Descartes and Tradition: The Miracle of the Eucharist

by

Eric P. Lewis

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Virginia Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts

In

Philosophy

Approved:

Roger Ariew, chair

David Burr

Eric Watkins

December 1995
Blacksburg, VA

Key Words: Descartes, Eucharist, Transubstantiation, Cartesianism, Scholasticism
c.2
LD
5665
V835
1995
L495
c.2
DESCARTES AND TRADITION: THE MIRACLE OF THE EUCHARIST

By

Eric P. Lewis

Roger Ariew, Chairman

Philosophy

Descartes and the followers of his new mechanistic physics were subject to condemnation as a result of a reaction against his philosophy on the basis that it could not adequately explain the miracle of the Eucharist. Descartes, however, firmly believed that he could give an explanation of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist which was not only consistent with his physics and metaphysics, but which was also consistent with the orthodoxy demanded by the Church. His explanation exploited the ambiguity of the language adopted by the Council of Trent, yet rejected the Aristotelian philosophy traditionally relied upon to explain the miracle. Descartes’ explanation of transubstantiation remained provocative to his scholastic contemporaries not because it was internally inconsistent, but rather because Descartes attempted to overthrow the whole of traditional philosophy. Descartes’ confidence in his own explanation of the sacred rite ultimately obscured the long and troubled history of the issue from him, leading him to believe that he could win converts to his philosophy by publishing his own theory of the Eucharist. Consequent to this excursion into theology, Descartes’ philosophy came under fire and was condemned in part because it could not give a traditional explanation of the Eucharist.
Acknowledgment

I would like to thank the entire faculty of the Department of Philosophy at Virginia Tech. Either directly or indirectly their input has been essential to the completion of this project. Most importantly, however, I wish to express my gratitude to Roger Ariew. Without his instruction and criticism I could never have begun this work. I would also like to thank Eric Watkins and David Burr for their support and presence on the thesis committee. I must also acknowledge Marjorie Grene for inspiring me to write about transubstantiation in the seventeenth century. Finally, I wish to express thanks for the continued support of my wife Michele.
Contents

Abstract i i i
Acknowledgment i i i
Introduction 1

Chapter One: Establishing a Tradition

A Calling for a New Council 4
Gasparo Contarini at Regensburg: A Precursor to Trent 7
The Thomistic Legacy 1 2
The Council of Trent Meets 1 5
The Eucharist Theory of Thomas Aquinas 1 9
The Church Condemnations of 1277 2 7
Duns Scotus and the Eucharist 3 0
William of Ockham and the Eucharist 3 7
The Doctrine Produced at Trent 4 1

Chapter Two: Innovation and Conflict

Descartes and the Eucharist in the Seventeenth Century 4 8
Arnauld and Real Qualities 5 3
The Eucharist and the Scholastics 5 8
Descartes Against the Scholastics 6 2
Response to Arnauld: The Fourth Set of Replies 6 5
Early Resistance to Descartes’ Philosophy: Utrecht 7 5
The Mesland Correspondence 8 3

Conclusion 9 2

Bibliography 9 7
Introduction

In 1660 the Benedictine Dom Antoine Vinot advised Claude Ciéreselier, editor of Descartes' correspondence, not to correspond with the Jesuit Pere Jean Berthet saying: “you could not deliver a more deadly blow to the philosophy of Mr. Descartes. . . . than to communicate your views on the Eucharist to those people the Jesuits.”¹ Not fifteen years earlier, Descartes' correspondence with the Jesuit priest and enthusiastic advocate of his philosophy, Denis Mesland, had been cut short when it was decided that the Order's mission would best be fulfilled if the young admirer of the Meditations were sent to America to convert the savages. Throughout Europe in the mid-seventeenth century the philosophy of René Descartes was both gaining popularity and the ire of the Church. There were a myriad of condemnations against Cartesian doctrines in general, and against the Cartesians’ doctrine of the Eucharist in particular. Why then did Descartes believe he could safely give and explanation of the Eucharistic, much less that such an explanation would be accepted?

Philosophically, Descartes' belief can be easily explained by his confidence in his metaphysical project portrayed in the Meditations on First Philosophy. In the Meditations, Descartes advances a new mechanistic philosophy opposed to the traditional scholastic metaphysics which had its basis in Aristotle. Descartes believed that the truth of his own system would manifest the weaknesses of the traditional philosophy, thus ushering in a new era which not only meant a change in the teachings of the schools, but also a revision of certain interpretations of theological doctrines. Descartes firmly believed that his philosophy was correct, and consequently would make converts of those who chose to give it a careful reading.

Descartes' intention to undermine scholasticism by proposing a new system in opposition to it, was, to say the least, an ambitious goal. The root of this project was a new metaphysics which made no use of the traditional notions of real accidents and substantial forms. This metaphysics, as laid out in the *Meditations*, was an attempt to provide a foundation for a new physics - a physics quite unlike the one built from the four elements: air, earth, fire and water, and containing a plethora of entities including the four causes, matter, forms, real qualities and the rest of the scholastic ontology. Indeed, at one point, Descartes openly denied the basic qualities from which the scholastics built their precious elements. There was thus little room to compromise between the defenders of the old school, and the mechanists. Descartes’ ontology was simply too thin to make amends. Part of the fight that ensued was a reaction, on theological grounds, to the claim that Descartes’ philosophy could not explain all the mysteries of the Faith. This, of course, was to be expected. Philosophy was long the hand-maiden of the Church; and when confronted, the Church had its methods of controlling the dissemination of doctrine.

From an early date Descartes was both aware that his project required certain new interpretations of theology, and that the spectre of censorship was very real. However, despite his careful tactics, he was supremely confident that he was within the bounds of true orthodoxy. Indeed, he claimed that his philosophy would provide a more consistent explanation of certain tenets of the Faith; and there is little reason to doubt his sincerity given the consistency of both his claims in this regard, and his theological explanations as a whole. Never did he oppose what he believed to be the authority of the Church. Rather, he sought refuge from the attacks of his opponents in the doctrines of the ‘Councils’, always claiming that he was most consistent with the dogma as laid down by the Church. Descartes ‘refuge’ in the Councils was sincere, although it exploited the purposefully ambiguous language found therein. Descartes’ references to the historical documentation of the Church do not.
however, show sensitivity to the history of the debates he entered. One might say this was his down-fall. While Descartes was quick to refer to the defining texts of Catholicism, he showed little knowledge of, or regard for, the context of the debates which produced those texts and drove his adversaries' attacks. He was not concerned with what others had to say on the subject, nor why they said what they did. Nothing, he thought, could gain him victory over scholasticism better than the truth of his philosophy as demonstrated through its proper application in theology. I hope to show in the following pages that Descartes' explanation of the Eucharist was a consistent and sincere attempt to apply the results of his physics, established by the Meditations, to a theology which he believed had gone astray as a result of the scholastic reliance on real qualities and substantial forms. While Descartes' tactics in his project do shift, he is consistent in believing in his own orthodoxy, and he is unswerving in defending that orthodoxy through the exploitation of the ambiguity of the terminology adopted by the Council of Trent.
Chapter 1: Establishing a Tradition

A Calling for a New Council

At the heart of the debates about transsubstantiation in the Seventeenth Century lies the Council of Trent (1545-1563). While it cannot be said that the Council is all important in defining official Church doctrine concerning the Eucharist, it is clear that Descartes, in defence of his own explanation of the rite, invokes the council's name on at least five occasions in his correspondence.\(^2\) It is also clear that he has read and is aware of the Council's specific texts and vocabulary concerning transubstantiation, as is his chief mechanist rival Gassendi.\(^3\) While it is often difficult to determine what texts Descartes has read (given his habit of denying familiarity with other authors), it is not only certain that he is well aware of the Council's decrees on transubstantiation, but also that he intentionally uses the ambiguity of its terminology to address one of the most devastating criticisms made against his philosophy - a criticism which would eventually see its way into a multitude of official condemnations. That criticism concerns the failure of Descartes' physics to explain the miracle of the Eucharist.

The Council of Trent, officially begun in 1545 amid political turmoil, was in part the result of promises made by Cardinal Franese which gained him election as Pope Paul III in 1534. It spanned eighteen years in its three sessions\(^4\) and provides us with a connection point between the medieval debates concerning the Eucharist, and important condemnations of Descartes' physics in the seventeenth century.

---

\(^2\) The five letters are: to Mersenne 31 March 1641; to Mesland 2 May 1644, 9 February 1645 and another of unknown date (AT IV 347); and for Arnauld 4 June 1648.

\(^3\) Gassendi, Exercise Against the Aristotelians; Book II, Exercise III, 11; translated by Brush.

\(^4\) The Council of Trent, while spanning eighteen years was not continuous during that period, instead meeting only in 1545-1547, 1551-1552, and 1562-1563.
Determining the intentions of the Council, exactly what its resulting doctrine on the Eucharist was, and determining how that doctrine is later perceived by the mechanists and their scholastic adversaries, are three essential undertakings of this study. The first of these problems, determining the Council's intentions, is perhaps the most difficult one. It requires that we not only understand the political turmoil surrounding the counter-reformation, but also that we have some familiarity with the texts of Thomas Aquinas concerning the Eucharist, as well as the reaction against his interpretation of transubstantiation. Only with this knowledge can we accurately state the intentions of the Council concerning the Eucharist.

The Council of Trent is generally believed to be an effort to reform practice and define doctrine in and by the ideologically-besieged Church. The story is of course more complex. Hopes were harbored by some that the Council could serve as a platform of reunification. While such hopes quickly vanished along with the associated problems of reconciling doctrine, permanent reform remained difficult. Even after the Council concluded its initial discussion on the Eucharist in March of 1547, and eventually published the associated resolutions in 1551, there was further and extensive debate on the issue prior to the convening of the third and final assembly of the Council in January of 1562. While this doctrine would not be changed by the latter meeting of the Council, the on-going debate shows new tendencies in the relations between the Protestant factions and the Church, as well as an unwillingness to simply accept the published resolutions of the earlier sessions of the Council concerning transubstantiation. Nevertheless, what was ultimately published and widely known by the scholars of the seventeenth century is not directly the result of the 1561 debates, but the published doctrine resulting from the 1547 sessions. This doctrine was clearly the result of an attempt to define the Eucharist in opposition to particular Protestant views while avoiding the issues of the specific debates of the previous centuries.
While reform was becoming more obviously necessary within the Church by the beginning of the sixteenth century, the failure of the earlier councils, and the feared power struggle between any sanctioned Council and the Pope stymied the quick assembly of such a meeting. A Council was as much feared as it was necessary. It is claimed that “at the very mention of a Council, all the saleable offices in Rome went down in value”\(^5\). Charles V, however, realized that suppressing the Protestants along the lines of the Edict of Worms had failed miserably\(^6\). Wishing to restore his political authority in Germany he was forced to try to negotiate with the Protestants. The Council was eventually called to meet by Paul III in June of 1536. This effort and another in 1542 were aborted because of the renewed war between Charles V and Francis I. In the meantime an attempt was made to end the schism in Germany between the Protestants and Catholics. A conference was called in Regensburg in 1541 and held in conjunction with a meeting of the Imperial Diet. Charles V, between wars with Francis I, was under increasing pressure to reconcile differences between the Lutherans and Catholics. He did not have the military might to crush the German Protestants, and any such action, given his hostilities with the French, could put him in a precarious if not disastrous predicament. Further, the Turks were threatening from the east, and without Protestant support Charles V had little hope of defending his territory. He was forced to negotiate. Consequently, the conference at Regensburg seemed like the only alternative. Paul III sent the eminent Cardinal Contarini to Regensburg as the head of the Catholic delegation. The conference at Regensburg becomes significant to the Council of Trent because it demonstrates the political and philosophical difficulties involved in resolving doctrinal disputes. Regensburg manifests the particular philosophical hurdles which must be overcome in order to make progress toward reconciliation of theological doctrine. At center stage of the political


failure of the negotiations at Regensburg is the issue of how transubstantiation is interpreted by representatives of the Catholics and Protestants.

Gasparo Contarini at Regensburg: A Precursor to Trent

In May of 1535 Paul III made Gasparo Contarini a cardinal. Contarini was known for his desire to reform the church, and he quickly became one of the Pope’s closest advisors. At the urging of Contarini, the Pope called for a General Council to meet in Mantua in 1537. The commission lasted three months and ended with Contarini presenting to the Pope the Consilium delectorum cardinalium et aliorum prelatorum de emendanda ecclesia. The document boldly states particular abuses of authority and papal bureaucracy within the Church. The document, which was intended to be confidential, found its way into the hands of Luther and the German Protestants who published it with a “scornful preface” as confirmation of their own accusations against the Church. While the Pope initially saw this Council as a success (he elevated three of its nine members), the resulting document was used as a weapon against the Church by the Protestants.7

Despite the hostile reaction by the Protestants to the Council in Mantua, Paul III sent Contarini, a prominent Venetian and a Thomist, to Regensburg in 1541 to attempt to settle doctrinal disputes between the two parties. Here there was success resolving perhaps one the greatest theological divides between Luther and the Catholic Church. Central to Luther’s theology was that man was saved by the grace of God, not by good works. Contarini is credited with working out a

compromise with the doctrine of "double justification", which held “that any inherent justification man himself attained had to be supplemented by a divinely imputed justification if he was to be saved”. What is particularly interesting about Regensburg is the failure of the two sides to agree on the doctrine of the Eucharist, which remained an impediment to Contarini's goal of reunification. The importance of the issue of transubstantiation is compounded by the fact that despite progress toward reconciliation of other essential Church doctrine, it remained an obstacle.

It is worth noting Contarini's own views concerning transubstantiation because they directly influence the relations and doctrinal negotiations between the Protestants and Catholics prior to the eventual assembly of the Council of Trent. The issue of transubstantiation was put squarely between the key advocates for the Council of Trent when Charles V refused the Pope's appointment of Contarini as a legate "probably because of his firm stand on transubstantiation in Regensburg." As we have said, Contarini failed to reach a compromise with the Lutherans at Regensburg over the issue, despite a willingness to negotiate on other theologically difficult issues. Prior to Contarini's death in 1542 he had fallen in stature as a result of failure at Regensburg, yet his influence cannot be denied on this particular issue.

The extent of Contarini's authority at Regensburg can be disputed. Peter Matheson argues that Contarini had little room to negotiate on theological issues, especially issues concerning the Sacraments. He claims: "Peace on the political level could not be bought by concessions on the spiritual." The Roman curia feared that Contarini would sacrifice too much in the negotiations, and they had a much more

---

8 John Olin, Catholic Reform From Cardinal Ximenes to the Council of Trent, p. 22.
9 Despite agreement at Regensburg and the Popes neutrality, ultimately “double justification” was rejected by the Council of Trent in 1546.
11 Matheson, p. 59.
conservative agenda. There was thus a conflict of interests between the Curia and Contarini. The Curia did not endow Contarini with a “full mandate to come to terms with the Protestants”.\textsuperscript{12} This perhaps explains, to a certain degree, Contarini’s unwillingness to compromise on the Eucharist.

But to say that Contarini’s unwillingness to compromise on the Eucharist was simply a result of his limited negotiating powers would be incorrect. To the surprise and even suspicion of the Protestants, the Catholics had agreed to compromise on double justification, as mentioned above. This early success created a sense of optimism among the negotiators. However, the issues of the authority of the Church in the interpretation of scripture and Papal authority were put aside after failure to reach agreement. The question of the sacraments was taken up next. It was precisely the problem of transubstantiation which killed the negotiations at Regensburg. The two sides reached agreement on ordination, baptism and confirmation. But when the discussion turned to the Eucharist, the negotiations went sour. However, the two sides were not far apart on the issue. The Protestants at Regensburg accepted the real presence of Christ in the sacrament and even argued that real presence had been defended by numerous members of its churches.\textsuperscript{13}

What was problematic was Contarini’s insistence that the term ‘transubstantiation’ be used. The Protestants had stressed the common ground with the Catholics on the Eucharist calling the miracle a ‘mystical mutation’. When this seemed unsatisfactory to Contarini, they suggested that the issue, as had been done with the problem of Papal authority, be postponed to the end of the conference. This suggestion too was flatly rejected. Contarini, the apparent preeminent negotiator and reformer, was now resolutely against compromise concerning the terminology of the Eucharist.

While the Protestants at Regensburg appeared to have a uniform explanation

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{12}Matheson, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{13}Matheson, p. 130.
\end{flushright}
of the Eucharist, the issue had caused great controversy and division within its own ranks in the two decades before. The problem of the Eucharist in Protestant circles has been called “the single most significant controversy among Protestants in the Sixteenth Century”\(^{14}\). While Luther's view is not entirely consistent through the volumes he wrote on the subject, he ultimately believed in the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Sacrament along with the existence of the bread and wine after consecration\(^{15}\). Luther's view is very close to the Medieval view called consubstantiation, which Thomas argued was heretical, although Luther intentionally does not offer a detailed explanation of the phenomena, claiming that no such explanation can be given. Between 1524 and 1529, Luther battled extensively with the Dutch theologian Desiderius Erasmus and Swiss Protestant Ulrich Zwingli over the issue of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist, writing prolifically on the subject. Indeed, it is safe to say that the issue of transubstantiation was troublesome within the Protestant church while negotiations were being conducted in Regensburg prior to the Council of Trent, and remained an issue until Luther’s death in 1546.

Contarini’s surprisingly strong stand at Regensburg, as Matheson readily admits, is a bit of a mystery. It does not seem that it was Contarini’s lack of authority, or the order of the Curia which caused him to be uncompromising on the issue. It is suggested here that Contarini considered ‘transubstantiation’ to have a very specific and technical meaning which forbade what he considered to be the Protestant position, although the term was not universally considered to be so exclusive. He writes in a letter to Cardinal Farnese: “I read the writing of the Protestants by which it is manifest that they want to adhere to their erroneous idea


\(^{15}\)For a detailed description of Luther’s doctrine of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist see Hermann Sasse’s work, *This Is My Body*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1959.
that the substance of the bread remains in the Eucharist after consecration. So I told [Gropper and Pflug] that I clearly realize that we differed from them concerning the meaning [of the Eucharist] while difficulties are made about the words. I will never consent to what is an agreement only in appearance, or make the sense of the church ambiguous."\textsuperscript{16} This suggests that Contarini considered the Protestant position to be an attempt to \textit{allow} something akin to consubstantiation in the interpretation - where the bread and wine continue to exist with the real body and blood of Christ after consecration. Indeed Luther is commonly believed to hold the doctrine of consubstantiation, yet the use of the term 'transubstantiation' does not necessarily appear to exclude this interpretation. Additionally, it appears that the Protestants were not insisting at this point on the doctrine of consubstantiation, but merely wanted to allow a broad interpretation of the miracle. Why then did Contarini's attitude toward the Protestants and the entire negotiations take a change (to his own detriment) for the worse over the issue? Was there an official and specific interpretation of the Eucharistic miracle which Contarini believed was essential to the Catholic doctrine?

The debates over transubstantiation prior to Regensburg and the Council of Trent were quite extensive, although the Church statements on the issue were apparently non-specific. The first and most obvious statement of transubstantiation was the result of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, and Contarini specifically refers to it in describing his position at Regensburg. "Our aim was to preserve truth and to agree in truth, which in this article was very clear, having been declared in the words of Christ and St. Paul, explained by all the ancient and modern doctors of the church, Greek as well as Latin, ... and defined by our most famous council under Innocent III [the Fourth Lateran]."\textsuperscript{17} This statement is a bit confusing. The ancient and modern

\textsuperscript{16}Gleason, p. 237-238.

\textsuperscript{17}Letter to Cardinal Farnese, 9 May 1541, in Gleason's \textit{Gasparo Contarini}, p. 236.
doctors of the church had conflicting opinions concerning the exact nature of transubstantiation. The statement by the Fourth Lateran Council is also unspecific, although the official definition of transubstantiation is generally credited to it. Here "the doctrine of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist achieved its definitive formulation in the dogma of transubstantiation."18 The phrase in the opening creed of the Lateran Council "transsubstantiatis pane in corpus et ulno in sanguinem potestate diuina" has long been taken as the formal definition of the dogma of transubstantiation.19 This short statement is, however, non-specific in its explanation of the miracle and under-determines which of the various explanations is correct. There were roughly three interpretations of transubstantiation at the time, and it is not clear which, if any, is officially excluded by the Lateran Council. As Gary Macy points out, the difficulty in determining just what the Lateran Council means by transubstantiation is confused by its Thomistic reading after the council of Trent in the Sixteenth Century.20 I would like to suggest that Contarini, even prior to Trent (at Regensburg) has understood the Fourth Lateran in Thomistic terms, and given similar priority to the importance of the issue with which Thomas treats it in both Summas.

