

Descartes' *Passions of the Soul* and the Union of Mind and Body¹

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Abstract: I here address Descartes' account of human nature as a union of mind and body by appealing to *The Passions of the Soul*. I first show that Descartes takes us to be able to reform the naturally instituted associations between bodily and mental states. I go on to argue that Descartes offers a teleological explanation of body-mind associations (those instituted both by nature and by artifice). This explanation sheds light on the ontological status of the union. I suggest that it affords a way of understanding how mind and body form a true unit without compromising Descartes' dualism.

1. Introduction

Three distinct issues arise within Descartes' account of the union of mind and body constituting a human being. First, we can consider the interaction between body and mind whereby, upon one's body's being in a certain sort of state, one has a certain thought. (We can equally consider mind-body interaction whereby we effect a motion of the body through having a thought.) Second, we can consider *why* mind and body interact *as they do*. That is, we can consider the explanation of the specific associations between bodily states and thoughts. Finally, we can consider the ontological status of this union of mind and body, and in particular try to make sense of Descartes' claim that in the human being mind and body form a "true union" or an *ens per se*.

In this paper, I want to bring *The Passions of the Soul*, a work that has been widely disregarded by commentators, to bear on these issues. I will address the first of these issues only insofar as I want to take issue

¹ For the references to Descartes' works and their translations see the list of abbreviations below. If no translation is indicated, the translation is my own. My translations of the *Passions of the Soul* have benefited from Stephen Voss' edition of the work.

with a tacit assumption many commentators make about body-mind interaction.² Most readers of Descartes assume that the associations between states of mind and body are fixed and out of our control because they are instituted by nature. While this assumption might be a philosophically reasonable one, Descartes does not in fact subscribe to it. In his account of the regulation of the passions in the *Passions of the Soul*, Descartes maintains that we can reform the associations between bodily states and mental states. I bring this element of Descartes' account of the mind-body relationship into view in Section 2. This feature of Descartes' account, I go on to argue in Section 3, helps us to get clear on the second of these issues. For in his consideration of the reform of body-mind associations, Descartes effectively offers an explanation of *why* the associations are *as they are* in the first place. And his explanation is *teleological*: the associations between body and mind are as they are in virtue of their promotion of the *human good*. This explanation is, moreover, consistent with what Descartes writes about sensations in the Sixth Meditation. In turn, these two insights – our capacity for reforming body-mind associations and the teleological explanation of those associations – can help in addressing the third issue. That Descartes offers an explanation rules out his having a *simply* interactionist account of the mind-body union, whereby the union consists simply in the causal connections between mind and body which are themselves left unexplained. Moreover, the way the explanation runs affords a way of understanding how Descartes can maintain that mind and body form a unit without constituting a proper Cartesian substance and without compromising his dualism. I consider this claim in Section 4.

² That is, I will not consider the question of the nature of causation in play in this interaction. I believe the view I defend here has implications for our understanding of body-mind causation, but I cannot begin to lay out these implications here.

2. *Rejecting a tacit assumption:**The regulation of the passions and a dynamic mind-body relation*

Most readers of Descartes tacitly assume that the relation between mind and body is static.³ That is, they assume that the associations between a state of the pineal gland and a mental state are instituted by God, and that once God has instituted them, that is the way things stay: *nothing about those associations changes*.⁴ Although “God could have made the nature of man such that this particular motion in the brain indicated something else to the mind” (AT VII 88; CSM II 60), once God has crafted us to be the particular way we are it seems we stay that way. While we can apply ourselves in a wide variety of ways, all quite in keeping with our nature, we just immediately perceive things in accordance with the way we are originally configured. So, for example, we simply are so designed that we feel a pain in our foot when the pineal gland is oriented a certain way, and there is nothing we can do about it. We cannot change the particulars of our nature. Thus, while the initial associations instituted in us by God may be arbitrary, once we have been made that way, that element of arbitrariness disappears – these associations are fixed and cannot be changed over time, at least by us.⁵

There seems to be good reason – both textual and philosophical – for making this assumption. The position concerning sense perception that Descartes articulates in the Sixth Meditation and Replies to the Sixth Objections certainly seems to suggest that mental-physical associations are fixed. In the Sixth Meditation, in explaining how we come to feel a

³ Although it is not made explicit, this assumption is pervasive. In so far as it is assumed that there is a law-like relation between mental and physical states, it is equally assumed that those connections, once in place, remain unchanged. There are many commentators who expressly understand the associations between mental and physical states to be law-like. See Laywine (1999), 150 and Wilson (1978), 217 as good examples. The debate around the metaphysical consistency of mind-body interactionism also seems to presuppose this assumption. See Bedau (1986), O'Neill (1987), Radner (1971) and (1985), and Richardson (1982).

⁴ Hoffman (1991) is an exception to this view, as he expressly grants that mind-body associations can change for Descartes; see 169. Aliquie (1989) in his notes to the *Passions* remarks that Descartes thinks we can modify our instincts. See vol. III, 988. Neither, however, lays out Descartes' argument for that claim, as I will do here.

⁵ On this view, God could, of course, in his role as sustainer, change the associations he initially instituted in us. It does seem, however, that as a matter of fact he does not do so.

pain in our foot, Descartes describes a causal chain that extends from the motion of nerves in our foot to a motion in the brain. From that motion “nature has laid it down that [*qui institutus est a natura*] this motion should produce in the mind a sensation of pain, as occurring in the foot” (AT VII 87, CSM II 60). And, he continues, although we sometimes might feel a pain in the foot when there is no injury to the foot, this is natural “because a given motion in the brain must *always* [*semper*] produce the same sensation in the mind [...]. It is reasonable that this motion should *always* [*semper*] indicate to the mind a pain in the foot rather than in any other part of the body” (AT VII 88–89, CSM II 61; emphasis added).

Though we seem always to have the same sort of sensation when in a certain sort of physiological state, we can still correct for misperceptions we might have. In the Replies to the Sixth Objections, Descartes distinguishes three grades of sensation. The first grade is purely bodily, the effects of the world on our sense organs, and consequently on the rest of our body; animals have sensations in this sense. The second grade appears to be what is outlined in the Sixth Meditation; it “comprises all the immediate effects produced in the mind as a result of its being united with a bodily organ which is affected in this way” (AT VII 437, CSM II 294). The third grade of sensation “includes all the judgements we make about things outside us [...] judgements which are occasioned by the movements of these bodily organs” (AT VII 437, CSM II 295). In Descartes’ illustration of how we see a stick in water, it seems that the second grade is entirely fixed and that what changes is the third grade or our judgements. When we see a stick, light reflected off the stick affects our optic nerve, which in turn affects our brain (the first grade of perception). This movement then “leads to the second grade, which extends to the mere perception of the colour and light reflected from the stick; it arises from the fact that the mind is so intimately conjoined with the body that it is affected by the movements which occur in it” (AT VII 437; CSM II 295). From these sensory perceptions, Descartes goes on, we can form judgements:

But suppose that, as a result of being affected with this sensation of colour, I judge that a stick, located outside me, is coloured; and suppose that on the basis of the extension of the colour and its boundaries together with its position in relation to the parts of the brain, I make a rational calculation about the size, shape, and distance of the stick: although such reasoning is commonly assigned to the senses (which is why I have here referred it to the third grade of sensory response) it is clear that it depends solely on the intellect. (*Ibid.*)

Most of these judgements we have made “from our earliest years”, and so now we make them “at great speed because of habit, or rather we remember the judgements we have long made about similar objects; and so we do not distinguish these operations from simple sense-perception” (AT VII 438, CSM II 295). Though Descartes does not say so explicitly, it seems that he thinks that these *judgements* are what can be wrong and are what we can correct; the second grade of perception remains unchanged in our revised judgements. When we see a stick in water as bent, and when we see that same stick in water and judge that it only appears bent because of refraction, we have the same second grade sensations, the same sensations of color and light. That is, we can form different judgements, and so have different sensations of the third grade, on the basis of those second grade sensations. And in revising our judgements, we do not affect in any way the associations that exist naturally between mind and body.⁶

⁶ The account in the Second Meditation of how the meditator sees *men* on the square rather than automata points to the same idea. There, what he sees (second grade of sensation) are hats and coats. He further *judges* that these patterns of light and color are men, but he might well be wrong: they might be automata. See AT VII 32, CSM II 21. See also *Optics*, Discourse Six. Descartes there wants to draw an analogy between the way in which the blind man *judges* position, and the way in which we *judge* the shape and size of objects. In his discussion Descartes uses ‘judge’ quite liberally, though he also admits that our judgements are unreliable in part because of the high sensitivity to the shape of the eye of the images presented to the soul (AT VI 144, CSM I 175). For the purposes of this paper, I take the second grade of sensation to be of objects, for this does seem the most straight-forward reading. However, it does seem to me that Descartes remains ambiguous about the objects of these second grade sensations. Does Descartes maintain that we are sensing sticks in the second grade sensation? Or are we sensing patterns of light and color, which we then, in the third grade of sensation, refer to a stick, or a bent stick, or a man, that is, judge to be of one or the other of these things? Things get more complicated as we start to think of the senses other than sight. Do we smell meat? Or do we smell an aroma we refer to meat? It is not important for my point here to resolve this issue. One thing seems clear on either reading: the associations between physiological states and second grade sensations seem to be fixed.

There is, however, one puzzling turn of phrase which may suggest that even the second grade of sensation is variable. At the end of the Sixth Meditation the meditator remarks, “This consideration is the greatest help to me, not only for noticing all the errors to which my nature is liable, but also for enabling me to correct [*emendare*] or avoid [*vitare*] them without difficulty [*facile*]” (AT VII 89, CSM II 61). Here he is echoing an earlier remark: “Despite the high degree of doubt and uncertainty involved here, the very fact that God is not a deceiver, and the consequent impossibility of there being any falsity in my opinions which cannot be corrected [*emendandum*] by some other faculty supplied by God, offers me

Moreover, this assumption seems a philosophically reasonable one to hold. Certainly contemporary physicalists, as well as materialist contemporaries of Descartes such as Hobbes, insofar as they understand states of mind to be the result of a deterministic physiological process, suppose that a particular physiological state will always result in a certain mental state.⁷ And this view does seem in keeping with the common-sense position that we are just given to sense things in the way that we are. When I look out my window today, the trees (barring a few changing and fallen leaves), the patio table, the lounge chairs, the clothesline, all look the same as they did yesterday, the day before and so on. Indeed, one might think that the very constancy of our sense perception (along with an ability of abstraction, properly understood) is what allows us to identify objects in the way we do. Even though Descartes is a dualist, it is reasonable to think that he bears an equal burden of keeping with common sense in his account of sensation, and he can at least begin to meet that burden straightforwardly by insisting that the relations between mind and body be fixed. Moreover, issues of common sense and object identification aside, it also seems that if one attributes to Descartes the view that mind and body interact causally, this carries with it a commitment to the mind-body relations being fixed. For it does seem the ascription of a causal relation between two things requires that those two things stand in a necessary relation to one another.⁸

a sure hope that I can attain the truth even in these matters" (AT VII 80, CSM II 55f.). While *'emendare'* might well simply advert to our ability to correct for errors of nature through our judgements, it is also open to another reading, that we can literally reform the mind-body associations so that we sense differently. This possibility will prove more interesting in light of what I argue below. I thank Annette Baier for calling this passage to my attention.

