

The Problem of Individuation among the Cartesians



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Leibniz said that numerically different individuals always differ qualitatively; it would be a violation of his principle of sufficient reason if numerical difference were the only difference between things. Whether some further principle of individuation is entailed, we can at least say that for him qualitative difference is sufficient for numerical difference. Certainly no further principle is required for Berkeley—at least not for the individuation of physical things like books and bananas. Again without controversy, we may say that on his bundle analysis of such things, things with all the same qualities would ipso facto be numerically the same; set identity is a matter of membership identity. A perplexing question raised by such analyses concerns how qualities differ. An apple differs from a banana not only numerically, but also in shape and color, that is, qualitatively; but how do shapes and colors differ? Does red differ from yellow numerically or qualitatively? Although such questions may be perplexing, I want to argue that on the Cartesian line I shall develop, *not only physical objects but also minds differ in the way in which red and yellow differ*, however the Cartesians may understand that difference.¹

Elsewhere² I have argued that for Descartes there is but a single material substance, *res extensa*, of which the individual material things of our experience are modes, and that in this sense their essence is extension. Their essence just is *res extensa*, which is the thing that God creates when he makes it true, for example, that the interior angles of a triangle are equal to a straight angle. An individual thing of our experience, such as a piece of wax—what Descartes calls *extensum*—is individuated in *res extensa* by our sensations. What this means is that if we ourselves had no body, that is, if we had no sensations, we would never perceive individuals; all our perceptions would be of the universal. But it also means that without sensations, there would not *be* any such individuals. For an apple is not just extension, which gives it determinable geometrical properties, but also redness, which determines it to just a

set of those properties. Consider *Meditations* II. We learn that the wax is *known* through the mind alone, by which I take it that its essence, that is, extension, is known by the mind alone. But after learning this, Descartes raises and answers an often overlooked question: "But what is this piece of wax which cannot be known excepting by the mind? It is certainly the same that I see, touch, imagine and finally it is the same which I have always believed it to be from the beginning."³ What this means is that objects like apples consist in part of sensations; at least in part, they are mind-dependent.

This result raises the question as to the analysis and individuation of mind. If objects of experience are individuated by sensations, what individuates minds? Here I can only report that while Descartes may be read as taking physical objects to be modes of a single material substance, he seems nowhere to regard individual minds as anything less than so many thinking substances.⁴ Descartes's views on individuation are discussed elsewhere in this volume. My aim here is not to defend any of the above as Descartes's, but to show how it is found in certain of his self-proclaimed disciples. Indeed, I show in the third and fourth sections of this chapter that Descartes's alleged analysis of material things is extended by them to thinking things as well. In a brief first section I provide a bit of background whose aim is, among other things, to mitigate the impact of the obviously many texts in which 'substance' is used by these Cartesians, as by Descartes himself, to refer to individual things, including individual minds. In a second section I show the various other ways in which the Cartesians sought to deal with individuation—all of them uninteresting or unsuccessful, in my view. Finally, in the third and fourth sections I turn to the heart of the chapter, the heretofore almost totally ignored work of Robert Desgabets and Pierre-Sylvain Régis.

SOME BACKGROUND

In the seventeenth century the explicit treatment of the problem of individuation is not nearly commensurate with its perennial importance. There are several reasons for this. One reason relates to the emergence of mechanism, which undid the Aristotelian models of explanation, and in particular the appeal to final causes. On previous models it is important to individuate in order to have discrete loci for discrete teleological organizations. The mantis and the fly upon which it preys have radically different ends, even if those ends are thought to contribute to an overreaching universal end. With mechanism, how-

ever, teleology is either proscribed entirely (Descartes) or else severely restricted (Locke).⁵

A second reason for the overt neglect of the problem of individuation also relates to the emergence of mechanism. For the correlative problem of natural kinds had also undergone a radical change. On previous accounts, including especially the Aristotelian, but also the various versions of Platonism, hermeticism, naturalism, and the like, there are many different natural kinds. The significance of the great chain of being requiring that there be no gaps in nature, that every possible kind be instantiated, and so on, would have been upset or certainly at least diminished if the world were not plentiful, indeed overwhelmingly so, in its sortal diversity. Driven by mechanism, however, the thrust of the seventeenth century is to reduce natural kinds, even to the point of eliminating all but one of them. This is most obviously true of Cartesianism, whose material world is of one kind only, namely, the extended. But the thrust is also to be found in empiricism, as represented by Locke for example. We do not know the Lockean real essences of things, but the difference among all such essences may turn out to be, at least on the corpuscularian hypothesis that Locke often accepts and nowhere rejects, a difference in the primary qualities of their microscopic parts. That is, for Locke all material things are ultimately of the same determinable kind (having, e.g., shape), differing only in their determinates (e.g., specific shape). For these two reasons, the problem of individuation although still important tended to be ignored.

The upshot is that both in the atomist ontologies that typified empiricism and in the plenist ontologies typical of Cartesianism, substance became a mass noun rather than a count noun. In Aristotelian terminology, primary substances, which previously had been individuals, were abolished in favor of secondary substances, which previously had been only their essences.⁶ To use some homely metaphors, for atomism substance was like a paint to be spread by creation on some spatial figures and not on others.⁷ For the Cartesians of interest here, substance became the bread, not only of life, but of all else—sliced, as I argue, by our sensations.

Given the Cartesian dualism of Desgabets and Régis, there are qualitatively, and I argue, numerically two substances: *res extensa* and *res cogitans*. Many statements by them, and by other Cartesians, are ambiguous, however, and can be read as asserting the existence either of one substance or of a multiplicity of substances, of the two kinds. Régis, for example, begins the physics of his *Système* as follows: "There is no one who does not know that there is a substance [*une substance*],

extended in length, breadth, and depth, called *body*.”⁸ As Régis continues, however, we can only translate him as saying *one* substance and not *a* substance in the sense of some individual substance or other. The idea of one substance “is so comprised in all those that the imagination can form that we necessarily know it or else never imagine anything.” There seem to me only two ways to avoid this translation. One is to read Régis as asserting in the fashion of Locke that the idea of substance as the place-marker for a support (an I-know-not-what) is a component in our ideas of individual things; but this is implausible because contrary to Locke, substance *is* known, as either extension or thought, for these Cartesians. The other way is to say that the idea of any material thing is sufficient for the knowledge of all material things; this is true for Régis, but only because material things are not so many different substances. In knowing one thing I know all just because in knowing the essence of one I know the essence of all.⁹

PATHS NOT FOLLOWED

Among the followers of Descartes, there are four tendencies discernible with respect to the problem of individuation. (1) One tendency is simply to ignore the problem; this tendency was exemplified by the most acute of the Cartesians, Arnauld, although certainly not as a function of his acuteness. (2) A second tendency is to individuate by means of substance while yet satisfying the exigencies of the Cartesian version of substance ontology. In the most systematic of the Cartesians, Malebranche, this is in fact more than a mere tendency; it was an explicit effort he made throughout his career. (3) Another, no less clear response is to be found in the most deviant of the Cartesians, Corde-moy. His application of the independence criterion for substance directly responds to the problem of individuation, but in a way that undid the metaphysical core of Cartesianism and with it, perhaps, his claim to being a Cartesian at all. (4) Finally, those who were most rigorous in working out the implications of Descartes's views for individuation, and who in this sense were the most faithful of the Cartesians, are nowadays least known. Desgabets and Régis held that the difference between individuals is the difference between modes, either of the same or of different substances.

