

JEAN-LUC NANCY

Corpus

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The Extension of the Soul

Let's begin by reading a long passage from the letter that Descartes wrote to Elizabeth on June 28, 1643, which undoubtedly constitutes his major text on the knowledge of the union of soul and body.

Metaphysical thoughts that exercise the pure understanding make the notion of the soul familiar to us; and the study of mathematics, which exercises primarily the imagination in thinking about shapes and movements, gets us accustomed to forming very distinct notions of body. Finally, it is only by using our lived experience and ordinary interactions, and by abstaining both from meditation and from studying things that use the imagination, that one learns to conceive the union of the soul and the body.

I am almost afraid that Your Highness may think that I am not speaking seriously here; but that would be contrary to the respect I owe you, which I would never fail to show. I can also say truthfully that the main rule that I followed in my study—and the rule that I believe has helped me most to acquire some knowledge—is that I never gave more than very few hours a day to thoughts that occupy the imagination, and very few hours a year to thoughts that occupy the understanding on its own; I spent all the rest of my time in relaxing the senses and reposing my mind. I even include, among the uses of the imagination, all serious conversations and everything that requires attention. This is what made me retire to the country;

for although, in the busiest city of the world, I could have had as many hours' study as I currently enjoy, I could not spend them as usefully if my mind was distracted by the attention required by the ordinary business of daily life. I take the liberty of writing to Your Highness here that I genuinely admire the fact that, among the cares and business which are never absent in the case of people who, simultaneously, are of noble birth and have great minds, you have been able to find time for the meditations that are required to know the distinction between mind and body.

But I thought that, more than thoughts that require less attention, these meditations were responsible for making you find obscure the notion we have of the union of mind and body, because it seemed to me that the human mind is incapable of conceiving very distinctly, and simultaneously, both the distinction and union of body and soul. The reason is that, in order to do so, it would be necessary to conceive of them as two things—which is self-contradictory. Assuming that Your Highness still retains a vivid memory of the reasons that prove the distinction of the soul and body, and not wishing to ask you to get rid of them in order to conceive of the union that everyone constantly experiences in themselves without philosophizing—viz. of being a single person who has a body and thought together, and being of such a nature that thought can move the body and can sense the changes that occur in it—I therefore used an analogy above with heaviness and with the other qualities that we commonly imagine are united with certain bodies, for the way in which thought is united with our body. I was not worried that this analogy might be defective on account of the fact that these qualities are not real, as they are imagined to be, because Your Highness was already completely convinced that the soul is a substance which is distinct from the body.

However, since Your Highness suggested that it is easier to attribute matter and extension to the soul than to attribute to the soul the ability to move, and to be moved by, a body without having any matter itself, I beseech you to take the liberty to attribute this matter and extension to the soul, for that is nothing more than conceiving of its union with the body. Having conceived of that union properly and having experienced it in yourself, you will find it easy to think that the matter that you have attributed to this thought is not the thought itself and that the extension of this matter has a different nature from the extension of thought, in this sense: the former is determined to a certain place from which it excludes every other

bodily extension, whereas this does not apply in the latter case. In this way Your Highness will easily recover your knowledge of the distinction between the soul and the body, despite the fact that you conceive of their union.

Finally, although I think that it is very necessary to have understood well, once in a lifetime, the principles of metaphysics because they provide us with knowledge of God and our soul, I also think that it would be very harmful to occupy one's understanding frequently in thinking about them because the understanding would find it difficult to leave itself free for using the imagination and the senses. It is best to be satisfied with retaining in one's memory and one's belief the conclusions that have once been drawn from the principles of metaphysics, and to devote one's remaining study time to those thoughts in which the understanding acts together with the imagination and the senses.¹



The union of body and soul is thus conceived through the activity of ordinary life, and not through thought and imagination as isolated faculties. It's conceived "without philosophizing," and anyone can so conceive it. The evidence for this union works just like the evidence for "*ego sum*," which also had to be accessible to anyone's mind. The union is an object of evidence, analogous to the evidence of each of the substances it unites. The modality of this evidence differs by virtue of the fact that it's "experienced" rather than thought or figured. Not only is there a union but it has its own mode of evidence and certitude, its own mode of distinction, which is the distinction of the indistinct. But the structure of the evidence remains identical in this evidence: the known and the knowing are intermixed or separated from one another through a link of the same to the same. Thought thinks itself thinking, imagination pictures extended figures for itself, and union is experienced in the inattention of an activity that feels itself acting, and acted upon, without thinking about it. Moreover, thoughts of metaphysics and imaginings of mathematics should, once acquired and committed to memory, merely open the way to study, where the three registers of knowing are employed together and are therefore able to contribute to a knowledge that will itself be an active knowledge of ordinary life and of the mastery and possession of nature. The evidence of the union is the moment when the mind, endowed as it is with truth's certain foundations, and able to turn itself toward action, stops turning back on itself. Truth, here, is not an end but a means for this more ample, ever-moving truth, which is the usage of life and the world.