⁷ While Hobbes does not make this claim explicitly, it does seem to be implied in his account of sensation. For Hobbes, our ideas are just bodily motions; different motions cause different ideas, and 'decay' of these motions, or 'obscuring' of them, lead to parallel changes in the quality of the ideas. It does not seem that Hobbes can admit that one sort of motion can cause one idea at one time and another idea at another. Indeed, he accounts for our dreams in terms of the restoration of sensory motions and claims that the distortions of dreams are due to these motions not being completely restored. See *Leviathan*, ch. 1–2 and *Human Nature*, ch. 1–3.

⁸ This at least seems to be the case for standard accounts of efficient causation. As noted earlier, my claims here about the interaction of mind and body have implications for our understanding of the nature of the causal relation between mind and body. If I am right, I bear the burden of articulating a sense of 'cause' that can accommodate the dynamics of mind-body interaction. While I am inclined to think a species of occasional causation is in play, I cannot undertake to flesh out

We might well expect Descartes' account of the passions to be similar, for, according to Descartes, the passions are not different in kind from sense perceptions (whether internal, such as hunger or pain, or external, of objects). In the *Principles* Descartes assimilates "the appetites of hunger, thirst, etc.; and similarly the emotions or passions of the soul (which do not consist solely in thought) [...]; and finally all sensations, such as pain, pleasure, light color, sounds, odors, tastes, heat, hardness, and the other tactile qualities"⁹. All of these are things we "experience in ourselves [...] which should be attributed neither solely to the mind nor solely to the body, and which [...] originate from the close and profound union of our mind with the body" (Pr. I, 48; AT IXB 23; MM 21–22). In the *Passions*, Descartes explains further that they are grouped together because all three arise through a certain "mediation of the nerves" (AT XI 345, PA aa.22): in all three, a particular bodily state makes it so the soul feels what it does.¹⁰ They differ only in the objects to which we refer these feelings: external sensations are referred to objects outside us; internal sensations, the "affections we feel as in our members and not as in objects outside us," are referred to "our body or some of its parts" (PA a.24; AT XI 346–47); and finally, the passions are "referred to the soul alone" (PA a.25; AT XI 347).¹¹ This similarity in structure and the difference in object are captured in the definition of the passions. They are:

perceptions or sensations or excitations of the soul which are referred [*qu'on rapporte*] to it in particular and which are caused, maintained and strengthened by some movement of the spirits. (PA a.27; AT XI 349.)

Thus, it would seem that the passions should admit of the same treatment as do sensations, at least as far as concerns questions of the relation of the mind and the body.

and defend this suggestion here. See Nadler (1994) for a helpful discussion of the distinction between occasional causation and a particular species of it, occasionalist accounts of causation.

⁹ While in this passage Descartes calls hunger an appetite, in Pr. IV a.190 he clarifies this language: "The nerves which extend to the stomach, esophagus, throat, and other interior parts intended to satisfy our natural needs form one of the internal senses, which is called 'natural appetite' [e.g. hunger and thirst]" (AT IXB 316; MM 277).

¹⁰ See also Pr. IV 189–191 ff.

¹¹ See also PA a.22: "All the perceptions I have not yet explained come to the soul by the mediation of the nerves, and there is between them this difference: that we refer [*rapporçons*] some to objects outside of us which strike our senses, others to our body, or to some of its parts, and finally others to our soul" (AT XI 345).

Moreover, in his treatment of the passions Descartes uses the same language of an “institution of nature” that we have just seen he employs in the Sixth Meditation. While the definition of the passions is cast in terms of a bodily state’s *causing* the perception that is the passion, the expression pervades his examples just to indicate the tie between the physiological state and the passion. So, if we feel apprehension upon seeing something “very unusual and very frightful”, it is because “simply in virtue of entering these pores, these spirits excite a particular movement in this gland which is *instituted by nature* to make the soul feel this passion” (PA a.36; AT XI 357; emphasis mine). Similarly, “abhorrence is instituted by nature to represent to the soul a sudden and unexpected death, so that, though it is sometimes only the touch of a little worm or the rustling of a trembling leaf or its shadow which produces abhorrence, one immediately feels as much excitation as if a very plain threat of death were being offered to the senses” (PA a.89; AT XI 394–95)¹², while “delight is particularly instituted by nature to represent the enjoyment of what delights as the greatest of all goods belonging to man-making one desire this enjoyment very ardently” (PA a.90; AT XI 395). We also feel joy and sadness with titillations and pains as a result of the institution of nature.¹³ While Descartes does not invoke the language of natural institution in the accounts he offers of each passion, it seems safe to say that his choice of which passion to describe in these terms is arbitrary rather than a matter of principle.

In the case of sensation, as we have seen, the associations between bodily states and states of mind seem to be fixed. According to Descartes, it seems that a certain bodily state always sends the same signal to

¹² It seems that here ‘abhorrence’ refers both to the passion, a species of desire, and to the physiological state that engenders that passion.

¹³ “What makes joy usually follow titillation [*chatouillement*] is that what we call a titillation or delightful sensation always consists in the fact that objects of the senses are exciting some movement in the nerves which would be capable of harming them, if they did not have enough strength to withstand it or the body were not well disposed. This produces an impression in the brain which, being instituted by nature to testify to this sound disposition and this strength, represents it to the soul as a good which belongs to it, insofar as it is united with the body, and so excites joy within it. [...] And what makes pain usually produce sadness is that the sensation we call pain always comes from some action so vigorous that it injures the nerves, so that, being instituted by nature to signify to the soul the damage the body receives by this action and its weakness in not having been able to withstand it, it [this pain] represents both of them to it [the soul] as evils which are always unpleasant to it [...]” (PA a.94; AT XI 399f.).

the soul. As we develop and learn things about the world, we may well be moved to make different judgements about things. As what we learn sinks in, the judgements we make as a result come so quickly that they appear to be automatic, but that does not stop them from being judgements. As we can revise the judgements we make from sensations, so it seems we regulate our passions, and thereby control what we feel.¹⁴ At the close of the *Passions of the Soul*, Descartes claims that “the chief use of wisdom lies in its teaching us to be the masters of our passions and to control them with such skill that the evils which they cause are quite bearable, and even become a source of joy” (PA a.212, AT XI 488), and this concern for the mastery of our passions informs the work as a whole.¹⁵

What concerns me here is whether Descartes' account of the regulation of the passions challenges the assumption that the relation between mind and body is static – that is, that the mind-body associations are fixed and out of our control. In order to answer this question we need to determine what is involved in our revising the perceptions of the importance of things proper to the passions. In what follows, I begin by considering Descartes' claim that any mastery we have of our passions must be achieved indirectly, for it can certainly appear that this indirect action amounts to just a mental process of critically reflecting on our perceptions of the importance of things to us and adjusting our actions accordingly, a process very much like that involved in correcting the judgements we make in the third grade of sensation. If this is so, then it would seem the account preserves the idea that the mind-body relation is fixed. I will argue, however, that his discussion of the passions goes somewhat differently. In what he says about the regulation of the passions, Descartes claims that we can do more than simply correct for our evaluations of things. We also have a limited capacity to *reform* the particular associations between the soul and the body. That is, while judging correctly does figure in Descartes' account of the regulation of the passions, he also claims that in *fully*

¹⁴ For Descartes, the passions cannot yet be full judgements, since for him judgements essentially involve the will. That the passions are not full Cartesian judgements need not preclude their being akin to the judgements proper to the third grade of sensation. Indeed, Malebranche articulates a similar idea in his *jugements naturels*. In *The Search After Truth*, this notion is first explicated in Book I, Chapter 7 – interestingly, with regard to sensations rather than the passions. However, as will become clear in what follows, we need to be quite careful, both about drawing this parallel, and if we do, how we do so.

¹⁵ See PA aa.45–50, 138, 144–48.

mastering our passions we change the way we *immediately* perceive the importance of things.¹⁶ In recommending that we regulate the passions in this way, Descartes is claiming that mind-body associations are changeable, and so that the relation of mind and body is dynamic. That is, we reform the associations between mind and body in such a way that we naturally feel, and so evaluate, things in the way that we should.

Let us then look more closely at what Descartes says about the regulation of the passions. If we start from Descartes' assertion early on that the soul can only regulate its passions indirectly, it can seem as if his account of the regulation of the passions is just like his account of how we correct for errors of perception. To see this, consider Descartes' justification of this claim. He begins by drawing a fundamental division in the functions of the soul: the soul can be either active or passive. On the one hand, its actions or volitions "come directly from our soul and seem to depend only on it" (PA a.17, AT XI 342), and as such are "absolutely in its [the soul's] power and can only indirectly be altered by the body" (PA a.41, AT XI 359). On the other hand, the soul in its passive function as perceiver depends upon the actions external to the soul which produce its perceptions, for "it is often not our soul that makes them such as they are, and because it always receives them from things that are represented by them" (PA a.17, AT XI 342). Descartes goes on to claim that these passive perceptions¹⁷ can only be changed by the soul indirectly. Descartes' reasons for this claim become clear through consideration of the exception he draws: in order to change those perceptions caused by the soul itself, such as our perception that we are withholding assent from an idea, all we need to do is to will something else, such as to affirm the idea. The soul then can only directly affect the perceptions it itself causes; so it cannot directly affect these passive perceptions just because it is *not* their total cause.¹⁸ It can, however, alter the effects of these passive perceptions on us. That is, it can alter what

¹⁶ Again, Aliqu   (1989) and Hoffman (1991) are alone among contemporary commentators in recognizing this claim on Descartes' part. I hope in my discussion to clarify Descartes' claim and to bring out its significance for Descartes' metaphysics.