(1) Arnauld seems not to have had a view on individuation. At least none readily emerges from his long debate with Malebranche, in which the only related issue concerns how we perceive things as distinguished. Both he and Malebranche agree that perceptions are particu-

larized by our sensations—paradigmatically, a shape is distinguished within the visual field by a difference in color. They agree further that the sensation, of color, for example, is a modification of the mind. Their disagreement, which is the central issue of their debate, concerned the status of the perceived shape. For Malebranche, like all other perceived properties of extension it was independent both of the mind and of the shaped, but uncolored, thing in the material world that it represented to the mind. For him it was an Idea in the mind of God after which the material thing was created. For Arnauld, on the other hand, the perceived shape was in the mind as a modification of it. But their discussion, in both agreement and disagreement, was restricted to the individuation of our perception of material things and did not extend to the individuation of the material things themselves.¹⁰ Still less did they address the individuation of minds, despite the theological concerns (such as conditions of salvation for individual souls) that drove their discussion of perception. To put it another way, although their disagreement revealed deep ontological differences, the issue between them was the discernibility of individuals, not individuation as such.¹¹

(2) I do not give here an extended treatment of Malebranche's views on individuation, which are dealt with elsewhere in this volume. Rather, I treat them, briefly, only as an indication of the dialectical pressures of Cartesianism that drove others to take a more consistent position than did Malebranche on the problem of individuation.¹²

It seems clear that throughout his career Malebranche regarded individual material things as so many substances, meaning by substance what Descartes laid down in the *Principles*: that which, because conceivable apart, can exist apart from all else (but God).¹³ But their individuation *qua* substances posed a problem for him. For example, when space or extension was identified by Descartes with homogeneous matter, the task of accounting for the differences among cohesion, contiguity, and union became problematic for obvious reasons. In the *Search after Truth*, Malebranche criticized Gassendi's non-Cartesian account of cohesion in terms of interlocking, branched, and crooked particles on the grounds that in failing to explain the cohesion of the particles themselves, the account only puts off the difficulty. Nor will it do, he says, to regard the binding particles as essentially indivisible, for their parts are conceivable apart from each other; hence, as substances, they can exist apart from each other. This means that on Malebranche's view every extended substance contains an infinite number of substances because every part of extension is at least conceptually divisible to infinity. The independence criterion of conceiv-

ability also means that every extended substance is contained by an infinite number of substances.¹⁴ Furthermore, he seems committed to introducing an infinite number of modifications for each substance but one, for a modification is that which is inconceivable apart from that of which it is the modification, and the whole of which any substance is a part is inconceivable apart from its parts. That is, every substance but one has an infinite number of modifications, for every substance is a member of an infinite number of wholes except for the substance that is all of extension, which has no modifications. With such a dialectic, Malebranche's ontology, in which everything is either a substance or a mode, is not of much use with respect to the problem of individuation. To put it another way: if a substance is what can be conceived apart, ordinary material individuals cannot be so many substances.

Nonetheless, when confronted with the charge of Spinozism, Malebranche insisted that individual material things were so many substances. Against Mairan, who took material things to be modifications of extension, he replied that he could "conceive, imagine, sense by itself a cubic foot of extension, without thinking of anything else. Therefore, this extension [that is, presumably, the cubic foot of extension] is the substance and its cubic shape is its modification. This cubic foot is indeed a part of the larger extension, but it is not the modification of it."¹⁵ At this point the concept of conceivability itself becomes problematic. In the end, individuation seems inscrutable on Malebranchian grounds, which is perhaps as it should be since for him the individual is as such unintelligible. That there are individuals, as opposed to the essences they instantiate, depends on the indifferent will of God. This is likely what Malebranch means in pointing to existence itself as what distinguishes otherwise identical things.¹⁶ More than this, what his struggle shows is the pressure inherent in Cartesianism toward positions that were in fact developed by others.

(3) The conclusions at which Cordemoy arrived may obviously have been heterodox in Cartesian terms, but the premises from which he departed were at least arguably orthodox.¹⁷ Without ever stating it in such terms, Cordemoy relies on the Cartesian independence criterion for substance. But he uses it to argue that each individual body is a simple and indivisible extended substance whose shape cannot change. That is, for Cordemoy, the text of conceivability apart leads directly to atomism. "Bodies are extended substances. . . . As each body is but a self-same substance [*une même substance*], it cannot be divided; its shape cannot change."¹⁸ Matter, on the other hand is a collection [*assemblage*] of bodies, which compose it as its parts. "As each body cannot be divided, it cannot have parts; but as matter is a collection of

bodies, it can be divided into as many parts as there are bodies."¹⁹ Furthermore, although each body is extended and perforce possesses extremities and a middle, it cannot be altered. "If . . . a self-same substance cannot in itself be divided [*une même substance ne se peut diviser en elle-même*] and if its nature is to be able to be extended, then, as soon as the substance is conceived to exist, we must allow that since it is the same in all its parts, none of its extremities can be separated from it."²⁰

To answer the problem of individuation, Cordemoy thus appeals to substance as an individual; indeed, his tendency is to regard the individual as bare, that is, unnatured. To this Cartesian heresy, Cordemoy added the atomist conception of space as a nonmaterial container independent of the matter it might contain. If the matter in a vase or a room were annihilated, its sides would not ipso facto touch, for the bodies of which the sides are composed are independent of each other.²¹ The void is thus possible, with the result that matter and extension or space cannot be identical as Descartes thought.

(4) Such anti-Cartesian views did not go unnoticed. Cordemoy's book was sent by Clerselier to Desgabets, who replied in no uncertain terms.²² Aside from personal invective, Desgabets's rebuttal of the independence argument allows that parts of matter taken in relation to a common end are "formally and essentially" indivisible, but insists that the parts composing it are nonetheless separable.²³ The spring in the object before me is separable from it insofar as both are composed of bodies; but it is inseparable insofar as both compose a watch. Régis made the same kind of distinction, and answered the voided-room argument as follows. The walls of the room have an independent existence, but only "considered in themselves." "The disposition they have to compose a room is dependent on the space between them and consequently on some quantity and some matter."²⁴ Elaborating these Cartesian responses to Cordemoy's atomism involves many difficulties and anyhow is less important than Desgabets's and Régis's own answers to the problem of individuation. Each of them deserves an extended treatment.

DESGABETS

Desgabets's longest and most important work is the *Supplément à la philosophie de Monsieur Descartes*.²⁵ Although finally published in 1983, it nonetheless shows the ways in which it was possible in the period to develop Cartesian principles and it indicates the thinking that may have influenced others, especially Régis. The title of the work is indicative of

Desgabets's program. For Desgabets, as for other Cartesians such as Malebranche, Descartes's fundamental principles were correct but the use he made of them was sometimes defective.²⁶ Yet if Descartes "sometimes ceased to be a good Cartesian," we need turn only to Descartes's principles in order to find the remedy.²⁷ In this sense it was thought possible, as Malebranche put it, to base views opposed to Descartes's (and the boldness to defend them) on Descartes himself (and his way of doing philosophy).²⁸ Desgabets thus supplements Descartes's philosophy by supplying its defects, and he attempts to do so with respect to two topics that emerge from the *Meditations*: (1) the real distinction between soul and body, and (2) the existence of God.

