

WAS DESCARTES A TRIALIST?

By

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This project is an investigation of the philosophy of Rene Descartes. Specifically, it is an attempt to show that recent attempts to prove that Descartes considered human beings to be substances on par with mind and body are not successful. The main target of the thesis is a reading of Descartes put forth by Paul Hoffman. The thesis attempts to show that Hoffman's position is untenable for three reasons. First, the traditional reading of Descartes establishes a coherent and accurate account and shows that Descartes need not be reinterpreted. Second, the textual evidence provided in support of the reinterpretation is lacking. Finally the reinterpretation, as presented by Hoffman, is conceptually flawed.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In the field of modern philosophy there is a large and vibrant community of Descartes scholars. Amongst these scholars there many camps formed with the intent of championing various interpretations of Descartes' philosophy. One of the more lively areas of interest centers around the problem of Mind-Body interaction, the Princess Elizabeth problem. A related and no less contentious dispute has grown up around the question of how many created substances Descartes really thought there were.

Paul Hoffman has recently proposed that Descartes should be thought of as a trilateralist, a proponent of the idea that there are three created substances. Hoffman asserts that Descartes believed that a human being is a substance in its own right, not merely a conjunction of the substances of Mind and Body.¹ This interpretation of Descartes is of course completely at odds with the traditional reading on which that there are only two created substances in the world, Mind and Body. In defense of this proposal Hoffman suggests rereading certain key components of Descartes' metaphysics which he believes has been misunderstood within the traditional story. Unfortunately there does not seem to be a way to reconcile the two. A human being simply is or is not a third substance.

¹ I prefer to capitalize “mind” and “body” when speaking of mental and physical substance *qua* substance. The uncapitalized form is reserved for speaking of specific minds and bodies (that is, specific things).

Hoffman's motivation for suggesting this reinterpretation of Descartes is unclear. At places he in his work he seems to be attempting to resolve a perceived problem,² in other places Hoffman presents his view as a new insight concerning Descartes' claims.³ In either case, it is hard not to notice that if his reinterpretation of Descartes' ontology were to prove successful, a solution to that problem would follow immediately.⁴

Hoffman's project revolves around two main problems. First, there is the need to find evidence in the body of Descartes' work to support the claim that Descartes believed that a human being is a substance. Hoffman gathers quite a lot of support for this conclusion by shifting the emphasis of study from Descartes' major works to supplementary materials. Second, one must reconcile such evidence with Descartes' claims about dualism; namely, his claims that there are only two kinds of created substance, Mind and Body, and his argument for the Real Distinction between them. To resolve this problem Hoffman draws support from a radical reinterpretation of Descartes' Theory of Distinctions and a suggestion that Descartes held a theory of substantial forms derived from the scholastic philosophy. Hoffman describes his goal in this way: "what I want to ask is whether there is in Descartes's philosophy a notion of the union of mind and Body . . . according to which a human being has an intuitive claim of being one thing, and not merely two things conjoined." (UDM p.341)

2 "Descartes's Theory of Distinction"

3 "The Unity Of Descartes's Man"

4 It is a bit mysterious exactly how establishing the existence of a complex substance would resolve the Princess Elizabeth problem. It would presumably involve the claim that interaction between disparate attributes of a substance is less troubling than interaction between disparate substances. After all, we do not worry about the interaction of motion and shape. To be fair Hoffman denies that he is attempting to resolve the mind-body problem, my point here is that his project could be taken as a first step in that direction.

Does Hoffman's ambitious project succeed? There are several ways in which Hoffman's account can be confronted. One could engage in a line by line counter-analysis of the passages that he thinks are most suggestive of his reading of Descartes in an attempt to show that Hoffman's interpretations are illegitimate. Or one could provide textual evidence against the trialist account, arguing that material supporting the traditional interpretation should outweigh Hoffman's evidence. Or one could analyze the arguments that are offered by Hoffman and show that they are untenable either because they cannot be reconciled with Descartes or because they are flawed. I take the first two approaches to be unlikely to succeed outright. If the textual evidence did support one position over the other, in a clear and decisive manner, the debate would be a non-starter.⁵ I shall comment only on a few points Hoffman makes to provide alternative, but plausible, interpretations and do so where Hoffman thinks he is on firmest ground. Thus we will reach something of a stalemate in the textual debate. But my goal is not to refute Hoffman's exegesis with my own alternative interpretations but to present arguments to show that his positions are untenable.

Yet, there is a need to emphasize that Hoffman is attempting to present a view that he thinks belonged to Descartes. He is neither attempting to provide a novel way of thinking about Cartesian substance nor is he attempting to resolve a general problem in philosophy with some ideas he has taken from Descartes. Hoffman is clear that he is merely presenting Descartes actual views. He opens the investigation by asking “whether there is in Descartes's philosophy a notion of the union of mind and body . . . according to which a human being has an intuitive claim of being one thing, and not merely two things

⁵ I take it that it is immaterial whether the clear and decisive support came from better translations or overwhelming evidence from the opposing camp.

conjoined”(UDM, pg. 341) He then claims that Descartes can “consistently maintain that a human being is both an *ens per se* and an *ens per accidens* in roughly the same way he can consistently maintain that composite figures both do and do not have true and immutable natures”(CC, pg. 251). Finally Hoffman argues that “the heart of Cartesian dualism concerns the separability of the attributes thought and extension. It does not require that mind and body are separable in the sense that each can exist without the other”(DTD, pg. 57). Whatever Hoffman's final conclusions, they are clearly meant to be accurate representations of Descartes' thought and must be consistent with the rest of his work for his project to be successful.

I believe that Hoffman cannot construct a viable reading of Descartes that accommodates the positions required by his interpretation. I also believe that even taken on their own merits Hoffman's proposals are philosophically flawed. As part of the discussion I will argue specifically that throughout Hoffman's project he presupposes a reading of Real Distinction that is incompatible with his trialist interpretation of Descartes. Therefore, we should abandon the trialist proposal, not only because it is unsupported in the text, but because it relies on flawed reasoning and un-Cartesian conclusions.⁶

⁶ While I have already admitted that the text that deals directly with the matter at hand (whether a human being is a substance) is ambiguous there is a significant amount of text that unequivocally contradicts certain claims made by Hoffman in support of the overall project.

CHAPTER 2

SURVEY OF TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATIONS

Before I begin my analysis of Descartes' various theories and arguments I think that it would be beneficial to give a brief survey of some of Descartes' most important ideas. In Appendix A, I provide a guide to the fundamental concepts in Descartes' metaphysics. With this information in hand, I hope that the reader will gain an appropriate context for the more in-depth exegesis and analysis that follows. I do not go beyond Descartes' own words at this point, nor do I intend to settle any disputes with Hoffman within that section. A defense of any interpretations upon which my arguments hinge will be given in the argumentative sections.

Introduction

Before embarking on the project in earnest, it would be fruitful to pause a moment and consider what lies ahead. My thesis considers and rejects an interpretation of Descartes' philosophy by Paul Hoffman. The reader should harbor no doubt about the radical nature of Hoffman's new account of Descartes. If we were to accept Hoffman's position, we would have to treat most, if not all, of Descartes' seminal Meditations on First Philosophy¹ as at best an incomplete presentation of Descartes' views. Even worse,

¹ Descartes describes his most famous work as an epistemological project. I consider that epistemological argument in the first part of this thesis, but here I would like to table discussions on the nature of, and the mechanisms for gaining, knowledge. I will limit myself to Descartes' metaphysical story. For example, at the moment and for the thesis, I am less interested in how I come to know that I'm a thinking thing than I am with what it means for me to be a thing and, moreover, a thinking thing.

much of Descartes' Principles of Philosophy would have to be deemed false or misleading. I think it would be an understatement to say that such a radical shift in the study of such an important historical figure as Descartes should be accepted only if it can pass the strongest tests. Hoffman is challenging generations of scholarship. Of course such a challenge is not in and of itself a bad thing. My case against Hoffman's project is not based on reactionary traditionalism. I simply wish to make certain that Hoffman is not attempting to replace the traditional interpretations with newer but less coherent results.

But while this is my primary goal, if this were the entire project, it would not be enough. While Hoffman's account might be flawed, if the traditional accounts were equally unsatisfactory, we would still have a problem. Consequently, the first part of the project provides two different interpretations of Descartes, by Margaret Wilson and Marleen Rozemond, that I should like to champion as a defense against the need for any large scale revision of Descartes' view of substance, and not just Hoffman's revision.

A further aspect of the presentation of the two positions will be an attempt to show that far from being incompatible, they are complimentary and mutually supporting. The two interpretations when combined give a coherent and accurate account of Descartes view of substance. And even though I think it is a benefit of this work that the two traditional positions are reconciled, I do stress that no part of the discussion and refutation of Hoffman's positions rests on the two traditional views as represented by Wilson and Rozemond hanging together. The primary goal shall be accomplished even if the two camps that I have chosen to defend cannot see eye to eye.

Wilson

In “Descartes: the Epistemological Argument for mind-body Distinctness,” Margaret Wilson sets out to present Descartes argument for Real Distinction in the *Meditations*. She takes Descartes to be proposing an epistemological argument for the metaphysical independence of mental and physical substances. In other words, she argues that Descartes' contention that we should hold that minds are distinct from bodies is based on certain knowledge claims.² The full Epistemological Argument is mainly in Meditation VI, but there are several crucial points in Meditation II that ought to be considered first.

First, while Descartes relies on clear and distinct ideas of mind and body, the Epistemic Argument is not simply a claim that we clearly and distinctly perceive minds apart from bodies. Nor is it nothing more than the well-known claim that God, of whom we know through innate ideas³, can create the world as we clearly conceive it to be.⁴ The Epistemic Argument takes advantage of these claims but is not limited to them. If a conceived idea is clear and distinct, then we can be certain that the world is that way since it would be against the nature of God to allow us to have a clear and distinct idea that is also false. In other words, Descartes holds that we can derive metaphysical certainty from epistemological certainty. Yet while the Epistemic Argument is more than

2 We shall see that the full story involves not just knowledge claims but also claims about the nature and powers of God. The key is to remember that while God is able to make true what we clearly and distinctly conceive, he is not compelled to do so. His role is not merely to make the world conform to our ideas.

3 Meditation 3: AT VII 51.

4 Meditation 2: AT VII 78.

these two principles, they are integral to the argument and together sufficient for establishing the Real Distinction of Mind and Body.

Descartes writes, “I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind”(AT VII 25). He then augments the assertion that he exists necessarily by arguing that he exists as a thinking thing. “At present I am not admitting anything except what is necessarily true. I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks, that is, I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason . . . I am a thing which is real and which truly exists”(AT VII 27). He is careful to not inflate his conclusion beyond this deduction. In fact, he does not deny that he has a body, preferring the agnostic conclusion that as far as he knows he could still be a thinking *and* extended thing. “And yet may it not perhaps be the case that these very things which I am supposing to be nothing, because they are unknown to me, are in reality identical with the 'I' of which I am aware? I do not know, and for the moment I shall not argue the point, since I can make judgments only about things which are known to me”(AT VII 27). He has concluded that Body and Mind have different attributes and thus one could be contemplated without any need to consider the other, but he is not yet willing to state that they are actually independent. In other words, Mind could be more than just a thinking thing. But Meditation II is equally important for its discussion of how we acquire knowledge.

In the discussion of the wax example, Descartes makes clear that he will not accept any claims not vetted by reason. “I normally say that I see the men themselves, just as I say that I see the wax. Yet do I see any more than hats and coats which could conceal automatons? I *judge* that they are men. And so something which I thought I was seeing

with my eyes is in fact grasped solely by the faculty of judgment which is in my mind” (AT VII 32). The argument is simply that we come to know the nature of things in the world through the use of reason and not simply through the accumulation of experience. Even innate ideas, like the idea of God, must be considered rationally before we can employ them in argumentation and draw certain conclusions. Further, it is only by applying reason to clear and distinct ideas that we can be certain to arrive at truth. Though I will not explore what it means for an idea to be clear and distinct in any depth, I will offer this brief suggestion by Wilson. The key to understanding clarity and distinctness is that an idea can never be clear and distinct if its negation can itself be clearly and distinctly perceived to be true.⁵

But Wilson's simple reconstruction of the foundation of the Epistemic Argument is not unproblematic. Two problems stemming from vagueness in the concept of a complete idea, which are raised in the *Objections and Replies*, stand in the way of the argument.

Caterus points out that from the fact that some things can be conceived separately it does not follow that they are separable.

for one object to be distinctly conceived apart from another, there need only be what he calls a formal and objective distinction between them (such a distinction is, he maintains, intermediate between a real distinction and a conceptual distinction). The distinction between God's mercy and his justice is of this kind. . . . Yet it does not follow that because justice and mercy can be conceived apart from one another they can therefore exist apart. (AT VII 100)

Thus the mere claim that two purportedly different things are known under different concepts is not enough to establish their difference in reality. While God's

5 EAD, pg. 5

mercy and justice can be thought of independently, they are not actually distinct from each other; that is, they cannot actually exist apart.⁶ Descartes responds:

as to the 'formal' distinction which the learned theologian introduces on the authority of Scotus, let me say briefly that this kind of distinction does not differ from a modal distinction, it applies only to incomplete entities, which I have carefully distinguished from complete ones. . . . For example, the distinction between the motion and shape of a given body is a formal distinction. I can very well understand the motion apart from the shape, and vice versa, and I can understand either in abstraction from the body. But I cannot have a complete understanding of the motion apart from the thing in which motion occurs, or of the shape apart from the thing which has the shape; and I cannot imagine there to be motion in something which is incapable of possessing shape, or shape in something which is incapable of motion. . . . By contrast I have a complete understanding of what a body is when I think that it is merely something having extension, shape and motion, and I deny that it has anything which belongs to the nature of a mind. Conversely I understand the mind to be a complete thing, which doubts, understands, wills, and so on even though I deny that it has any of the attributes which are contained in the idea of a body. This would be quite impossible if there were not a real distinction between the mind and the body. (AT VII 120-121)

Descartes responds that Mind and Body are complete things in themselves. His conclusion about minds and bodies rest on a claim that Caterus has failed to notice.

Descartes insists that we have complete ideas of Mind and Body apart from each other not just a notion that they are different. That is, they are things that we are entitled to take to be complete things without any of the attributes of the other.

Further, for Descartes, to have a complete idea seems to be nothing more than to have an idea of a things properties.⁷ Conceptual completeness does not have particularly high epistemic requirements.

6 Here Caterus is voicing an objection taken from Scotus's theory of distinctions. While the language in the objection and the example (the distinction between attributes of God) are more naturally read as a discussion of Cartesian Conceptual Distinction, Caterus is actually concerned with Cartesian Modal Distinctions. That Descartes understands the objection in this way is shown in the quotation from the replies.

7 What it takes to have a complete idea is discussed further in the Arnauld discussion coming up.

after saying that I had 'a complete understanding of what a body is', I immediately added that I also 'understood the mind to be a complete thing'. The meaning of these two phrases was identical; that is, I took 'a complete understanding of something' and 'understanding something to be complete' as having one and the same meaning. . . . by a 'complete thing' I simply mean a substance endowed with the forms or attributes which enable me to recognize that it is a substance. (AT VIII 222)

Once we see that our idea of a thing is rich enough so that the thing would need nothing else in order to exist we see that it is metaphysically independent of any thing else, and we can be certain that God could create the thing independently of all other things. Once I have a clear and distinct idea of some thing such that I see that it could exist without any other thing, then my idea of it is complete and I know that it is Really Distinct from everything else. Thus, while Caterus is correct to say that simply conceiving of a distinction between two ideas is insufficient for establishing the existence of two different things, Descartes' claim is that we have distinct ideas of Mind and Body as complete things, and this claim is sufficient to establish difference and independence.

