

Descartes and the “metaphysical dualism”: Excesses in interpreting a classic*

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Abstract

The article focuses on one of the most serious accusations brought against Descartes and modern philosophy, namely “the dualism of substance”. The accusers claim that the human body and soul were viewed as completely separate; consequently, their relationship as such and the united being of man become incomprehensible. As has been shown above, the idea of the separation of the soul from the body did not originate with Descartes; it was formulated much earlier, and repeated by a disciple of Descartes’, Henry Leroy, known as Regius. When Descartes became aware of this bizarre interpretation he was dismayed and sought to clarify the matter. He sought to distinguish between two terms, “distinction” and “separation” and to illuminate the relationship between body and soul at three different levels, i.e. ordinary experience, analytical mind and metaphysical meditation. Eventually, he embraced the paradox of the two natures – the double substantial make-up of the human being, a paradox of patristic inspiration.

However, the later history of ideas was not sympathetic to Descartes: nowadays, when one looks up the term “metaphysical dualism” in dictionaries or glossaries, even in the studies of prestigious researchers, one will find views similar to those of the unfaithful disciple Regius. The resilience of this *locus obscurus* is explained both by the power of a new mode of interpreting discourse (as technical or logical analysis) and by the ever more privileged position of the reader (*intentio lectoris*). Both attitudes are related to modern ideologies and to changes which have occurred in the intersubjective life-world, especially in the communication of the scholarly and academic world.

Keywords: Descartes, hermeneutics, *locus obscurus*, metaphysics, dualism, substance, body and soul, intersubjectivity

1. Intersubjectivity and interpretation

I will start this article by making a relatively straightforward point. We are all aware that the lived space of subjectivity is never neutral or homogenous. Rather, it

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resembles a mountain range, featuring uneven and complicated topology. The experiences which it comprises do not support a single orientation in the world of life. Indeed, some situations make no sense at all. Many experiences prove equivocal or contradictory and hard to fathom. We may point, in this respect, to the experience of mutual knowledge, superbly expounded by Hegel in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where he mentions the “independence and dependence of self-consciousness: lordship and bondage” (Hegel 1977, 111). Likewise, we can point to the experience of otherness and of the emergence of the other *ego*, a key element in Husserl’s fifth meditation in his *Cartesian Meditations*. As has been rightly noted, one’s understanding of the self provides a means to understanding the others (*Sein und Zeit*, § 26). Especially in the public milieu, there are certain inescapable deficiencies in one’s care for the other (which Heidegger called *Fürsorge*). A further, “dramatic function” of intersubjectivity was described, with unexpected results in communication (Habermas). Consequently, it makes sense to always consider the intersubjective character of interpretation. More important still is its rugged topography, with serious consequences in terms the perception of the self and of the other. By being aware of such situations, one may be more able to understand why certain interpretations, while highly debatable, manage to take centre stage and occasionally dominate entire eras. Moreover, one may perceive more easily a kind of “pathology” of interpretation (in the Kantian understanding of the term, which invokes the Greek *pathos*), with possible disorders and excesses. Although the interpretation effort aims to clarify certain presuppositions about the mind, others equally bizarre or scandalous continue to emerge.

I will attempt to discuss below how a famous *locus obscurus*, “the Cartesian dualism”, emerged and has remained prominent to this day. It can only be properly understood, I believe, in connection with the emergence in the modern world of certain modes of intersubjective life, such as communication in the scholarly and academic environments. To this end, I will call attention to one the most serious accusations levelled at Descartes and the entire modern philosophy, i.e. “the dualism

of substances”: the human body and soul have been understood as being two completely separate substances. Consequently, both the relationship between them and man’s lived presence would have become totally incomprehensible. It was claimed that this dualism of substances was the unmistakable symptom of metaphysical thought, which would possibly mean that the very presence of metaphysics is indicative of a serious case of misapprehension or deviation¹. However, the very idea of “Cartesian dualism” may be viewed as a *locus obscurus* in the philosophical thought. It is an obscure place not only because it has been inadequately examined or debated. Rather because recent history has accepted it completely as the symbolic thesis of a whole tradition of thought. Therefore, it is not surprising to find references to “Cartesian dualism” in almost any philosophy dictionary, manual or encyclopaedic tome.

I would like to make another preliminary point. We should recall that the old phrase *locus obscurus*, especially when it concerns a written segment, has at least three accepted meanings. First, it may refer to a passage or fragment not yet exposed or known well enough. Second, it designates something which is intrinsically unclear or ambiguous. Last, it frequently involves a meaning found in ancient religious hermeneutics: *locus obscurus* may refer to an enigmatic or secret aspect. We can therefore realise that the phrase had negative connotations only in some definite cases.

I will focus in the beginning on a fact that must give us pause: the bizarre interpretation of Descartes’ writings continues to this day, at times with the purpose of creating scandal. It is a fascinating, even seductive spectacle at times. However, it manages to obscure two instances of interpretative dialogue, *intentio operis* and *intentio auctoris*, to borrow Umberto Eco’s established terminology.

2. The Fauvism of certain interpretations

I do not intend to catalogue all the interpretations which can reasonably apply to Descartes’ writings. Yet before examining what the “Cartesian dualism” is about, let us briefly look at the “Descartes phenomenon”, specifically at certain

images or idols which emerged in the intersubjective space of interpretation.

What became of Descartes in the 20th century, especially after the Second World War, seems to be a jungle of interpretations. Each interpretation seeks to take you on a new path, yet as you cannot forget about the existence of the others, you constantly risk being caught in a state of total confusion. All these interpretations compose together a landscape like those in equatorial areas. Long gone is the picture of the solitary thinker, who retired for a time to a house in the Netherlands, and, clothed in his dressing gown, seated at the fireplace, looking undecided at a blank page, reflecting alone and writing down for several nights, almost as a confession, potential answers to his long deliberations on the existence on anything certain in the world of knowledge. This image probably appears to those who feel themselves filled with loneliness and the sheer freedom of metaphysical thought. It is as though Descartes must now face the harsh retort to the metaphor of the tree of knowledge, which he himself used in one of his letters.

Few are those who generally consider Descartes to be a very lucid author, among them Étienne Gilson sau Ferdinand Alquié and, in the post-war period, Jean-Luc Marion. Some have referred to a genuine French tradition of Cartesian hermeneutic, whose other prominent figures include Henri Gouhier, Jean Laporte, Martial Gueroult or, later, Jean-Marie Beyssade, Nicolas Grimaldi and Geneviève Rodis-Lewis. Those who do make attempts at rehabilitation often do so by resorting to exotic or defensive approaches. They focus either on the ethical effects of Descartes' thought, or on his cultural model and certain key ideas that the French philosopher asserted.