The first, which is by far the longer of the two treatments, culminates in an argument of great importance to the issue of individuation. According to Desgabets, Descartes erred greatly when in his *Replies to Objections* II he allowed that only by faith do we come to accept that God does not afterward do what he, Desgabets, has just demonstrated separation of body and soul does not do, namely, annihilate the soul. That is, according to Desgabets, once it is demonstrated that the soul's separation from the body does not annihilate the soul, the soul's immortality can then be demonstrated and no appeal to faith is necessary. The reason for this is that substance, like eternal truth, is indefectible. Desgabets was among the minority of Cartesians who accepted Descartes's argument based on divine omnipotence that God is the "total and efficient" cause, not only of the existence of things but of their essence as well.²⁹ What this means is that the eternal truths depend on God's will, that is, he could have made it false that the three angles of a triangle equal two right angles or more generally that contradictories should simultaneously both be true.³⁰ While this strips geometrical truths of their necessity (they could have been otherwise if God had willed otherwise), they are nonetheless eternal (there is no time at which God in fact wills them otherwise). God makes geometry true by creating *res extensa* as its object.³¹

While God's will is perfectly free with a "freedom of indifference," it is eternal and immutable and therefore what he wills is eternal and immutable.³² The upshot is that although substance is created, it is nonetheless eternal and immutable, that is, it is indefectible. However problematic this line of argument may be for Descartes's exegesis, it is abundantly clear in Desgabets, as I now indicate.

Desgabets explicitly links the creation of the eternal truths with the creation of other *things* (*choses*) such as the soul and matter, which are their "object and subject" (*objet et sujet*).³³ God is the author of both sorts of creation with a sovereign indifference, which is to say, absolute

omnipotence. The problem this raises is that God could, however inconveniently to us, “annihilate” a truth such as the whole is greater than its parts. That he does not, however, seems to be derived from the same attribute that generates the problem, namely, divine omnipotence. “Everyone believes it justified to regard [such a truth] as fixed for all eternity, the reason for which is, according to Descartes, that God wills that it be what it is and that it would be absurd and even impious to place in Him contrary volitions, of which one would destroy what the other had done.”³⁴ That is, just because he always and immediately has his way, God never has to change his mind, as it were, and try something else. Though absolutely indifferent, his will is fixed for all eternity.³⁵

If the eternal fixedness of geometry follows from divine omnipotence, however, the eternal fixedness of everything else dependent on God’s will also seems to follow. And indeed, this is just the conclusion that Desgabets draws in arguing for the immortality of the soul. “For if this so noble substance does not depend on God in a way other than the truths which do not withal cease to be immutable, notwithstanding their dependence, we must say that its existence is no less firm than theirs . . . which in no way prejudices God’s prerogatives. Nonetheless, this is more than sufficient for my purpose, for it follows that a soul can no more be annihilated than a truth can cease to be a truth.”³⁶ Desgabets apparently ignores an important disanalogy between the creation of the eternal truths and the creation of the soul, namely, that *ex vi terminorum*, there is no time at which the eternal truths are not, whereas for individual minds, if they are so many thinking substances, there is presumably a time at which they begin to be and before which they are not. My own view is that either Desgabets did not think through his position on this question fully or that, if he did, he drew back from expressing the consequences of it. What those consequences were, and why the expression of them should be problematic will become more obvious below. Meanwhile, Desgabets has no hesitation in arguing that matter is indefectible and indeed that if it were not, the foundation of the whole of Descartes’s physics would be upset.³⁷ The obvious question this whole line of argument raises concerns the possibility of change. If everything happens according to God’s will, indeed utterly as a result of it, and if that will is eternally fixed, then nothing would ever change. Yet the river flows, or at least appears to do so, *in omne volubilis aevum*, as Horace says.³⁸ What we have is Aristotle’s problem with Parmenides: the experience, and presumed fact, of change in the face of a dialectic that says change is impossible.

I have indicated above the context for Desgabets’s account of change. There is an analogous question about the necessity and contin-

gency of truths. To be sure, all truth is contingent in the radical sense that all truth could have been otherwise with a different divine volition, which itself could have been otherwise. But presumably we still want to distinguish between the propositions of geometry, which are eternally true, and propositions about the weather, which are true only for a time. The difference for Desgabets is the difference between statements about substance and statements about modes. Consonant with his view that essences are created, he holds that there is no absolute possibility and that possibilities are defined only when substance is created. When God creates a substance he gives it a nature that defines the modes of which it is capable. "Only modes or things particularly as such [*les chose particulièrement en tant que telles*] have an actual coexistence in time, but matter *qua* corporeal substance . . . prior to its determinations through forms is not in time at all . . . it exists simply in itself, without any difference of present past and future time."³⁹ The variable individual things of our experience are modes, and only they are in time and change; their essence, the single corporeal substance of which they are modes, does not change. The important point that emerges for our story is not the account of modality but the view of individuals as modes that determine substance/essence to exist in a certain way. As Desgabets puts it in an earlier work devoted entirely to the topic of the indefectibility of substance: "matter considered in itself will be the essence of corporeal things, which matter will receive its existence when it takes on [*quand elle sera revetue*] its modes, which give it a particular and determinate mode of being [*qui lui donnent une manière d'être particulière et déterminée*]."⁴⁰

The problematic consequences of Desgabets's position for the individuation of minds now becomes clearer. For if minds are transitory modes of a single thinking substance as physical things are transitory modes of a single extended substance, then the indefectibility of substance cannot be appealed to in order to secure the personal immortality required by religious (and political) dogma. When I die my substance may be immortal, but I myself will not be around to receive the rewards of a good life or the punishments for a bad one. Desgabets avoided this problem, as far as I can tell, only by ignoring it. His follower Régis did not ignore it; *au contraire*, he acknowledged this consequence. The difficulty for this position can be made even worse, for even before either of us dies any difference between us seems not to be real. It is, to use a technical term, an 'appearance' or a 'phenomenon', as I now show.

