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The Spatial Presence of Spirits among the Cartesians

JASPER REID*

I. INTRODUCTION

AS IS WELL KNOWN, the Cartesians believed that minds and bodies were really distinct substances, perhaps sometimes united to one another in some manner, but nevertheless each capable of existing in the absence of the other.¹ Material substances were defined in terms of extension, spiritual substances in terms of thought, and, at least according to the standard reading of Cartesianism, none of the properties of one could be ascribed to the other (aside, perhaps, from some of the most abstract, transcendental properties, such as existence itself and whatever goes along with it simply as such²). In particular, the modes of extension, such as size, shape, location and motion, could belong only to bodies, never to spirits. Now, most of this is clearly correct. Certainly, the Cartesians did insist that size and shape could not be ascribed, in any literal sense, to incorporeal substances. But where the situation is not quite as clear-cut is over the question of location or

¹The following abbreviations shall be used when referring to Descartes's texts:

- CSM René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vols. I–II, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- CSMK René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. III, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- AT René Descartes, *Oeuvres*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: J. Vrin, 1996).

In each case, citations will be by volume and page number.

²In *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, Descartes lists “existence, unity, duration and the like” as simple natures common to minds and bodies (rule 12) (CSM I, 45; AT X, 419). In a letter to Elisabeth of May 21, 1643, he lists “being, number, duration, etc.” as applying “to everything we can conceive” (CSMK 218; AT III, 665). In the *Principles of Philosophy*, he lists “substance, duration, order, number and any other items of this kind” as extending “to all classes of things” (CSM I, 208; AT VIII, 23). In the third *Meditation*, he lists “substance, duration, number and anything else of this kind” as elements in his idea of body that he could have borrowed from his idea of his mind (CSM II, 30; AT VII, 44).

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spatial presence, and it is this that will be the focus of the present article. (Whatever one decides about spatial presence, a consequence may or may not follow for motion. I will return to this point in note 56 below).

My study will take in both “the Cartesians” at large and Descartes himself. I will also separate the questions of the spatial presence of created minds on the one hand, and the spatial presence of God himself on the other. It should be acknowledged that the account that the Cartesians offered of the essence of God (in terms of infinite perfection) did differ from the account they gave of the essence of created minds (in terms of thought), so that, strictly speaking, they made him a third kind of substance, unlike both minds and bodies. Nevertheless, they insisted that he did at least fall on the incorporeal side of the basic corporeal/incorporeal division. Malebranche, for instance, claimed that, although scripture required us to think of God as a spirit, unassisted reason could not teach us this. But he added that what reason *could* teach us was that, if God was going to be found a place in the dualistic mind-body classification of things at all, it would certainly be as a mind rather than a body.³ Regardless of whether God was a mind, strictly speaking, or else some even higher form of substance, it nevertheless remained the case that, simply to the extent that he was not a body, the usual reading of Cartesian dualism would suggest that his actual substance should not be present in the spatial world, but should instead enjoy a transcendent subsistence in an utterly non-extended realm.

This reading of the Cartesians, according to which they did not believe that created minds and God were present in the spatial world, certainly has a long and venerable history, dating right back to some of their very first readers. Henry More, for instance, gave the name ‘nullibism’ (from the Latin for “nowhere”) to the theory that spiritual substances were not spatially present. He described Descartes as “the chief of the Nullibists,” and declared him to be the “first author” of this doctrine.⁴ In a similar vein, Pierre Bayle claimed:

Until Descartes, all our learned men, whether theologians or philosophers, had ascribed extension to spirits—an infinite one to God, and a finite one to angels and rational souls. It is true that they maintained that this extension is not material nor composed of parts and that spirits are completely in every part of space that they occupy [*toti in toto et toti in singulis partibus*]. . . . The Cartesians have overthrown all these doctrines. They say that spirits have no kind of extension, nor local presence.⁵

And this interpretation is still prevalent in our own time, especially outside of the more cautious and analytic historical literature. For instance, when philosophers of mind pick up Cartesian dualism (with a view to knocking it down again), this element regularly enters into their discussions. Thus, for instance, Gilbert Ryle makes it absolutely central to his statement of what he dubs the “official doctrine, which hails chiefly from Descartes,” that “bodies are in space . . . But minds are not in space.”⁶

³Nicolas Malebranche, *The Search after Truth*, ed. Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 250 [bk. 3, pt. 2, ch. 9].

⁴Henry More, *Manual of Metaphysics*, trans. Alexander Jacob (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1995), 1: 98 [*Enchiridion metaphysicum*, ch. 27, §2].

⁵Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*, trans. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991), 280–81 [“Simonides,” note F].

⁶Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson’s University Library, 1949), 11.

Now, it must certainly be acknowledged that such claims are not without support from the Cartesian writings. Indeed, it is not my contention that they are wholly incorrect either. But what I do contend is that this is a far more nuanced issue than has often been appreciated. This common, uncritical interpretation, whereby Cartesian incorporeal substances were to be entirely removed from the spatial world, is far too simplistic. It does contain elements of truth, to be sure, but it also involves certain distortions. Even in the more scholarly literature on Cartesianism as such, one can find any number of comments like this one from Cottingham: "It seems that the soul, being non-corporeal, cannot have a location in the normal sense of occupying space."⁷ As a matter of fact, this is quite correct—just as long as it is properly understood. But a great deal hangs on how the reader interprets ambiguous terms like 'location' and 'occupy' and, in the absence of clear definitions for such technical vocabulary, there is a grave danger of mis- or over-interpretation.

The same point holds for the term 'place'. One factor which has greatly contributed to the prevalence of this interpretation of Cartesianism lies in the fact that the Cartesians themselves were quite adamant that incorporeal substances could not be ascribed "places," and that "place" was a mode of extension which could belong to bodies alone. It is therefore important for us to examine this claim at the outset—for, as we shall see, it is potentially something of a red herring, from the point of view of the issue that really concerns us. The term 'place' had a precise technical meaning for the Cartesians, such that, when they denied "places" to spirits, this should not automatically be taken to mean that they were denying that those spirits were present in the spatial world.

The Cartesian definition of 'place' was actually two-fold. Following scholastic tradition, they drew a distinction between "external place" and "internal place." The external place of an object was defined in the traditional Aristotelian manner, simply as the innermost surrounding surface of whatever happened to contain the object. The internal place, meanwhile, was identified with the extension of the object itself, albeit only when this extension was conceived generically, as a certain kind of extension, defined by size, shape and situation, and therefore as something which could be successively occupied (or, perhaps more accurately, instantiated) by the particular extensions of a number of different objects. But these definitions were such as to entail that, whether one was interested in internal or external place, neither notion could be applied to anything that did not possess extension, in the strict sense of having really distinct parts outside parts. Therefore, according to the manner in which the Cartesians had defined 'body', neither of them could be applied to anything incorporeal. Neither a created mind nor God, therefore, could exist in a "place" (*locus* in Latin—hence, at least from an etymological point of view, we should indeed avoid saying that a Cartesian spirit could be "located" in the spatial world).⁸

⁷John Cottingham, *Descartes* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 120.

⁸See CSM I, 227–29; AT VIII, 45–49 [*Principles*, pt. 2, §§10–15]; Johann Clauberg, *Opera omnia* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1968), 2: 704–05 [*Exercitationes centum de cognitione dei & nostri*, ex. 66]; Louis de La Forge, *Treatise on the Human Mind*, trans. Desmond M. Clarke (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), 113–14 [ch. 12]; Antoine Le Grand, *An Entire Body of Philosophy*, trans.

When the Cartesians came to address this topic in their writings, one of the first observations they would often begin by making was that it was a common prejudice—deriving from Aristotle’s *Physics* (bk. 4, ch. 1, 208a30)—for philosophers to suppose that whatever existed had to exist *somewhere* and, conversely, that anything that was nowhere was nothing at all. They would point out that a spirit could exist without existing in a “place,” and they would occasionally even go so far as to declare that spirits did actually exist “nowhere.” Unsurprisingly, these remarks have commonly been read as indications that the Cartesians did not think that spirits had any manner of substantial presence in the spatial world at all. They could perhaps exercise their power therein, the human soul acting on the body to which it was united, God acting everywhere, and they might perhaps be ascribed a lesser form of presence on the basis of this, merely a “virtual” or “operational” presence. But the incorporeal substances that were performing these operations upon spatial things were still supposed to reside in an utterly non-spatial realm. However, when the Cartesians themselves came to elaborate on what they actually meant by these claims—that spirits were “nowhere” and did not have “places”—they would take care to explain that this was to be understood to mean simply that spirits possessed no extension, measurable in length, breadth, and depth.⁹ The point to appreciate is that, by the standards of the time, this was not enough to remove spiritual substances from the spatial world altogether, for there was another way in which a spirit might be understood as being present in a certain region of space—a way which did not require it to occupy a “place” by being three-dimensionally spread throughout it.

As the above-quoted passage from Bayle suggests, it was actually a very common view, among philosophers and theologians, up until the time of Descartes, that spiritual substances were indeed spatially present, but also that they were not spread out three-dimensionally, and hence could not be ascribed “places” in the twin Cartesian senses. This theory became established in the early centuries AD, in the writings of the neoplatonists and the fathers of the Christian church, and it became a standard opinion among the medieval schoolmen, not to mention the renaissance revivers of neoplatonism, and philosophers of other stripes to boot. The view was that a spiritual substance *had* to be spatially present, or else it simply would not be in a position to act upon bodies. This opinion arose out of a metaphysical extrapolation of the physical principle of “no action at a distance” (or, better, “no action without presence”). Just as it was almost universally felt that one body could not act upon another body except through contact, it was also felt in many

Richard Blome (London: Samuel Roycroft, 1694), 85a–b [bk. 1, pt. 3, ch. 7], 111b–13a [pt. 4, ch. 12]; Pierre Sylvain Régis, *Système de philosophie* (Paris: Denys Thierry, 1690), 1: 130–32 [bk. 1, pt. 2, ch. 8]; Jacques Rohault, *Rohault’s System of Natural Philosophy, illustrated with Samuel Clarke’s Notes*, trans. John Clarke (London: for J. Knapton, 1723), 1: 28 [pt. 1, ch. 8, §4]; Lambert van Velthuysen, *De initiis primae philosophiae* (Utrecht, 1662), 174–78 [“De ubi”].

