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**The Cartesian Man; The Hybrid Entity Emerging from an Intimate
Unification of the Mind and Body**

Abstract

The term ‘Cartesian dualism’ is commonly used to lump together all forms of ‘consciousnesses under the single category of the mental. Alongside thought and extension, modern interpreters of the Cartesian philosophy have often inclined to disregard Descartes’ presentation of a third category, the category of sensation and imagination. However, Descartes’ philosophy of mind strongly points out a threefold distinction instead of a simple duality. In this article, after a brief chronological survey of the Cartesian theory of the mind-body union, I try to argue against the alleged inconsistency of Descartes’ view and the supposed unintelligibility of his doctrine of the three primitive notions, namely, mind, body, and their union.

Key Terms: Descartes, mind, body, substantial union ve primitive notions.

**Kartezyen İnsanı: Ruh (Akıl) ve Bedenin Yakın İlişkisinden Doğan Melez Varlık
Özet**

‘Kartezyen ikicilik’ terimi genellikle tüm bilinç formlarını tek bir zihin ya da bilinç kategorisi altında toplamak için kullanılmıştır. Düşünce ve uzamın yansıması, Kartezyen felsefesinin çağdaş yorumcuları Descartes’in ortaya attığı veya tanıttığı hayalgücü ve duyum kategorisi olarak adlandırılan üçüncü bir kategoriye sıklıkla göz ardı etmektedirler. Halbuki, Descartes’in zihin felsefesi basit bir ikilik yerine üçlü bir ayırımı işaret eder. Bu makalede, Kartezyen ruh-beden birliği kuramının kısa bir kronolojik araştırmasını yaptıktan sonra, Descartes’in görüşünde iddia edilen tutarsızlık ve onun üç birincil kavramlar, akıl, beden ve onların birleşimi doktrininde varsayılan anlaşılamazlığına karşı (filozofun bu konudaki orijinal ve dikkate değer yönlerini) tartışmaya çalışacağım.

Anahtar Terimler: Descartes, zihin, beden, tözsel birlik ve birincil kavramlar.

1. Descartes’ Approval of the Unity of Man

The nature of a human being appears to be extraordinarily mysterious in the Cartesian Philosophy. This is because, on the one hand, Descartes’ philosophy

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particularly in its metaphysical and epistemological grounds, suggests certainly a composite human nature – a composition of a pure incorporeal soul or mind and the mechanical configuration of the body. Descartes himself insisted in the Sixth Meditation that ‘God has bestowed on me ... a combination of mind and body’ (AT VII 82; CSM II 57), and indeed argued in favour of the ‘real distinction’ between these two different constituents. However, on the other hand, if we take into consideration all the Cartesian statements on the issue of the mind and body relation, it also becomes evident that Descartes’ philosophical program draws our attention to the unity of human nature. The first distinctive reference to the unity of man in Descartes’ writings can be discovered in one of the passages from the *Rules for the Direction of our Native Intelligence*, one of his earliest major work, where our author states: ‘Turning now to the first factor, I should like to explain at this point what the human mind is, what the body is and how it is informed by the mind, what faculties within the composite whole promote knowledge of things, and what each particular faculty does’ (AT X 411; CSM I 39-40). From this preview, given in a valuable manuscript written in the mid to late 1620s, we can realise that the young Descartes has already in mind a conception of a human being as a union of mind and body. Another early valuable source for an understanding of the Cartesian approach to the question of mind and body union is the *Treatise on Man (Traité de L’Homme)*, written 1629-1633, which constitutes a single work in conjunction with *Le Monde (The World)*. In this treatise, Descartes begins to express his view on the unity of man as follows:

These men will be composed, as we are, of a soul and a body. First I must describe the body on its own; then the soul, again on its own; and finally I must show how these two natures would have to be joined and united in order to constitute men who resemble us.

In this text, Descartes seems to refer to the hypothetical men by the words ‘these men’. The hypothetical men must have been introduced by him in an earlier lost section of the above mentioned treatise, and they are intended to be semblances of real human beings, just as the general description of an ‘imaginary new world’ in the Chapter 6 of *Le Monde*, is meant to be a semblance of the real corporeal world.

At a later period, the passage from the *Discourse*, whose full title is *Discours de la Méthode pour bien conduire sa raison, et chercher la vérité dans les sciences* (‘Discourse on the Method of rightly conducting one’s reason and seeking the truth in the sciences’), first published anonymously in 1637, constitutes another unmistakable reference to the idea of the unity of man in Descartes’ writings. There in Part Six, our philosopher announces, for the first time, the mutual and intimate relation of mind and body by expressing the idea that ‘I showed how it is not sufficient for it [the rational soul] to be lodged in the human body like a helmsman in his ship; except perhaps to move its limbs, but that it must be more closely joined and united with the body in order to have, besides this power of movement, feelings and appetites like ours and so constitute a real man’ (AT VI 59; CSM I 141).

