Introduction

> As Descartes saw it, the real *you* is not your material body, but rather a nonspatial thinking substance, an individual unit of mind-stuff quite distinct from your material body.
>
> (Churchland, 1984: 8)

> What Dualist philosophers have grasped in a confused way is that our direct acquaintance with the mind, which occurs in introspective awareness, is an acquaintance with something that we are aware of only as something that is causally linked, directly or indirectly, with behaviour.
>
> (Armstrong, 1980: 25)

Descartes is often accused of having invented the modern mind by having invented the modern notion of consciousness, the unmediated awareness that the mind has of itself and of its thought contents.[1] Although not denied an important part in the constitution of the human being, the human body and its worldly acts appear to have no obviously indispensable role in the functioning of the Cartesian mind, and it is this very autonomy of the mental that many find so unpalatable. This sentiment hasn't prevented us from continuing to feed Descartes to our children. The *Meditations* is still core reading for every philosophy major, but the pedagogy behind this is often like that of the conscientious parent whose idea of moral instruction is a family outing at a public flogging. We can't accept the Cartesian mind but we can't seem to avert our gaze either, and we despair of finding a better way of introducing the mind–body problem to our kids.

[1] Richard Rorty (1979: ch. 1), for example, accuses Descartes of begging the question against materialism by assuming that diverse mental phenomena can all be classified as thoughts of a single entity, the mind, considered in isolation from the body, and then as inconsistently arguing that some of those thoughts depend on the functions of the body. John Carriero (1990: 230–1) argues that Rorty underestimates Descartes' non-sceptical arguments for the autonomy of pure understanding from sense and imagination.

There have been various attempts to diagnose why we remain in the grip of the Cartesian mind-set. With the ascension of physicalism as the one true theory of everything, few are inclined to subscribe to the dogma of 'the ghost in the machine', as Gilbert Ryle famously put it (Ryle, 1949: 15–16), or to the 'forlorn' and deeply *unscientific* view that the immaterial and material can interact [Dennett, 1991: 33], but we have retained a 'Cartesian' orientation in the study of the mind. The term 'mind', as it has come down to us from Descartes, seems to describe a self-contained entity, completely transparent to itself and only accidentally connected to things outside it. It has spawned an entire industry of thought directed at undoing the scepticism that led Descartes to it, and another aimed at reconciling what follows from it – the primacy and irreducibility of subjectivity – with the objective perspectives of the natural sciences. Daniel Dennett diagnoses the problem as a tendency to view the mind as a theatre, a place where intellectual thoughts and sensations, the ghosts of neural activity, dance before the spectral observer we call the conscious mind.[2] The theatre metaphor is supposedly the root of all Descartes' epistemological woes. Because the Cartesian mind has immediate access only to its ideas, it is thus Descartes himself who made possible the very sceptical worries he had to overcome, as well as the various forms of idealism and phenomenalism that threaten our direct cognitive access to the world.[3]

Despite the awful consequences of the Cartesian mind, we retain the insidious identification of the self with the Cartesian ego, the 'I' that Hume and Kant failed in their different ways to stumble across on their introspective forays. What is left of our essence – the thinking thing – is something that we can neither understand nor yet conceive differently. Thomas Nagel laments this horrible predicament – 'the view from nowhere' – to which Cartesian thinking has led us thus:

The apparent impossibility of identifying or essentially connecting the self with anything comes from the Cartesian conviction that its nature is fully revealed to

[2] Dennett argues that the anti-scientific attitude rests on the false 'Cartesian' intuition that consciousness has some kind of unity, some point at which information comes together and awareness happens, the physical substrata of which is the pineal gland. It leads theorists to postulate an obscure 'centre' of the mind/brain, a Cartesian Theatre, where 'it all comes together' and consciousness happens. This idea does not accord with the hierarchical structure of the brain (Dennett, 1991: 39).

