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Author(s): Paul Hoffman
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THE UNITY OF DESCARTES'S MAN
Paul Hoffman

INTRODUCTION

One of the leading problems for Cartesian dualism is to provide an account of the union of mind and body. This problem is often construed to be one of explaining how thinking things and extended things can causally interact. That is, it needs to be explained how thoughts in the mind can produce motions in the body and how motions in the body can produce sensations, appetites, and emotions in the mind. The conclusion often drawn, as it was by three of Descartes's illustrious successors, Malebranche, Spinoza, and Leibniz, is that mind and body cannot causally interact.1

I mention this problem of the interaction between thinking things and extended things only to distinguish it from the problem concerning the union of mind and body which I wish to discuss. Some commentators, such as Daisie Radner, maintain that the union of mind and body is metaphysically more fundamental than their interaction and is meant to account for the possibility of such interaction.2 But not everyone agrees that Descartes should or even can draw a distinction between the union of mind and body and their causal interaction. Margaret Wilson attributes to Descartes a theory of mind-body union which she refers to as the “Natural Institution” theory.3 According to this theory, “to conceive mind and body as united is just to conceive of mind as subject, at a given time, to experiencing certain sorts of sensations in response to certain movements in the brain; and the brain as subject to certain movements as a result of certain thoughts or volitions in the

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mind.” As she explains, “[o]n the Natural Institution theory, then, it would seemingly be wrong to say that we experience sensations in different parts of our bodies because of a state of affairs designated as the close or intimate union or intermingling of mind with body. Rather, what we call the close union or intermingling of this mind with this body is nothing but the arbitrarily established disposition of this mind to experience certain types of sensations on the occasion of certain changes in this body, and to refer these sensations to (parts of) this body.” Despite the occasionalistic ring to this latter quotation, her point is that on what she refers to as “Descartes’s best account of embodiment,” the union of mind and body is nothing other than their interaction.

Wilson does acknowledge that it is an important feature of Descartes’s theory of embodiment that he does not rest content with the Natural Institution theory and instead tries to account for the interaction of mind and body on the basis of another theory of their union which she refers to as the “Co-extension” theory. However, she dismisses this Co-extension theory as “seemingly almost ineffable.” Thus she seems to think both that it would have been better if Descartes had stuck solely to the view that the union of mind and body just is their interaction and that his attempt to draw a distinction between their union and their interaction rests on a hardly intelligible theory of the nature of their union.

It is this problem of the nature of the union between mind and body, as opposed to the problem of their interaction, which is the subject of this paper. Moreover, I do not wish to discuss the nature of the union of mind and body with respect to its success in solving the problem of mind-body interaction. I disagree with Radner’s seeming belief that the sole problem the notion of the union between mind and body is meant to solve is the problem of their

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4Ibid., p. 219.
5Ibid., p. 211.
6Ibid., p. 218.
7Ibid., p. 211. Wilson, however, does not mention that in a letter to Regius, January, 1642 (which will figure prominently in my interpretation of Descartes’s view) Descartes tells Regius that he thinks it is untrue that mind and body are united by position or disposition (AT III, 493; R 127). See page 345 below.
8Ibid., p. 207.
interaction. Instead, I think that it also has a more important task, which is to explain how two really distinct things, mind and body, can somehow generate another thing, the man or human being, which is itself a unity, that is, a genuine individual or an *ens per se*. Thus, what I want to ask is whether there is in Descartes's philosophy a notion of the union of mind and body which gives a satisfactory account of the unity of the man or human being, that is, an account according to which a human being has an intuitive claim of being one thing, and not merely two things conjoined.

That Descartes considers a human being to be a genuine individual is an underappreciated fact among English-speaking commentators. To take an extreme case, in a recent article, Fred Sommers alleges that “a Cartesian person is a non-individual, since it is composed of a mind and a body,” and he leaves the impression that it is Descartes's intention to characterize human beings as non-individuals. And even Wilson, who does acknowledge that one of the defects of the Natural Institution theory is that it “can be construed as having unorthodox implications with respect to the unity of man,” fails to give due weight to the seriousness of this defect. However, as I shall argue below, whether or not Descartes succeeds, it is surely his intention to leave the man intact as an individual.

The French commentators, much more than their English-speaking counterparts, do put appropriate emphasis on the unity of Descartes's man. But while they grant Descartes the intention to preserve the unity of a human being, they deny that he is successful. Étienne Gilson, for example, asserts that “[m]edieval philosophy distinguished the body and soul less really than Descartes, in that they did not make two complete substances, and this is why they had less difficulty than Descartes in uniting them.”

In what follows I want to defend Descartes's account of the unity of a human being. In Part I, textual evidence will be cited in sup-

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9Radner, *op. cit.*, p. 162.
port of the view that Descartes does think that his man is a unity. In Part II, it will be argued that Descartes believes mind inheres in body as form inheres in matter, and that this hylomorphic conception of the union of mind and body does real philosophical work for him, and is not, as several commentators state, a conception to which he gives, to quote Bernard Williams, “little metaphysical weight.”13 In discussing the most important objection against taking his hylomorphism seriously, I will argue contrary to Gilson that Descartes’s account of the per se unity of his man compares favorably with medieval accounts of per se unity, and, indeed, is remarkably close to the views of Scotus and Ockham.

I. DESCARTES’S BELIEF THAT A HUMAN BEING IS A UNITY

It is certainly true that Descartes emphasizes the real distinction between mind and body much more than the unity of a human being. He admits as much in a letter to Princess Elizabeth and gives a hint as to why:

There are two facts about the human soul on which depend all the things we can know of its nature. The first is that it thinks, the second is that it is united to the body and can act and be acted upon along with it. About the second I have said hardly anything; I have tried only to make the first well understood. For my principal aim was to prove the distinction between soul and body, and to this end only the first was useful, and the second might have been harmful (AT III, 664; K 137).14

In another letter, this time to Regius, he makes a very similar remark:

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, and in order to refute those who believe souls to be mortal it is more important to teach the distinction of parts in man than to teach their union (AT III, 508; K 130).

14A translation is my own if it differs from the English source cited.
But to teach the distinction between mind and body is not to deny their union. Earlier in the same letter to Regius, Descartes advises him to say that he believes a human being is a true \textit{ens per se}:

And whenever the occasion arises, in public and in private, you should give out that you believe that a human being is a true \textit{ens per se}, and not

\begin{quote}
\textit{[i]t does not seem to me that the human mind is capable of conceiving at the same time the distinction and the union between body and soul, because for this it is necessary to conceive them as a single thing and at the same time to conceive them as two things; and this is absurd} (AT III, 693; K 142).
\end{quote}

In commenting on this assertion Wilson says that it is hard to avoid interpreting it “as an overt admission on Descartes’s part that his position on the mind-body relation is self-contradictory” (Wilson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 207). Thus on her reading, Descartes thinks it would be harmful to discuss the union, given his aim of trying to prove the real distinction, because he thinks the two views are incompatible. But since she thinks that the two views are not incompatible, she is puzzled as to what could have motivated him to make such a statement. On her view, all that is required for a real distinction between mind and body is that they are capable of existing apart. Therefore, he could have consistently conceived of them as really distinct yet as “temporarily constituting one thing as a result of their present conjunction.” In other words, she is relying on the quite plausible intuition that there is no difficulty in conceiving a proposition of the form “not p and possibly p,” where “not p” is the proposition that mind and body do not exist apart and “possibly p” is the proposition that mind and body can exist apart.

