Cartesian Corporeality and (Aesth)Ethics

EREC R. KOCH

The Cartesian Body

In the fifth set of objections to Descartes's *Méditations*, Pierre Gassendi's critique of Cartesian metaphysics explores the encroachment of corporeality into the realm of the thinking subject: Gassendi there asserts that the body may in fact subtend and corrupt the purity of all thought (712). Descartes's forceful rebuttal crystallizes the dualism at the core of his metaphysics, epistemology, and anthropology: resuming part 4 of the *Discours de la méthode* (1637) and *Méditation II* (1641), Descartes reasserts that the philosophical subject is *res cogitans* 'thinking substance,' and he expels the body to the domain of *res extensa* 'extended substance' (2: 790–803).[1] Subject to the mechanical laws governing space, time, and motion, that alienated and mechanical body functions purely in accordance with the physics of the coercive movement of matter. Recently, philosophers and cultural theorists have granted the Cartesian body more critical attention, and in almost all cases they perpetuate the corporal model founded on alienation and mechanization.[2] Those authors focus almost exclusively on Descartes's earlier metaphysical writings, especially the *Discours de la méthode* and the *Méditations*, and neglect his later writings on corporeality and ethics, which culminate his philosophical opus. Moreover, those fields require for the subject the reappropriation of the body and of its sensible rather than purely mechanical functions. I contend that in such later writings Descartes does not simply elaborate the mechanical functions of an alienated body but foregrounds a theory of corporal sensibility that subtends his ethics. This contention requires a preliminary rehearsing of the Cartesian body.

Descartes's physiology, bolstered by his dualist metaphysics, at first sight certainly lends itself to analyses of mechanical corporeality.

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The Cartesian body is inserted in a chain of material causality; it is subject to dynamic forces that drive its responses, in many cases without the intervention of or countervention by the will. This externalized and mechanical body is the residue of radical doubt and dualist metaphysics. As happens frequently in his work, Descartes's analogies both illustrate and posit his doctrine. His posthumous physiological treatise *De l'homme* presents two seminal analogies. The first is a variant of the familiar automaton analogy: the system of the body is like a mechanical fountain in which hydraulic force produces mechanical action and dazzling effects, which can be altered by the fountain keeper, the psyche embodied, who adjusts valves to redirect the flow of current (1: 391).

There is, however, another important analogy that illustrates corporal physiology and signals a very different function of the body. Later in *De l'homme*, Descartes compares the body to a musical organ:

> Or vous pouvez ici concevoir que le cœur et les artères, qui poussent les esprits animaux dans les concavités du cerveau de notre machine, sont comme les soufflets de ces orgues qui poussent l'air dans les porte-vents, et que les objets extérieurs, qui, selon les nerfs qu'ils remuent, font que les esprits contenus dans ces concavités entrent de là dans quelques-uns de ces pores, sont comme les doigts de l'organiste, qui, selon les touches qu'ils pressent, font que l'air entrent des porte-vents dans quelques tuyaux.[3] (1: 436)

> Thus, here you can conceive that the heart and the arteries, which push animal spirits into the concavities of the brain of our machine, are like the bellows of those [musical] organs that push air into the chambers and that external objects, which, according to the nerves that they stir, make the spirits contained in those concavities enter from there into those [cerebral] pores, are like the organist's fingers, which, according to the keys that they press, make air pass from the chambers to the pipes.

By metaleptic reversal, the dynamic outside world "plays" the body. Fingers manipulating the keyboard of an organ are compared to material stimuli, and the organ's sound and action are like affectivity and reflexive responses, respectively. The body here is not simply an alienated machine driven to action by mechanical causality but a machine in which the play of external forces produces sensibility—that is, the body is subject to pleasure and pain, to aesthetic responses.[4] Descartes here constructs a very different model of the body, one that is not a target of mechanical dressage but that is instead the source and site of passion and sensation. That model reappropriates the sensibility of the body that had been suppressed by Cartesian epistemology. By the terms of that analogy, the body is first and foremost the source of passions and sensory representations; that is, the body is an *aesthetic* machine.

The Cartesian body is a sensible rather than a purely mechanical entity, and it is driven by pleasure and pain, by passions, rather than by the mechanics of physical coercion. Through Descartes's correspondence with Elisabeth of Bohemia and the more systematic *Les passions de l'âme*, I propose to examine the construction of the Cartesian body and to explore the ways in which it produces the ethical individual in society, a subject-body. I will begin by analyzing an important Cartesian displacement of the Aristotelian concept of *sensus communis* 'common sense' and then turn to the Cartesian body as the source and target of affective ethical habit. This is the body that operates in the ethical life of the individual, not the one driven by mechanical dressage (Foucault 138–42) or robotic habit (Dear 72, 74–78).

(Aesth)Ethics

Descartes's correspondence with Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, *amatrice* of philosophy and daughter of the deposed elector of

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the Rhine Palatinate, Frederick V, extended over seven years, from 1643 until Descartes's death, in 1650. The exchange afforded Descartes the opportunity to expand his philosophical works to the domains of ethics and related passion. Indeed, his final work, *Les passions de l'âme*, is inspired by Elisabeth.[5] The correspondence focuses at first on Cartesian metaphysics of mind and body and turns with increasing insistence to one of their principal points of interaction, the passions. In the first two letters of the correspondence, Elisabeth opens with a line of questioning that was broached originally by Antoine Arnauld in the fourth set of objections to Descartes's *Méditations*: how can the two radically different substances interact—how can a thought move a body and, more radically, how can a body, by passion and sensation, move a mind? In the correspondence, Descartes reviews his physiological mechanics and retraces dualist interaction to the point of articulation between body and mind: the pineal gland, which houses *sens commun* 'common sense.'

