong motive to try to develop an alternative theory of the soul, one more congenial to the doctrine of personal immortality than the traditional Aristotelian theory. This would be independent of any views he may have had about the usefulness of the doctrine of substantial forms in physics. No one will deny that he thought substantial forms were useless in that area. But we think he also wanted to reject them in psychology.

Given the Church's commitment to the Aristotelian theory that the soul is the form of the body, seeking an alternative theory of the soul would not be a project he could be too candid about. He could not say, openly and bluntly, that the Aristotelian/scholastic position is difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile with the doctrine of personal immortality. But he probably comes as close to saying that as he comfortably could when he recommends the following language to Regius in that letter of January 1642:

from the opinion affirming substantial forms it is very easy to fall into the opinion of those who say that the human soul is corporeal and mortal. (AT iii. 503 (6-9))

We think our hypothesis—that is, supposition (vi)—is supported also by Descartes's contention, in that same letter, that

many more people make the mistake of thinking that the soul is not really distinct from the body than make the mistake of admitting their distinction and denying their substantial union. In order to refute those who believe souls to be mortal, it is more important to teach the distinctness of parts in a human being than to teach their union. (AT iii. 508 (24-9))

From the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy, Descartes thinks, the doctrine of mind-body union is dangerous. It must be true, *in some sense*, that mind and body are united, that together they constitute one thing. That form of dualism which says that the human being is just a soul using a body, lodged in the body like a pilot or sailor in his ship, is untenable. But in our understandable desire to avoid that error, we must not fall into the opposite error of making the union too close. We must not embrace the Aristotelian doctrine that the soul is the form of the body, but must find a form of dualism which avoids the hazards of **(p.120)** Platonism.<sup>71</sup> We think Descartes believed he had accomplished that with the theory articulated earlier in this chapter.

#### 10. Principles of Interpretation

Hoffman defended his interpretation of Descartes by appealing to a version of the interpretive principle that we should take Descartes at his word 'unless there was compelling reason not to'.<sup>72</sup> This seems a strange principle of interpretation. No doubt Hoffman did not intend to apply it to uses of irony, or concessions made to opponents for the sake of the argument. But what about an author who wrote in a time when he would be subject to severe penalties for expressing heterodox views, an author we know to have held some heterodox views (such as the Copernican theory of the solar system), and to have repressed those views to avoid condemnation? Why must we have a *compelling* reason not to take Descartes at his word before we conclude that he is not being entirely candid with us? Why isn't probable cause good enough? And doesn't the textual evidence give us probable cause to think that the social pressures in favor of conformity influenced what he was willing to say about the nature of the soul, made him hesitant to advertise too publicly his differences with the Aristotelians?

We don't think these questions of interpretive policy arise in the January 1642 letter to Regius, because we don't think that in that letter Descartes really asserted that the soul is the form of the body, any more than a mathematician asserts that the square root of two is a rational number when he uses that proposition as the premise for a *reductio* argument designed to show the absurdity of the proposition. But the **(p.121)** situation is different elsewhere. There is one passage where Descartes does affirm hylomorphism, in a letter to Mesland, written in 1645 or 1646, where he uses hylomorphism to explain the identity of a body over time:

It is quite true that I have the same body now as I had ten years ago, although the matter of which it is composed has changed, because the numerical unity of the body of a man does not depend on its matter, but on its form, which is the soul. (AT iv. 646 (17-22))

This seems to us to be the best evidence of hylomorphism in the whole Cartesian corpus.<sup>73</sup> But it also seems to us pitifully slender evidence. It's just one passage,

after all, and it invokes a Catholic doctrine about the nature of the soul in a letter to a Catholic priest, in the course of explaining to him how Descartes's metaphysics is consistent with the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist. Descartes is not, in this letter, trying to explain the unity of the human being. We think he might, without impropriety, make use of what he can presume to be his correspondent's assumptions to solve a problem which a Catholic might raise for his metaphysics.

We would be more impressed by this passage if we found Descartes embracing hylomorphism as a solution to the problem of mind-body union in later works, and particularly in works published after the correspondence with Regius. But when he takes up this topic in the correspondence with Elisabeth, he emphasizes two things: interaction and the experience of union.<sup>74</sup> And when he proposes an answer to the question of the unity of the human being in his *Principles of Philosophy*—that work where, more than any other, you might expect to find him appealing to scholastic doctrines if he thought he could use them—he doesn't say a word about hylomorphism. He appeals to the phenomenology of bodily sensation:

We can conclude that a certain body is more narrowly joined to our mind than any other from the fact that we're clearly aware that pain and other sensations **(p.122)** come to us quite unexpectedly. The mind is aware that they do not proceed from itself alone, and that they cannot pertain to it simply because it is a thinking thing, but only because it is joined to a certain extended and mobile thinking thing, which is called the human body. (AT viii-1. 41 (14-22))

When he does mention the doctrine of substantial forms late in the *Principles* (iv. 198), what he says just raises questions about how they could possibly play the causal role they are supposed to play.