I agree with Wilson that it is sufficient on Descartes’s view for mind and body to be two things that they be capable of existing apart and that it is sufficient for them to constitute a single thing that they not exist apart. Thus it is not contradictory that mind and body should at the same time be two things and constitute a single thing. [My view, however, differs from hers as to what existing apart amounts to. In my dissertation, \textit{Metaphysical Foundations of Descartes’ Concept of Matter} (UCLA, 1982), I argue that what he means by the elliptical expression ‘exist without the other’ is that each can exist without the essential attribute of the other, and not, as Wilson and others seem to think, that each can exist without the other existing (Wilson, p. 190).] But let me offer the following conjecture, which I think is interesting but problematic, as to why Descartes might have thought it is impossible for us simultaneously to \textit{conceive} of mind and body being two things and constituting a single thing. I think that Descartes might not distinguish between conceiving of p and conceiving of possibly p. In making this conjecture I do not see myself as attributing a mistake to Descartes,
because I myself have doubts as to whether such a distinction can be drawn. I can see no difference in what I do when I conceive of it snowing in July and when I conceive of it possibly snowing in July. This is not to say there is no difference between the proposition that it will snow in July and the proposition that possibly it will snow in July, for surely these propositions have different truth values and we can believe one without believing the other. But that sort of distinction in modality does not enter into our conception. Thus I think it would be entirely plausible for Descartes to maintain that we conceive the very same thing when we conceive of mind and body existing apart and when we conceive of them possibly existing apart. So if there is no distinction between conceiving of p and conceiving of possibly p, and if we cannot conceive of the state of affairs not p and p, then it would follow that we cannot conceive of the state of affairs not p and possibly p.

One merit of this conjecture is that it helps clear up some of the confusion surrounding Descartes's remarks about the relation of clear and distinct conception to reality. He is widely held to maintain, and in fact he does state in the *Third Meditation*, that whatever we clearly and distinctly conceive is true (AT VII, 35; HR I, 158). But in the *Sixth Meditation*, from the premise that we can clearly and distinctly conceive mind apart from body and body apart from mind, he draws only the weak conclusion that mind can exist apart from body, when one would have expected him to conclude that they do exist apart (AT VII, 78; HR I, 190). This has led to a misreading of the conclusion, which Wilson points out, as stating that they do exist apart (Wilson, p. 190). But I would also challenge her reading of the premise as stating that whatever we conceive is that mind and body can exist apart (Wilson, p. 197). Her reading is wrong because he consistently describes what is or can be conceived as their separate existence, not their possible separate existence (AT VII, 78; HR I, 190: AT VII, 121, 223, 355, 444; HR II 22, 99, 209, 256: AT VIII, 25; HR I, 241). Of course, it is not significant on my reading whether we describe what is conceived as their separate existence or their possible separate existence, but it is on hers. Now the language of the *Meditations* might support an interpretation according to which whatever we do clearly and distinctly conceive is true, and that whatever we can clearly and distinctly conceive is possible. But this reading is philosophically idiotic. Surely Descartes does not believe this: we do not conceive of the separate existence of mind and body, but we can conceive of it.

Instead, I think Descartes is best interpreted as believing that whatever we can or do clearly and distinctly conceive is possible, and that we can infer that something is true only if we can or do clearly and distinctly conceive that it cannot not be true. This interpretation finds support in a letter to Mersenne, March 1642:

> you quote as an axiom of mine: whatever we clearly conceive is or exists. That is not at all what I think, but only that whatever we perceive clearly is true, and so it exists, if we perceive that it cannot not exist; or that it can exist, if we perceive that its existence is possible (AT III, 544-5; K 132).

This passage supports my reading insofar as it denies that whatever we clearly and distinctly conceive is true. But it does not offer unequivocal
an *ens per accidens*, and that the mind and the body are united in a real and substantial manner. You must say that they are united not by position or disposition, as you say in your last paper—for this too is open to objection and, in my opinion, quite untrue—but by a true mode of union, as everyone agrees, though nobody explains what this means and so you need not do so either (AT III, 493; K 127).

These three passages from the letters to Princess Elizabeth and Regius give clear indication that, contrary to the claim of Sommers, Descartes does not call into question the Aristotelian and commonsense view that a human being is a genuine unity, that is, an individual. However, the evidence from the letter to Regius might be challenged on the grounds that Descartes’s advice to him does not reflect his real views, but is merely a strategic response to avoid further controversy. Regius, an exponent of Descartes’s views at the University of Utrecht, had offended his Aristotelian colleagues, who, led by Voetius, attempted to get the magistrates to forbid him to teach. In this letter Descartes is coaching Regius how to respond to a public disputation in which the followers of Voetius had challenged Regius’s claims that a human being is an *ens per accidens*, that the earth moves around the sun, and that substantial forms should be rejected (K 126).

Although I acknowledge that accusations of disingenuousness are difficult to defeat, my own belief is that this letter does reflect Descartes’s real views.¹⁶ Even though he admonishes Regius for his support for my reading. Instead of saying that whatever we clearly and distinctly conceive is possible, he says that if we conceive that something is possible we can infer that it is possible. This might seem to suggest what I want to deny, that he does see a distinction between conceiving of p and conceiving of possibly p. But in that case one would have expected him to tell us in this passage what we can infer from conceiving p, in addition to telling us what we can infer from conceiving that p is impossible and that p is possible. However, since no such account is provided, let me conjecture that it is not provided precisely because he sees no distinction in conceiving p and in conceiving possibly p. It should be noted that Wilson thinks this strong condition on what sort of conception is required to guarantee truth is too strong for Descartes’s purposes (Wilson, p. 142).

¹⁶It was gratifying to discover that I am in agreement with Leibniz on this reading of Descartes. See his *New Essays on Human Understanding*, translated and edited by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 317. I would ask of those who think Descartes is being disingenuous to play along with my attempt to take his remarks at face value.
lack of tactfulness in openly denying substantial forms instead of merely showing their uselessness, his own reply scarcely conceals his contempt for substantial forms, not to mention his contempt for Aristotelians in general and Voetius in particular. Moreover, one wonders what motivation he would have had for concealing his real views from Princess Elizabeth.

There is other important evidence that Descartes believes a human being is an individual. In the Sixth Meditation he asserts that he is not united to his body as a pilot to a ship, but is “closely joined and, as it were, mixed together with it, so that I make up one thing with it” (AT VII, 81; HR I, 192). Moreover, there are several passages in which he refers to the substantial union of mind and body. By using the expression ‘substantial union’ I take him to be pointing out not merely that the union is a union of two substances, which he does think is the case, but that the product of the union is itself a substance. The fact that Descartes considers a human being to be a substance provides further evidence that he thinks that a human being is a genuine individual, since a substance just is an individual. Descartes uses the terms ‘substance’, ‘ens per se’, and ‘complete thing’ interchangeably, and all of them I take to be equivalent to my terms ‘individual’ and ‘genuine unity’.

