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Descartes on Animals

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base the variable-realization argument on empirical grounds. But so far as I can see, we have not, as yet, been presented with the empirical evidence that we need.

I conclude that none of the traditional arguments succeed in providing support for variable realization. The arguments from what we can imagine, from what we know conceptually, or from empirical likelihood all fail to establish their conclusion. Like many, I feel some inclination to *believe* that a variable-realization doctrine is true. My problem is with finding a plausible and non-question-begging reason for this belief.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> My greatest debt is to Henry Jacoby, to whom I am very grateful. Many of the points that I make here emerged in the course of conversations with Henry during my year at East Carolina University. Henry also gave me interesting comments on a draft. I am also very grateful to Tim Crane, Simon Evnine and Peter Smith for helpful and illuminating comments.

## DESCARTES ON ANIMALS

BY PETER HARRISON

‘They eat without pleasure, cry without pain, grow without knowing it; they desire nothing, fear nothing, know nothing.’<sup>1</sup> The words are Malebranche’s, but they are generally thought to capture the essence of Descartes’ view of animals. The father of modern philosophy is credited with the opinion that animals are non-sentient automata, an opinion for which over the centuries he has been ridiculed and vilified. It has been variously characterized as ‘an internecine and murderous view’,<sup>2</sup> a ‘monstrous thesis’,<sup>3</sup> an ‘irredeemably fatuous belief’,<sup>4</sup> a doctrine which ‘brutally violates the old kindly fellowship of living things’.<sup>5</sup> Amidst the clamour of disapproving voices, there has been one valiant attempt to expunge this stain from Descartes’ otherwise exemplary record. John Cottingham has suggested that the relevant passages in the Cartesian corpus do not support the common view that Descartes denied feeling to animals.<sup>6</sup> While Descartes did insist that animals

<sup>1</sup> Nicolas Malebranche, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. G. Rodis-Lewis (Paris: J. Vrin, 1958–70), II, p. 394.

<sup>2</sup> More to Descartes, 11 December, 1648, *Œuvres de Descartes*, eds C. Adam and P. Tannery (Paris: L. Cerf, 1897–1913), V, p. 243 (cited hereafter as AT).

<sup>3</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *New Studies in the Philosophy of Descartes* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), pp. 135f.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Clark, *The Moral Status of Animals* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> A. Boyce Gibson, *The Philosophy of Descartes* (New York: Garland, 1987), p. 214.

<sup>6</sup> ‘“A Brute to the Brutes?”: Descartes’ Treatment of Animals’, *Philosophy*, 53 (1978), pp. 551–61. It is interesting that in the nineteenth century, natural historian St George Mivart proposed a similar interpretation of Descartes. *Lessons from Nature as Manifested in Mind and Matter* (London, 1876), p. 200.

were automata, and denied them thought and *self-consciousness*, none of these assertions, in Cottingham's view, commit him to the thesis that animals do not feel.

There is, I believe, additional evidence which supports Cottingham's reading of Descartes. It is surely significant that unlike many of his so-called disciples (most notably Malebranche), Descartes did not develop the most obvious theological corollary of animal insensitivity: namely, that if animals are by nature incapable of feeling pain, then God cannot be held responsible for visiting unmerited suffering upon these innocent creatures. Virtually every seventeenth-century proponent of the 'Cartesian' view of animals alluded to this advantage of what was otherwise a rather implausible view.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, from what little we know of Descartes' treatment of animals, his was not the behaviour of one who considered them unfeeling machines. We are reliably informed, for example, that Descartes owned a little dog – Monsieur Grat – upon whom he lavished much affection, and who used to accompany him on his walks.<sup>8</sup> (These were not walks to the dissecting room, as some have suggested.<sup>9</sup>) Again, this is in stark contrast to Father Malebranche and other 'Cartesians' whose rather cavalier attitude towards animals is a matter of record.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the fact that we can find in Descartes no succinct statement about animal awareness of the kind we find in Malebranche gives us some grounds to feel uneasy about the standard interpretation. If Descartes did believe that

