

ON DESCARTES

Most of my work on Descartes has centered on his account of human beings. If there is any unifying theme that has emerged from my various papers on Descartes, it is that he retains three important Aristotelian doctrines, though in modified form, that play a crucial role in his metaphysics and epistemology. The first doctrine is that of hylomorphism: that mind and body are related as form to matter. The second doctrine is the identity of action and passion: that whenever a causal agent acts on something (referred to as the patient), what the agent does (the action) and what the patient undergoes (the passion) are one and the same. The third doctrine we might call the convergence of perceiver and perceived: that when we perceive something, that very thing exists in the soul, but the kind of being or reality it has in the soul is different from the kind of being or reality it has in the world.

I. HYLOMORPHISM AND THE REAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN MIND AND BODY

In three of my papers I explore issues connected to Descartes's hylomorphism and mind-body dualism. In "The Unity of Descartes's Man," I maintain that in spite of arguing that there is real distinction between mind and body (dualism), Descartes wants to retain the Aristotelian view that mind is related to body as form to matter (hylomorphism), so that the human being resulting from their union is itself a substance. I then try to show how he can reconcile these two views of the relation between mind and body — dualism and hylomorphism — that have been thought to be incompatible. My analysis of Descartes's position includes an account of how he can conceive of mind as a substantial form in spite of conceiving it as substance. It also includes a comparison of his account of how something composed of form and matter can still have the sort of unity essential to substance with the accounts of some of his prominent Scholastic predecessors, in particular, those of St. Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and Ockham. The key to both of these discussions is noticing that Descartes's conception of substance (at least that conception of substance at stake in his fundamental claim that mind and body are really distinct substances) is considerably weaker than the Aristotelian conception of substance. Unlike his Aristotelian predecessors, Descartes does not require of substance that it never exist in a subject. He thinks that anything that can exist apart from a subject has sufficient independence to be considered as substance. I argue that since his conception of substance is weaker in this way, it is not implausible for him to maintain, as it would have been for his Aristotelian predecessors, that a being with really distinct substances as constituents can itself be a substance.

In "Cartesian Composites," I return to a problem that had been left unresolved in the unity paper, namely, that Descartes appears to contradict himself when he asserts both that a human is an *ens per se* (i.e. has a genuine unity) and that it is an *ens per accidens* (i.e. does not have a genuine unity). By making a comparison with his account of true and immutable natures, where he also seems to contradict himself in asserting that a triangle inscribed in a square both does and does not have a true and immutable nature, I show that Descartes does provide a way of reconciling these apparently contradictory assertions. I also defend my claim that Descartes thinks a human being is an *ens per se* in a robust sense against objections raised by Marleen Rozemond and Vere Chappell. My most important contention in defense of this interpretation is that when Descartes asserts that a mind is a substance he means it only in the weak sense that it can subsist apart from a subject in the same way that he thinks a hand can exist separately, so that his views about the

ontological status of the mind are in fact quite similar to those of Aquinas. I also argue that Descartes's letters to Regius, which are often dismissed on the ground that his advice to Regius does not reflect his real views but only his desire to avoid controversy with religious authorities, should not be dismissed because he earlier expressed the same doctrines in his reply to Antoine Arnauld's objections to the *Meditations*.

I now believe, and I would like to thank Dan Kaufman for prompting me to reconsider the issue, that my claim on page 257 about the correct translation of the phrase *ratione ipsius* in Descartes's letter to Regius is mistaken. What I consider to be compelling evidence against my translation of the phrase as "by their very nature" is provided in the following passage from the letter to Father Dinet, in which Descartes refers to what Regius had said (AT VII 585-6, HR II 362): *illas substantia dici incompletas, ratione compositi quod ex earum unione oritur*. I think this clinches it that the other translation of it as "in relation to the human being" is better. The fact that Descartes uses *compositi* here strongly suggests that he intended *ipsius* to refer to *hominem*. And that in turn implies that *ratione* should be rendered either as "in relation to" or "by reason of." Nevertheless, I still think a strong case remains that Descartes thinks the mind calls for union with the body in the weak sense that it is natural or proper for the mind to be united to the body.

