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## **FORTY YEARS AFTER: RECONSIDERING THE PROBLEM OF DESCARTES'S NATURAL INSTITUTION THEORY VS THE COEXTENSION THEORY**

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### **0. Introduction**

2018 marks double anniversary in Cartesian scholarship: important books by Margaret Wilson, *Descartes*, and Marleen Rozemond, *Descartes's Dualism*, were published 40 and 20 years ago respectively.

One of the central and most widely discussed topics in Wilson's book was the distinction of the two theories of mind-body union that can be found in Descartes texts, the Natural Institution theory and the Coextension theory. On Wilson's view, these theories are in conflict because the former takes particular ways in which mind and body interact as sort of primitives that require no further explanation (it was just established by God that way, because he willed so), whereas the latter seems to hold that the mind-body union explains the interactions. Wilson also suggested that the Natural Institution theory is by far the best and that Descartes would better cling to it and abandon the Coextension theory.

Marleen Rozemond, among other things, took issue with Wilson on that point and proposed a different account of Descartes's notion of the mind-body union as, in a sense, explanatory of both the mind-body interaction and the qualitative nature of sensations. Despite Rozemond's book's being highly appreciated, this account and its merits and demerits *vis-à-vis* Wilson's account were not widely discussed and critically evaluated.

Recently, Minna Koivuniemi and Edmond Curley developed yet another account of Descartes's views on the mind-body union. This account explains away the purported conflict between the Natural Institution theory and the Coextension theory; however, it seems to be in conflict with both Wilson's and Rozemond's accounts in presenting the mind-to-body and body-to-mind directions of causality as symmetrical (while Wilson's and Rozemond's accounts both point out strong asymmetry, the dominance of the body-to-mind causal direction in Descartes's notion of the union).

The relationship between these three accounts and the possibility of their (partial) reconciliation and synthesis is the topic of the following discussion.

### **1. Margaret Wilson's account: the Natural Institution theory vs. the Coextension theory**

According to Wilson [Wilson, 1978: pp. 205-220], the best Descartes's account of the mind-body union, the Natural Institution theory, is that «what we call the close union or intermingling of this mind with this body is nothing but the arbitrarily established disposition of this mind to experience certain types of sensations on the occasion of certain changes in this body, and to refer these sensations to (parts of) this body» [Wilson, 1978: p. 211]. However, Wilson thinks that this theory conflicts with some Descartes's statements, such as that sensations «are nothing but confused modes of thinking which arise from the union and, as it were, intermingling of the mind with the body» (AT VII, 81/CSM II, 56)<sup>1</sup> and that «the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body» (AT VII, 86/CSM II, 59).<sup>2</sup> She thinks that such statements converge into another conception (although vague and underdeveloped, «seemingly almost ineffable» [Wilson, 1978: p. 207]), the Coextension theory, which conflicts with the Natural Institution theory. Wilson identifies two points of conflict.

First, Wilson thinks that the statement that sensations «arise from the union and, as it were, intermingling of the mind with the body» sits badly with Natural Institution theory:

«[o]n the Natural Institution theory, ... it would seemingly be wrong to say that we experience sensations in different parts of our bodies *because of* a state of affairs

<sup>1</sup> Here and forthwith, references to the texts of Descartes and his correspondents are made to the classical French/Latin edition by Adam and Tannery [Descartes, 1996], abbreviated as AT, and the English editions: Volumes I and II of *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, transl. by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch [Descartes, 1985], abbreviated as CSM; Volume III of *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, transl. by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch, and A. Kenny [Descartes, 1991], abbreviated as CSMK; *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, transl. by E. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross [Descartes, 1931], abbreviated as HR. The abbreviation is followed by a blank, the volume (if any, in Roman numerals), a comma, and the page number.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson quotes the latter statement imprecisely, replacing «seems to be» with «is» [Wilson, 1978: p. 206]. (She refers not to CSM but to HR; however, the translation of this fragment in (HR I, 196) is the same as in (CSM II, 59).)

designated as the close or intimate union or intermingling of mind with body. Rather, what we call the close union or intermingling of this mind with this body is nothing but the arbitrarily established disposition of this mind to experience certain types of sensations on the occasion of certain changes in this body, and to refer these sensations to (parts of) this body.» [Wilson, 1978: p. 211]

Wilson suggests that if Descartes consistently clung to the Natural Institution theory, he could not say «that one has sensations of a certain sort, in response to changes in a certain body, *because* one is united with that body» but should rather say that «having sensations of a certain sort, etc. is what *it is* to be united to that body» [Wilson, 1978: p. 211].

