

L'HOMME CARTESIEN

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Man in the *Meditations*

What kind of being is a man, a human being, according to Descartes? The answer is quite explicit in the Sixth Meditation. A man is a *compositus ex mente et corpore* (VII 82; II 57), a composite being consisting of a mind and a body. [Note: In parenthetical citations of Descartes's text, the first pair of numerals refers to volume and page of the Adam and Tannery edition; the second pair to volume and page of the English translation by Cottingham, Stoothoff, Murdoch, and Kenny.] These two components of a man are themselves different things. Not only are they disparate in nature, having nothing in common; but they are also distinct from one another, in the sense that each can exist without the other.

The fact, however, that a man is composed of two different things does not mean that he is not himself one single thing. A man's mind, Descartes says, is not merely "present" to his body *ut nauta adest navigio* (VII 81; II 56), but is "united" (VII 85; II 59) with it, and is "so closely conjoined" with it that the two of them constitute *unam quid* (VII 81; II 56).

This notion of the "union and as it were intermingling" of the mind with the body is not further explained in the *Meditations*. It is clear, however, that one major aspect or consequence of it is the causal interaction of these two human "parts" (VII 83; II 57). That such interaction occurs is not something that Descartes undertakes to prove. He rather regards it as an obvious fact, and cites numerous examples of cases, on the one hand, in which things that happen in a man's body give rise to events in his mind, sensory perceptions and feelings; and, on the other hand, in which mental actions, which is to say volitions, bring about motions in and of his body.

One thing Descartes does *not* say about human beings in the *Meditations* is that they are individual substances. Nor does he ever call a man an *ens completus* or an *ens per se*, terms he takes to be synonymous with *substantia* (*Res* i: VII 120-21; II 85-86; *Res* iv: VII 226; II 156-57). Each of the components of a human being, the mind and the body, is a substance, a complete being, and a being in its own right; but the composite being which they together make up apparently is not. Whatever the union of mind and body which a man is amounts to, Descartes refrains from saying that it results in the formation of an additional substance.

Post-*Meditations* Passages on the Unity of Man

Such is the conception of man that is presented in the *Meditations*. In subsequent works Descartes returned to this

subject, often in response to questions that were raised by his readers. For the most part, his later pronouncements are in perfect accord with those of the *Meditations*: not only are the same views expressed but the same language is used to express them. In several passages, however, Descartes says things about man that are different from those he had said earlier. These are things that suggest not merely a different vocabulary but a different conception, a conception, furthermore, which conflicts with the position laid out in the *Meditations*.

The passages in question can be divided into two groups. In those of the first group, Descartes uses the terminology of scholastic Aristotelianism, "the language of the Schools." He says that the human mind and body are not merely united but *substantially united*, and that they make up something that is *unum per se*. He says that the soul is the *form* and indeed the *substantial form* of a man, and that it *informs* or is the *form of* the human body or its matter. He even speaks of human beings as *entia per se*. Most of these passages are found in Descartes's Replies to Arnauld, in two letters he wrote to Regius in the winter of 1641-42, and in two letters to Mesland written in 1645 and (perhaps) 1646. There is also one such passage in the *Principles*, and one each in letters to Dinet (1642) and Clerselier (1646).

In the passages of the second group, Descartes maintains that the union of body and soul in a human being is a "primitive notion," an ultimate or irreducible fact which can be used to explain such things as the power of the soul to move the body and the occurrence of sensory perceptions, but which cannot itself be explained, or perhaps even analyzed, although it is well known to us. Such passages occur in two letters to Elizabeth written in the spring of 1643, in the *Principles*, and in a letter to Arnauld (1648).

In all of these passages Descartes clearly is putting greater stress upon, or giving greater significance to, the unity of man than he had done in the *Meditations*. (I shall sometimes refer to these passages henceforth as the "post-*Meditations* unity passages," or "PMUP" for short.) Indeed he seems to be maintaining that the human mind and body are united, and that a human being is a single thing, in some sense stronger or more stringent than was the case according to his earlier position. The view of man expressed in these passages may even appear to be incompatible with his earlier view.

The Problem of Interpretation

At the very least these passages pose a problem for interpreters of Descartes's philosophy. There are, broadly speaking, three strategies for dealing with this problem. The first is to claim that the view of man expressed in these passages is incompatible with the view of the *Meditations*. One then concludes, either that Descartes was

guilty of inconsistent thinking or that he changed his mind sometime after finishing the *Meditations* in the spring of 1640 and before writing his Replies to Arnauld approximately one year later. The second is to find a view of man in these passages that is different from but not incompatible with Descartes's earlier position. This view is then read back into the Sixth Meditation, thereby completing and clarifying the latter so as to reveal its true import. The third strategy is to show that, despite appearances, there is no basis in these passages for attributing to Descartes any view of man other than the one he stated in the *Meditations*.