A number of Cartesians were explicit in recognizing the importance of what might be called the principle of intentionality.⁴¹ Desga-

bets's version of it goes as follows: "the simplest, best known and most necessary of all principles is that every simple conception always has outside the understanding a real and existent object that is in itself such as it is represented by thought."⁴² Without this principle, he thinks, all certitude of our own existence, of the world, of God and of religion is upset; even the *cogito* is undermined without it.⁴³ Desgabets is thus at great pains to establish the principle against the obvious objections that can be made against it—for example, that we can think of such items as a golden mountain that are not real and existent, outside our thought, but purely possible, within our thought. (His long account of logical modality, which is only touched upon above, is in fact designed to meet just this sort of objection.) One of his arguments for the principle invokes a premise already limned above, namely, that real possibilities conceivable by us are created only when substance is created. The "pure" possibility of God creating different substances and thus a different range of possibilities conceivable by us is itself inconceivable. We can think as possible only what God has created.⁴⁴

Desgabets at one point extends the argument as follows. "In addition to the fact that when we think of something, and when we think that it is already conceivable intrinsically and in itself, we have the power to give it an actual and real existence, in virtue of which it can also be shown that our thoughts always have a real object."⁴⁵ That is, just by thinking of anything we think of something possible, which shows that God has created some substance; but beyond that, we can *through our thought* determine that substance to exist in a certain way, which is to say that we determine its actual modes. This "production of things by thought" is likened by Desgabets to God's own creation, which brings into existence what he knows even as he knows it. What we do is to draw out of substance modes that consequently have a real and temporal existence; without this operation of the mind, modes have only a possible existence in substance.⁴⁶ It is in this additional sense that "our thoughts always have a real object," even when we think about such items as golden mountains. While Desgabets's main concern is to defend his principle of intentionality against objections based on such items as golden mountains, he extends his account to cover thoughts about, and the "production of," such items as the Alps. If I am correct, the account to which Desgabets commits himself is that: (1) only substances are individuated by themselves; (2) there are but two substances, thought and extension; (3) things, that is, individual minds and physical objects, are modes respectively of these two substances;⁴⁷ (4) the individuation of modes depends on our thought. All of these points are contentious as explications, certainly of

Descartes's position, but even of Desgabets's. I conclude by concentrating on just the final point, whose plausibility entails that of the previous three. I then turn to Régis, who carries out essentially the same program.

In Desgabets's terminology, substance exists intrinsically, mode extrinsically. "When an architect designs a house, it is very certain that he gives to matter, i.e. to the stone and wood, a form of a house which belongs to them extrinsically, although it is commonly imagined and said that this sort of being is only in thought and does not exist outside of the understanding, for an object which is known effectively possesses an extrinsic form of being known."⁴⁸ It is extrinsically that the predestined are chosen by God, he explains, and then continues: "All of geometry, architecture, etc. do nothing else but give that sort of being [i.e. extrinsic] to their objects: a pole divided into ten feet by mental designation [*par désignation mentale*], a cask divided into a hundred points, etc., are actually divided, and we believe that they have this determinate quality outside of the understanding. Men divided into regiments, companies, etc. really form these bodies. 20, 30, 40 pistoles are indeed such a number, and we cannot say that this has existence only in thought, because regiment, foot, 20 pistoles are real and corporeal things, and not thoughts, although their being as such comes to them through thought, which gives them that form and that extrinsic denomination."⁴⁹ I see no other reasonable interpretation of what Desgabets says here than to say that numerical distinctions in the physical world, that is, the individuation of it, depends on our thought. This is not a surprising result of the view that the things of the world are modes of a single substance and that modal distinctions depend on us. The rub comes when the same analysis is given to the world of minds and when both are read in the Parmenidean tradition of construing what is not real, that is, mind independent, as only apparent or phenomenal.

RÉGIS

Régis produced the most important systematic Cartesian treatise of philosophy as traditionally divided into logic, metaphysics, physics, and ethics. (But for Antoine Legrand's *Entire Body of Philosophy* of 1694, it was the only such systematic account.) In the *Système de philosophie*⁵⁰ Régis claims, like Desgabets, to be offering a purer version of Cartesianism than is to be found in the works of the eponymous author. While admitting to new explanations and definitions of, inter alia,

mind, soul, understanding, motion rest, quantity, and prime matter, he also says that they should be attributed to Descartes, “whose method and principles I have followed even in explanations that are different from his.”⁵¹ Régis’s reading of Descartes seems to have been influenced by Desgabets on a great number of issues, but especially on those of most concern to us here.⁵² He understands the connection between individual minds and material things on the one hand and thought and extension on the other in essentially the same terms as Desgabets, and thus is committed to the same account of individuation.

In a text cited in full and discussed below, Régis actually calls “body and mind considered in themselves *substantial beings* or simply *substances*, . . . and . . . all particular minds and bodies *modal beings*.”⁵³ Sometimes Régis does refer to himself as a substance; if I am right these instances must be disambiguated as references to his essence alone. But unless I am mistaken, he nowhere refers to his body, or any other particular body, as a substance. On the contrary, in discussing how we can know the existence, number, and duration of modal beings, he argues as follows. We have different sensations at different times that do not depend on us. Because they change they do not depend on God. For the same reason, they do not depend on body, at least not “considered in itself.” Therefore, “when I sense in a given fashion, this depends immediately on body being divided into several bodies and its having received through this division modes that enable it to produce all the variety in my sensations, from which I conclude that several bodies exist.”⁵⁴ This sounds as though different motions *cause* different sensations in us, as in Régis’s Cartesian physiology they certainly do. But his point in *ontological* terms is that modes *result* from individuation through our sensations. On the basis of sensations like green and yellow, according to Régis, one picks out, that is, constitutes such objects as the earth and the sun that make up the sensible world as opposed to the so-called imaginary spaces that are termed such, not because they are void, but because the senses perceive nothing in them.⁵⁵ Individual things *result from* our projection of sensations on otherwise homogeneous and undifferentiated extension. On this view individual things *are* what Malebranche and Arnauld took to be the *representations* of things.⁵⁶

Later in the *Système*, Régis distinguishes between *body* (that substance whose essence is extension) and *quantity*. Because of its essence, “size in itself” is an essential property of body; but quantity, which is a given size, is not an essential property—presumably for the reason that individual bodies can be of different sizes and perhaps change size. What is the distinction between body and quantity? “Quantity is noth-

ing else but body itself considered according to size."⁵⁷ This distinction is sufficient to allow them to have different properties, as the distinction of reason between numbers and things numbered allows them to have different properties (e.g., oddness versus color). The difference in property crucial for the issue of individuation is divisibility. Infinite divisibility is an essential property of quantity, but not of body. If body were divisible, then "since all division brings a change to the thing divided," its essence would be changed, which is contrary to reason.⁵⁸ In fact, however, after division each part still has the whole essence of body. So there is no question here of matter being really divided by motion into individual bodies. The single material substance is the essence of all individual material things (bodies) which are so many quantities of it; but one still wants to know how those quantities are constituted. We still need an account of individuation.