Second, it is an integral part of the Natural Institution theory that the mind-body interaction is localized somewhere in the brain (*viz.*, the pineal gland), whereas Descartes's descriptions of the whole mind as united, and as if intermingled, with the whole body, seem to imply the-whole-body-distributed interaction. So Wilson suggests that «Descartes may have been subject to the confusion of thinking he did have direct experience of the mind-body union in himself, while forgetting that on the Natural Institution theory, *no such experience is possible*» [Wilson, 1978: p. 216].

However, are these contradictions real rather than merely apparent?

Consider the first Wilson's point. If the union of a mind and a body is nothing but the disposition of this mind to have certain experiences on the occasion of certain processes in this body, why should it be wrong to say that the mind's sensations arise from the union, and that the union explains these sensations? Wilson's point seems to be that if the union *consists in* that sensations arise contingently on certain bodily occasions, then to say that sensations arise from the union would be like saying that sensations arise from sensations (and to say that the union explains the sensations would be like saying that sensations explain sensations). However, this would be the case only if the union was nothing but a *multitude* of sensation-events rather than a system of *dispositions* for such events. If certain enduring dispositions are in place (as God-established Natural Institution), particular events can be rightly said to arise out of these dispositions and so be explainable by them. And although the dispositions are *contingent* (in the sense that it is in God's power to establish different dispositions, or no dispositions at all), once they are in place, particular events arise out of them *necessarily*.

Thus, the statements that sensations *arise from* the union, or that we experience sensations *because of* the union, or that the union *explains* sensations, perfectly agree with the Natural Institution theory, if we understand these statements as the explanation of particular mental events happening at different times by universal or enduring ontological facts such as the laws of nature, or the Natural Institution, or the enduring union of a certain soul with a certain body.

To understand this clearer, consider an analogy from modern physics: Newton's law of gravity (which can also be described as a natural institution) can be regarded as an arbitrarily established or (in terms that are neutral with respect to the issue of

God's existence) contingent (logically/metaphysically unnecessary, such that worlds in which it does not hold are logically/metaphysically possible) disposition of physical bodies to attract one another in a certain regular way (according to a certain mathematical formula). This does not contradict the fact that we can explain particular cases of gravitational interaction (the attraction between this and that body at a particular moment of time) by the existence of the law of gravity. The view of Newton's law of gravity as a contingent natural institution perfectly agrees with explanatory statements of the form: body A and body B are attracted with force  $F=G*M_A*M_B/D^2$  because of Newton's law of gravitation and because they have masses  $M_A$  and  $M_B$  and the distance between them is D. Likewise, we can interpret Descartes's statements at issue in the sense: there is a (contingent, arbitrarily established by God, in the sense that it is in his power to arrange things otherwise) universal natural institution, on which the states of a human soul are associated in a certain regular way with certain states of the brain of the body with which this soul is bound in the union, and there is the enduring union of a particular soul with a particular body; accordingly, every sensation of a person at one or another particular moment of time arises because 1) there is the Natural Institution, 2) his-or-her soul is bound in the union with a particular body, and 3) the brain of the body has the corresponding physical state.

Note that the enduring union of soul and body ontologically precedes any particular interaction between the soul and the body and any particular effect of such interactions (in particular, it precedes particular sensations that the person experiences at any moment): such interactions and consequences are possible only because the soul and the body are already bound in the union, and because the soul is bound in the union with this rather than some other body. In this sense, the union explains all particular interactions and their effects, such as sensations. However, this is perfectly consistent with the possibility that the union is nothing but an enduring complex of causal dispositions between a soul and a body.

There still remains a problem with this interpretation: although it shows how the Natural Institution theory assimilates the statement that sensations arise from the union, it is still unclear how it can be fitted with the whole of Descartes's statement that sensations arise from the union and as if intermingling of the mind with the body. What this quasi-intermingling is supposed to do with the causation (and explanations) of sensations?