When Descartes wrote to Father Dinet after receiving the *Seventh Objections* from Bourdin, he boasted that

I can demonstrate that for every problem ever solved by the principles distinctive of peripatetic philosophy, the supposed solution is illegitimate and false....As for theology, since one truth can never be in conflict with another, it would be impious to fear that truths discovered in philosophy might conflict with the truths of faith. I maintain that there's nothing relating to religion which cannot just as easily or even more easily be explained by my principles than by those commonly accepted.<sup>75</sup>

It's surprising that so much recent discussion of the mind-body union in Descartes has been devoted to trying to show that Descartes did not really think

this—and this by interpreters who profess to take Descartes at his word unless there is compelling reason not to.<sup>76</sup>

Notes:

<sup>(1)</sup> AT vii. 78 (2-20); 169 (20)–170 (18). We cite the Adam and Tannery (AT) text and make our own translations from Descartes. Generally these translations differ only stylistically from those in CSM and CSMK. When they differ substantively, we note that fact. The numbers in parentheses following the page numbers refer to line numbers.

There may be other senses in which Descartes is not a dualist. Some scholars have urged that we think of Descartes as a ‘trialist’, on the ground either that he recognizes three fundamental kinds of attributes (John Cottingham, ‘Cartesian Trialism’, *Mind*, 94 (1985), 218–30) or that he recognizes three fundamental kinds of substances (Paul Hoffman, ‘The Union and Interaction of Mind and Body’ [‘Union and Interaction’], in Janet Broughton and John Carriero (eds.), *A Companion to Descartes* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 390–403). It’s not obvious that these forms of trialism are incompatible with being a dualist in the sense specified, but we find Marleen Rozemond’s criticism of trialist interpretations persuasive (see her *Descartes’s Dualism [Dualism]* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 191–203).

<sup>(2)</sup> Synopsis of the *Meditations*, AT vii. 12–13. The best discussion of Descartes’s doctrine of immortality, which does not yet seem to have received the recognition it deserves, is C. F. Fowler, *Descartes on the Human Soul: Philosophy and the Demands of Christian Doctrine [Human Soul]* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999).

<sup>(3)</sup> E.g., AT vii. 63 (4–5); similarly at AT vii. 73 (6–7); 78 (9–12); 81 (1–5); AT ix-1. 62 (20–2); AT vi. 33 (7–11). Sometimes Descartes will identify the self with the composite of mind and body (e.g., at AT vii. 81 (22–7); 82 (23–5)), but this is much less typical.

<sup>(4)</sup> AT vii. 78 (13–15); 81 (3–5).

<sup>(5)</sup> AT vii. 81 (2–3). The *Discourse* makes a similar point (at AT vi. 59 (12–13)), but there the comparison rejected is that of a pilot in his ship. The different ways of framing the metaphor may be significant. Bernard Williams observed that ‘perhaps only large ships have pilots. In smaller ships, as in smaller motor cars, the famous phrase may underestimate the controller’s capacity to feel the vehicle as an extension of himself’ (*Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry [Pure Enquiry]* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), 279 n.). This might argue for preferring the language of the *Meditations*. On the other hand, the language of the *Discourse* is more suggestive of the mind’s control of the body.

<sup>(6)</sup> As Gassendi quite reasonably complained in the *Fifth Objections* (AT vii. 343–4).

<sup>(7)</sup> For the first version of this interpretation, see Henri Gouhier, *La pensée métaphysique de Descartes*, 3rd edn. (Paris: Vrin, 1978), 335. For the second, see Margaret Wilson, *Descartes [Descartes]* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 204–20.

<sup>(8)</sup> The propriety of these labels is unclear. It might be more apt to call Wilson's 'Natural Institution' theory the 'Divine Institution' theory, since God is supposed to institute the causal connections. As for the 'Co-extension' theory, the justification for this label seems to rest partly on a passage in the Sixth Replies (AT vii. 442), where Descartes says that the mind is coextensive with the body, suggesting that the mind has extension, and partly on the letter to Elisabeth of June 28, 1643 (AT iii. 694), where he grants her permission to ascribe extension to the mind—but with the proviso that 'extension' does not have the same meaning when ascribed to the mind that it does when ascribed to bodies. On Descartes's use of the term 'extension', see Tad Schmaltz, *Descartes on Causation [Causation]* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 134, 167–71.

<sup>(9)</sup> Wilson, *Descartes*, 216, her emphasis. In *Descartes's Dualism* (London: Routledge, 1996), 171–2, Gordon Baker and Katherine Morris are rightly critical of Wilson's claim that the two theories are inconsistent. Nevertheless, they seem in the end to arrive at an account of the union which makes its essence consist in mind-body interaction. This is not so much wrong as incomplete. See §6.