Descartes here categorically rejects the Platonic strain of thought, and thus makes it clear that he has no personal sympathy for the analogy of the pilot and the ship to explain mind-body relation. In any case, the next source from which one can discover the Cartesian interest in the notion of man as a union of mind and body is contained in

the *Meditations on the First Philosophy* (*Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*), published in 1641 in Paris, as Descartes' philosophical and metaphysical chef-d'oeuvre. In the Sixth Meditation, having reconstructed the existence of the external world and argued for the real distinction between mind and body, Descartes finally offered judgement about the unified nature of human being.¹ Exceptionally, there the Cartesian meditator is speaking of himself as 'my whole self, in so far as I am a combination of body and mind' (AT VII 81; CSM II 59). The assertion of such a unity is also approved by our philosopher a few paragraphs earlier in the same treatise: 'It is true that I may have (or, to anticipate, that I certainly have) a body that is very closely joined to me'.²

Certainly, Descartes' ideas in the *Meditations* about the mind and body relationship gave rise to great interest as well as concern among the contemporary theologians, philosophers, and logicians of that period (1640-42). For instance, the theologian and logician Antoine Arnauld in the Fourth Set of Objection to the *Meditations* questioned Descartes' arguments of the mind-body distinction and delivered the following judgement: 'It seems that the argument proves too much, and takes us back to the Platonic view... that nothing corporeal belongs to our essence, so that man is merely a rational soul and the body merely a vehicle for the soul – a view which gives rise to the definition of man as 'a soul which makes use of a body' (AT VII 201; CSM II 143). For Arnauld, it is very difficult to believe that Descartes' idea of the 'union' of mind and body is compatible with the doctrine of the 'real distinction between mind and body'.³ But, the charge of such Platonism is denied by Descartes in his replies to the Fourth Set of Objections:

Nor do I see why this argument 'proves too much'. For the fact that one thing can be separated from another by the power of God is the very least that can be asserted in order to establish that there is a real distinction between the two. 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 (AT VII 227-8; CSM II 160, emphasis added).

¹ For the idea of the unity of man, see particularly the famous passage in the Sixth Meditation (AT VII 81; CSM II 56).

² In the Sixth Meditation, it is possible to find more references to the 'composite' of soul and body (AT VII 85; CSM II 59), (AT VII 82; CSM II 56), (AT VII 82; CSM II 57), Letter to Hyperaspistes of August, 1641 (AT III 422; CSMK 189). In these documents, Descartes does not simply describe man as a combination of mind and body. Most importantly, the human being is conceived to be the hybrid entity emerging from an *intimate unification* of the mind and body; in this regard see also Letter to Regius of January, 1642 (AT III 508; CSMK 209).

³ Antoine Arnauld, the courageous supporter of the unorthodox theology of the Jansenists, the severe critic of the Jesuits, and the advocator of mind-body unity, does not seem to be convinced by Descartes' argument for the unity of the human being in the Sixth Meditation. Descartes especially writes two letters to Arnauld to defend the thesis of the Fourth Set of Replies by firmly maintaining the union of mind and body: For [Arnauld] of 4 June, 1648 (AT V 192; CSMK 354) and For [Arnauld] of 29 July, 1648 (AT V 219; CSM II 356).

Dutch physician Henri le Roy Regius, the Chair of Medicine at the University of Utrecht in 1638, was a close friend of Descartes and had taken pleasure in teaching Cartesian ideas on physics and physiology. He somehow interpreted and represented Descartes' position as insisting that the union of mind and body is *ens per accidens*, that is to say, man is *ens per accidens*. This surely meant that the human being is nothing more than a 'composition' of mind and body that are accidentally united with one another during the individual's terrestrial life – soul uses body for its own purposes so as to prepare itself for eternal life. This being the case, there is no essential unity between soul and body and thus the human being is not *ens per se* – a real being in its own right.