One possibility is that the right answer is «Nothing»; perhaps, Descartes just unhappily expressed his thought, which was that the sensations arise from the union, and that the union is experienced as *as-if-intermingling* of the mind with the body. Descartes's statement a few pages later that the whole mind *seems* to be united to the whole body (AT VII, 86/CSM II, 59) seems to support this construal of «the Coextension theory» as having to do only with *the phenomenology of the union*. If the Natural Institution theory accounts for real causal links and the Coextension theory is confined to the phenomenology of the union, no conflict between the two arises.

It may be objected that later, in *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes stated this view with «is» instead of «seems»: «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» (AT XI, 351/CSM I, 339). However, Descartes explains this point entirely in terms of the functional unity of the body («which is in a sense indivisible because of the arrangement of its organs, these being so related to one another that the removal of any one of them renders the whole body defective» (AT XI, 351/CSM I, 339)) and the mapping of its states into phenomenal states of the mind. The mind is the indivisible unit which phenomenal states are arranged and causally bound to the body in such a way that they map the happening in the whole body, all of its parts. This is still a matter of the phenomenology of the union, and so there is no contradiction in Descartes's combining it with the point (stated in the very next paragraph of *Passions*) that «nevertheless there is a certain part of the body where it exercises its functions more particularly than in all the others», *viz.*, the pineal gland (AT XI, 352/CSM I, 340).

Another possibility, suggested by Marleen Rozemond, is that there is something more to as-if-intermingling of the mind with the body than mere phenomenology; that with respect to sensations, it has some causal and explanatory bite as well.

## 2. Marleen Rozemond versus «interactionism»: a non-existent alternative

Rozemond proposes her construal of Descartes's notion of the union of mind and body as an alternative to two other kinds of construal. On the one hand, she opposes trialism — the group of construals whose supporters hold either that Descartes's ontology involves three kinds of created substances (bodies, souls and soul-body unions or composites)<sup>3</sup> or that even though Descartes recognized only two kinds of substances (bodies and souls), his ontology involves three kinds of fundamental attributes — extension, thinking and sensation, the latter considered as the attribute of the soul-body union rather than of the soul [Cottingham, 1985]. On the other hand, she opposes «one common interpretation», on which «the union simply consists in their [soul's and body's] interaction» [Rozemond, 1998: p. 172]. Rozemond dubs this interpretation «interactionism», and identifies Wilson (her account of the Natural Institution theory) as its foremost representative. (Besides Wilson's book, Rozemond mentions two other works, by Vere Chappell [Chappell, 1994] and Henri Gouhier [Gouhier, 1987], as representative of «interactionism»<sup>4</sup> [Rozemond, 1998: p. 261]; however, she discusses only Wilson's version of it in considerable detail.)

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<sup>3</sup> Some representative works of this variety of trialism are: [Richardson, 1982], [Hoffman, 1986], [Hoffman, 1990], [Schmaltz, 1992], [Garber, 1992].

<sup>4</sup> In the following discussion, I take the term «interactionism» in angle brackets because it is used in Rozemond's specific meaning that essentially differs from the one in which this term is used in the contemporary philosophy of mind.

What Rozemond means by «interactionism», and what she finds wrong with it?

