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# The Fourth Meditation<sup>1</sup>

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Recent scholarship suggests that Descartes's effort to establish a truth criterion is not viciously circular (notwithstanding its reputation)—a fact that invites closer scrutiny of his epistemological program. One of the least well understood features of the project is his deduction of a truth criterion from theistic premises, a demonstration Descartes says he provides in the Fourth Meditation: the alleged proof is not revealed by a casual reading, nor have commentators fared any better; in general, the relevance of the Fourth Meditation has not been duly appreciated. This paper reconstructs the argument of the Fourth Meditation, detailing the steps in the demonstration of the criterion and clarifying its role in the larger program. Surprisingly, Descartes deduces a truth criterion more fundamental than clarity and distinctness; this more fundamental criterion helps explain what are otherwise cryptic (though central) epistemological moves in the Sixth Meditation.

According to the so-called *problem of the criterion*, efforts to establish a truth criterion involve an inevitable circularity: in advancing the steps of a proof one thereby presupposes the criterion one endeavors to prove. Famously, the epistemological program of the *Meditations* was thought to provide a case study of the problem. Descartes's efforts to establish a criterion of clarity and distinctness look (prima facie) to unfold as a circle defined by two arcs: he endeavors to demonstrate a veracious God by appeal to the veracity of the criterion; he endeavors to demonstrate the veracity of the criterion by appeal to a veracious God. As a perusal of recent scholarship suggests, it is now widely held that the project is not straightforwardly circular—numerous commentators have challenged the first arc.<sup>2</sup> The second arc, however, is not in ques-

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Robert Audi, Annette Baier, Paul Hoffman, Harry Ide, Nicholas Jolley, Alan Nelson, Ram Neta, Nelson Pike, Mark van Roojen, and an anonymous referee for *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, for commenting on earlier drafts of this paper. I have also benefited from discussion of earlier versions of the paper with audiences in philosophy colloquia at Harvard University, University of Pittsburgh, and the California Conference in Early Modern Philosophy.

<sup>2</sup> There are a variety of interpretations in the literature whereby the first arc is rejected. See, e.g., Sosa (1997), Loeb (1992), Van Cleve (1979), and Kenny (1970). Here's the gist of one such account (cf. Newman and Nelson 1999). Propositions may induce assent, in virtue of being clearly and distinctly perceived, even if the perceiver has no proof of clarity and distinctness as a general truth criterion. On this reading, the Third Meditation proofs of God (among others) are clear and distinct and thus assent-compelling, even

tion. But the details of the demonstration (there mentioned) have not been well understood, nor has the relevance of the Fourth Meditation been duly appreciated.

In his introductory synopsis of the *Meditations*, Descartes writes:

In the Fourth Meditation it is proved that everything that we clearly and distinctly perceive is true ... (CSM 2:11, AT 7:15)<sup>3</sup>

[I]t was not possible to prove this [the truth criterion] before the Fourth Meditation. (CSM 2:9, AT 7:13)

These [Fourth Meditation] results need to be known both in order to confirm what has gone before and also to make intelligible what is to come later. (CSM 2:11, AT 7:15)

Commentators have been unable to make good on these claims;<sup>4</sup> some even have challenged them.<sup>5</sup> In general, our understanding of the Fourth Meditation is embarrassingly inadequate: the theory of judgment presented there *is* generally well understood;<sup>6</sup> the matter of its contribution to the (presumably orderly) epistemological project in which it is embedded, and to which Descartes alludes (in the *Synopsis*), is widely regarded as an enigma and routinely receives short shrift.<sup>7</sup> In the present paper, I aim to repair these defects in our understanding while taking seriously Descartes's synoptic remarks.

As I argue, the Fourth Meditation unfolds as follows. Descartes begins by reconsidering the problem of evil as it applies to error. The bulk of the Fourth Meditation is then devoted to a theodicy for error, one that is interesting in its own right and central to the larger epistemological project. The theodicy is advanced with the help of the Aristotelian privation-negation distinction. This distinction is also used for epistemological purpose, in that it

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though clarity and distinctness *qua criterion* has yet to be established. The claim of the first arc is thus false. There are a host of residual problems in Descartes's efforts to solve the skeptical problem, but vicious circularity is not among them.

<sup>3</sup> 'AT' = Adam and Tannery (1904); 'CSM' = Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch (1984); 'CSMK' = Volume III of CSM for which Anthony Kenny is a contributing translator. References to both AT and CSM are to the volume and page.

<sup>4</sup> I am aware of no successful effort to locate a proof of the criterion of clarity and distinctness in the Fourth Meditation. Rather, interpreters tend to focus on a suggestive passage in the Third Meditation (at AT 7:35). See, for example, Rodis-Lewis (1986, 273ff), Stout (1968, 169ff), Frankfurt (1970, 114 and 170–80), and Caton (1991, 106). Others de-emphasize this suggestive Third Meditation passage but offer no account of how the criterion is established in the Fourth Meditation. See, for example, Gewirth (1941, 382–84), Doney (1955, 334), Williams (1978, 107–8 and 187ff), and Loeb (1992, 200).