In "Descartes's Theory of Distinction," I provide an analysis of Descartes's three kinds of distinction: real distinction, modal distinction, and distinction of reason. Descartes holds that any things A and B are really distinct when each of them can be clearly and distinctly conceived separately from the other, that they are modally distinct when exactly one of them can be clearly and distinctly conceived separately from the other, and that they are distinct by reason when neither can be clearly and distinctly conceived separately from the other. This much is uncontroversial. One difficult question is whether Descartes believes that things distinct by reason (which include a substance and its principal attribute and also various attributes of a substance that cannot be clearly and distinctly conceived separately) are identical in reality. I argue, against a forceful case for the identity interpretation made by Lawrence Nolan, that in most instances when Descartes asserts that things are distinct by reason he means only that they are inseparable in reality, not that they are identical in reality. Another crucial issue of interpretation I take up that I hope will reorient discussion of his theory is what he means when he speaks of one thing being able to exist separately from another thing. There seems to be a widespread uncritical assumption that Descartes maintains that for one thing to be able to exist separately from another is for it to be able to exist without the other thing existing. But I distinguish five different notions of separate existence and I argue that the two notions relevant to the real distinction between mind and body are much weaker than on the standard interpretation. This understanding of Cartesian dualism as relying on weaker notions of separability provides additional support for my claim that Descartes believes that mind and body can be united to form an entity that is itself a substance.

II. CAUSATION

Aristotle and his followers held that when an agent brings about a change, the agent's action is one and the same change as the passion in the subject undergoing the going. So Aristotle said

that the teacher's teaching is one and the same change as the student's learning. In "Cartesian Passions and Cartesian Dualism," I argue that Descartes retains this Aristotelian doctrine of the identity of action and passion but makes an important modification in it. Unlike his Aristotelian predecessors who located the agent's action in the patient, he locates the agent's action in the agent. I examine Descartes's motives for modifying but not abandoning this doctrine. My primary concern, however, at least in this paper, is to explore the implications of Descartes's use of the doctrine for his dualism. I argue that his use of the doctrine implies that he thinks there are modes that straddle mind and body. When the body acts on the mind, the action existing in the body is the same mode as the passion existing in the mind; and when the mind acts on the body, the action existing in the mind is the same mode as the passion existing in the body. Thus, contrary to the standard picture of Cartesian dualism, Descartes holds that some modes belong to both mind and body. For example, each of our sensations, appetites, and emotions, which are passions existing in the mind, is the same mode as an action existing in the body. So in an important respect Descartes retains the traditional Aristotelian view that the being of such states is intermediate between the corporeal and the incorporeal.

In my still unpublished "Descartes's Spinning Top," I argue that the doctrine of the identity of action and passion is also fundamental to understanding his account of uniform rectilinear motion. Alexandre Koyré argued that Descartes's reconceptualization of motion as a state, rather than a change as the Aristotelians understood it, paved the way for both his and Newton's laws of inertia because a change requires a force but continuing in the same state does not. I maintain, on the contrary, that the question of whether uniform motion is thought to require an efficient cause does not turn on the question of whether it is viewed as a state or a change. Instead the more revealing question is whether uniform motion is viewed as a passion. Descartes thought of uniform motion as a passion and, because he retained the Aristotelian doctrine of the identity of action and passion, concluded that motion requires a corresponding action at each moment not just in God but in body, so that a projectile is acting on itself so long as it continues to move. Newton did not think of uniform rectilinear motion as a passion. He regarded only changes of motion as passions, and so he required active forces only for them. Newton did require a force for uniform motion, but it was a force of inactivity.

III. COGNITION

Aristotelians are often considered to be direct realists. They are taken to believe that the immediate objects of sense and knowledge are things existing in the world. According to the Aristotelian theory of cognition, when we sense a thing or know a thing, that very thing exists in the soul, but the kind of being or reality it has in the soul is different from the kind of being or reality it has in the world. Descartes's rejection of Aristotelian hylomorphism (as an adequate account of substances other than human beings) is commonly thought to entail the rejection of the Aristotelian theory of cognition, for it is held that only forms could have two kinds of being, one in the soul and one in the world. Instead Descartes is thought to have adopted a representationalist theory of cognition, according to which we are directly aware of ideas existing in our thought which represent objects in the world. Along with other commentators such as Lilli Alanen, Calvin Normore, and Stephen Nadler, I believe that Descartes's account of the objective reality of ideas shows that he retains the most basic elements of the Aristotelian theory of cognition. Nadler and Alanen argue that this shows that Descartes too is a direct realist.

However, it is my contention that this Cartesian/Aristotelian theory of cognition is in fact representationalist.

