Tampereen yliopisto

JAN FORSMAN

Of Dreams, Demons, and Whirlpools

Doubt, Skepticism, and Suspension of Judgment in Descartes's *Meditations*

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION
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Responsible supervisor and Custos	Docent Jani Hakkarainen Tampere University Finland	
Supervisors	Professor Mikko Yrjönsuuri University of Jyväskylä Finland	Professor Leila Haaparanta Tampere University Finland
Pre-examiners	Docent Vili Lähteenmäki University of Helsinki Finland	Professor David Cunning University of Iowa USA
Opponent	Associate Professor Scott Ragland Saint Louis University USA	

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¿Qué es la vida? Un frenesí. ¿Qué es la vida? Una ilusión,
Una sombra, una ficción, y el mayor bien es pequeño.
¡Que toda la vida es sueño, y los sueños, sueños son!
-Pedro Calderón de la Barca

Reach for the answer
Take your chances and taste the pain
Open up your mind, don't trust your senses
You have been blind
Awaken the sleeper
Dig down deeper and break the chain
Let the truth flood in, tear down your fences
The search begins…
-Arjen Anthony Lucassen

Basket of Apples in Landscape by Levi Wells Prentice

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When I was a child, I had three dream jobs: a writer, a detective, and a scientist. Working in history of philosophy, I often feel like I am all of them.

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In Karkku, next to a fireplace, with a piece of wax, 14th of December 2020

Jan Forsman

Abstract

I offer a novel reading in this dissertation of René Descartes's (1596–1650) skepticism in his work *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641–1642). I specifically aim to answer the following problem: How is Descartes's skepticism to be read in accordance with the rest of his philosophy? This problem can be divided into two more general questions in Descartes scholarship: How is skepticism utilized in the *Meditations*, and what are its intentions and relation to the preceding philosophical tradition?

I approach the topic from both a historical and a text-based analysis, combining textual and contextual research. I examine Descartes's skepticism against two main traditions in the historical analysis: philosophical skepticism and Aristotelian Scholasticism. I argue that skepticism in the *Meditations* is intended to oppose and upheave both Scholasticism and skepticism. The intended results of the work are not merely epistemological but also metaphysical and even ethical. Furthermore, these ambitions cannot be neatly distinguished but merge into each other.

The third historical context against which the skeptical meditations are examined is the literary genre of meditative exercises, particularly from the 1500–1600's, which, while religiously and spiritually oriented, likewise provided the practitioner with an enlightened understanding of self-knowledge and their cognitive place in the world on the way to closer spiritual proximity to God. I argue by this reading that the skepticism of the *Meditations* is an attentive, meditational *cognitive exercise* that is not merely instrumental and methodological but is to have a genuine and serious (psychologically real) effect on our thinking. The skeptical meditation is not simply a theoretical thought experiment but is to be seriously practiced as a transformative process of reorienting one's cognitive framework to discover truth, certainty, and a way to a happy, tranquil, and virtuous life.

I offer a close reading in the textual analysis of the first three meditations of the *Meditations*. I argue that the meditative skepticism employed in the work does not reject the previous beliefs but suspends judgment on them, withdrawing assent until further evidence can be found. I introduce a new term into Descartes scholarship in this analysis, based on the terminology of ancient skepticism: *Cartesian epochē* (gr. *epochē*, suspension, withdrawal). Instead of rejecting previous beliefs or assenting to the probably false, the skeptical procedure of the *Meditations* is argued to emulate in important ways the suspension of judgment on equally balanced reasons in ancient Pyrrhonian skepticism. Novel interpretations are presented along the way of the will's freedom, of the First Meditation's skeptical scenarios, of the *cogito*, and of the vindication of metaphysical certainty, as well as a clarification of the Cartesian Circle problem.

Reinterpreting the relation of Descartes's skepticism to the preceding historical and literary traditions leads to a new look at the skeptical method itself. Presenting a new interpretation of skepticism in the *Meditations* leads at the same time to a new look at its relation to the historical context. The two research questions are, then, intrinsically tied together.

My focus in the study is on the *Meditations*, but I also reference and discuss Descartes's other philosophical works, as well as his correspondence, when necessary.

Contents

Abbreviations

I have used the standard edition of Descartes's original writings in Latin and French, *Oeuvres de Descartes* (I–XII), edited by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (1899–1908; 1963–1967), when referencing his works. These references are abbreviated as AT, with a Roman numeral marking the volume number. I have mainly used the *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (I & II) by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (1984–1985) for the translations of Descartes philosophical works, abbreviated as CSM (with once again a Roman numeral for the volume), and *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Vol. III: The Correspondence* by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (1991) for the translations of his letters, abbreviated as CSMK. I have modified the translation in some instances either to be more literal or because I have considered the translation offered in *PWD* to be misleading. I have added the original in parentheses and noted the modification in most cases.

Throughout this work I refer to Descartes's writings by abbreviated versions of the title: *Meditations* (*Meditations on First Philosophy*), *Comments* (*Comments on a Certain Broadsheet*), *Discourse* (*Discourse on the Method*), *Passions* (*The Passions of the Soul*), *Principia* (*Principles of Philosophy*), *Regulae* (*Rules for the Direction of the Mind*), *Search* (*Search for Truth by means of the Natural Light*), *World* (*The World, or Treatise on Light*), and *Conversation* (*Conversation with Burman*, which strictly speaking is not Descartes's own work). The early texts *Cogitationes Privatae* and *Compendium Musicae* are abbreviated as *CP* and *CM*. References to different parts of the *Meditations* always use Title Case spelling, for example the First Meditation or the Second Objections. References to Descartes's correspondence likewise mention the recipient and dating of the letter using Title Case spelling, for example the Letter to Mersenne, 8 October 1629.

I have used the typical manners of reference and abbreviation with historical sources other than Descartes. This is case oriented and based on the traditional method on each particular work. A complete list of these abbreviations in alphabetical order follows:

A/B	*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Immanuel Kant
Acad.	*Academica*, Cicero
AG	G. W. Leibniz's *Philosophical Essays* (eds. Ariew, Roger and Garber, Daniel)
AM	*Antoniana Margarita*, Gómez Pereira
An. Post.	*Analytica Posteriora* (*Ἀναλυτικὰ Ὕστερα*), Aristotle
Apologie	*Apologie de Raimond Sebond*, Michel de Montaigne
B	*Correspondance with Bernard of Arezzo*, Nicholas of Autrecourt

Beat. Vit.	*De Beata Vita*, St. Augustine
Boet. Trin.	*Super Boetium de Trinitate*, St. Thomas Aquinas
C. Acad.	*Contra Academicos*, St. Augustine
Castillo	*El Castillo Interior*, St. Teresa of Ávila
Civ. Dei	*De Civitate Dei*, St. Augustine
Col.	*Adversus Colotem* (*Προς Κωλώτην*), Plutarch
Conf.	*Confessiones*, St. Augustine
Correspond.	*Correspondence*, Marin Mersenne
Crisis	*Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie*, Edmund Husserl
D	*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, David Hume
De An.	*De Anima* (*Περὶ ψυχῆς*), Aristotle
De Casu	*De Casu Diaboli*, St. Anselm of Canterbury
De Ins.	*De Insomniis* (*Περὶ ἐνυπνίων*), Aristotle
Deliverance	*Deliverance From Error* (*al-Munqidh min al-dalāl*), al-Ghazali
De Mem.	*De Memoria et Reminiscentia* (*Περὶ μνήμης καὶ ἀναμνήσεως*), Aristotle
De Stoic.	*De Stoicorum repugnantiis* (*Περὶ Στωϊκῶν ἐναντιωμάτων*), Plutarch
De Veritate	*De Veritate*, Edward Herbert of Cherbury
Dialogo	*Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo*, Galileo Galilei
Dialogues	*Dialogues faits à l'imitation des anciens*, François de La Mothe Le Vayer
Discorsi	*Discorsi e dimostrazioni matematiche, intorno à due nuove scienze*, Galileo Galilei
Disq.	*Disquisitio Metaphysica seu dubitationes et instantiaea adversus Renati Cartesii metaphysicam, & responsa*, Pierre Gassendi
DL	*Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (*Βίοι καὶ γνῶμαι τῶν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ εὐδοκιμησάντων*), Diogenes Laertius
DLS	*De la sagesse*, Pierre Charron
DM	*Disputationes Metaphysicae*, Fransisco Suárez
DV	*De Veritate*, St. Thomas Aquinas
E	*Ethica*, Baruch Spinoza
EHU	*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, David Hume
Essay	*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke
ES	*Exercitia spiritualia*, Ignatius de Loyola
Exerc.	*Exercitationes paradoxicae adversus Aristoteleos*, Pierre Gassendi
Immortalité	*L'immortalité de l'âme*, Jean Silhon

Impiété	*L'impiété des déistes, athées, et libertins de ce temps*, Marin Mersenne
La vérité	*La vérité des sciences*, Marin Mersenne
LDV	*Les deux vérités*, Jean Silhon
Lect.	*Lectura*, John Duns Scotus
M	*Adversus Mathematicos* (*Πρὸς μαθηματικούς*), Sextus Empiricus
Met.	*Metaphysica* (*Τὰ μετὰ τὰ φυσικά*), Aristotle
Mon.	*Monologion*, St. Anselm of Canterbury
Ord.	*Ordinatio*, John Duns Scotus
PH	*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (*Πυῤῥώνειοι ὑποτυπώσεις*), Sextus Empiricus
Pro Ins.	*Pro Insipiente*, Gaunilo of Marmoutires
Pros.	*Proslogion*, St. Anselm of Canterbury
QC	*Quaestiones de Cognitione*, Matthew of Aquasparta
QF	*Quaestiones de Fide*, Matthew of Aquasparta
QM	*Quaestiones in Aristotelis Metaphysicam*, John Buridan
QNS	*Quod Nihil Scitur*, Fransisco Sanches
Ratio	*Ratio Studiorum et Institutuines Scholasticae Societis Jesu* (ed. Pachtler G. M.)
Rep.	*Republic* (*Πολιτεία*), Plato
Resp.	*Responsio*, St. Anselm of Canterbury
Retract.	*Retractationes,* St. Augustine
SD	*Summulae de Dialectica*, John Buridan
SPQ	*Summa Philosophiae Quadripartita*, Eustachius a Sancto Paulo
SQO	*Summa Quaestionum Ordinarium*, Henry of Ghent
ST	*Summa Theologiae*, St. Thomas Aquinas
T	*Treatise on Human Nature*, David Hume
Tht.	*Theaetetus* (*Θεαίτητος*), Plato
Trin.	*De Trinitate*, St. Augustine

1. Introduction: Before the *Meditations*

René Descartes's *Meditations on First Philosophy* is a truly influential and revolutionary work, transforming the way philosophers both then and now approach epistemological and metaphysical issues. Its most famous aspects are the skeptical inquiry by the method of doubt, seeking an unprejudiced fresh start while undermining skepticism, and the rational foundationalist metaphysics, discarding Aristotelian Scholasticism while making way for the period's New Science. Many books and studies have been written about these topics, yet there is a remarkable absence of systematic reading against both the skeptical and Scholastic traditions. Studies tend to make a choice, focusing either on Descartes's metaphysical project and cognitive theory (e.g., M. Wilson 1978; Carriero 2009), reading them against Scholastic doctrine, or on skeptically driven epistemology and the method of doubt (e.g., E. Curley 1978; Broughton 2002), reading them against skeptical history.

However, these areas are not separate. Descartes's use of skepticism is closely connected with his metaphysical and cognitive projects, aiming to overturn both Scholasticism and skepticism. In this book, I will fill this gap in the research literature by reading both anti-skeptical and anti-Scholastic positions side by side while combining them with an understanding of Descartes's method of doubt as a *meditative skeptical exercise*. In the latter aspect, specifically, I draw from the historical genre of spiritual exercises, or *meditations*, prominent especially in the 16th and 17th century, that formed a part of the religious-cultural background of the period when Descartes wrote.

The dissertation presents a novel interpretation of Descartes's skeptical method in the *Meditations*, basing it on a close textual and contextual reading of the work and the surrounding tradition. I argue the skeptical enquiry to be a *serious* effort to overcome both the Aristotelian-Scholastic cognitive framework and skeptical tradition, with intended metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical results.

Before getting to the core reading, I chart certain initiative topics in this introductory chapter. I begin by mapping previous key interpretations of Descartes's skeptical procedure and relation to skeptical and Aristotelian tradition. Next, I present my own take, first by advancing a reading of the skeptical inquiry as a cognitive exercise against the historical background of the meditative literature of 1500–1600's, and then by discussing how such a reading leads us to take the skeptical inquiry *sincerely:* not just as a tool, a form of play-acting, but a genuine exercise requiring practice and effort. I finish by presenting the work's structure and expounding each individual chapter's topic and role.

1.1. Earlier Readings

It is impossible when writing about the history of interpretations of Descartes and skepticism, to overlook the influence of Richard Popkin, whose work on the history of skepticism (1960; 2003) has perhaps contributed more to the handling of the issue than any other work. Before Popkin, Descartes's relation to, and use of, skepticism was rarely discussed; the common consensus saw him seek distance and liberation from Medieval Scholastic oppression to make way for the New Science (e.g., Gilson 1951; cf. Sebba 1964; Lennon 2008, 56; but see Dambska 1950; Gouhier 1954; 1958). What Popkin did was to take more seriously Descartes's own comments and concerns about skepticism, especially Renaissance skepticism, paying attention to statements of having overcome "the suppositions of the sceptics" with his philosophy (e.g., *Discourse*: AT VII, 32; CSM II, 127). Instead of as an opponent of traditional dogmatism, Descartes became pictured as its fiercest proponent against the novelty of Renaissance thinking. Popkin even went as far as to suggest Descartes's philosophy to be a reaction to *a personal skeptical crisis* suffered sometime around 1628–1629. However, according to Popkin, despite his best efforts, Descartes failed to slay the dragon of skepticism due to his philosophy being so skeptically inclined from the very beginning: He ended up a skeptic *malgré lui*.

Most of Popkin's claims have been questioned by later research (see chapters 2.4 and 2.5), but his influence was strong. Following Popkin, readings continued to take seriously Descartes's own claims of conquering skepticism, considering his aim with the *Meditations* to be to irredeemably refute skeptical thought that formed a threat or even a crisis at the period of the work's writing. If he failed at the task, it was typically due to the arguments for God's existence and the veracity of clear and distinct perception being viciously circular. (E.g., Gouhier 1999; 1972; E. Curley 1978; Gilson 1987.)

Nevertheless, while the claims for targeting skepticism were taken seriously, the use of skepticism itself was not. Cartesian skepticism was typically taken as a sort of *sham*: something ungenuine, not to be taken too serious, and abandoned as soon as possible. This sort of reading was often sought in order to distinguish Descartes's modern 'methodological' skepticism from ancient skepticism as 'a way of life' (Burnyeat 1982; 1997; Annas & Barnes 1985; M. Williams 1986; Grene 1999). Instead of helping to live a practical life, skepticism is to be *insulated* from it – to be used only as means to an end, an epistemological instrument, for certain knowledge. One would know from the beginning the skeptical inquiry to be mere pretention, not a serious and genuine discarding of belief. Descartes's position at the end of the First Meditation is one of *rejecting* the previous beliefs and *affirming* the probably false, with the doubt being a kind of *play-acting*, a *mind-game* of sorts (Gueroult 1953; Kenny 1968; Larmore 1998; 2006;

2014; Newman 2019). Cartesian skepticism has been called "innocuously thin and undisruptive", leaving us "provisionally, with a shadow of a doubt or unease", and even considered "inappropriate" to be described as skepticism, and unnecessary to be conjoined with the skeptical tradition (Frankfurt 2008, 20–23; M. Wilson 1978, 26, 33; Brandhorst 2010, 21). Even scholars who consider the doubt to be in part serious and well-founded still refer to it as a "tool" and concentrate on its methodical aspect (B. Williams 2015; 1983; Broughton 2002).

However, if the 'skepticism' of the *Meditations* is a sort of sham, is it even deliberately set to answer skeptical thinking? Several scholars have challenged the previously common interpretation of Descartes as an epistemologist concerned with skeptical issues, reading him instead as a metaphysician interested in the role and function of the human mind in the world or propagating his own scientific views and interests (e.g., Gaukroger 1995; Alanen 2003; Carriero 1997; 2009; Christofidou 2013).

This change in the literature has come simultaneously with what could be considered two of the most major advances in contemporary Descartes studies: the *directness* of cognitive access and the questioning of *immediate transparency* of thought or 'consciousness'. Instead of considering Descartes as trying to reach the world behind a 'veil of ideas', various major accounts read him as sharing with his Scholastic predecessors "the basic tenet that cognition involves a common reality, form, or structure existing both in the mind ("objectively") and in the world ("formally"), even at the level of sensory cognition" (Carriero 2009, 21). Descartes's cognitive theory would not be indirect – imprisoned to grasp mere representations of things – but *direct*, able to grasp the things themselves through their reality existing objectively in the cognitive act. (Alanen 2003; Broughton 2008; Carriero 2009; Sinokki 2015.[1]) As such, the next to unanimous essentiality of transparent conscious experience has likewise been challenged by concentrating on the relational aspect of Cartesian cognition: Awareness is seen as "a mark of thought or the mental" but not constitutive of it (Alanen 2003, 82). Instead of being the "High-Priest of Transparency" (Paul 2018), Descartes sees our cognition to be obscure and confused for most of the time, and though some of our cognition can be transparent, we must do a lot of cognitive and meditative work to cleanse that lucidity out. (See Barth & Lähteenmäki 2020, 2–3; cf. Rozemond 2006; Lähteenmäki 2007; Barth 2011; 2017; Hatfield 2011; Simmons 2012; Forsman 2019.)

These advancements have also affected the view of Descartes's handling of skepticism. A strong consensus lately is to read Descartes as not really bothered by the skeptics and using skeptical doubt merely as means to an end for his scientific and

[1] Using Sinokki's analogy, by coming into contact with, say, the Eiffel tower, it *infects* us with its reality like a virus, copying its being into our thinking (2015, 3).

metaphysical work, specifically in bringing down the Aristotelian edifice. Descartes would not be truly interested in the skepticism he uses, having no genuine or serious treatment of it but seeing it rather as a methodical tool. David MacArthur expresses Descartes to be seen "more concerned to establish the metaphysical and epistemological foundations of the new mathematical physics than he is to answer the skeptic" (2003, 160). Or, as John Carriero puts, "excessive focus on skepticism – in particular a misunderstanding of what Descartes is using the skepticism for – has distorted our understanding of his thought" (2009, 3). Descartes was not only a skeptic, but his interest in and concern about skepticism, as well as willingness to answer or refute it is also, pardon the pun, called into doubt. (E.g., Garber 1986; 1992; Graukroger 1995; Carriero 1997; 2009; Grene 1999; Kambouchner 2005; Clarke 2005; Lennon 2008.)

Two arguments have particularly been raised against Descartes's refutation of the skeptical tradition. (1) There appears to be no evidence of direct concern or even interest in skepticism in Descartes's works and letters before the condemnation of Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) in 1633. Until then, he had been preparing the *World*, his treatise on physics, for publication in the United Provinces of the Netherlands, but after hearing that Galileo had been convicted for establishing that Earth circumnavigates the sun, was so astonished he "almost decided to burn all [his] papers" (Letter to Mersenne, End of November 1633: AT I, 270–271; CSMK, 40–41). The Galileo incident would have made Descartes worried about the acceptance of his scientific theories, prompting him to change tactics with the publications of the *Discourse* and *Meditations* and to use skepticism as a presuppositionless way to insinuate the metaphysical underpinnings of his mechanistic and corpuscularian worldview that would overcome and replace Aristotelianism. (Loeb 1986, 263–264; Gaukroger 1995, 11–12, 184–186; 2008, 12–14.) (2) If Descartes is primarily concerned with refuting skepticism, why does not he ever say so? Descartes would consider the skeptics a lost cause instead of as a serious threat, claiming to refute them when pressured about being a skeptic himself and, even then, not due to epistemological or scientific but to *moral* reasons, forbearing to demonstrate a bad example. (Lennon 2008, 62–77.) His primary concern would be (scientific) certainty, with skepticism being merely a "tool" for gaining it.

No doubt, one of Descartes's motivations for skeptical utilization was methodical and tied to his interests in mechanistic, anti-Aristotelian science, and he indeed had reasons to be concerned about the reception of those views by the religious authorities at large. Being well-versed in the anti-Aristotelian scientific movement and influenced by the Dutch natural philosopher Isaac Beeckman (1588–1637), he drops the names of Bernardino Telesio (1509–1588), Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639), Sébastien Basson (c. 1573–1625), and Lucilio Vanini (1585–1619) in a

Letter to Beeckman in 1630 (AT I, 158; CSMK, 27). He must have known that Telesio's books were prohibited, Campanella was arrested by the Inquisition, Basson got into trouble with the theologians in Geneva, and Bruno and Vanini were executed. Later on, he warned Mersenne not to tell anyone of his plans to write a commentary on Eustachius a Sancto Paulo's (1573–1640) *Summa Philosophiae Quadripartita* (1609) before the publication of the *Meditations*, as he feared it might hinder the approbation of the Faculty of Theology in Sorbonne for it. A few months later he warned the Minim not to let people know that it would contain "all the foundations of [his] physics" because it could make the Aristotelians less accepting (AT III, 233, 297–298; CSMK, 157, 173). Skepticism, then, probably did appeal to Descartes as a presuppositionless beginning for his scientific, Aristotelian critical foundations. (Cf. Broughton 2002, 10–13.)

However, unlike what Gaukroger claims, one can also find evidence for skeptical worries in Descartes's thought before the Galileo incident. Descartes returned to Paris in 1625, joining a circle of like-minded thinkers, many of whom were skeptically inclined. The city at the time was open to new ideas but, at the same time, dangerously protective of orthodoxy. Vanini had been burned at the stake six years earlier for libertinism (i.e., free-thinking), atheism, and suspected homosexual acts. Noted anti-libertines connected the libertine movement with atheism and other morally suspect behavior, with a strong link also with skepticism (see chapter 2.5).[2] Descartes was very familiar with the libertine and skeptical movements; his friends included both libertines and anti-libertines, although he later shed and vehemently denied whatever association he himself had with libertinism.[3]

Descartes began several scientific treatises in Paris, among them early drafts of what would become *Optics*, *Meteorology*, and *Geometrics*, but left them unfinished due to being "forced to start a new project, rather larger than the first" and moved to the United Provinces in 1628. We do not know exactly what his "new, larger project" was but can draw conclusions from his allusions to metaphysical topics. Descartes was, at the time, likewise working on a draft of the *Regulae*, which included the thesis of only attending to those objects which the mind has certain and indubitable cognition by intuiting clearly and distinctly, a precursor of the doctrine of *clear and distinct perceptions* in the *Discourse*

[2] The definition of atheism was wider than today's, covering almost all heterodoxy, like homosexuality and questioning of soul's immortality. See Ariew 1998, 137; Gaukroger 1995, 135–138; Grayling 2006, 116–122; Clarke 2006, 72–81.

[3] Gisbert Voetius and Martin Schoock accused Descartes of skepticism, atheism, and libertinism in *Admiranda Methodus* (1643), with thinly veiled sexual allusions by comparing him to Vanini. To say Descartes was unhappy would be an understatement (Letter to Voetius, May 1643: AT VIIIB, 169–175; CSMK, 223). Cf. Seventh Objections (AT VII, 528–531), Letter to Chanut, 1 November 1646 (AT IV, 536; CSMK, 299), and *Comments* (AT VIIIB, 365–368; CSM I, 308–310). See Rodis-Lewis 1998, 207–209; Watson 2007, 226; Clarke 2006, 239–241. For Descartes and libertinism, see also Cook 2018.

and *Meditations* (AT X 362–370; CSM I, 10–15; cf. chapter 3.4). However, the draft was abandoned in 1628, published posthumously as a Dutch translation in 1684. I postulate that while working in the skeptically charged atmosphere, Descartes recognized a skeptical concern buried in making infallible intuitive cognition the main means to, and source of, certain knowledge, resulting in the need for more secure metaphysical basis for correct science (the larger project). Descartes talks in his 1630 correspondence with Mersenne not only of his work in physics but also of a "little treatise in Metaphysics" on which he worked the first nine months in Holland, set to prove "the existence of God and of our souls when they are separate from the body" in a manner "more evident than the proofs of geometry" (AT I, 144, 182; CSMK, 21–22, 29).

This early metaphysical work is lost, so whether it already included skeptical inquiry is impossible to say, although the Letter to Mersenne, 27 February 1637, implies that the arguments of Part IV of the *Discourse* are condensed from the Latin treatise from eight years earlier (AT I, 350; CSMK, 53). However, I argue in a later chapter (2.5) that there is not much doubt about the use of these proofs in opposing atheistic skepticism. This opposition was ethically inclined, yet such moral issues cannot be set aside from the epistemological or metaphysical in the way Lennon does. Thus (contra Lennon 2008), the issue is specifically about skepticism of an immoral and atheistic kind with a clear-cut distinction between epistemological and moral skepticism being forced and something Descartes cannot afford to make. Consequently (contra Loeb 1986; Gaukroger 1995; 2008), Descartes's interest in skepticism would not be simply a means to an end to make his natural philosophy more acceptable; it rose over a long period and was partly motivated by his work in natural philosophy. If Galileo's conviction changed anything, it was the *order* of the plan, not its execution. (Cf. E. Curley 1978, 37–38; Rodis-Lewis 1998, 78; Alanen 2000, 259–261; Broughton 2002, 13.[4])

Filtering out other targets and intents of Descartes's skeptical handling has been highly beneficial, yet part of the benefit has come at the cost of devaluing the impact of the skeptical movement and Descartes's own concern over it. This concern might originate more from ethical issues and his own scientific and metaphysical work, but it is still identifiably there, motivating Descartes's worry over the skeptical issue. Descartes's relation to the skeptical tradition and his use of skepticism has been more positively featured in recent commentaries, not treating Cartesian skepticism as simply rejecting and considering everything previous as false but as actually suspending belief (e.g., Bermúdez 1997; Alanen 2000; Fine 2000; Broughton 2002; MacArthur 2003;

[4] In chapter 3.4, I connect the problem of skepticism with Descartes's doctrine of God's *created eternal truths*, discovered before 1630 and included in the early stages in his "treatise on physics" because he "would not have been able to discover the foundations of physics" had he not "looked for them along that [metaphysical] road" (AT I,145; CSMK, 22–23).

Paganini 2008a; 2008b; Christofidou 2013; Maia Neto 2015). However, there is still a call for a coherent reading that brings the anti-skeptical, anti-Aristotelian, and pro-scientific aspects into a single frame.

1.2. Reading the *Meditations* as a Cognitive Exercise

Descartes offers three reasons in the Third Replies for the use of the skeptical doubt: (1) to prepare the readers' minds "for the study of the things which are related to the intellect" and help them distinguish these from corporeal things; (2) to "reply to them in the subsequent Meditations"; and (3) to "show the firmness of the truths" that he propounds later on, in "the light of the fact that they cannot be shaken by these metaphysical doubts" (AT VII, 171–172; CSM II, 121). Reason (1) is targeted at the Aristotelian view of cognition, (2) is seemingly targeted at the skeptical tradition, while (3) is a continuation of the first two, demonstrating how Descartes's natural philosophy is to be preferred over all the competing theories because of its firmness and certainty.

Secondary literature, as mentioned, usually takes into account all of these reasons but rarely simultaneously. Most readings of Descartes tend to emphasise one of the reasons over the others. This is surprising, given Descartes's comments on both Aristotelianism and skeptical philosophy. His Preface to the French edition of *Principia* (henceforth the French Preface) identifies philosophy prior to him as a dispute between disciples of Plato (the skeptics) and Aristotle (the Scholastics), seeing the main debate among them as "whether everything should be called into doubt or whether there were some things which were certain" and considering both sides to have led to "extravagant errors". "Some of those who were in favour of doubt extended it even to the actions of life, so that they neglected to employ common prudence in their behaviour; while those who took the side of certainty supposed that it had to depend on the senses and trusted them entirely…". (AT IXB, 5–7; CSM I, 181–182.) Descartes's own assessment is that the truth lies "midway between [these] two positions" which, surprisingly enough, is also the position that the Sixth Meditation posits:

> [B]eginning to achieve a better recognition (*nosse*) of myself and the author of my being, although I do not think I should heedlessly accept everything I seem to have acquired from the senses, neither do I think that everything should be called into doubt (AT VII, 77–78; CSM II, 54).

It is easy to see how these three motives come together. Descartes wants to build a solid ground for science, but such ground cannot be found from science itself. One must go over scientific observation to the function and limits of understanding and

judgment to find this sort of absolute (or, as Descartes also puts it, metaphysical) certainty. Descartes aims to overturn both the Scholastic-Aristotelian doctrine and the skeptical philosophical tradition with his own *Cartesian skepticism* – the skeptical phase one must go through in the *Meditation*s to discover the metaphysical foundations of Cartesian science. The use of the skeptical method is, then, *therapeutic* – correcting our cognitive errors as though treating an illness (AT VII, 172, 573–574; CSM II, 121, 387). Cartesian skepticism does, then,, have a methodic aspect; however, due to Descartes's skeptical motivations independent of Aristotelian or skeptical onslaught, the skeptical arguments cannot be considered simply as instrumental but as having *sincere and genuine* application. (Cf. B. Williams 1983; Alanen 2000, 259.)

A major reason why the serious and genuine aspect of Cartesian skepticism has not been sufficiently recognised is an incomplete understanding of the *Meditations* as the text of a *meditative cognitive exercise*. Now, reading the work as a therapeutic mental exercise does have a long tradition (e.g., Alquié 1950; Gilson 1951; Gouhier 1999; Frankfurt 2008; Kosman 1986; Hatfield 1985; 1986; Garber 1986; Cunning 2010; Secada 2013; Schüssler 2013; Wagner 2014; Vitz 2015). More structural argumentative readings are still not uncommon (e.g., Almog 2002; Larmore 2006; 2014; Rubin 2008; Dicker 2013) but an approach to the text as an exercise to be practiced instead of a cohesive argument to be followed, is beginning to be more or less accepted across the board. Nevertheless, I argue that all the implications have not yet been fully explored. Likewise, recent discoveries in the 16th and 17th century meditative tradition force us to re-evaluate Descartes's drawing from, and the *Meditations* as a text inside, the literary genre in question. I begin this evaluation with a short historical introduction to the topic before moving on to discuss the consequences such a reading has for the skeptical enquiry.

1.2.1. Meditative Tradition

Meditation (from *meditari*, to reflect, to contemplate, to practice) forms an important and evolving tradition of attentive, spiritual exercises in the western Catholic history. Religious meditation typically involves learning to turn one's attention onto God by a series of mental steps and practices done in solitary contemplation, often with the guidance of a written word or manual. The guide text could be a passage of scripture, like in *Lectio Divina*, a manner of reading in which a biblical passage is read and meditated on, becoming a sort of prayer, or, as was typical during Baroque Scholasticism (1500–1600's), a written meditative record of a solitary thinker in the form of a first-person narration, whose place the reader would occupy. (See Mercer 2014, 27; Vitz 2015, 16.)

St. Augustine's (354–430) *Confessions* (c. 397–400) is the single most influential text in the meditative tradition. Following a mostly (neo-)Platonic example, the work is part autobiography, part private intellectual meditation on God and human corruption, in which Augustine invokes his decades-long search for truth and enlightenment. It influenced a series of similar meditative works that encouraged self-improvement and intellectual attainment of God, such as St. Anselm of Canterbury's (c. 1033–1109) *Monologion* or *Exemplum Meditandi de Ratione Fidei* (1075–1076).

Following a period of meditative practices loosely based on Augustinian ideas, the 12th century saw the rise of more systematic meditative exercises, explicating contemplative steps on the faculties of memory, imagination, intellect, and will. However, with the influence of Aristotelian cognitive theory on Medieval Scholasticism, an intellectual grasp of God became less emphasised because direct cognitive access to divinity was considered impossible. Instead, the faculty of imagination became particularly important for spiritual meditation, the goal being to imagine the emotional reality of Christ's suffering as vividly as possible to genuinely feel it as *psychologically real*. Certain exercises also instructed the practitioner to meditate intensely for brief periods, punctuated with periods of rest. (See Hatfield 1985; 1986, 48; Mercer 2014, 27–29.)

Catholic theologians began to evolve significant changes in spiritual practices in the 1500's, on the heels of the Protestant Reformation, when proper development and following innovative teachers were promoted. One such spiritual leader was Ignatius de Loyola (c. 1449–1556), founder of the Jesuits and the writer of *Spiritual Exercises* (*Exercitia spiritualia*, 1548). The work is a set of meditative exercises, divided into four thematic weeks, intended to cultivate the "three powers" – memory (including imagination), understanding, and the will – of the participants at religious retreats to join their wills in union with God's will. The Ignatian meditation differs from the Augustinian due to the Aristotelian cognitive basis but it likewise features turning away from the senses as a major component. Imagination is used to draw attention to various canonical matters, and understanding to draw implications from experience, raising affections in the will and strengthening its resolve. Part of the *Exercises* are written in the second-person, in the form of a *director* who leads he meditation, and part are in the first-person, in the form of an *exercitant* who practices them. The reader is intended to read the author's instructions (second-person parts), and then undertake the role of the exercitant (first-person parts) and meditate accordingly (e.g., *ES*: I, i, pr. 1). (See Hatfield 1985; 1986, 48–49; Mercer 2014, 29; 2017; Vitz 2015, 17–18.)

Much of the previous attention on the meditative form of the *Meditations* has been directed towards comparisons of Descartes's *cognitive* with Loyola's *spiritual* exercises (e.g., Hatfield 1985; 1986; Vitz 2015). Descartes was an alumnus of the Jesuit School La

Flèche, so there is no doubt he was familiar with Loyola's work and likely had meditated along with it several times himself. There are similarities between the two texts, most of them probably intentional, but also striking differences, which has made certain scholars question the direct influence of the Ignatian model on the *Meditations*. Descartes's exercise follows more in the intellectual Augustinian path and while imagining is used to direct the attention towards certain psychologically real states (see chapter 4.5), it is emphasised far less. It is possible to distinguish the voice of an 'author' from the voice of a 'meditator', yet there are no second-person instructions found, so this difference is much more subtle. Augustine's *Confessions* is another clear influence (Hatfield 1985; 1986; Menn 1998), yet the *Meditations* traces more faithfully in the meditative exercise model of the time. Thus, there are reasons to expect Descartes to have had some other meditative work as an example for the *Meditations* than simply Loyola's and Augustine's.

One of the historically interesting features of the reformed spiritual exercises leading up to the 16th century was that they were increasingly being written by women. In the Catholic efforts to promote spiritual teachers in the face of Protestant revolution, one of these teachers was a Spanish Carmelite nun, Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582), whose writings, particularly the *Interior Castle* (*El Castillo Interior*, 1588) became widely known and translated into several European languages, including Latin and French. Divided into seven parts, called *Mansions*, the work compares the human soul to a perfect castle through which the "seeker" is required to wander by the means of a meditative exercise to experience a mystical union with God. Like many other meditative works of the period, the *Castillo* has the meditation's author share advice on how to acquire more accurate knowledge of the self and become increasingly familiar with divinity. What sets Teresa's work apart though, is its psychological subtlety and intimacy, mixing personal struggles with analytical clarity in spiritual improvement. There are, likewise, several key similarities between the *Castillo* and the *Meditations* that hint towards a rather large influence by Teresa on Descartes.

No direct evidence exists that Descartes had read the *Castillo* but Teresa's large recognition and particular reverence among the Jesuits make it highly probable. Written solely in the first person, the *Castillo* offers a closer comparison with Descartes's own meditative exercise than either Loyola or Augustine. Both Teresa and Descartes urge turning away from external sensory matters, emphasise the arduousness of the meditative journey, and, maybe most importantly, have their meditators struggle with customary concerns forcing their way in and face off against deceiving demonic powers. Teresa, like Decartes also sees proper self-knowledge as an entryway to better knowledge of God. (*Castillo* I, ii, 9; II, i, 1–8; see Mercer 2014, 34–35; 2017.)

Looking at previous meditative exercises can help us understand the *Meditations* as a text in a literary tradition. However, we must be careful not to force the comparison too far. Descartes is not after a religious experience similar to the Medieval and Baroque meditations and we ought not to take his examples of demons as literally as Teresa's (see chapter 4.5). Most likely Descartes took full advantage of the available resources of imagined physical realities containing deceiving demons, and his use of them in similar passages of the *Meditations* gives his audience clues what to do (see Mercer 2014, 35; 2017).[5] We also should not underestimate the closeness of metaphysical knowledge to a spiritual experience in the tradition Descartes is working in. Still, many comparisons between Descartes and earlier texts miss the mark by trying to force similarities in the contents and the forms of the exercise.[6] We should take the meditative genre as a *guide* to understanding the *Meditations* instead of interpreting them as bending to the form of the genre. Such an understanding imposes certain requirements on our reading. The purpose of a meditational text, like a book on physical exercise, is partly lost unless the reader does the exercise. We do not read a book on practicing yoga as an essay or a treatise; we are expected to actually practice yoga. (Cf. Brandhorst 2010, 4–8.)

1.2.2. First-Person Narrative in the Meditations

The first-person narrative is one of the most famous aspects of the *Meditations*, introducing a tempting structure through which to follow each *Meditation* with intimacy and warmth and inviting the reader to experience the thought processes of a solitary meditating person as their own. The overarching "story" of the work is for this meditator-reader to discover the three founding 'principles' of errorless (so true and certain) cognition – 'I' (the self as a cognising being), God (the author of the meditator's nature and existence), and body (the sensory-material reality) – without being able to grasp any of these principles through sensation (cf. Carriero 2009, 3; see also chapter 7.3.3). The meditative cognitive exercise form suits these purposes ingeniously.[7]

However, one must be careful not to identify the 'I' of the text as Descartes himself (contra, e.g., Lennon 2008, 207; Rubin 2008; Ariew 2011, 33–34). The meditating

[5] Mercer (2017) forcefully argues for Teresa to be the originator of Descartes's Deceiving Demon doubt, and the reason for previous inattention to this is the exclusion of women in early modern history. See, however, chapters 2.3.3 and 4.5. See Mercer (2014, 30–35) for other early modern meditations, some of which likewise include warnings about demons and deceivers,

[6] Unfortunately for the otherwise excellent analysis, this is likewise the case with Mercer (2017).

[7] Descartes experimented with other forms, e.g., textbook (*Principia*), dialogue (*Search*), and philosophical autobiography (*Discourse*). See Menn (2003) and Paganini (2009a, 255) for history of philosophical autobiography and the *Discourse*.

person of the exercise traditionally is not fully the author themself and the cognitive journey is not meant to be simply autobiographical. Instead, as with Loyola's *Excercises* and, more subtly, with Teresa's *Castillo*, we can distinguish two 'voices' or 'characters' in the text: the 'author' or the 'narrator', working as a sort of a guide, and the 'meditator', working through the exercise. This distinction in personae is most apparent in first-person, quasi-imperative resolutions: "[r]eason now leads me to think […] I must make an effort to remember […] I will suppose then, that everything I see is spurious […] I will now shut my eyes, stop my ears, and withdraw all my senses" (AT VII, 18, 22, 24, 34; CSM II, 12, 15, 16, 24). Such resolutions guide the meditator's attention to the issues that must be concentrated on next in the meditative order, providing instructions to be followed for the exercise. In the beginning, the meditator-reader is to simply trust the 'narrator' (the resolutions) and follow the instructions in a non-confrontational way, supposing that the exercise is successful in dissecting our errors. (See Kosman 1986; Broughton 2002, 23–25; C. Wilson 2003, 5–7; Carriero 2009, 28–29.)

Not everyone agrees, though, with the division into two personae, seeing it as undermining the authority of the "natural light" of reason that every person shares (e.g., Christofidou 2013, 9–10). Indeed, Descartes does not consider himself privileged here, but does make the caveat that "hardly anyone makes good use of that light, so that many people […] may share the same mistaken opinion" (Letter to Mersenne, 1639: AT II, 598; CSMK, 139[8]). The narrator's instructions are due not to most potential meditators' inability to follow the exercise but due to their reasoning being *clouded* and *confused*.

Descartes's role as the author dictates certain guidance due to the 'pedagogical problem' of most readers not being in the best position to perceive things as evident in the beginning of the enquiry. This becomes apparent in the Second Replies, in which Descartes sheds light on the work's "order" and "method" of reasoning, calling the latter "analysis" as opposed to "synthesis" (which proceeds from axioms to theorems in a geometrical fashion), and the former: "items which are put forward first must be cognised (*cognosci*) entirely without the aid of what comes later; and the later items must be arranged in such a way that their demonstration depends solely on what has gone before" (AT VII, 155; CSM II, 110; translation modified). This order is also called the *order of discovery*, dictating that one can draw conclusions only based on material that has come previously in the meditation.

Order of reasoning is sometimes taken to be synonymous with the analytic method, so that analysis itself presupposes no steps that have not already been made (e.g., Gueroult 1953, 23–29; Frankfurt 2008, 6–8). However, note that Descartes distinguishes the order from the method, indicating that as there are at least two possible

[8] Note that these passages are a critique of Herbert of Cherbury's *notitae communes*. See chapter 2.5.1.

methods of reasoning, the proper order of reasoning can be followed with either. The synthetic method "demonstrates the conclusion clearly" by employing "a long series of definitions, postulates, axioms, theorems and problems", so that if anyone denies a conclusion "it can be shown at once that it is contained in what has gone before" no matter how argumentative or stubborn the reader is. What sets analysis apart as the more fitting method for the purposes in the *Meditations* is that synthesis does not "engage the minds of those who are eager to learn" like the analytic method does, because "it does not show how the thing in question was discovered". The order of relying only on what has come before likewise applies to the synthetic method, but it is only with the analytic method that it becomes the order of *discovery*. Synthesis, being the chosen method of "ancient geometers", starts from premises that were discovered later (being perhaps metaphysically prior but epistemically posterior) to demonstrate what was discovered first. Analysis, when done with the proper order of reasoning, starts from what is easier and more effortless to discover and reveals what takes more meditative work later.[9] (AT VII, 156–157; CSM II, 110–111.)

This means, for Descartes, that the analysis is the "best and truest" method of *instruction* (*docendum*). Most readers enter the enquiry with a confused understanding of self, God, and the sensory-material reality (taking things that are deeply problematic to be plausible and even certain), thus having a misaligned conception of cognition. Bringing the reader into the best position to see things as they really are, requires instruction and leadership from the author-narrator, with the meditator-reader entering into a sort of voluntary pedagogical relationship with the latter.

However, as opposed to synthesis, the nature of the analytic method requires considerable amount of *collaboration* from the reader. Geometrical truths accord with sensory perception (following the Aristotelian-Scholastic model) and are readily accepted by even "the less attentive", whereas the "metaphysical subjects" dealt with in the *Meditations* conflict with our common-sense understanding and preconceived opinions derived from the senses by habit. As such, while being more evident than the geometers' "primary notions (*primae notiones*)", perceiving them to be such takes more effort, and as such "only those who really concentrate and meditate (*valde attentis & meditantibus*) and withdraw their minds from corporeal things, so far as is possible, will achieve perfect cognition (*perfecte cognoscuntur*) of them". (AT VII, 156–157; CSM II, 111;

[9] For example, God is metaphysically prior to the 'self' but discovering the 'self' takes less attentive meditative effort. See chapters 6.2.3 and 7.1. While "synthesis" is *a priori* in the traditional Thomistic sense, proceeding from cause to effect (see chapter 3.1.1) it is "as it were" *a posteriori* in Descartes's sense (proceeding from what is posterior by the order of discovery). Note that this "as it were" understanding of *a priori – a posteriori* likewise differs from the post-Leibnizian one (what is and is not known independently of experience).

translation altered.) The work is not titled 'Disputations' or 'Theorems and Problems' and the meditative form requires careful attentiveness to achieve the required effect. Descartes specifically calls for a *serious meditator* in the Preface, urging only those who are "able and willing to meditate seriously with me, and to withdraw their minds from the senses and from all preconceived opinions" to read the book. Confrontational readers, who do not make the effort to grasp the proper order of reasoning, should not even bother. (AT VII, 9–10; CSM II, 8.) This call is repeated in the Second Replies:

> Analysis shows the true way by means of which the thing in question was discovered methodically […] so that if the reader is willing to follow it and give sufficient attention to all points, he will make the thing his own and understand it just as perfectly as if he had discovered it for himself. But this method contains nothing to compel belief in an argumentative or inattentive reader; for if he fails to attend even to the smallest point, he will not see the necessity of the conclusions. […] I would not have nothing to do with anyone who was not willing to join me in meditating and giving the subject attentive consideration. […] I am therefore right to require particularly careful attention from my readers; and the style of writing that I selected was one which I thought would be most capable of generating such attention. […] [I]t is fair for me to reject out of hand and despise as worthless, the verdict given on my work by those who refuse to meditate with me and who stick to their preconceived opinions. (AT VII, 155–159; CSM II, 110–112.)

Reading the work and doing the practice entails faithful but critical exercise by the reader, perceiving the evident reasoning and coming to the conclusions on their own.

Descartes also comments on the importance of occupying the first-person point of view in the Letter to Clerselier, 12 January 1646:

> I never wanted to force anyone to follow my authority […] [and] pointed out in several places one should allow oneself to be convinced only by quite evident reasoning. […] [T]he perception or cognition (*perception ou connoissance*) [of each person] should be for him the 'standard which determines the truth of the thing' […]. (AT IXA, 208; CSM II, 272.)

Descartes's own thinking is not the "standard of truth" and should not be followed authoratively. Any reader willing to meditate along with the work should, instead, attempt to adopt the cognitive and volitional states of the meditator for themself (cf. AT IXB, 20; CSM II, 189).

> Although ignorant people would do well to follow the judgment of the more competent on matters which are difficult to know, it is still necessary that it be their own perception which tells them they are ignorant; they must also perceive that those whose judgment they want to follow are not as ignorant as they are, or else they would be wrong to follow them and would be behaving more like automatons or beast than men. (AT IXA, 208; CSM II, 273.)

The practiced meditation is a cognitive exercise in grasping things as they are. It is therefore not enough to just read it; the first-person meditative form requires an

attentive and capable reader who is willing to intensively and seriously meditate along with the guiding narrator, the supposed result being a genuine effect, a *psychologically real experience*, on our conceptions. Taking the role of the narrator as a 'teacher' too literally, then, is to misunderstand the meditative exercise form of the work. (Cf. Cunning 2010; 14, 27–28, 40; Secada 2013, 201–202; Mercer 2014; 35–37; contra Vitz 2015, 18–19.)

I follow the practice of separating the *narrator* (to whom I refer to as Descartes[10]), who instructs and motivates the exercitant, and the guided *meditator*, who takes the role of the *I* in the meditations. I refer to the meditator with the pronoun "she" to further distinguish her from Descartes-as-the-guide (of whom I use the pronoun "he").[11]

1.2.3. Meditator's Persona

Descartes is a 'teacher' or a mentor in that he recognises the unfavourable position from which most meditators enter the meditation. We have difficulty paying attention and following what cannot be sensed or imagined due to overt reliance on embodied sensory perception. However, the meditative procedure likewise implies a second difficulty: Not everyone begins to meditate from an equal mental impediment. Not only are we not in the best position to perceive things as evident in the beginning, but also most meditators enter the inquiry from a variety of positions (AT VII, 120; CSM II, 85; cf. Cunning 2010, 28–29.) I will analyse in this chapter some of these positions relevant for our understanding of the text, concentrating on three: Aristotelian, naïve, and skeptical.[12]

Not everyone agrees with the meditator occupying a specific role in the narrative, though. Rico Vitz (2015, 9–20) has particularly argued against such approach, reasoning that because the work is a set of meditations, the meditator is not a character in a fictional narrative but any actual person attempting to adopt the cognitive and volitional states of the *I* as their own (contra, e.g., M. Wilson 1978, 5; Christofidou 2013, 10). I do agree that the meditator is meant to be any thoughtful and attentive reader, and, thus,

[10] I do not mean to insinuate that the historical Descartes would have discovered all the doctrines of the *Meditations* in the order they are presented in. However, Descartes-as-the-guide can be considered a sort of a 'mentor' who has already found the truth and is now eager to show what has been discovered (cf. Cunning 2010, chapter 1; Vitz 2015, 19).

[11] Note that as contemporary readers, we cannot naturally engage in the exercise and fully put on the meditator's garb. Due to this historical distance, I sometimes refer to "readers" separately, with the pronoun "them". Cf. Secada 2013, 202.

[12] Compare with the *Search*, which includes three characters: Epistemon (gr. *ἐπιστημων*, "knowledgeable"), a person well versed in Scholastic philosophy; Polyandros (gr. *πολυς ἀνήρ*, "everyman"), an uneducated but capable layperson; and Eudoxos (gr. *ἐυδοξος*, "one of good judgment"), who has already discovered the truth and guides Polyandros to do the same. For earlier dialogues clearly inspirational for the *Search*, see Le Vayer's *Dialogues* (1630–1631) and Galileo's *Dialogo* (1632) and *Discorsi* (1638).

is to be as general and easily relatable as possible, but there is, likewise, intrinsic worth in reading her as meditating from a certain starting position. It not only helps make sense of certain passages (which sometimes hint at an initial cognitive basis) but it also enables to somewhat track the meditative progress of the intended readership. Descartes's instructions are intended to address various minds, be they Aristotelian inclined, philosophically naïve, skeptically or atheistically concerned, or mechanistically leaning. The question of the meditator's persona, while largely an extratextual matter, is therefore not as irrelevant as Vitz presents it. (See Broughton 2002, 23; Cunning 2010.)

The first position I want to bring up is a supporter of the *Aristotelian* worldview, reflecting a common well-educated reader of Descartes's period, who (unknowingly) would have to witness and accept the undermining of her traditional view piece by piece. This unsuspected, gradual demolition is especially emphasized in the Letter to Mersenne from 28 January 1641: "I hope the readers will gradually get used to my principles, and recognize their truth, before they notice that they destroy the principles of Aristotle" (AT III, 297–298; CSMK, 173). However, it is questionable whether the meditator is to represent an *Aristotelian-Scholastic philosopher*, with an understanding of the metaphysical cognitive structure deriving from Thomistic doctrine (contra, e.g., Carriero 1997; 2009, 30–34) who most likely would not be wondering about the fundamentals (as for her, something lasting has already been pertained) and might be too confrontational and argumentative (see Broughton 2002, 27). Even Descartes himself seems skeptical that a person with a strong Scholastic conviction would be able to meditate along easily (see the *Search*: AT X, 502; CSM II, 403).[13] Instead, we could see the Aristotelian meditator occupying a more *broadly* Scholastic position, well educated in the School system of the time but not necessarily a professional philosopher, generally agreeing with the Aristotelian view of sensation and cognition (as most readers at the time would).[14]

The second possible position, often likewise posited for the meditator, is as a philosophical *novice*, a sort of naïve but intelligent and capable layman. This philosophically unsophisticated viewpoint is brought up in the *Conversation*: "[T]he author is considering at this point the man who is only just beginning to philosophize and who is paying attention only to what he knows he is aware of" (AT V, 146; CSMK, 332). This "pre-philosophical level" naïve meditator shares certain commitments with the Aristotelian position but in a less metaphysically and epistemologically robust and sophisticated way. She would not enter the *Meditations* with a ready theory of cognition,

[13] Cf. the Letter to Pollot, 6 October 1642, *Regulae*, and the French Preface (AT III, 577, IXB, 12–14, X, 366; CSM I, 13, 185–186, CSMK, 215).

[14] Broughton (2002, 27), drawing from the *Search*, postulates that we could picture an *eaves-dropping* Scholastic philosopher following someone else's meditation. However, this would go against the meditative form of the work.

but it is reasonable to think she has some sort of a broad idea of the nature of reality running essentially through her senses. She could not access reality if she had no senses, or her senses would not work as she thought, thus, possessing a sort of rudimentary picture of cognition directly related to the world, but one that lacks theoretical systemisation. She would then be a *folk naïve realist*. Descartes seems to think that the Aristotelian-Scholastic cognitive account takes this sort of naïve, everyday picture and works it out in a more systematic and nuanced version within the Aristotelian frame. The meditator's beginning position, in this sense, encapsulates both the philosophically naïve folk thinking and its more robust, Aristotelian elaboration in a strategically clever way. (Cf., e.g., Frankfurt 2008, 19–21; Larmore 1998, 2006; 2014; Broughton 2002, 27; Kambouchner 2005, 256; Carriero 2009, 32–35.)

The third position, which has not previously been much emphasised, is a meditator convinced of the *skeptical* literature and thinking of the time, reflecting an ex-dogmatic skeptic. This sort of former empirical aspect might be possible to dissect from the first sentence of the First Meditation: "Some years ago (*ante aliquot annos*) I was struck by the large number of falsehoods that I had accepted as true in my childhood" (AT VII, 17; CSM II, 12). The implication could be seen that the meditator used to be an empiricist (either of the Aristotelian or naïve variety) until she awoke from her dogmatic slumber. This position, though initially triumphant, is likewise undermined on the way. I will argue in chapter 2 that the commonly perceived skepticism in Descartes's time was atheistically oriented, and as such, the skeptical meditator can also fill the role of an atheistic practitioner, whose position will similarly be undermined by discovering full knowledge (*scientia*) of God's existence (see the Dedicatory Letter to Sorbonne: AT VII, 1–3; CSM II, 3–4). (Cf. chapters 4.1.2 and 5.1.2.)

The (atheistic) skeptical position is particularly fruitful in analysing the meditator's initial motivation for undertaking the inquiry. One of the primary questions in the literature about the meditator's character has been her reason for suspecting her childhood-acquired beliefs to be false. The problematic is easy to solve in the case of a skeptically inclined meditator, yet such motivation is difficult to understand in the case of the meditator occupying Aristotelian or naïve positions: Why would someone with an Aristotelian education or folk common-sense reliance come to question their previous beliefs and seek to do so by the means of a radical skeptical meditation. Some commentators have opted to read Descartes as putting words into the mouth of the meditator at the start due to lack of a clear answer to this question (e.g., Broughton 2002, 28–32; cf. C. Wilson 2003, 10–31).

However, it seems to me that the search for a particular motivation is misguided and forcing the fictional narrative too far. Anyone picking up the work as a meditational text

and occupying the meditator role should be ready to follow the instruction and accept that their previous beliefs include possible falsehoods (even if they had not before), just as anyone picking up Teresa's *Castillo* should be ready to accept the soul resembling a castle. However, this does not mean, either, that we should expect the meditator to enter the text with a fully developed understanding of Cartesian philosophy. She is initially confused, after all, and only with time and attentive meditation will she discover the metaphysical and epistemological grounds of her errorless cognition, turning into a Cartesian *scientist* (in the sense of possessing *scientia*). The question is more that not all the motivations *must* be fully available from the start; it is enough that her curiosity and interest are piqued (cf. Carriero 2009, 28; Vitz 2015, 19). Instead of asking what is the meditator character's motivation to begin the inquiry, we should ask what motivation any common person (be they an Aristotelian, a philosophical naïf, or an atheistic skeptic) would have to undertake the meditation and begin the skeptical enterprise (I discuss these motivations in the following chapter; cf. chapter 2.5.2).

I consider that these three meditator positions – Aristotelian framework, naïve sensory reliance, and skeptical allegiance – benefit the text's analysis, with some passages making more sense from one than the other position; therefore, I will carry them along in the reading, with the atheistic position partly overtaking the skeptical at the beginning of the Second Meditation. Note, however, that these are not the only possible options for the meditator's identity. The meditator is meant to be as universal and relatable as possible; thus, any reader from any position should be able to perform the meditational exercise. An exercise that would undermine only Aristotelianism, folk naïve realism, and skepticism would leave other competing views unscathed. As such, I will occasionally also refer to the meditator's position as a materialist and a mechanist, to represent some of Descartes's competitors (such as Hobbes and Gassendi). (Cf. Ayers 1998, 1011–1013; Cunning 2010, 30–33.)

1.3. Taking Skepticism Seriously: Cartesian *Epochē*

The meditative reading, as mentioned, sets certain stipulations for our approach to the skeptical method. Many other aspects of the meditative approach have been discussed in the literature (see, e.g., Kosman 1986; Hatfield 1986; Secada 2013), but the implications for Cartesian skepticism have gone largely unnoticed (but see Rosenthal 1986; MacArthur 2003). The cognitive exercise emphasises how the suspension is arduous, challenging, and difficult, which suggests that the meditator should be completely serious about the general suspension, genuinely trying to withhold her assent

from previous opinions, difficult as that may be. The use of skepticism would not, then, be a purely instrumental, hypothetical thought experiment. Cognitive suspension of judgment is meant to be a real and genuine experience, as is the imaginative state of the baroque meditative exercises.

The previously mentioned traditional distinction between ancient and modern (Cartesian) skepticism is sought through two different modes of skepticism – one that is "serious" and another that is "unserious" or purely "philosophical". The latter would leave our behaviour or mode of life unaffected and would undermine only the epistemic-philosophical notion of *knowledge*, being the chosen method of Descartes's and other modern forms of skepticism. The ancients, however, utilised a "serious" skepticism, that does affect one's mode of life, having practical and ethical ramifications for everyday situations through the practice of thorough suspension on all matters and beliefs known as *epochē* (*ἐποχή*). Thus, there would be a large distinction between 'therapeutic' or 'ethical' ancient skepticism and 'methodological' Cartesian skepticism. (Annas & Barnes 1985, 7–9.[15])

A closer look, however, shows that this attempt to draw the distinction is unjustified. The skepticism of the ancients can just as well be described as 'methodical' (a method to suspend belief) and the skepticism of the *Meditations* is just as much 'therapeutic' and 'ethical' in its application. I suggest in chapter 2 ways to draw the distinction more accurately (as a change from a discursive public practice to a private mental experience and from what I term moderate to extreme external world skepticism through the Medieval Christian tradition). It suffices for now, though, to note that the description of Cartesian skepticism as simply 'methodological' misjudges something important about Cartesian skepticism and skeptical history. (Cf. Paganini 2008a, 186–191.)

Moreover, Descartes emphasises the seriousness of the inquiry in several places.

> I would not urge anyone to read this book except those who are able and willing to meditate seriously with me. […] I will devote myself seriously and freely to the general overthrow of my opinions. […] [That doubt can be raised on all former beliefs] is not a flippant or ill-considered conclusion but is based on powerful and well though-out reasons. […] So grave are the doubts into which I have been thrown… […] You pretend that I am playing a game when I am serious […]. (AT VII, 9, 18, 21–23, 350; CSM II, 8, 12, 15–16, 243. Translation modified.)

He even states it to be a grievous misreading of the *Meditations* to regard them as merely an "unserious" philosophical game – "a sham". It is *necessary* to read the skeptical arguments as serious.

[15] This is not the only way this distinction has been drawn, but I use it as an example of a larger approach. Cf. Fine 2000.

> When I said that the entire testimony of the senses should be regarded as uncertain and even false, I was quite serious; indeed the point is so necessary for an understanding of my *Meditations* that if anyone is unwilling or unable to accept it, he will be incapable of producing any objection that deserves a reply. (Fifth Replies: AT VII, 350; CSM II, 243.[16])

Reading the *Meditations* as a cognitive exercise is intended to have a genuine effect even on our common-sense view, including moral and ethical implications. The exercise is a *rediscovery* and *reorientation* of the self and one's thinking through intensive and rigorous meditation. The reorientation takes time and effort, just as with the Baroque spiritual exercises, being a slow and arduous journey, and Descartes advises his readers to "not just take the short time needed to go through [the First Meditation skeptical suspension], but to devote several months, or at least weeks, to considering the topics dealt, before going on to the rest of the book". Doing this, they will "undoubtedly be able to derive much greater benefit from what follows". (AT VII, 130; CSM II, 94) The skeptical inquiry takes *attentive effort*, which in the beginning can be extremely difficult and strenuous but becomes easier through practice and repetition as the meditator progresses with the exercise. Thus, the skeptical suspension appears more arduous in the first two Meditations than in the later ones (see AT VII, 62; CSM II, 43). Why would skepticism be initially more laborious than by further use if it was simply an insincere thought-experiment? (Secada 2013, 201; Mercer 2014, 35–37; cf. M. Wilson 1978, 5; Forsman 2017, 54.) I see the intended psychological result no less serious or genuine than the *epochē* of the ancient skeptics due to this meditative, practiced aspect of skeptical scrutiny. Thus, I will refer to the *Meditations'* general suspension as *Cartesian epochē*.[17]

There is, however, one aspect that the traditional depiction explains correctly: Unlike the skepticism of the ancients, meditative skepticism is not intended as 'a way of life'. The meditative person in the spiritual exercise tradition is not expected to substitute the exercise for their day-to-day attitude or mode of living but to use it instead as an *alternative* (often more accurate) approach to spiritual matters. Descartes similarly emphasises the distinction between everyday life and meditative inquiry.

> [W]e must note the distinction which I have insisted on in several passages, between the actions of life and the investigation of the truth. For when it is a question of organizing our life, it would, of course, be foolish not to trust the senses, and the skeptics who neglected human affairs to the point where friends had to stop them from falling off precipices deserved to be laughed at. […] But when our inquiry concerns what can be known with complete certainty by the human intellect, it is quite unreasonable to refuse

[16] Descartes does refer to the doubt as "excessive" and "metaphysical" in some instances. I explain these in suitable places.

[17] To be exact, what I refer to as Cartesian *epochē*, is the self-induced suspension of judgment from the Second Meditation onward, which leaves one's own existence (at least momentarily) outside of the scope of the *epochē*. See chapter 5.1.2; cf. chapters 2.5.2 and 4.4.

> to reject these things in all *seriousness* (*serio*) as doubtful and even as false. (AT VII, 350–351; CSM II, 243. Emphasis added.)

The skeptical exercise is to be practiced while secluded from the worries, obligations, and activities of everyday life, requiring a "stretch of free time" in peace and solitude (AT VII, 17–18; CSM II, 12). The skeptical endeavour is indeed, in this sense, to be *insulated*, but the reason for this is, ironically, not the unseriousness but the *seriousness* of doubt, as an intense and attentive exercise.

The precondition of a committed attentive and unprejudiced undertaking for the skeptical meditation similarly sets certain restrictions – temporal and contextual – on the skepticism. The *temporal restriction* follows from the limited human attention span. Similar to Baroque exercises that instruct intense meditation only for certain brief periods, with rest in the middle, to secure the meditator's attentiveness and vigilance, Descartes does not expect his readers to go through the exercise in one sitting. "Our mind is unable to keep its attention on things without some degree of difficulty and fatigue; and it is hardest of all for it to attend to what is not present to the senses or even to the imagination" (*Principia* I, §73: AT VIIIA, 37; CSM I, 220). Skeptical meditation is possible only for a limited time before one's laboured attention begins to lapse and one's concentration loosens.

The temporal limitation likewise induces the *contextual restriction*. The exercise is an "arduous undertaking", so a certain laziness brings the meditator "back to normal life" from time to time (AT VII, 23; CSM II, 15). Similar to the spiritual exercises, the meditator is not intended to spend six actual days, or indeed several weeks or months as Descartes suggests, in thorough suspension but is to repeat the exercise in several short intervals over many different days. The meditator thus requires time away from the attentive meditative effort as a way to contextually separate the "arduous" skeptical exercise from "normal life". The meditative person is to live as a common man in the street in the "normal life" context, taking the world as it appears in the common-sense, everyday attitude while genuinely suspending, or 'bracketing', the same issues in the "skeptical exercise" context. (See chapters 2.5.2, 3.3, and 4.5 for more on contextual and temporal restrictions to skepticism.)

Of course, one might wonder why anyone would undertake the *Meditations*' contextual inquiry? Even Descartes notes that "no sane person has ever seriously (*serio*) doubted [that there is an external world and human beings have bodies]" (AT VII, 16; CSM II, 11). So, what would make 'a sane person' seriously doubt such things even if only as a meditative exercise secluded from everyday life?

The *Meditations*, as a meditational text, promises certain results for those who undertake the exercise. Spiritual exercises are read to find spiritual peace and improve

self-awareness, closeness with God, and religious experience. A cognitive exercise is to be read for similar reasons: To discover epistemically solid ground, to improve knowledge of oneself and God, and to gain a metaphysical-cognitive experience, allowing for a stable metaphysical basis for all our true cognitive states. However, if the results were just these, a hardened "man on the Clapham omnibus" could question the exercise's utility: If he cares not for the metaphysical cognitive basis, what use would it be to go through the meditation? Nevertheless, especially in the case of the volitional powers, the exercise promises equal results not just in establishing stable science but also in well-founded *moral behavior*. The meditative goals are not simply metaphysico-epistemological but ethical, providing fruits for scientific practices as well as for a virtuous everyday life. (See Davies 2001; Araujo 2003; Vitz 2015.)

Attention *(atteOntio*) for Descartes is our cognitive and volitional powers directed towards the same object or goal, working in internal unison (AT XI, 361; CSM I, 344). Such an attentive cognitive grasp is necessary not only for discovering a metaphysical epistemic basis but also for behaving *virtuously*. Virtue, and consequently happiness, results from the right use of the will and the intellect – from striving to judge well (finding the best course of action) and being decisive (executing firmly whatever course one has chosen). (Letters to Elizabeth, 1645 and Christina, 1647: AT IV, 263–296, V, 83–84; CSMK; 256–267; 325; cf. *Discourse*: AT VI, 28; CSM I, 124–125.) Inattention leads to error, irresponsibility, and moral wrong, all which challenge the Cartesian notion of happiness as virtuosity (Fourth Meditation and Letter to Mesland, 1644: AT IV, 117, VII, 59–60; CSM II, 41, CSMK, 234). We need a better understanding of our cognitive and volitional capacities in order to act virtuously and be happy, thus requiring a reliable epistemic guide to perceive what the good is (power of understanding and its capacity to distinguish errorless and erroneous cognition) and a free ability to follow the good (power of will and its attentive control over our cognitive states and agency over our acts). The meditational exercise of purging these two powers is, then, not only essential for us as true *cognisers* (beings capable of knowing how things are) but also as *moral agents* (beings capable of acting virtuously and living a happy and tranquil life). The skeptical exercise is not simply directed at finding truth but also at avoiding *error*, both cognitive and moral. Before the metaphysical cognitive basis is found, suspension of judgment becomes a *moral responsibility*. (See chapters 2.5.2, 3.3, and 4.5. Cf. Naaman-Zauderer 2010; Svensson 2011; 2015; Christofidou 2013; Secada 2013.)

The fact that the Cartesian *epoche* is not a 'way of life' like its the ancient counterpart does not diminish from the "seriousness" of suspension as a meditative exercise. Cartesian skepticism, while insulated from interactions of life, is to likewise lead the participant to a more virtuous and ethically good life, with skeptical inquiry intended to

have a *genuine effect* even on our common-sense thinking. However, the meditator will also be able to slide in and out of the *epochē* as she wills, because, unlike in the ancient tradition, the common-sense perspective survives outside of the suspension context.[18]

1.4. Structure of the Work

The work is structured around four chapters that analyse the first three Meditations. Preceding them are two chapters discussing the historical tradition relevant for understanding Descartes's goals.

Chapter 2 concentrates on the history of skepticism, beginning with ancient traditions and developing through Medieval and Scholastic discussions to the Renaissance and then to early modern skepticism. I also discuss Descartes's use of skepticism and his relation to the skeptical tradition.

Chapter 3 discusses the role and importance of the two main powers of the meditator's thinking, her cognition or understanding and her will. I begin with the role of understanding and will in late Medieval and Baroque scholasticism to make the use of these capacities in the Cartesian context more understandable, then move on to discuss Descartes's conception of these powers.

Chapter 4 analyses the First Meditation, conentrating on the *three levels of doubt* (particular, systematic, and ultimate). I also discuss the *modification of Pyrrhonian epochē* and the psychological tool of the Demon, intended to ease the still laborious suspension.

Chapter 5 analyses the Second Meditation, dividing it into *two chains of discovery*: The first focuses on the existence of the 'I' and the second focuses on the example of the wax. I also discuss how the modification of Pyrrhonian *epochē* from the previous Meditation develops and progresses into the more concentrated *Cartesian epochē*, leaving what is *cognitively evident* outside of the suspension.

The analysis of the Third Meditation is divided between chapters 6 and 7. Chapter 6 analyses the first half of the Meditation, focusing on the *preliminary discussion* of distinguishing between different features of cognition while suspending their truth value and on the first of the *causal arguments* for God's existence. While discussing the latter, I distinguish two main causal principles, *Principle of Causal Dependence* and *Principle of Causal Adequacy*, on which the causal arguments lean.

Chapter 7 analyses the last half of the Third Meditation, focusing on the change of perspective from cognitive features to the existence of 'I' and the second causal

[18] See, however, Eichorn (2014; 2020) who reads the ancient skeptical writer Sextus Empiricus as a sort of a "proto-contextualist".

argument for God's existence. I also discuss the progress of the skeptical exercise through the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Meditation.

Finally, the conclusive chapter 8 discusses the intended changes in the meditator's attitude and view of the world as she finishes with the meditative inquiry, especially concentrating on how far-reaching on one's common-sense perspective the genuine effect is to be after the *Meditations* and how the results of the exercise are to be repeated in an everyday, morally virtuous life.

2. Preliminary Considerations I: Doubt and Skepticism

It is beneficial to present a brief history of skeptical thought up to Descartes's time before embarking on the skeptical exercise in the first three Meditations. I see a double benefit in such a presentation. Firstly, it provides us an understanding of the historical and intellectual context that Descartes, for better or for worse, accidentally or deliberately (as I argue), sets for himself. Secondly, it demonstrates that his choice of skepticism is not accidental but is due to a deliberate effort to answer the skeptical, especially atheistic skeptical, threat still prominent in the scientific intellectual climate of his time.

Descartes's relation to the skeptical tradition is one of the most intriguing components of the meditative exercise and the interest towards it has been strong in recent years (e.g., Bermúdez; 2000; 2008; Fine 2000; Lennon & Hickson 2013; Brown 2013; Stuchlik 2017). This interest is partly fed by the remarks Descartes makes towards his predecessors. Skepticism already had a long tradition by Descartes's time, which he is the first to acknowledge. He even presents himself to be continuing the skeptical line from antiquity, hinting that the scenarios presented in the *Meditations* are merely a reheating of the "old cabbage" of the ancients (Second Replies: AT VII, 130; CSM II, 94).

Nevertheless, skepticism for Descartes is not just some trivial quibbling of ancient lore or even the remains of Renaissance humanism. He treats skepticism as a *living* issue. "[W]e should not suppose that sceptical philosophy is extinct. It is vigorously alive today". Descartes presents the "atheistic sceptics" as needing refutation and himself as the first philosopher to successfully answer their doubts (AT VII, 548–550; CSM II, 374–376).[1] Descartes's concern with skeptical issues was both epistemological/metaphysical and *moral*. He considered skeptics a threat not only for their challenge to science but also for their challenge to the ethical and virtuous life. (See chapter 1.3.)

I take a closer look in this first preliminary chapter at the history and tradition of skeptical philosophy, starting with ancient discussions, moving to Medieval and Renaissance developments, and ending with early modern adaptations, to gain a clearer view of the issues and to better understand Descartes's willingness to employ these methods. My focus is especially on two questions: 1) Where does skepticism begin (its motivation), and 2) Where does skepticism lead (its results)?

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[1] Cf. the *Conversation*, Third Replies, and the *Comments* (AT V, 165, VII, 172, VIII, 366–368; CSM I, 309–310, II, 121, CSMK, 347). See also the Letters to Hyperaspistes, August 1641, and to the Curators of Leiden University, 4 May 1647 (AT III, 430–431 & V, 9; CSMK, 194–195, 316–317).

2.1. Ancient Skepticism: The Garden and the Porch

The roots of ancient skepticism can be traced to Pre-Socratic philosophies, such as the questioning of motion by the Eleatic school founded by Parmenides (c. 5th century BC) but known mostly through Zeno's paradoxes (e.g., Achilles and the turtle). Later on, certain epistemologically wired dialogues by Plato (c. 438–347 BC), such as the *Theaetētus*, would likewise question sensory experience as the basis of knowledge (*Tht.* 151d–186e). The aspiration to *epistēmē* (ἐπιστήμη), a state of knowing, or a body of knowledge, that was *lasting* and *unchanging*, was generally running in the background of these discussion. If there is truth, the thought went, what is true cannot change and become untrue. If I know the truth (taken that the truth is knowable), how could my knowledge change and become unknown? Just as truth is unchanging, so is true knowledge. This eternal *epistēmē* was, especially after Plato, contrasted with *doxa (δόξα*), usually translated as belief or opinion. *Doxa* is the kind of common belief that one could be persuaded to hold but that is subject to change and instability. The visible, ever-changing world consisted only of *doxa* for both Parmenides and Plato, far removed from the true reality of eternal Being or Forms, that one could only reach by the equally eternal *epistēmē*. (E.g., *Rep. V*, 476e–478e.[2]) Robert Pasnau has described that ancient theories were set to form an *epistemic ideal* – knowledge as a systematic framework (science, if you will). To have *epistēmē* is to grasp the unchanging principles or essences underneath (2017, 3–6). *Doxa*, then, is to be avoided and *epistēmē* is to be aspired to. A wise man should live "without beliefs" (*adoxaston*, gr. *ἀδόξαστον*).[3]

Another goal in ancient philosophy, arguably even more important, was to attain *eudaimonia* (*εὐδαιμονία*), usually translated as happiness but including stronger and more specific connotations. The kind of happiness one attains by *eudaimonia* is eternal, unchanging and reliable *spiritual tranquillity*. It is, in a sense, *divine*, the sort of happiness enjoyed by philosophical deities. It is typically tied to aspirations for *epistēmē*, because one aspect that leads to unhappiness, frustration, and disturbance in human life is the hunger for answers. Similar to knowledge by *epistēmē*, the kind of tranquillity gained by *eudaimonia* is reliable and stable, something that remains the same no matter one's circumstances or fortune. This similarly upped the ante for *epistēmē*, for to be absolutely sure about something was to be both happy and to rest on something truly eternal.

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[2] For early skeptical antecedents, see Lee 2010. For Plato's influence on later skeptical currents, see Vogt 2012, esp. 7–9. Note that for Plato, *doxa* does not necessarily pertain solely to the visible and *epistēmē* solely to the Forms. As with any other Platonic doctrine, there is contention of the true meaning of this distinction. See Moss 2014; 2020.

[3] This epistemic ideal was later assimilated into Scholastic discussions as *scientia*. See Pasnau 2017, 6–7. It still resonates in Descartes, who purports an epistemic distinction similar to *doxa*/*epistēmē*. See chapter 3.4.

How to gain, or at least approach, *eudaimonia* and live a good, pleasant life is a topic that unifies practically all the ancient philosophical sects. It came into particular prominence during the Hellenistic period, occurring after Aristotle (384–322 BC) but before the emergence of Neo-Platonism by Plotinus (c. 204–270 AD). The Hellenistic period came to be known, from the point of view of skeptical history, specifically by the debate between certain "dogmatic" schools, that claimed that happiness and tranquillity can be gained by knowing a certain *criterion of truth* and sticking to it (e.g., the Stoics and the Epicureans) and the skeptical orientation that questioned them.

We customarily mean two "factions" – *Academic* and *Pyrrhonian* skepticism – when speaking of ancient skepticism specifically (instead of skeptical leanings in ancient thought). This same distinction was also used during Descartes's time and he clearly was aware of both skeptical factions.

> [G]eneral doubts would lead us straight into the ignorance of Socrates or the uncertainty of the Pyrrhonists. (*Search*: AT X, 512; CSM II, 408. Cf. AT X, 519–520; CSM II, 413.)

> Although the Pyrrhonists reached no certain conclusions from their doubts, it does not follow that no one can. (Letter to Reneri for Pollot, 1638: AT II, 38–39; CSMK, 99.)

> Although I had seen many writings by the Academics and Sceptics on [the doubts of the First Meditation] and was reluctant to reheat and serve this cabbage, I could not avoid devoting one whole Meditation to it. (Second Replies: AT VII, 130; CSM II, 94. Translation modified.)

I return later to how familiar Descartes was with these doctrines. First, I will discuss ancient skepticism and its influence on skeptical history. However, for a full understanding of the ancient skeptical current, we must begin the story in a painted porch on the side of the Athenian Agora.

2.1.1. Stoicism and Academic Skepticism

The beginning of the skeptical phase has much to do with their "dogmatic" opponents. The Academics' direct opposition was the Stoic school, founded by Zeno of Citium (c. 334–262 BC) and named after the painted colonnade hall or *stoa* (*ἡ ποικίλη στοά*) in Athens where he taught. The Stoics, though branded by the Academics as dogmatic, were already skeptically inclined. They appreciated skeptical concerns and considered epistemic caution as one of the main components of being a "sage" (i.e., a wise, virtuous person). According to the Stoics, a sage should never give in to mere *doxai*, seen as weak and malleable assenting, considering those states of mind where assent could be given to be attainable but hard to achieve. (See Vogt 2012, 8, 159. Cf. Frede 1983; 1997b.)

The Stoics think there are fundamentally two kinds of impressions (*phantasia*, gr. *φαντασία*) we encounter, either by our senses or our rational capacities: *kataleptic*, or cognitive, and *akataleptic*, or non-cognitive. Cognitive impressions (*φαντασία καταληπτική*) occur and are "imprinted" on one's soul precisely and in full detail according to how things are – they firmly *grasp* (*katalambanein*, gr. *καταλαμβάνειν*) what is true. Non-cognitive, "ungrasping" impressions, such as what one experiences in states of delirium, drunkenness, or dreaming, or when one's vision is blurry, one is tired, in a rage, or does not fully understand the argument, are not "imprinted" in this way. These cognitive and non-cognitive impressions appear as *rational* for all persons – they are thoughts on which one's reason is free to either give, deny, or withdraw assent. (DL VII, 45–46, 50–52.)

The Stoics recognized three kinds of assent: *epistēmē* (knowledge), *doxa* (belief) and *katalēpsis* (*κατάληψις*, comprehension, lit. taking hold of), typically translated as *cognition*, which is assenting to cognitive impressions and is "stationed between" (*methoriai tetagmenēn*, gr. *μεθορίᾳ τεταγμένην*) the two. Someone who forms and holds beliefs is unable to improve on their state and reach knowledge; beliefs are weak and changeable assents, whereas knowledge requires firm and true assenting. A believer cannot be a knower. Cognition, in contrast, is careful assenting to cognitive impressions which have some sort of conformity to real objects. One ought only to assent to cognitive impressions in order to be a sage and withhold assent on the various non-cognitive ones. Grasping the truth by assenting to a *clear and distinct* cognitive impression is, then, the Stoic suggestion for the *critērion* (*κριτήριον*) of truth and reality. (*M* VII, 151–152. Cf. *Acad.* I, 11.41–42, II, 6.17.)

However, just because someone gives assent to a cognitive impression does not mean they possess *epistēmē*. Both a sage and a non-sage might assent to several cognitive impressions, but a non-sage does so inconsistently. Say that Calvin is a non-sage and Hobbes is a practiced Stoic. Both Calvin and Hobbes assent similarly to a cognitive impression, for example, understand a complex argument equally well. However, in Calvin's case, since he has also given assent to several non-cognitive impressions, and might do so as a consequence of the cognitive impression (e.g., understanding the argument makes him happy[4]), his grasp of the matter does not rise to *epistēmē* and become knowledge but falls to *doxa*, becoming belief.[5] If one were to ask Calvin the next day how the argument goes, he would be at a loss and would have to work to gain the same grasp of it all over again. Hobbes, as a practicing Stoic sage, can fit the cognition into the framework of cognitive impressions, firming them into place so they

[4] Emotions, as opposed to rational feelings, are also non-cognitive impressions. See Vogt 2012, 178–181.
[5] According to Vogt (2012, 162), cognition is not a separate doxastic attitude improving on *doxa*. Instead, cognition figures in both *epistēmē* and *doxa*: both a knower (sage) and a believer (non-sage) assent to several cognitive impressions.

become incorporated in a systematic body of knowledge. A singular cognitive impression may grant one truth, but it does not guarantee that one knows the truth, as knowing the truth includes assent so firm and strong one never has to change one's mind. The Stoic *epistēmē*, just like the Platonic and Aristotelian one, represents an ideal state that can (and must) be aspired to.[6] (Vogt 2012, 159–162; Baltzly 2019, 4. Cf. Broughton 2002, 34–35; Perin 2008, 57.)