Rozemond describes «interactionism» as the view on which the union of mind and body «simply consists in their interaction: the role of the body in sensations is merely that it is the efficient cause of their occurrence, and sensations are just a species of thought and modes of the mind» [Rozemond, 1998: pp. 172-173]. She objects that this view «is in tension with Descartes's claim that the union *explains* interaction, and it ignores the role of the union in regard to the qualitative nature of sensation» [Rozemond, 1998: p. 211]. On her construal, Descartes's view was that the notion of the union explains, firstly, the fact of the interaction between the mind and the body and, secondly, the qualitative nature of sensations. However, a reader who would look to Rozemond's book for an explanation of *how*, according to Descartes, the notion of the union explains the fact of interaction and the qualitative nature of sensations, is likely to be disappointed. Rozemond admits that Descartes does not give «an account of how the union gives rise to this feature of sensation» [Rozemond, 1998: p. 182] and does not even tries, because he «thinks ... that very little could be said to explain the nature of this union» [Rozemond, 1998: p. 183]. Descartes's «explanations» leave unanswered the question of «why a particular kind of state of the body causes an occurrence of a particular kind of sensation» or «[h]ow is it that certain motions in the brain cause pain rather than a sensation of red, or pain as if in the foot rather than pain as if in the head» [Rozemond, 1998: p. 205]. So, with these explanations, just as well as without them, «[t]he connection seems arbitrary»; the notion of mind-body union «does not at all remove the seeming arbitrariness of the particular causal correlations» [Rozemond, 1998: p. 205]. In other words, if we look for an explanation in the «strong» sense — one that would explain «how» and «why» and «remove the seeming arbitrariness» — then, on Descartes's view (as Rozemond construes it) the notion of the union does not explain, *in this sense*, neither the fact of interaction nor the qualitative nature of sensations. In this, Rozemond's and Wilson's construals agree. However, Rozemond is right to suggest that (pace Wilson) there is no good reason why we should understand Descartes's claim that the union explains interaction in this strong sense. There is another, much weaker sense of «explanation», in which Descartes could, consistently with his other statements (those that Wilson construes as the Natural Institution theory), claim that the union explains interaction.

According to Rozemond, this sense can be explained as follows.

Descartes assumes that the nature of mind *on its own*, without influence of the body, is thought as *pure intellection, which lacks the qualitative character of sensations*. If so, then sensations as modes of thought that have this qualitative character cannot arise in the mind as an «intrinsic» effect of its own thinking activity: they should be caused (evoked in the mind) by *something else that has nature different from the nature of mind*, and the most natural (or even the only tenable) candidate for this role is the union with the body [Rozemond, 1998: pp. 181-182]. According to Rozemond, this is all there is to Descartes's claim that the union explains interaction and the qualitative character of sensations. However, is it so principally dif-

ferent from the view of the Cartesian scholars classified by Rozemond as «interactionists»?

To answer this question, let us first note that Cartesian scholars seem to agree that Descartes held that with human beings, sensations arise only insofar as a mind is united with a body: an unembodied soul would have no sensations. It is not easy to find a reputed Cartesian scholar who would deny this; so even if some «interactionists» did not assert (and did not deny) this explicitly, we should assume «by default» that he-or-she accepted this view. So, it is reasonable to proceed on the assumption that Wilson and other «interactionists» also thought that on Descartes's view, *sensations arise in a human mind only insofar as this mind is united with a human body*, because of certain states of the brain. Indeed, Wilson, for one, explicitly subscribed to this view: «Descartes's position is, first, that unembodied mind would be a pure intellect or pure understanding» [Wilson, 1978: p. 210]. Insofar as «interactionists» admit that sensations would not arise in a mind without its union with a body, they thereby admit that Descartes's notion of the union «explains» the arising of sensations, — in exactly that sense, in which Rozemond holds that Descartes's notion of the union «explains» the arising and the qualitative nature of sensations.

However, can it be that on the view of «interactionists», Descartes's notion of the union «explains» (in the weak sense) only the arising of sensations but not their qualitative nature? (Rozemond's way of describing the difference between «interactionism» and her construal — insofar as she emphasizes that on «interactionist» view, the union consists in interaction, whereas on her view, the union explains both interaction *and the qualitative nature of sensations* — can suggest this, if we take the addition «and the qualitative nature of sensations», rather than the difference between «consists in» and «explains», as crucial.) I find it difficult to make sense of this suggestion. If on the «interactionist» view, the union «explains» the arising of sensations (in the same weak sense, in which on Rozemond's view, it explains the arising and qualitative nature of sensations), then it thereby «explains» the arising of *sensations*, where «sensations» means mental states (modes of thought, according to Descartes) that have specific qualitative character (how it feels, what it is like for an experiencer). So we cannot separate the «explanation» of the fact of the arising of sensations from the «explanation» of their qualitative nature. This separation would make sense only if «interactionists» denied that Descartes attributed sensations with specific qualitative character; however, so far as I know, Wilson and other authors classified by Rozemond as «interactionists» never denied this.