Cartesian common sense refers to Aristotle's theory of the soul, in which αἴσθησις κοινή (lit., "common sensation"), discussed in *De anima*, is the faculty that unifies different modalities of sensation so that they can be attributed to the same object (425a15–27; bk. 3, ch. 1). In his commentary on *De anima*, Thomas Aquinas translates the term as "sensus communis," and, echoing Aristotle, he notes that the faculty unifies sensory attributes such as white and sweet to ascribe them to the same object (*Commentary* 304). It is noteworthy that for Aristotle and Thomas common sensibility is distinct from affect and passion, which are purely products of interiority, of the sensitive faculty or soul. In *De anima*, Aristotle compares those processes with denomination and judgment, respectively: sensation is comparable with the affectively neutral naming of a thing, to which the sensitive faculty subsequently attributes pleasure or pain and hence a value for pursuit or avoidance (431a10–20; bk. 3, ch. 7). Those valorizations are analogous to linguistic affirmation and negation. Compelling action, such valorizations are ethical and ally pleasure and pain with the order of good and evil. For Descartes, however, common sense transmits not only sensation but also affects and consequent valorizations, unifying them as representational ideas, sentiments, for the subject. In *De l'homme*, Descartes follows his introduction of *sens commun* with a list of the ideas that it generates. These include the sensations found in Aristotle's *De anima* (movement, size, distance, colors, sounds, odors), as well as passions, which are not to be found in Aristotle's text: "le chatouillement, la douleur, la faim, la soif, la joie, la tristesse, et autres telles passions" 'tickling sensation, pain, hunger, thirst, joy, sadness, and other such passions' (1: 450). The same sentiments—sensations and affects—are the products of corporal activity.[6] A chain of causality incited by material forces at work on the body provokes the flow of animal spirits at different rates, densities, and speeds, and these variations in turn, by manipulation of the pineal gland, provoke different sentiments shaped in *sens commun*.

The corporal determination of the passions now stands against the tradition that informed the understanding of sensation and affectivity in the early seventeenth century. In the scholastic tradition still vital then, passion is a function of interiority, of the sensitive faculty or soul. Thomas's *Summa theologiae* defines passion as "a movement of the sensitive appetitive power" according to perceived good or evil.[7] This psychic movement corresponds analogically with "bodily alterations" that are products of "acts of the sensitive appetite." The sensitive faculty creates an affective value by determining the spiritual or psychic "movement" relevant to the object of sensation. Passion is a phenomenon of interiority, and in this tradition the soul or psyche must recognize and assent to, or try to resist,

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the affect and the affective value attributed to some object. For Descartes, however, the function of *sens commun*, which mediates *sentiment* (as both sensation and passion), makes it clear that passion is not a phenomenon of interiority or of psyche but is already inscribed in the body. The forces that act on the body provoke a flow of the animal spirits that manipulate the pineal gland in a manner determined by natural causality. In the scholastic tradition, passion is voluntarist in that it requires the soul or psyche to make an assumption of value and to provoke an affective movement of the soul. In Descartes, on the contrary, passion is a corporal necessity.[8] Moreover, for Descartes *sens commun* receives valorizations according to the valence of pleasure and pain and links sensory pleasure and pain with the ethical order of good and evil. *Sens commun* is both a physiological and an ethical category.

Descartes's strategy in the early letters to Elisabeth is twofold. On the one hand, he asserts that the articulation of mind and body can best be known through corporal, sensory representations, whose very existence, in passing from bodily functions to the experience of pleasure or pain attendant on representation, demonstrates the interaction of the two substances. But in addition to the metaphysical point, Descartes also asserts that the body, as a sensory or aesthetic machine, is the source and site of the passions and that they regulate practical and ethical life by imposing valorizations. The task of ethics is to adjust corporal passions so that pleasure and pain are brought into line with the order of good and evil, for the valorizations must in turn be judged by reason in order to accede to those moral categories. The physiology of the body necessitates a *morale* (ethics), a description and prescription of life in society. The body—the aesthetic body and its consequent system of passions—allows the individual to enter ethical space and to engage in the practical realm of life in society. For this reason, Descartes claims in a related text that "toute la conduite de notre vie dépend de nos sens" 'the conduct of our lives depends on our senses' (*Dioptrique* [1: 651]).[9] The correspondence with Elisabeth is an excellent example of the transportation of *sens commun* into the ethical realm. Acknowledging Elisabeth's extensive knowledge and mastery of civil life and recognizing his own solitude and isolation, Descartes states that reason must be tempered by experience when directing public conduct (May 1646 [3: 653]). In response to Descartes's claims, Elisabeth asserts that experience in the public sphere is governed by "sens commun" (July 1646 [4: 448]).[10]

Ethics must articulate the corporal passions, according to the primary valence of pleasure and pain, and the order of good and evil, in view of the individual conservation of self as well as the proper promotion of interaction in the public sphere. This necessary continuity of passion and ethics explains why, in response to Elisabeth's request for a definition of the passions (13 Sept. 1645 [4: 289]), Descartes launches into a prolegomenon to ethics and draws on its principal topoi. For example, he discusses the difference between personal interests and the interests of the social bodies of which one is a part: state, *société* 'social group,' and family. Self-interest, desires, and passions must be weighed against the good of those social unities. But what Descartes adds of interest is the necessary presence of two elements that enable us to judge well: knowledge of truth and the habit of acceding to the demands of truth. Habit is important here because it also circumscribes the role and function of the body in the regulation of the passions (15 Sept. 1645 [3: 605]). This, Descartes notes in his gallant closing to the letter, is the therapeutic value of the correspondence for him, for it enhances his commitment to the truth and to speaking the truth through cultivation of that habit (609). This intervention of the traditional discourse of ethics reminds us again that the passions have ev-

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erything to do with life in society. Descartes proceeds to call on Elisabeth to direct herself beyond the *particulier* 'private' to the public, to the shared domain where she must discover the common good (6 Oct. 1645 [3: 613]).

In those early letters, Elisabeth repeatedly addresses Descartes as a metaphoric physician of the soul bound by the Hippocratic oath to dispel her ignorance (6/16 May 1643 [3: 662]), but the force of this honorific extends as well to the treatment that she requests. Descartes's appointed task is to provide a cure and therapy for the affective malady from which Elisabeth suffers: the melancholia provoked by her house's misfortune. Descartes begins this task by assessing the wisdom of the ancients. As part of his therapeutic regimen, Descartes proposes reading Seneca's *De vita beata*, a text that should be engaged as a "dialogue agréable" 'pleasant dialogue,' broached as one would a conversation (4 Aug. 1645 [3: 587]). Descartes's purpose is not simply to apply Senecan Stoic philosophy, although he accepts its desire of the good life. Descartes shapes Seneca's goal in a way consistent with his own philosophy as a "contentement de l'esprit" 'contentment of the mind' that is allied with virtue (18 Aug. 1645 [3: 597]). He thus seems to adapt the Senecan Stoic discourse of reforming the will, of a spiritual or psychic reform that is inherent in the Stoic doctrine of acceptance. Descartes's subsequent recasting of what in the *Discours de la méthode* he calls "morale par provision" 'provisional ethics' is consistent with the Stoic tradition and the reform of the will (1: 592–98). The third and final point is a clear example of this: Descartes there advocates the acceptance of one's social condition, which would restrict the power to change the circumstances of one's life. Stoicism, like religious or pious ethoi, advocates voluntarist or psychic reform and regimentation, a shaping of the will and personal comportment that would restrict or suppress the action of the passions. Such voluntarist action is consistent with the Aristotelian-Thomist model of the will and with the neo-Stoic vogue of the early and mid seventeenth century, exemplified by Guillaume Du Vair's *La philosophie morale des stoïques* (1606).