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Nicolas Malebranche, 'Défense de l'auteur de la Recherche de la vérité, contre l'accusation de Monsr. de la Ville', in *Œuvres complètes* XVII/1, pp. 507–31; Antoine Dilly, *De l'Ame des bêtes* (Lyon: Anisson and Poysuel, 1676), pp. 96–9; Jean Darmanson, *La Beste transformée en machine* (Amsterdam, 1684), pp. 22f.; François Bayle, *Institutiones physicae ad usum scholarum accomodatae*, Vol.3 (Toulouse, 1700), II, pp. 645–6; Florentius Schuyl, 'Ad lectorum', in *Renatus Des Cartes. De Homine. Figuris et latinitate donatus a Florentio Schuyl* (Leyden: Franciscus Moyardus and Petrus Leffen, 1662); John Norris, *Essay Towards the Theory of the Ideal or Intelligible World*, Pt II (London: Printed for S. Manship, 1704), pp. 58–100. See also Leonora Rosenfield, *From Beast-Machine to Man-Machine* (New York: Octagon, 1968), and Hester Hastings, *Man and Beast in French Thought of the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1936). Descartes satisfied himself with the observation that he had posited a difference in kind between man and the animals, a difference which he believed was under threat from the likes of Montaigne and Charron. See *Discourse on Method*, V, in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, eds E. Haldane and G. Ross, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), Vol. I, p. 118 (cited hereafter as HR); letter to Newcastle, 23 November 1646, in *Philosophical Letters*, ed. A. Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), p. 206 (cited hereafter as K).

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Jack Vrooman, *René Descartes: a Biography* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1970), p. 194.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Ryder, in *Animal Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), informs us that Descartes' ideas sprang from his 'neuroticism', and that he alienated his wife by experimenting on the family dog (pp. 56f.). This clearly is a case of mistaken identity, for it is the French physiologist Claude Bernard who is notorious for having so misused his wife and the domestic pet.

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. Joseph Lavalée, *Letters of a Mameluke* (London, 1804), p. 106; N. Trublet, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la vie et des ouvrages de M. de Fontenelle* (Amsterdam: Marc-Michel Rey, 1761), p. 115. Nicholas Fontaine also wrote of Cartesians who justified vivisection by claiming that animals did not feel pain. See Rosenfield, *Beast-Machine to Man-Machine*, p. 54. The French poet, Louis Racine, is an interesting counter-instance, for he was both an enthusiastic advocate of the beast-machine hypothesis and a devoted dog lover. Again, see Rosenfield, *Beast-Machine to Man-Machine*, p. 53.

animals were incapable of feeling, he seems to have been reluctant to express his views unambiguously, and his actions, unlike those of others, do not accord with the traditional interpretation.

What, then, did Descartes think about animals? Did he really subscribe to the 'monstrous' thesis that animals are incapable of feeling pain? And if he did, why was he so disinclined to act upon his belief?

## I

Perhaps the best way to begin is to consider the details of Cottingham's argument.<sup>11</sup> Cottingham's defence of Descartes begins with an analysis of the following assertions:

- (1) Animals are machines.
- (2) Animals are automata.
- (3) Animals do not think.
- (4) Animals have no language.
- (5) Animals have no self-consciousness.
- (6) Animals have no consciousness.
- (7) Animals are totally without feeling.

No-one disputes that Descartes held (1)–(5). The mistake many commentators have made, in Cottingham's view, is the assumption that in holding to these weaker assertions, in particular (2) and (3), Descartes was thereby committed to (7).