All the scholars who have considered this problem would agree on the following points. At various places throughout his works Descartes affirms the duality of human beings. Also in various places, including many of the same ones, he affirms the unity of man. Let us call the doctrine that a man is composed of two different things "dualism," and the doctrine that a man is one single unitary thing "unitarianism." Now each of these doctrines has both a strong and a weak, or a hard and a soft, version or formulation. The two doctrines in their strong or hard forms are incompatible with one another: to accept the one is to be logically bound to reject the other. But hard dualism is compatible with soft unitarianism, and hard unitarianism with soft dualism.

It is further agreed that Descartes's dualism is more prominent in the Sixth Meditation than is his unitarianism, although the latter does find expression there; and also that his unitarianism is more prominent in the PMUP than it is in the *Meditations*. The question on which scholars disagree concerns the form in which each of these doctrines is asserted or intended in each of these contexts. Is it hard or soft dualism that Descartes affirms in the Sixth Meditation? Is it hard or soft unitarianism that is being put forward in the PMUP?

Those who follow the first strategy noted above take Descartes to be affirming hard dualism in the *Meditations* and hard unitarianism in the Fourth Replies and associated passages. They claim therefore that what he says in the one place is incompatible with what he says in the other. This incompatibilist strategy has been adopted, inter alia, by Stephen Voss in his paper "The Disappearance of Cartesian Man." Taking the incompatibility of the doctrines expressed in the two contexts as a premise, Voss argues that Descartes changed his mind in the time between the one and the other. Indeed, Voss maintains that Descartes changed his view of human beings not once but twice in his lifetime. According to Voss, Descartes first rejected the "moderate Platonism" that he had presented in the *Meditations*, and adopted an Aristotelian position akin to that held by Arnauld. He then abandoned that position in turn in favor of an extreme version of Platonism that denies the existence of human individuals altogether.

"Descartes's final position," Voss contends, "is that there is no such thing as man" (p 2).

The second strategy for dealing with the PMUP problem has been followed by quite a number of Cartesian scholars, British and American as well as French. On their interpretation, the doctrine expressed in the Fourth Replies and in the Regius and Mesland letters is hard unitarianism; and since they recognize that this is incompatible with hard dualism, they argue that the position Descartes puts forward in the Sixth Meditation is not that doctrine, as they grant is natural to suppose, but only its weak or soft counterpart. Two recent proponents of this strategy are Paul Hoffman in his paper "The Unity of Descartes's Man" and John Cottingham in "Cartesian Trialism." Hoffman and Cottingham do not emphasize the same specific features of the unitarian position that they both attribute to Descartes, in part because they concentrate on different Cartesian passages, those of the first or Aristotelian group distinguished above in the case of Hoffman, those of the second or primitive notions group in the case of Cottingham. But both authors make Descartes a hard unitarian, and both work to soften his dualism, so as to bring it into line with what they take to be his primary commitment.

Proponents of the third strategy, by contrast, make Descartes's dualism fundamental, and seek to bring the doctrine of the unity passages into line with it. Their Descartes is first and foremost a hard dualist with respect to human beings; and they find this doctrine not only in the *Meditations* but in the writings which succeeded it, personal correspondence included. According to this strategy, the position expressed in the PMUP is soft unitarianism at best; and there is nothing in these passages that either conflicts with or requires the reinterpretation of the discussion of the Sixth Meditation.

This third strategy is the one that I myself favor, and my objective in this paper is to develop and defend it. I do not have time to consider all of the relevant passages, however, so I must confine my attention to those of the Aristotelian group. I shall first examine each of these passages by itself, with the aim of showing that there is no justification for reading any of them as expressing a hard unitarian conception of man. Second, I shall develop two general considerations which in my view prove that Descartes never meant to profess anything other than soft unitarianism. Finally, I shall explore the nature of that unity which I believe Descartes did mean to attribute to human beings.

Examination of the Passages

1. The Fourth Replies. This is the earliest of the passages to be examined, having been composed in March of 1641. In his *Objections*, Arnauld had suggested that Descartes's argument for the distinctness of body and mind "proves too much," in that it leads to the Platonic opinion that a man is merely a "soul making use of a body" (VII 203; II 143). To this Descartes responds by claiming that he had, in the Sixth Meditation, not only established that a man's mind and body are really distinct, but "proved" that these two are "*substantially united*" (VII 227-28; II 160). Descartes uses this phrase, *substantialiter unita*, three times, and the related phrase *unio substantialis* once, to characterize the mind-body relationship in his Replies to Arnauld. He had of course used the terms "union" and "united" in the Sixth Meditation, but the qualifier "substantial" or "substantially" appears for the first time in the Fourth Replies.