Wilson then considers an objection from Arnauld that challenges the claim that we can have a complete idea of a thing. Arnauld specifically denies that Descartes has shown that we have a complete idea of Mind in Meditation II. About Descartes' conclusions regarding self-knowledge in Meditation II, Arnauld writes:

so far as I can see, the only result that follows from this is that I can obtain some knowledge of myself without knowledge of the body. But it is not yet transparently clear to me that this knowledge is complete and adequate, so as to enable me to be certain that I am not mistaken in excluding body from my essence. (AT VII 201)

Arnauld wants to know why Descartes believes that we are entitled to conclude that we are distinctly *and completely* thinking things with no hidden or unobserved

properties. Descartes replies by explaining that he does not need to know that his knowledge about himself is exhaustive, all he needs is to show that Mind, with nothing more than the attribute of thought, and including none of the attributes of Body, is already such that it can exist independently of everything else and is therefore a complete thing. In other words, it is not necessary to have exhaustive knowledge of a thing in order to know its nature, and knowing the nature of a thing is enough to know whether it is a complete thing or not.

Mind can be perceived clearly and distinctly, or sufficiently so for it to be considered a complete thing, without any of those other forms or attributes by which we recognize that body is a substance, as I think I have sufficiently shown in the Second Meditation; and body is understood distinctly and as a complete thing without those which pertain to mind. (AT VII 223)

Descartes has only to remind Arnauld that the idea of a mental substance is not that a mind is a thinking thing, and possibly something else besides; instead, the idea of Mind is just that it is essentially a thinking thing. This claim is enough for us to know that it is complete because we do not need to include anything else in order to conclude that it could exist independently.

If the 'I' is understood strictly as we have been taking it, then it is quite certain that knowledge of it does not depend on things of whose existence I am as yet unaware; so it cannot depend on any of the things which I invent in my imagination. . . . Yet I know for certain both that I exist and at the same time that all such images and, in general, everything relating to the nature of body, could be mere dreams. . . . I thus realize that none of the things that the imagination enables me to grasp is at all relevant to this knowledge of myself which I possess, and that the mind must therefore be most carefully diverted from such things if it is to perceive its own nature as distinctly as possible. (AT VII 27-28)

So, having a clear and distinct idea that some thing, A, is a complete thing neither requires nor entails having adequate knowledge of A. Wilson is now able to give a detailed account of the Epistemological Argument.

- (1) If A can exist apart from B, and vice versa, A is really distinct from B, and B from A.
- (2) Whatever I clearly and distinctly understand can be brought about by God as I understand it
- (3) If I clearly and distinctly understand the possibility that A exists apart from B, and B apart from A, then God can bring it about that A and B do exist separately
- (4) If God can bring it about that A and B exist separately, then A and B can exist apart and hence, by (1) they are distinct.
- (5) I can clearly and distinctly understand the possibility of A and B existing apart from each other, if: there are attributes Φ and Ψ , such that I clearly and distinctly understand that Φ belongs to the nature of A, and that Ψ belongs to the nature of B, and that $\Phi \neq \Psi$, and I clearly and distinctly understand that something can be a complete thing if it has Φ even if it lacks Ψ (or has Ψ and lacks Φ).

(6) Where A is myself and B is body, thought and extension satisfy the conditions on Φ and Ψ respectively.

(7) Hence, I am really distinct from body and can exist without it.

(EAD,13-14)

Wilson's reconstruction allows us to make an important provisional claim. Real Distinction obtains between substances, not properties.⁸ Properties, either modes or attributes, fail the test for independent existence that is a hallmark of Real Distinction. By extrapolating only a bit we can see that if two things⁹ are not Really Distinct, it must be because at least one of them does not have the necessary attribute(s) for completeness. We can also see that the key to recognizing a Real Distinction between two substances is recognizing that the two substances have attributes that allow each substance to be complete independently of anything else. In other words, Really Distinct substances need to have different attributes.¹⁰

Is this an accurate representation of Descartes' reasoning? Is the argument strong enough to stand on its own? I think the answer to the first question is yes, but the answer to the second question is no.

8 While we would certainly say that weight is Really Distinct from any mind it is so only in virtue of being a property of a body and not in virtue of its own nature.

9 When we say "two things" we are, strictly speaking, wrong. If there is no Real Distinction there will not actually be two things.

10 Two questions arise, Some or all attributes? How do we know that a substance doesn't have an attribute contingently? The same answer can be given to both, two substances must have different essential attributes (of course each substance has a single essential attribute). But here we are anticipating Rozemond's Principal Attribute Thesis. For Wilson it seems to be enough to say that a substance needs only one attributes such that it makes the idea of the substance complete.

If we are to take Descartes' conclusions in Meditation VI seriously, then I see no other way, in the *Meditations*, to get to them other than by way of this argument. But, as it stands, there are two troubling aspects of the argument. First, Wilson mentions that there is no argument provided by Descartes to justify the shift from showing that there is a thinking thing to the claim that the nature of mental substances is thinking. "Descartes does not seem to offer justification for the transition from 'I think' to 'Thought belongs to my nature'" (EAD, endnote 1). Second, Descartes reached his metaphysical conclusions from largely a priori epistemic grounds. Is Descartes justified in switching from an epistemological claim to a metaphysical one? Descartes could, and likely would, resort to the assurances that our understanding of the nature of God and of the truth of clear and distinct ideas he affirms in Meditation III. He would argue that his knowing with certainty that he is thinking just means that he knows it to be a part of his nature. This claim, coupled with the benevolence and omnipotence of God is enough to generate the conclusion that thinking is the nature of Mind. But any argument employing the nature of God as a premise wouldn't be sound until after Meditation III.¹¹ Descartes needs a way to link the cogito to his nature that does not rely on God's power. In other words, Descartes needs the metaphysical story to be in place in by Meditation II, not Meditation IV. Is Wilson's concern resolvable within Meditation II itself?

¹¹ Descartes wants the *Meditations* to proceed along the lines of a geometric proof. Thus, he is only able to use premises that he has already proved to be true. In Meditation II he has not yet discussed the nature of God.

I think it is because it is in the background of what is going on in Meditation II. If we take Descartes to have a consistent metaphysical picture between the *Meditations* and the *Principles* we shall be able to bring his implicit position into clearer relief. To see how to resolve these concerns I turn to another reading of Descartes.

Rozemond

Wilson's puzzle above (from endnote 1) is really about substance. What, for Descartes, is the nature of substance and how can we justify the conceptual points that are needed to allow his epistemic argument for Real Distinction to go through? Rozemond concludes that this problem can be resolved by turning our attention away from a concept of distinction based on separability and toward a conception of distinction based on a clear picture of the nature of substance. The possibility of Mind existing apart from Body is not the intended goal of the real argument for substance dualism. "His dualism does not consist in this possibility, nor is it fundamental to the argument. Instead, crucial to the argument is Descartes' conception of substance, including important claims about the relationship between the nature or essence of a substance and the properties it can have"(DD, p. 1). In other words, conceiving that a thing, A, can exist apart from some other thing, B, is only a sign that the two things are Really Distinct, not the reason that they are distinct. In his response to Caterus, Descartes states that he can "understand the mind to be a complete thing . . . though I deny that it has any of the attributes which are contained in the idea of a body. This would be quite impossible if there were not a real distinction between mind and body"(AT VII 121). The idea that minds and bodies are

complete and independent things *depends* on the actual occurrence of a Real Distinction.

We see him make a similar claim in the the Fourth replies.

I must also explain what I meant by saying that a real distinction cannot be inferred from the fact that one thing is conceived apart from another by an abstraction of the intellect which conceives the thing inadequately. It can be inferred only if we understand one thing apart from another completely, or as a complete thing. . . . In the same way, when I said that a thing must be understood completely, I did not mean that my understanding must be adequate, but merely that I must understand the thing well enough to know that my understanding is complete. . . . that is, I took 'a complete understanding of something' and 'understanding something to be a complete thing' as having the same meaning. . . . by a 'complete thing' I simply mean a substance endowed with the forms or attributes which enable me to recognize that it is a substance. (AT VII 220-221)

Descartes is clearly asserting that a Real Distinction between two things should only be inferred (“it can be inferred”) after we conclude that the two things are complete substances in their own right (“endowed with forms or attributes which enable me to recognize that it is a substance”). Showing that Mind and Body are separable is not enough to show that they are independent substances if they are not complete things. As Rozemond suggests, “the conclusion that he aims for is that mind and body are different subjects of inherence, each of which actually has an entirely different set or properties” (DD, p. 6).

The idea is just that, for Descartes, determining that a distinction (regardless of which kind of distinction) can be properly said to obtain can only be a recognition of the way the world already is. And this conclusion is in accord with many passages in Descartes. In *Principles* 1.51, a substance is said to be a thing able to exist without anything else. “By substance we can understand nothing other than a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on nothing else.” And in the Fourth Replies Descartes writes

that “the notion of a substance is just this – that it can exist by itself, that is without the help of any other substance. . . . I should have added nothing more to demonstrate that there is a real distinction between the mind and the body, since we commonly judge that the order in which things are mutually related in our perception of them corresponds to the order in which they are related in actual reality”(AT VII 226).

Substances exist as things in their own right; they could exist even if no other thing existed. Modes and attributes are properties that cannot exist without some other things, namely substances, existing. Substances are metaphysically independent, which is not to say they are causally independent, of any and all other substances and, a fortiori, independent of the modes and attributes of other substances. Modes are both causally and metaphysically dependent on substances. It is because of this actual metaphysical independence that substances are Really Distinct from each other. Substances “*exist in such a way* as to depend on no other thing” for their existence (VIII A, 1.51) Rozemond writes,

To take an arbitrary example, a piece of wax is a thing, which exists in its own right. Its shape and size are properties of it, which exist by belonging to the piece of wax. As a result, if one were to destroy the piece of wax, the shape and size would disappear. But the piece of wax itself is not a property of something else such that its existence depends on that entity in this way. (DD, pg. 8)

Rozemond is concerned to show that substances are independent because she wants to support Descartes' claim that mind is independent of body, that these substances are Really Distinct. But it is not enough to show that in general substances are independent, because Mind and Body might still fail to be different substances. To establish a Real Distinction between Mind and Body we need to show that minds and

bodies are different kinds of substance, making them independent and incompatible.

Rozemond turns to Descartes' *Principles* to find what she needs.

To each substance there belongs one principal attribute; in the case of mind, this is thought, and in the case of body it is extension.

A substance may indeed be known through any attribute at all; but each substance has one principal property which constitutes its nature and essence, and to which all other properties are referred. Thus extension in length, breadth and depth constitutes the nature of corporeal substance; and thought constitutes the nature of thinking substance. Everything else which can be attributed to body pre-supposes extension, and is merely a mode of an extended thing; and similarly, whatever we find in the mind is simply one of the various modes of thinking. For example, shape is unintelligible except in an extended thing; and motion is unintelligible except as motion in an extended space; while imagination, sensation and will are intelligible only in a thinking thing. By contrast, it is possible to understand extension without shape or movement, and thought without imagination or sensation, and so on; and this is quite clear to anyone who gives the matter his attention. (VIII A, I.53)

Descartes' view is that every substance has a single attribute that differentiates it from other kinds of substance and which every other property is a mode. But it is important to realize that this primary attribute of a substance is not just a necessary property. Rozemond explains: “His view is a particular version of the idea that a substance has a nature that determines and explains what properties that substance has” (DD, pg. 9). These other properties, which Descartes names qualities and which include weight and shape for physical substance, and judgment for mental substance, are metaphysically dependent on the principal attribute. A principal attribute is more “like the atomic structure of, say, gold, which determines the properties of gold, such as its color, weight, solubility in aqua regia”(DD, pg. 9). The general idea is that every substance has a primary (principal) attribute which determines all of the other attributes that the substance has to have and in turn the modes that it may have. In other words, no

shape without extension, no judgment without thought.¹² And it is in virtue of having different primary attributes that two substances are Really Distinct.

Every substance has a principal attribute that is just that substance's essential nature. And it is because of the very different essential natures of Mind and Body, thought and extension, that Mind and Body are really distinct.

One major objection to Rozemond's Primary Attribute interpretation is the possibility that Descartes adhered to the more traditional Bare Subject View. According to this view a substance is nothing more than the subject in which properties inhere. "Properties inhere in the subject, but are not constituents of a substance. The subject constitutes the entire substance"(DD, pg. 10). The key difference between the Bare Subject View and Descartes' Principal Attribute Thesis is that substance, according to the Bare Subject View, has no constituent properties, and can exist without them, even if only by an act of God. This would make it impossible to differentiate between substances. There would be no difference between the substance of a mental thing and the substance of a physical thing, and thus no a priori reason why they couldn't be the same substance.

Descartes indirectly addresses the possibility of a Bare Substance theory:

Thought and extension can be regarded as constituting the natures of intelligent and corporeal substance; and then they must be conceived not otherwise than as thinking substance itself and extended substance itself, that is, as mind and body. . . . For we have some difficulty in abstracting the notion of substance from the notions of thought and extension, since the distinction between these notions and the notion of substance itself is merely a conceptual one. (AT VIII A I.63)

12 Notice that this is exactly what we would intuitively conclude is the proper order of dependence.

Descartes here explicitly denies that we can have a clear and distinct idea of substance without including an idea of the principal attribute of that substance. This alone would block any attempt by Descartes to consider the Bare Subject View as a viable foundation for his metaphysics. But Descartes' inability to have a clear and distinct idea of bare substance is derived from a stronger and more interesting claim. Descartes asserts that there is only a Conceptual Distinction between our ideas of principal attributes and substances. This claim suggests that the link between substances and attributes for Descartes is stronger than the Bare Subject View could support. If the Conceptual Distinction is such that the attribute and the substance are identical, then the Bare Subject View is obviously false. If the Conceptual Distinction is actually such that they are only inseparable, then they are still closer than the Bare Subject View would allow. On the Bare Substance View a substance does not require any attribute in order to exist. Further, Descartes thinks that a substance needs a principal attribute not only to exist but also to be complete.¹³

There is another theory of substance that Descartes could have adhered to, the Scholastic Theory¹⁴ of substance. According to this theory corporeal substance was composed of prime matter and immaterial forms. Prime matter is similar to the substance in the Bare Subject View, a featureless subject that gains or loses attributes according to the form imprinted on it. But Descartes asserted, against the scholastics, that Prime Matter was incoherent because matter could not be clearly and distinctly conceived as having no properties. In *The World* “On the other hand, let us not also think that this

13 Since having a complete idea of a thing is equivalent to having an idea of a complete thing, and complete ideas require knowing the primary attribute.