Dutch theologian Gisbertus Voët Voetius, Professor of Theology and the Rector of the University of Utrecht, was an acrimonious enemy of Descartes, and prohibited the teaching of the Cartesian philosophy in the university. He condemned the work of the enthusiastic disciple of Descartes, Regius, who had portrayed the Cartesian position on the human being as an *ens per accidens*, since, for him, such a view was not only atheistic but also at odds with the traditional scholastic philosophy.⁴ Descartes was conscious of the fact that the real target of this attack on the issue was at heart himself rather than his disciple Regius. And thus, he urged his friend Regius not to be offensive to orthodox thinkers at the University of Utrecht, and asked him to endorse the view that man is not an *ens per accidens* but actually an *ens per se*. At the end of his letter to Regius of January, 1642, Descartes himself makes it clear that he is not willing to tolerate any interpretation which regards man as an *ens per accidens*, and recapitulates his view of man by using rather scholastic terminology:

We affirm that human beings are made up of body and soul, not by the mere presence or proximity of one to another, but by a true substantial union.... If a human being is considered in himself as a whole, we say of course that he is a single *ens per se* [essential unity], and not *per accidens*; because the union which joins a human body and soul to each other is not accidental to a human being, but essential, since a human being without it is not a human being (AT III 508; CSMK 209).⁵

The next significant letters to demand our attention on this issue were composed between 21 May and 28 June 1643. They were specially written by Descartes to his royal friend Princess Elizabeth in the hope that they could provide the most comprehensive and elaborate explanations of the notion of the union of mind and body. In the first letter of 21 May, our philosopher presents his view to his admirer: 'Your Highness... There are two facts about the human soul on which depend all the knowledge we can have of its nature. The first is that it thinks, the second is that, being united to the body, it can act and be acted upon along with it' (AT III 664; CSMK 217-18).

⁴ Letter to Father Dinet (AT VII 582-596; CSM II 392-93).

⁵ See for more information on this: Letter to Regius of December, 1641 (AT III 460-2; CSMK 200-1), Letter to Regius of January, 1642 (AT III 491-509; CSMK 205-9), Letter to Regius of July, 1645 (AT IV 248; CSMK 254).

Importantly, Descartes allows one more distinctive ‘primitive notion’, that is, the notion of the union of mind (or soul) and body, over and above the notion of extension and the notion of thought.⁶ In his second letter to Elizabeth of 28 June, the master explains to the Princess how we can conceive the unity of mind and body in these following lines:

First of all then, I observed 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 (AT III 691-2; CSMK 226-7).

Descartes also cannot avoid considering and including the issue of mind-body union in the contexts of his academic textbook, the *Principles of Philosophy* (*Principia Philosophiae*), which was first published in Latin in 1644, and then appeared in French in 1647, and was specially dedicated by its author to Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia. This treatise comprised the most extensive account of the Cartesian philosophical, metaphysical and scientific system. The following passage, from Part One of the treatise in question, clearly intends to establish the thesis of the union of mind and body; and it significantly sheds light on our knowledge of this unity in a way similar to that adopted in a letter to Elizabeth of 28 June: ‘I recognise only two ultimate classes of things: first, intellectual or thinking things, i.e. those which pertain to mind or thinking substance; and secondly, material things, i.e. those which pertain to extended substance or body...But we also experience within ourselves certain other things which must not be referred either to the mind alone or to the body alone. These arise ... from the close and intimate union of our mind with the body’ (AT VIII A 23; CSM I 208-9).

Clearly, these remarks indicate that our comprehension of the union of the soul and body is only possible through everyday experience or sensory perceptions rather than through the operations of intellect and imagination. ‘It is’ said Descartes to Elizabeth ‘the ordinary course of life and conversation, and abstention from meditation ... that teaches us how to conceive of the union of the soul and body’ (AT III 692; CSMK 227).

The next significant source to magnetise our attention on this issue is the last philosophical work of Descartes, the *Passions of the Soul* (*Les Passions de l’âme*), published in 1649 and again dedicated to the Princess. This treatise in fact came into existence as a result of Descartes’ correspondence with Elizabeth on the issue of the soul’s relation with the body, and significantly reflects the author’s latest developed ideas on the theme of mind-body relationship. In it, Descartes substantially stresses the close and intimate union between mind and body as the title of 30 of Part One precisely announces it: ‘The soul is united with all the parts of the body conjointly (AT XI 351; CSM I 339).

So far, we have provided a brief historical survey of the passages where one can locate Descartes’ treatment of the union of mind and body in his original writings and

⁶ Letter to Princess Elizabeth of 21 May 1643 (AT III 665; CSMK 218).

correspondence. Certainly, this survey might be more extensive, but I imagine these textual references from Descartes' writings on the thesis of the mind-body union will be sufficient for our purposes for the moment. In the course of our review it becomes evident that in Descartes' account there are two fundamental elements that are essential for our understanding of his doctrine of the unity of mind and body in the human being: (1) the union of mind and body is the 'primitive notion' and (2) the mind-body union is a substance - the 'substantial union' of mind and body. Now, we shall continue our discussion with an analysis of what Descartes means by the primitive notion of mind-body union.