18Janet Broughton and Ruth Mattern understand his use of the expression ‘substantial union’ in the same way. See their article “Reinterpreting Descartes on the Notion of the Union of Mind and Body,” in the Journal of the History of Philosophy 16 (1978), p. 27.
19The key passage is AT VII, 222; HR II, 98–9. Descartes’s use of the term ‘per se’ is obscured by the French translation, which translates ‘a se’ as ‘par soi’, and ‘per se’ as either ‘par soi’ or ‘de soi’ (AT IX, 35 & 173). Haldane and Ross make use of the terms ‘per se’ or ‘self-derived’ where ‘a se’ is found in the Latin, although in a footnote to one passage they do point out that the Latin is ‘a se’ (HR II, 4 & 14). The crucial evidence that ‘a se’ and ‘per se’ have different meanings is found in the Replies to the Fourth Objections. Unlike his translators, Descartes is careful to restrict the use of the term ‘a se’ to the “Reply to the Second Part, concerning God,” where it is used to characterize God’s power of causing his own existence (see also AT VII, 110; HR II, 15), and the use of the term ‘per se’ to the “Reply to the First Part, concerning the Nature of the Human Mind,” where he makes it explicit that the distinction between things which can exist per se and things which cannot exist per se is the very same distinc-
There is a standard picture of the Cartesian created universe which perhaps contributes to the tendency to deny that Descartes conceives of a human being as a genuine individual. According to this picture, the Cartesian created universe is populated by a lot of minds, but by only one extended substance, the entire extended world, of which individual bodies are merely modes. Such a picture makes it difficult to see how a human being could be a genuine individual. How could a substance, in this case a mind, be combined with a mode of another substance, in this case a human body, to form a genuine unity?

Martial Gueroult, the most persuasive defender of the view that Cartesian bodies are not substances but modes, ascribes to Descartes a very strong notion of what it is to be a created substance in the strict sense, according to which only God can cause substances to come into or to go out of existence, and according to which substances can go out of existence only by annihilation. If this strong conception of created substance were the proper conception, it would exclude human beings from the class of substances not only indirectly, by entailing, as Gueroult at least thinks it does, that there is only one extended substance of which individual bodies are modes, but also directly: first, human beings go out of existence when other bodies cause the death of the human body, and second, on Descartes’s view a human being need not be annihilated to go out of existence, since he thinks the soul survives. The key evidence in favor of Gueroult’s interpretation is a famous passage from the Synopsis of the Meditations:

first, it must be known that absolutely all substances or things which must be created by God in order to exist, are by their nature incorrup-

tion as that between complete and incomplete things:

But if they are said to be incomplete, because they cannot exist per se alone, I confess it seems to me contradictory that they are substances, that is, things subsisting per se, and at the same time incomplete, that is, not able to subsist per se (AT VII, 222; HR II, 99).

tible, nor can they ever cease to be unless they are reduced to nothing by God denying them His concurrence, and second, it must be noted that body, at least taken generally, is a substance and for that reason never perishes. But the human body differs from other bodies only insofar as it is composed of a certain configuration of members and other such accidents; while the human mind is not similarly composed out of any accidents, but is a pure substance; for although all its accidents are changed, so that it understands other things, wills others, senses others, etc., the mind does not for that reason become something else; however, the human body becomes something else from the sole fact that the shape of some one of its parts is changed; from which it follows that body very easily ceases to exist, whereas the mind by its nature is immortal (AT VII, 13–14; HR I, 141).

Even this passage, however, does not provide unambiguous evidence for the standard picture of the Cartesian extended universe. First, it is not at all clear that Descartes is referring to the extended universe taken as a whole when he says that body, at least taken generally, is a substance (“corpus quidem in genere sumptum esse substantiam”). Second, he falls short of saying that individual bodies are modes.

Nor do I think Gueroult has made a convincing case that the strong conception of created substance is the proper conception. Noting that elsewhere Descartes does explicitly refer to bodies as substances, Gueroult also ascribes to him a loose conception of created substance in addition to the strong conception of the Synopsis. Any subject is a substance in this loose sense. I agree that Descartes does have both a strong and a weak conception of created substance. But I disagree that entities which are substances in the weak sense, such as bodies, are, strictly speaking, modes and not full-fledged substances. To respond briefly, Gueroult does not cite a single passage where Descartes says that bodies are modes to offset the passages where Descartes says they are substances. More-

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22See AT III, 477; K 124: AT VII, 222; HR II, 99: AT VIII, 71 for passages in which Descartes asserts that bodies or parts of extended substance are themselves substances. See AT IV, 349; K 186: AT VII, 255; HR II, 121: AT VIII, 28; HR I, 243 where he makes assertions which entail that they are substances.
over, Descartes seems committed to denying that bodies are modes, since he says that bodies are parts of matter and denies that modes are parts.\textsuperscript{23}

In the Synopsis passage quoted above, Descartes suggests that entities which satisfy the conditions of the strong conception of created substance are not composed of parts or other similar accidents. Following his language in that passage, we can refer to such substances as pure substances. But even though bodies are composed of parts and so fall short of being pure substances—we might call them impure substances—they nevertheless should still be considered as full-fledged substances. Therefore, contrary to the standard picture of the Cartesian created universe, Descartes, in constructing a human being, does not face the impossible task of generating a unity out of a substance and a mode of another substance. His task, which may seem equally impossible, is that of generating a unity out of two substances.\textsuperscript{24}

II. DESCARTES'S HYLOMORPHISM

It is well known that Descartes rejects substantial forms and real qualities. This creates a certain skepticism toward the claim that he conceives of the mind as the substantial form of the man. But what is less well known, indeed the main passages have never been translated into English, is that in the same letter to Regius cited above, which is where he makes his most concerted attack on substantial

\textsuperscript{23}See AT VII, 433; HR II, 249 where Descartes asserts that modes cannot be parts and AT VIII, 53; HR I, 266 where he identifies bodies and parts of matter.

\textsuperscript{24}It is clear that the issue as to whether Descartes’s human being can claim to be a unity is not whether it satisfies the conditions of the strong conception of created substance. Accordingly, I am not referring to the strong conception when I say that he uses the term ‘substance’ to mean a unity. In discussing his strict conception of created substance, Gueroult curiously fails even to mention Descartes’s claim that a human being is an \textit{ens per se}. Perhaps this omission can be explained by his view expressed in \textit{Descartes selon l'ordre des raisons}, Vol. II, pp. 65–66 and Chapter XV, that Descartes thinks the substantial union of mind and body is incomprehensible from the point of view of our finite intellects, even though it is an indubitable fact made known by sensation and made possible by God’s omnipotence.
forms, he also asserts both that the human soul is the substantial form of the man and that it is the only substantial form, whereas the rest of the so-called substantial forms are composed of the configuration and motion of the parts of matter (AT III, 503 & 505).

As I have already mentioned, there is some controversy whether this letter should be taken at face value. But it should not be so surprising that Descartes would consider the human soul or mind to be the only substantial form. Neither of his two major reasons for rejecting substantial forms applies to the human soul. First, one of his major reasons for rejecting substantial forms and real qualities is that explanations which appeal to them are anthropomorphic, that is, they attribute to bodies properties which properly belong only to the human soul:

But it is clear that the idea of gravity was taken partly from that which I had of the mind primarily from the fact that I thought that gravity carried bodies toward the center of the earth as if it contained in itself some knowledge of this center within it. For this could not be done without knowledge, and there cannot be any knowledge, except in the mind (AT VII, 442; HR II, 255).

The first is that I do not grant there are in nature any real qualities, which are attached to substances, as little souls to their bodies, and which can be separated from them by divine power (AT III, 648; K 135).