⁹See Clauberger, *Opera omnia*, 2: 704–05 [*Exercitationes centum de cognitione dei & nostri*, ex. 66]; La Forge, *Treatise on the Human Mind*, 114–15 [ch. 12]; Le Grand, *An Entire Body of Philosophy*, 66a [bk. 1, pt. 2, ch. 9], 85a–b [pt. 3, ch. 7]; Régis, *Système de philosophie*, 1: 132 [bk. 1, pt. 2, ch. 8]. See also Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, *Logic, or the Art of Thinking*, trans. Jill Vance Buroker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 94 [pt. 2, ch. 7]; Antoine Arnauld, *Of True and False Ideas*, trans. Stephen Gaukroger (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 85–86 [ch. 8].

quarters that a spirit could not act upon a body either unless there was a genuine co-presence in that case too.¹⁰ At the same time, though, the scholastic and other supporters of this line of reasoning were still keen to preserve the immateriality of spirits. If these spirits were going to be spatially present, then their mode of presence would have to be very different from that of bodies. They had better not be extended in the sense of being spread out, partly here and partly there. Accordingly, the adherents of this view decided that a spiritual substance should be *wholly* present wherever it was present at all. This notion was captured in one of the classic slogans of scholasticism, also alluded to in the above Bayle quotation: a spirit would be “whole in the whole and whole in each part” of a certain body or region of space. A human soul would be present in the body it animated, at least for as long as it continued to do so; but, whereas the physical organs of the body were all distinct from another, it would be the *whole* of the soul that was present in the person’s head, and the whole of the soul that was simultaneously present in his foot. In this way, it was felt that the indivisibility (and hence the immortality) of the soul could be preserved. God, meanwhile, could act anywhere, and hence the divine substance would have to be present everywhere in the spatial world, not by being spread out through it, partly here and partly there, but instead by being wholly present at each and every point.¹¹

For just one noteworthy expression of such sentiments, consider the following from Saint Thomas Aquinas:

God is in all things; not, indeed, as part of their essence, nor as an accident; but as an agent is present to that upon which it works. For an agent must be joined to that wherein it acts immediately, and touch it by its power; hence it is proved in *Physic.* vii. that the thing moved and the mover must be joined together. . . . No action of an agent, however powerful it may be, acts at a distance, except through a medium. But it belongs to the great power of God that he acts immediately in all things. Hence nothing is distant from him, as if it could be without God in itself. . . . Hence, as the soul is whole in every part of the body, so is God whole in all things and in each one. . . . God is said to be in all things by essence, not indeed by the essence of the things themselves, as if he were of their essence; but by his own essence; because his substance is present to all things as the cause of their being.¹²

However, although this was a prevalent—even the predominant—view in the centuries leading up to the Cartesian era, it was not (*pace* More and Bayle) universally accepted. On the other side, John Duns Scotus, for one, maintained that the very

¹⁰For an extensive taxonomy of (mostly) scholastic attitudes to the “no action at a distance” principle, construed both physically and metaphysically, see the first part of Francis J. Kovach, “The Enduring Question of Action at a Distance in Saint Albert the Great,” in *Albert the Great: Commemorative Essays*, ed. Francis J. Kovach and Robert W. Shahan (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 1990), 161–235, at 161–71.

¹¹On this “whole in the whole, and whole in each part” doctrine (which Henry More dubbed “holenmerianism,” from the Greek for “whole in part”), see Edward Grant, *Much Ado About Nothing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 143, 222–25, 350 n. 127, 400 n. 239; Dennis Des Chene, *Life’s Form: Late Aristotelian Conceptions of the Soul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), ch. 10; Marleen Rozemond, “Descartes, Mind-Body Union, and Hologenmerism,” *Philosophical Topics* 31 (2003): 342–67; and Jasper Reid, “The Evolution of Henry More’s Theory of Divine Absolute Space,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 45 (2007): 79–102, at 88–100.

¹²Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, vol. 1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 2nd ed. (London: Burn Oates & Washbourne, 1920), 82–83, 85, 87 [pt. 1, qu. 8, arts. 1–3].

fact that spirits *could* act on spatial things without being present to them was itself a testament to their potency. Above all, God's omnipotence was manifested in the fact that his substance and essence did not need to be present anywhere, whether in part or in whole, in order to be able to act everywhere. His will was entirely sufficient by itself, and no further preconditions were required.¹³

So, when the Cartesians came along in the seventeenth century, there were these two competing theories on the table, and the question that faces us is: which of them did they actually prefer? *Both* of these viewpoints were entirely compatible with the Cartesian refusal to grant "places" to spirits, because neither of them granted spirits any extension in the strict "parts outside parts" sense of the term. But did the Cartesians think that, notwithstanding their lack of "places," spirits were nevertheless capable of being substantially present in the spatial world, by way of this "whole in each part" form of presence? Or did they prefer the Scotist view, whereby the fact that spirits could exercise their power upon spatial things in no way entailed that they themselves had to be spatially present? The usual reading of Cartesianism would seem to favor the latter interpretation. My own suggestion is that, although, as I have said, the situation is rather nuanced and there is certainly much support for that reading, there is also more reason to favor the former interpretation than has often been appreciated. We will begin by examining the case of the divine substance of God himself, before turning to that of created minds.

2. CARTESIAN VIEWS ON THE SPATIAL PRESENCE OF GOD

With regard to God's relation to the spatial world, there are certainly remarks here and there in the Cartesian literature which would seem to support a Scotist or "nullibist" reading. The Cartesians had no qualms about ascribing omnipresence ("immensity," "ubiquity") to the divine being; if nothing else, faith alone would dictate that God had to be characterized as omnipresent in *some* sense. But, in explicating what this omnipresence actually amounted to, they would often give the impression that his omnipresence was merely an operational one, wholly consisting in the fact that he could exercise his power everywhere, without any suggestion that a precondition on this operation should be the actual spatial presence of his own substance or essence. Thus, for instance, we find remarks like the following from Louis de La Forge: "The immensity of God is nothing but his omnipotence, by which he is present to all creatures in general because he creates them and conserves them; he is present to bodies, in particular, because he extends them and contains them, arranges, moves and stops them."¹⁴ Or this, from Spinoza (while he was wearing his Cartesian hat, laying out, more or less faithfully, what he had learned from Descartes's *Principles of Philosophy*):

¹³On Scotus's position, see Grant, *Much Ado About Nothing*, 146; and Michael Sylwanowicz, *Contingent Causality and the Foundations of Duns Scotus' Metaphysics* (London: E. J. Brill, 1996), 171–81. On Scotus in comparison with Aquinas and also Ockham, see Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 50–63.

¹⁴La Forge, *Treatise on the Human Mind*, 117 [ch. 12].

Though we say that God is everywhere, we do not thereby concede that God is extended, i.e. (by P2), corporeal. For being everywhere is related only to God's power and concurrence, by which he preserves all things.¹⁵

Immensity is only ascribed to God in a certain respect. For it does not pertain to God insofar as he is considered absolutely, as a most perfect being, but only insofar as he is considered as the first cause.¹⁶

Or, finally, from Antoine Le Grand: "When we say that *God* is *extended* through all the *World*, this is not to be understood of the *Extension of Substance*, but of the *Extension of Power*, so that the meaning only is, that *God* can exercise his *Power*, sometimes on a greater, and other times on a less part of *Matter*."¹⁷ In the light of such remarks, one can certainly see why the Cartesians were, and still are, generally read as if the only kind of spatial presence that they were willing to grant to God was an operational one, amounting to nothing over and above the fact that, by the exercise of his omnipotent power, he could create and act upon spatial things. It is true, of course, that the main ground for Saint Thomas's own insistence upon God's omnipresence was (as we saw) his activity in the spatial world. To that extent, these Cartesian statements do fall in line with the Thomistic position. But what we do not find in Saint Thomas is the slew of 'onlys' and 'nothing buts' that permeate these remarks. The Cartesians clearly seem to be siding with the Scotists, and against the Thomists and the bulk of scholastic opinion in general, in allowing *only* an operational presence to God. His omnipotence served to establish a bridge between his own realm and the spatial world, in such a manner that the fact that he was able to create and affect spatial things did not need to entail that he himself should be spatial.

On the other side of the coin, however, we can also find Cartesians who definitely did not take that course. Malebranche, for instance, adamantly resisted it. In his *Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion*, when the character of Aristes began to trot out this distinction between substantial and operational presence, the character of Theodore—representing Malebranche himself—literally cut him off in mid-sentence, to pour scorn on the distinction:

THEODORE. Is God not here, in your garden, in the sky, and is he not in his entirety everywhere He is? Would you dare deny that God is everywhere?

ARISTES. He is present by his operation. But . . .

THEODORE. How "by his operation"? What kind of reality is God's operation as distinguished and separated from his substance? By "God's operation" you do not mean the effect he produces, for the effect is not the action, but the end of the action. Apparently by "God's operation" you mean the act by which he operates.

¹⁵Baruch Spinoza, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 267–68 [*Descartes' Principles of Philosophy, Demonstrated in the Geometric Manner*, pt. 2, p. 2, schol.].