In the case of automatism (2), Boyce Gibson is cited as a typical example. 'Descartes' says Gibson, 'uses the term [mechanism] explicitly to exclude purpose and feeling'.<sup>12</sup> Others have similarly drawn the conclusion from Descartes' talk of mechanism that he meant to deny feeling to animals.<sup>13</sup> Cottingham points out, however, that there is nothing in the concept of 'automaton', rightly understood as 'a machine that is relatively self-operating', which logically necessitates lack of feeling. Indeed, in the seventeenth century, Leibniz spoke of the human soul as 'a kind of spiritual automaton' and he can hardly have meant by it that humans were incapable of feeling.<sup>14</sup> Thomas Huxley, the great nineteenth-century apologist for evolutionary theory, certainly saw nothing odd in the suggestion that animals were sensitive automata:

though we may see reason to disagree with Descartes' hypothesis that brutes are unconscious machines, it does not follow that he was wrong in regarding them as automata. They may be more or less conscious, sensitive automata;

<sup>11</sup> Cottingham's argument has already been criticized in Daisie and Michael Radner, *Animal Consciousness* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1989), pp. 60–4. My analysis, as will become apparent, is somewhat different from theirs.

<sup>12</sup> Gibson, *The Philosophy of Descartes*, p. 211.

<sup>13</sup> Kemp Smith, *New Studies*, p. 135.

<sup>14</sup> See Cottingham, 'A Brute to the Brutes?', p. 553.

and the view that they are conscious machines is that which is implicitly, or explicitly, adopted by most persons.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, the theory of mind according to which our mental states are epiphenomena would suggest that we too are merely conscious automata. At this stage, then, we can endorse Cottingham's observation that automatism does not, of itself, entail insensitivity.

The case of animal thought (3), however, is more complex. Most interpreters of Descartes simply allude to his rather broad understanding of 'think' (*cogitare*, *penser*), to make the connection between (3) and (7). Descartes' 'thought', it is claimed, includes feelings. This is not an unreasonable interpretation. In the *Meditations*, for example, Descartes informs us that a thing which thinks is 'a thing which doubts, understands, [conceives], affirms, denies, wills, refuses, which also imagines and feels'.<sup>16</sup> 'Feeling [*sentire*]', he later says, 'is no other thing than thinking'.<sup>17</sup> Again, in the *Principles*, he equates thought with 'all that of which we are conscious'.<sup>18</sup> Finally, in a letter to Mersenne we have the telling assertion that 'the feeling of pain exists only in the understanding'.<sup>19</sup> 'Feeling' in these passages clearly is a species of thought, and 'thought' refers to the contents of consciousness.

Cottingham's response is to argue that not all feelings are thoughts even in Descartes' extended sense of the term, but only those which involve the mind's 'self-conscious apprehension' that it is feeling.<sup>20</sup> In his correspondence, for example, Descartes alludes specifically to the 'feelings' (*passions*) of animals, and to their 'impulses [*impetum*] of anger, fear, hunger'.<sup>21</sup> He also states quite plainly that he does not deny sensation to animals.<sup>22</sup> For Cottingham, then, Descartes wedges animal feelings into the gap between self-consciousness (5) and consciousness (6).

On the face of it, Cottingham has a case. Either Descartes' view of animals is incoherent, or most commentators have failed to discern his true meaning, or both. Before we foreclose on the matter, however, there are significant weaknesses in Cottingham's position which ought to be addressed. To begin with, there is one important assertion which Descartes made about animals to which, I believe, Cottingham should have given more attention. Let us label it:

<sup>15</sup> 'On the Hypothesis that Animals are Automata, and its History' (1874), in Thomas Huxley, *Method and Results* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), pp. 237f.

<sup>16</sup> Meditation II, HR I, p. 153.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> *Principles of Philosophy*, I, p. ix; HR I, p. 222.