The earliest judgments which we made in our childhood, and the common philosophy later, have accustomed us to attribute to the body many things which belong only to the soul, and to attribute to the soul many things which belong only to the body. So people commonly mingle the two ideas of body and soul when they construct the ideas of real qualities and substantial forms, which I think should be altogether rejected (AT III, 420; K 109).

Obviously, this objection that explanations appealing to substantial forms are anthropomorphic does not apply to an explanation which takes the human soul to be a substantial form.

Second, Descartes’s other major reason for rejecting substantial forms is that they are merely theoretical entities which he thinks are dispensable because they have no explanatory value, whereas explanations in terms of the motions and configuration of the parts of bodies are successful (AT II, 200; K 59; AT XI, 25–6; M 39).
The human soul, in contrast, is not a mere theoretical entity. That he exists and that he is a thinking thing are the first two propositions Descartes claims to know with certainty in the Second Meditation (AT VII, 25 & 27; HR I, 150 & 152). Thus, on my view, he should not be construed as first rejecting substantial forms generally, and subsequently making an exception of the human soul in order to do some required philosophical work. On the contrary, he is to be construed as beginning with the view that the human soul is a substantial form and as rejecting the attempt to use the human soul as a model for explanations of the non-human physical world.

In addition to these passages in the letter composed for Regius in which he asserts that the soul is the substantial form of the man, there are several other texts which support the view that he thinks the mind inheres in the body as form inheres in matter. In the Rules he says that the mind informs the body, and in the Principles he says that the human soul informs the whole body (AT X, 411; HR I, 36: AT VIII, 315; HR I, 289). In the Third Meditation he says that he judges that he exists in the body (AT VII, 50; HR I, 170). In the Replies to the Sixth Objections he says that the mind, even though a substance, can be said to be a quality of the body to which it is connected (AT VII, 441–2; HR II, 254–5).25

Despite the fact that there are numerous passages in which Descartes seems to commit himself to the view that the soul informs the body, there is a significant passage in the Replies to the Sixth Objections in which he considers the mind as a quality of the body, rather than as the substantial form of the body. This passage is as follows:

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Radner, op. cit., p. 165, contrasts the hylomorphic model of mind-body union with a model according to which mind is said to be a quality of body:

Descartes himself seems to be dissatisfied with the whole idea of one substance being styled a quality of another. For elsewhere, when he uses the analogy of gravity, as well as when he uses the other two analogies mentioned above, what he seems to have in mind is not one substance considered as a quality of another, but a special kind of relationship between two kinds of substances considered as such.

But I think there is an important sense in which Descartes sees no distinction between the two models. To consider a substance as a quality of another just is to conceive a special kind of relationship, namely inherence, between two substances considered as such. However, I think that Radner is probably correct in suggesting that to consider one substance as a quality of a second substance is to deny that the first is the substantial form of the second, even if the first does inhere in the second. Thus this passage from the Replies to the Sixth Objections only supports the view that the mind is a form of the body, not that it is the substantial form of the body.

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25Radner, op. cit., p. 165, contrasts the hylomorphic model of mind-body union with a model according to which mind is said to be a quality of body:
body as form inheres in matter, many commentators are inclined to dismiss them. The one notable exception among contemporary commentators is Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, who does take these remarks seriously as expressing Descartes's own views. But, as already mentioned, Bernard Williams alleges that Descartes gives them little metaphysical weight. Gilson argues that “even though we do not forget the art that Descartes always had to put new wine in old bottles,” in this instance it is a case of not preserving anything of the idea with the expression. Henri Gouhier, perhaps even less charitably, claims that “what Descartes retains from scholastic philosophy is precisely what is not philosophical.”

In what follows I shall defend Descartes’s account of the unity of a human being by responding to various reasons for thinking that the old scholastic notions of form inhering in matter cannot do for him the philosophical work of uniting mind and body into a single entity. I shall consider four different sorts of such objections to Descartes’s hylomorphism.

The first objection is that Descartes believes thought and extension are incompatible because any extended thing is divisible whereas no thinking thing is divisible (AT VII, 85–6; HR I, 196). Therefore, a human being could not be an individual, because, having both attributes, thought and extension, it would be both divisible and indivisible. My reply is that it is only the mind considered alone which he thinks is indivisible. He does not say of the composite human being that it is indivisible.

The second objection, that the Cartesian mind is not the right sort of entity to inhere in a substance, can be generated from remarks made by Gouhier. Gouhier asserts that according to Descartes’s two definitions of substance, a substance is a subject which, metaphysically as well as grammatically, can never be an attribute,

27Gilson, op. cit., p. 247.
29See the Notes against a Programme for the clearest exposition of Descartes’s view that attributes which constitute the essence of a thing are incompatible in a simple substance, but not in a composite substance (AT VIII-II, 349–350; HR I, 436–7).
where the term ‘attribute’ is being used in its more general sense to mean quality.\textsuperscript{30} Thus, if, by definition, no substance can ever be a quality, then since the mind is a substance, it would be contradictory for Descartes to maintain that the mind can be a quality of body, that is, could inhere in a body.

This argument can be readily dismissed. Gouhier is simply mistaken in ascribing to Descartes the view that no substance can be a quality. It is not, as Gouhier claims, a consequence of either of Descartes’s two definitions of substance. The definition from the \textit{Replies to the Second Objections}, that a substance is a thing in which or through which qualities exist as in a subject, does not entail that a substance itself could not exist in a thing as in a subject (AT VII, 161; HR II, 53). The \textit{Principles} definition, that a (created) substance is a thing which needs only the concurrence of God in order to exist, also does not entail that no substance can be a quality (AT VIII, 24–5; HR I, 239–40). What it does entail is that a created substance, unlike a mode or attribute, can exist without existing in a subject, that is, it can exist without being a quality (of a created substance). But it does not follow from the fact that in order to be a substance a thing must be able to exist without existing in a subject that it cannot exist in a subject.\textsuperscript{31}

Moreover, there is decisive textual evidence that Descartes’s conception of what it is for a thing to be a (created) substance is, unlike Aristotle’s, sufficiently weak to require only that the thing be able to exist without existing in a subject and not that it never exist in a subject. One important piece of evidence is the terminology itself. That a substance or \textit{ens per se} is a thing which can exist with only itself as a subject, or alternatively, without any subject, follows directly from the supposition that Descartes uses the word ‘\textit{per}’ to mean the same thing in the term ‘\textit{ens per se}’ and in the definition of substance in the \textit{Replies to the Second Objections}, where it is used to characterize the relation between a quality and its subject (AT VII, 161). Another piece of evidence is that the entities he cites as examples of incomplete things are modes, for example, motion, shape, and the faculties of mind (AT VII, 120 & 224; HR II, 22 & 100),

\textsuperscript{30}Gouhier, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 353.

\textsuperscript{31}Nor does it follow from the strong conception of substance discussed above in the Introduction that a substance cannot exist in a subject.
and modes are dependent because they must exist in some thing in order to exist (AT VII, 222; HR II, 98). Third, and most important, in arguing against real accidents, he makes it clear that he thinks the kind of separate existence which is sufficient for a thing to be considered a substance is its capability of existing apart from a subject.