Academic skepticism, formed in Plato's Academy (originally founded in a public garden in nearby Athens) during the so-called Middle Academy period (c. 268–155 BC), argued heavily against the Stoic cognitive impressions.[7] The crux of their objections is that no impression is of an infallible "grasping" quality; thus, all impressions are non-cognitive: ungraspable and incomprehensible (*akatalēpsia,* gr. *ἀκαταληψία*). Incomprehensibleness for the Academics does not mean that we would not understand the impressions, for example, that I would not realise that an impression of Donald Trump is an impression of the former President of the United States. Rather, no impression for the Academics is such that it certainly grasps a true quality of an object. The Stoics described cognitive impressions as those that (1) proceed from a real object and (2) are impressed or "stamped" exactly in agreement with the object itself. The Academics argued back that no impression is such that it could not be mistaken for another exactly similar but non-cognitive one. Typical examples included two or more identical eggs, twins of known people, and so on. The Stoics then included a third clause in the description of cognitive impressions, that (3) they are of such a kind that could not arise from what is not (i.e., could not turn out to be false). (*M* VII, 152 & 247–252; *PH* II, 4; *DL* VII, 50.[8]) Still, the Academics pressed on that no impression satisfies even the third clause. Moreover, according to the Academics, there is nothing less convincing or real about delirious, drunken, or dreamt impressions while they are being perceived to distinguish cognitive impressions from them.

> [P]resentations seen by people asleep and tipsy and mad are feebler […] How? […] As if anybody would deny that a man that has woken up thinks that he has been dreaming […]. But […] what we are asking is what these things looked like at the time when they were seen. (*Acad.* II, 27.88.[9])

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[6] Zeno is said to have likened an impression to a stretched-out hand, assent to a hand with the fingers bent, cognition to a fist, and knowing to a fist clenched by the other hand. *Acad.* II, 47.145 For Aristotelian axiomatic science as an epistemic ideal, see *An. Post.* I, 71a1–71b9. Cf. Pasnau 2017, 3–6. Descartes also makes an epistemic trichotomy (*persuasio*, *cognitio*, *scientia*) that is similar to the Stoics'. See chapter 3.4.

[7] The Academic skeptics saw themselves as following the model of Socrates, which is why Socrates is sometimes included as the first "Academic skeptic". See the French Preface and the *Search* (AT IXB, 5–6 & X, 512; CSM I, 181 & II, 408).

[8] Cf. Broughton 2002, 34; Hankinson 2003, 60–61; Vogt 2012, 159–160; 2018, 3.1.

[9] Similar scenarios of madness and dreams are conjured up in the First Meditation. Cf. chapter 4.2.

Cognitive impressions, then, cannot act as the criterion of truth. The Academics argued that to be coherent, a sage would have to suspend assent on *every and all* impressions. The Academic plays the part of a judo master in a way, using the strength of the Stoic's doctrine to flip him into suspending judgment on everything. (*Acad.* II, 26–27.84–87. *M* VII, 409–410. Cf. Broughton 2002, 35–36.)

Arcesilaus (c. 316–240 BC) was the first leader of the Academy in the Middle period and the founder of its skeptical phase around 268 BC. His thinking survived only through second-hand sources, most of which are biased in one way or another, so it is not surprising that confusion and disagreement exists about his actual teachings (see Ioppolo 2018; Vogt 2018). Certain sources indicate him purporting radical skepticism according to which truth has no criteria, nothing can be known, and one should withhold assent on everything (e.g., *Acad.* I, 12.45; *PH* I, 232–234). He would have, thus, been a representative of *negative dogmatism*, which denies the possibility of knowledge or *epistēmē*. However, recent commentaries tend to read him with a more moderate *dialectical interpretation*, not forming firm conclusions himself either way but arguing that it is the Stoics who, by their own doctrine, must give up on *epistēmē*. Arcesilaus himself would merely possess a slight suspicion that *epistēmē* might not be possible.[10] Either way, the method to acquire in the face of knowledge claims is *epochē* – a complete suspension of every assent, belief, and judgment. (DL IV, 28; *M* VII, 150–158. Cf. Couissin 1983; Thorsrud 2010, 58–59; 2014, 53–55; Perin 2010, 145–146.)

Carneades (c. 214–128 BC) is the second important leader of the skeptical Academy we know of, taking over some one hundred years after Arcesilaus, during the so-called New Academy period (c. 155–90 BC). Like Arcesilaus, he wrote nothing down but was especially known for his argumentative skills (e.g., *DL* IV, 62–63). He continued and strengthened the skeptical method of Arcesilaus, purporting a thorough going *epochē* while also making some modifications to it. According to Carneades, a skeptic does not assent to anything as knowledge and, thus, withholds or suspends on all dogmatic truth claims. However, there are certain impressions that a skeptic can assent to in order to live and act in the world. Here, Carneades distinguishes between *incomprehensibleness* and *clarity* of impressions, arguing that while all impressions are *akataleptic*, not all of them are unclear (*adēlon*, gr. *ἄδηλον*). Certain impressions appear more clear (*hikanon*, gr. *ικανόν*) to us than others and, thus, are more persuasive or plausible (*pithanon*, gr. *πιθανόν*). Cicero (106–43 BC), whose work *Academica* is the main existent source on Academic skepticism, later translated *pithanon* as *veri simile*, truthlike (*Acad.* II, 10.32,

[10] This would be based on a reading of the Platonic dialogues by which no interlocuter, not even Socrates, is able to justify their knowledge claims. Note that the Stoic teachings were reportedly also based on Socrates. The dispute was, then, in a way on the correct interpretation of Plato. See Frede 1983, 65–66; Sedley 2003; Thorsrud 2010, 59–63; Vogt 2012, 5–9.

31.99).[11] Skeptics can, thus, follow certain convincing impressions, while not considering them true but merely as plausible. Carneades, then, apparently narrowed the scope of *epochē*, articulating a way a skeptic can live an everyday life.[12] (*Acad.* II, 31.99–32.104. Cf. Hankinson 1995, 94–96; Thorsrud 2010, 58–74; 2014, 76–81; 2018.)

2.1.2. Pyrrhonian Skepticism

Pyrrhonian skeptics opposed not only the Stoic and Epicurean epistemology but also the Aristotelian axiomatic view of science and even the Academic skeptics themselves. The name Pyrrhonism derives from Pyrrho of Elis (c. 360–270 BC), often considered the first skeptic, being some 50 years Arcesilaus's senior. Unlike other Hellenistic skeptics, he seems to have been so committed to his skepticism that not only did he not leave anything written, but he also did not even form a school around his philosophy. Whatever little we know of him has survived through his disciple Timon (c. 320–235 BC) and later skeptical writers he inspired.[13] Pyrrhonism as a philosophical school was founded by Aenesidemus (c. 1st century BC) around the time of Cicero's death. He is considered to have been a former member of the Academy, who later went renegade and formed his own skeptical doctrine in opposition to the Academics of the time, specifically Philo and Antiochus, whom he considered to hypocritically assent to persuasive impressions while unambiguously claiming thorough *akatalēpsia* (*PH* I, 235). (See, e.g., Decleva Caizzi 1992; Striker 1983; Castagnoli 2018, 70.)

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[11] For the history of *Academica*, see Schmitt 1972; Thorsrud 2014, chapter 5; Wynne 2018. *Pithanon* has also been described as "probable", following Cicero's other translation of it as *probabile* (e.g., *Acad.* II, 11.32). As probability today refers to statistics, which is not what Carneades meant, I have decided to avoid the term. Cf., however, Obdrzalek 2006.

[12] There are two traditions on what following convincing impressions means, one by Carneades's pupil Clitomachus, the other by an Epicurean convert Metrodorus and Clitomachus's pupil Philo (Cicero's teacher). Cicero follows the Clitomachean "radical" reading, taking Carneades to follow what appears as convincing but not espouse any views. Metrodorus and Philo saw Carneades as following convincing impressions because they appear more reasonable than the others, holding *fallibilistic* opinions. *Acad.* II, 18.59, 24.78. Cf. Lévy 2010. Later, the Metrodorian-Philonian "mitigated" reading became influential for the Renaissance and early modern skepticism. See Caluori 2007, 32–33; Maia Neto 2014.

[13] As Pyrrho is an obscure character, there is no clear understanding of his skeptical philosophy. Ancient reports describe him as living a life of constant danger, taking no precaution with carts or wild dogs and nearly falling from precipices if his friends were not to save him. However, these are most likely from his philosophical opponents and are thus hardly trustworthy. Aenesidemus reports Pyrrho to suspend judgment only in philosophical matters, while not lacking "foresight in his everyday acts" (DL IX, 62). There is also debate whether Pyrrho was a skeptic like the later Pyrrhonists, suspending judgment on how things are while registering how they appear (an epistemic reading), or whether he held that things by their nature are unknown to us (a metaphysical reading). For this interpretive issue, and the so-called "Aristocles passage", see Hankinson 1995, 59–65; Bett 2000a, chapter 1; 2000b; 2018; Svavarsson 2010; Thorsrud 2014, chapter 2; Perin 2018; Castagnoli 2018, 68–69.

Along with the foundation of the Pyrrhonian skeptical faction and its divergence from the Academic line, Aenesidemus is most known for the Ten Modes of Skepticism, attributed to his now-lost work, *Pyrrhonian Discourses* (*Pyrrhōneoi logoi*, gr. *Πυῤῥώνειοι λόγοι*). These modes, or tropes, aim to demonstrate how things appear different from different perspectives, to different animals, to different humans, and even to the same human in differing states and locations. Their basic form is:

1. A thing x (e.g., honey) appears F (e.g., sweet) to Calvin
2. To Hobbes, x (honey) appears F* (e.g., bitter)
3. One cannot decide whether either, or none, of these testimonies has authority over the other
4. One is not able to either accept or deny that x is F or that x is F*[14]

With this basic form, the modes show how nothing is infallibly grasped as certain: by different animals having different senses (first mode), by different persons experiencing things differently (second mode), by the senses of one person disagreeing with each other (third mode), by things appearing different in different circumstances (fourth mode), by them appearing different from different perspectives (fifth mode), by coming across them only indirectly through intermediary mixtures (sixth mode), by their qualities differing on quantity and constitution (seventh mode), by everything being relative (eighth mode), by being less impressed by things the more frequent they occur (ninth mode), and by the societies' differing customs and laws (tenth mode). (*PH* I, 35–162. Cf. DL IX, 79–88.[15]) One would have no option but to suspend judgment by *epochē*.

Pyrrhonist Agrippa (c. 1st century AD) later augmented the Ten Modes with an additional Five: from dispute, from regress *ad infinitum*, from relativity, from assumption of hypothesis, and from circularity. The first (dispute) and the third (relativity) appear to be condensed from the Ten, whereas the other three seem more original. By them, every knowledge claim must be justified, for which there appear only three possibilities: 1. assuming an axiomatic foundation (i.e., refusal of response), 2. circular reasoning (i.e., repetition of an earlier claim). or 3. vicious infinite regress (i.e., supporting the knowledge claim with another *ad infinitum*). (*PH* I, 164–177; cf. DL IX, 88–93; Thorsrud 2014, 150–160.) These are known in contemporary epistemology as *Agrippa's trilemma*.[16]

The best-known representative of Pyrrhonism is, however, Sextus Empiricus (c. 160–210 AD), whose works, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* and *Against Mathematicians*, are the

[14] Just as with Pyrrho, there are similar interpretive issues regarding Aenesidemus, whether he should be read as suspending judgment on everything due to an undecidable balance of testimonies or as seeing that no x is by nature F or F*. I have tried to present the Ten Modes neutrally to both readings. See Striker 1983, 98–105; Woodruff 1988; Hankinson 1995, 127–128; 2010, 109–113; Bett 2000a, 189–222; Thorsrud 2014, 102–103; Castagnoli 2018, 72–76.

[15] See Annas & Barnes 1985, 26–30, 39; Striker 1983, 100; Hookway 1990, 7–10; Castagnoli 2018, 71–72.

[16] For the trilemma in contemporary discussion, see, e.g., M. Williams 1991, 60–68; 2001, 61–63. I argue in chapter 3.4 that to be successful, Descartes's project has to overcome this trilemma by proving it false.

main source of Pyrrhonian skepticism surviving to contemporary times (see Floridi 2002). It is difficult to say how much of what Pyrrhonism Sextus describes in these works was already present in the thinking of the earlier skeptics such as Aenesidemus and Pyrrho (cf. Bett 2000b, 12; Pellegrin 2010, 121–122; Brennan & Roberts 2018, 125–127). Thus, the following description of Pyrrhonism should be understood as how Sextus reports it and not as a description of historical Pyrrhonism as a whole.

Sextus distinguishes three types of philosophers: those who think truth has been discovered (Dogmatists), who claim it is inapprehensible (Academics), and who still investigate (*skeptikos*, gr. *σκεπτικός*) (Pyrrhonists or Skeptics) (*PH* I, 1–4).[17] Pyrrhonism, unlike Academic skepticism, does not propose *akatalēpsia* – they neither affirm nor deny that things can be grasped or that truth can be gained. It appears that attempts to gain truth have been unsuccessful, yet acquiring truth may still be possible. However, since truth is not found, the Pyrrhonist practices *epochē* and suspends judgment.

Pyrrhonism, like other Hellenistic philosophies, aims at tranquility and freedom from mental disturbance. However, the Pyrrhonist recognises that since one aspect causing disturbance and frustration in human life is the hunger for answers and knowledge, which are not found by the dogmatic methods, one must live without any *dogma* (*δογμα*) to live happily. A skeptic first notices an unevenness, anomaly (*anōmalia*, gr. *ἀνωμαλία*), in how things appear: For Calvin honey appears sweet, whereas for Hobbes it appears bitter. The two impressions are contrary to each other (*antithesis*, gr. *ἀντίθεσις*) (but not in contradiction; it is also possible that both impressions are false). Since neither impression is more convincing than the other, they result in *isostheneia* (*ἰσοσθένεια*), equipollence or equal balance. Impressions being equally balanced, the skeptic suspends judgment on whether honey is bitter or sweet by means of *epochē*. The skeptic then notices the resulting state to be complete tranquility and peace of mind (*ataraxia*, gr. *ἀταραξία*) when judgment is suspended.[18]

The peacefulness of *ataraxia* appears to be a step below full *eudaimonia*, because the state of tranquility the skeptic reports feeling is not stable and unchanging; impressions force themselves on him, and a new disturbing anomaly might appear at any point to disturb his peace, making him repeat the process. The Pyrrhonian skeptic then follows

[17] The term "skeptic" was not used during the early Middle Academy, and not, apparently, even in Aenesidemus's time (Castagnoli 2018, 67). By the time of the Renaissance rediscovery of Sextus, "skeptic", Academic" and "Pyrrhonian" had become synonymous terms (Schmitt 1972, 8; Limbrick 2008, 67–68; Caluori 2007; 2018; Naya 2009, 24). It later became common place to refer to Pyrrhonists as "Skeptics", to distinguish them from Academics. Cf. AT VII, 130; CSM II, 94.

[18] Whether or not suspension results causally is questionable. The connection is closer to causal than logical or argumentative, yet the Pyrrhonist creates no dogma on the suspension, not closing out the possibility that sometimes equipollence might not result in suspension. See, however, Thorsrud 2014, 126–130; Eichorn 2020.

the path from *antithesis* to *isostheneia* to *epochē* to *ataraxia* continuously, until full *eudaimonia* is reached. Even here, the skeptic makes no dogmatic claims on how *eudaimonia* is to be gained; if some true knowledge is found and leads to *eudaimonia*, the skeptic would be happy to get on board. Until that though, the skeptic suspends judgment in each case, reaching *ataraxia*. (*PH* I, 8–12, 29–30.) Skeptics do not even form a belief that suspension necessarily leads to *ataraxia* – they merely hope to gain *ataraxia*, suspend judgment due to disturbing anomalies in seeking it and notice that *ataraxia* follows "as a shadow follows a body" (*PH* I, 29).[19]

However, there are large debates on what the claim of living without dogmas means. The Pyrrhonist, while suspending judgment on dogmas, can assent (*synkatatithetai*, gr. *συγκατατίθεται*) to the feelings forced on him (*katēnankasmenois pathesi*, gr. *κατηναγκασμένοις παθεσι*) by the impressions of things (*PH* I, 13). The traditional reading, also known as the "No Beliefs" view, holds that the Pyrrhonist lives completely without beliefs, including those about everyday life (Burnyeat 1983; 1997; Barnes 1997; Thorsrud 2014). Assenting to forced feelings means that the Pyrrhonist suspends on how things truly are and reports only how things appear to him. A Pyrrhonist who burns his mouth with bean soup would not say that the bean soup is hot, but that "it appears that the soup is burning my mouth now", not assenting to a belief but simply expressing the state he appears to be in.

Still, because it is difficult to defend the skeptic not at least assenting to the *feeling* of being impressed, others hold a so-called "Some Beliefs" view of the Pyrrhonian *epochē*. This view has been proposed in two forms. 1) The skeptic has beliefs over how something appears (Fine 2000; 2003b; Perin 2010). The skeptic, then, assents to the bean soup appearing to be hot but suspends judgment that it really is hot. 2) The skeptic suspends judgment on scientific theorisation and unclear (*adēlon*) views (which the dogmatists hold) but has beliefs concerning everyday life (Frede 1997a; 1997b; Brennan 2000; Tuominen 2016; Morison 2019). According to this, call it the "No Unclear Beliefs" view, the skeptic assents to ordinary, everyday life beliefs while withholding assent on the dogmatic claims of going from the appearances to the natures of the things themselves. These would cover all theoretical claims, for instance, that gravitation affects objects (to which "Some Beliefs" 1 skeptic could assent, taken that the qualification "it appears that" is added to the beginning), and other non-apparent views, such as generalisations. The skeptic assents that the bean soup is hot *right now* but not that the bean soup is *always* hot or that it is naturally hot or that it is hot because of the

[19] Sextus demonstrates this with a story about the painter Apelles: After unsuccessfully trying to portray foam in a horse's mouth, he angrily flung his sponge at the canvas, accidentally creating the desired representation of lather (*PH* I, 28).

speed of the atoms that constitute it. This latter reading has the advantage of fitting rather well with how Sextus describes the differences regarding assent between the dogmatists and the skeptics: "[The Skeptics] do not hold beliefs in the sense in which some say that belief is assent to some non-apparent object of investigation (*zētoumenon*, gr. *ζητούμενον*) in the sciences (*epistēmas*, gr. *ἐπιστήμας*); for the Pyrrhonists do not assent to anything non-apparent" (*PH* I, 13). (Cf. Tuominen 2016, 95–108.)

2.2. Ancient Skeptics and *Epochē*: Living in the World

Both Academic and Pyrrhonian skeptics then recommend *epochē* as a way of life, a dialectical strategy, and even as a *therapeutic* method for dealing with disturbances and anomalies. One would withhold assent on dogmatic claims in *epochē*, avoiding forming (theoretical) beliefs on how things truly are, concentrating on how they (convincingly) appear to be. Whether the two should be considered as separate factions or whether such a distinction is more or less artificial has generated some hot debate in recent decades (see esp. Striker 1996; 2010; Klein 2003; Thorsrud 2014, 7–14). Be that as it may, the distinction between Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism does appear rather thin. Sextus accused the Academics of negative dogmatism (*PH* I, 226), yet whether the Academics truly held such a view is rather suspect. The main dispute between the factions seems to have been in proclaiming or not proclaiming *akatalēpsia*, and even then, it is unclear and debated whether the Academics themselves truly held to the incomprehensibleness of everything or whether they only maintained that their Stoic interlocutors are required to hold it. One should also remember that the distinction has political, rather than just philosophical, features, as Aenesidemus attempted to separate his own faction from his ex-colleagues in the Academy (cf. Castagnoli 2018, 69–70). If some real difference existed, it could have been in that Academic skepticism was more *dialectically* oriented, using skeptical strategies to oppose other claimed followers of Socratic-Platonic philosophy, whereas Pyrrhonism appears more *ethical living* oriented – a way to an undisturbed, tranquil life.[20]

However, there are still two issues worthy of discussion regarding skeptical *epochē*: 1. How does the skeptic live without beliefs (a so-called problem of *apraxia*)? 2. How wide is the ancient skeptical *epochē* (does it extend to the existence of the world)? Both of

[20] See DL IV, 33; *PH* I, 234. Cf. Hankinson 1995, 75; Ioppolo 2018, 36. See also Burnyeat 1997, 34; Striker 1996; 2010. Note, though, that Carneades and "No Beliefs" Sextus would react to a hot bean soup very differently. Carneades could view it convincing that the bean soup is hot and refrain from eating it, whereas "NB" Sextus would merely "go along" with the impression that it appears hot and, as it has been reported that it may burn, refrain from eating it. See *PH* I, 227–230.

these issues are related to a larger frame question: How does ancient skepticism differ from modern (Cartesian) skepticism (cf. chapter 1.3)?

As mentioned, the traditional distinction between ancient and modern skepticism is to see the ancient variant as a way of life, contrasted to the Cartesian instrumental use of skepticism as a methodological affair with no practical concern (i.e., *insulated*, chapter 1.1). By seeing skepticism just as an epistemological tool, Cartesian skepticism is, consequently, able to bypass a counter argument the ancient skeptics faced: If the skeptic suspends on everything, how can he take action? This argument is also known as the *apraxia* (*ἀπραξία*) or *inactivity* charge. If the skeptics truly suspend on everything, they could not be able to act, as being active requires beliefs. A skeptic who suspends all belief would be incapable of even speech, resembling a house plant more than a man (a so-called *classic* or *plant apraxia*) (e.g., Aristotle, *Met.* 4.4, 1008b8–17). *Apraxia* became a major tool in the arsenal against skepticism in both the Stoics' quarrel with the Academics and the dogmatists' critique of the Pyrrhonists. For example, Sextus reports of the skeptics being presumed to reject life and "remaining like a vegetable" by withholding from desiring and avoiding (*M* IX, 163–164).

However, the charge would take different forms based on the charger's philosophical framework. Besides the classical version where the skeptic is incapable of acting whatsoever, there were forms of the charge that could be titled *pragmatic apraxia*, allowing the skeptics action but in a disparaging way. Pyrrho was not reportedly inactive but took no precaution with his action, being self-destructive (*pragmatic self-destructive apraxia*) (DL IX, 62). Meanwhile, the Stoics consider that rational action presupposes an impression (visual or mental) that such-and-such would be good or beneficial, with the impulse to act following the assent to such an impression. Both impression and assent are relevant for rational agency, and refraining from either abolishes human action, relegating skeptics to the level of irrational animals (*pragmatic irrational apraxia*) (*Acad.* II, 12.37–39; *M* VII, 158).

The *apraxia* charge, by implication, makes the skeptics vulnerable to two other charges: *insincerity* and *non-eudaimonism*. An *apraxia* charger can also charge the skeptics with being inconsistent because they do move and act, even rationally and with precaution, and, thus, even they do not sincerely and faithfully follow their philosophy (*Met.* 4.4, 1008b8–17; *M* IX, 164; *Acad.* II, 38). The *apraxia* charger can similarly charge the skeptics with being unable to live a good and happy life, one where the person chooses good and virtuous actions instead of bad and vicious ones (*Acad.* II, 39). (Cf. Fine 2000, 213–214; Striker 2010, 197–198; Vogt 2010, 166–168; Obdrzalek 2012.)

The skeptics, as earlier implied, had various strategies to answer the inactivity charge. Arcesilaus held that the impulse to act can occur without assent, solely by impression.

If a Stoic opponent insisted that this position still leaves him vulnerable to the irrationality and the non-eudaimonist charges, Arcesilaus would refer to regulating one's actions by "the reasonable" (*to eulogon*, gr. *το εὐλόγον*) as a criterion for the conduct of life and, by performing prudent (*phronēsin*, gr. *φρόνησιν*) and correct (*katorthōma*, gr. *κατόρθωμα*) actions, attaining happiness (*Col.* 1122A–D; *M* VII, 158). Carneades distinguishes between unclear and inapprehensible impressions, referring to some impressions as more convincing than others; the skeptic is then able to follow the more convincing impressions and live a rational and happy life while refraining from assenting to them by practicing *epochē* (*Acad.* II, 10.32).[21] Sextus, like Arcesilaus, distinguishes the criterion of truth from the criterion of action, referring to the latter as being guided by what is apparent (*phainomenon*, gr. *φαινόμενον*). Apparent impressions, being passive and involuntary, are not objects of investigation (*azētēton*, gr. *ἀζήτητον*) for the Pyrrhonists; thus, the skeptic lives in accordance with "everyday observances" without assenting dogmatically. Sextus lists these observances to be seemingly fourfold: [1.] guidance by nature (e.g., the ability to sense and think), [2.] necessitation by feeling (e.g., hunger, thirst, tiredness), [3.] following laws, traditions and customs (e.g., from an "everyday point of view" piety is good and impiety bad), and [4.] teaching of technical expertise and skill (the life of a skeptic is active and acute). (*PH* I, 21–24.) A skeptic in *epochē* can, then, live and act in accordance with what appears to him, without committing to the truth of those appearances. The skeptic not only has an active and rational life but can even be happier and more moderate than the dogmatist, because while the skeptic has the same impressions of pain and hunger, he suspends the belief that these conditions are bad (which would drastically raise one's anxiety and frustration). (Cf. Fine 2000, 219–220; Obdrzalek 2006; Thorsrud 2010, 67–78; Vogt 2010, 168–178.) Academics and Pyrrhonists had resources for replying to *apraxia*-type charges, allowing them to live an assent-free life while recommending thorough *epochē*. Moreover, although the traditional account assumes that Cartesian skepticism does not even bother with *apraxia* arguments (e.g., Thorsrud 2014, 7), I argue in chapter 2.5 that Descartes was similarly worried about the ethical and practical-political concerns of radical skepticism.

Let us turn now to the other issue previously presented: How thorough, actually, is the ancient *epochē*? More specifically, did the ancients suspend judgment on the existence of the external world; were they external world skeptics? The answer can depend on how we describe external world skepticism. Ancient skepticism, and Pyrrhonism specifically, is traditionally described, following an influential reading by Myles Burnyeat

[21] By dialectical reading, Arcesilaus and Carneades could simply point out the *apraxia* being a problem for the Stoics. By responding, they appear to acknowledge it as a problem for themselves. (Hankinson 1995, 113; Thorsrud 2010; 2014, 81–82.)

(1982, 25–26; 1983, 128–130; 1997, 97–98), as what is called *property skepticism*: Skepticism that raises comparisons between contrary impressions and suggests that one cannot be preferred over the other but does not question whether the source of the impressions actually exists or not. Their sort of skepticism pays attention to honey appearing to taste sweet in one condition and bitter in another but does not question the honey being there. Instead, it presupposes the existence of the honey.[22] A specific aspect of Cartesian skepticism is its wide-reaching *generalised* nature: Skeptical doubt does not merely consider each perception on its own (locally) but extends to consider *every and all* instances of perception (globally). It is difficult to find such generalisations in either Cicero's reporting on the Academics or Sextus's reporting on the Pyrrhonists. Furthermore, related to the practical aspect of skepticism as previously described, since ancient skepticism constitutes a way of living in the world, it must stop short of questioning the very existence of the world. According to this reading, it is tedious to ascribe external world skepticism, as it is usually portrayed (either in the early modern or today) to the ancients. Their skepticism questions the *nature*, or *essence*, of things, not their existence.[23] Burnyeat even considers that the ancients had resources for generalising skepticism to the external world but did not "dare" to do so (1982, 37).[24]

Recently, however, the Burnyeatian reading tradition has been disputed and the lack of external world skepticism for the ancients questioned. Gail Fine has particularly challenged the divide of practical life skepticism vs. theoretical external world skepticism as uncomfortable. That the ancient skeptic must believe the external world exists in order to take evasive action not to fall from a precipice seems unjustified to Fine. The skeptic in *epochē* could just non-dogmatically follow the appearance of there being a precipice or that the honey exists or even that he has a body and the external world exists (2000, 229–231).[25] The skeptics could even be read as conceiving a kind of external world skepticism, based on passages in which Sextus describes what is outside the skeptic's intellect, referring to "all external objects" and "the nature of external

[22] Notice that in the classic *apraxia*, why the skeptic won't just walk into a well is based on the equal balance of positive and negative outcomes (falling/not falling); the skeptic is not expected to question the existence of the well itself (see *Met*. 4.4, 1008b8–17). Hume's modern version of the *apraxia* comparably sees a (true) skeptic questioning whether he would even fall at all if he left from the window instead of the door (*D* 1.5–6). Cf. Gassendi (AT VII, 282; CSM II, 197).

[23] Cf. Annas & Barnes 1985, 7–9; M. Williams 1986, 118–122; 2010, 288–290; Larmore 1998; 2006, 17; 2014, 49–50.

[24] Burnyeat refers to an argument in the *Academica* by which a deity could send the sage false presentations disguised as plausible (*Acad.* II, 15.47). Cf. Fine 2000, 228–230; Bermúdez 2000, 338–342; 2008, 64–67. However, see chapter 2.3.3.

[25] Note that Fine does not maintain that the ancients *do* generalise their skepticism, or even that they *do* non-dogmatically follow the appearances of external objects. She merely finds the Burnyeatian distinction unjustified (2000, 230; 2003a).

existing objects" being non-apparent (e.g., *PH* I, 163, 215; *M* VII, 191–194; 366). A similar reading can be drawn from his discussion of physics by which the skeptic suspends judgment on motion, rest, place, and time, among other things (*PH* III, 63–150). (Fine 2003a; 2003b; Thorsrud 2014, 182–183; Vogt 2018).

Nevertheless, it can be questioned whether these discussions lead to a wide enough skepticism of the external sphere. Both Academics and Pyrrhonists treat each impression of a seeming external object separately from each other. "We oppose what appears to what appears, or what is thought of to what is thought of, or crosswise" (*PH* I, 13). Nothing that Sextus says excludes external nature from this method. He sometimes refers to external things in plural, but a Pyrrhonist's suspension is clearly not generalised in the same sense as in the Cartesian discussion. The same is true for physics. The skeptic should suspend judgment independently on motion, rest, place, and time (e.g., "Parmenides states that there is no motion, Aristotle states there is motion, this cannot be settled"), but only as *local* cases, separate from each other. The skeptic cannot just pile the suspensions up for a coherent skepticism of the whole physical nature. Even by the "No Beliefs" reading, though radical on their own, the Pyrrhonists' tropes are not sufficiently far-reaching to question the whole of nature, not to mention the external world. (Cf. Bermúdez 2000, 337–342; 2008, 63–67; Vogt 2016, 266.)

However, unlike what Burnyeat and others seem to think, just generalising the skeptical strategies from local cases to global suspension does not yet give us the modern external world skepticism. Even if, for argument's sake, we granted a generalised reading of *epochē* for Sextus's Pyrrhonists (e.g., by Agrippan modes) or Cicero's Academics (e.g., by the indistinguishability of plausible and false) and considered applying it in terms of the external world, there would still be something off about this ancient external world skepticism. One way to put the issue is by analysing the required aspects of modern, and at the same time contemporary, external world skepticism. The first aspect is a distinction between 'inner' and 'outer' scopes – the former inside the perceiver's mental conception and the latter outside of it. The second aspect is that these scopes could be fully *distinct*: The outer scope might not exist at all while the inner scope remains unchanged and vice versa. The result could be called *extreme* external world skepticism. Now, even if we read the ancients as suspending judgment generally, they seemingly would not conceive the extreme version. At most, the skeptic that Sextus and Cicero describe would say that the external world might be different from our impressions of it. It may seem that there is a precipice in front of me, but the ground might actually continue (yet, I can still follow my natural tendencies that make me avoid what seems like a precipice). Even if I widen the scope generally to each sensation at the same time, I am still left with the weaker claim that reality merely might not be as I

perceive it. Call this *moderate* external world skepticism. The two may seem only a small step apart, yet to move from one to the other requires a huge conceptual leap. The extreme version requires a more clear-cut division between the internal and external spheres, in which the outer world could even be reduced or absorbed into the mind's inner world. Just moving from local to generalised suspension does not yet grant us extreme external world skepticism (a lesson we will return to with Descartes's dream skepticism in chapter 4.2).[26]

2.3. Medieval Skepticism: External World and Divine Deception

The ancient skeptics, particularly the Academics, were then perhaps the first to conceive the so-called *indistinguishability argument*: For every perceptual experience, there can be a phenomenally indistinguishable experience that is non-veridical. The argument forms the backbone of the Academic critique of Stoicism and Epicureanism, appears in Sextus (e.g., *M* VII, 403–411), and later returns as the main principle in Descartes's dreaming scenario.[27] However, unlike Descartes, the ancients did not generalise their skepticism, and even if they did, it would have only resulted in moderate external world skepticism, not yet holding a clear-cut distinction of inner and outer scopes. One must make *two* transitions for the distinction to be possible: first from particular objects to the nature of objects in general and then from the general nature to its status as the external world sufficiently separate from the mind. Ancient philosophers held what has been called *physicalism* of mind, considering mind and the external world to be parts of the same structure (Everson 1991; Vogt 2016; cf. Bermúdez 2000, 335–342; 2008, 62–67).[28] They might have made the first transition but not the second.

I describe in this chapter how the second transition and the clear-cut distinction became possible, arguing that the critical accounts of skepticism in late antiquity and the Middle Ages played a significant role in it. I concentrate first on Augustine's critique of Academic skepticism, then moving to discuss high and late Medieval epistemological debates, especially versions of the famous *deceiver argument* traditionally considered essential for external reality skepticism and generalised doubt.

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[26] As is seen in Aristotle and Laertius (*Met*. 1008b16; DL IX, 62) skeptics falling from precipices was a common caricature. Cf. Montaigne (*Apologie*: 1907, 236; 1991, 563); Descartes (AT VII, 351; CSM II, 243).

[27] Cf. *Acad*. 2.28.90; AT VII, 19; CSM II, 13. Contrast with *PH* (I, 104). Cf. chapters 2.5.2. and 4.2.2.

[28] Fine (2003b, 201–209) has argued the ancients had to have had a certain concept of subjectivity (e.g., *PH* I, 170). Even so, the concept alone is not enough for the skeptics or their interlocutors to conceive the mind as sufficiently distinct from the rest of the world. Cf. Remes 2007; Thorsrud 2014, 182; Vogt 2016, 266–267. See also Matson 1966. See Bermúdez (2000, 339–340; 2008, 65–66) for differences between the Pyrrhonian and the Academic tropes regarding this issue.

2.3.1. Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages: Augustinian Critique

Ancient skeptical thought was preserved for later periods mainly through three sources: Cicero's *Academica*, Sextus's *Outlines* and *Against Mathematicians*, and biographical sections on Arcesilaus, Carneades, Pyrrho, and Timon in the *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* by Diogenes Laertius (probably 3rd century AD).[29] By the time of the late antiquity and early Medieval periods, Cicero's Latin work had become the most known and read, spreading Academic thought as the skepticism most known to philosophers and theologians. This came at the expense of Pyrrhonism, particularly Sextus's Greek texts, though Laertius's account was also affected ("Life of Pyrrho" remained virtually unknown until the 15th century, see Schmitt 1983, 227; Blackwell 1993, 327–328). As a result, *Academicus* became synonumous with "skeptic", this linguistic use being retained until the 17th century (see note 17).

Another early player in the circulation of Academic over Pyrrhonian thought was Augustine, whose first known work, *Contra Academicos*, became a fourth major source of ancient skepticism (though its description of skeptical arguments was lifted straight from Cicero). As a devastating critique of Academical skepticism, it was also one of the last efforts to deal with the movement as a living issue (until the rediscovery of Pyrrhonian skepticism during the 15th and 16th centuries) (Schmitt 1983, 226). Thus, the skeptical terminology and argumentative arsenal became to be based on Cicero's and Augustine's Latin works. (Floridi 2002, 13–14; 2010, 267–268.[30])

Augustine appears to have delved into skeptical questions early on, aided by his reading of Cicero's works. He was first attracted to the pursuit of wisdom as an 18-year-old student in Carthage by the (now lost) *Hortensius*, and about ten years later while residing in Rome was inclined to believe that "'The Academics' were wiser than the rest in holding that we ought to doubt (*dubitandum*) everything" (*Conf.* 5.10.19). The skeptical hold did not last long though, for soon afterwards Augustine was exposed to Neo-Platonism and later converted to Christianity around 386–388 (*Conf.* 3.4.7, 7.9.13, 8.12.29; *C. Acad.* 1.1.4, 2.9.23, 3.20.43). (Cf. Kirwan 1983; 1989, 15; Floridi 2002, 13.)

Nevertheless, the early skeptical crisis affected Augustine's writing throughout his life, for he never ceased to consider skepticism a challenge for both knowledge and faith. Augustine, while not a skeptic, contributed to the history of skeptical thought in three crucial ways: first, by taking skepticism as a serious threat and seeing fit to answer

[29] There are passing remarks on skepticism also in the works of Plutarch (c. 46–120 AD), Ptolemy (c. 100–170 AD), Aulus Gellius (c. 125–180 AD), and Galen (c. 129–210 AD). See Schmitt 1983, 226.

[30] Other early Christian authors who mention skepticism include Tertullian (c. 155–240), Lactantius (250–325), Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260–340), and St. Jerome (c. 347–420). See Schmitt 1972, 23–28; 1983, 226; Svavarsson 2010, 37.

it; second, by these efforts, enabling the circulation and spread of skeptical arguments; and third, through his reflections, conceiving a new form of skepticism – skepticism as a thought experiment of the inner 'self'. (Marchand 2018, 175.)

Contra Academicos was written around the time of Augustine's conversion[31] and heavily relies on Cicero's *Academica*, so much so that it can be actually seen answering Cicero's defense of the Academics rather than the Academics themselves. Partly due to Augustinus's mediocre skill in Greek, he was unaware of both Sextus's and Laertius's accounts of Pyrrhonism, and did not include it into the discussion, further cementing the Academics as "the skeptics" for the subsequent period (see Schmitt 1972, 24 & 29–30; Kirwan 1983, 206; 1989, 16–17; Floridi 2002, 13; Lagerlund 2010a, 5).[32]

Augustine takes the dogmatist side in the ancient rivalry between the Garden (the Academic skeptics) and the Porch (the Stoic dogmatists), though not in a particularly Stoic way. The discussion does begin rather Hellenistically, with Augustinus's students Licentius and Trygetius, following the eudaimonistic model, arguing whether a man who merely seeks the truth without gaining it can be happy, but this debate ends in the temporary victory of the skeptical side, represented by Licentius. Augustine seemingly considers the earlier Stoic and other Hellenistic answers to skepticism to be inadequate, for they seek to simply trim the definitions of happiness, desire, truth, and so on. Although siding with the dogmatists in considering that a wise man cannot be happy if he is still trying to discover the truth, Augustine feels that the argument eventually leads to the skeptics' advantage, and the assistance of additional arguments is required. (*C. Acad.* 1.3.7–9, 1.8.22–23, 1.9.24–25.) Augustine derives one from the Carneadean concept of *pithanon*, especially its Ciceronian translation as *verisimilitude*, or truth-likeness (*Acad.* II, 31.99). According to Augustine, to accept something to be 'like truth' would require one to also know what truth is, because in order to say that someone looks like their father, one would have to have met the father in question. The question for Augustine is not just about words either. Following something as seemingly true is to assent to it, but to assent to it as seemingly true, one must know what truth is (as we can see, Augustine has already began to somewhat reform the skepticism of the ancients in his critique).[33] (*C. Acad.* 2.7.16–19, 2.10.24–2.11.26, 3.18.40; cf. Kirwan 1983, 206–211; 1989, 17–22; Lagerlund 2010a, 6.)

However, even the argument from *verisimilitude* makes only a dent in the Academic armour, and Augustine proceeds to his main attack against what he considers the Academic position: that (1) nothing can be comprehended (i.e., known) and (2) a wise

[31] The year of the conversion is debated (see, e.g., Kirwan 1983; 1989, 15; Floridi 2002, 13; Vogt 2016). The work was composed in the villa of Classiciacum near Milan, most likely just before the conversion.
[32] There were sporadic references to Pyrrhonism, but it was dying out. Floridi 2002, 12–14; 2010, 267–269
[33] Lactantius takes a more approving attitude towards the skepticism in Cicero. See Schmitt 1972, 24–28.

man ought to suspend assent on everything (*C. Acad.* 2.13.29). The argument against (2) is rather run-of-the-mill, with Augustine conjuring his own versions of the *plant apraxia* and the Ciceronian *non-eudaimonism* charge,[34] but the argument against (1) proved to be truly influential. Augustine begins it by defending the Stoic criterion of truth: Some things can be understood with such details that they could not be false, referring, like the Stoics to assent-compelling, evident cognitions (e.g., *M* VII, 257). Unlike the Stoics and other Hellenistic schools, however, Auugustine relies on *a priori* knowledge and necessary logical truths (the definition is either true or false, there is either one world or more than one world, etc). Every similar disjunction is necessarily true, so there are things that can be known. Skeptical *contrarities*, with a possible third option, the become disjunctive "either or" *contradictives*. (*C. Acad.* 3.9.21–3.10.23.)

Augustine takes the argument even further, asking by the Academic's mouth, "if the senses are deceptive, how do you know that this world exists?" and answering "by the term *world*, I mean this totality which surrounds us and sustains us […] [w]hatever its nature may be" (*C. Acad.* 3.11.24). Even though our knowledge of the external world is mediated through the senses and can be deceptive or even false, whatever we think of its existence, it is nevertheless true that we have subjective presentation of something we can call "a world" and of which we can have knowledge (even if dreaming or mad). Augustine still presents the question to be more about knowing the *nature* of the world, rather than its existence, but his discussion drastically reforms the skeptical framework, allowing a distinction between the 'external' (presented by the bodily senses) and the 'internal' (known by the spiritual mind). Thus, while somewhat misrepresenting the skeptical argumentation, Augustine allows subjective mental states to satisfy the conditions of knowledge. My appearance that it is now raining might be non-cognitive, but it is still true that it appears so to me. Subjective and mathematical-logical truths are, for Augustine, irrefutable to the cogniser, whether she is dreaming or not. "[E]ven if the whole human race were fast asleep, it would still be necessarily true that *three times three* are nine, and that this is the square of intelligible numbers" (*C. Acad.* 3.11.25–26).[35]

Another line of argument pertaining to subjective states, appearing underdeveloped in *Contra Academicos* but taking prominence in other writings of the period, is *self-referential knowledge*: Knowing, for example, that "I am alive" and "I think" (e.g., *Beat. Vit.* 2.7).[36]

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[34] *C. Acad.* 3.14.32–3.15.34. Cf. Heil 1972; A. Curley 1997; Yrjönsuuri 2000, 229; Marchand 2018, 178.

[35] Cf. Kirwan 1983, 213–218; 1989, 24–29; Marchand 2018, 176–177. See also Bolyard 2006. Brown (2008, 31–33) calls this *Augustinian content dogmatism*, for one is always capable of grasping the truth condition of logical and subjective states. This is often taken to be Descartes's view as well (see, e.g., Burnyeat 1982, 28–29, 32–33) but see chapter 4.3.2.

[36] One reason why this argument might be mostly missing from *C. Acad.* is that the work's goals are meant to be meagre, demonstrating the inconsistency and impossibility of skeptical position (likely as Augustine's

This anti-skeptical theme continues later in his intellectual career. In *De Trinitate*, Augustine lists things that cannot be doubted, including that one lives, remembers, understands, wills, knows, and judges (*Trin.* 10.10.14, 15.12.21–22). In *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine notes most famously that even if he is mistaken or deceived, as an Academic suggests, that he could be wrong about something demonstrates that he necessarily exists (*si enim fallor, sum*) (*Civ. Dei*, 11.26). Self-knowledge, for Augustine, is direct, simple, transparent, and effortless, equal to logical and mathematical truths, as something one knows for certain and cannot doubt or be mistaken about.[37] (Cf. Yrjönsuuri 1999; 2016.)

Several components make it possible for Augustine to separate the internal and external spheres more prominently. One is the Platonic/Neo-Platonic concept of mind or soul, more real than mere material body, which Augustine adopts as an inner spiritual 'self' (contrary to, e.g., the Aristotelian understanding of the soul as the principle of life, see chapter 3.1.1; cf. Lagerlund 2007, 3–4). Augustine reworks the ancient skeptics' traditional arguments to a form he can answer by laying claim to internal knowledge, severing the 'internal' and 'external' spheres to be sufficiently independent. Skepticism becomes a pathway to the interior, a passage to one's own immortal soul and origin in the image of God. (Yrjönsuuri 2000, 230–231; Marchand 2018, 182.) Another component is Augustine's tendency to ask questions that are different from those of the ancients. Stoic and Academic discussions center around which cognitions, if any, can be irrefutably true. Augustine innovates by asking what can and cannot be doubted. The term "doubt" rarely, if ever, comes up in the ancient discussions, but does appear in Cicero as *dubitari* (e.g., *Acad.* II, 9.27). Reflecting on the Academics through Cicero, Augustine inadvertently includes doubt as an essential component of the skeptical lingo, setting up much of the following epistemological stage (Vogt 2016, 261–270; 2018).[38]

Augustine retains many Stoic-Hellenistic doctrines, despite the partial remodelling of the traditional ancient picture, particularly an eudemonistic conviction of the happy, ethical life as an investigation of the truth, and its discovery by reaching a highly set epistemic ideal, adopting the Ciceronian Latin translation of *scientia* for the idealised Greek *epistēmē* (e.g., *C. Acad.* 2.5.11, 3.2.3–3.3.5; *Beat. Vit.* 4.33). Eudemonism would eventually make room for other ethical theories, especially voluntarism (see chapter 3.2),

way of clearing his personal skeptical crisis for accepting Christianity). *C. Acad.* 2.9.22, 3.14.30, 3.20.43; *Conf.* 7.10.16; *Retract.* 1.1.1; cf. Schmitt 1972, 30; Kirwan 1983; 1989, 15–16; Hookway 1990, 35; Marchand 2018, 175–176. See also A. Curley 1997, 14–18.

[37] Cf. the Second Meditation; chapter 5.1.2. Self-awareness for Augustine is more meagre, though, not intended for further realisations. Cf. Kirwan 1983, 218–221; 1989, 31–33; Yrjönsuuri 1999, 48–51; 2000, 227–229; Marchand 2018, 181–182. For Augustine and Descartes, see Hatfield 1986; Matthews 1992; Menn 1998; Brown 2007; 2008; C. Wilson 2008.

[38] The Platonic-Augustinian and Aristotelian concepts of the soul would later get more or less united in the Scholastic discussions. Cf. Lagerlund 2007, 4; Martin 2007, 97; Leijenhorst 2012, 144.

but the concept of *scientia* as an ideal form of knowing would come to represent much of the following Medieval, Renaissance, and early modern discussion in the West.[39]

2.3.2. High and Late Middle Ages: Medieval Debates

It is questionable whether Augustine's critique was wholly or even partly responsible for the skeptical school's disappearance. However, his refutation coincides well with the growing disappearance of the original skeptical writings in Greek, and even today Augustine is still seen as the last (Western) writer to deal with ancient skepticism as a real, living philosophical school of thought. Augustine's role was thought even larger in the late Medieval discussions on skepticism: As demonstrating how certain knowledge can be found, proving skeptical teachings wrong and immoral, dissipating the school (e.g., *QF*: 1957, 43). (Cf. Yrjönsuuri 1999, 49; 2000, 228; 2016, 179.)

The late medieval picture of Augustine as a demolisher of skepticism is considered fanciful today, but Augustine's influence on the vanishing of the skeptical school can be traced in another way. Direct knowledge of Cicero's *Academica* was relatively rare before the 14th and 15th centuries, and the work was mostly known through indirect accounts such as Augustine's and Lactantius's. Meanwhile, the growing grip of Christianity affected attitudes and epistemological interests, replacing skeptical considerations with robust realism and, especially in the late Medieval period, what has been called "*epistemological optimism*" (Adriaenssen 2017) – that human knowledge does, at least in optimal conditions, reliably reach the truth about God's creation.[40] Even the term *scepticus*, while still occurring in Gellius, was absent from Medieval vocabulary, becoming common currency only in the 1430s by the circulation of Ambrose Traversari's (1386–1439) translation of Laertius's *Lives*. (Schmitt 1972, 12–24; 1983, 226–233; Blackwell 1993, 327–328.)

Academica was little known and referenced despite Cicero being one of the most widely read ancient authors throughout the medieval period. Several sporadic references to the work occurred throughout the Middle Ages (though most were probably based on secondary sources) and copies were included in several Medieval libraries, with few manuscripts from before the 14th century still extant, but the text was not included in any authoritative collections. There was also a Latin translation of Sextus's *Outlines* in the late 1200s, (surviving as three manuscripts, one of them also including fragments

[39] See Pasnau 2017, 6–7, 26–27; Carriero 2009, 348. Cf. A. Curley 1997; Vogt 2016, 261. While I concentrate on Stoicism, other Hellenistic philosophies, like Epicureanism, are likewise to be found in Augustine's influences. See Bolyard 2006.

[40] See Floridi 2002, 14–15; 2010, 268–269, 274; Adriaenssen 2017, 239–246. Cf. chapters 3.1, 4.1, and 4.2.

from *Against the Mathematicians*) but it seems to have had almost no influence or circulation. Sextus's works mostly gathered dust in the far corner of gloomy library. A few (non-surviving) translations of Laertius likewise existed before the Traversari edition, but those were barely known, and "Life of Pyrrho" faded into obscurity. These led to Pyrrhonian skepticism playing an insignificant role during the western Middle Ages, discounting a few mentions of Sextus and Pyrrhonism, until the transmission of Greek manuscripts to Italy from Constantinople in the 1420s (Sextus and Laertius among them), leading to the Renaissance recovery of Greek culture in the west.[41]

It would be a mistake, however, to say that the Latin Middle Ages were devoid of skeptical topics, and the description of the Medieval period as an "Age of Faith" during which no skeptical considerations were entertained due to religious dogma, gullibility, or acritical thinking is, happily, behind us. Almost no authors identified themselves as bona fide skeptics, yet several raised skeptical discussions in an attempt to either criticise someone else's epistemological doctrines or to justify their own.[42]

By the time of the 13th century, most of the epistemological debate concerned how knowledge is acquired rather than whether it is possible, with most authorative authors,

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[41] Cf. Hookway 1990, 35; Copenhaver & Schmitt 1992, 241; Blackwell 1993, 327–328; Popkin 2003, 17–18; Yrjönsuuri 2016, 180; Machuca 2018, 165–166. See Schmitt (1972, 35–36) for a listing of medieval manuscripts of *Acad.*, For the same of Sextus's works, see Floridi 2002, 14–25, 64–70, 79–80; 2010, 268–277; Wittwer 2016. For DL, see Long 1972, xxvi. For *C. Acad.*, see A. Curley 1997, 1–3. Reasons for losing the original texts include destruction of the Library of Alexandria and the sacking of Constantinople in 1204. Note that due to limited resources, our knowledge of these periods is rather defective.

Meanwhile in the east, Pyrrhonism remained as a main skeptical influence of Islamic and Byzantine Christian traditions. Sextus's and Laertius's texts were more available for the Greek Orthodox theologians in Constantinople, with even Aenesidemus's *Discourses* still existent. Research is lacking in these parts but we know that several Byzantine writers, like Gregory Nazianzen (c. 330–389), opposed the influence of "Sextuses and Pyrrhos" to religious thought, with renewed interest in the topic during the 1300's. Such comments suggest there to still have been some Pyrrhonists in the east at the beginning of 4th century. Schmitt 1972, 34–35; 1983, 227–235; Floridi 2002, 12–28, 63; 2010, 269–278; Wittwer 2016.

On the Arabic side, while no flesh-and-blood skeptics seem to have existed, skeptical thought played a central part in the tradition of classical Islam. Important Islamic skeptical themes include Avicenna's (c. 980–1037) "floating man" (bringing him close to Augustinian self-knowledge), and al-Ghazali' (c. 1058–1111) autobiographical *Deliverance from Error* describing how he was cured from a personal skeptical crisis by God (*Deliverance*, II). However, no evidence exists of Islamic skepticism's direct influence on western skeptical thinking, Descartes included (but see anyway Menn 2003, Moad 2009, and Ruddle-Miyamoto 2017). For al-Ghazali, see also Halevi 2002; Kukkonen 2010; Heck 2014; 2018.

[42] Among the earliest to tackle skepticism seriously was John of Salisbury (1120–1180), who extensively dealt with Cicero's *Academica* (though he apparently knew the work only through secondary sources) and even considered himself an Academic skeptic. Salisbury, while not a genuine skeptic in the ancient or early modern sense (several issues are beyond doubt for him, such as logical truths, immediate perceptions, and religious dogma), recommends intellectual modesty by suspending judgment on *dubitabilia sapienti*, regarding truth to exist but to be attainable only for God. Humans, however, have an inclination towards the truth and can approach it by holding reasonable, probabilistic beliefs in everyday life and natural science. Adopting a Metrodorian-Philonian style *fallibilism*, Salisbury acts as an important antecedent for Renaissance and early modern fideism and mitigated skepticism (cf. Machuca 2018, 167; Bloch 2018).

especially Thomas Aquinas (1225– 1274), obtaining an Aristotelian view that the cognitive process is fundamentally a reliable one (see chapter 3.1.1). Some exceptions, though, existed, such as Siger of Brabant (c. 1240–1285), who, while not taking skepticism as a serious threat, devotes some space to confront it to strengthen his own position. Most importantly, Henry of Ghent (c. 1217–1293), a contemporary of both Siger and Aquinas, begins his *Summa Quaestionum Ordinariarum* with the question of whether a human can know anything (*SQO*, a.1, q.1). Henry engages with several traditional skeptical arguments to analyse the question, drawing them from Cicero. However (unlike Salisbury and probably Siger), Henry's assessment of Academic skepticism seems to come not only from Augustine's refutation or other indirect sources but he also appears to have had direct access to the *Academica* itself, quoting passages tha do not appear in *Contra Academicos* (cf. Schmitt 1972, 39–42; 1983, 227).

Henry, though, does not just settle for the traditional skeptical arguments; he constructs his own.

> One who doesn't perceive the essence or *quidditas* of a thing, but only its image, can't know (*scire*) the thing. For one who has seen only a picture of Hercules doesn't know (*novit*) Hercules. But [a] human being perceives nothing of a thing except only its image – that is, a species received through the senses, which is an image of the thing and not the thing itself. (*SQO*, a.1, q.1, VII.)

The argument Henry depicts is not found in the Academic skeptic's quiver but rises from the Aristotelian-Scholastic *species* theory: A perceived object is not present to the senses itself but sends an image-like sensible *species* to the perceiver's eye. This is how, for example, Aquinas sees perceptual cognition occurring. However, Henry recognises a worry here: If all we are acquainted with are images of the external objects, and not the objects themselves, can we really *know* external reality? Henry, following the highly idealised form of *scientia*, considers that knowing is cognizing a thing as it is, without any falsity or deception (*SQO*, a.1, q.1). However, to cognise something as it is requires a grasp of that thing's essential nature – to know x is to know what kind of a thing x is; seemingly an impossible task if one only has an image of x and not x itself. Henry solves the puzzle of grasping essences by way of "reading them off" from images, holding on to the *species* as cognitive intermediaries and remaining optimistic about the intellect's ability to distinguish their veridicality. However, later writers grew more critical of the Aquinian-Ghentian depiction, seeing *species* as coming between the cogniser and the thing cognised. Among these critics were the Franciscan tradition of Peter John Olivi (1248–1298), John Duns Scotus (c. 1266–1308), Petrus Auriol (1280–1322), and William of Ockham (c. 1287–1347), composing various forms of *diaphanous* cognition, against the assumed *mediated* views of Aquinas and Henry (though without referring to

Cicero).[43] There is, however, something common to all these cognitive frameworks: They all were *directly realistic*, taking external reality to be depicted by the senses more or less directly as it is, with perception, like knowledge, becoming a *success* term – something that, when properly executed, cannot be false.[44] (Adriaenssen 2017, 29–39, 82; Bolyard 2017, 4.1.1–4.1.2. For direct realism, see also chapter 1.1.)

2.3.3. Late Middle Ages: God as Deceiver

Henry was also a central figure in another crucial aspect of late Medieval intellectual history, with long-extending skeptical ramifications down the road: the Condemnation of 1277. The more conservative theological faculty rose to oppose the merging of too many Aristotelian elements into the still prominent Augustinianism due to Aristotle's certain, less Christian orthodox doctrines, aided by the rediscovery of previously unknown Aristotelian texts, starting to make their way into universities in the 13th century. Henry, the regent master of the University of Paris and a more faithful follower of Augustine than Aquinas and Siger, was at the frontline of these matters, contributing to the 219 propositions condemned as heretical. Among the condemned were Aquinian doctrines considered to synthesise Aristotelianism inappropriately with Christianity, as well as several propositions that were to limit God's potential. The somewhat unexpected (and ironic) consequence was that the most historically significant effect of the Condemnation's emphasis on God's omnipotence was the expansion of the realm of possibility in Medieval discussions, leading to an entirely new skeptical concern: If God is omnipotent, could he not be deceiving us in any single particular case or even on a general and systematic scale? (Normore 2007, 113; Bolyard 2017, 4.1.2.)

The idea that a higher being (God or Demon) might be feeding fabricated information and globally deceiving me is typically taken to be an essential and distinguishing feature of modern (Cartesian) skepticism (a contemporary alternative is a mad scientist controlling a brain in a vat or a *Matrix*-like virtual reality). The potential deceit by a (nigh-)omnipotent god-like entity, combined with the strong mental-external divide, allows the Cartesian skeptic to bring the questioning to the external reality, including the skeptic's own corporeal body, and even doubt the contents of

[43] See chapter 3.1.2. See also Yrjönsuuri 2000, 232; 2016, 186–188; Adriaenssen 2017; Pasnau 2017, 73–74. Ultimately for Henry, although humans are capable of sensory knowledge by their natural condition, divine illumination is required to gain truly certain knowledge (*SQO*, a.1, q.2). Cf. Pickavé 2010. For Henry and illumination, see Pasnau (1995).

[44] Thus, even Henry did not commit to what would be called *indirect realism*, by which all we have of externality are the intermediary ideas, leaving a gap between the mind and the world for extreme external world skepticism. Cf. chapter 1.1.

mathematics and geometry (considered certain by Augustinian refutation). The ancients, in comparison, are considered not to have had the scenario at hand (or not daring to go as far *à la* Burnyeat), setting Cartesian skepticism apart by reconfiguring the ancient scenarios. Descartes is also often credited with acknowledging his originality, reportedly commenting that to cast the readers into as many doubts as possible, he raises "not only the customary difficulties of the sceptics" but also every difficulty that can be raised, implying the deceiver to be a novel addition (*Conversation*: AT V, 147; CSMK, 333). (Cf., e.g., Burnyeat 1982; M. Williams 1986; 2010; Larmore 1998; 2006; 2014; Grene 1999.)

However, Descartes was by no means the first to propose the possibility of a deceitful deity, and several commentators have noted that divine deception does have ancient antecedents (e.g., E. Curley 1978, 68–69; Bermúdez 2000, 341; 2008, 66; Broughton 2002, 43; Brown 2013, 27). Take Plutarch, for example: "Again Chrysippus says, however, that both god and the sage induce false impressions" (*De Stoic.*, 1057). Likewise, Cicero outlines the following counter argument towards the Stoics:

> [As it is accepted that] some presentations (*visa*) are sent by the deity […] how […] can the deity have the power to render false presentations probable and not have the power to render probable […] those which do not differ from them at all? […] [T]he mind may also be set in motion in such a manner that not only it cannot distinguish whether the presentations in question are true or false but that there really is no difference at all between them… (*Acad.* II, 15.47–48.)

Both of these passages are targeted against a rather obscure Stoic doctrine of accepting revelations from a deity. The Ciceronian one is especially interesting; it suggests a deity's potential ability to induce presentations that would not come from any real object (being, thus, false by the Stoic definition) but that would be indistinguishable from true *kataleptic* presentations, even in the best of circumstances and under the utmost care. Plutarch is less clear on the matter, yet he does not hint that the deity induced false impressions could be distinguishable from *kataleptic* ones, either.

However, the ancient examples do not really support Cartesian generalisation (contra, e.g., Burnyeat 1982). They question whether any given presentation might be caused by a non-veridical source indistinguishable from a veridical one, following the standard Academic strategy. The Ciceronian/Plutarchian deity works on a local, rather than a global level, questioning perceptions *individually* instead of simultaneously. (Cf. Bermúdez 2000, 342; 2008, 67; Brown 2013, 28.)

The Condemnation of propositions in 1277 that set limits to God's omnipotence offers, conversely, a more fertile ground for potentially generalised deception. For example, take proposition 22, "That God cannot be the cause of a newly-made thing and cannot produce anything new". An essential significance for the subsequent debates

was also condemning proposition 69: "That God cannot produce the effect of a secondary cause without the secondary cause itself". Our experience of the external world, the whole set of our impressions and beliefs, is a paradigm example of an effect of a secondary cause, which God can produce without the correct operation of the secondary causes (our senses and our intellect). Étienne Gilson (1999, 61–91) has also emphasised the condemning of proposition 28, "That from one first agent there cannot proceed a multiplicity of effects", because it allows Christian God to create the totality of the world and all of its multiplicity of effects and beings in a single stroke (instead of acting through several mediating causes like Greco-Arabic God does), and, more importantly, intervene freely in its natural constitution at any instance, either by creating an effect in the mental sphere without a correlating secondary cause, or by performing miracles in the physical. (Klima, Allhoff & Vaidya 2007, 182–184. Cf. Bermúdez 2000, 345–347; 2008, 68–70.)

Epistemological theories became subtler in the aftermath of the 1277 Condemnations, having to account for the possibility of God's intervention in the cognitive process. For example, Olivi's objection to the *species* theory relies on an assessment that the *species* become a barrier between mind and object. An Aristotelian ontological assumption, that cognised *species* is instantiated by a form-corresponding object in physical reality, is then open to a skeptical challenge of God presenting an image-like *species* to the intellect without a present corresponding object, prompting Olivi to opt for *disjunctivist* direct realism with occurrent perceptions, dispensing *species* as intermediaries (in post-perceptual cognition, like memory and imagination, Olivi is, though, happy to rely on *species* as a cognitive medium). Other *species* critics such as Scotus and Ockham demonstrate similar sensitivity towards *Academica*-like local deceptions. Ockham especially is noted for thinking God could bring about intuitive knowledge of a non-existent object (e.g., by preserving the perception of an object that has changed or ceased to exist), although, due to the nature of intuitive cognition, one would then *correctly judge* the object to not exist. Later Ockhamists, such as Robert Holcot (1290–1349) and Adam de Wodeham (1298–1358), however, held that if God brought about intuitive cognition of the non-existent, we would not be able to distinguish between true and false cognition, making the false judgment that the non-existent object *does* exist (neither, though, deviated from seeing the cognitive process as generally reliable). (Lagerlund 2010a, 17–19; 2018, 227; Perler 2010, 179–181. Cf. Normore 2007, 120–121; Panaccio & Piché 2010; Slotemaker & Witt 2019. See also chapter 3.1.2.)

It is not surprising that such localised cases of God's deception were common in the Medieval discussion. After all, Academic arguments were rather widely known due to Augustine's influence, and Henry's account of them was likewise well-spread, especially

as a consequence of the Condemnations. However, were there also global, generalized examples of deception in the Middle Ages?

It is possible to extract one such case from the writings of Nicholas of Autrecourt (1299–1369). Whether Autrecourt was a skeptic himself has been a hotly debated matter. What is certain is that he raises several radically skeptical issues, especially in two surviving letters to Fransiscan Bernard of Arezzo, a colleague at the Parisian Faculty of Theology. We know of Bernard's views only through Aurtecourt's summary, but based on the presented account, he agreed with later Ockhamists that one would judge a thing to exist by intuitive cognition, whether it did or not. Autrecourt infers two further propositions from Bernard's: we cannot distinguish when our awareness of the existence of external objects is true and when false by our "natural light" (the constituting nature of human intellect), and *every* impression we have of the existence of objects outside our minds can be false. (*B* I, 2–3.) While the former is reminiscent of Academic arguments and Descartes's dreaming, the latter draws a comparison with the Cartesian global deceiver possibility. According to Autrecourt, Bernard is unable to know not only his surroundings and own body (whether he has a head or a beard) but also his own intellectual acts, because he has maintained that cognition of one's acts is less clear than cognition of things in the world (*B* I, 13–14). Autrecourt can then be seen as the first to originate a new kind of skeptic – a modern who generally questions whether the external world exists and whether he has a body or performs reliable cognitive acts. (Thijssen 2000; Bermúdez 2008, 68–69; Grellard 2010.)

However, Autrecourt's arguments were not meant to propagate radical skepticism but to reduce Bernard's position *ad absurdum*. Autrecourt notes that Bernard's thinking, especially regarding cognitive acts, leads to a position even more absurd than that of the Academics (as inherited from Augustine, *B* I, 15). Autrecourt's Second Letter moderates the skepticism of the First, suggesting a probabilistic *foundationalism*, in which the principle of non-contradiction founds all certain knowledge, and other sorts of clear and intuitive cognitions remain merely *plausible* or *hypothetical* (*B* II, 2, 8, 25). Nevertheless, Aurtecourt's comments against Bernard strongly affected the late 14th century epistemological discussions, with later authors often presenting them as arguments *for* radical skepticism. One of the large-scale ramifications of Autrecourt's account was the partial relinquishing of the pursuit for *scientia* as an idealised epitome of certainty. Particularly influential in this approach was John Buridan (c. 1300–1361), who opted to distinguish between different types of knowledge and evidence, with *multiple* founding principles, instead of a foundationalist approach.

Bernard already appealed to cognition in normal circumstances against Autrecourt, arguing that God would be performing a *miracle* by intervening in the cognitive process.

Autrecourt was not satisfied, for this still leaves open whether we ever know anything in the *absolute* sense (we cannot distinguish when God is doing miracles and when not). (*B* I, 8–11.) Buridan's answer is to separate between *absolute* or *divine* evidentness and evidentness by *natural constitution* or (his preferred choice of words) the *common course of nature*. The move is based on a distinction between God's absolute power (*potentia absoluta*), by which God can do anything (barring a contradiction), and his ordained power (*potentia ordinata*), limited to what God has *prescribed* by the set laws of nature.

According to Buridan, God could turn of the sun at 9pm while conserving its perception, so we can never have absolute certainty of things like the sun's brightness. Nevrtheless, with the common course not altered, the laws of nature applying, and being in my typical condition, I can access the truth using cognitive abilities and know that the sun is bright, such naturally constituted knowledge being sufficient for science (*scientia*). (*SD* 8.4.4; *QM* II, 1: 9ra–b.) Buridan further distinguishes *moral evidentness* which, while weaker than the previous two, suffices for moral behaviour in everyday life, allowing me to act calmly on, say, the belief that my cup contains the tea I poured there, even though one of my colleagues could have changed the liquid within or God could have transformed the tea into battery acid. Buridan abandons previous infallibilist attempts at founding knowledge, arguing for a reliabilistic *fallibilism*. After Buridan, the approach of separating absolute from conditional *relative* evidentness to counter skepticism was followed by writers such as Albert of Saxony (1320–1390) and Peter of Ailly (1350–1420), remaining a common response until the 16th century. (Cf. Zupko 1993; Floridi 2002, 24; 2010, 276; Grellard 2007; 2018; Klima 2010; Karger 2010.)

In summary, several Medieval writers took it as evident that God could, or even actively does, deceive us, even perhaps on a global scale. These include, along with those previously mentioned, names such as William Crathorn (fl. c. 1330) and John Rodington (c. 1290–1348). The possibility of God's deception was also discussed by Gregory of Rimini (1300–1358) and Gabriel Biel (c. 1420–1495), who are among the examples that Mersenne raises against Descartes's solution to his own version of the deceiver argument, that God's nature as infinitely good bars any deception (Second Objections: AT VII, 125; CSM II, 89–90). Holcot and Rodington even hasten to say that benevolent God's deception is not with bad intention; maybe it is beneficial that God's deceives us, like a parent lying to their children for their own good (cf. AT VII, 126; CSM II, 90). Descartes is therefore gravely mistaken when claiming to be in agreement with "all metaphysicians and theologians past and future" on this doctrine (Second Replies: AT VII, 142; CSM II, 102). (Gregory 1992a; Perler 2010.[45])

[45] Cf. Lagerlund 2010b; 2018; Pasnau 2017, 117–121. Ironically though, both Rimini and Biel agreed with Descartes on this matter.

Global scale deception was definitely in the air in the late Medieval Scholastic discussions, with even demonic deception a common topic, yet it never really materialised as the sort of wide-ranging skepticism that occurs in the First Meditation. The main reason for this is the Medieval background supposition of epistemological optimism – that the sensory cognitive process is generally and naturally reliable. Even the possibility of God deceiving us did not relinquish this overall confidence in natural cognitive processes, divine deception being a matter of *interfering* with the natural order by which we can obtain true knowledge of how things are in the world. The case of demonic deception is similar for the Scholastics, the common view being that while God or the angels could affect even matters pertaining to our intellect, or in God's case even our will, demons could merely affect us on a sensory material level.[46] Unlike Descartes, the Medieval writers did not engage in discussion of the general erroneousness of our cognitive framework. Their skeptical worries rose from the *efficient cause* of our cognitions, not from the efficacy of cognitive capacities as a whole.[47]

None of the Medieval authors, then, seem to have articulated global deception as radically as Descartes, but their debates did, in any case, advance the distinction between the mind and the world, allowing for a type of extreme external world skepticism previously unseen.[48] Moreover, while the common response to skepticism somewhat gave up the idealised *scientia*, it was not completely abandoned (see Grellard 2007, 341; 2018, 218; Karger 2010; cf. Perler 2010, 190–191). The concept remained essential, rising to prominence in the Renaissance discussions on the intellect's limited prospects at gaining truth of the created reality (even of one's intellectual acts). These discussions also returned *eudaimonistic* questions of a happy, ethical life to the forefront, aided by the distinction of a practical life moral certainty from the certainty of scientific endeavours and a "God's-eye view".

The skeptics were practically fictional challengers during the Middle Ages – shadow fencers against whom to test the sharpness of one's epistemological and theological

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[46] Cf. Scarre 1990. Even if we limit Burman's report to the Demon (AT V, 147; CSM II, 333), Descartes comes off as less innovative than commonly assumed. See also the use of demonic deception in Teresa of Ávilla's *Castillo*. Cf. chapter 1.2.1. In chapter 4.5, I argue that Descartes follows the late Medieval distinction between the scope of deception by demons and God.

Another aspect of the skeptical range is that all medieval examples of divine deception consist of God *sending* for or *producing* in us false impressions, actively deceiving us. In chapter 4.3, I argue that Descartes's Deceiving God suggests *passive* deception instead, by which we are deceived *qua* our created imperfect nature. Cf. Gregory 1992b; Bermúdez 1997, 767; 2000, 343–351; 2008, 67–72; Pasnau 2017, 117–121; Adriaenssen 2017, 239; Machuca 2018, 165, note 2.

[47] In chapter 4, I take the Buridinian approach as the background for Descartes's Deceiving God.

[48] Gregory (1992a) suggests Descartes was harking back to these debates when introducing God's possible deception by "long-standing opinion (*vetus opinio*)" that there is an omnipotent God who has created her (AT VII, 21; CSM II, 14).

blades – but not for the Renaissance. Several Renaissance authors were influenced by and adopted openly skeptical positions (though only a few radical ones). Skeptical arguments also became important hammers of political-religious arguments of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation movements of the 1500s when the Protestant factions challenged the power of the Catholic church. (Cf. Machuca 2018, 168–169.)

2.4. Renaissance Skepticism: Scientist, Gentleman, Physician, Priest

The beginning of the Renaissance skeptical period is typically located with Fransisco Filelfo (1398–1481) bringing a Greek manuscript of Sextus's to Italy from Ottoman-sieged Constantinople in 1427. It should be noted, though, that the exchange between Greek scholars coming to Italy (who knew of the original skeptical sources), and Italian humanists obtaining Greek manuscripts (Sextus among them), also included several other names, including Georgius Gemistus Plethon (c. 1360–1452) on the scholar side and Fransesco Patrizi da Siena (1412–1494) on the humanist side. The transmission of manuscripts, influenced by the renewal of skeptical controversies in the 14th century Byzantine tradition, guaranteed in any case that all the main skeptical sources were again fully available for western writers. Soon after this, Traversari's Latin translation of Laertius distributed *scepticus* as a colloquial term. Translations of Sextus followed in the 15th century but attracted little interest, having at the time only a few serious readers in Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1492), his disciple Gianfransesco Pico della Mirandola (1470–1533, nephew of the more famous Giovanni Pico) and Francesco Robortello (1516–1567). (Popkin 2003, 17–36; Schmitt 1983, 233–237; Cao 2009).

In 1562, Henri Estienne (1531–1598) made the first printed Latin translation of Sextus's *Outlines*, in the middle of the Catholic-Protestant dispute. An instant success, it spread skeptical argumentation further than before, influencing many of the following philosophical discussions. Laertius's "Life of Pyrrho" as part of the *Lives* had seen several manuscripts since the first translation and an early printed edition in 1533; it was also included with Estienne's translation of the *Outlines*. Estienne compiled a print of the whole *Lives* with Greek and Latin combined in 1570, and nine years after Estienne's printed edition of the *Outlines*, it was republished with Gentian Hervet's (1499–1584) translation of *Against Mathematicians*. Cicero's *Academica* likewise became more popular with the growing interest in Pyrrhonism, having been named one of Petrarch's (1304–1374) favourite books in the 1330's, and it regained importance in the 16th century with authors such as Omer Talon (1510–1562) and Pedro de Valencia (1555–1620) writing

studies of and commentaries on the work. Nevertheless, although a printed edition of Cicero's philosophical works (*Academica* included) was published in 1471, it was only in the 1530s when the *Academica* began to garner any serious philosophical interest, and its role as a source for skeptical ideas lessened significantly (though Cicero's overall influence remained strong) after Estienne's first printing of Sextus. Augustinus's *Contra Academicos*, meanwhile, was rather neglected during the 15th and 16th centuries, being referred to but seldom cited, with the exception of Joannes Rosa's (1532–1571) commentary on *Academica* printed in 1571. (Harwood 1778, 72; Schmitt 1972; 1983; Blackwell 1993; A. Curley 1997; Floridi 2002; 2010; Laursen 2009a; 2009b.)

European philosophy was not, then, suddenly overtaken by skeptical doctrines, or, adopting Richard Popkin's suggestion (1960; 2003), had fallen into a "Pyrrhonian crisis". Skeptical interests had been brewing for a long period, and the rediscovery of original material in the west merely made them flourish. Indeed, one textual tradition with ties to the skeptical development but which thus far is quite under-researched, is the history of late Scholastic and Renaissance commentaries on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. Constance Blackwell (2009) has demonstrated how this tradition translated Aristotle's concept of puzzlement (*aporia*, gr. *ἀπορία*) into *dubitare*, folding the terms into one for the 16th and 17th centuries and, especially through commentators such as Petrus Ramus (1515–1572) and Benito Pereira (1535–1610), influencing the skeptical discussions in these periods. (Cf. Lagerlund 2010b; Bolyard 2017, 5; Grellard 2018, 218; Paganini 2018a, 240.). Further reasons for why an overarching *crise pyrrhonienne* in Renaissance and early modern philosophy has been challenged include that the development of skeptical themes in the 16th and 17th centuries was rather heterogenous, with different authors having differing strategies, goals, sources, and influences for their skepticism (Perler 2004; Ayers 2004; Maclean 2006; Naya 2009; Lennon 2010).

Nevertheless, while there might not have been a Pyrrhonian crisis *per se*, skepticism in general, and Pyrrhonian skepticism in particular, was one of the driving forces of Renaissance and early modern discussions, and the printing of skeptical works, particularly by Sextus, undoubtably expanded skeptical argumentation in a more compelling and systematic way than before. Usage of skepticism became more varied than in Medieval times, away from merely epistemological or theological considerations and back to questions of moral life, utilised to promote the cause of Counter-Reformation, criticism of Aristotle, Neo-Platonism, and the propagation of New Science alike. Development of these events coincided with the reappraisal of skepticism, and rather than being more central to the times, stealing the spotlight, they favoured and took full advantage of newly discovered skeptical thought. (Machuca 2018, 169–170; Maia Neto 2015, 62–63. Cf. Marcondes 2009.)

I concentrate on two of these developments – skeptical fallibilism and skeptical fideism – that carried over to the early modern period, greatly influencing Descartes's intellectual environment. Neither was truly a new development. The concept that we can approximate the truth by following the plausible, refining our abilities and discounting our errors, arguably originated already with Carneades, with probabilistic fallibilism promoted by the Metrodorian-Philonian line of interpretation (and later by Salisbury as the type of skepticism that can be lauded). Discussions of fideism – skepticism clearing the mind from reasons to prepare for the reception of mere faith – likewise had an early origin. Lactantius already thought *Academica*'s critique of stiff dogmatism an entryway to true knowledge and propaedeutic for accepting the Christian religion, seeing skepticism differently from Augustine, for whom true knowledge and firm faith are acquired only by slaying the skeptical beast. Lactantius's and Augustine's different ways of using skepticism preceded the 16th and 17th century pro-/contra-debates, in which ideologically neutral skeptical doctrines were seen to both defend and undermine religious faith, becoming the instrument of Catholics and Protestants, liberals and conservatives, theists and atheists, scientists and non-scientists. (See chapter 2.3.1. Cf. Schmitt 1972, 24–28; 1983, 240; Maia Neto 2015, 63; Clarke 2016, 35–36.[49])

Fideistic and fallibilistic tendencies received new interest during the 16th century due to the rediscovery of skeptical materials combined with religious controversies and scientific developments (especially the critique of Aristotelianism) of the time. Similar to all Renaissance skeptical interest, these directions began with Italian humanism, fideism propagated by Savonarola and the younger Pico in their conflicts with papal authorities, and empirical, Aristotle-critical New Science promoted by the natural scientists such as Bernardino Telesio. Aided by the printings of Pyrrhonian sources in France, however, they had become specifically French territory by the end of the 16th century. The Buridanian-style fallibilistic concept of knowledge, which rapidly took over epistemological discussions as an aftermath of Autrecourt's radical skeptical worries, was challenged early in the 16th century by new scholars at the University of Paris, such as Spaniard Antonio Coronel (d. c. 1550), arguing that we cannot know even by natural evidentness that perceived effects are caused by finite objects and not by God. Combined with growing criticism of Aristotelian views by science-oriented thinkers such as Giordano Bruno (an Italian but prominent mostly in Northern Europe), this consequently provided ample ground for infallibilist thinking to creep back into philosophy. On the religious side, Hervet's translation of Sextus was already motivated

[49] However, important to notice, especially in the largely secular contemporary environment, is that skepticism would not become allied with *criticism* of religious doctrines until the 18th century and especially Hume. Cf. Schmitt 1983, 240.

by the Counter-Reformists goals, with Pyrrhonian skepticism harnessed as a weapon against Protestant dogmatism, Catholic conviction based on "faith alone" and, thus, immune to it. (Schmitt 1972, 37, 1983; Floridi 2002; 2010; Karger 2004; Clarke 2016, 36. Cf. Rowland 2008; Dagron 2009. See chapter 1.1.)

The French philosophical current was also the breeding ground of the three most important and influential skeptical works of the Renaissance period: Montaigne's *Apologie de Raimond Sebond* (1580), Sanches's *Quod Nihil Scitur* (1581) and Charron's *De la Sagesse* (1601). All three texts made their mark on early modern philosophical thought, especially in the religious and scientific orientations, influencing not just Descartes but also his peers, such as Mersenne and Gassendi.

Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) is considered the most significant skeptical writer of the Renaissance period. Unlike earlier skeptically oriented thinkers, such as Pico and Hervet, who used skeptical arguments to advocate their dogmatic views, Montaigne was a genuine skeptic (how radical is disputed, see e.g., Larmore 1998; 2004; Rosaleny 2009; 2011; Eva 2009; Clarke 2016, 39). He is mostly known from his massive collection of personal, autobiographical writings, *Essais*, published for the first time in 1580 but revised several times until his death (second edition in 1588 and third, posthumously, in 1595). *Apologie*, the clearest exposition of Montaigne's skeptical thinking, forms the twelfth essay of the second book, and is the longest text by a good measure.