<sup>19</sup> It is worth reproducing the relevant passage in full, for it is the closest Descartes comes to a definitive statement of his position: 'Je n'explique pas sans ame le sentiment de la douleur; car, selon moy, la douleur n'est que dans l'entendement; mais i'explique tous les mouemens extérieurs qui accompagnent en nous ce sentiment, lesquels seuls se trouvent aux bestes, & non la douleur proprement dite' (letter to Mersenne, 11 June 1640, AT III, p. 85).

<sup>20</sup> 'A Brute to the Brutes?', p. 555. Cf. Cottingham, 'Descartes on Thought', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 28 (1978), pp. 208–14.

<sup>21</sup> Letter to More, 5 February 1649, K, pp. 244f., AT V, p. 278; letter to Newcastle, 23 November 1646, K, p. 207, AT IV, p. 574.

<sup>22</sup> Letter to More, 5 February 1649, K, p. 245, AT V, p. 278.

## (1) Animals have no rational soul.

This is a surprising omission from Cottingham's list, for it is the key to understanding how the various claims which Descartes makes about animal minds are linked together. Thus it could be that although (2) does not entail (7), both (2) and (7) might be entailed by (1'). Cottingham, it must be acknowledged, does make passing reference to Descartes' denial of the animal soul, but he dismisses its relevance. 'To deny that X has a soul', he says, 'is a separate claim from the claim that X's movements can be explained by mechanical principles.' Here, I believe, Cottingham is mistaken.

## II

Descartes, we must understand, did not deny the existence of animal souls *per se*: animals might well have 'corporeal souls'.<sup>23</sup> It was the view that animals had *spiritual* souls, or 'substantial material forms' that Descartes was at pains to refute. 'Substantial forms' were the contrivance of scholastic thinkers, who, extrapolating beyond the biology of Aristotle, postulated that animals possessed a soul composed of a substance intermediate between spirit and matter. The champions of Aristotle, known then as 'Peripatetics', also maintained the Aristotelian distinction between vegetative (plant) souls, sensitive (animal) souls, and rational (human) souls.<sup>24</sup> In the sphere of biology, then, the ruling doctrine in seventeenth-century France was that the vital activities of living things, along with their sense perceptions (if they were animals), were functions of a non-corporeal soul.<sup>25</sup> In rejecting this conception of the interior operations of animals, Descartes was left with three problems: How did animals move? Were they alive? Did they have sensations?

The first difficulty Descartes dealt with quite simply by attributing the motions of animals to mechanism. As he expressed the matter in a letter to the English Platonist Henry More: 'I now came to realise that there are two different principles causing our motions: one is purely mechanical and corporeal . . . the other is the incorporeal mind, the soul which I have defined as a thinking substance'.<sup>26</sup> The motions of animals, who lack an incorporeal source of motivation, must therefore be purely mechanical. On this point Cottingham could not have been more wrong. For Descartes, to deny that X has a soul is precisely to assert that X's movements are mechanical.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> ' . . . the souls of animals are nothing but their blood . . . ' Letter to Plempius, 3 October 1637, K, p. 36, AT II, p. 414; cf. *Replies to Objections* VI, HR II, p. 244.

<sup>24</sup> Aristotle, *De anima* 412–15, *De partibus animalium*, 641a.

<sup>25</sup> For a statement of the Peripatetic position, see e.g. Père Pardies, *Discours de la connoissance des bestes* (Paris: Mabre-Cramoisy, 1672). Cf. Pierre Bayle's comments, 'Rorarius', n. G, *The Dictionary, Historical and Critical, of Mr Peter Bayle*, 2nd edn, 5 vols (London: Printed for J.J. and P. Knapton, 1734–8), IV, 909a.

<sup>26</sup> Letter to More, 5 February 1649, K, p. 243, AT V, p. 276; cf. *Replies to Objections* IV, HR II, p. 103.