Much more numerous are the authors who refer to Descartes with an almost fauvist freedom in their assumptions. They bring forth a mix of scandal and spectacle of ideas. One is thus able to discover a non-Cartesian Descartes, unpredictable and even rebellious. This marks a return to the image of the masked philosopher (famously asserted by Maxime Leroy) or that of the modern and somewhat unrestrained man (an image once promoted by Ferdinand Brunetière, and later by Georges

Friedmann). To support this view, certain less speculative episodes in Descartes’s life are evoked, such as: a duel he fought over a beautiful lady, in 1625, at the age of 29; the long-standing suspicion (originated by Voetius) that he had fathered several illegitimate children; a secret affair with H el ene Jans, a woman of means, who gave birth Francine, out of wedlock, in 1635; certain pages in his correspondence with princess Elisabeth of Bohemia; but also certain bizarre confessions, such as the one in his letter to Chanut, of 6 June 1647, in which he declared that as a child he had been in love with a crossed-eye girl and then as an adult he had a long-lasting attraction for women with this natural condition.

A recurrent picture is that of the indexed heretic, as it is a well-known fact that in 1667, king Louis XIV outlawed the teaching of Cartesian philosophy. Descartes’ writings had already been indexed since 1663. Bossuet, in a 1687 letter to D’Allemands, Malebranche’s disciple, described the danger posed by Cartesianism to the Christian teaching of those times. Voetius, Le Maistre de Sacy and Du Vancel had similar reactions. As noted by Baillet, Descartes’ biographer, Voetius was very rigorous and exact in his claims, listing seven points of profound disagreement between Cartesianism and Christianity: “This philosophy is dangerous, favourable to scepticism, apt to destroy our belief concerning the reasonable soul, the procession of divine persons in the Trinity, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, original sin, miracles, prophecies” (Baillet 1691, 146). Even though Voetius might have been right in a historical or dogmatic sense, in his reaction he should have heeded the advice of the one who offered the parable of the good Samaritan. Denunciations similar to that delivered by Voetius’ exist to this day, however far more numerous are those who turn the heresy accusation into an encomium to a free mind.

There is a short distance separating the heretic from the radical thinker, one who, according to Paul Val ery experiments continuously, in an almost aesthetic manner, and risks everything in the exercise of doubt. This Descartes, in this rather avant-garde guise, would thus be considered an inspiration for the art of Matisse and C ezanne, as through the test of the limits of doubt he leaped in the space of absolute

solitude.

Very often one can also find the image of a divided Descartes, violently at odds with himself. He appears as perfectly baroque (Rosario Assunto), esoteric or Rosicrucian (F.A. Yates), analytical (Jean Laporte), Christian (Le Senne) yet atheist (Sartre), canonical theologian (Gilson) and secular theologian (Jonas), free-thinking metaphysician (Ortega y Gasset), legitimiser of past phalocentric eras (Susan Bardo) but egalitarian with regard to gender issues (Stanley Clarke), modern (Habermas) yet scholastic (J.-Fr. Courtine), liberal (Alain) but also conservative (Fr. von Hayek), empiricist (Laporte) but no less a spiritualist (Cousin) and rigorous to the extreme (Steven Gaukroger), yet with an almost poetical audacity, especially in how he himself interpreted his bizarre dream of November 1619 (Mallarmé). “Descartes has been presented to us, in equal measure, as champion of the apostolic and roman Church, a Huguenot, wearing a mask and consciously putting on a show, mysticist and Rosicrucian, an agent of secret societies, a revolutionary and advocate of bourgeois order. To some, he is the epitome of Western intelligence; to others, he is a pedantic thinker who knows everything, and nothing else, a defender of simple wisdom, but the most imbecile of rationalists, a destroyer of the arts and poetry and the main culprit for the dissolution of our culture. A commentator for each of guises of Descartes-Proteus” (Frédéric 1959, 9). Perhaps on a map of critical attitudes in modern Europe few areas have been left uncharted by the interpreters of the French philosopher.

The conservative picture of Descartes - in epistemology (Bachelard), and subsequently in the archaeology of power (Foucault) or even in metaphysics (Rorty) – is matched against the perfectly equivocal (Derrida) or even the revolutionary Descartes who proclaims liberty as the foundation of being (Sartre). The former metaphysician thus becomes a revolutionary that precedes all revolutions. In his analysis, Sartre recalls the ideologists of 1789, who celebrated Descartes as a covert materialist, a genuine progressive and a liberator of the human mind. This image is reminiscent of late echoes of the *German Ideology* or the writings of disciples who upheld the

notion of the exalted history of the deprived.

The rebellious Descartes, for he is one too, is not only French. He appears as an embodiment of American spirit (Pierre Nzinsi), or Dutch (a free Protesant, according to Kojève), a Western Slav (assures Merab Mamardachvili, in his *Cartesian Meditations*, 1981), or even an Islamist (S. Mosbah), a post-modern, therefore a post-Cartesian (F. Frimat). Descartes himself would suggest a going beyond Cartesianism, whereas others failed to do the same with regards to their own doctrine (Jacques D’Hondt). He would recommend searching for other moral norms, which could be connected with the manipulation of the human body and the process of development on a global scale, with the possibility of giving in to virtual worlds or even with individual and cultural minorities’ rights.

Still other interpreters made truly appalling claims. They had their own motives for discovering in Descartes’ writings the source of terrible future historical troubles. They would consider him a precursor of totalitarian thought (Karl R. Popper) a master who legitimised domination over people and objects (André Glucksmann). He contributed allegedly to the establishment of a tyranny of reason (Jean-Marie Benoit), which would be possible based on the modern interpretation paradigm (Richard Rorty).

There is a visible reaction to the post-modern views of Descartes. Thus, Jean-Luc Marion, one of the most exacting researchers of his works, identified the positive scholastic mind and their theological inspiration². Later, Steven Gaukroger demanded that all researchers of Descartes should make a decisive return to the 17th-century scientific context, the only one which could explain the emergence of this scholar (Gaukroger 2000, 4-6). Others, such as Ioan P. Couliano, would always debate the images of Bacon, Descartes, Galileo and others which were created by late 18th-century ideologists. Beyond all these images, Descartes has remained for most a classical metaphysician (Couliano 1987, 179-191). After Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, he is the one thinker who created a genuine European metaphysical tradition. In the modern world, only the Kantian tradition would be comparable

– and obviously competing – with the Cartesian tradition.

However, Descartes is the prerequisite reference when one debates “metaphysical dualism” today: allegedly he generated this affliction. Pierre Mesnard, a thorough researcher of Cartesian philosophy, observed “Descartes still remains to Aristotelians the man of absolute distinctions and of the impossible synthesis, the only one who is forbidden to make distinctions to create unity” (Mesnard 1937, 156). It is an important remark, as usually modern Aristotelians have perceived Cartesian ontology as perfectly dualist and brutally fractured at its very foundation.