Written during the Catholic-Protestant skirmish, *Apologie* is framed by a book on natural theology, *Theologia Naturalis* (1484), by one Raymond Sebond (c. 1385–1436). The work caused an uproar among the fideistically aligned religious authorities, who regarded Sebond's arguments as weak and considered his reconciling of Christian faith with naturalistic reason as heretical. Montaigne's "apology" for Sebond consists in using traditional skeptical means for arguing that Sebond's attempts are no better or worse than any other arguments based on reason. Montaigne aims to defend Catholic faith, yet he is surprisingly tolerant of Protestantism, going so far as to adopt a Pyrrhonistic maxim that one were to follow the customs and religion of the country one were born in. A later passage, though, problematises this conclusion, and Montaigne's final stance on the issue, as with many others, is left quite unresolved. (*Apologie*: 1907, 110–132, 372–376; 1991, 490–502, 652–654.) Such irresolution is a strong feature through-out the essay (and *Essais*), prompting a variety of different interpretations of his views.[50]

Montaigne's influence on later skeptical writers was large. The latter half of the *Apologie* consists mainly of the unsystematic retelling of various skeptical arguments,

[50] Montaigne has especially been seen as a fideist (e.g., Popkin 2003, 44–56; cf. Larmore 1998, 1150), a reading that lately has been questioned (Rosaleny 2009; Cardoso 2009; Bermúdez Vázquez 2015. Cf. Penelhum 1983; Hookway 1990, 36).

mostly Pyrrhonian ones, greatly contributing to the spread of skeptical material. Montaigne was also instrumental in the 17th century understanding of the ancient skeptical term *phainomenon*, which he translated as 'appearances' (*apparences*, after Estienne's *apparentia* instead of Ciceronian *visa*), arguing that we have no knowledge (*science*) beyond these. *Phainomenon*, for Sextus, are passive and involuntary impressions (*phantasia*) that do not belong to the objects of skeptical investigation (see chapter 2.2). In Montaigne's hands, they come to mean the apparent qualities of things, which reveal nothing about underlying structures or how things actually are – they give us appearances but not *essences* (*Apologie*: 1907, 408; 1991, 676). This understanding of appearance became important for the following skeptical trend and was shared by Charron, Mersenne, Gassendi, and La Mothe Le Vayer.[51]

Montaigne's probable main influence on Descartes was his radical emphasis on God's omnipotence that drew a difference between the human and the divine and maintained it is not up to us to say what God can or cannot do, resulting in the question "*Que scay-je?* (What do I know?)". This widened divine potency even further from the Medieval discussions – instead of God *sending* or *maintaining* false impressions for us, "deception" could derive merely from the created, faulty human nature.[52]

Yet another Montaignian influence on Descartes is the result of skeptical resolution: Unlike the ancients' suspension, Montaigne's doubt leads not to joy and tranquility but to confusion and misery due to human condition. The solution for anguish is a *skeptical ethic*, to live by the laws and customs of one's society, making one as comfortable as possible in the midst of indeterminable controversy. (*Apologie*: 1907, 268–278, 340, 408–418; 1991, 585–592, 633, 676–682. Cf. Sextus: *PH* I, 23.[53])

The intellectual environment that birthed Montaigne's *Apologie* would a year later see the publication of another important skeptical work. Fransisco Sanches (c. 1550–1623) was a Spanish-Portugese physician, a professor of philosophy and (later) medicine at the University of Toulouse (a colleague of Bruno for a while) and Montaigne's distant cousin. In *Quod Nihil Scitur* (*That Nothing is Known*), he uses several traditional skeptical arguments to argue against the Aristotelian concept of science as discovering the necessary causes and inherent natures of events and objects. Such underlying factors remain hidden for us, as our senses only have access to the outward appearances (*apparentia*, *exteriora*), not to internal substances or essences. Sanches follows the infallibilist definition of knowledge as an idealisation: "*Scientia est rei perfecta cognitio*

[51] Burnyeat (1997, 99) calls this Montaignean reading of appearances the *country gentleman's interpretation*.
[52] See note 46. Montaigne is though consistently *moderate* regards to external reality. Cf. Pascal (*Entretien Pascal*, 43).
[53] Descartes likewise describes modern skeptics as "embracing all that is apparent" (AT VII, 549; CSM II, 375; translation modified).

(Knowledge is the perfect awareness of a thing)" (*QNS*, 23). Nevertheless, perfect awareness is beyond us due to the restrictions set by the objects, the mediating element, and the unreliability of the senses and human nature. We don't even possess self-knowledge, because the content of such *cognitio* constantly escapes from our grasp and we don't know what the "self" amounts to. (*QNS*, 43–44, 51–58.)

Quod Nihil Scitur, as a skeptical text, differs from the *Apologie*: The latter is unsystematic in its approach and targets all knowledge claims, not just Aristotelian ones (although Aristotle is singled out as the "Prince of Dogmatists"; 1907, 240; 1991, 566), while the former is a concentrated effort to use skeptical tropes to undermine Aristotelian doctrines. Nevertheless, there are also similarities. Unlike the title might suggest, Sanches's thesis propagates not negative dogmatism but a thoroughly questioning attitude similar to Montaigne's. The work even begins by Sanches declaring in Arciselean fashion, "I do not even know this one thing, namely that I know nothing" and ends with an interrogative question "WHAT? (*QUID?*)", reminiscent of Montaigne's *Que scay-je?* (*QNS*, 1, 100). The questioning of reasoning and self-knowledge is likewise similar to Montaigne, who notes equivalent problems in knowing himself. Both even consider awareness of the mind's inner contents inferior to the grasp of sensory objects (*Apologie*: 1907, 390, 410–414; 1991, 633, 677–680). However, unlike the ethical-religiously oriented *Apology*, Sanches's work stays out of the counter-reformist frame, advocating a kind of fallibilism in scientific endeavours. Aligned with Montaignian view of appearances as observable qualities, this proved extremely influential for later mitigated skeptics such as Mersenne and Gassendi, using similar skeptical weapons to oppose the prevalent Aristotelianism. Most likely Descartes also found an example of skepticism in Sanches as a personal experience against Aristotelianism. Additionally, the Sanchesian distinction of *cognitio* and *scientia*, with only the latter allowing for essences, would turn up almost the same in the *Meditations*. (*QNS*, 99–100. Caluori 2007, 37; 2018, 261; Paganini 2009a; 2018a, 237–239; Clarke 2016, 43.)

A prevalent debate regarding Sanches's skepticism, due to certain isolation from the perceived dominant narrative and the propagation of fallibilistic remedy, has been whether it is Academically or Pyrrhonistically inclined (Carvalho 1955; Limbrick 2008; Copenhaver & Schmitt 1992, 249; Popkin 2003, 41–43; Caluori 2007; 2018; Buccolini 2017; Machuca 2018, 171). Recent readings have questioned the previously common view of Pyrrhonism as the dominant form of skepticism in the later Renaissance period, arguing for more importance for Academic skepticism (e.g., Naya 2009; Maia Neto 2009a; 2014; 2015; Smith & Charles 2017). This debate is also significant regarding the author of the third influential Renaissance work, Pierre Charron (1541–1603), a French Catholic priest and Montaigne's friend, disciple, and heir apparent. He published *De la*

Sagesse (*Of Wisdom*) in 1601, a moral philosophical work that systematised and developed Montaigne's counter-reformist skepticism. A revised edition followed in 1604. (See Larmore 1998, 1152; Paganini 2018b, 247.)

Whereas Montaigne's partaking in fideism is questionable, *De la Sagesse* is a strongly fideistic work. Charron emphasises the need to make oneself an empty slate by skepticism, to clear out all previous prejudices, passions, and popular opinions in order to receive wisdom. He recommends making a distinction between the public and private spheres to accomplish this: One is to externally live by the common practices and follow the customs of society in actions of life while internally being indifferent to everything (e.g., *DLS* II, 1–2: 1986, 377–394; 1998, 52–59). One becomes a blank sheet by withholding assent to prepare for the acceptance of God into one's soul. Cleaning out reason allows for the acceptance of Christian doctrines as heaven-sent, which is why "[a]n Academic or a Pyrrhonist can never be a heretic". An objection could be raised that they would not necessarily be Catholic either, but this does not worry Charron. There might not simply be any choice on the matter – God can just force divine truth on the wisdom seeker. (*DLS* II, 2: 1986, 405, 1998, 62.)

Despite the popularity and influence of *De la Sagesse* on later thinkers (Gassendi preferred it to Montaigne's *Essais* and the *libertins érudits* such as Le Vayer greatly admired the work), Charron's contribution to skeptical history was seen for a while as systematising and straight-lining the rambling skepticism of Montaigne, making it more accessible but losing the subtlety of the original, developing further the movement of *nouveaux Pyrrhoniens* in France (e.g., Larmore 1998, 1152–1155; Popkin 2003, 57–63). However, more attention has recently been put on Charron's originality, propagating a new form of *Academic skepticism* and influencing almost all of the following 17th century French philosophers, Descartes included. By this reading, Charron was influenced by Talon as much as by Montaigne, adopting an (Metrodorian-Philonian) Academic skeptical wisdom, in which the wise man is to follow propositions that are most plausible, persuasive, or convenient, while practising *epochē* on the rest (*DLS* II, 2: 1986, 385–411; 1998, 56–65; Maia Neto 2003; 2009a; 2014; Bahr 2017; Paganini 2018b, 253–254.) A similar Academic reading has been proposed, as mentioned, also on Sanches and even on Montaigne (Limbrick 1977; cf. Floridi 2002, 48; 2010, 281–282).[54]

[54] Sanches can be read in a dialectic fashion, targeting the Aristotelians instead of the Stoics ("nothing is known by Aristotles's criteria"). Nevertheless, insistence on a continued search despite the absence of knowledge and adherence to a highly idealised *scientia* are strong hints of Pyrrhonian influence. Caluori (2007; 2018, 263–264) reads Sanches as a "No Unclear Beliefs" Pyrrhonist, skeptical about (Aristotelian) scientific knowledge but not about everyday ordinary beliefs. Cf. Popkin 2003, 40–42; Machuca 2018, 171. But see Limbrick 2008; Buccolini 2017. Montaigne is difficult due to the eclectic writing and Augustinian criticism of Academic *verisimilitude* (*Apologie*: 1907, 338–340; 1991, 632–633), but see Vazquez (2015, 54–

2.5. Cartesian and Early Modern Skepticism: The Battle of Gods, Giants, and Leviathans

Interest in ancient skepticism shifted north of the Alps, especially to France, at the beginning of the 16th century while the Italian skeptical savor gradually waned. Such geological change has previously appeared surprising, even baffling, but taking into account the late Scholastic skeptical debates in the Parisian theological faculty that continued well into the 1500's, it was only a matter of time that a similar interest would manifest with the recovered Greek and Latin material. The University of Paris ended up in a type of crisis from 1540 to 1562 after the challenging of Buridanian solution to skepticism, with Ramus criticising Scholastic Aristotelianism and proposing to reform the curriculum. This led to the compatibility of *Academica*'s skeptical content with Christianity and science being debated between the *nouveaux Académiciens*, such as Talon, and their opponents, especially Pierre Galland (1510–1559) and Guy de Brués, who published *Les Dialogues contre les nouveaux Academiciens* in 1557. Outside the University, Pyrrhonian ideas spread due to Estienne's and Hervet's publications of Sextus and Laertius, leading to a similar philosophical current of *nouveaux Pyrrhoniens* in France, with skeptical works becoming almost fully Northern domain by the end of the century. Montaigne's *Apologie*, Sanches's *Quod Nihil Scitur*, Valencia's *Academica* and Charron's *De la Sagesse* were all printed in the North, three of them by philosophers prominent in Southern France.[55] The same locational specialisation would continue in the 17th century skeptical debates, with Gassendi, Mersenne, Hobbes, Le Vayer, Silhon, Campanella, and Herbert of Cherbury all residing in Paris at various times, their works printed in France, Germany, and the Netherlands. (Cf. Schmitt 1972, 78–108; 1983; Floridi 2002, 35–37; Blackwell 2009; Maia Neto 2014.)

However, the neo-Academic and neo-Pyrrhonian movements in France were by no means separate. Ramus turned Protestant in 1561 and fell victim to the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572. Counter-reformists such as Hervet saw the Calvinists as part of the New Academy, finding in Sextus counters to both the Protestants and *nouveaux Académiciens*. Even Montaigne's *Apologie* is arguably a reaction to the neo-Academic probabilism of certain Calvinists apologists. (Cf. Popkin 2003, 36–37; Maia Neto 2013.) Later, the Academic and Pyrrhonian currents were largely combined, and even when considered as separate, any true distinction between the factions remained fuzzy (see note 17).

62, 139–142); Prat (2017). Panichi (2009) reads Montaigne as a Neo-Plutarchian. Like Montaigne's, Sanches's skepticism results in despair about the faulty human condition (*QNS*, 57–58). Cf. Lupoli 2009.

[55] Valencia's *Academica* from 1596 was printed in Antwerp and Rosa's commentary from 1571 in Frankfurt, just like later 1618 reprints of *QNS*. See Schmitt 1972, chapter 6; Limbrick 2008; Laursen 2009a; 2009b.

In the middle of this was also Descartes, who likewise arrived in Paris in 1625 and began to socialise with people associated with skepticism in various forms. Previous chapters have been establishing the history of skepticism until Descartes's childhood. Now, the main character enters the scene.

2.5.1. Early Modern Skeptical Scene

A strong influence on the later tradition, as mentioned, was considering the *phantasia* of the ancients as equivalent to appearances as observable sensory qualities, tying skepticism to a sort of empiricism (cf. chapter 4.1.2). Sextus comparably reports that *phantasia* can be intellectual, covering even the skeptic's thoughts. Such a development, along with skepticism becoming characterised more by doubt than suspension,[56] led to skeptical activity turning into *mental experience* instead of *discursive practice*, conducted alone in privacy instead of in public philosophical discourse. This culminated with Charron expanding the Augustinian interior-exterior distinction of Montaigne and Sanches to a separation between the skeptic's (or, wisdom being the goal of Charronian practice, the sage's) *inner* and *outer* life, following customs and behaving in an as-if-judgment-forming manner publicly while remaining undecided and suspended privately. These developments led to the abandonment of *ataraxia* as the highest goal and standard of success of skeptical inquiry, replaced by Stoic-influenced personal moderation, unmoving of the will in the face of indetermination, and finding final solace in God's grace.[57] This change from public discourse to private meditation fits the difference between ancient and modern skepticism the best. (Cf. Paganini 2008b; 2018a; 2018b.[58])

Popkin's influential study of skeptical rediscovery (1960; 2003) described skepticism in the early modern period as means to dogmatic ends, used to clear away reason and prejudice in preparation for a leap of faith. Thus, early modern skepticism for Popkin is associated with fideism, giving fideistic readings of several Renaissance and early modern thinkers. However, Popkin's assessment of early modern skepticism being specifically fideistic in nature has been challenged by later reinterpretations of those philosophers and by putting more attention on non-fideists in the early modern picture. (E.g. Cardoso 2009; Maya 2009. Bermúdez Vazquez 2015. Cf. Maia Neto 2015, 63.)

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[56] Estienne followed the Ciceronian-Augustinian tradition, translating Sextus's *aporein* as *dubitare* (Paganini 2018, 240).

[57] Note that Charron, unlike Montaigne and Sanches, nevertheless emphasises the happiness and peace of mind that results from the indifference and freedom of judgment (*DLS* II, 2: 1986, 404; 1998, 61).

[58] Maia Neto (2003; 2008; 2014), argues for the *cogito* ensuing from Charronian subjective freedom as a metaphysical interpretation of his *epochē*. Paganini (2009a; 2016) argues similarly about Sanches's reflexive analysis of the self.

Instead of simply fideism, the skeptical uprising in the late Renaissance generated three reactions in the early 17th century, closely resembling the philosophical triumvirate of Academic, Pyrrhonist, and Dogmatist (*PH* I, 4.): *mitigated fallibilistic skepticism*, *libertine fideistic skepticism*, which certain anti-skeptical factions considered *atheistic*, and *anti-skepticism*, which regarded skepticism as a threat and metaphysically, epistemologically, and morally reprehensible. The opponents of skepticism obviously included several defenders of Aristotelian Scholasticism, but the most important anti-skeptics (and even mitigated skeptics) of the time sought to work out a third alternative, a middle way between Scholasticism and full-blown skepticism (cf. Larmore 1998, 1155).

I briefly discuss these reactions starting with the *mitigated* one. Metrodorian-Philonian plausibility began to gain more support as the guideline to follow while remaining indeterminable due to the blending of Pyrrhonian and Academical themes. Charron shared Montaigne's criticism of taking the plausible as *truthlike* (*verisimile*); nevertheless, he considered that limited human cognition is only able to attain plausible presentations, while acknowledging, in Montaignian fashion, the difficulty of withholding assent due to human psychology. Simply following appearances and opposing them against one another would result not in balancing the scales but in constant flux and instability, with each new (more or less plausible) appearance superseding the previous one. Charron emphasises the active role one must take, due to this, in judging everything by "balancing reasons for and against". The ancient Pyrrhonists considered suspension as a natural, involuntary occurrence and the skeptic as being merely *cast into* it as a passive spectator. The modern Montaignian-Charronian skeptic comparably *casts* suspension voluntarily, taking an active role in the skeptical inquiry. The skeptic has *agency* instead of being a spectator, performing an active assessment of how things appear and turning down inadequate reasons while following the more plausible ones.[59] (*DLS* II, 2: 1986, 386–411; 1998, 56–65. Cf. Paganini 2008a; 2008b; 2018b, 249–253; Maia Neto 2013.)

Later, Charron influenced, skeptically inclined propagators of New Science combined probabilistic skepticism with their projects, developing "mitigated" skeptical views on the uncertainty of underlying features while grounding scientific certainty on plausible appearances. The trend occurred in a circle of correspondents in Paris around Marin Mersenne (1588–1648), a French Minim who, while mostly known for his friendship with Descartes, also developed mitigated skepticism as an anti-skeptical strategy himself. He admits in *La vérite des sciences contre les sceptiques ou pyrrhonienne* (1625) that underlying essences are unknowable in the Sanchesian sense, because we do not

[59] Note that Academic skepticism seemingly allows the skeptic performing *actions*. Cf. Vogt 2010; Gómez-Alonso 2011; 2016). Cf. the meditator being persuaded (*persuadeor*) vs. persuading (*persuasi*) herself (AT VII, 25; CSM II, 17; chapter 5.1.2).

possess a perfect understanding of them, but claims we can have knowledge (fr. *science*) of how objects of the senses appear, avoiding the dangers of Charron and his followers in science and faith. Nevertheless, Aristotelianism is incapable of taming Pyrrhonism in this way, and should be replaced by New Science when appropriate (*La vérite* I, 2, 9: 1998, 154–159, 163–165; cf. Dear 1984; 1988).

The mitigated skeptical approach was also acquired by Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655), whose earliest work, *Excercitationes paradoxicae adversus Aristoteleos* (1624), used Sextus's Pyrrhonian tropes and ideas to oppose Aristotelianism. However, Gassendi was more susceptible to skepticism than Mersenne was, and while the latter's main critical target might have been the skeptical uprising, with criticism of the followers of Aristotle more of a side issue, it was the complete opposite for Gassendi. He was an enthusiastic follower of Charron, not merely aiming to tame skepticism but to use it against the dogmatic Scholastics. Thus, while both shared the Sanches-style empirical fallibilism, Gassendi's early skepticism was even more Sanchesian than Mersenne's. (*Exerc*. Preface; II, vi, 1 & 7.) Gassendi modified his stance on skepticism in later works, following Mersenne's line of finding a middle way between skepticism and dogmatism by claiming that we can discern regularities among the apparent qualities of things. However, he aimed to found Epicureanism as the main philosophy of the Catholic faith, leading him to make atomistic conjectures about deeper features of things, whereas Mersenne opposed all speculation on the underlying nature. (Cf. Walker 1983; LoLordo 2018.)

If mitigated skepticism is closer to (Metrodorian-Philonian) Academic skepticism, *libertine fideistic skepticism* shares more ties with Pyrrhonism; relevant questions surrounding it are ethical rather than scientific in nature, although it was equally affected by the blending of the skeptical factions. Fideistic skepticism is also intimately associated with *anti-skepticism*, due to the assumption of it leading to immorality and atheism. Theologians had been divided on skepticism since Augustine and Lactantius, as established, some seeing it as irreligious and a threat to the Christian faith, others praising it as a pious weapon against the heathen masses, demonstrating the impotence of reason alone in the lack of faith. Nevertheless, Renaissance and early modern periods saw definite growth in discussions of the moral ramifications of skepticism. This is not to say that there were no ethical readings of skepticism in the Middle Ages (see, e.g., Salisbury), but the tradition was feeble due to the lack of ancient skeptical material and wider access to skeptical literature in the 16th and 17th centuries allowed ethical-religious readings to return to the forefront. (Floridi 2002, 48; 2010, 282.[60])

[60] Following Charron, Neo-Stoic ethics became popular, adopted by, e.g., young Gassendi (*Exerc*. Preface) and young Descartes (AT VI, 25–27; CSM I, 123–124). See Larmore 1998, 1154–1158; Kambouchner 2008; Paganini 2018b, 255–257.

Debate about skeptical fideism had already occurred in the early 1520s exchange between Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536) and Martin Luther (1483–1546). Erasmus praised the Academic skeptics for their discretion, but Luther considered the skeptical approach incompatible with faith and atheistic in nature (Schmitt 1972, 59–62; Penelhum 1983, 293–295; Bermúdez Vázquez 2015, 68–81). Counter-Reformist movements began to accept skeptical fideism as a basis against Protestantism after Charron, with his ideal skeptic, who voluntarily participates in the traditions and formalities of the society, having a profound influence on early modern French moral thought. It particularly inspired thinkers known as the "*libertins érudits*", anti-Aristotelian free-thinkers, who saw themselves spiritually superior to unthinking conformists and Aristotelian-Scholastic dogmatists due to their inner freedom and sought to break away from tradition in both theoretical and political matters.

The most (in)famous of these libertine philosophers is François de La Mothe Le Vayer (1588–1672), a self-proclaimed skeptic who wrote *Dialogues faits à l'imitation des anciens* (1630–1631) under the pseudonym Orasius Tubero, which included not only fideistic passages but also several irreligious remarks. Le Vayer agreed with Montaigne's Augustinian criticism of *verisimilitude*, but like Charron, he thought that human cognition is capable only of approaching the plausible, and blended Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism together.[61] Le Vayer, similar to Mersenne and Gassendi, views appearances (*phainomenes*) as passive, observable affections, and shuns dogmatist attempts to go beyond them. However, he claims no knowledge of them and conforms to what is apparent even in ordinary life, extending these to moral and religious matters (*phainomenes morales*), publicly complying with them while privately remaining undecided. Le Vayer even summarises the Baconian paradox that atheism is preferable to superstition. Such open-mindedness has made recent scholars question Popkin's (2003, 82–87) earlier verdict on Le Vayer as a fideistic Christian Pyrrhonist and consider him as truly one of the *libertinage*.[62] (*Dialogues*: 1988, 242, 273, 330–331. Cf. Paganini 2008a; 2008b; Maia Neto 2013; 2014; Clarke 2016, 46–47; Giocanti 2018.)

Even discounting the skeptical notions of religion inherent in Le Vayer, many shared Luther's critical stance on skepticism and genuine faith. Suspicions grew that neo-Pyrrhonist skeptics were loyal to the Catholic faith not from sincere fideism but rather from outward conformity while privately entertaining atheistic thoughts. These accusations extended to Charron as well, with *De la Sagesse* seen as corroding all belief (religious and non-religious), the reader finally hoaxed into an atheistic, tradition undermining libertinism. Jesuit priest François Garasse (1585–1631), the most

[61] It is debated if he is closer to Montaigne or Charron. Maia Neto 2013; 2014; Giocanti 2001; 2017; 2018.
[62] The *libertins érudits* were part of a larger libertine movement in 17th century France. See Pintard 1983.

outspoken of such critics, regarded Charron as a secret atheist and patriarch of all free-thinkers. These fears caused several writers to attest to what they saw as *atheistic skepticism* and its negative ethical ramifications. If mitigated skepticism can be seen as combining skeptical thought with science and skeptical fideism as combining it with religion, atheistic skepticism would see itself as incompatible with both.

The main force of *anti-skeptical* reaction was, then, raised against the perceived atheistic skeptical threat, including Mersenne's *La vérité* and *L'impiété des déistes, athées, et libertins de ce temps* (1624).[63] Similar efforts were undertaken by Jean de Silhon (1596–1667), a Parisian friend of Descartes whose *Les deux vérités* (1626) were to establish God's existence and immortality of souls as indubitably true (*LDV* I, i: 1998, 177) and Edward Herbert of Cherbury (1582–1648), an English natural theologian, ambassador to France, and Mersenne's acquaintance, whose *De Veritate*, printed in 1624 for small circulation in Paris, set out to lay metaphysical truth for science and natural religion with the so-called *notitae communes*, targeting especially "*insanos & Scepticos*" (Prop I: 1645, 8).[64]

Certain texts reveal Descartes similarly targeting libertine skepticism. He rants in the Seventh Replies about the skeptics "nowadays (*hodierni*)" not having "any doubt in practice" of whether they have heads or that 2+3=5 but treating "such claims as if (*tanquam*) true because they appear (*apparent*) to be so" without accepting them as certain.

> [T]hey do not see the existence of God and the immortality of the human mind as having the same appearance of truth, and hence are unwilling to treat these claims as true for practical purposes unless and until they have seen them proved by means of arguments more reliable than any of those which lead them to embracing all that is apparent. (AT VII, 549; CSM II, 375.)

Treating these "atheistic sceptics (*Atheorum Scepticorum*)" merely as lost souls would not answer their doubts or demands for demonstration and would set a "very bad example (*valde mali example*)", being basically a white flag of surrender for Descartes.[65] It is not difficult to place the object of Descartes's contempt here in the *libertine érudits*, and specifically on Le Vayer. Montaignean-Charronian skepticism had for long followed pausible appearances, but concepts such as God and the human soul had been intentionally kept out of the sphere of *phainomenes* until Le Vayer and the other libertine skeptics, who considered religious and moral matters to fall inside of *moral phenomena*.

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[63] Anti-skeptical efforts had obvious antecedents in the 16th century Parisian controversies regarding Academic skepticism. See also Giulio Castellani's disputation of *Academica* from 1558 (Schmitt 1972, 109–133; 1983, 230–231).

[64] See Larmore 1998, 1153; Popkin 2003, 61, 80–142; Hutton 2015, 103–105; Clarke 2016, 47–54; Paganini 2018b, 248. A somewhat separate anti-skeptical project was by Tommaso Campanella, an Italian natural philosopher who dedicated the first book of *Metaphysica* (1602–1638) to answering classical skeptical problems. See Paganini 2005; 2008b; 2009b.

[65] Descartes also connects skepticism and atheism to the Leiden Curators (AT V, 316; CSMK, 316–317).

Of course, even Le Vayer in the *Dialogues* does not state what Descartes accuses, that God and an immortal soul belong to the *adēlon* (unclear or non-apparent) of the ancients; he merely says that, as part of phenomena, they can be followed in practical life. However, the implication is clear: By extending "what appears" to touch not only physico-mathematical but also immaterial, moral-theological concepts, the libertine skeptics welcome rampant atheism, in which God's existence and religious truth are either followed non-dogmatically (a paradoxical claim) or considered inside the set of things to which we have no access. Both are ethically untenable results. Thus, as previously discussed, while the skeptics' error is more ethical than epistemological, moral error in relation to skepticism cannot be put aside as marginal from the epistemological and/or metaphysical errors in the project of the *Meditations*. The earlier traditional view that Descartes wanted to answer skepticism has been questioned in the recent scholarship but reading the main skeptical current of the 17th century not fideistic (*à la* Popkin) but libertine gives the attempted skeptical rebuttal in the *Meditations* plausibility. (See chapter 1.1. Cf. Paganini 2008a, 176–186; Maia Neto 2015, 63–65.[66])

This assessment is also supported by the Dedicatory Letter to Sorbonne, describing the *Meditations'* goal:

> [I]n the case of unbelievers (*infidelibus*), it seems that there is no religion, and practically no moral virtue, that they can be persuaded to adopt until [that God exists and that soul and body are distinct] are proved to them by natural reason. (AT VII, 2–3; CSM II, 3–4.)

The description of unbelievers goes perfectly together with the preceding portrayal of atheistic skeptics as those who do not see God's existence or the mind's immortality as apparent unless they are demonstrated by arguments more reliable than "whatever is apparently true".[67]

2.5.2. Cartesian Skepticism: Moral Certainty and Everyday Life

The skeptics that Descartes directly opposes are not, then, the ancients or the Renaissance ones, but the libertine "atheists" of his own time.[68] The reason he opposes them is not simply due to science or metaphysics, but also to ethics – to what leads to

[66] Cf. Hookway 1990, 36–37. Paganini considers the link between atheism and skepticism to be more explicit in Le Vayer's later work, *De la vertu des Payens* (1641), which considers pyrrhonism *a-religious* in spirit.
[67] Silhon also sees Pyrrhonism undermining belief in God and the soul (*LDV* I, i: 1998, 178; Clarke 2006, 74; 2016, 54).
[68] The skeptical focus has been on the ancients or Montaigne and Charron (e.g., E. Curley 1978; Gilson 1987; Broughton 2002; Lennon 2008. Cf. Paganini 2008a, 176–178. See Rodis-Lewis (1998) for atheism disconnected from skepticism.

a good and virtuous life. Still, some questions remain on the skepticism of the *Meditations* in relation to everyday life and happiness. We must look into Descartes's sources on skeptical thought (ancient and modern) and how he relates to them for these.

Skepticism had already been used to oppose Aristotle's authority, including by the younger Pico and Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535) in the 1520s, Ramus and Talon some 20 years, and Sanches another 40 years later. Montaigne's *Apologie* includes similar anti-Aristotelian passages, abandoning the epistemologically optimistic notion of *species* (or its alternatives) as the carrier of form from the object to cognition, severing the reliable bridge between appearance and reality.[69] Charron's skeptical attack on the unreliability of the senses also directly targeted Aristotelian Scholasticism, which made the senses the source of all knowledge. Descartes was most likely aware of and probably had read all of these previous challenges. (Cf. Larmore 1998, 1154; Popkin 2003, 60; Paganini 2018a, 237–239.)

Of the ancient works, he most likely read Laertius's "Life of Pyrrho" reiterating the story of skeptics almost falling of precipices were it not for the intervention of their friends (Fifth Replies: AT VII, 351; CSM II, 243; cf. DL IX, 62).[70] He probably also knew Augustine's *Contra Academicos* and references the Saint numerous times, although always unrelated to skepticism.[71] Much research has been conducted on Descartes's relation with Sextus and Pyrrhonism (e.g., E. Curley 1978; Burnyeat 1997; Grene 1999; Fine 2000; Popkin 2003), yet no evidence exists that Descartes ever read either the *Outlines* or *Against Mathematicians*. The best indirect citation is a reference to the ancient painter Apelles in the Fifth Replies, but the context is completely different and could easily be a coincidence (Apelles was not exactly unknown). Descartes does describe a fourfold "provisional moral code" in the *Discourse* to be followed while remaining undecided in his judgments for living "as happily as [he] could", similar on the surface to Sextus's reporting of the Pyrrhonists' fourfold observances (*PH* I 23–24; cf. chapter 2.2), but a deeper look reveals the closer source to be Charron. Descartes makes the same distinction between the private and public spheres while deciding to follow the plausible in everyday actions, adhering to a Stoic ethic of self-mastering (AT VI, 22–28; CSM I, 122–124; cf. *DLS* II, 2, 1986, 385–401; 1998, 56–61; see *Apologie*: 1907, 234–236; 1991, 563). Descartes most likely knew Sextus's name and reputation but might

[69] See also Sanches (*QNS*, 33) and Mersenne (*La vérité* I, 2:1998, 154–155). Cf. Lupoli 2009, 171–176.

[70] See note 26. Montaigne notes Pyrrho *standing* on the edge of a precipice and neither he nor Aristotle mention the interfering friends.

[71] Descartes mentions to have gone through books "concerning the subjects that are considered most abstruse and unusual" while studying in La Flèche (1607–1615), which might be a reference to skeptical works (AT VI, 5; CSM I, 113). Note that Greek and Latin edition of Laertius's *Lives* from 1594, and a 6 volume *Opera Augistini* from 1571 might have been included in the La Flèche library during Descartes's stay. Cf. Harwood 1778, 72.

have known his views only through second-hand sources (such as Charron and Montaigne).[72] (See also Maia Neto 2015, 65–67.)

Nevertheless, the most important ancient skeptical source for Descartes seems to have been Cicero's *Academica*. The first five years of study in a Jesuit school such as La Flèche concentrated on grammar, rhetoric, and Latin and Greek classics, with Cicero's works being "the one model of style" (*Ratio*, 73). One could assume that parts of the *Academica* were among these works. (Cf. Gouhier 1999; Gaukroger 1995, 48; Clarke 2006, 17–18.) Descartes likewise refers directly and indirectly to Cicero in several places (e.g., AT III, 274; CSMK, 166), and his dream argument is closer to Cicero's than Sextus's, depending on the indistinguishability of epistemically different dream and awake states at the moment of the experience (see chapter 2.3.2).[73] He also eschews the classic plant version from Aristotle and Sextus when charging the ancient skeptics with *apraxia*, going with *pragmatic apraxia* and *non-eudaimonism* charges, viewing skeptics not as inactive but their actions as either self-destructive (AT VII, 351; CSM II, 234) or impractical and fruitless as they wander aimlessly, unable to live a happy, prosperous, and virtuous life. (AT IX, 6, X, 512–520; CSM I 182, II, 408–414).[74]

However, a full awakening to the skeptical discussion and its application in criticising Aristotelianism most likely did not occur before Descartes returned to Paris in 1625 and joined Mersenne's circle of likeminded Aristotle-critical mechanists and corpuscularians, who took the skeptically charged critique of the Renaissance authors and combined it with endorsing New Science. It is not overt speculation that Descartes as a member of Mersenne's circle had access to *La vérité* and Gassendi's *Excercitationes* (cf. Rochot 1959, vii; Larmore 1998, 1157; Fine 2000, 201). He also probably saw *Le deux vérités*, being a friend of Silhon. We know that Descartes tried to read the tortuous Latin of Herbert's *De Veritate* (expanded in 1633 with copies given to Mersenne and Gassendi) and later read Mersenne's French translation of it in 1639 before starting on the *Meditations* (AT II, 566, 570–571, 596–599, 648–649; CSMK, 137–140).[75] Another mechanistically aligned regular visitor of Mersenne in Paris was the Englishman Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), best known as the writer of the political philosophy treatise *Leviathan* (1651; for Hobbes's relation to skepticism, see Paganini 2003; 2008b). The

[72] Descartes was gifted the *DLS* by a Jesuit, Jean Molitor in 1619 (Rodis-Lewis 1998; Grayling 2006; Clarke 2006). The *Discourse* includes indirect reference to it and Montaigne's *Essais* (e.g., AT VI, 1–2; CSM I, 11).
[73] Scenarios of dreaming and madness are already found in Plato (*Tht.* 158b–d) and are later discussed by Aristotle (*Met.* 1010b3–12). See also *C. Acad.*, 2.5.11, 3.11.25; *Trin*, 15.12.21; *Deliverance* II; *Apologie*: 1907, 404–412; 1991, 674–679. Cf. Galen (Annas & Barnes 1985, 86), Siger (Pasnau 2017, 117–118; Bolyard 2017), and Campanella (Paganini 2009b).
[74] Cf. Fine 2000, 217. Descartes also makes the *insincerity* charge in a few places (e.g., AT III, 434. VI, 29; CSM I, 125, CSMK, 196–197). See also Lennon 2008, 66–67; Lennon & Hickson 2013, 16.
[75] See *Correspond.* VII, 435–436; Bedford 1979, 57; Popkin 2003, 134; Clarke 2006, 185; Hutton 2015, 104.

participation in the Mersenne circle was, then, influential for Descartes in another way as well, as four of the seven Objections to the *Meditations* were either penned or compiled by members of the circle (Hobbes with the Third, Gassendi with the Fifth, and Mersenne himself with the Second and the Sixth).[76] (Cf. Larmore 1998, 1155–1164; LoLordo 2005; Maia Neto 2014; LoLordo & Duncan 2016; Clarke 2016, 43–52.)

Descartes is critical of the mitigated plausible empiricism of Mersenne and Gassendi, yet, as previously discussed, his main gripe with the "modern" skeptics is ethically oriented. The discussion in the 1630 Mersenne Letters, in which Descartes first mentions his "little treatise on Metaphysics", also involves a "wicked book" (fr. *meschant livre*), which Descartes thought included atheistic content and initially saw needed a reply while boasting to have discovered a proof for God's existence "with more certainty than […] any proposition of geometry" (AT I, 145, 148–149, 181–182; CSMK, 22–24, 29). Some people, myself included, suspect this book to have been none other than Le Vayer's *Dialogues*, whose first edition came out that year, setting for Descartes a model of skepticism to be answered (see, e.g., Paganini 2008a; 2008b). However, dominant "atheism" at the time was skeptical libertine, so whether or not the tome is actually the *Dialogues* matters little; even if it was some other work, Descartes's contempt and willingness to refute it would have been skeptically inclined anyway. Moreover, while Descartes is not as concerned about the ancient skeptics as he is about the moderns, considering them mostly lost souls as shown by the *non-eudaimonism* charges, his grievances with the ancients are likewise ethical in nature. His warnings about the "weaker intellects", who "would remain lost all their lives" if they started to doubt their principles, also indicate that Descartes considers the skeptical procedure suitable only for certain people, "the finest minds", able and willing to meditate seriously and attentively. The worry Descartes has here is clearly that the weak minds would take the skeptical inquiry too rigorously and follow the ancients by *extending* it even to the actions of life. (AT VI, 15, 32, VII, 7–9; IXB, 6; CSM I, 118, 126, 182, II, 7–8.[77] See chapter 1.)

Descartes's comments suggest two things about the skeptical inquiry in the *Meditations*. First, that the skeptical inquiry is *genuine* and *serious*. One must use serious skepticism to overcome skepticism. Second, that Descartes's usage of skepticism *does* have ramifications for everyday life, promising ethical results in what the ancients called *ataraxia* – happy, peaceful, and virtuous life. Nevertheless, Descartes considers

[76] Lennon (1993) argues that the contest between the supporters of Descartes and Gassendi regarding which system should replace the undermined Aristotelian model formed one of the most important philosophical debates of the 17th century, continuing what Plato called the perennial battle of Gods (rationalist friends of the Forms) and Giants (empiricist materialists).

[77] Cf. AT VII, 549; CSM II, 375. Ancient skeptics, then, were not excessive by scope but instead by extending the doubt to *practical life*.

skepticism that is extended to practical life an error, even a vice. The ancients lost their lives to doubt, and the moderns even question God's existence and the immortal soul for "practical purposes" (AT VII, 549; CSM II, 375). True and lasting happiness, tranquillity, and virtuosity for Descartes can only be discovered in absolute certainty (*epistēmē*/*scientia*) by overcoming the skeptical arguments (see the Letter to Dinet: AT VII, 573–574; CSM II, 387). In Cartesian skepticism, filtered through Montaigne, Sanches, and Charron, the First Meditation general suspension brings only anxiety and "inextricable darkness", while both the Third and the Sixth Meditation end in joy and spiritual peace (AT VII, 23–24, 52, 89–90; CSM II, 15–16, 36, 61–62).

However, Descartes also draws a larger distinction between the public and the private than do Montaigne, Charron or Gassendi, due to considering even private suspension a laborious and unnatural disposition for humans. The Cartesian exercise requires cutting oneself off from everyday activites, with skeptical meditation kept apart from practical conduct of life (see chapter 1.3). His comments on the earlier skeptics demonstrate that true skepticism, if extended and exhausted to its apex, is in the practical and moral sense *untenable* for Descartes. Instead, the search for truth and conduct of life, in a Buridanian fashion, heed different standards of certainty: *metaphysical* certainty for the former and *moral* certainty for the latter. Metaphysical certainty for Descartes is equivalent to reality and concerns the highest possible epistemic notion (*scientia*). Moral certainty, meanwhile, has its origins in Buridan's moral evidentness, describing what suffices for acting morally well in everyday conduct, but whereas for Buridan it can still give rise to *scientia*, Descartes, following the later developments by the Jesuits, separates it into its own domain (Pasnau 2017, 36, 198–200; Maryks 2008). Basing scientific endeavours or the nature of the soul simply in the moral domain will not suffice for Descartes, as it does for Gassendi in the former and Silhon in the latter, due to differing standards. We must discover something more solid than mere plausibility (which might just as well be false) to be secure even in the public domain. One is required, in order to succeed in the metaphysical quest, to suspend not just in the case of "inner natures", knowledge claims, and scientific matters, but even in the case of "highly probable" opinions. (See AT VI, 37–38; VII, 22, 476, 548, VIIIA, 327; CSM I, 130, 289–290, CSM II, 15, 320, 374.)

I suggest, as previously discussed, that the distinction between practical conduct and skeptical inquiry is *contextual*. Partaking in everyday life's obligations, the meditator acts according to common-sense thinking and regards things "from a practical view" not doubtful, trusting that the tea in her mug exists and is not battery acid. Nevertheless, when partaking in the skeptical exercise, she commits to it seriously, genuinely following the inquiry and changing her attitude regarding the issues at hand. What motivates the

'insulation' from everyday life is not skepticism as a method or an epistemological instrument, but the nature of the skeptical consideration as a fully devoted meditative exercise, to be practiced free from obligations and practical considerations. Moreover, the motivation for why even the most hardened man in the street should undertake the project is the promise of fruits not just in the establishment of science but also in *moral behavior*. (See chapter 1.3; cf. chapter 8.2.)

The many Academic elements in Descartes's skepticism have led to reading him as intentionally following their tradition over the Pyrrhonists, some even going so far as to claim him having been a genuine (early modern) academic skeptic (Groarke 1984; M. Williams 1986; Lennon 2008; 2011; Maia Neto 2003; 2014; 2015; Davies 2017; Giocanti 2017; Stuchlik 2017). Descartes's skepticism, like Academic and especially Charron's modern French Academic skepticsm, is active – a skeptic retains agency over her suspension and cognitive states – and allows for degrees of persuasion. Suspension is voluntary and retains the freedom to act and judge, both physically (in practical life) and mentally (in private suspension). Even the plausible must be suspended, yet some cognitions (the clear and distinct type) are so persuasive that one cannot but be convinced of them being true. One way to read skeptical Descartes is, then, to see him as the first Academic skeptic who found a reliable way to distinguish cognitive from non-cognitive impressions, discovering *epistēmē*/*scientia* (truth/reality).

However, based on my study, the forcing of an equal balance (*isostheneia*) of impressions as the first step in suspending judgement appears to have been fully a Pyrrhonian element, absent from the Academic formulations of the issue. Academic skepticim is based mostly on indistinguishability arguments and on generating theoretical counter measures to any (specifically Stoic) dogmatic claims, resulting in indifference of opinion and *epochē*, in which the followers of Carneades saw the possibility of more or less persuasive views.[78] However, the Pyrrhonists do more; they set contrasting beliefs or reasons against each other, resulting in no side being more persuasive than another. The same strategy appears in Montaigne as scales (*Apologie*: 1907, 276, 340–344 1991, 591, 633–635) and in Charron as balancing reasons (*DLS* II, 2: 1986, 386; 1998, 56). Counter-balancing also forms an important part of Descartes's skepticism (see especially chapter 3.3)[79], however, for him, the following suspension is

[78] Followers of Augustine saw the Academics as 'hidden dogmatists', protecting the Platonic soul-body dualism during the materialistic Hellenism (*C. Acad.* 3.17–18.38–41). Cf. A. Curley 1997, 127–132; Maia Neto 2014, 19–21.

[79] Note that the meditator admits plausible opinions only to force them into balance. Only persuasiveness that forces itself on us so that we cannot doubt it while being present can upset the balanced scales of indifference. AT VII, 22; CSM II, 15; cf. chapter 4.4. See also *Passions* III, §170 (AT XI, 459–460; CSM I, 390–391), where irresolution has a beneficial function but is to be avoided in actions of life.

a *voluntary action*, not a forced-on passive state, due to the equalisation being filtered through Montaigne and Charron (AT VII, 22; CSM II, 15; cf. AT VII, 158, 465; CSM II, 112, 312–313; but see Thorsrud 2014, 127–130; Eichorn 2014; 2020). Descartes's skepticism as an amalgam of Academic and Pyrrhonian positions does not appear strange when one considers that the factions, while discussed distinctly, were not properly distinguished during the 17th century.

Descartes adopts the general tactic of Renaissance and early modern skeptical literature of moving into oneself, questioning everything previous, and seeking a new method of cognising, connecting this with the written tradition of meditative exercises (see chapter 1.2.1; cf. Limbrick 2008, 55–56; Lupoli 2009, 151; Paganini 2009a, 257; Clarke 2016, 37–43). This allows him to draw a stronger distinction between everyday life and the skeptically driven quest for truth than his predecessors, leading to a further development in skeptical history: Skepticism not just as a private, subjective deliberation but as an attention-requiring meditative exercise, disjointed from the practice of everyday life and conducted in the peace and solitude of one's study chamber. Exhausted skeptical exercise, for Descartes, is the optimal route in overturning both the morally questionable skeptical tradition and the scientifically suspect Scholastic cognitive picture while also providing ammunition against the naïve realism of the pre-meditative viewpoint. However, the French Preface reveals that there is one aspect in which Descartes's anti-skeptical project agrees with mitigated skeptical doctrines: He, too, wants to find a *third way* between skepticism and Scholasticism (AT IXB, 5–7; CSM II, 181–182; cf. the Sixth Meditation AT VII, 77–78; CSM II, 54).

3. Premilinary Considerations II: Cognition and Will

Before a more detailed analysis, one must first have a sense of the cognitive equipment the meditating enquirer is required to have to understand the meditative exercise taking place in the *Meditations*. Firstly, the meditator needs an *ability to perform* what the exercise requires. This turns out to be her power of *will*, enabling her to suspend judgment when she is in hazard of falling into error. Secondly, she needs an *ability to recognise* potentially errorless cognition. This turns out to be her power of *understanding*, especially her intellect's capacity for intuitive *clear and distinct perception*.[1]

According to Descartes, thinking (*cogitatio*) can be divided into two principle modes: perception (*perceptio*), or the operation of understanding (*operatio intellectus*), and volition (*volitio*), or the operation of the will (*opratio voluntatis*). All thought acts can be reduced to these two basic ways of thinking: volitions include desiring, averting, asserting, denying, and doubting, and perceptions include understanding, sensation, and imagination. I also call the general perceiving act *cognition*. (*Principia* I, §32: AT VIIIA, 17; CSM I, 204.)

Though often overlooked in analysis, correct use of the will is just as important for the exercise's success as the correct form of cognition is. Part of what is going on in the *Meditations* is that we recognise our own *free agency* and then attempt to discover the *limits* of that agency. The free agency aspect is especially important in the Second Meditation, in which the meditator recognises her existence from her agency in creating the doubt, and in the Third Meditation, in which she tests the limits of her agency in the production of her ideas and cognitive nature. Another aspect in which the importance of the will becomes apparent and is crucial for the First Meditation is that, as previously argued, the project has not only metaphysical and epistemological concerns but also moral ones. Habitual following of possibly error-ridden prejudices and skepticism that extends to practical life are both morally condemnable vices. Even if my prejudices would be correct, I would not deserve any praise or credit for following them, as my being right was merely a case of what in contemporary epistemology would be called epistemic luck. Successful and morally laudable cognition requires practice and the correct use of one's cognitive tools. (Cf. the French Preface*:* AT IXB, 6; CSM I, 182; Letter to Elizabeth, 1645: AT IV, 291; CSMK, 265). Descartes then brandishes a version of *virtue epistemology*, though one were moral responsibility has a large role.[2] (Cf. chapter 2.5.2.)

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[1] Davies (2014, 3) also recognizes the need for two-part special equipment but draws it differently.

[2] Cf. Sosa 2015, 233. Descartes also differs from contemporary virtue epistemologists in that virtuous cognition for him does not in itself guarantee the truth. For the importance of will in Descartes's *Meditations*, see also Alanen (2003; 2009; 2013); Shapiro (2008); Schüssler (2013); Christofidou (2013); Ragland (2016). For moral responsibility and skepticism, see Davies (2014); Araujo (2003). For will and virtue, see Naaman-Zauderer (2010) and Vitz (2015).

I discuss Descartes's theories of cognition and will in this second preliminary chapter, articulating how they come together to perform error-free and virtuous, morally responsible cognising. Both are indispensable for the exercise's cognitive success. I first discuss how their correct use was conceived in the late Scholastic theories, which form both the basis and the target of criticism for Descartes's doctrines, to gain a better understanding of these powers. I then turn my attention to the powers themselves, starting with the use of the will and its role in suspending one's judgement. I lay out my reading of Descartes by what I call indirect doxastic voluntarism (IDV), concentrating on indirect negative voluntarism (-IV): The will must direct attention to the *reasons for doubt* in order to suspend judgment. The will comes face-to-face with its own freedom by attending to these reasons, recognizing the inherent free agency. Lastly, I discuss Descartes's doctrine of the correct use of cognition, the core of which is the intellect's capacity for *intuition* and the clear and distinct perceptions it provides. However, these clear and distinct perceptions should not yet be considered knowledge because of Descartes's understanding of truth as a *conformity-relation* between thought and object. They provide internal compelling cognition or conviction (what Descartes more specifically terms *persuasio*) but not yet knowledge in its full sense (*scientia*).

3.1. Late Scholastic Views of Cognition

The Scholastic theories of perception mostly followed the Aristotelian scheme but saw further development and even deviation from Aristotle in the late Scholastic thinking. The proper object of human cognition was generally taken to be the material world, with the natural and distinctive way for human beings to gain knowledge being through sensory perception of things, from which intellectual and abstract notions could be derived. Our access to reality was thought to run exclusively through the senses, so that whatever the intellect possessed had been acquired by sensory perception. These views carried all the way to the early 1600s, shaping Descartes's own stance on the matters.

3.1.1. Cognition and Sense Perception

The late Medieval doctrines of cognition were strongly influenced by Aristotle's theory of perception according to which the soul (*psychē*, gr. *ψυχή*), defined as "the first actuality of natural body potentially possessing life", is divided into three hierarchical capacities: the vegetative (nutritious capacity), the animal or sensitive (capacities of sensation and desire) and the human or intellectual soul (the capacity of understanding). Plants possess

only the first capacity, while animals have also the second, and humans are the only beings with all three. (*De An*. II.1, 412a28–29; II.3, 414a29–414b19; III.1, 424b22–24). Aristotle takes sensation (*aisthēsis*, gr. *αἴσθησις*) to be reliable for the most part, viewing it in true cases to be the same as the sensible object (*aisthetōn*, gr. *αἰσθητών*), with veracious perception being the actualisation of perceptual potency. The soul then, in a way, becomes all the things it is thinking, sensing, and perceiving. (Cf. Knuuttila 2008; Carriero 2009, 11.)

Similarly, in the Aristotelian tradition, especially following Aquinas, knowledge was considered as *assimilation* of the cognised by the cogniser, requiring there to be something in common between the two. This similarity was typically understood as a *formal identity*. The cogniser assimilates the form of the cognised thing in a cooperation between the lower sensory faculties and the higher intellectual faculties. Aquinas depicts this assimilation as the perceived object, say a rock, sending sensible *species* to the senses, which are in turn refined in the common sense (*sensus communis*) and presented to the mind as a corporeal image, or a *phantasm*. The intellect then abstracts a universal, an intelligible *species*, of the perceived rock. This universal is the matterless form of the external rock presented in the mind. The intellect can now think of any rock, as the same rock form is presented in them as well. However, knowledge is always aimed at universals, which provide the real structure of the world to the mind. Particular objects are only indirectly reachable for the intellect. (*ST* I, Q.85–86.)

The sensation-produced real structure is stored as phantasms in the imagination (*phantasia sive imaginatio*), which also contains memory. When the intellect thinks of universals, it turns to these phantasms, which work as a sort of a gateway to the world. If the senses did not function properly and the intellect happens to lose its phantasms, not only would the connection to the world be severed but, due to the necessity of phantasmal conversion, no understanding could take place. Aquinas then adopts the famous Aristotelian-Scholastic maxim of *Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu* (nothing is in the intellect without first being in the senses) (e.g., *DV*, Q.2, a.3, ad.19). According to the Aristotelians, cognitive abilities are inherently tied to the material world, sensory reality being their natural object. Cognitive faculties could not function as they are intended to without the senses and the phantasms, the subject being unable not only to remember and imagine but also to abstract, cognise, and understand. The nature of the human intellect is to work through the senses in the late Aristotelian-Scholastic context. (*ST* I, Q.84, a.7; Q.87, a.1. Cf. Carriero 2009, 11–16 & 34.)

It is easy to see why one would have to first acquire some structure through the senses to cognise the natural world of material bodies. However, this is so even regarding the cognition of intellectual concepts such as mathematics, and immaterial

things such as God and the intellect itself. For Aquinas, mathematics concerns *intelligible matter* (sensitive matter restricted solely to quantity) and is abstracted from the particular somewhat similarly to sensory material. Conceiving mathematical entities is to consider perceived matter in terms of accidents that can be quantified. When reducing other accidents, the mathematician is able to reason *a priori* (in the traditional sense) from cause to effect (from definitions of quantified matter to their consequences), whereas the natural philosopher is bound to reason *a posteriori*, from effect to cause (from the sensible world to the underlying essence or nature causing it). Mathematical concepts are then mental constructs, yet they have a real, remote foundation in the sensible world. Despite methodological differences, both the mathematician and the natural philosopher depend on the senses and abstraction for gaining cognition of their subject matters. (*Boet. Trin.* Q.5, a.3. Cf. Maurer 1993; Carriero 2009, 13.)

The cognition of immaterial things works a bit differently for Aquinas. The mind's acquisition of phantasms is sensory; thus, it is best suited for cognising the material "outside" world. However, it is not fully devoid of any knowledge of immaterial things; that is just not the primary object of its function. The knowledge we have of God and of ourselves is always mediated and indirect. The way knowledge about God is oblique is also different from the way one's intellectual self-knowledge is oblique.[3]

Unlike in the case of sensory-based cognition, where we can grasp the essences or natures of things through the particular by way of abstraction, Aquinas thinks we have no way (at least in this mortal life) to grasp God's essence (i.e., grasp *what* God is). In this, he is following a tradition in Medieval philosophy whereby we cannot have *positive* knowledge of God's essence; we can know God only negatively (e.g., Pseudo-Dionysius) or as the cause of our created attributes (e.g., Maimonides). Aquinas similarly states that we can merely infer certain aspects about God, such as his existence. In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas lists five ways we can know that God exists: based on change, causation, necessity of being, gradation of observable perfection, and teleology. All these ways are a variation of what we now call the *cosmological argument* – they are based on an observation of something perceivable by the senses and argue for the source of the thing in the necessary First Cause (the Aristotelian unmoved mover, i.e., God). (*ST* I, Q.2, a.3.) However, the strategy does not really tell us anything about that First Cause, just that the Cause must exist. In *Boetium de Trinitate*, Aquinas supplements the five ways of knowing God exists with three principle ways of having inferred knowledge about God: that God is the first cause of all bodies by way of causation (similar to the five ways), that God is not a body by way of negation, and that God transcends body (being

[3] The Scholastics would then agree with Descartes on the ideas of God and the soul not having been in the senses (see AT VI, 37; CSM I, 129).

more perfect than it) by way of transcendence (*Boet. Trin.* Q.6, a.3). We start with knowledge of body and work our way up in all three ways, just like in the five ways. Our knowledge of divinity operates through the images we acquire by sensory experience. The dependence here is not simply genetic either. We only come to understand God *through* these images, or likenesses (*similitudines*), that enable our understanding of body. Lacking the stockpile of images, we would lose cognitive access not only to material bodies but to God as a being that causes, excludes, and transcends body. Images are the "starting point of our knowledge" (*Boet. Trin.* Q.6, a.2, ad.5). (Cf. Nolan & Nelson 2006, 105; Carriero 2009, 13–14, 168–182, 195–196; Nolan 2014, 130.[4])

Regarding the intellect's knowledge of itself, Aquinas denies the Augustinian ability of the mind to know itself directly, viewing that the materially directed abilities (vision, hearing, and so on) are not capable of reflecting on their own acts. However, the mind can know itself by two routes: *singularly*, when "Socrates or Plato perceives that he has an intellectual soul because he perceives that he understands", and *universally*, when "we consider the nature of the human mind from the act of the intellect" (*ST* Q.87, a.1). The first is easily acquired from the "mere presence of the mind" through its acts, while the second is more difficult, requiring "a careful and subtle inquiry". This strenuousness is due to our thoughts not being the immediate, primary object of our understanding. There is no phantasm of one's own mind, so we can only ever have an indirect grasp of it. "[I]t is connatural for our intellect in the present life to look to material, sensible things" (*ST* I, Q.87, a.1; cf. *DV* Q.10, a.8). Since our grasp of the intellect as this sort of faculty is based solely on the senses so, too, is intellectual self-knowledge (Yrjönsuuri 1999, 56–59; 2000, 231–232; 2007, 143–144; Carriero 2009, 14–15.[5])

3.1.2. Intuitive Cognition and Self-Knowledge

Aquinas's thought came to influence most of the subsequent philosophy, but many of his doctrines were also challenged. One discussion that emerged in opposition to Thomistic thought was *intuitive cognition* (*cognitio intuitiva*), related to perceiving particular

[4] Descartes departs from the Scholastics here, viewing us as having direct access not just to God's existence but also to his essence.

[5] Note that, according to Aquinas, if there were not acts in the mind, it would not know itself, this being the standard rejection of Avicenna's "floating man" (see chapter 2.3.2). However, to be precise, Aquinas does allow human intellect to have other modes of cognition beyond its natural capacities, such as supernatural assistance from God's divine light, which is available (in this life at least) only for the blessed. See Pegis 1974. Though it could be argued that these other forms of cognition bring Aquinas closer to Descartes, what seems most important for our understanding of Descartes's *Meditations* is how the intellect functions in *natural conditions* for Aquinas and Descartes. Cf. Carriero 2009, 15–16

objects and grasping one's own mental states, brought to the forefront by Scotus.[6] Scotus followed Aquinas quite faithfully in knowledge by abstraction but denied the Aristotelian principle that our direct knowledge can only concern universals and not particulars, viewing the human mind to be able to directly cognise the particular and the general (e.g., *Lect.* II, d.3). I know what a rock is by abstracted knowledge through phantasmal image without there being a single rock to be perceived. Knowing that the *exact* particular rock that is rolling right behind me on a narrow slope exists is a job for intuitive knowledge. Scotus even takes imagination to be a form of abstractive cognition and sensation to be a form of intuitive cognition. (Yrjönsuuri 1997; Pasnau 2003, 297.)

On intuitive self-knowledge, Scotus follows an older Fransiscan tradition, such as Olivi and Matthew of Aquasparta (1240–1302), preferring Augustinian thought over the systemised Aristotelianism of the Dominican Aquinas (cf. chapter 2.3). Aquasparta particularly considered self-knowledge in the straightforward Augustinian way while being critical of the position of "great men" (which just happened to be similar to Aquinas's). He held that intuition, using Augustine's analogue of "mental vision", grants direct access to its object, allowing knowledge of both existence and essence. However, for him, the direct intuitive knowledge considers only the intellect itself, whereas matters of the corporeal world can be known through the senses only by abstraction. (*QC*: 1957, 285–286, 300–309.) Scotus follows Aquasparta in that the intellect becomes aware of itself and its nature through intuitive cognition but also held that certain intuitive cognition, for instance of particulars, is possible even of external reality. Scotus then intriuingly suggests that the intellect is capable through the senses of having direct *non-phantasmal* access to particular reality. (*Ord.* IV, d.45, q.3. Cf. Yrjönsuuri 1999, 60–62; 2000, 232–234; Adriaenssen 2017, 29–80; Pasnau 2003; 2017, 79–81.)

Scotus's doctrine of intuitive cognition was influential for much of the later Scholastic discussion of the intellect's understanding of particulars and of itself for thinkers like Auriol and Ockham. Ockham particularly (no pun intended) viewed matters of particular cognition and self-knowledge in a generally Scotian manner, using the term intuitive knowledge (*notitia intuitiva*) typically in connection with sensory access to external things but likewise extending it to the mind's perception of its own activity. 'I understand' is a statement that can be directly and immediately known to be true for Ockham. However, as is made clear by the other use of the concept, intuition had as much, if not more so, to do with sensory faculties, particularly vision. The topic even sparked a debate in the 14th century between Ockham and Walter Chatton (1290–1343), who claimed that only the senses are capable of intuitive cognition, whereas the intellect is restricted to abstractive cognition of universals.

[6] A kind of intuition is already found in Henry of Ghent (Pasnau 2003, 297; Adriaenssen 2017, 29–39).

Ockham admits that the immediate "gaze" directed at the mind's activity is structurally the same as the one directed at external reality; only the object differs. This did not bode well for Chatton, who noticed an infinite regress worry: If every act is the same and one direct act can be directly perceived with another, the direct act of awareness would be directly perceived with another, that with another, *et cetera*. Chatton views that no extra perceptive act is required to experience the intellect's act of awareness. Seeing a rock, one experiences the visual impression and does not need to perceive the experience itself separately. The awareness arises from the *content* of the experience itself when experiencing one's own thoughts. However, Chatton preserves the Scotian notion of intuitive cognition in terms of sensory awareness of particular objects. These 14th century debates then developed the concept of intuition as relating to sensory visualisation of material objects. The paradigmatic object of intuition was not the mind or its acts but the external particular things, such as the rock. These developments still influenced the 17th century and probably affected Descartes's rejection of the earlier uses of "intuition" in the *Regulae*. "By 'intuition' I do not mean the fluctuating testimony of the senses or the deceptive judgement of the imagination as it botches things together, but the conception of a clear and attentive mind" (AT X, 14; CSM I, 368; cf. Yrjönsuuri 2007, 144–149).[7]

Of course, these 14th century debates were no longer actively present in Descartes's intellectual surroundings. Nevertheless, it becomes apparent that these themes were still at play in the philosophy of the time by looking at the 16th century Baroque Scholastic thought. Fransisco Suárez (1548–1617), one of the leading Jesuit thinkers and familiar to Descartes through the latter's education, especially followed Aquinas for the most part with self-knowledge while demonstrating the subtle influence of Scotus's and Ockham's Fransiscan position. Suárez shares Aquinas's view that the proper object of the intellect's natural function is the material world, making self-awareness mainly indirect. The act of vision, for example, is non-material, and the intellect cannot naturally perceive it other than indirectly. However, he was not a faithful Thomist, accepting the Ockhamian/Chattonian concept that mental acts are in principle individual qualities of one's mind, and carry not only immediate directedness to the object of the act but also immediate awareness of the act itself. An act of seeing a rock carries along an awareness of seeing the rock in question, which is not produced by a separate act. However, for Suárez, going against Augustine, such an act neither gives a clear view of the mind, nor delivers us the nature or essence of intellect. The best the

[7] Cf. Thijssen 2000, 202; Adriaenssen 2017, 99–110. Scholars have been tracking the roots of the 14th century development of intuition in the 13th century theories of vision (e.g., Tachau 1988), but see Yrjönsuuri (1999).

act can accomplish is an obscure and incomplete picture of our thinking due to the natural object of the act being material reality. In Suárez, then, we have direct intuitive cognising of particular individual things and immediate awareness of our cognitive act *à la* Scotus, Ockham, and Chatton, along with there being no clear perception of the mind, leaving us without the mind's essence and with the requirement of material images for our cognition to work properly *à la* Aquinas. Descartes's understanding of self-awareness seems practically anti-Suárezian. (Yrjönsuuri 1999, 63–65; 2000, 234–236; Leijenhorst 2012, 142–143.)

All in all, it is evident that the late Aristotelian-Scholastic thinkers, just like Augustine before and Renaissance skeptics after (or in Suaréz's case, concurrent with), accepted the privileged understanding of one's thinking (see chapters 2.3 and 2.4). However, they heavily debated whether such understanding was direct or indirect, mediated or immediate, clear or obscure. Intuition became direct sensory access to particular, individual material objects in these discussions. Comparing Medieval and Baroque Scholastic accounts with Descartes's in the Second Meditation allows credibility for the view of him wanting to secure an account of intuitive cognising that is completely separate from sensory means, and grants us an unmediated and evident access to our existence and nature as cognising beings, specifically against these discussions (I discuss Descartes's objection to the Aristotelian accounts of cognition more in chapter 3.4). (Cf. Yrjönsuuri 1999, 63.)

3.2. Late Scholastic Views of the Will

Let us now turn to the will, the second important utensil in our cognitive toolbox. Descartes is generally considered a *doxastic voluntarist*, maintaining that the will has some kind of control over one's doxastic states, such as belief and doubt (e.g., AT VII, 22, 59–60; CSM II, 15, 41). Voluntarism as a philosophical school of thought assigns individual power to the will apart from emotions and the intellect. Most voluntarists describe the will to be in some form *superior* to the others, so it can override or not be affected by them. Thus, per strong or radical voluntarism, the will is free to make its own choices without being tied to follow rational or emotional impulses. Regarding doxastic voluntarism, I refer to the strong voluntarist position as *direct doxastic voluntarism*, in which doxastic states are affected directly by the mere act of the will. I will defend in the next chapter a view that Descartes, despite the classic account portraying him as a direct doxastic voluntarist, is actually purporting *indirect doxastic voluntarism*, maintaining that the will can affect a doxastic state indirectly by making one concentrate on essential

tasks to form that state, such as gathering up and paying attention to strong reasons and evidence. However, I first present an account of the discussions on voluntarism and the will's freedom that were heavily debated in Medieval and Baroque Scholasticism and became key concepts for moral responsibility that influenced Descartes on the issue.

The following section is influenced by three accounts of the Scholastic antecedents to Descartes's theory of will: Alanen (2003) on Scotist voluntarism, Carriero (2009) on Thomistic intellectualism, and Schüssler (2013) on the 17th century Jesuit discussion uniting the other two. All of these accounts advance an important part of the preceding influence on Descartes's thought, but I have yet to see an account that puts all three together in a single frame. I would like to propose my own.

3.2.1. Saint in a Pear Tree: Road to Voluntarism

Voluntarism became a key concept in the late medieval context, especially for questions of moral responsibility and motivation, when thinkers such as Scotus and Ockham challenged some of the earlier views on those topics. The two aspects used to explain both moral and immoral behaviour (i.e., virtues and vices) in ancient philosophy were reason and emotions. For example, the Socratic model asserted that since human beings are rational, if they know what is good, they pursue it. The reason why humans do evil is out of ignorance or because their reason is affected by their emotional responses, not malice. Aristotle, even though critical of Socratic ethics, especially in regard to acting against one's good judgment, still considered these aspects (reason and emotion) as the building blocks of moral behaviour and emphasised the importance of reason for virtuous behaviour. The will to act, for Aristotle, is part of reason (*De An.* III, 9. 432b5). A previous chapter (2.1) noted that the Hellenistic philosophy schools dealt with the issue in similar terms. Just like Aristotle, the Stoics and the Epicureans defined the desired ultimate good to be human happiness by *eudaimonia*, and whatever contributed towards that goal was considered morally good behaviour. However, when a Stoic encounters a cognitive impression, the decision to assent to it is up to his reason and when a Pyrrhonist recognises the equilibric state of disturbing contrarieties, suspension of judgment is not a voluntary action but is naturally and automatically forced on him due to the balance of reason. The will does not really play a part in either picture.[8]

This ancient picture of morality was still used in early Medieval philosophy; however, it had already started to cause problems, especially in connection with theodical matters

[8] Although an Academic could retain agency over suspension, voluntariness might not be implied, but see Dihle (1982), Thorsrud (2014, 128–132), and Eichorn (2014; 2020). See also Alanen (2003, 220–224).

on the origin of sin. Another issue through which the ancient model was considered problematic was a person's voluntary decision to act morally wrong. A famous example of this is Augustine's story of how he and his friends stole pears from a nearby tree not because they were externally motivated to steal them (e.g., they looked juicy, he was hungry), were overtaken by emotion (e.g., for the sake of someone else) or were ignorant of the act's wrongness, but simply for the pleasure of stealing the pears (*Conf.* 2.4.9). Augustine dealt with most cases like this, like bodily temptations, in terms of Aristotelian *akrasia* (*ἀκρασία*), a lack of self-control or weakness of will. According to Aristotle, an acratic person acts without sufficient reason and, thus, still acts badly while knowing the good. *Akrasia* is not really a vice, but neither is it virtuous. Augustine supplements this with a three-part view on vice – confusion between virtue and vice (ignorance), ineffectual knowledge of virtue (*akrasia*) and a lingering attachment to vice (temptation) – without making a sharp distinction between vice by ignorance and vice by weakness of will (Wetzel 2008, 60–62). However, the pear case is more puzzling because it appears that the wrong-doing was due not to ineffectual use of reason or weakness in following what is good but to an actual will to do bad – to sin out of pure joy of malice. (See H. Schmid 2018; Wills 2002. Note that Augustine still followed the eudaimonistic model, seeing pleasure as the ultimate motivator.)

The aspect of will and its freedom were added to the Aristotelian-Augustinian picture to effectively explain how and why even the highly educated and capable were able to commit sins. The issue became especially important with Anselm of Canterbury, who was one of the first to give the will some sort of power of its own in moral agency. Part of Anselm's analysis was to distinguish what makes a subject morally responsible for its actions (i.e., what makes it a *moral agent*). Medieval tradition, generally following Aristotle, considered rationality as the requirement for someone being the subject of praise or blame. One must know what good and bad are and how to gain them in order to be morally responsible (thus, brute animals, lunatics, and infants were not considered moral agents). However, rationality is insufficient by itself for Anselm. The subject also requires the *will to do* good or bad to be a moral agent; that is, to have a wilful motive for the right or the wrong thing, to have done the act willingly for a reason, and to have had other options. Anselm's view is that every subject is given a motive by God and is, therefore, in a way *hard-wired* for that motive. A cat's nature is to pray on mice; they are designed to have mouse catching as their motive. A cat cannot on its own gain a different motive, say, for car chasing, or be unmotivated to catch mice. A cat also always prefers more mouse catching to less. However, a subject that is hard-wired for its motive is not, strictly speaking, a moral agent, since it could not choose otherwise. Cats are not good or evil when catching mice; they are merely acting on their God-given structural

motivation. A moral action must be a free action. Anselm then adopts a so-called *two-wills theory* according to which a moral agent requires two types of willing, *just* and *beneficial*. An agent that only willed justice would not be a moral but a *justice hard-wired* agent and not an apt recipient for either blame or praise. Likewise, if an agent only willed benefit, its attempts to gain happiness in an unjust way would not be a moral wrong. Only when the agent has two conflicting willings, one within the moral norms and one directed at the agent's (non-moral) self-benefit, can the agent be morally responsible. (*De Casu* I–V, VIII: 2000, 216–226, 229. Cf. King 2010, 361–362; Ekenberg 2016.)

Scotus accepts Anselm's account of moral responsibility almost directly: Morality requires freedom, and a moral agent must have willing towards (or affection for) justice and personal advantage. Unlike Anselm, though, he saw these affections as aspects of the same will. Scotus defines affection for advantage as desiring happiness, and affection for justice as providing the will's freedom, which it would lack if it only desired what is beneficial for itself. However, he also sees affection for justice as more noble than affection for advantage. Affection for justice causes us to will something that is directed outside ourselves; thus, it has moral priority over affection for advantage, effectively moderating and restricting the latter. The moral agent possesses affection for justice, so it can act not only out of self-love but also out of love for something in its intrinsic worth. (*Ord.* II, d.6, q.2. Cf. T. Williams 2006, 345; Kent 2006, 356; Irwin 2008, 162.)

Affection for justice evidently becomes the innate freedom of the will for Scotus. Moral wrong is not merely pursuing personal benefit for a rational reason over what ought to be pursued. Scotus distinguishes willing from the willed action and locates moral wrongdoing in the act of the will itself. Thus, he challenges the classic (Stoic-Aristotelian) eudaimonistic moral motivation by distinguishing the two affections: For Scotus, the highest good is not personal happiness (self-love) but happiness for others (friendship-love), especially in its highest form as love for God in himself. (*Ord.* II, d.44. Cf. Irwin, 2008, 160–164; King 2010, 372.) By willing to pursue personal benefit over justice, one also, with a separate act, wills to sin. What matters for moral responsibility for Scotus is that the will is always free; nothing undermines it. Whatever habits we have developed, be they virtuous or vicious, the will is free to act or not act according to them (see T. Williams 2006, 348). For Scotus, as for Augustine and Anselm, the will's freedom comes from its power to do the opposite. However, unlike the previous two, Scotus views the will to be the efficient cause of moral behaviour (both good and bad). Even an intellectual understanding of the good does not hinder the will, as it can simply not take the reason's suggestions into account – we can always just choose not to follow the righteous path. What amounts to moral responsibility for Scotus is that we freely will to follow what is just.

3.2.2. Compatibilism Debate

Scotus's account was extremely influential on the Fransiscan tradition of the will, with later thinkers such as Ockham also purporting a strong version of voluntarism. The radical voluntarism of the Scotists, as just seen, was based on seeing the will's freedom as a *two-way power* to do otherwise in any given situation. This understanding of freedom is likewise called *libertarian* or *incompatibilist*. However, the Fransiscan-Scotist voluntary freedom was heavily debated by the Dominican-Thomist intellectual line that maintained that the will is free when it is *determined to choose* what the intellect apprehends as the best course of action. This understanding of freedom is then called *compatibilist*, since will's freedom is compatible with the will being intellectually determined by what is good. (Cf. Wee 2014, 187–188.) Aquinas, the foremost authority for the compatibilist camp, viewed the will as a special sort of orientation, a natural aptitude, towards the good, which is expressed in different ways for different sorts of beings. The nature of the tree is oriented towards maintaining its form and kind; thus, its natural "appetites" are nourishment and spreading seed. Intellectual beings are related to the good on a different level from trees and can grasp their good intellectually. The will as a faculty is necessarily directed at its proper object. In the case of humans, this proper object, the inclination it is naturally striving for, is happiness and whatever comes with it, such as the knowledge of the truth (*cognitio veritatis*). Unlike the later Scotus, Aquinas saw one's eudaimonistic happiness to be in line with the truth and the highest good due to the nature of our will being optimised towards them. (*ST* I, Q.19 & Q.59; *DV* Q.22 & 23.)

However, since our will is necessitated like this, what happens to free decision (*liberum arbitrium*) and moral responsibility? Can we be worthy of praise or blame if we just necessarily go for the right choice? For Aquinas, that we characteristically have an intellectual orientation to the truth and the good does not mean there would be no indeterminacy regarding the will. Happiness comes in many shapes and forms, giving us multiple options to define, and various ways to attain, it under them. Such indeterminacy is inherent for the intellectual being's condition and requires some power to settle the relation to the will's proper object; that is, free decision. One must figure out what one's happiness consists in and choose the appropriate means for attaining it. Free decision is compatible with the larger picture of morality, requiring understanding of the good and ways to gain it (Aquinas then, like Scotus, fuses Anselm's two wills together into one). We freely will even those things that our will is necessitated towards. Accordingly, we do not gain praise or blame by willing necessarily what we naturally desire but by working out the best intellectual grasp of what the truth or the good is. Our will follows necessarily (but freely) when we have this figured out and we are

morally responsible for our actions. (*ST* I, Q 59, 83; *DV* Q.22, 24. Cf. Carriero 2009, 243–264.) Aquinas's account is similar to the Aristotelian-Augustinian one, still viewing happiness as the highest virtue and seeing freedom as not a question of the will but of choice, ultimately done with the consultation of reason and not by the will on its own (*ST* I, Q.59, a.1, ad.1). After the Scotist voluntarists separated from the Thomist intellectualists, the issue of the will's freedom was debated for the last part of the Medieval period, with some of the debates continuing into the Renaissance and early modern Scholasticism as well (cf. Alanen 2003, 233–236). Is the will essentially free by *indifference* (i.e., having the power to do otherwise) or by *spontaneity* (i.e., self-moving so that nothing violently forces it against its nature but is compatible with being internally determined to follow the good)?

However, as Rudolf Schüssler (2013, 164–168) has argued, clear lines between Scotism and Thomism got somewhat blurred by the 17th century. As in the case of cognition, many Jesuit philosophers, Suaréz among them, had adopted Scotian ideas while generally following Aquinas, considering the will indifferently free. The Jesuit voluntarists of Baroque Scholasticism also began to emphasise the will's role in not just moral action but also in doxastic belief-formation, contributing to the discussion between will's power to *elicite* (*elicire*) and *command* (*imperare*) action. Scholastics such as Aquinas distinguish between two acts of will: choosing to, say, raise my arm (directly elicit) and attempting to carry out the chosen action, so actually raise my arm (indirectly command). Assenting and dissenting are *acts of reason* for Aquinas, though: The will can immediately elicit a decision to exercise contemplation but only command assent and dissent in cases that are not immediately spontaneous (therefore, determined by nature), leaving potential room for doubt. The former is known as *freedom of exercise* (*exercitium*) and the latter as *freedom of specification* (*specificationem*). (*ST* I–II, Q.10, a.2, co, Q.13, a.6, ad.3, Q.17, a.6, co.) However, with Suaréz and other leading Jesuits, such as Luis de Molina (1535–1600), the will's power to directly elicit passing or suspending judgment became part of its freedom of exercise, with assent, dissent, and suspension being *acts of will*. (Cf. Freddoso 2004, 25; Vitz 2010, 111; 2015, 74–75; Ragland 2016, 177.)

I view that this Jesuit picture, with influences from both Scotist voluntarism and Thomist intellectualism, was largely inherited by Descartes from the Jesuits at La Flèche and incorporated as sort of a combination of libertarian and compatibilist freedom into his philosophy. As with cognition, the thinking by which Descartes was mostly influenced was not Medieval but early modern.[9]

[9] There are good reasons to see the influence on both cognition and will coming from Baroque rather than Medieval Scholasticism. Descartes rarely mentions medieval thinkers other than Augustine and Aquinas,

3.3. Will and Suspension of Judgment

We saw earlier that Descartes considers willing and perceiving as the two "general headings" of thinking. However, unlike in the late Scholastic tradition, they are not to be thought really distinct faculties or active agents within the same soul (for Descartes, the mind is a single substance without parts) but more like constantly manifest powers (cf. *SPQ*: 1998, 85–86; see Perler 2013; S. Schmid 2015). For Descartes, then, the will is a capacity; moreover, a *free* capacity. Nevertheless, there is a debate on how exactly the will is free, especially on a famous paragraph from the Fourth Meditation:

> [T]he will simply consists in our ability to do or not to do something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid); or rather, it consists simply in the fact that when the intellect puts something forward for affirmation or denial or for pursuit or avoidance, our inclinations are such that we do not feel we are determined by an external force. (AT VII, 57; CSM II, 40).

Descartes seems to give two contrary accounts of the will's freedom from both sides of the compatibilism debate. Does he then follow earlier (direct) voluntarists, such as Scotus, Ockham and Suaréz, and consider the will's freedom to be essentially indifferent (like the first part suggests), or the Thomistic intellectualists, and consider it to be spontaneous (like the second part suggests)?

There is, though, further complexity regarding the will and its acts to tackle before advancing in this issue. Merely following voluntarism does not yet commit one to a libertarian or incompatibilist notion of the will's freedom, as alluded, because one's voluntarism can be either direct or indirect.

3.3.1. Direct and Indirect Doxastic Voluntarism

Descartes, like the 17th century Jesuits and unlike Aquinas, does not view judgment solely as a chore of the reasoning power. According to him, our ability to make judgments becomes more the area of will than of cognition in distinguishing thinking to cognizing and willing powers or capacities.

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once referring to his possession of *Summa Theologiae* (AT II, 630; CSMK, 142), but he mentions several Renaissance and early modern Jesuit thinkers, like Fransisco de Toledo (1532–1596), Rubius (1548–1615), and the "Conimbricenses", a set of commentaries on Aristotle done by Jesuits at the Portugese University of Coimbra, among them leading Jesuit thinkers Suárez and Molina (both voluntarists). He also famously refers to Suárez in the Fourth Replies and mentions purchasing Sancto Paulo's *SPQ* as an abstract of Scholastic philosophy, commenting it to be "the best book of its kind ever made" (AT III, 185, 232, VII, 235; CSM II, 164, CSMK, 154, 156). The book, while not a Jesuit work, combined many elements from Thomism and Scotism. See Perler 2015, 258. Cf. Kenny 1972, 134–135; Wee 2014, 187–188.

> [O]ver and above perception, which is prerequisite of judgment, we need affirmation and negation to determine the form of the judgment […] [W]e are often free to withhold our assent, even if we perceive the matter in question. Hence I assigned the act of judging itself […] to the determination of the will rather than to the perception of the intellect (*Comments*: AT VIIIB, 363; CSM I, 307.)

Judgments result from the cooperation between understanding and will. "[T]o make a judgment, the intellect is of course required since, [if] we do not in any way perceive, there is no judgment we can make. However, the will is required so that, once something is perceived in some manner, our assent may be given" (AT VIIIA, 18; CSM I, 204). Coming across something that inclines toward judgment is an act of cognition while forming or withholding judgment on that inclination is an act of the will.

Allow me to elucidate. I gain a sense impression of a tree growing next to the railway track when I happen to turn my attention from writing this chapter and look outside the balcony window. I see that it has certain qualities, such as size, figure, and the colour of leaves. My belief in the tree's existence is a judgment when a sense impression of a tree is conveyed to my understanding and I accept it to be real and existing by my will. My will is free and has the independent freedom of choice, so I may also voluntarily deny said proposition as false (the tree does not exist) or suspend my judgment on the existence of the tree altogether. If I, say, consider that my perception of the tree is too obscure and confused, I can decline the judgment that the tree exists (it is merely a telephone pole that I mistake for a tree) or, considering that I might only dream of seeing the tree (and even of writing the chapter, perhaps), I can wilfully suspend judgment on whether the tree exists or not.