What is the significance of this addition? Some proponents of the hard unitarian interpretation, Hoffman for one (p 346), have claimed that a substantial union is one whose product is a substance, whereas the product of a non-substantial union is an entity of some other kind. Certainly the unity that would belong to a human being if it were a single substance is stronger than any it would have if it were merely a *compositum* of two distinct substances. If this is what substantial union is for Descartes, then he clearly has made his unitarianism harder by ascribing it to human beings.

The fact is, however, that Descartes never actually says, in this passage or anywhere else in his writings, that substantially united items form a substance, or that the human mind and body do. Nor does he ever say that things in substantial union constitute an *ens per se* or *res completus* - terms he has just been telling Arnauld he takes to be synonymous with *substantia*.

Indeed, if we attend to the actual words that Descartes uses in responding to Arnauld, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that not only does "substantial union" not mean "union which produces a substance" here, but the word "substantial" adds nothing to the meaning of "union" at all. It looks as if "substantial" is being used not to restrict or modify the union referred to but merely to mark its importance. What Descartes precisely says is this: "in the Sixth Meditation, where I dealt with the distinction between the mind and the body, I also proved at the same time that the mind is substantially united with the body" (VII 228; II 160). But the conclusion he actually states in that work is simply that the mind is united with the body, or *arctissime conjunctum* to it. If he was speaking accurately and truly then, and also is doing so now, then it follows that the terms "substantially united" and "united" have the

same meaning for Descartes. It follows, that is, that to be substantially united, at least in the Fourth Replies, is not to be united in some special way not heretofore identified, but simply to be united in the same way, whatever it is, as that already noted in the *Meditations*.

In any case, Descartes assures Arnauld, the fact that mind and body are substantially united does not prevent us from conceiving the mind clearly and distinctly as a complete thing - which is to say, it does not prevent the mind from being an independent substance distinct from the body. So even if substantial union were different from and stronger than mere union, it would not be strong enough to weaken the hard dualism of the Sixth Meditation.

Furthermore, the overall objective of Descartes's response to Arnauld is to vindicate his argument for the distinctness of mind and body, and to secure the status of each as a substance, a being independent and complete in itself. It is, in short, to reinforce the dualism defended in the *Meditations*. It would thus be quite perverse for him to do anything in this context that might tend to weaken this dualism - as any move in the direction of a harder form of unitarianism would certainly do. Descartes in fact is not troubled very much by Arnauld's charge of Platonism, and he sees no need to change his view or develop any new conception of mind-body unity in order to refute it. He thinks that the unity he has already affirmed in the *Meditations* is sufficient to show that he is not a Platonist, and that he has only to call attention to it to answer Arnauld - to call attention to it, not to replace it with some more powerful surrogate.

2. The Regius letters. These two letters contain the richest store of Aristotelian locutions regarding man that is to be found in the Cartesian corpus. Not only is the union of the human soul and body called *substantial* in them, but the human being himself is said to be an *ens per se* and not an *ens per accidens*. Furthermore, it is in one of these letters that the human soul is said to be the *substantial form* of the man.

Regius was Descartes's disciple. But his profession of Cartesian doctrines at the University of Utrecht had caused considerable controversy, and Regius himself was under attack. Descartes wrote these letters in order to help him respond to his critics.

One thing Regius had said is that a human being is an *ens per accidens*. This seems a fair appellation, given the Cartesian view that a man is a composite being, though it is not an expression that Descartes himself had used. But it proved to be a red flag to Regius's Aristotelian colleagues, including the University's rector, Voetius. "You could scarcely have said anything more objectionable and provocative," Descartes writes in the first of the two

letters under discussion (III 460; III 200). He does not, however, say that Regius's statement is false. He then undertakes, not the theoretical task of correcting Regius's opinion, but the practical task of controlling the effects of his speech. For advice he offers not philosophy but rhetoric; the objective is not truth but to avoid "giving further offence to the theologians" (III 461; III 200).

Indeed, Descartes shows himself quite willing to sacrifice truth to expediency. After acknowledging that Regius had called man an *ens per accidens*, he advises him to tell his adversaries that he "did not say that a human being is an *ens per accidens*"; and that he "understood it to be an *ens per se*" (III 460; III 200). Nowhere in this letter does Descartes give any indication that Regius should believe that a human being is an *ens per se*, much less that he himself so believes. On one occasion Descartes does speak of the soul's union with the body in a way that makes it clear that he is expressing his own view. But in doing so he does not even characterize this union as substantial, let alone call the product thereof a substance, which is what being an *ens per se* would entail.

Descartes again takes up Regius's statement that a human being is an *ens per accidens* in the second of our two letters. "When you said [this]," Descartes writes, "I know that you meant only...that a human being is made up of two things which are really distinct. But this expression," he goes on, "is not used in that sense by the scholastics." So Descartes advises Regius to claim that he "misunderstood this scholastic expression," and to proclaim the belief "that a human being is a true *ens per se*, and not an *ens per accidens*" (III 492-93; III 206). But what does this advice amount to? Descartes is not telling Regius to accept the belief that the scholastics would express in these words. Nor is he proposing that Regius lie, that he falsely pretend to accept the scholastics' belief. His proposal is merely that Regius use the scholastics' terminology to express his own conviction about man, which Descartes indicates is his conviction too.