<sup>(10)</sup> There's some confusion about the source of these two passages, which Wilson quotes on 205. She cites AT vii. 83ff., for both quotes. But the second evidently comes from AT vii. 81. And the first apparently comes from AT vii. 86, though it does not quite accurately represent what Descartes said in that passage: '*toti corpori tota mens unita esse videatur* [the whole mind seems to be united with the whole body]' (our emphasis).

<sup>(11)</sup> Wilson, *Descartes*: 'obscure' (215); 'seemingly almost ineffable' (207); 'philosophically resourceful and relatively intelligible' (215).

<sup>(12)</sup> Williams, *Pure Enquiry*, 281, 287–8.

<sup>(13)</sup> Cf. Wilson, *Descartes*, 215. Nor is it clear that she should have been troubled by them, since they often seem to depend on debatable assumptions about what is required for causality. Gassendi seems to have been the first to raise what has come to be called the 'heterogeneity problem', the problem of understanding how there can be causal interaction between entities totally different in nature (AT vii. 345). For a good discussion see R. C. Richardson, 'The "Scandal" of Cartesian Interactionism', *Mind*, 91 (1982), 20–37. Elisabeth's problems with interaction seem to have been different. On this, see Schmaltz, *Causation*, 5–7, 130–5. On a Humean analysis of causation, there seems to be no reason why the heterogeneity of mind and body should be an obstacle to their being causally related. (Cf. Howard Robinson, 'Dualism', in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of*

*Philosophy*.) Although Descartes's reaction to Gassendi was quite dismissive, he himself does sometimes adopt a view of causation which makes heterogeneity a problem. Cf. Descartes, *Principles* iv. 198, AT viii-1. 322.

(<sup>14</sup>) *Principles* iv.196, AT viii-1. 320. Descartes had previously described her case in his letter to Plempius for Fromondus, October 3, 1637, AT i. 420. His discussion of these cases in the *Meditations* (AT vii. 77 (1-7)) may suggest that his knowledge is from hearsay. But his other descriptions show that he not only had personal acquaintance with one case, but also knew that such cases are common and well-known to surgeons. The sixteenth-century French surgeon Ambroise Paré seems to have been the first in the surgical literature to describe them. See Stanley Finger and Meredith Hustwit, 'Five Early Accounts of Phantom Limb in Context: Paré, Descartes, Lemos, Bell and Mitchell', *Neurosurgery*, 52 (2003), 675-86. It appears that Descartes is only partially right in his explanation: right to emphasize the importance of the brain state as the proximate cause of the sensation, but wrong to think that this must result from stimulation of the nerve endings at the point of amputation. See V. S. Ramachandran and Sandra Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain [Phantoms]* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998), ch. 2.

(<sup>15</sup>) So Louis Loeb's discussion of Wilson's work on this topic ignores the Co-extension theory to focus exclusively on the Natural Institution theory. See his 'The Mind-Body Union, Interaction, and Subsumption', in Christia Mercer and Eileen O'Neill (eds.), *Early Modern Philosophy: Mind, Matter, and Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 65-85.

(<sup>16</sup>) Descartes emphasizes this point in *The Passions of the Soul*, I, §31. But it is also clear from the Sixth Meditation, AT vii. 86 (16-19).

(<sup>17</sup>) Cf. Williams: 'The entire content of Descartes's denial that he is a pilot in a ship is phenomenological—it is exclusively about what the experience of being embodied is like' (Williams, *Pure Enquiry*, 280). If this is an exaggeration, it is an exaggeration of an important insight, which Williams unfortunately does not elaborate on. The same is true of Rozemond, *Dualism*, 174-83, which rightly, we think, emphasizes the importance of the qualitative nature of sensation for the union, but doesn't seem to get the special features of sensation right. The best discussion we have found of the Cartesian phenomenology of bodily sensation is in the work of Alison Simmons. Of her numerous articles, the most relevant are 'Re-Humanizing Descartes', *Philosophic Exchange*, 41 (2010-11), 52-71, and 'Guarding the Body: A Cartesian Phenomenology of Perception' ['Guarding the Body'], in Paul Hoffman and Gideon Yaffe (eds.), *Contemporary Perspectives on Early Modern Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Vere Chappell* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2008), 81-113. Simmons's discussion of the phenomenology is tremendously helpful. But she does not present her account of this

phenomenology as part of a theory about the nature of the mind-body union, and from personal correspondence we know that she is reluctant to view it that way.

(<sup>18</sup>) Wilson is oddly tentative about acknowledging this aspect of Descartes's theory: 'The sensation the mind feels has a location, but it is an "as if" location. The mind experiences a tendency, *one might almost say*, to assign pain to the foot' (Wilson, *Descartes*, 208, our emphasis). Why not just *say* that the mind experiences this tendency? Of course, the tendency does not always issue in the judgment it tends to. Someone who wakes from an operation, is told that her foot has been amputated, *and sees that her foot is gone*, may realize that the pain she seems to feel in her foot must result from an atypical cause, and so refrain from judging that the pain *is* in her foot. But this doesn't mean that the way the pain feels does not dispose her to assign it to her foot. When the organ removed is one which would not normally be visible—say, an appendix—patients will sometimes vigorously resist believing that the organ has really been removed, in spite of what their doctors tell them. Cf. Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms*, 24–5. In the case Descartes was familiar with, the amputation was concealed from the girl for some weeks. She thought she was feeling pain in her amputated arm.