[3] Miles Burnyeat has argued that Descartes' sceptical arguments represent the first moment in the history of philosophy where knowledge of the subjective realm was thought to be immune from doubt (Burnyeat, 1982). Fine [2000] and Groarke [1984] reject the idea of a great distance between Cartesian and earlier forms of scepticism.

introspection, and that our immediate subjective conception of the thing in our own case contains everything essential to it, if only we could extract it. But it turns out we can extract nothing, not even a Cartesian soul . . . Identification of myself with an objectively persisting thing of whatever kind seems to be excluded in advance. (Nagel, 1986: 34–5)[4]

Justifiably lamentable to be sure, but attempts to ground the mind or self in the objective, publicly observable properties of the body or behaviour have not proved terribly successful either. The very perspectival quality of conscious experience seems hard to ignore, as Nagel himself has noticed, and makes it difficult to see how the mind could be defined from the third-person perspectives belonging to the natural sciences. We may not like the Cartesian concept of mind, but we seem to be stuck with it.[5]

I want in this book to establish some distance from these 'Cartesian' conceptions of mind and self. I do not intend to offer a panegyric to substance dualism, or to rewrite Descartes as some kind of closet materialist. There is no getting around the dualism, or the autonomy he perceives the mind as having. But it is our failure to set the Cartesian mind in the wider context of Descartes' thought that exacerbates the problems associated with this notion. What it is like to be a Cartesian mind is not the same as what it is like to be a spectator watching a private performance, someone who is left wondering about what is going on outside the theatre or backstage. When we look at those texts in which the union of mind and body is under discussion, what we find is not an inward-looking mind reflecting its metaphysical distinction from the body, but a kind of phenomenological monism – an experience of being one unified and embodied substance.[6] This book is an attempt to explore why it is important to Descartes that our experience is like this.

It is generally assumed, for example, that if there were a genuinely Cartesian science of the mind, it would have to resemble nineteenth-century introspectionism, a study of the conscious mind based on direct inner awareness, and a dismal prospect to many if ever there was one.[7]

[4] See also John McDowell's rejection of the identification between self-consciousness and the Cartesian ego (McDowell, 1994: 99–104).

[5] Nagel (1974) is arguably Cartesian on the irreducibility of the first-person perspective.

[6] For recent discussions emphasising mind–body unity rather than distinction, see Alanen (2003), Almog (2002), Baker and Morris (1996), Broughton and Mattern (1978), Cottingham (1998), Gaukroger (1995) and (2002), Hatfield (2003), Radner (1971) and Rorty (1986a).

[7] Introspectionism in psychology is generally associated with the German psychologist, Wilhelm Wundt (1862) and his student, E.B. Titchener (1898). Introspectionists catalogued mental events, particularly sensory experiences, from the point of view of the conscious subject. Their techniques were more scientifically respectable than is usually supposed, involving, for example, objectively

The reasoning behind this is as follows. The real distinction of mind and body entails a disintegration of the human being into two completely separate realms of activity, mental and bodily, the functions of which are specifiable independently of each other. Since nothing is defined by anything outside itself, the mind cannot be defined in relation to the body, and so cannot be known in relation to the body. This reasoning seems to leave only the mind's awareness of itself as a possible point of entry to the study of the mind. But although it is true that the Cartesian mind is not defined by its relation to matter, it is created conjoined to matter with which it forms a system of coordinated functions, and with which it causally interacts. Many of the functions of the mind concern its relationship to the body and the world it inhabits, and when Descartes turns to the study of these, he turns not inward to his own consciousness but to the natural science of his day, mechanics, and to his own practical experience. It is highly doubtful, therefore, that Descartes would ever have favoured the introspectionist psychologies that have taken his name over the neuropsychological perspectives that purport nowadays to be reactions against all things Cartesian.

Descartes' account of the embodied mind is present in the *Sixth Meditation,* but its presence tends to be eclipsed by the emaciated notion of the mind that dominates the early parts of the *Meditations*. By the end of the *Second Meditation,* Descartes takes himself to have established that he cannot know with certainty whether anything other than his mind exists, that his mind is essentially thinking, and that body in general, including his own human body, should it exist, is essentially extended, non-thinking stuff. It seems natural to assume that at this point he has committed himself to the conclusion that *self* and *mind* are the same thing and metaphysically independent of his or any other body. But this, as Hobbes pointed out, would be too quick. It is fallacious to move from 'I know *only that p*' (where p in this case is the proposition: *I am a thinking thing*) to 'I know that *only p*.'[8] By the end of the *Second Meditation,* Descartes cannot claim to have established anything about the relationship between mind and body. But, as he replies to Hobbes, the proof comes not there but in the *Sixth Meditation*, where the veracity of clear

measurable and repeatable response time and attention tests, and tests designed to measure a subject's sensitivity to changes in sensory stimuli. It was not so much the methodology as the assumption that conscious experience can be analysed into primitive 'elements' that accounted for its demise. Descartes' enumeration of the passions bears some similarity to this analytic project.