And what is this conviction? Descartes identifies it with his very next words: it is "that the [human] mind is united in a real and substantial manner to the body" (III 493; III 206). He then proceeds to consider what this means. For one thing, it means that the mind and the body are "united not by position or disposition," for that is an opinion which Descartes, speaking in his own person, declares is "quite untrue" (ibid.). Beyond that, there is no need for Regius to give any further explanation, he says, since nobody does that. On the other hand, he points out that Regius could follow his example in the *Meditations*, and explain mind-body union "by saying that we perceive that sensations such as pain are not pure thoughts of a mind distinct from a body, but confused perceptions of a

mind really united to a body. For", he continues, "if an angel were in a human body, he would not have sensations as we do, but would simply perceive the motions which are caused by external objects, and in this way would differ from a real man" (ibid.).

It should be clear that Descartes has not, in this portion of his letter at least, committed himself to any doctrine about man that he had not already stated in the *Meditations*. It is true that he uses a different example to illustrate his conception of mind-body union - an angel in a human body as opposed to a sailor in a ship. But the import of the two examples is the same - although neither, be it noted, tells us very much about mind-body union as Descartes conceives it: this is a point I shall return to later in this paper.

The discussion just reviewed, in which Descartes comments on Regius's use of the expression *ens per accidens*, occurs near the beginning of the second letter. At its conclusion, Descartes turns his attention to a particular text in which Voetius had criticized Regius's views. He counsels Regius to respond to this criticism in an open letter, a full draft of which he then undertakes to provide, so that Regius will know exactly what ought to be said. (He will, he says, write *partim gallicè*, so that Regius will not be tempted to use his very words in responding to Voetius!) Nearly all of the rest of Descartes's letter, some 14 pages in the Adam and Tannery edition, is taken up with this draft of Regius's response.

Now the noteworthy fact for our purposes is that every one of the sentences dealing with man which this letter contains, other than those we have just considered, falls within the scope of this script that Descartes has composed for the use of Regius. This includes the one sentence in which the human soul is called the substantial form of a man - *anima...est vera forma substantialis hominis* (III 505; III 208) - along with those in which the scope of the polemic against substantial forms is narrowed so as to exclude this single "privileged" instance (III 503; III 207-08). It also includes the following sentences, which are frequently quoted by Cartesian scholars:

We affirm that a human being is made up of body and soul, not by the mere presence or proximity of one to the other, but by a true substantial union. ... When we said that a human being is an *ens per accidens*, we meant this only in relation to its parts, the soul and the body; ... But if a human being is considered in himself as a whole, we say of course that he is a single *ens per se*, and not *per accidens*; ... (III 508; III 209)

The consequence is that none of these sentences can properly be taken to express any view about man that

Descartes himself held. Descartes is not using these sentences to convey his own thoughts; indeed, he is not strictly using them at all, but merely mentioning them. Nor is he proposing that Regius use them for the purpose of conveying thoughts, Descartes's or even his own. These are rather the sentences which he believes Regius must use for the practical purpose of placating his enemies.

In sum, the two Regius letters provide no evidence whatsoever that Descartes held any scholastic or Aristotelian view regarding the unity of man, or indeed any view about man that is not explicitly stated in the Sixth Meditation. In particular, they provide no reason for thinking that Descartes ever took the human soul to be the substantial form of a human being, or thought of a man as an *ens per se*, at least in the strict, commonly understood sense of that term, or that he understood mind-body union in any way that would render it incompatible with the composite nature of man and the real distinction of the mind and the body.

This conclusion regarding the Regius letters is confirmed by Descartes's letter to Dinet, in which he gives a detailed account of the proceedings at Utrecht. In this letter Descartes says that the dispute between Regius and his adversaries was merely verbal; and he also is explicit in ascribing to Regius the view that the human soul is the substantial form of the body: he does not even appear to acknowledge it as his own (VII 585-87; HR II 363-64).

3. The Mesland letters. The letters in question are two of several that Descartes sent to Mesland in 1645 (or perhaps 1645 and 1646) on the subject of transubstantiation. They are important not only for the Aristotelian language they use to speak of human beings, but because they put forward a view about the human body which is not found anywhere else in the Cartesian corpus. According to some recent commentators, this view is unmistakably Aristotelian in content - Hoffman calls the view "hylomorphism" (p 342 et passim) - quite apart from the language in which it is presented. And it entails, they allege, a stronger conception of the unity of man than the one traditionally associated with Cartesian dualism - a hard unitarian conception.