The Thomistic Legacy

Medieval Theologians accepting the 'real presence' of Christ in the Eucharist tended to believe one of three basic theories concerning transubstantiation. The first group believed that the bread and wine coexisted with the body and blood of Christ in

20 See above footnote.
the Sacrament. In its simplest form, as stated here, this was a widely held belief of the German Protestants and is often called ‘consubstantiation’, though the Medieval theory of the coexistence of the body and bread does differ slightly from that put forth by Luther. A second group believed that the substance of the bread and wine were annihilated, and only the body and blood of Christ remained after the blessing. The key term here is ‘annihilation’. There was not a change of one substance into another, but one act of destruction of the bread and wine and another of the replacement of what formally existed with the body and blood of Christ. The third and most “modern” interpretation was that the bread and wine became (changed into) Christ’s body and blood. By the end of the Thirteenth Century, the theory that the body and bread coexisted was out of favor, although it is not excluded by the definition of transubstantiation by the the Fourth Lateran Council. Indeed, Thomas Aquinas, who adhered to the third of our options, would insist that the coexistence model is heretical because the biblical terminology ‘Hoc est corpus meum’ (“This is my body”, said by Christ.) specifically excluded any other substance from being present with the body of Christ. This argument is prominently made in both Thomas’ Summa Theologiae and Summa Contra Gentiles. Aquinas states: “Furthermore, if the substance of the bread is simultaneous in this sacrament with the true body of Christ, Christ should have rather said: ‘My body is here’ than ‘This is my body’.”

We know that Contarini was well versed in Thomistic thought, and should be considered a strict Thomist. Concerning the proposed compromise with the Lutherans on justification, Contarini writes: “We have explained how to guide ourselves in accepting and rejecting the Lutheran structure by basing our treatise on the doctrine of St. Thomas, that is, by following his guidance.”

---

21Thomas Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, Book IV, Ch. 63, p. 5.
22Gleason. p. 296.
does the same with the doctrine of transubstantiation. When Contarini says that Christ himself declares the reality of transubstantiation, he must be referring to the same *hoc est corpus meum* which Thomas uses to specifically attack the coexistence of the bread with the body of Christ. Thomas then appears to be both the source of Contarini’s views on transubstantiation, and his motivation for insisting on its uncompromised priority as a tenet of the Church.

Luther, in direct opposition to the Thomistic argument against consubstantiation, uses the same simple words ‘This is my body’ to argue for the presence of the bread with the body of Christ. In his *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*, these four words figure prominently in his argument. He concludes: “I maintain, however, with Wycliffe that the bread remains; on the other hand, I also maintain with the sophists that the body of Christ is present. So against all reason and hairsplitting logic I hold that two diverse substances may well be, in reality and in name, one substance.” In 1527 Luther published an essay entitled *This Is My Body* in response to two dozen published writings attacking his own doctrine of the Eucharist. To a Thomist such as Contarini it must have been quite vexing to read Luther’s arguments not only for the presence of the bread in the sacrament after consecration (using the same quotation ‘hoc est corpus meum’ which Thomas emphasized to make the opposing argument) but also his outright rejection of any logical explanation of the miracle. The radical conflict between Luther’s position and Thomas’, and their use of identical biblical texts to defend their opposing positions, did not leave any room for agreement between Contarini and the representative Protestants at Regensburg. Thus following the strict interpretation of transubstantiation given by Thomas, Contarini could not accept any terminology he believed would be consistent with the coexistence of the body and bread of Christ in

the sacrament. To him, ‘transubstantiation’ forbid such coexistence theory.

Contarini’s apparently steadfast adherence to Thomistic doctrine concerning the issue of transubstantiation not only led to the failure of Regensburg, but caused him to fall from Charles V’s favor. In a letter to Cardinal Farnese dated 29 May 1541 papal legate Morone writes: “transubstantiation was a difficult matter that pertained only to the learned and did not touch the people, for whom it was enough to believe that the body of Christ was in the sacrament and that it should be adored, remaining there until it was received.”

Charles V was most likely in agreement with Morone’s sentiments and was much annoyed by Contarini’s stubbornness on the issue. The failure at Regensburg represents the political difficulties involved in reconciling philosophical doctrines. In this case, the adherence to a specific Thomistic interpretation of the Eucharist led to irreconcilable differences between the negotiators. To the participants of the Council of Trent, Regensburg is an example of this conflict between political objectives and philosophical loyalty - a conflict which the Council recognizes it must circumnavigate by being sensitive to the historical debates concerning the Eucharist, and by giving priority to doctrinal resolution over philosophical justification of that doctrine.

The Council of Trent Meets

In 1542 Pope Paul III issued a Bull which led to the formation of the Council of Trent. The Bull specifically claims that the failed attempt of reconciliation at Regensburg perpetuated the need to call the Council together at Trent, mentioning Contarini’s valiant efforts as the Church’s legate. After referring to Regensburg and

---

24 Morone to Cardinal Farnese, 29 May 1541, in Dittrich, “Nuntiaturberichte Morone’s,” 471. From Gleason, p. 239.
25 Gleason, p. 239.
Contarini, the Bull reads:

“For since, as we had previously feared, we might be petitioned by a decision of the diet to declare that certain articles maintained by the dissenters from the Church be tolerated till they be examined and decided upon by an ecumenical council, and since neither Christian and Catholic truth, nor our own dignity nor that of the Apostolic See would permit us to yield in this, we chose rather to command that it be proposed openly that a council be held as soon as possible”.

The “certain articles” apparently refer to the problem of transubstantiation, and the Bull indicates the need to define doctrine in conjunction with the “truth of the Catholic faith”. Thus the very Bull which called together the Council of Trent is part of the legacy of Regensburg, and though without mentioning it by name, the problem of transubstantiation. It is also a statement of the unwillingness of the Church to compromise with the Protestants in light of the failure at Regensburg, and an indication of the Church’s awareness of the political difficulties which surround philosophical debates concerning tenets of the faith.

The Pope had been under continued pressure from Charles V to call a General Council because he, as we have indicated, was himself under pressure to either suppress his Protestant critics or at least make gestures toward reformation of church doctrine. The Pope sent his legates to Trent; however, he was forced to recall them when Charles V became embroiled in more hostilities with Francis I. Needing Protestant support against a Franco-Turkish alliance, Charles, at the Diet of Speier in 1544, promised the Protestants a Council which was to be “general, free and Christian”.

Pope to decide to win Charles' sympathies and so he dispatched his grandson as a legate to Germany and offered all aid necessary to suppress the Protestants. This alliance ultimately meant that the Council would "meet for the establishment of a Catholicism not traditional merely but exclusive."  

The two principal Players at Regensburg (Charles V and the Pope) had radically different objectives concerning the meeting of a General Council. But the previously mercurial alliance between Charles V and Paul III finally led to the assembly of the Council in Trent in December 1545. This alliance, to a large degree, was now aimed at reforming and establishing Church doctrine as a reaction against the Protestants; it was not so much an attempt to compromise for the purpose of a unification of the two Churches. Outwardly, the Council was open to all Christian princes, yet the initial business undertaken by the Council concerning the title and authority of the Council, and the voting rights of the Council members, was indeed favorable to the Pope. Charles and the Pope were, however, still at odds over whether doctrine or reform should be addressed first. Having no desire to satisfy the Protestants, with his own power being vulnerable to those wishing significant reform, the Pope desired to use the Council primarily to give exact definition to Catholic doctrine. Charles, on the other hand, had promised to use the Council to reform Church abuses. Ultimately it was agreed that both issues would be addressed simultaneously, and exact procedural details were worked out.

Further setbacks for the Protestants quickly followed. The fourth Session of the Council, in April 1546, undertook the discussion of religious truth. Scripture and tradition were defined as the bearers of this truth. In obvious defiance of the Protestants, the Council decided that the Church alone could expound the scripture, and placed restrictions on the printing and publishing of it. The fourth Session's effect

27 Kidd, p. 55.
28 Ibid., p. 55.
on the subsequent relations of Catholicism and Protestantism was decisive. "It rendered reconciliation with the Protestants impossible: for their fundamental tenet was that the Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants"\textsuperscript{29}. The division between the Protestants and Catholics continued to grow.

On February 18, 1546 Luther, who had long argued against taking up arms to oppose the Emperor, died. Charles V, who had been actively attempting to include the Protestants in the Council was now faced with impending war as the Protestants gathered forces to protect themselves. The Protestants were the first to attack at Fussen on July 9th. Now allied with the Pope, the Emperor entered a holy war against the Protestants. Consequently, the Council was interrupted, but the fate of the Council's attitude toward the inclusion of Protestant views was firmly decided in the negative. When the issue of the Eucharist was introduced at Trent in January of 1547, it is safe to say that the Council had no intent to appease the various Protestant positions on the issue.

The actual definition which the Council of Trent gives to transubstantiation is, however, fairly unspecific. The two most obvious rival interpretations, that of John Duns Scotus (whom we shall discuss shortly) and Thomas, are not specifically named. The term 'transubstantiation' is carried over from the Fourth Lateran Council with little embellishment beyond the insistence on the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament after consecration. This leaves some ambiguity to exactly what the Council means by the terminology, although the insistence of real presence eliminates several of the more prominent Protestant positions. As we have seen from the negotiations at Regensburg, the term transubstantiation could have very specific meaning to any given individual, and yet was not universally considered to be so exclusive. How exactly the Council used the term would become quite important for Descartes and his defenders (including his mechanist rival Gassendi), because they

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., p. 59.
pointed to the apparent ambiguity which is found in the doctrine of the Council. Was the Council then purposely giving an unspecific interpretation to transubstantiation in order to appease the various Catholic factions, or did it, like Contarini, have a specifically Thomistic or Scotistic view which can be extracted from the text of the Council itself?

The Council of Trent was establishing Church doctrine in defence against Protestant protest and criticism. In defining its doctrine it, it also had to account for the history of debate between Dominicans and Franciscans. On one hand, Aquinas had developed an extensive explanation of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist based on Aristotelian physics. His system attempted to show the necessary relationship between transubstantiation (as a divine instituted substantial change) and real presence. On the other hand, John Duns Scotus tried to drive a wedge between that relationship by showing that there could be the real presence of Christ’s body and blood without the Aristotelian substantial change to which Thomas was committed. The presence at Trent of strong loyalties to the doctrines of both Scotus and Thomas among the Franciscans and Dominicans respectively, was made quite apparent in the discussion concerning the doctrine of justification.\footnote{For a detailed account of these debates at Trent see Hubert Jedin’s \textit{A History of the Council of Trent} Vol. II.} The issue of the Eucharist, therefore, could not be addressed without such divisive doctrines in the background.

\textbf{The Eucharistic Theory of Thomas Aquinas}

Superficially, it seems that Aquinas’ account of transubstantiation, even though it fell victim to church condemnation in the 1270’s, became the accepted doctrine of
the church through the Council of Trent. I would like to argue that it was most likely not the intent of the Council to endorse a specifically Thomistic account, and indeed, it may ultimately be indeterminable exactly what the official doctrine of the church was in the seventeenth century. The complexities of the doctrines embraced by both the Dominicans and Franciscans make such determination difficult, nonetheless, it is clear that Thomas’ extensive doctrine on the Eucharist figured prominently not only as the historical basis to which the Franciscans responded, but also that parts of that doctrine survived to serve as ammunition against the mechanistic philosophy of Descartes. What then was the Thomistic account of transubstantiation which became subject to such criticism before it seemingly prevails at the Council of Trent in 1551, and how was it relevant to the seventeenth century?

As we have said, Thomas specifically argues that transubstantiation is necessary for upholding the doctrine of real presence. He appeals first to the forced recantations of Berengarius in 1059 and 1079 to establish the historical evidence for the doctrine of real presence. Berengarius was a teacher in Tours who claimed Christ was not actually present in the sacrament; subsequently, Berengarius was forced to recant this claim on two separate occasions. Aquinas makes this historical reference simply to defend the orthodoxy of the doctrine of real presence.

Aquinas turns to the physics of Aristotle both to attack the alternative views of annihilation and coexistence of the bread and wine, and to defend his interpretation of transubstantiation through substantial change. Recognizing the limits of the physics, however, Aquinas admits that the conversion of the bread into Christ’s body is outside proper naturalistic grounds and says: “but now we must consider how a subject is converted into a subject. And this to be sure, nature cannot do”.31 Nevertheless, the description of transubstantiation Aquinas defends is given at least partly on the grounds of Aristotelian physics.

In both the *Summa Contra Gentiles* and the *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas is immediately concerned with disproving the possibility that after consecration the substance of the bread remains with the body of Christ, or that the bread is annihilated. He gives arguments from analysis of scripture, from church history (the forced recantation of Berengarius) and finally, from an analysis of local motion. The reason, he claims, that transubstantiation cannot be explained in terms of local motion is that physics, for Aquinas, denies that two bodies can be in one place at one time. If transubstantiation involved local motion, Christ would either cease to exist in heaven, or he would exist in two places at once. The first is a theological impossibility, the second a physical one. Further, according to Aristotelian physics, a simple body can have only simple motion. If the eucharistic rite were performed simultaneously in two separate places, it would require that Christ’s body move in two different directions at the same time. Aquinas claims: “Furthermore, no local motion has two places simultaneously as its term. But clearly, this sacrament is celebrated simultaneously on different altars. Therefore, it is not possible that the body of Christ begins to be therein by local motion.”\(^{32}\) Aquinas believes that the only two options for describing how something can exist where it formerly did not is either through local motion or by change. Having ruled out local motion (the body moving into the place of the bread), the only alternative is that the bread is changed into the body. This excludes the coexistence theory by definition because “what is changed into something else is no longer there after the change. The reality of Christ’s body in this sacrament demands, then, that the substance of the bread be no longer there after the consecration.”\(^{33}\)

Eucharistic change for Aquinas is the complete passing of one substance, both matter and form, into another whole substance. This is different from Aristotelian

\(^{32}\)Ibid., p. 255.

\(^{33}\)Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, p. 63.
hylomorphic theory where there is not simultaneous change of matter and form together. Thus the Eucharistic change is not natural substantial change, nor is it formal change. However, it is described in the same Aristotelian language. Aquinas specifically says: “This conversion, however, is not like any natural change, but it is entirely beyond the powers of nature and is brought about purely by God’s power.”\(^{34}\) One whole substance being passed into another whole substance raises a particular problem however: if such change is not to be considered some form of annihilation, there must be a common subject between the two substances. Further, given that the senses still perceive the accidents of the bread, there must be some way in which those accidents adhere to the new substance. Then what exists through the change such that one need not conclude that the first substance (matter and form) was simply eliminated, and the second substance posited? And why is it that we still perceive the accidents?

Aquinas is obviously aware of the difficulties of justifying transsubstantial (eucharistic) change on the basis of Aristotelian physics. Nowhere is this more apparent then when he compares transubstantiation to both Aristotelian creation (generation) and natural change. Transubstantiation is like creation because “in neither one nor the other is there any underlying subject present to each extreme term. But the contrary of this is observed in all natural change.”\(^{35}\) In natural change, matter underlies a change in form, but in creation, as in transubstantiation, Aquinas claims ‘strictly speaking’ there is no such subject. However, because the accidents of the bread remain after the conversion, transubstantial change is like natural change in that “an identical element survives the change in both cases” although this element should not be considered a subject proper. It is clear that Aquinas is walking a thin line. On one hand he does not want to reduce the miracle of

\(^{34}\)Aquinas., *Summa Theologicae*, Question 75, article 4. (p. 71).

\(^{35}\)Ibid., p. 87.
the Eucharist to simple physics, on the other hand he must give a coherent view, given the doctrine of Aristotle.

A further problem Aquinas’ theory of transubstantiation faces is its resemblance to the theory that the bread is annihilated at the consecration of the sacrament. Aquinas needs some subject to persist through the change of one complete substance to another. While the accidents of the bread do persist, Aquinas does not use this as specific evidence against annihilation (or to distinguish his theory from annihilation). To the contrary, he claims that there is no subject which persists through the change. Indeed, his theory, though he denies it from the outset, looks very close to a claim of annihilation.

One reason Aquinas’ theory looks so close to annihilation theory is his insistence that the substantial form of the bread cannot remain through the change. Being part of the whole substance, the substantial form of the bread cannot be there after consecration.

"Were the substantial form of the bread to remain, it would do so either as informing primal matter or as separate from it. Now the first alternative is ruled out. Because, were it to remain as informing primal matter, then the complete substance of the bread would remain; but we have already seen the opposite. Nor could it remain in some other piece of matter, because each piece of matter is exclusively actuated by the form it has. Were it to remain as separate from matter, it would now be an intelligible form, indeed it would be an intelligence, because all forms separate from matter are such."\textsuperscript{36}

Although in some later scholastic literature on the Eucharist prime matter becomes the common existing element to explain the subsistence of the accidents of the bread and wine, we see from above, as well as from very specific denials in the \textit{Summa}

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 79.
Contra Gentiles, that Aquinas holds the Aristotelian view that prime matter is simply pure potential, and therefore, it is useless to talk of it as existing independently.\textsuperscript{37}

Then what does cause the persistence of accidents for Aquinas?

In the Summa Theologiae Aquinas reiterates that only God can cause the accidents to remain through the change, however, he ultimately concludes that “dimensive quality is the subject of the accidents which remain in this sacrament.”\textsuperscript{38}

This is consistent with his discussion in the Summa Contra Gentiles where he states: “Among accidents, however, there is a certain order to be considered. For, among all the accidents, that inhere more closely to the substance is the quantity which tends to measure. Then the qualities are received in the substance with the quantity as medium.” Aquinas concludes: “Therefore, one ought to hold that the accidents of the bread persist after the conversion mentioned in such way that only the quantity which tends to measure subsists without a subject”.\textsuperscript{38} By raising the status of quantity to a subsistent entity, Aquinas not only retains a consistent subject (of a sort) to explain the change of the bread to the body without calling it annihilation, but more importantly, he explains how the accidents of the bread can remain through a complete substance change.

Aquinas, however, must still resolve the many criticisms to which any Eucharistic scenario is subject. There is no lack of imagination in these problems: they range from how to explain that Christ’s body can fit under the species of the bread given its much larger natural dimensions, to what happens should crumbs of the consecrated host fall from the alter and be eaten by mice. For our purposes, the discussion of Christ’s dimensions proves important because Aquinas makes a significant distinction

\textsuperscript{37}At least one contemporary author erroneously claims Aquinas used prime matter as the underlying subject of substantial change. See P.J. Fitzpatrick’s In the Breaking of Bread, Cambridge University Press, 1993 for such an opinion.

\textsuperscript{38}Summa Theologiae, p. 133.

\textsuperscript{39}Summa Contra Gentiles, p. 259-260.
about how Christ is present in the Eucharist to answer the related questions. Aquinas claims that Christ is present as the result of sacramental sign on the one hand, and as the result of natural concomitance on the other.

“Our Catholic Faith makes it absolutely necessary to profess that the whole Christ is in the sacrament. But note that there are two ways in which a part of Christ can be in it. The first way is as an immediate result of the sacramental sign; the second way is by a natural concomitance. As a result of the sacramental sign, you have under the sacramental appearances that into which the pre-existing substance of the bread and wine is directly changed. And by natural concomitance, you have here whatever is found joined to the term of the conversion."\(^{40}\)

That which is changed directly and essentially from the bread into the body is the substance of Christ, since this is what is denoted by the term ‘body’, according to Aquinas. Substance then is the result of the sacramental sign. Joined naturally to the substance of Christ are his soul\(^{41}\) and the accidents of his body, including the bones, nerves and blood. Of course the dimensions of Christ’s body, being accidents thereof, exist joined to the substance, and therefore, are present only concomitantly. In this way Aquinas can claim that “it follows then that Christ’s extended body is in the sacrament as if it were just substance and not in the way a substance already envisaged as affected by quantity is underneath its quantity or in a place.”\(^{42}\)

The above distinction effectively solves how it is possible that Christ is present under the dimensions of the bread, and why it is that in any part of the bread all of Christ is completely present. The substance of Christ (his body) exists under the species of the bread. Indeed, the dimensions of Christ exist under the dimensions of

\(^{40}\) *Summa Theologica*, p. 95.