Descartes, then, is a doxastic voluntarist; but is he a strong voluntarist in line with the 16th century Jesuits, or is he more in line with the Thomistic theory, viewing reason also playing a crucial part in forming and altering doxastic states? A long-held tradition reads Descartes as committed to direct doxastic voluntarism (DDV) or direct voluntarism (DV) for short, viewing that we are capable of assenting, dissenting, and suspending based only on our will to do so. Thus, these acts would be utterly volitional. DV can be divided into two further positions, direct positive voluntarism (+DV) and direct negative voluntarism (-DV). +DV deals with the act of forming judgments, maintaining that one can accept or deny a proposition wilfully and either believe or not believe something merely voluntarily. -DV deals with the act of suspending judgment, maintaining that it can likewise be accomplished by a simple act of will. (For DV readings of Descartes, see, e.g., Frankfurt 2008; E. Curley 1975; M. Wilson 1978; B. Williams 2015; Broughton 2002; MacArthur 2003.)

I read Descartes instead as committed to indirect doxastic voluntarism (IDV) or indirect voluntarism (IV) for short, considering the will and reason working together in

forming and suspending judgments, with the will affecting doxastic states indirectly by deciding to exercise concentration and pay attention to reasons and evidence for the state in question. IV is also divided into indirect positive voluntarism (+IV) and indirect negative voluntarism (-IV). Per +IV, the will must direct attention to reasons for accepting or denying some belief. Likewise, by -IV, in order to suspend judgment, the will must direct this attention to reasons for doubt and suspension. (Cf. Araujo 2003, 31–34; Newman 2008, 343; Vitz 2010, 107–108; 2015, 73–74; Schüssler 2013, 148–150.)

Because this is a work on Descartes's skepticism as methodic suspension of judgment, I will concentrate on -DV and -IV. Note that defending IV in suspension does not commit one to supporting IV in formation of doxastic states. One can read Descartes as an indirect negative voluntarist and a direct positive voluntarist at the same time (or vice versa). Nevertheless, I do view Descartes as following IV in both positive and negative judgment processes, for reasons I will not elaborate here.[10]

Support for -DV seems to be found in the Fourth Meditation, when the meditator refers to her God-given "freedom to assent or not to assent" in cases where there is insufficient clarity and distinctness, stating that if she simply refrains from making a judgment in such cases, she is behaving correctly (AT VII, 59–61; CSM II, 41–42). Descartes also states in a Letter to Clerselier (12 January 1646):

> [I]t is evident that [suspension] is something in our power. For [...] to get rid of every kind of preconceived opinion, all we need to do is resolve not to affirm or deny anything which we have previously affirmed or denied until we have examined it afresh. (AT IXA, 204; CSM II, 270.)

Remarks like these have made many commentators see the will as having direct control over the meditator's suspension of judgment. Suspension of judgment by -DV could then work in the following way. When the meditator states in the beginning of the First Meditation that earlier acquired knowledge is full of falsehood and, due to this, decides to overthrow everything previously learned, a general overthrow of all opinions would be accomplished by this mere decision (AT VII, 17–18; CSM II, 12). The meditator suspends judgment on earlier beliefs because she *decides* to suspend them, with the resolution being itself already the act of overthrow. No further steps are required. This *provisional suspension of judgment* would then be distinct from the following skeptical scenarios, occurring even before their consideration. (See Frankfurt 2008, 24–31. Cf. Broughton 2002, 58.)

[10] See, however, Forsman (2015; 2017). Note that -DV does not need to hold that we can directly suspend on *every* perception, and many proponents of DV agree that clear and distinct perceptions are utterly irresistible for the will.

3.3.2. Indirect Negative Voluntarism

However, it seems that -DV simplifies and causes tension in Descartes's account in an unwarranted way. Indeed, indirect negative voluntarism, that suspending on a perception requires one to attend to reasons for doubt, is gaining growing support in recent discussions (e.g., Kenny 1998; Halbach 2002; Araujo 2003; Della Rocca 2006; Newman 2008; Carriero 2009; Naaman-Zauderer 2010).

Support for -IV can be found in the First Meditation. Right at the beginning, the meditator states: "[F]or the purpose of casting aside all my opinions, it will be enough to find in each of them at least some reason for doubt (*rationem dubitandi*)" (AT VII, 18; CSM II, 12; translation modified). According to Descartes, the meditator first requires reasons for doubt, provided by the skeptical scenarios, to cast her prejudices aside, this applying to every opinion one wishes to suspend.

Descartes also emphasises the reasons for doubt in the *Search*: "[O]pinions first received in our imagination remain so deeply imprinted there that our will cannot erase (*effacer*) them on its own, but can do so only by calling on the assistance of powerful reasons (*puissantes raisons*) (AT X, 509; CSM II, 496) and in the 1646 Letter to Clerselier "[B]efore we can decide to doubt, we need some reason for doubting (*raison de douter*); and that is why in my First Meditation I put forwards the principal reasons for doubt (*les principals*)" (AT IXA, 204; CSM II, 270). Descartes clearly holds that one requires strong reasons in order to succeed in the suspension. The scenarios precede the suspension because the former are necessary for the latter. This becomes evident in the Fifth Replies when answering Gassendi on why not just briefly state the previous knowledge to be regarded as uncertain: "Is it really so easy to free ourselves from all the errors which we have soaked up since our infancy? […] [M]ost people, although verbally admitting [to the suspension], never do so in fact, because they do not spend any care or effort (*studium aut laborem*) on the task…" (AT VII, 348; CSM II, 242). The difficulty of the general overthrow is likewise emphasised in the First Meditation, described as both an "enormous task" (*ingens opus*) and "arduous undertaking (*laboriosum […] institutum*)" (AT VII, 17, 23; CSM II, 12, 15). Descartes then denies the ease of suspension and holds it to require more than a simple, solitary act of will. (Cf. Della Rocca 2006, 149; Newman 2008, 344.)

However, the proponents of -DV do not have to surrender this quickly. Firstly, they do not have to commit to the ease of suspense – that voluntariness is direct does not mean it is not difficult. Secondly, in more than an uncomplicated act of will being required, they can rely on what I call the *memory argument*. Say that Hobbes decides to stop eating tuna by an uncomplicated act of the will at noon on the 1st of Janurary.

Based on just the decision, can we say that Hobbes really did stop eating tuna? If Hobbes opens a new can at 12:30, the answer would be no. However, if by the next New Year's Eve Hobbes had not eaten any tuna, we could say yes – Hobbes did indeed stop eating tuna. A proponent of -DV can see the meditator in a position similar to Hobbes: she can make the decision to suspend judgment on all beliefs, but if she immediately accepts another belief, she would not have suspended her judgment after all. Descartes indeed puts emphasis on remembering the resolve in several places:

> [I]t is not enough merely to have noticed [the need to suspend]; I must make an effort to remember it […] I can avoid error [in a way], which depends merely on my remembering to withhold judgment on any occasion when the truth of the matter is not clear […] [N]o matter how much we have resolved to assert or deny anything, we easily forget our resolution afterwards if we have not strongly impressed it on our memory. (AT VII, 22, 61–62, IXA, 204; CSM II, 15, 43, 270.)

Per the memory argument, the scenarios help with the suspension, but only in reinforcing the resolution and avoiding formation of new beliefs. (Frankfurt 2008, 29–30; cf. Broughton 2002, 58.)

However, such a line of argument is an insufficient response to the second source of tension for -DV, namely the *order* of skeptical scenarios and suspension. The reason why Descartes presses the meditator with the skeptical scenarios in the First Meditation is that one first requires reasons for doubt to be able to suspend judgment. Descartes clearly places the scenarios before the suspension; thus, it would be incoherent on his part if suspension occurred as a distinct act before them. Harry Frankfurt has, though, challenged this order on account of the so-called *basket-of-apples* analogy.

> Suppose [Bourdin] had a basket full of apples and, being worried that some of the apples were rotten, wanted to take out the rotten ones to prevent the rot spreading. How would he proceed? Would he not begin by tipping (*rejiceret*) the whole lot out of the basket? And would not the next step to be to cast his eye over each apple in turn, and pick up and put back in the basket only those he saw to be sound, leaving the others? (Seventh Replies: AT VII, 481; CSM II, 324.)

According to Frankfurt, the analogy suggests that the project of overthrowing opinions has two phases: phase 1, where the "basket" is tipped over and judgment is suspended on all earlier beliefs, and phase 2, where the earlier beliefs are closely examined to see what can be reinstated. The skeptical scenarios, according to Frankfurt, would belong to phase 2 and if the scenarios take place before the suspension, the mistake is Descartes's, confusing the two phases of his project. (Frankfurt 2008, 24–31.)

However, Frankfurt's account leaves unnoticed that the basket-of-apples analogy is unrelated to the First Meditation but is, instead, a reply to an objection considering the Second. When the meditator there considers what she is, she first ponders what she

thought she was before beginning the project (AT VII, 25; CSM II, 17). Bourdin objects that is the meditator not now referring to things already rejected from the mind? The basket of apples is Descartes's reply: To examine preconceived conceptions, it is necessary to tip the "basket" and empty its contents, yet, overturning the basket does not mean throwing the apples away. They stay on the side for later inspection. (Cf. AT IXA, 204; CSM II, 270.). Frankfurt's 'second phase' happens then in the Second Meditation with the meditator going through her previous sense-based notions of herself and the world, while the 'first phase' occurs in the First, and there is no reason to consider it occurring distinctly from the skeptical scenarios.

Regarding the memory argument, the difficulty in remembering the decision is not due to the memory itself (cf. *Conversation*: AT V, 148; CSMK, 334). Neither Hobbes nor the meditator seem to have poor mnemonic abilities. The difficulty is due, rather, to the restricted attention span and the mind's natural propensity to believing habitual opinions (e.g., that sensory perception is reliable).

> I am aware of a certain weakness in me, in that I am unable to keep my attention fixed (*defixuss inhaerere*) on one and the same item of cognition (*cognitioni*) at all times; but by *attentive and repeated meditation* (*attentâ & fraepius iteratâ meditatione*) *I am nevertheless able to make myself remember* it as often as the need arises, and thus get into the habit of avoiding error. (Fourth Meditation: AT VII, 62; CSM II, 43. Translation modified. Emphasis added.)

The mind's grasp of the meditation easily loosens, which makes the suspension difficult to retain. However, when the meditation is replicated often enough with sufficient attention, one becomes more competent in the suspension and can accomplish it for longer periods of time. Still, it is not easy to diverge from the earlier inclinations (that, in a sense, are even justifiable), and the mind's grip from the suspension easily slackens (see chapters 1.3 and 2.5.2). Suspension is then cumbersome not because it is difficult to remember but because it is *mentally laborious*. Making oneself remember the suspension is specifically paying attention to the reasons for doubt against the reasons for belief, recalling the vitality of withholding assent and once again vigorously concentrating on it. This effort is likewise what Descartes means in the Letter to Clerselier by impressing the resolution strongly on memory not to affirm or deny anything (cf. the First Meditation: AT VII, 22; CSM II, 15).

Indirect negative voluntarism is, thus, a textually stronger and a more coherent way of reading Descartes's understanding of the will and suspension of judgement. More than just an act of will is required to suspend on the tree's existence, namely, to find reasons to consider the experience of the tree to be in some way in error or disconnected from the way reality might truly be. The commitment to suspend judgment may be easy to make, yet, its actual success is the result of arduous and attentive meditative practice,

and even then, one can suspend judgment only temporarily. The will can then affect a negative doxastic state indirectly by deciding to seek and contemplate evidence for that state.[11] (Cf. AT VII 62; CSM II, 43; see also chapter 4.1.1.)

3.3.3. Indifferent vs. Spontanious Freedom of the Will

Let us now return to the previous issue on the will's freedom: Is the will free to suspend and assent indifferently or spontaniously? Descartes's answer here is somewhat complicated by his picture of cognition. One can gain either completely clear and distinct perceptions, in which no room for doubt or error seem to be present at the time of the perception, or more or less obscure and confused perceptions, which do have room for doubt and error and, thus, are merely plausible (*probabile*) but suffice to base action and avoid blameworthiness in morally certain everyday life. Regarding clear and distinct perceptions, most commentators consider the will assenting to them out of necessity being so irrestistably inclined it has no choice but to assent (e.g., Kenny 1998; B. Williams 2015; M. Wilson 1978; Rosenthal 1986; Araujo 2003; Carriero 2009; Naaman-Zauderer 2010; Christofidou 2013). Thus, the will would be spontaneously free at least regarding clarity and distinctness – the will is 'forced' by the intellect's (natural or ordained) recognition of the good and the truth but is not inclined by anything external to it. This reading is supported by the *Meditations*:

> In order to be free, there is no need for me to be inclined both ways; on the contrary, the more I incline in one direction – either because I clearly understand that reasons of truth and goodness point that way, or because of a divinely produced disposition of my inmost thoughts – the freer is my choice. Neither divine grace nor natural knowledge ever diminishes freedom; on the contrary, they increase and strengthen it. (Fourth Meditation: AT VII, 57–58; CSM II, 40).

Some have even extended the intellectual determination to acts of suspension in that we have no choice but to suspend judgment if we fully recognise how obscure and confused the perceptions are (e.g., Halbach 2002, 557; Naaman-Zauderer 2010, 107–108, 113–115). Descartes would then leave no room for voluntary decision in assent or suspension and would be on the side of *compatibilism*.

However, several commentators have instead read Descartes as a *libertarian*, viewing the will to be indifferently free (e.g., Davies 2014; Alanen 2003; 2013; Wee 2014). The libertarian reading is based around another set of texts. Descartes comments in the

[11] This is the case at least with habitually made judgments, e.g., the existence of a familiar tree by a railway track. Schüssler (2013) reads Descartes holding -IV with entrenched habitual beliefs, and -DV with newly formed (non-C&D) beliefs.

Principia that automatons performing designed actions perfectly are not deserving of praise or blame due to their movements occurring necessarily, whereas humans are deserving since they are the "author" of their own actions. "[I]t is a supreme perfection in man that he acts voluntarily, that is, freely…" (I, §37: AT VIIIA, 18–19; CSM I, 205). The strongest support for libertarianism comes from a particularly notorious Letter to Mesland in 1645, in which Descartes admits the will has "a positive faculty of determining oneself to one or other of two contrarieties", not only with those actions in which it is not pushed by any evident reasons on either side but also with "all other actions". Here, Descartes seems to allow a two-way voluntary decision between assent and suspension not only with obscure and confused, but even with clear and distinct perceptions, considering it "always open to us" to "hold back from pursuing a clearly know good, or from admitting a clearly perceived truth, provided we consider it a good thing to demonstrate the freedom of our will by so doing." (AT IV, 173; CSMK, 245.)

Now, an important clarification. Descartes appears happy to speak of the will's freedom as both spontaneous and indifferent in the Fourth Meditation. Even when considering the will freer the more it is inclined in one direction, the meditator comments that "the indifference I feel when there is no reason pushing me in one direction rather than another is the *lowest grade of freedom*" (AT VII, 58–59; CSM II, 40–41). Even in the best support for compatibilism, Descartes does not *deny* the freedom of indifference from a Cartesian agent but grants it as a *lower grade*, compared to the higher grade of spontaneous freedom. The debate, then, is more about whether the will's freedom is in *essence* in line with compatibilism or libertarianism, trying to press Descartes into holding one over the other.

However, Descartes distinguishes between two senses of indifference to Mesland:

> [N]otice that 'indifference' in [the *Meditations*] context seems to me strictly to mean that state of the will when it is not impelled more (*magis*) one way rather than another by any perception of truth and goodness. This is the sense in which I took it when I said that the lowest grade (*gradum*) of freedom is that by which we determine ourselves to things to which we are indifferent. But perhaps others mean by 'indifference' a positive faculty of determining oneself to one or the other of two contrarieties… (AT IV, 173; CSMK, 245. Translation modified.)

There is, then, 'indifference' 1) as not being strongly impelled in either way due to an *equilibrium of reasons* and 2) as *self-determination* to one or the other of two contraries (e.g., affirm-deny), with 1) being a *mental state*, the lowest grade of freedom described in the Fourth, and 2) being a *power* in the positive Jesuit sense (which Mesland probably supported). Typically, commentators have wanted to strictly separate these two sorts of 'indifference', with the supporters of compatibilism reading Descartes to use only the first sense when referring to indifference (e.g., Naaman-Zauderer: 2010, 106–107), while

the supporters of the libertarian reading extend the second sense to cover not only cases of a rough equal balance but even of strongly impelling clarity and distinctness (e.g., Alanen 2003, 230–233; 2013, 191–193). (Cf. Ragland 2013; 2016, chapter 6.)

However, Descartes's comments make it clear that the two senses are intimately linked. The previous quote demonstrates that Descartes does not deny the positive power of self-determination "with respect to those actions to which it is not pushed by any evident reasons on one side rather than on the other". Instead, he contextualises the distinction by separating freedom before (*antequem*) the acts of the will are *elicited* (*eliciantur*) and during (*dum*) the elicitation, with the positive self-determining power available *before* the elicitation. (AT IV, 173; CSM II, 245.) What Descartes seems to have in mind here is similar to the Scholastic distinction between freedom of exercise and freedom of specification, supported by the term *elicitation* with the acts of the will (see chapter 3.2.2). We recall that freedom of exercise for the Dominican compatibilism refers to *attentive control*: The will has direct elicitative control over what to contemplate and for how long, being free to exercise attention and concentration but not free to control assent. Only in cases of hesitation does the will have freedom of specification and be able to indirectly command assent in some direction. Jesuits, such as Súarez, later modified the account, allowing the will direct elicitation of even acts of assent.[12]

I read Descartes here as trying to *combine* these two accounts. The will can freely exercise attentive control (i.e., choose where to direct the attention), before assent or suspension is elicited and, thus, decide what reasons or evidence to focus on (doxastic control being indirect). This is what Descartes refers to 'indifference' as *self-determination* (not as indifference in the Jesuit sense). However, the will is capable of choosing either assent or suspension if the reasons pro and contra happen to be *equally balanced*. This act of will, unlike in the Dominican model, also seems to be a *direct elicitation*. Therefore, although he generally is an indirect voluntarist, when it comes to the state of equalised indifference, Descartes follows the Suárezian-Jesuit model of granting the will direct power to act. This may sound incoherent with indirect voluntarism, but note that assent or suspension is in the direct control of the will *only if* the attended reasons are balanced out. Any doxastic voluntarism that relies on the direction of attention is indirect. (See Della Rocca 2006, 149; Schüssler 2013, 158.[13])

However, neither sense of indifference is entailed *during* the moment of elicitation, as freedom then consists simply in "ease of operation", with "freedom, spontaneity and

[12] Descartes exchanges "elicit" with "exercise (*exerceantur*)" in a variant of the 1645 Letter (AT III, 705). Mesland, though, was a Jesuit priest, so the terminology might be Descartes's way to humor the recipient.
[13] Vitz (2010; 2015, 75–78) argues for -DV by reading the reasons for doubt as a necessary and effective precondition: Performing an elicited act of will alters the intellect's perception not to be clear and distinct, enabling a separate suspension act. However, this turns -DV into a form of -IV. Cf. Schüssler 2013, 159.

voluntariness" being the same thing" (AT IV, 174–175; CSM II, 246). It is then not only in the *Meditations* that Descartes describes the will as having both indifferent and spontaneous freedom. Likewise, in the *Principia*, we have "such close awareness (*conscios*) of the freedom and indifference which is in us that there is nothing we can grasp more evidently or more perfectly" while "the minds of all of us have been so moulded by nature that whenever we perceive something clearly, we spontaneously give our assent to it and are unable to doubt its truth" (I, §§41 & 43: AT VIIIA, 20–21; CSM I, 206–207; translation modified).[14] Even in §37, alleged as evidence for libertarianism, Descartes writes "[w]hen we embrace the truth, our doing so is much more to our credit than if we were not able to not embrace it (*quam si non possemus non amplecti*)" (AT VII, 19; CSM I, 205; translation modified).[15] Descartes's reference to automatons is that humans (unlike, e.g., animals), have autonomy over their actions, and are not designed to just churn out reaction or assent based on clear and distinct perception (one can always fail to see things clearly). That human action differs from brute mechanical activity does not mean the act cannot be spontaneous (i.e., due to reasons). (See Letter to Mesland, 2 May 1644: AT IV, 117; CSMK, 234. Cf. Naaman-Zauderer 2010, 125; Christofidou 2013, 155–156; Cunning 2014, 81–82.)

3.3.4. Indifferent and Spontaneous Freedom of the Will

We have seen that Descartes consistently asserts both views in a single text.[16] Historically such a combination is out of the ordinary, but it is not impossible considering Descartes's education combined Thomist and Augustinian-Scotist elements (cf. Ragland 2016, 195–205). I then follow so-called *moderate compatibilism/incompatibilism*, that spontaneity and indifference are both part of the will's freedom (e.g., Shapiro 2008; Newman 2008; Schüssler 2013; Ragland 2016; Fogal 2017). I particularly read both types of freedom as playing important parts in the meditative skeptical exercise.

Descartes notes in the Fourth Meditation that the mental state of indifference may come in several ways. "[T]his indifference does not merely apply to cases where the intellect is wholly ignorant, but extends in general to every case where the intellect does not have sufficiently clear knowledge at the time when the will deliberates" (AT VII, 59; CSM II, 41; cf. 1644 Letter to Mesland: AT IV, 115; CSMK, 233). The indifference

[14] Descartes, though, also considers all our volitions pre-determined by God, but insists that this does not hinder our freedom, even though we do not grasp why. Cf. AT IV, 314; CSMK, 272. See chapter 7.3.
[15] CSM translates "than would be the case if we could not do otherwise", leaving a libertarian impression.
[16] It is, then, unlikely he changed his mind between the *Meditations* and the Mesland Letter (contra, e.g., Alquié 1950; Beyssade 1994). Cf. Kenny 1972, 153; Shapiro 2008, 25; Naaman–Zauderer 2010, 121.

can occur if one is ignorant of the subject matter (for example, if I am living in Leiden without access to a weather forecast, and were to judge whether or not it currently rains in Amsterdam, or as a non-expert were to judge how the weather is on Jupiter, I would be at a complete impasse) and also if neither side is sufficiently persuasive over the other, as in there is room for doubt and error. Descartes also admits that indifference comes in degrees: the less inclination there is, the more indifference there is. This seems to support the compatibilist reading, in that the more indifference there is, the less the will is (spontaneously) free, with complete indifference being "the lowest degree" (the will having almost no freedom whatsoever). However, note that the will is not *passive* regarding the evidence – it *actively* attends to it. The will can choose which evidence to more keenly attend to, even to try forcing the reasons in balance like pushing one side of the scale with a finger. At the end of the First Meditation, when the "reasonable" and "highly probable" habitual opinions force themselves on the meditator, she decides in return to "turn [her] will in completely the opposite direction" by "pretending (*fingere*) for a time" that these opinions are false "until the weight of preconceived opinion is counter-balanced (*aequatis utrimque*)" (AT VII, 22; CSM II, 15). Because the issue is about "pretending", the meditator does not truly believe the opinions are false (assent to their falsehood) but directs her attention to the supposition and imagine it to be real. (Compare with 16th century spiritual exercises, chapter 1.2.1. Cf. Shapiro 2008, 26–28.)

Descartes holds the will capable of assent in cases of incomplete indifference (the reasons incline but not clearly and distinctly), similar to complete indifference. After all, the source of errors is that we extend the will further than the intellect clearly perceives, assenting to things we do not fully understand, and "[s]ince the will is indifferent in such cases, it easily turns aside from what is true and good" (AT VII, 58; CSM II, 40–41). However, the assent is clearly made for a *reason*, having at least an 'appearance' of truth or good even if we do not sufficiently understand why (AT I, 366: CSMK, 56). Fully indifferent suspension is available only by evenly balancing the reasons for assent and dissent, which might require extra work initially but with practice we can eventually reach equilibrium merely by noticing the insufficient manner of our habitual thinking.

> [A]lthough probable conjectures may pull me in one direction, the mere awareness that they are simply conjectures, and not certain and indubitable reasons, is itself quite enough to push my assent the other way. My experience in the last few days confirms this: the mere fact that I found all my previous beliefs were in some sense open to doubt was enough to turn my very most confidence (*quammaxime credideram*) in their truth into the supposition (*supposui*) that they were false. (AT VII, 59; CSM II, 41; translation modified. Cf. Shapiro 2008, 32; Cunning 2014, 82.)

The Medievals and early moderns traditionally connected doubt with a roughly even balance of reasons pro and contra (being *aequiprobabilis*, equally plausible) in which a

direct decision is either difficult or impossible, even in the sphere of moral plausibility (see Schüssler 2013, 171). The subsequent state would be similar to the Pyrrhonist *isostheneia*, making them suspend judgment on contrary impressions due to indeterminable tension. Descartes's 'state of indifference' clearly follows this historical tradition. However, for him, since the context of inquiry (governed by metaphysical certainty) is to be distinguished from the context of every day action (governed by moral certainty), such evenness should cause pause and deliberation only in the search for truth, for in ordinary life, mere plausibility suffices for compellingess. And "[f]rom time to time we may even have to make a choice between two alternatives, even though it is not apparent that one of the two is more probable than the other" (*Principia* I, §3: AT VIIIA, 5; CSM II, 193). (Cf. Naaman-Zauderer 2010, 105–108. See chapter 2.5.2.[17])

Furthermore, nothing about the suspension seems voluntary for the Pyrrhonists, and while the intellectualists grant the will freedom of exercise (deciding what to contemplate and for how long), suspension would be up to the intellect which the will only *indirectly* commands. However, suspension is an act of the will for Descartes, and, as such, includes voluntary control. The will is free to choose in the state of indifference to affirm or deny either alternative or suspend judgment over them; nothing compels or determines it. Unlike some have argued (e.g., Naaman-Zauderer 2010), even at a state of complete equilibrium, recognising how much doubt and error might be involved there, the suspension is not determined or forced on us but is a *voluntary action*. We could choose one alternative over another and hope that we are betting on the right horse.

Nevertheless, while the suspension is not determined, it is still the *morally right* choice.

> If […] I simply refrain from making a judgment in cases where I do not perceive the truth with sufficient clarity and distinctness, then it is clear that I am behaving correctly and avoiding error. But if in such cases I either affirm or deny, then I am not using my free will correctly. If I go for the alternative which is false, then obviously I shall be in error; if I take the other side, then it is by pure chance that I arrive at the truth, and I shall still be at fault... (AT VII, 59–60; CSM II, 41.[18])

When the reasons for pro and contra appear to be in stasis, with insufficient clarity and distinctness on both sides, the *morally secure* decision is to avoid error on both sides by withholding the assent for the time being, at least until further reasons or evidence can be discovered. Even if the meditator would happen to bet on the right horse by chance, her success would not be due to the right reasons or be the result of a reliable process but would be merely a case of epistemic luck. She would still misuse her freedom by making judgments without full understanding and be just as blameworthy and morally

[17] Descartes views indifference in the moral-religious sphere *a vice in itself* (AT V, 159; CSMK, 342).
[18] Note that this morally correct use of the will applies even if we read Descartes as a strict compatibilist.

responsible as if she would have chosen the wrong alternative. Thus, while the suspension is not spontaneous and one can make an indifferent voluntary decision, the suspension is still *morally normative*, at least with insufficiently clear or distinct perceptions. The meditator requires a reason to suspend judgment (seeing it potentially beneficial) for motivating assent withholding as a higher strategy of avoiding errors. (See chapters 4.1.1 and 4.4. Cf. Araujo 2003, 58–59.)

Descartes's understanding of the will's freedom is, then, a sort of a combination of Dominican intellectual spontaneity and Jesuit voluntaristic indifference. The will's freedom is exercised spontaneously with clear and distinct perceptions, those being *irresistible* reasons and evidence for something. However, when we are not determined towards either side due to having equally persuasive or equally non-compelling reasons, we are able to exercise the "lesser" (yet true) freedom of indifference and choose between assent, dissent, and suspension. Judicious behavior is, then, a collaboration between the understanding and the will, in which they follow a precise order of labor. The will has attentive control over the direction and duration of mental concentrative activity until elicitation of judgment, after which understanding takes charge. With clear and distinct perceptions, voluntary assent to overwhelming evidence is then a matter of necessity, but if the evidential reasons are deemed incomplete or insufficient (less than optimally clear and distinct), the will can direct attention to conflicting possibilities, balance the scales, and result with capacity for indifferent choice.[19]

Descartes emphasises to Gassendi, when the latter defends probabilistic determinism in the Fifth Objections, that indifferent freedom is not something to be proved by a rational argument but, being self-evident, ought to be *experienced* by attending to it. (AT VII, 316, 377–378; CSM II, 220, 259–260. Cf. *Conversation* and *Principia* I, §§39–41: AT V, 159, VIIIA, 19–20; CSM I, 205–206, CSMK, 342). Such experience is important in discovering our agency on the path to our existence and nature (cf. chapter 5.1.2). However, due to the temporal limitation of human attentiveness, such indifference, like suspension of judgment, can be upheld only temporarily, until the persuasiveness of certain habitual opinions begins to unbalance the scales again (cf. chapter 4.4). By sticking to the cognitive exercise of avoiding error by withholding on incomplete reasons, at least until more evidence presents itself, we eventually discover the true essence of our will as being spontaneously free and determined towards the truth and the good in a higher manner, with the experienced indifference being only the lowest grade of freedom. (Cf. Letter to Elizabeth, 15 September 1645: AT IV, 295–296; CSMK, 267. See Schüssler 2013, 157, 167; Shapiro 2008, 30–35; Alanen 2013, 185–186; Cunning 2014, 83–84.)

[19] What causes this modification of redirection seems to be the meditator's recognition of insufficiency.

3.4. Perception and Cognition

Descartes comments in a Letter to Elisabeth from 1645 that there are only two things we require for judging well: "knowledge of the truth" and "practice in remembering and assenting to this knowledge whenever the occasion demands" (AT IV, 291; CSMK, 265). The latter depends on our will, requiring self-constraint and practice to suspend judgment on all potentially error-ridden perceptions, while the former depends on our understanding's cognitive capabilities. (Cf. Naaman-Zauderer 2010, 183.) However, to successfully 'know the truth', we first must be able to reliably distinguish between error-ridden and errorless cognition. Thus, after analysing Descartes's understanding of the will and its freedom, let us now consider what amounts to true Cartesian cognition.

Descartes, as we know, is strongly critical of the Aristotelian tradition when it comes to cognising things as they are, particularly the strong reliance on sensory material, image-like phantasms, and the late Scholastic concept of intuition as sensation-based visualisation of particular objects. For him, the mind has intuitive access to reality *independent* of the senses. Descartes extends his criticism of sensory reliance not only to the self-appointed followers of Aristotle (traditional Scholastic thinking) but also to all those "saturated with his opinions in their youth", such as sensation-reliant proponents of New Science (e.g., atomistic materialists and mechanists), because "these are the only opinions taught in the Schools" (AT IXB, 6–7; CSM I, 182). (Cf. chapter 2.5.)

The irony, of course, is that Descartes was likewise a product of the Aristotelian school system. Indeed, in his early writings Descartes still seems to hold on to the Aristotelian style sensory reliance, taught by the school masters at La Flèche (see *CM* & *CP*: AT X, 91–92, 218–219; CSM I, 5; cf. Larmore 2006, 20; 2014, 52; Hatfield 2007, 11). However, he was growing more critical of Aristotelian doctrines by 1625 while living in Paris. This early critique is most prevalent in the opening chapter of the *World*, titled "The difference between our sensations and the things that produce them", and in the *Regulae* Rules 2 and 3, which contain the earliest rendition of the doctrine of *intuitive clear and distinct perceptions* (AT X, 362–370, XI, 3–6; CSM I, 13–15, 81–82).[20]

3.4.1. Clarity and Distinctness

Descartes, in a Sanchesian manner, describes true knowledge (*scientia*) as certain and evident cognition (*cognitio*) (AT X, 362–364; CSM II, 10–12; cf. chapter 2.4), but whereas

[20] Gaukroger argues that the *Regulae*'s early parts are composed 1619–1620, but he also considers the initial C&D different from the one after the early 1630s (1995, 111–112, 202). Cf. Alanen 2000, 260, note 17.

Sanches saw such epistemic ideal as practically unattainable, evident cognition is attainable by clear and distinct (C&D) perception for Descartes. Perception is clear "when it is present and accessible (*praesens et aperta*) to the attentive mind", like when something is in plain view and cannot be unnoticed. A perception is both clear and distinct when "it is so sharply separated from all other perceptions that it contains within itself only what is clear." Clearness, therefore, refers to the strength of the manifestation, which in certain cases can be controlled by attention, while distinctness refers to the sharpness of distinguishability from other perceptions. Perceptions can be clear without being distinct but not distinct without being clear. For example, a feeling of intense pain manifests itself as if something in the painful limb that resembles the pain, being clear but not distinct, while 'self-evident' mathematical truths can be clear and distinct if attended to with sufficient care and segregation. Both clearness and distinctness, like inclination, have degrees: Perceptions can be more or less manifest, more or less complete in their manifestation, and more or less carefully attended to. The clearer and more distinct our perception is the more attentively aware of a thing we are and the more perfect our clear cognition of its features is. (*Principia* I, §§45–46: AT VIIIA, 21–22; CSM I, 207–208. Cf. Alanen 2003, 66.)

Neither sensation nor imagination, the two main pillars of Aristotelian-Scholastic cognitive theory, appears sufficiently clear or distinct. Our sensory perception can be clear but not distinct, being usually accompanied by precipitated habitual judgments about its nature and origin (from "things outside us"), whereas imagination is neither clear nor distinct. Our ability to perceive clearly and distinctly is, then, based on another capacity, and the only mode of cognising left is *pure understanding* (*pure intelligere*) (AT VIIIA, 17; CSM I, 204). It is our intellect, instead of the senses or imagination, that grants us true cognition and reliable access to reality, especially on the three main tenets of human knowledge: God, the mind, and the body. (Cf. Carriero 2009, 3, 16).

What is it about our understanding that acts as the primary source of clear and distinct cognition? Descartes notes in the *Regulae* that, of "all the actions of the intellect by means of which we are able to arrive at cognition of things with no fear of being mistaken", we recognise two: *intuition* (*intuitus*) and *deduction* (*deductio*). Descartes distinguishes intuition from the senses and imagination, wanting to separate his "novel" use of the term from the way it is "lately used in the Schools", considering it "the conception of clear and attentive mind, which is so easy and distinct that there can be no room for doubt about what we are understanding". Deduction, conversely, is the process of inferring what necessarily follows from the intuited certainties through a "continuous and uninterrupted movement of thought" in which "each individual proposition is clearly intuited". Intuition, then, is the source of evidently cognising some

self-evident and certain truth, such as that 'I' exist or that 2+3=5, whereas deduction is a continuous chain of interconnected intuitions hung together that allows us to have certainty about truths that are not immediately self-evident. Even deduction is something one cannot perform erroneously (taken it is done with enough care and attention), yet intuition, being simpler, is more certain, being "the indubitable conception of a clear and attentive mind which proceeds solely from the light of reason". (Rule Three: AT X, 368–370; CSM I, 14–15. Translation modified.)

Of course, it is still rather difficult to fully determine the conditions under which intuition is perfect and reliable and we can be certain our perception is clear and distinct. Descartes is notoriously unclear about the criteria for clearness and distinctness and was criticised for the notion's subjectivity and ambiguity by Hobbes, Gassendi, and Leibniz (AT VII, 192, 278, 318; CSM II, 134, 194, 221; AG, 26–27). However, such vagueness is partly intentional and, especially in the *Meditations*, a feature of the cognitive exercise. Descartes prefers to demonstrate C&D by *examples*, instead of definitions or Stoic-like formal rules (an easy target for the skeptics), wanting the readers to experience and become accustomed with distinguishing clear perceptions from obscure ones (Second Replies: AT VII, 145–146, 164; CSM II, 104, 116; cf. Naaman-Zauderer 2010, 11–12).

What Descartes refers to in the *Regulae* as "certain", "errorless", and "indubitable" is clearly the *absolute peak* of clarity and distinctness, when the inclination is the most irresistible and assent the most spontaneous. For clarity, I will be referring to such a cognitive peak as (completely) clear and distinct, with all other degrees considered more or less obscure and confused, thus, merely plausible (i.e., doubtful). (Cf. chapter 3.3.4.)[21] It is no wonder that clear and distinct perception has been taken as an infallible mark of truth in certain readings, given this emphasis on the indubitability of intuition and its role in clarity and distinctness that Descartes places in these passages (see, e.g., Gueroult 1953; Kenny 1968; M. Wilson 1978; B. Williams 2015; Broughton 2002). Descartes is often read to take full certainty as the result of indubitability, so that clarity and distinctness of, say, my existence, cannot be doubted would make it fully certain. Such a reading is favoured by those seeing Descartes as an *epistemic internalist* (although not exclusively), with C&D providing indispensable internalist evidence. This internally accessible infallibility of clarity and distinctness is also referred to as Descartes's Truth Rule: Whatever is perceived clearly and distinctly is true (see AT VII, 35; CSM II, 24). Such intuitive infallibility tends to centre on the *cogito*, with the existence of the thinking 'I' taken as the first full certainty, a *foundationalist* truth (cf. chapter 5.1.2).

[21] Descartes, then, does not consider all of our thoughts to be transparently clear and distinct, unlike he is sometimes presented (e.g., McDowell 1998). Cf. Fine 2003b, 210–214; Rozemond 2006; Paul 2018. See chapter 1.1.

A version of this epistemically internalist foundationalism often credited to Descartes, which I call *cogito foundationalism* or *clear and distinct foundationalism*, can be found in early works such as the *Regulae*, as seen earlier, and the *Discourse*, which includes the first pronouncement of the mentioned Truth Rule (AT VII, 33; CSM I, 127). However, as argued earlier (chapter 1.1), by 1628 Descartes would have realised a radical skeptical concern in infallible intuitive cognition, namely, how do we know that our most evident intuition corresponds with the reality of things? Just as the Stoic concept of clear and distinct impressions as the criteria of truth was challenged by the skeptics, questioning the indistinguishability of cognitive and non-cognitive impressions, Descartes making peak clarity and distinctness the foundation of certain knowledge would become problematic for similar reasons: How can I rest assure that even at my highest cognitive peak, I actually do get things right? For all I know, more persuasive clarity and distinctness could be just as uncertain as obscurity and confusion.

Such a worry can particularly be seen rising with so-called *created eternal truths*, which Descartes had supported at least from 1630 onwards, that God was indifferently free in a *non-motivational way* in creating the truths of, for example, mathematics and the law of contradiction. Descartes considers human and divine will equal as an ability to "do or not do something", yet God's indifference diverges from, and is greater in extent, than ours. Humans always have reasons and motivations for something, whereas God *never* has any reasons (perception of truth and goodness) for his actions. God's indifference is therefore *unlimited*. (See Fourth Meditation and Sixth Replies: AT VII, 57, 431–433; CSM II, 40, 291–292. Cf. Alanen 2013, 186–187; Cunning 2014, 77; Ragland 2016, 98–100.) Thus, while the eternal truths are necessary (and are so independently of the existence of material objects), they are still metaphysically *contingent*. Our thinking is dictated by these eternal truths; thus, we cannot conceive them differently (and should not even try), but we should also not expect God's power of creation to be limited by what appears necessitated for humans. God creates not only what is actual but also what is *possible*. (Letters to Mersenne, 1630: AT I, 145–153; CSMK, 23–26).[22]

Descartes went against most Scholastic tradition with such doctrine, especially Aquinas and Suaréz, who considered logical necessity part of God's essence, necessary for created and divine minds alike, with not even God capable of contradictions. However, it is not as if this view had no predecessors. Scotus and Ockham considered God to voluntarily dictate what the good is (T. Williams 2013), and Buridan saw God able to make us doubt the non-contradictive principle (*QM* II, 2: 9vb), opening the door

[22] Cf. Replies (AT VII, 380, 432–436; CSM II, 261, 291–294), *Conversation* (AT V, 160; CSMK, 343), and Letters to Mesland, 2 May 1644, Arnauld, 29 July 1648, and More, 5 February 1649 (AT IV, 118–119, V, 224, 272–274; CSMK, 235, 358–359, 363–364).

for Descartes's more radical view. The largest influence on Descartes's position was likely Montaigne, separating human understanding from divine, considering it impossible for mere mortals to grasp, and, therefore, be in no position to say, what God can and cannot do (see chapter 2.4).

However, if human understanding in no way bounds God's creation, how can we know that our intuitive cognitive peak truly grasps what is true? Descartes's 1639 Letter to Mersenne describes truth as *conformity-relation*, likening truth to *being* in the sense that if something (thought of) exists, it is true (AT II, 597; CSMK, 139). Truth for Descartes is, then, a *metaphysical* rather than a propositional attribute; yet, God could have arranged a set of logical necessities for our understanding that do not correspond with any actual features of reality. What is to stop truth from also being different for us and for God if necessitation is? Descartes does vehemently reject such a consideration in the Second Replies (AT VII, 144–145; CSM II, 103), but the thought seems to have bothered him, being a probable reason for abandoning the *Regulae* in 1628, moving on to the 'larger project' (see chapter 1.1). (Cf. Frankfurt 1977; Alanen & Knuuttila 1988; Alanen 2008.)

Descartes's general outlook is closer to the Stoic Dogmatists than to their skeptical rivals, in that he views humans as naturally construed to attain the truth and live a good life, yet he sides with the skeptics in a very important detail: Just because one appears to have grasped the truth, that does not mean the truth has been grasped. One must demonstrate how and why the truth has been grasped. Descartes's cognitive project is required to clear all three horns of Agrippa's trilemma to succeed: the regressive, the axiomatic, and the circular (chapter 2.1.2). We require a reliable basis for cognition that relies on nothing else and that demonstrates why it is reliable without arguing in a circle. Clear and distinct intuition might fulfil the first but not the latter two. The basic problem in the *Meditations* project is, then, not so much about epistemological justification as it is about *metaphysical grounding*. (Cf. E. Curley 1978, 37–40, 72; 2006, 31–34; Gaukroger 1995, 202–210; Alanen 2000, 258–261.[23])

3.4.2. Cognitio*,* Persuasio*, and* Scientia

However, if the cognitive peak of clarity and distinctness is indubitable, and we necessarily assent to it whenever presented with one, how can clear and distinct

[23] Descartes then shares similar considerations with Carneades and Autrecourt in that convincing perceptions appear only plausible unless reliably grounded. See chapters 2.1.1. and 2.3.3. Cf. Bermúdez 1997, 746, note 5; Menn 1998, 218–220. Note that Descartes discusses created eternal truths in the same letter as the 'larger project', mentioning them to be part of his treatise on physics (AT I, 137–138, 146; CSM II, 21, 23). For created eternal truths, see also Forsman 2016.

perceptions be doubted? Descartes, in fact, states that clarity and distinctness are impossible to doubt only *at the moment they are perceived*.

> [I]f we see very clearly that a thing is good for us, it is very difficult – and, on my view, impossible, as long as one continues in the same thought – to stop the course of our desire. But the nature of the soul is such that it hardly attends for more than a moment to a single thing; hence, as soon as our attention turns from the reasons which show us that the thing is good for us […] we can call up before our mind some other reasons to make us doubt it, and so suspend judgment, and perhaps even form a contrary judgment. (Letter to Mesland, 1644: AT VII, 115–116; CSM II, 233–234; cf. Seventh Replies; Letter to Voetius, 1643: AT VII, 460, VIIIB, 170; CSM II, 309, CSMK, 223.)

Our attentive span is restricted, so we easily loose C&D from sight; wherefore it can come under doubt once again. This is especially problematic for deductive reasoning, since during the continuous chain, we could not be certain of the previous clear and distinct evidence on which the later steps are based on. However, it is likewise problematic for intuition, for whenever the cognitive peak fades, we can doubt not only the memory of being certain but also the truth itself. Cognitive metaphysical grounding is necessary exactly for this reason: To fix the momentary and fleeting evident cognition as something stable and lasting (i.e., *epistēmē* or *scientia*, as an ideal state of knowledge).

What does, then, constitute a cognitive ground if internal evidence is insufficient? A potentially successful route would be to discover the origin, the source, of our native cognitive powers. Descartes famously claims this source to be an infinitely powerful, non-deceitful God. We can be certain, because the source is infinitely powerful, that it could have granted us a reliable access to true reality, and because it is non-deceitful, we can be certain that it indeed has done so. If God would have arranged a set of logical necessities for my thinking without creating them as necessary features of reality, then, according to Descartes, God would be a deceiver, which would go against the nature of God as infinitely omniperfect (i.e., devoid of any defect that comprises deceit). We cannot be absolutely or fully certain, then, of even our clear and distinct cognition before confirming the origin of our nature by a non-deceiving God: Otherwise, we could always be deceived. Descartes does not reduce truth to mere psychological states, such as indubitability, but considers it a metaphysical conformity-relation of thought and object; thus, his project is epistemically *externalist*, with the external reliability of clarity and distinctness being verified by God's existence and nature.[24]

[24] In chapter 7, I call this reading *God foundationalism*. Note that the Stoics were similarly epistemic externalists: cognitive impressions are true because they are in accordance with the nature of things in full detail. Cf. chapter 2.1.1.

The goal of the grounding project becomes clear in the Second Objections' and Replies' discussion on an atheist's cognition of a triangle. The discussion begins with Mersenne's remark that as long as the meditator is uncertain of God's existence, she cannot know anything clearly and distinctly by her own admittance (see Third Meditation: AT VII, 36; CSM II, 25; cf. chapter 6.1.2). Mersenne draws an objection from this: "[A]n atheist is clearly and distinctly aware that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles; but [as for] the existence of God […] he completely denies it" (AT VII, 125; CSM II, 89). The atheist denies God's existence but can clearly and distinctly demonstrate correct truths about a triangle, so he seems to have an argument against Descartes. Facing mathematical and geometrical proofs, one's mind could tell the potential deceiver to "go hang himself", as Gassendi in the Fifth Objections eloquently writes (AT VII, 327; CSM II, 227). What is the epistemic advantage that the Cartesian agent would have over the atheist mathematician here?

Descartes's reply does not deprive the atheist of an evident perception of the triangle's geometrical features, but he maintains that his cognition (*cognitio*) is not true knowledge, since "no act of awareness that can be rendered doubtful seems fit to be called knowledge (*scientia*)" (AT VII, 141; CSM II, 101). Descartes then distinguishes two states: isolated, momentary awareness of *p* (*cognitio*), which can be rendered doubtful, and systematic, lasting knowledge of *p* (*scientia*), which cannot.

> [A]n atheist […] cannot be certain that he is not being deceived on matters which seem to him to very evident… [A]lthough this doubt may not occur to him, it can still crop up if someone else raises the point or if he looks into the matter himself. So he will never be free of this doubt until he acknowledges that God exists. (AT VII, 141; CSM II, 101.)

The atheist does not know the origin of his nature and cannot be certain that his cognition is true or, as Descartes puts it, constitutes 'metaphysical' knowledge.[25] The result is a gap between cognising well by using one's native resources and cognising truly. According to Descartes, the atheist cannot bridge the gap himself. (Cf. the Third and the Sixth Replies: AT VII, 196, 428; CSM II, 137, 289. See chapter 2.5.2.)

This distinction also surfaces in the Third and Fifth Meditation: in the former, the meditator states that "[i]n this first cognition (*cognitione*) there is simply a clear and distinct perception of what I am affirming"; in the latter, with the existence and nature of God already verified, she states that "[without knowledge (*ignorare*) of God,] I should thus never have true and certain knowledge (*vera & certa scienta*)", later commenting "all knowledge (*omnis scientiae*) depends uniquely on my cognition (*cognition pendere*) of the

[25] Descartes uses *scientia*, metaphysical certainty (fr. *certitude metaphysique*: AT VI, 38; CSM I, 130), full certainty (*plane certus*, *plane nota & certa*), perfect knowledge (*perfecte scire*: AT VII, 36, 71; CSM II, 25, 49) and metaphysical knowledge (*Metaphysico sciendi*: AT VII, 475; CSM II, 320) interchangeably.

true God, to such an extent that I was incapable of perfect knowledge (*perfecte scire*) about anything else until I cognized him" (AT VII, 35, 69–71; CSM II, 24, 48–49; translation modified). However, it is the most apparent in a Letter to Regius from 1640:

> [I]f we lack knowledge (*ignoremus*) of God, we can imagine that the conclusions are uncertain even though we remember that they were deduced from clear principles: because perhaps our nature is such that we go wrong even in the *most evident matters*. Consequently, *even at the moment* when we deduce them from those principles we did not have *knowledge* (*scientiam*) of them, but only a *conviction* (*persuasionem*) […]. (AT III, 64–65; CSMK, 147. Emphasis added.)

Context clarifies *persuasio* being used here in the same sense as *cognitio* above. Indeed, cognition is an umbrella term for Descartes, not a label for a 'state' of certainty, referring to a variety of attentive grasping, and can be either *persuasio* (compelling assent) or *scientia* (unshakable certainty).

What seems to me the most crucial aspect of this distinction is stability: *Persuasio* is unstable while *scientia* is stable (*firmus*) and lasting (*mansurus*) (AT VII, 17; CSM II, 12; cf. chapter 4.1). *Cognitio* as *persuasio* is certain in the sense that it (momentarily) compels assent. For example, the meditator states in the Third Meditation, "[y]et when I turn to the things themselves which I think I perceive very clearly, I am so convinced (*persuadeor*) by them that I spontaneously declare…" (AT VII, 36; CSM II, 25). A clear and distinct conviction constitutes strong internal evidence, but, even if she has access to evident cognition that imposes assent, the meditator's mind is easily distracted by the preconceived opinions. Some commentators have argued for clear and distinct cognition vs. unshakable certainty to be a question of temporality (e.g., B. Williams 2015, 186–187, note 15; Christofidou 2013, 179–186; Wagner 2014, 102), but the main issue between *persuasio* and *scientia* is seemingly not the time truth is attended to but whether there is *reasonable room for doubt*. The Cartesian agent's *scientia* of God is not temporally extended more than the human attention span allows but is rendered certain by the removal of powerful reasons to doubt what we evidently perceive (AT VII, 69–70, 140; CSM II, 48, 100; cf. *Principia* I, §30: AT VIIIA, 16–17; CSM I, 203). [26]

> [T]here is conviction (*persuasio*) where there remains some reason which might lead us to doubt, but knowledge (*scientia*) is conviction based on a reason so strong that it can never be shaken by any stronger reason. Nobody can have the latter if he lacks knowledge (*ignorare*) of God. But a man who has once clearly understood the reasons which convince us that God exists and is not a deceiver, provided he remembers the

[26] See the *Conversation* for temporal extension of thought (AT V, 148–149; CSMK, 335). Descartes also uses *persuasio* right before the passage on the meditator's existence in the Second Meditation (AT VII, 25; CSM II, 16–17). Tradition exists for distinguishing *cognitio* and *Scientia*, but how *persuasio* fits with these terms has not been sufficiently traced.

> conclusion ' God is no deceiver' whether or not he continues to attend to the reasons for it, will continue to possess not only the conviction but true knowledge of this and all other conclusions the reasons for […] clearly perceived. (AT III, 65; CSMK, 147.)

The Cartesian agent's ultimate advantage over the atheist is that her knowledge is permanent and lasting, whereas the atheist's conviction is unstable and remains partly in doubt.[27] Nevertheless, we require a powerful reason to doubt the clear and distinct perceptions, which is provided by the initial ignorance of the origin of our natural capacities. With that reason proven false by discovering the nature of God, our most evident perceptions are guaranteed to grasp the truth. The meditator, then, can fix unstable cognition into permanent, lasting metaphysical certainty by cognizing God's existence and nature. (See though chapter 7.3.3.)

Of course, it still remains to explain Descartes's 1645 comments to Mesland on the Cartesian agent's ability to withhold judgment *even* with (current) clear and distinct perceptions that hint at a rather radical libertarian two-way power of the will: It is *always* possible to do otherwise, even resist the peak clarity and distinctness. The most notable reading of this kind is by Lilli Alanen (2003, 245–246; 2013, 189–199), who considers the Cartesian agent capable of suspending judgement even on clear and distinct *cognitio* (uniformly instead of piecemeal) by changing our aims and motivations and *forsaking* the pursuit for the truth. After all, it is by the will, experienced as "not restricted in any way" that humans are in the image of God (AT VII, 56–57; CSM II, 39–40).[28]

However, Descartes *relativises* the possibility of going against our strongest inclinations in the controversial Letter, considering it to be *morally* impossible yet *absolutely* (*metaphysically*) possible.

> When a very evident reason moves us in one direction, although *morally speaking* (*moraliter loqeuendo*) we can hardly move in the contrary direction, *absolutely speaking* (*absolutè*) we can […] provided we consider it a good thing to demonstrate the freedom of our will by so doing. (AT IV, 173; CSMK, 245.)

Those who support a strong libertarian reading take "morally speaking" as referring to the dichotomy between moral/absolute certainty so that while a morally oriented rational person could not but follow their evident reasons, one's mind has a metaphysical possibility of withholding one's assent even from the most irresistible evidence (i.e., by altering our directives). (Cf. chapter 2.5.2.)

However, this radical libertarian reading is problematic for at least three reasons. Firstly, there are many texts in which Descartes is clearly committed to it being *impossible*

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[27] Chapter 2.5 discussed that putative atheism at the time was skeptically inclined, and Descartes wants to deal with it properly. We will meet the atheist again, particularly in chapters 4.3.2, 5.1.2, 6.1–6.2, and 7.3.

[28] See Davies (2014, 129–134) and Wee (2014) for libertarian readings somewhat different from Alanen's.

not to assent to a clear and distinct perception while having one (e.g., Fifth Meditation, Second Replies, 1640 Letter to Regius and 1644 Letter to Mesland: AT III, 64, IV, 116, VII, 65, 145, 165; CSM II, 45, 104, 117, CSMK, 147, 233). Secondly, a radical libertarian reading such as Alanen's raises several questions regarding the skeptical project of the *Meditations*. Say that I start the meditative exercise for discovering the truth, and *in medias res* would realise I am more interested in money, fame and/or the Presidency of the United States, and, thus, abandon the project. Would this mean I could not recognise that 2+3 equals 5 or that a triangle's three angles add up to 180 degrees? Thirdly, notice that the Scotist-Jesuit description of a libertarian indifference is a choice made for *no reason*. However, displaying the will's freedom or being enticed more by money and fame *are* reasons, supporting the indirect power of diverting attention from the clarity and distinctness (at which point it would *cease* to appear clear and distinct) over direct one (choosing something else while keeping one's intellectual gaze "fixed").

Previous chapters (2.3.3 and 2.5.2) discussed that historically moral certainty referred not only to a kind of cognitive certainty that is tantamount to avoiding moral reproach, but also to practical necessity or implausibility. I think Descartes's reference to the moral/absolute distinction in the 1645 Letter should be read in these lines, so that withholding one's assent or going for the opposite while one is explicitly cognising clearly and distinctly is practically impossible. However, since the will does have direct attentive control over the direction of mental scrutiny, it is possible, in the absolute sense, for it to *cut off* the deliberation of understanding; thus, prohibiting the assent to a clearly and distinctly cognised thing by diverting the attention to a differing reason.[29] After all, by the moderate compatibilist/incompatibilist reading, the will does *possess* a capacity for indifferent freedom; it just is not in a position to *exercise* this capacity in clear and distinct cases. (Cf. Araujo 2003, 53–54; Newman 2008, 349–350; Carriero 2009, 262–264; Wee 2014, 192–193; Fogal 2017, 515–516.[30])

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[29] Alanen is on the right track, as the diversion could happen due to an alternate motivation or goal. The skeptics, according to Descartes, were able to doubt endlessly due to not being after the truth but suspension itself, thus not caring for clarity and distinctness (AT III, 433–434, VI, 29, X, 520; CSM I, 125, CSM II, 414, CSMK, 196–197). Descartes even claims that no skeptic has had clear and distinct cognition, and if they did, they would not be able to suspend and would cease being (radical) skeptics (see Seventh Replies and *Conversation*: AT V, 146, VII, 477; CSM II, 321, CSMK, 333).

[30] To be in a position to exercise a power, one must have no internal or external impediments to exercising it. As argued, the position to exercise indifference for Descartes comes about only if the reasons for both sides are completely equal. Cf. Kenny 1998, 150–152; Naaman-Zauderer 2010, 129–130; Schüssler 2013, 157–175, esp. 162; Ragland 2013; 2016, chapter 6. Schüssler goes a step further, holding that while practically impossible, Descartes wants to postulate a possibility of direct suspension of judgment on current C&D under *ideal conditions*. However, I read Descartes to hold direct suspension possible only in cases of complete equilibrium, requiring us to force C&D into balance with some other reasons, at which point it would not be C&D anymore.

We have now come to better terms by this analysis not only on the cognitive equipment of the meditative agent and its correct and responsible use, but also on how closely the skeptical problem is likewise tied to problems of reliable cognition and free will for Descartes. Conquering skepticism requires both a metaphysically grounded theory of cognitive behavior and a confirmatory experience of our active autonomous agency. If God would have created a reality that does not correspond with my most evident peak cognitions or if a similar entity would even actively feed me falsified cognitive input, I might not even be responsible for my own errors (see chapter 5.1.2; cf. Hookway 1990, 81, 144; Araujo 2003, 36). With these considerations in mind, let us now turn to the text, starting with the First Meditation.

4. First Meditation: Dreams and Demons

The First Meditation is a crucial step in setting up the meditational cognitive exercise. However, the meditator is first required to put aside certain forceful beliefs she has for it to succeed. Common-sense thinking is so strong that if we did not sort of 'bracket' it, the exercise would go nowhere (a man in the street would wonder why he should doubt such things). Thus, the meditator must *cut away* from everyday activities and distinguish the meditative exercise from ordinary life attitude to initiate the meditative doubt. The motivation for this is the promise of stable and lasting knowledge (*scientia*). The skeptical exercise promises to get to the bottom of our errors and uncover why we commit them, providing a metaphysical ground for our correct epistemic states with results likewise extending to the moral life in terms of virtue and happiness. (See chapters 1.3 and 2.5.2).

At the beginning of the First Meditation, Descartes's meditator proceeds through three *levels of doubt*. Each level deepens the doubt, making it constantly more enclosing. The three levels direct the cognitive exercise and lead the meditator to think about cognition and will in the way Descartes wants, offering control over skepticism. Unlike the Pyrrhonist, who suspends judgment to avoid contrariety, Descartes's meditator chooses to confront skepticism (cf. chapter 3.3.)

On the First Level, only particular sense perceptions are questionable. The meditator searches for the basis of her beliefs and finds this basis to be the senses. Because we sometimes confront *occasional sensory errors*, we can cast doubt on a particular sense perception and not trust it uncritically. On the Second Level, doubt is cast generally and systematically on sensation and imagination by the *dreaming scenario*. On the Third Level, the whole process of reliable cognition is under doubt by the *Deceiving God scenario*. Consequently, the First Meditation comprises three levels of affect by error: locally in our particular perceptions, systematically in our general view of nature and reality, and ultimately in our cognitive capacities as a whole. As the meditative exercise continues, the meditator overturns three basic principles her earlier beliefs were based on: the Empirical Principle (overturned by the Second Level, questioning sensation and imagination with dreaming) the Rational Principle (overturned by the first aspect of the Third Level, questioning the intellect with the allowed deception by God) and the Theological Principle (overturned by the second aspect of the Third Level, questioning authority with an imperfect nature by faith or chance) (cf. Christofidou 2013, 16).

However, even though the narrative proceeds through three levels, the First Meditation is not strictly the three-phase structure it is commonly read to be (cf. B. Williams 1983; Bermudez 1997; 1998; 2008). Such a reading misses three other important parts of the narration: the *madness scenario*, the *painter analogy*, and the *Deceiving*

Demon.[1] Two of these, madness and painting, work as *transitional scenarios* between different levels, developing the meditator's thinking from one level to another. These passages possess a similar character, with the meditator resisting the full force of the earlier skeptical onslaught by seemingly reasonable counter arguments that eventually must be dropped due to the following level of doubt. Descartes's skeptical project is, after all, a very gradual process.

The third part of the narration, the Demon, is introduced somewhat outside of the skeptical scenarios, as a tool to assist with the psychologically difficult *general suspension of judgment*. The skeptical scenarios in the three levels fulfil reasons for doubt, balancing out the meditator's will between reasons to believe and not believe and resulting in her suspending judgment. However, she quickly realises that the pull towards her habitual opinions is much stronger than towards non-belief in them. Thus, she is required to create a stronger equal balance between her reasons to believe and not believe in order to succeed in the suspension in a more reliable and temporarily extended fashion. Thus, she decides to imagine the things in doubt to be non-existent, thereby offsetting the pull of her will towards belief with an even stronger pull towards denial. For this, she conjures up an imaginary scenario in which a malevolent Demon is deceiving her in what she thinks she cognises evidently. This scenario aids her self-deception as a strong psychological instrument, intended to level out her will between an equally strong reason for assent and non-assent. During this process, she discovers that she has (indifferent) freedom of the will, allowing her to suspend her assent.

The First Meditation then has the following structure:

> Introduction: Observation of the lack of stability and a call for something certain
> **Resolve 1: Preliminary decision to suspend judgment on doubtful matters**
> **Level 1: Occasional sensory errors and particular doubt of the senses**
> Counter argument and transition 1: Madness scenario
> **Level 2: Dream scenario and systematic doubt of the senses**
> Counter argument and transition 2: Dreaming as painting
> **Level 3: Deceiving God/Imperfect Nature scenario and doubt of rationality and theology**
> **Conclusion 1: General suspension of judgment**
> Alteration: The need for stronger equilibrium between reasons for belief and disbelief
> **Resolve 2: Deceiving Demon as a psychological instrument to help out the suspension**
> **Conclusion 2: Reliable general suspension of judgment**

The tale of doubts and discoveries Descartes tangles the reader in is easy to follow and set oneself into, yet it comprises different layers that require intricate examination. A close analysis of the First Meditation is then required to dissect the meditative exercise that Descartes wishes the mediator (and the reader) to practice with careful attention.

[1] Lennon and Hickson (2013) draw a similar conclusion but with two missing challenges, leaving out the painter analogy.

4.1. First Level of Doubt: Foundations of Knowledge and Unreliability of the Senses

The first paragraph of the First Meditation uncovers the Cartesian metaphor of the *foundations* of knowledge, on which all other things are built.

> Some years ago I was struck by the large number of falsehoods that I had accepted as true in my childhood, and by the highly doubtful nature of the whole edifice that I had subsequently based on them. I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to overturn everything and start again right from the foundation if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last. (AT VII, 17; CSM II, 12. Translation modified.)

The first phase of the method is aimed at reaching the supporting base of cognition, toppling it over and starting again from the first foundations (*primis fundamentis*). One must overturn (*evertenda*) everything believed and learned earlier to achieve this.[2] The architectonic metaphor is consistent for Descartes, recurring throughout his works.[3] The eventual goal, then, is to establish something stable and lasting (*firmum & mansurum*) in the sciences (*in scientiis*). The stable certainty that Descartes is after is more metaphysical in nature than epistemological: It considers *scientia* (cf. chapter 3.4).

4.1.1. Preliminary Decision to Overthrow Opinions

The task of overturning appeared enormous, so the meditator waited for a "mature enough age". Now the project should not be put off any longer and she devotes herself fully to the general overthrow (*generali eversio*) of opinions. (AT VII, 17–18; CSM II, 12.)

Certain commentators, as previously discussed, see the overthrow as *provisional* with the meditator suspending on earlier beliefs and opinions merely by deciding to do so However, such an account would leave us with a great deal of tension, suspension appearing easier than Descartes describes it to be, requiring the meditator to have waited for a "suitable" age to engage in the inquiry. One requires powerful reasons to successfully overthrow one's preconceived opinions.[4] (Cf. chapter 3.3.)

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[2] CSM translates *evertenda* as "demolish". I consider demolishing to be misleading, because I do not see the doubt as rejecting former beliefs. See also the Letter to Mersenne, 24 December 1640 (AT III, 268; CSMK, 164), in which Descartes discusses the phrases *erutis fundamentis* and *suffosis fundamentis*, choosing the latter.
[3] See, e.g., AT II, 380 & VI, 22; CSM I, 122 & CSMK, 124. See also the Seventh Replies (AT VII, 536; CSM II, 366): "Throughout my writings I have made it clear that my method imitates that of the architect".
[4] The ease of suspension seems to originate from the general overthrow being viewed as a natural extension of our everyday evaluations (Frankfurt 2008, 24; cf. B. Williams 2015, 46; Cavell 1979, 191; Stroud 1984,

What about the general overthrow of opinions? If the suspension does not happen here, why does Descartes have the meditator make this commitment from the beginning? Better yet, how can the meditator know that she can find reasons to doubt her opinions by examining them? Following Descartes's architectonic metaphor, I see it as quite an intuitive conclusion that one must bring down the old structure to reach the first foundations. However, the decision is merely *preliminary*, introduced as a devotion to make the required effort for the overthrow.[5] The general overthrow of opinions requires careful attention and considerable mental effort that the meditator must promise to provide. The six Meditations, after all, are a cognitive exercise, requiring practice and training.

Trusting Descartes's guidance, the meditator makes the decision to devote herself "seriously and freely (*seriò tandem & libere*)" to the following overthrow (AT VII, 18; CSM II, 12; translation modified). Suspension of judgment requires commitment that is sincere and without reservation. The overthrow is not a mere mind game or a psychological sham but a real and earnest *meditative exercise* to gain metaphysical certainty.[6] If the meditator were like Gassendi, acknowledging the need for suspension but not taking the skeptical scenarios seriously, she would be unable to properly and genuinely suspend her judgment according to Descartes (AT VII, 257–258, 348–351; CSM II, 180, 241–242). Like the ancient skeptics, Descartes has in mind an internal skeptical evisceration aimed at reaching an *equilibrium* between equally strong reasons for assent and non-assent that covers not only epistemic notions but all earlier beliefs (AT VII, 22; CSM II, 15). However, he also significantly differs from the ancients in the basic supposition. The meditator maintains that something certain exists and that this certainty (at least in theory) can be gained. This is clearly a stronger postulation than the Academic and Pyrrhonistic possibility of knowledge that does not seem to be discovered yet. The influence of the later skeptical tradition from Augustine to Montaigne, Sanches, and Charron, and the other early modern anti-skeptical projects, are evident here. (Cf. chapters 1.3 and 2.)

Descartes presents a central Cartesian principle at the beginning of the second paragraph: "Reason now leads me to think that I should hold back my assent from opinions which are not completely certain and indubitable just as carefully as I do from

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24–26). As argued, though, Descartes does not think general suspension is natural for humans. See, e.g., the *Principia* I, §§71–73 (AT VIIIA, 35–37; CSM I, 218–220). Cf. M. Williams 1986; 1991, 2–10; Broughton 2002, 23, 72–93; Cunning 2010, 22. While -DV does not commit one to the ease of suspense, many of its proponents do imply easiness (e.g. Frankfurt 2008).

[5] Cf. the *Discourse* (AT VI, 13–15, 31; CSM I, 116–118, 126–127). See also Broughton 2002, 5.

[6] Cf. the Preface and the Second and Fifth Replies (AT VII, 9–10, 130, 350; CSM II, 8, 94, 234). Unlike sometimes read (e.g., Kenny 1968, 24; M. Wilson 1978, 33), doubt and suspension are not mere "play-acting". Cf. chapters 1.1 and 1.3.

those which are patiently false" (AT VII, 18; CSM II, 12). Reason leads the meditator to suspend judgment on opinions in which room for doubt can be discovered, and which thus are not indubitable. "So, for the purpose of casting aside (*rejiciendas*) all my opinions, it will be enough if I find in each of them at least some reason for doubt" (AT VII, 18; CSM II, 12; translation modified[7]). This commitment has also been called the *strong maxim* for withholding assent (Broughton 2002, 43–44).

There are two reasons for the strong maxim. Firstly, what lies behind is a desire for *scientia*: Absolute, indubitable (metaphysical) certainty. This can already be seen in the first paragraph, aiming to establish *in scientiis* something stable and lasting (AT VII, 17; CSM II, 12). Secondly, unlike ancient skepticism, Cartesian suspension is not a reaction to contrary impressions but a recognition of a lack of metaphysical certainty and follows from finding room for doubt. Some conflicting considerations do play a role, especially in the First Level particular doubts, but just as Descartes does not think the suspension to be a natural state, he does not think the meditator can generally and systematically suspend judgment based only on conflicting impressions. (See chapters 2.1.2 and 2.2.)

Nevertheless, reasons for doubt do not constitute reasons for suspending judgment.[8] I might find reason to doubt the moon landing (perhaps it was a hoax), but this does not make me suspend judgment on whether man has been to the moon. In order to get the meditator suspend judgment based on the skeptical scenarios, Descartes makes her commit to a maxim to withhold assent on every opinion in which one can find reason for doubt. A skeptical scenario succeeds as a reason for doubt if it can create sufficient room for doubting some set of beliefs (compelling evidence being stronger or at least equal for questioning rather than affirming). (AT VII, 473–474; CSM II, 319. Cf. Curley 1978, 85–85; Broughton 2002, 44; Perin 2008, 63; Naaman-Zauderer 2010, 114.)

Notice that the second reason is motivated by the first. Descartes requires a special reason to move the meditator from attending to evidence, maybe even slight, that she might be wrong about something to wanting and obtaining suspension of judgment and withholding her assent on something. This special reason is conditioned by the desire for absolute certainty. The commitment of overthrow is not done in just any situation, but in the exceptional case of wanting to obtain something metaphysically certain. The

[7] CSM translates *rejiciendas* as "rejecting". However, it is not a conjugation of the word *rejectio* but of the verb *rejicere*, which literally translates as "throwing back". Descartes uses the same term in the basket-of-apples analogy (AT VII, 481; CSM II, 324), referring to removing apples from a basket (*ex corbe rejiceret*) but does not mean a complete discarding of them. The meaning of the word appears less strong than rejection would imply. See chapter 3.3.2.

[8] Broughton (2002, 55–59) argues for -DV on this notion while disagreeing with Frankfurt that suspension would occur *before* the skeptical scenarios. However, it is unclear from her account why the meditator could not suspend on judgment merely by willing to. Note that Broughton acknowledges some of these difficulties. Cf. Vitz 2010; 2015, 75–78.

meditator has provisionally decided to overthrow her prior opinions, so it will be beneficial to withhold judgment where reason for doubt can be found. Of course, it might be that no convincing reason can be discovered for doubting the meditator's set of beliefs. She cannot be sure that the inquiry will succeed before attempting it. The meditator can feel more secure if this is so, because her set of beliefs are not as suspect as she originally expected. The inquiry has proven beneficial, even if it did not succeed in her goal of general overthrow. However, if compelling reasons for doubt can be discovered, the meditator can safely assume that suspension of judgment is the correct action to take. The reasons for doubt would not contribute much without a reason to suspend judgment, or a reason to overthrow the prior set of beliefs.[9] (Cf. chapter 3.3.4.)

4.1.2. Empirical Principle: Scholastic, Naivë, and Skeptical

Systematically going through each individual belief one by one would be a task much too arduous, something she might never accomplish, so she opts to handle them *en masse*. Following the architectonic metaphor, everything built on top collapses on its own when the foundations of the building are undermined. The meditator is potentially able to bring down the whole edifice of erroneous beliefs by combining the reason for suspending judgment (the strong maxim) with finding reasons to doubt the basic principles (*ipsa principia*) of her earlier preconceptions.[10]

The basic principle that the meditator sets her sights on first is the Emprical Principle: "Whatever I have up till now accepted as most true I have acquired either from the senses or through the senses (*vel a sensibus, vel per sensibus*)" (AT VII, 18; CSM II, 12). All the things the meditator has the closest and most intimate relationship, and has come to know as most true, have been acquired through sensory experience. Descartes is reported as explicating the meaning of "from the senses or through the senses" in the *Conversation*. Something is acquired *from* the senses when there is a first-hand sensation of it, such as a shape or a colour in sight. In short, from the senses means truths gained by *personal sensory experience*. Something is acquired *through* the senses when

[9] As previously noted, due to the cumbersome nature of suspension, the meditator eventully also requires some extra work, namely, self-deception by pretending her beliefs to be false in order to suspend judgment reliably and enduringly.

[10] One way to read this mention of principles is as a reference to the three cognitive tenets that the meditator discovers during the exercise: 'I' (the thinking mind), God, and body (the extended material reality). However, I do not think this is the full intention, as the meditator would not yet think of cognition or metaphysics in this Cartesian way. Descartes more likely aims to expound on the meditator's previous epistemological principles, overturn them, and compensate his own *metaphysical* account, grounded on these three principles. Cf. chapters 1.2.2, 3.4.1, and 7.3.3.

there is a second-hand source, such as being heard from a parent or a teacher. Descartes leaves it unmentioned, but through the senses seems to also include information acquired by reading. In short, through the senses means truths gained by *authorative testimony*. (AT V, 146; CSMK, 332.)

A famous criticism has been that Descartes is trying to implement an otherwise missing foundational theory of knowledge into the discussion by the architectonic allusion of principles and foundations (e.g., M. Williams 1986). After all, it does not seem self-evident that our beliefs and opinions have a foundation, a basic principle on which everything else is supported. Nor is it self-evident that once those basic principles are shaken enough, all of our other strong beliefs also crumble. However, this criticism fails to acknowledge that during Descartes's time, having a foundation or a basic principle for all knowledge was, while perhaps not universally accepted, at least fairly common. More specifically, with the Empirical Principle Descartes has in mind a foundation akin to the Aristotelian-Scholastic maxim of *Nihil est in intellectum nisi fuerit in sensu*, according to which most beliefs and opinions the meditator has are based on one structural prop: sensory experience.[11]

For Descartes, Aristotelianism is equally foundationalist, with the foundation of all knowledge lying in empirical sensation.[12] Descartes views that Aristotelian metaphysics, epistemology, and science follow the so-called *Resemblance Picture of Sensation* (RPS): Reality, for the most part, resembles our sensations of how it appears. This resemblance critique is one of Descartes's main criticisms of the Aristotelian doctrine and motivates the *Meditations*. "I used to assert […] that there were things outside me which were the sources of my ideas and which resembled them in all respects. Here was my mistake; […] if my judgment was true, it was no thanks to the strength of my perception" (AT VII, 35; CSM II, 25). Desiring to undermine the RPS model Descartes places the meditator's tentative worldview on an Aristotelian support beam; cutting the beam would bring down the whole structure.[13]

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[11] See, e.g., *Met.* 1.1, 980a21–26; *An. Post.* 2.19, 996b20–100a14; *ST* I, Q.17, a.3; *SQO*, a.1, q1, I–II; *B* II, 2–3; *Apologie* (1907, 390; 1991, 663); *QNS*, 51. Cf. Grellard 2007, 334–338. See the Letter to Mersenne, 28 January 1641 (AT III, 298; CSMK, 173) for more evidence that the Empirical Principle is directed towards Aristotelianism. Note, though, that Descartes does not state that *all* of the meditator's beliefs stem from this principle. In the earlier paragraph, the meditator states to dive into the basic *principles* (*principia*). Cf. the Synopsis (AT VII, 12; CSM II, 9). Unlike what some suggest (e.g., Frankfurt 2008; Larmore 1998; 2014; Bermúdez 2008), it is not obvious that, e.g., mathematics would initially have a sensory basis in a robustly Scholastic manner (see chapter 3.1.1). Cf. Cunning 2007, 124; Christofidou 2013, 10–29.

[12] Descartes's criticism of the Aristotelians applies also to, e.g., Epicureans and to non-Aristotelians nevertheless infected by Aristotelianism. See the Letter to More, 5 February 1649 (AT V, 271; CSMK, 362) and the French Preface (AT IXB, 7; CSM I, 182). Cf. Cunning 2010, 32. See chapter 3.4.

[13] Obviously, this is a bit of a straw man of the Aristotelian position. See chapters 2.3 and 3.1. Cf. Zupko 1993.

It is good to remember that Descartes also does not have to build the meditator character as a card-carrying Aristotelian to have her to commit to the Empirical Principle and RPS. In the Sixth Meditation, the meditator goes through the reasons why she earlier followed the Resemblance Picture. These reasons follow the Third Meditation description of being taught by nature, but none of them strike as particularly Aristotelian. Sensations and the ideas perceived by them simply seemed more likely, vivid, and more distinct than those derived from intellectual contemplation, and since the sole source of her knowledge of external things was the ideas gained by the senses, the supposition that those things resembled the ideas she had of them was bound to occur. Thus, she was easily convinced that she had "nothing at all in the intellect which had not previously been in sensation (*nullam plane me habere in intellectu, quam non prius habuissem in sensu*)". (AT VII, 75; CSM II, 52.) The conclusion is Aristotelian in character, but the reasoning behind it is considerably less nuanced, not relying on a systematic theory of cognition. Finding the senses a reliable source for knowledge and believing the reality to conform to them accurately is quite a natural inclination for us, as embodied creatures relying on the sensory needs since infancy. As discussed earlier, Descartes seems to consider the Aristotelian-Scholastic doctrine to be a more nuanced elaboration of this naïve everyday life attitude. Both the Aristotelian and the naïve meditator are *naïve realists*, thinking the world mostly resembles our perceptions of that world. It can be seen as natural for the meditator (be she naïve or Aristotelian) to think that her connection to the world runs essentially through the senses.

However, we also don't need to read the meditator as holding onto naïve realism or RPS to make sense of the Empirical Principle. The Principle is likewise understandable from the third perspective: the skeptic meditator. Skeptical writers of the Renaissance period can also be read as certain sort of empiricists: If truth is to be found, it is to be based on the senses, but since the senses are often in error and contradict each other, one should suspend judgment on their evidence.

> [K]knowledge is conveyed through the senses… […] Anyone who can force me to contradict the evidence of the senses has got me by the throat… […] The senses are the beginning and end of human knowledge. (Montaigne, *Apologie*: 1907, 390; 1991, 663.)

> All awareness is derived from the senses […]. If the sense was deceived, so is the mind […]. (Sanches, *QNS*, 51; translation modified.)

Later on, several early modern skeptics (e.g., Le Vayer) upheld a similar kind of empiricism, with mitigated skeptics such as Mersenne and Gassendi attempting to build science on appearances by the senses. It is more than likely that this empirical leaning

of skeptical thought likewise motivated Descartes to begin with the Empirical Principle.[14] (See chapters 2.4 and 2.5.)

Descartes, then, is not trying to smuggle a foundationalist model of knowledge into the picture,but instead relies on the principle that is already familiar to the meditator: the naivety of sense perception (be it Aristotelian, folk or skeptical ex-dogmatic). Using the Empirical Principle, Descartes is able to group the Aristotelian and the skeptical traditions, along with the naïve realism of our natural inclination, under the same heading and undermine them all. (Cf. chapter 1.2.3)

4.1.3. Particular Doubts: Occasional Sensory Errors

The target of the inquiry now set, the meditator moves on to the next step: finding out reasons for doubt and seeing how far they can be applied. The meditator considers various skeptical scenarios to discover these reasons which make her question the beliefs she previously held onto.

One could be tempted to move right away to the dreaming doubt or the possibility of a deceiving deity. However, before the infamous scenarios of dreams and demons, Descartes offers a criticism of particular sensory perceptions that has had comparatively less careful attention. These particular doubts, or occasional sensory errors (OSE), do have an important role to play, and unlike other scenarios, questioning of the senses is not permanently resolved at the end of the Sixth Meditation. This skeptical scrutiny of particular sensory experiences comprises the First Level of doubt.

As many have noted, Descartes's criticism of particular sensory perceptions is neither long nor profound. The meditator merely draws a brief conclusion: "From time to time I have found that the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once" (AT VII, 18; CSM II, 12). As the senses occasionally deceive us and provide erroneous testimony, the first step in the metaphysical project for avoiding error is not to trust them on each occasion.[15]

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[14] Cf. Gassendi's comments in the Fifth Objections (AT VII, 267, 277–278; CSM II, 186, 193–194), where he defends the Empirical Principle against Descartes. See also the French Preface (AT IXB, 5–7; CSM I, 181–182). See Stough (1969, 106–107, 147–148) and Ring (1991, 492) for this empirical underpinning of skepticism argued for ancient Pyrrhonism. Cf. *M* VIII, 60; *PH* II, 48. See Stough (1969, 41) for the same argued for the ancient Academic skeptics.

[15] In the *Discourse*, Descartes supplements OSE ("our senses sometimes deceive us") with what could be titled *occasional logical errors* (OLE): "[T]here are men who make mistakes in reasoning, committing logical fallacies concerning the simplest questions in geometry…" OLE provides a comparable scenario to OSE in the sense that logical fallacies are typical for human cognition and anyone can occasionally commit them. Descartes also treats them as a legitimate reason for doubting demonstrative proofs because he is

Descartes elaborates more on the deceitful nature of particular sense perception when recalling and summarizing the skeptical evisceration in the Sixth Meditation:

> Sometimes towers which had looked round from distance appeared squared from close up; and enormous statutes standing on their pediments did not seem large when observed from the ground. In these and countless other cases, I found that the judgments of the external senses were mistaken. (AT VII, 76; CSM II, 53.)