There is one occurrence of the phrase "substantially united" in these letters; but the main Aristotelian term they contain is "form" and its variants. The human soul is said to *inform* the human body (or the matter which composes it). The soul of Jesus Christ is said to *inform* the matter of the Eucharistic host (or the particles of bread and wine whereof it consists) - which, on Catholic doctrine, is equivalent to saying that Christ's soul informs Christ's body. And the soul of a man is said to be the *form* of his body. It is noteworthy that Descartes uses these terms in this way almost nowhere else in his writings. There is one passage in a letter to Clerselier, written about

the same time as the second of our two letters to Mesland, also on the subject of transubstantiation, in which Descartes says that the soul of Jesus Christ informs the matter of his body. And in one sentence of Part IV of the *Principles* the human soul is said to inform the entire human body, although the use of this word in this context is surely incidental. (It is not used in the 1647 French translation of that work.)

If, however, we examine the actual use that Descartes makes of these Aristotelian expressions in the two Mesland letters, it seems quite clear that he attaches no special significance to them. There are six instances in which the terms "form," "inform," and "substantially united" are used to characterize the relation of the soul to something material, either the body itself or the matter which composes it. (Three of these, be it noted, concern the relation of the soul of Jesus Christ to matter or to "the particles of bread and wine" which make up the Eucharistic host - a special case if ever there was one!) But interspersed with these six instances are eight in which the soul is said to be "joined" or merely "united" or in "union" with the body or its matter - that is, in which the terms used are exactly those that Descartes had used in the Sixth Meditation. It is hard to escape the conclusion that Descartes is using these various expressions interchangeably, and that his choice of one instead of another is devoid of semantic significance. One might suppose that what is being spoken of in these different ways are different relations. But this is obviously not so: in some cases expressions of both types are used in describing the same example. Thus the difference here is merely a verbal one, a matter of vocabulary. For Descartes, in these letters at least, to say that the human soul "informs" a body is just to say that it is "united" or "joined" with it.

Nor is it surprising that Descartes should have used scholastic terminology in these letters, rather than confine himself to the vocabulary of the *Meditations* - which in any case he also retains. For his correspondent was a Jesuit father, trained in the language of scholastic Aristotelianism. Not that Descartes had any need to disguise or even soften his true opinions in writing to Mesland, who had shown himself to be quite sympathetic to Descartes's philosophy. But it was a common practice for Descartes to accommodate his speech to the habits and expectations of his audience, a practice he not only frequently followed in his writings, but also explicitly endorsed on occasion, as in his January 1642 letter to Regius (III 491; III 205).

As for the view of the human body that Descartes presents in these letters, the first thing to note is that this view is part of a larger account of transubstantiation that Descartes, in another letter to Mesland, appears to disavow. "As for the manner in which Jesus Christ exists in the Holy Sacrament," he writes, "there is no need at

all to accept the explanation I sent you in order to make it agree with my principles. For I put it forward not for this reason, but because I deemed it quite useful for getting round the objections of the heretics" (IV 216; III 248-49). Of course, Descartes may be dissembling in this letter, seeking to deflect the criticisms that were then being made of his principles, in part because of their implications for the traditional doctrine of transubstantiation. And in any case he may not be intending to disavow that portion of his account which concerns the bodies of ordinary men. But the fact that he wrote in this vein to Mesland at all ought to make us wary of simply concluding that this view of bodies is one that Descartes himself accepts - especially since, as I mentioned earlier, it is not stated anywhere else in his writings.

Even if the view is Descartes's own, however, it turns out not to have the Aristotelian content, or to entail the hard version of unitarianism, that commentators such as Hoffman have claimed it does. To see this we have only to spell out precisely what the view is - something that I believe these commentators have not adequately done.

Descartes begins his discussion of "the body of a man," in the first of our two letters, by distinguishing this notion from that of a "body in general." "When we speak of a body in general," he says, "we mean a determinate part of matter, a part of the quantity of which the universe is composed. ... But when we speak of the body of a man, ... we mean simply the whole of the matter which is united with the soul of that man" (IV 166; III 242-43). From this it appears that Descartes is addressing the question of what makes something to be a human body in the first place: given some matter, under what conditions does it constitute the body of man? But he also, and indeed within the same sentence, answers the different question of what accounts for the identity of a human body through time: given the body of a man, under what conditions will it be the same body at some later time (or is it now the same body that it was at some earlier time)?

Most of the subsequent discussion is devoted to this second question, and Descartes's answer to it is clear. A human body is "the same body," he says, "numerically the same body, so long as it remains joined and substantially united with the same soul" (IV 166; III 243). Put more precisely, the view he is stating here is that a human body x , existing at a time t_1 , is (numerically) the same human body as a human body y , existing at a later time t_2 , if and only if x and y are both united with the same human soul - i.e. if and only if x is united with a human soul s_1 and y is united with a human soul s_2 and s_1 and s_2 are (numerically) the same human soul.