(<sup>19</sup>) AT vii. 88 (1–5). Here the translation Wilson, writing in 1978, used is from Descartes, *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Elizabeth Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (eds. and trans.), 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911); see Wilson, *Descartes*, 208. Though CSM is generally a great improvement on Haldane and Ross, in this case the latter seems preferable. The most significant difference is that CSM render *tanquam* by 'as' instead of 'as if'. For other examples, see *Principles* i. 46, 67, AT viii-1. 22, 32.

(<sup>20</sup>) Strictly speaking, it is a thought whose linguistic expression would have the form 'It seems to me that [I see a light, hear a sound, or whatever]' (cf. AT vii. 29 (11–18)). I might have that thought without actually judging that [I see a light, hear a sound, etc.]. Cf. E. M. Curley, *Descartes Against the Sceptics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 190–1.

(<sup>21</sup>) AT vii. 81 (17–27). There are complexities here which we will not pursue, but Alison Simmons treated helpfully in 'Are Cartesian Sensations Representational?', *Noûs*, 33 (1999), 347–69. Roughly: bodily sensations do not give an accurate representation of the geometric and kinetic features of the body which cause the mind to have the sensations it has; but they do give a reasonably accurate representation of what Simmons calls 'the ecological properties' of the body, those properties of the body which are relevant to its survival in its environment. So, for example, the bad taste of a piece of fruit may warn us that it is dangerous to eat, but it does not tell us anything about the

mechanical properties of the fruit which are the underlying cause both of its taste and of its potential harmfulness.

(<sup>22</sup>) AT vii. 82 (25-7); similarly at AT vii. 88 (1-7), where the emphasis is on removing, rather than avoiding, the cause of pain.

(<sup>23</sup>) The normal case. Phantom organ pains are different. There the absence of the organ in which we tend to locate the pain poses a serious clinical problem for the doctor trying to give the patient relief. 'Chronic pain in a real body part, such as the joint aches of arthritis or lower backache, is difficult enough to treat, but how do you treat pain in a nonexistent limb?' (Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms*, 22).

(<sup>24</sup>) Odd things sometimes happen, it seems, even without divine intervention. One of Ramachandran's phantom limb patients, who had lost his leg below the knee, found that when he subsequently had intercourse, he experienced the sensations of orgasm in his phantom foot. His case is not unique, and is apparently explained by certain features of the anatomy of the brain. See Ramachandran and Blakeslee, *Phantoms*, 35-7.

(<sup>25</sup>) Simmons makes this abundantly clear in 'Guarding the Body', 102-6.

(<sup>26</sup>) Perhaps this inaccuracy is just the result of carelessness on Descartes's part, but it seems at least equally likely that it reflects his procedure of starting from commonly held views which will ultimately be modified by the dialectical process of objections and replies which his analytic method entails. At the point in the Sixth Meditation where Descartes says that he can never be separated from his body, he is explaining his pre-philosophic belief that there is one body which belongs to him more than any other, and he has not yet proven the real distinction. For other examples of this method in the *Meditations*, see E. M. Curley, 'Analysis in the *Meditations*: the Quest for Clear and Distinct Ideas', in Amélie Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Descartes's Meditations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 153-76.

(<sup>27</sup>) Louis de La Forge, *Traité de l'esprit de l'homme, de ses facultés & fonctions, & de son union avec le corps, suivant les Principes de René Des Cartes* (Amsterdam: Abraham Wolfgang, 1666), 214f. For an English translation, see La Forge, *Treatise on the Human Mind*, Desmond Clarke (trans.) (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1997), 129.

(<sup>28</sup>) The principal exponent of this approach, who developed it in the greatest detail, was Paul Hoffman, who first proposed it in 'The Unity of Descartes's Man' ['Unity'], *Philosophical Review*, 95 (1986), 339-70, republished in Hoffman, *Essays on Descartes [Essays]* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 15-32. The latter collection includes several other previously published essays which develop topics related to his interpretation (with some revisions). We'll make our



references to the first published versions, unless the later reprint modifies the original version.

Before Hoffman, similar views had appeared in the French literature, most notably in Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, *L'individualité selon Descartes* (Paris: Vrin, 1950), 74–81; and *L'oeuvre de Descartes [L'oeuvre]* (Paris: Vrin, 1971), vol. I, 351–65. She returned to the view in 'Le paradoxe cartésien', in Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, *L'anthropologie cartésienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), though without reference to Hoffman.