2. The Primitiveness of the Notion of Mind-Body Union

The most important passage where Descartes presents the thesis of mind-body union as a primitive, basic or simple notion is unquestionably his letter to Princess Elizabeth of 21 May, 1643. In it, Descartes portrays the issue to her Royal Highness as follows:

I consider that there are in us certain primitive notions which are as it were the patterns on the basis of which we form all our other conceptions. There are very few such notions. First, there are the most general - those of being, number, duration, etc. - which apply to everything we can conceive. 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 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 passions (AT III 665; CSMK 218).

In this passage, Descartes clearly sets out and draws our attention to, four kinds of primitive notions that constitute the fundamental building blocks of the human knowledge. They are the common or general notions, the notion of extension, the notion of thought, and the notion of the union of mind and body. Descartes' classification of the primitive notions as such has sometimes been bypassed by the modern expositors of the Cartesian philosophical system, which either focuses on a twofold distinction (thought and extension, i.e., dualism) or a threefold distinction (thought, extension, and the category of sensation).⁷

It clear that the term 'primitive notions' used in the letter to Princess Elizabeth has exactly the same meaning as the terms 'simple notions' in the *Principles* and 'simple natures' in the *Regulae*.⁸ In spite of the fact that Descartes subsequently seems to forsake the jargon of the 'simple natures', he uses these terms interchangeably as synonyms when discussing the objects or items of knowledge. For instance, the doctrine of 'simple notions' given in the *Principles* is reminiscent to that of the 'primitive notions' of the letter to the Princess. There, our philosopher expresses the idea in the

⁷ For a trialistic distinction, as opposed to a standard dualistic one, see John Cottingham's article, called 'Cartesian Trialism', John Cottingham, 'Cartesian Trialism', pp. 218-30.

⁸ See also, Brian O'Neil's useful article, 'Cartesian Simple Natures', 161-79.

following manner: 'to enable us to get rid of these preconceived opinions, I shall here briefly list all the *simple notions* which are the basic components of our thoughts; and in each case I shall distinguish the clear elements from those which are obscure or liable to lead us into error' (AT VIIIA 22; CSM I 208). Once more, on this occasion '*the most general items* which we regard as things are *substance, duration, order, number* and any other items of this kind which extend to all classes of things' (AT VIIIA 22-3; CSM I 208, emphasis added) are also included in the category of the simple notions, besides the notions of thought (mind or soul) and extension (matter or corporeal substance).⁹ Furthermore, and more significantly, the most momentous thing here is Descartes' affirmation of the notion of mind-body unity through experience: 'But' says the philosopher 'we also experience within ourselves certain other things which must not be referred either to the mind alone or to the body alone. These arise ... from the close and intimate union of our mind and body' (AT VIIIA 23; CSM I 209). Again, the doctrine of the 'simple notion of mind-body unity' offered in the *Principles* here bears a resemblance to the idea of the 'primitive notion of mind-body unity' which appeared in Descartes' correspondence with Princess Elizabeth of 21 May. In the *Regulae*, Descartes uses the term 'simple natures' as an alternative common name for the four kinds of 'primitive notions' of the letter to Elizabeth and the 'simple notions' of the *Principles*.

At this stage, it is important to raise the question, what Descartes means by a 'primitive notion', 'simple notion' or simple nature? By the term primitive, simple notion or nature he refers to the simple notions or item (i.e. the basic starting points or concepts) which appears the most transparent, clear and distinct to the human intellect. The philosopher puts it in better words: 'That is why, since we are concerned here with things only in so far as they are perceived by the intellect, we term 'simple' only those things which we know so clearly and distinctly that they cannot be divided by the mind into others which are more distinctly known' (AT X 418; CSM I 44). Thus, the primitive notions or the simple natures are actually conceived to be epistemological items, rather than ontological ones,¹⁰ and accordingly each belongs to an independent

⁹ *Principles* (AT VIII A 23; CSM I 208-9); Cf. Daniel Garber, Descartes' Metaphysical physics, p. 91.

¹⁰ In this regard, see Jean-Luc Marion's interesting and valuable article, entitled 'Cartesian metaphysics and the role of the simple natures', where he takes into consideration Descartes' doctrine of the simple natures and assesses the Cartesian position as follows: 'The simple nature remains the simplest term, but the simplicity is an epistemological, not an ontological one: it does not relate to essence or *ousia*... The result is a concept or "idea" that is distinctly and originally Cartesian: "idea" defined as an object that is primary in respect of our knowledge and not in respect of its *ousia* or essence – primary in so far as it is "easy" to know, and not in respect of some indivisible form or *eidōs*', p. 116. Marion is clearly correct in this evaluation as Descartes himself makes it clear: 'Hence we are concerned with things only in so far as they are perceived by the intellect, and so we term 'simple' only those things which we know so clearly and distinctly that they cannot be divided by the mind into others which are more distinctly known' (AT X 418; CSM I 44). Descartes' concept of simple notions is certainly different from Plato's concept of ideas, forms or *eidōs*. Although for Descartes simple notions are the contents of our consciousness and we have immediate

realm of knowledge. The notions are primitive or simple since they are known singly in order, separately from all other notions, and cannot be made intelligible by reference to each other.¹¹ Descartes explains the primitiveness of the notions to Princess Elizabeth more plainly by saying that 'if we try to solve a problem by means of a notion that does not pertain to it, we cannot help going wrong. Similarly we go wrong if we try to explain one of these notions by another, for since they are primitive notions, each of them can be understood only through itself' (AT III 665-6; CSMK 218).¹²

