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The Faces of Simplicity in Descartes's Soul

1 Introduction

In the *Phaedo* Plato argues that the soul is simple, indivisible: it has no parts. Consequently, it cannot decompose, unlike material things, and it is immortal. This view of the human soul recurs often in the history of western philosophy. Descartes is no exception. For him too the soul has no parts and it is immortal. Unlike in the case of Plato, however, this aspect of Descartes's conception of the soul has not received much attention in the literature. Nevertheless his commitment to it emerges on a number of occasions in his writings.

Descartes's most prominent treatment of the soul's indivisibility occurs in the *Meditations* and its Synopsis. These discussions are the starting point for Section I of this paper. In Meditation VI three important issues about the soul's lack of composition emerge. Or rather, Descartes speaks of the mind, for him "mind" and "soul" refer to the same thing, but he prefers the term "mind."¹ First, Descartes suggests that the soul is "whole in the whole and whole in the parts" of the body, an analysis of the relationship of spiritual substances to bodies that had been around for a long time already. Second, he denies that the faculties of the soul constitute parts of it. Finally, in the Synopsis Descartes addresses the immortality of the soul. We will see that he does not directly connect it to the soul's indivisibility, but to a different notion, its incorruptibility, which implies another sense in which the soul is non-composite.

While the idea that the soul is simple and indivisible can be found in many philosophers in the tradition, the view was not universally accepted, in particular not among the Aristotelian scholastics. They tended to think that either there was more than one soul in a human being or that the faculties of the soul are really distinct from it. I will explore Descartes's position in relation to some scholastics who held the latter in section II. I will focus on St Thomas Aquinas and Francisco Suárez, both of whom were very influential in the period. I will also include some discussion of Eustachius of St Paul, a lesser known late scholastic. Descartes considered writing a book comparing his own views to those of Eustachius.²

Descartes contends that the faculties of the soul are not really distinct from it and from each other. But on what ground? What he says in support of this view in the *Meditations* is rather quick. We might be quite sympathetic, and think that a real distinction of faculties from each other and from soul is an instance of excessive ontological complexity. But it is

¹ On this terminological point, see the Fifth Replies, AT VII, 355–356/CSM II, 246).

² See his letter to Mersenne of November 11, 1640 (AT III, 233/CSM III, 157).

not obvious how what he says could be convincing to an opponent, in particular, to those Aristotelian scholastics who held that the faculties of the soul are really distinct from it. I will argue that for Descartes his view of the real distinction, as well as his identification of the soul with the mind and his relegation of various traditional Aristotelian faculties of the soul to the mechanistic body.

2 The divisibility argument in the Sixth Meditation

Descartes states the argument as follows:

(1) For when I consider [the mind], or myself in so far as I am merely a thinking thing, I am unable to distinguish any parts within myself; I understand myself to be something quite single and whole [*integram*]. (2) Although the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body, I recognize that if a foot or arm or any other part of the body is cut off, nothing has thereby been taken away from the mind. (3) As for the faculties of willing, understanding, of sense perception and so on, these cannot be called parts of the mind, since it is one and the same mind that wills, and understands and has sensory perceptions.³

Our first order of business is to address a terminological point the significance of which is not clear to me: as I noted above, when Descartes addresses what looks like the issue of the simplicity of the soul, he does not use the term ‘simplicity,’ rather he speaks of its “indivisibility.” This is true, for instance, in the discussion of the divisibility argument for dualism both in the Sixth Meditation and in the Synopsis to the *Meditations*.⁴ Descartes seems to limit his use of the term ‘simple’ to qualitative lack of composition rather than an absence of parts. That is to say, Descartes does not speak of entities being simple, but he does speak of “simple natures” and speaking of the divine perfections, he also describes God’s nature as simple: “the unity, simplicity or [*sive*] indivisibility of all the things that are in God is one of the main perfections that we understand to be in him.”⁵ Following Descartes, from now on, I will speak of the indivisibility rather than the simplicity of the soul or mind.

³ AT VII, 86/ CSM II, 59.

⁴ It was not uncommon in the tradition to deny that the human soul is simple by contrast with God. (See Aquinas ST I.3, I.77.1, Suárez DA II.I.2) Much earlier, Augustine had held that the soul is simple compared to bodies, but not, or less so, compared with God. But Descartes calls God indivisible rather than simple. One possible explanation for Descartes’s failure to use the term ‘simple’ is this: an entity could be indivisible but not simple because it has parts that are not separable. But it is unlikely that this is what Descartes has in mind: he denies that the mind has parts, and, as I will discuss below, he must mean really distinct parts, which for him does imply mutual separability. This is potentially a complicated issue, however, since divisibility (and separability) could be understood in a number of ways, for instance, conceptual, natural, or metaphysical indivisibility. For this point see Holden 2004, 9–16. For more on this terminological point, see Rozemond 2010, 255–257. For discussion of the simplicity of the soul in medieval philosophy, see Lagerlund 2008, 75–91. For discussion of Augustine on this issue see 76–78.

⁵ AT VII, 50/CSM II, 34, see also AT VII, 137/CSM II, 98.

Let us return now to the Divisibility Argument in Meditation VI. It contains essentially 3 claims:

(1) The meditator cannot distinguish any parts in herself or her mind: she considers herself to be something “single and whole – *integram*.”⁶

(2) Although the whole mind is united to the whole body, if a limb were to be cut off from his body, “nothing would thereby be taken away from his mind.”

(3) The faculties of the mind – will, intellect, sense perception – are not parts of the mind, because it is one and the same mind that wants, understands and senses – *una et eadem mens*. The French, it is worth noting, is more emphatic: *car le mesme esprit s’emploie tout entier ...*⁷

In (1) Descartes states that the meditator finds no parts in herself or her mind. Descartes then continues to consider specific ways in which the mind has no parts in his view. How should we understand Descartes’s denial that the mind has any parts? In his initial statement he offers no argument or clarification. The next two claims consider illustrations of the point, specific ways in which the soul or mind cannot be said to have parts. Two different denials of composition are at stake: the first lies in the claim that, as Descartes puts it elsewhere, the mind is “whole in the whole body and whole in its parts.” Second, Descartes specifically means to deny that the soul’s faculties constitute parts of it. His point is that the faculties do not constitute really distinct parts in the soul or mind. I will discuss these ideas in this order.

(1) We can find Descartes’s claim that despite the soul being united to the whole body, cutting off a limb won’t result in the separation of a soul-part again in the *Passions of the Soul*:

But in order to understand all these things more perfectly, we need to recognize that the soul is really joined to the whole body, and that we cannot properly say that it exists in any one part of the body to the exclusion of the others. For the body is a unity which is in a sense indivisible, because of the arrangement of its organs, these being so related to one another that the removal of one of them renders the whole body defective. And the soul is of such a nature that it has no relation to extension, or to the dimensions or other properties of the matter of which the body is composed: it is related solely to the whole assemblage of the body’s organs. This is obvious from our inability to conceive of a half or a third of a soul, or of the extension which a soul occupies. Nor does the soul become smaller if we cut off some part of the body, but it becomes completely separate from the body when we break up the assemblage of the body’s organs.⁸

⁶ CSM translate *integram* as “complete,” but that translation is misleading given Descartes’s technical use of the term ‘complete.’ See in particular his discussion in the Fourth Replies at AT VII, 222–227/CSM II, 156–159.

⁷ AT IX, 68.

⁸ *Passions* I.30.

