and ingenious theories about where the story is going. But we are not the authors of the story. And the dénouement is not ours to devise. If we proudly insist on twisting the story into the pattern which we choose for ourselves, there can be only one ending. And it will not be a happy one.

* The annual sermon on 'The Sin of Pride' was endowed by the Revd. William Master. This sermon is printed here by kind permission of the Vice-Chancellor.

1 *The Place of the Lion,* Faber paperback, pp. 60—1.
2 *Paradise Lost 1* 258—263.
3 *Praktikos 14.*
4 *Contra Gentes 4.*
5 *Hymns on the Faith* 37:26, 39:6, 23:2—3.
6 *The Defendant,* London 1901, p. 131.
7 Op. cit. 3.
8 Cf. St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae II—II* q. 162 a.1 ad 3.
9 *Francis Thompson and other Essays,* London 1955, p. 16.
10 Op. cit. p. 187.
11 Op. cit. pp. 74—5.
12 Aristotle, *Metaph. I* 980a21; cf. 982b11—21. St Thomas, II—II q. 180 a. 7
13 Op. cit. 8:11.
14 Guigo I, *Meditations 204.*
15 Letter 91 (ed. Chitty).
16 *The Man who was Thursday,* ch. 1.
17 E.E.T.S., O.S. 23 p. 17.
18 J.P. de Caussade (?), *L'Abandon à la Providence Divine,* ed. M. Olphe-Galliard, Paris 1966, pp. 99—100, 109, 140; for life as a fairy story, cf. ibid. p. 50.

Descartes and Capitalism

Ian Hamnett

In a pace-setting paper recently published in *New Blackfriars*[1], Fergus Kerr argues that Cartesian assumptions and presuppositions have entered so deeply into the thinking of the West that even those who profess to follow other traditions of thought can often be found to be working within the Cartesian paradigm. Here I hope to develop just one of the many lines of inquiry to which Father Kerr has pointed, arguing that there is a convergence between Cartesian anthropology on the one hand and the productive relations of capitalism on the other. Beyond this, I shall try to suggest that this convergence can

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1985.tb02675.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

tentatively be documented so as to form a real part of the "history of ideas" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, rather than left as no more than an abstract, analytical congruence or aptness of fit.

The theoretical argument is straightforward and can be concisely stated. Thomist anthropology and psychology propose a unitary conception of man and of the relationship between soul and body. Kerr pertinently reminds us (p. 255) of Aquinas's commentary on I Corinthians 15, and quotes his memorable reference to the soul as *pars corporis humani*[2]. This unity is found in all living things, in vegetables, for example, and in "brutes"; the rational soul in man, moreover, is no exception to this unitary principle. A corollary of this is that, as Kenny puts it, "a human being is not something that *has* a body; it *is* a body, a living body of a particular kind"[3]. It follows that I cannot strictly be said to "own" my bodily powers or faculties, as though "I" were something apart from them. Accordingly, I cannot alienate those powers and faculties by sale or lease as though they were objects at my disposal, like material goods or even non-material goods such as legal rights and so forth[4].

Descartes substituted for this a dualist anthropology, wherein the body, including the human body, can in the end be regarded as a mechanism (whether "hydraulic" or otherwise) in which, in the case of human beings, the "soul" is lodged as an alien or at least a gratuitous element. This element was superadded by the will of God to the physiological container, and was hypothesised to reside in the pineal gland[5]. Various metaphors and analogues were used by Descartes and his followers to illustrate the relationship. Descartes himself was more careful than some of his disciples to maintain the empirical unity in actual human persons of the two disparate elements thus conjoined. Thus, "I am not only lodged in my body as a pilot in a vessel, but ... I am besides so intimately conjoined and as it were intermixed with it, that my mind and body compose a certain unity"[6]. Statements, like this, however, must not be interpreted the wrong way round. Descartes' firm assertion of "a certain unity", in its very emphasis and even note of surprise, derives from a prior and more fundamental stress on difference, which his seeming qualification simply confirms.