In acting this way, the evidence of union is offered in some fashion on two sides or in two moments—a fact that is congruent with the nature of its content, at once single and double. In one of its aspects, in effect, this evidence belongs to the order of obscurity, to the indistinction and internal contrariety of an antinomic conception; but under another of its aspects it is very certain and very clear by virtue of being what one "experiences in oneself," as Descartes puts it twice in a few lines. What we experience in ourselves is the self united with the self just as the body is united with the soul, since this union is the only place where "a single person who has a body and soul together" is present, in such a way that this ensemble makes it possible for the body to make itself felt in thought and for thought to make itself the driver of the body.

What, then, is this clear-obsure, passive-active ensemble, which is the ensemble of a *self* completely present to itself, present in itself and for itself, and of a *self* at once another and the same, extended out of the self, sensing the world and also sensing itself there, with this evidence whose certainty is proportional to its inattention to the self?

When the union is conceived, what's inconceivably conceived? Is it an object or a subject of knowledge? First of all, who knows? Assuredly not thought, which knows only itself or objects. Might it be the body? Certainly not, because the body doesn't know; it only senses. Sensing, however, is one mode of thought, at least insofar as an ego relates to itself in the body, as much as it does in conception, imagination, or will. The body knows itself as a soul, or as intimately united with soul. But the soul thus knows itself as what is extended, not across the body but along the body's extension. So the soul should be recognized as having an extension that is linked to the whole extension of the body, though without sharing the character of the impenetrability and exclusion of extended places. The soul is extended right along what is extended, not as a content in a container (nor as a pilot in a ship) but as the extension of the unextended, through which the thing extended (or the body) is known in its union with the unextended.

This is precisely not a form of knowledge: it's an obscure evidence whose obscurity makes for certitude. It's not a matter here of thinking a "body proper," which would, in fact, be only a figure of the soul, alone knowing itself properly through an extended figure. It's the opposite: the unextended soul is given over to an extension that is improper to it, and its union with this impropriety is what it conceives without conceiving and what it conceives as inconceivable.

When I struggle or breathe, when I digest or suffer, fall or jump, sleep or sing, I know myself only as being what struggles or sings, grimaces or

scratches itself; that, and not that person, or at any rate not as an ego distinct from every other thing. That, then, instead of this one, or this one who is only that.

That which knows, therefore, is nothing other than that which is known, but what's known in this way is the fact that these are two distinct things in a single indistinction. The more effective this identity is, the more indistinct it is, and the less there is to know, properly speaking. The less, therefore, is there also knowledge of a "body proper," since the instance of propriety has evaporated. I can't introduce this instance—a "self" able to say "my body" or "I am my body"—without keeping the body at a distance, distinct and disunited. And so I weaken the evident knowledge of the union.

This doesn't mean that this evidence would be an immediate immersion in the supposedly intimate density of the union, represented as a presence to self comparable to the impenetrable in itself, which defines matter, as well as to the absolute penetration in itself and in everything pertaining to the mind. For the union would then be only the improbable penetration of the impenetrable, conceived as a being in itself. But what it isn't, and what it makes, is indeed the penetration of the impenetrable. Evidence, here, is the very penetration of this penetration, but it therefore is not the conception of a presence in itself.

Whatever its nature, a substantial presence can be only a negation of presence as of the self, of presence in itself as to itself. For a presence is nothing if it's not somehow a setting before—*prae-sentia*—an ex-position, and a self is nothing if not, at its heart (the heart of a self is its very self), apart from and touching on itself, a pulsing of self to self, by which the "same" decomposes the "self" that we would have thought to be posed and supposed.

From this it follows that the evidence of the union, far from being a reply and a retort to the evidence of the mind and extension—as certain apologies for the "body" or certain approaches to "flesh" would have us understand—is evidence of a different order. It's neither "evident" nor "clear and distinct," and it cannot relate to itself as the self-grounded certitude of an *inspectio mentis*. And, in the fact, it's a fact subject not to "inspection" but to an "exercise," or a "test."

Its proper modality pertains to its content. This is the substantial union. This signifies, first of all, that it is not a third substance: if that were so, given that a substance relates only to itself, it would be impossible for this one to have the slightest relation to the other two. Yet the union is precisely the relation between the two substances.