Other scholars have accepted Hoffman's claim that Descartes thought the mind was the substantial form of the body, though they may have disagreed about other aspects of his interpretation. See, for example, Marjorie Grene, 'Die Einheit des Menschen: Descartes unter den Scholastikern', *Dialectica* 40 (1986), 309–22; Grene, *Descartes Among the Scholastics* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1991); Daniel Garber, *Descartes's Metaphysical Physics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 89, 97–9; Roger Ariew, *Descartes and the Last Scholastics [Last Scholastics]* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 89; Justin Skirry, 'A Hylomorphic Interpretation of Descartes's Theory of Mind-Body Union', *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 75 (2002), 267–83; Lilli Alanen, *Descartes's Concept of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), ch. 2; Peter Machamer and J. E. McGuire, *Descartes's Changing Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 232; and Calvin Normore, 'Cartesian Unions' ['Cartesian Unions'], *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 35 (2011), 223–39. This view also appears in the (unsigned) article on the union of mind and body in Roger Ariew, Dennis Des Chene, Douglas Jesseph, Tad Schmaltz, and Theo Verbeek (eds.), *Historical Dictionary of Descartes and Cartesian Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2003).

Robert Pasnau's *Metaphysical Themes, 1274–1671 [Metaphysical Themes]* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) sometimes seems to endorse Hoffman's reading of the January 1642 letter to Regius (e.g. on 568), but in the end concludes (properly, as we think) that Descartes is 'an unqualified opponent of the doctrine of substantial forms' (573). Daniel Garber tells us (personal correspondence) that he has become very doubtful of the position he took in 1992.

(<sup>29</sup>) AT vii. 203 (14–19). The term rendered 'soul' here is *animus*, which in this context signifies what the Aristotelians would have called the intellective or rational soul, as opposed to the vegetative and sensitive souls. Fowler, *Human Soul*, has a helpful discussion of seventeenth-century use of this terminology in his fifth chapter.

(<sup>30</sup>) It's unclear whether Plato himself ever made the comparison of the mind-body relation to that of a sailor to his ship, but it seems to be in the spirit of his philosophy. The comparison apparently crops up first in Aristotle's *De anima* II, i. 413a8-9, which does not explicitly tie it to Plato and is noncommittal about the appropriateness of the analogy. That Plato held man to be a soul using a body is clearer, even if we reject the Platonic authorship of the *Alcibiades* (where that doctrine occurs in 129e-130c). The *Timaeus* describes the body as the vehicle of the soul (69c), and the *Phaedo* compares it to a cloak a man might wear (87b-88b). The latter passage helps to explain one reason why full-strength Platonic dualism is anathema in the Christian tradition, since the comparison is used there to support the doctrine of transmigration. In his life a man may wear many cloaks. For these and other Platonic references, see Stephen Voss, 'Descartes: The End of Anthropology' ['Anthropology'], in John Cottingham (ed.), *Reason, Will and Sensation: Studies in Descartes's Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 275. For the history of the metaphor among the Aristotelian commentators, see Victor Caston's edition of Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On the Soul* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014). For an illuminating discussion of Arnauld's objection in the context of Catholic theology, see Fowler, *Human Soul*, ch. 9.

(<sup>31</sup>) Hoffman, 'Unity', 346.

(<sup>32</sup>) See Normore, 'Cartesian Unions', 229: 'Given the philosophical context in which Descartes worked, he could not and did not assume that every *ens per se* is a substance, could not and did not assume that a *unio substantialis* either was a substance or automatically constituted one, and could not and did not assume that wherever A is the substantial form of B, A and B together make one substance.' We cite this article as Normore's, because his name appears alone on the title page. But a footnote gives Deborah Brown credit as co-author. Marleen Rozemond had made a similar point in *Dualism*, 167-9.

(<sup>33</sup>) See Vere Chappell, 'L'Homme Cartésien' ['L'Homme'], in J.-M. Beyssade and J.-L. Marion (eds.), *Descartes: Objecter et répondre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994), 409.

(<sup>34</sup>) For a good account of the controversy at Utrecht, see Theo Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch: Early Reactions to Cartesian Philosophy, 1637-1650* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), ch. 2. Fowler's discussion in *Human Soul* is also most helpful.

(<sup>35</sup>) Part V of the *Discourse* describes a cosmological treatise which 'certain considerations prevent me from publishing'. It does not make the Copernican nature of the treatise explicit, but it would not have taken much imagination for a knowledgeable reader to make a good guess about what the considerations were.

<sup>(36)</sup> See *Les Météores*, AT vi. 239 (translated in Descartes, *Discourse on Method, Optics, Geometry and Meteorology*, Paul Olscamp (trans.) (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), 268.

<sup>(37)</sup> AT iii. 460 (9–13). The emphasis is in Descartes's original.

<sup>(38)</sup> Descartes offers mice as an example. They are *entia per se*, but Descartes imagines that they come to be *per accidens*, from dirt (AT iii. 460 (22–5)).