The cogitating "ego" thus lodged in its house of clay can now plausibly be said to "own" the body which it inhabits, and hence to own also that bodily activity which is labour (or "labour power", to anticipate the later distinction); and if I own my bodily powers I can, not impossibly, be regarded as free to sell them too. Where the Aristotelian-Thomist psychology sees my labour as *myself in act*, Cartesian dualism permits it to be seen as the exercise of faculties which I can dispose of to others, either for value (as in a contract of labour) or otherwise. The road is clear, in other words, for a political

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1985.tb02675.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

anthropology where I, who now own nothing but my labour power, sell it to the owner of the means of production, who appropriates the wealth which that purchased—alienated—labour creates.

It is instructive to note the *démarche* which makes that final step possible. The *locus classicus* is found in Locke, himself an admirer of Descartes.—

> Though the earth and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has a 'property' in his own 'person'. This nobody has a right to but himself. The 'labour' of his body and the 'work' of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state that Nature has provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with it, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state Nature placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it that excludes the common right of other men. For this 'labour' being the unquestionable property of the labourer, no man but he can have a right to what that is once joined to ... Thus, the grass my horse has bit, *the turfs my servant has cut,* and the ore I have digged in any place ... *become my property* ... The labour that was mine, removing them out of that common state they were in, hath fixed my property in them.[7]

Locke is charmingly unaware of the contradiction in the latter part of this passage which, as it stands, should logically make "the turfs my servant has cut" become *his* property, not mine. The absent middle term is the implied thesis that the servant's labour becomes my labour by the contract of employment. What had been my servant's becomes mine, just as if it were a horse or a field conveyed to me by a contract and instrument of sale.

There is an interesting comparison here with classical Roman law, which denied acquisition of ownership through free men (servants, in Locke's sense) while admitting it through slaves. The latter possibility depended on the idea that the *dominus* really owned the slave much as he owned a thing, so that everything the slave acquired became automatically the property of his master. It was of course always possible for a free man to be under a contractual obligation to convey the property in certain goods to the creditor in the contract; but in such a case, the creditor enjoyed only a right *in personam* against the other to have the goods conveyed. He did not directly acquire a right *in rem* to the goods themselves, as he did in the case of a slave—or as Locke did in the case of his servant.[8]

In principle, the labour transferred from servant to master should not be compared only to material goods nor restricted to physical

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1985.tb02675.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

labour in the usual sense. In a seventeenth and early eighteenth century context, however, there are some difficulties in extending the notion to "mental" work. These difficulties make it more than usually hazardous to reach prematurely for neat conclusions. W.F. Bynum warns that "eighteenth century theories of mind took far less cognisance of the brain than we do. Their universe was more nearly Cartesian than ours in their separation of mind and brain, and, more important, their conflation of the philosophical and medical concepts of *mind* with the theological concept of *soul*... indeed the French use the single word *l'âme* for both".[9] Mental labour thus still lay on the "spiritual" side of the mind (soul)-body dichotomy. Perhaps this can be consistently accounted for by the suggestion that at this point in western European history the norm of "labour" was, or was perceived as being, physical toil. The concept of "workers by hand and brain" lay in the future.

It is easy enough to point to an analytical congruence between the relationship of master and servant sketched by Locke, and Descartes' dualistic anthropology. It is another matter to affirm a genetic link between the two sets of ideas—unless, that is, one is content, as so often in "history of ideas" methodology, simply to ascribe everything wholesale to the "spirit of the age". In what follows, I attempt no more than to make some tentative moves to pass beyond that somewhat tautologous kind of argument. A useful starting point is to distinguish at the outset between the use that Descartes made of his theoretical ideas, and what happened to them when they passed into the hands of his successors and popularisers. I offer three specific examples.

Occasionalism. Nicolas Malebranche[10], the Oratorian philosopher, was perhaps the most dedicated Cartesian of them all—Descartes himself included! He followed his master's dualism to its conclusion, dispensing with Descartes' rather useasy affirmation of the substantial unity of soul and body already discussed, and instead boldly affirming that the two constituents of man could only be held together, as Hobart says (pp. 81—3), "by means of a mutual correspondence between the modifications of the soul and those of the body ... God has established for man's conservation that, when man wills to act, his willing (a purely mental modification) is accompanied by his acting (a modification of the body)". This occasionalism has, unsurprisingly perhaps, brought radical dualism into some disrepute: but though it may well be regarded as a logical derivative of Cartesian theory, Descartes himself did not propound it.