The answer is that the mind in its perception individuates bodies. "From [his] doctrine it follows," Régis says, "first, that having some quantity or other⁵⁹ is of the essence of particular bodies . . . and second, that quantity is not an interior mode of body, but an exterior mode consisting in a certain manner in which body is conceived in relation to a given size."⁶⁰ Régis's exterior mode is the same notion as Descartes's extrinsic denomination or Desgabets's extrinsic mode. There are complications here, but the point clearly emerges that individual material things are modes of a single material substance and that their individuation depends on the conception of them.⁶¹

Régis's treatment of the individuation of material things is largely that of Desgabets. His advance beyond Desgabets lies in developing what is at best implicit in Desgabets concerning the individuation of minds. Régis is remarkably explicit in treating individual minds as modes of a single thinking substance. "Because body and mind considered in themselves do not contain in their idea any actually existing mode and considered as such or such they do, to mark this difference I shall call body and mind considered in themselves *substantial beings* or simply *substances*, because I conceive nothing in them that does not subsist in itself, and I shall call all particular minds and bodies *modal beings*, because in their idea they contain modes, which form part of their essence; thus by the word *modal being* in general I shall mean a being which contains modes in its essence."⁶² The argument seems to be the following. From thought as an essence it no more follows that I am having a specific thought than it follows from extension as the essence of the object before me that it should have one shape rather than another. Furthermore, both essences are independent of the things of which they are the essences, while the converse does not

hold—an asymmetry that Régis tries to capture with the Cartesian version of the substance-mode connection: modes depend on substances, but substances do not depend on modes, for a substance can be conceived without its modes, but a mode cannot be conceived without the substance of which it is the mode. Finally, Régis suggests that individual minds consist of their thoughts and bodies of their modes of extension, that is, shapes; for I can see no other way than in terms of class-inclusion to interpret the containment whereby, as he says, their idea contains modes that form their essence.⁶³ An individual mind, then, looks proleptically very much like a Humean bundle of perceptions.

The above is not the only point at which Régis anticipates Hume's analysis of the mind. In discussing duration, he argues that one often has the same idea at different times, which leads one to believe that it is produced by the same object. From this identity one gets the idea of duration—the perseverance of a body in being. Not only do modal bodies endure, but they also change—our ideas succeed one another, which also gives us the idea of duration. “Through this perpetual change of ideas I notice in my mind that I have an idea not only of my own duration but also of that of all the other modal beings that are the objects of my ideas.”⁶⁴ To be sure, there is an important difference here between Régis and Hume. For Régis, the kinds of things bundled into minds and into bodies are essentially different, while for Hume they are essentially the same and are in fact bundled according to the same principles of association. Régis subscribes to dualism of kinds, Hume to neutral monism.⁶⁵ But for Régis, as for Hume, the idea of duration is not derived from either bodies or the mind, but rather from the *manner* in which the ideas (‘perceptions’ in Hume’s terminology) composing bodies and the mind are presented.⁶⁶ If the idea of duration were derived from bodies or minds themselves, then for both Régis and Hume bodies or minds would be substances, that is, things remaining identical through change.⁶⁷ The point here, however, is less Régis’s anticipation of Hume, than Régis’s acceptance of the opening move in the Humean dialectic when he construes minds as bundles of modes, that is, as modal beings: “I have an idea not only of my own duration but of that of all other modal beings.”

There is additional evidence for the set-theoretic analysis of individuation whereby individual things, minds and physical objects, differ insofar as the qualities constituting them differ. Régis at one point begins with a fair representation of the Cartesian notion of real distinction: “the true mark of the real distinction found between two things of the same nature is that these two things can be known without each other.”⁶⁸ That they can exist apart, which is presumably what Régis

means by their being really distinct, is known because they are known apart. He then produces three kinds of real distinction: (1) the generic, between things of different genera (e.g., a man and a stone); (2) the specific, between things having a common attribute (e.g., a man and a horse, which are both animals); (3) the numerical, “between things that have a same genus and a same difference, but do not have the same common accidents, which is how one drop of water differs from another.”⁶⁹ All these kinds of real distinction rely on qualities for individuation, or at least on substances *qua* essences rather than substances *qua* individuators. This reliance is obvious in the first case, where a man *qua* thinking thing and a stone *qua* extended thing cannot be the same because they have different essences.⁷⁰

It is even more obvious in the third case, where it would seem that two drops of water can differ only because of differences in qualities.⁷¹ The second case is ambiguous because a man involves two essences; *qua* thinking thing his difference from a horse is generic, while *qua* extended thing it is numerical. For my argument concerning Régis’s analysis of mind, the numerical is the crucial case, for Régis later argues, in connection with the problem of knowledge of other minds, that his soul is *really* distinct from the souls of other men because he senses and imagines through his body and they do not: “I also say that other souls are distinct among themselves because the use of language [*la parole*] clearly shows me that these different souls have different thoughts, from which I conclude that they are really distinct according to that kind of distinction that I have called *numerical*.”⁷²

Régis does sometimes refer to himself, presumably his mind, as a substance,⁷³ which for theologico-political reasons it would be in his interest to do, but he really cannot sustain this position. For one thing, on his account substances do not begin or cease to be, whereas surely minds must at least *begin* to be. The theologico-political problem of the immortality of the soul is thus raised for Régis in terms that he cannot ignore, and he tries to argue for the soul’s immortality on the basis of the indefectibility of substance. But the substantial soul turns out to be, as it must for him, a universal soul: “as extension, which is the essential attribute of body is never corrupted, and it is only the modes making it this or that body that perish, we are forced also to recognize that thought, which is the essential attribute of mind cannot be corrupted. And it is only the modes determining it to be this or that soul, for example to be the soul of Peter, Paul, John, etc., which are destroyed.”⁷⁴

Régis is prepared, then, to maintain the merely modal status of minds even at the cost of supporting the theological and political heresy of denying individual immortality,⁷⁵ which he attempts to miti-

gate with a fideist skepticism. He begins the chapter entitled "that the soul is immortal" with the observation that apart from faith we can have no certainty on this question because the state of the soul after death depends on the will of God, which can be known only through experience (of which we have, and can have, none in this case) or revelation. So we are to believe that we are immortal because we are told on the best authority, revelation, that we are immortal. But what we are told to believe, it would seem, either is incomprehensible in the way the doctrine of the Trinity is, for example, or else results in the universal soul as explicated above. For in the next two chapters he argues that with death the soul loses its properties (such as sensation) that depend on the body and retains those that are independent (such as knowing itself). He concludes this line of argument by saying that death destroys everything but "what is substantial in man."⁷⁶

The upshot is that the difference between individual minds is a difference between modes. This conclusion is not some suggestion at the periphery of Régis's system; it is found at the very core of his account of Cartesianism. Régis begins his metaphysics with an assertion of his own existence based on consciousness [*conscience*] of its truth. Simple, inner awareness [*connaissance simple et intérieur*] rather than reasoning produces this assurance, although he also says that the natural light teaches him that quite apart from their truth or falsity, he could not have perceptions if he did not exist.⁷⁷ From this he draws a conclusion about his nature, namely, that he is a thought [*une Pensee*], by which he means "a fixed and permanent thought . . . that exists in itself and is the subject of different modes of thought," which are in flux and change from one moment to the next as we think of different things.⁷⁸ This sounds as if each mind were an individual substance. But not so, for his concern is with his *nature*. "Since the thought that constitutes my nature exists in itself, and since all my modes of thought exist only in this thought, I shall say, in order to mark this difference, that the thought constituting my nature is a *substance*, and that all my different modes of thought [*manières de penser*] are only *modes* [*modes*], *modifications*, *modes of being* [*façons d'estre*] or in general *properties* of that substance. Extending it to every other subject, I shall mean by the word *substance* a thing that exists in itself; and by the latter words, what can exist only in a subject."⁷⁹ This is to say that if Peter and Paul have the same nature they have the same substance. The difference between them cannot be a difference of substance; the difference can be only of mode.⁸⁰

That the difference between Peter and Paul can be only modal is all the more clear since Régis goes on to argue the Cartesian position

on the basis that *his* substance cannot change. "The essences of things are indivisible and nothing can be added to or taken away from them without destroying them."⁸¹ This is the position that Descartes takes in response to Gassendi's objection that the idea of God is not complete and innate, but is arrived at by a process of construction from experience: "[Gassendi appears] not to have attended to that common saying among Philosophers—that the essences of things are indivisible. For the idea represents the essence of the thing, and if something is added to it or subtracted from it, it is forthwith the idea of something else . . . after the idea of the true God is once conceived, although new perfections can be detected in it which had not previously been noticed, this does not cause any increase in that idea, but merely renders it more distinct and explicit, because they must have been contained in the very same idea, since it is assumed to have been true."⁸² Régis says that essences are indivisible in this sense else *his* substance would change. The substance that does not change is *his*, but also Paul's, essence. The difference between them can be, like the difference between Paul's own thoughts, only a modal difference.