Cases like towers appearing both squared and rounded demonstrate that the senses can occasionally be in error. This applies not only to the external senses but also to the internal ones, since one can feel pain in a limb without the limb even being attached to the rest of the body. (AT VII, 77; CSM II, 53.)

Out of all the reasons for doubt presented in the First Meditation, the OSE scenario is the closest to the ancient skeptical tropes of comparing contrarieties. The First Meditation'a skeptical scenarios generally rely on creating reasonable room for doubting earlier beliefs, one being unable to rule out the possibility of such a case, as opposed to Pyrrhonian skepticism, which offers two ways in which things can appear to different people or the same person at different times, and points out that there is no way to decide between them (cf. Bemúdez 2000, 335). However, the OSE cases do offer two different ways in which things appear to the meditator at different times, in a manner not unlike the Pyrrhonian skeptical tropes. Sextus also uses the same example of a tower as Descartes does:

> [Suspension] comes about […] through the opposition of things. We oppose what appears to what appears, or what is thought of, or crosswise. […] [W]e oppose what appears to what appears when we say: 'The same tower appears round from a distance and square from nearby'. (*PH* I, 31–32.)

Granted, in the First Meditation, this phase is not precisely set up in the Pyrrhonian way of comparing impressions. In fact, a closer source is found in Montaigne: "If this appearance has once deceived me, […] why should I trust [it] this time […]. Is it not stupid to let oneself to be deceived so often by the same guide?" (*Apologie*: 1907, 342–344; 1991, 634–635).[16] Nevertheless, the implications of the First Meditation do include a similar comparison: "[T]he senses occasionally deceive us with respect to objects which are very small or in the distance" (AT VII, 18; CSM II, 12). We can construct

"just as a prone to error as anyone else". (AT VI, 32; CSM II, 127. Cf. the *Principia*: AT VIIIA, 6; CSM I, 194.) First Meditation omits OLE, but does make a similar reference later on, relating to the scenario of the Deceiving God: "What is more, since I sometimes believe that others go astray in cases where they think they have the most perfect knowledge, may I not similarly go wrong every time I add two and three or count the sides of a square…?" (AT VII, 21; CSM II, 14.) Here, though, the assessment has a more general and systematic sense.

[16] Montaigne criticises Lucretius's defence of the senses as true guides. Cf. *Apologie*: 1907, 390; 1991, 664.

this: "A tower in distance looks small but nearby huge. Thus, senses should not be trusted in every occasion".[17]

The First Level of doubt by the OSE is the first step in undermining the meditator's earlier conviction of cognitive access to reality running essentially through the senses. From the Aristotelian and the naïve positions, they would abandon those earlier belief when that connection is demonstrated to be insufficient, and when the connection to the world is eventually shown to be running through the intellect, the skeptic has to yield as well. Using OSE cases, Descartes can begin to show that RPS is too crude of a picture for expressing reality accurately, taking the initial step towards proving the insufficient nature of that previous conviction. The scenario of OSE, despite given less prominence, is equally important for the successful outcome of the inquiry, generating a serious skeptical puzzle.[18]

4.2. Second Level of Doubt: Madness and Dream

Aristotelians, however, would not have been very impressed by the First Level counter measure. It was widely acknowledged in the Medieval Scholastic discussions that senses can deceive from time to time, typically referring to cases inherited from the ancient skeptical tropes, such as large objects seeming small in the distance, islands seeming to be in motion when passed by in a ship and sweet things tasting bitter when sick. The common remedy for such doubts was to refer to sense perception in normal circumstances. Take, for example, Henry of Ghent: "[I]n a case in which the one sense is deceived in one condition, in another […] it indicates what is true" (*SQO*, a.1, q.1, IV).[19] The Medieval Scholastics, as previously discussed, had an epistemologically optimistic attitude towards sensory perception, viewing that human perception is fundamentally veridical and reaches reality in a reliable fashion in the common course

[17] In fact, the round and square tower was a standard example of contrarieties for the ancient skeptics, along with large objects appearing small, honey tasting bitter when sick, and an oar appearing broken when submerged in water. See *Acad.* 2.25.79–26.82; *M* VII, 414. See also the Third Meditation and the *Search* (AT VII, 39, 510; CSM II, 27, 407). Cf. chapter 2.1.

[18] The particular sensory doubts, though, differ from the later scenarios in that whereas the latter two levels are eventually resolved by discovering the true nature of God and our own cognitive powers, the occasional sensory errors are never fully settled. And while they don't pose a similar problem since the RPS model of reality has been overturned, they stay lingering even after the meditative exercise. Even though one can perform double-checks with the other senses, memory, and intellect to ensure the circumstances are optimal, occasional errors of particular sense experience are still bound to occur. They are not a puzzle but still remain a threat. (AT VII,77–78, 90; CSM II, 54, 62. See chapter 7.3.3.)

[19] Henry specifically refers to the relativities of the Pyrrhonists in relation to the deception of the senses. See also Augustine (*C. Acad.* 3.11.26; *Trin.* 15.12.21–22), Aquinas (*ST* I, Q.85, a.6), and Buridan (*QM* II, 1: 8rb). Cf. Zupko 1993.

of nature. They admit that misperceptions, such as illusions, do occur, but are exceptional cases, required to be evaluated against the background of normal, veridical perceptive acts. (Adriaenssen 2017, 241. Cf. Pasnau 2017, esp. 70–94. See chapter 2.3.2.)

In fact, the meditator will not swallow the First Level sensory doubts hook, line, and sinker either:

> [A]lthough the senses occasionally deceive with respect to objects which are small or in the distance, there are many other beliefs about which doubt is quite impossible, even though they are acquired through the senses – for example, that I am here, sitting by the fire, wearing a winter dressing-grown, holding this piece of paper in my hands and so on. (AT VII, 18; CSM II, 12–13.)

Unlike sometimes accused, Descartes does not question the whole testimony of sense perception just because some sense data is deceptive (see, e.g., Rescher 1959, 230–231; Wash 1963, 91).[20] That senses sometimes deceive does not mean they would not accurately testify to reality in optimal cases. Following a reasoning similar to epistemic optimism of the late Scholastics, the meditator rephrases the Empirical Principle based on the earlier critique: Despite certain occasional mishaps, the senses report reality fairly well as a norm, especially when the circumstances are optimal. OSE cases must be evaluated against this background of perception in normal, optimal situations. As an example, the meditator offers her present state of sitting *here* by a fireplace and writing on a piece of paper.[21]

Unlike with later scenarios of dreaming and deceiver, there is a sense of casuality and normalcy, even naturalness, related to the OSE. Sensory errors are fairly common and while they can make the meditator perform double-checks when the circumstances are not optimal, even suspend judgment in certain particular cases, they do not make her doubt her perception to be *systematically* in error. The issue is driven home further in the French translation: "*il s'en recounter peut-être beaucoup d' autres desquelles on ne peut pas* raissonablement *douter*". Particular sense-error doubt is clearly reasonable and occurs in an unlaboured fashion merely from the experience of seeing a square tower rounded from afar or a straight oar bent in water. Meanwhile, the meditator finds no reasonable room for doubting that these are her hands holding the paper and this is her body sitting near a fire ([*m*]*anus verò has ipsas, totumque hoc corpus meum esse*) (AT VII, 18; CSM II, 13).

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[20] The accusation was already raised by Gassendi (*Disq.* I, i, 5). For other critiques of the accusation, see Frankfurt 2008, 45–48; Kenny, 1968, 28; B. Williams 2015, 36–37; Cottingham 1986, 30–31; Dicker 2013, 27–30; Christofidou 2013, 17.

[21] Cf. the *Search* (AT X, 510; CSM II, 407): "[T]he senses are sometimes deceptive if they are in poor condition, as when all food seems bitter to a sick person; or if their objects are too far away […]; or, in general, whenever they do not act freely in accordance with their *natural constitution*. But such defects of the senses are all quite easy to recognize, and do not prevent me from being quite sure at present that I am seeing you, [and] that everything which ordinarily appears to my senses is genuine." Emphasis added.

Descartes's next move with the upcoming dreaming doubt is therefore to suggest that instead of being reliable, senses systematically failing to grasp what is real might be the norm. However, since the meditator resists such a general doubt, Descartes cannot just seamlessly flow into the systematic error by dreaming; he must guide the meditator from the naturally occurring occasional doubts of the First Level to the *metaphysical* doubt of the Second Level for the general doubt to succeed. Following this guidance, the meditator will recognise that, despite her initial resistance, it is completely possible and reasonable for the senses to be systematically in error as a norm, undermining the recently rephrased Empirical Principle.

4.2.1. First Transitional Scenario: Madness

I read this transition as being fulfilled by the scenario of madness. Like the OSE scenario, madness has received only minor discussion in the literature without well-driven attempts to place it in the larger narrative. Even when separation between everyday life and metaphysical inquiry is given attention, the role of the madness discussion in the exercise has been missed (e.g., MacArthur 2003).[22]

The scenario of madness occurs in the fourth paragraph, between the OSE cases and the dreaming doubt, and its origin is in the meditator's resistance. She wonders how she can find reason to doubt that the hand holding the paper and the body wrapped in a dressing-gown are hers:

> [P]erhaps I were to liken myself to madmen (*insanis*), whose brains are so damaged by the persistent vapours of melancholia that they firmly maintain they are kings when they are paupers, or say they are dressed in purple when they are naked, or that their heads are made of earthenware, or that they are pumpkins, or made of glass. (AT VII, 18–19; CSM II, 13.)

The meditator considers that she might be insane, maintaining wearing a dressing-gown and holding a paper due to physiological defect (unbalanced vapour levels in the brain), whereas in reality she could be naked and not holding a paper at all.[23] The madness scenario is then seemingly rejected, as the meditator considers insane people unfit to be equated with herself due to their condition. "But such people are insane (*amentes*), and I would be thought equally mad (*demens*) if I took anything from them as a model for myself." (AT VII, 18–19; CSM II, 12–13.)

[22] Carriero (2009, 38–39) notices a similar heuretic value in the paragraph but does not take madness as an attempt at a skeptical scenario, considering the search for such a scenario as "overreading".

[23] The examples of madmen's delusions were common in the medical literature of the time, their source being André du Laurens's (1558–1609) *Discours des maladies mélancoliques* (1594). See, e.g., Fabietti 2015.

Many readings treat madness as uninteresting and unworthy of analysis, apparently simply because the meditator seems to treat it as such. Others have taken madness not to be a serious attempt at a skeptical scenario, viewing it as being brought up and rejected in order to emphasise the meditator's rationality.[24] However, reading madness as contrasted to rational thinking is not really supported by the text. Comparing the madness paragraph to Descartes's other discussions of madness and its cause conveys that the madmen have a disability in their sensation and imagination, not in rationality.

> [I]t is the soul which sees, and not the eye; and it does not see directly, but only by means of the brain. That is why madmen and those who are asleep often see, or think they see, various objects which are nevertheless not before the eyes: namely, certain vapours disturb their brain and arrange those of its parts normally engaged in vision exactly as they would be if these objects were present. (*Optics*: AT VI, 141; CSM I, 172.)

> [M]elancholic individuals who think themselves to be vases […] will swear that what they see and touch is just as they imagine it to be. To be sure, a good man would be indignant if you told him that his beliefs cannot have any more rational basis than theirs, since he relies, like them, on what the senses and imagination represent to him. (*Search*: AT X, 511; CSM II, 407.)

Madmen do not think their head is a vase because they are irrational but because of an unbalanced distribution of vapours in their brains. Their faulty judgment is to do with defective causal capacities that corrupt cognitive mechanisms and can introduce systematic error in some people's beliefs.[25]

Madness, however, fails to create a sufficient reason for doubt and the meditator quickly disregards it. The meditator, to make systematic doubt of the senses possible, must be convinced that senses failing to perceive reality in the normal course of events might be more typical than she originally considered. However, madness is still an exceptional case – as a physiological impairment, madness is not a normal or natural state and implies a background of physically defectless minds. Thus, madness is unconvincing as a systematic scenario. (Cf. Lennon & Hickson 2013, 14–15.)[26]

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[24] Frankfurt (2008, 51–54) is a strong influence here, later followed by, e.g., Ablondi (2007), Hatfield (2007, 75–76), M. Williams (2010, 309) and Christofidou (2013, 35–36). Foucault (2006, 44–45) also treats the madness in a similar way. Classic readings not mentioning the madness scenario include, e.g., Gueroult (1953), B. Williams (2015), and Cottingham (1986). Classic readings that observe Descartes dismissing madness but seem uninterested in analysing it further include, e.g., Kenny (1968), M. Wilson (1978), E. Curley (1978), and B. Williams (1983).

[25] See also the *Principia* IV, §196 (AT VIIIA, 319–320; CSM I, 283). Cf. Carriero 1997, 4; Broughton 2005, 12; Wagner 2014, 52. In the so-called Toulouse Manuscript (an unpublished draft of the *Meditations*) the term for insanity is *furiosis* which also hints at a causal link.

[26] Some, though, read madness as creating a genuine reason for doubt, which is not turned down but assimilated into the dreaming scenario. Influentially argued by Broughton (2002; 2005), this reading has been followed by, e.g., Scott (2009), Russo (2011), and Wagner (2014). Derrida (2005) also reads madness as a serious scenario in an answer to Foucault.

What is madness doing in the First Meditation if it is an unconvincing scenario? It feels strange that Descartes would waste space in such a short text for raising a scenario that fails. My reading is that madness is raised to transition the meditator from the practical life context to the metaphysical context of suspension of judgment, preparing her thinking for the upcoming dreaming scenario. Madness bridges the narrative, paving the way for moving from the First Level of doubt to the Second.[27]

The need for transition, as discussed, is motivated by Descartes's careful distinction between the meditative inquiry and practical life matters. The meditator's thinking must be altered from the everyday context of moral certainty to the skeptical context of the general suspension of judgement, driven by the search for metaphysical certainty. Thus, a transition is required to move from the naturally occurring particular doubts to the metaphysically charged systematic doubt and from the common-sense naïve conviction (or 'teachings of nature', see AT VII, 38; CSM II, 26) to the meditative exercise, in which perception of reality and reality itself might be cut off.[28] (Cf. chapters 1.3 and 2.5.2.)

The preceding is a lot to ask and Descartes seemingly recognizes this. The meditator is expected to seriously consider that not only is her sensory cognition limited, but it might not even access reality regularly and systematically (not just exceptionally and occasionally). Just as in the beginning of the First Meditation and at its end, Descartes hints with madness that this sort of doubt is extremely difficult. It seems initially *insane* from the meditator's perspective, going against what nature has taught us. It is, to an extent, an *unnatural* doubt. Descartes even points out in the Synopsis that to deny our everyday trust in the senses is quite mad and something that "no sane person (*sanae mentis*)" has ever seriously doubted (AT VII, 16; CSM II, 11).[29]

The meditator's decision not to take the mad as an example also works as a warning not to expand the metaphysical doubts to the everyday situation of practical living. Reading the madness discussion in this fashion likewise allows us to see in it an inherent critique of the ancient skeptics.

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[27] Madness, of course, was one of the traditional weapons of the ancient skeptics, often found paired with dreaming. See *Acad.*, 2.17.53–54, 2.28.88–90; *PH* I, 100–104; *M* VII, 403–407. Madness and dream are also paired in Galen, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine and Montaigne: Annas & Barnes 1985, 86; *Tht.* 158b–d; *Met.* 4.5–4.6., 1010b8–1011a7; *C. Acad.*, 2.5.11, 3.11.2; *Trin*, 15.12.21; *Apologie* (1907, 404, 410; 1991, 674, 677–678). Broughton (2002, 65–66; 2005) and Russo (2011) have suggested following this tradition as a sufficient motivation for Descartes to include madness in the discussion. However, this reasoning on its own comes off as ungenerous towards Descartes.

[28] Due to the work's meditative nature, it would be expected of Descartes to make this separation in the beginning of the First Meditation. Indeed, this is what he does in the *Discourse* and the *Principia* (AT VI, 25, 31 & VIIIA, 5; CSM I, 123, 126, 193). However, the First Meditation surprisingly does not include a similar distinction before the very end (AT VII, 22; CSM II, 15). Meanwhile, the *Discourse* and the *Principia* do not include the madness scenario.

[29] Cf. Seventh Replies; Hyperaspistes Letter (AT III, 422–423, VII, 460; CSM II, 309, CSMK, 188–189).

> [W]e must note the distinction […] between the actions of life and the investigation of the truth. For when it is a question of organizing our life, it would, of course, be foolish not to trust the senses, and the sceptics who neglected human affairs to the point where friends had to stop them falling off precipices deserved to be laughed at. Hence I pointed out in one passage that no sane person ever seriously doubts such things. (Fifth Replies: AT VII, 350–351; CSM II, 243.)

Descartes contrasts the practical doubts of the ancients with insanity, which is deservedly laughed at. The meditator's decision not to follow the mad can then be likewise understood as a statement not to take the ancients as a model for skepticism. (Cf. Christofidou 2013, 18. See chapters 1.3 and 2.5.2.)

4.2.2. Systematic Doubt: Dreaming and Waking

Leading up to the fifth paragraph, the meditator is willing to side with the sane crowd and is, thus, resistant to considering herself a lunatic. However, while tentatively considering madness as the only way to succeed in the systematic doubt, she now realises a much more likely scenario:

> A brilliant piece of reasoning (*preclare sane*)! As if I were not a man who sleeps at night, and regularly has all the same experiences while asleep as madmen do when awake – indeed sometimes even more improbable ones. How often, asleep at night, am I convinced of just such familiar events […] when in fact I am lying undressed in bed! (AT VII, 19; CSM II, 13.)

Insanity is not a convincing reason for doubting the background norm of reliable sensory cognition because it is a defect of our natural capacities, affecting only *some* people for some of the time.[30] One cannot make this same objection against dreaming, with the meditator sarcastically declaring how *sane* the earlier objection appears when compared with it (cf. the *Search*: AT X, 511; CSM II, 407–408). Dreaming, a feature of human cognition, just like occasional sensory errors, is something we all experience some of the time. Dreaming enables the meditator to consider that her senses might not work as she thought, allowing for the possibility that sense perception is unreliable as a norm even if the meditator's (and everyone else's) brain was physically defectless. Thus, it offers a more convincing challenge to the background of epistemic optimism than madness. (Cf. Lennon & Hickson 2013, 14–15.) The meditator, by considering

[30] Descartes makes use of two words in the madness passage, *amentes* and *demens*. The former designates a temporary attack of madness, whereas the latter is a more permanent state. The meditator would then be unwilling to follow those who from time to time suffer from defect in the brain in order not to be permanently insane (AT VII, 19; CSM II, 13).

madness, is able to ease into the attitude of the Second Level doubt on the senses and discover dreaming as a possible way to find their connection to the world as suspect, temporarily casting aside her naïve realist conviction of sensation.

However, when sketching the dream scenario, the meditator is still struggling with the systematic doubt of the senses. Comparing the case of dreaming to her own sensory experience, she finds that at the moment she is "certainly wide awake" and does a series of tests to prove this to herself.

> All this would not happen with such distinctness to someone asleep. Indeed! As if I did not remember other occasions when I have been tricked by exactly similar thoughts while asleep! As I think about this more carefully, I see plainly that there are never any sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep. The result is that I begin to feel dazed, and this very feeling only reinforces the notion that I may be asleep. (AT VII, 19; CSM II, 13.)

Systematic doubt proves to be difficult even with dreaming as indicated by the meditator's insistence that she is awake, and the description of being "dazed (*obstupescam*)" when concluding that she might be asleep. This is to be expected. The dreaming scenario is meant to suggest that the meditator's senses might not generally access the reality in the ordinary common course of nature, as she thought they do. Cartesian suspension of judgment as an attentive meditative exercise is not intended to be easy for humans, ingrained with well-established habits and belief systems. Compare with Buridan, who views dreaming as an unfavourable state: "[T]he species of sensible things can be preserved in the sense organs in the absence of these things, as it is stated in [Aristotle's] *On Sleep and Waking*. And then we judge that which is not there to be there" (*QM* II, 1: 8rb). As an epistemological optimist, dreaming is simply uninteresting for Buridan. He offers no criteria for distinguishing between waking and dreaming states and gives no direct answer to dream-based skepticism. He merely does not take it as a serious argument, because he views sensory perception as working reliably in the natural order of things, this being sufficient for scientific and moral certainty (*QM* II, 1: 94a).[31]

Descartes, in contrast, compares the waking experience to errorless sensory cognition and the dream experience to sensory cognition that has been disrupted by error in some way, and suggests that dream experiences cannot be distinguished from wake experiences with any *inherent features* of sensation. In the paragraph from the *Optics* quoted above, Descartes considers dreamers to have causal hindrances similar to the

[31] However, unlike Ockham, Buridan does not commit to the direct, unmeditative access by intuitive cognition on the existence and non-existence of cognized objects. Buridan does account for simple apprehension as singular cognition of something being present to the senses, but this act fails to be veridical in the natural order because we can also experience it while dreaming (*QM* VII, 20: 45). See chapter 2.3. For intuitive cognition, see chapter 3.1.2 Cf. Zupko 1993, 212–216.

madmen's, which arranges errors in cognitive mechanisms (AT VI, 141–142; CSM II, 172–173).[32] When I assume I am looking at a frozen lake from my balcony, due to a causal error in my perception, there might be no balcony, no lake, and no cat seeking to be caressed. Just as a naked madman may erroneously view himself to be clothed in purple due to the causal effects in his brain, I may have a similar systematic error that I am sitting by the fire writing on a piece of paper – or on the balcony, writing on my laptop – due to a causal error like dreaming.

Descartes's account of dreaming differs not only from Buridan's but also from certain ancient considerations. Specifically, Sextus describes how "different appearances" occur depending on whether one is dreaming or awake. "[W]hen asleep we will see things which are unreal in waking life, not unreal once and for all. For they exist in sleep, just as the contents of waking life exist even though they do not exist in sleep" (*PH* I, 104). Sextus contends that one cannot be sure whether waking contents are truer than dream contents, satisfying the Pyrrhonian contrast of impressions. However, for Descartes, the difference between erroneous and errorless sensation cannot be pointed out by inherent criteria in the sensory experience. Senses failing to reach the reality might be more akin to the natural order than is assumed in the epistemological optimism of the Empricial Principle.[33]

The dream scenario in the First Meditation is infamously sketchy and unclear, though, which has led to disagreement on the consequences of the indistinguishability. The text does not offer a clearly worked out argument, so many commentators have relied on their own resources and Descartes's other texts to squeeze the argument out (cf. Carriero 2009, 44).[34] An earlier common reading was to take Descartes as suggesting that we might be dreaming in every instance, our lives a continuous dream (e.g., Walsh 1968, 91; Kenny 1968, 16; M. Williams 1986, 128). Since *continuous dream* reading proved difficult to maintain, many took Descartes to mean that we might simply be dreaming at any given instance, because dream experiences are sometimes indistinguishable from waking ones (e.g., Frankfurt 2008, 70–72; Hatfield 2007, 76). However, if Descartes's

[32] Cf. *Treatise on Man* (AT XI, 173–174, 198–199; CSM I, 104–105).

[33] However, see *Acad.* 2.28.90. Cf. *M* VII, 403–408. Cicero does not generalize that our whole cognitive experience might be false but offers a version of the dream argument that is close to Descartes's, though still running dreaming and madness together. Of course, Cicero's argument is directed at the Stoic doctrine of cognitive impressions, which claims there *to be* inherent criteria to distinguish between veridical and non-veridical impressions. Note that in both Cicero and Descartes, the interlocutor does view dreaming as epistemically *unreliable* compared to being awake. (Cf. chapters 2.1 and 2.2.)

[34] Focusing on other instances of dreaming, Descartes's willingness to experiment with the scenario comes apparent. He phrases the doubt as the indistinguishability of dreaming and waking in the *Principia* (AT VIIIA, 6; CSM I, 194), as a possibility of continuous dreaming in the *Search* (AT X, 511; CSM II, 408), and as a comparison between dream and waking experiences in the *Discourse*, approaching Sextus's account of dreaming (AT VI, 32, 28; CSM I, 127, 130).

intention is to suggest that the meditator might have never perceived reality as it is (and neither has anyone else), the *any-instance* reading seems insufficient. Some have then questioned whether the scenario has to do with distinguishing dreaming and waking at all but, rather, whether even waking experience should be taken as providing reliable cognitive access to the world (e.g., M. Wilson 1978, 17–31; Stuart 1983).

However, the simplest way to grasp the dreaming scenario in the *Meditations* is to look at its resolve. What most take as the resolution of dreaming comes at the end of the Sixth Meditation: "I now notice that there is a vast difference between [dream and awake], in that dreams are never linked by memory with all the other actions of life as waking experiences are." (AT VII, 89; CSM II, 61). This resolve is seen by many as *ad hoc* (e.g., Hobbes: AT VII, 195–196; CSM II, 137; cf. Kenny 1968, 30), and it would surely be such, if it was the only resolution to the Second Level of doubt. However, by this point the meditator has discovered her true cognitive nature and has full use of her intellect, memory, and free will. Metaphysical knowledge of her epistemic character allows her to recognise the cause of her errors, which removes the reason for the Second Level doubt (inability to distinguish between reliable and non-reliable sensory cognition). She realises that in relation to natural habits, senses do reliably access reality more often than not (AT VII, 89; CSM II, 61; cf. 7.3.3).[35]

The meditator is not searching for an epistemic criterion to distinguish between dreaming and waking. Rather, her inquiry is about delving into the causes of her errors in order to know whether she can reach errorless cognition. Dream experiences are clearly false; they do not reach a cognitive access to reality as it is.[36] The dream scenario demonstrates that we are incapable of knowing whether we reach such errorless sensory access, because we cannot distinguish between those experiences that are veridical and those that are not. Reading the dream scenario as based on the indistinguishability of erroneous and errorless cognition, Descartes does not take the epistemic stand of dreaming and waking experience being the same (cf. Christofidou 2013, 21–22).[37]

[35] Cf. the Third Replies (AT VII, 195–196; CSM II, 137): "An atheist can infer that he is awake on the basis of memory of his past life [but not] that he is not mistaken, if he does not know that he was created by a non-deceiving God." One has to be aware of the author of one's nature and the reasons for one's errors before the dreaming doubt can be resolved.

[36] Cf. the Third Replies (AT VII, 195–196; CSM II, 137): "[E]veryone admits that a man may be deceived in his sleep. But afterwards, when he wakes up, he will easily recognize his mistake."

[37] Descartes seems to give a new version of the scenario in the Sixth Meditation: "[E]very sensory experience I have ever thought I was having while awake I can also think of myself as sometimes having while asleep; and since I do not believe that what I seem to perceive in sleep comes from things located outside me, I did not see why I should be any more inclined to believe this of what I think I perceive while awake" (AT VII, 77; CSM II, 53). This rephrasing, along with the version in the *Discourse*, have been taken as evidence for the reading of whether we should take even wakeful experience as veridical data (M. Wilson

Dreaming is intended to make us consider that things might not be as they appear and question the background of veridical sensation as a norm. Descartes then does not have to make the meditator consider that there have been actual cases of errorless sensation nor that she is dreaming all the time. It suffices that she is unable to tell whether her cognition is bereft of error and her experience of objects comes from outside or not.[38]

Dreaming suggests that erroneous sensation might be the natural order, undermining the first of the meditator's cognitive foundations and providing a reason to put aside her naïve convictions regarding access to reality. It prepares the meditator to distinguish between sensation and imagination, which was touched on in the madness paragraph and is brought up in full form in the following analogy between dreaming and painting.[39] The meditator, thus, commits to the Second Level, moving from questioning some sensory beliefs at certain times to questioning all sensory cognition at any given time, temporarily putting aside the common-sense view of everyday naïve realism.

4.2.3. Second Transitional Scenario: Dreaming and Painting

The meditator further develops the dreaming sketch at the beginning of the sixth paragraph, questioning her sensory experience as a whole. "Suppose then I that I am dreaming, and that these particulars – that my eyes are open, that I am moving my head and stretching out my hands – are not true. Perhaps, indeed, I do not even have such hands or such a body at all" (AT VII, 19; CSM II, 13).

However, just as after the First Level doubts, the meditator once again resists the full force of the skeptical scenario, concluding that even if she was dreaming "the visions which come in the sleep are like paintings" that must be fashioned "in the likeness of things that are real". Here Descartes compares the meditator's imagining (and, to an extent, her thinking) to painting, holding that even when painters create chimerical

1978, 24; Stuart 1983, 99–101). However, we can also read the rephrase to support the indistinguishability reading: We do not take dream objects to be located outside of ourselves; thus, we should withhold judgment on sensory objects that we think we perceive while awake but could just as well be perceiving while asleep.

[38] Cf. Wagner 2014, 54–56. Wagner though suggests that Descartes's "strong validation of reason" project means that he must always raise the strongest possible doubt; thus, that no external objects exist, and the meditator is dreaming all the time. However, I take the meditative exercise as not requiring the strongest doubt at every level due to its gradual process.

[39] Cf. the *Treatise on Man* and the *Principia* (AT VIIIA, 6 & XI, 174; CSM I, 105, 194). See also Christofidou 2013, 22; Wagner 2014, 49, 52–53, 58. It is natural for both the naïve and the ex-dogmatic skeptic meditator to take the dream images as the result of her imagination. Likewise, Aristotelian tradition draws a difference between external and internal senses, with dreaming, imagination, and memory belonging to the internal ones. Thus, the same conclusion is also bound to occur to the Aristotelian meditator. See, e.g., Aristotle's *De Ins.* I, 459a23; *De Mem.* I, 450a24. Cf. chapter 3.1.1.

creatures, such as satyrs and sirens, they jumble together body parts of real nature. Or, even if the artists come up with something wholly fictitious, at least they have to use real colours to depict them. Similarly, even if general things such as hands and bodies are imaginary, at least some "simpler and more universal things" would be real. "These are as it were the *real colours* (*coloribus veris)* from which we form all the images of things, whether true or false, that occur in our thought." (AT VII, 19–20; CSM II, 13–14.) The meditator realizes in the analogy between dreaming and painting, also known as the painter analogy, that even if her senses might not work as she thought they would, her access to reality does not seem to be completely shut off. There is more to the fabric of reality than what the senses reveal (cf. Christofidou 2013, 24).

The painter analogy has gained a surprisingly small amount of attention from the literature, possibly once again due to its placement between two major scenarios (dreaming and the deceiver).[40] However, the passage is essential to the unfolding of the First Meditation. The analogy, similar to madness before it, acts as a transition between the Second and the Third Levels of doubt, bridging the narrative from systematic sensory doubt by dreaming to the ultimate doubt of the whole rational cognitive process. However, unlike the more condensed discussion of madness, the analogy of dreaming as painting also introduces new material into the narrative. It develops the dreaming doubt, with the meditator supposing that she in fact is dreaming and her cognitive access is systematically erroneous, it includes imagination among the doubted sensory cognitions, and it extends the skeptical consideration into the realm of external world skepticism (though, as I argue, only in the moderate sense, see chapter 2.2). The painter analogy requires the meditator to take seriously the scenario that her sensory access right now *is*, not just might be, flawed by causal disturbance such as dreaming. The scenario carries further than the previous scenario that she is presently mad, accounting for the longer length and novel material of the former. However, *present dreaming* turns out not to be enough for questioning the meditator's whole experience of reality, which leads the way to the Deceiving God scenario. Failing to give the analogy between dreaming and painting a significant role leaves us without a proper understanding of the advancement of the meditative exercise, with stretches of text that appear more or less idle. Or, as Carriero states, standard readings that "do not explain how this moment on the discussion advances an overall argument" break away from the narrative just as the discussion is gaining steam (2009, 27).

The meditator realises with the painter analogy that even if her sensation does not work as she thought it would, she can still rely on some of her capacities which have to

[40] The fullest treatment is by Carriero (1999; 2009, 46–53). Others have followed (e.g., Hatfield 2007; 77–80; Cunning 2010, 56–59; Christofidou 2013, 22–25; Wagner 2014, 57–60), but it is still scarcely discussed.

do with sensation, namely imagination and, to a lesser extent, memory, to raise a counter-argument to the dreaming scenario.

> [I]t must surely be admitted that the visions which come in sleep are like paintings, which must have been fashioned in the likeness of things that are real, and hence that at least these general kind of things – eyes, head, hands and the body as a whole – are things which are not imaginary but are real and exist. (AT VII, 19–20; CSM II, 13.)

The meditator is used to thinking that sensation and imagination have something to do with each other (either naively or in a more fleshed out Aristotelian form). Even if she might be dreaming, her dream images have to have *some* causal relation to real things. Perhaps, as a more Aristotelian meditator, she could rely on her stockpiled *phantasmas* to argue that the senses cannot be as dysfunctional as Descartes suggests. That she is capable of dreaming heads in the first place means that at some point in time she had to be in contact with a composition of a real head from the world.

The meditator initially follows Aquinas's thought, viewing that the intellect gathers the world's structure through universal concepts and that our ability to cognise depends on the stockpile of likenesses (*similitudines*) we have gathered from the world (see chapter 3.1). However, the discussion changes with the meditator's realization that even if these general compositions did not exist, some *simple and universal things* (*simplicia & universalia*), like the painter's real colours, must be true. She specifies these in the seventh paragraph to include extension and corporeal nature in general, the shape of the extended things, their quantity, size, number, place, the time they endure, and so on (AT VII, 20; CSM II, 14). Descartes reverses the Scholastic cognition at the end, viewing simple notions not as universals abstracted from sensory particulars but as singular natures, penetrating our cognitive features (cf. Secada 2000, 123–128; Christofidou 2013, 23–24).

The essentiality of sensation for capturing reality diminishes throughout these paragraphs, including first entire particular parts, such as limbs and organs, and in the end mere spatial-temporality, which does not have as clear-cut a relation to sensation. The discussion of painting begins with Johannes Vermeer (hands, heads, pearl earrings), moves to Hieronymus Bosch (combinations as sirens, satyrs, and bird monsters), and ends with Jackson Pollock (mere shapes and sizes). The meditator begins to find not only sensation but also the internal sensitive features of imagination and phantasmal memory suspect during the painter analogy. Maybe even imagination does not have as much to do with the structure of reality as she thought. As the significance of sensation diminishes, the strength of sensory *phantasmas* also crumbles and the meditator begins to question any structure of the world coming from the senses. The analogy is set so that she recognises a familiar set of arguments while the main elements of her earlier world view are debunked. The way we depict reality might not be based on similitude

between real and sensory objects but on certain cognitive boundaries that structure the experience like colours in a pallet.[41] (Cf. Carriero 1999, 27–29; 2009, 46–48.)

Nevertheless, since these boundaries make certain features repeat in the meditator's experience, she seems to be on the safe side as long as she concentrates on those features. She then concludes in the eighth paragraph that "physics, astronomy, medicine, and all other disciplines which depend on the study of composite things, are doubtful", whereas "arithmetic, geometry, and other subjects […] which deal only with the simplest and most general things, regardless of whether they really exist in nature of not, contain something certain and indubitable" (AT VII, 20; CSM II, 14).

There has been a strong divide in the literature about whether we should read the dream scenario as already questioning the existence of the external world or just questioning its resemblance to our sense experience (so called *wide* and *narrow* readings). This debate is tied to whether the scenario of present dreaming (coupled within the painter analogy) leaves the world of Cartesian physics unquestioned.[42] However, to accomplish the undermining of the naïve realism of RPS, Descartes is not required to commit the meditator, at least yet, to the extreme version and thus to consider that she has no ground to expect that the physical reality exists at all. It suffices that the meditator follows *moderate* external world skepticism, having no reason to think we have reliable access to the external world through the senses alone (see chapter 2.2). The same is supported by the reading of dreaming scenario as indistinguishability of errorless and erroneous cognition. The corruption by error in the meditator's cognition is *causal* in nature; thus, it is anchored in the existence of a body. Dreaming is a regular physiological state, requiring a brain operating in some kind of body.[43]

Of course, in the Sixth Meditation, having sufficiently resolved the Third Level of doubt and beginning to resolve the Second, the meditator still must examine "whether material things exist" (AT VII, 71; CSM II, 50).[44] However, by then, she already knows

[41] A stubborn Aristotelian might, though, still resist the questioning of the senses, imagination, and *phantasmas* because the mind would then have nothing to perceive. Descartes is quite impotent to convince such a reader. Thus, the painter analogy does not work as a full-on criticism of Aristotelianism, the major critique being saved for the Second and Third Meditations. However, an attentive and co-operative meditator, which Descartes calls for (AT VII, 9; CSM II, 8) should be able to get enough guidelines from the instructions to think about cognition in the correct way. Cf. Carriero 2009, 53.

[42] See Gueroult 1953, 34–35; Kenny 1968, 31–32; M. Wilson 1978, 13–17; Rozemond 1996; 1998, 64–75; Bermúdez 1997; 1998; Carriero 1999; 2009, 40–52; Cunning 2010, 30–32; Christofidou 2013, 22–25.

[43] Notice that even as she commits to the present-dream scenario, the meditator does not doubt the general existence of hands and bodies, just that she might not have *such* (*talis*) hands and *such* a body as she seems to perceive (AT VII, 19; CSM, 13). Dreaming empowered by the Deceiving Demon would then be dreaming without the existence of a body.

[44] See Carriero 2009, 54, note 29. Carriero defended the wide reading similarly in a private conversation. See also Stuart 1983, 104. I argue that in order to resolve the Third Level doubts, the meditator has to

(*scire*) that "they are capable of existing, in so far as they are the subject-matter of pure mathematics", as her clear and distinct cognition is verified by the removal of the reason for the Third Level doubt. The painter analogy indicated possibility of *something* existing, at least as the subject matter of mathematical reasoning, is the extent of the Second Level doubt. The analogy of dreaming as painting suggests a discrepancy between the content of our sensory experience and the metaphysical structure of reality.[45]

However, one should be careful not to assign too mechanistic a reading to the reality left behind by the painter analogy. The meditator discovers by the Sixth Meditation that the existing material reality is made of corpuscularist extended matter in which everything in her sensation does not have a real nature (e.g., colours). Some commentators have been eager to jump on the mention of simples in the First Meditation and view it as introducing Cartesian physics (e.g., Gueroult 1953; Bermúdez 1997; 1998; 2008).[46] Yet, the eighth paragraph reveals that the simples Descartes wants the meditator to concentrate on are geometrical and mathematical in nature. What survives the dreaming doubt are especially *non-sensory intellectual concepts*, exemplified by the Augustinian notion that the meditator's capability to conduct correct mathematics remains the same, whether her sensory cognition is erroneous or not: "For whether I am awake or asleep, two and three added together are five, and a square has no more than four sides" (AT VII, 20; CSM II, 1; cf. *C. Acad.* 3.11.25; see chapter 2.3.1). It is possible to consider the concepts to also include mechanistic notions, such as motion and rest, or even Aristotelian ones, such as colour and taste, but this is more due to the universal role of the meditator rather than to any intentional implementing of Descartes's physics into the discussion. (Cf. Cunning 2010, 57–59; Bermúdez 2008, 59.) Notice that the intellectual concepts at this point are *non-commital*. The meditator discovers for the first time that some of her notions of reality appear non-sensory and native, but in a neutral way, unburdened by any Cartesian theory.

The painter analogy reveals that there are limits to dreaming, and the meditator is entitled to certain beliefs independent of sensory perception, imagination, and phantasmal memory. Certain intellectual features, such as spatial-temporality and especially mathematical reasoning, seem impervious to doubt, bridging the narrative between the Second and Third Levels. The meditator discovers that, although her sensory faculties might not provide a reliable foundation, she can still rely on her

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discover her full nature as a cognitive agent and the metaphysical tenets of that nature, which she succeeds in only by the Fifth Meditation.

[45] The Fifth Meditation, in which the meditator discovers that the simples (like size and shape), geometry and mathematics have a *real nature* independent of her, plays a major role here. Cf. chapter 7.3.3.

[46] Rozemond (1996) goes even further, suggesting the simple and universal things to include also Cartesian secondary qualities like colours and sounds, thus being close to the reality of the Resemblance Picture.

intellect and reason, which appear to get something right about reality. Even if the Empirical Principle has failed, she can recline on this Rational Principle and consider that even if we dream, certain "transparent truths (*perspicuae veritates*)", such as our understanding of mathematics independent of the real existence of its objects, seem impossible to question (AT VII, 20; CSM II, 14).[47]

Similarities to the madness paragraph are clear. Both painting and madness begin with a statement of limitations within the proceeding Level, demonstrating beliefs and their basis the doubt does not cover (background of optimal sensation, common features of imagining, reasoning). Both also lead the meditator to a desired thought process through a simile, preparing her for the subsequent Level. Of course, the painter analogy does more work, as it also prepares for the questioning of sensory imagination and leads to reality as a domain of spatial geometry, duration, and mathematics. After all, making the meditator, who is used to relying mostly on her sensory abilities, concentrate on more rational concepts is no easy task. The relative length of dreaming and painting is therefore justified.

4.3. Third Level of Doubt: Deceiving God and Imperfect Nature

A question emerges as we proceed to the Third Level of doubt: Why does Descartes include this level? If his goal with the skeptical scenarios is merely to lead the mind away from the senses, as he indicates in the Synopsis, or to prepare the reader's minds for intellectual things and distinguish these from corporeal ones, as he puts it in the Third Replies, this seems to have succeeded by the Second Level (AT VII, 12, 171–172; CSM II, 9, 121).[48] The meditator has turned away from sensory capacities and concentrates on non-sensory and rational concepts, especially geometry and mathematics, which do not much care whether their objects "exist in nature or not". If the discussion on dreaming and painting proceeds from Scholastic abstractionism towards Descartes's own nativism, as Carriero suggests (1999; 2009, 49–53), why would he need to push the meditator further? Would it not be sufficient to call the Resemblance Picture into

[47] Secada (2000, 138) assumes the simples to be intellectual. Christofidou (2013, 23–24) takes them to be material, separating them from mathematical simples. Wagner (2014, 57) reads all simples as non-sensory objects. Descartes seems to leave the true being of simples intentionally vague but indicates them to be at least comparable with intellectual concepts. However, reading the dream scenario as systematically questioning the resemblance of the world instead of its existence, the spatial-temporal simples would have some *mind-independent* reality, perhaps even materially. Cf. the French: "*plus simples plus universelles, qui sont vrayes &* existantes". Carriero 2009, 51, note 25; Christofidou 2013, 28.

[48] Not fully, of course, as leading the mind away from sensory perception continues in the Second and Third Meditations. See, e.g., AT VII, 24, 34; CSM II, 16, 24; cf. Second Replies (AT VII, 131; CSM II, 94).

question and provide a route for cognising reality independently from the senses, namely through clear and distinct perception?[49]

Indeed, Descartes thinks it would be insufficient for several reasons. Firstly, Descartes's endgame is not only epistemological but also metaphysical, discovering the foundation of our cognitive nature and its possible errors. The meditator is to cast doubt on the reliability of *all* the abilities she has thus far trusted – senses, imagination, and reason – recognising that none of them alone can eliminate error in her views. The Scholastic tradition recognised self-evident foundational truths, such as the principle of non-contradiction or 'I am thinking', as indubitable (see chapter 2.3). To eviscerate the meditator's whole cognitive landscape, Descartes also calls into question its rational foundations, not just empirical ones. "In the First Meditation reasons are provided which give us possible grounds for doubt about all things, especially material things, so long as we have no *foundations* for the sciences other than *those* we have had up till now" (Synopsis: AT VII, 12; CSM II, 9; emphasis added).

Secondly, that the human mind might not be equipped to know the truth about reality became a common topic in the fallibilistic and fideistic discussions of 16th and 17th century skepticism. Montaigne and Sanches accepted the mind's mental activity as distinct from its perception of external things but considered our intellectual abilities too limited for reaching the truth (see chapter 2.4; cf. Yrjönsuuri 2000, 229; Popkin 2003, 39–63; Lupoli 2009). The Third Level of doubt is an indication that Descartes is not just concerned about naïve sensory realism but about skeptical thinking as well.

Thirdly, following the two earlier points, Descartes not only tries to provide reliable cognition by clarity and distinctness; he attempts to *demonstrate* the reliability of clear and distinct cognition. Descartes, as discussed (chapter 3.4.1), sees truth as metaphysical – as something that is real. By contrast, falsity is *chimerical* (*chimarae*) – either invented by jumbling up real material (as discussed in the First Meditation), non-existing (as noted in the Second) or participating in non-being (as defined in the Fourth) (AT VII, 20, 24, 54; CSM II, 13, 16, 38). Truth for Descartes is a conformity relation of thought and its object, so me thinking of something that is false is me being in relation with something that does not exist, such as the head of a horse on the body of a brontosaurus (AT II, 597; CSMK, 139).[50] Just as the meditator considers mathematics to be true at this point in the First Meditation, mathematical reasoning would involve some mind-independent reality, whether or not singular triangles exist materially in corporeal nature. Similarly,

[49] Cf. the *World* (AT XI, 3–6; CSM I, 81–82); Bermúdez 1997, 756–759; 1998. See chapter 3.4.

[50] Traditionally, chimeras were fantastic but impossible beasts, hybrids of different animals like the head of a lion and the body of a goat. Such creatures would have no real nature and not be part of existing being. The word 'chimerical' is also used in paleontology to describe fossils from various animals put together as a single creature. Cf. Carriero 2009, 49–50.

the spatial-temporal simples would also be real, as fundamental geometrical elements of dream experience (cf. Christofidou 2013, 28). However, because of Descartes's metaphysical understanding of truth, the meditator must confirm that her clear and distinct perceptions actually *do* correspond to reality. The nature of her errors would be left uncovered if she cannot do this. Descartes would, concurrently, be unable to answer the skeptic demanding a reason to trust the clear and distinct perception.

One way to frame Descartes's issue here is through the doctrine of created eternal truths. Just as there was no reason for God to choose one set of necessary truths over another, he could have also created them in another way, even granting us a set of seemingly necessary truths without actualising them as part of reality. However, according to Descartes's definition of truth as a conformity relation, for the necessary truths to be true they must be true of actual reality. Thus, Descartes must confirm that our evident cognition is cognition of the reality as created by God. We can have a compelled feeling that we have reached the truth (a piece of reality) but cannot be completely certain that we indeed have without confirming the second-order reliability of our cognition. (Cf. chapter 3.4.1.[51])

4.3.1. Ultimate Doubt: Deceiving God

Descartes then presents the meditator with a new scenario in the ninth paragraph:

> [F]irmly rooted in my mind is the long-standing opinion that there is an omnipotent God who made me the kind of creature I am. How do I know (*scio*) that he has not brought it about that there is no earth, no sky, no extended thing, no shape, no size, no place, while at the same time ensuring that all these things appear to me to exist just as they do now? (AT VII, 21; CSM II, 14.)

The scenario begins by questioning not only the external reality (earth and sky) but also the previously mentioned spatial simples. Perhaps an omnipotent God has made it so that while shape, size, and placement of objects appear even when I dream, nothing external actually exists. The Deceiving God, though, questions not only the simples but also the mathematical and geometrical truths.

> [S]ince I sometimes believe that others go astray in cases where they think they have the most perfect knowledge (*scire*), may I not similarly go wrong every time I add two and three or count the sides of a square […]. (AT VII, 21; CSM II, 14.)

[51] While truths about created reality are contingently necessary, truths about God are *necessarily* necessary and could not be otherwise (AT I, 150; CSMK, 24). See Alanen 2000, 258; Dicker 2013, 167–168; Cunning 2014; Forsman 2016; 2019.

The meditator may have been created to erroneously assume that reality is spatial-temporal and 2+3 is 5. At this ultimate level the most extreme form of doubt is targeted at reason itself, our very capacity of distinguishing truth from falsity, undermining even the Rational Principle (cf. Alanen 2000, 264).

The nature of the Deceiving God scenario, unlike it has sometimes been phrased (e.g., Kenny 1968, 34; Frankfurt 2008, 119; Dicker 2013, 36–37; Wagner 2014, 11), is not that God specifically comes in the middle of each and all of my thought processes. Instead, God could have created me so that I am unable to grasp what is real and true even by using my natural abilities as they were intended and reached my cognitive best. The doubt is more about my own *imperfect nature* than about an evil and petty God.[52] How can we be certain we do not err even when we seem to reach our cognitive peak?

> [I]f it were inconsistent with [God's] goodness to have created me such that I am deceived all the time, it would seem equally foreign to his goodness to allow (*permittere*) me to be deceived even occasionally […]. (AT VII, 21; CSM II, 14.)

Even if deception seems alien to the meditator's conception of God, allowing her to be occasionally deceived seems equally foreign to it. Deceiving God does not have to actively deceive us. It is enough that he merely *allows* us to be deceived by not creating things in a way that appears to us as evident.[53]

Discussions of God's possible deception, as established (chapter 2.3.3), were common in the late Scholastic landscape (cf. Second Objections: AT VII, 125; CSM II, 89–90). However, the consensus was that by doing so, God would intervene in the common course of nature and perform a *miracle*. Descartes suggests, conversely, that perhaps my natural disposition is one in which my cognitive abilities are lacking and do not reach the truth. It might be more according to the common course of nature that I miss out what is actually real. Just as in the case of the dreaming scenario, Descartes's aim is to go against the background assumption of getting things right and suggest that it might be more typical of us to err, either because of inability to distinguish between erroneous and errorless cognition or because our cognitive capacities might be authored so that we never reach the truth.[54]

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[52] Cf. Carriero 1997, 16–25; 2009, 53–60; Newman & Nelson 1999; Hatfield 2007, 81.

[53] Descartes supports *continuous creation* in which God creates the world with the same act continuously (AT VIIIA, 61–62; CSM I, 24). Thus, active deception could theoretically be possible. However, the more natural reading of these passages is that God allows us to be deceived by *not making* what we clearly and distinctly perceive part of existing reality.

[54] This reading suggests a connection between the madness and deceiver scenarios, as the latter enables doubt about the meditator's rational capabilities. Cf. Frankfurt 2008, 113–114; Christofidou 2013, 19, 33–36; Lennon & Hickson 2013.

4.3.2. Theological Doubt: Atheist's Imperfect Nature

In the tenth paragraph, Descartes forms an *atheistic* rendering of the scenario.

> [T]here may be some who would prefer to deny the existence of […] God rather than believe that everything else is uncertain. Let us not argue with them, but grant them that everything said about God is fiction. According to their supposition […] I have arrived at my present state by fate or chance or a continuous chain of events […]; yet since mistake and error (*falli & errare*) seem to be imperfections, the less powerful they make my original cause, the more likely it is that I am also so imperfect as that I err (*fallar*) all the time. (AT VII, 21; CSM II, 14. Translation modified.)

Even if I am an atheist and believe to be at my present state by fate or chance, my nature could be so imperfect that I might still be deceived and would not grasp reality as it is.

Why does Descartes include this atheistic rendition of the doubt? I see two reasons. The Sorbonne Letter makes it clear that atheism is one of the positions that the *Meditations* undermines. "[T]he only reason why many irreligious (*impios*) people are unwilling to believe that God exists […] is the alleged fact that no one has hitherto been able to demonstrate [it]" (AT VII, 3; CSM II, 4). Descartes expects some of his readers to be atheists, as he expects some of them to be Aristotelians and skeptics. As a previous chapter (2.5) discussed, atheism and skepticism for Descartes are closely linked, considering the "atheistic sceptics" in need of refutation (AT VII, 549; CSM II, 375.[55])

Descartes's other reason for introducing the atheistic version of the imperfect nature scenario is that the final principle he wants to undermine from the meditator's thinking is *religious authority*. The meditator should not rely on just the authority of earlier theological figures but grasp God with her own intellect if she is to find God's existence. Thus, by also undermining the Theological Principle, the meditator can rely only on her own intellectual capabilities (as limited as they may be), questioning all other authorities. (Descartes is careful with the phrasing, never putting God's non-existence in the meditator's mouth. Nevertheless, she follows the suggestion that God may not exist.)

The Third Level is, at its core, about the author of my nature, the generating cause of my natural abilities. Is God the author of my nature? If he is not, what is my origin and can something that is less than perfect author me to truly grasp the reality? If he is, how can I know he has not authored me so that I do not truly grasp the reality even at my cognitive best, with peak evident perceptions?[56]

The Third Level is typically considered the most original of the First Meditation's scenarios, but its originality is somewhat misplaced. The possibility of divine deception

[55] Cf. Gassendi's and Descartes's exchange on atheists and skeptics (AT VII, 328, 384; CSM II, 228, 263).
[56] Cf. *Principia*; Fifth and Sixth Meditation (AT VII, 69–77, VIIIA, 6–16; CSM I, 194–203; CSM II, 48, 53).

is not novel, though Descartes's rendition of not knowing the full capacity of our epistemic nature gives it a new spin.[57] The metaphysical goal of the Third Level comes clear from the Fifth Objections and Replies, in which Gassendi questions the necessity of God or a Demon tricking us, when it would have sufficed to "cite the darkness of human mind and weakness of our nature", seemingly in the style of Renaissance and early modern skeptics. This would not suffice for Descartes, as it would be the same as saying we make mistakes because we are prone to make mistakes. "It is more helpful to pay attention […] to all the circumstances where we may happen to go wrong, to prevent our heedlessly giving assent in such cases" (AT VII, 258, 349; CSM II, 180, 242). All the scenarios have a causal nature, providing a reason why we might fail to reach the truth. They are intended to make us withhold assent in places we are used to give it, suspending judgment at least until we know more about the nature of our errors.

The Third Level calls into question those truths that seemed impervious to the doubt before, including mathematical and geometrical reasoning. Descartes does not specify, yet I think it safe to also include the law of contradiction among these questioned truths, as it is mentioned together with mathematics and the meditator's existence as clear and distinct perceptions that make it out of the Second Meditation but that the beginning of the Third questions again (AT VII, 36; CSM II, 25) [58].[59] The Third Level goes deeper than the Second by this, questioning not merely the resemblance of the external reality but its very existence, resulting in *extreme* external world skepticism. It might be part of my nature that I fail to reach reality, so how can I be sure of the existence of any reality? However, the Third Level does not stop there. The strongest form of doubt in the First Meditation is not merely that our sensations might come apart from the world but that our thinking in general, our thought processes as a whole, might come apart from how reality actually is. My cognitive steps could be unreliable, or worse, I could be mistaken about the actual content of my thought (Is it really number 2 that I think about?). Either way, I cannot be sure that my thinking is all together coherent. Maybe there is no thinking, or even truth, whatsoever. Even the Augustinian move of accepting what

[57] Montaigne precedes Descartes here but does not give the possibility a systematic use. See chapter 2.4.

[58] One question that has caused debate is whether mathematics is already clearly and distinctly perceived in the First Meditation. I think that the meditator recognizes that her perception of mathematics is somehow more compelling than sensory perception but is yet unaware of why. She still assents to mathematics mostly habitually, keeping things "at arm's length" (Carriero 2009, 55). After she concludes her existence and runs through the wax example, she works out the clearness of mathematics and appreciates this clarity.

[59] Viewing the Deceiving God scenario as questioning the reliability of created eternal truths supports this, since the law of contradiction is among the eternal truths (the *Principia* I, §XXII: AT VIIIA, 23–24; CSM I, 209). However, it is to be noted that the Deceiving God scenario works even without the doctrine of created truths. Cf. Forsman 2016.

appears to me as "my world" is not possible for the meditator at this ultimate level (*C. Acad.* 3.11.24; chapter 2.3.1). (Cf. M. Wilson 1978, 41; Brown 2013; Wagner 2014, 61.)

4.4. Modification of a Pyrrhonian *Epochē*

The meditator concludes at the end of the tenth paragraph:

> I […] am finally compelled to admit that there is not one of my former beliefs about which doubt may not properly be raised; and this is not a flippant or ill-considered conclusion, but is based on powerful and well-meditated reasons (*validas & meditatas rationes*). So in future I must withhold my assent from these former beliefs jus as carefully as I would from obvious falsehoods, if I want to discover any certainty. (AT VII, 21–22; CSM II, 14–15. Translation modified.)

The levels of doubt have succeeded in counter-balancing the meditator's former reasons for belief with reasons for doubt. These reasons, as she mentions, are powerful, so powerful that they upset her earlier inclinations for believing that reality resembles her perceptions of it and that she has access to the world through the senses, imagination, and reason. She therefore decides to suspend her judgment on these issues until she can find some certainty. Her assent will be withheld as long as she has no more reason for belief than for doubt (cf. Seventh Replies: AT VII, 474; CSM II, 319).

By countering the meditator's former beliefs with equally strong doubts, Descartes has succeeded in what the meditator will call equal balance (*aequatis utrimque*) in the next paragraph. The meditator's will is at stasis as the reasons for belief and disbelief balance each other out: Her evidence is insufficient to follow either option. However, she discovers that her will is *indifferently free*: She can make the decision to follow either belief or disbelief, or, as she does, to suspend judgment all together and await additional evidence for either side. The Cartesian suspension of judgment, as such, is comparable to the Pyrrhonian one, in which placing contrarieties against each other results in an equipollence (*isostheneia*) of equally strong reasons for both sides, wherefore the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment on the issue. I see the meditator's suspension at this point emulating the Pyrrhonian one, so I call it a *modification of a Pyrrhonian epochē*. (Cf. chapters 2.5.2, 3.3.4. See also Alanen 2016.)

I identify the Cartesian suspension as a modification for certain obvious differences with the *epochē* of the ancient Pyrrhonists. Firstly, the scope of Descartes's modified *epochē* is explicitly wider, covering not only essential claims but also existential ones, thanks to the Third Level. The meditator suspends her judgment on the external reality not only in the moderate but also in the extreme sense, questioning whether any external objects and reality exist. Secondly, as the meditator testifies in the next paragraph,

suspending judgment is not as simple as this as her earlier doxastic states begin to leak back. Unlike ancient skepticism, Cartesian skepticism retains the practical common-sense beyond the philosophical enquiry, separating everyday life from the suspension (see, however, Eichorn 2014; 2020). Thirdly, the final difference relates to the manner of suspending judgment. According to Pyrrhonists, suspension results naturally, even accidentally, from the equipollence of equally contrary views. Descartes, however, does not view suspension as a naturally occurring state but instead as a *voluntary* decision. The meditator experiences the freedom of her will by placing the equally convincing reasons in balance. No reason convinces her over the other or pulls her decision, so she is indifferent towards which of the alternatives (belief, denial, suspension of judgment) is the correct one. Descartes indicates the meditator's suspension to be *normative* instead of natural or causal. If no reason convinces her one way or the other, she ought to suspend her judgment to avoid choosing wrongly (so believing falsely). Suspension, when truth has not yet been found, is a *moral obligation*. (See chapters 2.5.2, and 3.3.)

It is revealing that Descartes provides freedom of one's will before the certainty of one's existence in the *Principia*. No matter our origin, we have a *self-evident* experience of (at least) indifferent freedom to suspend judgment on matters that are not completely certain (thoroughly examined) that enables us to avoid error when more evidence is required. (I, §6: AT VIIIA, 6; CSM II, 194; cf. AT VII, 377–378, VIIIA, 19–20; CSM I, 205–206, II, 259–260). Similarly, after summoning the Demon in the First Meditation, the meditator exclaims "even if it is not in my power to know any truth, I shall at least do what is in my power, that is, resolutely guard against assenting any falsehoods" (AT VII, 23; CSM II, 15). Suspending judgment, by forcing an equal balance of reasons, is not only in our power but is even the morally right choice. (Cf. Clarke 2003, 134; Shapiro 2008, 26–27, 31–34.)[60]

Based on the skeptical scenarios, the meditator comes to the conclusion that she should generally suspend her judgment. However, as indicated, she finds this suspension an arduously difficult task. The eleventh paragraph then finds the meditator struggling with the suspension.

> My habitual opinions keep coming back, and, despite my wishes, they capture my belief, which is as it were bound over to them as a result of long occupation and the law of custom. I shall never get out of the habit of confidently assenting to these opinions, so long as I suppose them to be what they are, namely highly probable opinions […] which, […] [are] still much more *reasonable* to believe than to deny. [Thus] I think it will be a

[60] Later, the meditator finds out that her will is *spontaneously* free when she cannot but assent. Of course, even suspension can be a morally questionable choice in certain instances, e.g., C&D perception, if done for questionable reasons (such as suspending for the sake of suspension like the ancients). See chapter 3.3.4. Cf. Cunning 2014, 84.

> good plan to turn my will in completely the opposite direction and deceive myself, by pretending for a while that these former beliefs are utterly false and imaginary. (AT VII, 22; CSM II, 15.)

This passage is one of the most debated of the First Meditation. Some read it as indicating that Descartes's whole project is insincere (the doubt is merely a theoretical endeavor or a game) that demonstrates how Cartesian skepticism is not really about suspension of judgment but of rejecting earlier views completely. Descartes's aim would not be withholding judgment but a more epistemic idea of treating as false everything that can be called into doubt. Broughton also relies heavily on the passage, arguing that Descartes *insists* we have a reason to prefer the common-sense beliefs of waking life, concluding that the meditator is not in a Pyrrhonian stage of equipollent considerations for and against certain beliefs (2002, 69–70, 79–80).[61] (See chapters 1.1 and 1.3.)

I view this paragraph simply as revealing that the meditator's attention on the meditative exercise is relaxing and her habitual views are leaking back. Attentive suspension is mentally tiring, and she easily returns to the morally certain teachings of nature, which, while doubtful, are still strongly persuasive to her in the common-sense attitude. The meditator discovers that her habit of finding the common-sense opinions more reasonable is too strong to be balanced by the skeptical scenarios. She still finds them preferable, which snaps her from the suspension without sufficient concentration and attention. Her freedom still appears to be somewhat *limited*.[62] (Cf. chapter 3.3.)

4.5. Deceiving Demon

The meditator decides to turn her will to the other side to counter the pull of her habitual beliefs and pretend (*fingam*) that these beliefs are actually false, willingly practicing *self-deception* instead of merely suspending on them. This is done specifically to upset the habitual pull towards belief with an even stronger pull towards denial. "I shall do this until the weight of preconceived opinions is counter-balanced and the distorting influence of habit no longer prevents my judgment from perceiving things correctly" (AT VII, 22; CSM II, 15). In the Fifth Replies, Descartes uses the example of a curved stick, that we bend in the opposite direction to straighten it out. We are

[61] Broughton's discussion criticises E. Curley (1978, 89, 117, 120-122), who sees the reasons for doubt required to overcome (in Broughton's terms, "counterbalance") our tendency to believe that, e.g., "here is a hand". Curley does not use the term counterbalance, and I am not certain if his use of "overcoming" is to be understood this way.

[62] See *Principia* I, §73 (AT VIIIA, 37; CSM I, 220); cf. Araujo 2003, chapter 4. I can appreciate both the seriousness of the suspension and the commitment to the common-sense by reading the suspension as a meditative exercise.

required, in order to counter the stronger pull in one direction, to create an even stronger pull to the opposite direction if we want the stick to balance out. Similarly, "it is often useful to assume falsehoods instead of truths in this way in order to shed light on the truth, e.g., when astronomers imagine the equator, the zodiac, or other circles in the sky, or when geometers add new lines to given figures". (AT VII, 349–350; CSM II, 242. Cf. Naaman-Zauderer 2010, 112–115; Schüssler 2013, 153–154.)

Due to the meditator's habitual commitment to form beliefs and give assent to preconceived opinions, the special reason (desire for ideal certainty) is insufficient to make her suspend in a reliable and enduring fashion. The suspension has a temporal restriction as it demands laborious attention. However, she gains competence in the suspension with practice (replicating the meditation with sufficient attention), succeeding in it for longer periods, so that by the Third and Fourth Meditations she no longer finds common-sense views preferable but as merely a *blind impulse* (*caeco impulsu*) and *plausible conjectures* (*probabiles conjecturae*) (AT VII, 40, 59–62; CSM II, 27, 41–43).

Nevertheless, to get the suspension going despite the initial difficulty, the meditator also has to engage in some special work, namely, to pretend that most of what she thinks is false. She is quick, though, to remind herself that this self-deception applies only in the context of inquiry and does not cause harm in her everyday life. "I know (*scio*) no danger or error will result from my plan [to deceive myself], and that I cannot possibly go too far in my distrustful attitude. This is because the task now in hand does not involve action but merely the acquisition of knowledge" (AT VII, 22; CSM II, 15).

However, to be able to "turn her will in the opposite direction", she requires a specific *psychological tool*, a (made-up) reason to think her views are false and imaginary, that enables her self-deception and helps her to retract the habitual pull towards belief. The twelfth paragraph then opens:

> I will suppose then that not God, who is supremely good and the source of truth, but rather *some malicious demon* (*genium aliquem malignum*) of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me. I shall think that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds and all external things are merely the *delusions of dreams* which he has devised to ensnare my judgment. I shall consider myself as not having hands or eyes, or flesh, or blood or senses, but as falsely believing that I have all these things. I shall stubbornly and firmly persist in this meditation; and even if it is not in my power to know any truth, I shall at least do what is in my power, that is, resolutely guard against assenting to any falsehoods, so that the deceiver […] will be unable to impose on me in the slightest degree. (AT VII, 22–23; CSM II, 15. Emphasis added.)

The meditator decides to imagine herself under the deceit of a malicious Demon that actively manufactures all of her sensory input in order to make her assent to it. The created scenario of the deceiving Demon is combined with the dreaming scenario,

amplifying the power and scope of the latter, with the meditator now viewing that the external world, with all colours, shapes, and sounds, as well as her own body and its sensory functions, are just delusions of dreams (*ludificationes somniorum*). Dreaming and the Demon working in tandem, the meditator imagines herself dreaming without a body, severing physiological ties and expanding the dream scenario into extreme external world skepticism (cf. Carriero 2009, 41–42). The meditator persists in the meditation with this imagined scenario, countering the pull of habitual beliefs. Our will is free and allows us to suspend judgment and not err even if we are unable to know the truth or are even actively deceived.

The Deceiving Demon is a very different scenario than the Deceiving God, despite being often treated similarly (see, e.g., Kenny 1968, 35; Frankfurt 2008, 119; Hatfield 2007, 88; Cunning 2014). The Demon is a methodical tool, fabricated to help with the will's pull towards earlier beliefs. It is not a convincing reason for doubt, but is introduced outside of the genuine scenarios, not intended to be taken seriously other than as an instrument of self-deception. This is also demonstrated by the use of the term *fingere* (to deceive, to pretend). Unlike the other scenarios, the Demon is not a *what if* -account; it requires actively imagining someone deceiving us. While form of the Demon argument is similar to the previous reasons for doubt, the psychological effect it produces and the purpose it carries in the exercise are different. The Deceiving God/Imperfect Nature works separately from dreaming, raising the possibility that we err in everything we consider as evident, whereas the Demon forms a tandem with dreaming, making us actively imagine that nothing we sense is real. Also note that in listing things she considers delusions of dreams, the meditator does not mention mathematics, which was explicitly questioned by the Deceiving God. This is not to say that mathematics is not suspended leading to the Second Meditation. Mathematics is not included in the Demon list because Descartes wants to put the meditator's focus on drawing the mind away from judgments regarding sensory materiality for the following Meditation, in which mathematical entities are not in the forefront. Thus, the First Meditation follows the Medieval distinction between deception by God and demons.[63]

The Demon is another often misunderstood moment in the First Meditation, partly for the abovementioned confusions. A surprising amount of detail has been put on the

[63] See chapter 2.3.3. Cf. Gouhier 1973; Carriero 2009, 57–60; Bermúdez 1998, 243–244; Hatfield 2007, 87–88; Christofidou 2013, 31–33; Wagner 2014, 69–70; Cunning 2014, 74. Some commentators consider mathematics not to be questioned at all in the First Meditation (e.g., Olson 1988, 407–408; Grene 1999, 567–569; Secada 2013, 205–207); yet, Descartes clearly states that mathematics is included in the scope of the Deceiving God. With the Demon, the meditator's attention is merely drawn to refraining from sensory judgments for the Second Mediation, which is exercised within this redirected scope of the Demonic dream, in which the focus is on material things (including the simples and phantasmal memory), and even the meditator's physical ties to reality are questioned (see also AT VII, 130–131; CSM II, 94).

notion that it is a *demon* that is deceiving the meditating person (e.g., Scarre 1990; Mercer 2017). This is misleading. It makes no difference whether the meditator considers herself to be under the machinations of a malign spirit, a demiurge, or the Old Nick himself.[64] For Descartes's purposes, the contemporary trope of a computer simulation or a brain controlled by a mad scientist would equally do the trick (minus the existence of the brain, of course). Another mischaracterisation is that since the Demon is obviously a non-serious methodical tool, *all* earlier skeptical scenarios are like that. Descartes treats the Demon as a joke in the Seventh Replies, which is thought to imply that the other reasons for doubt are not to be taken seriously either (e.g., Hookway 1990, 55; Watson 1993).[65] However, as the Demon is introduced outside of the levels of doubt, it is no indication that the rest of the scenarios are similar psychological tricks. Descartes treats the Demon mockingly only in relation to how Bourdin uses it.

> [M]y critic regards doubt and certainty as being in the objects rather than our thought. […] But perhaps the demon prevented him seeing the contradiction in his words. It is regrettable that the demon so often interferes with his thought processes. (AT VII, 475; CSM II, 319–320.)

The criticism is that Bourdin misunderstands the meditative exercise, giving too much credibility to an assumption that was meant as a self-deceptive instrument, not to be confused with the "powerful and well-meditated" reasons. The third confusion is that because Descartes describes the meditators position here as treating earlier conceptions as false, this would apply to the whole skeptical project of the First Meditation (e.g., Gouhier 1973; Bermúdez 2000, 335–336). However, this is not necessarily the case. Treating doubtful things as false is part of the cognitive exercise only as the last measure, when the strength of earlier convictions is too much to counter with the skeptical scenarios. Suspension, not rejection, is what characterises a Cartesian skeptical exercise. (Cf. AT V, 9, VII, 465; CSM II, 312–313, CSMK, 316. See also Vitz 2015, 78–80.)

With the Demon, the meditator has a reason to imagine her views to be false, counterbalancing the pull of believing them to be true. During the exercise, if she feels herself tempted by her earlier views, she can imagine the Demon deceiving her and experience her will's free power to "guard against assenting to any falsehoods". By practice, she later can reach a more genuine agnosticism because a "distorting influence of habit" no longer warps her assent. Meanwhile, the Demon does not replace any of the skeptical scenarios but empowers some of them (specifically dreaming) in case of

[64] The word *genius* indicates the intention as a malevolent spirit, similar to a *djinn* (جن) in the Arabic tradition.
[65] Hookway also considers the Deceiving God doubt hypothetical because, unlike, e.g., dreaming, it lacks the connection to ordinary experience as we have no reason to suppose that God deceives us. This issue is solved by considering the scenario to instead be about our own imperfect nature due to either a divine or a mundane origin.

strong habitual beliefs.[66] The Demon is not a superfluous addition, even if suspension succeeds before it (see *Conversation*: AT V, 147; CSMK, 333. Cf. Christofidou 2013, 33).[67]

The meditator testifies, though, that guarding against false assent and suspending judgment is an "arduous (*laboriosum*) undertaking", while "a kind of laziness" brings her back to normal life.

> I am like a prisoner who is enjoying an imaginary freedom while asleep; as he begins to suspect that he is asleep, he dreads being woken up, and goes along with the pleasant illusion […]. In the same way, I happily slide back into my old opinions and dread being shaken out of them, for fear that my peaceful sleep may be followed by hard labour when I wake, and that I shall have to toil not in the light, but amid the inextricable darkness […]. (AT VII, 23; CSM II, 15.)

Here Descartes presents a *prisoner analogy*, that is often either misunderstood or not taken seriously. The meditator considers herself like a prisoner who enjoys her illusory freedom of dreaming and dreads the harsh reality of waking life. It would be easy to read the cognitive exercise as the "pleasant illusion", and the reference to dreaming is suggestive of this (see, e.g., Wagner 2014, 74). However, a close reading reveals the opposite: The pleasant illusion are the old habitual opinions, providing the meditator an easy life by the teachings of nature, while the meditative exercise is described as a hard labour, giving no immediate light but inextricable darkness. The analogy clarifies another difference between Descartes's suspension and the Pyrrhonian *epochē*. According to the Pyrrhonists, *epochē* is fortuitously followed by tranquility from the mental distortions caused by contrary impressions (*PH* I, 29). For Descartes, the resulting state from suspension is not pleasant but fills the meditator with confusion and uneasiness, described in the Second Meditation as a "deep whirlpool" tumbling around her (AT VII, 24; CSM II, 16). Like the Pyrrhonian *epochē*, the Cartesian cognitive exercise of suspending judgment is just as much an ethical journey as it is epistemic and metaphysical. However, for Descartes, human happiness and tranquility result not from suspension but from certainty.

The prisoner analogy also reveals an important aspect of the meditative exercise. The suspension, as established, is hard labour requiring arduous attention and concentration,

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[66] Some view Descartes summoning the Demon because the concept of God includes absolute good and is incompatible with deception. Belief in God would actually never be doubted after all (e.g., Kenny 1968, 35; Hatfield 2007, 88). This view depends again on the Deceiving God and the Demon being the same scenario. Recalling that God as the source of good is *among* her habitual opinions, the meditator imagines a different entity to deceive her, as God's nature and existence are suspended. (Cf. Christofidou 2013, 32.)

[67] Wagner reads withholding of assent not achieved before the "cognitive experience" of imagining the Demon (2014, 44, 63–70). However, this conflates with what Descartes writes right after the Third Level of doubt but *before* the Demon: "In future I must *withhold my assent* from these former beliefs…" (AT VII, 21–22; CSM II, 14–15. Emphasis added).

and, even then, it is temporarily restricted. The meditator thus happily takes a break from suspending judgment from time to time, sliding back to her morally certain opinions of everyday life. Because the suspension is also contextually restricted, she can flip between the context of enquiry and the context of common life whenever her attentive potency decreases. The meditator can suspend judgment during the exercise by concentrating on the reasons to doubt and the stasis of indifference created by their equal strength with reasons to believe. If her attention begins to waver, she can rely on the imagined Demon to ease the meditation. Meanwhile, her normal everyday life continues as always, and she is able to slip out of the exercise whenever she wants to and continue on a later date. Descartes even states that considerable time should be spent on each Meditation (Second Replies: AT VII, 130; CSM II, 94).

Where does this leave *belief* in the First Meditation? Is the meditator truly suspending judgment, for example, that she has hands, or is she simply in a position to entertain hypothetically that she has no hands, for the sake of the argument? Compare if I were to ask students to assume they are dreaming. Perhaps a few drowsy ones will be able to suspend judgment whether they are awake or not, but most will likely continue to believe they *are* awake, even as they go through the exercise.

This depends on the contextual limitation, as indicated earlier. When the meditator slides back into her normal life and somebody were to ask the above, she would reply that of course she believes she has hands. However, while she practices the meditative exercise, and assuming the question does not snap her out of that state, she would answer that she does not believe she has hands as she is generally suspending judgment. The meditator does not *assent* to the non-existence of the world but *refuses* to commit to her cognition of it, even with imagining the Demon (see chapter 3.3.4). The pretended falsity is motivated by reaching an equal balance with the strong pull towards belief, resulting in withholding assent from sensory judgments. "[E]ven if it is not in my power to know (*cognoscere*) any truth, I shall at least do what is in my power, that is, resolutely guard *against assenting* to any falsehoods (*ne falsis assentiar*)" (AT VII, 23; CSM II, 15). The French translation makes the case even clearer: "*il es ten ma puissance de suspender mon jugement* (it is in my power to suspend my judgment)". The experience of a hypothetical case of deception helps the suspension, and even when pretending that everything the senses tell is false, the meditator's resolution is to genuinely suspend judgment on the assumed falsehoods (cf. Schüssler 2013, 154; Wagner 2014, 72). (See chapter 2.5.2. Compare with the imagination-reliant spiritual meditation tradition, chapter 1.2.1.)

The First Meditation builds the doubt *layer by layer*, moving from a common-sense position that *some* perceptions are deceptive, to saying that *any* of them could be, to finally stating that *every* perception, and even one's whole cognitive grasp, might be

deceptive (cf. B. Williams 1983, 34; Dicker 2013, 30). These reasons for doubt create an equal balance with reasons for belief, with the meditator suspending her judgment to avoid erroneous and morally wrong judgment. However, the meditator's conviction in the habitual beliefs is too strong to be upset with merely finding room to doubt them. Thus, the meditator forms a psychological technique to enforce the counter balancing of reasons by imaging her perception of external material reality to be a "dream" created by a deceptive Demon. This introduces a *layer of denial* similar to the third layer of doubt but only fixed on sensory-material elements, including the simple and universal things.

The meditator unravels these layers one by one in the Meditations that follow. She clears the layer of denial in the Second Meditation, discovering her existence and nature as a cognising being, which overcomes the Deceiving Demon. In the Third Meditation, she compares the discovered clear and distinct cognition to the three Levels of doubt, starting with the outer and most radical Third Level. While the Third Level puts all of the Second Meditation results into doubt (including the *cogito*), cognitive certainty of clarity and distinctness enables her path to metaphysically certain *scientia* of God as a non-deceiver. In the Fourth Meditation, she contemplates the question of whether God allowing her to occasionally err is consistent with God's non-deceiving nature. Discovering her errors as misapplications of will and intellect begins the process of unravelling the Third Level. She discovers the structures of reality present in her mathematical and simple universal notions in the Fifth Meditation, returning the discussion to the Second Level. Finally, in the Sixth Meditation, she unravels the Second Level by discovering the role of sensation and imagination and recognises the essence of her erroneous cognition. While the First Level doubts cannot be fully settled, they also no longer cause concern due to our ability to always rectify our judgments on them. Correct use of the meditative exercise then reveals the metaphysical grounding of one's cognitive nature.

5. Second Meditation: The Whirlpool, The Keyhole, and the Wax

The Second Meditation continues the refinement of our common-sense thinking of the world with the skeptical meditation, challenging the naïve and Scholastic assumptions alike. The position of total skepticism is also challenged for the first time with the emergence of the meditator's self-awareness, demonstrating the clarity and distinctness of certain perceptions (cf. Broughton 2002, 108–109).

Unlike the First, the Second Meditation comprises of two distinct *chains of discovery*, demonstrating the nature of the mind as better known than the nature of body. The First Chain aims to prove the existence of incorporeal 'I' as more persuasively evident than the naively conceived corporeal self. The Second Chain aims to prove that the mind and its nature are more clearly and distinctly perceived than body and its nature.[1]

The First Chain of discovery begins with a summary of the end of the First Meditation, reminding practitioners of the suspension by which the meditator operates. The meditator describes her anxious condition as if she is being whirled around by a *whirlpool of doubt*. However, she has an optimistic wish of a steadfast *Archimedean point* to use as a foothold. The Deceiving Demon and the *layer of denial* then return, through which the meditator realises her own existence, providing the sought Archimedean point of internal evidence and working as a *keyhole* to peek at reality. The meditator then delves into the nature of the existent 'I', discovering it to be a *cogitating being*. The Second Chain is introduced because it would be odd if doubtful corporeality was more distinctly known than the internally evident 'I'. This notion leads to the discussion of the *wax*, explaining how the cogitating being (mind) is in fact clearer and more distinct than the extended bodies grasped by sense perception.

I present here the structure of the Second Meditation, just as I did with the First:

> Introduction: Reminder of the suspension and the whirlpool of doubt
> **Chain of Discovery 1: '*I*' as the keyhole to the world**
> **Conclusion 1: '*I*', as a cogitating being, am more evident than my doubtful corporeal self**
> Alteration: Doubtful corporeality appears clearer and more distinct than the evident '*I*'
> **Chain of Discovery 2: The example of the wax**
> **Conclusion 2: Mind and its nature are clearer and more distinct than body and its nature**

The two chains build an interesting narrative that flows smoothly from one to another. However, to have a clearer picture of the presented argumentation, the chains

[1] The subtitle of the Meditation is *De natura mentis humanae: quod ipsa sit notior quam corpus*. The French translates *corpus* as "le corps" and CSM follows this with "the body". However, Descartes discusses not only *the* (human) body, concentrated on in the First Chain, but also *a* body (a piece of wax) in the Second Chain. Cf. Carriero 2009, 65, note 1.

must be picked into their parts. This once again requires a close dissection of the cognitive exercise in the Second Meditation.

5.1. First Chain of Discovery: The Whirlpool and the Keyhole

The first paragraph begins with a short recap of the previous exercise, which has cast the meditator into almost a state of desperation. "So grave (*tantas*) are the doubts into which I have been thrown as a result of yesterday's meditation that I can neither put them out of my mind nor see any way of resolving them" (AT VII, 23; CSM II, 16; translation modified). She describes her situation as if falling "into a deep whirlpool (*gurgitem*) which tumbles me around so that I can neither stand on the bottom nor swim up to the top." (AT VII, 24; CSM II, 16). The anxiety caused by the deepest skepticism makes her wish for at least one firm steppingstone to use as a foothold in the maelstrom. Even if she is unable to open the doorway to the truth, she hopes for a simple keyhole to peek through.