Animal sensation. Cartesian theory led to a view of animals that saw them as machines, incapable of suffering pain[11]. Nicholas Fontaine gives a sickening account of the cruelties inflicted upon dogs, and says of the experimenters, "on y parloit sans cesse du nouveau

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1985.tb02675.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

système du monde selon M. Descartes, et l'on admiroit''[12]. Malebranche too is said to have thrashed his dog daily, and laughed at those who reproached him. Yet though Descartes' theories of animal automatism provided the theoretical basis for the idea that animals do not suffer pain, he himself seems to have been in practice reasonably humane.

L'Homme-Machine. The most dramatic development of Cartesian dualism was, of course, Julien Offroy de La Mettrie's *L'Homme-Machine,* published in 1748, almost exactly a century after Descartes' *Traité des Passions de l'Âme* (1649).[13] La Mettrie turned Descartes on his head, extending the notion of animal automatism to embrace human beings too, and by eliminating the "spiritual" element in Cartesian dualism, extracted a rigorous, unitary and atheistic anthropology from what was left. This potential development in an atheistic direction was noted by Henry More, and was one of the principal reasons why so passionate and extreme a youthful disciple of Descartes came later to reject those aspects of Cartesian philosophy that smacked to him of mechanism.[14]

Cartesian influence was thus generally transmitted in modified or even in inverted form. Its impact in England is of more particular interest since it was there that capitalism developed first and most fully: though it was also there that Descartes' penetration was unusually obscure and ambiguous. "Historians", writes Laudan[15], "have never been able to come to any satisfactory conclusions about the influence of Descartes on seventeenth-century English thought", though he goes on to refer to work in the 1950s and 1960s that shows this influence to have been much greater than previously supposed; and a considerable periodical literature, especially in the fields of medicine and science, has subsequently confirmed this judgment.[16]

Popularisations of Cartesianism in fact gave Descartes's ideas—or transformations of them—a place in the minds of ordinary educated people at the very point when, for mixed reasons, Cartesian philosophy was losing much of its appeal for many scientists and philosophers. This is precisely the dynamic process that Max Weber had in mind when (echoing Goethe[17]) he spoke of the "elective affinity" or "congeniality" (*Wahlverwandschaft*) that holds between material or moral interests on the one hand and systems of ideas or beliefs on the other. The original doctrines are subjected over time to a process of selective emphasis by their adherents. Thus, the Calvinism (in the context of Weber's studies of Puritanism and capitalism) or the Cartesianism (in the context of this article) that emerges in the second or third generation is a significantly modified transposition of the original, and one that is better adapted to the interests of the believers.

Finally it is worth noting that rejections of Cartesianism, especially by former disciples, and more especially still when thirty or

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1985.tb02675.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

fifty years have passed, may be far less significant than they seem. Nicolson remarks that "although the disciples of Descartes departed from his teaching, they never entirely recovered from his influence"[18]. Fergus Kerr has shown how professed Thomists, even while actually engaged upon a struggle against Cartesianism, could still be found working within a Cartesian paradigm of which they were unaware. The "post-Cartesians" of the later seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries are similarly placed. Moreover, even explicit refutations of Descartes can be ambiguous. The seventeenth-century English physician and pioneer of cerebral anatomy, Thomas Willis, noting that the pineal body occurs in animals as well as man, claims that "hence we can scarce believe this to be the seat of the soul"[19]. This observation, while rejecting Descartes' precise placing of the soul in the body, nevertheless takes the underlying anthropology for granted. Somewhere or other, even if not in the pineal or any other gland, there is a purely spiritual *humanum ego* (Kerr, p. 254) inhabiting, owning and selling off its acts, faculties and powers in the market economy now accelerating towards supremacy in the western world.[20]

1 "The need for philosophy in theology today", *New Blackfriars,* Vol. 65, no. 768, June 1984, pp.248—60.

2 Among many references to *anima* as *forma corporis* see S. Th. Ia, 3, 2 arg.; IaIIae, 51, 1, co,; IIIa, 75, 6, ad 2. The thesis here is directly Aristotelian. Aquinas elsewhere refers to Augustine's phrase (in *De Trinitate*) "tota in toto" in order to describe the relationship between the soul and the parts of the body: S Th. Ia, 8, 2 ad 3; IIIa, 46, 7 co.

3 A. Kenny, *Aquinas,* O.U.P. 1980, p. 48.

4 Viz., vested rights under a contract, etc. I am not referring to "human rights" or "natural rights" in the loose modern sense.