What, then, of my thesis, stated at the outset, that on the Cartesian line developed above, not only physical objects, but also minds differ in the way in which red and yellow differ? Whether minds and physical objects are individually *single* modes, or whether, as Régis seems more plausibly to construe them, they are individually *bundles* of modes, the difference between one mind and another, and between one physical object and another, will be purely conceptual—it depends on our thought. This difference will thus have, on one standard use of the term, the status of being *unreal*. Minds are modes of one substance, from which *we* distinguish them; physical objects are modes of another substance, from which *we* distinguish them. The difference between the two substances, however, will be—as the definition of 'substance' indicates—*real*, for they can exist apart from each other.⁸³ As a result, the original statement of my thesis is ambiguous. I meant the original statement to be an initial indication that numerical difference would be a function of the difference between qualities. We now see that there are two kinds of such qualitative difference: that between two essences, which is real, and that between their instances, which is unreal. The difference between red and yellow can be taken, as it is commonsensically perhaps, to be real; or it may be taken, as it was by these Cartesians, to be unreal. In any event, however, these are the two sorts of Cartesian numerical difference or individuation.

1. What this means is that in the end my account of Cartesian individuation depends on the Cartesian answer to Porphyry's question about universals. Except for some elliptical comments along the way, however, I ignore this question here.

2. "Descartes's Idealism," in *Philosophy and Culture*, Proceedings of the XVII World Congress of Philosophy (Montreal: Editions Montmorency, 1988), 4:53-6.

3. *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. C. Adam and P. Tannery (Paris: J. Vrin, 1973) (hereafter *AT*), 7:31; *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. E. S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931) (hereafter *HR*), 1:155.

4. Consider the Synopsis of the *Meditations*: "all substances generally—that is to say all things which cannot exist without being created by God—are in their nature incorruptible, . . . and can never cease to exist unless God, in denying to them His concurrence, reduce them to nought; . . . body, regarded generally, is a substance, which is the reason why it also cannot perish, but . . . the human body, inasmuch as it differs from other bodies, is composed only of a certain configuration of members and of other similar accidents, while the human mind is not similarly composed of any accidents, but is a pure substance. For although all the accidents of mind be changed, . . . it does not emerge from these changes another mind: the human body on the other hand becomes a different thing from the sole fact that the figure or form of [certain—*quarundam*] of its portions is found to have changed" (*AT* 7:14; *HR* 1:141). More needs to be said about his text, but I take it to be sufficient for the *prima facie* plausibility of the above.

5. See especially Malebranche, who connects the issues of mechanism, causal explanations and the integrity of living things. See *Nicolas Malebranche: The Search after Truth*, trans. T. M. Lennon and P. J. Olscamp, *Elucidations of The Search after Truth*, trans. T. M. Lennon, *Philosophical Commentary*, T. M. Lennon (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980), *Elucidations* 15; pp. 661ff. The mechanistic undoing of teleology was complicated by a theological constraint on the analysis of humans. At a remarkably early date (1311-12) the Council of Vienne condemned (*reprobamus*) as "erroneous and inimical to the Catholic faith [the view that] the substance of the rational or intellectual soul is not truly and of itself [per se] the form of the human body . . . anyone asserting, defending, or assuming that it is not should be regarded as a heretic" (H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum*, 32d ed. [Barcelona: Herder, 1963], p. 284). Thus, although rejecting hylomorphism in all other contexts, Descartes (e.g., *AT* 3:503), Malebranche (*Elucidations* 8:582), and other Cartesians claimed that the soul is the substantial form of the body. Since for them the natural state of the soul was separate from the body, the individuation of souls posed a problem

not faced by Aquinas, for whom the soul's natural state is to be individuated by matter. I ignore this complication here.

6. *Categories* 5; 2all. For the problems generated by the failure of Descartes's Latin to disambiguate substance as qualified by definite and indefinite articles, and for much else of interest on these topics, see G. Rodis-Lewis, *L'individualité selon Descartes* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1950), Chapter 2.

7. See Newton's *De gravitatione et aequipondio fluidorum*, in *The Unpublished . . . Papers*, ed. A. R. and M. B. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp. 132–33.

8. *Système de philosophie* (Lyon: 1690), p. 279. This work is discussed *in extenso* below. Except where indicated otherwise, all translations are my own.

9. 'Being' is another term that, like 'substance', 'mind', and 'body', deserves careful attention in this context. Régis and Jacques Rohault both define it as "that which exists, in whatever manner it exists" (Régis, *Système* [here and below: vol. 1], p. 69; Rohault, *Traité de physique* [Paris, 1671], part 4, chap. 4, par. 2). For the term 'body', see Régis, *Système*, p. 76: "by this word *body* I mean only an extension in length, breadth, and depth that exists in itself."

10. For Malebranche, an 'idea' that was a modification of the mind could represent to the mind nothing beyond the mind itself. Thus *Oeuvres complètes de Malebranche*, ed. A. Robinet, 20 vols. (Paris: J. Vrin, 1958–70) (hereafter *OC*), 6:55–56: "To perceive [*voir*] a sensible object—the sun, a tree, a house, etc.—two things are necessary: the modality of color, for Arnauld agrees that color is a modification of the soul; and a pure idea, *viz.*, the idea of extension, or intelligible extension. For when we have a lively sensation of light attached or related to an intelligible circle removed from a certain intelligible space made perceptible by different colors, we see the sun, not as it is, but as we see it . . . all our perceptions are representative modalities. I agree that no ideas are necessary to represent perceptions. . . . But I deny that, without my *idea*, there can be any *perception* that represents to the mind a being distant from it. It is that alone which is in question." Thus, for Arnauld the representation resulted from one modification of the mind (color) individuating another (extension); for Malebranche it resulted from a modification of the mind color individuating intelligible extension in God's mind.

11. See Jorge J. E. Gracia, *Individuality: An Essay on the Foundations of Metaphysics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 21.

12. I have given a more extended account of Malebranche's effort to solve this problem elsewhere in the context of his idealism in my *Battle of the Gods and Giants: The Legacies of Descartes and Gassendi: 1655–1715* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), chapter 4, section 14.