Secondly it is contradictory that real accidents should exist, because whatever is real can exist separately apart from any other subject; but whatever can exist separately is substance not accident. And it makes no difference whether it be said that real accidents can be disjoined from their subject, not naturally, but merely by the divine power; for coming to pass naturally is nowise different from coming to pass by the ordinary power of God, which does not differ at all from his extraordinary power, and does not make any further contribution to things, so that if everything which can exist naturally apart from a subject is substance, so whatever by the power of God, however extraordinary it may be, is capable of existing without a subject, must likewise be termed substance (AT VII, 434; HR II, 250).

More specifically, it is useful for our purposes to mention his analogy of mind-body union with what he considers to be the ordinary, but mistaken, view of the relation between gravity and body. He argues that just as gravity is considered to be a real quality, that is, a quality which exists in body but can exist apart from it, so the mind can be said to be a quality of body, even though it can exist apart from body (AT VII, 441–2; HR II, 254–5). Although this account of gravity is incorrect, because if it were something which could exist apart from a subject, it would be a substance, which it is not, Descartes believes that anyone who had accepted this account of gravity should be willing to accept the notion of mind-body union.32 As he says in a letter to Arnauld,

32These remarks about gravity indicate that closely linked to Descartes’s modification of the concept of substance is a modification in his concept of what it is to be in a subject. For Aristotle, part of what it is to be in a subject is to be unable to exist apart from it (Categories, 1a 23–25). But Descartes, following his medieval Aristotelian predecessors, thinks that some things, such as gravity, which exist in a subject can nevertheless exist apart from it. He differs from the Aristotelians by insisting that such things are substances.

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So it is no harder for us to understand how the mind moves the body, than it is for them to understand how such gravity moves the stone downwards. Of course they deny that gravity is a substance, but that makes no difference, because they conceive it in fact as a substance since they think that it is real and that it is possible, even if only by Divine power, for it to exist without the stone (AT V, 222–3; K 236).

The third sort of objection includes those which attack his use of the hylomorphic model of mind-body union by challenging this analogy with gravity. One such objection is made by Wilson. She notes that on what she refers to as the Co-extension theory of mind-body union, the mind, like gravity, is said to be “co-extensive with the body, ‘whole in the whole and whole in any of its parts’.”33 Her objection is that this talk of gravity and co-extensiveness is merely obfuscatings.34 To evaluate this charge, it will be useful to have Descartes’s statement of the gravity analogy before us. What he says is the following:

although I imagined that gravity was diffused throughout the whole of the body possessing weight, . . . I also saw that while it remained coextensive with the heavy body, it could exercise its force at any point of the body, because whatever the part might be to which a rope was attached, it pulled the rope with all its weight, exactly as if the gravity resided in the part alone which the rope touched and was not diffused through the others. Indeed it is in no other way that I now understand mind to be coextensive with the body, the whole in the whole, and the whole in any of its parts (AT VII, 442; HR II, 255).

He seems to be suggesting here that since the entire gravity of a body can act at any part to which a rope is attached, it must exist in the body whole in any of its parts. What I like about this example is that it provides a picture of how something which exists in a whole body can nevertheless be conceived to exist whole in one of its parts. It exists whole in one of its parts if the whole of it can act in that part. But if I understand Wilson, she seems to find the analogy obfuscatings because she is still left wondering how he can reconcile

33Wilson, op. cit., p. 213.
34Ibid., p. 214.
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his assertion that the soul “exercises its functions more particularly” in the pineal gland with, first, the assertion that the soul exists whole in the whole body, and, second, that it exists whole in every distinguishable part of the body.35

I agree that the gravity analogy does not help us understand how the soul exists whole in the whole body, nor does it explain how the soul exists whole in every distinguishable part of the body, although the last sentence of the quotation—“indeed it is in no other way that I now understand mind to be coextensive with the body, the whole in the whole, and the whole in any of its parts”—suggests that Descartes thinks it does. What the analogy does illuminate is how something which we already take to exist whole in the whole, such as gravity, can still exist whole in a part. But I disagree that he should find it especially difficult to find “some sort of accommodation” between his claim that the soul acts on the pineal gland and his claims that it exists whole in the whole body and whole in any part of the body.36

In defense of Descartes, let me begin by pointing out that Aquinas had similar worries about reconciling his own view with that of Aristotle. In the Summa Theologica one of the objections he considers to his own view that the soul exists whole in each part of the body is Aristotle's assertion in On the Movement of Animals that “there is, then, no need of soul in each part: it is in some governing origin of the body, and other parts live because they are naturally attached, and do their tasks because of nature.”37 Aquinas's solution to this objection is to say that Aristotle is speaking of the motive power of the soul.38 According to Aquinas, since the soul is the substantial form of the body, it must exist whole in each part of the body, but its powers need not exist in every part of the body.

Not only could Descartes make this same distinction between the

35Ibid., p. 213.
36Ibid.
38See also Summa Contra Gentiles, Bk. 2, Ch. LXXII.
soul and its power to move the body, but he actually does make it in the *Passions of the Soul*. In Part I, Article 30, he says:

> the soul is truly joined to the whole body, and one cannot properly say that it is in some one of its parts to the exclusion of others . . . (AT XI, 351; HR I, 345).

And in Article 31, he says:

> although the soul is joined to the whole body, there is nevertheless in the body a certain part in which the soul exercises its functions more particularly than in all the others. And it is usually believed that this part is the brain, or perhaps the heart . . . (AT XI, 351–2; HR I, 345).

When he speaks of the soul exercising its functions, I take him to be referring to what Aquinas refers to as the motive power of the soul. Thus the major difference between Descartes and the Aristotelians on this score, as Descartes sees it, is that he associates the motive power of the soul with a part of the brain, whereas they have associated it with the whole brain or with the heart. But there is no reason why he should be any less justified than Aquinas in asserting both that the soul exists whole in the whole body and whole in each of its parts, even if its motive power does not exist whole in each of its parts. According to Aquinas, if a form is not divided when its subject is divided, then it follows that the whole of it is in each part of the body. This is precisely what Descartes claims about the human mind in Article 30, as well as in the *Sixth Meditation*—it is not divided when the body is divided (AT VII, 85–6; HR I, 196). Still, one might object that all this consideration shows is that if the human body were the subject of the mind, the mind would exist whole in every part of the body. But it does not settle the issue of whether the human body, as opposed to the pineal gland, is the mind’s subject.

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39 After having come to the conclusion that such a distinction is available to Descartes, it was only upon rereading Wilson and noticing her juxtaposition of these two articles from the *Passions* that it occurred to me that he actually makes the distinction. My translations of the articles closely follow hers.