\(^{41}\) Aquinas claims that had the Eucharistic rite been performed after Christ's death but prior to his resurrection, his soul would not be present with the body under the species of the bread.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., p. 97.
the bread because the former are there as a result of their concomitance to his body, and not because of the sacramental sign. Aquinas explains: "The definite distance of the parts from one another in an organic body is something that follows on its being extended, but you must remember that the specific nature of any substance is prior to its being extended."\(^{43}\) Christ is properly (by sacramental sign) in the sacrament as if it were only substance. The distance of the various parts of Christ’s body exists in the sacrament, but these dimensions do not control how it is present since they exist concomitantly. “The manner of the presence is controlled solely by considerations of what it means to be there just as substance, as we have said.”\(^ {44}\) Aquinas’ distinction is thus based on the essential nature of the term ‘corpus’ being conceived as substance. What is essential to the body is its substance. “Outside the essential demands of the situation”\(^ {45}\) is Christ’s accidental body including its dimensions, so it exists concomitantly under the dimensions of the bread and does not control the presentation of the attributes thereof. Finally, Aquinas uses his distinction between presence by natural concomitance and presence by sacramental sign to answer a series of questions concerning the place, and mobility of Christ’s body in the sacrament, and whether the body could be seen by the eye\(^ {46}\).

In summary, Aquinas’ account of transubstantiation can be broken down into roughly three parts. First he attacks the theories of coexistence and annihilation. Here he appeals to Aristotelian local motion in order to attack the rival theories. Next he makes the accidents of the bread and wine dependent on the accident of quantity in order to explain why the senses cannot detect transubstantial change, and to describe how those accidents are able to persist through the quasi-Aristotelian

\(^{43}\)Ibid., p. 103.

\(^{44}\)Ibid.

\(^{45}\)Ibid., p. 107.

\(^{46}\)There were accounts that, at the consecration of the sacraments, the bloody flesh of Christ appeared on the altar, or that he appeared there as a child.
substantial change. Finally, to explain how Christ exists in the Eucharist, and to support the subsistence of the accidents, he makes a distinction between Christ’s presence by natural concomitance and presence by sacramental sign. Aquinas’ Eucharistic theology thus answers both the subtle and obvious difficulties to which any claim of real presence in the sacrament is subject. His appeal to Aristotle gives him a solid physical foundation for his explanation; yet the special nature of this substantial change preserves the miracle of the rite without drifting into the heresy of calling God’s work a deception of the senses - a heresy which would later plague Descartes and the Cartesians. Nevertheless, such a close association with the apparent necessity of the Aristotelian physical account of transubstantiation is not everywhere well received. As his Franciscan rivals indicate, “over and over again, these theologians insist that the Thomist-Bonaventuran thesis, in presenting transubstantiation as a necessary explanation of eucharistic presence, unduly limits the sphere of God’s power.” Aquinas’ explanation of the Eucharist, it is claimed, is, therefore, part of the perceived threat to God’s omnipotence and is subsequently subject to church condemnation.

The Church Condemnations of 1277

Coinciding with the rise of Averroes’ interpretation of Aristotle in the early to mid-thirteenth century, the Church perceived a threat to its own doctrine from the philosophy being taught in its schools. In part, the perceived threat was the result of the challenge to God’s omnipotence posed by Aristotelian science. Some of these challenges, such as the impossibility of creation ex nihilo, were rather directly opposed to Church doctrine. By the 1260s it was clear that there was an intellectual crisis between the Church and the philosophy being taught in Paris. “By 1267,

47David Burr, Eucharistic Presence and Conversion in Late Thirteenth-Century Franciscan Thought, p. 100.
Bonaventure was protesting against excessive daring in philosophical investigation; and in 1268, Thomas Aquinas was back in Paris surely because his superiors thought that the university was undergoing an intellectual emergency." In January of 1277, Pope John XXI asked Bishop Tempier to give him a report on the situation in Paris. In March of 1277, that request for a report resulted in the listing of 219 specific propositions which were considered heretical by the church.

In addition to condemnations earlier in the thirteenth century, more immediately preceding the condemnations of 1277, there had been 13 propositions forbidden in 1270. In 1272 and 1276 there were restrictions on teaching theological subjects. The extensiveness of the condemnations of 1277 may well have been a result of the apparent failure of these previous censures. In preface to the actual list of condemned propositions, Bishop Tempier prescribed the punishment of excommunication to “all those who shall have taught the said errors or any one of them, or shall have dared in any way to defend or uphold them, or even to listen to them, unless they choose to reveal themselves to us or to the chancery of Paris within seven days.” Further punishment deemed appropriate to the severity of the offense was also threatened.

The specific condemnations listed by the Church are a hodge-podge of philosophical positions ranging from problems of creation, the doctrine of two truths, and God’s knowledge, to the impossibility of void. While the effects of these condemnations on scientific theory (specifically physics) can be debated, it is clear that they generally are a reaction against the growing popularity of philosophical positions which seem to limit God’s power in the world. It is also clear that the teachings of Aquinas on transubstantiation are involved in Bishop Tempier’s attack; but it is not clear exactly how. Propositions 138 through 141 all pertain to the subsistence of accidents without a subject. As we have seen, Aquinas claims that the

48 Philosophy in the Middle Ages, edited by A. Hyman and J. Walsh, p. 582.
49 Ibid., p. 584.
accidents of the bread cannot naturally subsist without a subject. While Aquinas says that transubstantial change is not the same as natural change, and that only God can cause the miracle, he does no break entirely from Aristotelian physics. He claims that except for the miracle of the Eucharist (given God’s power), an accident cannot subsist without a subject. Even in Eucharistic change, Aquinas keeps the accidents of the bread dependent upon quantity. He therefore remains indebted, at least to a small degree, to Aristotle’s dependent status of accidents.

The condemned propositions concerning accidents do look somewhat confused, however. Proposition 141 reads: “That God cannot make an accident exist without a subject or make more that one dimension exist simultaneously.” Clearly Aquinas’ account of the Eucharist does not claim that God cannot make an accident persist without a subject. But God does still rely on quantity to pull off the miracle. While the condemnation does not specifically prohibit Aquinas’ explanation of Christ’s quantity being concomitant to his substance, it indicates that if God can make dimensions exist simultaneously, such an explanation is at least unnecessary. Proposition 139 seems to support Aquinas’ theory: “... that it is impossible for quantity or dimension to exist by itself, for this would make it a substance.” Propositions 138 and 140, likewise, claim it heresy to say an accident cannot exist without a subject. Tempier’s condemnations are confusing because they seem to support Aquinas’ account of transubstantiation, yet attack other Thomistic doctrines, specifically parts of his theory of substance and place. It is possible that Tempier supported Thomas’ account of transubstantiation, but rejected the need for the accidents of the bread to adhere to the quantity or dimensions of the bread, or that he was simply rejecting competing explanations. A third possibility is that Tempier was confused by, or ignorant of, the specifics of Aquinas’ theology on the Eucharist, and simply listed the strict Aristotelian view that accidents cannot exist independently as heretical. Nevertheless, the condemnations show a clear concern for reasserting God’s

50See the condemned propositions numbered 54 and 55.
omnipotence in the face of Aristotelian limitations. This concern, manifested in the condemnation of 1277, influences the Franciscan response to Aquinas on many accounts, including the Eucharist. Whether Aquinas' position is considered in violation of the condemnations, or whether the subsequent Franciscan writers simply perceive the need to tread more carefully around the issue of God's power, we will see new development in Eucharistic theory with the works of Duns Scotus and later, William of Ockham - a development directly influenced by the condemnations of 1277.

**Duns Scotus and the Eucharist**

Determining Scotus' positive doctrine of the Eucharist is not an easy task. Scotus gives various criticisms of all three of our Eucharistic theories; annihilation, Thomistic transubstantiation and coexistence. In particular, he attacks the necessity of transubstantiation for explaining the real presence of Christ. Yet Scotus does not deny that transubstantiation is the true doctrine of the Church, and he makes reference to the Fourth Lateran Council as substantiating the doctrine. But Scotus' acceptance of a doctrine of transubstantiation seems a bit reluctant, and indeed he does not seem far from accepting annihilation theory. What is clear is that he ultimately has a different doctrine from Aquinas, one that he believes does not threaten divine omnipotence.

The *Quodlibetal Questions*, written between 1306 and 1307, represent Scotus' most mature work on the Eucharist. Here he attempts to answer the question: "Can God Convert the Eucharistic Species into Something Previously Existing?" While ascribing a consistent doctrine of transubstantiation simply from the *Quodlibetal Questions* is not possible, this document does manifest two critical divergences from the Thomistic doctrine, and it illuminates the problem of annihilation. The first and second...
most striking divergence which Scotus makes from Thomistic doctrine has to do with two bodies being in one place at one time. While Thomas considers this an impossibility, and consequently argues against the coexistence and the annihilation of the bread, Scotus argues the contrary. The second divergence is Scotus’ rejection of Aquinas’ argument that annihilation is impossible because it would require local motion. Scotus does this by denying Thomas’ aristotelian assumption that two bodies cannot be in one place at one time. Scotus, however, does not use the denial that two bodies can’t occupy one place at one time to argue for annihilation, but only to show that it is not impossible. Nor does Scotus use it to argue for coexistence, which appears the most likely explanation to follow, given that it opens the door for the claim that the bread and body could exist in the Eucharist together.

From the beginning of the Quodlibetal Questions, Scotus in concerned with addressing the problem of annihilation, and preserving God’s omnipotence. On the one hand, he wants to claim that God can convert the Eucharistic species into something previously existing (Christ’s body); on the other hand, he claims “nothing can be converted into something else unless the two have something in common. These species, however, have nothing in common with what already exist. Therefore they cannot be converted into something already existing.” 52 Scotus is quick to point out that such a conversion would simply be annihilation. What follows in the Quodlibetal Questions is a series of objections and replies about what results from these premises, with no clear indication of Scotus’ actual position. However, the relationship between his physics, God, and his theory of the Eucharist becomes apparent.

Scotus claims that if nature can convert one thing in its entirety into another, then so can God. He says that this occurs naturally in nutrition when food becomes body. Further, any agent which can dominate both terms of the conversion (he calls

these terms the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem*) as far as their being and non-being, and what is concomitant of their being, “can convert one completely into the other”. He next raises a series of objections to the above conclusion and then replies to those objections ultimately deciding that God can change anything into another which has a corresponding mode of existence (it is not a contradiction to change an extended thing into another extended thing, for instance).

Scotus follows the above conclusion by specifically talking about the *terminus ad quem*, or that which preexists (Christ’s body prior to the conversion). Converting something into the *terminus ad quem* poses no special difficulties he claims. Indeed, he claims this is what happens in the Eucharist. God can do this because he does not have to act instrumentally. Instead he can act directly to change something. “The reason a created agent cannot do this is that its action involves movement.”⁵³ Movement means that there is succession, and since there is succession, there cannot be numerical identity between the *terminus ad quem* and the result of the change. Because God can act without local motion, there is no difficulty with him producing identical subjects. Scotus tells us: “furthermore, God regards matter *qua* quiddity, and as such, it is indistinct. Therefore, any form that could be imposed on such matter could be put into any matter whatsoever.”⁵⁴ This means that God can restore a form previously destroyed to a subject’s matter, or he can put any form into any matter. “By the same token, he is able to put a form existing in its own matter into any other matter, but because of the numerical identity of the form, it follows that the resulting matter will be the same matter. Consequently God can make the form of the body of Christ take over the matter of the bread.”⁵⁵

Scotus does not rest with the above conclusion, however, and raises a series of objections. His first objection simply claims that if all matter is the same *qua*

---

⁵³Ibid., p. 242.
⁵⁴Ibid., p. 243.
⁵⁵Ibid.
quiddity (before having place), then it is all the same numerically, or at least of the
same kind. Scotus quotes Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: "The causes of things in the same
species are different, not specifically, but in the sense that the causes of different
individuals are different".\(^{56}\) While the universal definition of matter in the same
species is the same, the individuals must be different, at least numerically because
they have different causes. Further, Scotus quotes Augustine's claim that "matter is
somehow prior to that which is made out of it."\(^{57}\) What does not exist as matter,
therefore, cannot be formed into something. Finally Scotus says: "Matter itself is the
same under opposite forms, but form cannot remain without matter. Now a
variation in what is posterior [form] by nature does not imply variation in what is
prior."\(^{58}\) A change in the form of one thing cannot affect the matter of that thing,
because matter has a 'certain priority' according to this criticism. What is
particularly interesting about Scotus' chain of arguments here is that he is developing
the notion of the priority of matter over form as an argument against
transubstantiation. Later, in Dupleix for example, we will see the priority of matter
develop into the independence of prime matter in order to explain the continuity of
subject in Eucharistic change. Nonetheless, what was impossible for Aquinas, namely
that prime matter has independent existence, has been rendered possible by Scotus.

Scotus elaborates no farther on the objections to God's ability to change an
existing form from matter to matter. Rather, he drops the subject and proclaims
that it is a true tenet of the Church that God can cause a conversion into what
existed before by restoring the identical thing that was destroyed. Scotus says that
something can be converted into: "something which once was, but does not exist at
present, or to something which not only existed before but retains its same being
now". The term (Christ's body) of this conversion either (1)"has something new

\(^{56}\)Ibid., p. 244.
\(^{57}\)Ibid.
\(^{58}\)Ibid.
added to its being, such that here this term is now present to something in a way it was not present to it before, or (2) has nothing new about either its essential being or anything it has posterior to that being.\textsuperscript{59} Scotus objects to one without elaboration, and claims that the Eucharist changes according to (2). “This seems to be what \textit{de facto} must take place in the Eucharist.” To object to (2), however, he makes the claim:

“Something is \textit{per se} the \textit{terminus ad quem} of the conversion only insofar as it succeeds the \textit{terminus a quo}. But according to you, what succeeds the bread in not the substantial being [form] of the body, but only the new presence it acquires. Here it is a \textit{per se} term insofar as it becomes present here or acquires this presence, but this sort of presence is not substance or anything substantial. Therefore, the \textit{per se} term of the conversion in the Eucharist would not be substance, and consequently the conversion itself would not be a transsubstantiation, because transsubstantiation is the transition of one substance into another”.\textsuperscript{60}

Scotus’ unidentified critic supposedly is forced to accept that if transsubstantial change does not involve the substantial being of the body, the change cannot be of one substance to another. Aquinas had claimed that it is not the substantial form of the bread which changes into the substantial form of Christ, but the whole substance. Scotus’ thus gives a counter argument here. Further, he defines quantity as the “reason for being in place.” In the Eucharist, what comes to be in the place of the bread does so because it has the same quantity as what perished. If the quantity of Christ’s body is left behind and only the substance (as quiddity or pure substance) apart from quantity comes into being, it would have no reason to take the place of the bread, since quantity, in this criticism, is the reason for place. Quantity cannot be left behind in the conversion or there would not be presence; if it were converted into something else, the presence could not be in the place of bread.

\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., p. 245.
\textsuperscript{60}Ibid., p. 245-246.
This string of arguments evidently leaves one to conclude what Scotus calls “two absurdities”. The first is that the same thing would be present in two places at once. The second is that two different bodies could exist in the same place. The first absurdity results in the apparent contradictions that something could be both moving and at rest, hot and cold, and continuous and discontinuous simultaneously. The second absurdity, Scotus says, Aristotle simply shows to be an impossibility.

Scotus systematically replies to his own objections to transubstantiation given above. He rejects the premise: “Something is per se the terminus ad quem of the conversion only insofar as its succeeds the terminus a quo”\textsuperscript{61} by claiming that the body does have being after the bread, but does not begin to exist only when the bread ceases to be, “which seems necessary if we are to say that it follows the being of the bread here, properly speaking.” He also rejects the premise that quantity is the reason for Christ’s presence in the bread by saying that quantity is not formally in the body of Christ at all. Further, it is the agent of the conversion that effects the place, not the quantity. All in all, Scotus’ replies to his own criticisms appear fairly weak - for the most part he simply denies the premises explicit in the arguments.

Scotus continues, however, and he defines a contradiction as “only that sort of thing that we say is impossible to God, ‘for no word shall be impossible with God,’ where “word” means any concept possible to the intellect, and that would be any concept in which contradictory elements are not included.”\textsuperscript{62} After defining God’s omnipotence as his ability to do anything but a contradiction, Scotus claims that the two absurdities he mentioned above are not contradictory. Indeed, one body being in two places at once is possible for two reasons. The first reason is: “Forms prior by nature to unity as such do not vary with variation in the posterior”\textsuperscript{63}. In other words, the criticisms concerning a body having, at the same time, contrary qualities

\textsuperscript{61}Ibid., p. 246.
\textsuperscript{62}Ibid., p. 248.
\textsuperscript{63}Ibid., p. 248.
does not apply. Scotus claims that substantial form, and anything in the category of quantity or quality are prior to place and, therefore, are unaffected by the accidents of any given place. The second reason is: “Anything affecting substantial form or its quality or quantity that a body might suffer from two agents acting on it at one place, it would also suffer from them if one acted on it at one place and the other acted on it at the other place.”

Scotus states that a “judicious use of these two principles” will dispel all his preceding arguments against the impossibility that the same thing could be in two places at once.

Scotus then claims that his second “absurdity” is not a contradiction either. Indeed two bodies could coexist in the same place. He reasons that “oneness of place in not formally unity of body.” Consequently, it does not follow that any body in one place is the same body. He claims that Aristotle’s Physics only proves that a body by its own power, or the power of created nature, is subject to this restriction.

Scotus returns to the problem of annihilation in Article III of the Quodlibeta Questions. He states that it is generally believed that conversion does not involve annihilation of the terminus a quo (bread). Yet the being of the bread requires the non-being of the body and vice versa - and this is annihilation. Scotus counters this statement with a series of arguments, each designed to show a relationship between the bread and body of Christ across the conversion. There can be a common subject, such as matter, which exists through the change. However, in complete substance change (matter and form), this is ruled out. A second possibility is that the “common term of the change may refer to something conceptual, for instance, that both terms fall under the notion of being.”

This argument may appear to be a stretch. Certainly Aquinas did not feel it sufficient to rule out annihilation. Scotus, however, claims that the mere fact that the body and bread both have the same agent of change (God) “would be enough to rule out annihilation, because pure

64 Ibid., p. 249.
65 Ibid., p. 255.
nothingness does not fall under any agent's power, properly speaking, since it is not something causable.\textsuperscript{66}

Scotus' arguments and counter arguments in the \textit{Quodlibetal Questions} are not clearly marked as either his opponent's or his own; this makes it difficult to discern his own positive doctrine of transsubstantiation - and indeed he may not have one. What one can draw from the discussion is quite clear, however. In the wake of the Condemnations of 1277, Scotus is primarily concerned with preserving God's omnipotence; so much so that he is willing to give up what Aquinas could not: that it is possible that both one body can be in two places at one time, and that two bodies can occupy the same place at once. Scotus is also less concerned with dispelling the problem of annihilation. Many of his arguments seem to accept it, and reject the conversion implicit in transubstantiation. Ultimately, he claims that transubstantiation, as opposed to annihilation, is the doctrine of the Church, but his reasons for ruling out the later are not definitive. This is one reason why David Burr claims that Scotus' view of annihilation seems to be in the process of development "and might well have continued to change had he not died in 1308".\textsuperscript{67} It may also be true that by explicitly ruling out coexistence, and annihilation, and positing his own positive doctrine of Eucharistic change, it would be more difficult for Scotus to retain the radical omnipotence of God for which he argues.

\textbf{William of Ockham and the Eucharist}

William of Ockham has been called the "the preeminent Franciscan thinker of the first half of the fourteenth century, successor in stature to John Duns Scotus".\textsuperscript{68} His writings on the Eucharist, like Scotus', reflect the careful considerations given to

\textsuperscript{66}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 255.
\textsuperscript{67}Burr, p. 98.
God's omnipotence in Franciscan thought after 1277. Also, like Scotus, he denies the impossibility that one body can be in two places at once, or that two numerically distinct bodies can share the same place. He also continues the shift in Eucharistic thought away from viewing matter as only potential, and towards positing it as capable of existence apart from its accidents. Still further, he gives the Eucharistic conversion of bread to the body an interpretation which appears to be annihilation.