5.1.1. Whirlpool of Doubt and the Archimedean Point

Descartes's description of a "deep whirlpool" is a clear indication of the psychological effect that the general suspension of judgment is to have on us. According to the ancient Pyrrhonists, *epochē* was a safeguard from the mental disturbance of contrarieties, a way to achieve tranquility and live a good life. For Descartes, well versed in Renaissance and early modern skepticism, it is the cause of disturbance itself, making one question the very prospects of a truly peaceful life. The uncertainty has clearly made the meditator very anxious and restless, being far from a tranquil state of *ataraxia*. Cast into the tumbling whirlpool of doubt, the meditator seems incapable of reaching neither the bottom (resolving the doubts by some certainty) or the surface (accepting the uncertainty and putting the doubts out of his mind, relying on sensory awareness). The whirlpool is too deep to find a quick and simple resolve and too fierce and disturbing to just leave the suspension hanging. (Readers who have done the meditative exercise seriously and properly should also feel as if falling into a deep whirlpool, seemingly with no evident way out. See E. Curley 1978, 43; cf. Maia Neto 2014, 59.)

The meditator is left with one option: Continue the effort of the meditative exercise.

> I will make an effort and once more attempt the same path which I started on yesterday. Anything which admits of the slightest doubt I will set aside just as if I had found it to be wholly false; and I will proceed in this way until I recognize something certain, or, if

> nothing else, until I at least recognize for certain that there is no certainty. (AT VII, 24; CSM II, 16.)

The meditator reminds herself of the exercise she is currently operating in: Whatever admits reasons for doubt is to be set aside and suspended. However, the goals of the exercise slightly shift in this paragraph. The goal in the First Meditation was to see how far the suspension reaches, the result being that it can encompass every single former belief. Thus, the goal has to be altered for the Second, becoming to continue with the meditation so long that the meditator either recognises something as being beyond reasonable doubt or concludes that nothing is.

There is still a ray of hope, even if things look bleak, emphasised by the analogy of an *Archimedean point* – one firm spot for levering the meditator to the surface. "Archimedes used to demand just one firm and immovable point in order to shift the entire earth; so I too can hope for great things if I manage to find just one thing, however slight, that is certain and unshakable" (AT VII, 24; CSM II, 16). Suspension being incapable of achieving solace or closure, the meditator ventures onwards, trying to uncover at least one certainty, even one of negative dogmatism. Even the seemingly self-defeating certainty of nothing being certain would provide some footing in the storming maelstrom.

If the meditator is a skeptic, wouldn't she call a foul here? The open-ended questioning, in which a third option is always a possibility, is seemingly replaced with assurance of some certainty and the possibilities limited to two, *positive or negative dogmatism*. This would appear as Descartes's own dogmatic doctrine leaking into the skepticism, making it less sweeping than is admitted.

Such a skeptical foul calling is not given though. The meditator's move is very hand wavy, allowing for the exercise to potentially be nearly open-ended. It is unclear when in the project one could just declare all certainty non-existent; how long does one have to meditate before being convinced that nothing truly is certain? The meditator might end up endlessly suspending judgment. We also must remember that the skeptic Descartes concentrates on is not the ancient Pyrrhonian or Academic but the historically savvy Renaissance/early modern skeptic. Neither Montaigne's nor Sanches's skeptical project offers immediate solace; rather both leave one with anxiety about the uncertainty of human nature. Even with Charron's French Academic *epochē*, final deliverance from inner turmoil comes not from suspension of the uncertain but from fideistic acceptance of the Christian faith. The Renaissance skeptical doctrine was generally not one of peacefulness but of turmoil, kept in line mostly by continuing the search. The meditator similarly experiences that tranquility is not found by suspending on uncertain matters; in fact, things seem more dire than ever, and thus she seeks certainty, any certainty, as

a better potential candidate for mental solace. For Descartes, true peace of mind can only be attained by discovering something certain. (See chapters 2.4. and 4.5.)

It is typical to take the prospective Archimedean point to be the first absolute certainty discovered in the exercise. Some of Descartes's wordings also point towards this view. The meditator calls for something "firm (*firmum*)" and "immovable (*immobile*)", "certain (*certum*) and "unshakable (*inconcussum*)". Compared with the beginning of the First Meditation, where the meditator yearns for *in scientiis* something "stable (*firmum*)" and "lasting (*mansurum*)" (AT VII, 17; CSM II, 12; translation modified), the indication seems to be that the Archimedean point (typically read as the soon to be discovered existence of 'I') would be a first instance of knowledge as *scientia*. However, one does not require lasting stability for the metaphor to work; even momentary stability would be sufficient for the levering. Indeed, I will later propose that in the Second Meditation the meditator does not yet know, in the fullest sense, that she exists, being still merely persuaded of this.

The meditator then continues with the meditative exercise. However, she does so not by the means of the layers of doubt but by the layer of denial, going immediately for self-deception.

> I will suppose then, that everything I see is false. I will believe that my memory tells me lies, and that none of the things that it reports ever happened. I have no senses. Body, shape, extension, movement and place are chimeras (*chimarae*). So what remains true? Perhaps just the one fact that nothing is certain. (AT VII, 24; CSM II, 16.)

The meditator considers that she has no body and no senses. Everything she encounters, including simples such as shape, extension, and place, are chimerical and unreal. Even her memories are telling lies, reporting things that never happened. She then supposes not only that the senses do not function (she has no sense organs) but also that they never have. Corporeality, material bodies and their features generally, are non-existent. The desired effect is in fact the result of the dreaming-demon tandem, in which everything is merely a bodiless dream caused by the Deceiving Demon. One could point to the mention of "memory telling lies" as a hint that the deceiver has altered the meditator's mnemonic process and the deception is not just sensory. However, I do not think that alteration of memory itself is the intention here. If everything ever experienced through the senses is spurious, all memories of such experiences are unreliable as well. Put in Aristotelian terms, since nothing ever experienced came from real objects, all the sensible *phantasmas* stored in the memory are of no help. Nothing seems to be true in such a situation except, perhaps, that no certainty exists.

The last statement might come across as puzzling: Would there not be certainty that I have no senses and that material bodies are chimeras? We must remember Descartes's

metaphysically committed view of truth and certainty to understand the intention. Descartes considers truth (*verum*) to be real and falsity (*falsa)* to be unreal. The whole prospect of truth is suddenly endangered if all external reality is chimerical. If the mediator thinks in the naïve and Aristotelian lines, that there are no existing objects that resemble her perceptions would mean that there would be no reality either. The same thing also applies to materialist and mechanist lines by including the simples among the chimerical things. There would be no truth without reality, and without truth there would be no certainty (cf. Carriero 2009, 41–46, 72–74). (See chapters 3.4.1 and 4.3.)

A larger issue is, why does the meditator turn immediately to the denial of external reality? Following the reminder of the exercise in the previous paragraph, that everything doubtful should be "set aside (*removendo*)", it would seem more sensible to proceed with the suspension of judgment by the three levels of doubt. There appears to be two reasons for this. Firstly, the meditator is still very inexperienced with the meditative exercise, finding her everyday beliefs almost irresistible. She is to make remarkable progress with the suspension during the Second Meditation and will not find the existence of the external world as obvious anymore by the beginning of the Third, but here she is still a novice with the exercise. Resolving to the psychological self-deception from the beginning can help with the process. Secondly, it is clear that Descartes's intention in the Second Meditation is to redirect the scope of the doubt to attend to sensory and material things, including the simples, phantasmal memory, and one's own bodily ties. This is why the Second Meditation is exercised in the scope of the Demonic dream – its particular emphasis is to draw the mind away from the senses.

In the Synopsis of the First Meditation, Descartes describes the greatest benefit of the extensive doubt to be "providing the easiest route by which the mind may be led away from the senses" (AT VII, 12; CSM II, 9). This is backed up in the Third Replies, when Descartes explains that one of the aims of the arguments for doubt is to "prepare my reader's minds […] to distinguish [things related to the intellect] from corporeal things" (AT VII, 171–172; CSM II, 121). It is commonly assumed that this process of leading the mind away from the senses would be fully accomplished with the First Meditation skeptical scenarios (e.g., Rozemond 1996; 1998; Hatfield 2007, 71–72). However, the Synopsis comment merely states the doubt to be a *way towards* leading the mind from the senses, a first step in the process rather than a concluding argument. Likewise, as previously argued, the First Meditation doubt goes even further, questioning not merely sense perception and the accustomed corporeality but also the whole process of rational cognitive functioning by the means of the Third Level. These notions indicate that a large part of drawing the mind from the senses is actually carried out somewhere else. (Cf. Patterson 2008.) Indeed, in the Second Replies, Descartes

assigns the correct and unique method of drawing the mind away from the senses to be contained in the Second Meditation (AT VII, 131; CSM II, 94). The Synopsis of the Second Meditation is similarly described as "the mind uses its own freedom and supposes the non-existence of all the things about whose existence it can have even the slightest of doubt" and in doing so "notices that it is impossible that it should not itself exist during this time", with this exercise being "of the greatest benefit, since it enables the mind to distinguish without difficulty what belongs to itself […] from what belongs to the body" (AT VII, 12; CSM II, 9). This description fills the role of distinguishing things related to the intellect from corporeality. Descartes requests the meditator to follow the persuasiveness of her intuition by diverting the attention to sensory-material issues. Just as suspension is crucial for establishing the *authority of will*, acceptance of the mind's conviction is crucial for establishing the *authority of reason*, being the initial step towards discovering one's true cognitive nature. Putting the attention on the reliability of the senses by the layer of denial (and away from the reliability of reason by the Third Level of doubt) simultaneously allows Descartes to circumvent the objection that the doubt is too strong and the whirlpool is too deep for anything to be salvaged from it, or that even if something could be salvaged, nothing could be reasoned from there on.[2] Self-deception is directed towards material things, so doubts about the reliability of reason have been put aside for the time being and the meditator is free to follow the compelling nature of her own evident intuition.[3]

Specific attention should also be paid to the mention of mind using "its own freedom" in the Synopsis of the Second Meditation. Like the end of the First, where the meditator decides to do what is in her power and resolutely guard against assenting to falsehoods, the beginning of the Second asserts the will's freedom as a power to assent or suspend.[4] The meditator realises the strength of will as a direct power in the case of *stasis of indifference*. This power manifests as self-deception, supposing the non-existence of all things of which existence can be doubted, directing the attention towards the realization of the existence of self. Freedom of will is then asserted before the existence of self not only in the *Principia* but also in the *Meditations*, providing an important step towards self-awareness (AT VII, 12, CSM II, 9. Cf. AT VII, 23, VIIIA,

[2] See, e.g., *EHU*, 12.1.3; Frankfurt 2008, 39. Cf. Wagner 2014, 65. Another objection has been that the strongest form of doubt is self-defeating. If raising the doubt requires reasons, doubting reasoning seems to erase those reasons from which the doubt is raised. See Frankfurt 2008, 39–40; M. Wilson 1978, 35–37; Christofidou 2013, 33–36; Wagner 2014, 63–65. I discuss this issue in chapter 6.1.2.

[3] This is not to say that mathematical reasoning would be reliable at this point. This notion is important especially for the later point I make about the *cogito* not being based on logical or inferential reasoning but on a single intuition.

[4] Christofidou sees the end of the First Meditation being the realisation of the strength of reason (2013, 36). I suggest the realisation to instead be of the strength of will. Cf. Wagner 2014, 72; Cunning 2010, 67.

6; CSM I, 194, CSM II, 15). What is often missed is that from the very beginning the Cartesian 'I' is not merely a reasoning subject but a willing one as well. (Cf. Christofidou 2013, 39–42; Boehm 2014. See chapters 3.3 and 4.4.)

5.1.2. 'I Exist': Keyhole to the World

The third paragraph of the Second Meditation is one of the most famous in Descartes's entrie oeuvre. It begins by puzzling over whether there could still be something else she has not yet listed.

> [H]ow do I know (*scio*) that there is not something else which does not allow even the slightest occasion for doubt? Is there not some God, or whatever I may call him, who puts into (*immittit*) me the thoughts I am now having? But why do I think this, since I myself may perhaps be the author of these thoughts? (AT VII, 24; CSM II, 16. Translation modified.)

To summarise, the meditator wonders even if everything material and sensory has been negated would something still exist outside any doubt? Supposing that I am deceived by "some God" (*aliquis Deus*)" or Demon that manufactures false information, even plants false thoughts into me, would not such a deceiver have to exist for me to have those thoughts? Wouldn't there have to be a reason, some generating cause or author, for their occurrence?[5] However, why would I assume this deceiver to be real since such a creature is my own pretense. For all I know, I could be the author of the thoughts.

> In that case am not I, at least, something? But I have just said I have no senses and no body. This is the sticking point (*haereo tamen*): what follows from this? Am I not so bound up with a body and with senses that I cannot exist without them? But I have convinced (*persuasi*) myself that there is absolutely nothing in the world, no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies. Does it now follow that I too do not exist? Yet, if I convinced myself of something then I certainly existed (*eram*). (AT VII, 24–25; CSM II, 16–17. Translation modified.[6])

The realisation brings the meditating me to a standstill. As a being used to rely on senses and bodily needs since infancy, could I even exist without them? I have persuaded myself that there is nothing, not minds or bodies. My non-existence seems to follow as

[5] The Demon was identified as a "malign spirit (*genium malignum*)" (AT VII, 22; CSM II, 15), leaving its relation to corporeality suspicious. Assuming all material bodies to be fictional does not mean there are no God-like entities.

[6] CSM translates as "No: if I convinced…", as if the meditator affirms that she can exist without minds, bodies, or senses. However, the Latin has *imo*, which can indicate a sharper break, i.e., whatever the nature and relationships between bodies, minds, and senses turns out to be, if I convinced myself, I had to exist. Cf. Carriero 2009, 74, note 6.

well.[7] But wait. If I persuaded myself, if I successfully and freely practiced self-deception – if I authored my own thoughts – I had to exist.

> But there is a deceiver, I do not know who *(nescio quis*), of supreme power and cunning who is deliberately and constantly deceiving me. In that case I too undoubtedly exist, if he is deceiving me; and let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something. So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally establish (*statuendum*) that this proposition, *I am*, *I exist*, (*Ego sum, ego existo*) is necessarily true whenever it is put forward (*profertur*) by me or conceived in the mind (*mente concipitur*). (AT VII, 25; CSM II, 17. Emphasis in the original. Translation modified.[8])

Even if I assume a deceiver putting thoughts in me, I must exist to be deceived. It must be the case that I indubitably exist as long as I conceive the proposition in question.[9]

There is a lot going on in the text that can be difficult to appreciate at first glance and is likewise challenging to summarise convincingly without the first-person narration. The line of thought is run in a sort of internal debate with the skeptical mediator. The existence of 'I' is first established in the past (I had to exist at that very moment) and then in the present and in the possible future (whenever I conceive myself as existing, I exist). This line of thought is obviously similar to Augustine's refutation of skepticism in *De Civitate Dei* and *De Trinitate* (see chapter 2.3.1): If the meditator is made to go false, or convinces herself of going false, she has to exist. The self-deceptive step is then crucial in establishing one's own existence, directing the attention from deception to the self. Taking the *Meditations* as a serious cognitive exercise is therefore essential for the discovery of the *cogito*.

The delicate back-and-forth resembles of the interplay between the levels of doubt and transitive counter passages in the First Meditation, where the naïve and the Aristotelian meditator had to give in that things might not be as thought. In the Second, the skeptical meditator must likewise yield in that there is at least one thing that cannot be doubted when attended to: her own existence.[10]

The reasoning in the Second Meditation is noticeably different from the famous phrasing *Cogito, ergo sum*. This broader and more general phrasing is found originally in

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[7] Of course, the 'I' *is* a mind, but here the meditator still has no clear concept of what a mind is and how it relates to the body and the senses and will not have this sorted out until the Sixth Meditation.

[8] CSM omits *nescio quis*, translating *statuendum* as "conclude", but the result needs not to be a demonstration.

[9] Broughton argues that Descartes does not consider the meditator's existence immune from doubt because of her authorship of her own thoughts, as she is not yet in any position to settle the question of what is causally responsible for the occurrence of the thoughts in her (2002, 115). Unlike Broughton, I do not consider the meditator to know her existence with full certainty before settling the question of God's existence and deception. Thus, I do not consider the Second Meditation to settle the causal question. The meditator is intuitively compelled of her authorship and nothing more.

[10] Cf. the Hyperaspistes Letter and the *Conversation* (AT III, 434 & V, 146; CSMK, 196–197, 333).

French in the *Discourse* (*Je pense, donce je suis*) and later in its Latin form in the *Principia* (AT VI, 32 & VIIIA, 7; CSM I, 127 & 195)[11] but does not appear in the Six Meditations.[12] Instead, the epiphany takes a more measured form as *Ego sum, ego existo*. Unlike the broad phrasing suggests, in the Second Meditation the meditator's existence is not a consequence of her thinking, but, as we later see, her thinking (*cogito*) is entailed from her existence (*sum*). It can be somewhat misleading for this reason to call the existence of the cognising 'I' in the Second Meditation the *cogito* and the passage it appears in the *cogito* passage, as is the custom. However, though there have been suggestions of other names (e.g., "I exist" passage, see Broughton 2002, 112), those have not caught on and most still refer to the Second Meditation realization as the *cogito*. I have likewise followed this established practice.

The measured form in the Second Meditation actually brings Descartes even closer to Augustine's *Si enim fallor, sum* than the superficially similar broad phrasing. Augustine does not exist because thinking requires existence, but because he was mistaken. He exists as the *agent* of a failed cognitive act or a mistaken assertation. Similarly, the meditator exists not because of an instance of thinking by her but because she realises her own free role in creating the make-believe, of actively authoring suspension of judgment, being the *agent* of a successful cognitive act.[13] The meditator then recognises herself as a *willing* being, with agency and autonomy over her acts. (Cf. chapter 3.3.) Or, even if she did not author her thoughts, if the thoughts were indeed emitted from a distant source, she at least must be the recipient of those thoughts. She must exist to have been actively caused to err (though then she would be caused to act in a certain way and would not be *morally responsible* for her errors).

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[11] The *Search* has *Dubito, ergo sum*, followed later by *Cogito, ergo sum* (AT X, 515, 523; CSM II, 410, 417).

[12] The famous phrasing does appear in the Objections and Replies., though. In the Second Replies, Descartes defends *Ego cogito, ergo sum, sive existo* against charges of deducing existence from thinking by syllogism (AT VII, 140; CSM II, 100). In the Third and Fifth Replies, Descartes accepts *Ambulo, ergo sum* only if referring to the *awareness* of walking (AT VII, 172–174, 352; CSM II, 122–123, 244). Cf. the Letter to Clerselier, 12 January 1646 and the Sixth Objections and Replies (AT VII, 413, 422 & IXA, 205; CSM II, 271, 278 & 285). The famous phrasing has been suggested in the Second Meditation text "[the deceiver] will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think (*cogitabo*) that I am something" (e.g., Frankfurt 1991, 192–193; 2008, 135–136). The French could be seen to support this, adding "if I convinced […] or thought anything at all (*ou seulement si j'ai pensé quelque chose*)". However, the text is complicated, and the addition seems premature. Cf. Broughton 2002, 116; Carriero 2009, 75.

[13] It is unknown how much of the similarity is intentional. Descartes seems not to have known the Augustinian passage in detail before writing the *Discourse* but read it while preparing the *Meditations* for publication (the Letter to Colvius, 14 November 1640: AT III, 247; CSMK, 159). However, the manuscript must have been quite finished, as Descartes had just sent it for Mersenne to be checked, printed, and delivered for the round of objections (the Letter to Mersenne, 11 November 1640: AT III, 239–240; CSMK, 158–159). See also the Letters to Mersenne, 1637, 1638 and 1640 (AT I, 376, II, 435 & III, 261; CSMK, 129, 161). Cf. Ariew 2019, 28–29. For Descartes and Augustine, see Menn 1998. Note though that Silhon makes a similar connection between being and acting. *Immortalité* II (1998, 199); cf. Clarke 2016, 54.

Now, of course, Descartes is unequivocal about whichever act being insufficient here. Just because the meditator would be the agent of a (physical) walking or seeing act does not prove that she exists, since both walking and seeing are spurious because she might have no body (e.g., *Principia* I, §IX: AT VIIIA, 7; CSM I, 195).[14] The free act performed is essentially a mental one, be it the self-deceptive denial of matter, willing suspension of judgment or, as Descartes sometimes puts it, doubting itself (e.g., *Search*: AT X, 515; CSM II, 409–410). Since denying, judging, doubting, and suspending are instances of thought, one becomes self-aware through one's mental activity (being the author of one's own thoughts). This way, the more famous phrasing of the *cogito* is also accurate. Nevertheless, what I want to suggest is that in those passages where Descartes specifically discusses *Cogito, ergo sum* in the Objections and Replies, he is not referring to just the meditator's realisation of her existence but to the whole First Chain of discovery – the argumentative chain from her existence to her nature – in which she concludes that she is a thinking thing. The emphasis in this Second Meditation passage is not yet on the thinking but instead on the existence, specifically as a willing agent.[15]

This also explains Descartes's insistence that the *cogito* is no inference or a syllogism.

> [W]hen we become aware (*advertimus*) that we are thinking things, this is a primary notion (*prima notio*) which is not derived by means of any syllogism. When someone says 'I am thinking, therefore I am, or I exist', he does not deduce existence from thought by means of a syllogism, but recognizes (*agnoscit*) it as something self-evident *(rem per se notam*) by a simple *intuition* of the mind. This is clear from the fact that if he were deducing it by means of a syllogism, he would have to have had previous recognition (*novisse*) of the major premiss 'Everything which thinks is, or exists'; yet in fact he learns it from experiencing in his own case that it is impossible that he should think without existing. (Second Replies: AT VII, 140; CSM II, 100. Translation modified.)

Descartes denies the conclusion of those, like Gassendi, who view that the *cogito* requires a premise like 'whatever thinks, exists' and emphasises the *cogito*'s self-evident nature, viewing it as intuitive (AT VII, 422 & IXA, 205–206; CSM II, 271 & 285; cf. AT V, 138; CSMK, 331). By wondering how exactly 'I exist' is deduced, inferred or derived from 'I think', we dilute the discussion and misread Descartes's point.[16] Recall that while

[14] It is not clear if Augustine would have denied *Video, ergo sum* or *Ambulo, ergo sum*. Cf. Hintikka 1962, 23.
[15] Cf. also Alanen 2016; 2020. Chapter 3 mentioned that the rest of the Meditations consists partly of the meditator coming to terms with the *limits* of her agency. In the wax paragraph, she does not discover the nature of the wax by imagining (adding, removing, and molding) it. In the Third Meditation, she distinguishes fictitious ideas from adventitious and innate ones because the latter seem impervious to her will, and later recognises that she could be the cause of all her ideas, *except* the idea of God. Finally, in the Fourth Meditation, she discovers herself as *spontaneously* free, especially in C&D cases.
[16] Famous argument by the 18th century physicist Georg Lichtenberg, that the conclusion should be 'thinking occurs', is derivative to this point. Cf. Gassendi (*Disq.* II, i, 6). See B. Williams 2015, 79; Hatfield 2007, 103–116; Fisher 2014, 3.

mathematics and logic are not the main focus of the Second Meditation, reliability of logical inferences is still under doubt (cf. Stone 1993; Wagner 2014, 76). What provides us with self-awareness is *direct intuition*, a single attentive flash of a freely performed act on our part, not logical demonstration. Of course, there are instances when Descartes seems happy to treat the *cogito* as inferential, but these are related to the more general phrasing of *Cogito, ergo sum* (e.g., AT III, 247, V, 147, VI, 32, VII, 352, VIII, 7–8, IX, 27; CSM I, 127, 195–196, II, 244, CSMK, 159, 333).One has a clearer grasp of how things are after going through the Meditations and can, in turn, also present this intuitive certainty in the form of an inference or syllogism. By then we know that thinking is not just necessary and inseparable but *essential* for one's existence, represented by the word *ergo*.[17] (Cf. E. Curley 1978, chapter 4; B. Williams 2015, 74–75; Sarkar 2003.)

Self-awareness being direct, the meditator becomes aware of herself not through the mediation of the senses, as in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, but through the free mental act itself.[18] Self-awareness being indubitable while it is attended to, it can trump the Renaissance skeptical questioning of the self. The *cogito* results directly from the meditative exercise of doubt, suspension and self-deception, allowing Descartes to go against Aristotelian and skeptical traditions, demonstrating the failures of both.[19] (Cf. Frankfurt 1992; 2008, 151; E. Curley 1978, 86; Broughton 2002, 109–119.)

The realisation of the existence of 'I' provides the meditator with an initial grip of certainty – a little opening to peek at the world. The discovery of 'I' concludes the modification of the Pyrrhonian *epochē* presented in the First Meditation and modifies it further. Suspension by a full equilibrium of opinions comes to temporary halt, because the meditator now possesses one notion that feels stronger and more convincing than anything else. The robust balance of all beliefs becomes a more developed *Cartesian*

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[17] This reading can be seen as in line with Hintikka's (1962; 1963) influential performative reading of the *cogito*. Cf. Frankfurt 1992; 2008; E. Curley 1978. It is possible to read the general phrasing in the *Discourse*, *Principia*, and *Search* as not an inference from thinking to existence, either. Cf. Broughton 2002, 112.

[18] Although, as chapter 3.1.2 discussed, Scholastic self-knowledge is not all this simple and was heavily debated in the 14th century. See Yrjönsuuri 1999; 2000; 2007; 2016; Leijenhorst 2012; Carriero 2009, 75.

[19] Other evidence for questioning the inferential reading of the *cogito* is Descartes's criticism of deductive syllogism over intuition in the *Regulae* (AT X 363–370; CSM I, 14–15). I discussed intuition and deduction in chapter 3.4.1. However, it should be noted that inferential and intuitive readings do not necessarily exclude one another. See Newman 2016, 4.1.

There has been much discussion of Descartes's originality with the *cogito*. Augustine aside, several authors in the Renaissance and early modern periods have been identified as preceding Descartes, including Charron, Campanella, and Silhon. Cf., e.g., Blanchet 1920; Gilson 1951; Popkin 2003; Maia Neto 2003; 2014; Paganini 2008a; 2009b; Ariew 2011; Clarke 2016. One recent addition to this list has been the Spanish philosopher Gómez Pereira, whose *Antoniana Margarita* (1554) includes the following passage: "*nosco me aliquid noscere, & quidquid noscit, est, ergo ego sum*" (*AM*: 1749, 277; cf. Rodriguez Donis 2008). It seems that Descartes was made aware of this connection, as he comments to Mersenne in a 1641 letter that he has not seen the *Antoniana* and is not all that interested in seeing it, either (AT III, 386).

epochē in which all but the meditator's own existence (and whatever belongs to her) is suspended.[20] Attending to her agency, the meditator intuitively notices that she must exist. When attended to, her existence is indubitable because she sees no reason to doubt it: If she tries to doubt herself, she establishes her existence. The awareness of her existence is so strong and evident that she cannot but assent to its truth, breaking the indifference (cf. AT VII, 58–59; CSM II, 41; see chapter 3.4). Still, the stasis of indifference in broad terms continues, because everything else is suspended. This sort of self-awareness can then avoid the regressive horn of Agrippa's trilemma: Being intuitive, the existence of 'I' vindicates itself.[21] The existence of 'I' is not a belief or an opinion like any other. It serves as a certain starting point, a keyhole through which one can gain a glimpse of reality, a sneak peek into the room of existence, which she understands being a part of and which she is able to discover through her own power, indicating to her a potential path for unravelling what else there is.[22]

However, unlike typically read, I propose that the meditator is not yet absolutely certain of her existence. She does not know (in the *scientia* sense) that she exists and will not until she recognizes God's existence as non-deceiver. The heralded Archimedean point, as earlier stated, is often read to be the first absolutely indubitable certainty (e.g., Broughton 2002, 117, 183–185). Since the structure of the Second Meditation indicates that the call for the Archimedean point is filled by the soon to be discovered 'I exist', many have read the *cogito* as a foundationalist truth, setting up the first *datum* of certainty and allowing Descartes to create a method of acquiring permanent opinions for a rational foundation upon which science can be built (a reading I call *cogito* foundationalism, e.g., Gueroult 1953; Kenny 1968; M. Wilson 1978; Broughton 2002).[23] I suggest that the meditator's existence is still merely a strongly compelling and evident conviction (*persuasio*), indicated by Descartes's use of the term ("if I convinced [*persuasi*] myself") just before establishing 'I's existence. Notice that the notion of the self, just

[20] Another way to put this is that not all existence is bracketed in the Cartesian *epochē*: As 'I' am the one forming the *epochē*, 'I' am also outside of it. Cf. Husserl on Descartes's "Cartesianische *epochē*" in *Crisis*, §17 (*Hua.* VI, 76–77).

[21] Cf. E. Curley 1978, 84–85. For intuition's role in the skeptical history, see, e.g., Alanen 2000, 260–262.

[22] The keyhole could be read differently: The meditator is allowed just this opening to reality for understanding and analysis, widening as she learns more about herself and the world but everything is ultimately perceived solely through it, the only certainty being that the 'I' exists and cognises (a view close to *cogito* foundationalism). However, proving God's existence would be rather difficult, easily leading to questions of the Cartesian Circle variety. As I argue below, the meditator does not know her existence for certain before cognising the existence of a non-deceiving God.

[23] Cf. chapter 3.4.1. See Kant's criticism of Descartes (A342–347/B400–406; 2000, 412–415). Cf. Christofidou 2013, 38–53. Note that readings of the *cogito* are not homogenous. Still, I consider readings that see the *cogito* as establishing a foundational propositional content, as an (asyllogistic) inference, as a performatory thought act, or both inferential and performatory (see, e.g., Hintikka 1962; 1963; Stone 1993; Markie 2005) as also being guilty of *cogito* foundationalism.

like her autonomy, still appears limited at this point.[24] The meditator concludes that her existence is necessarily true *only* as long as she conceives (*concipire*) that she exists.[25]

Descartes's seeming tendency to relate alethic modality to temporality might seem puzzling to a contemporary reader. However, as previously discussed (chapter 3.4.2), the condition here is not temporal but based on reasonable room for doubt. The difference between persuasive conviction and full knowledge, as discussed earlier, is whether there remain reasons for doubt. It is also crucial to recall that the Cartesian necessity of created nature is *contingent* due to God's absolute potency. Just because something appears necessary to me does not guarantee that it indeed is the case (cf. Dicker 2013, 167–168). The meditator states in the Third Meditation that if she does not know (*ignorare*) whether God exists and deceives, it seems that she can never be "fully certain (*plane certus*) about anything else" without excluding even the *cogito* outside of this condition (AT VII, 36; CSM II, 25; translation modified). We are convinced of our existence but are still ignorant of our cognitive nature and its origin, and thus, do not yet possess true knowledge. (See AT VII, 13, 53; CSM II, 9, 37.)[26]

Descartes, as earlier established, does not reduce truth to psychological states like indubitability. The *cogito* works as an Archimedean point (without being a foundational ground) by making the meditator aware of the persuasive cognitive certainty of her existence and guiding her to discover her true cognitive nature. Nevertheless, as we later find out in the Third Meditation, once the layers of doubt are re-introduced with full force, even this Archimedean point can still be questioned (cf. E. Curley 1978, 94–95; Cunning 2007; 2010, 68–70; Wagner 2014, 76). We could read the meditator as an atheist (somewhat merging with the skeptic meditator) to emphasise this: She admits her own existence and whatever it entails but insists on suspending judgment on all else, including God's existence. Such a person, for Descartes, would not only fail to reach fully certain knowledge but would also fail to ground a stable body of *science*. The intuitive *cogito* might surpass one Agrippan problem but the other two horns remain troubling. Descartes must demonstrate why the meditator should trust her intuition and do so without arguing in a circle.[27] (See chapter 3.4.1.)

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[24] See chapter 4.4. Cf. Araujo (2003, chapter 4), who calls the indifferent freedom to suspend *minimal autonomy* and the spontaneous freedom of forming beliefs in accordance with the truth *maximal autonomy*.

[25] This point is often tied to the special indubitability of the *cogito* by which the meditator cannot construct a coherent skeptical scenario on how she would err about her existence (e.g., Frankfurt 1992, 196–197; 2008, 140–141; E. Curley 1978, 86; Broughton 2002, 117–118). This is not true. "My nature is so imperfect that whenever I think I exist, I err" is a coherent skeptical scenario of the cause of error on my existence.

[26] Cf. AT VIIIA, 7; CSM I, 195. Note that in Scholastic discussions it was standard to describe "I exist" as a contingent truth that was known with certitude. Cf. Sanches (e.g., *QNS*, 58). See chapter 2.4.

[27] Descartes, though, describes the certainty of one's thought acts as "metaphysical" in the Fifth Replies. Some then consider all C&D cognition metaphysically certain, i.e., *scientia* (e.g., Della Rocca 2005). Others have read C&D as 'psychological' certainty, in that it simply *psychologically* convinces us of some truth (e.g.,

5.1.3. 'I Think': Cogito *Being*

The meditator looks to venture forward by initially establishing the *cogito*. However, it is not all-together clear how the meditator's awareness that she exists can help her in the project. The meditator's existence is not an ordinary truth and does not directly lead to anything else. Carriero raises similar worries about whether the meditator's mere existence works as a levering point in the inquiry: "If the meditator knew only that she existed and, in the process, learned nothing further about herself, it is hard to see how this might count as the Archimedean point" (2009, 71; cf. Hatfield 2007, 116–117). The meditator must first closely examine *what* she is before she can move any further.

> But I do not yet have sufficient understanding of what this 'I' is, that now necessarily exists. So I must be on my guard against carelessly taking something else to be this 'I', and so making a mistake in the very item of cognition (*cognitione*) that I maintain is the most certain and evident of all. (AT VII, 25; CSM II, 17. Translation modified.)

Here we see the meditator practicing great care with the recent discovery. Her understanding of herself might also include unwarranted misconceptions and prejudices and, thus, she could still have a very obscure and confused picture of the 'I'. The meditator decides to retrieve the beliefs about herself before she began the cognitive exercise and meditate on them anew in order not to assent to a false belief right away. She will then subject those views to the denial-scenario of Demonic dreaming, to see which of them will be left (AT VII, 25; CSM II, 17).[28]

We can also see the first sign of the *cogito*'s instability in this fourth paragraph. My existence (and nature) are certain and unshakable by being evidently perceived, because I can see no reasons to doubt them while attending to them. However, when the evident perception begins to wane, as the meditator's wariness indicates is happening, hesitation can set in. Clear and distinct perceiving of my existence may concede a standing place, but without more investigation it won't allow a safe route out of the whirlpool, nor will it stop me being washed away again by a new wave of doubt. However, with careful consideration, it may point out a passage to a fixed and completely immovable rock, capable of guarding against all subsequent waves no matter how high or fierce they are.[29]

Gewirth 1941; Loeb 2005; Wagner 2014, 204). Some, however, including this author, read C&D as some sort of *normative certainty* but one not yet sufficient for full metaphysical certainty, because this certainty is still subject to being undermined by the Third Level of doubt (e.g., Carriero 2009; Christofidou 2013). I call this sort of normative certainty *cognitive*. Cf. Forsman 2019.

[28] Descartes suggests in the *Search* the Archimedean point to be the doubt itself (AT X, 515; CSM II, 409).

[29] Cf. Cunning 2007; 2010, 69–70. Wagner comes to a similar conclusion; however, he considers the meditator to not have a C&D perception of herself before the example of the wax, since Descartes's "law of true logic" dictates that we have to understand a thing's essence before its existence (1995; 2014, 76–77; cf. The First Replies: AT VII, 107–108; CSM II, 78). However, the importance of this "law" is unclear

The meditator then thinks back to her former opinions. She considered herself to be "a human (*hominem*)" and that, following the Aristotelian definition, to be "a rational animal", but this sort of analysis only brings up questions on the nature of rationality and 'being an animal', so she abandons that train of thought.[30] Instead, she decides to concentrate on what spontaneously (*sponte & natura*) occurred to her when considering herself. She lists several body parts (face, hands, arms), which she attributed to body, and functions (nourishing, locomotion, sensing, and thought) which she attributed to soul. The meditator admits she did not have a clear picture of the nature of soul: Either she did not think about it, or she thought it to be tenuous "like a wind or fire or ether". However, she had no qualms of the nature of body and thought she knew it distinctly: as something possessing a determinable shape and definable location, occupying a space (*spatius*) by excluding any other body, perceivable by different senses, and movable in various ways by whatever comes in contact with it. Self-movement for her was as foreign to the nature of body as sensation and thought was, and certain bodies containing such "faculties" caused her wonder (*mirare*) (AT VII, 25–26; CSM II, 17–18).

This fifth paragraph reveals some of the meditators Aristotelian colours, with the list of abilities following the distinction between the nourishing, sensory, and thinking parts of the soul. Nevertheless, nothing is too foreign for the naïve meditator's common-sense approach here, either, which might work better with the description of the soul. However, while self-movement is natural to exclude from the body and assign to the soul (both in the naïve and Aristotelian perspectives), the last part is somewhat puzzling: What does the meditator mean by certain bodies containing "faculties (*facultates*)" such as thought, sensation, and movement? This could be understood by relying on Descartes's own view of animals as mechanistic automata, but the descriptions of body and soul in the paragraph are clearly not his own, and the meditator is not yet in any position to define animal nature. A better way is to take *facultates* only referring to self-movement, and the meditator marveling that mechanistic statues and other inanimate objects can move on their own. This way, the passage likewise gratifies certain mechanistic-materialist sensibilities (along with describing the soul as a kind of ether).[31] (Cf. Carriero 1986, 209–211; 2009, 86–87; Cunning 2010, 74.)

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and controversial, and Descartes's following of it seems inconsistent (cf. Carriero 2009, 209–210). As I go on to argue, we do not yet gain understanding of our essence in the Second Meditation. One way to understand the *cogito* passage in relation to the "law" is to view that we intuitively grasp both our nature and our existence at the same time but are initially only attentive to the latter and have to do extra inquiry for the first. The use of *cogitabo* in the passage on the meditator's existence might support this.

[30] Descartes also criticises Scholastic conceptual analysis and genus-species definitions by the meditator abandoning this approach. See also the *Search* (AT X, 515–516; CSM II, 410–411). Cf. Carriero 2009, 85.

[31] Cf. AT VII, 350; CSM II, 243: "[I merely put] forward commonly held views…". The meditator's awe about the self-movement of inanimate objects seems inspired by Descartes's own fascination.

The sixth paragraph subjects these former (partly Aristotelian, partly naïve, and partly mechanistic) views to the layer of denial. The meditator supposes that she is being deliberately tricked by a "supremely powerful and […] malicious deceiver (*deceptorem aliquem potentissimum, & […] malignum*)" and considers whether she could possess any of the attributes she assigned to body in such a situation. The Demon questions even the simples, such as shape and spatial placement, so the conclusion is negative. How about the attributes assigned to the soul? Nutrition and movement without a body are mere fabrications, sense perception does not occur without a body, either, and can be easily fabricated since "when asleep I have appeared to perceive through the senses many things which I afterwards realized I did not perceive through the senses at all" (AT VII, 26–27; CSM II, 18). Here we begin to see the first signs of the rearrangement of the Aristotelian view of body and soul, with the nutritional and the sensory parts being more closely connected to the body. Especially important to note is that sensation is described not to occur without a body, my appearance of it easily being just a bodiless dream. Without senses and bodies to be perceived, there is no sense perception.

However, next comes another breakthrough.

> Thinking? At last I have discovered it – thought; this alone is inseparable from me. I am, I exist – that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking. For it could be that were I totally to cease from thinking, I should totally cease to exist (*desinerem*). (AT VII, 27; CSM II, 18.)

The meditator discovers that the only thing the layer of denial leaves unscathed is her thinking. She might have fabricated sensory evidence and could even be made to think false thoughts, but the fact she is thinking those thoughts is inseparable from her. It is important that this discovery is made by subjection to the layer of denial rather than to the layers of doubt. The meditator would not be able to reach the conclusion she makes here with the Third Level of doubt, because her whole cognitive process, her thinking itself, would be questionable. Here, with the focus on the pretense of the Demonic dream, the meditator follows the persuasive nature of her reasoning, assenting only to what she is convinced to be the case when keenly attending to it.[32] "At present I am not admitting anything except what is necessarily true" (AT VII, 27; CSM II, 18). Descartes describes the benefit of this attentive exercise in the Synopsis, as earlier seen, as "enabling the mind to distinguish without difficulty what *belongs* to itself, i.e., to an *intellectual nature*, from what belongs to body" (AT VII, 12; CSM II, 9; emphasis added.) Descartes means here by "necessarily true" what is *inseparable* (*divelli nequit*) from how

[32] Wagner (2014, 78) draws a similar point, but describes the meditator's reasoning as only "psychologically" persuading. It seems, however, that something else is going on in here than a mere psychological quirk. Cf. Carriero 2009, 80.

the meditator conceives herself (cf. the *cogito* passage). The call for an attentive meditator reveals its importance again. Attention – reason and will working together – is the requirement for the project's success, as well as of moral behavior in life, while inattention results in error and irresponsibility (Fourth Meditation: AT VII, 60; CSM II, 41; cf. Christofidou 2013, 40).

> I am, then, in the strict sense only (*praecise tantum*) a thing that thinks; that is, I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason – words whose meaning I have been ignorant of until now. But for all that I am a thing which is real and which truly exists. But what kind of a thing? As I have just said – a thinking thing (*res cogitans*). (AT VII, 27; CSM II, 18.)

The meditator finally comes to the conclusion that she exists as a thinking and cognising thing, a *cogito being*.[33] Recognising that she exists and she thinks, the meditator appears to possess *reality*. However, if we read the earlier establishing of the meditator's existence as an inference (or some other derivation) from her thinking, this part would include puzzling repetition. If the meditator derives her existence from thinking, would not she have an answer to her question of what her nature is? She is something that thinks. Likewise, the revelation that she thinks would come twice, once with *cogito* and once with the inquiry of her nature. The next four paragraphs seem to go nowhere by reading the *cogito* passage as deriving existence from thinking, merely clogging the narrative (cf. Broughton 2002, 109 & 121; see also M. Wilson 1978, 72). In contrast, the passages provide a smooth progression by viewing the inquiry of the meditator's nature as affirming her thinking by attending to it for the first time, with her existence established by means of free agency. The actual dictum of *Cogito, ergo sum* becomes possible for the meditator only after establishing her existence and then discovering that she is a being that thinks. (Cf. the *Search*: AT X, 515–523; CSM II, 409–417).

The discussion of the nature of the self is important for the *cogito* to function as the Archimedean point. The *cogito*'s role as a point of levering depends on establishing the persuasive strength of the meditator's intuition and the clear and distinct perceptions it provides. The *cogito* comes in a single flash of intuition, without the meditator being able to understand or attend to the nature of the revelation. By further inquiry, discovering herself as a cognizing being, the meditator learns to rely on her evident perceptions, at least while the layer of denial is practiced. There is also the danger of the meditator, either as an Aristotelian, naïf, atheist, skeptic, or a mechanist, misunderstanding the existence of 'I', relying too much on the pre-meditative obscure and confused

[33] I am following Carriero (2009, 81) in describing the cognizing 'I' as a *cogito* being. I view this term unburdened by religious and psychological-cognitive connotations of 'soul' and 'mind'. Similarly, the term leaves open the ontological category of the 'I', whether it is a substance, an attribute, or a mode, of which the meditator cannot make judgments yet.

conception of the self. The meditator's understanding of the composition of body and soul in the beginning of the inquiry is extremely confused, mistaking the soul for something material or physical, and body for something that occupies a space.[34] She must target the layer of denial on this pre-meditative self until she no longer understands her existence as sensory-material. For Descartes, the "mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason" is not like wind or fire, nor is it what animates a living thing (the first principle of life) as in the Aristotelian tradition (see chapter 3.1.1; cf. *ST* I, Q.75, a.1).[35]

However, unlike how it is often viewed (e.g., M. Wilson 1978, 72; Carriero 2009, 82–83; Wagner 2014, 80), I do not consider this discussion establishing the meditator's essence yet.[36] Throughout the passages, Descartes never mentions essence, with the discussion regarding the *nature* (*natura*) of herself.[37] The difference between these terms might seem innocuous, yet there is evidence that Descartes does not consider them wholly synonymous (e.g., *Comments*: AT VIIIB, 347–348; CSM I, 297). *Nature* is something that I can clearly perceive belonging to something (what is necessary to or inseparable from it), whereas *essence* (*essentia*) is what makes something what it is. Essence individuates, whereas nature does not.[38] The meditator is not yet in a position to make metaphysical conclusions or essential claims. She might not have a full account of her being, instead possessing only a partial picture, and wonders whether there is something more. (Cf. the Fourth Replies: AT VII, 219; CSM II, 154–155. See also the Synopsis: AT VII, 12–13; CSM II, 9; Christofidou 2013, 41).[39]

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[34] *Principia* II, §13 &14 (AT VIIIA, 47–48; CSM I, 228–229): "The terms 'place (*loci*)' and 'space (*spatii*)' […] do not signify anything different from the body which is said to be in a place". Descartes does not think of space as a container, viewing space and body as identical. Cf. Christofidou 2013, 23, note 25.

[35] Cf. Cunning 2007, 125; 2010, 70–74. See also Frankfurt 2008, 163–164; Menn 1998, 247; Broughton 2002, 124–125. According to Cunning, even after the *cogito* passage, the meditator often perceives the self only dimly and obscurely, being therefore in a position to doubt her existence. Though I agree with him, later on I advance a view that besides viewing herself obscurely, the meditator can also doubt her existence by losing attention from self-awareness.

[36] Carriero is correct in describing the meditator's question of what she is as a request for an answer to the Aristotelian "What is it?" question (2009, 82). However, it is natural to read the Aristotelian question as part of her earlier understanding of soul and body, whereas when she reduces the questionable aspects of her existence, she is not trying to describe what makes her what she is but what she cannot separate from herself (AT VII, 27; CSM II, 18).

[37] The title is also "The nature (*natura*) of the human mind, and how it is better known than body".

[38] Aristotelian comparison: man's essence is "a rational animal", yet laughter is necessary for being a man.

[39] According to Christofidou, nature is what can be clearly understood as belonging to the knowledge of a thing, while essence is what belongs to a thing. The corresponding passage in the *Discourse* goes "I knew I was a substance whose whole essence or nature is simply to think" (AT VI, 33; CSM I, 127). *Principia* I, §8 (AT VIIIA, 7; CSM I, 195) discusses the nature of the mind in relation to the mind-body distinction. See also the Fifth Meditation (AT VII, 64; CSM II, 45): "When […] I imagine a triangle, […] there is […] a determinate nature, or essence, or form of the triangle…" Descartes then does often talk of nature and essence as at least closely connected (and with a triangle, they appear to be the same). Nevertheless, I suggest that the use of 'nature' is less metaphysically committal and conclusive than 'essence' would be.

We also saw earlier that the meditator only concentrates on the aspects she perceives to be the case, suspending judgment on everything else. Descartes does not mean it as an essential claim when stating that the 'I' is "in the strict sense only a thing that thinks". He connects the meaning of the word "only" as "in the strict sense only" instead of "only a thing that thinks" in the Letter to Clerselier: "[By 'in the strict sense only'] I do not at all mean an entire exclusion or negation, but only an abstraction from material things; for I said that in spite of this we are not sure that there is nothing corporeal in the soul, even though we do not recognize anything corporeal in it" (AT IXA, 215; CSM II, 276). The meditator likewise surmises that she *might even* (*forte etiam*) cease to exist, were she to cease thinking.[40] With the possibility of Demonic dreaming, the meditator separates from the concept of herself everything that fails the test, concentrating on this restricted way of seeing the self. She has not yet concluded that her mind's essence is to think, that her thinking is not corporeal, or that her mind is really distinct from her body. There could be more to her nature (and there indeed is) than she is yet aware of, for all she knows.[41] (Cf. Frankfurt 2008, 159–162; Broughton 2002, 124).

Descartes makes a distinction between understanding (*cogitatio*) and imagination (*imaginatio*) in the seventh paragraph. The meditator decides to imagine if she is something more. She is not a structure of limbs or a thin vapor (pre-meditative picture of body and soul) that she earlier imagined.

> And yet may it not perhaps be the case that these very things which I am supposing to be nothing, because I am unaware (*ignota*) of them, are in reality identical with the 'I' of which I am aware (*novi*)? I do not know (*nescio*), and for the moment I shall not argue the point since I can make judgments only about things which I am aware of (*mihi nota sunt*). (AT VII, 27; CSM II, 18.)

It is clear that if the 'I' is taken strictily (*praecise*) in this restricted sense, it is not dependent on things the meditator can "invent (*effingo*)". For Descartes, imagination is not grasping the reality of things but merely "fictitious invention (*fingerem*)" contemplating a "shape or image of a corporeal thing", either picturing it, piling up on it, or excluding from it. This continues the discussion of imaginative picturing from the First Meditation, questioning the Aristotelian picture of storing and contemplating

[40] There is also another reading of this part. Descartes does not have to mean that the meditator would vanish from existence if she ceased to think, but that if the meditator would cease to think, she would not be compelled of her existence anymore (Latin *desinere* means simply ceasing or ending). The reference would not be to "I am, I exist" but to "that is certain" when asking "how long?". What might cease is *not* the meditator's existence but her *cognitive certainty* of it.

[41] A person, for Descartes, is a *union* of mind and body. Hobbes proposes in the Third Replies the *cogito* being to be corporeal and thinking to be motion in the body. Descartes corrects that he did not assume the *cogito* being to not be corporeal, leaving the matter hanging until the Sixth Meditation. He also seems utterly repulsed by both suggestions. (AT VII, 172–179; CSM II, 122–126. Cf. Grene 1985, 139–140.)

phantasmas in the imagination. The concept of 'I' does not derive from this imaginative theory, which is closely connected with corporealism and "all such images and, in general, everything relating to the nature of body could be mere dreams". Imagination, in fact, might be dangerous at this stage of the inquiry; therefore, the mind "must be carefully diverted from such things if it is to perceive its own nature as distinctly as possible". Yet, as the meditator has reminded herself, at this point it is still too early to make any conclusive statements. Imagination may still play a role in cognising myself.

Indeed, the eighth paragraph lists the powers or abilities of the *cogito* being. "But what am I? A thinking thing (*res cogitans*). What is that? A thing that is doubting, understanding, affirming, denying, willing, unwilling, and also imagining and sensing." Descartes separates *imaginans* and *sentiens* with *quoque*, indicating them to be special cases. It is not hard to see why. Imagination and sensation were found flawed and suspended in the First Meditation. Since the Second specialises in withdrawing the mind from material things – affiliated with the lower cognitive functions – it would be a safe assumption that imagining and sensing are inside the circle of suspension. The meditator herself is similarly hesitant to include them on the list: "This is a considerable list, if everything on it belongs to be. But does it?" She has become aware of having free will, capable of doubting, affirming, and denying, and a compelling, perceptive intellect, capable of understanding and seemingly getting to the truth, even though she has willed not to be deceived (notice that most powers are ones assigned to the will, emphasising the role of free agency for realising the *cogito*). She is just as cognitively certain of these as she is of her existence. (AT VII, 28–29; CSM II, 19; translation modified.)

Nevertheless, it is also the same 'I' who "imagines many things even involuntarily" and "is aware of bodily things that come *as it were* (*tanquam*) through the senses" (AT VII, 28–29; CSM II, 19; emphasis added). Even if the materials present for her imagination are chimeras, the "power of imagination" is something real and belongs to her cognition. Imagination is something she is capable of, whatever it turns out to be. Similarly, even though actual sense perception would require a real object to be sensed, the meditator nevertheless is aware of something that is in the *vicinity* of sensing.

> I am now seeing light, hearing a noise, feeling heat. But I am asleep, so all this is false. Yet I certainly seem (*videre*) to see, to hear, and to be warmed. This cannot be false; what is called 'having a sensory perception' is restrictedly (*proprie*) just this. n this strict sense (*praecise*) of the term it is simply thinking. (AT VII, 29; CSM II, 19. Translation modifed.)

Descartes is even more delicate with the description of sensation than he is with imagination. Imagination is one of the *cogito* being's powers, but its role in cognising what must be the case remains rather non-existent. It is still more of a nuisance than an asset. Sensation resembles imagination in that it, too, has to do with material things, but

the question related to it is more challenging. Imagination allows the contemplation of a body that is not real (i.e., a horse's head on a brontosaur's body) and has enough leeway for the possibility of all the material available to it being fabricated. However, sense perception, as it is, requires first of all senses and second of all a direct contact with a real body to be sensed. The meditator cannot be certain of either at this moment in the inquiry. Perhaps she cannot see because she has no eyes or a body to perceive; perhaps there is nothing to be perceived either way. Thus, the meditator treats her appearing sensory cognition as *seeming to see* (*videre video*), restricting the talk on sense perception to the mental part of sense experience), likening it to dreamed sensation. Let us call this restricted concept of sensation "*as it were* sensing".[42]

Descartes differentiates between *three grades of sensation* in the Sixth Replies. The first grade is limited to "the immediate stimulation of the bodily organs by external objects". The second grade comprises "all the immediate effects produced in the mind" such as perceptions of pain, hunger, and colour, which arise from the "union and as it were intermingling of mind and body". The third grade comprises the judgments "occasioned by the motion of these bodily organs", which is not sensory but solely intellectual, in the strict sense. (AT VII, 436–438; CSM II, 294–295. Translation modified.) Comparing "as it were sensing" to these three grades, the aim is not only to question the first grade of bodily sensation but also to pull apart the second grade of embodied rudimentary sensations from the third grade of purely mental judgment. Of course, the issue is still left rather vague in the paragraph in question. I see this as intentional. The meditator is not aware of mental perception as judgment before analysing the piece of wax at the end of the Second Meditation, and mind-body union comes available only by the discussion in the Sixth. The meditator's suspension would most likely break if Descartes delved too deeply into the nature of sense perception. By leaving things vague, he allows the meditator to follow her intuition without sacrificing the Cartesian *epochē*. Just as with imagination, whatever "as it were sensation" turns out to be, it is at least something that the meditator experiences. (Cf. Carriero 2009, 100–105; Yrjönsuuri 2019, 66–72.)

5.2. Second Chain of Discovery: The Wax

The meditator has made much progress in the right direction at the end of the First Chain. She has discovered the clarity and distinctness inherent in her certain perceptions

[42] Here I follow Carriero's terminology (2009, 25, 102). Imagination similarly has a bodily and a mental part. When the mind imagines, it turns to corporeality, setting off changes in the physiological part of the brain (*phantasia corporea*) (e.g., the Third Replies: AT VII, 181; CSM II, 127). We should then take discussion of imagination as likewise restricted to the mental part.

and learned to trust evident intuitions about herself and her powers. She is able to cut away from her nature everything on which she suspends her judgment by conceiving herself *praecise* what she is cognitively certain when attended to. This leads her to realise that, while the existence of material objects is suspended, her own being carries evident reality she cannot doubt when attending it. She can regard all her sensory perceptions of corporeality "as it were sensing", accepting that she experiences something while continuing to suspend on really sensing anything.[43] (Cf. Carriero 2009, 94–97.) Nevertheless, just as at the end of the First Meditation, the meditator's mind begins to wander, and her attention lapses. The seductiveness of the sensory-corporeal world leaks back again, making the meditator wonder, why the material reality is more distinct than her newly discovered existence as a *cogito* being.

> But it still appears […] that the corporeal things of which images are formed in my thought […] are recognized (*agnosci*) with much more distinctness than this puzzling 'I' *(nescio quid me*) which cannot be pictured in the imagination. And yet it is surely surprising that I should have a more distinct grasp of things which I realize are doubtful, unknown and foreign to me, than I have of that which is true and known – my own self. (AT VII, 29; CSM II, 20. Translation modified.)

The meditator, whether as an Aristotelian, an atheistic skeptic, or a naïf, is still used to grasping mind and body with senses and imagination, considering those essential for her cognition (cf. Hatfield 2007, 125–126). It would surely be strange if the material subject matter of the imagination and sensation was more distinctly recognised than what she attends to as cognitively certain. The meditator still finds the cognitive exercise supremely taxing, so Descartes decides to change tactics and present the meditator with a particular body to experience and experiment with: a piece of wax.

5.2.1. Wax by Common-Sense

As I read it, Descartes has the meditator loosen her grip on the exercise, returning (momentarily) to the common-sensical context, which following passage addresses:

> [M]y mind enjoys wandering off (*aberrare*) and will not yet submit (*patitur*) to being restrained (*cohiberi*) within the bounds of truth. […] [J]ust this once let us give it (*permittamus*) a *completely free rein* (*laxissimas habenas*), so […], when it is time to tighten the

[43] This reading leaves the meditator in a surprisingly similar position as the Pyrrhonian skeptic. Just as the Pyrrhonist assents to the feelings forced upon him by impressions, so the meditator assents to her experience of "seeming to see".

> reins (*reductis*), it may more readily submit to being curbed (*regi*). (AT VII, 29–30, CSM II, 20. Emphasis added.)

The passage demonstrates a momentary relaxation of skepticism, releasing the reins on the mind to freely follow the senses and to form beliefs. This move is important because the meditator is required to contemplate on a *particular wax* that she can see, feel, and hear (not just "as it were see, feel, and hear"). Therefore, at the beginning of the wax passage, Descartes must temporarily relax the exercise to put an actual piece of wax on the meditator's "radar". (Cf. Carriero 2009, 106.)

> Let us consider the things which people commonly think they understand most distinctly of all; that is, the bodies which we touch and see. I do not mean bodies in general – for general perceptions are apt to be somewhat confused – but one *particular body*. Let us take, for example, this piece of wax (*hanc ceram*). (AT VII, 30; CSM II, 20. Emphasis added.)

The wax, just refined from a honeycomb, retains some of the honey's taste and the flower's scent. It has a distinctive colour, shape, and size and is hard, cold, and easy to handle. Rapping it with a knuckle produces a sound. "[I]t has everything which appears necessary to enable a body to be known as distinctly as possible." (AT VII, 30; CSM II, 20.) Then the meditator takes the wax by the fireplace:

> The residual taste is eliminated, the smell goes away, the colour changes, the shape is lost, the size increases; it becomes liquid and hot; you can hardly touch it, and if you strike it, it no longer makes a sound. But does the same wax remain? It must be admitted that it does; no one denies it […]. So what was it in the wax that I understood with such distinctness? Evidently none of the features which I arrived at by means of the senses; for whatever came under taste, smell, sight, touch or hearing has now altered – yet the wax remains. (AT VII, 30; CSM II, 20.)

By heating the wax, all the sensible qualities have either disappeared or been altered. Nevertheless, it is still the same wax and, more importantly, we can recognise that it is the same wax. Now, Descartes is not suggesting that the senses play no role at all in recognising the wax as the same wax. We can trace by the senses the changes the wax undergoes and should assume that they play at least *some* role in the story. After all, we needed to release the reins of the meditative exercise in order to cognitively locate *this* wax. What the passage demonstrates is that the senses play only a part of that role, and that part alone cannot grasp the wax distinctly, grasp what its *nature* is (harking back to the meditator's view of grasping sensible and corporeal things more distinctly than herself as a cognitive agent, knowing better the nature of a body than the nature of a mind) (AT VII, 26; CSM II, 17).

The meditator proceeds to consider the wax by the imagination after considering it by the senses. Do we grasp the nature of the wax better by imagining it? She tries to

imagine the wax not as a combination of sensible qualities (taste of honey, floral fragrance, whiteness, shape, sound) but as a *body* (*corpus*), presenting itself in different forms than it did a moment ago, concentrating (*attendamus*) to "take away everything which does not belong to the wax". By focusing, the meditator is left with something extended, flexible, and changeable. However, grasping the wax as 'flexible' and 'changeable' appears not to be a feature of the imagination; she can grasp the wax as capable of immeasurable changes of this kind, yet she is unable to run them all in her imagination. The same goes for the wax as 'extended', as she would not be making a correct judgment about what the wax is, unless she believed it capable of being extended in many more different ways than she is capable of imagining. "I must concede that I do not imagine what this wax is (*quid sit haec cera*), but perceive it with the mind alone. (I am speaking of *this wax* in particular; the point is even clearer with regard to wax in general)." (AT VII, 30–31; CSM II, 20–21. Emphasis added. Translation modified.)

We should pause here, because these passages are quite complex. Taking away "everything which does not belong to the wax" should not be understood as sensory qualities not belonging to the wax at all, because the meditator is not yet in a position to conclude so (although, it is Descartes's considered view that "materially false" sensations – such as colour, sound, and coldness – do not; cf. chapters 6.1.3, 6.2.2). Instead, just as earlier with herself, the meditator should consider the wax in a restricted sense (*praecise*), narrowing the focus on what is inseparable from it. Here, Descartes makes the meditator gradually "tighten the reins" on the suspension of judgment, starting with sensory apprehension of the wax, moving to the wax by imagination and concluding with perception of the wax by reason alone. The proceeding imitates the First Meditation exercise, beginning with skeptical consideration of the senses, followed by a similar consideration of imagination, and finally of reasoning itself. At face value the conclusion that grasping the nature of the wax must be by "mind alone" seems quite abrupt, but we must keep in mind that the meditator has earlier established the three ways of reaching real things (senses, imagination, and reason). By elimination, the nature of the wax cannot be reached by the first two; thus, only reasoning remains. It is also important to notice that while the suspension is being tightened, the meditator has not left the common-sense thinking (as a reference to the particular piece of wax demonstrates). However, the common-sense attitude she is in is somewhat restrained; she has begun to concentrate on different aspects of the wax, similarly to the First Meditation's skeptical reduction. Descartes is, thus, gradually removing the importance of senses and imagination from the meditator's understanding of the wax.

> [T]his wax which is perceived by the mind alone […] is of course the same wax which I see, which I touch, which I picture in my imagination […]. And yet […] the perception I

> have of it[44] is a case not of vision or touch or imagination – nor has it ever been, despite previous appearances – but of purely mental scrutiny […]. (AT VII, 31; CSM II, 21.)

The mental exercise allows the mediator to separate those facets that are not important for perceiving the wax, like vision, touch, and imagination, and concentrate on those that are. Sensitive and imaginative features (colour, shape, size, taste, smell, sound…) do not constitute the nature of a body as a body but are something extra, so those aspects need not be focused on. Even if I considered that my senses are working properly and my sensory cognition was not erroneous (i.e., I was awake and not dreaming), those senses are limited in grasping how things actually are. They do not make the contribution in the distinct grasp of a body as we think they do. "[Mental scrutiny] can be imperfect and confused, as it was before, or clear and distinct (*clara & distincta*) as it is now, depending on how carefully I concentrate on what the wax consists in." (AT VII, 31; CSM II, 21.) By gradually tightening the suspension and narrowing the focus, the meditator is able to mentally perceive the wax *clearly* and *distinctly*.[45] (Cf. Carriero 2009, 106–107, 109–110 & 112–113.)

5.2.2. Wax in the Cartesian Epochē

In the next few paragraphs, Descartes begins to bring the meditator back to the full suspension of judgment by the Cartesian *epochē*. The transition begins by a quick return to the common-sense views and a deliberation on the mental difficulty of the suspension in the thirteenth paragraph. "I am amazed at how prone to errors (*errores*) my mind is.[46] For although I am thinking about these matters within myself […] nonetheless […] I am almost tricked by ordinary ways of talking." (AT VII, 31–32; CSM II, 21. Translation modified.) The common way of describing her perceptions is confusing and misleading her, almost forcing the habitual opinions back into her considerations.

> We say that we see the wax itself, if it is there before us, not that we judge it to be there from its colour and shape; and this might lead me to conclude without more ado that knowledge of the wax comes from what the eye sees, and not from the scrutiny of the mind alone. But then if I look out of the window and see men crossing the square […] I normally say that I see the men themselves, just as I say that I see the wax. Yet do I see

[44] The French indicates activity: "*ou bien l'action par laquelle on l'aperçoit*… (or rather the act by which it is perceived)".

[45] Of course, to be able to tighten the reins again, one must not have them relaxed too wide. Part of the discussion of the wax must fail to measure up to the highest standards the mind can set to itself *without* giving up on the meditative exercise completely. The contextual distinction between actions of life and investigation of the truth is again crucial.

[46] French adds "*faiblesse, et de pente qui le porte insensiblement dans l'erreur* (weak and prone to error)".

> any more than hats and coats which could conceal automatons? I *judge* that that they are men. (AT VII, 32; CSM II, 21. Emphasis added.)

Looking outside the window in the common-sense attitude, the meditator can see shapes wearing hats and coats, taking from this that she sees humans. However, as all she sees are *accessories* (the hats and coats) and not the humans themselves underneath, her perception is based on a *judgment* that human beings are under the garments. Similarly, when she thinks she sees the wax, all she sees are colour, shape, and size, things which, like hats and coats, seem accessory to the wax itself. Just as in the case of the shapes outside, her initial view of grasping the wax by the visual capacity turns out to be mistaken. Instead, she judges the wax to "be there" based on certain evidential clues. Her grasp of the wax is the work of the *capacity of judgment*.

> [O]ne who wants to achieve knowledge (*sapere*) above the ordinary levels (*supra vulgus*) should feel ashamed at having taken ordinary ways of talking as a basis for doubt. So let us proceed, and consider on which occasion I perceived (*percipiebam*) what the wax was (*quid esset cera*) more perfect and evident. Was it when I […] believed I cognized (*cognoscere*) it by my external senses, or at least by what they call the 'common' sense[47] – that is, the power of imagination? Or is my cognition more perfect now, after more careful investigation of what it is (*quid ea sit*) and of the means by which it is cognized? (AT VII, 32; CSM II, 21–22. Translation modified.)

By establishing the power of judgment having a role in the sensory process, we can better assess how we perceived the wax clearly and distinctly just a moment ago. As discussed, bodily sensations fulfil clear perception, but not distinct, because they are associated with unnoticeable, spontaneous judgments of "coming from things outside ourselves" we habitually make on them. Imagination, by contrast, does not fulfil either one. (See chapter 3.4.1. Cf. Alanen 2003, 66; Clarke 2003, 66–67.)

> [W]hat distinctness was there in my earlier perception? Was there anything in it which an animal could not possess? But when I distinguish the wax from its outward forms – take the clothes off, as it were, and consider it naked – although my judgment may still contain errors, at least my perception now requires a human mind. (AT VII, 32; CSM II, 22.)

However, we can concentrate on the clarity of sensory awareness by narrowing our attention to only what is strictly contained in the perception and separating what is not.[48] This way, we can remove the accessory qualities, 'take off the clothes' so to speak, and

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[47] Linking imagination with the concept of *sensu communi* (integrating data from the five specialized senses), Descartes can connect the "ordinary" views with the Aristotelian framework (either in the naïve or the more sophisticated form).

[48] Cf. *Principia* I, §66 (AT VIIIA, 32; CSM I, 216): "[Sensations…] may be clearly perceived provided we take great care in our judgments concerning them to include no more than what is strictly contained in our perception – no more than that of which we have inner awareness". See also Alanen 2003, 66, note 54; Broughton 2008, 191.

perceive the things unadorned – as what necessarily belongs to them. The motivation for such a restriction is again the separation between the everyday viewpoint and the philosophical investigation and the desire to gain knowledge *beyond* the ordinary levels of perceiving the world.[49] The example of clothed automatons outside the meditator's window demonstrates that it is possible to raise doubt over what the senses reveal by those ordinary levels (just as it is possible to question their reliability by occasional sensory errors). Nevertheless, this is unadvisable for the meditative project. The common-sense view must be again fully suspended, and the meditator is required to operate in the restrained scope of the Cartesian *epochē*.

What does Descartes mean by perceiving the wax with the human mind? We recall from earlier that Descartes had left the nature of "as it were sensing" intentionally vague. The meditator was not yet in a place to conclude judgment having to do with sensation in her previous analysis of her "seeming to see" things. Now, however, she can discern her sensation of a body to include not only a mental part of sensation but (mental) judgment as well. Her earlier understanding of grasping the wax by her senses and imagination (working as a unifying common sense) was not much different from an animal's grasp of the same wax, operating mostly on the embodied first and second grade of sensation. This 'ordinary level' understanding is unsatisfying, insufficient to base science on or to refute the skeptical arguments raised thus far. The meditator discovers through Cartesian *epochē* a way to perceive a body distinctly by detaching from corporeality and focusing on the aspect of sense-experience belonging strictly to the mind alone; that is, the power of judgment as the third grade (which properly speaking is not sensory but intellectual). Even if this capacity would contain errors (the wax is not located 'outside of her' at all) making such a judgment is only possible by possessing a freely *active human mind*. (AT VII, 437–438; CSM II, 295. Cf. Carriero 2009, 117–119.)

The train of thought is concluded in the fifteenth paragraph, where the wax exercise is contrasted with the restricted concept of the meditator's self as a cognising mind.

> But what am I to say about this mind, or about myself? (So far, remember, I am not admitting that there is anything else in me except a mind.) What, I ask, is this 'I' which seems to perceive the wax so distinctly? Surely my cognition (*cognosco*) of my own self is not merely much truer and more certain than my cognition of the wax, but also much more distinct and evident. For if I judge that the wax exists from the fact that I see it, clearly this same fact entails much more evidently that I myself also exist. (AT VII, 33; CSM II, 22. Translation modified.)

Even if the wax does not actually exist, even if what the meditator "sees" is not the wax at all, even if the meditator had no eyes to see in the first place, when she thinks she

[49] Interestingly, Descartes uses the term *sapere* here, instead of *cognoscere* or *scire*.

"seems to see" she must exist as a cognising being. She is not merely a passive recipient of "as it were sense-experience" but an *active agent* of her own cognitive acts, judging the wax to exist based on vision, touch, imagination, or any other reason. Just as in the earlier *cogito* passage, discovering herself freely authoring her own thoughts demonstrates her own existence with clarity and distinctness, whether those thoughts referred to anything located outside of her or not.[50] (Cf. Christofidou 2013, 99.)

> [I]f my perception of the wax seemed more distinct after it was established (*innotuit*) not just by sight or touch but by many other considerations, it must be admitted that I now cognize (*cognosci*) myself even more distinctly.[51] This is because every consideration whatsoever which contributes to my perception of the wax, or of any other body cannot but establish even more effectively the nature of my own mind. But […] there is so much else in the mind itself which can serve to make my notion (*notitia*) of it more distinct, that it scarcely seems worth going through the contributions made by considering bodily things. (AT VII, 33; CSM II, 22. Translation modified.)

By considering things "located outside" ourselves, we can also become aware of ourselves in a clearer and more distinct fashion. However, since the target is discovering understanding above ordinary levels of senses and imagination, concentrating merely on bodily things is hardly worth it. By suspending all of one's judgments on the existence of bodies, one is capable of unraveling the boundaries of understanding and discover the *preconditions* of cognition (cf. chapter 1.2.)

Thus, the Second Chain reaches an answer to the earlier puzzle: The nature of one's mind is actually grasped more clearly and distinctly than the nature of material bodies. The meditator even comments in the sixteenth paragraph that she has "finally got back where she wanted" (AT VII, 33–34; CSM II, 22). Perceiving corporeality is not strictly speaking (*non proprie*) the work of the senses and the imagination but of the intellect alone – of being understood (*intelligantur*). One should be careful though not to read too much into this statement. The predicament seems to make perception of bodies wholly the function of the intellect, going against the *direct realist* view with which I have been reading the *Meditations* (see chapter 1.1), but this would be a hasty conclusion. Descartes's inclusion of *non proprie* clearly intends these lines to be read in the restricted *praecise* sense in which nothing is included in the meditator's self that is non-evident (which the roles of sensation and imagination still are). This way, her perception of her own mind is more evident and easier to achieve than anything else. (AT VII, 34; CSM II, 22–23.) The meditator still learns more about her (thinking) nature than about the nature of corporeal entities in the discussion of the wax.

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[50] "[W]hen I see, or I think I see (I am not here distinguishing the two)." AT VII, 33; CSM II, 22.

[51] French has "*plus nette et plus distincte*" and at the end of the sentence "*plus d'évidence, de distinction et de netteté*".

Much has been accomplished by the end of the Second Meditation. The meditator has become more accustomed to the suspension of judgment and has begun to trust her own persuasive intuition, viewing its results as cognitively certain. She has discovered her own existence as an actively free agent to be indubitable when being attended to. She has been able to clarify, with the help of the wax experiment, this intuitive grasping to be the work of clear and distinct perception and to locate this as the work of her own active intellect and power of judgment instead of sensory or imaginative capacities. She has also made progress with understanding the nature of bodies, compared to the nature of her own active mind, by experimenting with the wax. She still has work to do to grasp the *essences* of body and mind, but she is already on the right path.[52] (Cf. AT VII, 13; CSM II, 9.)

Despite the meditator progressing with the meditative exercise, she still somewhat struggles with maintaining her suspension of judgment. Due to this difficulty, a hesitation on the suspension with an alteration in the proceeding, including partly letting go of the full suspension, follows both in the First and the Second Meditation. The conclusion to fully suspend judgment in the First due to reasons for doubt balancing reasons for belief is followed by the return of habitual opinions and the experiment of imagining the Demon to keep them in line. The successful analysis of the meditator's 'I' in the Second is followed by worries about the sensory-material bodies being perceived clearer and more distinct and the experiment of perceiving the wax to demonstrate that this is not the case. The difficulty carries over to the end of the Second Meditation: "But since the habit of holding on to old opinions cannot be set aside so quickly, I should like to stop here and meditate for some time on this new knowledge I have gained, so as to fix it more deeply in my memory." (AT VII, 34; CSM II, 23.) The habitual opinions are still strongly impressed in the meditator's mind, easily diverting her attention from the cognitive exercise, and because of this, suspension of judgment is still exceedingly tiresome.[53] Like the First, the Second Meditation ends with a call for more meditation and a requirement for supplementary concentration on the reasons for

[52] Wagner (1995; 2014, 86–102, 107–116) reads the wax passage as the meditator discovering her mind's essence, and by the same token its actual existence, with an experiential discovery of the *cogito*, constituting "psychological certainty" of the two. I agree that this sort of persuasive certainty is part of the metaphysico-epistemological task of getting the meditator from internally compelling C&D perception to the externally grounded metaphysical certainty. However, I view that the meditator must feel the cognitive certainty actually *grasping* some truth, and disagree that the meditator would already discover the mind's essence with a C&D perception, and that she would not have the initial certainty of her existence before the wax passage. Cf. Cunning 2010, 97–98, note 53. See also Forsman 2019.

[53] Cf. *Principia* I, §73 (AT VIIIA, 37; CSM I, 220): "Our mind is unable to keep its attention on things without some degree of difficulty and fatigue; and it is hardest of all for it to attend to what is not present to the senses or even to the imagination." See also ibid, §66, §68, §70 (AT VIIIA, 32–34; CSM I, 216–218); Cunning 2010, 101–102.

doubt and suspension (fixing them in memory). The additional meditation on the reasons for doubt becomes especially important for the beginning of the Third Meditation, which calls into question all the progress made in the Second by the return of the Third Level of doubt and the Deceiving God/Imperfect Nature scenario. With this, the progression of the first three Meditations follows Descartes's procedure of nothing being known with absolute certainty before cognising God's existence.

6. Third Meditation I: Existence, Mathematics, and God

In the Second Meditation, the meditator operated inside the hypothesis of a bodiless dream, created with the layer of denial. This led to her directly discovering her existence and free activity as a thinking being. She learned to trust her intuition, especially the cognitive peak of her perception at its clearest and most distinct. The assent-compelling nature of this perception allows her to recognise cognitive certainties that are more evident than the claims she put forward in the First Meditation. She feels confident enough in these cognitive certainties at the beginning of the Third Meditation to lay down an epistemic *truth rule*: Whatever is perceived very clearly and distinctly is true. Now, she can begin to build the metaphysical foundation of her cognition.

However, in order to build the foundation, the meditator is required to answer the two remaining Agrippan problems. That her intuitive certainties are indubitable, evident, clear, and distinct does not guarantee that they are true, and if they are to be true, their truth should emerge in a way that is not circular in nature. The Third Meditation, then, reinstates the layers of doubt that were temporarily substituted by the layer of denial in order to analyse the meditator's epistemic nature. The results of the Second Meditation chains of discovery are specifically estimated against the Third Level of doubt: one's potentially imperfect nature either as a theist or an atheist.

Compared to the previous two, the Third Meditation narrative is again a bit different. Its most famous contents are the two *causal arguments for God's existence*, but the text also includes a lengthy *preliminary discussion* on the truth and falsity of ideas as modes of thought. This discussion leads to addressing God's existence for the first time, by the *actual infinity* included in the idea of God. The meditator next begins to wonder anyway whether her free agency could be greater than she acknowledges and whether she could possess or potentially possess all the perfections she ascribes to the idea of God, including the ability to keep herself persisting through time. This leads the way to address God's existence for the second time by the *causal relation* of her existence to God's existence.

The Third Meditation structure is, then, as follows:

Introduction: Recap of the results from the previous Meditation and the general truth rule
Return of Level 3: Questioning the *cogito* and mathematics
Preliminary Discussion: Classification of ideas
Causal argument 1: Idea of God and God's existence for the first time
Conclusion 1: God exists and is the cause of my nature's innate idea of him
Alteration: My free agency could be greater than assumed
Causal argument 2: Existence of 'I' and God's existence for the second time
Conclusion 2: God exists and is the cause of my existence and nature

The Third Meditation's narrative, like the First's and Second's, is intricate and even confusing in places. The causal arguments for God's existence are some of the most challenging content in the *Meditations*, largely due to their heavy reliance on Scholastic metaphysics. The dissection is even more important because of this difficulty for understanding how the cognitive exercise is meant to flow in the Third Meditation.

I have decided to separate the Third Meditation's analysis into two chapters because of its length. In this first chapter, I analyse the preliminary discussion of ideas as modes of thought and the First Causal argument for God's existence (paragraphs 1–22).

6.1. Preliminary Discussion: Ideas as Modes of Thought and Most Common Mistake

The beginning of the Third Meditation might appear auxiliary to the rest at first glance. Even the Meditation's title is simply *De Deo, quod existat* (Considering God, that He exists). The Synopsis similarly describes it as having "explained quite fully enough" Descartes's principal argument for proving God's existence (AT VII, 14; CSM II, 10). However, the chain of argumentation for God's existence does not begin before the thirteenth paragraph, exactly one third of the way into the text. What is this preliminary discussion meant to accomplish, and why was it placed here?

Descartes did not mean the titles of the particular Meditations to be wholly representative of the content but to mark certain key points he wants people to notice (AT III, 297; CSMK, 172–173).[1] The Synopsis actually gives us a fairly good hint about the motives and placement of the preliminary discussion. "But in order to draw my readers' minds away from the senses as far as possible, I was not willing to use any comparison taken from bodily things" (AT VII, 14; CSM II, 10). The preliminary discussion is still part of the exercise to draw the mind away from the senses; however, it is also more than this. With the return of the Third Level of doubt, even the meditator's intuitive and deductive reasoning is once again in doubt, meaning she cannot trust either the previously discovered cognitive certainties or mathematics (cf. chapter 3.4). What she can do is consider the different modes of thinking she experiences, her ideas, inside the Cartesian *epochē*, suspending her judgment on them being either true or false. The meditator is to concentrate in the preliminary discussion on her internally experienced ideas, bracketed from their truth value, allowing her to

[1] The Sixth Meditation title is *De rerum materialium existential, & reali mentis corpore distinction* (Considering the existence of material things, and the real distinction of mind and body), both topics being argued early on in two of the twenty-four paragraphs (AT VII, 77–80; CSM II, 54–55). Cf. Carriero 2009, 359.

first, categorise them into different classes and second, recognise their differing amounts of *objective reality* related to their content. Analysis of these topics enables the causal arguments for God's existence and would not be possible before the Second Meditation progress on her cognitive nature.

The task of the Third Meditation is far from easy. Descartes aims to prove that 1) God exists, 2) is the cause of the meditator's nature (as its creator), 3) is the cause of her existence (as the preserving power that created her and keeps her in existence), and 4) is not a deceiver. This proof should also provide an *external* metaphysical ground for the meditator's internal certainties, and, by the cognitive exercise, is possible only by material covered in previous parts of the meditation.[2] Descartes is all in and the stakes are high. Now it comes down to the cards he has dealt for the meditator.

6.1.1. General Truth Rule

The Third begins by resetting the meditation and recapping the previous exercise.

