Diakrisis Yearbook of Theology and Philosophy
Vol. I (2018): 143–164
DOI: 10.24193/diakrisis.2018.9

Tango, ergo sum: Descartes in Jean-Luc Nancy's Deconstruction of Christianity

Julia M. Reed

Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA
E-mails: jmreed@fas.harvard.edu; juliamtr@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper shows the importance of Jean-Luc Nancy's interpretations of René Descartes in Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity, especially in the notions of bodily *exposition* and the impossibility of *intactness.* I argue that Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity is prefigured and developed in his readings of the Cartesian *ego* as an ex-posited and intangible body. I then turn to Jacques Derrida's critique of Nancy's deconstruction of Christian intactness: Derrida argues that Nancy appeals to a key Christian trope of the proper or tactful touch and thus affirms a Christian metaphysics of presence. I propose the importance of *historicizing* the understandings bodily presence and intactness at stake in the difference between Derrida and Nancy, and turn to Descartes' treatments of transubstantiation as an example. I argue that attending to the seventeenth-century debates concerning Cartesianism's threat to the material and theological intactness of Eucharistic real presence historically situates the question of deconstructing Christianity. In response to Nancy and Derrida, I suggest that the question is not *if* Christianity is or is not intact, but rather how historically specific understandings of the nature and perception of bodies differently conceive bodily presence and intactness.

Keywords: Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Derrida, René Descartes, deconstruction, Christianity, immanence, incarnation, haptics, transubstantiation

In his analysis of the Eucharistic pronouncement "this is my body" [*hoc est enim corpus meum*] Jean-Luc Nancy argues that *this body* of the Eucharist is the site of God's disappearance into an "exposing/exposed: *ausgedehnt* [extended]" body.[1] Although Christianity claims the presence of God in the incarnation, Nancy argues,[2] Christ's Incarnation, especially as offered

[1] Nancy, *Corpus,* trans. Richard A. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008) 3; 25.

[2] Nancy, Jean-Luc Nancy, *Noli me tangere—On the Raising of the Body,* trans. Sarah Clift, Pascale-Anne Brault, and Michael Nass (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008) 14/*Noli me tangere: Essai sur la levée du corps,* (Bayard Editions, 2003). References are to the English translation unless otherwise indicated.

in the Eucharist, is the site of the impossibility of that presence, the body that "never happens" and cannot be touched.[3] There is no Incarnation, in other words, in the sense of a presence outside the world coming-in-to-flesh [*caro*] and that remains as the immanence of this transcendence in the world. For Nancy, Christianity contains within itself its own deconstruction or undoing, which unfolds in history, in fact, *as* the history of the West. God enters history in Christ's Incarnation, Nancy argues, but this incarnational presence is also the absence of God and the promised world to come. Deconstruction is thus originally a *Christian* possibility internal to the doctrine of the Incarnation: God was and is fully human in Christ but is not fully present *in* his human body. The divine presence is not *in*tact in God's human body, so it is impossible to come into *con*tact with that presence, in other words, requiring "an entirely different articulation of" the Eucharistic demonstrative ('*this* is my body')[4] that is both the "truth" and "destitution" of Christianity.[5]

In *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy* Jacques Derrida traces Nancy's "deconstruction of Christian flesh" through the impossibility of incarnational immanence.[6] Yet Derrida is dubious that Nancy does not deconstruct Christianity as much as affirm one of its central thematics, namely, the proper touch of Christ's holy body. Derrida tracks a Christian "haptic" metaphysics of presence and wonders if Nancy is in fact articulating a *law of tact* at work in the Christian doctrine of incarnation—a haptocentric metaphysics of divine presence figured as a prohibition against touching God's body in order to touch it properly and *tactfully.*

I want to pose this question of Christian intactness through another *corpus* that figures prominently in Nancy's deconstruction of the flesh—Descartes'. Nancy's interpretations of Descartes feature consistently throughout his work as an alternative articulation of "*this* is my body"--an ego that is and *is not* its body and that is exterior to its body, a *corpus ego* that is never properly itself. Nancy finds this other sense of '*this* is my body' both as the truth of the Incarnation and in his readings of Descartes as the impossibility of a body's intactness—the "displacement" rather than the "appropriation" of the Eucharistic demonstration that *this* is my body—such that a body's identity is "neither immanent nor transcendent," but always displaced or ex-posited.[7]

[3] Nancy, *Corpus,* 5.

[4] Jean-Luc *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity,* trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant, and Michael B. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008) 73/ *La déclosion (Déconstruction du christianisme, 1).* Paris: Editions Galilée, 2005. References are to the English translation unless otherwise indicated.

[5] Nancy, *Corpus,* 39.

[6] Jacques Derrida, *On Touching—Jean Luc Nancy,* trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005) 218-9/*Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy* (Paris: Editions Galilée 2000). References are to the English translation unless otherwise indicated.

[7] Nancy, *Corpus,* 19; 25.

Neither Nancy nor Derrida consider Descartes' own curious and controversial account of the possibility of divine presence in Eucharistic transubstantiation, however, which I propose suggests a different approach to the intactness of Christianity. If Derrida suspects that Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity in fact reiterates a haptocentric metaphysics of the proper touching of God's body, the seventeenth-century debates around the nature of body, and the nature of the human body in particular, offer a historically and theologically specific context to pose the questions at the core of the difference between Nancy and Derrida. My object is neither to support Derrida's critique nor to defend Nancy from it, but to argue for the importance of situating its question in the context of historically specific disputes about the metaphysics, physics, and perception of bodies. Thus the question I want to ask with Descartes is not *if* the incarnation is the site of Christianity's intactness (Derrida) or its deconstruction (Nancy), but rather how particular philosophies of body mobilize different (im)possibilities of bodily presence, and how the (im)possibility of bodily presence is a function of commitments to the nature and perception of bodies that had implications for the theological intactness of the Incarnation and Eucharist. In Descartes' case, his commitment to body as pure extension was widely considered to threaten the possibility of transubstantiation, and he was exhorted by his followers to offer a philosophical account of the possibility of the Eucharistic miracle. Descartes' responses to the problem of transubstantiation negotiate both senses of the intactness of a *corpus* in Nancy's and Derrida's treatments of touch—the ontological intactness of the human body that is possibly really present in the Eucharist and the intactness of a Christian metaphysics of presence. Can Descartes' philosophy properly touch on the Eucharistic miracle—can Descartes keep the theological mystery of transubstantiation intact? I end with divergent seventeenth-century answers to this question and suggest the importance of historicizing philosophies of the body in relation to incarnational and Eucharistic theologies in order to ask the question of Christian immanence critically and tactfully.