40 Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk. 2, Ch. LXXII.
So on what grounds can Descartes claim that the whole body is the mind’s subject? Aquinas seems to think that the subject of the soul is that which is actualized by the soul. Is there any suitably powerful sense in which the Cartesian mind can be said to actualize the human body? I think that there is. In a letter to Mesland, February 9, 1645, Descartes says:

First I consider what is the body of a man, and I find that this word ‘body’ is very ambiguous, because when we speak of a body in general, we mean a determinate part of matter, and the whole of the quantity of which the universe is composed, so that if the least bit of that matter were removed we would judge at once that the body was smaller and no longer complete; and if any particle of that matter were changed we would at once think that the body was no longer totally the same, or numerically the same. But, when we speak of the body of a man, we do not mean a determinate part of matter which has a determinate size, but we mean only all of the matter which is together united with the soul of this man, so that, even though this matter changes and its quantity increases or decreases, we still believe that it is the same body, numerically the same, while it remains joined and substantially united to the same soul; and we believe that this body is entirely whole while it has in itself all the dispositions required to conserve that union. There is no one who does not believe that we have the same bodies which we have had since our infancy, although their quantity has much increased, and even though according to the common opinion of doctors, and without doubt according to the truth, there is no longer in them any part of the matter which was in them before, and even though they no longer have the same shape; so that they are only numerically the same because they are informed by the same soul. Personally, having examined the circulation of the blood and believing that nutrition takes place by a continual expulsion of the parts of our bodies, which are driven from their place by others which enter it, I do not think that there is any particle of our members which remains numerically the same for a single moment, although our body, insofar as it is a human body, always remains numerically the same while it is united to the same soul. Moreover, in that sense, it is indivisible, because if an arm or a leg of a man is cut off, we think correctly that his body is divided, taking the word ‘body’ in the first sense, but not taking it in the second sense; and we do not think that someone who has an arm or leg cut off is less a man than any other. Finally, whatever matter it is and whatever size or shape it can be, so long as it is united to the same rational soul, we still take it as the body of the same

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man, and we take it as the entire body, if it does not need to be augmented by other matter in order to remain joined to this soul (AT IV, 166; K 156).

Similarly, in another letter to Mesland, dated 1645 or 1646, he says:

it does not cease to be true to say that I have now the same body that I had ten years ago, even though the matter of which it is composed has been replaced, 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, 346).

What these passages suggest is that if the determinate part of matter which is united to my mind ceases to be united to my mind, it will cease to constitute the body I now have. It may perhaps continue to exist as a body, in this case a corpse, depending upon the circumstances of my death, but it will no longer constitute my body. My body will have ceased to exist. There is, therefore, a suitably powerful sense in which the mind actualizes the human body—a human body exists only so long as it is united to the mind.42 Moreover, the entire human body cannot be constituted by the pineal gland alone, because the pineal gland needs “to be augmented by other matter in order to remain joined to the soul.” It does not have “in itself all the dispositions required to conserve that union.”

It is true that for Aquinas, as well as for Aristotle, closely associated with the notion of a part of the body being actualized by the

42Ferdinand Alquié, in his edition of Descartes’s works, alleges in a footnote [Descartes: Oeuvres philosophiques (Paris: Garnier Freres, 1967), Vol. III, p. 976] that the Passions, Part I, Art. 30, conflicts with this claim that the identity of the body derives from the soul. There Descartes asserts that “the body is one and in a certain manner indivisible because of the disposition of its organs, which are so related to one another that when any one is removed, that renders the whole body defective.” However, I am not so sure there is a conflict. There would be a conflict if Descartes asserted that the identity of the human body derives solely from its union with the soul. But in the letter to Mesland he seems to think that the identity of the human body depends on both its union with the soul and the dispositions of its organs. Geneviève Rodis-Lewis makes what I take to be a similar response to Alquié in “Limitations of the Mechanical Model in the Cartesian Conception of the Organism,” fn. 37, in Hooker, op. cit., p. 169.
soul is the notion of that part of the body retaining its proper action or function. It is a necessary condition of a body and its parts retaining their proper functioning that it be ensouled. In contrast, Descartes, as an element of his mechanism, banishes the notion of bodies or their parts having a proper action or function to the realm of God's inscrutable will. But I do not think that this difference, as important as it is, somehow makes it implausible for him to say that the subject of the mind is what we normally take to be a human body and instead commits him to the view that the pineal gland is the subject of the mind. And even for Descartes, the notion of the soul's actualizing the body is not entirely divorced from the notion of teleological explanation. To the extent that teleological explanation of the behavior of bodies retains a place in Descartes's philosophy, it is the purposeful behavior of human bodies which is accounted for, as it was for the Aristotelians, by their being ensouled.

43Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pt. I, Q. 76, Art. 8; Aristotle, *De Anima*, Book II, Ch. 1, 412b 10–24. But I do not think that even for the Aristotelians it is a necessary condition of a part being a part of my body that it retain its proper functioning—my eye will continue to be part of my body, should I go blind, even though it will cease to be an eye.

44I am indebted to Jennifer Whiting here.

45It might well be argued in further defense of Descartes that there is no need for me to concede any significant difference between his views and the Aristotelians' on the relation of ensoulment and teleological explanation. Gueroult, most prominently, thinks that the substantial union of mind and body "is the basis of the teleology of human nature and the finality of the human body" (*Descartes selon l'ordre des raisons*, Vol. II, p. 187). He even goes so far as to claim that finality is spread through the whole human body, down to its smallest parts to infinity (p. 186), where the end in question is the conservation of the union of mind and body (p. 180). Gueroult's attribution of finality to the human body derives from Descartes's suggestion in the *Sixth Meditation* that God gave us the particular sensations we have because they indicate what is beneficial or detrimental to the composite human being. Indeed, this is why Gueroult says that it is sensation that transforms the human machine into an end (p. 180).

But in providing such an explanation of our sensations, Descartes is violating his own strictures against appeals to God's will (my thinking on this issue has been influenced by an unpublished paper by Janet Broughton). Thus it strikes me that the issue as to whether teleological explanation plays only a very limited role in Descartes's account of human beings, as I was suggesting, namely, in the explanation of behavior that derives from the will of human beings, or whether it plays a more comprehensive, Aristotelian role of the sort Gueroult suggests, hinges on resolving Descartes's conflicting remarks about our access to God's will. I hope to
A second objection to the gravity analogy is raised by Gilson. He accuses Descartes of offering a closed and exceedingly short circle of explanation which is consequently empty. He points out that on the one hand Descartes uses the gravity analogy to make sense of the relation between mind and body, and that on the other hand, as we have seen, Descartes asserts that our understanding of gravity rests on a confusion of our ideas of mind with those of body.\textsuperscript{46}

Gilson is correct that we gain no understanding from the gravity analogy of how mind can exist apart from body, because it is only by confusing gravity with mental substance that we think gravity can exist apart from body. But the understanding of what it is to exist whole in any of the parts, which we do gain from the gravity analogy, is not undermined when we see that there are certain flaws in our conception of gravity which arise from importing notions which properly belong only to mind, namely, that it can exist apart from body and that it must have knowledge. However, it might be claimed in defense of Gilson, even though he himself does not make this argument explicitly, that it is not just the conception of gravity as capable of existing apart from body and its having knowledge which illegitimately import notions which properly belong only to mind, but that our conception of gravity as existing whole in any of the parts does as well.\textsuperscript{47} One such argument points out that to exist whole in any of the parts is for the whole to be capable of acting in any of the parts, but only minds can act. Another argument points out that even if things other than minds can act, for Descartes there is no such thing as gravity which acts. If the term 'gravity' is used properly, it refers to a certain effect which is explained by his vortex theory of motion.

The second argument does tell against the gravity analogy. But there is another analogy available. Descartes could have instead compared the mind with what he called the quantity of motion of a body which collides with another body. He would have been willing to say, I think, that the entire quantity of motion of the body acts in the point which touches the other body. And I do not think that

\textsuperscript{46}Gilson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 247–248.

\textsuperscript{47}John Carriero pointed out to me that Gilson might be defended along these lines.

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this analogy is circular, since I do not see how this conception of the quantity of motion acting at a point imports notions belonging to mind.