3. A prejudice of historical proportions: “Cartesian dualism”

Unaware that he would provide fodder for centuries of controversies, Descartes declared that a proper distinction must be drawn between body and soul before attempting anything else. Only by achieving a proper understanding of what we call “the self” or the “I”, could we obtain the knowledge of other important matters, for example whether mathematical truths can be questions, whether fear of death is justified, whether it is good to prevent the suffering of the other and whether we should believe in the effective presence of the divine power. Descartes was to dedicate a whole book, probably his most important, to this issue: the distinction between mind and body. The work in question is *Meditationes de prima philosophia, in qua de existentia et animae humane a corpore distinctio demonstratur*, edited in 1639-1640, with the final title *Meditationes de prima philosophia, in qua de existentia et animae immortalitatis demonstratur*, Amsterdam, 1642, accompanied by seven series of objections and answers. Most of those who invoke this book assert that Descartes described in it the human body and soul as two completely separate substances: *res extensa* and *res cogitans*. Thus, modern Europe allegedly imposed an incomprehensible representation of the two substances, an inflexible dualism, which so far we have not been able to discard. Consequently, we might not actually be able to understand ourselves.

Yet how did we end up this way, so critical of Cartesian metaphysics? Was Descartes unaware of this interpretation of his writings?

It all began with his closest disciple, Regius (Henry Leroy), who insisted on the separation of mind and body, believing that was his master’s own claim³. Relying on this conviction, Regius seriously troubled the waters of metaphysics and defined the human being as an „ens per accidens” (Descartes 1991, 200; Adam and Tannery III, 460). Unaware that he was an infidel and heretic, Regius translated on his own some of Descartes’ ideas and stated that, according to Descartes, man is an accidental entity, *ens per accidentem*. In other words, the union of body and soul of this being is accidental or occasional. For an accidental entity, the meeting of body and soul occurs only at irregular and undetermined times. We must admit that this is quite a spectacular idea, beyond its metaphysical scandal. Claiming that man is a contingently composed being is bound to draw anyone’s attention. Thus the view of man’s contingent being emerged well before the 20th-century exaltation of facticity or man’s absurd situation. All it required was the bold interpretation by a disciple, who referred to Greek metaphysics.

I would like to make a side comment at this point. One can find a lot about the accidental being in Aristotle’s writings. For example, in *Metaphysics*, V, 1025, he writes that we call accidental “what holds good of something and is true to say, but neither of necessity nor for the most part.” (Aristotle 1993, 64). The examples which the philosopher provides are eloquent: finding a treasure when digging a hole for another purpose, being a learned person or being white. “There is thus no definite cause of [the accident], but a chance one, and that is indefinite. It was a coincidence for someone to visit Aegina if he went there not in order to visit but having been for off course by a storm or captured by pirates.” (Aristotle 1993, 65).

If we were to refer back to the Greek philosopher’s assertions, but based on Regius’ own interpretation, then we could believe that the body and soul end up composing a human being not because it would be necessary, but because, while floating through the ether, as mere entities, the fortuitous game

of some powers would cause them to meet and to compose a single entity, man himself.

4. Descartes' response and some of his arguments

Yet did Descartes make the claim that man's soul and body, as substances, are actually separate? A careful reading of his demonstrates that this is not the case. We do know that the philosopher laid great emphasis in his early writings, until around 1640, on the distinction of mind and body. Therefore, *distinction*, not separation, as the philosopher himself would stress. The relevant works are: *Traité du Monde ou de la Lumière*, written in 1633, *Discours de la Méthode*, published at Leyda in 1637, and *Meditationes de prima philosophia*. In *Traité du Monde ou de la Lumière* there is an attempt at understanding the communication between soul and body, yet the soul Descartes refers to is specifically the sensitive soul, if we accept a tentative Platonic distinction.

Something truly extraordinary occurred afterwards. Descartes would focus mainly on the intimate relation of the soul and body, and on their living union. It is hard to tell exactly what caused this visible shift of focus. It could have been due to some of the objections he faced after he wrote *Meditationes de prima philosophia*. Copies of the work were sent to Mersenne, Caterus and others. Certain objections, such as those made by Antoine Arnauld, emphasised the point that Descartes excessively separated man's soul from his body. He was even accused of angelism, because he claimed that essential for man was only his rational soul, while his body was a mere vehicle of the soul. Supposedly he endorsed the definition: *hominem esse solum animum utentem corpore*, meaning that man is the soul himself which makes use of a body (Adam and Tannery VII, 227). Such interpretations drew further objections, which troubled Descartes. Some were truly bizarre, picturing man as the soul of an angel sheltered in a body, or as a pure mind in a material vehicle. Descartes would openly express his annoyance and intention to respond. We will present below some of his case against these interpretations.

The pain of man is not a mere notion. If the soul were separate from the body, Descartes claimed, then pain would only be a thought of the soul. Thus it could only be perceived by the mind, without man actually feeling it. “For if an angel were in a human body, he would not have sensations as we do, but would simply perceive the motions which are caused by external objects, and in this way would differ from a real man” (Descartes 1991, 206; Adam and Tannery III, 460). Indeed, the pain that we feel certainly means more than that. It represents rather “the confused perception of a mind really united to a body” (Descartes 1991, 206; Adam and Tannery III, 460). The same applies to sorrow or joy, hunger or thirst etc. Descartes focuses on certain specific cases for his era, such as the illusions of those who had an amputated limb (*Meditationes*, VI) or the pain felt in a phantom limb (Letter to Fromondus, 3 October 1637). He demonstrates that the mutilation of one part of the body does not change the latter’s original union with the soul.

One cannot conceive of the mind and body in terms of a simple analogy, such as that of a sailor on some ship (*Meditationes*, VI): “I am not merely present in my body as a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am very closely joined, and, as it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit. If this were not so, I, who am nothing but a thinking thing, would not feel pain when the body was hurt, but would perceive the damage purely by the intellect, just as a sailor perceives by sight if anything in his ship is broken” (Descartes 1996, 56; Adam and Tannery VII, 81). If the soul were like a sailor, and the body of man like the ship that the sailor commands on waters at will, then the soul would be able to perceive the soul’s state only with his mind. Moreover, if at one point he felt he was suffering from a serious disease, he could simply leave the body, and take refuge far away, as the sailor does when he abandons a sinking ship save his life.

The misunderstanding concealed by such an analogy causes Descartes to regularly address and emphasise the idea that the man’s soul, although distinct in substance, is nevertheless truly united with his living body.

Passions are troubles that are born of the mutual relationship between body and soul. I believe that in supporting this idea, the philosopher was particularly stimulated by the numerous asked in numerous letters by Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia. The princess's quite unusual interests – the Latin language, theories of mathematics and cosmology, and certain disputes in metaphysics at the time – stimulated this exchange of correspondence. A further inspiration could have been the moments of sadness or despondency which she regularly and quite seriously experienced. There might have been other reasons, unknown to outsiders.