14 I shall use scholastic to stand for philosophical positions common in Europe before Descartes and derived from Aristotle.

matter is the 'prime matter' of the philosophers, which they have stripped so thoroughly of all its forms and qualities that nothing remains in it which can be clearly understood”(AT XI 33). And further on he writes:

Nevertheless, the philosophers are so subtle that they can find difficulties in things which they seem extremely clear to other men, and the memory of their 'prime matter', which they know to be rather hard to conceive, may divert them from knowledge of the matter of which I am speaking. Thus I must tell them at this point that, unless I am mistaken, the whole difficulty they face with their matter arises from its external extension – that is, from the property of occupying space. In this, however, I am quite willing for them to think they are right, for I have no intention of stopping to contradict them. But they should also not find it strange if I suppose that the quantity of the matter I have described does not differ from its substance any more than number differs from things numbered. Nor should they find it strange if I conceive its extension, or the property it has of occupying space, not as an accident, but as its true form and essence. For they cannot deny that it can be conceived in this way. (AT XI 35-36)

At first it seems that Descartes may be attempting to diffuse any conflict between his view of matter and the scholastic account, but I think this would be a misinterpretation. His tone is neither conciliatory nor respectful (the sarcasm in the opening lines is hard to miss). But the quotation does contain a significant philosophical thrust against the concept of prime matter. His description of prime matter as something that is hard to have a clear and distinct idea of echoes the *Principles*: “Thus extension in length, breadth and depth constitutes the nature of corporeal substance; . . . shape is unintelligible except in an extended substance”(AT VIII A I.53). Since the the idea of prime matter is not clear and distinct it would be ill-suited as a foundational principle of a proper theory of metaphysics. Finally, Descartes explicitly contends that the idea of a material bare substance is inconceivable. In effect, he is asserting that his theory “cannot

be denied,” a hallmark of a clear and distinct idea. That Descartes intends to disparage the prime matter theory is clear.¹⁵

It also seems clear that Cartesian substance has no need of the Scholastic notion of form since the principal attribute takes the place of the forms in establishing which properties a thing will have. In the last line of the quoted passage he does describe extension as the “form and essence” of matter, but in this context form cannot mean scholastic form. Scholastic forms are (incomplete) substances in their own right, while extension is nothing more than an attribute. For Descartes, extension is the essence of physical matter, it is its principal attribute, and scholastic forms are no such thing.¹⁶ This new conception of matter also served to establish a metaphysical grounding for Descartes' mechanistic physics. This last point shouldn't be overlooked. Descartes' mechanistic model is incompatible with scholastic form. Descartes clearly broke with the traditional accounts of substance.

For all that we have shown, Mind is not yet necessarily a substance that is different from Body. It could still be a quality of Body or a mode of extension. Conversely, extension could be a quality of Mind or mode of thought. To show that they are distinct substances we need to return to our discussion of what a substance is.

We have already seen¹⁷ that to be a substance is merely to be a complete thing: “by a complete thing' I simply mean a substance endowed with the forms or attributes which enable me to recognize that it is a substance”(AT VIII 222). So, if we can show that the

15 Notice that the arguments against the possibility of Scholastic prime matter can be easily used against the Bare substance view.

16 Whether or not a substance just is its principal attribute is really irrelevant. While I think that the relationship is one of identity, all of the arguments involving either substance, principal attributes or both should go through regardless of whether the two are identical or merely inseparable.

17 Wilson, above.

clear and distinct idea of Mind is complete, we will prove that Mind is a complete substance. To do this we must show that the idea of Mind, considered only as a thinking thing, is independent of any ideas of Body or extension.

First, consider the possibility that thought is a mode of a physical substance. Careful attention to the epistemic requirements for thinking of a mode rules out this possibility. “[W]e can clearly perceive a a substance apart from the mode which we say differs from it, whereas we cannot, conversely, understand the mode apart from the substance”(AT VIII A 1.61). Since our ideas of modes are dependent on our ideas of substances, we are unable to conceive of them without also conceiving of their substance, except in a confused way. If thought is a mode of extension, we should be unable to consider the former clearly and distinctly without the latter. Descartes uses this point in the Second Meditation to show that thought is not a mode of Body when he asserts that he can think of himself as a mind clearly and distinctly without also thinking of himself as an extended thing. “If the 'I' is understood strictly as we have been taking it, then it is quite certain that knowledge of it does not depend on things of whose existence I am as yet unaware; so it cannot depend on any of the things which I invent in my imagination. . . . Yet I know for certain both that I exist and a the same time that all such images and, in general, everything relating to the nature of body, could be mere dreams <and chimeras>”(AT VII 27-28).¹⁸ Descartes of course remains agnostic about the existence of bodies, but the point he is making is that a thinking thing is complete in itself as nothing more than a thinking thing and that it does not depend on being extended.

¹⁸ Terms with inside angle brackets“< , >” are found in the French text but not the Latin.

Reasoning along these lines also precludes the possibility that Mind and Body are themselves modes of some third thing. If you clearly and distinctly consider two modes you will, at the same time, be compelled to consider the substances in which they inhere. If they both inhere in the same substance, it stands to reason that you will notice that they are both modes of the same substance.

Finally, there is the chance that our ideas of thought and extension are only Conceptually Distinct from each other, or from some third idea, and as a result thought and extension might be identical or inseparable from each other or some third thing, as would be the case if they were both principal attributes of the same substance. But as Descartes writes in a letter from 1641¹⁹ “When things are separated only by a mental abstraction, one necessarily notices their conjunction and union when one considers them together. But one could not notice any between the body and the soul, provided that one conceives them as one should, the one as that which fills space, the other as that which thinks.” (AT III 420-421) Similar conceptual exercises will show that neither thought, nor extension, is dependent on any other quality or mode.²⁰

Where do we stand now? We have seen that thought is neither a mode nor a quality of extension, and therefore is unrelated to Body. We have also concluded that each substance must have a principal attribute. But since we cannot have a clear and distinct idea of either Mind or thought without the other, thought must be the principal attribute of Mind. And since all that is needed for a substance to be complete is for it to

19 Probably to de Launay, though the letter is not explicitly addressed.

20 Of course Descartes explicitly rules out the possibility of a substance having multiple principal attributes in *Principles* 1.53 but the quotation rules out any other scenarios in which we might have thought it was possible to confusedly consider the same attribute to actually be two different attributes.

have a principal attribute, Mind must be a complete substance even without having any of the properties of Body.

But might it be the case that extension is a mode or quality of mind making mind in fact extended? To prevent this conclusion Descartes needs only to establish that extension is itself a principal attribute.

The existence of an extended thing that does not think is likely to be obvious to anyone. Descartes makes it clear that thinking is not an essential attribute of physical things in his discussion of the piece of wax in the Second Meditation. “Let us concentrate, take away the everything which does not belong to the wax, and see what is left: merely something extended, flexible and changeable”(AT VII 31). In a move analogous to how we showed the independence of thinking and Mind from extension, the wax example shows us that we have a complete idea, which is clear and distinct, of an extended thing that does not in any way include the idea of thinking. An extended thing is itself complete without any attributes or modes of thought. Extension is therefore at least one principal attribute of Body. We are left only with the need to show that each substance can have only one principal attribute.

Descartes makes it clear in *Principles* 1.53 “each substance has one principal property which constitutes its nature and essence.” It is unfortunate that Descartes does not explicitly endorse the principal attribute theory in any of his other works, but it can be seen operating behind the curtain in certain other passages. Rozemond points out a passage in the Fourth Replies where Descartes writes: “No one who has perceived two substances through two different concepts has ever failed to judge that they are really distinct”. She analyzes the passage in this way:

The concepts in question are those of the mind as a thinking complete thing and body as an extended complete thing, where neither concept contains what belongs to the other concept. The idea is that mind and body are perceived through thought and extension respectively. I think that what is behind this comment is Descartes' view that two principal attributes yield two substances. The comment suggests that he regarded this view as pretty obvious, or that he simply assumed it - which might explain why he does not make the Attribute Premise more explicit when he states or discusses the Real Distinction Argument. (DD, 25)

If the possibility of multiple principal attributes were a live option, Descartes would likely have qualified the claim by alluding to the possibility of perceiving a single substance through two attributes. That he does not make such a qualification can be taken as evidence that he did not take multiple principal attributes in a single substance to be a metaphysical possibility.

There is also a passage from the work Conversation with Burman in which Descartes is quoted as saying:

You can however pose the following question: since thinking or thought is an attribute, to what substance does it belong? To a corporeal substance? Or rather to incorporeal and spiritual substance? The answer to this is clear. You have a clear conception of corporeal substance, and you also have a clear conception of thinking substance as distinct from, and incompatible with, corporeal substance, just as corporeal substance is incompatible with thinking substance. In view of this, you would be going against your own powers of reasoning in the most absurd fashion if you said the two were one and the same substance. For you have a clear conception of them as two substances which not only do not entail one another but are actually incompatible. (CB 43)

In this statement Descartes lays out the position that we would expect him to take in accordance with the principal attribute premise, even referring to attributes explicitly. Thinking is an attribute of Mind (“incorporeal substance”) and it would be “absurd” to think that it could be the attribute of any other substance. Further, his tone fits well with Rozemond's conjecture that, for Descartes, the premise that a substance has one and only one principal attribute is a basic idea that needs to be neither argued for nor analyzed.

Thus I think that we should conclude that for Descartes principal attributes mutually exclude each other.

If our investigations of Descartes are not faulty, his fundamental ontology is one in which every substance has one and only one principal attribute. This principal attribute is a unique feature of substance that determines what other attributes or modes it might have. It is for all intents and purposes indistinguishable from the substance itself, if not identical with it. And it is the mutually exclusive nature of the attributes, and thus substances, that make the substances Really Distinct.

The Combined View

Rozemond thinks that her interpretation renders Wilson's unnecessary, or at least shows Wilson's theory to be incomplete with respect to the separation of Mind from Body. While I concur with Rozemond that Wilson's Epistemological Argument does not show that mind and body have to be fully independent, I do not think that this was Wilson's goal. I take her project to be an attempt to explain how Descartes can show that Mind and Body are distinct. She does not claim that the distinction between Mind and Body, in so far as it is a metaphysical distinction, is caused by the epistemic conclusions drawn in the *Meditations*. We should also remember that Wilson expressed lingering doubts about how adequate the Epistemic Argument is.

Rozemond's theory, as I see it, shows that the argument for a Real Distinction between Mind and Body depends on Descartes' theory of substance so that Mind and Body aren't merely separable but fully independent and essentially dissimilar.

The proof given by Wilson, propositions 1-7 above, might be supplemented as follows.

- (8) The relationship between two substances A and B can be discovered by an epistemological investigation but is founded on the essential natures of the substances.
- (9) If two things are substances, then they are metaphysically independent of each other.
- (10) If two things A and B are metaphysically independent of each other, they are Really Distinct.
- (11) To be a substance is to be a complete thing and I can have a complete idea of A iff A is a complete thing.
- (12) By (9), (10) and (11), if I have a complete idea of A that does not include any idea of B, and a complete idea of B that does not include any idea of A, then A and B are different complete substances and thus Really Distinct. So, A and B are Really Distinct.
- (13) Further, each substance has one, and only one, principal attribute. The principal attribute determines what other qualities and modes the substance

may have, and any quality or mode that a substance could have is had in virtue of having a principal attribute.

- (14) Knowing the principal attribute of a substance is sufficient for having a complete idea of that substance.
- (15) Thinking is not a mode of extension, neither is extension a mode of thinking. Thinking and extension are not modes of some other attribute. Therefore, thinking and extension are distinct attributes.
- (16) By (12), (13) and (14), I can have a complete idea of Mind by clearly and distinctly conceiving of it as nothing other than a thinking thing. I can have a complete idea of Body by clearly and distinctly conceiving of it as nothing other than an extended thing.
- (17) By (15) and (16), thought is the principal attribute of Mind and extension is the principal attribute of Body.
- (18) By (8) and (16), Mind and Body are substances and Really Distinct from each other. So, Mind and Body are metaphysically independent of each other.

Combining Rozemond's metaphysical argument with Wilson's epistemic argument gives us two ways to arrive at the traditional interpretation of Cartesian metaphysics.

While Rozemond's theory should be acknowledged as more fundamental than Wilson's, I see the two arguments as complimentary, not competing.²¹

21 It has been suggested that there is an alternative interpretation to the reconstruction I have provided. Kirk Ludwig suggests that we could consider steps 13 and 15 to be sufficient for establishing the distinction between Mind and Body. Further, Wilson's reconstruction of the epistemic argument could be seen to be underwriting step 15. Hence, Rozemond's metaphysical argument would need Wilson's epistemic argument in order to go through. If this is the case, then so much the better for my suggestion that the two views can be combined to give a coherent account of Descartes' views.

CHAPTER 3 ATTRIBUTIVE REAL DISTINCTION

Hoffman also considers Descartes' theory of distinctions but he ends up proposing a radical new way of understanding the nature of Real Distinction. His interpretation of Real Distinction is motivated by what he sees as a serious problem: Minds and Bodies are just Modally Distinct from each other. This problem occurs to him as he considers the relationship between Mind, Body and God. He concludes that the dependence of Mind and Body on God could have problematic consequences. As he sees it, the kind of dependence Minds and Bodies have on God is an instance of that covered by Modal Distinction (type 2) not Real Distinction. In this fashion, the traditional picture of substance dualism, with its emphasis on the difference between Mind and Body, is challenged. He reaches this preliminary conclusion:

Given that Descartes thinks that mind and body cannot be clearly and distinctly conceived apart from God, in order to preserve his view that mind and body are not modally distinct in this second sense but rather really distinct, he would have to argue first, that there is more than one way things can be conceptually and metaphysically dependent on something else, and second, that the sort of dependence mind and body have on God does not undermine the claim that they are really distinct. (DTD, pg. 59-60)

Hoffman's solution is to turn away from *substantive* dualism toward an *attributive* dualism.¹ In other words, what it means for Mind and Body to be Really Distinct is only

¹ “Attributive dualism” simply means that Real Distinctions are determined by the incompatibility of a substance and an attribute, e.g. Mind is incompatible with extension so it is Really Distinct from Body.

that Mind does not have the attribute of extension, neither is thought an attribute of Body, but Mind and Body do not have to be independent of each other.

Further, Hoffman wants to conclude that we should “believe that Descartes would say that if it turned out that thought and extension are only distinct by reason, that is, if neither attribute could be conceived apart from the other, then instead of drawing the weak conclusion that their subjects cannot exist apart from one another, we should draw the the strong conclusion that they have the same subject”(DTD, pg. 65). Since Hoffman thinks that subject and substance are equivalent,² he is proposing that the putatively different substances Mind and Body should be thought of as a single substance in which both thought and extension inhere. This is, of course, a major revision to the traditional understanding of Descartes' Dualism.

Conceptual Distinction

As part of the move toward property dualism, Hoffman contends that in most cases when we perceive a Conceptual Distinction the source of the distinction is the recognition of two things that are different though inseparable.³ This allows him to resolve a problem that arises from holding that extension is conceptually distinct from both Body and duration. The problem is that even though it would be acceptable for proponents of Conceptual Distinction (with respect to identity) to hold that identity is the correct description of the relationship between extension and Body, i.e., extension is identical with Body, it can not be the correct description of the relationship between duration and Body. But Conceptual Distinction (with respect to separability) does seem to be the right way of distinguishing our ideas of duration and extension, and it is also an

² More on this later.

³ What I have characterized as Conceptual Distinction with respect to separability. See Appendix A.

acceptable way to differentiate extension and Body, or thought and Mind. Since Conceptual Distinction (with respect to separability) seems to have more explanatory power than Conceptual Distinction (with respect to identity), Hoffman concludes that in almost all cases of Conceptual Distinction the things being thought about are inseparable and not identical.

Hoffman does allow for one exception to the claim that all instances of Conceptual Distinction are about inseparable things. We could have a Conceptual Distinction (with respect to identity) in the case of universals that are instantiated in particulars.