Descartes's reliance on the wisdom of the ancients ends with his rapid gloss of Seneca.[11] This dismissal is due in part to Cartesian doubt and the rejection of custom as unfounded presupposition. It is also a product of the regimen that this physician will prescribe for his patient. That proposed cure will involve not simply the will but also the body and the enacting play of forces operative in the exercise of the aesthetic machine. Descartes begins by noting that the body can impede happiness; reason and the will alone do not suffice against the power of the body and of the forces that act on it:

> [C]ar il n'y a personne qui ne désire se rendre heureux, mais plusieurs n'en savent pas le moyen et souvent l'indisposition qui est dans le corps empêche que la volonté ne soit libre; comme il arrive aussi quand nous dormons; car le plus philosophe du monde ne saurait s'empêcher d'avoir de mauvais songes, lorsque son tempérament l'y dispose.
>
> (1 Sept. 1645 [3: 599–600])

> [F]or there is no one who does not wish to become happy, but many do not know the means, and often indisposition of the body impedes the will from being free, just as it does when we sleep, for the most philosophical man in the world could not prevent himself from having nightmares when his temperament disposed him to them.

Again the actions of or forces at work on the body may make it indisposed, or rather they may counteract any action of the will. Descartes goes on to list indispositions caused by the outside world, by impressions imposed on the senses, which provoke predictable passions but which Descartes is certain he can overcome (600–01). The causes of such disturbances as he lists are found largely in the

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social sphere: birth and rank, fortune, and interaction in court life (601). These phenomena, characterized by their "éclat" 'splendor' are linked to the body, to impressions made on the senses and the consequent passions provoked. These examples are inscribed in the domain of *sens commun*, of practical life and the life of the body as it produces affect-effects.

At this point in his correspondence with Elisabeth, Descartes assesses received wisdom on *morale* in order to dispose of it in a manner familiar to readers of the *Discours de la méthode* and the *Méditations*, but he also asserts that passion is a matter of the body, and thus properly a physiologico-medical issue, and that ethics must begin with corporal therapy and reform. Descartes here signals the limits of contemporary discourse on passions and ethics. Literary historians identify three principal contemporary ethical currents in the seventeenth century: scholasticism, neo-Stoicism, and Augustinianism.[12] Whether Thomist, like Scipion Dupleix's *Éthique, ou la philosophie morale* (1620), neo-Stoic, like Du Vair's *Philosophie morale des stoïques* (1606), or neo-Augustinian, like François de Sales's *Traité de l'amour de Dieu* (1617), all moralist works articulate ethical reform of the passions based on a reform of the will, a voluntarist ascesis or regulation. Descartes rejects Seneca's *De vita beata* precisely because reform of the will is ineffective in ethically altering the passions. Ethics, as he suggests here in the correspondence, must be allied with physiologico-medical knowledge of the body that accounts for its functioning as the source and site of the passions. Descartes thus anticipates the promise that he will make in the prefatory letter for the French translation of the *Principia Philosophiae*, a text again dedicated to Elisabeth, the incarnation of Minervan wisdom, whose interrogation of the passions made possible the incorporation of ethics in Cartesian philosophy. In that dedicatory letter, Descartes clarifies the articulation that he is trying to achieve:

> Ainsi toute la philosophie est comme un arbre, dont les racines sont la métaphysique, le tronc est la physique, et les branches qui sortent de ce tronc sont toutes les sciences, qui se réduisent à trois principales, à savoir la médecine, la mécanique et la morale; j'entends la plus haute et la plus parfaite morale, qui présupposant une entière connaissance des autres sciences, est le dernier degré de la sagesse. (3: 779)
>
> Thus, all philosophy is like a tree, whose roots are metaphysics and trunk is physics, and the branches that come from that trunk are all the sciences, which can be reduced to three principal ones—namely, medicine, mechanics, and ethics; I mean the highest and most perfect ethics, which, presupposing a complete knowledge of the other sciences, is the final degree of wisdom.

Descartes establishes the mutual imbrication of medicine, mechanics, and ethics, the consummate science, under the aegis of physics. The physics of the passions and of the aesthetic body makes it possible to bring ethical wisdom into the sciences. More precisely, the moral reform that Descartes elaborates is a physiological reform, a reform of the body and of the physical and mechanical functioning of the aesthetic machine. Descartes will articulate a case for the regulation of the body as a physiologico-ethical matter.

At this point, both correspondents turn their attention to the patient's body. In the letter of 24 May 1645, Elisabeth discusses at length the indisposition of her body, details the symptoms of her "maladie" 'illness' (4: 209), and notes a causal relation between her social condition and her affective state, her "tristesse" 'sadness' (208). Descartes first addresses the medico-corporal treatment of that passion, which manifests itself in the body as a fever (18 May 1645 [3: 565]). Lyrically, Descartes wishes to chase away the displeasures that affect the princess, and he begins to prescribe a cure for her psychosomatic illness. The regimen is of the body, seeking to make its communication with the mind salubrious.