But the union does not unite the two substances accidentally: it is, precisely, substantial.² Or we could say that it enacts the substantiality of an accident.³

The union unites substances: it is neither substance nor accident; it is neither a thing nor the quality or property of a thing (unless it's the property of the union as a property shared by the two substances). It depends on another order: not that of *res* but that of relation. But this relation is very specific: it is neither inclusion nor inherence, neither dependence nor causality, neither disjunction nor exclusion, without, however, being reduced to contiguity or proximity, which are no longer relations (except as relations "of proximity"). It is as if distinct from all these modes, which it nonetheless also includes.

It forms a pertaining of each substance to the other, such that it is not a matter of the assumption or subsumption of one by the other but rather of the susceptibility of one to the other. The soul can be touched by the body, and the body by the soul.

From the one to the other, there is touch: a contact that communicates while leaving both the two *res* intact. Touch, for Descartes, always touches the impenetrable: but the mind, "mixed, so to speak, with the body," "is touched by the vestiges imprinted in it." Wherever they touch each other, the mind and the body are impenetrable to one another and, by virtue of that fact, are united. Touch makes contact between two intact.

What touch communicates is not *res* (or *réel*) but of the order of touch, which itself is real without being *réel*: it's an impulsion or a drive, a pressure, an impression or expression, an unhinging. The union is made in the order of the movement: it is that in which, or as which, one of the soul's movements is transmitted to the body, or one of the body's movements to the soul.

Movements of the soul are of the order of thought, in other words, of the relation to self: an ego is related to itself in this movement, in the mode of sensing or conceiving, imagining or wishing. In a broad sense, and staying with the terminology of the *motum*, we could say that these movements are e-motions. Emotion is the percussion of an ego that is altered or affected by itself. At the same time, all e-motion presupposes an egological auto-affection or cogitatio, which is the co-agitation of the ego, announced in the doubling, indeed in the e-moted stuttering, of *ego sum, ego existo*.

Movements of the body are of the order of local transport: they go from one place to another. In itself, extension is outside itself: distance between places, *partes extra partes*, figures and movements (the figures

themselves being the effect of a movement that traces them). Let's say, broadly, that all movements of the body are extensions: settings outside itself of the pure coincidence of self, which is here the definition of the point and which is the negative of extension. Extension is the negation of this punctual negativity (but the latter denies a previous movement, the tracing of the two perpendicular lines that divide at the point).



From the preceding, two inferences follow.

1. The analysis of the union as a union of movements (motor or mobilizing union) confirms the reciprocal independence of the substances. Every *cogitatio* presupposes itself *cogito*, and every *extensio* presupposes itself *extenditur*. I think on one side, and it's extended on the other, and I always think "I," in one way or another, as extension itself is extended. Each substance is first and last for itself.

2. The union is therefore one of emotion and extension, which are two heterogeneous presuppositions. It's the touching of two mobilities, or rather, it's the mobility or motility proper to touching: a contact of intact.

At a point (it's the pineal gland, seat of incessant agitation), the two movements touch each other in the same movement. There, the incorporeal is corporeal, and reciprocally so. This is not a transubstantiation but a communication (though we could, undoubtedly, seek to identify the two). This communication extends emotion and moves ex-tension. Now this double movement is nothing but the duality comprised in the identity of a same *e* or *ex*, which is the prefix for both emotion and extension. The union is the unique and double operation of an ex-position that is like the same motoric property of the two substances. The union, if one may say so, is a re-union, which would have to be understood as an ex-union or as a union exogenous in and of itself . . .

This provides a better approach to the evidence we ex-perience. It's a knowledge that is not distinguished from its object and, for that very reason, is not at all distinguished, but in-distinguishes itself to the extent of its ex-perience. It is simultaneously and indistinctly emotive and extensive. Whenever I know myself in this way, I am moved by my knowledge, just as I extend this knowledge to the things in which it is invested, like the beating of my heart, the attachment of a nail, or the gray tint and granulated surface of a table on which my hand is resting. I know myself as a beating, nail, tint, and surface. Which is to say that I know all these extensions of ego, which is moved by this, and that I reciprocally know the egoity of these extensions: the latter is called a world, in the contemporary if not the Cartesian sense of the word. A world is a totality of

extended emotion and moving extension: in other words, a totality of ex-position, which we can also name "sense," in the sense that "sense" is here precisely the sharing of the *ex*: that which is in itself refers to the self as outside the self—but this outside is precisely the inside of the world, which consists only in this exposition, which we understand (without distinguishing it) as the indistinctly corporeal and incorporeal movement of that which is extended in an indissociable double sense: which is endlessly divided into impenetrable *partes extra partes* and which endlessly penetrates and is penetrated as *extra*-position in itself. The *extra* of the impenetrable parts is here confounded with the *exterior*: ex-ist, being *ex*, is to be exposed according to corporeal exteriority, it is to be in the world, and, in a more radical fashion, is being world.