<sup>27</sup> But not the converse. That is to say, the lack of soul entails mechanism, though mechanism does not necessarily entail lack of soul. Many human motions (e.g. functions of

Descartes' project also led to a new understanding of 'life'. In the new ontology, life no longer required the minimal presence of the vegetative soul, but was simply a mechanistic principle. 'Death', says Descartes, 'never comes to pass by reason of the soul, but only because some one of the principal parts of the body decays'. The difference between the living and the dead, he goes on to say, is analogous to the difference between a watch which is wound up, and one which has run down.<sup>28</sup> Life itself is sheer mechanism.

What, then, does Descartes say of animal sensations, and what are we to make of those passages, highlighted by Cottingham, in which Descartes seems to concede that animals have both sensations and feelings? It is clear that despite denying animals a sensitive soul, Descartes allows them sensations. In the ubiquitous letter to Henry More, however, he distinguishes between 'thought' (*cogitatio*) and 'sensation' (*sensus*). He also informs More that: 'I do not deny sensation [in animals], in so far as it depends on a bodily organ'.<sup>29</sup> The crucial part of this statement is the proviso that in animals sensation is a feature of *bodily organs*. For Descartes this meant that animal sensation was to be understood as a *mechanical* process, not as something which took place in the soul. As such, sensations need not be conscious. Descartes' novel distinction between 'sensation', traditionally conceived as 'conscious sensation', and his own *sentire* was a constant source of confusion to his critics, some thinking that he denied animals sensation (which seems patently false), others believing that if he granted animals sensation, he must be granting them at least rudimentary consciousness.<sup>30</sup> Descartes clarified his position by pointing out that not even all human sensation is conscious, for it is clear that sleepwalkers take in certain features of their environment, and reflex responses occur even before we become aware of the stimulus.<sup>31</sup> Sensations, then, though commonly assumed to be conscious, need not be. There is nothing in Descartes' attribution of sensation to animals which necessitates their conscious awareness.

Those passages to which Cottingham refers us in which Descartes apparently alludes specifically to animal 'feelings' need not occupy us long. Cottingham has rendered Descartes' Latin *passions*, as 'feelings', and this is rather misleading.<sup>32</sup> Again Descartes himself clearly distinguishes between *sentire* (feelings) and *passions* (passions/feelings). It is only the former which he wishes to deny animals. Feeling (*sentire*), he says in the *Meditations*, 'is no other thing than thinking'.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, passions (*passions*), 'even though in us they are accompanied with thought . . .

the autonomic nervous system, reflexes) are thus mechanical, even though we possess an incorporeal soul. This is because our bodies are still machines.

<sup>28</sup> *The Passions of the Soul*, I.vi, HR I, p. 333.

<sup>29</sup> Letter to More, 5 February 1649, K, p. 245, AT V, p. 278.

<sup>30</sup> See e.g. the Objections of Hobbes, HR II, pp. 68f., Gassendi, HR II, pp. 144–6, and 'Divers Theologians and Philosophers', HR II, pp. 235, 244. Cf. Leibniz, *Principles of Nature and of Grace, Founded upon Reason*, 4, in *Philosophical Writings* ed. and tr. Mary Morris (London: Dent, 1934), p. 23.

<sup>31</sup> Letter to Newcastle, 23 November 1646, K, p. 206, AT IV, p. 573.

<sup>32</sup> Anthony Kenny in his translation of the letters uses the English equivalent 'passions'.

<sup>33</sup> Meditation II, HR I, p. 153.

they do not depend on thought'.<sup>34</sup> For this reason, passions may occur in animals.<sup>35</sup> Such passions or impulses as Descartes admits in animals – fear, hunger, and so on – are simply ways of talking of animals' behaviour. They do not involve conscious awareness. The passage where this is most clearly expressed is in *The Passions of the Soul*, in a section entitled: 'Example of the movements of the body which accompany the passions and do not depend on the soul':