Nancy's deconstruction of carnal and Christian immanence: the impossibility of intactness

Throughout his work Nancy often turns to a close reading of Descartes to articulate the ex-position of the self—the self *as* body, and body always as and in a position outside itself. As Marie-Eve Morin notes in her recent English translation of *Ego Sum: Corpus, Anima, Fabula* (1979), Nancy's early work on Descartes, "exposition [subsequently to the readings of Descartes in *Ego Sum*] will become the basic ontological category of Nancy's thinking" that marks the materialism of being: to be is to be ex-posited-- ex-*peau*s-

ition--always outside a position that is itself impossible to be "in,"[8] and thus impossible to be in contact *with,* since it is not sufficiently *in*tact.

Nancy will later develop ex-position as the character of God's absent presence in the incarnation and the deconstruction of Christianity, or more precisely, deconstruction *as* Christianity.[9] If "to deconstruct means to take apart, to disassemble, to loosen the assembled structure in order to give some play to the possibility from which it emerged but which, *qua* assembled structure, it hides" Nancy argues, then a deconstruction of Christianity is only possible because deconstruction itself is a fundamentally Christian operation.[10]

> Christianity is by itself and in itself a deconstruction, and a self-deconstruction. […] In other words, Christianity indicates, in the most active way—and the most ruinous for itself, the most nihilist in certain regards—how monotheism shelters within itself—better: more intimately within itself than itself, within or without itself—the principle of a world without God.[11]

This deconstruction is both possible and inevitable in the logic of the incarnation, according to Nancy: in one person in two natures, divine and human, God is present in the world in a fully human body. Yet the identity and difference of the human and the divine in the incarnation also marks the withdrawal of God from full presence: in Christ's double nature in a single body the disappearance of full divine presence "becomes the proper act of God."[12] God's body is not the body *of* God; the Incarnation--the "central proposition of Christianity," Nancy argues—is not coming into flesh of a presence, as if God comes *into* that body from outside it. Thus the "Christian body" of the incarnation "is completely different from a body serving as an envelope (or prison, or tomb)" for an interior principle or presence.[13] The word does not *enter* flesh but rather *becomes* flesh, emptying itself totally into a body: "the Christian (or even the monotheistic) god is the god who *alienates himself.* He is the god who *atheizes himself* [….] the 'god' made himself 'body' in emptying himself of himself (another Christian motif, that of the Pauline *kenosis:* the emptying-out of God, or his 'emptying-himself-out-of-himself'). The 'body' becomes the name of the *a-theos*."[14] God's body *is* God—not hidden in the body as a presence represented or veiled by a carnal exterior, but is *this* body. And as *this* fully human body the divine presence in that body also disappears, according to Nancy. In becoming

[8] Marie-Eve Morin, "Translator's introduction," *Ego Sum,* trans. Morin, xix.
[9] Nancy, *Corpus,* 15.
[10] Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure,* 148.
[11] Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure,* 35.
[12] Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure,* 36.
[13] Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure,* 82.
[14] Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure,* 82-3.

rather than entering flesh, the Incarnation and its Eucharistic substitutions are "not-of-god": there is nothing *of* God withdrawn in the body on the interior of the body's exterior. Touching God's body does not mean that one touches God. One only touches a body that is only this exposition of an interior presence that has become nothing but that exposition—an interior that has disappeared and left its exterior "bare."[15]

Thus at the doctrinal heart of Christianity is a divine absence that deconstructs the intactness of the flesh in general. As Nancy argues in "Corpus,"

> When we say "I'm here," we presuppose that there's an exterior place that the "I," the unassignable interiority, would come to occupy—as soon as we say this, we involve ourselves in enormous difficulties, because how can "I," which has no place, come into a place? It's the mystery of the incarnation. But that's just it, we can in no way think the body in terms of incarnation. I am speaking not only of the Christian dogma of incarnation, where that which is without place, without exteriority, without form, without matter (God) comes into flesh, but of the *incarnation that is the model (itself Christian, in effect) of all our thought on the subject.*[16]

In order to think the embodied self the body must be freed from its incarnational expectations, if by incarnation we mean a presence immanent to a body that can be sensed or grasped *in* that body and keeps the body ontologically and epistemically intact.[17] Yet this is only possible, Nancy suggests, in the kenotic model of incarnation, and in effect the *impossibility* of incarnation in the sense of a presence *in* flesh.

Before Nancy gives the Incarnation "the name of the a-theos," the disappearance of any "founding presence,"[18] however, he has interpreted the Cartesian subject as similarly *extended,* a *corpus ego* always *outside of itself*.[19] Throughout Nancy's work one of the main expressions of this exposition of the body is Sigmund Freud's 1938 note, *"Psyche ist ausgedehnt; weiss nichts davon* [Psyche is extended; knows nothing about it]." Nancy first cites this phrase in a short piece from 1977, "*Psyche,"* a reflection on the spatial paradox of a subject dispersed among parts outside of parts "that divide themselves and never penetrate each other," though the subject "knows nothing of this."[20] The note also figures prominently throughout "Corpus" as the definitive expression of the ex-position of the body.

> Freud's most fascinating and perhaps (I say this without exaggerating) most decisive statement is in this posthumous note: *Psyche ist ausgedehnt:*

[15] Nancy, *Corpus,* 63.

[16] Nancy, *Corpus,* 132. My emphasis.

[17] Nancy, *Corpus,* 95.

[18] Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure,* 82.

[19] Nancy, *Corpus,* 15.

[20] Nancy, *"Psyche,"* trans. Emily McVarish, in *The Birth To Presence* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993) 393/ "*Psyche," Première Livraison* (16): 1977.

> *weiss nichts davon.* "The psyche's extended: knows nothing about it." The "psyche," in other words, is *body,* and this is precisely what escapes it, and its escape (we may suppose), or its process of escape, constitutes it as "psyche," in a dimension of not (being able/wanting)-to-know-itself.[21]

Well before this passage in "Corpus" Nancy has discussed Freud's note in *Ego Sum* in terms of the structure of the Cartesian subject. The thought of the psyche's extension "only came to Freud because he was thinking against the Cartesian subject" as a disembodied ego, Nancy argues, but crucially "this thought also 'came' to Descartes[.]"[22] The anti-dualistic, "anti-Cartesian demand for a re-incarnation [of the subject] proceeds directly from Descartes and repeats his ultimate gesture."[23] While the Cartesian *ego cogito* is essentially *not* its body, Nancy notes, it is also substantially united to its body—the mind and body are unified by being outside themselves, ex-posited from their proper and distinct ontologies (thought and extension, respectively). The extension of the ego thus "comes to" Descartes only as an incomprehensible experience in Cartesian philosophy. The substantial union of mind and body is "known" as an experience for the Cartesian philosopher rather than as epistemic certainty: it is the "feeling" of the union of one's mind and body that Descartes admits is best realized without metaphysical meditation.[24]