Descartes now uses the claim that cutting off a part of the body will not result in the loss of a part of the soul to argue that the soul is united to the whole body, or the body as a whole, which is in a sense indivisible. This notion of the whole body was absent from the Sixth Meditation. But in both texts Descartes supports the indivisibility of the soul or mind by stating that cutting off a part of the body does not result in the loss of a part of the soul and that we cannot conceive of parts of the soul or mind. And so in both texts he is addressing the relation of the soul to the body in light of its indivisibility.

The claim that cutting off a limb won't result in the loss of a part of the soul can also be found in Suárez, and he uses it to argue that "the whole soul is whole in the whole body and whole in the parts" – *tota in tota et tota in qualibet parte*.⁹ This was a common claim about the soul,¹⁰ and Descartes made the claim more explicitly in the Sixth Replies;¹¹ a letter to Elizabeth of 21 May 1643,¹² and a letter to Arnauld of 29 July 1648.¹³ This is a notoriously enigmatic view, which, following Henry More, I will call "holenmerism."¹⁴ I won't offer a full discussion of this idea here, but the important points of the claim for our purposes are these.¹⁵

Holenmerism was an attempt to analyze the relationship of spiritual substances to body while preserving the simplicity and indivisibility of the spiritual substance. It was widely used in Aristotelian scholasticism, although it was not unique to that context; it was used previously by, for instance, Augustine. In scholasticism it was used in two contexts: (1) The action of a spiritual substance on the extended world, in particular the action of God on the material world. (2) The union of soul and body in a human being, which in Aristotelian scholasticism was understood as a hylomorphic substance, a composite of matter and form. In both cases the difficulty was to reconcile the presence of a spiritual substance in an extended body with the idea that the spiritual substance is not itself extended – in the sense in which matter was extended, that is, in the sense of having *partes extra partes* or quantitative parts. Spiritual substances do not have such parts.

God can act anywhere in the physical world. According to many (but not all, for instance not Scotus), his doing so presupposes his presence in the location where he acts. But one would not want to say that God is present in virtue of one part of him being present in one part of the world, another part in another part of the world. If the spiritual substance were present in this way, as whole in whole and part in part, it would itself be extended and composite. But God cannot be composite; he has no parts and is absolutely simple. Whence the claim that it is not the case that God is present in each part of the material world in vir-

9 See, for instance, Suárez, DA I.XIV.9.

10 See also Aquinas, ST.I.76.8; QDA, qu. 10.

11 AT VII, 442/CSM II, 298.

12 AT III, 667/CSM III, 219.

13 AT V, 222–223/CSM III, 358.

14 More 1995, 98. More 1995 is a translation of his *Enchiridion metaphysicum*.

15 I discuss holenmerism in Descartes at length in Rozemond 2003. See also Grant 1981.

tue of a part of him being present in a part of the material entity. Instead he is present in each part in his entirety: so he is whole in the whole and whole in the parts. And in this sense all spiritual substances are simple: God, angels, human souls.

The view that the human soul is whole in the whole body and whole in its parts was widespread. In scholastic Aristotelianism in the context of the union of body and soul the issue was how the soul as substantial form is present in the body: the issue here is not the action of the soul on the body, as Aquinas put it, its being the mover of the body, but its informing the body. Aquinas sharply distinguished the two: "If the soul were united to the body only as its mover, then one could say that it does not exist in each part of the body, only in one part and that through this part it moves the other parts."¹⁶

Holenmerism is certainly a very puzzling view, but it helps to see its point if we consider the contrast between the human soul and other types of forms, which are not present in bodies holenmerically. Suárez argued that the soul of a worm or of a plant is in its body whole in the whole and part in the parts, and such souls are divisible. Their divisibility is evident from the fact that if we cut up a worm, both parts continue to wriggle. Similarly, when we cut off a branch from a plant, we may be able to graft it onto another one, or stick it into water to grow roots. These examples show that in some cases life continues in both parts of a substance that has been cut up, and so the soul is present in both.¹⁷ But Suárez takes this to mean that the soul in these organisms has parts that inform the parts of the organism while it is whole and which now explain why the separated parts of the organism continue to live.¹⁸

Like the Aristotelian scholastics, Descartes repeatedly used holenmerism both in discussing the union of body and soul and the action of the soul on the body. There are difficult questions about how to reconcile this with other statements he makes about mind-body union and interaction, most obviously, his view that interaction occurs at the pineal gland. Furthermore, the upshot of Descartes's use of holenmerism can be understood to result in the idea that the soul as a whole interacts with the body and that it is as a whole united with the whole body. But there is no clear sense in which for Descartes the whole soul is genuinely *in* the whole body, in part because of his mechanistic, non-hylomorphic conception of the human body. But it would lead us too far afield to examine these difficulties.

Nevertheless this is one pervasive manifestation of Descartes's commitment to the indivisibility of the mind. And it is important to note that holenmerism is clearly different from the other main potential source of complexity in the soul Descartes addresses in Meditation VI: the question whether the faculties of the soul are parts of it. This should be clear from the fact that Suárez and others combined a commitment to holenmerism with the view that the faculties are really distinct from the soul. For them the soul in and of itself is

¹⁶ ST I.76.8, see also QDA 10.

¹⁷ DA I.XIII. 2, 3.

¹⁸ For discussion see Des Chene 2000, ch. 9.

indivisible and it has no quantitative parts, and it is present whole in the whole and whole in the parts of the body. But it is the principle of faculties that are really distinct from it, and which in a different sense generate complexity within the soul. Thus Suárez argued that the soul in and of itself, one might say, is indivisible,¹⁹ but he holds that in combination with its faculties it constitutes an aggregate.²⁰

(2) Let us now turn to Descartes's claim that the faculties of the soul are not parts of it. At this point I wish to discuss what the meaning of this claim is, in the next section I will turn to Descartes's reasons for advancing it. First, Descartes's denial that the mind has parts means that it does not have really distinct parts. He allowed for three types of distinctions: in decreasing order of strength, the mind could in principle be subject to a *real*, a *modal*, or a *rational* distinction.²¹ Descartes held that modal distinctions do apply to the mind: thoughts are modes of the mind, and earlier in Meditation VI he describes its faculties of sensation and imagination as modes of the mind.²² While Descartes does not address this issue as explicitly, for him the intellect is only conceptually distinct from the mind, since he regarded the intellect as the essence of the mind and the mind cannot exist without it.²³ So Descartes must be denying that the mind has really distinct parts, and in this regard for him the mind is different in nature from the body.

What is it for two things to be really distinct?²⁴ Descartes's real distinction is best known for its application to the distinction between mind and body: he states his dualism by claiming that mind and body are really distinct. Now the real distinction is widely understood in the literature to consist in the separability of the items so distinct, but I do not think this fully captures the real distinction.²⁵ It is true that in the GE Descartes writes: "two substances are said to be really distinct when each of them can exist without the other."²⁶ But also in the Second Replies Descartes indicates that separability is a *sign* of real distinction, thus suggesting it does not constitute it.²⁷ In the *Principles of Philosophy*, which contains the most extensive and most formal exposition of Descartes's metaphysics he writes: "a real distinction obtains properly only between two or more substances"²⁸; and he explains that a substance is a thing "that so exists that it needs nothing else in order to

19 DA I.IX.1.

20 DA II.II.3.

21 *Principles* I, 60–62.