¹⁶Spinoza, *Collected Works*, 1: 319 ["Metaphysical Thoughts," pt. 2, ch. 3].

¹⁷Le Grand, *An Entire Body of Philosophy*, 96a [bk. 1, pt. 4, ch. 3]. See also 66b–67a [pt. 2, ch. 9] and 85b [pt. 3, ch. 7]. For further, comparable remarks in a couple of other Cartesian authors, see Régis, *Système de philosophie*, 1: 87 [bk. 1, pt. 1, ch. 7], 131 [pt. 2, ch. 8]; Gerauld de Cordemoy, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, ed. Pierre Clair and François Girbal (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 147 [*Six discours*, disc. 5]. See also Jean-François Battail, *L'Avocat philosophie: Gérauld de Cordemoy (1626–1684)* (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 134–35.

Now, if the act by which God produces or conserves this chair is here, surely God is here himself; and if he is here, he must be here completely and thus in all the other respects in which he operates.¹⁸

Malebranche quite plainly sided with Saint Thomas and the others (including, most significantly from Malebranche's own point of view, Saint Augustine) in feeling that it followed from God's operation on spatial things that his own substance and essence did indeed need to be spatially present. And since Malebranche certainly did not want to say that God was extended, and hence corporeal, he had better be *wholly* present wherever he was present at all: "God," he wrote, "is everything that he is wherever he is; and he is everywhere."¹⁹

At the same time, though, perhaps it would be wrong to place too much weight on this, or to read it as a reliable gauge of Cartesian opinion at large. Notwithstanding the fact that Malebranche was, and still is, often described as a "Cartesian"—and with good reason too—it nevertheless remains the case that he was too independently-minded a thinker simply to follow the herd, and the 'Cartesian' tag is not one that hangs terribly securely on him on every single issue. When Bayle observed that Malebranche was allying himself with the scholastic doctrine of the "whole in each part" substantial omnipresence of God, he commented: "It is hard to see how this can be squared with the principles of M. Descartes."²⁰ So let us instead return to the others we already considered—the more orthodox Cartesians like La Forge and Le Grand—who *appeared* to be following the Scotist line in saying that God was present only by power and not by substance at all. The surprising thing is that, when we take a second look at their works, we then begin to find comments like the following from La Forge: "Finally, when I say that he is present to all things by his omnipotence, I do not pretend to deny that he is also present by his essence and substance for they are all identical in God."²¹ Or, from Spinoza (still in Cartesian mode):

But it should be noted that when we say that his power is everywhere, we do not exclude his essence. For where his power is, there his essence is also (by IP17C). We exclude only corporeality.²²

Some claim that God's *Immensity* is threefold: immensity of essence, of power, and of presence; but that is foolish, for they seem to distinguish between God's essence and his power.

¹⁸Nicolas Malebranche, *Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion*, ed. Nicholas Jolley and David Scott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 133 [dial. 8, §5].

¹⁹Nicolas Malebranche, *Dialogue between a Christian Philosopher and a Chinese Philosopher*, trans. Dominick A. Iorio (Washington: University Press of America, 1980), 66; *Réponse à la troisième lettre de M. Arnauld*, in his *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. André Robinet (Paris: J. Vrin, 1958–78), 9: 954.

²⁰*Nouvelles de la république des lettres*, May 1685, article III. Here and elsewhere, any translations from non-English sources are my own.

²¹La Forge, *Treatise on the Human Mind*, 117 [ch. 12]. I have amended Clarke's published translation of this passage, which reads "I do not pretend to deny that he is not also present by his essence and substance." Not only does that awkward triple-negation ("I do *not* pretend to *deny* that he is *not*") fail to make much sense in the context, but it is not strictly true to the original French either (*ie ne pretens pas nier qu'il ne le soit . . .*). The negation is merely double: the thing that La Forge is not pretending to deny is that God *is* also present by his essence and substance; i.e., he is admitting that God is thus present.

²²Spinoza, *Collected Works*, 1: 268 [*Descartes' Principles of Philosophy, Demonstrated in the Geometric Manner*, pt. 2, p. 2, schol.].

But others have also asserted the same thing more openly, when they say that God is everywhere through his power, but not through his essence—as if the power of God were distinguished from all of his attributes, or his infinite essence. Nevertheless it cannot be anything else.²³

Or, again, when we take a second look at Le Grand—the same person whom we just saw insisting that, when we attribute omnipresence to God, “the meaning only is” that God can exercise his power on spatial things—we now find him insisting: “Neither can I assent to those who say, that *God* is present every where, not by his *Essence*, but by his *Power* only, by which they seem to divide his *Power*, from his *Essence* and other *Attributes*; whereas indeed all things that are in *God*, are one with his *Essence*.”²⁴ There does seem to be a stark contrast between these passages and those of the earlier group. Indeed, one of their earliest readers felt that there was a blatant inconsistency here. Henry More formed his view of the Cartesians as “nullibists” long before these works were published, but, when he finally came to read some of them, they did not shake him out of that impression. More did not fail to notice remarks like these. He quoted the above passage from La Forge, together with another from Lambert van Velthuysen, who had also explicitly stated that “wherever the power or operation of God is, there even is the nature of God, since God is a substance devoid of all composition.”²⁵ However, instead of revising his interpretation of the Cartesian position in the light of these open confessions of the substantial presence of God, More concluded that these authors were simply contradicting their own avowed principles. (Notwithstanding an earlier allegiance to certain Cartesian tenets in other areas, More had, by this time [1671], come to the conclusion that their entire approach was not only erroneous but theologically quite dangerous.²⁶ Consequently, it better suited his polemical purpose to cast doubt upon their philosophical acumen or integrity, rather than to concede that he had been misreading them all along, and that their actual position was not quite as far from his own as he had been suggesting.)

But these remarks were, in many cases, coming in precisely the same places in these authors’ works as the earlier remarks, sometimes even in consecutive sentences. The remarks of this second group, I contend, were not intended as retractions of the earlier ones: they were meant as elucidations of them. These authors would begin, just as Saint Thomas had done, by explaining that God needed to have an operational presence in the spatial world, and their wording (unlike that of Saint Thomas) would often give the impression that this was the full extent of his relation to space, and that his own substance and essence remained utterly non-spatial. But then they would promptly soften this claim by conceding that it did indeed follow from the fact that he was present by power that he should, after all, be present by substance or essence as well.²⁷

²³Spinoza, *Collected Works*, 1: 320–21 [“Metaphysical Thoughts,” pt. 2, ch. 3].

²⁴Le Grand, *An Entire Body of Philosophy*, 67a [bk. 1, pt. 2, ch. 9].

²⁵More, *Manual of Metaphysics*, 1: 101–03 [ch. 27, §6]. The Velthuysen passage that More quotes comes from Velthuysen, *De initiis primae philosophiae*, 178 [“De ubi”].

²⁶See Alan Gabbey, “Philosophia Cartesiana Triumphata: Henry More (1646–1671),” in *Problems of Cartesianism*, ed. Thomas M. Lennon, John M. Nicholas, and John W. Davis (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1982), 171–250.

²⁷It should be noted that the claim that God is omnipresent “by essence,” or that “his essence is omnipresent,” is not the same as the claim that God is essentially omnipresent. At the very least, the

As these remarks themselves make clear, what forced this conclusion onto the Cartesians was their doctrine of God's supreme simplicity. Although the divine attributes might be considered separately in our thoughts, within God himself they were one and the same, and each was identical with his entire essence and substance. This had been a commonplace within the schools, captured in the dictum that whatever is *in* God, is God. For instance, Saint Thomas himself wrote:

whatsoever is in God, is God, as was shown above. . . . God's action is not distinct from his power, for both are his divine essence; neither is his existence distinct from his essence. . . . Power is predicated of God not as something really distinct from his knowledge and will, but as differing from them logically.²⁸

And the Cartesians at large seem to have been entirely content to go along with such a notion. Thus, Antoine Le Grand would write:

Forasmuch as all the *Perfections* that are, or we can think of in *God*, are not only actually present in his *Nature*, and inseparably united with it; but are so intimately joyned, that the one is the other; yea, that one of them is all the rest, and All are most properly One in their *Essence*. . . . Wherefore whatsoever is in *God* is only distinguishable by reason.²⁹

Or, as Malebranche would observe (albeit in a different context): "The intelligible world is in God and is God himself, for what is in God is, substantially, all of God. It is not a modality, since there is no modality of the infinite, no nothingness in being, nor anything that limits infinite being."³⁰ And so it would seem that God could not be *merely* virtually present. When God exercised his power on a certain body, and the Cartesians accordingly allowed that he was present to that body in the weaker sense, by operation, they were forced to allow that he was present in the stronger sense too, by essence or substance, because these were just the same thing as that power whereby he was operating. Whatever distinctions of reason we might be inclined to draw between God's power, substance and essence, these purely epistemological considerations could have no bearing on the actual metaphysics of the case. Perhaps the Cartesians might sometimes have tried to brush this conclusion under the carpet, and to draw their readers' attention away from

latter is an ambiguous and potentially misleading way of putting the point. The Cartesians thought that, whatever form God's presence in the spatial world might have turned out to take, it was certainly going to be a relation that arose out of (or alternatively just consisted in) his voluntary agency in that world, not one that flowed necessarily from his own intrinsic nature. As Le Grand pointed out, God already existed before he created the spatial world at all, and he could not be truly called "omnipresent" until there was something there for him to be omnipresent in, any more than he could be truly called a "creator" until such time as he actually started doing some creating (*An Entire Body of Philosophy*, 66b, 67a, 86a). Therefore, when Le Grand allowed that God was omnipresent "by essence," he cannot have been claiming that God was essentially omnipresent, if that is understood to mean that he cannot be conceived to exist without being omnipresent. The idea is rather that every bit of the spatial world should be intimately permeated with divinity itself, and this latter view is the one that is at issue in the present article. I am concerned only with the relation that God bears to the spatial world while it is there for him to act in; just as, when I turn to the case of the human mind, I shall be concerned only with the relation that it bears to a body for the duration of their union.