In 1642, Regius encouraged Princess Elisabeth to ask Descartes to clarify certain matters concerning her emotional state. Descartes thus came to know her, would grow to cherish her greatly and the two of them would engage in extensive correspondence (Foucher de Careil 1879). In July 1644, he dedicated to her his book *Principia Philosophiae*, written in Latin. The first lines in the “Epistola Dedicatoria” seem to express an almost pure form of love: “The greatest advantage I have derived from the writings which I have already published, has arisen from my having, through means of them, become known to your Highness, and thus been privileged to hold occasional conversations [...]” (Adam and Tannery VIII, 1). In one of the letters, he told her that in *Meditationes* he briefly referred to the union of the soul and body (28 June 1643). This was due to the fact that the book dealt with metaphysics and therefore focused particularly on the use of pure intellect, which seeks to distinguish things with maximum attention, and thereby achieve a clear view of the self. As for the idea of the union of body and soul, it seems to be more clearly realised through the senses than through pure intellect or imagination. Based on this exchange of letters and responding to the wish of the princess, Descartes penned a rather unexpected book the treatise on *The Passions of the Soul*, written in 1645 – 1646, and published later, in 1649. In stark contrast to Descartes' disciple, Regius, the princess constantly invoked the union of the soul and body. She did it for several reasons, one of which was highly personal: “Your letters, when they do not teach me,

always serve me as the antidote to melancholy” (Elisabeth of Bohemia 2007, 93; Adam and Tannery IV, 233). In this particular work, the living communication of soul and body is viewed in terms of the typical human passions and aspirations. The two natures that compose us, the rational and the corporeal, affect each other profoundly, although it is difficult to express this relationship as a concept. Likewise for the three functions of the soul which ancient authors referred to: the vegetative, the sensitive and the rational function respectively⁴.

When relating to the world of passions, the mind undergoes a certain transformation. Descartes himself confessed about it, in a letter to the Marquess of Newcastle (April 1648): “The philosophy I cultivate is not so savage or grim as to outlaw the operation of the passions; on the contrary, it is here, in my view, that the entire sweetness and joy of life is to be found” (Adam et Tannery V, 135). Likewise, the real union of body and soul differs from a mere exchange of energy between the two entities. This unity takes on the name of human life itself and is perceived as a feature of this life. It constitutes a different term from the previous two already designated as substances. In a letter to princess Elisabeth, from 21 May 1643, Descartes referred to these three preliminary notions, viewed as patterns for all the other representations: “Then, as regards body in particular, we have only the notion of extension, which entails the notions of shape and motion; and as regards the soul on its own, we have only the notion of thought, which includes the perceptions of the intellect and the inclinations of the will. Lastly, as regards the soul and the body together, we have only the notion of their union, on which depends our notion of the soul's power to move the body, and the body's power to act on the soul and cause its sensations and passion” (Descartes 1991, 218; Adam and Tannery III, 665). This would lead to a multitude of questions over time: how is it possible for the two substances to communicate effectively, and moreover, to join together in creating a third notion, life itself? How is the union between the two substances made possible? Nevertheless Descartes constantly asserted this view⁵. The Aristotelian logic identified an incomprehensible or even utterly absurd area here. Descartes did not share this view, as it

emerges from his letters and his replies to objections.

When Descartes discusses the intimate union of the body and soul, he refers to the real being of man, as it becomes the actual site of communication between the “two substances”, intellectual and corporeal.

The obvious case of melancholy. In Descartes' correspondence with princess Elisabeth of Bohemia there are recurrent discussions about melancholy, perceived as a malady of the soul, at once noble and terrifying. The princess herself was afflicted by melancholy, and the regular attacks caused her to be quite concerned at times. She confessed about it to Descartes and their exchanges focused on the relationship between mind and body in the occurrence of this malady. As has been noted, the princess was surprised especially that “passions and bodily imperfections can obscure the mind and that even the highest and most obvious philosophical precepts cannot bring peace to a soul ravaged by the trivial disturbances of day-to-day life” (Brătescu 1984, 9). Descartes knew this condition well from the medical treatises of his era and believed that it might have been linked to madness itself (Mesnard 1995, 427-447). He wrote about melancholy and its relationship with the “vapours” discharged by the black bile in the first *Meditation* and in *La recherche de la vérité*, an incomplete dialogue.

More recent exegesis has also taken a different path, claiming that Descartes himself was affected by the condition. The texts collected in *Olympica*, about his three dreams of November 1619, as he stayed at Neuburg, on the shores of the river Danube, have provided arguments for claims that his solitude was linked to a state of melancholy (Mesnard 1995, 433). The third dream in particular is amenable to such an interpretation. In fact, Descartes himself greatly emphasised the role which imagination plays in moments of solitude and inspiration. He would notice a kind of alternation of states of enthusiasm and depression, or of inspiration and laziness. Indeed, such an alternation is typical of the melancholic disposition (Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl 1964, part one, II, 2 and part three, I, 3; Starobinski 1966). Therefore, Descartes had

enough reasons to seriously consider the condition which affected the palatine princess. Furthermore, for the metaphysician behind these exchanges and confessions, melancholy provided additional proof for the intimate union between the human body and soul.

Only by using our lived experience one learns to conceive the union of the soul and the body. This is an unexpected view of Descartes, that it is in our daily life that we can particularly see the union of the two. With each sorrow or joy, with the ailments that affect us, in pain and in insomnia, when we love and when we hate, we can notice that our soul and body participate in what happens to us. One could infer, based on all these facts, that there is a minimal difference between the two, that the soul is bound in all its acts by the actual life of the flesh. Yet we do know that much of what appears to us in a particular way in our daily life eventually proves to be inaccurate. Therefore, those who seek to find what exactly could be considered to be the truth, take the opposite path to that of ordinary thought and reject whatever is questionable: “I thought it necessary that I do exactly the opposite, and that I reject as absolutely false everything in which I could imagine the least doubt”, he announces at the beginning of the Part Four of *Discourse on Method* (Descartes 2000a, 60; Adam and Tannery VI, 31). Therefore, at times it is necessary to use an opposite approach to that used previously.