Indeed, it is precisely *because* the ego's extension in substantial union is an inexplicable experience for the Cartesian philosopher that Nancy turns to the "Cartesian" origins of Freud's insight. It can be experienced in Cartesian philosophy, Nancy argues, but not "established" in its metaphysics given the distinction between the mind's substance and the body's substance. Thus the contradiction of the ego's extension in the context of Cartesian metaphysics expresses its inevitable deconstruction of the *substance* of the subject: the "Cartesian experience" of the substantial union of mind and body is "the experience of the *sub* without stasis or stance."[25] As the Cartesian subject, I experience my "ownness" [*du propre*] as being unable to "posit" myself as a substantial union of mind and body—that is, as the impossibility of having a "position" in Cartesian metaphysics.[26]

For Nancy, in this sense, the Cartesian substantial union is the experience of the truth of the *cogito* and is Descartes' articulation of what Nancy will later claim is the basic Christian gesture of deconstruction—the ex-position of the subject that is "nothing that can *itself* be posited and grasped," which Nancy develops in his reading of Descartes' Second Meditation in

[21] Nancy, *Corpus,* 21.
[22] Nancy, *Ego Sum,* 110.
[23] Nancy, *Ego Sum,* 89.
[24] Nancy, *Ego Sum,* 106.
[25] Nancy, *Ego Sum,* 108.
[26] Nancy, *Ego Sum,* 105.

the *Meditations on First Philosophy*.[27] At this point the Cartesian meditator is searching for absolutely certain first principles by doubting as far as is possible; her ability to doubt a thought or perception is sufficient for her treat it "as if [it were] wholly false."[28] As she cannot doubt that *she* exists and *can* doubt that corporeal things exist, she resolves to continually "divert" her mind from all corporeal things in order "to perceive [her mind's] own nature as distinctly as possible."[29]

The meditation culminates in the famous contemplation of the wax, in which the meditator realizes that her grasp of the wax is greater than any one or the sum of the bodily forms the wax takes in her corporeal faculties,[30] and therefore that mind is better known [*notior*] than body. More importantly, it is also possible that the wax and her bodily faculties do not exist. She seems to sense the wax, though it is possible that she is not right now sensing the wax at all, since she is doubting the existence of all corporeal things. At the very least, she thinks that she senses the wax, and this seems to reinforce her perception of her own nature as a thinking thing rather than a corporeal thing.

> But what am I to say about this mind, or about myself? (So far, remember, I am not admitting that there is anything else in me except a mind.) What, I ask, is this "I" which seems to perceive [*videor percipere*] the wax so distinctly? Surely my awareness of my own self is not merely much truer and more certain than the wax, but also much more distinct and evident. For if I judge the wax exists from the fact that I see it, clearly this same fact entails much more evidently that I myself also exist. It is possible that what I see is not really the wax; it is possible that I do not even have eyes to see anything. When I see, or think I see [*videam sive … cum cogitem me videre*] (I am not here distinguishing the two), it is simply not possible that I who am now thinking am not something. […] Every consideration whatsoever which contributes to my perception of the wax, or of any other body, cannot but establish even more effectively the nature of my own mind.[31]

Seeing and *thinking that one is seeing* are synonymous here because the meditator is supposing body to be nothing. The statement "I think that I have a body" can function as an existential proof, in fact, insofar as it is a

[27] Nancy, *Ego Sum,* 55; 109.

[28] René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes,* Vol. 2, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugland Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 16. Hereafter CSM 2 followed by the page number followed by the volume and page number from the Adam and Tannery edition: *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. C. Adam and P. Tannery, Vol. 7 (Paris: CNRS/Vrin, 1897–1913) 24, hereafter AT, followed by volume number and page number.

[29] CSM 2:19/AT VII 28.

[30] CSM 2:21/AT VII 31.

[31] CSM 2:22/AT VII 33. My emphasis.

thought of having a body—I cannot doubt *that* it is a thought. Indeed, the *thought* of body in the meditation on the wax shores up the certainty of existence and that what exists is a thing that thinks, i.e., that seems to have a body and seems to sense bodies. I may doubt that bodies exist (including my eyes, my hands, and the wax), but I cannot doubt that it seems to me that I am sensing the wax.

Nancy argues that the *cogito* is most sharply and fundamentally stated here at the end of the Second Meditation in the claim that the meditator seems to see, *videor videre,* and that this *seeing* is fundamentally a question of *touching.* The *videor*—I seem to sense my body and the body of the wax—exteriorizes and ex-posits body from the subject, "the necessary and sufficient condition to establish" the truth of the *cogito.*[32] This truth is not found "*at* the extremity" of doubt; it is fashioned *as* that extremity in making the distinction between bodily sensing and mental seeming to sense.[33]

In other words, the Cartesian *ego* is constituted *as* and *through* the exteriorization of body, i.e., through the performance of the *cogito*: I think that I have a body—that is, it *seems to me that I have a body*—but I might not have a body because bodies might not exist. More precisely, Nancy argues, I seem to touch the wax.

> It's in Descartes' text. The wax that melts loses its color, its smell, it no longer yields a sound, and then the author hesitates: 'we touch it *just barely* if at all,' *just barely* because he can't say that we don't touch it anymore. […] We can say, to refine the analysis, that this barely but still touching, this sensing that still remains as touching, is the asymptote of seeing. Descartes seems to suppress the sight of the piece of wax: there's no more figure, no more color, but we certainly see something. This seeing is a touching.
>
> For Descartes, thought is sensing, and as sensing, it touches upon an extended thing, it's touching extension. The ego is only ego by virtue of being outside itself, by touching the wax.[34]

This is an odd reading of the passage in question, to be sure: the meditator can "barely" or "hardly" touch the wax [*vix tangi potest, nec jam*] because it has melted and is too hot to touch. The meditator seems to sense that the various sensory properties of the wax change when she moves it close to the fire—its shape, color, size, smell, texture, and temperature. Surely, however, the "same" wax remains throughout the change, and the meditator concludes that the *extension* of the wax is perceived by the mind alone and not the senses.[35]

[32] Nancy, *Ego Sum,* 46.
[33] Nancy, *Ego Sum,* 79-80.
[34] Nancy, *Corpus,* 130-1.
[35] CSM 2:20/AT VII 30.