13. I sketch here Malebranche's views on the individuation only of material things. Nonetheless, it is worth drawing attention to Bouillier, who cites a text from Malebranche's *Meditations*: "I feel led to believe that my substance is

external, that I am a part of the Divine Being, and that all my various thoughts are only particular modifications of universal Reason" (*OC* 10:102). Bouillier points out that Malebranche rejects the view in no uncertain terms, but remarks, "one senses that it obsesses him, and seduces him as it were despite himself" (*Histoire de la philosophie cartésienne*, 3d ed. [Paris, 1868], 2:61). This is the slide toward Spinozism, which Malebranche also struggled with in accounting for the individuation of material things, as I show briefly below.

14. One way to conceptualize this dual relation of containment had by every extended substance is that if it did not obtain, there would be holes in space, which is effectively the conclusion that Cordemoy *accepted* in arguing an ontology of atoms and the void. See below.

15. To Dourtout de Mairan, 5 December 1713; *OC* 19:865. Thus, any Spinozist interpretation such as the above dialectic must be taken as rational reconstruction and not simply attributed to Malebranche, as perhaps the following is. "Every object that cannot be conceived as standing alone depends upon another and is therefore 'a manner of being, or a modification of substance'. Only two created substances fulfill this definition of a substance: mind, and matter . . . particular bodies are not substances, but 'modifications' or 'manners of being' of extension, body in general. Likewise, . . . thought alone is substantial. . . . Thus, although retaining much of the traditional definition of substance as being that subsists in itself, Malebranche abandoned the concept of particular substances that stand alone as ontological subjects" (Michael E. Hobart, *Science and Religion in the Thought of Nicholas Malebranche* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982], pp. 96–97).

16. To Mairan, 12 June 1714; *OC* 19:886. Cf. Rodis-Lewis, *L'individualité*, p. 51.

17. Gérald de Cordemoy (1626–84) was a practicing lawyer who also frequented the leading *salons*, *conférences*, and *académies* of the period. He was known as a Cartesian and Baillet places him among those attending the Descartes funeral jamboree of 29 June 1667. The fine modern edition of his works at last makes his thought accessible; see it also for further bibliobiographical data (*Oeuvres philosophiques*, ed. P. Clair and F. Girbal [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968]).

18. *Oeuvres*, p. 95.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 96. The failure to distinguish between bodies and matter, according to Cordemoy, leads to the mistaken view that all extension is divisible, indeed infinitely so. No individual body is capable of affecting our sense organs; hence it cannot be perceived; since no individual body is perceptible, the conjunction that results in matter cannot be perceived, only the resultant matter. "Because all the extension we perceive is thus divisible, we so join the notion of what is extended to the notion of what is divisible that we believe all that is extended is divisible" (*ibid.*, p. 97).

20. *Ibid.*, p. 98. For more on the historical significance of the modal qualification 'to be able to be extended,' see the editor's note 7, pp. 306-7. That Cordemoy says that individual substances are *able* to be extended, rather than that they *are* extended, underlines the metaphysical atomism he was espousing as opposed to the primarily physical atomism advocated by Gassendi, for example. For more on this topic, see my "Physical and Metaphysical Atomism: 1666-1682," in *An Intimate Relation*, ed. J. R. Brown and J. Mittelstrass (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989).

21. *Oeuvres*, pp. 103-4. Cf. Descartes, *Principles* 2:18.

22. "Lettre écrite à M. Clerselier touchant les nouveaux raisonnements pour les atomes et le vide contenus dans le livre du Discernement du corps et de l'âme." This letter exists only in ms.: Bibliothèque d'Epinal, ms. 143, 59. It is discussed by Joseph Prost, *Essai sur l'atomisme et l'occasionalisme dans la philosophie cartésienne* (Paris: H. Paulin, 1907), pp. 156ff.

23. "Lettre," cited by editors, *Oeuvres* note 12, p. 309 after Prost, in *ibid.*, p. 168.

24. *Système*, p. 286.

25. Robert Desgabets (1610-78) was a Benedictine priest in contact with various Cartesians. Aside from two opuscles on transubstantiation and blood transfusion, he published only the *Critique de la critique de la recherche de la vérité*. Until recently, his most important work has been in manuscript only, known through two secondary sources. Now we have his *Oeuvres philosophiques inédites*, in *Analecta Cartesiana* 2 (1983).

26. As, for example, on the crucial doctrine of the created eternal truths. On this point Desgabets and Malebranche agreed that Descartes had erred, but had contradictory assessments of his error. See Desgabets, *Supplément* p. 209 and *passim*; Malebranche, *Eclaircissements* 10, *OC* 3:127ff.

27. C'est "Descartes mesme qui se redresse luy mesme." Desgabets to N.-J. Poisson, 9 March 1677, in Malebranche, *OC* 18:127. For a great deal more on this aspect of Desgabets's thought, see J. Beaudé, "Cartésianisme et anti-cartésianisme de Desgabets," *Studia Cartesiana* 1 (1979): 1-24.

28. *Recherche*, *OC* 2:449. See F. Alquié's extensive treatment of this topic in *Le cartésianisme de Malebranche* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1974).

29. To Mersenne, 27 May 1630, *AT* 1:151ff.

30. To Mesland, 2 May 1644, *AT* 4:118.

31. See my "Descartes's Idealism."

32. To Mersenne, 15 April 1630, *AT* 1:145-46.

33. *Supplément*, part 1, sec. 4.

34. *Oeuvres*, pp. 209–10.

35. Whether, and in what sense, God is capable of annihilating anything is an issue with several interesting contexts for the Cartesians. One is Malebranche's analysis of motion and rest, and his changes in Descartes's rules for the communication of motion. See his *Search after Truth*, 6, 2, 9; *OC* 2:429ff.

36. *Oeuvres*, p. 210.

37. *Supplément* part 1, sec. 5 and *passim*.

38. *Epistles* 1. 2. 43.

39. *Oeuvres*, p. 237.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 27. I say an earlier work, but the chronology of Desgabets's works is problematic. The *Traité de l'indéfectibilité des créatures* was begun at least as early as 1654 and the *Supplément à la philosophie de M. Descartes* was completed in 1675; but this is not to say that the latter could not have been begun before the former, or the former completed after the latter. See Introduction to *Oeuvres*, xvi, xx.

41. Consider Malebranche, for example: "It is certain that nothingness or the false is not perceptible or intelligible. To see nothing is not to see; to think of nothing is not to think . . . nothingness is not perceptible. Properly speaking, this is the first principle of all our knowledge" (*Search*, 4:11:3; *OC* 2:98).

42. *Supplément*, part 2, chap. 5, sec. 3.

43. *Ibid.*, secs. 5–6.

44. The upshot is an ontological argument for everything that exists, at least for every substantial thing. What is conceivable exists and what exists is inconceivable except as existing: "all matter that is conceivable and possible being the same as that which actually exists according to Descartes, no matter can be thought of that does not actually possess outside the understanding everything perceived in it, it being ridiculous to say, on this view, that purely possible matter can be thought of" (*Oeuvres*, p. 233). For more on the connections among omnipotence, the eternal truths, possibility-actuality-necessity, intentionality, and the like, see my "The Cartesian Dialectic of Creation," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-century Philosophy*, ed. M. Ayers and D. Garber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, to appear).