So I am inclined to think that Descartes is best interpreted as treating different sorts of cases of rational distinction differently. In the case of attributes which are in objects, those that cannot be clearly and distinctly conceived apart are inseparable in reality. In the case of attributes which are only in our thought, namely the universals, when we consider them in objects they are identical with the particular attributes in the object. (DTD, p. 63)

So, certain attributes (those that instantiate universals) are identical with their substances.

Despite this broad application of Conceptual Distinction with respect to separability, Hoffman eventually reaches the strong conclusion that even though a Real Distinction between Mind and Body does obtain, the union of Mind and Body is still a single substance. “So in the case of mind and body, the subjects of thought and extension, instead of there being four possibilities, that they are really distinct, modally distinct, rationally distinct, or identical, there were only three possibilities. They could have turned out to be really distinct, modally distinct or numerically the same substance, that is, identical.” (DTD, p. 65)

It is a bit difficult to see how a broad application of the separability flavor of Conceptual Distinction leads to the conclusion that Mind and Body are identical. But Hoffman's thinking seems to be that concluding that Mind and thought are merely inseparable allows Descartes to maintain that Mind and Body are a single substance, but does not force him to conclude that Body and thought, or Mind and extension, are identical. Further, Man is merely inseparable from thought and extension.

This is clearly a good result for Hoffman, since it shows that Mind is not identical to thought. When we conclude that Mind and Body form a single substance, there is no danger of concluding that Body is identical to thought. But contrary to Hoffman's proposed interpretation, the explanatory power of Conceptual Distinction (with respect to separability) does not range as broadly. For instance, the Conceptual Distinction that exists between the ideas of “the inventor of bifocals” and “the first Post-Master General of the US” is different from the kind of Conceptual Distinction that exists between the ideas of the radius of a circle and its circumference.⁴ To insist that there is only one kind of relationship that can obtain amongst things about which we have Conceptually Distinct ideas is to insist either that in the former case the extension Benjamin Franklin is merely inseparable from itself or that the radius and circumference of a circle are identical to each other. Hoffman would have us conclude the former, but either conclusion is absurd. I take this to be sufficient reason to doubt that Descartes would support only one kind of relationship between things about which we have Conceptually Distinct ideas.

Yet this shows only that there must be more than one relationship available in the world for the intentional objects of Conceptually Distinct ideas, and I have not shown that

⁴ I take it as intuitively obvious that neither “Ben Franklin” nor the properties of a specific circle would be mistaken for universals.

Hoffman's account of the relationship between thought and Mind (or extension and Body) is incorrect. But I think that Rozemond's Principal Attribute Premise is a compelling reason to think that Hoffman is incorrect.

Rozemond points out that in various passages Descartes seems to be identifying substances with principal attributes, not merely relating them to each other (AT VIIIA I.63, AT VIIIA I.53, and AT VII 31). Further, if Body and extension were only inseparable, then Body, strictly speaking, would have to be a substance very much like the substance of either the Bare Subject View sort or of the Scholastic Prime Matter sort. We have already seen arguments against either position. But the most telling argument is this: any story in which a substance is not identical with its Principal Attribute is one in which the substance does not need the Principal Attribute in order to exist. In such a scenario we should be able to have a clear and distinct idea of the substance by itself, but one fact that Descartes explicitly denies that we could have any such idea (AT VIIIA 1.31, AT XI 35-36) entails that for him a substance cannot exist without a principal attribute.

Hoffman is aware of the Primary Attribute Thesis, but disagrees with Rozemond's strong conclusion. To support his interpretation he cites a passage from Descartes'

Comments on a Certain Broadsheet.

As for the attributes which constitute the nature 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 together 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 question of a simple subject (as in the present case) rather than a composite one. (AT VIIIB 349-350)

Hoffman claims that this passage expands on the understanding of substance that is suggested by the Principal Attribute Premise. He argues that this passage actually supports the conclusion that a simple substance can have more than one principal attribute, as long as these are such that the concept of one is contained in the concept of another.

I am unconvinced by his proposal. Hoffman seems to be trading on two ambiguities in the *Comments* passage. The first is a textual ambiguity concerning the grammatical structure. The second is an ambiguity in the way Descartes is using the idea of a subject.

Hoffman's interpretation can be seen as a misreading the cited quotation from the *Comments*. He interprets the line “those which are different, and such that that the concept of one is ...” as a conjunctive statement describing two different properties of principal attributes (being a principal attribute and having its concept contained in the concept of another principal attribute). Hoffman's reading is analogous to the way we would read “red is a pretty color and it is not blue.” But the line has a comma before the 'and' and after 'other.' This is usually a grammatical structure that is introducing an unrestricted clause. In this case a clause that is functioning appositionally. It should be read as something like this 'it cannot be said that those (principal attributes) which are different from each other, where different is defined as the concept of one not not being contained in the concept of the other, are present together in one and the same thing.' This reading follows the grammar of the sentence and fits the definition of Principal Attributes in the *Principles*.

But Hoffman is also equivocating between subject and substance. While I agree that any substance is a subject (throughout his works Descartes often uses 'subject' where we would expect 'substance'), Descartes did not intend 'subject' and 'substance' to be synonymous. In any case, given the ambiguity in the text's use of “subject”, the identity of substance and subject would have to be established independently. Later in that passage Descartes has ample opportunity to assert that a human being is a substance, but he describes a human being as a mere entity.⁵

More perplexing, however, is a series of conclusions drawn by Hoffman from the *Comments* passage:

First, Descartes makes it clear in this passage that he believes even a simple subject can have two or more attributes of the sort that constitute the nature of things. This can happen when the concept of one is contained in the concept of the other. . . . Thus I would argue that the correct Attribute Premise is this: no simple subject can have more than one attribute of the sort that constitutes the nature of things when their concepts are independent. Second, this passage makes clear that Descartes thinks it is true only of simple subjects that they can have only one principal attribute . . . Composite subjects can have more than one such principal attribute. (DTD p. 66)

On Hoffman's reading of Descartes, certain principal attributes are such that their concept is contained within the concept of some other principal attribute. I cannot see how such a position is viable. Consider two principal attributes A and B. According to Hoffman, there are two ways in which A and B could be related. Either the concept of one is contained in the concept of the other or they are fully independent. In the first case, it would be hard to see how the contained concept could be the concept of a principal attribute. If the concept of B is contained in the concept of A, then there can be no Bs without As. The B attribute is dependent on the A attribute. But this just means

⁵ Here I offer a promissory note to further develop the argument against 'substance' and 'subject', being synonymous later in the thesis.

that the A attribute is the principal attribute, it is the attribute that determines what other attributes a substance can have. Further, Descartes writes that a substance “has one principal property which constitutes its nature and essence”(AT VIII A 1.53) Hoffman's account would suggest that a substance could have two essential natures. It should not go unnoticed that for a substance to have both thought and extension as attributes it would be both essentially material and immaterial.

We have already seen that establishing the order dependence is one of the ways of distinguishing principal attributes from dependent attributes.⁶ A principal attribute is one that is itself presupposed by every other attribute of that substance: color, density, motion, etc., all presuppose extension and the relationship is one of metaphysical dependence, not just conceptual dependence. How can an attribute that is metaphysically and conceptually dependent on some other attribute be a *principal* attribute? In the second alternative, where A and B are fully independent, Hoffman would be forced to conclude that a single substance could have two independent and distinct natures. I take such a position to be untenable.

Further, it is clear that Descartes believed thought and extension are each principal attributes.⁷ Even if an argument could be constructed to show that there is room for dependent principal attributes in Descartes' ontology, thought and extension could not be included in that group. Descartes is explicit in the *Principles* that thought and extension are principal attributes. The kinds of attributes that support other properties. “Everything else which can be attributed to body presupposes extension, and is merely a mode of an extended thing; similarly, whatever we find in the mind is simply one of the various

⁶ See Rozemond discussion.

⁷ See my entry in Appendix A on substance and AT VIII A 1.53

modes of thinking.”(AT VIIIA 1.53) Hoffman seems to acknowledge this when he inserts a further conclusion, drawn from the same *Comments* passage, that *complex* substances can embody multiple primary attributes. I will return to Hoffman's discussion of complex substances in a later section. My main point is that Descartes' unequivocal position on this matter goes against Hoffman's interpretation.

In *Principles* I.53 Descartes himself argues that each substance has a principal attribute upon which all its other properties depend. In an attempt to ameliorate the discrepancy between his interpretation of the passage from the *Comments* and the passage from the *Principles*, Hoffman states that it is his belief that the passage in the *Principles* is meant to convey a contingent claim about substances that happened to be created, not a necessary metaphysical truth. “I think that the *Principles* passage reflects Descartes' view that as a matter of fact the simple substances created by God have one principal attribute. But I think it is a mistake to read the *Principles* passage as implying that it is some sort of fundamental metaphysical truth that there can be no simple substance that has more than one principal attribute”(DTD, pg. 67). This point is crucial for Hoffman. While the text of the *Comments* is ambiguous, the text of the *Principles* is clear. If Hoffman cannot provide an alternate reading of *Principles* I.53, he should change his interpretation of the *Comments* passage to agree with the *Principles*. Is Hoffman's alternative plausible?

Descartes writes, “The first part of philosophy is metaphysics, which contains the principles of knowledge, including the explanation of of the principal attributes of God, the non-material nature of our souls and all the clear and distinct notions which are in us”(AT IXB 14). When detailing the structure of the *Principles* he writes, “I divided the book into four parts. The first contains the principles of knowledge, i.e., what may be

called 'first philosophy' or 'metaphysics'; so in order to gain a sound understanding of this part is appropriate to read first all of the Meditations which I wrote on the same subject”(AT IXB 16). So, *Principles* I.53 is part of a work examining clear and distinct notions, notions Descartes thinks are logically undeniable.

Further, I find it very difficult to understand how a single passage in the *Principles*, a work in first philosophy, appearing amongst statements about the nature of God, substance in general, and universals could be taken as anything but a claim about necessary metaphysical principles. Descartes does not signal a departure from this theme in the surrounding sections. If Descartes believed that *Principles* I.53 expressed a contingent truth, it would be extraordinarily odd for him not to convey that to the reader. Nor does Hoffman substantiate his claim by providing further textual evidence. His main justification seems to be that turning the passage in the *Principles* into a statement about contingent facts would make it compatible with his interpretation of the *Comments* passage. Of course, abandoning his controversial position on the *Comments* passage would also remove the discrepancy without also introducing the highly contentious claim about I.53.

Having cleared the ground of competing claims, Hoffman attempts to show that conceiving of thought and extension as independent of each other (a main requirement for the Real Distinction of Mind and Body) can be interpreted in a weak sense. He argues that “what Descartes means when he says that mind and body are really distinct is that mind can exist without the essential attribute of body existing in it (and hence without any of its modes) and that body can exist without the essential attribute of mind existing in it (and hence without any of its modes). We might characterize this sort of separability

as separability with respect to attributes”(DTD, p.69). Hoffman means to preempt Rozemond and Wilson's stronger Mind-Body independence by the claim that any dependence relationship between Mind and Body would make them Modally distinct instead of Really Distinct.

Hoffman believes his interpretation of Real Distinction has several intuitively appealing metaphysical consequences. On Hoffman's story Descartes' concept of substance allows that a substance may require another substance to exist. It also suggests that, for Descartes, existing as a substance entails only being able to exist without existing in something else as in a subject, not the stronger claim that existing as a substance requires existing without existing in something else as a subject. Finally, attributive Real Distinction allows Descartes to hold that what it means for a mind to exist without being a body is just for Mind to exist without the attribute of extension.

I, too, believe that these three consequences capture the original intent of Descartes. And I included the Wilson and Rozemond interpretations to show that they are compatible with the stronger, traditional, claim that Mind and Body are metaphysically distinct.⁸

Wilson⁹ would have no trouble with the suggestion that Real Distinction should not entail actual independence in the world. It is completely in line with the idea that Minds and Bodies are Really Distinct, in a stronger sense than Hoffman's property dualism, to think that in the world every mind is, and must be, joined with a body, the

8 The final claim that a substance requires only the ability to exist without existing in something else as in a subject is incompatible with the stronger thesis only if the claim is read as a denial of the stronger position that to be a substance means to necessarily exist without existing in something else as in a subject.

9 We should remember that Rozemond's account is, I have argued, the foundation for Wilson's.

conjunction itself simply cannot be a matter of logical or metaphysical necessity. As Descartes writes “It is true that I may have (or, to anticipate, that I certainly have) a body that is very closely joined to me. But nevertheless, on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body and can exist without it”(AT VII 78). Even Descartes acknowledged that it is the ability to exist without each other that makes two things Really Distinct.

As for Hoffman's final intuitively satisfying conclusion, Rozemond can make exactly the same claim. Since, according to Rozemond, being Really Distinct is a matter of being metaphysically incompatible and independent, a fortiori on her view, a substance is able to exist without the attribute of any other substance.

What, then, can we make of Hoffman's project? His attempt to reconstruct Real Distinction led him into intractable problems. The textual support for his attempted recasting of Real Distinction is at best problematic. And the intuitively attractive conclusions that his interpretation of Descartes generates are supported by Wilson and Rozemond. Perhaps it would be useful to briefly list Hoffman's breakdown of Descartes' Theory of Distinctions to see if anything is salvageable. I take the following to summarize Hoffman's interpretation:

Real Distinction_H: A is Really Distinct from B iff its nature does not include the essential attribute of B, though its existence may require the existence of B.

Modal Distinction_{H1}: A is Modally Distinct from B iff it is dependent on B and B is a substance and independent of A. (“dependent on” should be read as “cannot exist without” and “independent of” just means “can exist without.”)

Modal Distinction_{H2}: A is Modally Distinct from B if both are dependent on some substance C and are not themselves substances. (again, “dependent on” should be read as “cannot exist without” and “independent of” just means “can exist without.”)

Conceptual Distinction_H: A is Conceptually Distinct from B iff A and B are different ideas that denote either the same thing or two things that are inseparable.

As Hoffman admits, one consequence of his interpretation is that the existence of one substance may require the existence of another substance. He also explains that “Given that created substances depend on God as the efficient cause of their existence, what Descartes presumably has in mind is that created substances do not require other created substances as an efficient cause of their existence”(DTD, pg. 74). Thus created substances are such that they may sometimes require the existence of some other created substance in order to exist though they do not require it as an efficient cause. What Hoffman must have in mind is either ontological or nomological dependence.

But there cannot be an ontological dependence between two Really Distinct substances. Ontological dependence is covered under the rubric of Modal Distinctions, and we have already shown that at most one of the two things in a Modally Distinct pair can be a substance. One might then argue, on Hoffman's behalf, that there is a nomological dependence between A and B if it is a law of nature that whenever an A exists a B necessarily exists. This sounds, at least initially, like the relationship that

Hoffman has in mind when he formulates his version of Real Distinction and his claim that *Principles* 1.53 is about contingent facts.

But there is a problem lurking here also. A nomological necessity is generally taken to have scope over the physical, contingent world. We might say that while it is logically possible for a ball to fail to transfer its momentum to another ball upon striking it,¹⁰ we should say it is nomologically impossible. How could the ontological status of substance (its essential nature) be determined by nomological laws? Notions of nomological dependence are simply out of place in a metaphysical theory. But let us suppose that Hoffman is suggesting some sort of super-nomological dependence that does determine metaphysical relationships. This still will not resolve the problem. Claiming that this supposed super-nomological dependence would not interfere with claims of Real Distinction leads to the conclusion that substances are essentially independent but possibly essentially dependent. Substances (which for Descartes are essentially complete things, and thus essentially independent of other substances) may, on Hoffman's reading of Real Distinction only exist if some other substance exists. This view amounts to a contradiction.¹¹

Even if Hoffman could save his interpretation of Real Distinction by resorting to some other kind of dependence, it is nevertheless the case that Descartes' Real Distinction is intended to cover cases of complete independence. Descartes writes, "the notion of a substance is just this- that it can exist by itself, that is without the aid of any other

¹⁰ This is assuming, of course, that there are no unusual circumstances active in the example.