For the rest, in the same way as the course which these [animal] spirits take towards the nerves of the heart suffices to give the movement to the gland by which fear is placed in the soul, so too, by the simple fact that certain spirits at the same time proceed towards the nerves which serve to move the legs in order to take flight, they cause another movement in the same gland, by means of which the soul is sensible of and perceives this flight, *which in this way may be excited in the body by the disposition of the organs alone, and without the soul's contributing thereto.*<sup>36</sup>

In humans, fear is always 'placed in the soul', that is, it is conscious. But in animals the passion 'fear' consists only of the mechanical processes by which the body is prepared for flight. 'The principal effect of all the passions in men', Descartes goes on to say, 'is that they incite and dispose their soul to desire those things for which they prepare their body'.<sup>37</sup> It is reasonable to assume from this that Descartes' concession of passions to animals in no way entails that they have conscious 'feelings'.

I think that these considerations do some damage to Cottingham's case, for even if we concede that (2), (3) and (6) do not necessarily entail (7), it is clear that for Descartes at least (1') logically necessitates all of (2), (3), (6) and (7). None of this means, however, that we have vindicated the traditional interpretation of Descartes on this matter, for certain features of the Cartesian position remain puzzling. Why do we find in Descartes no definitive statement of a position? Why are there no theological corollaries? Why does he bother to keep a pet dog? The answer to these questions lies in locating Descartes' deliberations on the animal soul within his own philosophical system.

### III

Descartes' philosophical starting point, as everyone knows, was to consider everything a matter of doubt. Animal souls were merely one of the casualties of Descartes' initial methodological scepticism – along with God, other minds, and the external world. As it turned out, Descartes was ill-suited to radical scepticism, for he very quickly established rational grounds for belief in God, other minds, and the external world. Descartes' criteria for other minds, or, what is the same thing,

<sup>34</sup> Letter to Newcastle, 23 November 1646, K, p. 206, AT IV, p. 573.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> *The Passions of the Soul*, I.xxxviii, HR I, p. 349 (my emphasis).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., I.xl, HR I, pp. 349f.



for other souls, restricted them to human bodies.<sup>38</sup> Thus, Descartes' denial of animal souls and their accompanying mental states amounts to this: in view of a conspicuous absence of rational grounds for asserting the existence of those 'substantial material forms' or purely spiritual entities which were supposed to constitute animal souls, the most parsimonious explanation of animal activities is mechanism. The significance of the Cartesian view is what it denies, not what it asserts.

Descartes himself continually stressed the significance of the negative aspect of his case. Thus, to More: 'we cannot at all prove the presence of a thinking soul in animals';<sup>39</sup> to Reneri: the behaviour of animals 'is not at all a sufficient basis to prove [that they have souls]';<sup>40</sup> to the objections of Arnauld: 'we have had no cause for ascribing anything more to them [animals], beyond . . . the principle depending solely on the animal spirits'.<sup>41</sup> In a similar vein, Descartes informed Plempius that he had deliberately refrained from giving strong arguments for his view about souls 'partly for fear of writing something false while refuting falsehood, partly for fear of seeming to want to ridicule received Scholastic opinions'.<sup>42</sup> Again, it needs to be emphasized that Descartes' denial of animal souls must be understood in the light of the available alternatives. It was more probable, in his view, that animals were insensitive automata than that they possessed souls like ours, or ones composed of a mysterious substance intermediate between spirit and matter, by virtue of which they could feel.<sup>43</sup> Further, because it was virtually axiomatic that mere matter could not sustain thought or consciousness, brutes, if exclusively corporeal, must be devoid of feeling.