²⁸Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 345–47 [pt. 1, qu. 25, art. 1].

²⁹Le Grand, *An Entire Body of Philosophy*, 64a–b [bk. 1, pt. 2, ch. 7].

³⁰Nicolas Malebranche, *Malebranche's First and Last Critics*, trans. Richard A. Watson and Marjorie Grene (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), 85 [Malebranche to Mairan, June 12, 1714].

it, for fear that, if they were too vocal about the fact that God was substantially omnipresent, a careless reader might come away with the mistaken impression that they were claiming that he was extended and hence, by their own standards, corporeal. They were certainly not saying that. But, when it came down to it, they *were* willing to declare explicitly that God was substantially present in the spatial world.

3. THE SPATIAL PRESENCE OF GOD IN THE DESCARTES-MORE CORRESPONDENCE

If I have so far focused on “the Cartesians,” it is because they tended to discuss this issue much more fully in their works than Descartes ever did in his. Descartes himself was acutely conscious of the risk of being either misunderstood by careless readers or misrepresented by malicious critics. A clear illustration of his reticence in opening up publicly about tricky issues appears in the context of his views on mind-body union. After Princess Elisabeth questioned him on this issue, he explained to her that he was firmly committed to two theses: first, that the soul was essentially a thinking thing, and second, that, being united to the body, it could interact with it. But he admitted that the presentation he had given in his published works had been decidedly one-sided:

About the second I have said hardly anything; I have tried only to make the first well understood. For my principal aim was to prove the distinction between the soul and the body, and to this end only the first was useful, and the second might have been harmful.³¹

In a letter to Regius, he elaborated further on this suppression of a full, public discussion of mind-body union:

[M]any more people make the mistake of thinking that the soul is not really distinct from the body than make the mistake of admitting their distinction and denying their substantial union, and in order to refute those who believe souls to be mortal it is more important to teach the distinctness of parts in a human being than to teach their union.³²

I suggest that the rhetorical situation surrounding the issue that currently concerns us is comparable with this one. There is, after all, a close link between the two issues. In either case, a careless or materialistically-inclined reader might think that a stress on the union of mind and body—or, alternatively, on the presence of spirits in the extended world—would tend to lend support to a materialistic reading of Descartes’s philosophy. When it came to setting out his theories concerning minds and God, Descartes’s principal goal was to stress their incorporeality, because it seemed to him that the greatest threat was coming from those who would tend to make them corporeal, and hence divisible, corruptible, and ultimately destructible. If certain other discussions—be they on the nature of the union of mind and body, or the relationship between spirits and space—had to be suppressed, lest they should muddy the waters and draw the reader’s thoughts away from that all-important incorporeality, then so be it. Accordingly, Descartes

³¹CSMK 218; AT III, 664–65 [Descartes to Elisabeth, May 21, 1643].

³²CSMK 209; AT III, 508 [Descartes to Regius, January 1642].

glossed over this issue throughout his published works. If we want to find out his real opinions, we need to turn to his correspondence, where, once he could be confident that he was addressing someone who was in no danger of thinking that spirits might be material, he was willing to open up a bit more fully about subtle metaphysical issues like this.

The place where the question of the spatial presence (or otherwise) of God is most fully discussed is in Descartes's correspondence with Henry More.³³ As I have noted, More read Descartes and his followers as if their official view was that spirits had no substantial presence in the spatial world; and he did not like that idea one little bit. In 1671, he would be attacking La Forge and Velthuysen for it; but already in 1648 he felt that had discovered such a doctrine by reading between the lines in Descartes's works, and he was criticizing Descartes for it directly.

In his first letter to Descartes, More argued in the traditional way that God needed to be spatially present, for otherwise he would not be capable of acting upon spatial things:

He is certainly omnipresent, and he intimately occupies both the entire mundane machine and each individual particle thereof. For how could he impress motion onto matter, as he once did, and as you claim he still does even now, unless he closely touched the matter of the universe, or at least had once touched it? Which he certainly could never have done, if he was not present everywhere, and occupied each individual place.³⁴

Descartes's initial reply did not tackle this argument head on; but, in his reply to More's second letter, Descartes trotted out the distinction between an operational and a substantial presence in the spatial world:

For my part, in God and angels and in our mind I understand there to be no extension of substance, but only extension of power. . . . You seem here to make God's infinity consist in his existing everywhere, which is an opinion I cannot agree with. I think that God is everywhere in virtue of his power; yet in virtue of his essence he has no relation to place at all.³⁵

To sum up, God was everywhere "in virtue of his power" and possessed "extension of power," and yet he had no relation to place "in virtue of his essence" and possessed "no extension of substance." So far, so good.

But then Descartes went and pulled the rug out from under himself. In the very next sentence, he announced that, as a matter of fact, there was no distinction between God's power and his essence: "But since in God there is no distinction between essence and power, I think it is better to argue in such cases about our own mind or about angels, which are more on the scale of our own perception, rather than to argue about God."³⁶ Just like his followers, Descartes was satisfied that not

³³On this particular discussion, see Dennis Des Chene, *Physiologia: Natural Philosophy in Late Aristotelian and Cartesian Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 387–90; Rozemond, "Descartes, Mind-Body Union, and Hologramism," 357–58; Reid, "The Evolution of Henry More's Theory of Divine Absolute Space," 91–94. On the correspondence more generally, see Gabbey, "Philosophia Cartesiana Triumphata: Henry More (1646–1671)," 190–98.

³⁴AT V, 238–39 [More to Descartes, December 11, 1648].

³⁵CSMK 372–73; AT V, 342–43 [Descartes to More, April 15, 1649].

³⁶Ibid.

even so much as a “modal distinction”—still less a “real distinction”—could be drawn amongst God’s various attributes, or between any one of these and the substance whose essence it expressed. The most that we could hope to achieve would be merely a “conceptual distinction” or “distinction of reason,” as we focused our intellectual attention on, for instance, God’s omnipotence without considering him in any of the other respects in which he was equally available for consideration.³⁷ Descartes made it clear that he understood the divine attributes in this way in a letter of 1645 or 1646 to an unknown recipient, explaining further that what he had in mind was a “distinction of reason *ratiocinatae*” as opposed to a “distinction of reason *ratiocinantis*”.³⁸ Now, according to scholastic jargon, the former sort of distinction of reason was one that would have *some* sort of grounding in the nature of the thing that was being conceived, whereas the latter would be *purely* the creature of the mind alone. However, even if a distinction of reason *ratiocinatae* did need some kind of objective foundation, the important thing to note is that this foundation did not need to subsist in the object *as a distinction* of any kind at all. The same contrast had been developed previously by Suárez, somewhat more fully than it ever was by Descartes himself. Suárez treated the case of the divine attributes in particular as being characterised by a distinction of reason *ratiocinatae*, and he explained the nature of the grounding of these attributes as follows: “we partition [God’s attributes] into concepts in line with the various effects of which that eminent virtue is the principle, or by analogy with various virtues which we find distinct in man, but which in a most eminent way are found united in the absolutely simple virtue of God.”³⁹ But there is still nothing here to undermine the real identity between God’s substance, essence and attributes. In itself, God’s omnipotence *just is* his substance and essence.

In the light of this, one can certainly understand why Descartes might have wished to change the subject, and to talk about angels or the human mind rather than God, because he was now on very shaky ground indeed. How, one might ask, can God possibly be related to space by his power, and not related to space by his essence, when his power *just is* his essence? This might not have been a strict, logical contradiction—and there is a possible way around it, which I will discuss below—but it does seem to be dangerously close to one. ‘So-and-so is spatially present’ must surely be, in the parlance of the logicians, an extensional context: changing the way that one chooses to describe the situation cannot change the reality of it. If something is present in the spatial world, then it is present in the spatial world, regardless of whether one opts to call this thing “power” or “essence.”

And so, in his third letter, More pressed Descartes again, now referring to the cases of both created and divine spirits together:

³⁷On “real,” “modal,” and “conceptual” distinctions in Descartes, see CSM I, 213–15; AT VIII, 28–30 [*Principles*, pt. I, §§60–62].

³⁸CSMK 280; AT IV, 349–50 [Descartes to ***, 1645 or 1646].

³⁹Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, VII.1.5, as quoted in Dan Kaufman, “Divine Simplicity and the Eternal Truths in Descartes,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 11 (2003): 553–79, at 568. On Descartes’s notion of a distinction of reason, besides this article of Kaufman’s, see Justin Skirry, “Descartes’s Conceptual Distinction and Its Ontological Import,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42 (2004): 121–44.