However, cannot it be the case that what Descartes describes as as-if-intermingling of the mind with the body is supposed to provide some stronger sort of explanation than a mere causal one? Rozemond's exposition can suggest the following: there is an admixture to pure intellection of something extraneous (qualitative nature of sensations), and this admixture comes from the body with which the mind is bound in the union. This would make sense if there could be *real* admixture, *genuine* intermingling rather than as-if-intermingling, of bodily elements into the mind — if the qualitative character of sensations was due to the same qual-

itative character of bodily states. However, Descartes's clear view was that bodies do not have any such qualitative character (they have no other properties but modes of extension), and so cannot infuse it into mental states. Generally, for Descartes, mind and body have no common properties, which make the admixture of bodily properties into the mind impossible. So, there seems to remain no intelligible alternative to the view that all there is to as-if-intermingling of the mind with the body, as far as the body-to-mind direction of causation is concerned, is that the body causes the mind to have states of the kind it would not have on its own, and that these states are experienced as as-if-intermingling of the mind with the body.

There is yet another way how Rozemond explains the difference between her construal and «interactionism»: she writes that according to «interactionism», «there would seem to be no obstacle to the mind having sensory states even when not united to a body: God could bring them about», whereas on her view, this is «in tension with those aspects of Descartes's treatment of sensation that seem to commit him to a stronger conception of the union and to the view that we cannot have sensation without body» [Rozemond, 1998: p. 203], «with the view that sensation is not possible without body» [Rozemond, 1998: p. 204]. However, the soundness of this opposition is suspect.

To clarify this issue, the following clarification is useful. There are four different meanings (with different «strength») in which it can be said that sensations are impossible without the body:

(1) Sensations are impossible without the body because God has arranged the world in such a way that human souls experience sensations only if united with a human body and if the brain of that body has the corresponding physical states.

(2) In a sense, even God cannot do it so that sensations were experienced without the body: because God has decided once that human souls experience sensations only if united with a human body, and God's will is immutable, it is impossible that God change it and make things otherwise.

(3) There is also another sense in which, according to Descartes, God cannot do that sensations were experienced without the body: because God has created our minds and made sensations in such a way that we are strongly and incorrigibly disposed to infer from sensations the existence of the bodies that cause them (by affecting our bodies), and because *God is not a deceiver*.

(4) God cannot do that sensations were experienced without the body because it is impossible in principle, not even in his power.

Wilson and other «interactionists» do not deny that sensations are impossible without the body in the senses (1)-(3); they only deny that this is impossible in the sense (4). They hold that the mind could have sensory states even when not united to a body, that God could bring them about only in the sense that it is not impossible in principle, that it is in God's power. If it is in his power to create the world such that in it, some physical states of human brains cause sensations in human minds, then of course it is in his power to produce sensations in human minds directly, without bodies (or to make some other states of the brain or of some other

part of the body produce these sensations).<sup>5</sup> However, Rozemond also does not contend (and adduce no reason to think) that this is not in God's power. If so, there is no reason to oppose «interactionism» and Rozemond's view in this respect.

So we can conclude that the opposition between the view of Rozemond and «interactionism» is a non-existent alternative. Of course, Rozemond's interpretation differs in some respects from the interpretations of each of those authors she classifies as «interactionists»; however, these differences do not have that principal character that would divide dualistic interpretations into two distinct directions, «interactionism» and «rozemondism».