While it is apparent that Ockham is indebted to Scotus for his explanation of the Eucharist, he continues the evolution of the doctrine. True to his nominalist tendencies, Ockham argues against the existence of quantity as an entity distinct from substance. He, therefore, straightforwardly rejects Aquinas' theory that the accidents of the bread continue to exist as a result of their adherence to the medium of quantity. Ockham claims that Aristotle should not be interpreted as maintaining such: "I maintain that the Philosopher's intention, as I see it, is to claim that a continuous quantity in not an absolute thing that mediates between a substance and its qualities".69 Ockham reasons that an absolute accident which is "distinct from a substance is susceptible to contraries through a change within itself."70 If quantity were an accident distinct from substance and quality, and it was the subject of qualities (as Aquinas has indicated), then if it received a quality, it would be changed and could receive contraries through a change within itself. This, Ockham says, is "contrary to Aristotle". In Question 26 of the Fourth Quodlibet Ockham asks: "Can it be proved sufficiently through the principles of the faith that quantity is an absolute thing distinct from substance and quality?" After giving several proofs to the affirmative, and countering those proofs, he concludes the discussion: "I reply that the quantity that is the substance of the bread does not remain after consecration. Rather, it is the quantity that is a quality, and no other quantity, that remains. And the opposite of this is not gotten from Sacred Scripture."71 Ockham thus rejects

69Ibid., p. 359.
70Ibid.
the Thomistic explanation of quantity in favor of a view of substance in which quantity is an intrinsic accident.

Ockham also states, against Thomas, that God can maintain a substance without any accident adhering in it. He claims: “No believer, who believes and holds that the accidents are in the sacrament of the altar without a subject, ought to doubt that a substance could by the same virtue subsist without an accident.”\textsuperscript{72} In this way, Ockham has taken the Church’s decree that God can make accidents persist without a subject and turned it around to claim that God also can make a subject persist without any accidents.

Of special interest to our study is Ockham’s apparent embracing of the annihilation of the substance of the bread at consecration. Ockham says that there are basically three views concerning how the Eucharistic miracle occurs. Question 30 of the Fourth Quodlibet asks: “Does the substance of the bread remain after the consecration?” Ockham replies that if the bread does remain after the consecration, there is no necessity of a plurality of miracles. For the opposite view he simply states that it “is the determination of the Church”. His entire argument against coexistence theory is based on his belief that the church claims otherwise. Indeed, he argues that coexistence is not contrary to physics or the canon of the Bible. Because he accepts that two bodies can be in one place at one time, the substance of the bread could coexist with the substance of Christ’s body. Ockham claims that the coexistence explanation is thus favorable “if the determination of the Church were not opposed to it”.\textsuperscript{73} Ockham even alludes to Biblical examples where two bodies existed in the same place at the same time.\textsuperscript{74} The two other explanations of the miracle which

\textsuperscript{71}Ibid., p. 357.
\textsuperscript{72}Ockham, De Sacramento Alteris, Chapter XIII.
\textsuperscript{73}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74}Presumably this occurs during the Virgin birth and Christ’s ascension to heaven, where he penetrates the celestial sphere without dividing it.
Ockham gives are not easily distinguished: “The first opinion is that the substance of the bread that existed beforehand is afterward [identical with] the flesh of Christ. The second opinion is that (i) the substance of the bread and the substance of the wine cease to exist there and only their accidents remain, and that (ii) the body of Christ begins to exist under those accidents.”\textsuperscript{75} The first opinion, which appears to be closest to Thomistic conversion, is rejected out of hand. Ockham simply says that it is irrational because “every proposition in which the body of Christ is predicated of the bread is impossible.”\textsuperscript{76} Ockham claims that the second explanation is “the common opinion of all theologians” and that he holds it because it is the “determination of the Church and not because of any argument”\textsuperscript{77}. Ockham is thus not at all interested in defending it by argument, but only by reference to it as Church doctrine.

One must ask: what exactly is the distinction between the two explanations above? The answer is important because it now appears (or at least Ockham believes) that the Church has definitively established one as its doctrine. In both \textit{De Sacramento Alteris} and the \textit{Quodlibetal Questions}, Ockham gives the same basic argument. It would appear that the “is” in the first explanation, taken either possessively or as an identity, is what causes Ockham to reject it. His response seems to indicate that he rejects that Christ could be a property (‘predicated’) of the bread\textsuperscript{78}. Certainly he would not want to maintain such. But if the body \textit{is} the bread, does he mean that it \textit{becomes} the bread? Is it numerically distinct from the bread?

\textsuperscript{75}Ockham, \textit{Quodlibetal Questions}, Question 30.

\textsuperscript{76}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{77}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{78}The translators have added “identical with” in brackets to the text. This may confuse the issue given that Ockham accepts, like Scotus, identical, but numerically distinct entities (in the same place). Also it appears uncertain whether Ockham means ‘identical with’ or some form of possessive ‘is’.
In *De Sacramento Alteris*, Ockham presents the first Eucharist explanation slightly differently, saying that the "opinion asserts that the substance, which was at first bread, afterwards is the flesh". ("*Una asserit quod illa substantia, quae fuit panis primo, postea est caro Christi.*") This more clearly implies that the bread is actually changed into the body. The second opinion, he claims, is that the bread and wine *cease* to exist (*desinit esse*), and the body of Christ *begins* to exist (*incipit ibi esse*) afterward. Whether it is Ockham's intention or not, it appears that the second option, which he embraces only because it is church doctrine, is annihilistic. The first opinion appears more akin to the conversion implicit in Thomistic theory. Given Ockham's explanation in these two works, he seems to be embracing, as transubstantiation, a theory which states that the bread is annihilated. Further, he only defends it based on the fact that it is Church doctrine, not on philosophical grounds. It appears then, that annihilation theory, if it has not supplanted rival theories as the doctrine of the Church, has at least become difficult to distinguish from transubstantiation in the Thomistic sense.

The importance of Ockham's thought on the Eucharist directly carries over to the debates of the sixteenth century though the various publications of his text. In 1490, 1491, and 1504 the test of *De Sacramento Altarum* was printed in Paris, Strasburg and Venice respectively. The popularity of his writings in the period leading up to Trent is made apparent by these posthumous publications. In addition, his views on matter, place, and annihilation reflect a progression of Eucharistic thought which continues into the seventeenth century.

**The Doctrine Produced at Trent**

In May of 1547 the Council of Trent settled on the wording of eight canons concerning the Eucharist. These canons did not reflect a complete doctrine of the

---

79The first discussion of the Eucharist occurred in January of 1547 with the introduction of
Eucharist; and they did not settle the historical debate concerning the manner in which the bread and wine were converted into Christ's body and blood. The discussion concerning the adoption of the canons began with the introduction of ten articles collected from the writings of heretics, and the resulting canons are clearly a reaction against these mainly protestant heresies. The first canon simply asserts the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist, and is a reaction against the Swiss protestants' claim that the meaning of the rite is symbolic. The second canon is evidently a defense against the Lutherans. It asserts the conversion of the bread into the body of Christ, but without specific discussion concerning how this conversion occurs. The remaining canons are concerned with proper procedures for the administration of the rite. While there was some debate over the wording of the text, and it was also decided that it was not only an anathema to deny the real presence of Christ, but also heresy; the discussions and the resulting cannons show a desire to avoid the deep and troublesome debates which had taken place between the Franciscans and Dominicans of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. As Jedir points out, the Council avoided the philosophical debates concerning real presence and transubstantiation in order to give a unified view intended to juxtapose itself from competing Protestant theories. In doing so, the Council was not asserting a new or particular interpretation of the doctrine, but reaffirming the wording of the Councils which preceded it.

The eight canons which were worked out in Bologna were not published, but were submitted to the Council when it convened again in Trent in September 1551. The thirteenth session of the Council of Trent met specifically to discuss and draft ten heretical views. However, the meeting was moved to Bologna where the cannons were decided upon, although they were not presented to the assembled Council until September of 1551.

\footnote{For the most extensive work on the Council of Trent see Hubert Jedir's \textit{Geschichte Des Konzils Von Trient} in five lengthy volumes (the first two of which have been translated into English).}
resolutions pertaining to the issue of the Eucharist. The eight canons which were
decided upon earlier in Bologna were initially set aside in the September 1551 meeting
of the twenty five theologians now present in Trent to discuss the issue. Much of the
resulting debate concerning the Eucharist was concerned with justification and the
Eucharist's role in the forgiveness of sin. Apparently there was little debate
concerning the exact physical nature of eucharistic change.81 While there is little
evidence of discussion concerning the specific meaning of transubstantiation, there
were two topics debated at some length in this session. First, the Council questioned
its own role in defining Church policy. It was decided that the primary purpose of the
Council was not to describe why a certain doctrine should be followed, or to give
evidence in its defense, but instead to define error and more importantly, heresy. It
should express positive Church doctrines while remaining consistent with earlier
councils: in the case of the Eucharist, the Fourth Lateran was mentioned again.

The second debate of interest to our topic at the thirteenth session concerned
whether the word ‘transubstantiation’ should be used in the text of the decrees of the
Council. One of the legates, Melchoir Canos, insisted that transubstantiation was a
new word, and consequently should be optional as a description of the miraculous
change. Indeed the term, ‘transformed’ (converti) was sufficient to describe the
change of the bread into the body of Christ according to Canos. Ultimately, however,
the text of the eight canons decided upon in Bologna were reintroduced and agreed
upon with the use of ‘transubstantiation’ retained.82 Arguing in favor of the use of
the word ‘transubstantiation’, Bishop Nausea of Vienna claimed that while the word
was itself relatively new, its content was quite old. It should, therefore, be kept.
Further, in a somewhat circular argument, the Bishop of Bitonto responded to Canos’

81Jedin, who gives the most detailed account of session thirteen, makes no reference to
discussions concerning the meaning of transubstantiation or how the transformation of the bread
into the body of Christ is possible.
82The eight canons were modified and grew to eleven, however, they basically remained intact
and used the word ‘transubstantiation’.
criticism by claiming that because the heretics denied transubstantiation, the word should be retained.

The published proceedings of Thirteenth Session of the Council of Trent are divided into eight chapters and are followed by eleven canons which declare the heretical opinions concerning the Eucharist. Chapter III, titled “The Excellence of the Most Holy Eucharist Over the Other Sacraments” not only clearly elevates the importance of the Eucharistic rite above the others (in good Thomistic tradition), but gives the closest description of the miracle. It reads:

“This has always been the belief of the Church of God, that immediately after the consecration the true body and the true blood of our Lord, together with His soul and divinity exist under the form of bread and wine, the body under the form of bread and the blood under the form of wine ex vi verborum; but the same body also under the form of wine and the same blood under the form of bread and the soul under both, in virtue of that natural connection and concomitance whereby the parts of Christ the Lord, who hath now risen from the dead, to die no more, are mutually united.”

The Council further states that Christ is whole under the species of the bread with all its parts. This passage does go beyond the Fourth Lateran Council. It claims, as Aquinas had, that Christ’s soul is there by “natural connection and concomitance”. While it does not define these terms, nor make use of presence by sacramental sign as Aquinas had, it uses this Thomistic distinction between types of presence. One further apparently Thomistic importation follows in Chapter IV where transubstantiation is proclaimed. Here the Council states that it is the belief of the Church that by consecration “a change is brought about of

83 The translator has done a disservice to the reader here by consistently translating ‘specie’ as ‘form’. Importantly, this passage, in order to make sense of Descartes’ own claims concerning the Council, should read ‘species’ instead of ‘form’.

84 Schroeder, H. J., Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, p. 75.
the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ" ("per consecrationem panis et vini conversionem fieri totius substantiae panis in substantiam corporis Christi Domini nosti"). The Council thus announces anew that this change is called transubstantiation. The Council's insistence on the change of one entire substance into another substance looks more Thomistic than Franciscan. It does not, however, define the change in such a manner as to illuminate any discussion concerning annihilation. Chapter IV also does not mention any necessary relation between real presence and substantial change, but it apparently and ambiguously borrows the Thomistic use of substances changing in their entirety - insisting this is what is meant by transubstantiation.

The eleven canons of the Thirteenth Session of the Council of Trent are specifically directed against Protestant heresy. Canon I asserts it an "anathema" to say that Christ is present in the sacrament only as a sign, figure or force. In this way it establishes the dogma of real presence. Most interesting, however, is Canon II. It states that anyone claiming that "the substance of the bread and wine remains conjointly with the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and denies that wonderful and singular change of the whole substance of the bread into the body . . . , the appearances only of the bread and wine remaining (manentibus dumtaxat speciebus panis et vini), which change the Catholic Church most aptly calls transubstantiation",\(^8^5\) should be called an anathema. This passage clearly rejects the coexistence of the bread and body of Christ following conversion. It also calls the conversion a singular change and states that only the appearances of the bread remain. It remains unclear what the Council means by singular change, noting the difficulty of calling either Thomistic transubstantiation or annihilation a singular change. Nonetheless, it is clear that the church no longer considers the continued existence of the bread and wine, except for its appearances, a tolerable doctrine.

\(^8^5\)Ibid., p. 79.
The members of the Thirteenth session of the Council of Trent ultimately adopted the canons agreed upon in Bologna, with apparently little technical debate concerning the issue of transubstantiation. By avoiding the debates of the schools, they remained true to their purpose of defining heresy while giving only minimum explanation of the positive church doctrine. This allowed them to remain consistent with earlier councils (namely the Fourth Lateran) and yet express the heresy of their Protestant rivals. At Trent there appeared to be specific borrowing from Thomas, and an insistence on the heresy of coexistence theory. But the doctrine described was not specific enough to exclude the annihilation of the bread, nor did it mention how the accidents of the bread and wine could remain. Absent from the Council were the detailed debates of the Franciscans and Dominican philosophers concerning place and motion. Only incomplete fragments of Thomas' doctrine remained, and perhaps purposefully so. The Council of Trent thus managed to define Church doctrine enough to declare specific heresies, while not renewing the previous battles. Concerning the Eucharist, it did not have to address difficulties of God's omnipotence nor Aristotelian physics. It did this by remaining sufficiently unspecific, although the term 'transubstantiation' as evidenced by the discussion concerning its use, had specific enough meaning to cause debate - a meaning which many apparently believed juxtaposed the Catholic and Protestant positions. The Council's view of the Eucharist, I propose, should therefore be seen as a melting pot of the dogmas. It represents the somewhat ambiguous but uniform summation of Catholic Eucharistic thought, and is primarily a reaction against the competing Protestant theories. It remains, however, sufficiently ambiguous to avoid the debates concerning such things as how the accidents of the bread remain in the Eucharist, for example. By avoiding the deep philosophical debates, as is evident from the lack of discussion concerning the manner of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, the Council managed to be sensitive to the history of differences
among the Franciscans and Dominicans present. In this way, it was able to arrive at a consistent, if not detailed, doctrine of the Eucharist.
Chapter Two: Innovation and Conflict

Descartes and the Eucharist in the Seventeenth Century

When Descartes published the Meditations on First Philosophy in Paris in 1641, he added to the title “in which are demonstrated the existence of God and the immortality of the soul”. As we shall see, Descartes clearly understood that the foundations which he sought to provide for natural science through his work were a radical departure from the philosophy taught in the schools. He was also aware of the problems his philosophy posed to certain tenets of the faith. His dedicatory letter to the doctors of theology at the Sorbonne was a clear attempt to gain favor among the faculty by expressing his orthodoxy to the cause. But despite these expressions, it became immediately apparent that Descartes’ project was not only largely outside the philosophic tradition, but also that Descartes ignored the historical difficulties underlying his project. Given his opposition to tradition, overturning the likes of Aristotle without upsetting the Church was an impossibility.

Descartes’ lack of enthusiasm for historical endeavors is apparent from Part One of the Discourse on the Method (1637). Descartes claims that his education at “one of the most famous schools in Europe” taught him little of which he could be certain despite being an avid reader (AT VI 5). Indeed, he claims that too much study of history can make one “ignorant about those practices of the present” and a stranger in his own land. History also distorts

---

86 The subtitle to the Meditations was changed in the second edition to ‘in which are demonstrated the existence of God and the distinction between the human soul and the body’. Prior to the publication of the first edition of the Meditations Mersenne apparently objected that Descartes had not proven the immortality of the soul, but only that it was distinct from the body, yet Descartes did not change the subtitle to the Meditations until the second edition. See Letter to Mersenne, 24 December 1640 (AT III 266).
the significance of the issues of the past by omitting "the baser and less notable events" (AT VI 7). Rather, for Descartes, truth and certainty can be gotten only from philosophy as founded on first principles. In the preface to his Principles of Philosophy (1644), he claims: "In order for this kind of knowledge to be perfect it must be deduced from first causes; thus, in order to set about acquiring it - and it is this activity to which the term 'to philosophize' strictly refers - we must start with the search for first causes or principles." (AT IXB 2)

Even Descartes' project in the Meditations begins with the famous skepticism which not only renders the senses useless for gaining certainty, but eliminates the significance of historical study in the search for philosophical truth. Descartes, as we will see, was not concerned with the negative effects that his metaphysics could have on the traditional interpretations of certain theological doctrines because, he believed, the truth gained by doing philosophy properly should take priority over any supposed truth derived from mere tradition or history.

Arnauld saw the consequences which Descartes' physics could have on the Faith - consequences resulting from complications with the Eucharist. Arnauld concluded the Fourth Objection to the Meditations by stating: "even though his intention was to defend the cause of God against the impious, he may appear to have endangered the very faith, founded by divine authority, which he hopes will enable him to obtain that eternal life of which he has undertaken to convince mankind." (AT VII 218) This was no light criticism given by one who would eventually become a defender of Descartes. Although Arnauld's criticism belies a sympathy for Descartes' theological intentions, he recognizes the dangerous implications which Descartes' physics has for the traditional interpretations of Church doctrine.

---

87 This is not to say that Descartes in any sense rejected as true the revelations of scripture. Revealed truth and philosophy were compatible. The truths of philosophy may be, and often were according to Descartes, in conflict with particular interpretations of the truths of scripture.
Entering into theological debates was not one of Descartes’ intentions, although he recognized the close ties between Aristotle and the Church theology. As early as December 1629, Descartes realized that this connection would prove troublesome. In a letter to Mersenne he says that theology is “so deeply in the thrall of Aristotle that it is almost impossible to expound another philosophy without its seeming to be directly contrary to the Faith.” (AT I 86) This point became more vivid for Descartes in 1633, when working on *The World*, he discovered Galileo had been placed under house arrest and his views about the movement of the earth were condemned as heretical by the Church authorities. Descartes wrote in November: “I was told that it [a particular work of Galileo] had indeed been published but that all the copies had immediately been burnt at Rome, and that Galileo had been convicted and fined. I was so astonished at this that I almost decided to burn all my papers or at least to let no one see them”. (AT I 271) Descartes’ ‘astonishment’ itself manifests a certain failure on his part to realize the historical significance given by the Church to issues concerning heliocentricity. It reflects his firm belief that truth should be founded in philosophy and not tradition - a priority (to Descartes’ surprise here) not always recognized by the Church. Nevertheless, proposing a similar system to Galileo’s, Descartes withheld his own work from publication. Descartes thus knew that the greatest hurdles he faced were theological; so he approached such topics with some reluctance. Indeed, as radically different as Descartes’ metaphysical foundations were, it can be argued that he had hoped to avoid controversy. In is letter to Mersenne of January 28, 1641, he said that he wished his readers would “gradually get used to my principles, and recognize their truth, before they notice that they destroy the principles of Aristotle.” (AT III 298) Descartes did not pretend that what he was doing was not fundamentally new, yet it

88See Descartes’ letters to Mersenne dated November 1633 (AT I 270), February 1634 (AT I 281) and April 1634 (AT I 288).
seems he harbored the naive hope that somehow it would not create great controversy (that it would be so obviously true, no objections against it could endure) while overturning the long and complex history of scholasticism.