¹¹ This supposed super-nomological dependence seems to me to be nothing more than straightforward metaphysical dependence, but one that would only come in ontological or efficient flavors. Both of which have already been ruled out. The claim that Hoffman's account requires that a substance have two different essential natures will be further developed in the next section of this thesis.

substance. . . . I should have added nothing more in order to demonstrate that there is a real distinction between mind and body, . . . For it is of the nature of substances that they should mutually exclude one another”(AT VII 226-227). We are supposed to take Real Distinction as guide to different and therefore independent substances. But Hoffman wants and needs to weaken Real Distinction to include substances that might be dependent on one another, in order to support the conclusion that a man is Really Distinct from his own body.¹²

If we could remove Hoffman's concerns about Mind and Body being merely Modally Distinct, we would have much less reason, if any, to accept Hoffman's novel position. I shall show that we can overcome his concerns in the next section.

God and Modal Distinctions

While I think that the difficulties Hoffman faces in supporting his interpretation of Descartes' theory of distinctions are severe enough to cast serious doubts on his conclusions, I think the very attempt to address the concern that Mind and Body are merely Modally Distinct (type 2) is fundamentally misguided, since that problem involves certain alarming misinterpretations of Descartes' claims and conclusions. Once these misinterpretations are cleared up the need for a new (problematic) interpretation, disappears.

The key to understanding what Hoffman is trying to prove lies in getting clear about what he means when he asserts that according to Descartes “mind and body cannot

¹² Remembering, or at this point anticipating, that Hoffman thinks men are substances.

be clearly and distinctly conceived apart from God.”(DTD pp. 59-60) Unfortunately what it means to be “apart from God” is ambiguous and could be taken in three ways:

- (1) Mind and Body cannot be conceived clearly and distinctly conceived to exist independently of God.
- (2) Mind and body cannot be conceived clearly and distinctly conceived except as a part of God, since they are dependent on God.
- (3) Mind and Body cannot be conceived clearly and distinctly without also conceiving of God.

Descartes endorses the first claim. In his view Mind and Body cannot exist independently of God because they rely on God as their initial and continuing efficient cause. But dependence on an efficient cause is no threat to Real Distinction as it is normally understood by Cartesian scholars. Hence, Hoffman must think that one of the other two options is the serious threat to Real Distinction.

The third claim is less easily dismissed. In the *Principles* Descartes does claim that we can understand Mind and Body as things which need only the concurrence of God to exist, so it seems that the will of God is part of our understanding of Mind and Body. But this is only one of the ideas that we have about created substances. And though it would be necessary to include this idea in what Descartes describes as an adequate idea of mind (or body), we have seen that having a complete idea does not entail having an adequate idea. And we have already seen in discussion of Wilson's reconstruction of the Epistemological Argument for Real Distinction that a complete idea of a thinking thing

need not include an idea of God. Finally, an idea of a complete thing is not only equivalent to a clear and distinct idea but also indicative of a complete thing,¹³ and so it would seem that the third version of Hoffman's statement is far from being a threat to the traditional, substantive, reading of Real Distinction.

While it could be argued that claiming that the mind is a thinking thing is claiming very little, it can't be argued that the idea is not clear and distinct. It *may* be the case that we can't have an adequate understanding of Mind and body without thinking of God, but we can have a clear and distinct idea of them without thinking of God.

Even though Hoffman's statement seems plausible as a statement about the relationship of certain ideas to other ideas, Descartes does think that we can clearly and distinctly conceive of minds and bodies without also conceiving of God. If he did not, the entire Second Meditation would be problematic. In that meditation he is certainly having clear and distinct ideas of minds and bodies without considering God.

The second reading of Hoffman's statement seems to be the one most likely to generate fears of Modal Dependence. 'Being a part' could easily be taken to mean being related as a mode is to a substance. Thus the concern turns out to be that Mind and Body are nothing more than modes of God. But in the *Meditations* Descartes defines God as “a supreme God, eternal, infinite, <immutable,> omniscient, omnipotent and the creator of all things that exist apart from him”(AT VII 40)¹⁴ In *Principles* 1.56 he states “we do not, strictly speaking, say that there are modes or qualities in God, but simply attributes, since in the case of God variation is unintelligible”. It seems clear that for Descartes whatever

13 See the response to a similar concern presented to Descartes by Arnauld in the Wilson section.

14 The attribute in the diamond brackets, being immutable, was added in the French edition. Even without being made explicit immutability would logically follow from the other attributes.

the status of individual created minds and bodies is, whether they are independent substances, dependent substances or something else entirely, they could not be modes of God.¹⁵ The question immediately following from the quotations is this, “Must we say that God is perfect *and* unchanging?”. Could we say that God is perfect but mutable? If we could, we could argue that Mind and Body are modes of God, as Hoffman contends.

The problem with this suggestion is that a change for God would have to be from one perfection to another perfection, but since he is infinite, he already has all possible perfections. There is literally nothing else that God could change into, no property that he could acquire, and still be God.¹⁶ If there were such a property, then the being we have been discussing would not have been the most perfect being and thus not really God at all. There can be no contingency in the nature of God; that is, God cannot be other than he is. This conclusion is significant because there is no way to understand Descartes' modes as anything but accidents.¹⁷ Descartes writes, “From the metaphysical point of view, however, it is quite unintelligible that God should be anything else but completely unalterable”(CB, 50.40). But God would have to be able to have accidents, would have to be alterable, to motivate the second version of Hoffman's challenge to the traditional interpretation of Real Distinction.

Thus Hoffman's claim that Descartes held that “mind and body cannot be clearly and distinctly conceived apart from God” is not a problem and therefore the idea that Mind and Body are only Modally Distinct from each other is a non-starter.

15 The idea that Mind and Body might be attributes of God like omniscience, omnipotence and immutability is certainly beyond anything recognizable as Descartes' philosophy.

16 It should be noted that since God is an immaterial being so many (if not most) properties will only be had by him eminently. That is, he has the power to cause them but does not actually have the properties.

17 Notice that this is true whether you prefer the monist view, that there is only a single physical substance in the world, or the pluralist view, that there are many physical substances in the world.

But Hoffman has a second concern. He contends that Descartes “would have to argue, first, that there is more than one way things can be conceptually and metaphysically dependent on something else, and second, that the sort of dependence mind and body have on God does not undermine the claim that they are really distinct” (DTD p. 60). If Hoffman is right in this assessment, we may still be forced to abandon the traditional interpretation of Real Distinction.

Descartes' own description of the relationship between created substances (Mind and Body) and uncreated substance (God) is that the former exist only with the concurrence of the latter. “In the case of all other substances, we perceive that they can exist only with the help of God's concurrence”(AT VIII A 1.51). Unfortunately, Descartes takes this relationship to be relatively unproblematic and neither defends nor explains it to any great extent. It seems safe, however, to draw the conclusion that for a thing to exist by the concurrence of another thing in no way implies that either of the two things is the subject of the other. We should also note that in the quotations supporting concurrence there is no implication of an inherence relationship between God and created substances. Inherence, or existing in a subject, is the way in which a mode depends on its substance. If concurrence is not that kind of dependence, it cannot entail that Mind and Body are modes of God.

Descartes does have two ways in which one thing can be dependent on another; inherence in a substance and as the subject of God's concurrence. While it is not transparent what inherence and concurrence are supposed to amount to, we could think of them as follows. Inherence is the relationship between a property and its subject, while

concurrence is a causal relationship between created substances and God.¹⁸ Since minds and bodies cannot be properties of God but exist only by God's concurrence, we should conclude that concurrence, does not share the supportive role typified by inherence in substance-mode relations.¹⁹ Perhaps discussing dependence (as if all cases of dependence were the same), instead of differentiating between concurrence and inherence, is the source of Hoffman's challenge. In any case, it does indeed seem that Descartes' metaphysics has two ways in which one thing can depend on another, and the dependence relationship between created substances and God does not violate Real Distinction.

There is one final reason to be suspicious of Hoffman's project. Hoffman's initial concern is that there is a Modal Distinction (type 2) between Mind and Body, because they are dependent on the same thing.²⁰ But there are two kinds of Modal Distinction, and Modal Distinction (type 2) presupposes, i.e., requires, Modal Distinction (type 1).²¹ Further, if the two modes are not modes of the same substance, they are not Modally Distinct (type 2) from each other. They are, instead, Really Distinct. “A *modal distinction* can be taken in two ways: . . . and secondly, as a distinction between two modes of the same substance. . . . A different case, however, is the distinction by which the mode of one substance is distinct from another substance or from the mode of another substance. . . . It seems more appropriate to call this kind of distinction real distinction, rather than a modal distinction”(AT VIII A I.61). For Hoffman's initial concern to take

18 Something like a supporting volition.

19 Strictly speaking a created mental substance is related to its modes by concurrence and inherence (since we generally think that a mind creates its own thoughts), while uncreated mental substance might be the subject of inherence of its attributes, depending on the position we take regarding attribute substance relationships. But since the problem at hand is the relationship of created substance to uncreated substance neither admission should damage my conclusion.

20 DTD, pg. 59-60 and pg. 68

21 See the definitions in Appendix A.

hold each of the created substances must be in danger of being merely Modally Distinct (type 1) from God.

Yet Hoffman does not seem sensitive to the fact that, according to Descartes, Modal Distinction (type 1) is a requirement for Modal Distinction (type 2). This requirement should force Hoffman to be concerned with the possibility not just that Mind and Body are Modally Distinct (type 2) from each other, but also that they are Modally Distinct (type 1) from God. In fact, the dependence of created substances on God, which obviously still exists in Hoffman's final story,²² should trigger the very same fears about dependence claims that Hoffman originally reacts to. This is because by Hoffman's reading of Real Distinction, Really Distinct things would still be dependent on God, which would then trigger the same fear of them being merely Modally Distinct. Why doesn't Hoffman have to meet the same demand that he placed on the traditional interpretation? He must then provide two ways in which things could be dependent on each other without undermining Real Distinction.

But now we see that Hoffman's original concern can be separated into two distinct ones. Is there an ambiguity in Descartes' notion of dependence that could cause a problem for his theory of distinctions? And given such an ambiguity, can the theory of distinctions be saved from the problem in the dependence story? Hoffman's answer to the latter question is not at the same time an answer to the former and thus does not address the more fundamental problem. But if he were to provide an interpretation of Descartes' theory of dependence according to which the dependence of Mind and Body on God is different from the dependence of modes on substances, and thereby addresses the more

²² Of course, any such claim by Hoffman would be clearly against Descartes' view of the relationship between created and uncreated substances.

fundamental claim, I can see no reason why the solution wouldn't also be available to the traditional interpreters of substantial Real Distinction, and thus allow a substantial Real Distinction to meet Hoffman's challenge.

CHAPTER 4 SUBSTANCE TRIALISM

Paul Hoffman has written two articles defending the view that Descartes held that the Mind-Body union of a human being is a substance in itself. That is, he argues that Descartes believed that Mind and Body, when united, form a single substance, an *ens per se*, not merely a composite being, an *ens per accidens*.

Hoffman's main sources of textual evidence that man is a substance *qua man* are Descartes' letters to Regius and his first letter to Princess Elizabeth. We have already seen a quotation from the letter to Regius,¹ and we shall take a look at several more in what follows. Hoffman does acknowledge that Descartes does not offer support for this claim very often but he sees the lack of a supporting argument as a puzzle, rather than as evidence against his thesis.² If Hoffman were correct, we would have to radically rethink our interpretation of Descartes' entire work.

Weak Substance

Hoffman's first step is to broaden the scope of substancehood beyond the narrow definition according to which a substance is defined by its dependence on nothing but God. He needs to do this to deflect the well-known interpretation of Descartes which

1 In the definitions section at the beginning of my project.

2 In his first paper, "The Unity Of Descartes's Man," he states the initial argument in favor of considering Descartes to have held that man is a substance. The second paper, "Cartesian Composites," is Hoffman's attempt to explain how Descartes could make the claim without contradicting his positions in his other works.

holds that, strictly speaking, there is only one created physical substance; all particular bodies are nothing more than modes of that single substance.³ I will call this the monist position. If Hoffman fails to find a way to either refute or modify the monist interpretation, his project must amount to nothing other than an attempt to explain how a substance could be formed out of the combination of one substance and the mode of some other substance. Hoffman himself acknowledges that the latter project would be impossible to complete.

The argument begins by asserting that there are two notions of substance in Descartes, a notion of a strong substance and a notion of a weak substance. A strong substance, also called a pure substance, is such that it can be created or destroyed only by God. Pure substance includes individual Minds and the whole of created Body. Impure substance, also called weak substance, includes individual physical things and individual men. Hoffman makes three interesting observations in support of his claim. First, Descartes does in fact refer to particular bodies as substances on several occasions.⁴ Any attempt to deny that Descartes believed in individual physical substances would have to explain away these passages. Second, Descartes never explicitly states that individual physical things should be thought of as modes of a single extended substance. Third, Descartes explicitly states that modes are not parts, but the monist interpretation would seem to entail that particular bodies are nothing but parts of a simple material substance.⁵

3 The theory that only the physical world as a whole should be considered a substance should not be confused with the Plenum or Bare Substance views discussed by Rozemond and in the previous portions of this thesis.

4 AT III 477; AT VII 222; AT VIII 7. And for passages that entail individual substancehood see, AT IV 349, AT VII 255; AT VIII 28.

5 UDM, pg. 349.

These three observations offer significant support for his view that particular bodies are substances in their own right.

There is, however, a passage where Descartes at least seems to support the idea that Body is a single substance. In the *Synopsis* to the *Meditations* Descartes writes, “we need to recognize that body, taken in the general sense, is a substance, so that it too never perishes. But the human body, in so far as it differs from other bodies, is simply made up of a certain configuration of limbs and other accidents of this sort. . . . And it follows from this that while the body can very easily perish the mind is immortal by its very nature” (AT VII 14). This quotation is sometimes coupled with passages from *Part 2* of the *Principles*⁶ to shore up the conclusion that Descartes believed that there was only a single Body.

I think that the monist reading of the *Synopsis* is not the only reading available. The passage could be read to suggest that Descartes was thinking of the abstract concept of Body and not the totality of extended body. In other words, when Descartes wrote “body, taken in the general sense, is a substance” what he meant was something like 'body, qua body, is a substance.' The latter is, of course, something that all Descartes scholars should accept, but it is clearly not an explicit denial of the claim that particular bodies are substances.⁷

Treating particular physical things as substances allows Hoffman to accomplish two things.⁸ First, he can plausibly deny the reading of Descartes on which, strictly speaking,

6 See *Principles* II.10 and II.23 for instances where Descartes seems to argue that all of extended matter is a single thing.

7 A more detailed analysis of this passage and its failure to refute the pluralist account appears in an unpublished paper by Justin Skirry.

8 I realize that this is hardly a knock-down argument in favor of the pluralist position, but my project is not really affected by the outcome of that debate. If the monist position turns out to be right, Hoffman's

only Body taken as a whole is a substance and individual bodies are only modes. “[E]ven though bodies are composed of parts and so fall short of being pure substances - we might call them impure substances - they nevertheless should still be considered as full-fledged substances”(UDM p. 349). Second, it allows him to maintain that man is a substance. His detractors cannot simply claim that a human being cannot be a substance since it has dependence relationships that pure substances cannot have.