> I will now shut my eyes, stop my ears, and withdraw all my senses. I will eliminate (*delebo*) from my thoughts all images of bodily things, or rather, since this is hardly possible, I will regard all such images as vacuous, false and worthless. I will converse with myself and scrutinize myself more deeply; and in this way I will attempt to achieve, little by little, a more intimate knowledge of myself. I am a thing that thinks; that is, a thing that doubts, affirms, denies, understands a few things, is ignorant of many things, wills (*volens*), does not will (*nolens*), and also (*etiam*) which imagines (*imaginans*) and senses (*sentiens*)… (AT VII, 34; CSM II, 24. Translation modified.)

The meditator lists all the agencies she recognises in herself, including the primary powers of will (doubt, affirmation, denial) and intellect (understanding), as well as the additional powers of imagination and sensation, separated by *etiam*. The role of these additional powers remains unclear, but they are part of her capabilities if considered *praecise* as aspects of understanding.

> [F]or as I have noted before, even though the objects of my sensory experience and imagination may have no existence outside of me, nonetheless the modes of thinking (*cogitandi modos*) which I refer to as case of sensory perception and imagination, in so far as they are simply modes of thinking, do exist within me – of that I am certain (*certus*). (AT VII, 34–35; CSM II, 24.)

The meditator has made much progress during the meditative exercise and genuinely no longer finds it so obvious that the external world exists (at least in the philosophical

[2] Proof 4) is then expanded in the Fourth Meditation (AT VII, 21; CSM II, 14). See chapter 7.3.2.

context). Nevertheless, despite the amount of progress, eliminating the images of bodily things from her mind altogether hardly seems possible. Thus, for the first two paragraphs, she withdraws the mind from the senses by the layer of denial, used in the Second Meditation discoveries.

In the second paragraph, the meditator tries to draw some general conclusions from the results of her exercise thus far. Her previous meditation was successful in two ways: 1) She gained something which, for all purposes, appears to reach the truth (a piece of reality) and is certain, and 2) she learned to use her native cognitive faculties well and trust her intuition. (Cf. Carriero 2009, 128.) She considers the list of abilities just mentioned as consisting of "everything I truly know (*scio*)" or at least "everything I have so far discovered that I know (*scire*)". Just as she is certain that she is a thinking thing, would she also know what is required for her to be certain about anything? Such a *criterion of truth* could potentially then allow her a simple way to recognise the difference between real and false. The meditator recognises that "[i]n this first item of cognition (*cognitione*) there is simply a clear and distinct perception (*clara & distincta perceptio*) of what I am affirming (*affirmo*)". Perceiving something clearly and distinctly appears, then, to provide her with such a criterion, seemingly allowing her to lay down the infallibility of clarity and distinctness as a *general truth rule*: "Whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true" (AT VII, 35; CSM II, 24; translation modified).

Many commentators have been eager to take Descartes at his word and consider C&D as the infallible and indubitable criterion of truth, capable of reaching certainty and knowledge in their fullest sense (e.g., Gueroult 1953; Kenny 1968; M. Wilson 1978; Broughton 2002; Della Rocca 2005). This reading appears to be supported later in the Third Meditation when Descartes seemingly stacks the deck in favour of *cogito* or *clear and distinct* foundationalism by stating that not only is the clear and distinct *cogito* certain but so are such intuitively perceived mathematical truths as 2+3=5 (AT VII, 36; CSM II, 25). With the list of things the meditator thus far "truly knows", Descartes even uses the verb *scire* instead of *cognoscere*, taken to imply them counting as *scientia*.

I consider such readings hasty, often interpreting Descartes by the internalist perspective (albeit not in every case). In fact, the meditator is not yet ready to admit the infallible nature of clarity and distinctness. "[T]his *would not be enough* to make me certain of the truth of the matter *if it could ever turn out* that something which I perceived with such clarity and distinctness was false" (AT VII, 35; CSM II, 24; emphasis added). Even when stating the general truth rule, the meditator is careful, admitting that she now "seems (*videor*)" capable of laying it down as an epistemic rule. The meditator will test this general rule in the next two paragraphs, seeing if it can survive the ultimate trial by setting it against the Third Level of doubt. Unawareness of her origin and nature calls

into question even her *most persuasive and evident* perceptions; thus, her intuitive cognitions are not absolutely certain and could be false. She has reached *persuasio* but not yet *scientia*.

Descartes understands truth as a metaphysical conformity-relation, so it is not enough for the meditator to declare intuitive and evident perceptions to be generally true. She must demonstrate their reliability. Thus, the meditator's expression of the truth rule appears more like pondering at this stage.[3] The topic is especially relevant for how Descartes's deals with atheism. If evidently clear intuition were the guarantee of truth – if truth were the result of an infallible cognitive capacity that everyone possesses – the atheist meditator would get off the hook way too easy. This relates not only to the atheist's cognition of mathematics but likewise to the atheist's cognition of her existence.[4] Descartes demands a *metaphysically* firm ground for all true epistemic claims. Descartes's project, as stated, is epistemically *externalist*, with God's existence and nature verifying the external reliability of clarity and distinctness.[5] (Cf. chapter 3.4.)

6.1.2. Existence and Mathematics: Theological Doubt Reinstated

After being tempted to conclude that anything she perceives very clearly and distinctly is true, the meditator contrasts this dictum with her earlier accepted pre-meditative certainties. She remembers there to have been numerous other things she previously thought to be fully certain and manifest (material bodies and everything else apprehended by the senses) only to realise they were doubtful. However, she now recognises that the mistake was to do with a *habitual belief (consuetudinem credendi*) of there being objects external to herself, resembling the modes of her thought.

> [What I perceived clearly was] that the ideas, or thoughts, of such things appeared before my mind. Yet even now I am not denying that these ideas occur within me. But there

[3] Despite using *scire* in the beginning of the Third Meditation, Descartes indicates the state to be *cognitio/persuasio* (AT VII, 35–36; CSM II, 24–25). Describing absolute knowledge by cognising the existence of God in the Fifth Meditation, Descartes adds *perfecte* in front of *scire* (AT VII, 71; CSM II, 49). Cf. the Second Replies (AT VII, 141; CSM II, 100).

[4] Carriero (2009, 341–343), while distinguishing *cognitio* and *scientia* and emphasising the requirement for the knowledge of God's existence to reach the latter, insists that the meditator reaches proper certainty that she exists. While I do agree that with *persuasio* we can momentarily obtain a grasp of how things truly are, Carriero's reading indicates that the atheist meditator could reach proper certainty of her existence.

[5] Della Rocca (2005, 18–19) likewise describes Descartes's project as externalist but in a different way. For Della Rocca, Descartes is an externalist regarding the justification of current C&D perceptions, as this sort of perception gives us knowledge "even without 'checking up' on the perception and realizing that C&D ideas in general must be true". However, this description overlooks Descartes's attempt to demonstrate the reliability of C&D. If Descartes is this sort of externalist, the demonstration is superfluous because C&D would be reliable as a matter of fact. My reading explains Descartes's demonstration while still describing him as an epistemic externalist.

> was something else which I used to assert, and which through habitual belief I thought I perceived clearly, although I did not in fact do so. That there were things outside me which were the sources of my ideas and which resembled them in all respects. Here was my mistake; or at any rate, if my judgment was true, it was no thanks to my perception.[6] (AT VII, 35; CSM II, 24–25.)

Even if her judgment was true and there are external sensory-material bodies, her belief was not the result of clear perception and correct use of her will but of a mere habit.

It seems easy to read the above passage in support of the 'veil of ideas' interpretation of Descartes. (see chapter 1.1). I would suggest avoiding such an attempt. The meditator does not state that her thinking of things is *not* due to a direct external source nor that there are no such idea-resembling external things (which would still be difficult to swallow for an Aristotelian meditator). Even if there are, her belief, while correct, was not thanks to cognitive clarity but instead was *blindly* made. This continues the criticism of pre-meditation habitual naïve realism from the First Meditation and sets up the later critique of the Resemblance theory. The passage also follows Descartes's Fourth Meditation comments on the correct use of one's free judgment: It is better to suspend judgment than to choose blindly and be lucky, as relying on luck in epistemic matters is a grave misuse of the will and a moral *fault* (AT VII, 57–61; CSM II, 40–42; cf. chapters 3.3.4 and 4.4). What the passage indicates is the meditator's commitment to the Cartesian *epochē*. She is beginning to fully suspend her judgment on the external existence of the objects she perceives, considering them merely as modes of her thought.

After the comparison to her previous sensory-corporeal views, the meditator contrasts the *cogito*-like cognitive states with her previous mathematical reasoning in the fourth paragraph. This follows the previously assumed certainties of the First Meditation, in which a foundational basis was first sought in empirical and, then, in mathematical/rational principles. Interestingly, the simple and universal things, taken to be certain after the painter analogy, are not mentioned here. I take the reason to be their assumed connection to external reality, whose existence has now been genuinely suspended, while arithmetic principles are not so clearly connected with externality.

The meditator ponders whether she was in a similar cognitive peak when she concluded that 2+3=5. After all, it was so secure for her that the only reason it became open for doubt was that "it occurred to me that perhaps some God could have given me a nature such that I was deceived even in matters which seemed most evident" (AT VII, 36; CSM II, 25). The meditator's statement is less firm here than it was in the First Meditation, with the long-standing opinion of an omnipotent God replaced with a vague

[6] The French adds "*ce n'était aucune connoissance que, j'eusse, qui fût cause de la vérité de mon jugement* (it was not because of any awareness I possessed which caused the truth of my judgment)".

reference to "some God (*aliquem Deum*)". This replacement has been taken as evidence for placing mathematical reasoning on equal footing with the *cogito* (e.g., Grene 1999, 567–568). Indeed, this appears to be the meditator's initial conclusion as well:

> [W]hen I turn to the things themselves which I think (*arbitror*) I perceive very clearly (*valde clare percipere*), I am so convinced by them that I spontaneously declare: let whoever can do so deceive me, he will *never bring it about that I am nothing, so long as I continue to think I am something*; or make it true at some future time that *I have never existed*, since it is now true that I exist; or *bring it about that two and three added together are more or less than five*, or *anything of this kind in which I see a manifest contradiction*. (AT VII, 36; CSM II, 25. Emphasis added.)

Not only would the *cogito* be cognitively certain but so would be all clear and distinct mathematical truths. With later remarks on the "slight" and "metaphysical" reason for the doubt in question, this passage has likewise been read to confirm that the Deceiving God scenario was always meant as a hypothetical and less-than-serious supposition and that mathematical and rational truths were never really in doubt (Olson 1988; Grene 1999, 567–569; Secada 2013, 205–207).

I have two critical remarks on these readings. Firstly, there is clearly something off about mathematical reasoning sharing an equal cognitive status with the *cogito*. Why, if this was the case, did the meditator not already reach an evident *cogito*-like moment when considering mathematics in the First Meditation? Why did mathematical cognition not work as an Archimedean point?[7] One possible answer is that the meditator's grasp of mathematics was initially habitual rather than clear and evident, like it is now. Nevertheless, cognitive certainty of mathematics is still *post-reflective*, whereas with the *cogito* it is intuitive and self-evident. This does hint at a difference between cognising one's existence and nature and cognising evident mathematics. Indeed, a close reading of the Latin raises further suspicion: "[*V*]*el* forte etiam [*nunquam efficient*] *ut duo et tria simul juncta plura vel pauciora sint quam quinque*... ([O]r *perhaps even* [can never make it so] that two and three added together are more or less than five...") (AT VII, 36; CSM II, 25; translation modified).

Secondly, it is often missed that the meditator is clearly slipping in and out of her cognitive peak during this fourth paragraph. She enters the paragraph while in the cognitive peak, viewing her clear and distinct perceptions to be transparent and obviously coming to the truth, despite a previous thought of "some God" tricking her.[8]

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[7] The topic has been discussed amongst others by Gueroult (1953, 51–52), Broughton (2002, 175–186), Lennon & Hickson (2013, 20–21), Brown (2013, 33–36), and Schüssler (2013, 162). However, while considering the *cogito* more certain and compelling than mathematics, they all consider the *cogito* to be "fully certain". I suggest that the *cogito* is more certain and convincing than mathematics without being permanent *scientia*. I argue for this view in chapter 7.3.1.

[8] The reference to "some God" is likely an amalgamation of all the deception scenarios (the imperfect nature due to divine or mundane origin and the Demon). Cf. the *cogito* passage in the Second Meditation

However, when she considers her preconceived notion of "the supreme power of God", her attention is redirected from the matter, she loses the cognitive peak, and her confidence vanishes by the realisation of the still remaining room for doubt. "I cannot but admit that it would be easy for [God], if he so desired, to bring it about that I go wrong even in those matters which I think I see clearly with my mind's eye" (AT VII, 36; CSM II, 25). Attending to the clearly perceived matters again produces another cognitive peak and makes the meditator so convinced (*persuadeor*) as to spontaneously declare that no matter who deceives her, her existence, and perhaps even her ability to conduct correct mathematics, will remain true. However, at the end of the paragraph, the meditator must admit that as long as she is ignorant of her origin, there remains reason for doubt and, therefore, she seemingly cannot be absolutely certain of *anything*.

> Since […] I do not yet even know for sure whether there is a God at all, any reason for doubt *(dubitandi ratio*) which depends simply on this supposition is a very slight (*tenuis*), and so to speak, metaphysical one. But in order to remove even this slight reason for doubt, as soon as the opportunity arises I must examine whether there is a God, and if there is, whether he can be a deceiver. For if I do not know this (*hac enim re ignorata*),[9] it seems (*videor*) that I can never be fully certain (*plane certus*) about anything else. (AT VII, 36; CSM II, 25. Translation modified.)

The meditator cannot possess full certainty on what she perceives as long as reason to doubt remains. Thus, the meditator is required to examine the origin of her cognitive nature to reach knowledge in its fullest sense (*scientia*); that is, whether or not God exists as the creator of her native cognitive abilities and whether or not God could have created those abilities to fall short from grasping how the world truly is. This marks the return of the Third Level of doubt, putting in question again all of the progress made in the Second Meditation. The meditator's cognitive peak may come apart from reality; thus, none of her compelling clear and distinct perceptions might be true.[10]

Truth, as stated, is not an intrinsic or formal property of our thought for Descartes but a *metaphysical* conformity relation between our thoughts and reality. The meditator does assume that her cognition at its peak reaches how things are, because she takes the occurring clear and distinct perception to be true. However, at this point, she cannot be

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(AT VII, 24; CSM II, 16): "some God, or whatever I may call him… (*aliquis Deus, vel quocunque nomine illum vocem*)". Translation modified.

[9] The French emphasises knowing God's existence and nature: "*car sans la connaissance de ces* deux vérités".

[10] Clear and distinct perception being put into doubt is indirectly brought up in the Second Replies (AT VII, 144; CSM II, 103): "[O]nce we have become aware (*cognitum*) that God exists it is necessary for us to imagine that he is a deceiver if we wish to cast doubt on what we clearly and distinctly perceive." I take the issue to be that, even before knowing that God exists, we can doubt clear and distinct perceptions. Cf. the Seventh Replies (AT VII, 460; CSM II, 309): "[T]here will be nothing which we may not justly doubt so long as we do not know that whatever we clearly perceive is true". See also the *Discourse* (AT VI, 39; CSM I, 130). Contra, e.g., Owens 2008; Secada 2013, 205–207. Cf. Cunning 2010, 64.

metaphysically certain that it really *does*. It does seem that she arrives at the truth each time she perceives clearly and distinctly, but she does not grasp why this would be so. Truth for Descartes is not reduced to indubitability, so even if *momentarily* there are no good reasons to doubt the veracity of one's clear and distinct perception, it might still turn out to be unreliable and failing to grasp the truth (i.e., clear and distinct perception is not true just because it is clear and distinct; cf. Della Rocca 2005, 3.) The imperfect nature scenario of the Third Level ensures that even if I did clearly and distinctly grasp the truth, I can doubt not only the memory of being certain but also the truth itself when the moment passes. One may be able to glimpse the truth with *persuasio*, but this does not get us far in Descartes's eyes. As stated, we must confirm the second-order reliability of our cognition to be completely certain that we have reached the truth.[11]

One could argue against this reading, because the meditator still seemingly puts the doubt in less firm terms than she does in the First Meditation, but here we must remember the cognitive state that the meditator is in. She has not yet reached a strongly compelling clear and distinct cognition in the First and, thus, is more convinced by God's possible passive deception. Now, in the midst of still occurring cognitive peak, this reason feels more tenuous and "metaphysical". Descartes is quite happy to describe the doubt as metaphysical in other places, meant to be separated from practical life and moral certainty and aimed for metaphysical knowledge (*Metaphysico sciendi*) (e.g., AT VI, 38 & VII, 460, 475; CSM I, 130 & II, 308, 320). However, while being so strongly compelled, such doubt can seem an unnecessary trifle.[12] The importance of the metaphysical doubt is recalled again when the cognitive peak fades, and the meditator cannot but admit that she might not reach the truth.[13]

Another reason for this less-than-firm-phrasing is that the doubt is also theological: Even God's existence is still in question, giving reason to doubt the meditator's divine origin. Yet, as we recall from the First Meditation, the atheist meditator is likewise incapable of escaping the core scenario: The atheist's nature could just as well be so imperfect that she could be mistaken when she thinks she has correctly counted that 2+3=5 or cognised her existence as inseparable from her thinking. Following the strong maxim from the First Meditation (as long as reasons for doubt remain, assent should be withheld), the meditator cannot claim to know any of the results of the Second. The doubt is raised about the origin of one's nature instead of one's reasoning, so the reasons

[11] Cf. chapters 3.4 and 4.3; Carriero 2009, 129–13, 341–342. See, though, note 4.
[12] Not that the peak is morally certain; cognitive certainty is stronger than what suffices for everyday life.
[13] Descartes claims in certain paragraphs that some perceptions, such as one's existence, cannot be open to doubt (e.g., AT VII, 38–39, 145–146; CSM II, 27, 104) but these can be seen as referring to a strongly persuasive perception at the moment it is perceived. See AT V, 178 & VII, 460, 546; CSM II, 309, 373 & CSMK, 353. Cf. Cunning 2007, 120–122.

for doubt are not erased by reason itself being questionable. Thus, this strongest form of doubt is not self-defeating.[14]

The way Descartes slips the meditator (and us readers) in and out of this cognitive peak is masterful (see also Carriero 2009, 346). The meditator is to view the *cogito*-like cognitive states to be more certain, evident, and obvious than any of her previous "certainties" she considered in the First Meditation (access to reality runs through the senses, there are external objects which resemble her sensory perceptions, mathematical truths hold up). Yet, she cannot be certain that even this cognitive peak reaches reality. Cognising well by our native faculties might not be the same as cognizing truly.[15]

6.1.3. Ideas as Modes of Thought

The beginning of the Third Meditation is rather devastating. None of the cognitive certainties grasped in the Second Meditation might add up to true cognition, and now even clearly and distinctly cognised mathematics is questionable. Worse, it seems that other evidently perceived rational principles, such as non-contradiction, may also be false, as implied by the meditator's statement that "anything else of this [*cogito*-like] kind in which I see a manifest contradiction" is cognitively certain when perceived clearly and distinctly, but not known *fully* certain.[16] The most radical skepticism, endorsed by the axiomatic horn of Agrippa's trilemma, is still too strong to overcome.[17]

What can the meditator do if she can neither trust her cognitive abilities to reach the truth, even at their peak, nor rely on even the simplest demonstrations? Even if the first of the Second Meditation's double successes is questioned, the second success remains. The meditator is still more learned about her native cognitive powers and their use,

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[14] Contra, e.g., Frankfurt 2008, 40; M. Wilson 1978, 35–37; Olson 1988; Christofidou 2013, 33–36.

[15] Compare with the imagined reality of Descartes's "objection of objections". Letter to Clerselier, 12 January 1646 (AT IXA, 211–213; CSM II, 274–275). Popkin has famously read this passage as demonstrating the deep hidden skepticism lurking in Descartes's system, one he feared but was never able to overcome (2003, 167–168). My reading reveals that the meditative exercise not only realises but *emphasises* this possibility, being able to defeat it with *scientia* of God's existence and non-deception. See also the so-called Angel scenario (AT VII, 145; CSM II, 103; chapter 7.3.3).

[16] The principle of non-contradiction can also be included in the ultimate doubt through the doctrine of created eternal truths: God can make contradictories true, therefore, they might be true. However, even here the scenario should be read as "we don't know if God has made contradictories true and we are just not aware". God's creation is not bound by our rational limitations and, thus, there can be a gap between our clear and distinct perceptions and the reality created by God. Contra Olson 1988, 407. Cf. Wagner 2014, 3 & 63. See also chapters 3.4.1 and 4.3.

[17] The special nature of the *cogito* then overcomes the Demon but does not clear the Imperfect Nature scenario. Thus, it can be recalled into doubt in the beginning of the Third Meditation. The same applies to all clear and distinct cognition.

granting her trust in what she intuitively perceives. What she can do is consider her thoughts while suspending judgment of their truth value. Such consideration is meant to take care of certain preliminary matters before her examination on God's existence and nature occurs. "First, however, considerations of order appear to dictate (*videtur exigere*) that I now classify my thoughts into definite kinds, and ask which of them can properly be said to be the bearers of truth and falsity" (AT VII, 36–37; CSM II, 25).[18]

In the French version, the sentence above is greatly expanded:

> "So I may have opportunity of examining this without interrupting the order of meditation which I have decided upon, which is to start only from those notions which I find first of all in my mind and pass gradually to those which I may find later on, I must here divide…" (AT IXA, 29.[19])

The expansion may indicate that some of Descartes's readers felt the Latin text to be bumpy and difficult to follow in these parts (see Carriero 2009, 132). It is not hard to see why. One would expect Descartes to have immediately proceeded to the arguments for God's existence after the meditator's proclamation of examining the topic. Indeed, Clerselier specifically asked for Descartes's intentions with this preliminary discussion in a 1649 letter. Descartes had this to say on the matter:

> My purpose was to base the proof of the existence of God on the idea or thought which we have of him, and so I thought that I was obliged first of all to distinguish all our thoughts into certain classes, so as to observe which are those that can deceive. By showing that not even chimeras contain falsehood in themselves, I hoped to forestall those who might reject my reasoning on the grounds that our idea of God belongs to the class of chimeras. (AT V, 354; CSMK, 376.)

The causal arguments work out God's existence from our understanding of God; thus, Descartes is first required to discuss how our thinking about objects – our ideas and their contents – functions. The first order of business is to consider the ideas, or more precisely their contents, as merely modes of our thought, separate from whether they correspond with any reality. This way, we can potentially discover which parts of the cognitive process can be in error or bear falsity.

> Some of my thoughts are as it were (*tanquam*) the images of things, and it is only in these cases that the term 'idea' is strictly appropriate – for example, when I think of a man, or a chimera, or the sky, or an angel, or God. Other thoughts have various additional forms: thus when I will, or am afraid, or affirm or deny, there is always a particular thing which

[18] Just like with the *cogito*, the deceiver could not deceive the meditator about her thinking a certain thing, regardless of the thing's truth value, if she perceives the thing in question clearly and distinctly.

[19] *Et afin que je puisse avoir occasion d'examiner cela sans interrompre l'ordre de méditer que je me suis propose, qui est de passer par degres des notions que je trouverai les premières en mon esprit à celles que j'y pourrai trouver après, il faut ici que je divise toutes*… See chapter 1.2.2 for the order of meditation.

> I take as the object of my thought, but my thought includes something more than the likeness (*similitudinem*) of that thing. Some thoughts in this category are called volitions or affects (*voluntates, sive affectus*), while others are called judgments. (AT VII, 37; CSM II, 25–26. Translation modified.)

One should be careful not to take the meditator's description of ideas as "images of things (*rerum imagines*)" too literally. Descartes is very critical of an overly imagistic theory of ideas, as his critique of cognition based on similitude in the Resemblance theory shows (e.g., AT VII, 40; CSM II, 27). What the meditator describes here as "idea as an image of a thing" is the idea's content: What it is an idea of (sun, horse, brontosaurus, etc). Whether read as an Aristotelian, a naïf, or an atheistic skeptic, she is used to thinking of her cognition as imagistic, confusing the nature of content as likenesses.

Descartes makes a distinction in the Fourth Replies between the word 'idea' taken *materially*, as mental operation (thought, volition), and idea taken *formally* (*formaliter*), as "representing (*repraesentant*)" something, that is, the content of said mental operation (thought sun, wished pot of gold) (AT VII, 232; CSM II, 163). Comparably, a bust of Pallas materially is just marble, whereas formally it represents Pallas specifically. It is by this formal understanding that ideas act "as if images of things". (Cf. Nadler 2006, 87; Sinokki 2015, 122–125.) I discuss this distinction more later. It suffices for now that the meditator draws a distinction between the mental operation and the content the operation is directed at – considering the latter as ideas in a strict (*proprie*) sense.[20]

The meditator attempts in the sixth paragraph to locate the source of falsity and error in these modes of her thinking. Taking ideas strictly as mental content "considered solely in themselves" so they "do not refer (*referam*) to anything else" they cannot strictly speaking be false. "[F]or whether it is a goat or a chimera that I am imagining, it is just as true that I imagine the former as the latter." Moving to the broader understanding of ideas, the same goes for volitions and affects; whether or not the things I desire are immoral or even non-existent, it is true that I desire them. By the process of elimination, the only remaining source of error, for which the meditator must keep her guard up, is in judgments. "And the chief and most common mistake which is to be found here consists in my judging that the ideas which are in me resemble, or conform to, things located outside me." (AT VII, 37; CSM II, 26.)

However, how can the above be true? Does not Descartes uphold truth as a strong metaphysical conformity relation between thought and object? Should not there then *be* falsity in the content of my ideas? Indeed, in a later passage of the Third Meditation,

[20] In the Preface, Descartes points out a further ambiguity in 'idea', separate from the other two: The word can also be taken *objectively* (*objective*) as "the thing represented (*re repraesentata*)" by the operation (AT VII, 8; CSM II, 7). These senses are often confused with each other. I am following Sinokki (2015) in distinguishing them as three separate senses.

Descartes discusses *material falsity* (*falsitas materialis*) occurring in ideas, when their content expresses something that has no being of its own as real and positive (such as coldness). (AT VII, 43–44; CSM II, 30; cf. Fourth Replies: AT VII, 233; CSM II, 163.) Likewise, one way to read the meditator's imagistic comment on ideas is that ideas are "as it were images" because of the relationship they have to their object – they connect thinking with reality (Brown 2008, 198). How can ideas in the strict sense then not be "bearers of truth and falsity"? The content of our thoughts should be true or false independently from our affirmations or denials.

This issue has puzzled many commentators. The passage has been read so that Descartes runs together and conflates the notions of falsity and error. Judgment, as we have seen earlier, is a collaboration between the mind's perceptive and willing powers (see chapter 3.3). What Descartes should say is that the ideas perceived may be false, but error arises not in perception but in affirmation (M. Wilson 1978, 141). Another way to read the statement is to view it as applying only to non-relational ideas (Newman 2008, 139–140). A third way is to consider "ideas" in the passage taken *broadly* as mere affective mental items, their truth or falsity not being an issue. Issues of falsity arise only when "idea" is taken in the strict sense, as relating to something real (Brown 2008, 198).

I see this puzzlement coming from misunderstanding Descartes's description of different meanings of 'idea' and from failing to take the meditative exercise seriously. Descartes's description of ideas materially is an umbrella class – any mental item is an idea in this broad understanding. A loose slab of marble and a bust of Pallas share the same material composition by the previous analogy. In a similar vein, ideas, so to speak, are composed of my thinking, whether they were thought acts, volitions, affections or representational content. (Cf. Sinokki 2015, 122, 125.) It is also clear that the meditator's discussion of "ideas considered solely in themselves" refers to the formally taken content ideas, as the following example of thinking of goats and chimeras demonstrates

My suggested reading of the passage is that we are to treat the content of the ideas *inside* the Cartesian *epochē*; that is, consider them merely as modes of our thought – as mere *experience* – and suspend judgment on whether they "stand for" or "represent" anything outside of our thinking, bracketing their truth value. "If I considered just the ideas themselves as modes of my thought, without referring them to anything else, they could scarcely give me any material for error" (AT VII, 37; CSM II, 26). We tend to spontaneously judge the contents of our thoughts, volitions, and affects as referring to "things outside us" – consider them not as modes of thought but as modes of extension (see chapters 3.4.1, 5.2.2). Judging ideas to have external equivalents, when they might not, runs the risk of assenting to falsehood. Suspending judgment on the real existence of the content objects of my thought and leaving open the question whether they

correlate with external reality or not, protects me from falsity and from erring in my thinking. Whether or not there are goats with the head of a lion, or brontosauruses with the head of a horse, it is nevertheless the creature that I am thinking of or imagining at the moment, that is, it is the content of the current idea I am having.[21]

What Descartes calls falsity in the strict or *formal* (*formalem)* sense occurs, by the above reading, only in judgments – it is the case of coming to a false conclusion, like performing an invalid inference (AT VII, 43; CSM II, 30). This formal falsity differs from the earlier mentioned material falsity, when there is a possible error in the content itself, a sort of a false premise ("I seem to feel cold on its own, but what the content 'cold' might be is just the absence of the feeling of warmth"). One can make a valid conclusion from a false premise, but it does not take us any closer to the truth of the matter. One should remember that falsity for Descartes is the negation or privation of truth – it is the lack of some crucial piece, making us participate (*participare*) in *non-being* (e.g., AT VII, 54–55, 60–62; CSM II, 38, 42–43).[22] Thus, both formal and material falsity is the absence of something that should be there – the possible lack of equivalent reality in the formal sense or the missing of proper content in the material sense. (See also AT VII, 231–235; CSM II, 162–164.[23] Cf. Sinokki 2015, 119.)

Reading the above passage on the lack of falsity in the ideas from the viewpoint of the genuine cognitive exercise of Cartesian *epochē* clarifies why "ideas in themselves" are not bearers of truth and falsity. Taking them as merely modes of one's mind severs the possible connection to "things outside us" and makes sense of the claim that formal falsity takes place only in judgments.[24]

6.1.4. Chief and Most Common Mistake: Natural Impulses vs. Clear and Distinct Perception

The meditator concludes that from the restricted view of the cognitive exercise, her *chief and most common mistake* (*praecipuus & frequentissimus error*) has been to judge that her ideas

[21] Introspective transparency is possible but only by *worked out* C&D perception of thoughts. Cf. Paul 2018.
[22] It should be noted that negation and privation are not synonymous terms. A *negation* is me lacking something which I could have but which does not belong to me by my very nature (e.g., a tail with humans). A *privation* is possessing an impaired nature, deprived of something which one ought to have (e.g., sight with humans). This distinction becomes very relevant in relation to God's potential deception. See the Fourth Meditation: AT VII, 56 & IX, 43; CSM II, 38–39.
[23] Intriguingly, Descartes refers to Suárez here (*DM* 9, s.2, §4). I return to material and formal falsity below. For the discussion on material falsity, see, e.g., M. Wilson 1978, 110–117; Ariew 2005, 79; 2011, 49; Scholl 2006, 55–63; Wee 2006.
[24] The reading also questions the formal sense of ideas connecting thinking with reality (e.g., Brown 2008). This connection, I argue, comes from them possessing *objective reality* in relation to their content. See below.

resemble (*similes*) or conform to (*conformes*) things located outside of herself. Descartes explains to Clerselier that by restricting the discussion to the formal experience inside the Cartesian *epochē*, he is capable of forestalling the atheistic objection that the meditator's concept of God would be a chimera. Even chimerical ideas – ideas that contain no reality and have no existing equivalents – do not contain falsehood in themselves in this restricted experience sense (AT V, 354; CSMK, 376).

In the seventh paragraph, the meditator classifies ideas based on apparent origins.

> Among my ideas, some appear to be innate, some to be adventitious[25], and others to have been invented by me. My understanding of what a thing is, what truth is, and what thought is, seems to derive simply from my own nature. But my hearing a noise, as I do now, or seeing the sun, or feeling the fire, comes from things which are located outside me, or so I have hitherto judged. Lastly, sirens, hippogriffs and the like are my own invention. (AT VII, 37–38; CSM II, 26.)

Ideas can be considered to belong to three different classes: *innate* (*innatae*), so born with me; *adventitious* (*adventitiae*), so seemingly coming from foreign objects separate from myself (what I "as it were sense"), and *invented* (*factae*), so created by myself. Ideas would then originate from the three sources the mediator previously recognised: the reason, the senses, and the imagination. However, this is only what appears (*videntur*) to her; they could just as well be acquired from only one source. She is, after all, still largely unaware of her ideas' true origins. "But perhaps all my ideas may be thought of as adventitious, or they may all be innate, or all made up; for as yet I have not clearly perceived their true origin" (AT VII, 38; CSM II, 26; cf. AT III, 383; CSMK, 183–184).

The change of discussion from the truth and falsity of the meditator's modes of thought to the origins of her ideas may seem somewhat abrupt. However, the distinction between innate, adventitious, and invented ideas is crucial for the overall argument concerning God's existence. Descartes expands on the nature of innate ideas and the distinction in the *Comments*:

> I have never written or taken the view that the mind requires innate ideas which are something distinct from its own faculty of thinking. I did, however, observe that there were certain thoughts within me which neither came to me from external objects nor were determined by my will, but which solely came from the power of thinking within me; so I applied the term 'innate' to the ideas or notions which are the forms of these thoughts in order to distinguish them from others, which I called 'adventitious' or 'made up'. (AT VIIIB, 357–358; CSM I, 303.)

Descartes does not consider innate ideas to include only general natures (such as the concept of truth) separated from the mind's ability to think but also the *forms* of thought

[25] The French reads: "*étrangères et venir de dehors* (foreign and coming from outside)".

content that one is aware of. Even if we consider the content of our experience as merely a feature of our thinking, separated from whether it conforms with anything existing, we cannot but notice clear differences between that content. An apple that I "as it were sense" is clearly different from the concept of an apple that I think about, as well as from an imagined apple that I picture to be pink. Descartes's point is that at least some of this experience appears non-malleable by my will and not coming from elsewhere but originating as part of my nature as a thinking being. Similar to the painter analogy passage in the First Meditation, the meditator recognises certain general and universal natures or concepts that shape and form her cognition (the main difference to the painter analogy is that the meditator does not consider these natures to be necessarily related to anything real anymore; cf. chapter 4.2.3).

Of course, the features in question have a major part to play in the causal proofs for God's existence, as Descartes points out to Clerselier: "[I had to distinguish] the ideas which are born with us from those which come from elsewhere, or are made by us, in order to forestall those who might say that the idea of God is made by us or acquired by hearing others speak of him" (AT V, 354; CSMK, 376). Whereas the earlier forestalling was for a seemingly atheistic objection, this one is specifically directed to empiricist and materialist rebuttals. Both Hobbes and Gassendi raise a counter argument related to this, and a version of it can likewise be found in Regius's *Broadsheet*. Descartes stoutly, though not always patiently, denies these objections. (AT VII, 186–188, 286, 364, VIIIB, 345, 360–361; CSM I, 296, 305, II, 131–132, 199–200, 251–252) Awareness of God's existence is, for him, as native to cognitive beings as thinking itself is – an important feature of our innate nature.

However, the class of ideas the meditator is to concentrate for now on is the adventitious one: "[T]he chief (*praecipue*) question at this point concerns the ideas which I take to be derived from things existing outside me: what is my reason for thinking that they resemble these things?" (AT VII, 38; CSM II, 26). Her chief and most common mistake has been to judge these ideas as resembling things located 'outside of her'; thus, the meditator ponders what made her make such a judgment. Her first conclusion is that it seems to be "teaching of nature (*doctus a naturâ*)". Additionally, her acquaintance with them has shown that, like the seemingly innate ones and unlike the one's she invented, these ideas are not simply dependent on her will but rise in her experience involuntarily. "[N]ow, for example, I feel the heat whether I want to or not, and this is why I think that this sensation or idea of heat comes to me from something other than myself, namely the heat of the fire by which I am sitting" (AT VII, 38; CSM II, 26). The most obvious judgment from this, to her, is that the thing in question transmits (*immittere*) to her its own likeness (*similitudinem*) rather than anything else.

Descartes draws a distinction in the ninth paragraph between these teachings of nature and what has been revealed to the meditator "by some natural light (*lumine aliquo naturali*)". The meditator begins to analyse, whether her reasons for believing the adventitious ideas being transmitted and resembling external objects have been firm enough. She instantly concludes than instead of being meditated and well-thought out, like her reasons for doubt, or based on a strongly persuasive conviction, like her cognitive certainty of her own existence and nature as a thinking being, these teachings of nature seem to be based on a spontaneous impulse (*spontaneo impetus*). Taking them to be true is simply a habit acquired early on by her natural impulses (*impetus naturales*) of sensory reliance, without ever being reflected and meditated on. (AT VII, 38–39; CSM II, 26–27.)

The meditator also recognises that she has "often judged in the past that [the natural impulses] were pushing [her] in the wrong direction when it was a question of choosing the good" (AT VII, 39; CSM II, 27). She famously gives an example of such pushing in the Sixth Meditation:

> "[R]egarding those very things which nature presents to me as objects which I should seek out or avoid, and also regarding the internal sensations where I seem to have detected errors – e.g., when someone is tricked by the pleasant taste of some food into eating the poison concealed inside it.[26] […] [W]hat the man's nature urges him to go for is simply what is responsible for the pleasant taste, and not the poison [it knows nothing of]." (AT VII, 83–84; CSM II, 58.)

We have grown accustomed to follow certain native inclinations and habitually trust them to be beneficial. However, there can be cases where what nature has taught us might be harmful, even morally questionable.[27] These impulses are clearly not free of error; thus, the meditator cannot trust them in cases of truth and falsehood (i.e., what is real and not), either. She then compares them to "what is revealed [to her] by the natural light – for example that from the fact that I am doubting it follows that I exist", which "cannot in anyway be open to doubt" (AT VII, 39; CSM II, 27).

The reference to "natural light (*lumine naturali*)" is an infamously difficult notion, one that gains more prominence in the First Causal argument for God's existence. As such, I will return to this obscure Cartesian doctrine in the analysis of the First Causal argument. However, here in the preliminary discussion, the notion of *lumine naturali*

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[26] French adds "*et ainsi que je suis directement tromé par ma nature* (as if I have been directly deceived by my nature)".

[27] See AT XI, 430; CSM I, 376. Cf. Alanen 2003, 198–202; Yrjönsuuri 2019, 70, note 6. In Sixth Meditation, the meditator considers a body suffering from dropsy as an example of a distorted nature. Comparing dropsy case with madness in the First Meditation clarifies how the distorted nature of insanity fits with the non-deceptive nature of God. Cf. chapter 7.3.3.

appears to be nothing more complicated than the intuitive clear and distinct perception, as the reference to the Second Meditation *cogito* passage reveals.[28] The comparison, then, is between our ordinary common-sense teachings of nature, which, while habitual and reasonable, do not appear rationally compelling, and our meditated cognitive peak, which is so rationally compelling that it seems to include no room for doubt while being apprehended. Both are clearly part of our nature, but only one appears to get things right convincingly and reliably (at least, while the metaphysical exercise is still going on). (Cf. chapter 2.5.2.)

Of course, the meditator is quite unequivocal that what is revealed by the natural light has no room for doubt *at all*, which can question my reading of it as the same as clear and distinct perception. According to my interpretation, after all, clarity and distinctness can be open for doubt, at least reflectively. However, the meditator's confidence can be seen to be referring to a strongly persuasive clear and distinct perception *at the moment* it is perceived. She states herself that "[t]here cannot be another faculty both as trustworthy as the natural light and also capable of showing me that such things are not true" (AT VII, 38–39; CSM II, 27). We have nothing better at our disposal for distinguishing truth from falsehood than our cognitive peak. We are so convinced when experiencing such a peak not only that something psychologically "feels" true but also that we actually *grasp* something in reality that we cannot but assent that it is, indeed, the case. No room for doubt exists at that moment, which opens up only afterwards, when the cognitive peak fades and we reflect on whether what we experienced was indeed the truth. We realise by concentrating merely on our own native abilities that we do not seem to have anything better and are left to trust this illusive peak experience, no matter how faulty it might be.[29] Compared to our natural inclinations, we have only suspected that it might be in error and have not actually caught it to be in error.[30]

The meditator continues the critique of her previous habitual judgments in the following three chapters. She realises it does not necessarily follow that the ideas originate from things that are separate from her just because they are indeterminable to/independent from her will. Her natural impulses seem similarly to oppose her will, as the First Meditation made clear when "despite her wishes" the habitual inclinations pulled her assent so strongly that she had to invent an imaginary scenario of a Deceiving Demon to counter the pull and equalise her will (AT VII, 22; CSM II, 15). Nevertheless,

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[28] The reference is to 'I exist', not to 'I think', as revealed by the emphasis on the free agency of doubting.
[29] The French emphasizes the peak as an active ability by adding "*faculté, ou puissance* (faculty or power)".
[30] In the Sixth Meditation, as we gain a better understanding of our nature and God as its author, these natural impulses turn out to likewise include at least some truth. However, the genuine teachings of nature need to be separated from so-called *habitual false beliefs*. (AT VII, 77–78 & 82; CSM II, 54 & 56.) I return to this topic in chapter 8.1.

these impulses are part of her nature, so she might have another power that she is unaware of that produces the ideas without having to rely on things "located outside", as she has thought to be the case with dreaming. These ideas, then, could simply be a feature of her cognition, just as dreaming is. Likewise, even if the ideas did come from foreign sources, it does not follow, either, that they must resemble those things. Indeed, she notes having discovered disparity between an object and its idea in many cases, for example, in the two ideas of the sun she seems to possess. The senses testify the sun to be small, but her innate astronomical reasoning reveals it to be several times larger than the earth, and her reason persuades her that the idea that appears to directly emanate from the sun itself bears no actual resemblance to it.[31] (AT VII, 39; CSM II, 27.)

This discussion forms the climax of the criticism of Aristotelian epistemic optimism and Resemblance Picture of Sensation (RPS) that began in the First Meditation and was developed further in the Second (cf. chapters 4.1.2 and 5.1.1). The meditator concludes that the reason for her "chief and most common mistake" was threefold: 1) It was a spontaneous impulse based on custom and habit of nature, 2) the ideas in question appeared impervious to her will, and 3) she assumed the objects she experienced to transmit their likeness and not something else. Now, the meditator finds each of these reasons to be unfounded and concludes there is no meditated and convincing reason for making such judgement. This again lays the groundwork for God's existence as Descartes emphasises to Clerselier: "[T]he reason why I insisted on our lack of certainty concerning the convictions that arise from all the ideas which we think come from outside was in order to show that there is no single idea which gives such certain knowledge as the one we have of God" (AT V, 354; CSMK, 376–377).

These passages also indicate the meditator's progress with the exercise. She still found herself confidently assenting to "habitual opinions" in the First Meditation, considering them "in a sense doubtful" but "highly probable" (AT VII, 22; CSM II, 15). Now she realises their hold on her was not based on well-founded confidence or compelling reasons but on a "blind impulse" that "there exist things distinct from myself which transmit to me ideas or images of themselves through the sense organs or some other way" (AT VII, 40; CSM II, 27). She assents to them out of habit rather than reliable judgment and does not find them as plausible or reasonable anymore.[32]

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[31] This does come across as a rather weak argument and both Hobbes and Gassendi were quick to point out that there appears to be only one idea of the sun perceived from different perspectives, just as there is only one idea of the tower perceived from different distances (AT VII, 184, 283–284, 363–364; CSM II, 129–130, 197–198, 251). Descartes's point, though, seems to be that since we cannot see or "seem to see" the sun at a close distance, the concept of the sun we have through the senses differs significantly from the one we can reason to; thus, the case is not the same as with the tower.

[32] This progress later culminates in the Fourth Meditation in which the meditator regards these teachings of nature as merely "probable conjectures" (AT VII, 589; CSM II, 41). Cf. chapters 3.3.4 and 4.5.

6.2. God's Existence: First Causal Argument

The meditator's analysis of her previous reasons for considering things as 'located outside of herself' has revealed them to have been rather weak. "In so far as the ideas are simply modes of thought, there is no recognizable inequality among them; they appear to come from within me in the same fashion" (AT VII, 40; CSM II, 27–28). Considering ideas simply as a cognitive feature reveals no recognisable (*agnoscere*) inequality to their origin. Instead of being caused by something foreign and external to me, I myself could be their cause, just as I am the cause of my own thinking. Maybe my free agency is greater than originally thought, and the ideas are created by my will and imaginative power. Or, even if I do not actively invent the said ideas, they might originate simply from my own natural disposition and be innate (just as the concept of thinking seems to be). As far as I know, I could be causally responsible even for my own innate nature by possessing a power I am not yet aware of.[33]

The purpose of the causal arguments is to have the meditator recognise that 1) there is at least one concept she does not cause (the concept of God) and 2) she is not causally responsible for either her nature or her existence. Thus far, the meditator has cognitive certainty of her existence, her nature as something that thinks, and that her thinking has certain content, regardless of whether the content carries existence outside of her thought. The meditator can only use resources that are indubitable at the moment they are perceived; thus, the first argument begins from her thinking (she possesses a concept of God) and the second from her existence. The First Causal argument aims to prove that the idea of God is not invented but innate in a unique way that only God can cause that idea. The meditator could cause every other idea including angels, other people, even extension and thinking, but not the idea of God. The causal arguments reveal a divide between Descartes and his Scholastic predecessors on how we cognise God. For the late Scholastics such as Aquinas, our cognition of God (in this life) is limited and mediated, not reaching God's full nature or essence (see chapter 3.1.1). For Descartes, we have direct cognitive access not only to God's existence but also to his nature. (Cf. Nolan & Nelson 2006, 105–106; Nolan 2014, 128–130; Carriero 2009, 175–176.)

The causal arguments for God's existence, as mentioned in the beginning, are some of the most challenging content in all of the *Meditations*. They were mostly considered unconvincing and doomed to failure among contemporaries[34] and cause even greater

[33] The matter relates to what I call the Principle of Causal Dependence: Whatever exists must have a cause for its existence. It also relates to what I call the Principle of Causal Adequacy: The said cause must have at least as much "reality" as its effect. See below. Cf. Cottingham 1986, 49; Dicker 2013, 34, 117, 276.
[34] See, e.g., the First Objections (AT VII, 92–95; CSM ÌI, 66–69) and the aftermath of Gassendi's Counter-Objections in the *Disquisito* (Letter to Clerselier, 12 January 1646: AT XI, 209; CSM II, 273).

aversion today. Even readers sympathetic to Descartes's quest typically cannot help but feel that things begin unravelling when the proof for God's existence becomes topical (Cunning 2010, 112; Nolan 2014, 127). It is no wonder, then, that several commentators have preferred to build the case for Cartesian metaphysical knowledge without having to appeal to God's existence (e.g., Kenny 1968; Cottingham 1986; Della Rocca 2005).

These attempts, however, come across as questionable more often than not. Descartes was clearly very proud of his causal proofs for God's existence and considered them to have conclusively settled the question (cf. the First Replies: AT VII, 120; CSM II, 85). Therefore, we should not too easily give up on trying to understand their content. The importance of God's necessary existence for knowledge in the *scientia* sense can likewise be seen when considering the driving motivation behind the *Meditations*. The atheistic skeptic would be more than content with the conclusions drawn at the end of the Second and the preliminary discussion of the Third. She can have cognitive certainty that she exists, thinks, and "as it were" senses many things considered as mere features of her cognitive nature. However, Descartes's intended Cartesian *scientist*, whom he expects the meditator to morph into during the meditative exercise, cannot be content with this mere persuasive conviction. It might still just be wrongly placed confidence in an erroneous belief, not imperviously certain knowledge. Before God's existence and nature are concluded, we do not know anything in the full sense of the word.[35]

6.2.1. Principle of Causal Dependence and Principle of Causal Adequacy

Descartes has paved the ground for the path to God's existence with the preliminary discussion and has counted for certain atheistic, empirical-materialist, and Aristotelian objections. Now, the tracing of God's native signature in the meditator's mental landscape can begin. She starts this tracing by discovering an alternative way to study the ideas she possesses. "[I]t now occurs to me that there is another way of investigating whether some of the things which I possess ideas of exist outside me (*extra me existent*)" (AT VII, 40; CSM II, 27). Descartes clarifies what he means by this other way (*alia via*) in the Letter to Clerselier: "I could not have said 'there is another way' (*autre voye*) if I had not first turned down (*reiettè*) all the others and thus prepared my readers to understand what I was about to write" (AT V, 355; CSMK, 377; translation modified). The meditator has turned down the Aristotelian-empirical way as faulty and based on

[35] See chapter 1.2.3. I return to the atheist and the scientist in chapter 7.3.1 Cf. Forsman 2019.

custom rather than deep insight, but while ideas as modifications of one's thinking appear to be equal, they differ in regard to the *content* they represent.[36]

> "[I]n so far as different ideas represent (*repraesentat*) different things, it is clear that they differ widely. Undoubtedly, the ideas which represent substances to me amount to something more and, so to speak, contain within themselves more *objective reality* (*realitatis objectivae*) than the ideas which merely represent modes or (*sive*) accidents". (AT VII, 40; CSM II, 28. Emphasis added.)

The "other way" shifts the discussion of ideas from material and formal to taking them *objectively* as the represented content itself. Ideas considered as modes of the mind are caused simply by the meditator's thought, but considering merely their contents reveals them as sort of "reality" inside the mind, possibly requiring external causes. (AT VII, 8 & 233; CSM II, 7 & 163. Cf. Nolan 2014, 137; Sinokki 2015, 125.) This is a crucial step in discovering God's authorship, since the idea of "a supreme God, eternal, infinite, […] the creator of all things that exist apart from him, certainly has in it more objective reality than the ideas that represent finite substances" (AT VII, 40; CSM II, 28).

The causal arguments depend upon two general principles: *Principle of Causal Dependence* (PCD) and *Principle of Causal Adequacy* (PCA). The Causal Dependence Principle is neither unintuitive nor a big divergence from the historical canon. It merely states that everything existing has some cause for its existence. Thus, it is simply a rephrasing of the Scholastic *ex nihilo, nihil fit* and a version of what was known as the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) in later 17th century metaphysics.[37] The Causal Adequacy Principle, that the cause must have at least as much (reality) as the effect, in contrast, appears archaic, obscure, and even bizarre at first hand. However, I argue that even this is not the case, and we can see the force behind these assumptions by simplifying Descartes's argument.

One could question, how the meditator can make assumptions like these. Is she not to suspend from everything due to the Third Level of doubt? Yet, her cognitive success has revealed that some perceptions include such peak clarity and distinctness that she must give her assent. The inherent nature of these perceptions, as previously discussed is so strongly persuasive that the meditator cannot doubt them while presently attending to them, being intuitive and epistemically self-evident. In the fourteenth paragraph, the meditator realizes that both PCD and PCA are among these cognitive peaks.

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[36] Note that the representation of an apple is simply *having a way to think* about an apple. Cf. Carriero 2009, 169, note 2.

[37] PSR was relied on by Spinoza and, especially Leibniz in their respective philosophies: Everything that exists, must have a reason for existence. See, e.g., Melamed & Lin 2020. While Descartes's PCD is a close cousin of PSR, his view of God's *non-motivationally indifferent* creation of eternal truths does not fit with the general PSR. See chapter 3.4.1.

> [I]t is manifest by the natural light that there must be at least as much (fr. add. *realité*) in the efficient and total cause as in the effect of that cause. For where, I ask, could the effect get its reality from, if not from the cause. And how could the cause give it to the effect unless it possessed it? It follows from this both that *something cannot arise from nothing*,[38] and also that *what is more perfect* – that is, contains in itself more reality – *cannot arise from what is less perfect*. (AT VII, 40–41; CSM II, 28. Emphasis added.)

Natural light, as previously mentioned, is infamously obscure and has garnered complicated explanations over the years in relation to the causal arguments. However, Descartes explains this notion in relatively simple terms in the *Principia*: "[T]he natural light or faculty of cognition (*cognoscendi facultatem*) […] can never encompass any object which is not true in so far as it is indeed encompassed by this faculty […] in so far as it is clearly and distinctly perceived" (I, §30: AT VIIIA, 16; CSM I, 203; translation modified). According to this passage, the light of nature or natural light is the very power of my thinking by which the C&D cognitive peaks are obtained (see Dicker 2013, 146; cf. Hatfield 2007, 156–157). The capacity can also be attained by the cognitive success of the Second Meditation even before concluding God's existence and non-deceiving nature: Regardless of what my clear and distinct perceptions turn out to be, I experience their peak persuasion whenever I properly use my cognitive powers. This capacity could be called 'natural light'. Descartes once again guides the meditator to follow what she intuitively perceives by the seemingly successful use of her cognitive prowess by which she already discovered that the principle of non-contradiction is included in her peak cognitions (AT VII, 36; CSM II, 25). Now, she discovers causal principles, concluding a few paragraphs later: "[t]he longer and more careful[ly] I examine all these points, the more clearly and distinctly I recognize their truth" (AT VII, 42; CSM II, 29).

PCD, as argued, does not require a large cognitive leap. If something exists, it ought to have some cause, otherwise it popped out of nothing. However, "nothing" has no causal powers and, therefore, cannot be a cause. PCA, despite its apparent abstruseness, can be similarly derived. If some existence had something more (power, reality, perfection, etc) than its cause, that extra factor would have had to emerge from nothing. "Nothing" has no causal powers; therefore, it cannot cause what is incremental in the effect (Second Replies: AT VII, 135; CSM II, 97; cf. Nolan & Nelson 2006, 108).

We should pause here briefly to discuss the relation of causality and skepticism. It is good to remember that the skeptical scenarios that feed the meditator's suspension of

[38] Strictly speaking, both a *positive* (something cannot exist without a cause) and a *negative* (nothing cannot be a cause) principles are at work here. Descartes invokes them both at different places. Later on, Hume famously argued that we cannot conclude one of these principles from the other (*T* I, iii, 3). Some have questioned whether Descartes conflates the two (e.g., Dicker 2013, 139–144). However, the meditator clearly and distinctly cognises both the positive and the negative principle (AT VII, 164–165; CSM II, 116). Cf. Christofidou 2013, 97–98; Nolan 2014, 132, note 16.

judgment are causal by nature. They all tell a causal story on how my judgment is potentially erroneous either due to illusions, dreaming or the origin of my nature by divine or mundane means. This relation between causality and my reasons for doubt plays a role in the cognitive exercise, especially with the resolution of the Third Level doubt. However, this does not mean that the reasons *rely* on causality in such a way that causality cannot be doubted. The causal story in these reasons, specifically in the origin of my nature, is vague enough to allow room for doubting even my perception of causality. For example, take the Deceiving God/Imperfect Nature doubt. The scenario does explain the source of my erroneous nature, but I cannot make stable conclusions on how the said causality works or whether there even is such causality due to that inherently erroneous nature (cf. Hatfield 2007, 92–93). Nevertheless, if I follow what I keenly attend to be the case, I compellingly assent to both PCD and PCA.

If the thought behind PCD and PCA can be understood, where does the controversy on the causal arguments arrive from? The most controversial aspect of the argumentation is undoubtedly the further conclusion derived from the PCA: Descartes thinks that causal adequacy applies not only to the case of formal effects, with everything existing requiring a cause with at least as much formal reality, but also to cases of *objective reality*, with the objective reality of an idea requiring a cause with as much formal (actual) or eminent (higher form) reality as is in the idea objectively. The discussion here relates to the meditator's previous notion that reality is *scaled*. Modes are causally dependent on substances, thus, modes have less reality, both formally in existence and objectively in the mental content, than substances. This conclusion requires no actual substances or modes to exist but can be derived simply from the meditator's concepts. To be a mode is, in part, to be dependent, and to be a substance is, in part, to be depended upon. Similarly, an infinite God and the concept of such include more reality, both formally and objectively, than a finite substance or its concept, this conclusion simply depending upon the meditator's concepts of infinity and finitude.[39] (AT VII, 40–42; CSM II, 28–29; Christofidou 2013, 93–97. Cf. chapter 1.1.)

Why would we think that reality *is* scaled like this? More importantly, why would the causal scaling extend from the world into our mental concepts? The thought of degrees of reality has obvious predecessors in both ancient and Medieval thought, from Plato and Aristotle to the Scholastic doctrine of a continuous scale of beings running all the way to God (cf. C. Wilson 2003, 89–90; Nolan 2014, 134). Yet, even for these traditions, Descartes's formal reality–objective reality causal model seems odd (see Caterus: AT VII, 92–94; CSM II, 66–68; cf. Carriero 2009, 185). Comparingly, today we tend to think

[39] Of course, modes are *ontologically* dependent on substances, like finite substances are on God (but not on each other).

of reality more simply: Something either exists or it does not. For Descartes, however, the same existence and reality can come in two distinct ways, as actual beings in the world and as concepts in one's thought, and allow degrees of more or less perfection or completeness. The first part is not too foreign even today (think of metaphysics of fictional characters) but why would anyone be convinced of the latter (cf., e.g., Hobbes: AT VII, 185; CSM II, 130)?

Firstly, compared to previous traditions, Descartes's scaled reality is less complex and closer to our way of thinking. Reality admits only a three-part scale: modal reality, finite substance reality, and infinite substance reality. Secondly, and this is the main point, Descartes does not really have to rely on the formal–objective model with the causal arguments. In fact, they can be phrased without most of the Scholastic argumentative baggage. I will do just this in what follows, diverting the overly Scholastic discussion and clarifying Descartes's argument for God's existence in simpler terms.[40]

6.2.2. Causal Origins of Ideas

If the argument can be put more simply, why does not Descartes do so? What reason there could be to intentionally obfuscate one of the most, if not *the* most, important points of the cognitive exercise? Certain previous parts have demonstrated that while the meditator has progressed with the exercise, she still tends to think in empirical and imagistic fashion regardless of whether we consider her as an Aristotelian, a naïf, an atheistic skeptic, or a mechanist (e.g., AT VII, 37; CSM II, 25–26). Given her empirical tendencies, she is likely to assume herself to be the cause of her non-sensory ideas, such as that of God, and the critique of the RPS model has made her realise that even her sensory ideas might not be externally caused. Thus, she could very well have caused and compounded all of her ideas.

The more obtuse argument is to help the meditator, already skeptical of the Resemblance Picture but still mostly engaged in imagistic thinking, dislodge the last remnants of her previous views and appreciate the absolute perfection and infinity in the idea of God. In the rest of the fourteenth and then in the fifteenth paragraph, the meditator exhibits this imagistic thinking by giving sensory based examples of her persuasion to the formal–objective model.

> A stone […] which previously did not exist, cannot begin to exist unless it is produced by something which contains, either formally or eminently everything to be found in the

[40] This is not to say the model is not important for Cartesian metaphysics, just that the causal arguments do not rely on it.

> stone; similarly, heat cannot be produced in an object which was not previously hot, except by something of at least the same order of perfection as heat […]. But it is also true that the idea of heat, or of a stone, cannot exist in me unless it is put there by some cause which contains at least as much reality as I conceive to be in the heat or in the stone. […] [T]he ideas in me are like images which can easily fall short of the perfection of the things from which they are taken, but which cannot contain anything greater or more perfect. (AT VII, 41–42; CSM II, 28–29.)

The sensory imagistic examples unfortunately tend to confuse the matter more than clarify it. Descartes's contemporaries clearly struggled with the imagistic examples, mixing ideas to be literally corporeal images (see Hobbes: AT VII, 179–181; CSM II, 126–127), and the French edition is riddled with additions and explanations to these parts (though, in many cases, without really clarifying anything).[41] However, the underlying thought is not overly complicated. An idea of a primary quality (e.g., the form of the sun) is not the cause of that quality in formal reality. Similarly, a horse-headed brontosaurus cannot create me or the idea of itself in me, but I can create (an idea of) a horse-headed brontosaurus. Still, Descartes cannot just abandon the imagistic discussion because of the serious meditative nature of the exercise. The sensory image account is risky and allows for misunderstandings, but some misunderstandings are unavoidable. Descartes cares more to give enough material for the attentive meditator to move away from an imagistic understanding in order to discover the idea of God non-imagistically than to avoid misunderstanding and make malignant reading difficult (AT VII, 181; CSM II, 128). (Cf. AT VII, 9–10; CSM II, 8; Nolan 2014, 130, 139.)

Based on the previous train of thought, the meditator concludes that if at least one of her ideas includes objective reality in such form that it could not have gained it from her formal existence, she could not be the cause of that idea due to PCA. Thus, something other than herself would have to exist to cause it. However, if no such idea is to be found, she appears to have no convincing argument for the existence of anything apart from herself. "For despite a most careful and comprehensive survey, this is the only argument I have so far been able to find" (AT VII, 42; CSM II, 19). This exercise, then, is the last-ditch effort to secure something more stable than fleeting conviction.

It is good to notice that the meditator has not progressed any further from her cognitive success in the Second Meditation. She is merely applying terms and concepts to what she clearly and distinctly perceives in herself. That the ideas and concepts she possesses appear hierarchical tells nothing certain of the metaphysical hierarchies outside her thought (cf. C. Wilson 2003, 90; Nolan & Nelson 2006, 106). Indeed, as the

[41] For example, in the description of objective reality, the French adds "*c'est-à-dire participant par representation à plus de degrés d'être ou de perfection* (that is participate by representation in a higher degree of being or perfection)". Cf. C. Wilson 2003, 89.

following five paragraphs argue, the meditator could cause most of her ideas, including corporeal nature, angels, animals, and other humans. Descartes relies here on an intuitive thought process similar to what was prominent in the First Meditation's painter analogy (AT VII, 19–20; CSM II, 13–14): Invented ideas are formed by taking other ideas, or their elements, and compounding them in novel ways. I can create an idea representing a horse-headed brontosaurus due to possessing the ideas of a horse and a brontosaurus and a capacity to match these together (cf. Fifth Replies: AT VII, 362; CSM II, 250). What has changed from the painter analogy, though, is that the meditator no longer considers that even the basic and simple elements of these ideas have to be externally caused. Her ideas of other humans, animals, and so on represent finite things, and she herself appears to be a finite being, so she could cause them by combining aspects of the ideas representing herself and extended corporeality. Even ideas of angels could be invented by borrowing elements of the ideas representing herself and God, because angels represent creatures more perfect than herself but less perfect than God (the idea of God here is not perceived clearly and distinctly but more in terms of 'limitless' or indefinite, see chapter 7.1). (Cf. Nelson 1997; Nolan 2014, 133.)

The same applies even to her clear and distinct ideas of spatial-corporeal nature as extension, as she discovered in the wax exercise of the Second Meditation (AT VII, 30–32; CSM II, 20–21). Despite the idea of her own nature as a thinking being not including corporeal notions such as shape, size, position, and motion, these notions are simply modes of a finite substance and, thus, can be derived from her or contained in her eminently. However, she also notices other aspects of corporeal nature that she only has confused and obscure ideas about, such as light, colour, rest, sound, smell, taste, heat, and cold. Of these, she is not even certain whether the content they represent is accurate or materially false. For example, heat and cold express themselves as separate things, whereas one could be merely the absence of the other. The same applies to light and darkness or motion and rest. Such ideas do not require a distinct cause from the meditator, because, if materially false, they are simply negations and arise from her imperfection, and even if they are accurate, they clearly contain so little reality that they are difficult to even distinguish from the absence of a thing.[42]

The meditator also includes substance, duration, and number as parts of the extended nature she has a clear and distinct idea of. As with other aspects of extended

[42] A further clarification: Since heat for Descartes is the motion of particles and cold is simply their lack of motion, the content of the idea representing cold is materially false as it represents absence inaccurately as a distinct "thing". We can suspect this even before we know whether neither heat nor cold has external reality outside of our thinking. In contrast, my idea of a horse-headed brontosaurus, though invented by me and most probably without thought-external reality, is not materially false as it accurately represents its contents (a horse-headed brontosaurus). Cf. C. Wilson 2003, 92–93.

nature, she could have merely borrowed these from her own nature: She perceives that she exists at the moment and has done so for a while (at least as long as her clear perception endures), that her thoughts are dependent on her as a thinking being, and that she can count her various thoughts. Here, for the first time, the meditator describes herself to be a (finite) "substance". Is the meditator making an unjustified metaphysical assumption here? By a standard reading of the metaphysical hierarchy, she would be. The meditator is not in a position to make metaphysical claims on whether she can independently sustain her existence (and indeed, as the Second Causal argument clarifies, she actually cannot). Moreover, many have pointed out (e.g., Kenny 1968, 134; Dicker 2013, 138–139; cf. Nolan 2014, 137) that modes depend on finite substances in a very different way than finite substances depend on the infinite substance: A finite substance is not a substance without properties; thus, no finite substance can exist independently from modes, whereas an infinite substance can exist independently from finite substances (see *Principia* I, §§60–61: AT VIIIA, 28–30; CSM I, 213–214).[43]

However, the meditator may describe herself as a substance in a less metaphysically robust way. Instead of assuming herself completely independent, she can take herself to be a substance in the sense that her thoughts are dependent on her; they would not exist if she, the thinking agent, did not exist. Recalling the wax exercise, the meditator recognised that the piece of wax had a degree of independence from its properties (shape, size, consistency). Those properties changed, yet it continued to be the same wax. Applying this to herself, she notes that she can have various thoughts and ideas, yet, endure as the same thinking being. Though she clearly differs from a stone or the wax, concepts of substance and mode (such as shape, size, extension, etc) are contained in her due to her being a finite substance with a degree of independence.[44] (AT VII, 42–45; CSM II, 29–31.)

The only idea left is the one representing God. In this idea, the meditator discovers objective infinity, independence, and power of such magnitude that the more she attends to these aspects, the more she recognises that she alone cannot be the cause of the idea. By the PCA, for her to possess this idea, an external source (God), with the same magnitude of formal reality, must exist. "[F]rom what has been said, it must be concluded that God necessarily exists" (AT VII, 45; CSM II, 31).

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[43] In metaphysical lingo, there is only a *modal distinction* between modes and finite substances, while there is a *real distinction* between finite and infinite substances.

[44] The French translation specifically calls back to the wax: "*et comme les vêtements sous lesquels la substance corporelle nous paraît* (and as it were the garments under which corporeal substances appear to us)". Note that the meditator counts extension as one of the modes of corporeal substance, indicating that she is still largely confused about substances in the sense of Cartesian metaphysics. Cf. Nolan & Nelson 2006, 110; Cunning 2010, 109; Dicker 2013, 138–139, note 25.

6.2.3. Idea of God

It is important to notice that to form the core of the First Causal argument, the meditator needs not to rely on the formal-objective model. All it takes from her is to recognise that her idea of God represents an *actually* infinite substance, and that this actual infinity in her could be caused *only* by a substance that is actually infinite (AT VII, 45; CSM II, 31).[45] Distilled from the formal-objective discussion the core argument comprises of three clear and distinct steps, with a concluding fourth step:

1. In me exists an idea that represents an actually infinite being (God) with all perfections
2. PCD: Something that exists must have a cause for its existence
3. PCA: The only possible cause for this idea is an actually infinite being
4. Therefore, an actually infinite God exists

Step 2, as previously argued, is quite intuitive for the meditator and does not require much persuasion to be clearly and distinctly seen. It is steps 1 and 3 that pack the main force of the argument and require more work for her to grasp them clearly and distinctly (cf. Nolan 2014, 128, 134–135).

Step 1 is based on the idea of God being innate in the meditator's mind. A materialist or an atheist could object that we do not possess an idea of God, at least not a purported one, and at the very least Descartes would have to *argue* that we indeed do possess it (cf. Hobbes: AT VII, 179–180, 183; CSM II, 126–127, 129). Descartes would hark back that anyone who uses the word "God" in a sentence while understanding what they are saying, possesses the idea. "[I]f he had any conception corresponding to these expressions, […] he knew at the same time what was to be understood…" (Letter to Mersenne, July 1641: AT III, 392; CSMK, 185). This ingrained concept of God that has nothing to do with sensory material and includes all the perfections Christian theologians ascribe to God is a clear deviation from Scholastic thought, in which God's nature can only be cognised in mediate terms (e.g., as a negation or an analogy). Indeed, Descartes considers it an improvement that his argument for God's existence delivers us likewise a clear and distinct grasp of God's nature. The meditator, as discussed, requires awareness of not just God's existence but also of God's non-deceiving nature as the author of her disposition to overcome the Third Level of doubt.[46]

However, just because the idea is innate does not mean that it is always consciously present. Rather "we have within ourselves the faculty of summoning up the idea" (AT VII, 189; CSM II, 132). Descartes clarifies in the *Comments* that a certain idea, along with

[45] It was brought to my attention that God's actual infinity is, of course, objective reality. What I mean, is that we would recognise God's actual infinity even if it was not part of the formal-objective reality model.
[46] See chapter 3.1.1. Carriero (2009, 168–182) has extensively analysed Descartes's approach to God's nature compared to the Scholastic tradition of Aquinas. Cf. Nolan & Nelson 2006, 105; Nolan 2014, 130.

a capacity for summoning it up, being innate in us means that it exists in us *potentially* (AT VIIIB, 361; CSM I, 305). The idea of God is the clearest and most distinct idea that innately exists in us. However, we do not generally notice it because of our tendency to rely on sensory material objects. Nevertheless, just as the mind has a capacity to form ideas of external material things, it has a capacity (a potential power) to summon up the idea of God by concentrated and attentive meditative exercise (see the Second Replies: AT VII, 135–136; CSM II, 97; cf. Nolan 2014, 130–131). Because the idea is innate, Descartes does not have to argue for the meditator possessing it (presumably no argument would manage such a feat). He merely has to help her become aware of it to make her discover its contents.

Of course, as Descartes admits, it is possible that the exercise fails and the meditator does not become aware of the clear and distinct idea of God in herself, especially if she is lazy or inattentive. Even those who meditate faithfully might experience problems here due to the persistence of our sensory imagistic habits. "Some people will perhaps not notice [the implicit idea of God in them] even after reading the *Meditations* a thousand times" (Letter to Hyperaspistes, August 1641: AT III, 430; CSMK, 194). Innate ideas must be in a sense awakened, turning "the mental gaze" on them by repeated and attentive meditation (Fifth Meditation: AT VII, 63–64; CSM II, 44).[47] This also explains the meditator discovering her own existence and nature before God's; while the latter is metaphysically primary, we cognise the former with less meditative effort (see chapter 1.2.2).

Step 3 is based partly on the PCA but also relies on the way the innate idea of God represents infinity. The meditator, as discovered, is capable of inventing all of her finite ideas – excluding only the concepts of herself and of thinking, which are transparent to her (if perceived clearly and distinctly) and arise from her natural disposition, not requiring an external source. An empiricist or an atheist could object that the idea of God is formed the same way, from observation of things, hearing others talk of God or by simply amplifying various attributes and compiling them (e.g., Gassendi and Regius: AT VII, 286–287, 294–295, VIIIB, 346; CSM I, 296, II, 199–200, 205). Descartes's answer is that the infinity of the idea of God is *unique* in that the meditator cannot attain actual infinity by simply augmenting or negating the boundaries of finitude. Instead, her understanding of finitude is, in a way, a 'bounded' version of her cognition of God's actual infinity. That she is in the first place aware of her own limitations requires her to already have some concept of the unlimited. "[M]y perception of the infinite […] is in

[47] The Platonic metaphor here should not go unnoticed. The meditator even refers to the process of innate ideas becoming transparent as remembering something already known instead of learning something new (AT VII, 64; CSM II, 44). Cf. Nolan 2014, 131. For more on innate ideas, see Van De Pitte (1991) and Nelson (2008).

some way prior to my perception of the finite…" (AT VII, 45–46; CSM II, 31). The meditator, then, could not have compounded or borrowed the content of the idea from anything in her.[48] (Cf. Carriero 2009, 190–191; Nolan 2014, 133–134.)

The meditator's idea of God cannot be materially false either, as her ideas of heat or cold might be. Infinity being conceptually prior to finitude, the actual infinity conceived in God cannot represent something unreal. Even if I were to suppose that the content of the idea carries no external existence, there would be no way to confuse it with the absence of a thing. "[The idea of God] is utterly clear and distinct and contains in itself more objective reality than any other idea" (AT VII, 46; CSM II, 31–32). Because the actual infinity contained in the idea of God cannot represent an absence and the meditator cannot cause it by herself (as a finite being, it could not even arise from her native capacities), the only possible cause of the idea, according to the PCA, is an *actually infinite* being.

The meditator has concluded for the first time in the exercise the real existence of something external to herself and her thought with the First Causal argument. However, the causal argument is still more deductive than it is intuitive, resulting in the potential to *lose* the discovered conclusion. For the meditator to get from mere cognitive certainty to *scientia* of God's existence, she is is required to grasp it with a single and evident *intuition*. She is still required to do more meditative work, beginning with the rest of the Third Meditation and concluding in the Fourth and the Fifth. Something external has (potentially) been discerned, but the meditator's cognitive journey is far from over.

[48] See chapters 7.1. and 7.3.2 for more on the meditator's grasp of the infinite. See Agostini 2018 for the Scholastic background of Descartes's concept of the infinity and perfection of God, Suárez in particular. Does this mean that *no* being could understand finitude without the infinite? Maybe not. Descartes could simply mean that for us, as beings hardwired with the idea of infinite God, finitude is understood only by infinity. See Carriero 2009, 191.

7. Third Meditation II: Demons, Angels, and Atheists

In the Second Meditation, the meditator discovered her own existence to be *necessarily (necessario*) true as long as she conceives it. I suggested the presented condition not to be temporal but to be based on whether we have sufficient reasons for doubt (chapters 3.4.1, 5.1.2). The same thing applies in the Third Meditation with the meditator having evidence that, along with herself, an actually infinite God with all the perfections must *necessarily* exist. Each step of the First Causal argument is clear and distinct after some attentive meditative "massaging" of the meditator's intellect. Thus, the conclusion is clear and distinct, demanding the meditator's assent with no room to contest its validity.

However, just as withe the *cogito*, the Third Meditation implies that the issue is not yet fully settled. Despite momentary evidentness, even the clear and distinct cognition of God can fade and become open to doubt, with the meditator acknowledging that her concentration loosens and sensory-material beliefs leak back, making it harder to recognise why the idea of an infinite being must be caused by an infinite being itself. The Third Meditation, like the First and the Second, includes a moment where the meditator's attention on the meditation *relaxes*, making her to alter her approach.

In this second chapter on the Third Meditation, I analyse the alterative interlude on the meditator's potentially *unlimited* agency and the Second Causal argument for God's existence (paragraphs 23–39). I also dissect the cognitive exercise through the last three Meditations and discuss my reading of the meditative project as metaphysically grounding knowledge on the so-called *God foundationalism*.

7.1. Change of Perspective: Existence of 'I' and Existence of God

That even cognition of God can be called into doubt becomes apparent in the twenty-sixth paragraph, when the meditator, already past the clarity and distinctness of God's infinity, raises a counter: Could her free agency be greater than she has assumed and *potentially* include the infinity of God, along with other perfections? She discovered the potential for infinity within her in the Second Meditation, by noticing she has the power to make the wax undergo "immeasurable" changes in her imagination (AT VII, 31; CSM II, 21; cf. Secada 2013, 208). In the Third, she experiences a gradual increase of her cognition (*cognitionem*) and sees no reason why she could not increase it to infinity just like the countless ways she can influence the wax. The same thing could apply to all the perfections of God she perceives. The meditator, while not possessing actualised infinity, could still possess it *potentially*. "[I]f the potentiality for these perfections is

already within me, why should not this be enough to produce (*producendam*) the idea of such perfections?" (AT VII, 46–47; CSM II, 32.)

What is the meditator doing, though, if she increases her potential to infinity? She is taking a finite element of herself (cognising) and augmenting or amplifying it. Producing an idea of God through these means would be to systematically repeat the same process with all her finite attributes and compiling them. However, this would not suffice for *actual* infinity. "[E]ven if my cognition always increases […], I recognize that it will never actually be infinite, since it will never reach the point where it is not capable of a further increase; God […] I take to be actually infinite […]." (AT VII, 46–47; CSM II, 32; translation modified). As Descartes explicates in a Letter to Clerselier:

> [T]he notion I have of the infinite is in me before that of the finite because, by the mere fact that I conceive being […] without thinking whether it is finite or infinite, what I conceive is infinite being; but in order to conceive a finite being, I have to take something away from this general notion of being, which must accordingly be there first. (23 April 1649: AT V, 356; CSM II, 377.)

Infinity for Descartes is not merely limitless; he reserves the term "indefinite" for things such as the division of matter, the extension of space, or a continuous set of numbers. I could not reach actual infinity by adding finite numbers into a limitless chain, because there is always potential for one more finite number. The *complete* infinity of God allows no potential for addition (First Replies: AT VII, 113; CSM II, 81). All limitation implies "a negation of the infinite", and all amplification requires "an idea of something greater" (Fifth Replies: 365; CSM II, 252). I cannot reach the infinite simply by stretching the finite; I must already have the unbounded available to be able to remove the boundaries. That we are able to amplify and negate in the first place guarantees the idea of God.[1]

However, Descartes needs not to be read as implying that having perceived myself (a finite being), I must have previously (or contemporaneously) perceived an infinite God of which I am a limited version, or that I perceive the finite through the infinite.[2] Rather, by cognising myself, I gather the means to be *cognitively led* from myself to the idea of God by the order of discovery. The idea of myself as something finite and imperfect triggers in me a concept of something infinite and perfect. Concurrently, I will be led from my own existence to God's existence by these same means.

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[1] Cf. Schechtman 2018. Locke and Hume think we acquire the infinite by addition (*Essay* II, xvii, §3; *EHU* 2.6). Compare with Hilbert's fully booked infinite hotel that always has room for one more guest. Descartes holds that this sort of conceptual infinity is far removed from God's formal infinity. See the Letters to Regius, 24 May 1640 and Clerselier, 23 April 1649 and *Principia* I, §§26–27 (AT III, 64, V, 356 & VIIIA, 14–15; CSM I, 201–202 & CSMK, 147, 377).

[2] Cf. Spinoza (*E* I, P15). This would imply only one substance, which Descartes disdains. Descartes also considers it easier to discover the existence of oneself than the existence of God, being mostly concerned with creating a metaphysical foundation for errorless cognition. Chapters 1.2.2, 6.2.3. Cf. Nolan 2014, 132.

> [W]e are able to recognize (*cognoscere*) our own imperfections before we recognize the perfection of God […] because we are able to direct our attention to ourselves before we direct our attention to God. Thus, we can infer our own finiteness before we arrive at his infiniteness. Despite this […] the cognition (*cognitio*) of God and his perfection must implicitly always come before the knowledge of ourselves and our imperfections […] since our imperfection is a defect and negation of the perfection of God. And every defect and negation presupposes that of which it falls short and which it negates. (*Conversation*: AT V, 153; CSMK, 338. Translation modified.)

We recognise our own existence before God's in the order of discovery due to the former being easier to attend to. Nevertheless, the recognition of our imperfection presupposes a being that is perfect. This procedure likewise explains Descartes's comments in the Third Replies, in which he seems to give in to the empiricist objection that we can reach God's understanding by indefinitely extending our own (AT VII, 188; CSM II, 132). This extension should be taken as an heuristic tool, allowing us to discover potential infinity which reveals a prior concept of actual infinity (God). Cognising the existence of 'I' and cognizing the existence of God are then intrinsically tied together.[3]

The meditator has evident cognition that God necessarily exists by concentrating carefully. However, the task of attentive exercise is once again beginning to take its toll, and if she releases her attention, she recognises that all of the conviction of God's existence and nature starts to fade.

> [W]hen I relax my concentration, and my mental vision is blinded [by the sensory images], it is not easy for me to remember why the idea of a being more perfect than myself must necessarily proceed from some being which is in reality more perfect. (AT VII, 47; CSM II, 32–33.)

We are typically unaware of the clearness and distinctness of the idea of God due to our reliance on sensory material. Even after discovering the evident uniqueness of the idea, we struggle to keep it in mind when it is out of focus and not in the immediate attention. Reference to remembering likewise suggests that something similar is happening as when the meditator's habitual opinions flooded back in the First Meditation, and she had to make an effort to impress the resolution to her memory (AT VII, 22; CSM II, 15; cf. AT VII, 34, IXA, 204; CSM II, 23, 270). That she has momentary clear and distinct access to God's existence is not yet sufficient to completely overturn her doubts. When that perception fades and she loses the persuasion, doubt can creep right back in.

It is easy to see the meditator's concern here. Each step in her argumentation is clear and distinct, but what guarantees their cognitive certainty when she moves from one

[3] Cf. AT X, 421–422; CSM I, 46. We still could fail to reach a C&D concept of God by confusedly constructing an imagistic idea, e.g., an old man with a beard. AT VII, 133–138, 364–365, VIIIB, 360–366; CSM I, 305–309, II, 96–99, 251–252. Cf. Carriero 2009, 190–206, Cunning 2010; Nolan 2014, 132–134.

step to another? They are clearly different clear and distinct perceptions; while attending to step 2, then, the persuasion in step 1 has already disappeared. Some sort of reasoning or deduction is required; thus, a gap can appear in my clear and distinct perception of the causal necessity of God's existence and nature based on God's idea. Her certainty of God is still merely persuasive at this point: It is *cognitio*, not yet *scientia*. The meditator would need to acquire God's existence as immediate and intuitive, similarly to the *cogito*, for her to achieve stronger certainty of God. (Cf. AT V, 136–138; CSMK, 330–331.)