¹⁷ Descartes speaks of passions in general – the passive perceptions I refer to here – which include internal and external sensations, and the passions in the specific sense. For the sake of clarity, I reserve the term 'passions' for the passions in the specific sense.

¹⁸ Rozemond's (1999) account of how our perceptions are caused allows for the mind to be a partial cause of its sensory perceptions. See in particular 458ff.

we make of these perceptions, or its judgements. Take the case of our seeing a straight stick in water as bent. While we cannot change the way in which water refracts light, or the way in which light impacts on our eye and brain, we can revise the judgements we form upon being impacted in that way, and moreover this revision of our judgement about the stick enables us to revise other judgements that depend on this one. Thus, insofar as we need only revise our judgements in order to correct for the way we sense things, the effects of the “indirect action” of the soul here seem to be contained within the realm of thought. How does this analysis translate to the case of the passions? Is it the case that all the soul can do in order to regulate the passions is to revise its judgements?

It will be helpful to begin by extending the Sixth Replies analysis of sensation to the passions. For both sensations and passions, the first grade is physiological. In this regard, animals can be said to have passions just as well as sensations.¹⁹ Just as second grade sensations involve our perceiving patterns of light and color, second grade passions involve our perceiving something's benefit or harm to us. As Descartes writes with regard to the enumeration of the passions:

I note that objects which move the senses do not excite in us different passions on the basis of [*à raison de*] all their diversities, but only on the basis of the different ways in which they can harm or profit us, or better, in general be important to us. And the use of all the passions consists in this alone: that they dispose the soul to want those things which nature tells us are useful, and to persist in this volition [...]. This is why in order to enumerate them, it is necessary only to examine, in order, in how many different ways that are important to us, our senses can be moved by their objects. (PA a.52; AT XI 372.)²⁰

According to Descartes, not only do we feel the passions we do in accordance with the ways in which things are important to us, but also it seems that we sense this importance through the passions. For it is through the passions that nature tells us what is useful to us. So, in wondering, we see the object of wonder as new or unexpected, due to “the impression in one's brain that represents the object as rare and consequently worthy of being accorded great consideration” (PA a.70; AT XI

¹⁹ See *Discourse* Pt V (AT VI 57–58, CSM I 140f.); letter to the Marquess of Newcastle, 23 November 1646, (AT IV 574, CSMK 303).

²⁰ There may be a small disanalogy here if we understand second grade sensations to be of objects. See n. 6 above. While in feeling a passion we do perceive *a thing's* value to us, at the center of our perception is the way we are affected by its value to our well-being.

380). Similarly, we feel love “when a thing is represented to us as good with respect to us”, and hate “when it is represented to us as bad or harmful” (PA a.56; AT XI 375). And just as the third grade of sensation involves the will’s making a judgement about things on the basis of its second grade sensations, so too does the second grade of passions dispose the will to action. The passions “dispose the soul to want those things which nature tells us are useful”. We might think that the third grade of passions includes these dispositions to actions.²¹

At first it seems as if Descartes’ account of the regulation of the passions *is* wholly similar to his account of our correcting our sensory errors. For we begin to regulate our passions by calling other things to mind:

Our passions too cannot be directly excited or displaced by the action of our will, but they can be so indirectly through the representation of things which are usually joined with the passions we want to have and are contrary to the passions we want to reject. (AT XI 362; PA a.45.)

In order to stop feeling the way one does and to feel otherwise, “it is not sufficient to have the will to do so, but one must apply oneself to consider the reasons, objects, or precedents which persuade” one to judge that things are otherwise than the passion suggests (AT XI 363; PA a.45). That is, one must reflect upon, with the aim of revising, the evaluations proper to the passions. These revised evaluations would then in turn come with changes in our dispositions to act.²²

²¹ Here I am not entirely clear where to situate our dispositions within Descartes’ framework. On the one hand, as a disposition does not yet seem to be an act of will, they do not seem to fit squarely into the third grade of passion, that is, if we take the third grade of passion to involve an affirmation or denial of our perceptions. On the other hand, our dispositions to act do seem to be distinct from our representations of the importance of things, and so the second grade of passions. It does seem that some of these difficulties can be resolved if we settle on the reading I bracket for the purposes of this paper in n. 6 above. Forming a disposition to act would then be akin to forming an idea that something is the case. Both would require an act of will, and so could be called a judgement, though such a judgement would be different from those wherein we act on our dispositions, or affirm or deny the content of our ideas.

²² Here one again confronts the question of whether the passions are judgements, for if they are not yet judgements, how is the evaluation proper to them revisable? Perhaps the parallel with the three grades of sensation breaks down here. I cannot pursue this question here. It is clear, nonetheless, that Descartes *does* think that we can revise not just our disposition to act but also our passionate evaluations.

Yet while revising our judgements does seem to be sufficient for us to correct for the way we sense things, in the case of the passions such critical reflection upon our passions appears insufficient to change what we are feeling and so too to change our dispositions to act. The soul must also work to counteract those feelings (or at least those we don't want to have) *by affecting the physiology of the body*. So, in contrast with the case of sensation, it appears that such reasoning *cannot by itself* correct for what we are feeling, for the physiological component of the passions not only causes what we are feeling but also strengthens and maintains it, and "until this excitation has ceased they remain present to our thought" (PA a.46; AT XI 363).

In the case of the passions, our process of reflection often leaves us feeling differently. According to Descartes,

the whole activity of the soul consists in the fact that solely by willing something it brings it about that the little gland to which it is closely joined moves in the manner required to produce the effect corresponding to this volition. (PA a.41, AT XI 360.)²³

In thinking of the "reasons, objects and precedents" that counter our passions, we bring about a movement in the pineal gland, which in turn affects the movement of the spirits and the blood.²⁴ And just as those thoughts counter those perceptions proffered by the passion we feel, so does their associated physiology counter the physiology proper to the passion. Thus, we can effectively neutralize the passion by engendering movements internal to the body opposed to those engendered by the passions, thereby changing the course of the spirits. Presumably, this change of course of the spirits, resulting from the combination of the felt passion and the will's action on it, also puts a different thought

²³ In PA a.18 Descartes distinguishes two sorts of volitions: those "which have as an end the soul itself, as when we will to love God or in general to apply our thought to some object that is not material", and those "which have as an end our body, as when, from the mere fact that we have a volition to take a walk, it follows that our legs move and we walk" (AT XI 343). While it may be natural here to assume that Descartes in a.41 is speaking only of the latter sort of action of the soul, he does claim to be describing the *whole* of its activity. Also apparently missing from the catalogue is the action of the will in judgement.

²⁴ These changes can occur at the micro-level in the form of changes within the brain, as when the soul chooses to remember something (PA a. 42) or to imagine something it has never seen before (PA a.43), or they can extend to the macro-level in the form of gross physical adjustments, albeit engendered by micro-level changes, as when the soul chooses to walk (PA a.43).

in the mind – at least it does insofar as movements within the body affect the pineal gland and motions of the pineal gland are correlated with thoughts – and this new thought could conceivably be a new passion.²⁵ Then in feeling differently, we would be disposed to act differently.²⁶

Nothing in what I have presented so far would seem to argue against a picture in which associations between mind and body are fixed. In the case of the regulation of the passions, we have a slightly more complex picture than we had in the case of sensations. Reasoning alone cannot correct for misguided passions, as it seems to be able to in the case of sensations. For insofar as the physiological states proper to the passions are maintained, so too are the passions themselves. In regulating its passions, the soul's appeal to other sorts of perceptions – reasons, objects, precedents – engenders a new bodily feeling. Bringing these to mind results in those physiological changes that serve to neutralize the felt passion and get its associated dispositions to act out of our mind.²⁷ Despite these complications, it seems clear that there is a connection between the internal movements of the body and the thoughts or perceptions in the soul. Either the movements of the body can “cause” certain perceptions – passions for example – giving the soul occasion to take action on them, or thoughts are associated with bodily movements so that by bringing a thought to mind we engender correlated physiological changes. There is nothing to suggest that these connections ever change or are in any way within our control. Indeed, the picture seems a

²⁵ For an account of the coursing of the spirits to and from the pineal gland with respect to the passions, see J.-M. Beyssade (1983). Gueroult (1985) also offers an account of this aspect of Descartes' account of the regulation of the passions.

²⁶ The task of neutralizing a strong passion is not an easy one, and not every effort of the will will “have the strength to change the course of the spirits” (PA a.47; AT XI 366). Indeed sometimes “the most the will can do while this excitation [of a strong passion] is in its full strength is not to consent to its effects and to restrain many of the movements to which it disposes the body” (PA a.46, AT XI 364). With these strong passions, it seems, we can only control our actions with the strength of will required to ignore our passionate inclinations.

²⁷ While it may seem that a.46 argues against this reading insofar as it outlines the limits of the soul's ability to control its passions, I take Descartes here to be pointing simply to a problem of fluid dynamics. Sometimes, turning our attention away to other thoughts just does not settle us down. In these cases, we have to rely on our capacity for intentional action, for we can still refrain from acting as the passions dispose us.

more plausible one if the relations between mental and physical states are fixed.

The possibility for a dynamic relation of mind and body arises out of the distinction Descartes draws between two ways in which thoughts and the movements of the gland can be linked with one another. The connections between thoughts and the movements of the gland, and so the physiological movements of the body that those movements of the gland effect, can either be natural or be instituted by habit. So, for example, in the title to a. 44 he asserts that “each volition is naturally joined to some movement of the gland, but through artifice or habit we may join it to others” (AT XI 361). Again in article 50, he asserts that “although each movement of the gland seems to have been joined by nature to each of our thoughts from the beginning of our life, we may all the same join them to others through habit” (AT XI 368).

What does this distinction between natural and habitual institution amount to? What he means by natural institution is familiar enough: natural connections between thoughts and movements seem to be simply part of our natural constitution. Thus, the enlargement of our pupils is joined by nature to our wanting to regard distant objects rather than to our wanting to enlarge our pupils (PA a.44, AT XI 362). Similarly, movements that represent objects to the soul, and so occasion thoughts of particular objects, can also be naturally joined to the thoughts proper to passions. This natural relation in turn entails that there are some objects that naturally enjoin us to feel in a certain way; perhaps, growling dogs naturally inspire fear in us, or “the touch of a little worm or the rustling of a trembling leaf or its shadow [...] produces abhorrence” (PA a.89, AT XI 394f).