In the letter to princess Elisabeth, of 28 June 1643, he made a distinction between the exercise of the mind, imagination and sensitive perception: “First of all then, I observe one great difference between these three kinds of notions. The soul is conceived only by the pure intellect; body (i.e. extension, shapes and motions) can likewise be known by the intellect alone, but much better by the intellect aided by the imagination; and finally what belongs to the union of the soul and the body is known only obscurely by the intellect alone or even by the intellect aided by the imagination, but it is known very clearly by the senses. That is why people who never philosophize and use only their senses have no doubt that the soul moves the body and that the body acts on the soul. They

regard both of them as a single thing, that is to say, they conceive their union; because to conceive the union between two things is to conceive them as one single thing. Metaphysical thoughts, which exercise the pure intellect, help to familiarize us with the notion of the soul; and the study of mathematics, which exercises mainly the imagination in the consideration of shapes and motions, accustoms us to form very distinct notions of body. But it is the ordinary course of life and conversation, and abstention from meditation and from the study of the things which exercise the imagination, that teaches us how to conceive the union of the soul and the body.” (Descartes 1991, 226-227; Adam and Tannery III 691-692). Of course, Descartes does not allude to the exclusive reliance on pure intellect, on the one hand, or the imagination and the senses, on the other. Descartes knew very well that they could not be separated as mere faculties. However, there are certain cases when the force of only one of these faculties is most relevant and so is their individual capacity to reflect everything according to their particular language.

The distinction under consideration refers to the “rational soul”. From the above we can realise that Descartes pays particular attention to the difference between the soul and the mind. The terms *anima* and *animus*, although sometimes reproduced in French as *âme*, as is the term *spiritus*, allow such a distinction. However, Descartes is ultimately interested in the union of the soul and the body. He accepts the idea that it is the mind which mediates this union. When he proclaims the clear distinction between soul and body, he refers to the soul which is able to reflect, *ratio*, not to *anima*, because even animals are endowed with *anima*.

The argument is presented in brief in the final paragraph of *Discourse*, V, where Descartes discusses the radical difference between the human soul and the animal soul. The former has a higher, rational instance, whereas the latter is only sensitive. The two orders of life, rational and corporeal, are delimited based on this view. Bodily functions (digestion, locomotion, breathing, and even the memory of the flesh or imagination) can be described as parts of a machine

commanded by nature. They do not presuppose, as claimed by the Aristotelian tradition, a hidden soul which keeps the body alive and directs all its motions towards a specific goal. The metaphor of the clock or of the perfect machine becomes relevant at this point. Further, the nature of the body will be discussed in terms of extension, sensitive shape, motion and temporal succession, terms which are almost irrelevant to the act of thinking.

Ultimately, the functioning of the body itself explains certain particular states and movements for which it was made (*Passions of the Soul*, article V). The more bizarre phrase “animal spirit”, originating in the Antiquity, indicates that which is corporeal and minute, like the subtle particles of a flame (article X). What is the value therefore of the ancient assumptions which describe the soul as a subtle breath which animates the machine of the body and all its movements at all times?

Descartes has solid evidence to defend the difference in nature between soul and body. We have already highlighted several cases which he invokes in support of his idea. There are others still, for example the presence of those illusions and delusions which appear to us, as they are produced by the senses, by our imagination or due to certain conditions. One such illusion concerns the movement of stars in the sky. Man can however observe with much detachment what goes on in the vast world of existing things. He can thus notice that certain phenomena or movements are only apparent, although he often thinks they are true. He faces a more peculiar form of reality, one which is constantly shaped by appearances too. As a detached observer, man watches the spectacle of the world which is like an immense theatre (Afloroaei 1998, 30-40; Mesnard 2005). He comes to see himself as being removed from the real, sensitive world. For that brief moment, man is identified with his rational soul, which is capable of speculative thought.

The idea of “separation” may be understood as a supreme form of freedom of certain spiritual acts. There are certain acts which are typical of the human mind, including

the act of understanding, desiring, believing, willing, perceiving etc. Although they create an inseparable whole, some of these acts tend towards an extreme form of freedom. For example, memory and contemplation tend to become pure and unconditional to a certain extent, as if they only relied on *anima rationalis* (Adam et Tannery III, 371). Certain passions too, such as those which accompany the contemplation of idea, involve a form of purity. This is what causes the mind to be less affected by the passing of time, at least in certain situations. One could believe therefore that it continues to exist when all other things have ceased to exist. The body however – *corpus physicum* and not *corpus gloriae* – is defined by extension, which entails the notions of shape, time and motion. The whole it creates is divisible and also evolving and subject to the passing of time (*Meditationes*, VI).

Ultimately, as Descartes declares, rational approaches do not lead to the belief that the soul is subject to time or death as the body is. Nowadays this idea can seem strange, yet for the era Descartes wrote it for it was a serious matter.

Could we, however, accept a mode of the mind which is absolutely free from the bodily life? Does this occur through what we call death? In case the answer is positive, then we ought to refer again to religious experience, as Descartes himself does in the same meditation. However those who cannot invoke the divine power will have to reject everything as being nothing but speculation. Or to claim a mere logical possibility, a possible area on an imaginary map of mind games. Indeed, what definite proof do we have against this possible situation? As is plain to see, this issue cannot be decided by science, and is impossible to ignore metaphysically and inexhaustible from a religious point of view.

5. The paradox of the two natures

Alongside the arguments listed above, Descartes' answer features a particularly distinct element, namely the acceptance of a very common paradox in the patristic literature.

As we lead our simple lives, removed from more speculative pursuits, we do not doubt that the soul and body

form a single being. In fact, there is nothing strange about this situation; everything is relatively as it should be, in a kind of extended natural agreement. We cannot therefore notice any serious fractures in man’s being or any hidden conflicts that might overturn our self-image. Yet if we were to censure our initial perception, that is if we acted, even temporarily as sceptics do, we would be faced with a different image. Whatever seemed orderly and peaceful in our daily life up until then would suddenly become scandalous. Paradox thus emerges and forces us to accept it unquestioningly.

In the letter to Princess Elisabeth of 28 June 1643, Descartes clearly asserts this: “I think it was those meditations rather than thoughts requiring less attention that have made Your Highness find obscurity in the notion we have of the union of the mind and the body. It does not seem to me that the human mind is capable of forming a very distinct conception of both the distinction between the soul and the body and their union; for to do 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.” (Descartes 1991, 227; Adam and Tannery III, 693). These are indeed extraordinary remarks, which Descartes apparently made in passing and without any precautions. First, he tells the distinguished princess that philosophical meditation is not a way to clarify certain ideas and find peace. Rather, such meditation, due to the attention it requires, can lead to further obscurity. It contributes to unveiling other obscured things or changes the way we see things which have hitherto seemed rather clear. Then, the confessor makes a surprising comment, i.e. “the human mind is [incapable] of forming a very distinct conception of both the distinction between the soul and the body and their union”. We will see later on that Descartes does not rely on simple rhetoric when making this claim. Indeed, to distinguish completely between the mind and the body and also to see their perfect unity is rather typical of theology. Taking this further, the issue appears to belong to a revealed teaching with eschatological aims. Finally, Descartes observes a paradox which philosophy cannot escape: that it is necessary that we conceive the soul and the body “as a single thing and at the same time (...) as two

things”, being aware that the two perspectives are contrary to each other.