<sup>(39)</sup> AT iii. 493 (10–17), our emphasis. Hoffman quoted the passage immediately preceding this (from AT iii. 492 (17)–493 (10)), but broke off just where the passage here quoted begins, thereby missing what seems to us most interesting in it. See Paul Hoffman, 'Cartesian Composites', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 37 (1999), 251–70, at 258. His quotational practice was the same in 'Union and Interaction', 392. Voss seems to see what's going on here ('Anthropology', 279 n. 10).

<sup>(40)</sup> See his *Etudes sur le rôle de la Pensée médiévale dans la formation du système cartésien*, 3rd edn. (Paris: Vrin, 1967), 247.

<sup>(41)</sup> The hypothetical objector here is making an objection which at least closely resembles one Alison Simmons made in correspondence regarding an earlier draft of this chapter. She is not responsible for the particulars of this formulation.

<sup>(42)</sup> Or more accurately, a partial account. It can only be a partial account, on our view, because we take it to be common ground among all interpreters that part of what it is for the mind to be united to the body is for there to be a particularly tight causal interaction between mind-states and brain-states, of the sort described in §1. There may also be other aspects of the union, as the further argument of this chapter will seek to show.

<sup>(43)</sup> A passage which strongly favors this reading, we think, occurs at AT iii. 508 (3–10): 'For we assert that a man is composed of a body and a soul, not by a mere presence or proximity of one to the other, but by a true substantial union. This indeed naturally requires, on the part of the body, a positioning and configuration of the parts. But this union is different from position, shape, and other purely corporeal modes, because it concerns not only the body, but also the soul, which is incorporeal.' On our view what the union requires, on the part of the soul, is principally the kind of bodily sensation described in Meditation Six. We are indebted to Alison Simmons for calling this passage to our attention.

<sup>(44)</sup> *Summa theologiae* I, 76, 8, our emphasis. We adopt the translation of Robert Pasnau, in *Thomas Aquinas, The Treatise on Human Nature, Summa Theologiae 1a 75–89*, Robert Pasnau (ed. and trans.) (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 44–5.

<sup>(45)</sup> Cf. Hoffman, 'Union and Interaction', 392–3.

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(<sup>46</sup>) The view that the mind exists as whole in the whole body and in each of its parts has become known in the literature (following Henry More) as holo-merism. Marleen Rozemond's article, 'Descartes, Mind-Body Union, and Holo-merism' (*Philosophical Topics*, 31 (2003), 343-67) argues persuasively, we think, that Descartes's use of holo-merian language is of no help in explaining the interaction between mind and body, or the union between mind and body, and provides no grounds for attributing to Descartes a hylomorphic conception of the mind-body relation. In his *Metaphysical Themes*, Robert Pasnau reaches a similar conclusion. We think that for holo-merism to be intelligible, it needs to be explained in the manner described in §§5 and 6 of this chapter.

(<sup>47</sup>) Simmons, 'Guarding the Body', 94. Simmons notes that this way of determining the boundaries of my body 'has its limits,' since we normally count our hair and nails as part of the body, but don't experience bodily sensations when they are cut.

(<sup>48</sup>) See Jonathan Bennett, *Learning From Six Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), vol. I, 69, our emphasis.

(<sup>49</sup>) Brain surgery is only one of many possible physical causes of memory loss. See <<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/003257.htm>>.

(<sup>50</sup>) Typically the pain is intermittent even at its height, and often it gradually decreases in frequency and intensity over time. See L. Nikolajsen and T. S. Jensen, 'Phantom Limb Pain', *British Journal of Anaesthesia*, 87 (2001), 107-16.

(<sup>51</sup>) For a very helpful discussion of this, see Delphine Kolesnik-Antoine, *L'homme cartésien: La 'force qu'a l'âme de mouvoir le corps'* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009).

(<sup>52</sup>) Not that commentators have not criticized the use Hoffman makes of these texts. For example, Chappell argued that because the texts occur in a letter Descartes drafted for Regius's use, we should not regard them as expressions of Descartes's own thoughts (Chappell, 'L'Homme', 413). And Rozemond seems to concede that Descartes *does* describe the soul as the substantial form of the body. He just doesn't use this scholastic doctrine to solve the problem of mind-body union (Rozemond, *Dualism*, 152-5). Neither of these criticisms seems to us to go far enough. Both Chappell and Rozemond grant what seems to us quite dubious: that the draft letter endorsed the view that the soul is the form of the body.

(<sup>53</sup>) As Rozemond has noted, the Council of Vienne committed the Catholic Church to the view that the soul is the form of the body as early as 1312, and the Church reaffirmed this doctrine in the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-17). See *Dualism*, 111-12, and 164. See also Norman Tanner (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils [Decrees]* (London and Washington, DC: Sheed and Ward,

and Georgetown University Press, 1990), vol. I, Nicaea I to Lateran V, 605–6. We think it's worthwhile to go into more detail about this than Rozemond does, and to emphasize it more strongly.