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The remedy prescribed (and "remedy" suggests both cure and correction of error) is to "divertir son imagination et ses sens le plus qu'il est possible" 'divert one's imagination and senses as much as possible' (May or June 1645 [3: 571])—that is, to provoke sensation that generates and correlates with passions. Descartes proposes to achieve this end by actions on the body that will rehabituate it to the production of positive passions and emotions. In this retraining, the patient imagines or experiences objects that will elicit the appropriate passions. Descartes notes that a person who has every reason to be content "mais qui verrait continuellement représenter devant soi des tragédies, dont tous les actes fussent funestes, et qui ne s'occuperait qu'à considérer des objets de tristesse et de pitié qu'elle sût être feints et fabuleux" 'but who sees tragedies, in which all actions are disastrous, continually staged before him and who occupies his time considering objects of sadness and pity that he knows are feigned and fabulous' will experience *tristesse* (571). He goes on to detail the physiological effects prompted by this experience: decreased activity of the heart, pulse, and lungs and reduced circulation of blood corpuscles and of *esprits animaux* 'animal spirits,' which produce the material effects of sadness. These stimuli and physiological actions accustom the body to sadness. The remedy is to place the patient in front of sensory stimuli that will produce the opposite effect and "apporter du contentement et de la joie" 'bring contentment and joy' (572). Regulation of the body to produce the passion of contentment is vital to the health of the organism and enables the understanding and reason in general to function more effectively and efficiently. Descartes therefore encourages Elisabeth to take the traditional cure of the waters of Spa, but primarily on the condition that she also exercise the regimen that he has prescribed for reconditioning the body. One can overcome sadness by action on the body, by a discipline imposed on it. The cure is aesthetic, in the term's original and current senses: Descartes advises Elisabeth to "s'occuper . . . à imiter ceux qui [regardent] la verdure d'un bois, les couleurs d'une fleur, le vol d'un oiseau" 'apply oneself . . . to imitating those who [look at] a green wood, the colors of a flower, the flight of a bird' (573). She should not reason about anything but simply allow the body, the sensory, to act on the mind and produce the appropriate passions. It is a remedy that rehabituates the body to the production of appropriate passions. As Descartes goes on to say, this is essential to the health of the subject-body.

This apparent invocation to think positively—or, rather, to be sensuously acted on positively—is more than a seventeenth-century self-help regimen. Descartes continues to destabilize moral models of his time, which rely on a voluntarist view of the passions and on acts of the will to reform them, especially in the neo-Stoic tradition. Descartes further develops his thought on those matters in *Les passions de l'âme*, which, again, was inspired by his exchange with Elisabeth. Descartes tells Elisabeth that it is necessary to know and inventory the passions: this is the first step toward their productive use (1 Sept. 1645 [3: 599–604]). The composition of *Les passions de l'âme* is intended to accomplish this task. In that text, Descartes rigorously classifies, hierarchizes, and describes the economy of the passions. This knowledge constitutes a first step toward their mastery. The text, first published simultaneously in Holland and France in 1649, is divided into three parts. It opens with a review of the nature and physiological basis of the passions and then proceeds to an analysis of the six principal, primitive passions at the base of all particular species of passions, which Descartes analyzes in the third and final section of the treatise.

Early in *Les passions de l'âme*, Descartes examines the creation of affective habit in the individual subject-body. He accounts for the fact that, despite the universal laws of causal-

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ity, not every subject-body experiences the same passions before identical phenomena. Descartes broaches the individuation of the passions and the creation of affective habit in article 136:

> Au reste, afin de suppléer ici en peu de mots à tout ce qui pourrait y être ajouté touchant les divers effets ou les diverses causes des passions, je me contenterai de répéter le principe sur lequel tout ce que j'en ai écrit est appuyé, à savoir qu'il y a telle liaison entre notre âme et notre corps, que lorsque nous avons une fois joint quelque action corporelle avec quelque pensée, l'une des deux ne se présente point à nous par après que l'autre ne s'y présente aussi, et que ce ne sont pas toujours les mêmes actions qu'on joint aux mêmes pensées. Car cela suffit pour rendre raison de tout ce qu'un chacun peut remarquer de particulier en soi ou en d'autres, touchant cette matière, qui n'a point été ici expliqué. (3: 1050–51)
>
> Moreover, in order concisely to make up for all that could be added about the diverse effects and diverse causes of the passions, I will content myself with repeating the principle on which all that I have written on the subject is founded—namely, that there is such a conjunction between our soul and our body that once we have joined some corporal action with some thought, one of the two does not present itself to us thereafter unless the other one presents itself as well, and that it is not always the same actions that are joined to the same thoughts. Indeed, this suffices to account for what each individual remarks is particular to himself or to others about this matter, which has not yet been explained.

The habit of association is infinitely repeatable for a subject-body, in which the same object and sensory impression always elicit the same affect, but associations vary from individual to individual. This assertion, however, begs the question of associative habit, for Descartes must also account for the original association. He addresses this matter—the institution of nature—by examining the ontogenesis of the passions. Descartes notes that pleasure and pain, the primary valence, can dictate lifelong affection for or aversion to, for example, the presence of a cat or the smell of roses. He suggests that these formative associations begin in the fetal stage and are determined by the pregnant mother's affective responses to corporal stimuli: "Car il est certain qu'il y a du rapport entre tous les mouvements de la mère et ceux de l'enfant qui est en son ventre, en sorte que ce qui est contraire à l'un nuit à l'autre" 'For it is certain that there is a relation between the movements of the mother and those of the child in her womb, such that what distresses one distresses the other' (1051). Such associations are "impressed" on the mind—Descartes here refers to the bodily "cerveau" 'brain' to emphasize the physiological dimension of the passion—regardless of whether the subject-body remembers the original event.

In *De l'homme*, Descartes had similarly remarked that the flow of *esprits animaux* in a pregnant mother's bloodstream could "impress" an affect on the fetus (1: 451). In the responses to the sixth set of objections to the *Méditations*, Descartes claims that the soul, beginning from its incarnation in the fetal stage, is closely linked to the body's organs. Pleasure and pain derived from them are the first affects that impress themselves on the proto-consciousness of the fetus,[13] who turns progressively to the outside world (2: 884). Descartes suggests that these first impressions are preserved atavistically and help to determine the infant's sentimental responses: from birth, they forge a set of associations. Affective habituation is extended over time by the inscription of a present sensation in a similar past sensation and an associated affect. In *Les passions de l'âme*, Descartes uses fear to illustrate the biographical determination of passion and affective habit. The response of subject-bodies to a new image or sensory stimulus depends on its association with things previously experienced:

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> Et outre cela, si cette figure est fort étrange et fort effroyable, c'est-à-dire si elle a beaucoup de rapport avec les choses qui ont été auparavant nuisibles au corps, cela excite en l'âme la passion de la crainte, et ensuite celle de la hardiesse, ou bien celle de la peur et de l'épouvante, selon le divers tempérament du corps ou la force de l'âme, et selon qu'on s'est auparavant garanti par la défense ou par la fuite contre les choses nuisibles auxquelles l'impression présente a du rapport.[14]
>
> (3: 981; art. 36)

> Moreover, if that image is very strange and very frightening—that is, if it bears a close relation to the things that previously harmed the body—it excites in the soul the passion of fear, and then that of boldness, or else that of fright and horror, according to the variable temperament of the body and the strength of the soul, and according to whether one previously protected oneself by defense or by flight from the harmful things related to the present impression.