But what is an habitual institution? Descartes claims that we can somehow move beyond our natural constitution by acquiring these new habits. So, humans can come to associate certain thoughts with previously non-associated movements, as we do, for example, when we learn to speak a language. According to Descartes, “the habit which we have acquired in learning to speak has made it that we have joined the action of the soul, which by the mediation of the gland can move the tongue and lips, with the meaning of the words which follow these movements, rather than with the movements themselves” (PA a.44, AT XI 362). We do not start out associating meanings with the movements of our mouth. Indeed, naturally joined to those movements is just the will to move the mouth. As we learn to speak, however, we come to associate our desire to impart a certain meaning with those movements whereby we form with our mouth the words that convey that mean-

ing.²⁸ In his treatment of the regulation of the passions, Descartes endorses just *this* kind of habit formation.

I want to be completely clear on what Descartes intends by habit formation here, for Descartes thinks there are three points at which we might form habits. First, we might train ourselves physiologically, in much the same way that parrots are trained to speak and dogs are trained to hunt. Descartes alludes to this method only briefly in the *Passions*, at the end of a.50. There he writes: “For, since we can with a little effort, change the movements of the brain in animals deprived of reason, it is clear that we can do so even better in men” (AT XI 370). I will say little more than this about this method here. Second, we might alter the manner in which we are disposed to respond to our passions, whether this be to think other thoughts or to act on our passions. Third, we might come to feel things differently – that is, to immediately perceive things as important to us in a new way. This third sort of habit formation would require that we re-institute the connection between the movements of the animal spirits and a perception. The sort of control at issue will differ depending on which sort of habit we cultivate. Training our bodies to respond in certain ways does not affect the mind-body union. What we need to focus on are the second and third methods. If the habit is to be instituted in such a way that it re-associates perceptions and dispositions, then our naturally instituted constitution remains intact and what changes are the judgements we make about things. If we are rather to reform the naturally instituted connection between bodily movements and perceptions (or perhaps the combinations of perceptions and dispositions to respond), then this reformation will involve changing the particulars of the union of mind and body. Thus, for example, when we learn to stand up to growling dogs in

²⁸ It might seem from this example that Descartes could be suggesting that we develop mental habits, so that new thoughts come to be associated with physical movements through a chain of mental associations. On this alternative interpretation, I form a habit of associating the meaning of a word with the will to move my mouth to form that word, and that will to move my mouth is naturally associated with the movement of my mouth. However, in the letter to Chanut of 1 February 1647, Descartes asserts a position that involves no such intermediary step: “When we learn a language, we connect the letters or the pronunciation of certain words, which are material things, with their meanings, which are thoughts, so that when we later hear the same words, we conceive the same things, and when we conceive the same things, we remember the same words” (AT IV 604, CSMK 307). When we have learned a language, our intentions to convey a meaning are just immediately joined to the movements through which we form our words. See also PA a.50.

the former way we still are afraid of them; we just act on that fear differently. In the latter way, learning to stand up to growling dogs involves coming to see these dogs not as fearful but rather as, say, all talk and no action. Descartes actually proposes both these methods for changing our habits and so regulating our passions.

The passages we have looked at earlier here provide evidence that Descartes believes we can acquire new dispositions to respond to our passions. We have seen that he thinks we can control our passions by thinking of the reasons we should feel differently. Thinking such thoughts has a real effect on our physiology and so can help dampen the passions needing to be controlled. Equally, having such thoughts can also dispose us to act differently. We might well in part combat our fear, for example, by giving ourselves reasons to stay still rather than running away. Such reasons would serve at least to dampen the bodily urge to flee that we feel in fear. There is no reason to think that what starts as a conscious effort on our part cannot become a matter of habit. So, we might well get in the habit of thinking that it is best when afraid to remain and face what threatens us. For instance, when we do find ourselves confronted with something like a dog, we may well be afraid, but we will stand still instead of running. But changing the way we respond to the passions need not be this involved. Indeed, because the passions do dispose us to act, the first thing we must do in getting our passions under control is to abstain from acting in the way in which we are disposed.²⁹ Descartes thinks we would do quite well to get in the habit of simply postponing any actions we might be inclined to take until the heat of the moment has passed.

While Descartes does allow a large part of regulating the passions to lie in controlling the actions that result from our feeling what we do, changing the way we are prone to act is not the whole story. Indeed, in order to change our responses to the passions in the way I have just outlined we must already have a good sense that we ought not to be feeling the way we do. And so, while controlling our behavior is a good first step, if we were to master our passions fully we should simply cease to be afraid, say, when confronted with things of which we ought not to be afraid. If we were to master our fear of dogs, for example, then a dog would no longer cause the passion of fear in us.

In this regard, Descartes also maintains that the regulation of the passions occurs through a reformation of those associations that exist

²⁹ See PA aa.46, 211.

between a physiological state and a perception or passion.³⁰ As noted above, Descartes adverts to this sort of rehabilitation in a.44 and at the beginning of a.50. The point is reinforced in the discussion of a.50, where Descartes not only repeats the point made in a.44 about how we come to find words significant but also remarks that we often find ourselves, after “having unwittingly come across something very foul in a dish we were savoring, [...] only able thereafter to look upon such a dish with horror, whereas we had eaten it before with pleasure” (AT XI 369). His aim here is to show that it only takes one instance to change the way we feel towards something. He again advocates the reformation of body-mind associations as a method of self-control at the end of the *Passions* in a.211:

I have included among those remedies [to avoid the misuse and excess of the passions] the forethought and diligence through which we can correct our natural faults by striving to separate within ourselves the movements of the blood and spirits from the thoughts to which they are usually joined. (AT XI 486.)

Indeed, it seems that the preferred means of controlling ourselves, insofar as we are emotional beings who take action and make judgements based on our emotions, is to separate in ourselves the physiological state from the thought, the two aspects of the passion which are ordinarily associated with one another. For after presenting this method, Descartes goes on to describe a “general remedy for the passions” available to those who are not practiced enough to implement this one: the method of refraining from acting as the passions dispose us.³¹ If we are able to “separate within ourselves” our thoughts from the physiological states that have engendered them, we then, presumably, want to re-institute a connection between a bodily state and a mental state such that

³⁰ This sort of habit formation has been long neglected by commentators. Certainly, commentators focusing on sense perception have not noticed the relevant passages, but even those who do consider the passions, such as Gueroult (1984) and Voss (1994), do not remark upon them. Again, Hoffman (1991) and Aliquié (1989) are the exceptions here.

³¹ He writes: “[W]hat can always be done on such an occasion, and what I think I can set down here as the most general remedy for all the excesses of the passions and the easiest to put into practice, is this: when one feels the blood stirred up like that, one should take warning, and recall that everything presented to the imagination tends to deceive the soul, and to make the reasons for favoring the object of its passion appear to it much stronger than they are, and those for opposing it much weaker. And when the passion favors only things whose execution admits of some delay, one must abstain from making any immediate judgement about them, and distract oneself by other thoughts until time and rest have calmed the excitation in the blood.” (PA a.211, AT XI 487.)

it conforms to our “firm and determinate judgements bearing upon the knowledge of good and evil”, as these are the soul’s “proper weapons” for regulating the passions (PA a.48, AT XI 367). Thus, we are, in effect, to reform ourselves in such a way that we immediately see things as they are and evaluate them properly. This suggestion for the regulation of the passions seems to be the culmination of the principles articulated earlier in the *Passions* in the title to a.44 and the beginning of a.50. In this reforming of the naturally instituted associations between bodily states and mental states, in *this* rehabilitation, we find a conception of a dynamic relation of mind and body, one in which the associations between bodily states and thoughts are not fixed but changeable.

In claiming that we can rehabilitate ourselves in this way Descartes is proposing a third point of rehabilitation. He is not claiming simply that we can re-train our bodies so that upon being confronted with a particular thing, we react differently physiologically. Nor is he claiming simply that we can come to form new habits of thought, or dispositions to act, upon being affected in a particular way. He does allow that we can rehabilitate ourselves in each of these ways. His claim in a.50 that animals can be retrained and that we can certainly do whatever animals can at least suggest the former. The articles (PA aa.40–49) concerning our ability to consider the ‘reasons, objects and precedents’ which argue against our passionate evaluations and to control our actions demonstrate he allows the latter. Neither of these ways of rehabilitating ourselves entail that the associations between bodily and mental states themselves be changeable. However, the claim of a.211, along with the claims of a.44 and a.50, goes further. There he is suggesting that we can re-institute at least some of the associations themselves. Insofar as he claims we can rehabilitate ourselves in this way, Descartes claims that associations between mental and physical states are changeable.

It is worth noting that, in maintaining that we need to separate “the movements of the blood and spirits from the thoughts to which they are usually joined”, Descartes might appear to be controverting what he maintains as a central principle of the *Passions*:

So as to put in a few words all the points that might be added regarding the different effects or different causes of the passions, I shall content myself with repeating the principle which underlies everything I have written about them – namely, that our soul and body are so linked that once we have joined some bodily action with a certain thought, the one does not occur thereafter without the other occurring too; but we do not always join the same actions to the same thoughts. (PA a.136; AT XI 428.)

Descartes here maintains that while within each person the associations between bodily states and thoughts may be particular to them – for example, some people are unable to bear the smell of roses, while others are scared of cats – still, once a bodily state is joined to a thought, the association endures.³² So stated, this principle seems to be an expression of the assumption of a fixed mind-body relation. There is, however, one crucial difference. While Descartes' statement of principle may seem to express the standard reading of 'natural institution', in that statement he maintains that it is *we*, and not Nature, who join a bodily state to a thought. I do think Descartes' counsel for regulating the passions can be squared with the principle he says underlies all he has written about the passions by appealing to this agency on our part. Descartes' language consistently suggests that the associations between states of mind and states of body are achieved through some agency on our part (see PA aa.44, 50, 211, as well as the second half of a.107 in this regard) and so can be something over which we do have some control.³³ We may well begin with a certain naturally instituted union of mind and body, but the thoughts we are given to have through this natural institution can misrepresent things. It is up to us to reflect upon the thoughts we find ourselves having about the importance of things to us, to consider the "reasons, objects and precedents" that bear on those evaluations, and to change our behavior accordingly. We can, however, also affect the immediate evaluations we make about the importance of things to us.³⁴

There is another concern one might have. The account of the relation between mind and body as dynamic is, as I have already remarked, at odds with remarks Descartes makes about the relation of mind and body in sensation. If I am right about how to read Descartes on the regulation of the passions, one might well ask about the reason for this gap between the passions and sensation. The first thing to note is that the gap might not be as big as it initially appears. When he turns to

³² See also PA aa.44, 50, and 107 for other statements of this principle.