[8] See Brown and de Sousa (2003).

and distinct ideas and the separability of that which can be clearly and distinctly conceived apart can (he thinks) be assumed. Whether his reply to Hobbes suffices or not is irrelevant to our concerns here. The point is that the placement of the real distinction argument is significant because the conception of the mind we are left with at the end of the *Second Meditation* is not the conception of mind developed in the *Sixth Meditation,* where *both* the mind's real distinction from and substantial unity with the body are argued for in the same train of thought. Having been reduced in the *Second Meditation* to a thinking thing who knows only that it thinks and exists, the mind in the *Sixth Meditation* is reunited through sensation with its body and redeposited in a world teeming with more bodies than it began with (or one big continuous one, depending on your view). The mind of the *Sixth Meditation* may still be incorporeal, but its experiences of itself are not the out-of-body ones of a spectral observer. Fail to understand Descartes' conception of the human being, the mind *in corpore* rather than incorporeal, and one fails to understand Descartes' mind.

Why have we tended to miss or de-emphasise the discussion of the union in the *Sixth Meditation*? Part of the answer to this question, Descartes tells us, is that we cannot easily digest at the same time both the argument for the real distinction of mind and body and the conception of their union (AT III, 693). Yet, it is instructive to reflect on why it is Descartes, and not the countless other dualists in the history of philosophy, whom we regard as having severed the connection between the self or person and the whole human being. Among Descartes' chief opponents, the 'Scholastics' (by and large, commentators on Aristotle), the immateriality and immortality of the soul were largely uncontested doctrines. Descartes' way of arriving at the conclusion of the soul's immateriality – through the application of hyperbolic doubt – certainly differed from preceding approaches, but the conclusion was much the same. Yet no one would have accused an Aristotelian, for example, Aquinas, of identifying the self with the immaterial and intellectual part of the soul, or with anything less than the whole human being. And the reason why no one would level such an accusation is that, on the standard Aristotelian view, the soul's relationship to the body was conceived of not as that of one substance united with another substance, but as a form inhering in matter, and form and matter are not distinct substances, capable of existing completely apart from one another, but principles of one and the same unified nature. The notion of form explains why a material object is the kind of thing (*quid*) it is and why, consequently, it behaves as it does.

The separability of the human intellectual soul from matter was not, for the Scholastics, in conflict with the idea of their union, for regardless of the intellect's separability, the doctrine of the soul as informing matter, and on those accounts faithful to Aristotle's *De anima*, as relying on matter (particularly, the matter of the sense organs) for its proper functioning, entailed that the mind *could not be conceived of in any intelligible way apart from matter*.[9] It was this dependence of the rational soul on the body for its proper functioning that made Scholastic forms of dualism more palatable than Descartes', though not in the end more coherent.

What is particularly hard to grasp about Descartes' dualism is how, therefore, in the face of the metaphysical independence of mind and body, it is possible to conceive of them as constituting a system of integrated functions. To conflate the 'I' of the *Sixth Meditation* and the whole human being seems disingenuous. Descartes' assertion to Regius that the soul is the 'true substantial form of a human being', and indeed the only substantial form (separable from matter), did little to ease his contemporaries' suspicion that having separated mind and body so successfully, he would be hard-pressed to get them back together again (AT III, 505). But his preparedness to use the terminology of substantial forms in this one special context is illuminating. The sense in which the mind 'in-forms' the body is the sense in which, at any given time, a parcel of matter through its relation to a mind becomes a human body, matter being otherwise undifferentiated (AT IV, 166–7). The Cartesian mind does not in-form the body in the way the soul does on Scholastic accounts, that is, in the sense of determining all the functions of the body. But by its relationship to a mind, matter is promoted to a special status and subject to new modes of explanation. Human beings stand in need of teleological explanations, which make reference to the integrated functions of their components, and to the 'artistry' of God who creates them, in much the same way that clocks are understood as integrated systems, the parts of which function in accordance with the specifications of their designers. The human body cannot properly be understood apart from the mind to which it stands in a non-accidental relationship and with which it comprises a functional unity.