(<sup>54</sup>) CSMK translate only Descartes's paraphrase of Voetius's complaint (AT iii. 503 (1–5)). It may be helpful to translate the complaint itself, which AT give at iii. 513 (3–11): 'It needs to be seen whether the opinion denying substantial forms does not make it easier than the opinion affirming them to doubt whether there are any substantial forms which actuate the body of man and make one composite with it. If someone denies this, what arguments might he use to refute (more happily and safely than those who affirm substantial forms) Galen's blending, or the particle of the divine breath (or of the world soul), or Averroes's universal intellect, or Plato's mind, a spirit imprisoned in the body, and bound to it, like Prometheus to the Caucasus?'

(<sup>55</sup>) AT iii. 503 (6–17). CSMK's translation of this (admittedly long) letter abridges it more than we might wish. It also has a mistake in the translation of the italicized phrase. Readers may wish to consult Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, *Lettres à Regius et Remarques sur l'explication de l'esprit humain* (Paris: Vrin, 1959).

(<sup>56</sup>) Daniel Garber and Roger Ariew have both discussed the interesting case of a disputation which three anti-Aristotelian philosophers—Etienne de Clave, Jean Bitault, and Antoine Villon—attempted to hold in Paris in 1624. One of their theses denied all substantial forms except the rational soul. This did not protect them from having their disputation prohibited on pain of death. See Ariew, *Last Scholastics*, 87–8, and Garber, 'Defending Aristotle/Defending Society in Early 17th Century Paris', in Claus Zittel and Wolfgang Detel (eds.), *Wissenideale und Wissenskulturen in der frühen Neuzeit/Ideals and Cultures of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2002), 135–60.

(<sup>57</sup>) Pasnau's *Metaphysical Themes*, ch. 24, gives a helpful account of the various roles scholastic philosophers generally supposed substantial forms to play. Among them: that it was the essence of the thing, actualizing its prime matter, and making the composite substance exist as a thing of a certain kind; that it accounted for the unity of the thing and explained its persistence over time; and that it was the immediate cause of the sensible and insensible qualities of the substance.

(<sup>58</sup>) AT iii. 505 (8–25). The words in single quotes here are in italics in AT, indicating (roughly) that they come from Voetius's challenge (given in AT iii. 515–16). CSMK's translation of this passage does not consistently attempt to distinguish what comes from Voetius and what comes from Descartes. We use single quotes in preference to italics, to avoid confusion when we use italics to call attention to the words Hoffman quoted. The bracketed additions seem to us

necessary to complete the sense of what Descartes writes and are generally in line with the additions made in CSMK.

(<sup>59</sup>) The most significant exception to this generalization in Fowler's sadly neglected *Human Soul*. We have a different view than Fowler does of Descartes's reaction to those debates, but we have found his book extraordinarily helpful. Other exceptions are John Cottingham, 'Cartesian Dualism: Theology, Metaphysics and Science', in John Cottingham (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 236-57; and Susan James, 'The Emergence of the Cartesian Mind', in Tim Crane and Sarah Patterson (eds.), *History of the Mind-Body Problem* (London: Routledge, 2000), 111-30.

(<sup>60</sup>) C. Duggan and N. H. Minnich, 'Lateran Councils', in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd edn. (Detroit: Gale, 2003), vol. 8, 350-5. The rebels held their council in Pisa and Milan in 1511-12. Their chief complaint was that although Julius had promised, on his election to the papacy, to convene a council to deal with Church reform, he had not done so.

(<sup>61</sup>) Julius died in February 1513. *Apostolici regiminis* was issued in December of that year. For the decrees of this bull, see Tanner, *Decrees*, vol. I, 605-6. For useful discussion, see Fowler, *Human Soul*, passim, and Eric Constant, 'A Reinterpretation of the Fifth Lateran Council Decree *Apostolici regiminis* (1513)' ['Reinterpretation'], *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 33 (2002), 353-79.

(<sup>62</sup>) Following Sten Ebbesen's article on Averroism in E. Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998), we shall understand by 'Averroism (strictly understood)', the view that philosophy leads to the conclusions that there is only one intellect shared by all humans, that happiness is attainable in this earthly life, and that the world has no temporal beginning or end. Ebbesen points out that the term 'Averroism' is often associated with the theory of a 'double truth', according to which truths arrived at by reason may be inconsistent with truths arrived at by faith or revelation. It seems that Averroes himself was not an Averroist in this sense. But Pomponazzi might well be.