Clearly, Descartes here is drawing our attention to the fact that each of these primitive notions enter into a special epistemological domain. The knowledge and apprehension of mind, of body, and significantly of the mind-body union can only be acquired through their own primitive notions. What is important here is to note Descartes' endorsement of the 'primitiveness' of the concept of 'mind-body union'. One can achieve awareness and penetration of the union of mind and body by appealing to the 'primitive unity of mind-body', that is its primitive notion, but not by invoking the two different primitive notions (i.e. the primitive notion of mind and the primitive notion of body). Certainly, this idea, that is to say, the primitiveness of the notion of mind-body union was the heart of many of the criticisms of the Cartesian doctrine of the unity of mind and body. The commentators have often cast doubt on the conceivability of the primitiveness of the notion of mind-body union by raising the question that how something that is composed of two distinct primitive notions could yield a primitive notion? How can one call a thing 'primitive' if its existence is dependent upon the unification of the primitive notion of mind and the primitive notion of body, which are two distinct items? The primitiveness of the notions of mind and body, from whose composition or close relationship something or some kind of union emerges, rules out the possibility that such a thing or unification should be entitled a primitive notion.¹³ However, Descartes' response to such criticisms is much more convincing than one might expect. The way in which he explains the notion of mind-body union forces us to think that such a union is indeed a primitive notion. In a letter to Princess Elizabeth of 28 June, the philosopher puts the matter perspicuously:

First of all I distinguished three kinds of primitive ideas or notions, each of which is known in its own proper manner and not by comparison with any of the others:

awareness of them, according to Plato, ideas are the eternal and unchanging truths as archetypes existing independently outside the human mind.

¹¹ See Letter to Princess Elizabeth of 21 May, 1643 (AT III 665-6; CSMK 218); Letter to Elizabeth of 28 June, 1643 (AT III 691; CSMK 226).

¹² Letter to Princess Elizabeth of 21 May, 1643 (AT III 665-6; CSMK 218).

¹³ Daniel Garber claims the unintelligibility of the primitive notion of mind-body unity in his book *Descartes' Metaphysical Physics*, p. 92; Daisy Radner also argues for the impossibility of the primitiveness of the Cartesian concept of mind-body union in her article 'Descartes' Notion of the Union of Mind and Body', pp. 163-4 and 168; in this regard, Janet Broughton and Ruth Mattern make a criticism of Radner in their paper called 'Reinterpreting Descartes on the Notion of the Union of Mind and Body'; Radner's makes a counter-objection to them in her article entitled 'Is There a Problem of Cartesian Interaction?' p. 39.

the notions we have of the soul, of body and of the union between the soul and the body (AT III 691; CSMK 226).¹⁴

In this passage, Descartes eliminates the common or general notions from the category of the simple or primitive notions possibly due to their applicability to both the material and the intellectual primitive notions. Instead, he offers a tripartite picture rather than dualistic (i.e., the notion of thought, the notion of extension) and foursome network (i.e., the general notions, the notion of thought, the notion of extension, and finally the notion of the union of mind and body). Each of these primitive notions corresponds to a different faculty and a different realm of knowledge: 'I observed' says Descartes '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*' (AT III 691-2; CSMK 226-7, my emphasis).

Firstly, the primitive notion of mind can only be apprehended by means of the faculty of pure intellection, and is the subject matter of pure metaphysics. Secondly, the primitive notion of body can be perceived through the faculty of imagination, and is included in the field of mathematical physics. Moreover, finally and most importantly, the primitive notion of the union of mind and body can be grasped and penetrated through the faculties of the senses, and is the subject of ordinary, or non-philosophical awareness.¹⁵ In his correspondence with Elizabeth, Descartes clearly illustrates how the apprehension and the study of each of these primitive notions necessitate the operation of different faculties and the realm of knowledge:

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 [i. e., the soul and the body] 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 familiarise 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 the 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 body (AT III 692; CSMK 227).¹⁶

There is no doubt that Descartes' recognition of the primitive notion of 'mind-body union', besides the primitive notion of mind and that of body, within an epistemological context, appears to be a significant step forward towards achieving a true understanding

¹⁴ Letter to Princess Elizabeth of 28 June, 1643.