22 AT VII, 78/CSM II, 54.

23 For discussion of the intellect as essence of the mind, see Rozemond 1998, ch. 2 section 1. I take it that the will too is only conceptually distinct from the mind, it is the mind's active capacity. Sensation and imagination are faculties that are modes of the mind, but they presuppose the union with the body in the human being. I discuss this issue in Rozemond 1998, ch. 6. For further references, see also note 71.

24 I offer a more detailed discussion of the real distinction in Rozemond 1998, 3–12.

25 See Garber 1992, 85, 89; Hoffman 1986, p. 343fn.; Hoffman 2002; Wilson 1978, 190, 207.

26 AT VII, 162/CSM II, 114.

27 AT VII, 132/CSM II, 95.

28 *Principles* I, 60.

exist.”²⁹ It is tempting to read this definition of substance as saying that being a substance simply consists in having the ability to exist apart from anything else, and indeed, Descartes’s notion of substance is often understood in precisely this way. On this interpretation the real distinction reduces to mutual separability. But the definition in the *Principles* states that a substance needs nothing else in order to exist not as fundamental, but *as a result* of its actual mode of existence: a substance “*so exists that* it needs nothing else in order to exist.” Thinking of real distinction merely in terms of separability leaves out an important aspect of what it means for two substances to be really distinct. This aspect comes out clearly in Descartes’s definition of substance in the GE: “Each thing in which inheres [*inest*] immediately, as in a subject, or through which exists something that we perceive, that is, some property, or quality, or attribute, of which a real idea is in us, is called substance.”³⁰ The real distinction, then, is a distinction between two distinct subjects of inherence.

Intuitively, the idea is simple: to drop Descartes’s technical terminology, it concerns the distinction between things and properties. Things exist in and of themselves, their properties exist in virtue of being properties of things.³¹ Descartes’s basic ontology contains substances and modes. A substance is a thing in its own right, it has its own existence, unlike a mode.³² A mode exists in or through something else, a substance, whereas a substance exists through itself. Descartes quite frequently characterizes substances as things existing through themselves – *res per se subsistentes*.³³

Furthermore, when we see the real distinction at work, we often find that Descartes’s concern is not the modal notion of separability, but the idea that there are right now actually distinct entities with different (types of) modes. For instance, right after establishing the real distinction of mind and body in the Sixth Meditation, Descartes goes on to discuss what modes belong to mind and what modes belong to body. His concern there is not with separability of mind and body, although this is doubtless an important point for him in view of our immortality, but with mind and body as actually existing entities with different types of modes.

29 *Principles* I, 51. Strictly speaking this definition only applies to God, since all created substances depend on God as Descartes explains at once here. He concludes that the term ‘substance’ does not apply univocally to both God and creatures.

30 AT VII, 161/CSM II, 114. See also AT VII, 222/CSM II, 156.

31 It is important to realize that for Descartes modes were specific instances of properties: a body, say, can exist without any instance of a particular shape, that instance cannot exist without its particular body. In this regard they are like what are now called “tropes.”

32 Again, the role of God complicates matters, since Descartes believes God continuously creates the world. Thus really the existence of a substance continuously comes from God. One might say then that God gives a substance its existence directly – its own existence. A mode does not receive existence directly from God, but exists by virtue of inhering in a substance: it participates in the existence of the substance.

33 AT III, 502/CSM III, 207; AT VII, 222, 226/CSM II, 157, 159; AT VIII, 2, 348/CSM I, 297.

The present context, the ontological status of the faculties of the mind, is a case in point. At first blush it might seem that a modal claim must be at issue, because Descartes is aiming to defend the *indivisibility* of the mind. But note *how* Descartes denies that the faculties of the soul are parts of it: he denies that there are several entities each of which is a distinct subject of inherence for a distinct type of mental state. Instead, he writes, “it is one and the same mind that wills, and understands and has sensory perceptions.”

It can be hard to grasp this notion of real distinction for those more at home in contemporary analytical philosophy, where many metaphysical notions are understood in modal terms. But things were different in Descartes’s day.³⁴ Descartes’s conception of substance and real distinction is in line with what we find in Aristotelian scholastics who did not characterize substances, qualities, and the real distinction in terms of separability. For instance, in his handbook for philosophy, Eustachius of St Paul wrote that a substance is a “being that subsists or exists *per se*.” And he explains that “to subsist or exist *per se* is nothing other than not to exist in something else as in a subject of inherence, in which a substance differs from an accident, which cannot exist *per se* but only in something else in which it inheres.”³⁵ In his important discussion of the theory of distinctions, Francisco Suárez characterizes real distinction non-modally, as the distinction of one thing from another *una ab alia re*.³⁶ Suárez saw separability as a *sign* of real distinction, and did not think it was necessary for real distinction.³⁷

We find a particularly relevant application of the real distinction in Suárez’s argument that the faculties of the soul are really distinct from the soul and from each other. For Suárez the point of the real distinction of the faculties is not their separability. He argues for their real distinction from the soul on grounds other than the issue of separability. His main argument is based on the nature of creatures. By contrast with God, a creature “whose substance insofar as limited does not seem to be able to be the principle of as many actions as we experience in living beings” needs really distinct faculties.³⁸ And it is only *after* he has argued

34 Another example comes from various types of accidents. Analytical philosophers tend to think that a property that is essential to a type of entity is a property that necessarily belongs to such entities and without which they cannot exist (for an exception, see Fine 1995). But for a Scholastic Aristotelian there were various types of qualities that belong to an entity necessarily without being part of their essence. For instance, they recognized “*propria*,” “proper accidents,” qualities that flow from the essence of a type of substance and necessarily belong to it, but that are not part of its essence. An example is the human capacity for laughter, which flows from our essence as rational beings, but is not part of that essence. See Aquinas QDA qu. 12 ad 7. And Aquinas also speaks of “inseparable accidents,” accidents that cannot be separated from the individuals they belong to. For discussion see Wipfel 2000, 267–268.

35 SP I, 97.

36 DM VII.I.I. In this technical sense of the term *res* for Descartes only substances are *res*, modes are not, and he often uses the term *res* in a sense that excludes modes. See Rozemond 1998, 5–7.

37 Suárez thought that separability generally applies to really distinct entities, but he cites three exceptions: God and creatures; a relation and its term; and the three divine persons (DM VII.II.25–27). See also Eustachius, SP IV, 80.

38 DA II.I.5. This contrast goes back at least to Augustine. See *The Trinity* IV, 6, 209. For brief discussion of simplicity of the soul in Augustine see Lagerlund 2008, 76–78.

that the faculties are really distinct from the soul, that he devotes three sections to the question whether the faculties must be regarded as separable from the soul, that is, as capable of existing in separation from the soul. Indeed, this rather puzzling possibility appears in Suárez' discussion as a problem that results from their real distinction from the soul. Suárez discusses various opinions on this problem. One of these is that real distinction does not necessarily imply separability,³⁹ a view he too holds.⁴⁰ But he claims that the faculties of the soul can be separated from it by God.⁴¹ He discussed this question specifically for the intellect. He accepts that the intellect can be separated from the soul, but did not think that this separated intellect could understand, because "a vital action intrinsically depends on the first principle of life, without which, consequently, it cannot be exercised."⁴² This vital principle is the soul, and so the intellect cannot understand in separation from the soul.⁴³

It is not my purpose to deny that Descartes thought that really distinct entities are mutually separable. He did think that all and only really distinct entities are mutually separable. But I think that separability does not *constitute* the real distinction. A non-modal claim about subjects of inherence lies at its heart. So Descartes's denial that the faculties of the soul constitute parts, really distinct parts, of the soul should not be understood, or at least not entirely, in modal terms about separability. In regard to his notion of real distinction I think Descartes was a man of his own time, not of ours.