Being world does not mean being immanent to oneself: to the contrary, it means being outside oneself. It means being an extended sense: we should say that the sense of the world gets confused with the extension of the world, with no possible appeal to another world or to an outer world, but we should also say, indistinctly, that the sense of the world is outside the world.⁴ This indistinct identity, which is also that of the evidence in which its knowledge is exposed and im-posed, is ex-perienced in its confused proof and is therefore the identity of the inside and the outside.

But the identity of the outside and the inside does not effectuate the resorption of one substance into another: it effectuates, on the contrary, very precisely, the exposition of the one to the other as the exposition of the world to itself and therefore as the necessity of comprehending sense (or truth) as this exposition itself—and consequently, too, insofar as it cannot simply be called "itself." For it is, in itself, different from itself: it is distinct from itself in its indistinction.

What we so often designate Cartesian "dualism" can therefore be understood as entirely different from an ontological cut between body and soul. It is just as much, and may be even more, an ontology of the "between," of the swerve or exposition by which alone something like a "subject" can emerge. A subject that would henceforth have two fundamental characteristics: that of not being substance and that of being exposed to other subjects. These two characteristics are in turn the internal division of the *ex*—which makes for the motoricity and mobility of the union. A world of subjects can only be a world in internal expansion along this double line of ex-position, and thus a common and insubstantial world, common by virtue of its insubstantiality—in other words, common by the ontological impossibility of a common substance (no more common

to all subjects than common to the subject and to itself). This impossibility alone opens the possibility, the chance, and the risk of being in the world.

When I look at extension—the spilled wax spread without quality—and when the extension is extended to my eyes, then an emotion and an extension touch one other. Without this contact, my *inspectio mentis* would see nothing, and the extension wouldn't extend to my *mens*. The mind is then moved, in its very *inspectio*, even into extension, and the latter is extended all the way to the mind, through all the channels and all the fibers of the body, where the mind exposes itself by inspecting.

The soul is then touched: meaning at once that it is disturbed and that it is impressed by the “imprinted vestiges” in the body, in other words, by the extended traces of the world's extension. The soul is exposed there in a proper modality of extension and marries the impulse of the body: if I walk, it's a walking soul; if I sleep, a sleeping soul; if I eat, an eating soul. If a blade or a shard cuts through my skin, my soul is cut to the exact depth, force, and form of the wound. And if I die, the soul becomes death itself.

In other words, the soul doesn't experience the body, any more than the body does the soul. But someone experiences, and the “one” of this someone is altogether justly the indistinct motion of this “experiencing.” It senses itself, which doesn't mean that it distinguishes itself as “self,” or at least not as a substance—but that it in-distinguishes itself insofar as it is exposed to itself. By experiencing in this way, it is distinguished as distinct from the distinct in general, and thus as in-distinct. But this indistinction is not a weak and mixed-up character of the object: it is the very force and movement of what we can name the ex-piration of the subject: how it arrives by falling outside the self.⁵

Psyche is extended, knows nothing about it, writes Freud in a posthumous note. As extended, Psyche doesn't know itself as extended. Extension in general is not to be known; it is to move, to be moved. But in the being moved or being exposed of the union, in an inextricably single and double mode, two in one and one in two, the nonknowledge of the self is known, which makes the self, moves sense, and makes sense—even the sense of knowledge itself—an emotion exposed, from the soul, to the whole body, and to the end of the world.

The body is the extension of the soul to the ends of the world and to the confines of the self, the one tied to the other and indistinctly distinct, extension tensed to the breaking point.

To Exist Is to Exit the Point

ANTONIA BIRNBAUM

Outside is the world, and we're all outside. Jean-Luc Nancy's thought worries about the outside. Worried, it doesn't settle for, or settle on, any of the classical figures for the relation to exteriority that philosophy crosses, retrieves, and displaces. Outside: exteriority doesn't derive from an alterity that would divide the self on the inside, even if such a division were primary and constitutive. Because it's not a question of keeping one's own negation inside but of thinking each self as some “one” existing with others: one of us all. Outside: exteriority isn't the sublime or transgressive experience of the failure of every limit, in which the self, swept up in the vacillation of something exceeding the presentable, fails to recover itself. Access to the world doesn't happen when confronting something beyond the self, the immensity of a starry sky, the boundless chasms of the sea, the chaos of mountains. . . . The world's boundlessness, far more discretely, lies in as many worlds as are needed to make a world: in as many things and existences as are peopling our own. Outside: exteriority isn't anxiety, where *Dasein* is brought back to its own disappearance, finding itself, in the process, referred to the finitude of its being-in-the-world. Because the possibility of death is always already someone else's as well, and finitude so considered is felt as much in the simple everyday presence of “anyone” (each and every one) as in the anxiety-producing imminence of our own death.

If we're all outside, present to the world in the first place—someone among other “someone's”—then there is no dialectical split to produce a