Descartes proposes a few distinct steps in understanding the relationship between the mind and the body. There are three angles from which the relationship can be examined, i.e. of ordinary experience, of analytical mind and of metaphysics. We will make a few comments about each below.

Descartes states that if we rely on our daily experience we will easily notice that the soul and body are in an unmediated union. We therefore give considerable credit to sensory perceptions. The convenient reliance on the senses and the imagination can at times make us believe that the soul is actually corporeal (Adam and Tannery III, 666). Yet this does not mean that we will have been gravely mistaken in doing so; there are many situations when daily facts are founded on our actions. It is also possible for us to distinguish the difference between the two, as when we focus on what happened in a dream or in the case of certain medical conditions, visions, etc. Nevertheless, at this stage, their union and constant cooperation will appear certain to us.

As we step beyond the borders of daily experience, we can observe that the mind and the body are actually radically different. Their concepts themselves are distinct, as if they belonged to two separate worlds. This is the conclusion we are directed to by the pure intellect (the speculative thought, as Descartes calls it). To distinguish between the mind and the body is, for Descartes, a kind of obligation for speculative thought, in the positive sense of the word. It refers to what thought can experience itself: “we can conclude that two substances are really distinct one from the other from the sole fact that we can clearly and distinctly understand the one without the other” (Descartes 2000, § 60, 247; Adam and Tannery VIIIa, 28). They appear to the mind as some “primitive notions which are as it were the patterns on the basis of which we form all our other conceptions” (Descartes 1991, 218; Adam and Tannery III, 665). Strictly speaking, the mind and the body can be conceived distinctly. This happens not only because our mind, aiming to be very alert, will perceive them as distinct

eventually, but in a more profound sense, that is they emerge as such because of their nature.

A third natural step is possible in discussing this matter, beyond the clarity of the distinction between the body and the soul. What could motivate us to take this final step? Although two distinct concepts, the mind and the body constantly act upon each other and only together do they compose man’s real life. It is a claim that other metaphysicians, such as Spinoza and Leibniz, could not accept⁶. In a letter to Arnauld, of 29 July 1648, Descartes notes that the soul, although incorporeal, constantly acts upon the body, yet neither reasoning nor comparison with anything else could elucidate how this occurs. Certain obvious experiences in daily life do prove this fact. It is known to us mostly due to the senses. Yet it becomes obscure when we seek to understand it rationally. A few years earlier, on 28 June 1643, in a letter to Princess Elisabeth, he would dwell on the same issue.

I would like to draw a first conclusion at this point. There are two basic facts, the truth of ordinary experience (the soul and the body form a single thing, a single living being) and the truth of pure thought (the soul and the body are radically different substances). This does not entail that the second truth cancels out the first, only that it accompanies it on another level. In relation to these truths, metaphysical reflection focuses on a third: although radically distinct, the soul and the body are intimately and inseparably united in man’s being. This is the point reached for the moment by the Cartesian meditation. Again, this is a speculative conclusion, yet at a different level than the intellect. Descartes observes, as did the ancient sceptics, that the truth he may hold at a particular point in time must not be accepted outright. He then realises the need to reverse the original conditions, which causes thought to operate in a kind of inverted world (as Hegel would call it). We also know that Bergson later defined to philosophical reflection as a reversal of the habitual intelligence.

As we can observe, the conceptual exercise describes not only the distinction between the two substances but also their concrete cooperation. Yet only by clarifying their distinction can

one better understand how they exist in real union. His reply to Antoine Arnauld, to the fourth series of objections, is illuminating in this respect: “Nor do I see why this argument 'proves too much' [...] Also I thought I was very careful to guard against anyone inferring from this that man was simply 'a soul which makes use of a body'. For in the Sixth Meditation, where I dealt with the distinction between the mind and the body, I also proved at the same time that the mind is substantially united with the body. And the arguments which I used to prove this are as strong as any I can remember ever heaving read. Now someone who says that a man's arm is a substance that is really distinct from the rest of his body does not thereby deny that the arm belongs to the nature of the whole man. And saying that the arm belongs to the nature of the whole man does not give rise to the suspicion that it cannot subsist in its own right. In the same way, I do not think I proved too much in showing that the mind can exist apart from the body. Nor do I think I proved too little in saying that the mind is substantially united with the body, since that substantial union does not prevent our having a clear and distinct concept of the mind on its own, as a complete thing.” (Descartes 1984, 160; Adam and Tannery VII, 227).. The paradox is thus unavoidable: the “mind can exist without the body” and nevertheless “the mind is substantially united to the body”. The two facts that make up the real being of man are in equal measure radically distinct and substantially united.

One must admire the way Descartes approached such a fraught issue in metaphysics. He debates the relationship of the soul and the body as perfectly paradoxical: one can affirm both their substantial separation and their real union. The paradox builds on three levels: of ordinary experience, of metaphysical thought and of religious meditation. It achieves maximum power if we consider simultaneously the three perspectives listed here. Thus, the thinking soul and the living body are essentially distinct, yet inseparable in reality. They are distinct in nature, yet united in their concrete reality. They are separated in concept but perfectly unite as real forces. Their fusion most often takes the shape of passions. Each is projected completely in the other, yet this does not cancel identity with

itself, just as an image cannot completely substitute the imagined thing. One could establish a minimal analogy between this double constitution of man, as described by the philosopher, and the two natures of the incarnate Logos. Descartes suggests, essentially, that we will not find certain arguments through reason for their total union and complete separation.

6. Religious sources of the two-nature paradox

Does Descartes dwell too extensively on purely conceptual matters, that is, those which only highlight the mind-body distinction? If we were to believe a confession he made to Princess Elisabeth, in the letter of 28 June 1643, the answer is negative: “the chief rule I have always observed in my studies, which I think has been the most useful to me in acquiring what knowledge I have, has been never to spend more than a few hours a day in the thoughts which occupy the imagination and a few hours a year on those which occupy the intellect alone. I have given all the rest of my time to the relaxation of the senses and the repose of the mind” (Descartes 1991, 227; Adam and Tannery III, 692-693). Quite an unexpected confession!

Those who are ready to go further, to examine the matter from a religious point of view, will find the truths presented above, in a different version. In fact, Descartes declares, in a letter to Mersenne on 31 December 1640, that one could not prove that the soul is distinct from the body before proving the existence of God (Adam and Tannery III, 272). He resorted, in this respect, to arguments pertaining to *psychologia rationalis*, as in *Discourse*, V: “On the other hand, when one knows how different they are [the soul of men and the soul of beasts], one understands much better the arguments which prove that our soul is of a nature entirely independent of the body, and consequently that it is not subject to die with it. Then, since we do not see any other causes at all for its destruction, we are naturally led to judge from this that it is immortal” (Descartes 2000a, 73; Adam and Tannery VI, 59-60). Therefore, the soul searches for – or, otherwise, finds on its own

– a distinct form of atemporality.