So what does Nancy mean when he claims that *seeming to see* the wax is a touching, and that this touching is the asymptote of seeing? In Cartesian dualism, Nancy argues,

> we seem to have, quite clearly, on the one hand, pure extension and, on the other, pure cogitation, an outside-the-self completely pure and an inside-the-self completely pure. We could already very simply ask: how are they related to one another? How does one touch the other? And that's just it: *they touch one another.*[36]

Nancy is not suggesting here that touch is the *sense* that remains after the meditator has doubted all the other senses, as if touch is the one sense that is immune from hyperbolic doubt. This is certainly not what the Cartesian meditator discovers, in any case; touch does not remain *as the sense* of being in a physical contact with the wax. This seems to be precisely Nancy's point: touching is not a contact between the meditator's possible body--her fingertips connected to her brain—and the possible body of the wax's extension, either cold and hard or hot and melted. Touching the wax just barely does not mean that I touch the wax. It is more precisely a statement of the *cogito* as the *exteriorization* or *exposition* of body, "thrusting [body] outside the self so that there might be a 'self.'"[37] Touching is rather a swerve or asymptote, the contact between intacts that never happens. All the "phenomenological analyses of 'self-touching' always return to a primary interiority," Nancy argues, but this interiority is always already "in exteriority […] what I touch remains on the outside. […] And therefore—but this is the difficult point—the body is always outside, on the outside."[38]

The Cartesian ego establishes itself, in other words, by touching on the otherness of body: "body is the ego that senses itself to be other than the ego."[39] I touch this exteriority that is body; *tango, ergo sum.* Yet there is no being or reality of a body or bodies to be touched literally or figuratively. Bodies "feign" or "fashion" but "cannot *be*" anything for Nancy, and therefore are not sufficiently *in*-tact for proper *con*-tact.[40] Touching's impossibility is thus double—both the impossibility of touching *as a sense,* as the contact between one intact thing and another, and the impossibility of self-touching *making sense* as a figure of immanence.[41] There is no accomplished touch of two intacts because there is no interiority of the ego that touches the exteriority of the wax; *non tango, ergo sum.*

As Derrida argues in *On Touching,* this impossibility of intactness becomes the central expression of Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity. Derrida is

[36] Nancy, *Corpus,* 130.
[37] Nancy, *Corpus,* 27.
[38] Nancy, *Corpus,* 128-9.
[39] Nancy, *Corpus,* 130-1.
[40] Nancy, *Ego Sum,* 107.
[41] Nancy, *Corpus,* 143.

concerned, however, that Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity is rather a hyperbolic exercise in a long history of Christian *haptics,* a "quasi-hyper-transcendental ontologization of tact," in which salvation is a measure of touching without touching excessively-- a protection of the untouchable so that one touches it tactfully, just barely.[42] Indeed, Derrida argues that Nancy's "Corpus" is perhaps greatest treatment of touch since Aristotle's *On the Soul*, in which the ability to touch and be touched both distinguishes living [i.e., ensouled] animals from living plants and is necessary for the individual animal's survival. Thus the *loss* of touch, Aristotle concludes,

> must bring about the death of an animal. For as on the one hand nothing which not an animal can have this sense, so on the other it is the only one which is indispensably necessary to what is an animal. This explains, further, why […] excess [*hyperbole*] in tangible qualities […] destroys the animal itself […] what is tangible destroys touch, which is the essential mark of being an animal; for it has been shown that without touch it is impossible for an animal to be.[43]

Touching as a principle of life such that the loss of touch *or* its excess [*hyperbole*] is fatal seems to Derrida the form of a *law of tact,* of touching enough but not hyperbolically, that Nancy recapitulates in his deconstruction of the incarnate flesh. "A certain tact, a 'thou shalt not touch too much,'" Derrida argues, "would thus be inscribed *a priori,* like a first commandment, the law of originary prohibition, in the density of tactile experience."[44] Derrida follows this Aristotelian privileging of the haptic principle and presence of life through a Christian tradition of marking and protecting divine presence, and the divinity *of* presence, through a tactful reserve of touch. Derrida identifies a "general haptics" in the Gospels, for example, highlighting various episodes of touching and refraining from touching Christ's body,[45] and finds an Aristotelian "ontologization" and privileging of touch in Thomas Aquinas and Jean-Louis Chrétien, in which presence is figured as immediate intellectual or spiritual touching.[46]

In *Noli me tangere* Nancy responds to Derrida's "rabbinical skepticism" about touching[47] and further develops his deconstruction of Christianity as the paradox of thinking together Christ's Eucharistic pronouncement—"this

[42] Derrida, *On Touching,* 47; 268.

[43] Aristotle, *On the Soul,* 435b, trans. J.A. Smith, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation,* Vol. 1, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 692.

[44] Derrida, *On Touching,* 47.

[45] Derrida, *On Touching,* 99-100.

[46] "Here is where the reference to Aquinas becomes necessary; it Christianizes this haptologics. Aquinas comments on and relaunches Aristotelian theology dealing with intellectual contact and the intellect's touching […] and thereby simultaneously asserts the *immediacy* of intellectual touching and the *primacy* of the intelligible" (*On Touching,* 247).

[47] Nancy, *Noli me tangere,* 110, n. 19.

is my body"—and his admonition to Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb in the Gospel of John—"don't touch me." Analyzing representations of the encounter between Mary and Christ by Rembrandt, Dürer, Titian, and others, Nancy argues that the interplay of senses in the encounters with the resurrected Christ—seeing, hearing, and touching his body— is the fullest expression of the body as exposition and *kenosis*.[48] Distraught at the absence of Christ's body at the empty tomb, Mary mistakes his resurrected body for the gardener, but recognizes him when he addresses her by name and reaches out to him. Yet Christ responds by refusing her touch: "'Do not hold on to me (*mē mou haptou*), because I have not yet ascended to the Father.'"[49] For Nancy this episode exposes the centrality of touch, and, more precisely, the relationship of touch and vision in figuring the Incarnation, particularly in comparison with Christ's encounter with the doubting Thomas in the verses that follow. Like Thomas, Mary does not visually recognize Christ. Unlike Thomas, however, her recognition is aural, when Jesus addresses her by name, "contradict[ing] the [visual] appearance of the gardener." Often Jesus is depicted as a gardener, in fact, with shovel and a hat (as in Rembrandt and Dürer, for example), suggesting the strangeness of the resurrected body, appearing in the paintings as Mary's visual mistake.[50]

More importantly, for Nancy, in contrast to Thomas, who demands to touch Christ to the point of penetrating his body-- "'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe'"[51]— Mary's touch of the risen body is refused. Nancy notes that John's Greek verb, *haptein,* to touch, also means "to hold back," "to hold onto," or "to hold back from."[52] Mary's hands are often depicted as outstretched and supplicating, sometimes seeming to touch the hem of Christ's robe, while his hands often touch her in an ambiguous gesture of blessing and distancing.[53] If Mary touches Christ, or if he touches her, in keeping her from touching him, her touching and being touched is the kenotic departure of the touch-- the point at which touching "detaches itself from what it touches."[54] Don't touch me/don't hold me back, for I am departing: if you believe that you can touch me, you "believe in the presence of the present," and therefore "miss [that I am] departing," and have never been present in any way that touching could touch.[55] A touch that actually touches some thing, in the sense of making that thing present to touch "reifies itself in a grip, in an adhesion," and even a penetration,

[48] Nancy, *Noli me tangere,* 26.