Descartes instills the principal valence of passion, pleasure and pain, with the purpose of ascribing value to the outside world based on the forces at work on the body. Pleasure and pain have practical value that the subject-body would appear to delegate to more specialized passions over time. The problem, Descartes goes on to say, is that at times the subject-body may err: passions may emphasize objects of representation that do not merit value or attention. The body makes choices, as it were, with which reason should not or does not concur. Much of this third part of the treatise, and indeed of the treatise as a whole, is directed to correcting and reforming the passions so that they can be brought into line with reason.

Descartes reasserts that the will is powerless to alter passions and affective associations, but it is possible to affect the production of passions by regulating the aesthetic body and replacing or counteracting unproductive or erroneous passions (3: 985; art. 41). The argument above for the ontogenesis of passions suggests that physiological actions on the aesthetic body can make it associate new affects with old thoughts. Although Descartes opens *Les passions de l'âme* with a denial that he will delve into *morale* or leave the area of physics, the text belies this claim, as does his exchange with the Princess Elisabeth. This reform is carried out by creating new associations and by psychosomatic prescriptions, by a regulation of the aesthetic body. If the passions, like sensations, are a matter of passive reception, of forces acting on the body, the same forces can be rechanneled, the body regulated, to produce new affective associations. This is one of the achievements of Descartes's correspondence with Elisabeth, which exemplifies the prescriptive regulation of the body for psychic well-being. By working the aesthetic body and the passions, Descartes the physician and mechanist physicist becomes a moralist.

Descartes broaches the possibility of the reform and mastery of passion indirectly at first when he continues to elaborate on the physiology of passion. In discussing the genesis of fear in the correspondence, he notes, anticipating the same example in *Les passions de l'âme*, that inhabitants of a city who are confronted by the prospect of a military siege will imagine an excessive idea of danger, which in turn will signal the body by habit to begin the flow of *esprits* producing the passion of fear (6 Oct. 1645 [3: 616–17]). An especially informative and new point here is that this generation of passion is fostered by disposition, or more precisely by the corporal habit that associates images with affects. The imagination

> détermine les esprits qui vont du cerveau dans les nerfs, à enter dans ceux qui servent à resserrer les ouvertures du cœur, ce qui retarde la circulation du sang, ensuite de quoi tout le corps devient pâle, froid et tremblant, et les nouveaux esprits, qui viennent du cœur vers le cerveau, sont agités de telle façon qu'ils ne peuvent aider à y former d'autres images

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> que celles qui excitent en l'âme la passion de la crainte. (616)
>
> directs the spirits that move from the brain to the nerves to enter those that serve to constrict the heart, which slows the circulation of blood, and consequently the body becomes pale, cold, and trembling, and the new spirits, which travel from the heart to the brain, are agitated in such a way that they can only contribute to creating images that excite the passion of fear in the soul.

Reforming this response requires not an act of the will but altering the habitual corporal association of sensation or image and passion.

Descartes turns in greater detail to the remedies, reform, and mastery of the passions in the letter of May 1646. He has presented Elisabeth with a draft copy of *Les passions de l'âme*, which she inspired. He is grateful for her positive response and attempts to address her concerns about the reform of the passions—most notably, about the ability to master passionate excess and to override habit. He begins by describing the development of affective habits and habituation, primarily in the context of reflex action. Descartes notes that the presence of the same object will provoke the same thoughts in a person—that is, the same representation and affect. It will also produce reflexively the same action or disposition of the body (3: 650). This is the product not of a psychic or emotional disposition but of the play of material forces in and on the body, a habit of the body developed over the course of life. Despite Elisabeth's resistance, Descartes repeats the call for the intervention of dispassionate reason to ascertain affective values and thus to exert its power over the body while calming the mind: reason must temper the heat of passion. Descartes also acknowledges the difficulty of practicing this principle, and he recommends another, more effective strategy that will habituate the body and the psyche. In the letter of October or November 1646, he argues that just as the presence of pleasant and agreeable objects will produce joy and make any situation happier and healthier for the subject-body, so too imagining such objects will make the most difficult situation more pleasant; it will undo sadness by substituting another passion (3: 678). Descartes draws on the word "agréable" 'pleasant' and its correlate "agrément" 'charm,' which underscore the importance of pleasure and pain as primary affective values. Here again regulation of the body, of forces acting in and on the body, is essential to an ethos. This praxis will ensure the proper functioning of the machine and longer life, but it also will ensure the fulfillment of Elisabeth's political and social obligations (11 Nov. 1646 [3: 680–81]). Such action on the body will produce habit by a correction and substitution that become second nature.

As Descartes says implicitly and explicitly, new habits can foster the health of the body and the subject's consequent happiness. The body acts on the mind by creating new associations of idea-sentiments and affects—that is, by mediating the flow of *esprits animaux* to *sens commun*. The reform of the passions centers on undoing ontogenetic habits and creating new habits of the aesthetic machine. Initiating and repeating a new association of sensation and affect will reform the body and the mind, changing their response to a similar stimulus in the future. This regulation will direct the *esprits* to provoke by habit a different affective response in the subject-body. It will also produce a different corporal disposition and outward action.

In *Les passions de l'âme*, Descartes extends that argument to a broader *morale* that allies passion with the ethical order of good and evil. In article 138 of the text, Descartes acknowledges the trap that the primary passions of pleasure and pain, in the form of joy and sadness, can set for the subject-body. The body ascribes value through joy and sadness, and their natural associations with good and evil are frequently a lure and an error.

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Descartes here speaks of the power of those passions to distort the scale of those objects, a spatial translation of their value.[15] Reason and experience must intervene and restore the true order of value by chiastic reversal (3: 1053–54). But, once again, this is not simply an act of the will produced once but is a matter of correcting and modifying the aesthetic body over time. Descartes recapitulates the argument that he had made more fully in the final part of the *Méditations*, for reason plays a role in reforming the passions and forces at work on the body. Supported by memory and the understanding, reason must undo the chiasmus aligning pain with good and pleasure with evil (2: 503).