Frankly, I am surprised that you cannot grasp that the human mind, or an angel, is extended in such a manner, as if it implied a contradiction. I believe, indeed, that it would imply a contradiction for the power of the mind to be extended, when the mind itself is not extended at all. For the power of the mind is an intrinsic mode of the mind, and clearly not something distinct from the mind itself. And the same goes for God too: it made me equally astonished that, in your response to the penultimate instances you conceded that he was everywhere in virtue of power, but not in virtue of essence, as if the divine power, which is a mode of God, was situated outside God, for each real mode is always intimately united to the thing of which it is a mode. From which it is necessary that God is everywhere, if his power is everywhere.⁴⁰

Finally, in his third reply, Descartes surrendered, and made the concession that More had been hoping to elicit: "It is certain that God's essence must be present everywhere for his power to be able to manifest itself everywhere; but I deny that it is there in the manner of extended being, that is, in the way in which I just described an extended thing."⁴¹ Now, the latter point was one with which More himself was entirely happy to go along. Admittedly, he did repeatedly tell Descartes throughout this correspondence that, in his opinion, God was an "extended" being. But, as he gradually made clear, in saying this, he was using the term 'extension' in a way quite unlike that in which Descartes was using it. For More, the so-called "extension" that belonged to God was certainly not to be understood in terms of really distinct and impenetrable parts outside parts. Instead, More defined God's presence in the traditional scholastic manner, maintaining that the divine substance was wholly present at each and every point of the spatial world (while the human soul was whole in each part of its body).⁴² He had already explained this in print, but there is no reason to suppose that Descartes would have known this work before (or even after) More initiated their correspondence. One can certainly understand why Descartes might have been alarmed by More's suggestion that extension should be attributed to God. If, in the early stages of this correspondence, Descartes was a little reticent about opening up too freely about God's relation to the spatial world, one might well suspect that it could have been because he first wanted to sound More out, and to satisfy himself that More was neither claiming that God was a material being, nor that he was in any danger of inadvertently getting the wrong end of that particular stick from anything that Descartes himself might have said. But the fact was that More was every bit as keen as Descartes ever was to preserve the immateriality of God. Once Descartes had satisfied himself of this, he was finally prepared to state his case—or, perhaps more accurately, to grit his teeth and yield to the ultimate consequence of what he had

⁴⁰AT V, 379 [More to Descartes, July 23, 1649].

⁴¹CSMK 381; AT V, 403 [Descartes to More, August 1649].

⁴²More's views on spiritual presence/extension did change considerably over the subsequent course of his career. This was the position he called "holenmerianism" which, alongside "nullibism," would eventually find itself subjected to a vigorous critique, most fully in *Enchiridion metaphysicum* (1671). In that and other later works, More suggested that the kind of "extension" that pertained to spirits really did involve parts outside parts in some sense; although he also insisted that their immateriality could nevertheless be preserved, on the grounds that these "parts" were essentially inseparable from one another (and also penetrable). But, in the 1640s, More's conception of spiritual so-called "extension" was quite different, and it was drawn up in the very holenmerian terms that he would later be attacking. See Reid, "The Evolution of Henry More's Theory of Divine Absolute Space," for full discussion of this shift in More's position.

been saying. Even though God is not a corporeal being, with really distinct parts outside parts, he is nevertheless substantially present in the spatial world. He *has* to be spatially present, because he can exercise his power on spatial things, which he would not be able to do unless he himself were present to them. As Descartes was finally prepared to allow, God's entire essence and substance must be present along with the power whereby he acts, because his power *is* his essence and substance. To reiterate: "It is certain that God's essence must be present everywhere for his power to be able to manifest itself everywhere."

Thus, summing up the position we have reached in the divine case, it is true that the Cartesians did show some reluctance to embrace the doctrine of the substantial presence of God, and we can certainly find plenty of material in the Cartesian literature that would seem to support an interpretation under which they allowed him merely an operational presence and nothing beyond that. But a more careful inspection of their writings shows that, when they really thought it through, or when they were pressed on the issue, they did acknowledge the force of the argument for the conclusion that the very substance or essence of God should itself be present in the spatial world; and they were prepared, however begrudgingly, to state this conclusion in so many words. We shall have occasion below to examine a way in which, notwithstanding all that has been said so far, this conclusion might yet have been avoided. But, first, we will turn our attention away from the case of God, and look more closely at that of created minds. Did the Cartesians believe that a mind was substantially present in the body to which it was united, at least for the duration of that union? Or did they believe that this presence was merely an operational one?

4. THE SPATIAL PRESENCE OF CREATED MINDS

It does look as though an embodied mind should have at least an operational presence in the spatial world. The key component in the Cartesian notion of mind-body "union" was precisely that of a reciprocal interaction, such that movements in the body could be felt in the mind, and volitions in the mind could, in turn, move the body. There has been much debate in the secondary literature over the question of whether Descartes himself believed that mind-body union simply consisted in this interaction, or whether he thought that it was something prior to (and enabling) the interaction.⁴³ His followers, for their part, tended to be much less equivocal, generally coming down firmly in favor of the former opinion. Thus, for instance,

⁴³See especially Daisie Radner, "Descartes' Notion of the Union of Mind and Body," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 9 (1971): 159–70; Ruth Mattern, "Descartes's Correspondence with Elizabeth: Conceiving Both the Union and Distinction of Mind and Body," in *Descartes: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, ed. Michael Hooker (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 212–22; Paul Hoffman, "The Unity of Descartes's Man," *Philosophical Review* 95 (1986): 339–70; Tad M. Schmaltz, "Descartes and Malebranche on Mind and Mind-Body Union," *Philosophical Review* 101 (1992): 281–325; Marleen Rozemond, *Descartes's Dualism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), esp. ch. 6. Other secondary works tackling both this and some of the other issues currently under consideration include Margaret Dauber Wilson, *Descartes* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 204–20; Martial Gueroult, *Descartes' Philosophy Interpreted According to the Order of Reasons*, vol. 2, trans. Roger Ariew (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), chs. 27–28; Rozemond, "Descartes, Mind-Body Union, and Hologramism."

Régis: “The body and the spirit will be united when there are movements in the body which depend upon the thoughts of the spirit, and thoughts of the spirit which depend on the movements of the body, because it is precisely in this dependence that their union consists, as experience teaches us.”⁴⁴ Or Le Grand:

Perhaps it may be said, That the *Conjunction* of *Mind* and *Body* cannot consist in the relation which the *Actions* and *Passions* of both have to each other; because such a *Concourse* presupposes, that the *Mind* is already *United* to the *Body*. For the *Mind* must first be in the *Body*, before it can draw forth any *Operations* which depend upon the *Body*, and consequently *Union* precedes that *mutual dependency*.

I Answer, That there is no *Necessity* that the *Mind* should be first *United* to the *Body*, before it operate there, in regard its *Existence* precedes not *Action* in *Time*: So that it does not absolutely require to be joynd to the *Body*, before such time as it draws forth its *Operations*. Nay, if the Matter were well *Examin’d*, when as a *Spirit* is confin’d to no *Space*, and may only be in a place by its *Operations*: It cannot therefore be said, to be in the *Body*, but because it exercises there its *Operations* or *Cogitations* dependently on the *Body*. Which mutual *Correspondence* constitutes the *Reason* of the *Union*, which is between the *Mind* and *Body*.⁴⁵

Either way, though, what the Cartesians all agreed on was that mind-body union involved interaction, regardless of whether or not they believed that there was anything more to it than that alone. (For some of them, of course, this interaction was to be construed in occasionalist terms. This construal has some critically important consequences, and I will certainly be returning to it later on; but I will put it to one side just for the moment.) The natural question for us to ask is this: when one does allow a causal interaction between embodied minds and their bodies, will one not find oneself inexorably led towards the conclusion that such minds are spatially present wherever their bodies are, just as the activity of God in the world led to the conclusion that his own substance had to be spatially omnipresent? As the above passage from Le Grand makes clear, he was not prepared to go down that path. His own view was that a spirit “may only be in a place by its *Operations*,” and in fact this was part of the reason why he opted to reduce union to interaction. But how representative of Cartesian opinion at large was this? In particular, since many of Descartes’s own remarks do indeed seem to suggest that he believed that union was prior to interaction, might not he, at least, have been willing to grant a substantial presence to the embodied mind, even if some of his followers were not?

There are actually several passages which, on the face of it, would seem to suggest that Descartes *was* willing to grant a substantial presence to created spirits. Some of these suggestions, however, can be dismissed very swiftly indeed. Thus, for instance, it is true that Descartes claimed on occasion that it was permissible to consider embodied souls as being not only spatially present, but actually extended and even corporeal. But he also made it abundantly clear that he viewed such locutions as mere figures of speech to allude to the fact that, speaking more strictly, a mind “belonged” to a body, or could “affect” a body, or was “united” to it.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Régis, *Système de philosophie*, I: 119 [bk. I, pt. 2, ch. 3].

⁴⁵Le Grand, *An Entire Body of Philosophy*, 325b–326a [bk. I, pt. 9, ch. 3].

⁴⁶CSMK 190; AT III, 424 [Descartes to Hyperaspistes, August 1641]; CSMK 228; AT III, 694 [Descartes to Elisabeth, June 28, 1643]; CSMK 358; AT V, 223 [Descartes for Arnauld, July 29, 1648].

Another suggestion, which crops up here and there in Descartes's discussions of mind-body union, warrants a little more attention. Descartes felt that an analogy with the scholastic "real quality" of gravity or heaviness might help to illuminate the status of the mind in relation to the body to which it was united. According to the scholastic theory—a theory that Descartes himself rejected—heaviness was, on the one hand, supposed to be "scattered throughout the whole body that is heavy," but, on the other hand, not ascribed the same sort of extension as that "which constitutes the nature of body."⁴⁷ Corporeal extension, as Descartes explained in the Sixth Replies, excluded the interpenetration of its parts, which was not the case for the sort of extension that was attributed to this (spurious) quality of heaviness. In the same way, now turning to its analogue, he told Elisabeth that she should feel free to attribute matter and extension to an embodied soul, just as long as she understood that "the extension of this matter is of a different nature from the extension of the thought, because the former has a determinate location, such that it thereby excludes all other bodily extension, which is not the case with the latter."⁴⁸ Similarly, he told Hyperaspistes that the "mind is co-extensive with an extended body even though it has itself no real extension in the sense of occupying a place and excluding other things from it. How this can be, I explained above by the illustration of heaviness conceived as a real quality."⁴⁹ Gravity, as Descartes proceeded to explain in the Sixth Replies, could be contracted or expanded into a smaller or a larger space without losing or gaining anything of itself, and it could even be contracted to a mathematical point. Indeed, in this same passage, Descartes went so far as to appeal to the traditional scholastic formula, to describe the nature of a spirit's presence in the body to which it was united. "This is exactly the way in which I now understand the mind to be coextensive with the body—the whole mind in the whole body and the whole mind in any one of its parts."⁵⁰

Thus, as a matter of fact, a lot of what Descartes had to say on this issue makes it look as though he did, after all, incline to the view that the mind was substantially present in its body, notwithstanding the incorporeality of its mode of presence. Should we take these remarks to demonstrate an allegiance to the scholastic theory of spiritual presence? When Descartes said that the mind was "whole in the whole and whole in each part" of the body, was this to be understood in terms of a real substantial presence?