The fourth and most important sort of objection to the view that Descartes can use the form-matter model to explain the unity of the man derives from medieval accounts of per se unity, and ultimately from Aristotle. The objection is that even if the mind does inhere in the body as form inheres in matter, nevertheless, no substance, and hence nothing which is an ens per se, can be constituted from another substance or substances. While Aristotelian substances are themselves composites of form and matter, the composite of a substance and an accident, for example, Socrates and whiteness, is not an ens per se, but an ens per accidens. Thus the charge against Descartes is that he cannot consistently maintain that the body, the mind, and the man are all substances.48

48Radner makes what might be construed to be a similar objection (Radner, op. cit., pp. 162–164, 168). She points out that in a letter to Elizabeth, Descartes asserts that there are three primary notions in his philosophy, that of mind, that of body, and that of the union between them (AT III, 665; K 138). She equates these primary notions with his simple natures, and concludes that since simple natures cannot be analyzed by the mind into others more distinctly known, the union of mind and body cannot be a unity of composition, because a unity of composition can be analyzed into its components. Therefore, the objection is that Descartes’s account of the union between mind and body is inconsistent because he wants to maintain both that it is a unity of composition and that it is a simple nature.

This objection has force only if one understands Descartes’s assertion that the union of mind and body is a primary notion to be a claim about the man, that is, if one understands the term ‘union’ to refer to that entity which results from uniting mind and body. But it might instead refer to the relation which unites mind and body. In that case, what he would be saying is that the relation of informing or inhering in is unanalyzable. This fits well with his advice to Regius that he need not give an account of this relation, since no one else has either (AT III 493; K 127). (See Broughton and Mattern, op. cit., for another defense of Descartes against Radner’s criticisms.)

But more important, even if Descartes did slip in the way Radner suggests by demanding of the composite that it be unanalyzable, that is an entirely different sort of objection from the fourth objection. No Aristotelian would demand of an essential unity that it be unanalyzable. Even someone who thinks that in the most proper sense of the term ‘substance’, composites of form and matter are not substances, but that rather only the form is substance, is not going to deny that substance is capable of definition. But see Donald Morrison, Three Criteria of Substance in Aristotle’s Metaphysics: Unity, Definability, Separation (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation,
In defense of Descartes, I shall argue, relying heavily on a late draft of a chapter from Marilyn Adams’s forthcoming book on Ockham, that his account of composite unity compares favorably with those of Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham. Indeed, I will argue that despite terminological differences, his account is really the same as that of Ockham and Scotus.

Aquinas’s position is that an ens per se cannot have a plurality of actual constituents. Thus he concludes that a substance can have only one substantial form, and he relegates prime matter from the realm of actuality to the realm of pure potentiality. But Aquinas was in the minority. To quote Marilyn Adams, “most others were convinced by a variety of arguments that prime matter must have an actuality of its own and living substances a plurality of substantial forms, and inferred that a plurality of actual constituents does not interfere with a thing’s being one per se.”

These arguments, at least as presented by Adams, I find completely devastating of Aquinas’s position, although she herself is more sympathetic to him. Let me mention one argument by Scotus which I think is especially powerful. He alleges that prime matter, conceived as pure potentiality, cannot fulfill its role of being the ultimate subject of inherence, on the ground that pure potentiality is simply non-being, and non-being cannot be an ultimate subject of inherence.

Ockham and Scotus, in contrast with Aquinas, hold that an ens per se can be composed of a plurality of actual things. For example, on Ockham’s view, prime matter, the form of corporeity, the sensory soul, and the intellectual soul are all actual constituents of a human being, which he thinks is an ens per se. Their view is that what permits the essential unity of the composite is not the non-actuality of all but one of the components, but rather that none of the components is itself a complete thing, that is, a substance. Consequently, on the surface at least, they disagree with Descartes about what kinds of entities can combine to form an ens per se, because Descartes wants to assert that really distinct substances can unite to form an ens per se.

Princeton, 1983) Chapter 3, for an interesting discussion of the paradox in Aristotle’s demand that a definition be a unity.

However, the Cartesian conception of what it is to be a (created) substance or complete thing, namely, that a substance is a thing which can exist without existing in anything as in a subject, is sufficiently weak that entities which Scotus and Ockham consider to be mere actual things, such as prime matter, the form of corporeity, and the intellectual soul, would, if they had the property Scotus and Ockham ascribe to them of being able, at least by divine power, to exist apart from other things, count as Cartesian substances. Therefore, Scotus, Ockham, and Descartes are in fundamental metaphysical agreement that things which can exist apart from each other can form an *ens per se*, provided that they stand in the appropriate relation to one another. And all agree that the relation in question is the inherence relation. Where they disagree is first, with respect to their judgments as to which entities in fact have the capability of existing apart from one another, and second, with respect to the meaning of the term ‘substance’ or ‘complete thing’. For example, Scotus and Ockham would agree, but Descartes would disagree, that whiteness can exist apart from a substance.\(^{50}\) Moreover, Scotus and Ockham would agree that it does not follow from the fact that whiteness can exist apart from a subject that it is a substance, whereas Descartes would assert that if whiteness could exist apart from a subject, then it would be a substance. Nevertheless, since Descartes is in fundamental agreement with Scotus and Ockham on the formal conditions for the per se unity of composites, he is equally entitled to claim that his man is an *ens per se*.

However, to defend Descartes’s account of the unity of a human being by arguing that it is no worse than that of his predecessors is not necessarily to mount a very strong defense. There remains a serious question whether any hylomorphic ontology can generate a human being which is a genuine unity. Since the hylomorphic complexes of Scotus, Ockham, and Descartes contain components which can exist apart from the others, it would seem to follow that it is only a contingent fact about the components that they are united at all, so the unity would be a mere accidental unity and not a per se unity.

One strategy that Descartes could use to reply to this objection is

\(^{50}\)At least where divine power is limited by what we can clearly and distinctly conceive. But without such an assumption, Descartes’s theory of distinction—real, modal, and of reason—disintegrates.
suggested by his account of the identity of the human body mentioned above, according to which the numerical identity of the human body is determined by its union with the soul. He could propose that a union of things generates a per se unity when that union is not accidental to at least one of the components. This would entail that a human being is an *ens per se*, provided that a human being is understood to be a composite of a mind and a human body, as opposed to being a composite of a mind and a determinate part of matter.