[49] The Gospel of John, 20:13-17 in *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version,* ed. Wayne Meeks (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993).

[50] Nancy, *Noli me tangere,* 29.

[51] The Gospel of John, 20:25.

[52] Nancy, *Noli me tangere,* 15.

[53] Nancy, *Noli me tangere,* 32.

[54] Nancy, *Noli me tangere,* 49.

[55] Nancy, *Noli me tangere,* 15.

as we find in Christ's encounter with the incredulous Thomas. Thomas's touch is a demand for presence made sensible, according to Nancy: Thomas is "not as blessed as those who have believed without seeing," because his "'seeing' and 'touching' are posed as equivalents: touch as a confirmation or accomplishment of sight."[56]

In this sense Thomas's attempt to consummate sight in the tactile hyperbole of penetrating Christ's body is similar to Nancy's description of the Platonic *epopteia,* the mystical vision of the fullness of reality at the summit of the soul's ascent.[57] As Nancy has previously described it in *Corpus, epopteia* is "completed sight […] the sight that brings us beyond initiation (which only 'understands') to 'contemplation,' a 'super-sight' that is a 'devouring of the eyes,' […] a *grasping* and finally a *touching*: the very absolute of touching, touching-the-other as being-touched," an excessive breach of the other in search of the presence promised by vision.[58] The expositions of bodies, however, requires the different kind of vision, and, indeed, a different relationship between vision and touching that we find in Mary's touch and the touching of the wax in the Second Meditation-- not the consummating vision-*cum*-touching of the Platonic revelation, Eucharistic consumption, or Thomas's searching penetration of Christ's body, but the impossibility of the intactness of, and contact with, any body. In the visual representations of Christ's ascension Mary's extended hand "follows along the departure" of the resurrected body without touching it, because, like all bodies, its presence as *this* body is intangible.[59] Like the wax in the Second Meditation, Christ's body seems to be sensibly present. Mary seems to hear Christ calling her name and reaches out to touch him; the meditator seems to see and touch the wax. The *seemingness* of the body's presence, however, is ultimately all body is for Nancy: a feint or swerve in relation to which *touching it* becomes either a consummation of its presence—*this* body is something I can grasp, hold back, or hold in presence—or the impossibility of its presence figured as an asymptotic touch—a touching that always swerves away (or is tactfully held back so to keep the body intact, as Derrida would most likely reply?).[60]

---

[56] Nancy, *Noli me tangere,* 29.

[57] In the *Phaedrus* Socrates describes the immortal soul's ascent to the place beyond heaven where it has "a view of Reality" of the Forms. "We [the philosophers] were with Zeus, while others followed the other gods), saw that blessed and spectacular vision and were ushered into the mystery that we may rightly call the most blessed of all. And we were celebrated it were wholly perfect and free of all the troubles that awaited us in the time to come, and we gazed in rapture at sacred revealed objects that were perfect, and simple, and unshakeable, and blissful. That was the ultimate vision, and we saw it in pure light because we were pure ourselves, not buried in this thing we are carrying around now, which we call a body, locked in it like an oyster in its shell" (250b-c). *Phaedrus,* trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in *Plato: Complete Works,* John M. Cooper, ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1997).

[58] Nancy, *Corpus,* 45.

[59] Nancy, *Corpus,* 45.

[60] Nancy, *Corpus,* 45.

Tactful hyperbole: Descartes on transubstantiation

As Ian James and Kas Saghafi have carefully argued, the difference between Nancy and Derrida on the character of intactness situates their broader confrontation over the deconstruction of Christianity as a metaphysics of presence.[61] "Put rather schematically," James argues, "the belonging of Christianity to metaphysics, for Derrida, makes it deconstruction an infinitely paradoxical if not impossible task. This belonging, for Nancy, makes the deconstruction of Christianity both necessary and inevitable."[62] The (im)possibility of the deconstruction of Christianity, in other words, is figured as the (im)possibility of touching the Incarnate body. For Derrida, the intangible body implies a haptocentric metaphysical reserve, a moderation or prohibition of touching the presence in the body; for Nancy, the intangible body implies the impossibility of the presence in the body. Nancy, according to Derrida, deconstructs the Incarnation by exposing the body as "a structure made up of nothing but surfaces and outsides without insides." These surfaces or exteriorities are always open to a "touch that can only ever leave them intact, untouched and untouchable."[63] Nancy seems to disagree precisely with this equivalence: to be untouchable is *not* to be intact. What is untouchable here is precisely the question and the difference. Are the Christian body and the body of Christianity—the Christic body and the philosophical and theological corpus derived from, and organized around, that body—intact insofar as they are untouchable (or only open to the tactful touch) *or* untouchable because intactness is impossible?

Though both Nancy and Derrida draw on different moments in Western philosophy and Christian theology to answer this question, they do not pose the question of the body *historically*—that is, from the perspective of the historically specific philosophies of body that confronted, and were confronted by, theologies of the Incarnation and Eucharist. Though Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity is developed in his interpretations of the Cartesian *cogito*, for example, it is not entirely clear how Nancy understands the historical relationship between Cartesian philosophy and the deconstruction made possible by the atheology of the Christian incarnation. Is Descartes making explicit the kenotic logic of incarnation in the *cogito* argument that is already at play in Western metaphysics?

---

[61] Ian James, "Incarnation and Infinity," in *Re-treating Religion: Deconstructing Christianity with Jean-Luc Nancy*, eds. Alena Alexandrova, Ignaas Devisch, Laurens ten Kate, and Aukje van Rooden (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012) 247-255; Kas Saghafi, "Safe, Intact: Derrida, Nancy, and the 'Deconstruction of Christianity,'" *A Companion to Derrida*, eds. Leonard Lawlor and Zeynep Direk (Walden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) 447-463.

[62] James, "Incarnation and Infinity," 247.

[63] Derrida, *On Touching*, 14.

Nancy does not offer a clear answer to this question. The intersections of philosophical and theological problems in the history of Christian thought, however, offer a different approach to the question of the intactness of the Christian body—not *if* the incarnation is the site of Christianity's deconstruction or affirmation of metaphysics, but *how* philosophies of the body and embodiment were thought to threaten or protect the theological mysteries of the Incarnation and transubstantiation. I offer the Cartesian account of the possibility of transubstantiation as just one example of how the questions of the intactness of the Christian body and the body of Christianity were negotiated in historically particular encounters between philosophical explanations of bodily nature and incarnational and Eucharistic theologies.