In "Descartes on Misrepresentation," I examine Descartes's theory of cognition, taking as a starting point his account of how misperception is possible. In the Third Meditation Descartes introduces the hypothesis that there are ideas (such as the idea of cold) which seem to be of something real but which in fact represent nothing (if, for example, cold is a privation or absence of heat, rather than the presence of a positive quality). I argue, against Margaret Wilson, that Descartes does not think there are any such ideas and that he introduces the hypothesis only in order to formulate an objection to his argument for the existence of God. I argue further that while he agrees with Arnauld in accepting the Aristotelian account of cognition according to which the very objects in the world that we perceive exist in the soul or its ideas objectively, he still has a satisfactory response to Arnauld's objection that since an idea can represent only what it appears to be of, all error must reside solely in our judgment. I claim that Arnauld's objection that an idea represents what it appears to be of is based on the assumption that an idea appears to be of what exists in it objectively. But Descartes makes room for the possibility of misrepresentation by distinguishing between what exists objectively in an idea and what that idea appears to be of. First, he thinks that it is at least coherent to suppose that an idea lacking objective reality could appear to be of something in virtue of its material reality. Since an idea lacking objective reality would not represent any thing that exists in the world, Descartes concedes that it would not misrepresent any actually existing thing, but it could still appear to be of some thing and in that way misrepresent the way the world is. Second, there is reason to claim that like some of his Aristotelian predecessors Descartes holds that what exists in the soul objectively can appear to be other than it is. This interpretation has the implication that Descartes's theory of ideas, in contrast to sense datum theories, is not driven by the motive of finding some entity which is exactly as it appears to serve as the object of immediate awareness.

In "Direct Realism, Intentionality and the Objective Being of Ideas," I examine the distinction between representationalism and direct realism focussing on Nadler's argument for the view that Descartes and Arnauld are direct realists. I agree with several of Nadler's fundamental claims, including his view that ideas are acts of thought and that what Descartes refers to as the objective being of an idea is intrinsic to the idea and is directed to its object prior to our awareness of it. However, I do not think this entails direct realism. I argue that since Descartes and Arnauld are committed to the further claim that our attention is directed to an external object only in virtue of our awareness of the objective being of our ideas, they are representationalists.

IV. MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

While Descartes's moral psychology was clearly influenced by that of his Aristotelian and Stoic predecessors, in contrast to my discussions of the other topics, I do not argue that he retains some Aristotelian doctrine that provides the key to understanding it. In "The Passions and Freedom of Will," I explain the five-step sequence that Descartes thinks is involved in a fully free human action: a clear and distinct idea of something as good or bad, a judgment that the thing is good or bad, a volition to pursue or to avoid that thing, a movement of the pineal gland, and a bodily

movement. Then I consider at what points and in what way Descartes thinks the passions can intervene in the process by which we move our bodies. I argue that he thinks the passions do not oppose our volitions to pursue or to avoid something. Only the movements of the brain that cause the passions can oppose our volitions to pursue or avoid something. However, he does think the passions can intervene earlier in the sequence. Since the passions represent things as good or as bad, they can influence us to form volitions to pursue or to avoid something, even in opposition to our judgments about what is good or bad (although not when our judgments are based on clear and distinct ideas). They can also influence our judgments about what is good or bad. Next, I try to answer the question of how such interventions affect our freedom. I argue that there are two important passages indicating that Descartes thinks that the passions can diminish our freedom not only to the extent that our judgments regarding good and bad and our volitions to pursue or to avoid things are less than fully free but even to the extent that they are rendered unfree. Finally, I explain how the passion of generosity plays a crucial role in securing our freedom of will.

ABSTRACTS OF OTHER PAPERS

In "Locke on the Locke Room" I examine Locke's claims that the man's stay in the locked room and the paralytic's sitting still are voluntary. I argue, contrary to the views of Gideon Yaffe, that Locke does not think that voluntariness requires an exertion on the part of agent to produce a given effect. Instead Locke follows Aquinas in maintaining that things we undergo can also count as voluntary provided we prefer them to their alternatives. I also argue against Yaffe's assimilation of Locke to the views of Susan Wolf by his claims that Locke thinks having our volitions determined by the good is constitutive of liberty and that Locke thinks moral praiseworthiness is consistent with an inability to have chosen otherwise. Instead I again argue that Locke's views are more similar to those of Aquinas, who holds that being determined by the good in general does not entail being determined by any particular good.

In "Aquinas on Threats and Temptations" I explore Aquinas's discussion of the effects of fear and concupiscence on the voluntariness of our behavior. Aquinas maintains that when we succumb to temptation our actions are wholly voluntary. When we give up a good in the face of a threat our actions are partly involuntary, but they are more voluntary than involuntary. I argue that when we succumb to temptation our actions can also be partly involuntary. I also defend my intuition that in some mixed cases our action is more involuntary than voluntary, and I show how Aquinas's psychological theory can explain this. Finally, I explain why it matters that actions fully in accordance with our reasons responsive choices might not be fully voluntary.