This strategy might seem unsatisfactory because it might seem that by generating a sufficient dependency between mind and body to claim that their union is not accidental, he undermines his claim that they are really distinct. If the human body cannot exist without being united to the mind, it would seem to follow by his own criteria that mind and body are only modally distinct. I have argued elsewhere, however, that his account of real distinction does not require that mind and body can each exist out of real union with the other. Instead, what he does require for real distinction, namely, that each can exist without having the essential attribute of the other existing in it, is consistent with the claim that the body must be united to the mind in order to exist.51

But this strategy is still objectionable because it appeals to a very

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51 In my dissertation, *Metaphysical Foundations of Descartes' Concept of Matter* (UCLA, 1982), I argue that the notion of separate existence required for a real distinction between mind and body is not that each can exist without the other existing, nor that each can exist out of real union with the other, but that each can exist as a complete thing without having the essential attribute of the other. Thus mind can exist as a complete thing without being extended and body can exist as a complete thing without thinking. And since, as discussed above on pages 353–354, it is sufficient for being a complete thing or substance that a thing be able to exist apart from a subject, the human body can still be considered a substance even though it cannot exist without the subject of the mind, because it does not need the mind as its subject. That is, on my interpretation of the sort of separability that is required for real distinction, body not only can be separated from mind, it is separate from mind (because it does not exist in the mind), even though it is and must be united to the mind (because its existence requires the mind to exist in it). But only God, on my reading, has the power to separate mind from body, that is, to keep the mind in existence when it is not in the body (which is a different power from that bodies have of causing the composite human being to go out of existence by interfering with the human body). On this understanding, the relation of being separate is not symmetrical.
weak notion of per se unity. Instead of a composite being an *ens per se* just so long as the union is *not* accidental to at least one of the components, it would seem that, on the contrary, a composite is an *ens per accidens* just so long as the union *is* accidental to at least one of the components. Thus instead of inferring that a human being is an *ens per se* because the union is not accidental to the human body, we should infer that a human being is an *ens per accidens* because the union is accidental to the mind.

Let me mention two possible replies to this objection. The first reply provides what I consider to be a more philosophically satisfying solution to the objection, but Descartes himself seems to have endorsed the second. According to the first reply, he should have conceded that in the ordinary case a composite is an *ens per accidens*, if the union is accidental to one of the components, but then added the proviso that the composite is an *ens per se* if it is only in virtue of divine power that the union is accidental to one of the components. There is some textual evidence in support of this reply. In a letter of December 1641, in which he is again coaching Regius, under fire for asserting that a human being is an *ens per accidens*, he advises him to say that it is not absolutely accidental to the mind that it be united to the body or to the body that it be united to the mind, and tells him not to deny that it is only due to a miracle that they can exist apart.

It may be objected that it is not accidental to the human body that it should be conjoined to the soul, but its very nature, since, when a body has all the dispositions required to receive the soul, without which it is not a human body, it cannot, without a miracle, be that the soul is not united to it. Moreover, it may be objected that it is not accidental to the soul that it should be joined to the body, but it is only accidental to it that it should be separated from the body after death. All of this should not be denied, lest the theologians be offended again, but nevertheless, it ought to be responded that these things can on this account be said to be accidental, that considering the body alone, we clearly perceive nothing in it on account of which it demands to be united to the soul, as we perceive nothing in the soul on account of which it must be united to the body, which is why I said above that it is in a certain manner accidental, not that it is absolutely accidental (AT III, 460; K 122).

It is important to note that when he says in this passage that in considering the body alone, we perceive nothing in it demanding
union with the soul, he suggests, contrary to what I have said so far, that the mind's subject is a body whose identity conditions do not depend on its being united to the mind. Hence the body which is the mind's subject would not be the human body, but the determinate part of matter. In that case, there would no longer be any clear sense in which the mind actualizes its subject. But, as we have seen, part of Scotus's attack on Aquinas's account of composite unity is to deny that a substantial form needs to actualize its subject, because a subject must already be actual. This might seem to reintroduce the problem of fixing which determinate part of matter is the mind's subject—why isn't it just the pineal gland? But the same answer is still available. Descartes can respond that the pineal gland by itself cannot be the mind's subject because it needs to be augmented by other matter in order to remain joined to the mind. Moreover, according to the proposal under consideration of distinguishing between entia per accidens and entia per se on the basis of the distinction between ordinary accidental unions and those unions which are accidental only because God has the power to create one of the component parts out of real union with the others, Descartes could still maintain that a human being is an ens per se even if the mind's subject were not the human body but the determinate part of matter. It would still be the case that it would require a miracle for the determinate part of matter with all the dispositions required to receive the soul to exist apart from it.

One problem with this strategy of distinguishing between an ens per accidens and an ens per se on the basis of the distinction between an ordinary accidental union and a union which is accidental only because God has the power to create one of the component parts out of real union with the others is that Descartes only attributes the latter distinction to his opponents, he does not endorse it. And indeed, in the Replies to the Sixth Objections, he denies that such a distinction can be made:52

coming to pass naturally is nowise different from coming to pass by the ordinary power of God, which does not differ at all from his extraordinary power, . . . (AT VII, 435; HR II, 250).

52Michele Moody raised this objection.
But I do not myself see why Descartes could not have allowed such a distinction. There is no incoherence in maintaining both that it is a sufficient condition for a thing’s being a substance that it can exist apart from a subject, even if only by divine power and not naturally, and that it is a necessary condition for things to constitute an ens per se that they can exist out of real union only by divine power and not naturally. Nor does such a distinction appear to conflict with any other Cartesian doctrine.

Such a defense of the per se unity of a human being does, however, create a difficulty for my account of the status of bodies. I have alleged that Descartes believes bodies are substances and that he uses the terms ‘substance’ and ‘ens per se’ interchangeably. Yet since a union of parts of bodies can be disrupted naturally, by the actions of other bodies, and moreover, since those parts can continue to exist without any special action by God, it would follow that bodies are not entia per se, and hence, not substances. Now what I think is the best response to make on Descartes’s behalf here is to concede that in the end there is a distinction to be drawn between an ens per se and a substance. To be a substance it is sufficient to be able to exist apart from a subject, whereas for a substance to be an ens per se it is necessary that whatever parts it has can exist out of real union with one another only by divine power.

The other response to the objection that Descartes’s human being is not an ens per se is found in the same letter to Regius. He advises Regius to say that something can be both an ens per se and an ens per accidens:

That which is an ens per se can be made per accidens, for mice are generated or made by accident from dirt, and yet are entia per se (AT III, 460; K 122).

A human being is an ens per se because

body and soul, in relation to the whole human, are incomplete substances, and it follows from their being incomplete that what they constitute is an ens per se (AT III, 460; K 122).
A human being is an *ens per accidens* because

considering the body alone, we clearly perceive nothing in it on account of which it demands to be united to the soul, as we perceive nothing in the soul on account of which it must be united to the body, which is why I said above that it is in a certain manner accidental, not that it is absolutely accidental (AT III, 460; K 122).

Even I have been tempted to say that in advising Regius to assert that a human being is in one sense an *ens per se* and in another sense an *ens per accidens*, he is simply trying to avoid controversy. But this letter is not the only passage where he suggests such a response. In the *Replies to the Fourth Objections* he asserts that a hand is both complete, when considered by itself, and incomplete, when referred to the whole body of which it is a part, and he uses this example as an analogy to illustrate how mind and body are at once complete and incomplete (AT VII, 222; HR II, 99). So his endorsement of this solution does now strike me as sincere. But I have been unable to discover a way to defend its philosophical merits. Allowing one and the same thing to be both an *ens per se* and an *ens per accidens* seems to stretch those concepts beyond the breaking point. May others speak on his behalf.

**Conclusion**

I have argued that Descartes does take seriously the hylomorphic model of mind-body union. Moreover, I have argued that his account of the unity of a human being compares well with those of his medieval predecessors. The key move in making this comparison has been to point out that his conception of (created) substance is much weaker than the Aristotelian conception—he requires of a substance only that it be able to exist apart from a subject. Thus if
his Aristotelian predecessors are permitted to allow as constituents of an \textit{ens per se} actual things which can exist apart from each other, at least by divine power, then so should he.\textsuperscript{53}

\textit{Cornell University}

Abbreviations to editions of Descartes's works:

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