Although Descartes was reticent about entering into discussions which were overtly theological, from a very early date he was aware that his physics posed a particular problem for any traditional explanation of the Eucharist. While Descartes was working on his Optics, apparently Mersenne had distributed one of Descartes' letters in which he discussed his forthcoming work. Descartes informed Mersenne that he "would like this project to remain unknown". (AT I 179) He then continued in the 1630 letter to say:

"I think I will send you this discourse on light as soon as it is complete, and before sending you the rest of the Optics, because in it I want to give my own account of colours, and consequently I am obliged to explain how the whiteness of the bread remains in the Blessed Sacrament. I would be glad to have this examined first by my friends before it is seen by the world at large." (AT I 179)

Although Descartes apparently never gave the explanation of the whiteness of the bread at that time, the letter is remarkable for several reasons. Most importantly it shows that Descartes was concerned about the relationship between his physics and the Eucharist from the beginning of his mature work. It also expresses a certain caution on the part of Descartes to be open about his

---

89 There is some debate about this point. Descartes both claims that his philosophy is radically different from the Aristotle taught in the schools, and yet claims that he says nothing that Aristotle himself would not agree with. Apparently Descartes wants the credit of overturning scholasticism while remaining free of the taboo of being labeled an innovator. In the Preface to the French Edition of the Principles, Descartes apparently wants it both ways: "Yet although all the truths which I include among my principles have been known for all time by everyone, there has, so far as I know, been no one up till now who has recognized them as the principles of philosophy."
thoughts. His caution may be due to many factors, but its expression in the context of this mention of the Eucharist reveals an early awareness, on the part of Descartes, of the risky nature of such theological diversions. Despite Descartes’ concerns about who should read his works prior to their completion for the public at large, he nevertheless appeared confident in his ability to supply an answer to the traditional problem of how the whiteness of the bread can remain after consecration.\textsuperscript{90} Telling why Descartes did not explain the whiteness of the bread in the Eucharist along with the \textit{Optics}, as was his stated desire, would be speculation, but the fact that he did not do so at this stage is at least a weak indication that he was either advised not to,\textsuperscript{91} or chose not to, because of foreseen difficulties. What is most striking, however, is that three years before Galileo’s troubles in Italy became known to Descartes, he was concerned not so much about the problems his physics faced on theological grounds in general, but rather with the problem of the Eucharist in particular.

Why then did Descartes believe in 1630 that his \textit{Optics} would require an explanation of the Eucharist in his own terms? The \textit{Optics} was published along with the \textit{Discourse on the Method} ostensibly as an example of the application of Descartes’ epistemological project found therein. It was not published, however, until 1637. It is clear from the letters to Mersenne that Descartes had the \textit{Optics} well under way in 1630; its delay in publication can be explained in part as a result of the arrest of Galileo in Italy and Descartes’ subsequent shift away from publishing \textit{The World} and devoting his time to the theologically less

\textsuperscript{90}The fact that Descartes does not refer to the ‘accident’ of the bread as tradition would have it, indicates he may already have worked out an early solution consistent with his later denial of real accidents.

\textsuperscript{91}Mersenne later advised Descartes not to publish his full response to Arnauld’s comments concerning the Eucharist (\textit{Fourth Objections}). Descartes’ complete \textit{Fourth Set of Replies} were, therefore, not initially published in 1641 precisely because of the foreseen problems associated with denying the Scholastic interpretation of transubstantiation.
threatening project found in the *Discourse*. Works on light (minus any discussion concerning the whiteness of the bread after consecration), meteorology, and geometry must have appeared to be much safer grounds for publication; thus we see these being his next major works published following the abandonment of *The World* in 1633.

Even Descartes’ *Optics*, as he was aware, betrayed certain theological difficulties. In his opening discussion concerning light, Descartes tells his reader, by understanding the senses properly, he will give up the idea “that there is something in the objects [of the senses] which resembles the ideas or sensations that we have of them.” In a bolder statement still, Descartes says the reader “will be delivered from all those little images flitting through the air, called ‘intentional forms’, which so exercise the imagination of the philosophers.” (AT VI 85) In this passage, not lacking sarcasm for his scholastic opponents, Descartes, by presenting his rarefied ontology, is rejecting the entire explanation of accidents and forms which is founded in Aristotle. Descartes’ attack on scholastic philosophy is not direct (at least not compared to Gassendi’s early rejection of Aristotle); but in this short statement alone, it is thorough.

**Arnauld and Real Qualities**

Stephen Menn discusses the relationship between Descartes’ denial of real qualities and the problem of the Eucharist, suggesting that Arnauld’s criticism of Descartes on these grounds is surprising because “it is unclear where Arnauld is getting this [rejection of sensible qualities].” While, as Menn suggests, it may be difficult for the modern reader to understand why the issue of real qualities is

---

92 The *Discourse* was certainly not uncontroversial, but did fail to elicit the expected response.

so crucial to the acceptance of Descartes’ philosophy, it is not difficult to
determine why an astute reader like Arnauld would call Descartes’ greatest
hurdle the associated problem with the Eucharist. Arnauld warns Descartes:
“But what I see likely to give the greatest offence to theologians is that
according to the author’s doctrines it seems that the Church’s teaching
concerning the sacred mysteries of the Eucharist cannot remain completely
intact.” (AT VII 217)

Arnauld is certainly cutting to the chase in his criticism of Descartes’
Meditations. His criticism is astute, but not surprising. We know, for instance,
that when Arnauld is writing his Fourth Set of Objections, that he has previously
read Descartes’ Discourse.94 He says: “But the author [Descartes] thinks
there are no sensible qualities, but merely various motions in the bodies that
surround us which enable us to perceive the various impressions which we
subsequently call ‘colour’, ‘taste’ and ‘smell’.” (AT VII 217) Descartes, as we
have shown, has in his Optics as well as his Discourse, already denied the ‘little
images’ which flit in the air. He does it again, although a little more subtly, in the
Meditations and in the Second Set of Replies. That there are only two
substances which are distinct from one another is an obvious point of the
Meditations.95 Given this, Descartes’ ontology is quite simple compared to the
Scholastic model which begins with the four basic element and builds from there.

For the seventeenth century scholastic, the Aristotelian distinction between

94Arnauld’s objections refer at least twice to the Discourse. He refers to Descartes’
argument ‘elsewhere’ that brute animals have no soul (AT VII 205), and directly to the
Descartes’ statement in the Discourse that a “free style of philosophizing, which calls
everything into doubt” could be dangerous for those “only of moderate intelligence” (AT VII
215).

95The point may not be so obvious. There is obviously extension, and the mind or soul. Given
that a substance for Descartes is anything which exists independently of all else, perhaps only
God is a substance.
matter and form survives, although with modification and variation. The basic
metaphysical distinction for the scholastics is between substance and accident.
As the scholastic Eustachius a Santo Paulo says, a substance is something which
"is and of itself; an accident though is a being in another. . . Moreover the subject
of an accident is a substance".96 Accidents themselves have various relations
to their subject and are further differentiated. Certain accidents are sensible
qualities such as color, while others are generally considered modes of
substance, such as size and shape. Modes, because they have no existence
apart from their subject, are not considered real; they are less a res (thing).
What makes a substance what it is, and differentiates it from others, are forms.
Some forms are accidents and others essential or substantial.97 Nevertheless,
any natural thing is endowed with a substantial form. The substantial form
differentiates kinds of things, making a thing what it is.98 Further, accidents
adhere in the matter; and, in part as a consequence of the condemnations of
1277, those accidents can in various degrees exist independently of any
sustaining thing. "While some accidents must be understood as being in some
substance, they are not necessarily conceived through the essence of that
substance."99 The result is a complex structure of forms, accidents and
modes - a hotly debated structure among the Scholastics, and a structure
Descartes intends to simplify.

Evidence in the Meditations for Descartes' denial of real qualities, which
Arnauld astutely identifies, can be seen in Descartes' argument for the distinction

96Daniel Garber, Descartes Metaphysical Physics, p. 68.

97Stephen Menn argues against Gilson that in correct Scholastic usage, a substantial form is
itself a substance.

98Again there is disagreement among the Scholastics. For some, the greater emphasis put on
matter as an independent substance is reflected by the theory that matter, not form,
differentiates a substance.

99Garber, p. 68-69.
of the mind and body. Descartes claims that he, as a thinking substance, is distinctly different from his sensory perception because those sensory perceptions must have a substance in which to adhere in order to exist. “I also recognize that there are other faculties (like those of changing position, of taking various shapes, and so on) which, like sensory perception and imagination, cannot be understood apart from some substance for them to inhere in, and hence cannot exist without it.” (AT VII 79) He draws an analogy here between the senses, and the modes of position and motion. They both can only be understood through a proper substance (mind and extension respectively). Since this dualism admits no other entities, all real qualities must reduce to the modes of a substance. All sensory experience becomes a mechanistic relation between our brain and matter in motion. Descartes describes a particular pain in the foot as a set of motions in our nerves. The location of the various motions determine the place of the pain. He concludes this discussion saying: “And we must suppose the same thing happens with regard to any other sensation”. (AT VII 87) When Descartes says, “although I feel heat when I go near a fire and feel pain when I go too near, there is no convincing argument for supposing that there is something in the fire which resembles the heat, any more than for supposing that there is something which resembles the pain” (AT VII 83), he is denying a similarity between the perception and what is real. There is no real quality called heat - that is simply a perception of the same type as pain. Descartes' mechanistic description of foot pain taken in conjunction with his discussion of the heat of the candle becoming pain as it gets too close to the skin, is exactly a denial of real qualities. Descartes' intends to blur the distinction between heat and pain so that when he describes the later, one should conclude the former must operate on the same principles. Finally, to be more thorough in his denial of real qualities, in the same breath which he mentions heat, he says we must not suppose white or green resemble our perceptions either.
All of these qualities are not, however, created equal. Descartes and the
Scholastics recognized a distinction akin to what would later be called primary
and secondary qualities. While Descartes does not go into an explanation of
modes at this point in the *Meditations*, he refers to the distinction between
modes and real qualities - a distinction recognized, if not always agreed upon, by
his seventeenth century readers. Descartes accepts figure, motion and quantity
as modes of matter, and (with motion) the determining factor of our sensory
perception. In the *Second Set of Replies*, Descartes gives a rough ontological
hierarchy to his borrowed terminology: "There are various degrees of reality of
being: substance has more reality than an accident or a mode; an infinite
substance has more reality than a finite substance." (AT VII 165). In this
passage Descartes gives an ontological ranking in which accidents and modes
figure poorly.

While nowhere in the *Meditations* does Descartes explicitly state that real
qualities do not exist, it is clear that his metaphysics does not accommodate
them. 100 Arnauld had no difficulty seeing why, if accidents exist only as a result
of our sensory perception, they could not exist independently. If by definition,
they did not have independent existence, then the color of the bread could not
exist through a change in the substance to which it adheres. Indeed, the color is
only a relation between the motion of the matter and the mechanical apparatus
of our eye. Given all this, anything akin to a traditional interpretation of the
Eucharist would be impossible. Descartes would not want to argue the heretical
position that somehow we only perceive the accidents (or that God deceives us)
of the bread, and that they do not actually exist. Given the historical significance
of the debates concerning the Eucharist, and the still menacing Protestant denial
of real presence, it is not surprising that Arnauld points out, to an already aware
Descartes, that there is here a significant issue which should be addressed.

100 It may be telling that Descartes' rejection of real qualities is not so blatant, given his
awareness of the problem of the Eucharist.
Arnauld's response to the *Meditations* is interesting for at least one other reason. He says: "We believe on faith that the substance of the bread is taken away form the bread of the Eucharist and only the accidents remain. These are extension, shape, colour, smell, taste and other qualities perceived by the senses." (AT VII 217) The continued existence of these qualities of the senses is traditional and indistinguishable Catholic dogma, however, the substance of the bread being "taken away" from the bread of the Eucharist sounds like annihilation, not Thomistic conversion. This supports Armogathe's claim\(^{101}\) that by the seventeenth century transubstantiation is generally interpreted as the annihilation of the substance of the bread and its replacement with the body of Christ.

**The Eucharist and the Scholastics**

It would be a gross oversimplification to say that Descartes' scholastic rivals held any one particular metaphysical view.\(^{102}\) Indeed, their various views reflect the complexity of the historical debates. Perhaps the only generalization which can be established in this regard is that they claimed to be followers of Aristotle. Despite various views on the status of matter and form, certain regularities and trends can be seen. Reflected in Eucharistic theology is the positing of prime matter as something beyond mere potential. Scipion Dupleix, the king's historian and author of a well received philosophy text book,\(^{103}\) flatly contradicts Thomas' assertion that prime matter cannot be the subject of

\(^{101}\)J.R. Armogathe, *Theologia Cartesiana*.

\(^{102}\)In his *Physics*, Scipion Dupleix acknowledges the variety of differing opinions saying: "There is so much great noise among the Scholastics concerning the establishment of matter, that if I wanted to stop to appease all sides, I would lose too much time."

\(^{103}\)Dupleix's philosophy text book, *Corps de philosophie*, was published in 1623 in French, not traditional Latin.
accidents in Eucharistic change because it has no actual existence. Dupleix, in a
reversal of Aristotelian doctrine, gives matter priority over form.\textsuperscript{104} “First then
this matter, being the first subject and principle of natural things, cannot be
made or extracted from any other subject”.\textsuperscript{105} Dupleix then gives prime matter
chronological and epistemic priority by saying it was made first by God during
creation: “yet even if we consider a certain order in the creation of the world, we
must necessarily conceive matter before form”.\textsuperscript{106} Dupleix sets the stage for
Descartes’ radically new view of the world by emphasizing the independence of
quantity in matter. Dupleix says that “quantity is the inseparable companion of
matter, and not of form: that this quantity does not change as to its essence,
but only as to accidents and dimensions”.\textsuperscript{107} Dupleix’s views not only reflect an
ongoing Scholastic debate about physics, a debate often centered around the
status of matter, but most importantly they directly acknowledge and appeal to
the significance (both historical and contemporary) of the role of the Eucharist in
this controversy.

In his Physics, Dupleix attempts give a “resolution of arguments that
conclude that there can be no prime matter separate from forms”. One
argument used to substantiate that prime matter cannot be independent claims
that matter is neither accident nor a complete substance. Dupleix responds
saying that “it nevertheless deserves the name substance, because it subsists by
itself and is in no subject.” Most interestingly he continues:

“This reply is founded on the doctrine of the Philosopher, but still it

\textsuperscript{104} According to Marjorie Grene, it is generally accepted that Aristotle believes that form is
ontologically prior to matter. In seventeenth century scholasticism, some (including Dupleix)
turn this around. See M. Grene, “Aristotelico-Cartesian Themes in Natural Philosophy: Some

\textsuperscript{105} Scipion Dupleix, La Physique ou science des choses naturelles, p. 130, translation by M.
Grene.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
does not satisfy every kind of person, and particularly not St. Thomas Aquinas and his followers, who maintain that such matter does not exist at all in nature, and that it cannot be in any way, indeed, that it is even so repugnant to nature, that God himself could not make it subsist thus stripped of all form. But this opinion is too bold, badly mistaken, and as such has been refuted by Scotus the Subtle, and by several others who convict St. Thomas out of his own mouth. For he does indeed grant that God can bring it about that the accident subsists in nature apart from its subject: as indeed all true Christians believe that the accidents of the bread in the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist exist without the bread . . . even though there seems to be more repugnance in this than in making matter subsist without form, insofar as matter has no need of any subject or support, being itself the subject and support of all natural things.\textsuperscript{108}

It is true, as we have shown, that Aquinas does not accept the independence of prime matter, although Dupleix’s suggestion that his own contrary doctrine is founded on ‘the Philosopher’ is suspect.\textsuperscript{109} It is also important to note that Dupleix is attempting to preserve the intent of the 1277 condemnations\textsuperscript{110} by insisting that Aquinas’ denies the omnipotence of God by claiming he cannot make matter exist on its own.\textsuperscript{111} Dupleix has thus turned the tables, against Aquinas, concerning the limit to God’s omnipotence, tables which had been generally favorable to the Thomistic position in the wake of 1277. Nevertheless, Dupleix shows a historical sensitivity to, and awareness of, the traditional texts concerning the debates over transubstantiation.

Dupleix, like Scotus, accepts the logical possibility that one body can exist in more than one place at a time, and also that two bodies can exist in one place at one time. Unlike Scotus, he claims that this cannot happen naturally, but

\textsuperscript{108}Ibid., p. 131.

\textsuperscript{109}Prime matter for Aristotle is merely potential, and cannot exist in any way independently of form.

\textsuperscript{110}It does not appear that Dupleix is aware of the actual condemnations of 1277, yet I would assert that his claim here is part of the legacy of those condemnations.

\textsuperscript{111}For Aquinas it is a logical impossibility that matter can exist independently of form.
rather asserts that it is within the power of God. In his *Physics* Dupleix cites the Eucharist as evidence for this position. Dupleix, however, does not give a positive doctrine of the Eucharist. Nor does he defend a specific interpretation of the Eucharist. Instead, he uses the miracle of transubstantiation as evidence for the physics he is presenting. It is important to note, however, that he sees physics and the issue of the Eucharist as inseparable, and he is compelled to discuss the latter in context of the former. This is the same point made above about Descartes.

The increasing ontological importance of quantity and matter in scholastic thought is a precursor to Descartes’ ultimate claim that the world as matter is just extension. This precursor is prevalent in seventeenth century scholasticism. One of the few works we know Descartes to have read (in preparation to writing his *Principles*) is Eustachius a Sancto Paulo’s text book. It would be conjecture to say exactly why Descartes chose to purchase Eustachius’ work, but it may reflect his impatience for the long and complex texts of other scholastics such as Suárez. Given the relative brevity of Eustachius’ book, and Descartes’ dislike for the arduous debates of the scholastics as a whole, he admits to using it as a resource for his *Principles*, and it appears that it is indeed one of the few scholastic texts he consulted.

Regardless, Eustachius’ views on matter are revealing. Eustachius says: “The first property of matter is that it has quantity. Quantity is a property of matter to such an extent that it belongs to it of itself and first of all; and secondarily, in virtue of it, it belongs to the whole natural composite [of matter plus form].”

---

112Dupleix, p. 259.

113By not arguing for a particular interpretation of transubstantiation, Dupleix can, in relative safety, discuss his physics and use the Eucharist as evidence. Descartes, on the other hand, is forced to present his own positive doctrine of the Eucharist.

114Roger Ariew in a forthcoming article (cite?) makes a similar point: “A positive resolution of this esoteric topic [whether matter can exist without form] might lead one toward a dualistic, as opposed to hylomorphic, conception of substance”.

115See Descartes’ letter to Mersenne, 11 November 1640 (AT III 232).
Eustachius further claims that all forms, even substantial ones, are received by matter through the medium of quantity. He then concludes his discussion by saying that sometimes, such as in the Eucharist, the very nature of matter changes. This view of quantity is consistent with Aquinas' account of the persistence of the accidents of the consecrated bread, however, this is natural physics for Eustachius, not simply an isolated work of God's miraculous power. Suárez, often quoted as representative of seventeenth century scholastic metaphysics, like Aquinas does not consent to the natural separateness of quantity from matter. Yet he is consistent with Aquinas and with Trent's interpretation that accidents subsists in the quantity of the bread of the Eucharist; and so he states: "And this opinion [of the distinction and separateness of quantity from matter] we must in any event maintain; for though it were not sufficiently demonstrable by natural reason, nevertheless it is proved conclusively from the principles of theology, particularly by virtue of the mystery of the Eucharist."\textsuperscript{117} While one would not want to claim that the Eucharist has initiated the change in scholastic thinking about matter as a whole, we do see, in the seventeenth century, a close tie between discussions concerning matter and the Eucharist such that if one is not obliged to refer to the sacred rite, one's physics must at least be consistent with the now broad interpretation of transubstantiation.\textsuperscript{118}

\textbf{Descartes Against the Scholastics}

Although Descartes recognizes the vast differences of opinion within

\textsuperscript{116}Eustachius a Sancto Paulo, \textit{Summa philosophia quadripartita de rebus dialecticis, moralibus, physicis. et metaphysicis}, First Part, Treatise I, Discourse 2, Question 4 (p. 122), translated by Roger Ariew.

\textsuperscript{117}F. Suárez, \textit{Disputationes Metaphysicae}, disp. 40, sect. 2, subs. 8.