³³ This point requires a rethinking of just what 'natural institution' is usually taken to mean. I cannot begin to work through this point, here, however. I do offer some preliminary thoughts on this matter in my "The Structure of the *Passions of the Soul* and the Union of Mind and Body".

³⁴ That we can do so does not contradict what Descartes says earlier about the limits on the soul's ability to regulate its passions. For in changing mind-body associations, the soul is still not directly affecting its passions. Rather it is changing the way in which it is inclined to be affected immediately by the world.

senses other than sight – such as taste, as he does in PA a.50 – Descartes does seem to allow for our reinstating the associations between physiological states and thoughts. Is it possible that Descartes, once he was compelled to think about the passions, might have revised his views about sensation more generally? Perhaps he might have allowed that insofar as our judgements in sensation – about things like sticks in water, or pains in amputated limbs – become habitual, they do affect the way we sense things so that we elide any intermediary steps. Or would he maintain that some sensations, those of external objects, are in an important way different from the passions? Perhaps, for instance, our apprehension of objects is not open to revision in the same way as our apprehension of the importance of things to us. It does seem that, even though we know better, we cannot help but perceive a stick in water as bent. I will be better able to answer these questions in the next section, but for now I will remark that this anti-parallel in Descartes' discussion does accord with common sense. Our sensations of objects are more stable than our passions and even our tastes, which do seem changeable. While we regularly do things such as overcoming our fears of dogs, say, we still sense the same dogs before us. Equally, we can come to like people who once put us off, but we recognize them on sight as the same people they were before.

It is also worth noting that Louis La Forge, in his *Traité de l'esprit de l'homme*, finds this same distinction in Descartes. La Forge claims that for Descartes some body-mind associations are fixed while others are changeable. Moreover, he claims that in the latter case it is *we* who effect the changes in mind-body associations. La Forge first admits that there is some aspect of the relation between mind and body which we can change: “the relation of mind and body [...] is very constant, but nevertheless subject to a certain sort of change” and “we remark that our will has the power to join our thoughts to other movements than those to which they were joined in the first place”³⁵. He then concedes that there are some associations we cannot change – those that are naturally instituted by God. There are other associations, however, for which we are responsible and which are thus, in some limited sense, voluntary. These

³⁵ See La Forge (1666): “[...] la liason de l'Esprit & du Corps [...] est tres constante, & neanmoins sujette à quelque sort de changement” (208) and “nous remarquons que notre volonté a le pouvoir de joindre nos pensées à d'autres mouvemens que ceux auxquels elles ont esté jointes la premiers fois” (212). Note too that in these cases La Forge also assigns us agency in joining thoughts to bodily movements.

are the associations that are changeable.³⁶ While I am not sure that this is a satisfactory way of explicating the anti-parallel, it is clear that La Forge, too, thinks that there is a kind of dynamics to the relation of mind and body and that this fact is due to the control we have over the associations between mental and physical states.

*3. Implications of a dynamic mind-body relation:
an explanation of mind-body associations*

I have argued that the tacit assumption that Descartes holds that the relation between mind and body is fixed and out of our control is not wholly warranted textually. While his discussion of sense perception is consistent with this assumption, as is indeed much of his account of the passions, there is an aspect of Descartes' account of the regulation of the passions which suggests that he thinks we have a capacity to reform the associations between mental and physical states. It thus seems that the mind-body relation, for Descartes, is in some respects dynamic rather than fixed. I now want to consider the implications of understanding the mind-body relation as dynamic for resolving the interpretive problems surrounding Descartes' conception of the union of mind and body. In this section, I consider the question of the explanation of mind-body associations. In the next section, I turn to the question of the ontological status of the union.

If I am right that, for Descartes, the relationship between mind and body is dynamic, then there is a clear need to explain why mental-physical associations are reformed as they are. And it would make sense for this explanation to serve just as well for those associations we have naturally. What then is this explanation? In the rest of this section, I draw this explanation out of Descartes' account of the regulation of the passions and I show that this explanation is in keeping with Descartes' account of sensation in the Sixth Meditation.

We first need to consider what Descartes thinks should guide us in our regulation of the passions, and in particular in our reformation of body-mind associations. In this regard, the first thing to recall is that the passions serve to represent the ways in which "things can harm or profit us or, generally, be important to us" (PA a.52, AT XI 372). So in coming to feel a different passion in a certain situation, we come to represent the importance of things to us differently.

What might affect the way we perceive the importance of things? First, we might recognize that our passions have exaggerated or misrepresented our good in some way. Although in some cases we might do well to regulate our passions just by cor-

³⁶ La Forge (1666), 215, 226ff. La Forge does not expressly align this division with the distinction between sensations and passions. Indeed, he suggests that some sensations and some passions will fall into each category. It is enough for my point here that he too sees the changeability of body-mind associations as consistent with Cartesian principles.

recting our initial inclinations to act, other cases seem to require that we *do* reform mind-body associations. For instance, on Descartes' account, when we first come across something new, we feel wonder as we appreciate its newness to us. As we come to be better acquainted with it, however, we should cease to feel the wonder we first felt and come to feel differently, in accordance with how that thing might be important to us. It is easy to imagine that upon our first encounter with a boa constrictor we find ourselves impressed with its immense size. Yet as we familiarize ourselves with the snake, what once struck us as new is new no longer, and, moreover, we realize that this same size poses a real threat to us. Here, what was new becomes more commonplace, and we move on to feel the fear that is in keeping with that snake's power to crush us. Similarly, for Descartes, although the "natural use" of the passions is "to incite the soul to consent and contribute to actions which can serve to preserve the body or render it more perfect in some way" (PA a.137, AT XI 430), as we develop we move beyond considerations of our bodily good in having the passions that we do. Indeed, in the story Descartes tells about our first passions, we originally feel love not only *upon* there being a nutriment particularly well-suited to maintaining life flowing through the blood but also *for* that nutriment-rich blood (PA a.107). He tells similar stories about our first feelings of sadness, joy, hate and desire, and these too make the original object of those passions some bodily condition.³⁷ But it is surely not the case that, as developed human beings, we feel love for our blood. I suspect that we are rather indifferent towards our blood. Instead, we love other humans, and perhaps our pets or other animals. In Descartes' view, while our thoughts are different in these cases, the physiological states associated with each are similar. Here too he thinks that we have come to join a new thought – one different than that with which the movement of the gland was originally joined – with a certain movement of the pineal gland.

From these cases, we can arrive at an explanation for our reform of the associations between mind and body. It seems that it is our conception of our *good* that guides us in joining a physiological state to a thought different from that with which it was originally joined. We come to feel fear upon being confronted with a boa constrictor just because we have recognized that the boa can harm us. We come to love other people rather than our blood just because in our adult lives we recognize our good as involving more than mere bodily preservation.³⁸ That is, we come to institute new associations between bodily states and mental states just as we come to rethink our good. But this consideration of our good does not just explain why we move to reform body-mind associations; it also explains why we reform them in the way that

³⁷ On my reading of Descartes, the feeling proper to a passion is not separable from the object of that passion. The passions are our perceptions of the importance of *things* to us. Further discussion of the representationality of the passions would take me too far afield here.

³⁸ See PA aa.137–144. While the passions are given to the soul to help preserve and perfect the body, and presumably it tries to preserve this aim in regulating its passions, the good of the body is only one of its concerns. Insofar as the passions belong to the soul, the soul is equally concerned with getting clear on whether the things for which we feel our passions are "truly good" and "truly bad".

we do. For a particular sort of thought comes to be joined to a particular bodily state just *because of* our conception of our good.

Indeed, in the *Passions* Descartes offers just this sort of explanation of our *first* passions – that is, those we feel by nature – in the natural history he provides in aa.107–111 and to which I adverted above. Not only do these passions – those the soul “had when it began to be joined to our body” (PA a.107, AT XI 407) – like all passions, represent the importance of their objects to us, they also represent what they do *because* we have identified our good with the good of our body. This explanation comes out most clearly in the case of love. There, the blood’s containing some “some aliment more suitable than the usual for maintaining the heat which is the principle of life [...] *was cause for the soul to join itself by will* with this aliment, that is, to love it” (PA a.107, AT XI 407; emphasis added).³⁹ It is hard to know what Descartes means here, but the context of this article (and those that follow) suggest that Descartes wants to claim that it is in the soul’s recognition of this nutriment as good for the body, and in its taking the body’s good to be valuable, that the association between physiology and thought proper to love is instituted. The soul’s awareness of the body’s condition is on its own insufficient for the soul’s having the feelings it does. It is only once the soul “joins itself by will” with the physiological state of the body that it feels love.⁴⁰ What might lead the soul to join itself by will in this way? Pre-

³⁹ I am here deviating from the Voss (and the CSM) translation, which renders the crucial expression ‘de volonté’ in “ce qui était cause que l’âme joignait à soit de volonté cet aliment”, and in aa.79–80 on love, as ‘in volition’. While Voss aims to translate the expression in an interpretation-neutral way, ‘in volition’ renders a rather commonplace expression opaque. I am following Aliquié who reads ‘de volonté’ in this context as equivalent to ‘par volonté’. See Aliquié (1989), 1012, n.2. This reading is the natural one. The discussion of a.80 explicating the expression makes clear that in love we consider something that is not part of our nature to form one thing with us. That is, by will, through reconceiving ourselves and our relation to others, we effectively engender a new thing. Descartes writes that by ‘de volonté’ he means “the consent by which one considers oneself from the present moment as joined with what one loves, in that one imagines a whole of which one thinks oneself only a part, and the thing loved another” (AT XI 387). Moreover, translating ‘volonté’ as ‘will’ rather than ‘volition’ accords with standard French usage, both in the seventeenth century and today. Corneille, for instance, writes of a “changement de volonté” whereby he clearly means a change of will, and not a change of a faculty of volition. See Corneille (1660), 50; “Nous devons toutefois prendre garde que ce consentement ne vienne pas par un simple changement de volonté, mais par un événement qui en fournisse l’occasion.” For a range of examples in evidence of this claim consult the ARTFL database *Trésor de la langue française*, searching for the expression ‘de volonté’ in the years 1600–1700. The homepage for the site is: <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/ARTFL/databases/TLF/>.