45. *Supplément, Oeuvres*, p. 243.

46. *Supplément*, part 2, sec. 7; *Oeuvres*, p. 243. This is not an especially eccentric reading of the Cartesian notion of modal existence. In *Principles* 1, 60–62, Descartes tried to establish a kind of distinction that was neither a real distinction (capability of existence apart based on conceivability apart) nor merely a distinction of reason, which depends entirely on us. This *via media* is

the modal distinction, which Descartes seems to have modeled on Scotus's *distinctio formalis a parte rei*: we distinguish between items that cannot exist separately, but unlike the distinction between a thing and its definition (Scotus) or between substance and its duration (Descartes), there is some basis for the distinction in the thing itself. The tendency of later Cartesians, however, was to regard all distinctions that are not real as distinctions of reason. Régis provides an example of this (see below).

47. In the presumably earlier work, *Indefectibilité des créatures*, Desgabets resists this parallel between minds and things: "matter and spiritual substances [*sic*], that is, all the things in the world considered according to their substantial and created being, which is the foundation of their accidents and states, cannot be annihilated" (*Oeuvres*, p. 21).

48. *Oeuvres*, p. 244. See *Replies to Objections I*, AT 7:102; HR 2:10.

49. *Oeuvres*, p. 244.

50. Published in 1690, it was, according to Pierre Bayle, written some eighteen years earlier but had its publication delayed by political problems. Régis himself said: "I am not one of those falsely modest types who say that their works have been torn from their hands. I admit that in good faith that I have produced this work with the aim of publishing it and that I would have done so ten years ago had fortune or envy not been opposed to my intention" (*Système*, preface).

51. *Ibid.*

52. Bouillier cites Régis (1632-1707) as calling Desgabets one of the greatest metaphysicians of the century and supposes that Desgabets influenced Régis in his empiricist tendencies (*Histoire*, 1:531). With the Desgabets *Oeuvres* now available, many more of his views seem similarly traceable. For the account of their common doctrine of the creation of eternal truths, see my "Cartesian Dialectic of Creation," sec. 4.

53. *Système*, p. 101.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

55. Gassendi had resurrected the earlier notion of imaginary spaces and argues that they comprised a real being *suo modo* that is void of material extension (*Opera omnia* [Lyons, 1658] 1:183). Here Régis admits the notion, but characterizes it as the Cartesian *res extensa*.

56. Thus the criticism of Malebranche's disciple Lelevel, who claimed that Régis had confused ideas with the things of which they are ideas. Since, according to Lelevel, Régis incorrectly took matter to be the mind's immediate object, and since he also correctly saw that ideas are eternal, he was incorrectly led to regard matter as eternal. Given the confusion of matter with the idea of it, "one cannot avoid the excesses of Spinoza, who pretended that the substance

of the universe was not different from that of God and that all the changes occurring in bodies and minds were only different modifications of matter; or at least one says like Régis that substances have always been produced because one sees that it has always been and always will be" (*La vraie et la fausse métaphysique, ou l'on refute les sentimens de M. Régis sur cette affaire* [Rotterdam, 1694] p. 87). For an elaboration of the charge of Spinozism, and Régis's attempt to answer it, see my "Cartesian Dialectic of Creation," sec. 5. Except for an oblique reference through Hume below, I here ignore the difficult question of the individuation of God from creation.

57. *Système*, p. 280.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 282.

59. *La quantité indéterminée*. By this Régis means not indeterminate quantity, but quantity that is determined in some way or other, although not necessarily in a given way.

60. *Système*, p. 283.

61. One complication results from Régis's terminology. "Quantity is not distinct from body by a formal or modal distinction"—which suggests that individual bodies are not modes—"but by a distinction of reason," which is the distinction, however, "found between substance and exterior modes"—so individual bodies are modes after all. See *ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*, p. 101. Occasionally Régis seems to use 'substance' as a count noun with respect to himself. Thus, in giving the synthetic account of his position he argues that "substance is what exists in itself and is the subject of several modes. . . . I exist in myself and am the subject of doubt and certainty: therefore I am a substance" (*ibid.*, p. 96). But even this does not mean that Peter and Paul are not the same substance, and in the same synthetic account Régis goes on to say in arguing the existence of God that he has the idea only of two substances: the substance that thinks and the extended substance.

63. Régis says, "which form *part* of their essence," but I do not see what any other part could be.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

65. This is a crucial difference. For Hume would think that it enables him to avoid Spinoza's "hideous hypothesis." While minds and bodies may for Régis be bundles, the constituents of each are, *qua* essentially of the same kind, modes of a substance. Since there is no conceivable "specific difference" between object and impression, we are led to Spinozism according to Hume (*Treatise*, ed. Selby-Bigge, pp. 240ff.). I am grateful to W. Abbott for reminding me of this text.

66. *Ibid.*, pp. 36–37.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

68. *Système*, p. 116.

69. *Ibid.* Régis's modal distinction and distinction of reason, also discussed in this text, nominally do not differ from Descartes's distinctions.

70. This is the case Descartes discusses as follows: "As for the distinction whereby the mode of one substance is different from another substance, or from the mode of another substance, . . . it appears to me that we should call it real rather than modal; because we cannot clearly conceive these modes apart from the substances of which they are the modes and which are really distinct" (*Principles* 1, 61, in *HR* 1:244–45). Alas, one of the examples given by Descartes is contrary to the interpretation of Régis that I am proposing: "as the movement of one body is different from another body [*sic*] or from mind." If my reading of Régis is both correct and Cartesian, the movement of one body should be only modally distinct from another body. See note 71.

71. This is Descartes's second kind of *modal* distinction: "As to [this] kind of distinction, its characteristic is that we are able to recognize the one mode without the other and *vice versa*, but we can conceive neither the one nor the other without recognizing that both subsist in one common substance. If, for example, a stone is moved and along with that is square" (*Principles* 1, 61, in *HR* 1:244).

72. *Système*, p. 135.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 266–67.

75. The heresy, of course, is the moral heresy—asccribed to Hobbes and Spinoza in particular—which was thought to remove the ultimate sanction for all orderly existence. This was the main obstacle to the revival of Epicureanism by Gassendi and others in the period. See M. Osler, "Baptizing Epicurean atomism: Pierre Gassendi on the Immortality of the Soul," in *Religion, Science and Worldview*, ed. M. Osler and P. L. Farber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 163–83.

76. Louis de La Forge is another Cartesian who, in his *Traité de l'esprit de l'homme* (1666), took this line that led to a denial of personal immortality. For a discussion of the text in these terms, see R. A. Watson, *The Breakdown of Cartesian Metaphysics* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1987), pp. 175ff.

77. *Système*, p. 68.

78. *Ibid.*, pp. 70–71.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

80. "Everything that exists is either a substance or a mode" (ibid., p. 73).

81. Ibid., p. 74.

82. *Replies to Objections V*, in *HR 2:220–21*.

83. It follows from this that a mind and a physical object will, as modes of really different substances, differ really. This is the problematic case discussed in note 70. Perhaps the best way to construe this case is in terms of the Scotist *distinctio formalis a parte rei*. Without our thought there would be no distinction, but the distinction is not without a real basis.