One outcome of this position is that the one early objection to trialism, that Man can't be a substance because he can clearly be destroyed without being annihilated (that is, without God removing his concurrence) is thus defeated. Hoffman needs only to specify that Man is a weak substance to defeat the objection. Man is not a substance on a par with Mind, but it is like individual bodies in being a substance.⁹

Does Descartes really have a tiered hierarchy of substances? Does each kind of substance interact with modes in the same way? Are the modes of Mind somehow superior to the modes of Body in the way that Mind seems to be superior to Body? Is thinking a pure attribute and extension an impure one? Does it even really make sense to talk of pure and impure attributes? These are troubling questions but it would be best to put these concerns aside. Let us grant Hoffman's interpretation of Descartes' ontology. We will see that even granting that Hoffman has established a plausible claim to substancehood on behalf of particular bodies, he still has to show that Mind and Body can be combined into a substance. That task proves to be of greater difficulty for Hoffman.

trialist reading of Descartes is immediately refuted by that alone. The greater challenge, and thus stronger argument, is to refute Hoffman even if the pluralist account is the right one. So, let us put the monist/pluralist debate aside for the duration and grant that the pluralist position is the right one.

9 Perhaps this qualification of the initial claim about the substantial status of Man should lead us to doubt the entire project.

Hylomorphism

In order to accomplish the feat of turning the union of Mind and Body into a substantial instead of a mere composite being, Hoffman argues that Descartes held that Mind is the substantial form of Man. Hoffman maintains that, in fact, Descartes believed that the Mind-Body union, i.e., Man, is a hylomorphic substance very much like the hylomorphic substances of the Scholastics and Aristotle. Hoffman therefore objects to the traditional story that has Descartes reject all Aristotelean forms. Referring to unpublished sections of the letter to Regius,¹⁰ Hoffman reports that Descartes “asserts both that the human soul is the substantial form of the man and that it is the only substantial form, whereas the rest of the so-called substantial forms are composed of the configuration and motion of the parts of matter”(UDM p. 350). Neither of the two major objections that Descartes launched against substantial forms hold against the position that the soul is a form.

The first attack by Descartes against substantial forms is the claim that they are anthropomorphic and represent a confused projection of ourselves onto the world. In a letter to De Launay Descartes writes, “people commonly mingle the two ideas of body and soul when they construct the ideas of real qualities and substantial forms, which I think should be altogether rejected”(AT III 420).¹¹ For Descartes, the theory of substantial forms is an illegitimate mapping of the unique relationship between a mind and a body on to every other particular thing. He accuses the Scholastics of unnecessarily anthropomorphizing the natural world. But while this claim could certainly be used to

¹⁰ Cited earlier in the definition of “man.”

¹¹ See also AT VII 442 and AT III 648.

argue against the belief in substantial forms of non-human things, we cannot accuse a human substantial form of being anthropomorphic. Quite the opposite, the substantial form of a human being could be nothing other than anthropomorphic, it would be nothing other than the turning of matter into man. This objection against substantial forms then does not apply to the idea that the Mind is the form of Man.

Descartes' second attack on substantial forms in general is the argument that the forms are nothing more than theoretical constructs created to explain action and change in the world rendered superfluous by mechanical physics. Such a physics explains all the phenomena for which forms are supposed to account; and mechanism would provide the explanation without recourse to unobservable, untestable and dubious constructs. In the letter to De Launay, after rejecting substantial forms on grounds that they illegitimately anthropomorphize things, Descartes writes "If you examine physics carefully, you can reduce all those things in it which fall under the province of intellect to very few kinds, of which we have very clear and distinct notions"(AT VIII 420). Descartes' point seems to be that forms are nothing more than ephemera created by men to explain poorly understood phenomenon. The forms are rendered unnecessary by mechanics. But the human form, i.e., Mind, is not just an abstract construct. One of the main points of the Meditation II is that it is known through an indubitable and immediately perceived idea. Our mind is known to us better than any object of sensation or thought. Descartes writes, "I know plainly that I can achieve an easier and more evident perception of my own mind than of anything else"(AT VII 34). The argument that there simply is no evidence for substantial forms cannot be turned against the Mind if it is the substantial form of Man.

Thus Hoffman concludes that although Descartes did deny the existence of substantial forms in artifacts and natural things because they were unobserved and unnecessary, he could and did accept the claim that the soul is the form of Man.¹² Having established that it is indeed possible for Descartes to accept the notion that Mind is the form of Man, Hoffman tackles some objections based on the nature of substance.

The first objection is that a consequence of Descartes' substance theory is that Mind and Body cannot unite to form a substance because Mind is indivisible and Body is divisible. Hoffman points out that Descartes asserts only that Mind, when considered alone, is indivisible, not that Man is indivisible.¹³ Since the claim that Man is divisible *and yet* a substance is exactly the goal that Hoffman is driving at, this is hardly a concession on his part. But this is not as innocuous a turn as it may seem at first. If Man is divisible, then either he is entirely divisible or only divisible in part. If the former, it would seem that Mind becomes as the form of Man is divisible. If the latter, there are aspects of Man which are divisible (e.g. his Body) and aspects that are not (e.g. his Mind). But isn't this just the original objection? Either Hoffman has a bigger problem (can Mind ever be divisible?) or he has not answered the original objection.

Another objection to thinking that Mind is the form of Man is that Hoffman's claim would require that Mind be both a substance and a quality. To counter this objection Hoffman cites a passage in the *Sixth Replies*.

I conceived of gravity as if it were some form of real quality, which inhered in solid bodies; and although I called it a 'quality', thereby referring it to bodies in which it inhered, by adding that it was 'real' I was in fact thinking that it was a

12 My intention is to give nothing more than a thumbnail sketch of the objections to hylomorphism and Hoffman's responses. My own objection will not rest on these nor will they exploit any of Hoffman's rebuttals which I will leave out of the story.

13 UDM, pg. 352.

substance. . . . Or again, the mind, even though it is in fact a substance, can nonetheless be said to be a quality of the Body to which it is joined. . . . what makes it especially clear that my idea of gravity was taken largely from the idea I had of the mind is the fact that I thought that gravity carried bodies towards the center of the earth as if it had some knowledge, and there can be no knowledge except in a mind. (AT VII 442)¹⁴

Descartes is asserting that a substance can exist in something (can be said to be a quality) even though in itself it is a substance. Thus Hoffman argues that Descartes does think that a thing could be both a substance and quality.¹⁵

The last major objection against the joining of Mind and Body in a hylomorphic union is serious. As Hoffman puts it:

The fourth and most important sort of objection to the view that Descartes can use the form-matter model to explain the unity of the man derives from medieval accounts of per se unity, and ultimately from Aristotle. The objection is that even if the mind does inhere in the Body as form inheres in matter, nevertheless, no substance, and hence nothing which is an *ens per se*, can be constituted from another substance or substances. . . . Thus the charge against Descartes is that he cannot consistently maintain that the Body, the mind, and the man are all substances. (UDM, pg. 362)

The charge amounts to a denial that anything which is a substance in its own right can at the same time be a combination of other substances. Man cannot be a composite of Mind and Body and be a substance. This objection is derived from the claims of the late scholastics. They argued that a substance can have parts but only so long as none of the parts are complete things in themselves. For scholastic philosophers such as Scotus and Ockham, the form¹⁶ of Man is an incomplete thing and the matter of a Man is also incomplete in itself,¹⁷ thus allowing Man to avoid being merely an *ens per accidens*. But

14 Hoffman thinks of it as *actualizing* the human Body.

15 UDM, pg. 352-354.

16 Generally speaking the scholastics believed that a human being had multiple 'souls.' Hoffman describes Ockham as asserting both a sensory soul and an intellectual soul (UDM p.363).

17 Notice that this would likely mean that the matter of the scholastics is like the BSV mentioned by Rozemond.

if Descartes followed this model, it would have the infelicitous consequence that neither Mind nor Body could be considered complete substances in their own right.

The objection is powerful because Descartes clearly asserts that Mind and Body are complete in themselves. Hoffman intends to get around it by showing that how Descartes conceives of Mind, Body and Man is analogous to how the scholastics (Ockham and Scotus) thought of them. The scholastics all held that Man is a substance, an *ens per se*. If Hoffman's conjecture is correct and Descartes' Mind and Body are analogous to the scholastic substantial form and matter in the right way, he would have grounds to interpret Descartes as a dualist.

The first problem in the attempt to draw the analogy between Scholastic incomplete substance and Descartes' concept of complete substance is the view that Descartes' substances are essentially complete while scholastic substances are essentially incomplete, thus the accounts of substance are irreconcilable. But Hoffman contends that the two theories of substance aren't different in a crucial way. They both emphasize the ability of a thing to exist on its own in determining that thing's ontological status.

Hoffman argues that Descartes actually had a very low standard for something being a substance; to be a substance requires only being able to exist without anything else existing. He then points out that the scholastics believed that the substantial components could exist independently of matter, even though only by the power of God. On this reading, then, scholastic form and matter fit the criterion of substancehood in Descartes. Since both Mind and substantial form have the ability to exist independently of everything else, this is all Hoffman thinks that he needs for his analogy. Hoffman asserts, "Scotus, Ockham, and Descartes are in fundamental metaphysical agreement that

things which can exist apart from each other can form an *ens per se*, provided that they stand in the appropriate relation to one another”(UDM, pg. 364). Thus Hoffman concludes that just as the late scholastics could have an *ens per se* that was nevertheless composed of parts existing independently of each other, so could Descartes. But even Hoffman acknowledges it is a less than ideal explanation: “to defend Descartes' account of the unity of a human being by arguing that it is no worse than that of his predecessors is not necessarily to mount a very strong defense”(UDM, pg. 364). There is still the suspicion that the analogy amounts to no more than a condemnation of Ockham and Scotus along with Descartes. Hoffman still needs something more to show that the position is defensible.

One way to accomplish this is to show that like the incomplete things of the scholastics, at least one Cartesian substance requires union with the other, thus generating the kind of necessary union needed for an *ens per se*. He could say, for example, that Mind requires union with Body and thus Man is a substance. But Hoffman acknowledges that this position is not without peril, as it leaves open the possibility that one substance, Body in the example, does not need to be united with the other. In that case, the union is still just an *ens per accidens*. He considers two solutions to this problem. First, he suggests that Descartes could hold that a thing which can be split only by God is really an *ens per se*, and second, he suggests that Descartes believed that a thing may be both an *ens per se* and an *ens per accidens* depending on how it is being considered.

The first option is essentially the claim that as long as two things are united in such a way that only the power of God can separate them, the composite counts as an *ens per se*. This option is problematic, since, as Hoffman notes, Descartes explicitly repudiates

it: “coming to pass naturally is nowise different from coming to pass by the ordinary power of God, which does not differ at all from his extraordinary power”(AT VII 435). For Descartes there is no distinction between a natural cause and a divine cause, at least for the causes that determine worldly interactions. Even though the option may be available to a Cartesian, insisting on it in order to support a controversial claim about Descartes' metaphysics is inappropriate.

The second option is that Descartes believed that the ontological status of a thing depended, at least sometimes, on which of its relationships were being considered. This relativising move is a bit hard to grasp at first, but there are at least two place where Descartes seems to endorse it. In a letter to Regius, dated December 1641, Descartes writes:

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

and

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

And in the Replies to the Fourth Objections Descartes writes:

It is also possible to call a substance incomplete in the sense that, although it has nothing incomplete about it qua substance, it is incomplete in so far as it is referred to some other substance in conjunction with which it forms something which is a unity in its own right. . . . And in just the same way the mind and Body are incomplete substances when they are referred to a human being which together they make up. But if they are considered on their own, the are complete. (AT VII 222)

The quotation from the letter to Regius is often dismissed as nothing more than political advice designed to get Regius, who had been championing Descartes' philosophy, out of trouble with his peers. But the position gains significant weight when

coupled with the passage from the replies to Arnauld. Descartes seems to be endorsing a kind of relativistic understanding of substancehood. That is whether a thing is a substance, an *ens per se*, depends on what description we are considering it under. Hoffman, though initially skeptical, reaches the conclusion that this position is indeed defensible. To this end he considers a number of arguments.

Hoffman begins by introducing a passage from the *Replies to the First Objections*.¹⁸ In it Descartes discusses the Triangle-in-Square example and draws a curious conclusion. The idea that Descartes seems to have is that both the parts of a thing and the entire thing itself can have immutable, but different, natures. A triangle can have an immutable nature that is different from the immutable nature of a triangle-inscribed-in-a-square. The important part of this brief exposition is that the triangle-in-square has an immutable nature only when considered in a certain way. Descartes concludes that when considered as the origin of composite properties, or “in order to examine those things which arise from the conjunction of the two, then its nature will be no less true and immutable than the square or triangle”(AT VII 117-118). When not considered from that perspective, than the triangle-in-square has no immutable nature. This relatively brief observation is seized upon by Hoffman to shore up the idea that a substance may be considered incomplete from one perspective but complete from another. If two substances are united to form some third *per se* unity, then the two substances can indeed be said to be incomplete, at least, they are incomplete when referred to the third, whole, *per se* unity.

Hoffman then reconsiders Descartes' reply to Arnauld. As we saw, Descartes seems to be making a similarly relativising move when considering the relationship of Mind-

18 AT VII 117-118 for the discussion of the Triangle-in-Square problem.

Body-Man. Seen in the light of the triangle-in-square exposition on the possibility of a thing having more than one immutable nature, the comments about the complete and incomplete nature of Mind and Body seem even more plausible. Hoffman argues that Descartes' views about the nature of the triangle in the triangle-in-square problem can be used to explain how a Mind could be both complete and incomplete.

There is one immediate but brief objection to the pairing off of the two comparisons. In the triangle-in-square passage Descartes pins the existence of relative natures on the emergence of properties that are dependent on the composite thing. While in the Mind-Body-Man passage there is no mention of properties at all and so the analogy may not go through. Hoffman responds that although Descartes does not mention any properties in his reply to Arnauld he does mention them in other places. In The Principles of Philosophy I.48 Descartes gives a list of properties that belong only to Mind, only to Body and only to the union of the two. It seems that Hoffman can support the claim that Descartes does think that a substance can be both incomplete and complete.

Hoffman has three main steps in his argument. He begins by asserting that Descartes does not argue against the existence of the substantial form of Man. He then claims that on Descartes' definition of substance a substance can be composed of parts. Specifically a substance could have other substances as parts. Man can be formed from Mind and Body. Finally, he argues that Descartes himself thought that a thing could be both complete and incomplete, thus it is possible for things to be incomplete (and thereby unite to create a substance) while remaining complete (and thereby remain substances in their own right.) Hoffman in this way concludes that Descartes believed Man is a substance. What then can be said against this conclusion?

Against the first two arguments I find this quotation (from Descartes January 1642 letter to Regius) illuminating.