Other arguments include those related to man's personal relationship with the divine will. Indeed, mystical experience re-establishes, on a level that is difficult to attain, the complete union of the mind and the body and their intimate agreement to such an extent that reactions seem to coincide completely. I do not know whether it would be appropriate to quote here from the writings of authors who lived around the same time as our philosopher, such as Jakob Böhme and Angelus Silesius. I am certain that some of us will be quite sceptical of these examples, even though, in time and space, it is a truly decisive experience that man can have.

If it is true, as stated by his biographers, that Descartes' final words invoked the soul's free and solitary journey beyond that moment ("Now my soul 'tis time to depart"), we will understand that the philosopher did not abandon as a mere intellectual problem the joining of the human body and soul into a single being and their separation from this life.

Does this not revive, although in slightly modified form, a well-known issue to scholars of the early patristic centuries? I believe it does, especially as the paradox of the two natures, mentioned earlier, was perfectly reflected in the Christological disputes of the patristic era. In important writing on gnosis in the European area makes a relevant comment to this end: "It was not for nothing that St. Jerome declared: 'the word *hypostasis* is the poison of faith' (*Epistle XV ad Damasum*). The word's vague meaning of nature, substance, or person was scarcely distinguishable from the meanings of other frequently used Greek words such as *ousia*, *physis* and *prosopon*. The Latin Bible translated *hypostasis* with *substantia*, Tertullian with *origo* and *genitura*. Later, in the 4th century, Marius Victorinus and Rufinus of Aquileia preferred the term *subsistentia*. The indiscriminate use of the word *hypostasis* in the many semantic contexts in which it can function led to prolonged and fierce theological debates" (Couliano 1992, Introduction). As we already pointed out, Descartes speaks of the two substances which, in a real union, compose the very being of man. He also calls them distinct sides or, using a term that may easily create confusion, primary notions.

Beyond all these issues, the idea that man has two natures in one and the same person, recalls the formula imposed at the Council of Chalcedon (451A.D.): Christ is one being in two natures (*en dyo physeis*), concurring in one person and one hypostasis (*eis hen prosopon kai mian hypostasin*). It was natural, in fact, for man’s ontological status to be modelled on the Christological one, preserving the same paradox of the two natures.

7. Conclusions. Competing interpretations and favoured ideologies

As has been shown above, the idea of the separation of the soul from the body did not originate with Descartes. It was formulated much earlier, and repeated by a disciple of Descartes’, namely Henry Leroy, known as Regius. When Descartes became aware of this bizarre interpretation he was dismayed and sought to clarify the matter. In various letters to friends and contacts, and in his metaphysical writings, Descartes regularly examined the issue and provided evidence. He sought to distinguish between two terms, “distinction” and “separation”, then to review the relationship between the body and the soul at three different levels, i.e. ordinary experience, analytical mind and metaphysical meditation. Eventually, he embraced the paradox of the two natures – the double substantial make-up of the human being, a paradox of patristic inspiration.

However, the later history of ideas was not sympathetic to Descartes: nowadays, when one looks up the term “metaphysical dualism” in dictionaries or glossaries, even in the studies of prestigious researchers, they will find views similar to those of the unfaithful disciple Regius. This is precisely the common and official approach on this matter. It is explained, to a certain extent, by the new manner of interpreting metaphysical discourse: generally according to scientific theories, therefore as a technical or literal analysis of discourse. It is also explained by the special privilege of the reader’s intention, which easily obscures the two other instances in interpretative dialogue, *intentio operis* and *intention auctoris*.

Thus something very peculiar occurs in the interpretation of authors whom we call classics. They may end up as lab subjects, on which the most bizarre interpretations are tested. It barely matters how they responded for what they believed in, thought and written in their lifetime. What counts is the thesis promoted casually and vociferously by some interpreter.

Descartes made a truly impressive effort to reject the accusation made brought against him that he supported a radical form of dualism. Considering this effort, we realise that the expression “Cartesian dualism” is indicative of a terrible *locus obscurus* in the philosophical tradition. Its emergence must be connected with establishment of certain modes of intersubjective life in the modern world. I think, above all, of the expansion of academic and scholarly communication, especially beginning with the 17th century. This development was related to the interpretation imposed by the natural sciences, physics and astronomy, mechanics, biology, etc. Such interpretation had erudite and naturalistic roots, emphasizing the technical meaning of texts and the possibility of verifying them logically and empirically. I will not go into greater detail, as these aspects are well known. I will add however that based on this reading, metaphysical texts can appear to be impossible to decide or perfectly contradictory (as has been said on the idea of the unity of two distinct substances in the real being of man). The intellectual environment became ever more sceptical – or perhaps more selective – as regards the concrete act of knowledge (which Descartes himself acknowledged in the foreword to *Meditationes de prima philosophia*). In fact it is not scepticism proper, on the one hand, or explicit atheism, on the other, that conquered the minds of the people Descartes refers to. Rather, they were undecided and actually did not know what to believe in. Consequently, they preferred to search for “unquestionable proof”, “diverse evidence” and “certain demonstrations”, similar to those of geometry. The latter ended up becoming very prestigious, primarily in educated environments. As a result, people increasingly adopted a technical reading of scholarly and philosophical texts. The ideology which dominated such reading now accompanied the scientific practice of the time. It affirmed that there was

already an effective and failsafe model of knowledge (of mathematical and naturalistic descent), a sure method and validation criteria, an adequate reading of knowledge. The debates which ensued – in the form of objections and replies – increasingly complied with this new epistemic ideology.

Descartes did not condemn the new hermeneutic system, yet he was aware of its limitations. In a letter written as preface to *Principles of Philosophy* (addressed to Abbot Claude Picot, who translated the text into French), Descartes added “a word of advice as regards the method of reading this book” (Descartes 2000b, 227; Adam and Tannery IXb, 11). He aimed for a special reader – probably the ideal reader from his point of view – who would read the book four times. He would read it first as a novel “without forcing one’s attention unduly upon it”. Then, he could read it a second time “in order to notice the sequence of my reasoning” and know the principles presented in the book. Finally, the reader could take up the book for a third or fourth time to find solutions to any difficulties encountered earlier. One can easily see that Descartes attached great importance to metaphysical reading, which directs attention to the idea of the “principles of knowledge”. He then referred to the “order that should be followed in our self-instruction” what is useful in life. To those who only have “the common and imperfect knowledge”, he recommended that they achieve a moral code “sufficient to regulate the actions of his life”; then they must take up logic (“that teaches us how best to direct our reason in order to discover those truths of which we are ignorant”); finally, they must study “the true philosophy, the first part of which is metaphysics, containing the principles of knowledge, among which is the explanation of the principal attributes of God, the immateriality of our souls, and all the clear and simple notions that are in us.” (Descartes 2000b, 228; Adam and Tannery IXb, 14). He compared this metaphysics to the roots of an *arbor scientiarum*, a symbol of all human knowledge. This is, then, how Descartes intended the reading and understanding of his writings.