¹⁵ See, particularly, Letter to Mersenne of 13 November, 1639 (AT II 622; CSMK 141); Letter to Mersenne of 15 April, 1630 (AT I 144; CSMK 22) and (AT I 144-5; CSMK 22-3); *Principles* (AT VIII A 4; CSM I 192); Jean-Luc Marion, 'Cartesian Metaphysics and the Role of the Simple Natures', p. 117, (trans. by John Cottingham); Stephen Gaukroger, 'The nature of abstract reasoning: philosophical aspects of Descartes' work in algebra', pp. 108-111.

¹⁶ Letter to Princess Elizabeth of 28 June, 1643.

of human nature. We may have perception of the primitive notion of mind and that of body, but the notion of their unity still needs to be comprehended. This knowledge can only be acquired with the aid of the senses,¹⁷ but not by means of composition of two distinct primitive notions.

Now it is time to turn our attention to another significant element in Descartes' doctrine of mind-body union. It is important to understand what our philosopher means by the notion of 'substantial union' of mind and body.

3. Substantial Unity of the Mind and Body

It is necessary to be thoroughly acquainted with Descartes' conception of 'substantial union' – the idea that the mind and body are really and substantially united – so as to understand the true nature of the living human being. In his original writings and correspondence, there are passages where Descartes uncovers his view of man, that is, the unity of a human being as the union of mind and body through some kind of 'strong fabrication of unity' rather than just a combination of two distinct things. It is argued that our conception of the mind-body unity, from which a real human being emerges, goes beyond what is actually fabricated by just a mere conjunction of two elements (mind and body).

In the passages from the Fourth Set of Replies, and the letters to Regius, Father Dinet, Princess Elizabeth, and Mesland, our philosopher especially brings to light a very strong anti-Platonic conception of the mind-body union by making use of the Aristotelian-scholastic adjectives 'substantial' and 'real'. For instance, having in mind to avoid the charge of Platonism, in the Fourth Set of Replies Descartes puts the matter in a rather scholastic jargon by insisting that 'the mind is *substantially united* with the body (AT VII 228; CSM II 160, emphasis added). The concept of the substantial union between mind and body is significantly further referred to in a letter to Regius of January, 1642, where the philosopher writes to his friend support of the view that 'a human being is a true *ens per se*, and not an *ens per accidens*, and that the mind is united in a *real* and *substantial* manner to the body (AT II 493; CSMK 206).¹⁸ Towards the end of the same correspondence, Descartes uses approximately similar expressions to emphasise the idea once more: 'human beings are made up of body and soul, not by mere presence or proximity of one to the other, but by a true substantial union... [T]he union which joins a human body and soul to each other is not accidental to a human being, but essential' (AT III 508; CSMK 209). In these passages and the similar ones of the kinds,¹⁹ Descartes obviously intends to establish the notion of a human being as a real mind-body union – mind and body are not merely connected, but rather mind is 'substantially', 'really', 'truly', and 'essentially' united with the body.

¹⁷ See Sixth Meditation (AT VII 81; CSM II 56).

¹⁸ Letter to Regius of January, 1642 (AT II 493; CSMK 206).

¹⁹ See Letter to Mesland of 9 February, 1645 (AT IV 166; CSMK 243); Letter to Father Dinet: (AT VII 585; HR II 363).

By employing these adverbs, Descartes seems to suggest a type of ‘strong’ mind-body union in opposition to the Platonic doctrine of the mind-body unification. It is well known from dialogues of Socrates, that Plato conceives human being as an *ens per accidens*, that is to say, the human being is a composition of soul and body. The soul a disembodied, self-moving, eternal, simple, self-sufficient, incorruptible spiritual being which constitute the essence of man, and is accidentally attached to (or imprisoned by) the body during the individual’s earthly life. It uses the body for its own purposes and always struggles to free itself from the impediment and the imprisonment of the body. Being accidentally united with the body, the soul continues to be, even after the destruction of the body: ‘When death attacks a man, his mortal part, it seems, dies; whereas the immortal part gets out of the way of death, departs and goes away intact and undestroyed’.²⁰ This is obviously an inevitable implication of the view of mind-body union held by Plato. In the Fourth Set of Replies, Descartes opposes his position on the notion of the mind-body union or relationship with that of Plato, by emphasising the assertion that ‘the mind is substantially united with the body’ (AT VIII 228; CSM II 160). Referring back to the argument from the real distinction between mind and body in the Sixth Meditation, he considers himself to be proving from it the kind of strong mind-body unification that make up the human being. In the same Replies, the philosopher clearly states that ‘I was very careful to guard against anyone inferring from this [i.e., the real distinction between mind and body] that man was a ‘soul which makes use of a body’ (Ibid.).