In "Thomas Reid's Notion of Exertion" I show how Reid uses the notion of exertion in various ways that have not been distinguished in the secondary literature. Sometimes he uses it to refer to the exercise of a power, sometimes to the turning on or activating of a power, and still other times to the attempt to activate a power. Getting clear on Reid's different uses of the term 'exertion' is essential to understanding his account of the sequence of events in human action. It is also helpful in defending Reid against the objection that his account of action is subject to an infinite regress.

In "Plato on Appetitive Desires in the *Republic*" I argue, contrary to the standard interpretation, that in rejecting the view that thirst is the desire for good drink, Plato is not rejecting the view that all desires, including appetitive desires, involve viewing their object as good. His point is that the good thing that is the object of thirst is drink, not good drink.

In "The Being of Leibnizian Phenomena," I explore questions of unity and being as they pertain to Leibniz's account of body. Robert M. Adams has argued that Leibniz's two conceptions of body as mere phenomena and as aggregates of substances are consistent and belong to a single phenomenalist theory. I respond that Adams's strategy of understanding bodies to be intentional objects of perceptions - to be the objective reality of ideas in the Cartesian sense - is in fact inconsistent with taking them to be aggregates of substances. I agree with Adams that Leibniz thinks that aggregates of substances have their unity only in the mind, but I deny that the being of aggregates of substances is only in the mind.

In "Freedom and Strength of Will: Descartes and Albritton" and "Responses to Chappell and Watson" I compare Descartes's account of the relation between freedom of will and strength of will with that of a modern day defender of the Cartesian view that the will is so free in its nature that it cannot be constrained. Rogers Albritton argued on conceptual grounds that weakness of will is no barrier to freedom of will. Descartes, however, sometimes suggests that one must take certain practical steps to insure freedom of will. To understand this disagreement, I distinguish two different notions of strength of will. Our will is strong on the output side if we succeed in implementing our choices in the face of opposition. Our will is strong on the input side if we resist external forces in making choices. Descartes offers several different metaphors to explain the relation of the passions to a weak will, but he sometimes suggests that if our will is weak on the input side - that is, if our choices are incited by our present passions rather than our firm and decisive judgments concerning good and evil - and if we cannot control which passions we have, then we are not free, because what we propose to do is not really up to us. Albritton, I argue, holds that the will is always indifferent - all the conditions for choosing X having been posited, we can either choose X or not — which implies that even a weak will is always free. But the price of this account of freedom, I claim, is that it cannot be explained why we choose one thing rather than another. Descartes's own account of free will is objectionable primarily because it involves the identification of the self with reason. But his account of strength of will is very similar to Gary Watson's account of freedom, because what a Cartesian strong soul chooses to do reflects its evaluational system.

In "St. Thomas Aquinas on the Halfway State of Sensible Being," I examine Aquinas's account of the distinction between the corporeal and the incorporeal, especially as it pertains to sense perception. I argue, against Sheldon Cohen's attempt to read Aquinas as providing a physicalistic account of sensation, that Aquinas thinks that corporeity and incorporeity, both of activities and of forms, come in degrees, so that some activities and forms are partly corporeal and partly incorporeal. Thus, for example, he holds that the activity of digestion is a partly incorporeal activity that involves a wholly corporeal change taking place in a corporeal organ, whereas sensation (or at least the immaterial reception of a sensible form) is a partly incorporeal activity involving a wholly incorporeal change that takes place in a corporeal organ. Although this paper is focused primarily on the interpretation of Aquinas's texts, it should be of interest to those philosophers following the dispute between Myles Burnyeat and Richard Sorabji whether

Aquinas's interpretation of Aristotle's account of sensation is more accurate than contemporary functionalist interpretations of Aristotle. More generally, philosophers concerned with understanding what philosophical choices underlie our modern conceptions of what it is to be mental and what it is to be physical, conceptions that in my judgment are fundamentally Cartesian, might gain some insight by comparing them with Aquinas's account of the distinction between the physical and the non-physical, as it is manifested in his account of sensations and other psychic phenomena.

In "Three Dualist Theories of the Passions," I discuss in a preliminary way the theories of Descartes, Spinoza, and Malebranche. I examine their accounts of the nature and origin of the passions of the soul, their accounts of how the passions influence our behavior, and their methods of controlling the passions.

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