Wilson's and Rozemond's interpretations agree on the point that in Descartes's understanding (and explanations) of the specifics of the union of mind and body as especially close connection (essentially different from the relationship between a pilot and his ship, or the relationship that would have taken place if an angel had a body), «as if intermingling», the central role belongs to sensations. However, they differ in what they take to be crucial in sensations for that matter. Wilson takes it to be the representational (or quasi-representational<sup>6</sup>) character of sensations as if located in the corresponding parts of the body (pain in a foot, noise in ears, visual sensations in eyes etc.). On Rozemond's view, the specific qualitative character of sensations (how it feels) is crucial. However, in this respect, it seems that Wilson's construal fares not worse off: on the contrary, its explanation of Descartes's metaphor of «as if intermingling» of the mind with the body is simpler and more intuitive. The explanation is that the metaphor represents our spontaneous disposition to locate sensations in different parts of the body (my toothache seems to be located in my teeth, my perceptual visual, auditory, and olfactory sensations — in my eyes, ears, and nose respectively), whereas in fact, they are states of mind. Rozemond's explanation is that the body's influence upon the soul as if admixes to thought something extraneous to its nature as pure intellection, viz., qualitative experiential character. However, this construal seems to sit badly with Descartes's clear view that *bodies do not have that qualitative experiential character* (they have no other properties except modes of extension). And it is not necessary to account for Descartes's claim that the union explains interactions: there is another account, as outlined in the previous section, that explains this claim and reconciles it with the Natural Institution theory.

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<sup>5</sup> And Descartes was explicit and perfectly clear that on his view, «God could have made the nature of man such that this particular motion in the brain indicated something else to the mind; it might, for example, have made the mind aware of the actual motion occurring in the brain, or in the foot, or in any of the intermediate regions; or it might have indicated something else entirely» (AT VII, 88/CSM II, 60-61).

<sup>6</sup> This reservation is due to the point that in a sense, sensations and perceptions represent some movements in the corresponding parts of the body, or some properties of things we perceive, but they do not represent them *as movements or genuine bodily properties (modes of extension)*. In a sense, they misrepresent them as something having the qualitative nature of sensations.

Also, it is appropriate to note that these interpretations are not mutually exclusive: it may be (and plausible) that when Descartes highlighted sensations as the most characteristic for the union of mind and body and wrote about «is if intermingling» of mind and body, he meant both qualitative and (quasi)representative aspects without drawing clear distinction between them.<sup>7</sup>

### **3. Koivuniemi&Curley's account vs. Wilson&Rosemond accounts: the apparent conflict and its dissolution**

How about the supposed conflict between the Natural Institution theory, insofar as it holds that the mind-body interaction is *localized somewhere in the brain* (the pineal gland), and Descartes's descriptions of the whole mind as united, and as if intermingled, with *the whole body*?

In a recent paper, Minna Koivuniemi and Edwin Curley argued that there is no conflict and have presented an account of Descartes's views about the union of mind and body that in some respects develops Wilson's and Rosemond's accounts and in some other respects interestingly digress from both.

Koivuniemi and Curley proceed from Wilson's opposition between the Natural Institution theory and the Coextension theory, and point out that it is not clear where exactly the contradiction between the two is supposed to lie:

«Where, exactly, is the contradiction? There will be a contradiction if the Natural Institution theory holds that *direct* interaction between mind and body occurs *only* in the pineal gland, and the Co-extension theory holds that the mind interacts *directly* with *every* part of the body. But do Descartes's statements about the whole mind being united with the whole body really imply direct interaction between the mind and every part of the body? On the face of it, the answer is "no". What, then, do they imply?» [Koivuniemi and Curley, 2015: p. 88]

To answer this question, Koivuniemi and Curley analyse Descartes's texts (taking into account some developments of Descartes's thought after *Meditations*) and arrive at the conclusion:

«there are three elements in the mind-body union:

- (i) the basic fact of causal interaction between mind and body;
- (ii) the fact (one aspect of that basic fact) that the mind has, through its bodily sensations, a confused awareness of what is happening in each part of its body, though the complex process which results in those sensations involves details not present to its consciousness; and finally,
- (iii) the fact (a second aspect of that basic fact) that the mind has the ability to cause motions in the body of which it has that awareness, again, through a complex

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<sup>7</sup> This can be seen as anticipation of the modern discussion about the relationship between the qualitative character of phenomenal mental states and their intentionality, in particular, whether one is possible without the other.

process whose details are not present to its consciousness.» [Koivuniemi and Curley, 2015: pp. 107-108]