Descartes presents the same position in *Les passions de l'âme*. By knowledge of good and evil founded on truth and not simply dictated by the habitual flow of corpuscles in the body, reason can begin to counteract a bad, inappropriate passion by establishing new valorizations (3: 992–93; art. 48). At times this will divide the subject with conflicted and conflicting passions (3: 991; art. 47), but reason can establish truth, needed for reinstituting corporal habits that are conducive to the subject-body's well-being and perfection. The habitual link between a representation and a passion can be reconditioned; the flow triggering movement of the pineal gland can be redirected to produce a different passion over time. Descartes compares this process to language, in which sound and meaning can be disjoined and recombined in different ways:

> [E]ncore que chaque mouvement de la glande semble avoir été joint par la nature à chacune de nos pensées dès le commencement de notre vie, on les peut toutefois joindre à d'autres par habitude, ainsi que l'expérience fait voir aux paroles qui excitent des mouvements en la glande, lesquels, selon l'institution de la nature, ne représentent à l'âme que leur son lorsqu'elles son proférées par la voix, ou la figure de leurs lettres lorsqu'elles sont écrites, et qui, néanmoins par l'habitude qu'on a acquise en pensant à ce qu'elles signifient lorsqu'on a ouï leur son ou bien qu'on a vu leurs lettres, ont coutume de faire concevoir cette signification plutôt que la figure de leurs lettres ou bien le son de leurs syllabes. Il est utile de savoir qu'encore que les mouvements, tant de la glande que des esprits et du cerveau, qui représentent à l'âme certains objets, soient naturellement joints avec ceux qui excitent en elle certaines passions, ils peuvent toutefois par habitude en être séparés et joints à d'autres fort différents, et même que cette habitude peut être acquise par une seule action et ne requiert point un long usage.
>
> (3: 994–95; art. 50)

> [A]lthough every movement of the pineal gland seems to have been joined by nature to each of our thoughts from the beginning of our lives, one can nevertheless join them to others by habit, just as experience shows for words that excite movements of the gland, which, according to the institution of nature, represent to the soul only their sound when they are proffered by the voice, or the figure of their letters when they are written, and which, nevertheless, by the habit that one has acquired by thinking of what they signify once one has heard their sound or seen their letters, customarily make us conceive that signification rather than the shape of their letters or the sound of their syllables. It is useful to know that although the movements of the gland as well as of the spirits and the brain, which represent certain objects to the soul, are naturally joined with those that excite certain passions, they can nevertheless be separated by habit and joined to others that are very different, and this habit can even be acquired by one action and does not require lengthy practice.

The link of signifier and signified is not natural but conventional, although by habit and institution it appears indissoluble. Other conventional links between signifier and signified can be forged. Similarly, the affective bonds between passions and idea-sentiments, are conventional and habitual, and other links

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can be instituted by habit. We can learn to recondition the body so that the stimulation of the body and the flow of *esprits* are modified and mastered. This process is like learning a new language, a proper language that is natural, more in line with the true order of things, and consequently undoes affective tropological displacements. The analogy significantly underscores the reform of the passions through a regulation of the body and holds the promise of reforming the aesthetic body by reorienting the flow of corpuscles that produce the experience of passions and their associations with sensations. The process will also alter the consequent flow of animal spirits that dictate action and that inscribe action on the body.

Reason may posit the undoing of chiastic reversals between passion and ethics, but this realignment can be effected only by regulation and habituation of the body and of the forces at work on it. It is noteworthy that at this point in the treatise Descartes appears to construct an analysis that concurs with the ethical traditions of antiquity and humanism, discourses of morality founded on reform and mastery of the will. Descartes emphasizes, however, that this process requires the regulation of the body and of its articulation with mind. This discipline is not the ascesis of neo-Stoic or religious discourses, of self-abnegation or piety, a voluntarist reshaping of the will, but a regulation that conditions the body to generate the proper flow of *esprits animaux*. As we have seen, the prescription is for the mimesis of stimuli: the imagination directs thoughts to images and percepts that produce the response dictated by reason. This will gradually habituate the body to produce the appropriate, right, good, and true affective responses. This will also direct the body to produce the right material manifestations of the passions, as the body acts to make itself legible in the eyes, in the visage, and in its positioning. By the force of the *esprits animaux*, it will also direct the body into social action that is appropriate and in line with the true and the good.[16]

The emphasis that Descartes places on habit of action in ethics is consistent with the wisdom of antiquity. Aristotle centers the *Nicomachean Ethics* on the institution of virtue as habit and as disposition to action (bk. 2, ch. 1, lines 1003a–b). For Descartes, the ethical habit is corporal: it necessitates the regulation of forces at work in and on the body in the production of passions and in the alignment of valorizing passions with sensation and sensibility. This point emerges most clearly in part 2 of *Les passions de l'âme*, in which Descartes examines passions of sociability or of social disposition. Valorizing passions determine the subject-body's participation in life in society. As we have seen, the system of sensations and passions is the product of forces at work on the body, which generate sensuous and affective idea-sentiments. In this way, the body mediates between the subject and the outside world, but it also mediates between the subject and other subjects, other bodies in the world. The reforms that Descartes recommends in part 3 of *Les passions de l'âme* are for the happiness of private individuals—Descartes is a solitary who would practice those principles in his isolation—but also of those who, like Elisabeth, lead active lives in society. The subject-body is passionately shaped by contact with others, by socialization. Interaction with other subject-bodies enters into the play of forces and stimuli that act on the individual and provoke sensation and passion. Descartes cannot ignore the regulation of those forces—hence his investigation in *Les passions de l'âme* of what could be termed passions of sociability, such as the principal one, *générosité* 'magnanimity.'