Ultimately, the verdict seems at best to be "not proven," with the balance of probabilities tending against such a reading. The claim, just quoted, that the mind is coextensive with the body is not sufficient to entail *substantial* presence, for it is equally compatible with a theory of merely operational presence; there is no explicit qualification, one way or the other. Equally, the mere fact that Descartes chose to employ the "whole in the whole and whole in each part" formula did not entail any commitment to the scholastic theory that the whole of the *substance* of

See also La Forge, *Treatise on the Human Mind*, 114 [ch. 12]; Le Grand, *An Entire Body of Philosophy*, 66b [bk. 1, pt. 2, ch. 9], 85b–86a [pt. 3, ch. 7], 325b–26a [pt. 9, ch. 3].

⁴⁷CSM II, 298; AT VII, 442 [Sixth Replies, §10].

⁴⁸CSMK 228; AT III, 694 [Descartes to Elisabeth, June 28, 1643].

⁴⁹CSMK 197; AT III, 434 [Descartes to Hyperaspistes, August 1641].

⁵⁰CSM II, 298; AT VII, 442 [Sixth Replies, §10].

the soul should be present in each part of the body. And, indeed, the sentence immediately preceding this one gives a clue as to how Descartes himself intended it to be understood. There, he observed “that gravity, while remaining coextensive with the heavy body, could exercise all its force in any one part of the body.”⁵¹ For Descartes, it would seem that the presence of either gravity (according to the theory which, let us remember, Descartes did not actually accept) or alternatively the mind in a body should, first and foremost, be understood in terms of its capacity to exercise the whole of its *force* in the whole body, or in any one of its parts. Thus, when Descartes suggested that the mind was “coextensive” with the body, this would, after all, appear to have amounted only to an operational presence, not to a substantial one. At any rate, I have not located any texts that resist such a reading.

We do find that same “whole in the whole and whole in each part” formula cropping up here and there in the writings of the subsequent Cartesians; but, again, the manner in which they employed it suggests that they did not think it was a matter of substantial presence either. Thus, for instance, Le Grand was quite happy to align himself with “that common saying among *Philosophers, That the Soul is whole in the whole Body, and whole in each part thereof,*” but he explained that all he meant by this was that, if one part of the body to which the soul was united happened to be cut off, the soul would not thereby lose any quantity, but the whole of the soul would remain united to the remaining portion of the body. Such “union” was understood all the while merely in terms of a reciprocal interaction between soul and body.⁵² Or, again, having just explained that the spatial presence of a soul was to be understood in terms of its operational union with a body, Cordemoy wrote that “it is correct to say that a spirit is whole in the whole body it animates, and whole in each part, since the whole can follow its volitions, or give it sensations, and each part of this whole serves to support that which makes it fit to do this.”⁵³ Again, notwithstanding the fact that he was employing the traditional formula of spiritual presence, Cordemoy was using it to describe a union based entirely upon the mere fact of interaction between the mind and the body. Thus, although Descartes, Le Grand, and Cordemoy might have been content to write in the language of presence and coextensiveness, and to borrow the scholastic formula for their own purposes, we have no solid grounds for reading anything more than an operational presence into such remarks.

Now, it should be acknowledged this sort of ambiguity does cut both ways. Just as the occasional, apparent suggestions of a substantial presence for created minds can equally well be read in terms of a merely operational one, it is also true that many of the passages in the Cartesian literature which ostensibly *deny* a substantial presence can still be read as if they are claiming no more than that those substances do not possess “places,” and hence parts outside parts. This latter claim, as we saw,

⁵¹Ibid. What Descartes had in mind in the case of gravity was the fact that, although each part of a body would indeed have a certain weight of its own, the body would nevertheless behave physically as if all of that weight was gathered together at the centre of gravity.

⁵²Le Grand, *An Entire Body of Philosophy*, 333a–b [bk. 1, pt. 9, ch. 7].

⁵³Cordemoy, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, 147 [*Six discours*, disc. 5]. For yet another instance of this “whole in each part” formula in the Cartesian literature, see Velthuysen, *De initiis primae philosophiae*, 182 [“De ubi”].

is entirely compatible with minds nevertheless maintaining a substantial presence in the spatial world. But there are a few more clear-cut passages here and there in the literature which refer explicitly to the distinction between substantial and operational presence, and which do make it clear that only the former should be ascribed to created spirits. We have already seen one such passage, with Le Grand's comment that a human mind "may only be in a place by its *Operations*." To this we can add the following comment on angels: "Forasmuch therefore as *Angels* do take up no places, and cannot be said with respect to their *Substance* to be *Here*, *There*, or *Every Where*; it remains that their *presence* is only determinable by their *Operations*. And this seems to follow from the Nature of an *Intellectual Creature*."⁵⁴ And, responding to the charge that he had not left open any sense at all in which the ordinary opinion that the human mind was in a place could be preserved, Clauberg would write:

Although the soul does not admit of any physical place or motion from its own nature, it is nevertheless possible to say that the mind is there where the body that it governs, and by whose motion it is affected, is. This presence is not local presence or the presence of its own essence, but only that of its active and passive powers.⁵⁵

One might also recall Descartes's own rhetorical maneuver in his correspondence with More. When More elicited from Descartes the crucial concession that "in God there is no distinction between essence and power," Descartes's immediate response was not merely to attempt to divert the attention away from that bothersome case, but actually to shift the focus *towards* the cases of angels and the human mind. To the extent that he still hoped to maintain a theory of presence of power without presence of substance or essence, he clearly felt that he was going to be on far safer ground with created spirits. Moreover, in his various enumerations of those completely general properties that applied to both minds and bodies (see note 2), the fact that Descartes never mentioned anything to do with spatial presence at all should be considered in the light of the fact that he *did* consistently include its natural analogue, duration; the omission of the former can surely have been no accident.

All in all, when it comes to created spirits, the standard reading of Cartesianism does seem to be basically correct. In the divine case, we find several Cartesians, Descartes himself among them, quite explicitly admitting that God needed to be ascribed a substantial presence in the spatial world; but we find no comparable, explicit concessions in the case of the created spirits, and the general thrust of their remarks in that case does seem to weigh against such a reading.⁵⁶ And yet,

⁵⁴Le Grand, *An Entire Body of Philosophy*, 85b [bk. 1, pt. 3, ch. 7].

⁵⁵Clauberg, *Opera omnia*, 1: 222 [*Corporis et animae in homine junctio*, ch. 17].

⁵⁶We now have enough in place to allow us to return to the question I postponed at the start of the present article, concerning whether motion might legitimately be ascribed to a Cartesian spirit. It all depends on what one means by 'motion'. If 'motion' is understood as a change of place, in the technical Cartesian sense(s) of 'place', then it will not be possible to ascribe it to anything that lacks a place; and, as we saw, even if spirits were to turn out to be substantially present in the spatial world, the Cartesians would still deny that they occupied places therein. If 'motion' is instead understood as a change of place in a looser sense of that term, then it will turn out that (i) God cannot move because he is always present everywhere; that (ii) in one sense, created spirits cannot move either, because they are never (*qua* substances) present anywhere, though (iii) in a different sense, they can move,

once we accept that the Cartesians did, as a matter of fact, reject the view that created spirits were substantially present in the spatial world, we can then ask whether they had any real right to do so. If this really was their view, then perhaps they were actually guilty of inconsistency.

5. PRESENCE BY POWER WITHOUT PRESENCE OF POWER: POIRET

We have already seen Henry More's opinion on the presence of created spirits, for he drew no distinction between the created and divine cases with regard to the mode of their presence, but only with regard to the extensiveness thereof. More simply followed a traditional line of argument: (i) minds exercise their power upon spatial things; (ii) their power must therefore be spatially present where those things are, for otherwise it would not be (either figuratively or literally) in a position thus to be exercised; (iii) but, as More expressed it in his letter to Descartes, quoted above, "the power of the mind is an intrinsic mode of the mind, and clearly not something distinct from the mind itself"; (iv) therefore, wherever the power is present, the mind itself must also be present. The argument was long-established; it followed the same overall form as the argument concerning the divine presence, and, on the face of it, it seemed to be just as strong as that one had been. If one of these arguments—even by the admission of several Cartesians—was ultimately irresistible, then why might the other not be successful too?

There are a number of places where the argument might be attacked. If they could be made to work, some of the objections would seem to succeed against both forms of the argument, both for created spirits and for God. Others would seem to establish a separation between the two cases.