[9] The separated soul proved especially difficult for Christian thinkers committed to Aristotle's account of understanding as relying on sensory images. According to Aquinas, the separated soul has a less perfect knowledge of its proper objects, the natures of material things, although it can know things which are directly intelligible through divine illumination. *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.89.

The study of the integrated functions of mind and body is centred, for Descartes, around the study of passions. The passions are the lynchpins of mind–body unity, and to play this role passions must have a dual status, consisting in bodily processes and thoughts. That passions have this integrating function is reflected in the definition offered at article 27 of the *Passions.* The term 'passion' refers in the broadest sense to anything that happens in the soul independently of the will (PS, arts. 17–19), but passions in the strict sense are modes of the soul that are 'absolutely dependent' upon certain motions in the body (PS, arts. 27, 41). The definition of the passions states that they are 'perceptions, sensations or emotions of the soul, which we refer particularly to it, and which are caused, maintained and strengthened by some movement of the spirits' (AT XI, 349). The primary function of the passions is to protect the union of mind and body, specifically, 'to incite and dispose their soul to want the things for which they prepare their body' (AT XI, 359; see also PS, art. 52). How the passions achieve their biological ends is by a vigorous presentation to the will of objects for its consent and action upon. Biological success depends on being able to make quick evaluations of and responses to situations, a job for which the passions are particularly apt. Because the passions depend upon the body, the will, however, has only indirect control over the passions (PS, art. 45).

With this brief sketch of what a passion is and how it functions, the following eight chapters explore some of the more prominent themes of Descartes' account of the passions. The aim is to show that it is the passions more than any other modes of mind that are fundamental to our experience of unity, and to show why that experience is necessary in both our practical and theoretical enterprises, insofar as these depend on the co-operation of the body.[10]

In the following chapter, I examine the philosophical background to the passions, as presented in the exchange between Descartes and Princess Elisabeth. The problem of reconciling dualism with the experience of embodiment is the problem occupying Princess Elisabeth at the start of her correspondence with Descartes in 1643, and this and many other problems she raises set the agenda for his subsequent account. The fruit

[10] The *Passions of the Soul* is the culmination of work on sensation that begins with several earlier treatises (published and unpublished) concerned in part or whole with the functions of the human body – *La Dioptrique*, *Le Monde* and *Traité de l'homme*, all written between 1629 and 1633, and parts of the *Principia Philosophiae*, written between 1640 and 1642 – and represents Descartes' most mature formulation of the integration of rational and sensitive functions of the human being.

of their exchange is a treatise which complements and extends the project of the *Meditations* into the practical domain, and over which the *Meditations* also had a demonstrable influence. A comparison of the two texts is undertaken in the final section of this first chapter

Despite his claims to the contrary, Descartes' reflections on the passions do not emerge *ex nihilo* from the well-springs of his understanding, but are grounded in a number of traditions influential in debates about the passions during the Renaissance. Chapter 2 explores Descartes' place in these traditions, and argues that despite the continuity with a past he disparages, his treatise on the passions is revolutionary in the particular scientific perspective it adopts and in its treatment of passions as ideas of a unified soul.

Chapter 3 addresses the question why phenomenological monism is important to Descartes. I argue that passions and sensations are necessary for embodied rationality. Rational decision-making and action requires that one experience oneself as if one were a single embodied substance. We are not to our bodies as pilots are to their ships, and importantly, *we could not be*. Our navigating the world depends on our direct awareness of our bodies and the spatial orientation with respect to other objects that that provides. The passion of wonder plays a central role in explaining our spatial awareness and abilities. In his broader theory of the integrated functions of sensation and emotion, Descartes thus demonstrates a sensitivity to some strikingly modern problems in philosophy and the cognitive sciences, in particular, the relationship between attention and sensation, and the question of the indispensability of phenomenal content.

Passions inform our moral judgements and rational decision-making by virtue of their representational properties. Chapter 4 examines the intentionality of Cartesian passions, in terms of how they are referred to the soul. Descartes' treatment of how sensations and passions represent is puzzling and constrained, on the one hand, by his official account of representation, understood in terms of the objective reality of ideas, and, on the other, by his need to allow that sensations and passions often contribute to false judgements. A study of the referring function is useful for understanding Descartes' account of sensory representation generally, but also helps to solve certain perennial problems in Cartesian scholarship concerning the notion of material falsity. A study of these issues provides evidence that Descartes' realism is direct not representationalist.