All of the arguments to prove substantial forms could be applied to the form of a clock, which nobody says is a substantial form. . . . It is inconceivable that a substance should come into existence without being created *de novo* by God; but we see that every day many so-called substantial forms come into existence; and yet the people who think they are substances do not believe that they are created by God; so their view is mistaken. This is confirmed by the example of the soul, which is the true substantial form of man. For the soul is a substance. . . . It is clear from this that it is not those who deny substantial forms but those who affirm them who 'can be forced by solid arguments to become either beasts or atheists'. (AT III 505)

Descartes' position in this quotation is somewhat hard to unpack. He is clearly arguing against the existence of substantial forms in general by denying that we need them to make sense of clocks and the like. But then he switches to talk of the substantial form of man and seems to conclude that it exists and is a substance. Initially this may seem to support Hoffman's claim that the mind is the form of a substantial human being, but I do not think that the case is so clear cut.

First we should note that Descartes does not say that a human being is a substance only that the soul is.¹⁹ This is of course in straight forward agreement with *Meditation II*, where he establishes Mind as a substance. The argument is therefore not direct evidence for Hoffman's claims about the substantial standing of human beings. Nevertheless Descartes does seem to be accepting the idea of a hylomorphic human being. The text seems to provide evidence both for and against Hoffman's story. But there is an interesting feature of the quotation that does seem to cause unambiguous trouble for Hoffman's claim that substances can be composite entities.

¹⁹ He does refer to a human as an *ens per se* (and an *ens per accidens*) later in the letter but the passage, AT III 508, is heavily qualified.

According to the quotation Descartes is asserting that substances can only be created *de novo*, from nothing, and not through the combining of parts. And while Descartes is clearly thinking about mechanical substantial forms when he argues that they cannot be substances because no one thinks that particular physical things are created by God from nothing, the argument could easily be run against the claim that human beings are substances. Since Descartes seems to be denying that anything not created by God can be a substance we could read the text as applying to childbirth too. This would force Hoffman into the uncomfortable position of either having to accept that every human being is a creation of God *de novo* or having to explain why they are exempt from Descartes' claim.

We should also note that Descartes' claim could be taken as evidence for the monist position. If particular things are not created by God, they cannot be substances. So, rather than conclude that clocks, beds and balls of wax are created *de novo* it seems more reasonable to conclude that particular physical things are merely modes of a single physical substance. Of course, Hoffman has already acknowledged that his interpretation fails if particular things are modes and not *entia per se*.²⁰

There are also problems in Hoffman's interpretation of the 1641 letter to Regius. The end of the quotation "considering the Body alone, we clearly perceive nothing in it on account of which it demands to be united with the soul, as we perceive nothing in the soul on account of which it must be united to the Body"(AT III 461) seems to support the

20 It is worth noting that Rozemond takes the same part of the letter to Regius as not merely ambiguous with respect to its support for hylomorphism, but as clear evidence against it. "But what is important now is that for the scholastics the ideas the soul is created and immortal are precisely the features that generate tension with the view that the soul is the substantial form of the body. These features are part of the conception of the soul as spiritual substance as opposed to form, and they do not distinguish the scholastic or Cartesian conception of the soul from a purely Platonic one."

view that Body can exist without Mind and vice versa. It is exactly the opposite of what we would expect Descartes to say if he thought that either the soul or body of a man called for union with the other. And while it may certainly be the case that the independent existence of Mind and Body may only be possible by a miraculous act, it is nonetheless the case that they do not need each other. Thus the proper conclusion should be that Mind and Body have no built-in requirement to go together in his account.

While this study of the text is far from conclusive, I hope I have shown that there is both direct textual evidence against trialism and that at least some of the material that Hoffman takes to support his position can be plausibly interpreted as neutral, or at least ambiguous, on the subject. Let us turn now to the examination of the central claims of Hoffman's arguments.

A crucial claim in Hoffman's project is that parts can be considered incomplete when referred to wholes, but complete when considered on their own. If this is indeed the case, then Hoffman can claim that Minds and Bodies are complete when considered on their own (that is *qua* substance) but incomplete when considered as parts of Man. Yet I contend that this point is at best confused.

Let us begin by examining the notion of completeness. A thing, or substance, is complete when all of its necessary constituent parts are present.²¹ Thus a house is complete when its parts like the floor, chimney, walls, etc., are all present and joined one with the other and a circle is complete if its two halves are seamlessly united (in the right way.) In the same way, a body is complete when its hand is properly joined to it.

Further, it is easy to see how something that is sometimes part of a whole, but not

²¹ I am tempted to say that a thing is complete when all of its parts are present and arranged in the correct manner, but this last clause seems unnecessary. In any case, it is not germane to the question at hand.

necessarily so, can be complete on its own. This is the case with mufflers, triangles and garages. The crux of Hoffman's argument is the claim that there are things which can be both complete and incomplete, depending on how one is thinking of them.

It also seems odd to say that something which can never actually exist on its own is complete in any sense. Is the duration of Ben Franklin's life a complete thing? It seems more likely that the notion of the entirety of Franklin's duration would be born out of a Conceptual, not a Real, distinction between Franklin and his time on earth. It is something that can be separate in our intellect but not in reality. Thus it is not complete in itself. This reasoning should go for Minds too. In order to say that they are complete Hoffman must have Descartes say that it is natural for them exist on their own, that they are Really Distinct from everything else. But if Hoffman admits this, how can he maintain that they are in any way incomplete? A thing cannot be both Really Distinct from some other thing and conceptually Distinct from that same thing at the same time. The positions preclude each other.

If we think about a thing that can unproblematically exist completely on its own, such as a triangle, we see that it is not incomplete. It is not incomplete when referred to the Triangle-in-Square, any less then a floor is incomplete when referred to a house. Similarly, it is the house that is incomplete when it is missing a floor. The reasoning should apply to Mind-Body unity. Man is what would be considered incomplete when we consider its relation to the Mind, not the Mind itself.

Looking at these two refinements, we see that a thing is either complete in its nature, as a triangle is, or it is not, as a handless body is not. Never is it the case that a thing is both. It is also important to notice that Descartes never claims that a thing is

different, in its nature. The essence of a thing cannot be such that the thing is both a complete and incomplete substance. He only claims that a thing may be *considered* incomplete not that it is incomplete.

This point against Hoffman is strengthened when we press on the idea that we are not merely discussing accidental properties of Minds and Bodies. We are discussing their essential natures. Hoffman's contention amounts to nothing less than the claim that a thing, say a mind, is both essentially complete and essentially incomplete. It is an essentially complete Mind but an essentially incomplete part of a Man. Put that way the argument seems absurd. Mind is forced to have either two incompatible natures or to be two different substances, Mind and Man.²²

But let us suppose though that the hand to body example was able to show that the relativising move actually works as Hoffman would like it to. Would we then have an unproblematic series of steps terminating in the conclusion that a human being is a substance? I do not think that even after granting Hoffman the arguments that we have thus far denied him his conclusions would follow unproblematically. I do not think that he is in a good position to use the hand-body example as a true analogy to the Mind-Body-Man case.

The examples that Hoffman provides (hand-body, rock-gravity and Triangle-in-Square) concern things that are tokens of the same substance. The parts and wholes are homogeneous in their substancehood.²³ It is unclear that any conclusion drawn from these examples could be applied to problems that concern more than one type of

²² Similarly, a triangle is not both a complete triangle and an incomplete triangle-in-square.

²³ Putting aside the problem of whether or not Descartes thought geometric figures were substances. It is likely that he grouped them with numbers and denied them real substancehood. So much the worse for Hoffman, since an analogy between a pair of non-substances and substance seems dubious.

substance, as the Mind-Body unity problem does. There is no reason to think that Mind interacts with Body in the same way that bodies interact with other bodies. Indeed, we normally take it to be intuitively obvious that they don't interact in the same way at all. If we thought they did, we would be unlikely to take the Mind-Body interaction problem very seriously. It does not seem that the examples stated can function as they are intended to, and I don't think that we should just follow Hoffman, and admittedly sometimes Descartes, in accepting them without concern.

Method of Differentiation

Finally, there is a conceptual difficulty for Hoffman that I think is the most severe one that he has to face. It seems that his account of substance in Descartes presupposes something very much like Margaret Wilson's reading of the Real Distinction argument.

In both his attempt to reinterpret Real Distinction and his attempt to argue for particulars as substances, Hoffman repeatedly equates substance with subject. In *Cartesian Composites* he writes, first about *Principles I.53* and then about *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet*, “Nevertheless, it is my conclusion that it is one of the most serious mistakes of contemporary Cartesian scholarship that this passage is taken to endorse the principle that no substance can have more than one principle attribute. . . . Descartes makes it clear that he believes even a simple subject can have two or more attributes of the sort that constitute the nature of things”(CC, p.269). He also writes “I see no good reason for thinking that such a composite subject is not a substance”(ibid). And, in his efforts to establish the hylomorphic reading of Descartes, Hoffman agrees with Gueroult that there is a “loose conception of created substance . . . Any subject is a substance in

this loose sense”(UDM, pg.348). But he disagrees “that entities which are substances in the weak sense . . . are not full-fledged substances”(ibid).²⁴

He reads statements made by Descartes about subjects to be statements about substances, and vice versa. I do not think that he is completely wrong to do so. In fact, I agree that all substances are subjects. I simply deny that all subjects are substances. That the latter claim is right seems obvious to me.

Hoffman can't simply mean that all grammatical subjects are substances. If he did, then Winnie the Pooh would be a substance, as would unicorns, squared circles, and the substantial form of a clock. Of course I don't think he meant to make any such obviously false claim. But what did he mean? It seems that some sorting criteria would be in order. First, substances need to be able to actually exist and be such that they have properties, even if their only property is the ability to have properties. This rules out conceptually impossible things like squared circles and metaphysically unnecessary/problematic things like non-human substantial forms. But it still allows weird things like the ocean, flocks of seagulls, men wearing red ties (a substance and a property), cars, and numbers to be substances in their own right. Therefore, not just any kind of property possession will do; substances must be such that properties can inhere them. Certainly they can have properties by virtue of other means, as a body might have the property of being seen to be blue, but if the particular thing in question cannot be the subject of inherence, then it cannot be a substance. This is what rules out flocks of seagulls, numbers, and substance-property combinations.

24 The “loose sense” and “weak sense “ of substance are equivalent.

Further, it seems that a substance must be such that it would be said to be incomplete if it were missing a part.²⁵ In other words, if we accept that a composite being cannot be a substance, as Descartes certainly did, then a substance must be complete in itself. If you remove some part of it while maintaining that the remaining thing is still complete, then the original thing was merely a composite being. This rules out oceans as substances. We want to say that of the remaining things that we will only ascribe substancehood to those things that we could have a complete idea of while excluding every other thing. A table could be a substance (depending, I think, on whether you think that a table could lose parts and still be complete), but a mountain could not be. The mountain could not exist in a universe by itself without a valley, but a table needs nothing else to exist. I think that this helps considerably.

A subject is a substance if and only if it exists, can be the subject of inherence, does not have parts that it can lose without becoming incomplete, and it is conceptually independent from everything else.²⁶

Of course, there should be no surprise if we find that many philosophers will use these rules to grant or deny substancehood of things in varied and contradictory ways. I find the case of oceans and cars perplexing. It would be even less shocking to find that scholars might disagree with one rule or another, or wish to add a rule that I have neglected. The important thing to remember is not what gets counted as a substance nor how to determine the exact rules and procedure for sorting subjects. The important thing

25 Here I intend for “part” to be understood as a gross part and not merely a single particle or some similarly small quantity, otherwise nothing except mereological sums could be substances. Substance candidates that have no parts can't have parts removed and hence, pass this part of the test.

26 By “conceptually independent” we just mean such that you can have a clear and distinct idea of it that does not include an idea of anything else.

to take note of is that we need to deploy our intellect to resolve the problem by sorting out what we know about any given subject and deciding if it can be reasonably said to be substances. But haven't we seen this before?

In the first section of my project I outlined Margaret Wilson's reconstruction of Descartes' epistemological argument. The argument, as she lays it out, relies heavily on the ability to deploy good reasoning and clear and distinct ideas in the service of distinguishing things one from another. I think that this is exactly what is going on in the background of Hoffman's granting of substancehood to subjects. Both Wilson and Hoffman are simply describing Descartes' method of identifying substances. This is not a good turn of events for Hoffman. If I am right in my claim that they are engaging in the same practice, then Hoffman's project will devolve into a *reductio*. His theory of substance will clash with his theory of distinctions.²⁷

I have said that Wilson's story is the epistemic side of Rozemond's metaphysical story. Strictly speaking, this is not accurate. Wilson's interpretation requires some kind of substantial Real Distinction like Rozemond's, but, of course, not necessarily Rozemond's. However, whatever kind of substantial Real Distinction ends up supporting Wilson's account it will contradict Hoffman's interpretation of Real Distinction which is based on differences in attributes. Hoffman's claim that particular physical things (subjects) should be treated as substances seems to require an epistemological method of substance differentiation very much like Wilson suggests Descartes is employing in the

²⁷ It has been suggested that if Hoffman proposes that it is he who uses this method to differentiate subjects and substances but that in doing so he is not interpreting Descartes, there would be no contradiction. Unfortunately for Hoffman this option is not available to him if he still wishes to argue that he is only clarifying Descartes actual position and not merely constructing a view that is different in important ways.

Meditations. But Wilson's account depends on a kind of Real Distinction that is incompatible with Hoffman's attempt to recast human beings as substances.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

What, then, can be said about Hoffman's project? It is, I think, in disarray. In his attempt to establish an attributive reading of Real Distinction Hoffman does not pay sufficient attention to concept of God and the role of concurrence in Descartes' metaphysics. Further, his solution to the putative problem involves a rereading of Descartes' notion of Real Distinction derived from problematic interpretations of The Principles of Philosophy and the Comments on a Certain Broadsheet. Yet even if we take his initial qualms about the possible modal dependence of Mind and Body on God at face value, his solution fails to resolve that initial concern. His adoption of an attributive notion of Real Distinction simply cannot resolve his worry concerning the dependence relationship between created and uncreated substance.

Hoffman's attempt to recast Descartes as a substantial trialist is also in trouble. The primary textual evidence cited in support of the claim that Descartes believed that a human being is a substance falls well short of providing conclusive support. In addition, the relativising solution relies on the dubious claim that a substance's essential nature is self-contradictory.

But a far more serious problem appears beneath the surface of Hoffman's trialist reading of Descartes. The attributive reading of Real Distinction is in conflict with Hoffman's claims about the nature of substance. The use of clear and distinct ideas to

support the underwriting of certain subjects as substances is compatible with and indeed seems to require a substantial reading of Real Distinction, not an attributive one.

Thus we simply cannot accept Hoffman's reading of Real Distinction. Or if we accept Hoffman's position on Real Distinction, we must reject his claim about the substantial nature of particular bodies. In either case, the attempt to show that Descartes is a trialist will fail.

Further, anyone looking to Hoffman's project for the beginning of a resolution to the Mind-Body problem will be disappointed. The proposal that human beings are a single substance is unlikely to succeed on that front. Descartes clearly thought the problem of Mind-Body interaction was different from the problem of causal interaction within a single substance. Notice that in Meditation VI he introduces the discussion of Mind-Body interaction with the cautious claim that he “should not doubt that there is **some** truth”(AT VIII A 80, emphasis mine) to the idea that he has a body. But only briefly mentions the interaction between bodies, and then without any qualification “the nature of the body is such that whenever any part is moved by another part . . . it can always be moved in the same fashion by any other parts which lie in between”(AT VIII A 86). Hence any resolution to the problem that does not wish to stray from what Descartes believed will also have to address the difference in his attitude. The trialist will have to give a convincing explanation for Descartes' need to explain and defend Mind-Body interaction when, if human beings are a substance, it should not have troubled him anymore than body-body interaction.¹

¹ Descartes seems to have been even less troubled by the mechanism that minds depend on for having a succession of thoughts.