\textsuperscript{118}Gassendi's \textit{Exercises Against the Aristotelians} is another case in point. Following Article Ten of Book II, Exercise III, which is titled "The essence of quantity is external extension" he writes Article Eleven and titles it "Our orthodox faith teaches us that the species of the Eucharist is not like this".

62
scholastic thought concerning matter, substance and forms; he is not compelled to enter into their discussion because he is undercutting the foundation on which it is built. Descartes intends to overturn all of scholasticism by denying the existence of substantial forms (with the exception of the human soul) and real qualities, and by redefining substance. In November of 1640 he writes to Mersenne: “I do not think that the diversity of the opinions of the scholastics makes their philosophy difficult to refute. It is easy to overturn the foundations on which they all agree.” (AT II: 232) Indeed, Descartes does (in opposition to the tradition and ignoring their historical importance) overturn the scholastic foundations. He reduces the physical world to extension, or in other words, to simple quantity. He retains the soul as the only other thing (besides God) worthy of being called a substance. This is, of course, the heart of Descartes’ dualism in the Meditations. All sensible qualities are reduced to the motion of extended matter. Descartes’ denial that heat is a real quality is especially important because it represents not just a denial of qualities, but the undercutting of the basic composition of the scholastic world. By denying one of the four qualities on which the scholastics build their elements (earth, air, fire, and water) which make up the world, he reduces his opponent’s metaphysics to an absurdity. This is clearly Descartes’ intention long before the Meditations, as is apparent in The World: “If you find that in explaining these elements I do not use the qualities called ‘heat’, ‘cold’, ‘moisture’, and ‘dryness’ - as the philosophers do - I shall say to you that these qualities themselves seem to me to need explanation.” (AT XI: 25) He exclaims that he will build his system out of only motion, size and shape. This attack on scholastic philosophy is much more direct in the earlier work, but it is retained, as we have shown, in the Meditations. For reasons beyond Descartes’ views concerning the motion of the earth, The World would have been more troubling for the Church. Perhaps this is why we see a slightly more camouflaged denial of real qualities in the Meditations: it is indeed an attempt to get his readers to give up Aristotle without realizing it. Nevertheless, because of both Descartes’ denial of real qualities and his nearly complete rejection of
Aristotle, he is forced to develop a positive doctrine of the Eucharist - something his scholastic rivals were not obliged to do.

While Descartes' *Discourse* failed to elicit the expected response, he published the *Meditations* along with objections and replies.\(^{119}\) This forum not only generated a broader readership, but required Descartes to respond to questions and objections given by many of his best contemporaries. Consequently, he was forced at least to acknowledge the most sensitive criticisms, including Arnauld's perceived problems with the Eucharist.

Arnauld's warning to Descartes that his new metaphysical system did not allow for a traditional interpretation of the Eucharist thus spawned a new (and undesired by the Church) explanation of the sacred rite. However, it would be false to say that Descartes was either unprepared to respond to Arnauld, or that he did so against his desire. As we have shown, Descartes had been thinking about the relation between his own physics and the Eucharist in 1630. The problem continued to occupy his thoughts and is most likely the source of his comments in a letter addressed to Noel\(^{120}\), dated October 1637: “I know the main reason why your Colleges take great care to reject all sorts of innovations in philosophical matters is their fear that these innovations may bring about some change in theology as well.” (AT I 456) Descartes continues to assure his reader that his innovations are "most compatible with the mysteries of religion" and that he will show this compatibility given the opportunity. While his desire to give an explanation had been put on hold for a decade since his first mention of the issue, he is finally presented the opportunity by Arnauld.

Perhaps believing himself distant enough from the theological controversies which prevented his publication of *The World*, in March of 1641 Descartes appears quite confident that his explanation of the Eucharist would be well

\(^{119}\) Descartes had wished to have his objectors send their replies concerning the *Discourse* to his publisher, but he got little response to this request and complained about this to Mersenne. See the Letter to Mersenne March 1, 1638.

\(^{120}\) Etienne Noel, the most likely recipient of this letter, was a Jesuit priest and rector of various Jesuit colleges (Regardless, the recipient was a Jesuit priest).
received. Indeed, Descartes expresses great confidence that his physics would be judged so highly that theology would have to be adapted to fit. Given Descartes' relatively cautious denial of real qualities and substantial forms in the Meditations, it is surprising to see him so certain about the success of his explanation of the Eucharist - which he, in March of 1641, had yet to offer in either a publication or in private correspondence. Descartes freely expresses his faith in his ability to reshape theology to his good friend Mersenne:

“There will be no difficulty, so far as I can see, in adapting theology to my style of philosophizing. I do not see that anything in it needs changing except in the case of transubstantiation, which is very clear and easy to explain on my principles. I shall have explain it in my Physics, . . . I propose to send my explanation to the Sorbonne to be examined before it is printed”. (AT III 296)

Descartes then asks Mersenne if he would help him with the “writing of a whole new course of theology” if that becomes necessary. Although he has long delayed his discussion of the Eucharist, resisted publication of The World, and tempered his denial of real qualities,121 on the eve of the publication of the Meditations, Descartes seems quite assured that his philosophy, and along with it a new explanation of the Eucharist, will be embraced by nearly all.

Response to Arnauld: The Fourth Set of Replies

As evident from his correspondence with Mersenne, Descartes gave special consideration to his reply to young Arnauld concerning the issue of the Eucharist, considering the Fourth Objections “the best of them all”122. Arnauld, at that time, was teaching a course in philosophy at the College du Mans, a branch of the University of Paris, while working on his own degree toward becoming a doctor of theology of the Sorbonne. Descartes believed that of all

121Compared to what can be found in The World and even the Discourse.
122Letter to Mersenne, March 4, 1641 (AT III 331)
his objectors, Arnauld best understood his project. Indeed, even Arnauld’s wording of the Eucharist problem belies a sympathetic understanding. In this sense, Arnauld and Descartes shared a special relationship. This relationship would ultimately result in Arnauld’s fight against the censorship of Descartes’ work long after the death of the master. Part of Arnauld’s unsuccessful battle against this condemnation was to argue that Descartes’ interpretation of the Eucharist was not heretical but, in failing to settle the debates over transubstantiation, showed that explaining such a miracle was outside the bounds of philosophy. This tactic proved troublesome because it is exactly what Luther had argued late in his life - and reflects to some degree the protestant tendencies of Arnauld’s Jansenism. These tendencies would eventually find Arnauld, as a result of his Jansenism, fleeing the charge of heresy.

After having received Arnauld’s Objections, Descartes tells Mersenne to make certain revisions to his *Metaphysics*, apparently having prepared answers to all of Arnauld’s comments except the problem of transubstantiation. Descartes tells Mersenne that he delays his response so he can “read the Councils on this topic” and has not yet been able to obtain them. Within two

---

123 See Vincent Carraud’s “Arnauld: From Ockhamism to Cartesianism”. Carraud says: “... all historians of philosophy have rightly considered the Fourth Replies as an important, indeed inaugural moment for the Cartesianism of Arnauld himself”, p. 114.

124 More specifically, Arnauld argued in an anonymous treatise *Several Reasons for Preventing the Censure and Condemnation of Descartes’ Philosophy* “that a condemnation of a particular philosophy on the ground that it cannot explain the Eucharist would not be useful, but rather harmful, to religion. There would be no advantage to the church in having a popular philosophy, embraced by countless Catholics, declared as incompatible with the mystery of the Eucharist”. Further (and ironically), Arnauld argued that such censorship would give ammunition to the Calvinists that not all Catholics believed in transubstantiation. From Ariew, “Damned If You Do: Cartesians and Censorship”, *Perspectives on Science* (1994), vol. 2, no.3, pp. 262-263.

125 Evidently Descartes is referring to the decrees of the Council of Trent, which he later quotes and uses in defense of his explanation of transubstantiation. See Letter to Mersenne, 18 March 1641 (AT III 340).
weeks, having obtained the decrees of the Council, Descartes completes his response to Arnauld and sends it to Mersenne. Descartes is confident that his explanation of transubstantiation will replace the false existing doctrines. Apparently Descartes no longer fears condemnation, and instead plans to challenge certain authorities in the Church:

“...in it [reply to Arnauld] I reconcile the doctrine of the Councils about the Blessed Sacrament with my own philosophy - so much so that I maintain that it is impossible to give a satisfactory explanation of the doctrine by means of the traditional philosophy. Indeed, I think that the latter would have been rejected as clashing with the Faith if mine had been known first. I swear to you in all seriousness that I believe it is as I say. So I have decided not to keep silent on the issue, and to fight with their own weapons the people who confound Aristotle with the Bible and abuse the authority of the Church in order to vent their passions - I mean the people who had Galileo condemned. They would have my views condemned likewise if they had the power; but it there is ever any question of that, I am confident I can show that none of the tenets of their philosophy accords with the Faith so well as my doctrines.” (AT III 349 - 350)

This letter is striking for many reasons. It not only dates Descartes’ long awaited response to the problem of the Eucharist, but it sheds light on his theological motivations. Descartes, ignoring the importance of the long history of the debates, believes he will settle the issue once and for all. Much less, the traditional interpretations will be found 'impossible' in comparison with his own. It should be noted that Descartes does not give any indication that he rejects the decrees of the Councils or any tenets of the Faith, rather he intends to give an explanation of transubstantiation which is in accord with orthodoxy. He firmly believes his metaphysics is not only compatible with all essential Church doctrines, but actually supports them. Neither is he challenging what he believes to be proper Church authority, but rather specific interpretations of scholastic theology - and specifically the issue of transubstantiation which he believes is
under-determined by the decrees of the Councils. He, therefore, rather naively thinks he is on safe grounds; yet he does not pretend that the issue will be uncontroversial.

Apparently Descartes is still bitter about the condemnation of Galileo, and the long time it has taken him to get his philosophy published as a result. He is resolute in his stance against Church corruption and confident that he will prevail against those who “had Galileo condemned”. He hopes his answer to the problem of transubstantiation will provide him the platform on which he can do battle against these adversaries. This battle, Descartes believes, will be won by his physics and a subsequent rejection of Aristotle - but it is also a battle in theology where Descartes now sees as an opportunity. Transubstantiation is in many ways the perfect grounds for his radical and all encompassing philosophy. It provides a demonstration of the correct application of philosophy to theology, or so Descartes believes. It is also a defining part of Church dogma, yet that dogma is sufficiently under-determined by the Councils (specifically Trent) that Descartes believes there is room for his theory. If the physics of Aristotle crumbles under the weight of Descartes' own, so must certain theological interpretations of the Scholastics. There is no greater opportunity for Descartes to make this point than in a new and proper interpretation of the Eucharist. Descartes is aware that he denies the possibility of the void by positing matter as infinitely divisible extension. He also has views about the motion of the

126 As we have shown, it is an issue which demarcates a central division between the Protestants and the Catholics.

127 While the denial of the void is considered heretical and is part of the condemnations of 1277, Descartes' is most likely unaware of the history of Church condemnation, and the 1277 condemnations in particular. As evidence of this, Mersenne, perhaps the best informed scholar of the period, seems confused by a reference to the condemnations of Aristotle. He wonders why Thomas would not have referred to these condemnations in his own commentaries. Nevertheless, there is little to make one believe that until de Launoy's De varia Aristotelis fortuna (1653), much was known in the seventeenth century of specific Church condemnations. Arnauld, not surprisingly, plays an important role in the historical study of Church condemnation, himself using de Launoy's work, and writing his own history of the subject to use in defense of the
earth, causation (including God as *causa sui*) and divine omnipotence which conflict with certain scholastic theological views. He knows that a successful demonstration of his physics in the matter of the Eucharist will most likely give him the foothold needed to revamp theology in these other areas as well.

Descartes believed his philosophical project was strong enough to overcome any difficulties similar to those faced by Galileo. Descartes clearly had confidence in the truth of his physics. Further, a long time had passed since Galileo was condemned, and France was not Italy. This is not to say that the Church in France did not have a strong influence on philosophy, but their power of condemnation was filtered through the Parliament and the faculty of the University. In Rome, the authority to censor did not rest in the university, but rather more centrally and directly with Church appointees whose job was specifically to approve all submitted writings. Thus in France, outside of specific priestly orders, condemnation was generally less consistent and effective. On one hand, in 1624, the Parliament and the University had successfully censored, with the threat of death, three scholars who openly declared that they would hold a public forum in which they would dispute the philosophy of Aristotle.\(^{128}\) On the other hand, a doctor of medicine, Theophraste Renaudot was holding public conferences in 1633 with unusually open discussion on topics including natural philosophy, metaphysics and even theology.

In 1624 Gassendi felt confident enough to publish the first of a series titled *Seven Books of Exercises in the Form of Paradoxes against the Aristotelian*. While Gassendi wisely chose not to publish the second book in the series,\(^{129}\) and

---

\(^{128}\)Villion, de Claves, and Bitaud were banned by M. le premier of President de la Cour de Parlement from assembling to sustain their thesis. About eight hundred assembled at the advertised meeting time and Villion informed the crowd after handing out the written thesis, that they had been forbidden to present it. Subsequently, the Sorbonne censured parts of the thesis and the three were arrested and ordered to leave Paris, although even this ban did not last. From a lecture delivered in Chicago 1993 by Daniel Garber.

\(^{129}\)Apparently a footnote attached to the manuscript of Book II, not in Gassendi’s handwriting, claims that it was not published because of complaints from Peripatetics and the fact that
wrote no more of it, he altogether avoided official condemnation despite expounding a mechanistic (atomism) physics which also denied the existence of substantial forms and real accidents. Gassendi, like Descartes, was criticized for proposing a metaphysics which was inconsistent with transubstantiation and in many ways is in a similar situation on the issue.\textsuperscript{130} Gassendi also claimed orthodoxy for his views and referred to Trent in his defense: “Accordingly, I subscribe and consent to these decrees. You may be assured that I confess that this sacrament contains the true and real substance of the body of our Lord, which the councils teach me is contained substantially and through transubstantiation.”\textsuperscript{131} Yet in the next breath Gassendi attacked the Thomistic notion that God preserves the quantity of the Bread, while at the same time admitting that God could do just that. “Indeed, the intellect is much less dismayed at believing that in this sacrament the substance of a large body has been reduced to an atom which being deprived of its quantity is also deprived of extension than at believing that while the substance retains its quantity, it continues to be situated in an indivisible point”\textsuperscript{132} Thus Gassendi, like Descartes, did not only deny the Thomistic view of quantity, but proposed his own positive doctrine of transubstantiation. Gassendi, however, qualified his doctrine in probabilistic terms and claimed that ultimately he bows to Church authority on all such issues.\textsuperscript{133} Nevertheless, the inconsistency of condemnation in early to mid-

Francisco Patrizzi had already done much of Gassendi’s project. See Brush’s Introduction to his translation of Gassendi.

\textsuperscript{130}Book II was published only posthumously in 1658. However, Gassendi apparently had prepared it for publication, and must have originally believed it safe to publish. Even after publication, it escaped censorship nonetheless.

\textsuperscript{131}Gassendi, \textit{Exercises Against the Aristotelians}, Book II, Exercise III, Art. 11.

\textsuperscript{132}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{133}My point here is that unlike Descartes, Gassendi does not directly challenge Church authority, but takes a rather skeptical approach even to his own proposals. This may account for the different official receptions received by Gassendi and Descartes. For a better account of why Descartes suffered official condemnations, and Gassendi did not, see Roger Aried’s “Damned If You Do: Cartesians and Censorship, 1663-1706” in \textit{Perspectives on Science} 1994.
seventeenth century France leads one to believe that Descartes may have felt somewhat safe in publishing his own views on theology.

This brings us back to Descartes' response to Arnauld. Mersenne apparently suggested to Descartes that he not enter into a lengthy explanation of the Eucharist in the *Meditations*; and Descartes, despite his earlier enthusiasm, agreed to have his explanation of transsubstantiation truncated in the Fourth Set of Replies. Descartes' confidence in his ability to fight such a battle, and still gain the acceptance of the doctors of theology at the Sorbonne must have waned between March and July of 1641. Descartes opted to take the more conservative approach and told Mersenne: "I very much approve your having pruned what I put at the end of my reply to M. Arnauld, especially if this can help us to get a formal approval for the book."\(^{134}\) (AT III 416) In a letter to Huygens, on the eve of the publication of second edition of the *Meditations*, Descartes confirmed that his restraint from publishing his entire response to Arnauld was the result of not wishing "to offend our learned doctors" (at Mersenne's request).\(^{135}\) Consequently, the first edition of the *Meditations* does not contain all of Descartes' response; however, the second edition does.

Descartes' response to Arnauld on the Eucharist in the first edition of the *Meditations* is not only brief, but amounts to a denial of the author's rejection of real accidents, and an attempt to cover over any significant differences between himself and the scholastics. Descartes refers to his *Meteorology* and claims, "I expressly said that I was not denying their existence. And in the *Meditations*, although I was supposing that I did not have any knowledge of them, I did not thereby suppose that none existed" (AT VII 248) He then claims that his statement concerning modes being intelligible only through a substance in which they adhere "should not be taken to imply any denial that they can be separated from a substance by the power of God" (AT VII 249) Descartes' statements

\(^{134}\) Letter to Mersenne, 22 July 1641.

\(^{135}\) See Letter to Huygens, 26 April 1642 (AT III 785). In this letter Descartes claims that his explanation of the Eucharist is more "orthodox" than "the common view of the theologians".
here are a bit of a ruse. They are not an expression of his positive doctrine, but merely denials of his denials. Descartes is careful not to state that real accidents do exist in his reply to Arnauld. Rather, he says, that “it was certainly not my intention at that point to establish any definite results concerning the nature of accident.” Yet, as we have shown, this is precisely what his analogy between heat and pain in the Sixth Meditation does. Further, his reference to “not having knowledge of them” is a result of his scepticism in the Second Meditation; but his denial of real qualities occurs after he has the criterion of truth, and has established the physical world in the Fifth and Sixth Meditations. He is attempting to divert the attention away from this here. Descartes, however, can claim that he has not used real qualities in his philosophy (and that he has no use for them) and yet still say he has not denied their existence. The distinction is subtle, but important in order for Descartes to deflect criticism on this issue. Throughout Descartes’ works (with the exception of the Sixth Replies) he is careful to maintain that he does not need real qualities to explain his physics, but he does not deny their existence explicitly. However, there is no doubt that he means to reduce real accidents to the mechanistic perceptions of matter in motion.

To a large degree Descartes does not shy away from a positive explanation of the Eucharist in the first edition of the Meditations. However, he rather surprisingly (given his previous letters) down-plays the difference between his explanation and the scholastic interpretation. Descartes says: “I will not hide the fact that I am convinced that what affects our senses is simply and solely the surface that constitutes the limit of the dimensions of the body which is perceived by the senses.” (AT VII 249) He then explains that all sensation is a result of contact with something, and that contact can only occur on the surface. It may seem that there is again an inherent (but not explicit) denial of real qualities in this response, but he continues: “So bread or wine, for example, are perceived by the senses only in so far as the surface of the bread or wine is in contact with our sense organs, either immediately, or via the air or other bodies, as I maintain, or as many philosophers hold, by intervention of ‘intentional
species'\textsuperscript{136}.” (AT VII 249) Descartes is not denying his opponents’ position (or in a positive sense, that intentional forms exist); but rather he is claiming that transubstantiation is under-determined, and either explanation should satisfy the Church dogma. He is stressing this similarity between the two positions in this regard. Given this, Descartes’ reply in the first edition of the \textit{Meditations} appears taylor-made to avoid controversy, and to satisfy the doctors of theology at the Sorbonne.

Even though Descartes’ explanation in the first edition of the Fourth Set of Replies is cut short, it does give, for the most part, Descartes’ positive doctrine of the Eucharist. Descartes claims that the surface of the bread is made of tiny particles which have various shapes and motions which cannot be joined together. The bread maintains its identity even though these pores may contain air or other matter. We see the same bread even though quite literally there is much more there than meets the eye. The surface, which is what we sense, remains the same. “And since bread does not lose its identity despite the fact that the air or other matter contained in its pores is replaced, it is clear that this matter does not belong to the substance of the bread”. (AT VII 250) Descartes, in this way, eliminates the possibility of the coexistence of the body and bread. The surface of the bread “should not in this context be taken to be a part of the substance or the quantity of the body in question.”\textsuperscript{137} (AT VII 250) Descartes then claims that the boundary has “absolutely no reality except a modal one”. (AT VII 251) He is being consistent, therefore, with his reliance on

\textsuperscript{136}John Cottingham translates ‘\textit{species}’ here as ‘form’, but as will become apparent, this confuses the issue and should be translated ‘\textit{species}’.