Again, Descartes's case for reform begins in the traditional analysis of the humanist moralist. In article 161, Descartes says that *générosité* is the key to all other virtues and indeed the general remedy against the "dérèglement des passions" 'anarchy of the

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passions' (3: 1074). This is consistent with the ethos of the time, which ascribes tremendous value to that emblem of the noble heroic ideal. *Générosité* bears two essential aspects: a selfless and virtuous disposition that "generates" and is productive and, etymologically, nature by descent, since that noble quality is conferred at birth and passed down genealogically. Descartes defines *générosité* as "une ferme et constante résolution de bien user [de la disposition de sa volonté], c'est-à-dire de ne manquer jamais de volonté pour entreprendre et exécuter toutes les choses qu'il [le généreux] jugera être les meilleures" 'an unshakable and constant resolution to make good use [of the disposition of the will]—that is, never to lack the will to undertake and accomplish all things that one [the magnanimous man] judges to be the best' (3: 1067; art. 153). As a passion, magnanimity determines value and must be guided by reason. It is the principal passion of social interaction, for, as Descartes goes on to explain in article 156, again drawing on the diction of the classical moralist, magnanimity intervenes in the excesses of the passions. The *généreux* is "porté" 'carried' to undertake all "grandes choses" 'great things' of which he is capable. Maintaining constant courtesy, affability, and officiousness, "[les généreux] n'estiment rien de plus grand que de faire du bien aux autres hommes et de mépriser son propre intérêt" '[the magnanimous] judge nothing greater than doing good for others and scorning one's own interest' (3: 1069). Apparently, by the will and its direction of this passion, one is able to override the vicious passions and inclinations and to regulate actions in accordance with reason.

In article 161, Descartes examines how to foster this passion, which can guide a man to virtue. He notes that virtues "sont des habitudes en l'âme qui la disposent à certaines pensées, en sorte qu'elles sont différentes de ces pensées, mais qu'elles peuvent produire, et réciproquement être produites par elles" 'are habits of the soul that dispose it to certain thoughts, such that they are different from those thoughts, but they can produce, and reciprocally be produced by, them' (3: 1073–74). This statement sounds much like the traditional moralist discourse, but Descartes goes on to note that although those "pensées" 'thoughts' can be produced by the mind alone, they are also the product of the *esprits animaux* that evince and sustain *générosité*, and thus they are products of the aesthetic body. Certainly, birth may contribute more to *générosité* than to any other passion-virtue, but Descartes concedes that "institution," teaching by habituation, can help to correct even a defect or lack from birth. Such institution must be carried out in the way that Descartes has analyzed it up to this point, as a reform and regulation of the body and of its dependent valorizing passions.[17]

Descartes articulates a new model of the biological body, a model that informs the place of the subject in civil society. The Cartesian body is not the purely mechanical one that is subject to Foucauldian or other coercive dressage. In the Cartesian model, the body is the source and site of passions and sensibility: it is an aesthetic body, an aesthetic machine. The ethos that Descartes prescribes is a regulation of that body, a process of mastering and redirecting its actions, its play of forces in response to the play of forces in the outside world. He makes this clear in his correspondence with Elisabeth: Descartes invites her to turn away from her melancholy thoughts, which are provoked by stimuli around her, and to allow her imagination to counter them with sensory thoughts that carry joy and contentment. The intent of the process is to recondition the aesthetic machine so that it will incite different affective associations and act with a different force. In the analogy of language, a new association of signifier and signified could recover the proper language of the affect, restore the proper affective response, and naturally promote proper action. Again, the point is to rechannel bodily

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actions, the forces at work in the body, so that they labor in the most productive way possible. The body, passion, and sensation no longer are matters for the traditional moralist discourses of the will. The subject can learn to regulate the body and reinstitute its habits of learning but must accomplish the change by mastering and realigning affective valorizations. In this way, by the proper regulation of the aesthetic machine of the body, the mediator between subject and world, "les hommes qu'elles [les passions] peuvent le plus emouvoir sont capables de goûter le plus de douceur en cette vie" 'the persons whom they [the passions] can move the most are capable of experiencing the most pleasure in this life' (3: 1103; art. 212).[18] Life in society necessitates the cultivation, development, and deployment of the aesthetic body.

Notes

1. References to Descartes's philosophical works and to his letters to Elisabeth of Bohemia designate the Alquié edition (*Œuvres philosophiques*). Quotations from Elisabeth's letters to Descartes are taken from *Œuvres de Descartes*. All translations are my own.

2. Judovitz argues that corporal mechanics actualizes the "erasure" and "dehumanization" of the body, which ceases to be an integral part of the definition and existence of the thinking subject (106). Judovitz conflates the epistemological consequences of Cartesian metaphysics and ontology, a move that I will question in the argument that follows. Judovitz's analysis also retrojects postindustrial values: the association of "machine" and "inhuman" is a consequence of more recent history (as are Judovitz's references to "virtual" bodies). Deneys-Tunney similarly argues that Cartesian mechanics results in "thingifying" the body, which, objectified and instrumentalized, is not only separated but also distanced from the subject (35–54). Drawing primarily on the *Méditations*, Bordo discovers in Descartes a program of "mental purification" that excludes the machinelike body from the transcendent and "objective" Cartesian subject (94). In a pivotal chapter of *Surveiller et punir,* Foucault calls Descartes the inaugurator of the anatomo-metaphysical body, subject to technologies of power that in modernity will utilize, manipulate, transform, and perfect it (138). Foucault argues that power applied to targeted objectbodies is dependent on physical force and coercion, which operate with the necessity of the mechanics of material causality. The alienated body-as-machine is the appropriate target and instrument of the coercive, forceful, and violent manifestations of this microphysics of power. Several philosophical studies have been more attentive to the reappropriation of the body for the subject; however, they focus primarily on the reconciliation of mind-body interaction and metaphysical dualism. Gaukroger summarizes those efforts as attempts to derive "a clear understanding of the distinction between mind and body, and on the basis of such an understanding to formulate the appropriate notion of a substantial union" (398). The relevant studies by Gaukroger (394–403), Almog (71–98), Garber (esp. 327–30), Gouhier (345–74), Gueroult (123–56), Kambouchner (393–401) and Rorty, to cite only a few, thus aim to establish the *fact* of interaction, but they do not examine the nature and function of the Cartesian body in that conjunction of substances, as I will below.

3. Reiss has noted the importance of the musical metaphor in the "rational aesthetics" that launched the mathematization of knowledge during the seventeenth century. Descartes's early study of music (*Compendium Musicae* [1618]) elaborates a web of quantifiable proportional relations (within the object, between the object and the senses, and between the object and the passions) that makes possible a science of the passions, like that of *Les passions de l'âme* (*Knowledge* 169–200).

4. Although the term *aesthetics* does not openly circulate in the seventeenth century either in its modern, post-Kantian sense or *directly* in its etymological sense, it is nonetheless present surreptitiously, as I will argue below, in Descartes's account of *sens commun* 'common sense,' the faculty that is the sensory gateway to the mind.