(3) There is a third issue about composition, an issue that emerges in Descartes's treatment of immortality. Traditionally, ever since Plato, the soul's indivisibility, which distinguishes it from matter, has been connected with its immortality. But Descartes's approach to the issue of immortality is strikingly different: He does not ground it in the soul's indivisibility, but in its incorruptibility, which he distinguishes from it. We find him doing so in an often-misunderstood passage in the Synopsis to the *Meditations*, right after Descartes describes the indivisibility argument from the Sixth Meditation:

[T]he premises that lead to the conclusion that the soul is immortal depend on an account of the whole of physics. This is required for two reasons. First, we need to know that absolutely all substances, or [*sive*] things that 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. Secondly, we need to recognize that body, taken in general, 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, whereas the human mind is not made up of any accidents in this way, but is a pure substance ...⁴⁴

39 DA II.I.6.

40 See note 36.

41 DA II.I.7.

42 DA II.I.8.

43 For this view see also Eustachius, SP III.III.2, 285. I discuss this view in Suárez in Rozemond 2012.

44 AT VII, 13–14/CSM II, 10.

Descartes connects the immortality of the soul with its incorruptibility, and he claims that not only souls but all substances “or [*sive*] things that must be created by God in order to exist,” and so also material substances, are incorruptible. He does so right after he has described body as divisible, mind as indivisible, and so incorruptibility must be a different notion.⁴⁵ Also noteworthy is his claim that in order to establish the immortality of the soul Descartes thinks he needs to do all of physics. What is going on here? I will not offer a full analysis of the argument here, as I have done so elsewhere.⁴⁶ But the following should suffice to give a sense of Descartes’s line of thought.

The reason why Descartes thinks that full support for the immortality of the soul requires doing all of physics is that his physics will show that he can do without substantial forms. The connection between the issue of substantial forms and immortality is explicit in a letter to Regius:

[F]rom the opinion that affirms substantial forms it is very easy to slip into the opinion of those who say that the human soul is corporeal and mortal; when it is acknowledged that [the human soul] alone is a substantial form, and that the others consists of the configuration and motion of parts, this very privileged status it has over the others shows that it differs from them in nature, and this difference in nature opens a very easy road to showing its immateriality and immortality, as can be seen in the recently published *Meditations on First Philosophy*.⁴⁷

Descartes is responding to the charge levelled by Voetius, the rector of the University of Utrecht, that his position on substantial forms leads to denial of immortality. Descartes turns the charge on its head. He contends that, on the contrary, belief in substantial forms other than the human soul is a threat to belief in the immortality of the soul. Why is that? It is because most substantial forms on the Aristotelian scholastic view are not immortal entities; the forms of animals, plants and lower substances perish all the time. The human soul is an exception. But Descartes thinks that accepting such a broad range of substantial forms, most of which are not immortal, obscures the special status of the human soul and thus undermines its status as immortal.

In this same letter to Regius Descartes relates his critique of substantial forms to the notion of substance as incorruptible that we found in the Synopsis:

The arguments or physical proofs, which we think would force a truth-loving mind to abandon substantial forms, are mainly the following *a priori* or metaphysical ones. It is contradictory [*repugnet*] that a substance should come into existence without being created from nothing by God; but we see that every day many so-called substantial forms come into existence from nothing; and yet the people who think they are substances do not believe that they are created by God; therefore their view is mistaken. This is confirmed by the example

⁴⁵ But for the opposite view, see Nelson / Smith 2010.

⁴⁶ See Rozemond 2010. Also see Fowler 1999.

⁴⁷ AT III, 503/CSM III, 207–208.

of the soul, which is the true substantial form of the human being. For the soul is thought to be immediately created by God for no other reason than that it is a substance. Furthermore, since other substantial forms are not thought to be created in this way, but as only deduced from the potency of matter, they should not be regarded as substances. It is clear from this also that it is not those who deny substantial forms, but those who affirm them who “can be driven by solid arguments to become beasts or atheists.”⁴⁸

So Descartes charges that the adherents of substantial forms commit themselves to an incoherent view because, as he sees it, they regarded substantial forms as substances, while thinking such forms come into and go out of existence through natural processes, which, in his own view, is not possible for substances. Assessing the accuracy of this charge is a complicated matter. But for Descartes substances can only be created and annihilated by God, they are naturally immortal, and the human soul is the only substantial form. And this position, he argues, offers better support for the immortality of the soul.

This point implicitly relies on another lack of composition that lurks in the background. For the Aristotelian scholastics substantial forms other than the human soul do go out of existence through natural processes, but in addition what matters here is that for them such forms were constituents of composite substances that come into being through natural processes and that are corruptible. For them natural substances, plants and animals and inanimate corporeal substances, are composites of matter and form. Within natural philosophy, Descartes in fact supplanted thehylomorphic analysis of natural substances (leaving aside the complicated case of human beings)⁴⁹ with an analysis in terms of matter or material substance, and its modes. So there is no corruption of natural substances in the Cartesian scheme, understood as the separation of matter and substantial form, only changes in modes. And all substances are incorruptible.⁵⁰

48 AT III, 505/CSM III, 208.

49 Descartes calls the human soul the only substantial form. This raises the question whether he regarded the mind-body composite as a substance. For the view that he did, see Hoffman 1986. I argue against this view in Rozemond 1998, chapter 5.

50 At the same time, Descartes does write in the Synopsis that the human body is corruptible. This is so because “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, whereas the human mind is not made up of any accidents in this way, but is a pure substance.” And “the human body becomes something different simply as a result of the fact that the shape of some of its parts is changed” (AT VII, 14/CSM II, 10). Descartes’s views of the status of bodies and their relationship to the notion of substance is a complicated matter that I can’t fully address here, but I take his position to be as follows. The human body as such is not a substance, it is a chunk of matter modified in specific ways. This chunk of matter is a substance, and there are indefinitely many of those. (Some interpreters think that for Descartes there is only one material substance, the entire physical world. See, for instance, Nelson / Smith 2010. This is not a novel view, for a much earlier instance, see Gueroult 1953.) When the human body is corrupted, the relevant modes change and that is enough for its corruption. But the chunk of matter is not corrupted. It continues to exist albeit now with different modes. For excellent discussion of the notion of corruptibility in Descartes and others during the period, see Kaufman, unpublished manuscript. Kaufman argues that fundamental to the notion of corruptibility is that the process results in the original entity no longer existing and instead an entity or entities of a different kind coming to be.