It is in this light that we are to read Descartes' candid admission to Henry More, that 'though I regard it as established that we cannot prove there is any thought in animals, I do not think it is thereby proved that there is not, since the human mind does not reach into their hearts'.<sup>44</sup> The further implications of this stance we find expressed in the chief work of Descartes' foremost English disciple, John Norris. Norris, in his *Essay Towards the Theory of the Ideal or Intelligible World* (1704), addressed the issue of the souls of brutes, with a view to 'determining whether they have any Thought or Sensation in them or no'.<sup>45</sup> Here he sets out the Cartesian position but concludes with a plea for kindness to animals. His rationale: 'Reason does most favour the side which denies all Thought and Perception to animals, yet, . . . our Reason [may] deceive us, as 'tis easy to err in the Dark'.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Descartes' criteria were speech and rational behaviour of certain kinds. See *Discourse on Method*, V, HR I, p. 116; letter to Newcastle, 23 November 1646, K, pp. 206f., AT IV, pp. 573–6.

<sup>39</sup> Letter to More, 5 February 1649, K, p. 243, AT V, p. 276.

<sup>40</sup> Letter to Reneri, April 1638, K, p. 54, AT II, p. 41. (The date for this letter given in AT is March 1638.)

<sup>41</sup> Reply to Objections IV, HR II, p. 164.

<sup>42</sup> Letter to Plempius, 3 October 1637, K, p. 37, AT I, pp. 415f.

<sup>43</sup> Letter to Newcastle, 23 November 1646, K, p. 208, AT IV, p. 576. For some of the difficulties of the Peripatetic view see Bayle, 'Rorarius', nn. C, E, *Dictionary*, IV, 901a–907a.

<sup>44</sup> Letter to More, 5 February 1649, K, p. 244, AT V, pp. 276f.

<sup>45</sup> John Norris, *Essay*, pp. 58–100.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100, cf. p. 59.

These considerations help us make sense of Descartes' behaviour towards animals, and also account for his reluctance to build theological extensions onto his theory about animal souls. Perhaps the most accurate way to characterize Descartes' view is to say that he was cautiously agnostic on the whole question. He did not adamantly insist that animals could not feel (and this is why few passages can be found to this effect), but rather showed that there are no irresistible reasons for asserting that they do. His behaviour was not a case of a double standard, nor did it betray an unwillingness to live up to the implications of his own philosophy: he merely recognized the limits of philosophical speculation.

#### IV

There is currently a lot of nonsense spoken about Descartes, particularly on the question of animal consciousness. John Cottingham was correct to sense that there was something fundamentally wrong with our reading of Descartes on this question, although he himself did not penetrate to the heart of the matter. We are now, I believe, in a better position to identify the mistaken emphasis of most readings of Descartes. The view that Descartes was a brute to the brutes is, above all else, historically myopic. The value of the Cartesian hypothesis can only be assessed when it is compared with the views it was replacing. Descartes enabled his contemporaries to jettison the incoherent scholastic notion of 'substantial forms'. The beast-machine, moreover, played a vital role in exorcising the natural world of those occult forces integral to the functioning of the Aristotelian cosmos. It is rather ironic that Descartes is castigated for having authored the doctrine of the 'ghost in the machine' when in fact he successfully banished ghosts from all machines except the human, and in the process of doing so found a place for genuinely scientific explanation in nature. Modern critics of Descartes fail similarly to locate his views on animals within his own system of thought. They ignore his circumspect manner and misread his reluctance to make dogmatic pronouncements, attributing to him views which are more characteristic of Malebranche and his disciples. Finally, Descartes is commonly portrayed as one whose view of animals is morally repugnant. Such moral indignation is misplaced. One might disagree with Descartes, but to disapprove is to exhibit the same kind of muddle-headedness that placed Galileo before the Inquisition. Had Descartes claimed that animals did feel, but their feelings could be discounted, it would be another matter. However, this was not his position at all, although many contemporaries undoubtedly held such a view. Whether Descartes' hypothesis actually encouraged such practices as vivisection remains an open question. Certainly, the majority of vivisectors seemed not to need such a theory to justify their cruel activities.

In sum, then, Descartes was neither a brute, nor was he muddle-headed. His guilt consists of this: he had the temerity to point out that the traditional justifications for attributing consciousness to animals were vacuous. It is not yet clear that he was wrong.

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