Whatever its merits as a philosophical doctrine, however, there is nothing specifically Aristotelian about this

view of the diachronic identity of the human body. For it can be combined with hard Cartesian dualism or even with extreme Platonism as easily as with Aristotelianhylomorphism: it certainly does not entail an Aristotelian conception of the body. Hence if there is any such conception in the Mesland letters, it must lie within Descartes's answer to the first of the two questions just distinguished, the question of what makes something to be a human body in the first place.

But what exactly does this answer amount to? It might appear that Descartes is saying that a quantity of matter x is a human body if and only if x is united with a human soul. This cannot be his intention, however. For he cannot be supposed to hold that being united with a human soul is either necessary or sufficient for being a human body. He cannot be supposed to hold the former because of his commitment to the biological doctrine that a human body, taken by itself and apart from any soul, is nonetheless a living organism, a self-sufficient individual fully capable of performing all the vital functions of an animal without reason. This is a commitment that is manifested abundantly throughout Descartes's career - in his late *Description du corps humain* as well as his early *Traité de l'homme*, and in the *Discours de la méthode* in between. Hence whatever proposition Descartes means to be expressing here, it cannot be the proposition that x is a human body only if x is united with a human soul.

But nor can Descartes be supposed to hold that being united with a human soul is sufficient for being a human body. This is shown by what he says in these very letters to Mesland about the soul and body of Jesus Christ. He does tell us that the soul of Jesus Christ is united with - he says "informs" - the matter of the host during the Eucharist, that is, with the bread and the wine. And he indicates that it is in virtue of this union that this matter becomes the body of Christ. But he also observes that this body does not thereby become a living human body possessing "all its external parts with their quantity and matter" (IV 169; III 244). For that to happen, he indicates, the union would have to be brought about not supernaturally, "simply by the power of the words of consecration," but naturally. And for that in turn the "particles of bread and wine ... would have to mingle with [the] blood [of Christ] and dispose themselves in certain specific ways" (IV 168; III 244). They would have, that is, to be "assembled with many others to make up all the organs a human body needs for life" (ibid.). So it is not union with a soul alone that makes something to be a human body. Also required is that the matter in question have certain physical properties - that it have the right size and shape, and the right configuration of parts. Indeed, having these physical properties would seem to be the only requirement for being a human body for Descartes, in

which case it is sufficient as well as necessary therefor. The human case is thus quite different from that of Jesus Christ. The particles of bread and wine do become the body of Christ, merely by being informed by Christ's soul. But that body is not a body that any human being could possess: it is not even the body that Christ had when he was a man - not the body he had "when he ascended into heaven" (IV 169; III 244).

The upshot is that the view stated in the Mesland letters as to the nature of a human body, as opposed to its diachronic identity, is not after all novel or peculiar with respect to the rest of the Cartesian corpus. And in particular, no special Aristotelian such view is to be found there. An Aristotelian philosopher would take a human body by itself to be metaphysically deficient in some way, and would hold that it must be united with a soul in order to rank as a full-fledged being. Hoffman, for example, says that the body is "actualized" by the soul according to Aristotelian doctrine, and, on his interpretation, according to Descartes as well (p 358). His suggestion therefore is that a body by itself is a merely potential entity, so that even if we had a quantity of matter with the right size, shape and properly configured parts, we would not have a human body properly so called unless a human soul were brought in to "inform" it. But there is no basis in these letters for ascribing any such position to Descartes.

I conclude, therefore, that the Mesland letters provide no more evidence than do the Replies to Arnauld and letters to Regius that Descartes ever took a hard view of human unity, or even one substantially different from the view stated in the Sixth Meditation.

General Considerations

I want now to lay out two general considerations that seem to me to prove that Descartes never was a hard unitarian regarding man, that he never softened his dualism, and that he never held any other view of the relation of the human mind and body than that stated in the Sixth Meditation.

1. Principles of Cartesian metaphysics. The first such consideration is that the hard unitarian interpretation of Descartes's position is logically precluded by the fundamental principles of his metaphysics. Not all of these principles are actually stated in the *Meditations*; explicit formulations of some are found only in the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Replies, and in the *Principles*. But there is no doubt that Descartes accepted these principles while he was writing the *Meditations*, and that his thought there was guided by them.

Among these fundamental principles are the following. (P1) Every finite individual substance is independent of every other: it needs no other finite substance to exist. (P2) Every finite substance has exactly one principal attribute or essence. (P3) Every non-transcendental property of a finite substance is a mode of its principal attribute. [Note: By "non-transcendental property" I mean "property other than 'the most general' ones, such as 'substance, duration, order, number,' etc. 'which extend to all classes of things'"; see *Principles* I.48 (VIII A 22; I 208).] (P4) No non-transcendental property is a mode of more than one principal attribute. (P5) There are two and only two principal attributes for finite substances, thought and extension. (P6) A substance that has thought for its principal attribute is a mind, and one that has extension is a body. (P7) Human minds and human bodies are, respectively, minds and bodies.