However, during his life, the public favoured another type of reading, apparently more effective and convincing due to its straightforward nature – a reading of scholarly origin,

naturalistic to be exact, focused on the literal or technical meaning of texts.

Subsequently, this type of reading itself was replaced by other radical forms, related to the new political and social changes of the modern world. They would be accompanied by new ideologies, different from those Descartes was familiar with. The ideology-orientated reading is easy to spot when the interpretation is dependent on the interests of groups of people and the beliefs that emerge in their practical world (Paul Ricoeur). The phrase itself has already been accepted by researchers who have followed in the footsteps of Karl Mannheim (Jameson 1981; Ducrot & Schaeffer 1995, chap. I, § 9; Afloroaei 2002). Our understanding is often dependent on power plays and group strategies, however bizarre they might be at a given moment. The mind is constantly attacked – to a greater or lesser degree – by the force of ideologies. As a matter of fact, certain ideologies seek to change people’s way of thinking and expressing themselves. They can easily generate violence and censorship and bondage, as has often happened. On the other hand, our era has afforded us a new privilege, that of the reader’s position (*intentio lectoris*)⁷. It has led to the outburst of most eccentric readings, against the backdrop of collective reflexes, which can be easily observed in the world of scholarly communication. This means that inadequate readings can occur in any medium of intersubjective life. The “natural attitude”, so commonly debated in phenomenology, can be easily replaced by any privileged ideology.

Indeed, the force of collective reflexes, which resemble the unconscious reflexes, is immense. It demands, as we are before new pages or challenging issues, to follow in the footsteps of many others before us. On this common path, already travelled by countless anonyms of ideas, concerns may seem to be lesser and easier to confront. In the meantime, they stop being perceived as such, as the road is well known – and however long – it leads to the same “safe place”. “Metaphysical dualism”, as attributed to Descartes and his posterity, has been such a place for the culture of the last four centuries.

NOTES

¹ Notorious in this respect are Alfred Jules Ayer’s “condescending” claims which he made in the opening pages of his book *Logical Positivism*, of 1958, where he states that the metaphysician of today should no longer be regarded as a criminal, as in the past, but simply as a troubled person. For more on this terrifying portrait of metaphysics, especially on the ideological heritage of Ludwig Feuerbach and Auguste Comte (cf. Afloroaei 2008, 160-174).

² Jean-Luc Marion’s effort to clarify certain intentions and themes of Cartesian thought is truly impressive. His books on Descartes include: *Sur l’ontologie grise de Descartes. Science cartésienne et savoir aristotélicien*, 1975; *Index des Regulae ad directionem ingenii de René Descartes* (en collab. avec J.-R. Armogathe), 1976; *Sur la théologie blanche de Descartes*, 1981; *La passion de la raison (Hommage à Ferdinand Alquié)*, en collab. avec J. Deprun, 1983; *Sur la prisme métaphysique de Descartes*, 1986; *Le Discours et sa méthode* (sous la direction de N. Grimaldi et J.-L. Marion), 1987; *Questiones cartésiennes I. Méthode et métaphysique*, 1991; *Descartes. Objecter et répondre* (en collab. avec J.-M. Beyssade), 1994; *Questiones cartésiennes II. Sur l’ego et sur Dieu*, 1996; *Index des Meditationes de prima philosophia de René Descartes* (en collaboration avec J.-P. Massonet, P. Monat et L. Ucciani), 1996.

³ Henricus Regius (Henry Leroy, 1598-1679) published in 1646, at Amsterdam, his work *Fundamenta Physices*, where chapter 12 (*De homine*) deals with the new view of man as “accidental being”. Other works: *Fundamenta medica*, 1647; *Brevis explicatio mentis humanae, sive animae rationalis*, 1647; *De affectibus animi dissertatio*, 1650; *Philosophia naturalis*, 1654 (book V, titled *De homine*, is based on *Fundamenta Physices*, borrowing from Descartes’ *Passions of the Soul*).

Descartes warned his readers (*Les Principes de la Philosophie*, Lettre à Claude Picot) about Regius’s habits in rendering some of his ideas: “because he had transcribed badly, changed the order, and denied certain truths of metaphysics upon which the whole of physics ought to rest, I am obliged entirely to disavow his work, and here to beg readers never to attribute to me any opinion unless they find it expressly stated in my works, and never to accept anything as true in my writings or elsewhere, unless they see it to be very clearly deduced from true Principles” (Descartes 2000 b, 230; Adam and Tannery IXb, 19-20).

⁴ These functions are not understood exactly as in the scholastic tradition. Étienne Gilson in his *Index scolastico-cartésien*, refers to the distinct, yet not separate *anima rationalis*, *anima sensitiva*, *anima vegetativa*, *anima nutritiva* și *anima locomotiva*. He noted in this respect the influence of past authors, such as Thomas Aquinas (*Summae Theol.* I, 78, 1). Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, in the introduction to a recent edition (1994) of *The Passions of the Soul*, considers that the soul-body distinction replaces the older ranking of the three powers of the soul, i.e. vegetative, sensitive and rational (article XLVII), while totally rejecting certain dualities accepted by other authors, such as concupiscence and anger (article LXVIII).

⁵ See in particular his response to Antoine Arnauld, the author of a fourth series of objections to *Meditationes* (Adam and Tannery VII, 227-228); the reply to Regius (Adam and Tannery III, 493); the clarifications included in a letter to Elisabeth, 21 May 1643 (Adam and Tannery VII, 664-665).

⁶ Cf. Spinoza, *Ethica*, V, Preface. Leibniz issued rather stern retorts in: *Brevis demonstratio erroris memorabilis Cartesii*, 1686, *Animadversiones in partem generalem Principiorum Cartesianorum*, 1686, *De primae philosophiae emendatione, et de notione substantiae*, 1694, and other books.

⁷ There are several well-known post-war scholarly works on this matter including: J. M. Castillet, *La hora del lector*, 1957; Mircea Eliade, *L'Épreuve du Labyrinthe* (entretiens avec Claude-Henri Rocquet), 1978; Paul Ricoeur, *Du texte à l'action. Essais d'herméneutique*, II, 1986; Tzvetan Todorov, *Viaggio nella critica americana*, 1987. Later, the issue was dealt with extensively by Umberto Eco, in *I limiti dell'interpretazione*, 1990, or in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation. With Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler and Christine Brooke-Rose*, edited by Stefan Collini, 1995.

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