The most vehement censorship of Cartesian philosophy resulted from its perceived threat to the Eucharistic mystery, and prominent Cartesians were particularly anxious to avoid charges that Cartesianism implied a denial of the real presence of Christ's body in the Eucharist.[64] Descartes' explicit treatments of transubstantiation attempt philosophical explanations of the possibility of Eucharistic real presence: Descartes was pressed to explain how, in the terms of Cartesian physics, we *might* be touching the substance of Christ's body without knowing or perceiving that we are. The central issue was the nature of Cartesian body as extension: if Christ's body is *only* extension and its modes, then a change of extended substance would need to be perceived as such, as a change of shape, depth, or position. A change of extended substance, in other words, seems to necessitate a perceptual change. If Cartesians held to the principles of Cartesian physics, Cartesianism seemed "dangerously close to Lutheran and Calvinist heresies"[65] that denied the real somatic presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Due to the increasing popularity of Cartesianism in France, the archbishop of Paris issued a royal decree in 1671 prohibiting its teaching, "wishing to prevent the course of this opinion that could bring some confusion in the explanation of our mysteries."[66] Subsequently Cartesianism came under increasing attack throughout Europe for the perceived incompatibility of

[64] For the main treatments of Descartes's approach to transubstantiation, see J.R. Armogathe, *Theologia Cartesiana: L'Explication physique de l'Eucharist chez Descartes et dom Desgabets* (La Haye, 1977); Richard Watson, "Transubstantiation among the Cartesians," in *Problems of Cartesianism,* ed. T. Lennon (Ontario: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1982); Ronald Laymon, "Transubstantiation: Test Case for Descartes' Theory of Space," in *Problems of Cartesianism,* 149-70; Steven Nadler, "Arnauld, Descartes, and Transubstantiation: Reconciling Cartesian Metaphysics and Real Presence," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49 (1988): 229-46; Roger Ariew, *Descartes and the Last Scholastics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999) ch. 7; Julian Bourg, "The Rhetoric of Modal Equivocacy in Cartesian Transubstantiation," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62.1 (2001): 121-40; and Tad Schmaltz, *Radical Cartesianism: the French reception of Descartes* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007) ch. 1.

[65] Watson, "Transubstantiation among the Cartesians," 161.

[66] F. Bouillier, *Histoire de la philosophie Cartésienne,* Vol. 1 (Paris : Delagrave, 1868) 469.

the Cartesian understanding of body as extension with the possibility of transubstantiation.[67]

Descartes' major treatments of transubstantiation are offered in the *Fourth Replies* to the *Meditations* in response to inquiries by Antoine Arnauld in the *Fourth Objections* and in several letters sent to the Jesuit Denis Mesland. We might understand these responses as the necessity of philosophical tact towards a theological mystery—Descartes' concession to a law of tact that binds philosophy to a Christian metaphysics of presence. Indeed, *without* these explanations Cartesianism was thought to hyperbolically threatened Eucharistic real presence, touching on the matter of body *too much* such that Christ's real presence seemed impossible. Yet this misses the historical complexities of the *problem* of the body at the intersection of philosophy and theology—in this case, what it meant in Cartesianism for a body, and specifically a human body, to be *possibly* present and perceptible.

The first part of Descartes' dilemma requires explanation of how the substance of the Eucharistic bodies could change while the sense perception of those bodies remains the same. The *Fourth Replies* appeal to Tridentine orthodoxy but also claims to offer a better, hyperorthodox explanation.

> Now the teaching of the Church in the Council of Trent session 13, canons 2 and 4 is that 'the whole substance of the bread is changed into the substance of the body of Our Lord Christ while the form [*speciem*] of the bread remains unaltered. Here I do not see what can be meant by the 'form' of the bread if not the surface [*superficiem*] common to the individual particles of bread and the bodies which surround them.[68]

Descartes offers bodily 'surface' [*superficies*] as a synonym for the Tridentine term '*species*': "Everyone agrees that 'form' [*species*] here means precisely what is required in order to act on the senses. And everyone who believes that the bread is changed into the body of Christ also supposes that this body of Christ is precisely contained within the same surface [*superficies*] that would contain the bread if it were present."[69] The surfaces of the Eucharistic bodies are what remain after substantial change, and sensory perception of a body occur *only* by contact with these surfaces, i.e., the boundary "that constitutes the limits of the dimensions of the body which is perceived."[70] Indeed, bodily surface is the *haptic* basis of all sense perception, Descartes argues, citing Aristotle: "it is at this surface alone that [the] contact [necessary for sensory perception] occurs. And Aristotle himself admits, in the *De Anima,* Book 3, Chapter 13, that not just the sense

[67] For details of these attacks by Pierre Jurieu, Louis de la Ville, M. Le Moine, among others, and Arnauld's defenses of Cartesianism, see Nadler, "Arnauld, Descartes, and Transubstantiation," 241-4; and Schmaltz, *Radical Cartesianism,* ch. 1.

[68] CSM 2:175/AT VII 251.

[69] CSM 2:175-6/AT VII 253.

[70] CSM 2:173/AT VII 249-50.

that is specifically called the sense of touch but 'all the other senses, too, perceive by means of touching.'"[71]

What our senses touch in touching, in other words, is the common boundary a body shares with neighboring bodies, which has only has a modal reality that is ontologically dependent on the reality of the bodily substance whose surface it is.[72] But the surface that is preserved is not a mode of any *one* bodily substance insofar as it is the shared surface of two neighboring bodies. It is only a manner of being the shape and position of the bodies that share a boundary. Thus as long as both bodies remain in an "identical or similar" position and shape the surface remains the same: "when we call it the surface intermediate between the air and the bread, we mean that it does not change with either, *but only with the shape of the dimensions which separate one from the other*."[73] Though surface is only a mode of body, it is not properly a mode of any *one* body, neither a mode of the air nor of the bread. So it is possible that the body of Christ is "put in place" of the bread, yet "the surface which is between that air and the body of Jesus Christ is still numerically the same as that which was previously between the other air and the bread."[74]

In fact, it is precisely because of his understanding of *species* as shared surface that Descartes thinks he can better explain the possibility of transubstantiation than the traditional appeal to the Aristotelian categories of substance (which is changed from the bread to Christ's body) and accident (which are the non-essential properties of the bread that remain). The bulk of this discussion was cut out of the Paris edition of the *Meditations*—"so as not to offend our learned doctors"—and was restored in the Amsterdam edition, which Descartes declared "more correct […] [since] I have so far abandoned my restraint as to say that the common view of our theologians regarding the Eucharist is not so orthodox as mine."[75] In the censored passage Descartes argues that the traditional account of the conservation of the real accidents—the non-substantial and non-essential properties of the bodies—fails to explain the possibility of transubstantiation because a subsisting real accident *can only* be conceived as a substance.[76] To think of

[71] CSM 2:175/AT VII 251.