From these principles it follows that human minds and bodies are finite individual substances whose principal attributes are, respectively, thought and extension, all of whose non-transcendental properties are modes, respectively, of thought and extension, and none of whose non-transcendental properties is a property, respectively, of a body or a mind. If we then grant that human beings are or have both minds and bodies, then it further follows that each man includes or is composed of two substances which are really distinct and essentially diverse from one another. Thus in whatever way a man's mind and body are joined together, the man himself is still a composite entity whose two parts retain their separate identities. There are also these corollaries to be drawn. (C1) A man is not himself an individual substance. (C2) There is no human essence, no single or simple principal attribute of man as such, though a man may be said to have both thought and extension in a derivative way, since these are the essences of his two components; or he may be said to have the compound essence consisting of thought and extension together. (C3) Men have no non-transcendental properties that are peculiar to them as men, that is, none that are not also and primarily properties belonging either to their minds or else to their bodies.

On the Aristotelian view, by contrast, human beings are individual substances; they do have an essence in their own right; and they do have properties which belong to them directly, and are not really properties either of their minds or of their bodies. So this view contradicts each of the three Cartesian corollaries just listed. There is also a further difficulty in the way of anyone who wishes to attribute to Descartes both an Aristotelian view of man and the doctrine that human minds and bodies are themselves individual substances, as most of the recent hard unitarian commentators do seem to do. This is that the resulting combination would violate Descartes's fundamen-

tal principle regarding substance, the principle P1 above, that no substance needs any other substance to exist. For on this combination view, a man would be a substance which needs not one but two other substances in order to exist, namely the mind and the body belonging to that man. For the mind and the body of a man are his essential parts; he could not exist or be a man if either of them were lacking. Descartes does not of course claim that every human part is essential: he recognizes that a man can lose an arm or a leg without losing his being. But he is a mereological essentialist with respect both to the mind and to the whole human body. The following statement, although it occurs within the speech he wrote for Regius, unquestionably expresses his own view as well: "the union which joins a human body and soul to each other is not accidental to a human being, but essential, since a human being without it is not a human being" (III 508; III 209).

2. Post-Meditations duality passages. The second consideration that tells against the attribution of any hard unitarian position to Descartes is the fact that he explicitly reaffirms, and indeed reinforces, the hard dualism of the Sixth Meditation in two lengthy passages that he composed during the same period of time as that in which he was writing about human unity to Arnauld, Regius, and Mesland.

The first of these passages occurs in the Sixth Replies, written in 1641 three or four months after Descartes composed his response to Arnauld. Here Descartes not only says again that human beings are composite entities, but he identifies a special kind of unity which applies to such entities, which he then distinguishes from the unity that characterizes simple beings such as single substances. "There are," he writes, "two ways in which [different ideas of two things] can be taken to be one and the same thing: either in virtue of the unity or identity of their nature, or else merely in respect of unity of composition" (VII 423; IXA 226; II 285). He then makes it explicit that in his view "a thinking thing and an extended thing are one and the same [not] by a unity of nature [but] in respect of unity of composition, in so far as they are found in the same man" (VII 423-24; IXA 226; II 286). A page later he warns that "however often we find ... thought and corporeal motion in the same man, we should not therefore think that they are one and the same in virtue of a unity of nature, but should regard them as the same only in respect of unity of composition" (VII 425; IXA 228; II 287). And finally, in concluding his discussion of this topic, he declares:

that there are human beings, who possess both thought and a body [is] a result of a thinking thing's being combined with a corporeal thing ... [I]t is a conceptual contradiction to suppose

that two things which we clearly perceive as different should become one and the same (that is intrinsically one and the same, as opposed to by composition) ... Hence, if God has implanted the power of thought in certain bodies (as he in fact has done in the case of human bodies), then he can remove this power from them, and hence it still remains really distinct from them (VII 444-45; IXA 242; II 299)

The other passage is in the *Notae in programma quoddam*, a pamphlet Descartes wrote during the winter of 1647-48 in answer to a broadside recently put out by Regius, who had by then ceased to be Descartes's disciple and had become his adversary. Among other things Regius had claimed that "there is no reason why the mind should not be a sort of attribute co-existing with extension in the same subject" (VIII B 343; I 294-95). To this Descartes responds that "attributes which constitute the natures of things," as thought and extension do, "cannot be said [to be] present together in one and the same subject; for that would be equivalent to saying that one and the same subject has two different natures - a statement that implies a contradiction, at least when it is a question of a simple subject ... rather than a composite one" (VIII B 349-350; I 298). He then proceeds to stress "the difference between simple entities and composite entities." A composite entity, he says, "is one which is found to have two or more attributes, each one of which can be distinctly understood apart from the other." And he concludes by reiterating his conviction that "that which we regard as having at the same time both extension and thought is a composite entity, namely a man - an entity consisting of a soul and a body" (VIII B 350-51; I 299). This is of course exactly the conviction that Descartes had expressed in the Sixth Meditation.