In chapter 5, I return to the metaphysical issues surrounding the union of mind and body, and, specifically, to the relationship between passions

in the soul and actions in the body. The union is more than an accidental conglomerate of substances but less than a single substance itself, although some have argued that if we understand 'substance' broadly enough, we can count the union as a substance.[11] In the *Passions,* at least, Descartes is seeking a conception of mind–body unity or oneness compatible with his dualism. Although he does not postulate any kind of metaphysical identity between the substances of mind and body to account for this unity, there are passages that suggest a metaphysical oneness of modes across the two substances. Descartes expresses this view by referring to actions in the body and passions in the soul as being *une mesme chose.* Understanding what this means for Descartes brings us closer to understanding what the union entails for him and helps to resolve the question of Descartes' alleged occasionalism.

It is hoped that the present study will foster new ways of looking at the *Meditations* and many of its core ideas. Chapter 6 revisits the passion of wonder and argues that far from presenting the disembodied knower as an ideal, the *Meditations* should be read as providing certain principles by means of which the embodied knower may investigate natural phenomena. Knowledge of the natural world presupposes some affective engagement with it, an engagement that can be only imperfectly mimicked by a pure act of will. The passions of wonder and love are crucial to the practice of science and to our self-understanding, as particular individuals and as human beings. The 'self' that emerges from this study is both embodied and socially embedded. The social aspect of the self entails that its boundaries are to some extent flexible. We are capable of extending our selves to incorporate other persons, at least as parts of our moral if not metaphysical selves.

The last two chapters concern the *Ethica Cartesiana*, as Descartes' skeleton of a moral theory was oddly portrayed in some quarters during the seventeenth century. Moral advancement depends upon mastering and utilising passions. The final presentation to the will before action is the work of desire and controlling desire, as we shall see in chapter 7, is no trivial matter. We cannot avoid having some 'vain' desires, desires for things that do not come to pass, but a novelty of Descartes' account of desire is the introduction of something akin to the regret strategies of modern decision-theories, strategies for acting under conditions of total ignorance so as to minimise and, with practice, eliminate regrets.

[11] See Hoffman (1986) and Cottingham (1985).

Unlike the Stoics and Kant, Descartes does not believe that the path to virtue lies in extirpating one's passions. At the very end of the *Passions* we learn that all the good and pleasure of this life depend upon the passions (PS, art. 212). Whatever knowledge we attain of the good and evil for us in this life depends on our affective engagement with the social and natural world. Ethics is not an a priori study, but one that depends upon experience and acceptance of the providential order. This is a fitting end to a treatise that argues that happiness can only be achieved by recruiting a 'master' passion, *générosité*, to serve one's moral self-development. As will be argued in the last chapter, the treatise provides an elegant and simple solution to one central problem of ethical motivation: how can we be rationally motivated to act when action depends on desire and desires are not themselves the product of rational processes? Descartes' solution utilises the forces of reason and the body: to control what you desire and how you act, control what you esteem. It also marks Descartes' ethics as a virtue ethics grounded in the essential goodness of the free will, an ethics with some sinister precursors. The generally underplayed connection between Descartes and Machiavelli, and the problems with elevating the will above knowledge of the good, are explored in this final chapter.

The recommendation of this book is that Descartes' concept of mind, and the attendant concept of self, should be reconceived in light of those texts in which his attention is turned towards our experience of ourselves as whole human beings. If this picture is correct, the *Passions* should be as much core reading for our students as the *Meditations* is, for as Genevieve Rodis-Lewis eloquently describes it, the value of the 'little treatise' extends beyond the narrow topic of the passions and bears upon a proper understanding of Descartes' whole thought.

> 'From metaphysical roots, through physiology and its action in union with the soul, and through the soul's reaction to it, the treatise offers the most complete branch of the Cartesian philosophy and its ripest fruit' (Voss, 1989: xxv).

This ripened concept of mind, understood in terms of its complex relations to the body, the world, and others, this is Descartes' passionate mind.