One might begin by observing that, whereas the conclusion of substantial presence in the divine case had rested on the supreme simplicity of God, whereby his power simply *is* his substance, the same level of simplicity is not to be found in a created mind. True enough, a mind is an indivisible unit involving no real distinctions of parts; but there are, nevertheless, *modal* distinctions within it, as there are not within God. In particular, the mind's power might be construed as a mode of its overall substance, and it could, to that extent, be distinguished from that substance. Here, then, we do have a difference between the divine and the created cases. Unfortunately, this fact is scarcely likely to assist in thwarting the above argument, if that should be the desired objective. The distinction is the wrong way round for that. To say, with More, that power is a mode of the mind, and that a modal distinction can be drawn between them, means that the mind's substance can be understood, and could in principle actually exist, without the power. But what we would need to defeat the argument would instead be for the power to

because they are (operationally) present where their bodies are. Finally, if one understands 'motion' to mean not simply a translation (as in orthodox Cartesianism), but rather the motive force that drives such a translation, the result will probably be that motion cannot pertain in either case. But, given the dizzying breadth of the array of different theories in this area, of "*gravity, reaction, vis inertiae, vis insita, vis impressa, vis mortua, vis viva, impetus, momentum, sollicitatio, conatus*, and divers others such-like expressions" (this list from George Berkeley's *Alciphron*, dial. 7, §6), the situation does become considerably more complex—too complex for us to get into here.

exist and to be exercised in the absence of the substance, which is precisely what the notion of a “modal distinction” rules out.

A second possible way of disrupting the argument—and a considerably more promising way at that—would be to attack it at step (ii). I have implicitly been presenting the notion of a spirit’s possessing an “operational presence,” or being present “by power,” as if this should involve the actual presence of the spirit’s operative power in a certain place—this power establishing a bridge across the formidable gulf between the spatial patient and the non-spatial agent. If one accepts that, then one does indeed seem to have started out on a slippery slope towards the conclusion that the spirit’s own substance must be present wherever it acts, on the grounds that the power cannot subsist without the substance whose power it is. But one might suggest that a better way to understand operational presence would be to take it to mean nothing over and above the fact that the *effects* of the spirit’s action are spatially present. On this way of looking at things, it will be possible, after all, for a power to be exercised where it does not actually exist. This notion would certainly have rankled most philosophers of the period, but it does not entail any actual contradiction (as it surely would if we were instead to say that a power could be exercised *even though* it did not exist). And, in fact, this alternative interpretation of operational presence would not only have given the Cartesians a way to preserve the non-spatiality of created minds, but would have had precisely the same result in the case of God himself.

Now, adopting this position would certainly commit one to a rejection of what I described as a “metaphysical extrapolation” of the physical principle of no action at a distance—the principle that had led the bulk of the scholastics to maintain that spirits did indeed need to be present to the objects upon which they acted. But it is worth observing that the Cartesians did not explicitly declare any actual commitment to that metaphysical principle. As is well known, they were very firmly committed to the *physical* principle that one *body* could not act upon another body except by impact. That principle was, indeed, at the very center of their mechanical physics. As Descartes himself wrote: “I admit I am not subtle enough to grasp how something can be acted upon by something else that is not present.”⁵⁷ But even if Descartes did not bother to qualify this statement, its context was an entirely physical one (concerning the lingering effect of a whip upon a top that continued to spin after the whip was withdrawn). The issue of whether this physical principle might or might not be extended to a metaphysical domain simply did not get addressed head on, and so we should guard against simply assuming that the Cartesians would have been prepared to allow it to be applied to the action of spirits on bodies.⁵⁸

⁵⁷CSMK 193; AT III, 428 [Descartes to Hyperaspistes, August 1641].

⁵⁸This issue *might* have found itself addressed in the unwritten sixth part of Descartes’s *Principles of Philosophy*. In section 40 of the second part, after setting out his third law of nature, Descartes notes that it “covers all changes which are themselves corporeal. I am not here inquiring into the existence or nature of any power to move bodies which may be possessed by human minds, or the minds of angels,” and he refers ahead to this projected sixth part. Louis Loeb reads this (along with another passage from *The World*) as bearing on the issue of action at a distance, and he uses this remark as support for the claim that “Descartes specifically exempts mind-body interactions” from the principle that all interactions take place by contact. But, quite aside from the fact that Descartes’s remark does

We can actually find one philosopher of the period—and an errant Cartesian at that—who did offer precisely this solution to the problem: Pierre Poiret. Poiret would subsequently shift away from any sympathy he might once have had for Cartesianism, and he would descend (or perhaps ascend) into a decidedly anti-philosophical form of mysticism. Nevertheless, in his early work, *Cogitationes rationales de deo, anima et malo* (1677), he was still working from a broadly Cartesian standpoint. At one point in this work, Poiret turned his attention to these debates regarding the spatial presence (or otherwise) of spirits, and of God in particular. In order to avoid the conclusion that the divine substance was spatially present, Poiret simply denied that even so much as the divine power was spatially present at all. When God produced something, the only thing that was spatially present was the *effect* of his power, while the power itself remained only in him.⁵⁹

Some thirty years on from their correspondence, Descartes's old sparring partner, Henry More, came across Poiret's book. He had since repeated his arguments for the substantial spatial presence of God and created spirits in his *Divine Dialogues* of 1668 and, preparing a new edition of that work in 1679, he added a scholium wherein he addressed Poiret's recent proposal. Needless to say, he did not like it:

These things are too subtil to admit of any Truth or Solidity. For although Divine Power belongs only to God, in an inherent Nature, if I may be allowed to say so; yet in the nature or manner of Presence it may be present in the Creature. And how the Operation can be separated or divided from the Power, no continued Medium intervening, I can no way conceive.⁶⁰

More could achieve little more than a standoff with Poiret on this point. More might not have been able to conceive how a power could be exercised where it did not exist, but Poiret found that he encountered no difficulty at all in getting his head around this concept, and neither of them had any real *argument* to combat the other's intuitions.

For our own purposes, though, the really important point that arises out of Poiret's discussion is his claim that his proposed solution to the problem was actually *not* generally endorsed by the Cartesians at large. He might have been content (at this time) to follow the others on most issues, but on this one, as far as he was concerned, he was stepping out on his own. In the course of his discussion, Poiret himself cited Descartes's letters to More, and also Louis de La Forge's *Treatise on the Human Mind*, both of which he unhesitatingly read as supporting the doctrine that God was indeed spatially present: power, essence, substance, and all. Indeed,

not positively exempt the mind from anything at all, but merely postpones the question for another time, this third law is concerned not with whether *all* interactions take place by contact anyway, but merely with what happens in those that do. Compare CSM I, 242 (AT VIII, 65) with Loeb's "Notes and Discussions" to Daisy Radner, "Is There a Problem of Cartesian Interaction?", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 23 (1985): 221–36, at 230 and n. 7.

⁵⁹Pierre Poiret, *Cogitationes rationales de deo, anima et malo*, ed. Marjolaine Chevallier, constituting vol. 3 of Pierre Bayle, *Oeuvres diverses, volumes supplémentaires* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1990), 151–55 [bk. 1, chs. 6–7]. See also the remainder of chs. 5–7, together with Bayle's commentary on these chapters in the same volume, 740–44 (also available in French translation by Elisabeth Labrousse in vol. 5.1 of the *Oeuvres diverses* [Olms, 1982], 21–24).

⁶⁰Henry More, *Divine Dialogues*, 2nd ed. (London: Joseph Downing, 1713), 532 [dial. 1, §33, scholium].

in his estimation, this was true not only of Descartes and La Forge, but of all the other Cartesians too. Unsurprisingly, More gleefully swooped on this:

Cartes allows the strength of my Argument in this, according to *Poirett's* Confession; who, he says, owns the Essence of God ought to be present every where, that his Power might exert it self there, but not in the manner of the thing extended, as if it were corporeal, as he, no doubt, means it. Besides he grants, that *Forgius*, in his Treatise *Of the Spirit of Man*, asserts God to be present in all things by his Omnipotence, Presence and Substance; . . . and that all those they call *Cartesians* do assert the same. I cannot therefore see any sufficient Cause alledged by *Poirett*, why he should relinquish such excellent Assertions.⁶¹

As we saw above, Descartes did indeed say precisely that in his correspondence with More, and La Forge also agreed that substantial presence needed to be attributed to God. Poiret was, at the very least, correct about these two. As for the others, although it would be wrong to place too much weight on the testimony of a single man, it is nevertheless instructive to note that someone who (a) was actively working on these issues during the period in question, and indeed, (b) was working within a broadly Cartesian framework, actually believed that *all* of the other Cartesians shared this opinion. It is still possible that some of the Cartesians might, in the backs of their minds, have had some sympathy for Poiret's idea of refusing to admit even so much as the power of God into the spatial world. But they did not show it in what they actually wrote about this subject. He was (as far as I am aware) the only one who made this move properly explicit in print. The others either explicitly went the other way and openly granted a substantial presence to God; or, failing that, they at least granted him an operational presence without making it explicit that this amounted to nothing more than the presence of his effects. And the latter point also applies in the case of the operations of the human mind on its body. Poiret aside, the Cartesians did not explicitly say that it was only the effects of such operations that were spatially present, as opposed to the operations themselves, and it would be unreasonably speculative to project such a theory onto them.

But, even if it is allowed that the predominant opinion among the Cartesians was that God did, after all, have to be substantially present in the spatial world, for the reasons we have examined, there was still a way open for them to resist the analogous conclusion for created minds—a different way from Poiret's, and one with an intimate connection to an ostensibly quite separate Cartesian theme. The basic argument for this conclusion is, to reiterate, that (i) minds exercise their power in the spatial world; (ii) their power has to be there, in order thus to be exercised there; but (iii) this power cannot be separated from the substance of which it is but a mode; and therefore, (iv) the minds themselves have to be there too, substance and all. Poiret attacked step (ii), but there was, in fact, an opportunity to defeat the argument before it even arrived at that point. What if minds did not act upon spatial things after all?