Moreover, in a further attempt to keep away the charge of Platonism, Descartes makes a comparison between a human being (i.e. a mind-body union) and an ‘incorporate’ angel – an angel that makes use of a bodily mechanism. Both angel and human mind are conceived by our thinker to be incorporeal spirits lacking of the characteristics of extension and divisibility. Although they themselves are not extended, an angel and a mind are both capable of acting upon extended things (AT V 270; CSMK 361).²¹ Nevertheless, there is a fundamental difference between an ‘embodied’ angel and a human being that is a mind-body union. While the former one is not capable of experiencing sensation (*sentire*), the latter can do so by reason of the fact that the mind is really and substantially united with the body. It is the nature of sensation that is conceived to be the significant factor for the establishment of the ‘substantial union’ of mind and body that constitutes a real human being, and differentiates our nature and mental life from that of an angel, a pure incorporeal spirit that makes use of, and temporally resides, in the body. As a reaction to Regius’ interpretation of the Cartesian position as representing that human being is an *ens per accidens* – a composition of soul and body, Descartes advises his friend to put the matter quite the otherwise in those lines: ‘whenever the occasion arises, in public and in private, you should give out that you believe that a human being is a true *ens per se*, and not an *ens per accidens*, and that the mind is united in a real and substantial manner to the body. You must say that they are united not by position or disposition, as you assert in your paper - for this too is open to objection and in my view, quite untrue - but by a true mode of union, as

²⁰ Plato, *The Phaedo*, (trans.) D. Gallup, p. 61.

²¹ Letter to More of 5 February, 1649; Sixth Set of Replies (AT VII 425-6; CSM II 287); Letter to Regius of January, 1642 (AT III 493; CSMK 206).

everyone agrees, though nobody explains what this amounts to, and so you need not do so either'. And in the same passage the philosopher continues by expressing the view that 'You could do so, however, as I did in my *Metaphysics*, by saying that we perceive that sensations such as pain are not pure thoughts of a mind distinct from a body, but confused perceptions of a mind really united to a body. For 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...' (AT III 493; CSMK 206).

In those remarks, it is evident that great importance is placed on the notion of the mind-body union as a single thing existing in its own right rather than on the notion of the mind-body union as a composition of two different substances (mind and body). This consideration naturally leads us to the verdict that the mind-body union as a single thing existing *per se* is itself a substance. This means that a human being is itself a substance, and not the product of the synthesis of an incorporeal soul and a corporeal body, which are two different substances. Descartes actually tries number of manoeuvres for the rehabilitation of the concept of the human being that had been apparently wounded and torn apart by his official dualistic ontology, as well as by his metaphysical arguments for the mind-body distinction. Once more, in another letter to Regius of December, 1641 Descartes emphatically rejects his follower's assertion that man is *ens per accidens*, that is, the human being is a composition of two distinct substances: [Y]ou say that a human being is an *ens per accidens*. You could scarcely have said anything more objectionable and provocative. The best way I can see to remedy this is for you to say.... you understood it to be an *ens per se*' (AT III 460; CSMK 200).²²

Both of these letters written by Descartes to Regius in December, 1641 and January 1642 constitute significant sources for the notion of the mind-body union in the Cartesian philosophy of mind. In these sources, the philosopher courageously tells his friend to change his view that the human being is an *ens per accidens*, that is, not an entity existing in its own right, since the unification of two different substances does not give rise to an essential unity but form a contingent unity. Rather, Descartes advises Regius to adopt the view that the human being, that is, the mind-body union is an *ens per se* - an entity in its own right (Ibid., and AT III 493; CSMK 206). Descartes deliberately seems to use the terms, namely 'substantial manner' and 'real manner' in these passages and in many others so as to convey the idea that the outcome of the unity of mind and body is itself a substance.²³ This is obvious from the fact that, in the course

²² Letter to Regius of December, 1641.

²³ Some experts interpret Descartes' notion of the mind-body union in terms of causal interaction; according to them, when Descartes maintains that mind and body are united, he actually means that they are capable of causal interaction, see for this line of thought, Margaret Wilson, *Descartes*, p. 219; Daisie Radner, 'Is There a Problem of Cartesian Interaction?', pp. 38-9; and idem., 'Descartes' Notion of the Union of Mind and Body', p.162. However, there is an other line of thought which explicitly holds the view that in Descartes mind-body union gives rise to a third category of substance, in addition to incorporeal and corporeal substances (mind and body). This view is defended by: Tad M. Schmaltz, 'Descartes and Malebranche on Mind and Mind-Body Union', p. 288; Paul Hoffman, 'The