An interesting feature of this account is that on it, both causal directions, from body to mind and from mind to body, are constitutive of the union in similar ways, symmetrically. *Prima facie*, this seems to be at odds with the accounts of Wilson and Rozemond, both of which present Descartes's notion of the union as strongly asymmetrical between these causal directions: the body-to-mind causation is crucial, because it produces sensations, and sensations is what makes the union of mind and body especially close, that of «as if intermingling». As for the mind-to-body causation, Descartes seems to think of it as if in this respect, the relation of a human mind to its body is not principally different from the relation of a pilot to his ship. So, in *Discourse on Method*, Descartes wrote that «it is not sufficient for it [a soul] to be lodged in the human body like a helmsman in his ship, *except perhaps to move its limbs*, but that it must be more closely joined and united with the body in order to have, besides this power of movement, feelings and appetites like ours and so constitute a real man» (AT VI, 59/CSM I, 141; italics mine). There is also another Descartes's line of speculation that indicates the asymmetry. In a letter to Regius, Descartes explained the special closeness of the union of soul and body with the suggestion that «if an angel were in a human body, he would not have sensations as we do» (AT III, 493/CSMK, 206). With causation in the opposite direction, from soul to body, situation is different. In a letter to Henry More, Descartes wrote that «I find in my mind no idea that represents the way in which God or an angel can move matter that is different from the idea that shows me the way in which I am conscious that I can move my body by means of my thought» (AT V, 347/CSMK, 375).<sup>8</sup> Taking this into account, Rozemond directly asserted that Descartes «simply cannot use that direction of interaction {from mind to body} to defend the special union of the human mind to its body» [Rozemond, 1998: p. 180].

So, there seems to be a conflict between Koivuniemi's and Curley's symmetrical account of the union and Wilson's and Rozemond's asymmetrical accounts. On both sides, there is good textual support. How is the conflict to be resolved? I propose that it can be dissolved, if we draw the distinction between, on one hand, the *primitive notion* or *phenomenology* of the union of soul and body and, on the other hand, Descartes's *theory* of the union, of causal processes involved in it. The «asymmetric» construals hold for the primary notion (phenomenology), and the construal by Koivuniemi and Curley holds for the theory.

According to Descartes (letters to Elisabeth, 21 May 1643 and 28 June 1643), primitive notions are «as it were the patterns on the basis of which we form all our

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<sup>8</sup> This does not mean that Descartes thought that the human soul moves the body in the same way as an angel (or God) can move matter (just before the fragment quoted above, Descartes makes the reservation: «I think that no mode of acting belongs univocally to both God and creatures» (AT V, 347/CSMK, 375)). However, this means that we do not have any idea of how an angel (God) can move matter that could illuminate the difference between the union of soul and body and the relation an angel, if he were in a body, would have to that body.

other conceptions», and one of such notions is the notion of the union of soul and body, «on which depends our notion of the soul's power to move the body, and the body's power to act on the soul and cause its sensations and passions» (AT III, 665/CSMK, 218). As far as this notion is concerned, «what belongs to the union of the soul and the body ... is known very clearly by the senses» (AT III, 691-692/CSMK, 227).

So, the primitive notion of the union of soul and body is a notion that every human being has. An ordinary (wo)man has this primitive notion although (s)he does not know which brain processes correspond to which mental states, — indeed, even if (s)he does not know that the brain has much to do with mental states (suppose that one believes, like Aristotle did, that the corporal centre of mental states is the heart, and that the function of the brain is to cool blood). With respect to the mind-to-body causal direction, the notion involves only volitions to make certain movements and these movements occurring accordingly. For example, my primitive notion of how I move my hand is just that my volition to move it makes it move as I will. However, this primitive notion is far from giving the full story of *how* my volition to move my hand makes my hand move. The same goes for the causation in the opposite direction, from body to mind.