[72] CSM 2:174/AT VII 251-2.

[73] CSMK 242/AT IV 164.

[74] CSMK 242/AT IV 164-5.

[75] René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Correspondence,* Vol. 3, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugland Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 213/ AT III 785. Hereafter CSMK followed by the volume and page in the Adam and Tannery edition.

[76] CSM 2:176/AT VII 253-4. "The human mind cannot think of the accidents of the bread as real, and yet existing apart from its substance, without conceiving of them by employing the notion of substance. So it seems to be a contradiction, given that the whole substance of the bread changes, as the Church believes, to suppose that something real which was previously in the bread nonetheless remains. For if something real is understood to remain

accidents as possibly remaining after substantial change is, in fact, to think of them as substances—namely, as essential and subsisting properties of the thing. Descartes doesn't think it make sense to claim that something real *subsists* through a change of substance. Therefore, the orthodox explanation requires a miracle to separate the real accidents from the substance "in such a way that they [the real accidents] do not thereby themselves become substances."[77] His appeal to surface, however, Descartes argues, makes the preservation of the form of the bread that comes into contact with the senses explicable by reason alone: "my account not only makes it unnecessary to posit a miracle in order to explain the preservation of the accidents once the substance has been removed, but [also] make[s] it impossible for them to be removed without a fresh miracle (e.g., one that would alter the relevant dimensions)."[78] Surface is neither strictly modal in the sense of metaphysically belonging to a single substance (in which case it would change or disappear along with its substance) nor a subsisting real accident (that can only itself be conceived as a substance), and thus can remain without behaving like a substance or needing a specific miracle. As merely the boundary of a body shared with other bodies, it is neither a mode nor an accident of that substance and therefore does not require miraculous preservation. It is just the shared limit where one body touches another: in perceiving the bread, what affects the senses is the common boundary between the bread and the surrounding bodies in the air. Christ's human body could possibly be really present in the bread, therefore, as long as the interstitial dimensions between the bread and the surrounding bodies remain.

The preservation of the shared surfaces seems like it might answer question of how the sensory perceptions of the Eucharistic bodies remain unchanged despite transubstantiation, and there is evidence that Arnauld was satisfied with the explanation.[79] If the shared surfaces of bodies are preserved, however, wouldn't Christ's body need to be a "replacement corporeal substance with similar" dimensions to the Eucharistic bodies, i.e., "bread-shaped"?[80] Descartes' answer is no, which he elaborates in a controversial letter he tells Mesland to destroy: Christ's body is not extended in the manner of a recognizably human body in its dimensions because all that is required for the presence of a human body is the substantial union of a soul to some quantity of matter. "I [will explain how Christ is really present in the sacrament] on condition that if you communicate it to anyone else you will please not attribute its authorship to me; and on condition that you do not communicate it to anyone at all

it must be thought of as something which subsists; and though the word "accident" may be used to describe it, it must nonetheless be conceived of as a substance."

[77] CSM 2:177/AT VII 254.

[78] CSM 2:177/AT VII 254-5.

[79] Schmaltz, *Radical Cartesianism*, 53.

[80] Laymon, "Transubstantiation: Test Case for Descartes' Theory of Space," 167.

unless you judge it to be in accord with what has been laid down by the Church."[81] Descartes's worry was well-founded; the explanation was met with suspicion and alarm. Clerselier did not include the letters to Mesland in the 1657 edition of Descartes' correspondence due to their "dangerous" content, and even Arnauld, the staunch defender of Cartesianism who had accepted Descartes' arguments in Fourth Replies on the preservation of bodily surfaces, balked at Descartes' explanation of Christ's real presence as the uniting of Christ's soul to the Eucharistic bodies. Mesland seems to have rejected it, as well, given a subsequent letter in which Descartes remarks that "there is no need at all to accept the explanation" and to "destroy" the letter.[82]

Importantly, however, Descartes did take himself to be offering an account of the possibility of Christ's real bodily presence in Cartesian terms. After his usual qualifications that he has tried to avoid breaching theological matters ("not being a theologian by profession"), Descartes remarks that the human body is not merely extended, and that there are two different senses of body—as some quantity of extension and as the union of some quantity of extension with a soul.

> I consider what exactly is the body of a man, I find that this word 'body' is very ambiguous [*fort equivoque*]. When we speak of a body in general, we mean a determinate part of matter, a part of the quantity of which the universe is composed. In this sense, if the smallest amount of that quantity were removed, we would judge without more ado that the body was smaller and no longer complete; and if any particle of the matter were changed, we would at once think that the body was no longer quite the same, no longer numerically the same [*idem numero*]. But when when we speak of the body of a man, we do not mean a determinate part of matter, or one that has a determinate size; we mean simply the whole of the matter which is united with the soul of that man.[83]

Whatever quantity of extension is "joined and substantially united with the same soul" just *is* a human body. *Natural* transubstantiation, Descartes explains, changes such a substantial union. Food particles, for example, pass into the blood and "transubstantiate themselves naturally and become parts of our bodies simply by mixing with the blood." However, Descartes continues, they do not become part of the substance of our *bodies as such.* In fact, "if we had sharp enough eyesight to distinguish them from the other particles of blood, we would see that they are still numerically the same" food particles.[84] If we had sharp enough eyes, that is, we would see only an un-individuated arrangement of extended parts.

[81] CSMK 242/AT IV 165.
[82] CSMK 248-9/AT IV 216.
[83] CSMK 242-3/AT IV 166.
[84] CSMK 243/AT IV 167-8.

Understanding how the soul can be present in every part of the body in this way helps to explain how Christ's body might be present in the sacrament-- Christ's soul is supernaturally joined to the Eucharistic bodies by the power of consecration, which miraculously changes the Eucharistic matter into his body.