\textsuperscript{137}Descartes’ theory about the surface of the bread remaining the same after consecration sounds similar to a theory rejected by Thomas in the Summa Theologiae (3a. 77, l). Aquinas says: “Some theologians think that these accidents inhere in the atmosphere around the sacrament. But this is not possible.” In a letter to Mesland dated 9 February 1645, Descartes defines surface as that which “is intermediate between two bodies, that is to say between the bread and the air surrounding it . . . the surface intermediate between the air and the bread does not differ in reality from the surface of the bread, or from the surface of the air touching the bread.” (AT IV 163-1640)
modes to explain all the effects of matter. Further he is avoiding the heresy of denying real presence (underearth the surface) and the heresy of the coexistence of two substances (bread and body). If there were any doubt that Descartes is responding to the text of the Council of Trent, he cites it directly, believing it specifically supports his interpretation. "Now the teaching of the Council of Trent session 13, canons 2 and 4 is that 'the whole substance of the bread is changes into the substance of the body of Our Lord Christ while the species of the bread remains unaltered'. Here I do not see what can be meant by the 'species'\textsuperscript{138} of the bread if not the surface that is common to the individual particles of the bread and bodies which surround them." (AT VII 251) Descartes claims that even Aristotle says that contact only occurs on the surface, before referring again to the Council's use of the term 'species' over 'form' or 'accident': "everyone agrees that 'species' here means precisely what is required in order to act on the senses." (AT VII 251) The fact that the Council specifically does not mention the accidents of the bread in this passage, shows to Descartes that they are referring to the modes which result in our sensations. Indeed 'species' has this connotation while 'form' and 'accident' do not (at least for Descartes). Thus the Council of Trent's ambiguity, and its use of the term 'species', not only leaves the door open for an interpretation such as Descartes', but supports Descartes' belief that his interpretation is not only correct, but also more orthodox. In this way Descartes can both believe and claim that he "will receive their [orthodox theologian's] hearty thanks for putting forward opinions in physics which are far more in accord with theology than those commonly accepted." (AT VII 252) Despite Descartes' relative conservatism by withholding his full explanation of the Eucharist in the first edition of the Meditations, he gives a positive and consistent explanation of the Eucharist nonetheless.

For all of Descartes' consistency, he is however, ignoring the motives behind Trent's ambiguous wording. As we have seen, Trent intended to avoid the

\textsuperscript{138}Here Cottingham does a great disservice to the reader by translating 'species' as 'form', thus missing the intent of Descartes referral to this passage from the Council.
scholastic disputes by not entering into a detailed explanation of
transubstantiation. The Council intentionally avoided an advocacy of any
specific doctrine, and did not appear to desire further explanation. The Council
simply wanted to avoid the political difficulties involved in attempting to settle the
specifics. Descartes, on the other hand, takes the Council at face value, relying
solely on their printed doctrine to defend the orthodoxy of this explanation. He
thus ignores the complexities of the historical debates surrounding the Council's
document and claims orthodoxy relative only to the text of the decrees of the
Council. Indeed, there is no evidence that Descartes consulted any additional
texts concerning the issue of transubstantiation beyond the decrees of the
Council.

**Early Resistance to Descartes' Philosophy: Utrecht**

The period between Descartes' publication of the first and second editions
of the *Meditations* find him embroiled in controversy with Voetius, the Rector of
the University of Utrecht. This controversy actually began prior to the
publication of the first edition of the *Meditations*. Regius, a professor of
medicine at Utrecht and early advocate of Descartes' new philosophy, gained
popularity among the students at the University, and as a consequence of his
Cartesianism, the ire of Voetius. Descartes himself eventually became the target
of Voetius, who sought to obtain official condemnation of Descartes' philosophy
on the grounds that it would harm the student's ability to understand more
traditional texts, and that it could lead them estray from orthodox theology.
Voetius' attack on Regius and then Descartes seems largely political, but coming
from a "scholastic in philosophy and a Calvinist in theology" his attack on
Descartes' potential effect on theology seems strange. Nevertheless,
Voetius had considerable success repressing Cartesianism at Utrecht and even

---

139 See Descartes' Letter to Mersenne, 11 November 1640.
managed to have a charge of libel brough against Descartes, who was summoned to the city by the magistrates to answer the charges.\textsuperscript{141} These political and legal problems greatly troubled Descartes, who maintained a telling correspondence with Regius.

The January 1642 correspondence with Regius gives a rare view of Descartes being frank about his motives concerning his alleged denial of substantial forms and real accidents. This letter supports the earlier claim that Descartes was being disingenuous (although perhaps technically correct) in his Fourth Replies by claiming that he had not denied the existence of real accidents. Despite the fact that Calvinists reject transubstantiation altogether, Regius apparently was criticized for claiming that real accidents do not exist.\textsuperscript{142} Descartes tells him: “I should like it best if you never put forward any new opinions, but retained all the old ones in name, and merely brought forward new arguments”. Descartes tells Regius that if he does this he will not upset his listeners, and that they will draw the proper conclusions all the same. He says:

“For instance, why did you need to reject openly substantial forms and real qualities? Do you not remember that on page 164 of my Meteorology, I said quite expressly that I did not at all reject or deny them, but simply found them unnecessary in setting out my explanations? If you had taken this course, everybody in your audience would have rejected them as soon as they saw they were useless, and in the mean time you would not have become so unpopular with your colleagues”. (AT III 492)

As we can see (and have seen) Descartes clearly intends to do without real qualities (if not do away with them), but wishes Regius to be careful to profess

\textsuperscript{141}Descartes avoided these charges with the help of the French ambassador. See Nicholas Jolley, “The Reception of Descartes’ Philosophy”, The Cambridge Companion to Descartes, p. 396. Jolley claims that Descartes may have been in ‘real personal danger’.

\textsuperscript{142}On a more general level, this shows that Descartes’ denial of real qualities is not only troubling to Catholicism because of the problem with the Eucharist, but that the trouble is more deeply rooted in scholasticism itself.
his philosophy so as not to stir up trouble unnecessarily.

There is, however, some inconsistency to Descartes' denial of his denial of real qualities which must be addressed. This inconsistency lends evidence to the claim that Descartes is disingenuous in the shortened Fourth Replies and his letter to Regius. In the Sixth Replies, Descartes claims very explicitly, while not referring to the Eucharist, that real qualities do not exist: "In order to demolish the doctrine of the reality of accidents, I do not think we need to look for any arguments beyond those I have already deployed." (AT VII 434) This passage and what follows, not only removes all doubt as to Descartes' desire to be rid of real qualities, but it shows that he believes he has given successful argument to support this claim. Descartes' argument in the Sixth Reply shows no reservation except for the fact that it does not mention the Eucharist by name. "Secondly, it is completely contradictory that there should be real accidents, since whatever is real can exist separately from any other subject; yet anything that can exist separately in this way is a substance, not an accident. The claim that real accidents cannot be separated from their subjects 'naturally', but only by the power of God, is irrelevant." (AT VII 434) Descartes, therefore, not only blatantly denies that real accidents can exist, but also denies the traditional and historically important distinction between accidents existing (apart from a substance) naturally and being made to exist independently by God's power - a distinction invoked specifically to address the problem of the Eucharist, and insisted upon in the wake of the condemnations of 1277. Indeed, with no elaboration Descartes claims that the 'ordinary power of God' does not differ from the 'extraordinary power of God'. Without making claims as to the various possible theological implications of this statement, Descartes says that since anything which exists without a subject is substance, and accidents cannot naturally (by God's ordinary power) exist apart from a subject; it is impossible that they be substances. They have, therefore, no possible independent existence. If they did, the fundamental scholastic distinction between accidents and substances would be blurred according to Descartes' analysis. Further, while the Eucharist is not mentioned here, Descartes follows this passage by giving the
same argument about the surface of an object which he gives in the both the long and short versions of the Fourth Replies. It appears he has used his previous argument developed to explain transubstantiation in order to defend his denial of real qualities in the Sixth Reply. Descartes takes the most radical step in the Sixth Reply by not only denying the possible existence of real accidents, but by stating that God could not make them exist apart from a subject. He uses the scholastic terminology of ‘accident’ and ‘substance’ to reveal the inconsistency of claiming the existence of real accidents. All the while, Descartes is clearly referring to the Eucharist without mentioning it by name - using strikingly similar arguments to those he had used in his reply to Arnauld. So why is Descartes claiming in the Fourth Replies that he has not denied real accidents, and saying something similar to Regius in January of 1642; yet in the Sixth Reply, he explicitly denies their existence?

An explanation of Descartes' apparently changing tactics require perhaps more context than we have. Neither of two apparent explanations seem to be sufficient. On the one hand, his change of tactics may be the result of an early reaction to problems in Utrecht - problems which seem to prompt him to publish (or at least to desire to publish) opinions more openly in opposition to scholasticism. Descartes' troubles did not improve from November of 1640 (when we first learn of trouble with Voetius in Descartes' letter to Mersenne), and ultimately are reflected in his attack on Jesuit Father Bourdin in a letter to his superior Father Dinet. This Letter was added to the second edition of the Meditations along with Bourdin's Seventh Set of Objections with Descartes' reply, and the full response to the problem of the Eucharist in the Fourth Replies. Apparently Descartes was feeling besieged, and considered himself at war not only with Bourdin and his supporters, but also the protestant ministers in Holland. Obviously agitated, two months after we first learn of Descartes' troubles with Voetius, Descartes goes so far as to state that he may finally publish The World and would certainly do so if it were not for the fact that it was written in French, and needed to be translated into Latin first. While
Descartes did not publish The World, he was presumably working on the Replies at the time he makes this statement. Later he did publish the second edition of the Meditations with the full reply to Arnauld, his purely political letter to Father Dinet, and the Seventh Set of Objections. These additions to the Meditations may represent a rather aggressive move in Descartes' battle being waged in Utrecht. Chronologically, his writing of the Sixth Reply (which even borrows from the argument of the Eucharist in the Fourth Reply), coincides with the early trouble in Utrecht, although it was actually published in the first edition of the Meditations. It may represent his philosophical aggression against his adversaries there, at the sacrifice of a certain conservativism designed to gain approval from the doctors of theology at the Sorbonne. In the first edition of the Meditations he was still not willing, however, to expand on the Eucharist per se - indeed he gives, to a large degree, his interpretation of the Eucharist in the Sixth Reply without mentioning the sacred rite itself. 144 Considering that the Calvinists in Utrecht did not take particular issue against an interpretation transubstantiation, Descartes would gain little against his enemies by saying more in this regard - remembering that Descartes considered his explanation of transubstantiation a successful application of his physics to theology. All the same, Descartes' advice to Regius is consistent with the early cautious approach, but this comes at a time when it appears Descartes himself has taken up his pen on the offense. Finally when Descartes does get around to publishing the second edition, he apparently feels no need to withhold the full text of the Fourth Reply. 145

A second possible explanation of Descartes' changes in tactics may be

143See Letter to Huygens, 31 January 1642. (AT III 523)
144His argument concerning the surface of a body being what acts on the senses is repeated in the Sixth Reply.
145Descartes sends a copy of his second edition of the Meditations to Huygens in late April of 1642. In a letter to Huygens (26 April 1642) he says: "Besides, this edition is more correct than the Paris one, ... where I so far abandoned my restraint as to say that the common view of our theologians regarding the Eucharist is not so orthodox as mine". (AT III 785)
associated with his new project - the *Principles*. During the time in which Descartes was working on the Sixth Replies, he was also working on the *Principles of Philosophy*, which he intended to be the text book of his metaphysics. In particular, Daniel Garber notes that there is a similar account of error found in both the Principles and the Sixth Replies, but not found in the *Meditations*. \(^{146}\) Descartes gives an autobiographical account of how the senses cause one to suppose, from an early age, the existence of many things otherwise unsubstantiated. Consequently, we come to believe the existence of things which resemble our sensations. While this account does appear in both the Sixth Replies and the *Principles*, and shows that the two are related in thought, the explicit denial of real qualities which is part of the Sixth Replies, does not appear in the later work. Given that “Descartes' general strategy is, as much as possible, to emphasize his agreement with the schools, and simply to pass over his disagreements in silence”\(^{147}\) the explicit denial of real qualities in the Sixth Reply, and even full text of the Fourth Replies, look very much like anomalies. \(^{148}\)

Descartes’ early troubles resulted in his orthodoxy being called into question; and in a Letter to Mersenne he writes: “On the matter of my bearing public witness to the fact that I am a Roman Catholic, I think I have already done so very explicitly several times, for example in the dedication of my *Meditations* to the gentlemen of the Sorbonne, in my explanation of how the forms\(^{149}\) remain in the substance of the bread in the Eucharist, and elsewhere.”\(^{150}\)

\(^{146}\) See Daniel Garber’s *Descartes’ Metaphysical Physics*, pp. 100-102.

\(^{147}\) Ibid., p. 104.

\(^{148}\) In addition to the Sixth Replies, there is one other location where it appears Descartes explicitly denies the existence of real qualities. In a letter to Mersenne dated 26 April 1643 he writes: “My principal reason for rejecting these real qualities is that I do not see that the human mind has any notion, or particular idea, to conceive them by.” He claims that the only reason they were *posited* by other philosophers was because they had no other means of explaining the phenomena of nature. (AT III 648-649)

\(^{149}\) Again, ‘forms’ should be ‘species’ here.

\(^{150}\) Letter to Mersenne, March 1642.
In the same letter, Descartes, apparently oblivious to the historical reference, thanks Mersenne for informing him of the Council of Constance’s condemnation of Wycliffe in 1418, and simply tells Mersenne that Wycliffe would have been condemned “no less if all the members of the Council had followed my opinion”\(^{151}\). Descartes then says of the Councils in general: “When they denied that the substance of the bread and the wine remains to be the subject of the accidents, they did not specify that the accidents were real, and that is what I said I had never read in the Councils.”\(^{152}\) (AT III 543) Descartes here is using the distinction between what is perceived and real qualities. He does not admit either that real qualities exist or deny that they exist; but he interprets the Council’s decrees (most likely only being familiar with the Council of Trent) as meaning only (without explanation) that the experience (perception) of the qualities remain. He again takes the Council’s rulings out of their historically scholastic context to claim that his explanation is consistent with their doctrine. Nevertheless, this assault on Descartes’ orthodoxy and his additions to the May 1642 publication of the Meditations can be viewed at least in part as a result of his ‘war’ with both Protestants and Jesuits in Holland - this war pushed him on both theological and philosophical grounds to answer charges that he denied the existence of real accidents. Oddly, Descartes’ first resistance to his denial of real qualities comes from Protestant circles, where Descartes should be on safer grounds.\(^{153}\)

\(^{151}\)Wyclif, who had repeatedly attacked the authority of the Pope, was not condemned until he denied that accidents can exist without a subject and claimed that the doctrine of transubstantiation was a novelty and not a part of traditional theology. Although it is doubtful that Descartes had read anything by or about Wyclif (especially given his response to Mersenne’s information about Wyclif’s heresy); evidently some scholars have noted a similarity between the two’s metaphysical views. For a brief explanation of Wyclif’s views on transubstantiation and how they supposedly reflect a metaphysics similar to Descartes’, see Anthony Kenny’s Wyclif, pp. 80-90.

\(^{152}\)Descartes is referring here to what he had said in his soon to be published full response to Arnauld’s Fourth Objections.

\(^{153}\)Voetius apparently went so far as to attack Descartes on the grounds that he was a ‘foreigner
The portion of the Fourth Set of Replies not published in the first edition of the Meditations contains little philosophical argument not already found in Descartes’ response to the Sixth Objections and in the preceding parts of the same reply. However, Descartes does make certain historical and theological claims not found elsewhere. He also reasserts he has no use for real qualities, taking it a step further toward an outright denial of their existence. He says that the traditional claim that real accidents remain through transubstantiation is “just like saying that the substance of the bread changes but nevertheless a part of the substance called ‘real accident’ remains.” (AT VII 254) Descartes says that such a statement while not a ‘verbal contradiction’, is a ‘conceptual’ one. Such an accident must be conceived of as a substance if it subsists through change. If this were true, either the whole substance of the bread is not changed (which is against the decrees of the Council) or the accident cannot subsist, and is therefore not real. Descartes claims that this erroneous interpretation has resulted in conflicts with the Church of Rome. The philosophy which presupposes real accidents is thus in conflict with the true theology. Descartes’ explanation, he claims, is consistent not only philosophically, but with theology as well. The traditional explanation does not coincide with the proper dogma of the miracle. By positing real accidents, Descartes claims that a miracle also needs to be posited to explain their subsistence as a substance; yet “this is not only contrary to human reason but also violates the theological axiom that the words of the consecration bring about nothing more than what they signify.” (AT VII 254) Descartes claims his explanation requires no such miracle. Better still, in the alleged cases where the flesh of Christ or a tiny child actually appear, the old explanation requires a second miracle to remove the accidents that were preserved by the first. This would seem inconsistent of God. If the dogma of transubstantiation specifically referred to the preservation of the accidents of the bread, and if the accidents were not apparent as happens in and a papist. It seems Voetius exploited the fact that Descartes was a Catholic working in a Protestant country. See the letter to Voetius dated May 1643. (AT VIIIb 193)
those rare (and sometimes bloody) cases, Descartes concludes that God would need to undo his first miracle to make his second. According to Descartes, all this is evidence that his explanation is not only more consistent philosophically, but is better supported by the truth revealed in scripture and the Council.

Descartes concludes his Fourth Set of Objections by attacking the tradition of using real qualities to explain the Eucharist. He says that he hopes his doctrine will replace the existing one (which posits real accidents) which is “irrational, incomprehensible and hazardous for the faith” (AT VII 255) He then directly attacks those “who try to use the authority of the Church in order to subvert the truth”, and appeals for the support of the pious and orthodox. Descartes’ full version of the Fourth Set of Replies is not muted,\textsuperscript{154} and rings of the same criticisms he made against those who condemned Galileo. It also firmly steps into theological grounds where Descartes believes he has successfully overturned the traditional interpretation and yet remained loyal to orthodoxy.

\textbf{The Mesland Correspondence}

Descartes’ response to Arnauld in the Fourth Replies is the only explanation of the Eucharist which he actually publishes.\textsuperscript{155} However, Descartes continues to discuss, if not develop, his explanation in his correspondences. In particular, Descartes responds to questions addressed to him by the a young Jesuit priest Mesland. Descartes apparently sees in Mesland a potential advocate of his philosophy who may help him make in-roads with the Jesuits. Indeed, at the same time that Descartes’ \textit{Principles} are being published, Mesland is also working on translating Descartes’ \textit{Meditations} into something more appropriate for teaching. It is clear by now that Descartes strongly desired to have his philosophy replace that taught in the schools. Descartes’ undertaking of

\textsuperscript{154} Except, perhaps, that he never explicitly denies that real qualities exist.