5 The location of the soul in the pineal gland has often been derided, both then and now. An acephalous child that lived four days was taken to refute the hypothesis: S.X. Redbill, "Pediatrics", in A.G. Debus (ed.), *Medicine in 17th Century England,* U. of California 1974, p. 246. See also the discussion of Willis at the conclusion of this paper. A more sympathetic appraisal is in W. Reise and E.C. Hoff,, "A history of the doctrine of cerebral localisation", *J. Hist. Med.* Vol. 5, 1950, pp. 50—71, and Vol. 6, 1951, pp. 439—70.

6 Quoted in W. Reise, "Descartes as a psychotherapist", *Medical History,* Vol. 10, 1966, p. 239 n. 7. See also Kathleen Grange, 'The ship symbol as key to former theories of the emotions", *Bull. Hist. Med.* Vol. 36, 1962, pp. 512—23.

7 J. Locke, *Of Civil Government,* II, sections 27—28. The emphasis is added, but the inverted commas are original.

8 See for example W.W. Buckland and A.D. McNair, *Roman Law and Common Law,* or Buckland, *A Text-Book of Roman Law,* both C.U.P., several editions.

9 "Rationales for therapy in British psychiatry 1780—1835". *Medical History,* Vol. 18, 1974, pp. 317—34.

10 Probably the most recent serious study of Malebranche, certainly from the perspective of this article, is M.E. Hobart, *Science and Religion in the Thought of Nicolas Malebranche,* U. of North Carolina 1982; see especially pp. 80ff, 122f. Another philosopher of occasionalism was Arnold Geulincz (1625—69), who used the metaphor of the two synchronous clocks.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1985.tb02675.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

11 *Discourse on Method,* in *Philosophical Works of Descartes,* trans. E.S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross, Vol. I, C.U.P. 1911, pp. 115—8, and other passages in T. Regan and P. Singer (ed.s), *Animal Rights and Human Obligations,* Prentice-Hall 1976, pp. 60—6.

12 *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de Port-Royal,* Cologne, 1738

13 Of the considerable literature, I mention only L.C. Rosenfield, *From Beast-Machine to Man-Machine: The Theme of the Animal Soul in French Letters from Descartes to La Mettrie,* O.U.P. 1940, revd ed. Octagon Books (New York) 1968; and B. Campbell, "La Mettrie: the robot and the automaton", *J. Hist. Ideas* Vol. 31, 1970, pp. 555—72.

14 See M. Nicolson, "The early stages of Cartesianism in England", *Studies in Philology,* Vol. 26, 1929, pp. 356—74.

15 L. Laudan, 'The clock metaphor and probabilism: the impact of Descartes on English methodological thought 1650—1665", *Annals of Science* Vol. 22, 1966, pp. 73—104.

16 The periodical literature can be found in such journals as *British Journal for the History of Science; Bulletin of the History of Medicine; Journal of the History of Medicine; Medical History.* See also A.G. Debus (ed.), *Medicine in Seventeenth Century England* (cited in note 5 above); K. Dewhurst, *Dr Thomas Sydenham,* Berkeley 1966; B.J.T. Dobbs, *The Foundations of Newton's Alchemy,* Cambridge 1975; P.L. Entralgo, *Mind and Body: Psychosomatic Pathology,* Harvill Press 1955; J.L. Rather, *Mind and Body in Eighteenth Century Medicine,* Wellcome 1965; G. Scherz (ed.), *Steno and Brain Research in the Seventeenth Century,* Pergamon 1968.

17 Goethe's novel *Die Wahlverwandschaften* (tr. *Elective Affinities,* Penguin 1971) was published in 1809 and is the source for later usage in history and sociology. For Weber's use of the concept, see R.H. Howe, "Max Weber's elective affinities", *Am. J. Sociol.* Vol 84, 1978, pp. 366—85.

18 art. cit. p. 369.

19 F. Valadez, "Anatomical Studies at Oxford and Cambridge", in Debus op. cit.

20 C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism,* O.U.P. 1962.

* * * *

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual conference of the British Sociological Association Sociology of Religion section at the University of Surrey in 1979. Dr K. Flanagan kindly read and commented on a later draft. I am especially indebted to Dr V. Skultans for invaluable help and advice in regard to sources and bibliography.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1985.tb02675.x Published online by Cambridge University Press