The Nature of the Unity of Man

In this paper I have argued that the unity that Descartes ascribes to human beings is relatively soft, soft enough to be compatible with hard Cartesian dualism. But I have not done much to specify the nature of this unity. This omission should not be surprising, considering how little Descartes himself does to characterize the unity of man in positive terms. He does indicate a few things that this unity is not: it is not a "unity of nature," as we have just noted, and the human mind is not merely "present" to or "lodged" in the body, or united with it "by position or disposition." He also uses two negative similes, two examples of pairs of items whose relationship is unlike that of the components of a man: those of a sailor in his ship and an angel in a human body. But these contrasts do not

tell us much about what human unity is.

There is, to be sure, one particular respect in which Descartes says his two examples fail to resemble "real" human beings, the same respect in both cases. This is that neither the sailor nor the angel has bodily sensations and appetites, as human minds do. Both sailor and angel do perceive the material entity to which they are connected. But their perceptions of it are distinct and purely intellectual, whereas the sensations by which the human mind receives information from its associated body are "confused modes of thinking." Thus the angel "would not have sensations as we do, but would simply perceive the motions which are caused by external objects" via "pure thoughts" (III 493; III 206). And the sailor "perceives by sight if anything in his ship is broken": so that the mind, if it were like a sailor, "would not feel pain when the body was hurt, but would perceive the damage purely by the intellect"; and "when the body needed food or drink, [would] have an explicit understanding of the fact, instead of having confused sensations of hunger and thirst" (VII 81; II 56).

But what is the significance of this difference between the human mind-body compositum and the aggregates consisting of sailor and ship and angel and human body? Surely it is just this: that certain kinds of causal relationships obtain between human minds and bodies that are not to be found in the other two cases. It is not that the sailor is not causally related to his ship at all, or the angel to the body in which he is lodged. In the *Discourse*, where Descartes also mentions the example of the sailor (although there he calls him a "helmsman"), he acknowledges the sailor's power to cause movements in his ship (VI 59; I 141). And both the sailor's and the angel's distinct thoughts are caused in part by things occurring in their associated bodies. This is obviously so in the case of the sailor's visual perceptions of his ship. But it holds also for the angel's purely intellectual perceptions. For even though, as Descartes puts it in the *Principles*, the mind derives distinct thoughts "from itself alone" (VIII 317; I 281), such thoughts cannot have particular motions of bodies for their objects unless these motions have some causal role in their production.

So the difference between men and these other cases must lie in the nature of the causal relationships that they involve. Human minds and bodies interact in such wise that confused perceptions are produced; whereas the sailor and the angel are so related to their material partners that they have distinct perceptions of them. Of course the human mind sometimes has distinct thoughts about its associated body too: the distinguishing feature of human beings is not that all of their perceptions are bodily sensations and appetites, but that these confused modes of

thinking are only found in them.

There certainly are further differences between real human beings and Descartes's two examples. For one thing, a sailor can leave his ship, and an angel could leave any human body he might inhabit, simply by willing to do so. But a human mind that is currently united with a body cannot separate itself from that body at will, even though God could separate it now and death will separate it sometime in the future. But this difference too is a matter of the causal relationships that hold in these different cases.

This still does not tell us very much about the nature of mind-body union in human beings. Descartes gives no reason why the body's action on the mind sometimes results in a confused perception, nor does he explain exactly what a perception's being confused consists in. He says confused feelings and appetites are "quite different in kind" from any "distinct thoughts" we might have (*Principles* IV.190: VIIIA 317; I 281). But he does nothing to explain this difference or even describe it.

On the other hand, it is useful to know that the special kind of unity a man has is a function of the causal relationships that hold between his mind and his body. I said earlier that the causal interaction of minds and bodies is one aspect or consequence of their union in human beings. It now appears that such interaction, or the capacity therefor, is all there is to the unity of man, and that the union of the human mind and body is entirely a matter of their being causally related in certain ways. If so, then Descartes's effort, in his letters to Elizabeth, to explain the interaction of mind and body on the basis of their union is doomed to fail, as are the efforts of some recent commentators to defend Descartes on this score.

This conclusion is confirmed, I believe, by an accurate reading of the second group of post-*Meditations* unity passages I distinguished earlier, which includes passages from the Elizabeth letters and from the *Principles*. I have not had time to consider these passages in this presentation, but I examine them in the full version of this paper, and then seek to settle this question regarding the proper relation between the unity and the interaction of the mind and the body in Cartesian man.

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