We know, and Descartes knew, from science that the causation from sensation-originating parts of the body (ones in which we tend to locate sensations) to sensations (which are states of mind), as well as the causation from our volitions to our observable behaviour (movements of extrinsic parts of the body), is mediated by a chain of physical processes in the body, so that the *direct interaction* between the mind and the body occurs somewhere in the brain and has to do with some physical (brain) processes that *are not present to consciousness*. This scientific knowledge deepens our understanding of the union of mind and body, in respect of the causal mechanics involved, and moves it beyond the limits of the primitive notion. The latter does not reveal (but rather conceals) the bulk of the real state of affairs — mediating physical processes, the facts that my volition to move my hand directly causes some processes in my brain that cause some chain of physical events in my body that terminate in the intended movement.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to develop here Descartes's speculation «if an angel were in a human body». As far as we can conceive of such a possibility (given Descartes's point that we have no idea of how an angel can move matter that is different from our idea of how we move our bodies), it would be with the angel just as the primitive notion represents it with ourselves. If an angel inhabited a body and if he were to move his hand, he can do it by a mere volition to move the hand, and that would be the whole story. The causal link from his volition to move a hand to the movement of the hand would not be mediated by a chain of physical processes of which the angel would not be aware. Rather, with the angel's volition and movement, as far as we can conceive of it, things would transparently fit our primitive notion: all there is to it is just a volition to move the hand and the movement of the hand.

Or take a helmsman and his ship. With them, the situation is interestingly intermediate between that of the angel and of ourselves with respect to our bodies. On the one hand, the causation between the helmsman's volition to move the ship in a certain way and the ship's movement is

In this respect, both directions of the psychophysical interaction, from the mind to the body and from the body to the mind, are symmetrical. On the other hand, there remains essential asymmetry in another, phenomenological respect: I experience pain as if in the damaged part of the body, visual sensations as if in eyes, auditory sensations as if in years, etc.; unlike this, I do not experience my volition to move my hand as if in the hand.

The outcome of this discussion is that for Descartes's notion of the union between soul and body, asymmetrical accounts, such as those of Wilson and Rozemond, and the symmetrical account of Koivuniemi and Curley do not really conflict but supplement one another. Both kinds of account work pretty well in their appropriate domains. For the former, the appropriate domain is that of the primitive notion of the union and the phenomenology of sensation, volition and action; for the latter, it is the domain of the causal mechanics involved in the mind-body interaction. This distinction is pretty much like Wilson's distinction between the Coextension theory and the Natural Institution theory; however, it is not a matter of two alternative theories but of two complementary aspects of the union.

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usually mediated by a chain of physical processes, such as movements of the helmsman's hands, movements of the helm etc. On the other hand, for a helmsman with respect to his ship, unlike for ourselves with respect to our bodies, the causal chain is transparent. The helmsman is aware that in order to move the ship in a certain way, he needs to move the helm in a certain way, and in order to move the helm in a certain way, he needs to move his hands in a certain way. He can (and often, if not always, does) intend to move the helm in a certain way in order to move the ship in a certain way, and he can intend to move his hands in a certain way in order to move the helm in a certain way in order to move the ship in a certain way. It is not so with our volitions moving our bodies: we are not normally aware that in order to move our hands, we need to produce some movements in our brains, and we never intentionally (volitionally) produce some movements in our brains in order to move our hands, feet, etc.

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FORTY YEARS AFTER: RECONSIDERING THE PROBLEM OF DESCARTES'S  
NATURAL INSTITUTION THEORY VS THE COEXTENSION THEORY

The article discusses Margaret Wilson's argument to the point that Descartes's account of the mind-body interaction is incoherent because it involves two conflicting theories, the Natural institution theory and the Coextension theory, and later treatments of the problem by Marleen Rozemond, Minna Koivuniemi, and Edmond Curley. The first section deals with Wilson's suggestion that Descartes's Natural Institution theory conflicts with his statement that sensations arise from the soul-body union. The case is made that the suggestion is likely to be mistaken, and that the simplest way to reconcile the theory and the statement is to consider the union as an enduring dispositional relationship that is a precondition for particular interactions and their effects. The second section examines Marleen Rozemond's alternative explanation of how the union is supposed to explain interactions and the qualitative character of sensations; it is argued that this account fails to provide a genuine tenable alternative to what Rozemond calls 'interactionism'. The third section discusses the recent article by Koivuniemi and Curley, which answers Wilson's second worry about the coherence of Descartes's views on the union. The author also points out and explains away the seeming discrepancy between Koivuniemi's and Curley's account of the union, insofar as it treats the body-to-mind and mind-to-body directions of interaction symmetrically, and Wilson's and Rozemond's accounts, insofar as they involve a marked asymmetry in favour of the body-to-mind direction.

*Keywords:* Descartes, mind, body, union, interaction, Natural Institution, coextension

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