⁴⁰ This reading raises a number of issues that I cannot address fully here. Let me sketch out what I take to be the central points. First, this reading suggests that Descartes draws a distinction between the soul’s having a kind of receptivity to the state of the body and the *institution* of an association between bodily state

sumably, it conceives of the body's condition as good. And so, in this originary case, this conception of our good, as of a piece with the body's good, explains its feeling love when it does. Descartes tells a similar story about our first feelings of the other primitive passions (with the exception of wonder). The blood's lacking such a nutritive aliment causes the soul's first feelings of sadness, the body's being well-nourished causes its first feelings of joy, and so on. The particular states of the body in these original instances of our passions are not merely causes of the soul's having the feelings it does. They are also *reasons* for the soul's feeling things in the way it does. The soul feels the passion it does because the physiological state in which it finds the body has value for it in some way. Through this evaluation the soul institutes the association between physiological state and mental state that it does.

While I have developed this interpretation of the explanation of the associations between mind and body largely from the *Passions of the Soul*, it is also supported by the Sixth Meditation account of sensation.⁴¹ There, recall, the meditator explains that, while it is through these internal sensations that we learn something is amiss in our body, it is not that these sensations impart information on the body's condition from which we then draw inferences. We do not look upon our bodies from a distance – “perceive the damage purely by the intellect” – as a sailor inspects his ship, independently judging its condition. Rather, we “feel pain when the body is hurt”. We

and mental state. Clearly this distinction challenges the standard reading of ‘natural institution’. I want to maintain, however, that in the *Passions* Descartes works out in much more detail just what this ‘natural institution’ entails, and what he says is consistent with this reading. I cannot defend this claim here, however. Second, this reading suggests that the soul, rather than God, is responsible for these naturally instituted associations. Here too, the standard reading is challenged, but as I noted above, in the *Passions*, Descartes consistently assigns an agency to the soul in effecting associations and reforming them. Moreover, there may be a way of reconciling what seem to be competing interpretations, for one can still read Descartes as claiming that God makes it such that we will feel love when we perceive something as good. That is, God makes *my soul* of such a nature that *it* will feel love when it perceives something good. In the first case of love, the soul perceives the body's state to be something good, and joins itself willingly to it. To say this is still different from claiming that God makes *the associations* between mind and body such that I feel love when the body is in a certain state. It is also worth noting that La Forge talks of the natural institution as an “*alliance*”, or a treaty, which has certain terms. The analogy may well be peculiar, but it would seem to imply a similar sort of *voluntary act* of reconceiving oneself and one's interests. See 226ff. I cannot address these very interesting issues more here. For a more detailed discussion of them, though only sketches of resolutions to them, see my “Structure of the *Passions of the Soul*”.

⁴¹ Indeed, Gueroult takes these Sixth Meditation passages to reveal “the teleological relation as the condition of possibility of *‘the union of the soul with every part of the body’*” (Gueroult 1985, 157). While I have many sympathies with Gueroult's interpretation, as already noted, I differ with his account of particular mind-body associations, and I think ultimately with his account of the ontological status of the union.

might think of simply “perceiving the damage purely by the intellect” as akin to the “awareness” the soul must have prior to having the feelings it does. Something more is required for us to have full-fledged sensory experience.

Descartes continues:

Also the fact that some of the perceptions are agreeable while others are disagreeable makes it quite certain that my body, or my whole self, insofar as I am a combination of body and mind, can be affected by the various beneficial or harmful bodies which surround it. (AT VII 81; CSM II 56.)

It is interesting that here Descartes appeals to our benefit or harm as shaping the way in which we are affected by things.⁴² He thus seems to be implying that our having the sensations we do is to be explained by the way in which the objects that we sense impact on our well-being or our good.

He then turns to consider cases, such as that of a dropsical patient feeling thirst, where we might *misperceive* our good and so be naturally inclined to do just what it is worst for us to do. He accounts for these “true errors of nature” through his explanation of our sensations. Using the example of a pain in the foot, Descartes outlines his mechanistic account of how bodily sensations reach the pineal gland and then claims that “nature has laid it down that this motion [of the pineal gland] should produce in the mind a sensation of pain, as occurring in the foot” (AT VII 87; CSM II 60). The motion of the pineal gland could have been caused, however, by a motion at any point along the pathway between foot and gland just as well as by a motion in the foot. Mental-physical state associations are instituted the way they are, according to Descartes, because

the best system that could be devised is that it [the gland] should produce the one sensation which, of all possible sensations, is most especially and most frequently conducive to the preservation of the healthy man. And experience shows that the sensations which nature has given us are all of this kind. (*Ibid.*)

Here Descartes is clear that the natural institution between mental and physical states is *for our good*. Particular sorts of mental and physical states are associated with one another just because those associations serve to preserve and promote our well-being.⁴³ It is for this reason (combined with the recognition that God is not a de-

⁴² While the good of the body with which he seems to identify our good here would be insufficient to explain the reformations of mind-body associations through which we regulate our passions, we can still think of Descartes as detailing a minimal *human* good, one proper to a union of mind and body. He does suggest elsewhere that being in good physical health is necessary for us to be freely willing, and so rational and able to realize our full potential as human beings. See Letter to Hyperaspistes, August 1641, AT III 424, CSMK 190; Letter to Elizabeth, 1 September 1645, AT IV 282, CSMK 262.

⁴³ See also a remark at the end of this discussion: “This motion produces in the mind a sensation of thirst, because the most useful thing for us to know about the whole business is that we need drink in order to stay healthy. And so it is in the other cases.” (AT VII 88; CSM II 61.)

ceiver), Descartes thinks, that the occasional deception of the senses need not pose a problem.⁴⁴ It is significant that Descartes does not appeal to the preservation of the healthy *body* here, but rather looks to the whole man, even if it is the whole man in the minimal sense outlined earlier in the meditation.

So, in detailing the natural institution of mental and physical states in the Sixth Meditation, Descartes not only provides an explanation of why mind and body are associated in the way that they are, but also his explanation is akin to that afforded by his account of the regulation of the passions. I am suggesting that this explanation appeals precisely to the notion of the human good. Thus, we not only have an explanation of the particular associations between mind and body, we also have a kind of teleological explanation.⁴⁵

With this account, we gain some further insight into the relation between Descartes' account of sensation and his account of the passions. We might think that our sensations have the stability they do – so that when our foot is affected in a particular way (as when a heavy object is dropped on it) we always feel pain – just because, with sensations, it seems that *all* that concerns us is our bodily health and well-being. Furthermore, what keeps us alive and well is relatively quite stable. When heavy objects fall on our toe, they just will do our foot damage. Thus, even if we could change our natural disposition to feel, say, pain when we stub our toe, we would have no reasonable motivation to do so; it would run counter to the end of self-preservation. Note, however, that on this account, the stability of our perceptions of objects is grounded not in a law-like causal relation between bodily states and mental states.⁴⁶ Rather, the

⁴⁴ Alison Simmons (1999) argues from these same passages that Descartes' account of sensory representation should be understood on neither a strictly causal model nor a resemblance model but on a bio-functional model. She does not, however, there draw conclusions about the explanation of mind-body associations, though the questions are clearly related.

⁴⁵ There remains the question of showing how this explanation is consistent with Descartes' denial in the Fourth Meditation that we can know God's purposes. He writes: "there is considerable rashness in thinking myself capable of investigating the <impenetrable> purposes of God" (AT VII 55, CSM II 39). Insofar as Descartes claims to offer an explanation for mind-body associations and claims that those associations are instituted by God, he seems to be contravening his own caution. Here are two ways in which Descartes might get out of this apparent contradiction. First, he might draw a distinction between understanding God's purposes in physics and in the case of the human being. The Fourth Meditation claim can be read as applying only to physics, although it need not be. Here, however, the burden is to articulate the basis of this distinction. A second option would be for him to claim that the natural institution of mind-body associations is not effected by God directly. I have suggested that there are strands of this sort of resolution in the natural history of our passions that Descartes offers. (See n. 40 above.)

⁴⁶ Here we might have a way of accounting for the puzzling passage noted in n. 6. We might well be able to come even to sense things differently if it would be for our good. In this way we might also be able to make sense of La Forge's failure to align the distinction between fixed and changeable associations with that between sensations and passions.

stability of our perceptions of things rests on the stability of our good.⁴⁷ It makes sense, on the other hand, for our passions to be subject to change, precisely because our passions do not involve *simply* our awareness of our bodily good. Rather, they incorporate our good as thinking things as well. The way in which they do so is tied to our perception of the truth about the importance of things to us. While there might well be a fact of the matter about whether a particular thing is good or bad for us as human beings, our understanding of this fact often starts out quite obscure and then becomes clearer as we experience a wide range of things and develop as moral agents. Thus, it makes sense that the way we feel about things should change with our changing perception of our good.

4. *Implications of a dynamic mind-body relation:
The nature of the Cartesian human being*

The picture of a dynamic mind-body relation, and the explanation of mind-body associations it affords, can also shed light on Descartes' remarks about the union of mind and body. Readers of Descartes have been puzzled by a set of remarks in which Descartes avers that mind and body are not joined simply *per accidens* but together constitute a *unity*. So, in the Sixth Meditation, Descartes writes:

Nature also teaches me, by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst, and so on, that 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* [*adeo ut unum quid cum illo componam*]. (AT VII 81; CSM II 56; emphasis mine.)

Moreover, in the letter to Regius of January 1642, Descartes defends the view that a human being is an *ens per se* and not simply an *ens per accidens* (AT III 492f; CSMK 206).⁴⁸ There he seems to suggest that a human being is an *ens per accidens* just insofar as it is "made up of two things which are really distinct" (*ibid.*), but that the "mind is united in a real and substantial manner to the body" (AT III 493; CSMK 206).

⁴⁷ Simmons (1999) is useful on this point.

⁴⁸ Interpreting this letter is notoriously difficult, as in it Descartes is advising Regius on what he should say to Voetius' objections to mechanism. It is thus hard to distinguish what Descartes fully endorses from what he simply thinks is prudent to say politically. That Descartes is concerned with a strategy to avoid further controversy at the University of Utrecht does not, however, preclude his putting forward his actual position. For this reason I am inclined to take him at his word here, though those words may be quite well-chosen. Doing so, however, does yet settle the question of how to interpret those words. Hoffman (1986), Alanen (1989) and Rozemond (1998) all take Descartes to be speaking in honesty, but they interpret him differently.