This may be taken as bad news by philosophers who think the answer to Princess Elizabeth's Mind-Body problem lies in dualist interpretation of Descartes. But I do not think that ruling out these interpretations is a cause for concern. I think that the Mind-Body problem is resolvable within a dualistic reading of Descartes. I think that Descartes believed the Mind-Body interaction was just a brute feature of the world. In fact, when pressured by Burman to explain how the Mind and Body could interact he replies: "but here our experience is sufficient, since it is so clear on this point that it just cannot be gainsaid"(CB 44). Nonetheless, showing that the ostensibly problematic relationship between Mind and Body is not a real problem in Descartes eyes is too large a project to take up now.

APPENDIX A DEFINITIONS

Substance:

By substance we can understand nothing other than a thing which exists in such way as to depend on no other thing for its existence. . . . <In the case of created things, some are of such a nature that they cannot exist without other things, while some need only the ordinary concurrence of God in order to exist. We make this distinction by calling the latter 'substance' and the former 'qualities' or 'attributes' of those substances.> (AT VIII A 1.51.)

For Descartes, a substance is such that if everything else ceased to exist it could continue to exist without losing any part of itself. While what counts as substance in Descartes is generally taken to represent a break with scholastic tradition, the basic idea of what a substance is itself not revolutionary. A substance is, basically, the metaphysical grounding for attributes and/or modes, without which they could not exist.

God:

there is only one substance which can be understood to depend on no other thing whatsoever, namely God. In the case of other substances, we perceive that they can exist only with the help of God's concurrence. Hence the term 'substance' does not apply univocally. . . to god and to other things; that is, there is no distinctly intelligible meaning of the term which is common to God and his creatures. (AT VIII A 1.51)

Minds/Bodies:

But as for corporeal substance and mind (or created thinking substance), these can be understood to fall under this common concept: things that need only the concurrence of God in order to exist. (AT VIII A 1.52)

Mental and physical substances, are the only two substances that Descartes lists as examples of created substance. Created substances are what he refers to in Principles 1.51 as those “other substances” which we perceive to be such that “they can exist only with the help of God's concurrence.” It should be noted that being dependent (in the case of Mind and Body dependent on God) is not by itself an impediment to being a substance.

There is a further claim about substance that should be emphasized. Though Descartes never explicitly denies the possibility of other created substances, he does give a criterion that any substance must meet: “each substance has one principal property which constitutes its nature and essence, and to which all its other properties are referred.” (AT VIII A 1.52) Any proposal to add a substance to Cartesian metaphysics should either list what the primary attribute of that substance is or explain why this qualification does not apply to it.

Man:

And whenever the occasion arises, in public and in private, you should give out that you believe that a human being is a true ens per se, and not an ens per accidens, and the mind and body are united in a real and substantial manner. (AT III 493, Letter to Regius)

Hoffman argues that Descartes believed that human beings should be considered substances in themselves and not merely composite entities. To facilitate this interpretation Hoffman asserts that Descartes has two notions of substance, one of strong substance and one of weak substance. Strong substance is just the the substance that is defined in the *Principles* (see above.) The notion of weak substance is that any thing able to exist without existing in any other thing as in a subject can be taken to be a substance. As Hoffman writes: “the Cartesian conception of what it is to be a (created) substance or complete thing, namely, that a substance is a thing which can exist without existing in anything as in a subject” (UDM, 364) The crucial

point is that all that is needed for a thing to be a substance in the weak sense is the ability to exist as something other than the property of something else.

Attribute:

when we are simply thinking in a more general way of what is in a substance, we use the term attribute. . . . in the case of created things, that which always remains unmodified – for example existence or duration in a thing which exists and endure – should be called not a quality or a mode but an attribute. (AT VII 1.56)

and

each substance has one principal property which constitutes its nature and essence, and to which all its other properties are referred. (AT VII 1.53)

Attributes are the properties that are essential to a substance. They are the properties of a substance that cannot change. Further each substance has a primary attribute that also determines what qualities and modes it can have.

Mode:

we employ the term mode when we are thinking of a substance as being affected or modified (AT VII 1.56)

A mode, in the Cartesian sense, is property of a substance that can change or be affected. Thus a mode is a non-essential property. Strictly speaking, substances in general, i.e., when considered abstractly, do not have modes.

Concurrence:

Concurrence is the dependence relationship that exists between God and created substance. (AT VIII 1.52) Descartes does not directly define concurrence in the *Principles*, but in the *Synopsis* of, and the *Replies* to, the *Meditations* we can see what it must entail. In the

replies to Gassendi he argues that there are two senses in which one thing can be the cause of another. A thing can be the cause of other things when it causes them to come into being, Descartes continues, “but also in the sense that they are causes of their being; and hence they must always continue to act in the same way in order to keep it in existence.” (AT VII 369 passage 9) So, “absolutely all substances, or things which must be created by God in order to exist, are by their nature incorruptible and cannot ever cease to exist unless they are reduced to nothingness by God's denying his concurrence to them.” (AT VII (Synopsis) 14) So, concurrence is the continuous act of God that keeps created substances in existence. Descartes is careful to distinguish concurrence, at least conceptually, from a simple act of creation.

Real Distinction:¹

Strictly speaking, a real distinction exists between two or more substances; and we can perceive that two substances are really distinct simply from the fact that we can clearly and distinctly understand one apart from the other. (VIII A, 1.60)²

Two things are Really Distinct from each other only if there is no sense in which one would be rendered incomplete if the other were to cease to exist. Our ability to have a clear and distinct idea of a thing is a reliable sign that the thing is Really Distinct from everything not included in the idea.³

1 'Real Distinction', as are 'Modal Distinction' and 'Conceptual Distinction', is a term of art for Descartes; the use of capital letters is meant to quickly and easily remind the reader of this, and to prevent confusion with common notions that might otherwise run interference.

2 This definition is woefully underdeveloped, but I will hold off explicating Real Distinction now in favor of doing so in the context of the arguments that turn on how it is to be unpacked.

3 In the interest of clarity let us briefly turn to the elephant in the room. There are two tenets of Cartesian epistemology that I will not be considering in any significant depth. First, there is the matter of what exactly is a clear and distinct idea and how we can reliably distinguish one from confused a idea. Second, there is the problem of the supposed vicious circularity in the Cartesian story of justification. While both problems are significant for Descartes scholars, I will simply take Descartes' claims about the ability to have and reason from clear and distinct ideas at face value.

Modal Distinction:

A *modal distinction* can be taken in two ways: firstly, as a distinction between a mode, properly so called, and the substance of which it is a mode; and secondly, as a distinction between two modes of the same substance. The first kind of modal distinction can be recognized from the fact that we can clearly perceive a substance apart from the mode which we say differs from it, whereas we cannot conversely understand the mode apart from the substance. . . . The second kind of modal distinction is recognized from the fact that we are able to arrive at knowledge of one mode apart from another, and *vice versa*, whereas we cannot know either mode apart from the substance in which they both inhere. (AT VIII A 1.61)

MD1: X and Y are Modally Distinct (type 1) if and only if one is a non-essential property of the other. Modal Distinctions (type 1) can be determined to obtain by our ability to conceive of one without the other, the substance without the mode, but not, *vice versa*, the mode without the substance.

MD2: X and Y are Modally Distinct (type 2) if and only if both are non-essential properties of the same substance. Modal Distinctions (type 2) can be determined to obtain by our ability to have a clear and distinct idea of either mode without including the idea of the other⁴ and our inability to have a clear and distinct idea of either apart from their substance.⁵

Conceptual Distinction:

a conceptual distinction is a distinction between a substance and some attribute of that substance without which the substance is unintelligible; alternatively, it is the distinction between two such attributes of a single substance. Such a distinction is recognized by our inability to form a clear and distinct idea of the substance if we exclude from it the attribute in question (AT VIII A 1.62)

CD1: X and Y are Conceptually Distinct (type 1) if and only if one is a substance and the other is an attribute of that substance.

CD2: X and Y are Conceptually Distinct (type 2) if and only if they are different attributes of Z

4 Of course a clear and distinct idea of a mode would have to include the idea of its substance.

5 It should be noted that when we consider two modes, clearly and distinctly, at the same time it is impossible to be mistaken about whether or not they are modes of the same substance.

So, while Real Distinctions allow us to tell individual substances apart from each other and Modal Distinctions allow us to think about the relationship between modes and their subjects, Conceptual Distinctions seems to be intended to help us talk about the relationship of attributes to other attributes or of attributes to their subjects. Further, by acknowledging that attributes are not Modally Distinct from substances, Descartes is asserting that we cannot have a clear and distinct idea of substances and attributes being independent of each other. This is a crucial point: without a clear and distinct idea we will be unable to show that attributes and substances are separable.⁶

But this seems to cause a problem for Descartes. If he intended his theory of distinctions to account for all of the ways in which we could relate one thing to any other thing, whether substance, attribute or mode, the theory, as stated, does not provide a way for us to consider relationships within the concept of a single thing. That is, if C_1 and C_2 are different ideas about the same thing, what Distinction would apply to C_1 and C_2 ? What are we to make of things that seem different but in reality aren't?

Descartes does offer a response:

For it is quite clear to anyone who attentively considers the nature of time that the same power and action are needed to conserve anything at each individual moment of its duration as would be required to create that thing anew if it were not yet in existence. Hence conservation differs from creation merely by reason (AT VII 49)

Here he claims that the power to create substance is not to be considered a different power from the power to sustain substance. Yet they are supposed to be distinct “merely by reason.” How is it then that they could be the same attribute and yet distinct by reason, that is, Conceptually Distinct, which, in the *Principles*, seems to be a relationship that exists only between different attributes of a substance?

It seems appropriate to infer from the quotation that in addition to the use of Conceptual Distinctions presented in the *Principles of Philosophy*,⁷ Conceptual

6 Of course, it just seem intuitively true and entirely appropriate that a *necessary* attribute is inseparable from its subject, and vice versa.

7 Descartes does seem to be aware that Conceptual Distinction needs to be extended in more ways in the *Principles of Philosophy*, see the end of 1.62. I chose to use the quotation from *The Meditations on First Philosophy* because I felt that it provided a less confusing use of the broader application of Conceptual Distinction.

Distinctions can also be used to describe the relationship between ideas of ostensibly different things that are in reality identical, e.g., the attribute of omnipotence and the attribute of omniscience, and not merely inseparable and necessary attributes of God. So, in some cases of Conceptual Distinction, we can say that two things⁸ are distinct even though there is really only one thing in the world. Conceptual Distinction, properly speaking, is thus a distinction between ideas. The intentional object of the ideas could be numerically different, but inseparable, entities (as may be the case of a primary attribute and a substance) or a single thing (as in the case of God's omnipotence and omniscience). The quotation from the *Principles* seen in this light is then nothing more than a special case of the general principle of Conceptual Distinction. This is a significant point, for it blocks the inference that Descartes uses Conceptual Distinction as an ad hoc tool for resolving problematic cases of differentiation. In other words there are a lot of distinctions that don't reflect ontological plurality.

There is one important consequence of this interpretation that needs to be made explicit: Conceptual Distinction cannot yield Real Distinctions. That is, when I recognize a Conceptual Distinction between two ideas there should be no worry that I am considering two things in the world that could exist without each other.

What then, is the general principal of Conceptual Distinction? Dan Kaufman argues that while Descartes does not explicitly develop his account of Conceptual Distinction, we should conclude that Descartes followed Suarez on this matter. So when Descartes writes “a conceptional distinction, that is, *rationis Ratiocinatae*. I do not recognize any distinction *rationis Ratiocinantis*, that is, one which has no foundation in reality [*fundamentum in rebus*]” (AT IV 349)⁹ we could justifiably read him as following Suarez. Suarez explained that a distinction of the type *rationis Ratiocinatae* is such that it has a foundation in some reality and thus is a true distinction. So, when we think of God's different attributes, we are not denying that he is a simple entity but merely attributing to him a distinction found in us. Thus to claim that God's mercy is

8 Of course, we must be speaking loosely when we say that the “two things” are distinct, since strictly speaking there is only one thing being discussed. We should say that two ideas are distinct ways of thinking about a single thing.

9 This quote and the interpretation of difference between *rationis Ratiocinatae* and *rationis Ratiocinantis* were presented by Dan Kaufman in his paper. (DK, p.567)

Conceptually Distinct from his wisdom is just to claim that we can think of them as being different by an analogy from the clearly distinct modes of mercy and wisdom in man. The use of Conceptual Distinction to differentiate ideas that have a single thing as their intentional object I will call Conceptual Distinction with respect to identity.

But, of course, it is not the case that all Conceptual Distinctions are grounded in analogies from disparate individuals to identical things. We can also form a Conceptual Distinction by recognizing that two things, X and Y, are different but inseparable. Though they are different, one cannot be conceived clearly and distinctly without the other.¹⁰ We can say that a Conceptual Distinction exists between tri-laterality and tri-angularity, because we perceive that tri-laterality and tri-angularity really are different attributes of triangles. This, second, use of Conceptual Distinction I will call Conceptual Distinction with respect to separability.¹¹

An important consequence of understanding that Conceptual Distinction can apply to ideas about either identical things or merely inseparable things is that it leaves open the possibility that Conceptual Distinction (type 1) is a conceptual distinction between identical things.

So the scheme for conceptual distinction should be:¹²

CD1I: C_1 and C_2 are Conceptually Distinct (type 1) ideas if and only if they are about a substance and an attribute of that substance and the substance is identical with the attribute.

CD1S: C_1 and C_2 are Conceptually Distinct (type 1) ideas if and only if they concern a substance and an attribute of that substance and the substance is inseparable from but not identical with the attribute.

¹⁰ I take existence and duration to be good examples of inseparable intentional objects of conceptually distinct ideas.

¹¹ This is a somewhat misleading moniker, it really should be Conceptual Distinction with respect to inseparability, but it allows for a much less confusing set of the acronyms CDI and CDS.

¹² Notice that, strictly speaking, Conceptual Distinction is more general than the formulation found here. (There is no reason to think that it is inappropriate to claim that there is a Conceptual Distinction between the Evening Star and the Morning Star.) I have intentionally restricted the formulations to the relationship between substance and attributes because that is the key application of Conceptual Distinction for my project.

CD2I: C_1 and C_2 are Conceptually Distinct (type 2) ideas if and only if they concern putatively different attributes of a substance where the “two” attributes are really one.

CD2S: C_1 and C_2 are Conceptually Distinct (type 2) ideas if and only if they concern different attributes of a substance and the two attributes are inseparable but not identical.

With this refined notion of Conceptual Distinction, and the notions of Real Distinction and Modal Distinction, we can see that Descartes has a principled, and coherent, way to account for all of the various ways we could consider substance, attribute or mode to be related.

APPENDIX B
ABBREVIATIONS

- AT: Descartes, Rene. Oeuvres de Descartes Adam and Tannery eds.
- CB: Cottingham, John. Descartes' Conversation with Burman.
- CC: Hoffman, Paul. "Cartesian Composites."
- DD: Rozemond, Marleen. Descartes Dualism.
- DK: Kaufman, Dan. "Divine Simplicity and the Eternal Truths In Descartes."
- DTD: Hoffman, Paul. "Descartes's Theory of Distinctions."
- EAD: Wilson, Margaret. "The Epistemological Argument for Mind-Body Distinctness."
- NP: Descartes, Rene. "Notes on a Programme."
- UDM: Hoffman, Paul. "The Unity of Descartes's Man."

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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