So while Descartes champions the indivisibility of the human soul as opposed to the body as so many others have done, he does not rely on it to establish its immortality. Rather he thinks its status as a substance, which it shares with matter, supports its immortality. And here yet a different type of non-composition presents itself, one that is not peculiar to minds: substances for Descartes, be they minds or bodies, are not composites of matter and form. And this, of course, is a lack of composition of a specifically Aristotelian kind.⁵¹

3 No really distinct faculties: why not?

In denying that the faculties of the soul are parts of the soul, and really distinct from it, Descartes is rejecting a long tradition in Aristotelian scholasticism of seeing the human soul as ontologically complex in the sense of containing really distinct parts. On a view often referred to as the “unitarian view,” found in Suárez and widely attributed within scholasticism to Aquinas, a human being has a single soul, but its faculties are really distinct from each other and from the soul itself. There was much debate about the nature of the distinction between the soul and its faculties. Suárez cites 4 different opinions on the matter.⁵² Besides the view that the powers of the soul are really distinct from it, he cites the view that they are in no way distinct from the soul (he cites Ockham as an example); Scotus’s view that they are formally distinct from the soul; and the view that some powers are (sensitive and intellectual powers), others (vegetative powers) are not distinct from the soul, Suárez refers to Bonaventure and Durandus of St Pourçain.⁵³ Insofar as Descartes’s point is to reject the idea that the faculties of the soul are really distinct from it really means that he is taking a stance *within* a scholastic debate.

But there was another, different way of seeing complexity in the human soul, a view that Descartes also rejected.⁵⁴ On this, the “pluralist” view, within a human being there are least two really distinct substantial forms or souls. Thus Ockham, while rejecting the idea that the faculties are really distinct from the soul, held that a human being contains a sensitive and an intellectual soul (in addition to the form of corporeity, which is not directly relevant to our purposes).

At the same time, while Descartes rejected both these views, his position had something in common with each. Like the unitarians, he held that there is a single soul in a human being that is the principle of all the activities attributable to the soul. But like Ockham, he thought that the faculties of the soul are not really distinct from it. It is worth paus-

51 This type of non-composition figures in scholastic arguments for the soul’s immortality See Aquinas, ST. I. 75, art.6 and Suárez (DA I.X.23).

52 DA II.I.2.

53 Suárez offers the following ground for this surprising view: vegetative powers produces substances and an accidental power can’t do that.

54 See his letter to Regius of May 1641, AT III, 371/CSM III, 182.

ing over the question which of these he had in mind when he rejects a composition in terms of a real distinction within the human soul or mind in Meditation VI. It seems more likely that Descartes meant to address the Suárezian position as he states his point by denying explicitly that the *faculties* of willing, sensing and understanding create composition within the soul. In a letter to Regius he explicitly addresses the pluralist position in terms of a plurality of souls, and I am not sure why he would not do so in the *Meditations*. The debate between unitarians and pluralists about the soul was well-known and it would be misleading to reject the pluralist position in language that seems designed instead to address a plurality of faculties rather than souls.⁵⁵ In what follows, I will focus on examining how his arguments can be understood to address the unitarian view that there is a single soul with really distinct faculties in a human being, but I will also offer some discussion of their impact on the pluralist position.⁵⁶

In Meditation VI Descartes writes that the faculties of the soul are not parts of it because “it is one and the same mind that wills, senses, and understands.” But on what ground did he hold this view? And how would philosophers like Aquinas or Suárez, who thought that the faculties of the soul are really distinct from it, react to this claim?⁵⁷ What does Descartes have to offer to convince them? What does he offer the reader of the *Meditations* to convince him of his claim? For many of us perhaps his view seems much more

55 Descartes’s use of language in other places makes this matter not entirely easy to assess, however. When rejecting the pluralist position in the letter to Regius he uses expressions for souls interchangeably with talk of powers: thus he warns against conceiving of the soul “as a genus of which the mind, vegetative power and motive power of animals are species” (AT III, 371/CSM III, 182). In the Third Replies Descartes himself notes that sometimes terms for faculties were used to refer not to the faculties as such but to the things to which the faculties were attributed. (For a prominent example see Aquinas, ST I.75.2, 76.1.) He writes that in Meditation II he had used the terms “*intellectus*” and “*ratio*” to refer to the thing that thinks, but that these terms were also used to refer to the faculties (AT VII, 174/CSM II, 123).

Furthermore, it seems a bit odd to think of the Suárezian view Descartes rejects in Meditation VI as presenting the faculties as *parts* of the soul, which is how Descartes describes it. For Suárez the faculties of the soul are really distinct from the soul, without being parts of the soul in and of itself. He thought that the human, rational, soul *in itself* is indivisible and “whole in the whole body and whole in the parts” of the human body. On the other hand, he does write that the soul the soul with its faculties is one by aggregation – *anima cum potentiis est unum per aggregationem* (DA II.III.10). Ockham’s view that a human being contains two really distinct souls can be described by speaking of parts of the soul. On this view these are really distinct parts within the soul which Ockham held have “partial being.” For illuminating discussion of different types of complexity in scholastic views of the soul, see Adams 1987, 633–669; Perler 2010, Perler 2013, and Des Chene 2000, 143–169.

It is in principle possible that Descartes had yet a different view in mind, on which the soul is nothing more than the collection of its faculties. Christopher Shields attributes this view to Suárez, but I disagree (see Shields 2013). I know of no scholastics who held this view (I am not considering Aristotle himself here), but given their numbers this does not mean there were none. It clearly was not a prominent position.

56 There is another way in which acknowledgement of the historical background helps understand Descartes’s procedure in Meditation VI. The argumentation goes by quite fast, and perhaps this is so because he knows that his readers will be familiar with the well-known view that the faculties are not really distinct from the soul.

57 The case of Aquinas is complicated. He did not yet use the term ‘real distinction.’ Among late scholastics he was widely regarded as holding that the faculties of the soul are really distinct from it, as the case of Suárez illustrates. For discussion of the complexities, see Perler 2013.

palatable than a scholastic view on which the number of really distinct entities within the soul is awfully high. Furthermore, if the soul itself is really distinct from its faculties, it becomes hard to see what the soul itself really is.⁵⁸ So we might not feel a great urge for an argument, and instead we might feel relief at Descartes's ontological parsimony. On the other hand, we might feel some inclination in the direction of more ontological complexity when reminded of the problem of psychic conflict: how should we understand a conflict between our will and some rebellious appetite? Do we need parts of the soul in some sense to address that question, either different souls or really distinct faculties?

I will not attempt a full explanation of how Descartes's arguments are meant to address those of Suárez or other scholastics. To some extent I am not sure just how much doing so would illuminate Descartes's thought. Often scholastic arguments in favour of the real distinction of the faculties from the soul are deeply embedded in an Aristotelian framework that Descartes does not accept or does not employ. But I think we can see some clear reasons Descartes had for adopting his view that are rooted in some important differences with scholastic thinkers on the theory of distinctions, and on the nature of the soul and mind.

(1) *There are no real accidents.* First, one reason why Descartes could not accept the idea that the faculties are really distinct from the soul lies in his theory of distinctions. He rejects the scholastic conception of various accidents, in particular qualities, as really distinct from their subject of inherence. Descartes uses the terms 'real accident' and 'real quality.' While he never discusses this issue in relation to the faculties of the soul, his stance has clear implications for the ontology of the faculties. Here is a prominent Cartesian discussion of the issue:

It is entirely contradictory that there should be real accidents, because whatever is real can exist separately from any other subject; but whatever can exist so separately, is a substance, not an accident. It makes no difference to say that real accidents cannot be separated from their subjects naturally, but only by the divine power. For it is nothing else for something to happen naturally, than to come about by God's ordinary power, which differs in no way from his extraordinary power, and which posits nothing different in things. Therefore just as anything that can exist without a subject naturally is a substance, whatever can be without a subject through some extraordinary power of God, must be called a substance.⁵⁹

So Descartes criticizes the notion of accidents that are "real" – *res*, in a technical sense. Although he does not use the term 'real distinction' here, he is denying here that accidents can be really distinct from their subjects: they can't be separable from their subjects because that would make them substances. If two entities are different substances, they are

⁵⁸ For discussion of this problem, see Perler 2013.