⁶¹More, *Divine Dialogues*, 533 [dial 1, §33, scholium]. The remarks that More cites are drawn, not quite verbatim but nevertheless accurately, from the source indicated above.

6. SPATIAL PRESENCE AND
OCCASIONALISM: MALEBRANCHE

Cartesian occasionalism has received a great deal of attention in the secondary literature in recent years, and, if this work has yielded any clear results, they are these two: first, that the situation is pretty complicated, with a wide variety of theories and different combinations of sub-theories endorsed by different Cartesians; and second, that there is no universal scholarly consensus about who actually endorsed what. The basic principle of occasionalism is that creatures are causally inefficacious and it is God alone who acts immediately on everything. But this basic principle can be developed a variety of different ways, and different Cartesian authors tended to mix and match. There were at least four forms of partial occasionalism on the table: (a) that bodies had no genuine power to affect other bodies; (b) that bodies had no power to affect minds; (c) that minds had no power to affect bodies; and (d) that minds had no power to affect minds (which, since telepathy was already ruled out on other grounds, would boil down to an impossibility of intra-mental causation). Some Cartesians accepted full-blown occasionalism, embracing all four branches of the doctrine. Some embraced only some of them. There might conceivably have been some who did not accept any at all.⁶²

But it should be clear that, for present purposes, we are only concerned with form (c). All that is needed for the argument for the spatial presence of thinking substances to get going is that minds should be able to act on bodies. If this is denied, then the argument will be defeated before it even begins, regardless of what may or may not be said about other kinds of causation in the created world. Another thing to note is that it might actually be possible to achieve the same result without a full commitment to occasionalism, even just in this one area. Steven Nadler has drawn up a useful distinction between what he calls "occasionalism" and "occasional causation." Whereas ordinary efficient causation means that an object A simply makes an effect C occur, occasional causation will take place when an object A acts as an occasion (in some manner which will need to be explained, but which will fall short of *bona fide* efficient causation) for another object B to produce the effect C by *its* own efficacious power. Occasionalism is simply a special case of this, where B happens to be God.⁶³ (The "occasioning" relation might be a

⁶²See especially Thomas M. Lennon, "Occasionalism and the Cartesian Metaphysic of Motion," in *New Essays in the History of Philosophy*, ed. Terence Penelhum and Roger A. Shiner (Guelph: Canadian Association for Publishing in Philosophy, 1975), 29–40; Daniel Garber, "Descartes and Occasionalism," in *Causation in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Steven Nadler (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 9–26; Steven Nadler, "The Occasionalism of Louis de la Forge," in *Causation in Early Modern Philosophy*, 57–73; Steven Nadler, "Descartes and Occasional Causation," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 2 (1994): 35–54; Steven Nadler, "Occasionalism and the Mind-Body Problem," in *Studies in Seventeenth-Century European Philosophy*, ed. M. A. Stewart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 75–95; Steven Nadler, "Louis de La Forge and the Development of Occasionalism: Continuous Creation and the Activity of the Soul," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 36 (1998): 215–31; Andrew Pessin, "Does Continuous Creation Entail Occasionalism? Malebranche (and Descartes)," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 30 (2000): 413–39; David Scott, "Occasionalism and Occasional Causation in Descartes' Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38 (2000): 503–28; Steven Nadler, "Cordemoy and Occasionalism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 43 (2005): 37–54; Fred Ablondi, *Gerould de Cordemoy: Atomist, Occasionalist, Cartesian* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2005), ch. 3.

⁶³Nadler "The Occasionalism of Louis de la Forge," 63–68; Nadler "Descartes and Occasional Causation," 36–42.

divinely instituted constant conjunction, contiguity and succession, or something along those lines). But, in the specific case that concerns us, if a human mind stands in position A in this scheme, and it inefficaciously occasions a certain body to move (the effect C), then it does not matter whether the efficient cause B is God or whether it is something else—perhaps even the body itself. Just as long as it is not the mind A, that mind will be in no danger of getting sucked into the spatial world.

Now, even though, as I have said, there is no consensus about exactly which of the Cartesians endorsed which of the candidate combinations of theories, it is an uncontested fact that there were *some* Cartesians who did warmly embrace the branch of the occasionalist doctrine that particularly concerns us here. Most prominently of all, Malebranche firmly pledged his allegiance to full-blown occasionalism right across the board—mind-body causation not excepted. And Malebranche explicitly appealed to precisely this doctrine in explaining why, although he was adamant that God is substantially present in the spatial world, he was equally satisfied that created minds are not.

Just after the passage from Malebranche's *Dialogues* that we looked at earlier—where Theodore endeavored to persuade Aristes that God himself had to be present wherever he acted—Theodore then proceeded to explain why the analogous conclusion did not hold for the human soul. He had just said that, “if the act by which God produces or conserves this chair is here, surely God is here himself; and if he is here, he must be here completely and thus in all the other respects in which he operates.” This was just the traditional view: that of Saint Thomas, Saint Augustine, and so many others. Yes, the divine substance was spatially present, but no, it was not extended, for God was *wholly* present wherever he was present at all (and he was present everywhere). Aristes reckoned that he now understood. Theodore, he presumed, was simply adopting the traditional scholastic position, whereby both God and created minds needed to be granted a substantial presence in the spatial world on the grounds that they could act therein, albeit a “whole in each part” presence to preserve their incorporeality. And he was content to go along with this, replying:

I believe, Theodore, that God is in the world in the way you believe your soul is in your body. For in fact I know you do not think that the soul is spread through all the parts of the body. It is in the head, because it reasons there. It is in the arms and feet, because it moves them. Likewise God is in the world because he conserves and governs it.⁶⁴

But, as far as Theodore was concerned, Aristes still did not get it: “What prejudices, what obscurities in your comparison! The soul is not in the body nor the body in the soul, although their modalities are reciprocal as a consequence of the general laws of their union.”⁶⁵ Malebranche did accept the usual Cartesian account of the union of mind and body, drawn up in terms of reciprocal interaction. But he denied that this interaction carried any implications of substantial presence at all, precisely because mind and body did not interact by way of efficient causation.

⁶⁴Malebranche, *Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion*, 134 [dial. 8, §5].

⁶⁵Ibid.

The interaction of mind and body was instead explained occasionalistically, in terms of the efficacious activity of God upon them both in a regular and correlated manner. A few lines later, Theodore explained further:

Thus, God is everywhere in the world and beyond. But the soul is nowhere in bodies. . . . Therefore, Aristes, do not say that God is in the world, that he governs, as the soul is in the body it animates. For there is nothing true in your comparison, not only because the soul cannot be in the body nor the body in the soul, but also because minds cannot operate in the bodies they animate and consequently cannot be spread out in them by their operation, as you claim of the divine operation, by which alone, according to you, God is everywhere.⁶⁶

Aristes was now feeling a bit lost, and all that he could say in response was: "What you are saying now seems very difficult to me. I shall think about it."

Aristes' confusion arose precisely out of the fact that he automatically assumed that, whatever position Theodore chose to adopt in the divine case, he would naturally wish to endorse the analogous conclusion in the case of created spirits too. Thus, when Aristes had suggested that God had only an operational presence in the spatial world, and had thereby prompted Theodore to run through the traditional argument for his substantial presence, this had led Aristes to assume that Theodore was equally committed to the parallel argument for the substantial presence of the human soul. But Theodore was *not* committed to the latter argument, and the reason why he was not thus committed was precisely because he did not think that the human soul ever truly acted in the spatial world. Only God did that, and hence it was only in God's case that this sort of argument for substantial presence had any application.

On the face of it, this was a slightly peculiar position to take: to be saying that bodies are spatially present, that God is spatially present too (albeit in a different manner), but that souls—which, after all, Malebranche characterized as lying *between* the other two in the ontological hierarchy—are not spatially present. But, peculiar or not, there is nothing inconsistent about this position. Indeed, it was precisely this disanalogy between God and created spirits that enabled Malebranche to present God as an indispensable bridge between the immaterial world of thinking substances and the material world of extended substances. Because God is intimately united to *both* worlds, he is capable of granting to minds both causal and epistemological contact with bodies. Such contact might still be only an indirect one in both cases, *via* the divine will and wisdom; but, were it not for God's presence to both worlds, these minds would have had no kind of contact with the spatial world at all, for *they* are not present in that world. This position followed naturally from three assumptions, assumptions which Malebranche made explicit: first (and pretty uncontentiously), that God does act upon spatial things; second, that activity requires substantial presence, i.e., that an agent and its patient needs to be contiguous, even when the agent happens to be an incorporeal one; and third, that created spirits do not act upon spatial things.

As for the other Cartesians, they were not always as explicit as Malebranche in endorsing these three principles. Indeed, some of them appear to have positively

⁶⁶Ibid.

rejected some of them. Poiret, as we saw, did not accept the second principle. Other Cartesians—maybe even the majority, arguably including Descartes himself—did not accept the third. If one does reject that second principle, then one can certainly resist all ascriptions of substantial presence to both God and created spirits. But the more intriguing question arises when one accepts that second principle, but resists the third. As we have seen, many of the Cartesians, including Descartes himself, were prepared to allow that God should be ascribed a substantial presence in the spatial world. They might not have *liked* that conclusion, but they were more or less willing to accept it if they really had to. And yet they still displayed an unwillingness to accept the analogous conclusion for created spirits. Could they consistently accept one without the other, while yet resisting Malebranche's occasionalist solution? Possibly. But perhaps the safest thing would be just to steer studiously clear of the whole sticky debate altogether—which is, of course, precisely what Descartes had the sense to do in his published works.