> In this way it is easy to understand how the body of Jesus Christ is present only once in the whole host, when it is undivided; and yet is whole and entire in each of its parts, when it is divided; because all the matter however large or small, which as a whole is informed by the same human soul, is taken for a whole and entire human body.[85]

It is not difficult to see how this could be read as a denial of real somatic presence: Christ's *body* seems not to be present at all if we conceive of the body as some quantity of extension. Yet it is precisely the miraculous union of Christ's soul *with* the Eucharist matter, Descartes claims, that changes the Eucharistic matter into Christ's real human body. In identifying Christ by human-appearing bodily dimensions, in other words, we are mistaking what individuates his human body, which is the union of *some* quantity of extension with a soul. Denying the possibility of Christ's real somatic presence because Eucharistic bodies have different dimensions than anthropomorphic bodies mistakes what individuates a body as a human body. The observer of bodies as extensions would not be able to perceive a certain arrangement of bodies as properly belonging to a human body; such arrangements could just as easily be an inanimate machine. There is nothing in any arrangement of extension sufficient for the individuation of a human body no matter how humanlike or non-humanlike those extended parts appear.

Arnauld rejected the version of this explanation offered by the Benedictine Cartesian Robert Desgabets as a borderline endorsement of the Calvinist heresy that Christ was only spiritually rather than somatically present in the Eucharist.[86] As Tad Schmaltz has carefully shown, both the question of the nature of body and the nature of the claim *about* body were at stake. For Arnauld, Christ's bodily presence was extended but intangible, fully penetrating other bodies such that contact with Christ's body was impossible in the sense of one impenetrable surface touching another impenetrable surface. Christ's body was really present as *penetrable extension,* like a ghost or a spiritual body, but was still nonetheless extended and material (and therefore really somatically present).[87] Yet Arnauld was also anxious to avoid charges of Calvinism himself and emphasized the authority of Augustine in sharply distinguishing

[85] CSMK 244/AT IV 168.

[86] Schmaltz, *Radical Cartesianism,* 43-44.

[87] Schmaltz, *Radical Cartesianism,* 57-8.

between a philosophical explanation and a theological mystery.[88] Indeed, Arnauld warned against the "dangerous temptations" of discussions of Christ's real presence and the importance of believing in real presence "without philosophizing."[89]

I am not suggesting that Descartes succeeded in explaining the possibility of real presence in Cartesian terms, as Desgabets argued, or failed to do so, as Arnauld and the broad theological consensus did. My point here is to mark the historical work required to ask the question of Christian intactness at the interstices of philosophy and theology: whether Descartes' Christian philosophy is tactful or tactless relative to transubstantiation is less a function of the (im)possibility of deconstructing the Incarnation than historically particular differences over what bodies are, what Christ's human body is, and how bodies are perceived. Descartes' strategy is notable in allowing for the possibility of real presence without knowing or perceiving it as such precisely because the haptic contact with extension is insufficient to individuate that extension as a human body. We *may* be in contact with a human body when our senses perceive the Eucharistic bodies, Descartes argues, because the contact between bodies and our sensory organs required for sensory perception does not distinguish between human bodies and nonhuman bodies. Thus it is entirely possible in Cartesian terms that *this* body that I perceive as bread is the real human body of Christ. This was largely taken to be a denial of real presence, but I wonder if it would have been just as tactless and hyperbolic of Descartes *not* to touch on the question.

References

Ariew, Roger. *Descartes and the Last Scholastics.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999.

Aristotle. *On the Soul.* Translated by J.A. Smith. In *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation,* Vol. 1., edited by Jonathan Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

Armogathe, Jean Robert. *Theologia cartesiana: l'explication physique de l'Eucharistie chez Descartes et dom Desgabets*. La Haye: M. Nijhoff, 1977.

[88] In *Logic or the Art of Thinking*, for example, Arnauld and Nicole invoke the authority of Augustine in defending the mystery of transubstantiation from charges of its irrationality and impossibility: "it is sufficient to reply to all these objections [about the impossibility of two bodies occupying the same space] with what St. Augustine said on the same subject about the penetrability of bodies […] 'these are against the natural course that we are familiar with, because they are great, they are marvelous, they are divine, and so they are more true, certain, and enduring.'" Jill Vance Buroker, trans. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 262.

[89] Schmaltz, *Radical Cartesianism,* 54.

Arnauld, Antoine, and Pierre Nicole. *Logic, or, The art of thinking: containing, besides common rules, several new observations appropriate for forming judgment*. Translated by Jill Vance Buroker. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Bouillier, F. *Histoire de la philosophie Cartésienne,* 2 vols. Paris : Delagrave, 1868.

Bourg, Julian. "The Rhetoric of Modal Equivocacy in Cartesian Transubstantiation," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62.1 (2001): 121-40.

Derrida, Jacques. *On touching - Jean-Luc Nancy*. Translated by Christine Irizarry. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2007/ *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy.* Paris: Editions Galilée, 2000.

Descartes, René. *Oeuvres de Descartes*, edited by C. Adam and P. Tannery. Paris: CNRS/Vrin, 1897–1913.

———. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes,* Vols. 1 and 2. Translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugland Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

———. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: The Correspondence,* Vol. 3. Translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugland Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

James, Ian. "Incarnation and Infinity." In *Re-treating Religion: Deconstructing Christianity with Jean-Luc Nancy,* edited by Alena Alexandrova, Ignaas Devisch, Laurens ten Kate, and Aukje van Rooden. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012.

Laymon, Ronald, "Transubstantiation: Test Case for Descartes' Theory of Space." In *Problems of Cartesianism, Problems of Cartesianism,* edited by Thomas Lennon. Ontario: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1982.

Plato. *Phaedrus.* Translated by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff. In *Plato: Complete Works,* edited by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1997.

Nadler, Steven, "Arnauld, Descartes, and Transubstantiation: Reconciling Cartesian Metaphysics and Real Presence," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49 (1988): 229-46.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Corpus*. Translated by Richard A. Rand. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2008.

———. *Dis-enclosure: the deconstruction of Christianity*. Translated by Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant, and Michael B. Smith. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008/*La déclosion (Déconstruction du christianisme, 1).* Paris: Editions Galilée, 2005.

———. *Ego sum: corpus, anima, fabula*. Translated by Marie-Eve Morin. New York: Fordham University Press, 2016/*Ego sum.* Paris: Flammarion, 1979.

———. *Noli me tangere: on the raising of the body*. Translated by Sarah Clift, Pascale-Anne Brault, and Michael Nass. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008/ *Noli me tangere: Essai sur la levée du corps.* Paris: Bayard Editions, 2003.

———. *"Psyche."* Translated by Emily McVarish. In *The Birth To Presence.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993/ "*Psyche," Première Livraison* (16): 1977.

Saghafi, Kas. "Safe, Intact: Derrida, Nancy, and the 'Deconstruction of Christianity.'" In *A Companion to Derrida*, edited by Leonard Lawlor and Zeynep Direk. Walden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014.

Watson, Richard. "Transubstantiation among the Cartesians." In *Problems of Cartesianism*, edited by Thomas Lennon. Ontario: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1982.