⁵⁹ AT VII, 434–435/ CSM II, 293. See also AT VII, 253–254/CSM II, 176. I discuss Descartes's rejection of real accidents in Rozemond 1998, ch. 4, for the present line of thought see section 4.1. See also Menn 1995.

really distinct.⁶⁰ The view that there are such accidents was common in the scholastic tradition. Descartes holds that this makes them both substances and accidents at the same time, which is incoherent.

This argument directly bears on the view that the faculties are really distinct from the soul, but it does not bear on Ockham's view that a human being has more than one really distinct soul, since he held that the faculties are not really distinct from these souls. But the next line of thought does bear on Ockham's view.

(2) *The same "I."* In the *Meditations* Descartes does not appeal to this line of thought, and so the question arises what in that work he expects to move his reader to accept his view of the soul and its faculties. The crucial claim in the Sixth Meditation is that "it is one and the same mind that wills, senses, and understands," and he prepares it in the Second Meditation when he writes: "It is the same 'I' who doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions."⁶¹ He defends that contention as follows:

Am I not the very one [*ego ipse sum*] who already doubts about everything, who nonetheless understands something, who affirms this one thing as true, who denies other things, who desires to know more, who does not want to be deceived, who imagines many things even involuntarily, who also notices many things as if they come from the senses? Which of these, even if I am asleep, even though he who created me deludes me as much as he can, is not equally true and is me? What is it that can be distinguished from my thought? What is it that can be said to be separate from me? For that I am the same one who doubts, who understands, who wants, is so obvious, that there is nothing through which it can be explained more evidently. But I am also the same who imagines; for although perhaps, as I have supposed, no imagined things are at all real, the very power of imagination does, however, really exist and is part of my thinking. And again I am the same who senses, or who notices corporeal things as if through the senses; for instance, I see light, I hear noise, I feel heat. These things are false, for I am asleep. But certainly I seem to see, hear, become warm. This cannot be false, and this is properly what is called sensing in me, and this strictly speaking is nothing other than thinking.⁶²

What is Descartes's reasoning here? He is claiming that all these mental episodes really take place, even if he is being deceived, in particular about the existence of the physical world. But it is hard to see how that consideration favours the view that there is *one single* thing that is the subject of all these mental states. He also claims that it is the same "I" that has the various mental states, and he seems to present this as an introspective datum. This seems plausible and intuitive enough. But couldn't that "I" or the mind itself be composite? What might Aquinas or Suárez say?

⁶⁰ *Principles* I.60.

⁶¹ AT VII, 28; CSM II, 19.

⁶² AT VII, 29; CSM II, 19.

One difficulty in relating this Meditation II argument to the scholastics is that they were not accustomed to presenting their thoughts in the first person. But Descartes's claim may be understood as addressing the following sort of view that can be found in Suárez. One of Suárez' arguments for the distinction of the faculties from the soul is this:

... these very powers are distinct *ex natura rei* from each other, therefore also from the soul. The assumption is clear in the case of intellect and will, for otherwise we could correctly say that the intellect loves, and that the will understands.⁶³

Descartes rejects this language of mental states being predicated of faculties; he thinks the right thing to say that it is "the same I" that engages in all the mental faculties. And so he rejects this entire (not very appealing) argument.⁶⁴

On the other hand, Descartes's point about the subject of his mental states is reminiscent of Aquinas's claim that "it is the very same man who perceives that he understands and senses."⁶⁵ As in Meditation II, here too the subject of different types of mental states is at issue; Aquinas thinks it is "the same man." Yet Aquinas held that the human being is a composite substance (a composite of matter and form) and, most relevantly, that our faculties are really distinct from our soul. So it is not clear how intuitive claims of attribution that it is the same I, or mind, that engages in various mental activities could establish that the faculties are not really distinct from the mind and persuade those who accepted the opposite view.

It is worth noting, however, that Descartes's view on this issue has some important affinity with the unitarian position and displays a clear disagreement with Ockham's pluralism. Aquinas and Suárez thought that one single soul is the principle of all activities attributable to the soul, vegetative, sensory, intellectual. Suárez argued, for instance, that the activities of the faculties must all be "rooted" in one single soul on the ground that the faculties cooperate with each other (as when the imagination provides images to the intellect, or the intellect provides mental representations to the will) and interfere with each other (as when a sound distracts me from seeing something or thinking about philosophy). These interactions require, Suárez contended, that the faculties, while really distinct from each other, be rooted in one single soul, contrary to the pluralist position.⁶⁶ On this point, then, Descartes is in agreement with the unitarians against the pluralists. Nonetheless, again the question remains how much work an appeal to the intuitive idea that the same "I"

63 DA II.I.4. Suárez offers this argument in favor of the view that the faculties are distinct *ex natura rei* from the soul. After he establishes this claim, he specifies that they are really distinct from the soul (DA II.I.5).

64 In the Third Objections Hobbes worries that Descartes's way of talking will lead back to "the scholastic way of talking: the understanding understands, the sight sees, the will wills ..." (AT VII, 172–177/CSM II, 122–125). In response Descartes denies this.

65 ST 76.1.

66 See DM XV.10.22, see also Aquinas, SCG II.58.

engages in the various mental activities can do to establish that this “I” refers to a single, unitary soul.

(3) *The reconfiguration of the soul.* There is a different feature of Meditation II that can help us understand Descartes’s position: his reconfiguration of the soul and its powers. This point is central to the discussion of the mind in Meditation II. To see this point, it helps to look at Aquinas’ and Suárez’ conception of different faculties we now call “mental.”

Aristotelian scholastics like Aquinas and Suárez would respond very differently to various parts of Descartes’s claim that there is one I or mind who engages in the full range of mental activities if taken as a technical claim about the subject of inherence of these various activities. They drew a sharp distinction between willing and understanding on one hand, and sensing and imagining on the other hand. They would agree that the rational soul is the subject of inherence for both understanding and willing. Indeed, they relied on this view to argue for the human soul being a subsistent entity, capable of existing without the body.⁶⁷ And so they would have little difficulty with Descartes’s claim that the immaterial mind is the subject of intellect and will. But they would deny this for sensing and imagining, on the ground that those are activities that must take place in a corporeal organ. Their view was that the soul is the principle, the source or root [*radix*] of all these activities, but they held that their subject of inherence is not the soul, or not the soul by itself. They differed in what the exact subject of inherence is, but they always thought that body or matter was at least part of it. For instance, for Aquinas, sensory powers inhere in the mind-body composite; Suárez argued that they inhere in matter, which must be ensouled, but not in the soul; Eustachius of St Paul wrote that the soul is a partial subject for such powers.⁶⁸

For Descartes, however, imagination and sensation are modes of the soul. This puts him in a better position to say that the one mind or “I” is an indivisible thing that engages in all these activities and that its faculties are not really distinct for the following reason. The scholastic view that the soul by itself is not the subject of inherence of sensation and imagination creates an obstacle for this view. For it is difficult to see how a faculty that has a different subject of inherence, or for which the soul is just a partial subject of inherence, could fail to be ontologically significantly distinct from the soul.⁶⁹ In Descartes’s terms, if a faculty has a subject of inherence that is different from the soul, that faculty would be really distinct from the soul.⁷⁰ Descartes never discusses the possibility of something having two

⁶⁷ Aquinas, ST 75.2, Suárez DA I.IX.