These remarks echo those in both earlier and later works.⁴⁹ In all, Descartes holds as significant that mind and body form a whole or a *unit* in their liaison with one another, but he does not say much explicitly about what that amounts to. Indeed, he writes to Regius that he has no burden to explicate this union just because no one else does. Descartes, however, is under a pressure that Aristotelians are not. For his holding that mind and body form a unit seems to pose a real problem for his substance dualist metaphysics. Insofar as Aristotelians have a different ontology, they do not face the same problem in claiming that the human being has a unitary nature. Thus, the problem we readers face in understanding what Descartes intends by the *union* of mind and body is that of explicating what makes a human being the *ens per se*, or the independent thing, that it is, without finding Descartes either in the gross metaphysical confusion of holding that the human being is a third substance or in a contradiction of claiming that the union is both *per se* and accidental. I want to suggest that the account of mind-body associations I have been developing can help us to understand the puzzling passages concerning the union while avoiding problems other interpretations have faced. I will not be able to develop this suggestion fully here, but I do want to sketch the position I would like to flesh out.

First, it should be clear that Descartes' apparent commitment to a dynamic mind-body relationship poses real problems for simple interactionist accounts of the union – that is, for interpretations that take the *whole* of the union (or think that Descartes should take the whole of the union) constituting a human being to be just the associations between mental and physical states. Such a simple interactionist reading of Descartes must seek to dismiss Descartes' remarks about the union as either confusions on Descartes' part or else dissimulations, intended to mask his divergence from Aristotelianism and so help to minimize controversy.⁵⁰ This sort of interpretation claims that the associations between sorts of mental and sorts of

⁴⁹ See also the *Discourse* (AT VI 59, CSM I 141) and the *Passions* a.30 (AT XI 351). In the correspondence with Elisabeth, Descartes asserts that this *unity* constitutes a third primitive notion: “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.*” (Letter to Elisabeth, 28 June 1643; AT III 691–92; CSMK 227; emphasis mine.)

⁵⁰ Chappell (1994) and Voss (1994) seem to want to go this route. Note that there are more robust versions of interactionism. These accounts claim that the interaction between mind and body is involved in their union – it is their interaction, after all, which serves to explain why I sense what is affecting *this* body rather than another. But they would also admit that there might be something *more* to the union as well, for instance what explains these associations. In what follows, I aim to outline a view that is consistent with a more robust interactionism.

physical states are akin to causal laws.⁵¹ This claim would seem to entail that the mind-body relation remains fixed. But I have argued that Descartes thinks that we can change these associations, and it is not clear how associations that can be changed could have the status of causal *laws*. It would seem that if one wanted to maintain this sort of simple interactionist interpretation in the face of the textual evidence for a dynamic mind-body relation, one would be pressed to claim that the very nature of the human being changes with every change of association. This claim seems hard to swallow.⁵² It seems that if the simple interactionist wants to find a reasonable account of human nature in Descartes, she will need to appeal to something in addition to the interactions themselves.

On quite a different tack, some commentators have proposed taking Descartes' talk of a true union of mind and body seriously. Paul Hoffman has argued that Descartes' account of the mind-body union is essentially hylomorphic and that Descartes' Aristotelianism around the relation of mind and body reflects a commitment to the view that the mind-body union is a substance, though perhaps not in as strong a sense as the Aristotelian one.⁵³ While Hoffman's reading is quite provocative, it faces several problems. First, it is not clear how it can be squared with Descartes' account of the workings of the human body. Descartes insists again and again that the human body is properly to be described as a machine whose workings are governed wholly internally and driven by the heat in the heart that is the principle of life.⁵⁴ For Descartes, the soul has no role in animating the body, and this position seems wholly at odds with any hylomorphism, in that a hylomorphic view would claim that a particular parcel of matter is the thing that it is, and moves in the way that it does, in vir-

⁵¹ Interpreters of this sort vary in how they want to understand the nature of body-mind and mind-body causation, but they do agree, for the most part, that the associations are law-like.

⁵² Of course, if God wanted to change our constitution he could, but this does not seem to be the sort of change of association at issue in the regulation of the passions.

⁵³ Hoffman (1986). Hoffman develops his account by drawing heavily on the letter to Regius of January 1642, (AT III 502ff., CSMK 207ff.) and on those passages in which Descartes adverts to the relation of mind and body in the standard Aristotelian terms of the mind's informing the body (see *Rules*, AT X 411, CSM I 40; Pr. IV.189, AT VIII 315, CSM I 279). While I agree with Hoffman that the letter to Regius should be taken seriously, I do not agree that Descartes goes so far as to adopt an Aristotelian picture here. Rozemond (1998) is helpful in this regard. In this early piece, Hoffman does not say much about what this weak sense of 'substance' is. He argues only that, unlike medieval philosophers in the Aristotelian tradition, Descartes wants to maintain that mind and body can exist independently of one another as complete things. In Hoffman (1999), he develops this part of his view. He there maintains that for Descartes the mind is a substance in a sense weaker than that in which the human being is a substance for the Aristotelians.

⁵⁴ See especially *Passions* aa. 5–16, as well as the *Treatise of Man* and *Description of the Human Body*. Rozemond (1998) makes a similar criticism.

tue of being informed in a certain way.⁵⁵ Second, as Hoffman himself acknowledges, while his account makes good sense of Descartes' claim that a human being is an *ens per se*, it does not yet reconcile that claim with the other claim that a human is an *ens per accidens*. In a recent article, Hoffman has taken up this latter problem, and re-framed his claim.⁵⁶ For at the heart of Hoffman's original interpretation was not so much a notion of a hylomorphic substance in particular as the more general implication that the union of mind and body is a substance, albeit in a weak sense. In his recent work, Hoffman clarifies this point.⁵⁷

I take it to be a merit of Hoffman's account that it challenges us to rethink the sense in which mind and body can be said to be really distinct for Descartes. But it must square its insistence on understanding the human being as a substance in a weak sense with Descartes' account of substance in the *Principles*. Hoffman argues that his account can be reconciled with Descartes' definition of a substance as "a thing which exists in a such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence" (Pr.I.51, AT VIII 24, CSM I 210), or, in the case of mind and body, as a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing except for God for its existence (Pr. I.52). However, it is not clear how Hoffman's account can be squared with Descartes' further claims that a substance is known through its principal attribute and that that attribute gains expression through the various modes of the substance. For it is not at all clear what the principal attribute of the union of mind and body, nor what the modes of that attribute, would be.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ While it may be true that the soul does move the body in certain ways, that the soul plays no role in the *involuntary* motions of the body argues against the view that the Cartesian mind-body union is hylomorphic.

⁵⁶ See Hoffman (1999).

⁵⁷ According to Hoffman, we can gain understanding of this weak sense of 'substance' by considering the relativization at the center of Descartes' treatment of complete and incomplete substances. The same sort of relativization, Hoffman claims, can help us to understand the sense in which a human being is both an *ens per se* and an *ens per accidens*. It is the former in that when they are together mind and body form a complete or *per se* substance. It is the latter in that its constituents, mind and body, can, in a different context, themselves exist *per se*. Hoffman further suggests that although this same weak sense of 'substance' applies univocally to mind and body individually, a stronger sense might apply to the unit they form.

⁵⁸ Hoffman does argue that in the *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet* Descartes articulates a position on principal attributes different from that of the *Principles*. There, Hoffman maintains, Descartes admits that a simple subject can contain more than one principal attribute, so long as the concept of one is contained in the concept of the other, and suggests that a composite subject can have more than one attribute. See Hoffman (1999), 268 ff. Hoffman is drawing on the following passage: "As for the attributes which constitute the natures of things, it cannot be said that those which are different, and such that the concept of the one is not contained in the concept of the other, are present in one and the same subject; for that would be equivalent to saying that one and the same subject has two different natures – a statement that implies a contradiction, at least when it is a

But even if we are to grant Hoffman's reading here, and so find a principal attribute proper to the union⁵⁹, I am not sure that it could help. We would want that attribute to ground modes proper to the union, but Descartes is quite clear that those states that a human being has in virtue of its being a union of mind and body are not yet modes of that union but modes of mind as joined with the body. For instance, while the passions themselves are proper to a human being, they are *of the soul*. That is, they are thoughts and so properly speaking modes of mind.⁶⁰ It thus does not seem that the Cartesian union of mind and body constitutes a substance in a sense that might conform to Descartes' ontological categories. Thus, it still seems that the mind-body union cannot be a substance in a sense univocal with the way in which mind and body are each substances.

Hoffman's account brings out some further constraints on understanding the human being as an *ens per se*. While Descartes' language, especially in the letter to Regius, would seem to imply that he takes the human being to be a substance, reading him in this way leads to further interpretive problems. If we take Descartes to be using Aristotelian language in a straightforward way, to indicate a hylomorphic entity, we run up against his account of body, and of the human body in particular. On the other hand, if we take the language of *ens per se* to refer to substance in a weaker sense, we run into the problem of distinguishing the sense in which mind and body are substances from the sense in which a human being is a substance. If we maintain that Descartes' notion of substance applies univocally to all three, it does not seem that Descartes' account of a human being conforms to the ontology he presents in the *Principles*.

I want to suggest two options for making sense of Descartes' notion of a human being that may avoid these sorts of issues. Both draw on his explaining the associations between mind and body by their role in promoting the human good. I cannot develop either of them in detail here, but I do want to sketch them out. It may well be that there are strands of both in Descartes' writings. Articulating fully the successes and failures of each would help us to better understand the problems a substance dualist faces in developing an account of human nature.

question of a simple subject (as in the present case) rather than a composite one." (AT VIII 349f., CSM I 298.) I am not clear, however, that Descartes subscribes to the view Hoffman assigns him. While Descartes does admit that two different attributes constituting the natures of things can coexist in a composite subject, his grounds for denying that they cannot coexist in a simple subject suggest that such a composite substance cannot be properly understood as something *with its own nature*, that is, as an *ens per se* on Hoffman's reading of that expression. Thus, Descartes' position still seems to be that only one attribute can define the nature of a substance in the sense important to the question of the ontological status of the human being.

⁵⁹ We do not have an account of how the two principal attributes of the human substance form a unity with one another. One might see Hoffman as beginning to offer such an account through a notion of straddling modes in his "Cartesian Passions and Cartesian Dualism" (Hoffman, 1990).

⁶⁰ Rozemond (1998) makes this point quite convincingly with regards to sensations.

First, we might take the Cartesian human being to be the union of the substances of mind and body that together make up a third substance, whose principal attribute is the human good. That is, we might think that the explanatory role the human good plays with regard to our passions makes it well-suited to being a principal attribute, and so constitutive, of a substance – that is, of a human being. After all, though some of the associations between mind and body might change, one thing does not change, and that is the end, our good, which constrains how those associations are formed. Moreover, since the human good does not seem to reduce for Descartes to the goods proper to mind and to body, it does seem that the human being is not simply an accidental unity of mind and body. In this regard, we might be seen as pursuing Hoffman's program of maintaining that the human being is a substance in the same sense that mind and body are substances by explicating the principal attribute of a human being, and the modes proper to it.