(<sup>63</sup>) Rozemond discussed the Pomponazzi affair briefly in *Descartes's Dualism*, 164, but we think it needs a fuller consideration. For W. H. Hay's translation of Pomponazzi's treatise, see Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr. (eds.), *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* [*Renaissance Philosophy*] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 257-381. Generally we follow this translation, except for minor stylistic changes. Substantive changes will be noted. For the Latin text we have used Pietro Pomponazzi, Burkhard Mojsisch (ed.), *Abhandlung über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1990). For a good account of Pomponazzi's life and works, see Martin Pine, *Pietro Pomponazzi: Radical Philosopher of the Renaissance*

[Pomponazzi] (Padua: Editrice Antenore, 1986). Tanner, *Decrees*, identifies Pomponazzi as the target of the condemnation at vol. I, 593.

(<sup>64</sup>) So Ludwig von Pastor argued, in his *History of the Popes* (London: J. Hodges, 1891-1953), vol. 8, 389. Constant, 'Reinterpretation', 355 supports this conclusion.

(<sup>65</sup>) Cassirer et al., *Renaissance Philosophy*, 286. For a recent reading of Aristotle which defends an Averroist interpretation, see Theodore Tracy, S. J., 'Two Views of the Soul: Aristotle and Descartes's', *Illinois Classical Studies*, 11 (1986), 247-64.

(<sup>66</sup>) Cassirer et al., *Renaissance Philosophy*, 285. Cf. 322. Pomponazzi cites Aristotle's *Metaphysics* vii. 8, 1034a7-8; xii, 2, 1069b30; and xii. 8, 1074a33ff.; and *De anima* ii. 2, 414a25ff., in support of this attribution.

(<sup>67</sup>) Cassirer et al., *Renaissance Philosophy*, 315; *De anima* i. 1, 403a8-9. Cf. Cassirer et al., *Renaissance Philosophy*, 318. Pomponazzi cites this text quite frequently.

(<sup>68</sup>) In this last sentence we depart from the translation in Cassirer et al., *Renaissance Philosophy*, 379. The Latin is *Ceterae vero sunt fluctuantes*. Hay has: 'The rest are untrustworthy.'

(<sup>69</sup>) For details, see Pine, *Pomponazzi*, ch. 2.

(<sup>70</sup>) Suppositions (iii) and (iv) seem a reasonable inference from his behavior in the case of Galileo's condemnation. Cf. his letters to Mersenne at the end of November 1633, February 1634, April 1634, August 14, 1634 (AT i. 270-2, 281-2, 285-8, 303-6). That there was a problem about accounting for immortality consistently with the Aristotelian doctrine that the soul is the form of the body was well-known of course. There's a good discussion of this in Fowler, *Human Soul*, ch. 3. Pomponazzi's importance is that he showed how difficult it might be to solve that problem.

(<sup>71</sup>) Rodis-Lewis has written that 'les objections poussent Descartes à choisir entre la perspective d'Aristote et celle de Platon' (*L'oeuvre*, 354). If we are right, Descartes rejected the necessity of that choice, and thought he had found a third way. Hence our subtitle: *a kind of dualism*, which recalls Stuart Hampshire's 'A Kind of Materialism', *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 43 (1969-70), 5-23, where Hampshire argued that there's something very special about Spinoza's particular form of materialism which makes it a more viable philosophy of mind than classical materialism. Similarly, we think that Descartes is a dualist, but that his account of the mind-body union makes him a very special kind of dualist, not vulnerable to the standard objections to Platonic dualism, because he has an illuminating explanation for

our sense that a human being is not just a soul using a body, related to its body like a pilot to its ship.

(<sup>72</sup>) Hoffman, *Essays*, 3.

(<sup>73</sup>) Hoffman also liked to cite two passages in which Descartes says that the soul informs the body (in the *Regulae*, AT xi. 411, and in the *Principles* iv. 189, AT viii-1. 315). CSM's comment on the passage in the *Principles* seems appropriate, in view of Descartes's firm rejection of substantial forms at *Principles* iv. 198, AT viii-1. 322.

(<sup>74</sup>) AT iii. 664 (26-7); 665 (21-4); 691 (26)-692 (20); 693 (26)-694 (6).

(<sup>75</sup>) The first part of this quote comes from AT vii. 579 (30)-580 (3). The second from AT vii. 581 (3-9).

(<sup>76</sup>) This chapter is a development of ideas Minna Koivuniemi first expressed in her doctoral dissertation at Uppsala University in 2008, 'Towards Hilaritas, A Study of the Mind-Body Union, the Passions and the Mastery of the Passions in Descartes and Spinoza'. Dr. Koivuniemi is primarily responsible for the positive interpretation of Descartes in §§1, 2, and 6 and Prof. Curley for the rebuttal of the hylomorphic interpretation in the other sections. Ultimately we are interested in the mind-body union in Descartes because we think that understanding it may help us to understand Spinoza's doctrine of the mind-body relation. But we do not pursue that topic here. For comments on various drafts of the chapter we are indebted to Alison Simmons, Marleen Rozemond, Bob Pasnau, and the editors of this volume. During the writing of this chapter Dr. Koivuniemi was a teacher and researcher at the Universities of Jyväskylä and Helsinki, and Edwin Curley was Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at the University of Michigan.

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