⁶⁸ Aquinas, ST I. 77.8, Suárez, DA VI, III, 3, Eustachius SP III, 286–287.

⁶⁹ This difference between intellect and will on one hand, and faculties that require a subject that is at least partly corporeal explains an interesting feature of Suárez’ discussion. When he argues that the faculties of the soul are really distinct from it, he focuses entirely on will and intellect. For him the issues would have been obvious and less in need of discussion for the other faculties.

⁷⁰ *Principles* I.61.

distinct subjects of inherence at once, or having a composite subject of inherence.⁷¹ But this is a problem Descartes does not have, since he regarded sensation as inhering in just the mind, and so he is in a better position to hold that it is a mode of the mind.

It may not be obvious that this line of thought is relevant to understanding Descartes's thinking in the *Meditations*. But a crucial aim of the Second Meditation is to supplant an Aristotelian conception of the soul with a Cartesian one. Early in Meditation II Descartes examines what he is, ending with the well-known conclusion that he is a thinking thing. In the process of doing so he asks himself what he used to think he was, and one answer is: a soul. And he offers an Aristotelian analysis of what that means: "I am nourished, I walk, I sense and I think: these actions I referred to the soul."⁷² He then argues that (in light of the doubts about the existence of body) he only sees thinking as belonging to himself, he is a thinking thing. Thinking is here intellectual: he writes "I am a thinking thing, that is, a mind, intelligence, intellect or reason – *mens, sive animus, sive intellectus, sive ratio*."⁷³ But later in this Meditation he expands the notion of a thinking thing so that it includes the full list of mental activities we saw before and for which he is better known: "it is the same 'I' who doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, *and also imagines and has sensory perceptions*" (my emphasis). From the perspective of an Aristotelian conception of the soul, the omissions of nutrition, locomotion (walking) and sense perception at the first stage of this argument are noteworthy. Descartes relegates these (but in the end only a part of sense perception) to the realm of the mechanical and in effect narrows the soul to the mind, which for them was just the subject of intellectual and volition states. But from the perspective of their conception of the mind the subsequent addition of imagination and sensation are just as noteworthy, which is why Descartes writes "*and also imagines and has sensory perceptions.*"

Part of Descartes's aim here is to change the conception of sensation (and imagination). The Aristotelian scholastics, taking their cue from Aristotle's *De anima*, generally thought that, unlike the senses, the intellect does not operate in an organ. Descartes is here adding sensation (and imagination) to the operations of the mind, and in doing so he

71 I am taking a controversial position here. Some scholars have argued that for Descartes sensations are not modes of just the mind, but that they are modes of the union of mind and body or modes of both (see Hoffman 1990, Schmaltz 1992, Cottingham 1985). I disagree: I think that he regarded them as modes of the mind, and not at all modes of body, although sensation requires that the mind be united to the body. He describes them as modes of the mind as united to the body (see Rozemond 1998, ch. 6). Of course, Descartes recognizes a corporeal component to the process of sensation. But this falls outside of the notion of "sensation proper," and consist in mechanistic processes in the body. For a very clear discussion of this point, see the Sixth Replies (AT VII, 436–438/CSM II, 294–295). But it is not easy to pin down Descartes's views on the ontology of sensation. In this regard he is like Plato, at least in the *Phaedo*. Both the Plato of the *Phaedo* and Descartes have a reputation for staunch dualism, but in both cases the texts are in fact more murky. In the *Phaedo* Plato might seem to advocates a clear-cut body-soul dualism, but at the same time allows that sensations and appetites have the potential for dragging the soul down in a sense that seems to allow for one's lifestyle to affect the metaphysical status of one's soul.

72 AT VII, 26/CSM II, 17.

73 AT VII, 27/CSM II, 18.

changes the conception of sense perception – in the proper sense, *proprie*, which excludes the mechanical processes that occur in the human body – from something that inheres in an at least partially corporeal subject, to a conception of sensation as belonging to the mind. He returns to this idea in Meditation VI, right after the argument for the real distinction of mind and body: there he writes that

I find within myself certain special faculties for thinking, namely the faculties of imagination and sense perception, without which I can clearly and distinctly perceive myself as a whole, but not them without me, that is, without an intelligent substance, to inhere in [*insint*].⁷⁴

In other words, they are modes of the mind. A consequence of this move is that a reason for regarding sensation as really distinct from its principle, the soul, which for Descartes is identical to the mind, has disappeared.

It should be clear that Descartes is offering a novel conception of the mind in Meditation II, but the bearing of his doing so on the ontological status of the faculties and the indivisibility of the soul may not be so obvious. But it surfaces more explicitly in the *Rules for the direction of the Mind* as well as the *Passions of the Soul*. In the *Rules* Descartes contends that

The power through which we properly know things is purely spiritual, and is no less distinct from the whole body than blood is distinct from bone, or the hand from the eye. It is one single power [*unicam vim*], which receives figures from the common sense as well as does the [corporeal] imagination, or applies itself to those which are preserved in memory, or forms new ones which so preoccupy the imagination that it is often in no position to receive ideas from the common sense at the same time, or to transmit them to the power responsible for motion in accordance with a purely corporeal disposition.⁷⁵

Descartes argues here that there is just one, single mental power, which is spiritual, incorporeal, and which engages in all the various mental activities. The processes he refers to here as in the body he understands mechanistically. So the lack of composition in the mind is here connected with the idea that all these mental activities belong to the one, spiritual mind.⁷⁶

The connection between his dualism and the absence of a multiplicity of really distinct parts of the soul is more explicit in the *Passions of the Soul*, when he discusses the problem

74 AT VII, 78/CSM II, 54.

75 AT X, 415/CSM I, 42.

76 Descartes's reconfiguration of the soul also helps see how he would respond to an argument offered by Aquinas. Aquinas argued that if the faculties of the soul were not distinct from it, a human being would always engage in each of the activities of the faculties, because the soul is essentially act (ST I.77.1). Descartes reduces the soul to the principle of thought, so this argument would result in the conclusion that the soul always thinks. Descartes accepts this conclusion. He argues that since the essence of the mind is thinking, it always thinks (letter to Hyperaspistes, August 1641, AT III, 189/CSM III, 423, letter to Gibieuf, January 19 1642, AT III, 478/CSM III, 203).

of psychic conflict. When I feel conflict about a course of action, must I think of myself as a composite, where part of me wants to do it, part of it does not? Descartes writes:

The battles that are commonly imagined between the lower part of the soul, which is called “sensitive,” and the higher part of the soul, which is rational, or between the natural appetites and the will, merely consist in the opposition (*repugnance*) between the movements that the body in virtue of its spirits and the soul in virtue of its will tend to excite at the same time in the [pineal] gland. For there is in us but one soul, and in this soul there is no diversity of parts: the same soul that is sensitive is rational, and all the appetites are volitions.⁷⁷

Within scholasticism, psychic conflict often was used as an argument either for there being two souls in a human being, a sensitive and a rational one, or as an argument for a real distinction between relevant faculties.⁷⁸ But Descartes rejects any need for ontological composition within the soul to account for psychic conflict. Instead, he contends, the conflict is one between body and soul.⁷⁹ The articles that precede article 47 of the *Passions* prepare the way for this analysis by devoting much attention to his dualism, his view that body and soul are distinct entities, and his specific views about what in the realm of the passions must be assigned to body, and what to mind. Thus in article 2 he writes that

... there is no better way of coming to know about our passions than by examining the difference between the soul and the body, in order to learn to which of the two we should attribute each of the functions present in us.