However, it is not clear to me what the modes of a human being would be on this account. For it does not seem to me that our passions can be understood to be modes of this good. As noted earlier, Descartes consistently maintains that passions and sensations are modes of *mind*. Perhaps we can understand the *associations* between mental and physical states to be the modes of a human being on this view. The associations would seem to have a kind of dependence on the nature of a human being, understood as the human good. Still, it is not clear that this explanatory dependence is the same as the ontological dependence of an idea on thinking, or of a shape on extension, that is, of a mode on a substance of which it is a mode. In order to develop this line successfully, we would need to square it with Descartes' stated ontology, not only by working through the substance-mode relation but also by showing how there is no tension between these associations being the modes of a union, and the physiological states and thoughts being modes of body and mind, respectively. Although we might circumvent this issue by maintaining that the human being is a substance in a sense different from that pertaining to mind and body, and so afford the possibility of a different ontological analysis for the case of the human being, we would need not only to articulate what this different sense is, but also to explain why it goes missing from Descartes' exposition of his ontology. This tack seems less than promising, if only because it is at odds with a principle of simplicity in its complication of Descartes' ontology.

It is also not clear to me on this line what sense is to be made of Descartes' claim that the human being is an *ens per accidens*. Perhaps it would be simply this: mind and body need not be joined with one another; there is nothing in the nature of either which demands union with the other. In this regard, they need not ever have been brought together to be sustained in existence. Yet once they are brought together, by God, there is a good proper to their union. And it would seem that once mind and body are unified through this good, their unity ceases to be accidental. Perhaps Hoffman is right that any claim as to whether a human being is an *ens per se* or an *ens per accidens* will be context-relative. What needs to be worked out, for this interpretation to succeed, is how these contexts are compatible with one another.

Another way to go in thinking about the Cartesian human being involves taking seriously the puzzling suggestion of PA a.107, that naturally instituted associations

are a matter of the soul's joining itself *by will* with the body, and for a reason of our good. Recall that on my reading of a.107, Descartes is claiming that while the soul has some sort of "awareness" of or receptivity to the state of the body, this "awareness" does not yet constitute the union of mind and body. To form a *union* with the body, the soul must join itself by will, that is, reconceive itself as being part of a whole, with the body. It is through this reconception of itself and its relation to the body that the associations constituting the union are formed.

It is a straightforward matter on this line to account for Descartes' willingness to admit that the union is *per accidens*, and on the grounds outlined just above. For as he writes to Regius, all *that* means is that it is a union of two really distinct things. Considering the union of mind and body as a willing joining of the two presupposes that the two are distinct from one another. There is nothing intrinsic to either mind or body that demands that the two be united together. That is, the workings of the body are determined by bodily principles alone and do not require a mind to keep moving along. Equally, thought is something proper to the mind alone. The only thing we must admit in this regard is that the mind has some kind of "awareness" of, or receptivity to, the state the body is in, so that it might come to have those thoughts which are caused by the body. But it seems that Descartes admits that God has made the soul of such a nature that it does have this "awareness".⁶¹ Yet it is important to recognize that this receptivity alone does not yet constitute the *union* of mind and body as an *ens per se*. For if having this "awareness" were all there were to the union, the soul would be merely like a sailor in a ship, inspecting the condition of the body in which it finds itself. But this, Descartes claims is not enough "to have feelings and appetites like ours and so to constitute a real man" (AT VI 59, CSM I 141). For that, the mind must be united with the body to form a true unit.

While there is no problem understanding how the union is *per accidens* on the reading I am suggesting here, it is not clear why the mind's joining itself by will with the body should constitute an *ens per se*. Why is this union of mind and body not simply a conceptual entity? It is, after all, effected through the mind's *reconceiving* its relation to the body. To see what sense might be made of an *ens per se* here, consider again what the soul's joining by will with the body involves. I have suggested that the soul's joining itself by will is effected through the soul's conception of its good, as a mind joined with the body in the way that it is – that is, as a mind "aware" of the state that the body is in and disposed to join itself by will with this body. In the first instance, our conception of our good is identified with just the good of the body, but as we develop, it comes to incorporate the soul's own good as a thinking thing. With our changing conception of our good, we might well change the associations between mental and physical states. The true union of mind and body, then, is constituted through our conception of our good and the normative forces that move us to re-think and constrain the ways in which things are important to us. That is, the union is not *simply* a matter of the interaction between these modes. Mental and physical states come to be associated *for a reason*. The union of mind and body may be a

⁶¹ See, as well as passages already cited, *Treatise of Man* AT XI 143; CSM I 102; *Dioptrics* AT VI 130, 134–5; and *Principles* AT VIII 41, 316.

matter of the soul's reconceiving itself, but it is a reconception with real consequences. I want to suggest that insofar as a human being, a composite of mind and body, is something with has a good proper to it *in this way*, it is an *ens per se*.

A reading along these lines makes somewhat different sense of Descartes' willingness to adopt the Aristotelian language of '*ens per se*'. For an Aristotelian, substance is an *ens per se* in virtue of its having a proper nature, and this nature constitutes the formal cause of the thing just in constituting its end or purpose. That is, on the Aristotelian view a thing is what it is just in virtue of its containing its own good. Descartes' notion of the human being's unity trades on a similar teleological notion, but it does so without connoting a substance. For understanding the Cartesian human being in this way does not require that we conceive of Descartes' conception of the human being as hylomorphic. It is not the case that soul informs the body or makes it the particular parcel of matter it is. The human body still works as it does on its own.⁶² Furthermore, we need not go so far as to maintain that a Cartesian human's being a unity in this way entails it is a Cartesian substance either. For there is nothing about the concern for our good that shapes this union which suggests that it is an attribute of a new substance, with modes of its own. Our sensations and passions remain modes of mind, but modes afforded to the mind insofar as it is not simply joined to the body, but willingly joins itself with it.

I cannot here develop this account further. And I admit that emphasizing the soul's "joining by will" with the body presents a somewhat strange view of the Cartesian human being. However, I do want lend support to this line of interpretation by noting that La Forge suggests a similar account in his *Traité de l'Esprit de l'Homme*. In considering the objection that the union of mind and body as he has described it is not natural but 'moral' he writes:

It is objected secondly that this union [of mind and body] would not be natural, but only moral, since it would only be the effect of the will of a free mind. To which I respond first that this consequence is not a good one if one wants to hold that insofar as I freely push a ball, the movement that I give it, and all the effects which follow from it, are not natural because it is me who has caused them voluntarily and freely. But I want to say that this union is only moral since it is the mind which is united to a body and which has itself attached its thoughts to certain movements of the body, and which can thus, when it seems good to it, break or change this union. One cannot say the same thing insofar as this relation is not in its power and it does not depend on it to be united or not united. On the contrary, since this union follows the decree of God, through which he is resolved to govern all his creatures in the manner that we see that they are, it must pass for something just as natural as anything in the world.⁶³

Here La Forge is responding to an objection akin to the one Descartes sees Regius as facing: Isn't the human being on the Cartesian account but a moral unity, and not a natural one? La Forge admits that the union constituting a human being is a moral

⁶² Of course, through acts of will the soul can affect motions in the body.

⁶³ La Forge (1666), 199f.

unity, but for him moral unities can still be natural in a certain sense. For the union between mind and body is effected through the will of the mind itself “which has attached its thoughts to certain movements of the body”. Yet the mind exercises its will in this way just because God has created it with the nature it has, as joined with the body and disposed to unite itself with it for certain reasons. I would suggest that here, as he does in most of his writings, La Forge is putting forward Descartes’ own view.

Clearly, no matter which route one pursues, more needs to be said about the notion of an *ens per se* in play. In particular, one wants to know more about this conception of the human good that shapes the associations between mind and body.⁶⁴ On the former line, one wants a clarification of how this notion of the good figures in Descartes’ substance-mode ontology. On the latter line, one wants to know more about this “joining by will” and about how it might square with a reasonable notion of body-mind causation. On both lines, one also wants to know more about how Descartes can claim that the human being has a good that is not reducible to the goods of mind and body while at the same time managing to avoid hylomorphism altogether. It might be that in the end all these questions cannot be answered satisfactorily, but in pinpointing his failures here we would learn something quite interesting about the shortcomings of Cartesian dualism.

5. Conclusion

By looking at Descartes’ discussion of the regulation of the passions in the *Passions of the Soul*, I have called into question a tacit assumption that commentators have made – namely, that the associations between mind and body are fixed and out of our control. Descartes maintains that we can reform at least those associations proper to the passions. Moreover, in thinking about how we are to reform them, I have argued that we are offered a kind of teleological explanation of mind-body associations. The associations between mental and physical states are not instituted by God for reasons beyond our comprehension but rather are instituted by us (in the case of the passions) in keeping with our good. We come to reform these associations as we gain a clearer understanding of our good – a good proper not simply to our body but to us as unions of mind and body. I have concluded with a suggestion that this teleological explanation of mental-physical associations can afford some insight into Descartes’ somewhat cryptic remarks about the unity of a human being. For we can understand mind and body as united through the soul’s acting on its conception of the human good. Understanding mind and body as united in this way does not require that we

⁶⁴ I begin to offer such an account in my “Cartesian Generosity”.

understand the Cartesian human being as either an Aristotelian substance or as a third Cartesian substance, in the sense in which mind and body are substances. While more needs to be said about the nature of this unity as an *ens per se*, I leave this for another time.⁶⁵

List of abbreviations

- AT = *Oeuvres de Descartes*, Adam and Tannery (eds.), followed by volume and page numbers.
 CSM = *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol I and II, Cottingham, Stoothof and Murdoch (trans.), followed by volume and page numbers.
 CSMK = *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. III, Cottingham, Stoothof, Murdoch and Kenny (trans.), followed by page numbers.
 MM = *Principles of Philosophy*, Miller and Miller (trans.).
 PA = *The Passions of the Soul*, followed by article numbers.
 Pr. = *Principles of Philosophy*, followed by part and article numbers.

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⁶⁵ I have benefited greatly from the very generous comments of Paul Hoffman and Marleen Rozemond, as well as those of the North American editor of this journal, on this paper. Readers of a much earlier version, Stephen Engstrom, Hans Lottenbach, Jennifer Nagel, and Sergio Tenenbaum, were also very helpful.

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