The meditator then, once again, resorts to an alternate approach to achieve what is required. In the First Meditation, she used self-deception by imagining the Demon; in the Second, she granted limited return to common-sense thinking to obtain a particular body to experiment with. Following the inquiry of her potential possession of infinity, she decides in the Third to *change the perspective* from her ideas to something more immediate and intimate – her existence – and inquire whether her free agency could be so great that she can *cause* herself and *preserve* her endurance. "I should therefore like to go further and inquire whether I myself, who have this idea, could exist if no such being existed" (AT VII, 47–48; CSM II, 33). This way, she hopes to make God's existence more immediate and intuitive as well. (Cf. Carriero 2009, 197; Wagner 2014, 158–160.)

7.2. God's Existence: Second Causal Argument

One controversy concerning the causal arguments is whether they are two *distinct* arguments or if the second is just an extension or a variant of the first (see e.g., Carriero 2009, 198; Chistofidou 2013, 100). The Third Meditation seems to make a case for two separate accounts, the first from the idea of God and the second from the meditator's existence, but Descartes challenged this to Mesland in 1644:

> It does not make much difference whether my second proof […] is regarded as different from the first proof […] Just as it is an effect of God to have created me, so it is an effect of him to have put the idea of himself in me, and there is no effect coming from him from which one cannot prove his existence. Nevertheless, it seems to me that all these proofs based on his effects are reducible to a single one… (AT IV, 112; CSMK, 231.)

The causal arguments can be considered distinct, because they rely on different effects of God: that he has created me (existence) and has imprinted an idea of himself in me (nature). However, they are reducible to one because they contain the same basic elements: They rely on the two causal principles and the idea of God. The proposed effect could not be caused by the meditator in either case.[4]

[4] Third Meditation, First and Second Replies (AT VII, 51–52, 105–106, 167–168; CSM II, 35, 76–77, 118).

Descartes explicates in the First Replies that the purpose with the second argument "was not to produce a different proof from the preceding one", but "to take the same proof and provide a more thorough explanation of it". Why is the further explanation required? Firstly, for the intuitive understanding of God, it is not enough to realise that part of the meditator's nature (actual infinity in the idea of God) is caused by God. Her whole nature (native powers and innate ideas) and existence must be God's work. As a finite entity, the idea of God could not belong to her intellect, if her finite existence was not caused by God. (AT VII, 105–106; CSM II, 76–77.) The Second Causal argument supports and elucidates the first by adding the meditator's existence into God's effects.

Secondly, the causal arguments do not accomplish much if the effect is not evident, as made explicit by the reply to Caterus's objection that because objective reality of ideas is not "anything actual", it requires no efficient cause, let alone an infinite one. Descartes's answer compares the idea of God to an idea of a highly intricate machine: Such an idea is so "rich" with *objective intricacy* that it is fair to ask, what caused the idea.[5] The richer the idea is, the less likely it is to be just conceived and not relating to anything outside the intellect. What awakens or triggers in us the need for an external cause for the idea of God is, then, the richness we experience in God's actual infinity. However, the perceived intricacy in the machine idea is dependent on how well the conceiver is acquainted with mechanics, making it easier to see that the idea requires an external cause, because only a few can appreciate it to a certain 'fidelity' (thus, objective intricacy and objective reality are not synonymous; the machine is the same for both the mechanic and the layman regarding the latter). With the idea of God, everyone's ability to appreciate the adequacy of precision is the same. The idea is similarly rich and innate in everyone; thus, its requirement for an external cause is not as evident, being easier to assume one's intellect as the source. (AT VII, 92–93, 103–105; CSM II, 66–67, 75–76.) The meditator is to consider her own existence, the most cognitively compelling item she possesses, rather than "heaven and earth" (AT IV, 112; CSMK, 232). The Second Causal argument helps the meditator to perceive God's existence more evidently and intuitively.[6] (Cf. Carriero 2009, 186–189, Cunning 2010, 118–119; Sinokki 2015, 60–64.)

7.2.1. Causal Origins of the Meditator's Existence

The First Causal argument is crucial for demonstrating the first two of the Third Meditation's aims: that God 1) exists and 2) is the cause of (at least part of) the

[5] Cf. Synopsis, Second Replies, *Principia* I (AT VII, 14–15, 134–135, VIIIA, 11; CSM I, 198, II, 10–11, 97).
[6] Cf. the Second Replies (AT VII; 136; CSM II, 97–98).

meditator's nature (if God did not exist, she would not possess the idea of actual infinity). The task of the second argument is to strengthen the first two while demonstrating the last remaining aims, that God 3) is the cause of her existence and temporal endurance, and 4) is not a deceiver (cf. chapter 6.1). The Second Causal argument aims to prove that the meditator cannot be causally responsible for her existence or nature; she cannot have created herself nor can she preserve herself in existence. Like the first, the second argument can then be reduced to four clear and distinct steps, distilled from most Scholastic formal-objective parlance:

1. I exist as a thinking being that has an idea of an actually infinite being (God) with all perfections
2. PCD
3. PCA: The only possible cause for my existence is an actually infinite being
4. Therefore, an actually infinite God exists

With the meditator's progress, steps 1 and 2 appear clear and distinct and do not require persuasive argumentation. Once again, it is step 3 that demands cognitive polishing to evidently perceive it.

However, if the meditator must gain an intuitive cognition of God's existence, as I suggested, why would another chain of clear and distinct steps help? Would not those steps be just as vulnerable as the ones in the First Causal argument? Just as in the case of the first argument, where tracking the steps made the meditator appreciate the actual infinity present in the idea of God, the argumentative strategy in the second is to help the meditator discover why her perpetual existence could only be due to God's activity. By running the steps, she can gain immediate access to God as the author of her nature and the generator of her temporally enduring existence who cannot be deceitful.

The meditator begins the enquiry by listing potential causes for her existence in paragraph twenty-nine. These include herself, her parents, and "any means (*quibuslibet*) less perfect than God" (AT VII, 48; CSM II, 33; translation modified), comparable to the atheistic origin from the First Meditation by "faith or chance or a continuous chain of events" (AT VII, 21; CSM II, 14). The meditator runs down these possibilities with an argument by elimination during the next seven paragraphs. She begins the discussion with self-causation, which helps to establish three aspects Descartes wants to concentrate on: 1. If something is truly self-causing, it cannot be dependent on anything else (being *absolutely independent*). 2. Causation does not end with original creation but includes durationally extended preservation. 3. If the meditator is not self-causing/self-preserving (thus, absolutely independent, i.e., God), nothing less than an actually infinite God can cause her existence (as her nature includes an idea of actual infinity). The third aspect is particularly reminiscent of the First Causal argument with the meditator realising that nothing less than an actually infinite God can cause the concept of actual

infinity in her. Considering these aspects advances the position that, unlike herself, God *is* self-causing. (Cf. Nolan & Nelson 2006, 111; Nolan 2014, 129, 140–142.)

The discussion begins with the first aspect. If the meditator caused her own existence, why would she not have caused herself all the perfections she has an idea of but seemingly lacks? The meditator recognises a causal power over her thoughts, maybe even over most of her ideas, granting her some level of independence. However, if she could cause herself, she would not be dependent on *anything* and would be able to cause even the idea of actual infinity in her, making herself, *qua* PCA, an actually infinite being. Perhaps she would then just confuse the ideas of herself and God as distinct. However, if she can cause the idea of actual infinity, she should be able to cause her attributes to *be* actually infinite. This clearly is not the case, as the previously recognised lack of something (her doubt and desire) requires a prior notion of infinity. If, however, she was able to create the idea of actual infinity but not actual infinity itself, there would a limitation on her power and she would not be an actually infinite being, thus, again *qua* PCA, incapable of creating the idea of an actually infinite being.[7]

Based on the previous discussion, it is easy to see why, if the meditator is not self-causing and, thus, not actually an infinite being herself, her existence cannot be caused by finite causes, such as her parents or the atheistic "continuous chain of events" proposed in the First Meditation (AT VII, 21; CSM II, 14). Her nature as a thinking thing includes the concept of actual infinity, so whatever caused her, *qua* PCA, is required to have actual infinity either by itself or through its cause. If the means that caused her are finite, they could not cause the concept of actual infinity either in the means themselves nor in the meditator's thinking. Thus, one is required, *qua* PCD, to ask, what caused the finite means, *et cetera*? Just as in the case of ideas taken objectively, there cannot be an infinite regress here (cf. AT VII, 42; CSM II, 29). One must arrive at the *total and efficient* cause at some point, which in the case of actual infinity can only be an actually infinite being ((AT VII, 45–51; CSM II, 31–34).

7.2.2. Infinite and Indefinite Causal Regresses

The Second Causal argument is closer to the cosmological argument, wherein one starts from the existence of something perceived by the senses and deduces back to the uncaused First Cause (cf. chapter 3.1.1). Nevertheless, just as with the First, Descartes considers the Second to improve on the Scholastic arguments. The causal chain is not

[7] Cf. B. Williams 2015, 130–131; Nolan 2014, 142. The French connects self-causation and independence in a more apparent way: "*Or, si j'etais independent de tout autre, et que he fusse moi-méme l'auter mon être*…".

infinite because the meditator's thinking includes the concept of actual infinity in God's nature. If this concept were not innate in her nature, a *potentially* infinite regress of causes could be possible (without reaching actual infinity), as the "indefinite" set of numbers demonstrates.[8] The traditional cosmological argument could not sufficiently refute the meditator's possibly atheistic origin by an infinite chain of finite causes.[9]

Moreover, the chain cannot be infinite because the meditator is not considering just what originally caused her but also what is sustaining her at the present moment. She discovered earlier that causation does not terminate with creation but extends to preservation, preventing her from bypassing the causal argument by assuming that she has always existed and, thus, was uncaused. "For a lifespan can be divided into countless parts, each completely independent of the others, so that it does not follow from the fact that I existed a little while ago that I must exist now, unless there is some cause which as it were creates me afresh at this moment…" (AT VII, 49; CSM II, 33). Every countless temporal moment is causally independent of every other; existing at one point does not guarantee existence at another (division of time is, then, another indefinite regress).[10] There then must also be a cause for her sustained existence. This cause appears not to be her, just as in the case of her genesis, because she recognises no power in her that could endure her existence (after all, considered *praecise* in the restricted scope of the *cogito* being, she should be aware of such power if she had it).[11] Her existence, then, depends on something other than herself at *every* moment, making the infinite regress impossible, because "I am dealing not just with the cause that produced me in

[8] Similarly, the objective reality of ideas forms no regress only because something formal has to put the reality in the idea.

[9] Cf. AT VII, 112; CSMK, 232. The main difference between Descartes and Aquinas is, again, the nature of our cognition of God. Cf. Nolan & Newman 2006, 105; Carriero 2009, 198–199. See the First Replies (AT VII, 94; CSM II, 68): "[My approach] is plainly a quite different […] from observing that my father begot me […] and in view of the impossibility of going *ad infinitum* […] bringing the inquiry to a close by deciding that there is a first cause" (AT VII, 107; CSM II, 77–78). However, if Descartes attributes the former to Aquinas, he seems to be rather unfair towards the angelic doctor (see *ST* I, Q.46, a.2, ad.7). Cf. Carriero 2009, 199–208. See also the Fifth Replies (AT VII, 370–371; CSM II, 255).

[10] Descartes, though, insists on the indefinity of time to be different from the indefinity of space, for otherwise the world would have no beginning. For more, see Gorham 2018. Cf. AT XI, 656, V, 52–53, VIIIA, 27; CSM I, 212; CSMK, 320.

[11] This may come across as a rather weak argument. Arnauld picks up on it, noting that the mind could have powers it is unaware of (AT VII, 214; CSM II, 150). Descartes replies that the mind, regarded as a thinking being, is always *actually* aware of its acts and *potentially* aware of its powers: If one concentrates on employing a given power, supposing that the power resides in us, one immediately becomes actively aware of it (AT VII, 232, 246–247; CSM II, 162, 171–172). However, this seems insufficient because one might be aware of a power while being unaware of all of its effects (as a thinking being, my power to think might sustain my existence). The conclusion, though, is possible to draw similarly to the case of the meditator's genesis: Only an actually infinite (i.e., absolutely independent) being could sustain itself in existence. Thus, as the meditator notices limitations in herself, she is not an actually infinite being. For continuous creation, see *Principia* I, §62 & II, §§36, 42: AT VIIIA, 30, 61–62, 66; CSM I, 214, 240, 243. Cf. chapters 3.4.1, 4.3.1.

the past, but also and most importantly with the cause that preserves me at the present moment". (AT VII, 48–50; CSM II, 33–34.) Even if an indefinite chain of finite causes could cause her existence initially, it cannot cause her existence *right now*. (Cf. Nolan & Nelson 2006, 111–112; Carriero 2009, 197; Nolan 2014, 143.)

The meditator, by the way of the causal arguments, has now reached an evident cognition of God. "It must be concluded that the mere fact that I exist and have within me an idea of a most perfect being, that is God, provides an evident demonstration (*evidentissime demonstari*) that God indeed exists" (AT VII, 51; CSM II, 35). This idea of the most perfect being, which includes the indispensable attribute of actual infinity, cannot have arrived or been abstracted from the senses, nor can it be invented, either; it has never appeared or seemed to appear independently of the will and it cannot be compiled from other material through aggregation or negation. Thus, by elimination of the other established sources, it can only be innate – a feature of the meditator's native cognitive structure. (Cf. AT VII, 133 & VIIIB, 366; CSM I, 309 & II, 96.) Both the evidentness of God's causal nature and the possession of this cognitive structure are essential for the strategy. The causal arguments, in Descartes's words, would be "incomplete" lacking the evidentness of the effect and the idea of God (AT IV, 112; CSMK, 232). We are required to have within us an innate and intuitive concept of actual infinity in relation to the idea of God for the causal arguments to work.

It is a fair to ask if we really have a concept of the completed infinity required here? Pricking through my thinking, I find it hard to pinpoint any such concept. An empiricist or an atheist would then claim that we do not. Descartes would reply that we *do* but are not typically aware of it and have to partake in an arduous cognitive exercise to draw the concept out. One would eventually recognise God's existence as easily and intuitively as one's own by doing the exercise.

> [The idea of God] is innate in me, just as the idea of myself is innate in me. […] [T]he mere fact that God created me is a very strong basis for believing that I am somehow made in his image and likeness, and that I perceive that likeness, which includes the idea of God, by *the same faculty* which enables me to perceive myself. That is, when I turn my mind's eye upon myself, I understand that I am a thing which is incomplete and dependent on another and which aspires without limit to ever greater and better things; but I also understand at the same time that he on whom I depend has within him all those greater things, not just indefinitely and potentially but actually and infinitely, and hence that he is God. (AT VII, 51; CSM II, 35. Emphasis added.)

Following the order of reasoning, becoming aware of my intuitive existence and inquiring further into my nature, I ultimately cognise in myself the concept of God as actually infinite, making me recognise God's existence as an intuitive and necessary truth. The metaphor Descartes likes to use here is that God has stamped the mark of

his craftmanship in his work.[12] The notion that, by attending carefully, I recognise God's trademark in me by the same capacity that I recognise that I exist strongly implies that God's existence is an *intuitive feat* similar to the *cogito*.[13] The argumentative strategy is employed for the meditator to appreciate the actual infinity present in God and to recognise that God is a *causa sui*, both self-causing and self-preserving.[14] The Aristotelian or the atheist are just not meditating carefully enough or paying sufficient attention if they stubbornly persists in saying they do not perceive this clearly and distinctly, as Descartes insinuates in the Second Replies:

> I do not see what I can add to make it any clearer that the idea in question could not be present to my mind unless a supreme being existed. I can only say that it depends on the reader: if he attends carefully to what I have written he should be able to free himself from the preconceived opinions which may be eclipsing his natural light… […] Those who give the matter their careful attention and spend time meditating with me will clearly see that there is within us an idea of a supremely powerful and perfect being […]. I cannot force this truth on my readers if they are lazy, since it depends solely on their exercising their powers of thought. (AT VII, 135–136; CSM II, 97.)

Reading the *Meditation*s as a cognitive exercise is, then, indispensable not only for realisation of the *cogito* but also for understanding God's existence.

7.3. Demons and Angels: God Foundationalism

The meditator has established the four required aims at the end of the Third Meditation.

> [I]t would be impossible for me to exist with the kind of nature I have – that is, having within me the idea of God – were it not the case that God really existed. By 'God' I mean

[12] The causal arguments are then also referred to as the Trademark argument. Gassendi pressed Descartes on how this stamping is carried out: Is the meditator the stamp, the subject of the stamp or both? Descartes replied by likening the issue to a painting created with such high technique and mastery that it could have only been done by the ancient painter Apelles (Fifth Objections and Replies: AT VII, 306, 372; CSM II, 213, 256). Note that none of Apelles's known works have survived, and even in Descartes's time no one had seen a painting by the Greek master. Cf. chapter 2.1.2. and 2.5.2.

[13] In the last paragraph, the meditator pauses to contemplate on God, which is "the greatest joy of which we are capable in this life" (AT VII, 52; CSM II, 36). Cf. Carriero 2009, 189; Cunning 2010, 119; Secada 2013, 215; Wagner 2014. Like the previous, the Third ends with contemplation of the meditation's results.

[14] Even God is not exempt from the PCD, but, unlike the created nature, he is positively *a se* (from itself) – a self-caused sustainer. Caterus and Arnauld suggest that God's self-causing is to be taken negatively, as an *uncaused* sustainer, because the cause would have to exist prior to the effect to be the efficient cause of oneself (AT VII, 94–95, 207–214; CSM II, 68–69, 146–150; cf. Aquinas's second way: *ST* I, Q.2, a.3). Descartes rejects the negative meaning, stating that God needs no efficient cause since God's actually infinite and inexhaustable essence (his formal cause) is a positive *reason or cause* (*ratio sive causa*) for him needing no cause (AT VII, 108–111, 235–241; CSM II,78–80, 164–168). See *Comments* (AT VIIIB, 368; CSM II, 310). Cf. Carriero 2009, 217–222; Nolan 2014, 141–144, note 47; Agostini 2018, 20–24.

> the very being the idea of whom is within me, [has] no defects [and] cannot be a deceiver, since it is manifest by the natural light that all fraud and deception depend of some defect. (AT VII, 51–52; CSM II, 35.)

The meditator acknowledges that God 1) exists, 2) is the author of her nature (her capacities or powers and her innate ideas), 3) is the creator and sustainer of her existence, and, due to God's nature being bereft of all imperfection, 4) cannot deceive us. Nevertheles, as previously mentioned, the proof of God's existence needs to also deliver an external metaphysical grounding for the meditator's internal certainties in order to overturn the Third Level of doubt. I discuss in this last chapter how the meditator achieves this external ground by a reading I have termed *God foundationalism* (see chapter 3.4.2). Specifically, I concentrate on two intrinsically tied issues: 1. Why is the metaphysical basis mandatory (what would be lost if it was not discovered)? 2. How does the meditator move from strong internal evidence to metaphysical knowledge (how her *cognitio* can become s*cientia*). This analysis also requires me to trace the meditative exercise through the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Meditation.

7.3.1. Atheistic Mathematics and Atheistic Existence

I start with the first issue. Recall that the meditator discovers that after "a most careful and comprehensive survey", the only argument for something outside of her internal conviction is that one of her ideas carries reality she could not have caused herself. (AT VII, 42; CSM II, 19.) Failure to find such reality would be devastating, requiring us to abandon science (cf. Nolan 2014, 130.)

However, would a negative result truly be this devastating? Consider the meditator as an atheist: She would be content with the conclusions of the Second Meditation and the beginning of the Third, accepting the cognition of her own existence and nature but nothing relating to God. Descartes's intended Cartesian scientist, however, would not be. The reason, as discussed, is that neither a pre-scientist nor an atheist can be fully certain of their cognitive states, not even those affirming their existence. Recall that the meditator's self-vindicating intuition can avoid the regressive Agrippan problem, but it cannot clear the axiomatic or the circular horn. It is not enough to just claim that clear and distinct intuition is trustworthy; one must also verify *why* this cognitive peak can be trusted, without relying on its trustworthiness and arguing in a circle (see chapter 5.1.2). Just because certain peak cognitions are compelling, does not mean that they are *true*. It might seem that I grasp something real with my thinking, but do I (see chapter 6.2)?

Consider the atheist's and the pre-scientist meditator's cognition of mathematics. Descartes explains in the Second Replies that he grants the atheist mathematician clear

and distinct cognition of the triangle's features but maintains that "this cognition of his is not true knowledge (*vera scientia*)" because no cognition that can be rendered doubtful can be called "knowledge". The atheist then "cannot be certain that he is not being deceived on matters which seem to him very evident […] [s]o he will never be free of this doubt until he acknowledges that God exists." (AT VII, 141, CSM II, 101; cf. AT VII, 428; CSM II, 289.) The same applies, as previously argued, to the pre-scientist meditator's seemingly true cognition that 2+3=5 in the beginning of the Third Meditation. Both forms of mathematical cognising require some form of reasoning or deduction that can be lost once it is not directly attended to. Of course, the prospects of destabilisation seem larger regarding angles of the triangle than the addition of 2 to 3, because the latter appears more direct and intuitive. However, even the latter requires more than one component and is not a *single* intuition, like the *cogito*.

These considerations, though, can cause hesitation regarding the status of the *cogito*. I mentioned earlier that there are grounds for taking my existence as more evident and compelling than the truth of mathematics, indicating that the text of the Third Meditation adds "perhaps even" in front of the deceiver's assumed inability to make the meditator be mistaken of the addition of 2 to 3 (chapter 6.1.2). Even if we regard Descartes's choice of words here as a regular conjunction, it still seemingly holds that *cogito*, relying on nothing but pure intuition, carries more credibility than mathematics (cf. chapter 5.1.3; Forsman 2019). Descartes holds that we are always thinking and as we think, we are aware that we think, so it seems difficult to see how one would lose attention of her existence, in which case there seems to be no room for doubt (cf. the Fifth Replies: AT VII, 356–357; CSM II, 246–247). Neither the pre-scientist's nor the atheist's existence seems unrestricted and doubtful in the same way as the cognition of mathematics from which one's attention can easily slip.

However, for Descartes, being aware is not a singular activity but can occur in different ways. He distinguishes between two kinds of conscious thought, what he calls *direct thought* and *reflective thought*. Only the latter involves awareness that one is thinking (AT V, 220–221; CSMK, 356–357). Furthermore, he differentiates *reflective thought* from *attentive reflective thought* (the conscious thought of a person deliberately attending to her conscious reflection; cf. Lähteenmäki 2007). With the meditator's existence, Descartes seems to make a further separation between minimal self-awareness (being aware of one's thoughts as had by one) and full self-reflection (attending to the fact that since one possesses these thoughts, one must exist). Not all reflective awareness includes the sharp attention to one's existence; one's existence is a *philosophical discovery*, not a mundane experience. The existence of oneself is not attended to at every moment; thus, it can count as one of the shifting and changeable opinions (AT VII, 69; CSM II, 48).

We now have a better understanding of the dissimilarity of the *cogito* and mathematics. Despite the difference in stability, self-awareness and awareness of mathematical truths are not radically different when compared to the metaphysical knowledge through God. Prior to knowing God's existence, neither the pre-scientist nor the atheist has more than a persuasive conviction that they exist and that mathematical truths hold. One's attention might lapse in both cases and this cognition becomes minimal enough for doubt to creep in, because one's nature could be so imperfect that one goes wrong even when attentive evidentness leads to seeming indubitability. The meditator can doubt her existence if she becomes distracted by her former material understanding of the self, losing attention from the C&D one (cf. Cunning 2007; 2010), or considers that, though self-awareness seemed fully certain a moment ago, she might not have reached the truth due to potentially imperfect nature.

Nevertheless, unlike mathematics, one's existence has a special nature. Recognising their existence, both the pre-scientist and the atheist grasp a piece of reality, even if momentarily and without further understanding why. I discussed earlier that the *cogito*'s Archimedean role springs from the meditator becoming aware of the compelling quality of her certain peak cognitions, enabling the correct use of her cognitive powers and leading her to discover more about her true cognitive nature and its metaphysical grounding. Merely observing evident mathematics does not accomplish this.[15] The intimacy and intuitiveness of the *cogito* make it stronger than mathematics and more capable (at least momentarily) to resist the Deceiving God/Imperfect Nature doubt.[16] What is required, however, is not something that resists the doubt but that ultimately *defeats* it; this is possible only by knowing the author of my nature (a non-deceiving God). The meditator can have clear perception and even be cognitively certain of each clear perception before knowing God's existence, yet she cannot be metaphysically certain that her clarity and distinctness do not come apart from grasping the truth.

Of course, as God does exist and is not a deceiver, the meditator's mathematical demonstrations and awareness of her existence are metaphysically guaranteed to be true. It may, hence, be asked whether God guarantees the atheist's beliefs in the same way,

[15] The c*ogito* could also be seen as 'special' in that, to the extent that someone initially recognizes their existence by *free agency*, questioning the *cogito* can reaffirm it (cf. Hatfield 2007, 148). However, as this is *reaffirming*, it is still not stable but remains in flux. Also note that, unlike mathematics, the *cogito* asserts the existence of something *non-abstract*.

[16] Gueroult likewise argues that the meditator's existence is more certain than mathematics but calls the *cogito* "une certitude entière" (1953, 51–52). Cf. Lennon & Hickson (2013, 20–21), who do discuss the meditator's existence in relation to God but consider the *cogito* permanent, dependent on God only by being created by God (i.e., there was a time she did not exist). Broughton (2002, 175–186) views some clear and distinct ideas to be absolutely certain, whereas some are not, the favored set including "I exist," but excluding mathematics. Brown (2013, 33–36) ponders why mathematics is less compelling than the meditator's existence but without emphasizing the question or giving adequate answers.

despite the atheist's ignorance of God. The atheist has some grasp of how things are but is not fully aware of why he is in touch with reality as it is. He has internal evidence (clarity and distinction) but lacks this *external* ground. Having *scientia* of something is not just to be certain that things are a certain way but is to understand *why* one's certainty guarantees that they really are so. (AT VII, 141, 196, 428; CSM II, 101, 137, 289.)[17]

I previously argued, unlike it is sometimes read (see chapter 3.4.1), that clear and distinct perception does not guarantee full certainty or knowledge and can be doubted in the enquiry before God's existence has been discovered. Indeed, in the Synopsis, Descartes locates proving the general veracity of clear and distinct perception in the Fourth Meditation, even stating that "we should know (*sciamus*) that everything that we clearly and distinctly understand is true in a way which corresponds exactly to our understanding of it; but it was not possible to prove this before the Fourth Meditation" (AT VII, 13–15; CSM II, 9–11). The meditator concludes in the beginning of the Fourth that her contemplation of God "in whom all the treasures of the sciences and wisdom (*scientiarum & sapientae*) lie hidden" grants her a way forward to the "cognition (*cognitionem*) of other things" (AT VII, 53; CSM II, 37: translation modified). Discovering the nature of God as non-deceiving erases the reasons to doubt her evident perceptions. She knows that neither is she being deceived nor is she unable to grasp the truth with her cognitive prowess when correctly applied. Meanwhile, an atheistic meditator, unable to erase this ultimate level of doubt, cannot develop her cognition into *scientia*.

7.3.2. Fourth Meditation: Erroneous Cognition and Cartesian Theodicy

Why can the veracity of clarity and distinctness not be confirmed before the discussion of the Fourth Meditation if the meditator has discovered both God's existence and nature at the end of the Third? The reason is that, while she has become aware of God's nature, there are still certain aspects remaining in question. The meditator made an important observation in the First Meditation regarding God's supposed goodness and her own error-laden nature: "But if it were inconsistent with [God's] goodness to have created me such that I am deceived all the time, it would seem equally foreign to his goodness to allow me to be deceived even occasionally; yet this last assertion cannot be made" (AT VII, 21; CSM II, 14). This atheistic issue is still unresolved by the time of the Fourth Meditation.

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[17] *Scientia* can then somewhat be seen as a version of the KK-thesis, but it is not fully internalist. Cf. Carriero 2009, 348. I therefore disagree with building *scientia* on coherent justification (Frankfurt 2008; Sosa 1997), unshakable psychological conviction, or consistency of reason (Gewirth 1941; Loeb 2005). Cf. chapters 3.4. and 5.1.

The form of deception is imperfection (i.e., non-being) and God's nature is devoid of any imperfection; thus, God could not deceive. We discover in ourselves a capacity for judgment (the collaboration of the intellect and the will) through experience, which, as part of our nature, certainly comes from God, and because God is non-deceitful by nature, he would not have enabled us to err while using our judgment correctly. However, we still seem to err regarding obscure and confused perceptions, for example, by thinking that the presence and nature of the corporeal world is evident by the senses. If God allows us to err in these matters, would he also allow us to be in error with clear and distinct matters? Is our error compatible with God's nature as a non-deceiver? The meditator maintains that God could have created her nature so that she has *only* clear and distinct perceptions or could even live in a *perpetual* state of cognitive peak and avoid error altogether; she, then, must next enquire into the nature of her erroneous cognition. (AT VII, 52–55, 61; CSM II, 35–38, 42.)

The meditator's conclusion about the epistemic reliability of her judgmental prowess is based on three assumptions: God 1) exists, 2) is omniperfect and veracious (non-deceitful), and 3) is the creator of her capacity for judgment. However, she calls the conclusion in question in the fourth paragraph.

> There would be no further doubt on this issue were it not that what I have just said appears to imply that I am incapable of ever going wrong. […] And certainly so long as I think only of God, and turn my whole attention to him, I can find no cause of error or falsity. But when I turn back to myself, I know by experience that I am prone to countless errors. (AT VII, 38; CSM II, 54.)

We conclude when we look at the concept of God that we ought to assent to what we perceive clearly and distinctly with such creator. However, we notice when we look at ourselves that we do go wrong and fall in error in numerous places. We must know where our errors result from, and whether they are to be blamed on God or on us, to resolve this. If we can be in error even when using our cognitive powers at their fullest, our errors would be God's fault, resulting from granting us a nature that goes wrong even with full and correct use. We would not be responsible (blameworthy) for our errors. If, however, the errors result from the misuse of our cognitive abilities (i.e., depend on us), we are to be blamed for them ourselves. We could arrive at the truth by sticking to the abilities full and proper use.

The beginning of the Fourth Meditation, like the Third's, raises a skeptical counter for the previous meditative progress, turning attention from the clear and distinct idea of God to our erroneous nature. More specifically, there are two intertwined doubts at play here: 1. How can I make mistakes if God is non-deceitful? 2. Can omniperfect, veracious God exist if my nature is capable of mistakes? The first doubt questions

whether God could allow us to be deceived, potentially even by clarity and distinctness, targeting the previous assumption 2) about God's nature. The question there is about our *actual errors*: Perhaps allowing deceit is not foreign to God's nature. This could be called the problem of *erroneous cognition*. The second doubt questions whether God can be acquitted from the existence of error in his creations, targeting the previous assumption 1) about God's existence. The question there is about our *ability to err*: The meditator conceives God as an "omniperfect creator" (AT VII, 52; CSM II, 35), but if there is capacity for error in her, does anything fulfil that concept? This could be called the problem of *Cartesian theodicy*. (Cf. Ragland 2007; 2016; Dicker 2013, chapter 4.)

Descartes's solution to both the theodicy problem and the error problem is partly based on the meditator locating the source of her error in the misapplication of her powers of understanding and will, by willing to assent to more things than what her understanding can attentively grasp clearly and distinctly and by discovering her freedom to be at its fullest when spontaneously assenting to a clearly and distinctly known truth or good (AT VII, 56–59; CSM II, 39–41). I covered these topics in a previous chapter (3.3), so I will not spend much space on them here. Instead, I concentrate on what could be called the *metaphysics of error*. Recall that falsity for Descartes is not really a "thing" but a *lack* of being. Thus, error is a *negation*, and committing errors is *participating* (*participare*) in non-being. The meditator realises that error, or the capacity for error, is not something that can truly *be* in her but is caused by her being something between God (perfect being) and nothingness (non-being). "[E]rror as such is not something real which depends on God, but merely a defect. […] [G]oing wrong does not require me to have a faculty specially bestowed on me by God; it simply happens as [the God-given] faculty of judgment […] is in my case not infinite" (AT VII, 54; CSM II, 38).

However, the meditator is not fully satisfied with this neo-Platonic style answer. Erring is not a true negation, something that does not belong to her nature, but rather a privation of some knowledge she should possess but is deprived of somehow. If she is capable of erring, her nature must be impaired in some way (cf. chapter 6.1.4). The meditator concludes that there is "no doubt" that God could have given her such a nature that she is never mistaken, and that God always wills what is "best (*optimum*)" (AT VII, 55; CSM II, 38). However, as Gassendi notes, if God could have created her nature to never err but has not, God seems to lack either the knowledge, the power or the will to do so and is not omniperfect (e.g., omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent) (AT VII, 308; CSM II, 214–215).

The meditator recognises by attentive meditation that "there is no call to doubt [God's] existence" by not grasping why or how certain things were created, as her own

nature is "weak and limited" while God's is "immense and infinite", confirming the previous assumption 1) about God's existence (AT VII, 55; CSM II, 38–39). She recognises some paragraphs later that neither of her God-given powers of willing and understanding is culpable for her errors. Her will is perfect in its own right, and her understanding, granted by a veracious God, correctly grasps what it grasps, confirming the previous assumption 2) about God's nature (AT VII, 58; CSM II, 40–41).

However, this is insufficient for error or theodicy skepticism. The meditator must justify why an omniperfect, veracious God allows even an occasional error or erring-ability to occur. Not knowing God's motives is an inadequate answer, for God might think that us being deceived is the "best".

The meditator's answer here is double faceted. First, we have free will, which can be indifferent in a case of complete equilibrium of reasons. Error occurs due to us "betting on the wrong horse" when we assent to things we do not comprehend (and where our will is therefore indifferent, cf. chapter 3.3.4), so the privation results from the *incorrect operation* of our native power of free will, not from the power itself or its provider. God simply tolerates our errors due to the value of free will (it is better that we are free to make mistakes than if we were to see everything clearly and forced to suspend when we do not, i.e., were divinely determined to assent only to the truth). This value of the will's freedom explains our *actual* occasional errors.[18] (AT VII, 59–61; CSM II, 40–42.)

Second, by looking at God's whole creation, what seems imperfect on its own might appear quite perfect as part of a whole. The meditator "must not complain that the forming of those acts of will or judgements in which [she goes] wrong happens with God's concurrence", for as part of the innate nature coming from God they are "wholly true and good" and the ability to perform them is more perfect than lacking that ability is. Error is not caused by God (and, thus, should indeed be considered a negation rather than a privation), so our ability to err does not require his concurrence; there may be "more perfection in the universe as a whole because some of its parts are not immune from error". This perfection of unity could potentially explain our *ability* to err (I say "could" because, as the meditator points out, thus far in the cognitive exercise she recognises only herself and God with any certainty, but due to the immense power of God, she must at least acknowledge the possible existence of other things). (AT VII, 55–56, 60–61; CSM II, 39, 42–43. Cf. Ragland 2007; 2016, chapter 2.[19])

[18] This also supports Descartes considering the will's freedom *incompatible* with divine determinism in certain (equal balance) cases, while *compatible* in other (C&D) cases. Chapter 3.3.4. Cf. Ragland 2007; 2016.
[19] See Fifth Objections and Replies (AT VII, 313–314, 376; CSM II, 217–218, 258–259). Compare with Leibniz's theodicy, which explains the *occurrence* of evil by an appeal to unity of perfection. Some have questioned if the unity proves too much: If God's perfection is compatible with possible error in non-C&D, could it not also be so with possible error in C&D (e.g., Della Rocca 2006, 145–147)? However,

The significance of the Fourth Meditation discussion is often not recognised in commentaries, partly due to the tendency of reading God's existence and nature, as well as the veracity of clarity and distinctness, to have been fully settled in the Third Meditation. Thus, the Fourth is typically passed over rather quickly, considered more of a "quasi-theological interlude" than an intrinsic part of the core metaphysical-epistemological argument. (Cress 1994, 149; Della Rocca 2006, 142. Cf. Newman 1999; Ragland 2007; 2016; Christofidou 2013.) Read through the cognitive exercise, however, it becomes rather clear why Descartes thinks it was not possible to verify clarity and distinctness as reliable until the Fourth Meditation. Before the problems of erroneous cognition and Cartesian theodicy are solved, God's existence and nature are still in doubt and the meditator is incapable of escaping skepticism. In the twelfth paragraph of the Fourth Meditation, she is finally able to disclose unequivocally: "If […] I simply refrain from making a judgment in cases where I do not perceive the truth with sufficient clarity and distinctness, then it is clear that I am behaving correctly and avoiding error" (AT VII, 59; CSM II, 41; cf. Carriero 2009, 129, note 1). She likewise concludes in the last paragraph that "if […] I restrain my will so that it extends to what the intellect clearly and distinctly reveals and no further, then it is fully (*plane*) impossible for me to go wrong." Her clear and distinct perceptions are indubitably "something (fr. add. *réel et de positif*)"; therefore, they cannot come from nothing but must be authored by God and, since God does not deceive, those perceptions are "undoubtedly true". (AT VII, 62; CSM II, 43. Translation modified.[20]) The meditator then learns not only about the metaphysical nature of her errors and their source in the Fourth Meditation, but also how to unqualifiedly reach the truth by taking care to attentively focus on those things she understands clearly and distinctly and separate them from the ones she perceives only obscurely and confusedly. This is an important preliminary step in moving from clear and distinct *persuasio* to metaphysically secure and lasting *scientia*, resolving the Third Level of doubt.[21] (Cf. Naaman-Zauderer 2010, 11.)

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according to Descartes, the ability to err in C&D would be *malicious*, thus, barred by God's omniperfection. Cf. Ragland 2007, 137–139; 2016, 68–73. See also Cunning 2010, 127.

[20] Della Rocca (2006; 2011) locates a new version of the Circle in the Fourth, that Descartes presupposes the veracity of clarity and distinctness as part of the proof for their veracity (defending a *coherentist* reading). My reading dissolves such a Circle by having the issue be not about how to distinguish between C&D and non-C&D but whether even C&D could be erroneous. C&D can be verified with error and theodicy problems sufficiently settled. Cf. Carriero 2009, 278, note 40; Naaman-Zauderer 2010, 98–100; Christofidou 2013, 81, note 10; Ragland 2016, 73–81; Fulmer & Ragland 2017.

[21] There might, though, be a further problem for the error and theodicy solutions. According to Descartes, all of God's creation is a) non-motivationally indifferent and b) providentially pre-ordained (*Principia* I, §40 and the Letter to Elizabeth, 6 October 1645: AT IV, 314, VIIIA, 20; CSM I, 206, CSMK, 272). It then seems that a) God could have created a world where we are indifferently free, yet do not commit errors,

7.3.3. Fifth and Sixth Meditation: From Cognitio *to* Scientia

The final step in resolving the Third Level is taken in the Fifth Meditation. The Synopsis of the Fifth is very concise: "[B]esides an account of corporeal nature taken in general, there is a new reasoning to demonstrate the existence of God […] [and] I explain the sense in which it is true that the certainty even of geometrical demonstrations depends (*pendere*) on the cognition (*cognitione*) of God" (AT VII, 15; CSM II, 11; translation modified). The task is to 1) establish the reality present in her mathematical concepts and simple universal notions, 2) present a further reason for God's existence, and 3) elevate all of her momentary cognitions to lasting *scientia* by evident cognition of God, bringing the discussion back to the Second Level of doubt for the Sixth Meditation.[22] The Meditation structure also evenly reflects this, with task 1) taking the first seven paragraphs, task 2) consisting of the next six, and task 3) covering the last four.

The meditator begins the Meditation by acknowledging that despite the meditative progress, there are "many matters which remain to be investigated". She is aware of the nature (what is inseparable from the being) of both herself and God but is not yet certain whether those natures constitute the full *essence* of either (cf. chapter 5.1). However, as she was finally able to unquestionably lay down her proposed truth rule in the previous Meditation, discovering a reliable *criterion of truth*, she first decides to focus her attention on escaping from the doubts she "fell a few days ago", and meditate on whether she is able to disclose any certainty on corporeal-material nature. (AT VII, 63; CSM II, 44.)

The first task of establishing the present reality of her mathematical notions and spatial simples turns out to be not that difficult by the previous meditative progress. Encouraged by the successful enquiry of the idea of God in her and further reassured by the cognitive truth rule of assenting only to what is clear and distinct, she decides to use a similar method to consider which of the general ideas that objectively exist in her thought are distinct or confused, instead of yet inquiring whether any particular material objects exist outside of her. The discussion continues the argument line from the First Meditation painter analogy, where the meditator noticed, and then suspended, certain repeating general features of corporeal nature such as extension, quantity, size, shape, location, and duration. These, along with mathematical-geometrical apprehension, appear to be *something*, whether they exist in actual nature or not, and even if she were dreaming, and the only thing that made her doubt them was the uncertainty of the source and reliability of her nature. (AT VII, 20; CSM II, 14; chapter 4.2.4. Cf. the wax;

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and b) our errors are indeed pre-determined by God. Cf. chapter 3.3.3. However, see Ragland 2007, 128–132, 139–141; 2016, 51–56, 129–165, 191–235; Newman 2008, 350–351. Cf. Cunning 2010, 127; 2014, 83.

[22] Descartes states in the Synopsis that the certainty of "even geometrical demonstrations" depends on cognizing God, but in the text, the certainty of "all other things" depends on it (AT VII, 69; CSM II, 48).

chapter 5.2.) Now, with the meditative enquiry's recent successes, however, she has cognitive certainty of her nature's author, convincing her of its capacity to grasp features of reality precisely and accurately. The mathematical and simple notions that now appear "fully evident and transparent (*plane nota & perspecta*)" are not simply nothing, even if they may not exist externally, because she can grasp them clearly and evidently as 'something true', such a grasp being "in harmony" with her nature. Continuing the discussion from the Third Meditation on certain features of thinking being innately part of our nature as cognising beings, she can think of these notions by will, but they appear *impervious* to her agency (AT VII, 38; CSM II, 26; cf. chapters 6.1.4 and 6.2). Thus, they are not simply her own invention (extension of her active willing and imagining) but have "true and immutable natures (*veras & immutabiles naturas*)" of their own.

> When […] I imagine a triangle, even if perhaps no such figure exists […] anywhere outside my thought, there is still a determinate nature, or essence, or form of the triangle which is immutable and eternal, and not invented by me or dependent on my mind. (AT VII, 64; CSM II, 44–45.)

The Fifth Meditation is the first place where Descartes explicitly refers to the *essence* (*essentia*) of something, indicating a shift from the previous discussion of what is *inseparable* from a thing to what *makes* it the thing that it is. Now that the meditator has uncovered the transparency and veracity of clarity and distinctness, she no longer considers grasping only a partial picture of things, but their full being. She can now confirm her suggestion in the painter analogy that whatever these forms and simples are, they are at least capable of actual existence with some *mind-independent* reality of their own. What has changed from the First Meditation, though, as was the case in the Third, is that she does not consider them to originate from sensation anymore. "I can think up countless other shapes which there can be no suspicion of my ever having encountered through the senses, and yet I can demonstrate various properties of these shapes, just as I can with the triangle" (AT VII, 65; CSM II, 45). Instead of being exported from reality by means of the senses, the understanding and grasp of such figures and calculations appears to be *innately* part of the meditator as a cognising being. Nevertheless, they demonstrate the existence of *some reality* independent of her thoughts. This also applies to the spatial-temporal simples, briefly mentioned in the beginning of the Fifth Meditation, but as their previous connection with external sensory reality is still suspended, they are fused together with the subject-matter of pure arithmetic, mathematising the general nature of spatial-temporality.[23] (AT VII, 63–65; CSM II, 44–45. Cf. the Sixth Meditation: AT VII, 80; CSM II, 55.)

[23] "Temporality" is not to be taken too literally here. For Descartes, time is a modification of the mind to measure duration, which is not fully distinct from existence. Cf. AT VIIIA, 27; CSM I, 212; Gorham 2018.

The discussion then develops to the second task of elaborating God's existence further, producing what is typically called the *ontological argument for God's existence*. "[The idea of God is] within me just as surely as the idea of any shape or number. And […] that it belongs to his nature that he always exists is no less clear and distinct than […] that some property belongs to [their] nature." (AT VII, 65; CSM II, 45.) A natural question is, why does the meditator require this further elaboration of God's existence? God was already demonstrated to exist in the Third Meditation and reconciled with our actual and potential errors in the Fourth, so the second task might appear as a gratuitous repetition. However, as even the Second Causal argument includes some derivation, God's existence might still appear less intuitive and immediate than her own existence or even the geometric and arithmetic concepts. The intention of the further ontological realisation is to help the meditator cognise God's existence as transparently clear, self-evident, and immediately intuitive as her self-awareness was in the Second Meditation. As such, calling it an 'argument', or even a 'proof', is misleading, as it would have been in the case of the meditator's existence in the Second (in the Synopsis, Descartes in fact refers to it as a *ratio* instead of an *argumentum*: AT VII, 15; CSM II, 11).[24]

Descartes admits in the First Replies being worried about the inclusion of the ontological realisation. He is trying to appeal to "a variety of different minds" (among them theists and atheists, practiced thinkers and novices, skeptics and non-skeptics, Aristotelians and mechanists), many of whom might struggle with discovering the innate idea of God and be unable to intuitively grasp his existence through his essence (AT VII, 120; CSM II, 85; cf. chapter 1.2.3). However, an intuitive grasp of God is also essential for stabilising the meditator's persuasion into firm and lasting *scientia*.

> [My readers] should reflect on the fact that the ideas of all other natures contain possible existence, whereas the idea of God contains not only possible but wholly necessary existence. This alone, *without a formal argument*, will make them realize that God exists; and this will eventually be just as self-evident to them as the fact that the number two is even […]. For there are certain truths which some people find self-evident, while others come to understand them only by means of a formal argument. (Second Replies: AT VII, 163–164; CSM II, 115. Emphasis added.)

Different readers find different truths self-evident with less exercise than others, so some may intuitively and immediately grasp God's existence already by the Third Meditation's formal arguments. However, Descartes recognises that perceiving God intuitively might still be difficult for certain (maybe most) meditators at the end of the Third and the Fourth. The Fifth's ontological realisation enables those who struggle with the clarity and distinctness of God's existence by the formal arguments to grasp it

[24] Like with the *cogito*, we can produce a logical proof for God after the *Meditations*. Cf. chapter 5.1.2.

with a single, immediate intuition. Still, such readers initially benefit from the Third, because, if exercised correctly, it should allow anyone but the most cantankerous reader to embrace God's actual infinity, without which the Fifth's intuitive grasping would not be possible. The order of the 'proofs' in the meditative exercise is not arbitrary – we would be incapable of the Fifth's recognition without the cognitive effort of the Third. The ontological realisation also allows for a more simple and self-evident intuition of the same truth even for those who did intuitively grasp God's existence in the Third. One then relies on the meditative exercise, "deliberately altered" from Descartes's earlier methods of explanation, to make the matter manifest by careful attention and repeated cognitive effort, directing the mental gaze correctly as if remembering something that was present all along. (AT VII, 120; CSM II, 85. Cf. Nolan & Nelson 2006, 112–113; Cunning 2010, 103–105, chapter 6; Secada 2013. See chapter 6.2.3.)

There has been much commentary on the ontological 'argument' over the years (e.g., Gueroult 1953; B. Williams 2015; Nolan & Nelson 2006; Carriero 2009; Cunning 2010; Nolan 2020).[25] I will concentrate on how its discovery allows progress from cognitive to metaphysical certainty. The meditator initially experiences the single and immediate intuition of God's existence on the same cognitive level as mathematics and her own existence: "Even if it turned out that not everything on which I have meditated in these past days is true, I ought still to regard the existence of God as having at least the same level of certainty as I have hitherto attributed to the truth of mathematics".[26] Recall that the realm of cognitively certain conviction was discovered independently from the verification of the truth rule (see chapter 6.1). Similarly, this intuitive cognitive certainty of God's existence does not presuppose that clear and distinct perceptions are true, because whether or not they are verified, the intuitive grasp of God is at least as certain and obvious (more obvious than the First Meditation ones) as her grasp of her existence and nature is, as "the nature of my mind is such that I cannot but assent to these things, at least so long as I clearly perceive them" (AT VII, 65–66; CSM II, 45).[27]

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[25] Like the causal proofs, ontological recognition is to improve from the Scholastic arguments. Anselm famously argued the concept of a *being than which no greater can be conceived* demonstrating both God's existence and nature by a single self-evident argument (*Pros*., preface, 2–5). Contemporary Gaunilo (fl. 11th century) expressed the famous "Lost Island" version of the argument that, by the same logic, would also have to exist. Anselm, though, considered Gaunilo to have missed the point. (*Pro Ins.* and *Resp.*) Anselm's argument was again criticized by Aquinas, in part because of his view that we do not know the nature or essence of God, after which it was regarded as lifeless for several centuries (*ST* I, Q.2, a.1). It is no wonder Descartes was more drawn towards Anselm's meditative way than Aquinas's synthetic, as the former provides us with God's nature as well as his existence. Cf. T. Williams 2016; Oppy 2020. See Nolan 2020.
[26] Cf. Second Replies where Descartes compares the grasp of God to the *cogito* (AT VII, 151; CSM II, 107).
[27] Recall also that cognitive certainty is not merely having a psychological urge to assent. When I think that something is the case, my thought seems to grasp what is *real*. See chapter 5.1. Compare with Stoic cognitive impressions (chapter 2.1.1).

However, as argued, that an intuition is immediate does not mean that it would be readily or instantly available. Indeed, at first sight, that existence belongs to God's essence is not transparently evident (*perspicuum*), but by careful concentration it can *become* so, after which God's existence can no more be separated from his essence than that "three angles equal two right angles" can be separated from the essence of a triangle. The meditator concludes by attentively meditating on her concept of God that it is not the proofs that provide us conviction but perceiving intuitively and self-evidently – particularly that God's omniperfect, actually infinite essence contains necessary existence – that ultimately "completely convinces her". However, while God's existence is self-evident, in fact the most self-evident of all, perceiving it clearly and distinctly takes considerable mental effort from most meditators due to our tendency to be preoccupied and "overwhelmed" by preconceived opinions. If this was not the case, God's existence could be acknowledged before and with much less meditative labour. As things stand though, the meditator is required to start with what is easy to grasp self-evidently (her own existence and nature) and progress from there to what takes more time and attentive effort. (AT VII, 66–69; CSM II, 46–47. Cf. chapters 1.2.2 and 6.2.3.)

Now we are also closing in on the looming *Cartesian Circle*. The Circle has generated mountains of literature and solution attempts, most of which I will be unable to address. However, as I take my reading to *relocate* the problematic part of the Circle – the question is not how God's existence is proven by clarity and distinctness and *vice versa* but how cognition of God can become *scientia* of God – I highlight a few recent solutions I find promising for the redefined problem. A prominent line, traced to Gewirth's influential account (1941), is to have the initial *cognitio* (*persuasio*) ground the emergence of the metaphysical certainty of *scientia*. Carriero (2009, 347–358) reads that recognising the metaphysical underpinnings of cognition (God exists and is a non-deceiver, clear and distinct perceptions are verifiably true, etc) elevates one's condition from momentary true cognition to systematic, enduring, and stable understanding of one's place as a knower in the world (like mooring a castle in air). Andrea Christofidou (2013, 183–186) suggests that the meditator can grasp God's existence with a single intuition, running like an uninterrupted thread from the cognition of one's mind to the cognition of God, elevating the epistemic state from (in her terms, time-bound) *cognitio* to (tenseless) *scientia*. Georges Dicker (2013, 170–176) considers that since the radical doubt rests on the use of reason, it can be overcome by subtracting the grounds for doubt until those hypotheses no longer make sense (cognising that a non-deceiving God exists removes the reason to doubt that our C&D perceptions are true). (Cf. Forsman 2019, 111–112.[28])

[28] Allison Simmons and Calvin Normore defended a similar solution in private conversations. Cunning (2010; 2014) hints along these lines as well: The pre-*scientia* meditator is simply confused when conceiving

I am sympathetic to this line of reading, particularly the one resting on removing the reasons for doubt, as it goes well with my description of the difference between mere persuasion and absolutely certain knowledge to be in whether there remains ground for doubt (cf. chapter 3.4.2). However, a problem still remains: Since even my most self-evident grasping might be deceptive, how do I know my cognition of God's existence and non-deception is not just *one more* unreliable intuition? Could I not, once the clear conviction fades, once again call into question God's existence due to my possession of a potentially deceptive nature? Even if my cognitive thread would be uninterrupted and my grasp as immediate and intuitive as possible, as long as my understanding of God is merely cognitively certain and strongly persuasive, metaphysical *scientia* remains remote.

How does the meditator then elevate her cognitive state from *persuasio* to *scientia*? I suggest that the key lies in God's actual infinitude, retained to a degree in the concept of God we possess. Unlike all of the meditator's other ideas, which contain only potential existence, the idea of God, clearest and most evident of all of the meditator's ideas, marred only by her clinging to preconceived opinions, contains *necessary* existence as part of its nature due to omniperfection and included actual infinity. This actual infinitude provides the recognition of God's necessary existence, forcing on her that she is not its cause and that the formal equivalent of the objective concept must exist outside of her mind. Since (at least part of) the perfect infinity is *contained* in the concept (per the formal-objective model and PCA), recognition of it provides the means to confirm the metaphysical existence of something external by means more stable and solid than just conviction, like actually getting a hold of, not merely glimpsing, the thing in question. This raises the meditator's cognitive state from *cognising* to actually *knowing* God's existence and essence, which similarly elevates all her clear and distinct cognitions to the same level because God's essence includes that he does not deceive. (AT VII, 46, 53, V, 356–357; CSM II, 31–32, CSMK, 377–378. Cf. Christofidou 2013, 183.)

An obvious objection is how can a finite being come to understand actual infinity (e.g., Caterus and Gassendi: AT VII, 96–97, 286; CSM II, 69–70, 200)? During the causal arguments, Descartes draws a distinction between understanding (*intelligere*) and comprehending (*comprehendere*): One can understand infinity as a perfection without

God as a deceiver (a faulty being) – 'powerful deceiver' is a contradiction and could not severe our cognitive access to reality. Cf. Gómez-Alonso (2011). Along with Gewirth, these solutions can be read as a continuation of the "reason validating itself" tradition, influenced by Frankfurt (but note that Frankfurt's own solution to the Circle rested more on his reading of Descartes as a coherentist, viewing him as wishing to solve the science vs. revelation problem due to Galileo's conviction; 2008, 235–256). Cf. Loeb (1986) who suggests Descartes to have been insincere about God's role in the veracity of clear and distinct. However, the Letter to Mersenne, 15 April 1630 clearly indicates the metaphysical and epistemological questions to precede the physical ones and even Galileo's condemnation. (AT I, 144, CSMK, 22). Cf. Alanen 2000, 260, note 15.

having a complete comprehension of the infinite (AT VII, 46; CSM II, 32). Even by the meditator's direct intuition with which God's infinity confronts our thought, we can never truly reach (*attingere*) God's full essence but must consider it in "small quarters". Descartes uses the following analogy to describe the issue in a 1630 Letter to Mersenne:

> We can touch a mountain with our hands, but we cannot put our arms around it as we could put them around a tree […]. To comprehend (*comprendre*) something is to embrace (*embrasser*) it in one's thought; to understand (*sçavoir*) something, it is sufficient to touch (*toucher*) it with one's thought. (AT I, 152; CSMK, 25. Translation modified.[29])

Descartes's language here suggests a certain following of the Stoic tradition of *katalēpsis*: I can grasp something by getting in contact with it but can fully comprehend it only by *immersing* it in my thought. However, since I am finite, I can never embrace full infinity in my thought, being only able to superficially graze it. Nevertheless, though my thought cannot embrace, it can still be *in touch with* God's actual infinity, and this is enough for moving from *cognitio* to *scientia*. (Cf. AT V, 356, VII, 113–114; CSM II, 81–82; CSMK, 378; Nolan 2014, 130. See chapter 2.1.1.[30])

By the end of the Fifth Meditation, the meditator no longer possesses merely persuading cognition but absolutely firm *scientia* of God's existence. Concentrating on God's necessary existence, the meditator can move from the unstable grasp of *persuasion* to discovering the metaphysical basis of veracious perceiving and, finally, unravel the Third Level of doubt about the potential deviousness of her nature. God's simultaneous existence and essence as the creator of the meditator's cognitive nature verifies both earlier convictions and occurring C&D perceptions, removing all counter objections, and elevates all of the meditator's *persuasio* (including of her existence and nature) to *scientia*, morphing her into the Cartesian scientist. (AT VII, 69–71; CSM II, 48–49.)

I established earlier (chapter 3.4.1) that God's created eternal truths not being in contradiction with our clear and distinct perceptions is essential for Descartes's cognitive project. However, some have called this conformity suspect based on Descartes's certain turns of phrase in the Second Replies.

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[29] CSMK translates *sçavoir* as "to know", but whether Descartes uses it in the same sense as *science* is unclear.
[30] Cf. Fifth Objections and Replies and Letter to Hyperaspistes, August 1641: AT III, 430, VII, 287, 364–365; CSM II, 200, 252, CSMK, 195. See also *SPQ*: 1998, 82–83. Note that only God has existence as one of his "features". See Gassendi's criticism (AT VII, 323; CSM II, 224) and Kant (A598/B626; 2000, 567). Cf. Carriero 2009, 195. There might be a further problem for coming to know God through his infinite essence: How can a *finite* mind contain *actual infinity*, even objectively? Descartes never settles this question. Wagner (2014) has recently suggested a solution to the Circle where the meditator has numerically the same thoughts as God due to veridical perception elevating the human nature "into the sharing of divine nature". Cf. Secada 2013. While sort of similar to my own, I find such solution 'mysticistic' and inconsistent with Descartes's metaphysics. See *Comments*: AT VIIIB, 362–363; CSM I, 306.

> [A]s soon as we think that we correctly perceive something, we are spontaneously convinced (*sponte persuademus*) that it is true. Now if this conviction is so firm that it is impossible for us to ever have any reason for doubting what we are convinced of, then there are no further questions for us to ask […] What is it to us that someone may make out (*fingat*) that the perception whose truth we are so firmly convinced of may appear false to *God or an angel*, so that it is, absolutely speaking, false? […] For the supposition which we are making here is of a conviction so firm that it is quite incapable of being destroyed; and such a conviction is clearly the same as the most perfect certainty. […] For the evident clarity of our perceptions does not allow us to listen to anyone who makes up this kind of story. (AT VII, 145–146; CSM II, 103–104. Emphasis added.)

Descartes seems to shun the possible skeptical scenario of reality appearing different to God or an angle compared to us, so certain commentators, Frankfurt most famously, suggest that what he is truly after in the *Meditations* is not metaphysical conformity of our thinking with the created world but instead the inherent consistency of our thoughts. If 'perfect certainty' is simply synonymous with spontaneous conviction, which could be "absolutely speaking false", we could not in the absolute sense know whether God deceives us or not. (Frankfurt 2008, 248–249; 1977. Cf. Bennett 1994.)

However, as argued, such a result would be devastating for the *Meditations* project. For the metaphysical basis of cognition to actually work as a metaphysical basis, the sum of the three angles of a triangle must be 180 degrees because a) God has created my cognitive nature so, and b) it is part of the reality as God has ordained. So, what is behind the "God or an angel" passage, or as I like to call it, the Angel scenario?[31] Notice that Descartes does not dismiss the scenario as a legitimate option inside the meditative exercise but instead as a fable (*fingerem*) someone else has created. Use of the same Latin root *fingere* as with the Demon supposition (see chapter 4.5) indicates that the Angel, like the Demon and madness, is an *unconvincing* scenario. However, unlike madness, which has a transitional function, and the Demon, which acts as a psychological instrument, the Angel scenario serves no purpose, especially after the meditative project has already reached its end, and can just be dismissed out of hand as ridiculous. We do not possess convincing reasons for doubt after discovering *scientia*, and even if someone tried to offer such, it would be like an alien speaking in a language we do not understand, as our reasons for the opposite are so strong that our will simply does not go for the doubt or suspension. (See AT VII, 164; CSM II, 116. Cf. Cunning 2010; 2014.[32])

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[31] Also known as the "limited aims passage" and, due to Frankfurt's heavy reliance on it, "Harry's Angels" passage. Note that the Angel scenario differs from both the God and the Demon: It posits the possibility of a *purer enquirer*, from whose viewpoint what we consider as the evident truth by our conviction is no truth at all. Cf. Gomez-Alonso 2011, 23.

[32] Cf. also Kenny 1968, 195; Frankfurt 2008, 35–36; E. Curley 1978, 108–111; B. Williams 2015, 185; M. Wilson 1978, 135, note 42; Hatfield 2006, 134–135; Carriero 1997, 5; 2009, 352–353; Wagner 2014, 33–34. As noted, God's non-motivational indifference may, though, indicate that God could deceive. If God

This reading is not meant as a fully fleshed solution to the Circle – such is beyond this work's reach. It is, instead, to help *clarify* the inherent problem of the Circle and *point towards* a coherent solution to it. One of the advantages of the skeptical meditative reading, then, is that it also allows for a better understanding of, and a potential solution to, the Circle as well. (Cf. Forsman 2019, 111–112.)

By the end of the Fifth Meditation, the discussion has cleared all three Agrippan horns: We have learned to trust our self-evident, clear and distinct intuitions that justify themselves in the Second Meditation (the *regressive* horn), established not only the clarity and distinctness but why clarity and distinctness is reliable in the Third and the Fourth (the *axiomatic horn*) and, finally, avoided the *circular horn* by elevating a strongly persuasive conviction to actual knowledge through God's infinite nature in the Fifth. We know that our cognitive nature is created by a non-deceiving God and know how to avoid error, so we can trust clear and distinct perceptions. (Cf. *Principia* I, §30: AT VIIIA, 16–17; CSM I, 203.) Clearing Agrippa's trilemma resolves the Third Level of doubt, returning the discussion to the Second Level of moderate external world skepticism and (clear and distinct) content dogmatism. Such a return is indicated by the meditator asking herself at the end of the Fifth Meditation, "[c]an one raise the objection I put to myself a while ago, that I may be dreaming, or that everything which I am now thinking has as little truth as what comes to the mind of one who is asleep?", retorting "[e]ven though I might be dreaming, if there is anything which is evident to my intellect, then it is wholly true". (AT VII, 70–71; CSM, 48–49.) Likewise, the beginning of the Sixth posits that material things "are capable of existing" in so far as they belong to created eternal truths of corporeal nature (geometrical-mathematics and spatial-durational simples) and do not consider whether the things actually exist or not.

> For there is no doubt that God is capable of creating everything [I clearly perceive]; and I have never judged that something could not be not be made by him except on the grounds that there would be a contradiction in my perceiving it distinctly. (AT VII, 71; CSM II, 50).

The main part of the meditative goal – gaining a metaphysical foundation for veridical knowledge claims – has, thus, been acquried through *God foundationalism* and

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is capable of making our experience of freedom and his divine providence to be true at the same time, without us understanding how (*Principia* I, §40–41: AT VIIIA, 20; CSM I, 206; cf. AT IV, 314; CSMK, 272), how do we know he has not made it true that his concept excludes deception while being capable of deception. See note 21. However, note that Descartes's point seems to be that God would not grant us something detrimental, i.e., would not *do us harm*. Our nature and essence is to think – and not just to think but to grasp reality with our thinking. If God would make us clearly and distinctly cognise things that are not true, he would create in us a *false* nature. The same applies if God would decree us being deceived "good". See Ragland 2016, 9, 51–56; 2014, 83–84. Cf. Schmaltz 2014; Koistinen 2014. See also Forsman 2016.

its externalist ground over merely internalist conviction, providing *scientia* about everything cognitively certain.[33]

[33] However, the meditative journey is not over yet, continuing in the Sixth Meditation by clarifying the last remaining questionable cognitive abilities – sensation and imagination – especially in perceiving material bodies (including a long discussion on habitual false beliefs) and providing a more detailed account of the way the meditator constitutes two distinct ways of being (including a long discussion on possession of a potentially defective causal mechanism, roughly equivalent to madness in the First Meditation). By discovering the natures and essences of herself and her creator in the Fifth Meditation, the meditator has been able to uncover the 'principles' on which to base true and certain beliefs – 'I' (herself as a *praecise* cognizing being) and God (the author of her being, AT VII, 77–78; CSM II, 54). However, due to still generally distrusting her sensations, even the required third 'principle' for dissolving the Second Level of doubt – body – cannot be grasped by imagination or sensation, either (i.e., by Scholastic means). Unlike the 'I' and God, both of which were intuitive realisations instead of demonstrative inferences, the proof for corporeal body is demonstrative, based on the natures of the previous two. Our God-given "bodily" inclinations cannot be corrected (being *incorrigible* by any other capacity of our nature as a cognitive being), and God's non-deceiving nature guarantees our inclinations to be true (whereas cases like dropsy or madness are both defects, which can be corrected by being in a defectless state – healthy or sane). If our natural inclinations would lead to error, God would be a deceiver. Considering these issues makes the meditator recognise her *full cognitive nature*. In cases of both dreaming and occasional sensory errors, I can also use my other senses, memory, and intellect to correct what my senses tell me or what I think I sense but only dream, clearing the Second Level of doubt. However, as mentioned, the First Level of OSE cases can never be fully settled due to the weakness of human nature and the urge to get actions done. Just as with causal defects, we cannot always expect to be in an optimal position to make the right judgment or have the opportunity to perform meticulous checks and, thus, must acknowledge our proneness, despite our best efforts, to making mistakes. (AT VII, 83–90; CSM II, 57–62.) See chapters 1.2.2, 4.1.3, and 6.1.4. Cf. Carriero 2009, 359–361.

8. Conclusion: After the *Meditations*

What is the position where the meditator, and the reader, is supposed to be left after going through the meditative exercise? The experience is to be *transformative*, so even the common-sense world should appear to the meditator as if through a "new set of eyes". However, is she to see the common-sense world completely differently or was her initial common-sense perspective right about certain things but needed to be improved?

What if the skeptical doubts would ever return in our everyday life? Would we have to try and reach the cognitive peaks all over again? This would seem extremely difficult because, according to Descartes, we hardly ever experience C&D cognitive peaks in everyday (embodied) life and cannot afford to wait for such in order to get things done (e.g., AT VIIIA, 5; CSM I, 193). Would we then have to go through the exercise again?

I discuss these issues in this conclusive chapter while also drawing some closing remarks on my reading of the meditative skeptical exercise and its intended effect on us. I start with the first issue – how deeply is our common-sense perspective of the world we inhabit changed – and then move on to discuss the second issue of how we are to replicate the results in everyday embodied life if needed.

8.1. Cartesian *Epochē* vs. Common-Sense 'Teachings of Nature'

There are at least two ways to see the cognitive exercise's impact on our everyday, common-sense perspective of the world. In the first, common-sense is just a *mass* of confused colours, sounds, temperatures, and what not, misconceiving the true physical reality of fluid corpuscularian-extended matter and its motions. In the second, the common-sense perspective gets something *right* about the physical reality but it must be improved upon. In the first way, the cognitive meditative exercise has a clearly larger impact on our everyday life, altering it completely, than in the second one, where it simply enhances our understanding and knowledge of the world around us, leaving it somewhat as it was before the exercise began while refining certain aspects of our relation with it. I argue in this chapter for the second to be the best way to understand the transformative feature of the exercise.[1]

[1] This interpretative question is related to the understanding of *reductivism* in Cartesian physics. All complexity is 'reducible' to matter and motion in Descartes's picture. *Hard reductionism*, for which most of the scholarship has opted, reads this 'reducibility' making the world *less intricate*: The world is *just* matter and motion. *Softer reductionism* (e.g., Brown & Normore 2019) sees this 'reducibility' not taking away from the richness of the world we encounter in our everyday life but to make it *more intricate* by explaining the complex patterns that comprise encountered physical reality.

Part of the exercise with the Cartesian *epochē* is to recognise and separate cognitive clarity from natural inclinations, or teachings of nature. When we initially come across these inclinations in the Third Meditation, we habitually consider them to also include the sensory resemblance model of RPS. However, these teachings of nature prove indispensable to our full essence as *human beings* in the Sixth, unrestrained from the Second Meditation *praecise* sense – a closely joined, "intermingled (*permixtum*)" unit of (cognising) mind and (extended) body. The inclinations are hardwired in us by a non-deceiving God; thus, they depict and guide our everyday life accurately, at least for the most part. (AT VII, 81–82; CSM II, 56–57. See chapters 4.1.2, 6.1.4, and 7.3.3.)

Revisiting a theme that was touched quickly on in the Second Meditation (5.1.3), the meditator should raise the question of what it is to be human, so (by the redefined full essence of the Sixth Meditation) a closely conjoined unit of *two distinct ways of being* (cf. Carriero 2009, 360). As a compound, her rashly made habitual judgments may mislead her to make false conclusions on the mental side, or her body may have a causal defect, a faulty corporeal clockwork, that obstructs the composite nature from working as it should on the corporeal side (e.g., madness or dropsy, chapters 4.2.1 and 7.3.3). However, while the corporeal causal defects are somewhat unavoidable (our bodies are not always in optimal condition), we can train out of the habit of misusing our inclinations and judgment-making capacity by an attentive reorientation of our cognitive framework. We know the RPS model does not depict reality accurately, so we can learn to separate habitual false beliefs from real teachings of nature. (*Principia* I, §70–75: AT VIIIA, 34–39; CSM I, 218–221.) This does not mean that after exiting the meditation for the final time, we would stop taking trees and lakes to actually exist in our vicinity, but would be more aware of the intricate levels of complexity in them, and how that visible world differs from the metaphysical and physical reality that makes it. Instead of robbing us of the everyday world's majesty, the exercise makes us appreciate it more.

In fact, we cannot understand this composite nature fully in the Cartesian *epochē*. Descartes explains to Elizabeth in 1643 that we have three "primitive" ideas or notions: of the soul, of the body, and of the union between these two. Of the first two notions, the mental soul "is conceived only by the pure intellect", while the corporeal body "can likewise be known by the intellect alone, but much better by the intellect aided by the imagination". However, "what belongs to the union of the soul and the body is known only obscurely by the intellect alone or even by the intellect aided by the imagination, but it is known very clearly by the senses". (AT III, 691–692; CSMK, 226–227.)

> [P]eople who never philosophize and use only their senses have no doubt that the soul moves the body and that the body acts on the soul. They regard both of them as a single thing, that is to say, they conceive (fr. *conçoivent*) their union; because to conceive the union between two things is to conceive them as one single thing. (AT III, 692; CSMK, 227.)

Mathematical thinking and imaginative capacity aids in conceiving the corporeal side and the Cartesian *epochē* helps to conceive the mental side and the real distinction. However, their union cannot be perceived with either intellectual meditation or imaginative mathematical grasping. We cannot cognitively perceive we are so compounded; we can only *experience* it in our everyday actions.

> Metaphysical thoughts, which exercise the pure intellect, help to familiarize us with the notion of the soul; and the study of mathematics, which exercises mainly the imagination in the consideration of shapes and motions, accustoms us to form very distinct notions of body. But it is the ordinary course of life and conversation, and abstention from meditation and from the study of the things which exercise the imagination, that teaches us how to conceive the union of the soul and the body. (AT VII, 692; CSMK, 227.)

The essentiality of the ordinary course of life also explains why the meditative effort is to be attempted only once. Descartes advises us to spend only "a few hours a day on in the thoughts which occupy the imagination" and "a few hours a year on those which occupy the intellect alone" (AT VII, 692–693; CSMK, 227), clarifying in the *Conversation*:

> A point to note is that one should not devote so much effort to the *Meditations* and to metaphysical questions […]. It is sufficient to have grasped them once in a general way, and then to remember the conclusion. Otherwise, they draw the mind too far away from physical and observable things, and make it unfit to study them. Yet it is just these physical studies that it is most desirable for people to pursue, since they would yield abundant benefits for life. (AT V, 165; CSMK, 346.)

Note that Descartes does not mean here that philosophy in general should be done only rarely – for him, physics and other natural sciences are equally philosophy. His point is that once the stable metaphysical basis has been discovered and the principles of veridical cognition are set in place, one does not have to search for them all over again; thus, the exercise is a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence. Nevertheless, as the meditative contemplation is separated from the conduct of life during the exercise, with everyday common sense staying the same in our ordinary way of being, the world that we return to after the exercise is very much the same as it was when we entered it for the first time, only with a layer of metaphysical intricacy added/corrected. What the transformative character of the exercise does is to lead us away from the wrong way of seeing the world, clearing away the misguided principles of Aristotelianism and the resemblance assumption of folk naïve realism. In this sense, "nothing is restored back the way it was": We better understand the world around us at a more fundamental level (i.e., we stop being naïve realists). (Cf. Christofidou 2013, 10.)

However, common-sense is not overturned. A completely new alien realm of colourless corpuscules and mechanical motions has not replaced and overtaken the earlier reality of tables, chairs, and coffee mugs. We have shed most of the false beliefs

from our cognitive habits and have learned new appreciation for the complexity that produces the world around us. We still see the same tables, chairs, and mugs, but know there to be more to reality than just that (e.g., we know that an apple's red colour is simply light reflecting from it in a certain way and not a real attribute of it). (See *Principia* I, §66–68: AT VIIIA, 32–33; CSM I, 216–217. Cf. Broughton 2002, 196–202; Carriero 2009; Brown & Normore 2019. Contra, e.g., Bermúdez 1997; Grene 1999 562–563.)

8.2. Beyond the *Meditations*: Knowledge, Tranquility, and Happiness in Everyday Life

There is a further aspect to the exercise's transformative character: It is to benefit even practical life by making us vigilant about our native urges when considering the world around us, helping us avoid judgmental errors and the associated regret and irresolution, teaching us to live a morally good, tranquil, and happy life (cf. Fine 2000; Brown 2013).

This raises the question of how are the meditative results to be repeated in everyday life, when one rarely, if ever, has C&D perception and must make decisions in which the balance of reasons is not forcibly weighted on either side, not even by plausibility.

> As far as the conduct of life is concerned, I am very far from thinking that we should assent only to what is clearly perceived. On the contrary, I do not think that we should always wait even for probable truths; from time to time we will have to choose one of many alternatives about which we have no knowledge, and once we have made our choice, so long as no reasons against it can be produced, we must stick to it as firmly as if it had been chosen for transparently clear reasons. (Second Replies: AT VII, 149; CSM II, 106. Cf. AT VI, 25, VIIIA, 5; CSM I, 123, 193.)

Suspension during the exercise is a moral responsibility but *irresolution* is to be avoided in everyday life as blameworthy and even a vice (AT XI, 459–460; CSM I, 390–391; cf. AT V, 159; CSMK, 342; chapter 3.3.4). However, what if the skeptical doubts take hold of us again; could even the most hardened man in the street be susceptible to a sudden skeptical seizure? It does not seem we should rehearse the meditation all over, as the exercise is a "one and done" deal. How, then, are the results supposed to guide our life?

First, let me reiterate what possessing *scientia* is for Descartes. It is not actively rehearsing the steps leading to God's existence but requires a *single intuitive cognitive peak*, enabling transparency not only on that we are certain but also on *why* we are certain, which allows for an external ground for all our veracious cognition. The task, after such cognitive peak is reached, is not to train the mind to summon the peak again easily and effortlessly whenever skeptical doubts take hold but to rehearse it to distinguish clear thinking and a true cognitive grasp from mere *cognitive non-sense* and protect itself from

the latter. Possessing *scientia* outside of the cognitive exercise is, then, due not to reaching the peak every time I wonder about the reliability of my cognitive basis but to having trained my mind to guard against pure, cognitive poppycock. (Cf. chapter 7.3.[2])

The same thing extends to making morally right decisions in everyday life. Descartes says in a 1645 Letter to Elizabeth that virtue consists of the right collaboration between the understanding and the will according to three conditions (loosely related to the "provisional moral code" in the *Discourse*, see chapter 2.5.2): first, "always try to employ [your] mind as well as [you] can to discover what [you] should or should not do in all the circumstances of life"; second, "have a firm and constant resolution to carry out whatever reason recommends without being diverted by […] passions or appetites; and third, "[thus guiding yourself], by reason, all the good things which [you do not] possess are one and all entirely outside [your] power". The third is important since "nothing can impede our contentment except desire and regret or repentance", but "if we always do whatever reason tells us, even if events show us afterwards that we have gone wrong, we will never have any grounds for repentance, because it was not our own fault". Thus, by training the mind to use the power of understanding the best it can, and the power of the will to firmly follow what the reason recommends, we become accustomed to not desiring things that are outside of our agency. Such mental practice prepares the mind against irresolution, which easily leads to doubt and regret.

> "[E]xcess of irresolution results from too great a desire to do well and from a weakness of the intellect, which contains only a lot of confused notions and none that are clear and distinct. That is why remedy against such excess is to become accustomed to form certain and determinate judgements regarding everything that becomes before us, and to believe that we always do our duty when we do what we judge to be best, even though our judgement may perhaps be a very bad one. (*Passions* III, §170: AT XI, 460; CSM I, 391.)

Note that firmness and resolution by themselves are insufficient for virtue. Acting morally right in everyday life requires the best possible use of our intellectual capacity, which we have trained to distinguish between clear and confused cognition. If we just randomly pick a direction and firmly follow it, we would be morally blameworthy, regardless of the direction turning out right; we would not be using our capacity of judgment correctly. Of course, even using our understanding to the best of our ability, we might still end up making the wrong choice – we cannot anticipate metaphysical security or evident cognitive conviction in everyday life actions but have to rely on moral certainty, which, while typically sufficient, might get things wrong from time to time. Nevertheless, we can escape being blamed for vice and error and avoid regret and

[2] Consider the Angel scenario (chapter 7.3.3). Remembering the results of the exercise and training the mind to vigilance, such cognitive non-sense simply carries no convincing evidence for the will to follow.

repentance by striving to reach the best judgment possible and acting resolutely based on that judgment. (AT IV, 264–266; CSMK, 257–258. Cf. AT VI, 23–28; CSM I, 122–125. See chapters 1.3, 2.5.2 and 3.3.4; cf. Naaman-Zauderer 2010, 183.)

Happiness (*la béatitude*) for Descartes is the result of such virtuous, resolute, and non-regretful living, consisting of "a perfectly content and satisfied mind" (AT IV, 264; CSMK, 257; cf. AT V, 83; CSMK, 325–326). Like the Stoics and the ancient skeptics, Descartes thinks that happiness consists of a certain kind of tranquility, a contented state free from disturbances that work as obstacles for our felicity.[3] A happy and contented life is the intended result of the skeptical inquiry just as much for Descartes as it is for the ancients (see chapter 2.1). However, Descartes is not an eudaemonist; the highest good in this life for him is not the attainment of happiness but the right and virtuous use of our judgmental capacity, resolute practice of our free agency, and the contemplation of the truth (AT IV, 275–285, 304, V, 82–83; CSMK, 261–264, 268, 324–325; cf. *Regulae* and Third Meditation: AT VII, 52, X, 361; CSM I, 10, II, 36). Using such a practice, we can eventually reach such a stable and lasting containment and tranquility, even in this life, that our state of mind cannot be simply altered by sad events and misfortunes (AT IV, 236–237, 309; CSMK, 253, 270). Virtue is essential for lasting happiness, not the other way around. (Cf. Davis 2001; Araujo 2003, 199–203; Naaman-Zauderer 2010, 183–204; Svensson 2011; 2015; 2019; Brown 2013, 42; Vitz 2015.)

In summary, the meditative task is to train both cognition and will into distinguishing errorless from erroneous cognition and to rehearse their power to protect from cognitive gibberish. The cognitive, meditative exercise is to have a lasting, transformative effect both cognitively and morally, benefitting us not just with the proper cognitive basis and establishment of science but also with ethical results – virtue, tranquility, and happiness. The search for the truth is also a search for the highest good.

I argue that skepticism in the *Meditations* is attentive, meditational cognitive exercise, that is not merely methodological but is intended to have a genuine effect on our thinking. The skeptical meditation is not simply a thought-experiment or a theoretical mind-game but a seriously practiced, transformative process of rediscovering and reorienting our cognitive framework to discover truth, certainty, and a way to a happy, tranquil, and morally good life. This offers a novel way to approach the skeptical inquiry as undermining both Scholasticism and skepticism, advancing a reading that allows a better and more complex understanding of the relationship between our ordinary life context compared with the meditational enquiry, the will's role in Descartes's theory of judgment, and the way metaphysical *scientia* is founded in a potentially non-circular way.

[3] The conversation on happy life begins with Descartes suggesting the depressed Elizabeth to read *De Vita Beata* by Seneca the Younger (c. 4 BC–65 AD), a Roman Stoic (AT IV, 251–253; CSMK, 256).

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