5. In the prefatory letter for the first edition of *Les passions de l'âme*, Descartes asserts that the treatise was written "que pour être lu par une Princesse (i.e., Elisabeth) dont l'esprit est tellement au-dessus du commun qu'elle conçoit sans aucune peine ce qui semble le plus difficile à nos docteurs" 'to be read only by a Princess (i.e., Elisabeth) whose intellect is so far above the ordinary that she conceives with no trouble that which seems most difficult for our scholars' (3: 948).

6. In *Les passions de l'âme* as well, Descartes's definition of *sentiment* encompasses sensation and passion (3: 974; art. 28).

7. *Aquinas Ethicus* 84 (1st div. of the 2nd pt., question 22, art. 3). See also 86 (question 23, art. 2), which presents this motion as a figural movement toward or away from an object. Talon-Hugon has established that this definition was used with only slight modifications in seventeenth-century Stoic, Platonist, Galenic, and neo-Augustinian analyses of the passions (9–29).

8. Most studies of Cartesian passion overlook that important distinction. James, for example, asserts that Aristotelian-Thomist and Cartesian conceptions of pas-

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sion are largely identical, with the important exception that Descartes unifies the tripartite peripatetic soul (93–94). In fact, the more fundamental difference is between passion as the product of action by the sensible soul in response to sensation (Aristotle and Thomas) and passion as the product of action by the body (Descartes).

9. Descartes makes the same point in *Les principes de la philosophie* (3: 148–49; art. 3).

10. In his review of the humanist tradition, Gadamer notes the evolution at this time of *sensus communis* from biological term to ethical term, signifying "sense that founds a community" (21). His analysis suggests that, by synecdochical totalization, the biophysiological understanding of common sense changes to an ethical one with the shift from the individual's sensations and valorizations to those shared by the community. The Cartesian model of the body makes this development possible because it incorporates passion and consequent valorization. Significantly, κοινόν, the substantive derived from the adjective κοινή 'shared, common,' means "public domain" or "res publica." Armogathe shows the conflation of *sens commun* and *bon sens* 'good sense,' both terms connoting (ethical) opinion, in two citations from the *Discours de la méthode* and the *Principes* (181–83). See also Merlin's analysis of *sens commun* and *sentiment commun* 'common sentiment' in the *querelle du Cid*. Merlin argues that those terms connote both aesthetic (in the modern sense) and moral judgment (181–88).

11. Descartes's presumed advocacy of Stoicism has been central to feminist representations of the disembodied and masculine subject in his philosophy. On identifying Stoic currents in the correspondence with Elisabeth, Harth places them at the center of Descartes's ethics (75–78). Harth bases her argument on a reading of the correspondence up to the discussion of Seneca, but she does not acknowledge Descartes's critique of Stoic voluntarism in the rest of the exchange and in *Les passions de l'âme*. Harth's claim that for Elisabeth "the thinking subject is grounded in the materiality of the body" is also true of Descartes (77). Harth's gendering of sensibility and the body is consistent with Galenic but not Cartesian physiology. For example, Elisabeth's melancholy is a feminine condition in Galenic humoral theory, but that association is not valid for the ungendered Cartesian aesthetic machine of the body.

12. See Levi (esp. 9–23) and Talon-Hugon (7–69). Talon-Hugon's study contains a more detailed inventory of works in those categories.

13. See also the letters of Aug. 1641 to Hyperaspistes (2: 361) and of 1 Feb. 1647 to Chanut, where Descartes argues that joy is the first passion experienced when the soul is joined to the body (3: 712–13). The fetus subsequently experiences the range of other passions in the manner described in article 136 of *Les passions de l'âme*.

14. Descartes offers a similar account of affective habituation in his letter of 6 June 1647 to Chanut. Descartes asserts that sensation and affect create a "pli" 'fold' in the brain that is reactivated when the body encounters a similar object. He goes on to reveal that his own first love for a cross-eyed woman made such a fold and dictated a lifelong erotic attraction to women of that type (3: 741–42).

15. Descartes makes the same point in the correspondence with Elisabeth, where he argues that such an error is one of scale provoked by the imagination (1 Sept. 1645 [3: 602]), which makes some objects of satisfaction greater than they should be. Again, the role of reason is to ascertain the true value of the object of satisfaction. Although he is discussing the desire for vengeance, Descartes generalizes this to the functioning of all the passions: "et le semblable arrive en toutes les autres passions: car il n'y en a aucune qui ne nous représente le bien auquel elle tend avec plus d'éclat qu'il n'en mérite" 'and the same thing occurs in all the other passions: for there is none that does not represent the good to which it tends with more charm than it deserves' and compel us to imagine a pleasure far greater than the thing can actually accord (3: 603).

16. My conclusions differ markedly from those that Talon-Hugon advances in her important analysis of the Cartesian doctrine of passions. For Talon-Hugon, "la morale [cartésienne] demeure fondée sur le volontarisme et l'intellectualisme" '[Cartesian] ethics remains founded on voluntarism and intellectualism' (248). Morgan similarly points to the "the power that the activity of the soul—its volitions—has over the passions" (186). Seeing both Salesian and neo-Stoic currents in Cartesian ethical thought, Levi too asserts that "the activity of the will can overcome passion" (271). My reading also differs markedly from Dear's analysis. Dear conceives Descartes's ethics as a product of the articulation of the mechanistic body, which generates passions, and neo-Stoic reason, which governs them (esp. 74–78). Cartesian ethics, I have argued, is instead built on the inflection of the will by the body and by an ethos, or habit, that is corporal in origin.

17. Reiss also signals the importance of affective habit in the embodied subject in Descartes's ethics (*Mirages* 515–18).

18. Deneys-Tunney makes the following remark on Cartesian ethics, representative of a major current of thought on that topic: "L'ascèse morale qui doit éduquer la pensée pure en vue de la science, de la maîtrise de soi et du monde, exige que soient repoussées toutes les séductions aliénantes provenant des sens, du corps,—lieu d'origine de toute fausseté" 'moral ascesis, which must educate pure thought in view of science, of the mastery of the self and the world, requires that all alienating seductions of the senses, of the body—the source of all falsehood—be rejected' (69). This observation may be applicable to Descartes's epistemology but is not to his ethos of the aesthetic body. Descartes considers those corporal seductions of the aesthetic body vital in ethics.

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