\textsuperscript{155} More accurately, the Fourth Replies is the only place where he explicitly publishes his explanation of the Eucharist. The explanation in the Sixth Replies appears to be another attempt to explain his theory of the Eucharist without mentioning it by name.
the Principles is his own attempt to offer a text-book to facilitate this cause. But Descartes was stirring up as much controversy as he was winning converts. Mesland presents Descartes with an opportunity to gain more influence in the most ridged of schooling structures, and perhaps have his philosophy taught in Catholic France.156

The dichotomy we see in Descartes’ resistance to say to much about the Eucharist, and his desire to prove the application of his physics through it, continues to be evident in Descartes’ correspondence with Mesland. In perhaps their earliest written correspondence, Descartes tells Mesland that he does not talk about the extension of Jesus Christ in the sacrament because he was not obliged to, and that he tries to “keep away, as far as possible, from questions of theology”. (AT IV 119) He cites the Council of Trent’s proclamation about Christ’s presence “with that form of existence which we can scarcely express in words”. Descartes uses this citation not only in the Fourth Replies, but also in at least three letters to Mesland and one to Arnauld. He says that he quoted from Trent “precisely to excuse myself from giving an explanation”.157 Descartes also tells Mesland to be careful not to name him as the author of the explanations concerning the Eucharist which are offered in their correspondence.158 Descartes even suggest that Mesland destroy one particular letter in which they discuss Christ’s presence in the sacrament.159 In

---

156 In a letter to Grandamy dated 2 May 1644, Descartes writes: “I am confident that Father Mesland’s testimony will no less effectively lend authority to my Meditations, particularly since he has taken the trouble to adapt them to the style which is commonly used for teaching, and I am deeply obliged to him for doing this”. (AT IV 122)

157 See the lengthy letter to Mesland dated 2 May 1644.

158 Descartes tells Mesland: “I will venture to tell you here in confidence a manner of explanation which seems quite elegant and very useful for avoiding the slander of heretics who object that our belief on this topic is entirely incomprehensible and involves a contradiction. I do so on the condition that if you communicate it to anyone else you will please not attribute its authorship to me” (AT IV 165). Descartes warns Mesland only to offer what follows if he finds it in complete accord with “what has been laid down by the Church”.

159 See Letter to Mesland May 1645. (AT IV 216)
the last letter we have in which Descartes refers to the Eucharist, the letter to Arnauld of 4 June 1648, he cites the now familiar verse from the Council of Trent, and simply says: “I should fear the accusation of rashness if I dared to come to any conclusion on the matter [how the body of Christ is in the bread]; and such conjectures as I make I would prefer to communicate by word of mouth rather than in writing.”\textsuperscript{160} (AT V 194) Descartes seems to have grown leary the issue of the Eucharist. Even the extensive insights which he offers Mesland he wants kept anonymous. Indeed, Clerselier would eventually publish much of Descartes' correspondence but withhold those to Mesland. Clearly Descartes saw a greater need for caution while proceeding on the issue of the Eucharist after he published the second edition of the Meditations. Yet his explanations to Mesland are not only meant to be an extension of his explanation given in response to Arnauld, but are also an anonymous means of answering certain criticisms posed by his rivals. It may be that Descartes does not consider the content of his letters with Mesland as offering a coherent addition to his original work, but more likely he realizes that to say more publicly would gain him nothing - thus the words of caution. Indeed, by the time Descartes writes the letter to Arnauld cited above, not only is Arnauld in trouble with the authorities for his Jansenism, but Mesland has been shipped off to the New World to convert the savages. Nevertheless, the correspondences with Mesland offer insight into Descartes' attempt to gain ground from the scholastic philosophy by addressing the issue of Eucharist.

The bulk of Descartes' additional contributions (following the second edition of the Meditations) concerning the Eucharist can be found primarily in the letter to Mesland dated 9 February 1645. Here he is presumably responding to questions asked by Mesland in a former correspondence. These questions give Descartes the opportunity to address the more traditional problems of Christ's presence in the sacrament with the hope that the subsequent explanations may not only prove useful to Mesland for defending Descartes' orthodoxy against his scholastic opponents, but also give him ready answers to queries from students.

Descartes, evidently referring to the Fourth Replies, begins by explaining

\textsuperscript{160}See the letter for Arnauld dated 4 June 1648.
what he means by surface. He claims that there is no real difference between the surface of the bread, the air immediately surrounding the bread, and the surface intermediate between these. The surface is simply a mode of the substance. The numerical identity of a substance is dependent, at least as we perceive such identity, on the identity or similarity of the dimensions of that substance. After the bread is consecrated (and becomes the body of Christ), it appears numerically identical with the bread prior to consecration because the two substances share an identical dimensional mode. We, therefore, discern no numerical change, but literally see the same piece of bread, although there is indeed no substance of bread there. It appears that Descartes’ discussion of numerical identity here may entail some aspect of deception in the miracle, but it is simply an explication of the effect of the modes of a substance on our senses. The miracle is the change of substance while preserving the same dimensions, not the direct fooling of our senses. Descartes claims that in the same way we say the bread is numerically identical before and after consecration, we can claim numerical identity for a river “although it is no longer the same water, and perhaps there is no longer a single part of the earth which then surrounded the water.” (AT IV 165) Descartes thus makes an epistemological claim concerning numerical identity - such identity is determined by the modes of a substance which effect our senses. In the subsequent correspondence with Mesland, he adds an explanation which uses the rational soul to make numerical distinctions between humans.

How then is Christ present under the guises of the bread? Descartes must answer how Christ’s body in the bread is identical with the Christ who was supposedly crucified for the better of mankind. With a stern warning not to attribute the following explanation to the author, Descartes tells Mesland that this identity is maintained through the soul of Christ being united with the particles of bread and wine. This is indeed a convenient explanation for Descartes, who despite his rejection of all other substantial forms, maintains that of the human soul.
“Altogether then, provided that a body is united with the same rational soul, we always take it as the body of the same man, whatever matter it may be and whatever quantity or shape it may have; and we count it as the whole and entire body provided that it needs no additional matter in order to remain joined to this soul.”¹⁶¹ (AT IV 167)

There is, however, some ambiguity in what Descartes means here by ‘numerical identity’. By retaining the soul as the thing which differentiates human substances, he can claim a metaphysical identity needed to support Christ’s real presence in the sacrament. However, he seems also to be saying that somehow we perceive the soul as differentiating humans, who do not maintain a modal similarity which would normally enable us to perceive numerical identity - as in the case of the river, or surface of the bread. Further, Descartes likens Christ’s presence to ‘natural transubstantiation’, which happens in normal nutrition.¹⁶² He claims that when we normally eat bread and wine (unconsecrated) the particles of the bread and wine mix with our blood but remain numerically the same particles which existed before ingestion, and “if we did not consider their union with the soul (our soul in this case) we could still call them bread and wine as before”.¹⁶³ (AT IV 168) Descartes says:

“I see no difficulty in thinking that the miracle of transubstantiation which takes place in the Blessed Sacrament consists in nothing but the fact that the particles of bread and wine - which in order for the soul of Jesus Christ to inform them naturally would have to mingle with his blood and dispose themselves in certain specific ways - are informed by his soul simply by the power of the words of consecration.” (AT IV 168)

¹⁶² Scotus, as we have noted, made a similar comparison between natural nutrition and transubstantiation. See Scotus, God and Creatures: The Quodlibetal Questions, pp. 235-236.
¹⁶³ Letter to Mesland, 9 February 1645.
Descartes now has the tools to answer the traditional problems of Christ’s method of presence, grappled with at length by Aquinas, and conclude that his presence is whole and entire within all parts of the substance formerly called bread. Although the bread is consecrated as a whole, when it is divided the soul remains undivided in each of the parts - no matter what the division is. “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.” (AT IV 168) Descartes concludes by telling Mesland that this explanation will ‘shock’ those who believe that all of Christ’s body parts are present in the sacrament with their quantity and matter, but that the Church has never decided on any such doctrine.

What is most striking about this correspondence with Mesland is that it uses traditional scholastic terminology to answer the traditional difficulties of how Christ is present in the Eucharist. All the while, Descartes seems completely unaware of the history of the debates. Descartes tells Mesland that it is the form of Christ which ‘informs’ the matter of his body to make it what it is. Descartes keeps his anti-scholastic notion that what we perceive of a substance is simply its mode of being - which is represented to us as the surface; but when referring to the human individual, he states that the substantial form gives identity. There is some tension in this doctrine between why we perceive the

---

Descartes even briefly enters the discussion about whether Christ’s soul could be present in the Eucharist ‘in the host which is consecrated at the time of his death’. He claims that he does not know if the Church has a position on this, and then problematically says: “even if the Church had determined that the soul of Jesus Christ was not united to his body in the host which was consecrated at the time of his death, in saying that the matter of the host would then have been as much disposed to be united to the soul of Jesus Christ as the matter of his body which was in the sepulcher, we would say enough to ensure that this matter was truly his body.” (AT IV 347) Descartes does not say in what sense one can refer to a soulless body as identical with the body prior to death. Nevertheless, he seems oblivious to Aquinas’ claim that the soul of Christ would not exist in the sacrament if the bread were consecrated before its reunion with Christ’s body at the resurrection. Marjorie Gene’s claim that “it is hard to count Cartesian bodies” takes on a double meaning in light of these issues.
bread as bread (after consecration), and why we perceive humans as humans; yet do not necessarily perceive Christ's presence. If we accept that in the former case Descartes is being consistent with his epistemology and the denial of real qualities, and in the latter case he is referring to a metaphysical and not epistemic identity (which is consistent with his second substance the human soul), then this tension disappears despite the radically different vocabulary employed. Descartes’ final letter to Mesland seems to be a repeated attempt to answer the younger's confusion on this issue of numerical identity.

“The difficulty which you find in the explanation of the Blessed Sacrament can also, I think, be resolved easily. For in the first place, it is quite true to say that I have the same body now as I had ten years ago, although the matter of which it is composed has changed, because the numerical identity of the body of a man does not depend on its matter, but on its form, which is the soul.”

Apparently Mesland was confused by Descartes' referral to the likeness of a substance's modes (reflected in the surface) as being what enables us to tell that one bit of matter is that same bit seen before, and his use of the soul of Christ to differentiate the substance of the bread from the substance of Christ's body (and likewise show numerical identity between the Christ in the sacrament and Christ in heaven). As we have said, in the case of physics Descartes relies on modes; and in the case of human identity, and consequently the Eucharist, he relies on substantial forms. Thus we see numerically identical bread because of the identical (or perceptively similar) modes, however, we can claim Christ’s real (numerical identity between his substance on the alter and his heavenly body) presence because of the soul. In this way, Descartes' explanation of the

---

165 Letter to Mesland, 1645 or 1646. (AT IV 345-348) The exact date of this letter is unknown, however, it appears to be the last correspondence between Descartes and Mesland. Descartes begins the letter: “I have read with much emotion the last farewell that I found in the letter which you took the trouble to write me.” Shortly after this letter was written Mesland was sent to America by his Jesuit superiors, where he eventually died.
Eucharist is a unique description of both his physical and non-physical substances, and an application of his physics to theology.

Richard Watson claims that Descartes’ gives two explanations of the Eucharist which are “completely different”. But as we have seen, Descartes is consistent with his overall philosophy to rely both on the substantial form of Christ, and on the purely modal distinctions of matter to differentiate substances. Indeed, Descartes’ explanation of the Eucharist creates the perfect marriage between his two substances. It would be more correct to see the differences between Descartes’ reply to Arnauld, and his replies to Mesland’s questions, as constituting one consistent explanation, with the latter correspondence being an extension of the original doctrine. That is clearly how Descartes viewed it. In both cases he uses his modal explanation of how the surface of an object effects our senses in order to explain how the ‘accidents’ of the bread remain. It is on this point which he expands. He also consistently states his desire not to enter more deeply into the discussion, referring to the Council’s lack of specificity on the matter. He does, however, at Mesland’s request explain how Christ is present given that there are no ‘real accidents’ and only modal differences in substance. He treads lightly on these grounds, requesting that the opinions remain anonymous and that Mesland only use them in conversation, apparently feeling he has said enough in public in his response to Arnauld. Descartes’ use of the soul as what designates Christ’s substance in the Eucharist is thus an extension of his dualist framework which is not at all in conflict with his physics or his earlier response to Arnauld. His later theory of the

---

166 Watson, “Transubstantiation among the Cartesians”, in *Problems of Cartesianism*, p. 135. Watson argues that Descartes’ explanation of nutrition presents a view of transubstantiation 'completely different from the one he gives Arnauld'. However, this ‘different’ view is apparently an answer to Mesland’s questions concerning details about how Christ is present given that there are only modal distinctions in material substance. It picks up the discussion where Descartes left off with Arnauld, providing details consistent with the earlier, less extensive, explanation. Arnauld had never questioned Descartes concerning the numerical identity of material and immaterial substances, an issue Watson believes is inherently problematic for Cartesians.
Eucharist is consistent with both his denial of real qualities and substantial forms. It is not a completely new development, but an application of his philosophy to the realm of theology. It may, however, still be difficult to count cartesian bodies, but that is a problem of explaining perception, not transubstantiation.
Conclusion

The Council of Trent set out to reform Catholicism and define its doctrine in opposition to the Protestants. It recognized the long history of the debates concerning transubstantiation and sought to solidify the doctrine into one inclusive dogma. It clearly labeled the heresies of the Protestants - heresies which denied transubstantiation and the real presence of Christ’s body under the *species* of the bread and wine, or asserted the coexistence of the bread and body under the same species. It did not attempt, however, to define transubstantiation, but rather chose to adopt an ambiguous enough terminology which avoided the scholastic debates of the past.

Descartes specifically consulted the texts of the Council of Trent and exploited the ambiguity of its language. While he shows no sensitivity to the particular interpretations commonly held by his scholastic rivals,\(^\text{167}\) he repeatedly appeals to the text which was meant to be the defining doctrine of the Church. His explanation is consistent with the wording of text he cites. He asserts the truth of transubstantiation, the real presence of Christ’s body and the preservation of the species of the bread and wine. He does this without making the miracle a simple deception and without allowing for the coexistence of the bread with the body of Christ in the sacrament. His explanation, however, is significantly different from anything his scholastic rivals or the assembly at Trent could have anticipated. It describes a world without the fundamental building blocks of real qualities (accidents) and substantial forms (except for the human soul). It is part of his dualistic metaphysics which views the material world as simply extension, and the world of perceptions as a strictly mechanistic result of that matter in motion. His resulting explanation of the Eucharist not only largely

\(^{167}\) Indeed, Descartes broadly rejects all these interpretations as inconsistent with the Councils, stating that what is true according to the Faith, and what is commonly believed, are different things entirely. Regarding Christ’s presence in the Eucharist at the time of his death, he tells Mesland: “I do not know whether the Church has settled anything about this. We must, I think, take care to distinguish the views determined by the Church from those commonly accepted by the learned, which are based on shaky physics.” (AT IV 347)
ignores the rich history of the debate concerning how Aristotelian physics can be reconciled with the Christian miracle, but turns the scholastic terminology on its head. Ultimately, Descartes does resort to the use of substantial forms to explain his miracle, but this is done in a very specific context which is consistent with his rejection of real qualities and acceptance of simply modal distinctions in material substances. It is also consistent with the larger framework of his dualism, which is unlike anything prior in the tradition. As Descartes saw it, his denial of real qualities was neither a stumbling block nor a problem of Cartesianism. It was part of the foundation of his physics - a part which, when applied to certain historically sensitive realms of theology, solved, to the complete satisfaction of the dogma, the apparent contradictions found in the old interpretations. Despite his best efforts, however, Descartes could not fully overcome the legacy of Aristotle. This resulted in condemnations.

The Condemnations of Cartesianism began in Utrecht even before Descartes had published his second edition of the Meditations. From the start, these condemnations took issue against Descartes' apparent denial of real qualities. The Protestants in Holland, however, were not concerned with Descartes' deviation from traditional interpretations of the Eucharist; indeed, one may suppose that they would be somewhat amused at the trouble which this ultimately would cause him in Catholic circles. Outside of Utrecht, Descartes' explanation of the Eucharist caused quite a stir (particularly after his death). Perhaps this story would not have been quite so dramatic if Claude Clerselier, Dom Desgabets and Jacques Rohault had not brought more attention to the issue by actively defending Cartesianism on the grounds that it offered a better explanation of the rite than traditionally given. Even Arnauld (though perhaps not surprisingly and not to the benefit of Cartesianism) came to Descartes' defense on the issue of the Eucharist.168 Nevertheless, the faculty of theology formally

168 Arnauld argued that even Aristotle could not be reconciled with the mystery of the Eucharist, and claimed that there need not be a naturalistic explanation of the mysteries of the Faith. See Ariew, “Damned If You Do: Cartesians and Censorship”, 1663-1706, p. 9.
condemned Cartesianism in 1671; and the King issued an edict in an attempt to maintain the traditional teachings of the Universities, specifically mentioning the difficulties arising with the Eucharist. In 1691 the University of Paris itself condemned eleven propositions of Descartes; although the condemnations did not mention the Eucharist per se. In 1663 the Church put Descartes' works on the Index of Prohibited Books. In 1677, the Faculty of the University of Caen declared Descartes' philosophy incompatible with the Faith and threatened to withhold degrees from those who professed it.\footnote{For a more detailed discussion of the various condemnations that resulted from Cartesianism see Trevor McClauhlin's "Censorship and Defenders of the Cartesian Faith in Mid-Seventeenth Century France".} The legacy of Descartes' explanation of the Eucharist is thus troubled to say the least. Even Descartes' most ardent defender on the issue, Clerelier, withheld the publication of the Mesland letters. Only Descartes' explanation in the Fourth Replies actually saw the light of day, yet that was enough to stir condemnation on the issue of the Eucharist.

The condemnations of Cartesianism are themselves varied and complex. In many cases Descartes' physics is mentioned as incompatible with the orthodox explanation of the Eucharist. The problems which resulted for Descartes and his followers were only in part a result of the Eucharist, however. Regardless of Descartes' excursion into the issue, his philosophy was incompatible with Scholasticism, and was ripe for condemnation as a result. As we have shown, Descartes does give an explanation of the Eucharist which is both internally consistent and consistent with his metaphysics as a whole. He believes he is entirely consistent with the true dogma of the Church and that his metaphysics and physics supports transubstantiation as it should rightly be interpreted. If Descartes is inconsistent, it is only in his tactics with regard to his denial of real qualities. Yet this very inconsistency expresses a sincere belief in the superiority of his own project. Above all Descartes was driven to do what he considered best for the success of his own philosophy so that its truth could benefit theology as well as science.
If Descartes fails in any respect concerning the specific issue of the Eucharist, it is most likely only a result of his sometimes arrogant belief that he could overturn ingrained opinions on a subject whose historical importance runs so deep to both philosophy and theology. Descartes not only firmly believed that his philosophical project was superior (and right) to any expounded by his contemporaries, but he also believed it would supplant the philosophical tradition. Both his methods (beginning with first principles to find truth), and his motives were anti-tradition. Yet because his project would produce only truth, Descartes believed he need not fear leading people astray when applying his techniques to the revealed truths of theology. This is reflected in his belief that he could give new interpretations to very old theological problems, and yet have his solutions accepted as orthodoxy. But Descartes overlooked a very powerful force - a force which itself was defined as a source of truth in the very document he consulted to defend his explanation of the Eucharist. The Fourth Session of the Council of Trent declared that tradition, and well as scripture, were the sources of Catholic truth. It stated this rather powerfully:

“Furthermore, to check unbridled spirits, it decrees that no one relying on his own judgement shall, in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, distorting the Holy Scriptures in accordance with his own conceptions, presume to interpret them contrary to that sense which holy mother Church, to whom it belongs to judge of their true sense and interpretation, has held and holds, or even contrary to the unanimous teaching of the Fathers, even though such interpretations should never at any time be published.”\textsuperscript{170}

While it is a more difficult task to determine those texts an author has not read as opposed to those he has, it seems plausible to say that Descartes did not read anything beyond the specific decrees of the Council concerning the Eucharist which he thought brought him under the umbrella of orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{171} According to

\textsuperscript{170}Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, translation by H. Schroeder, pp. 18-19.

\textsuperscript{171}Even if Descartes had been aware of this text, it is doubtful he would have mentioned it. It is
the tradition, it would be difficult to say that Descartes was anything but an ‘unbridled spirit relying on his own judgement’. Those who wrote the decrees of the Council were decidedly not mechanists in the spirit of Descartes. They were firmly aware of the tradition and the historical difficulties surrounding the issue of transubstantiation, and wished to uphold the tradition while avoiding the philosophical disputes of the past. Descartes, contrary to both the intentions of the Council and the desires of his scholastic contemporaries, sought to change the tradition through the application of a new philosophy. These opposing views concerning the relationship between tradition, theology and philosophy were the catalyst for conflict.

not my claim here that this particular decree of the Council had a direct influence on the reception of Descartes' philosophy, but rather that the standards of acceptance of a given theological interpretation are largely historical, and this text reflects that claim.
Bibliography

Cambridge: Blackfriars.
Ithaca.


Hackett Publishing. Indianapolis.


Cambridge University Press.


McClauflin, Trevor. 1979. “Censorship and Defenders of the Cartesian Faith in Mid-