He then offers a lengthy discussion of functions of the body, arguing that some of these have wrongly been attributed to the soul (heat and movement in the body, the difference between a dead and a living body). Next he turns to the soul and then to the interaction between body and soul, where he explains his view of the role of the body in the passions. These articles prepare the way for the statement that psychic conflict does not involve a battle between parts of the soul, but a conflict between body and soul. So here again we see

⁷⁷ *Passions* I.47.

⁷⁸ Ockham argued that the opposition of appetites shows that the sensitive and rational soul must be distinct. See Perler 2013 and Adams 1987, 656–661. Suárez argued that the opposition of appetites should be explained by way of a plurality of faculties. Furthermore, he contends that the fact that only one of these appetites winds up being effective suggests that both faculties are rooted in the same soul, which would explain their interfering with one another (DM XV.X.27).

⁷⁹ Note that this suggests that he does think the explanation of psychic conflict requires ontologically distinct entities, since body and mind are really distinct. But he thinks his predecessors were wrong about what those entities are. It is also noteworthy that this is not the whole story for Descartes. Later at *Passions* I.47 he also invokes the idea that “the soul feels itself pushed to desire and not desire the same *almost at the same time*.” Descartes distinguishes two aspects of psychic conflict: (1) The causes of the conflict, which he assigns to body and soul; (2) The problem of the *experience* of psychic conflict, of incompatible mental states seemingly occurring at once in the soul or mind, which he addresses by claiming they occur *almost* at the same time. This was a Stoic view. For discussion, see for instance, Inwood 1985, 137–139, and Graver 2007.

how Descartes relies on his specific form of dualism, with its specific views of what belongs to body and what belongs to mind to deny composition in the soul.⁸⁰

Let me conclude with a brief discussion of the bearing of Descartes's reconfiguration of the soul on the pluralist position. First, the implications of his view that psychic conflict occurs between body and soul rather than within the soul is the same for pluralism as for the unitarian position that such conflict occurs between really distinct faculties of one soul. But furthermore, when Descartes rejects the pluralist position in the letter to Regius mentioned above, he connects it himself to his reconfiguration of the soul:

For by the sensitive soul you must understand nothing other than the motive power, unless you confuse it with the rational soul. This motive power does not, however, differ in species from the vegetative power, and both are entirely different in kind from the mind ... There is one single soul in the human being, namely the rational soul ... The vegetative power and the power to move the body that are called vegetative and sensitive in plants and the brute animals, also exist in the human being, but they must not be called 'souls' in human beings, because they are not the first principle of their actions and they are of a totally different genus from the rational soul. But the vegetative power in the human being is nothing other than a certain constitution of the parts of the body.⁸¹

In sum, Descartes redistributes the functions of the sensitive soul over the rational soul and the vegetative one, where the latter consists in the configuration of the (mechanistic) body. Souls other than the rational one are superfluous. Redistribution of sensation to the rational soul occurs in Meditation II and VI: the same "I" senses and understands (Meditation II), and the faculty of sensation is a mode of the mind, because it "involves some sort of intellection – *intellectionem nonnullam*."⁸² Reassignment of the vegetative functions occurs in Descartes's scientific works. Contrary to the pluralist position, the result is that there is only one soul in a human being.

4 Conclusion

We have seen that Descartes's analysis of the mind contains several denials of composition. Understanding of these denials is greatly helped by consideration of the Aristotelian scholastic background, as I hope this paper has demonstrated. Descartes makes a significant break with the scholastic tendency to see the soul as composite in significant ways, but at the same time there are points of continuity with the scholastic tradition. I have considered some important scholastic positions on this matter, but given the variety within scholasticism and the complexity of the issues, much work remains to be done.

⁸⁰ For discussion of the issue of complexity in the soul in relation to the passions see Gombay, 2008, and Wiliston 1999.

⁸¹ AT III, 371–372/CSM III, 182.

⁸² Meditation VI, AT VII, 78/CSM II, 54.

The types of composition Descartes rejects then are as follows. First, he holds that the mind is a spiritual substance that exists in the body whole in the whole and whole in the parts. It is difficult to make sense of this idea, but it is a denial of composition that Descartes shared with a long tradition of treatment of the relationship of spiritual substances, in particular God and human souls, to bodies. This tradition runs through Aristotelian scholasticism but goes back to Augustine and Plotinus. The point is to reconcile the soul's union and interaction with the body with the view that unlike the body, the soul does not have distinct parts that are spread out in space. Second, Descartes denies that there are really distinct parts within the soul in two senses each widely accepted but also controversial within scholasticism. First, he denies that the faculties of the soul are really distinct from it; they are at most modes of the mind. But he also denies that there is a plurality of (really distinct) souls in a human being. At the same time, I have noted ways in which Descartes accepted elements of both of these positions: the soul in itself, for Aquinas and Suárez, is a single, indivisible entity and the single source or root of all the faculties attributable to a soul in a human being (or other organism). And with Ockham's pluralist position Descartes shares a denial of the faculties being really distinct from the soul. In his third denial of composition he takes on Aristotelianism as a whole, because it relies on his rejection of hylomorphic substances, which were central to Aristotelianism. He holds that all substances are incorruptible, they do not have metaphysical constituents like a hylomorphic substance does, they are never composites of matter and form. The soul is a substance and so it is incorruptible for Descartes and naturally immortal.

I have devoted special attention to Descartes's grounds for his view that the faculties of the soul are not really distinct from it. This view follows straightforwardly from his view that only substances are really distinct, and the faculties are not substances. But I have argued that for Descartes this lack of complexity in his soul is also connected to his type of dualism, his way of dividing the material from the mental, which helps make composition in the soul superfluous with respect to the faculties. This point is perhaps most evident in his solution of the problem of psychic conflict: the conflict of will and natural appetite, for Descartes, is a conflict between body and soul, not between parts of the soul. Finally, his reconceptualization of the soul leads to the conclusion that, contrary to the pluralists, there is only one soul in the human being, the rational soul.

Abbreviations

AT	Descartes, René (1996): <i>Œuvres de Descartes</i> , 11 vols., eds. Ch. Adam / P. Tannery, Paris. Cited by volume and page.
CSM	Descartes, René (1985–1991): <i>The Philosophical Writings of Descartes</i> , 3 vols., eds. J. Cottingham / R. Stoothoff / D. Murdoch, Cambridge. Cited by volume and page.
DA	Suárez, Francisco (1856): <i>De anima</i> , in: <i>Opera omnia</i> , 26 vols., Paris. Cited by book, chapter, section.
DM	Suárez, Francisco (1856): <i>Disputationes metaphysicae</i> , in: <i>Opera omnia</i> , 26 vols., Paris. Cited by disputation, section and article.
SP	Eustachius of St. Paul (1609): <i>Summa philosophica quadripartita</i> , 4 vols., Paris. Cited by part and page.
ST	Aquinas, Thomas (1964–): <i>Summa theologiae</i> , New York. Cited by part, question, article, and where appropriate, the number of an objection or a reply.
QDA	Thomas Aquinas, (1968): <i>Questions de anima</i> , ed. J. A. Robb, Toronto; and (1984): <i>Questions on the Soul</i> , transl. J. A. Robb, Milwaukee. Cited by question.

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