of his discussion of substantial forms and real qualities, when the adjectives, 'substantial' and in particular 'real' are added or attributed to something, he in fact thinks that it is a substance. This is well illustrated in the Sixth Set of Replies, where the philosopher describes the notion of gravity that he held during his youth as follows: 'For example, I conceived of gravity as if it were some sort of real quality, which inhered in solid bodies; although I called it a 'quality', thereby referring it to the bodies in which it inhered, by adding that it was 'real' I was in fact thinking that it was a substance' (AT VII 441; CSM II 297). The strong version of the unity, the one is which the mind-body union is itself a substance, is mainly presented in scholastic terminology and overcomes the weak version of the unity; the one is which mind and body union is a composition of two different substances. Descartes' claim that '*the union which joins a human body and soul to each other is not accidental to a human being, but essential, since a human being without it is not a human being*' (AT III 508; CSMK 209, emphasis added) constitutes a decisive evidence for the notion of the mind-body union as *an ens per se*, i.e. a thing that exists in its own right, that is the substance.

4. Conclusion:

Descartes' account of the mind-body union deserves special attention. Although the philosopher, on the one hand, acknowledges a special relation of the human soul to its own body, he, on the other hand, argues in favour of the independent existence of the human soul from the body, from which immortality is entailed. Descartes as 'scientist' establishes the union of soul and body by relying upon the facts of experience, but on the other hand he as 'reflective thinkers' argues for the real distinction, and thus the possibility of the survival of the human soul, by means of the process of the philosophical or metaphysical contemplation.

Descartes insists that the human being, that is, the mind-body union is an *ens per se* (i.e., a thing in its own right) but not the combination of two distinct substances. He appears to be determined to elucidate a strong anti-Platonic conception of the mind-body union by making use of much stronger terms, for instance, mind is 'substantially', 'really', 'truly', and 'essentially' 'joined', 'intermingled' and 'united' with the body. The philosopher uses his famous disanalogy between the mind-body union and a sailor and his ship in order to illustrate the intimacy and substantiality of mind and body (AT VII 81; CSM II 56). Moreover, in his correspondence to Princess Elizabeth of 21 May, 1643, he declares the *primitiveness* of the concept of mind-body union in an epistemological sense of the term, as distinct from an ontological one. The notion of mind-body union is a primitive notion in so far as it capable of being understood

Unity of Descartes' Man', p. 346; L. J. Beck, *The Metaphysics of Descartes*, pp. 271-4; R. C. Richardson, 'The "Scandal" of Cartesian Interactionism', p.35; Janet Broughton and Ruth Mattern, 'Reinterpreting Descartes on the Notion of the Union of Mind and Body', p.27; Although Professor Cottingham draws our attention to a threefold distinction of the primitive notions in Descartes, he does not explicitly endorse the idea the mind-body union brings about a third substance in the Cartesian projects, See John Cottingham, 'Cartesian Trialism', pp. 127-32 and his *Descartes*, p. 127,

through itself. We acquire the knowledge of the union of mind and body in terms of its primitive notion (as primitive unity of mind-body), but not in terms of primitive notions of mind and body, which are two different things. What Descartes has in mind here is that the ordinary, pre-philosophical man, who never reflects upon the metaphysical arguments of the *Meditations* and thus lacks the knowledge of the nature of the mind and that of the body, is perfectly capable of conceiving of his own unified nature (as pure mind-body union) by means of the operation of the faculties of the imagination and the senses. It is, says Descartes to his royal friend, 'the ordinary course of life and conversation, and abstention from meditations ... that teaches us how we conceive of the union of the soul and the body (AT II 692; CSMK 227).²⁴ The study of metaphysical issues, in so far as they exercise the pure intellect, enables us to acquire the knowledge of the essence of the mind; and the study of the mathematical problems, in so far as they exercise the faculty of the imagination, enable us to attain to the knowledge of the essence of the body (the nature of corporeal bodies in general). Nevertheless, pre-philosophical life and everyday experiences help us to comprehend the knowledge of the essence of the mind-body union, as this exclusively exercises the senses. Descartes' recognition of the primitiveness of the concept of the mind-body union as an epistemological item is the most remarkable and original feature of his doctrine of the mind and body union.

Descartes' epistemological doctrine of the three primitive notions, and the idea that these primitive notions belong to different faculties and sciences, appears to be in harmony with his arguments for the real distinction between mind and body, and its implication that the human soul is immortal by its very nature. If the pre-philosophical man is capable of conceiving his own nature as the mind and body unity by the exercise of the senses, then it is perfectly possible for the Cartesian Mediator to conceive his own nature as pure thinking thing (*res cogitans*), whose nature is utterly different from the body, and to think of the possibility of the its survival after death through the exercise of the pure reason or metaphysical reflection.

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