<sup>5</sup> For instance, Gueroult claims that, from the Fourth Meditation, Descartes draws "nothing more than conclusions of method" (1984, 229). And Cress (1994) argues, in effect, that none of these synoptic remarks is strictly true.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Wilson (1978, chap. 4), Williams (1978, chap. 6), and Curley (1975).

<sup>7</sup> In one recent treatment of the *Meditations* (Dicker 1993), the Fourth Meditation is skipped entirely, without explanation, in a work that otherwise amounts to a Meditation-by-Meditation commentary.

allows Descartes to clarify in which circumstances error would be incompatible with the divine essence—call these  $\phi$ -type circumstances:

- (1) If I should be in error in  $\phi$ -type circumstances, God would be a deceiver.

In concert with the Third Meditation arguments for God's veracity, (1) yields the desired truth criterion: judgments arising in  $\phi$ -type circumstances are guaranteed true. This interpretation has a surprising consequence for the celebrated circumstance of perceiving a matter clearly and distinctly. Rather than  $\phi$ -type circumstances *consisting in* clear and distinct perception, such perception turns out to be a *special case* of  $\phi$ -type circumstances. Emerging from the Fourth Meditation is another truth criterion more fundamental than the clarity and distinctness criterion. This surprising result has welcome interpretive consequences. It helps explain seemingly cryptic epistemological moves occurring late in the *Meditations*: prima facie, the Sixth Meditation meditator appears to stray from the rigorous standards of the early Meditations, forming judgments that are unwarranted by the clarity and distinctness criterion; on the present interpretation, those judgments arise in  $\phi$ -type circumstances and are thus grounded in the more fundamental truth criterion.

In what follows, I first reconstruct Descartes's theodicy for error and explain how it yields the claim in (1). In Section 2, I reconstruct the demonstration of the clarity and distinctness criterion and explain its relation to the  $\phi$ -type circumstances that yield the more fundamental truth criterion. I close Section 2 with a brief discussion of the role of this more fundamental criterion in the Sixth Meditation.

## 1. The theodicy of the Fourth Meditation

### 1.1. The problem

In the Third Meditation, Descartes argues for an omniperfect deity. He opens the Fourth Meditation (AT 7:54) by reconsidering the traditional problem of evil, as applied to *error*—the form in which it is introduced in the First Meditation (AT 7:21). As typically construed, the problem rests on an apparent tension in the supposition of an omniperfect creator who produces a world with evil. The apparent tension may be clarified by an analogy to ordinary manufacturers, an analogy which Descartes variously develops and to which I later return. Defect in the products of ordinary craftsmen would seem to be owed to a limitation of power, knowledge, or benevolent intention. When we believe such defect is owed to a limitation in power or knowledge, we're apt to excuse the manufacturer from moral culpability (though perhaps not from all legal responsibility). I shall refer to any such excusing condition as a

morally sufficient reason (MSR).<sup>8</sup> In contrast, we admit of no MSR when we believe the defect is owed entirely to a lapse of benevolent intention. Precisely here lies the rub for the thesis of an omnipotent creator: since such a being would not be limited in power or knowledge, it would seem to have no MSR for producing creatures with defect. As Gassendi objects:

[G]iven that [God] could have made things more perfect but did not do so, this seems to show that he must have lacked either the knowledge or the power or the will to do so. He was certainly imperfect if, despite having the knowledge and the power, he lacked the will and preferred imperfection to perfection. (CSM 2:214–15, AT 7:308)

It appears that the mere existence of defective creatures (e.g. those that err) amounts to a *reductio ad absurdum* on the supposition of an omnipotent creator.

As will emerge, Descartes holds that this formulation of the problem is too crude. It cannot be that an omnipotent creator would have no MSR for producing creatures with *any* defect whatever, since (at least) the defect of *being a creature* (and hence dependent) is unavoidable.<sup>9</sup> A sufficiently subtle treatment of the problem would need distinguish among types of defect, along with the prospects of there being MSRs for each. Towards these ends, Descartes invokes the Aristotelian privation-negation distinction (as discussed in Section 1.2).

Since, for Descartes, skeptical problems often rest on conceptual mistakes, he must introduce them by way of hypotheses that (by his lights) involve disguised conceptual muddles. Thus, notwithstanding his more-subtle Fourth Meditation treatment, Descartes introduces the problem of evil in less-subtle fashion by having his First Meditation meditator make the same mistake that Gassendi later repeats—generating the *reductio*, by presupposing that an omnipotent creator would have no MSR for *any* occurrence of error:

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. (CSM 2:14, AT 7:21)

Never contested, in the *Meditations*, is the assumption that there would be no MSR for a world with creatures who systematically err (a scenario inspired by the Deceiver Hypothesis). In the above First Meditation remark, the naïve meditator is supposing the following:

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<sup>8</sup> I borrow the term from Pike (1963).

<sup>9</sup> As Leibniz puts it: "A being exempt from limitation would not be a creature, but God. Every creature is limited in this sense, that its greatness, power, knowledge, and all its other perfections are limited or restricted." (1965, 129)

- (2) A world with creatures that sometimes err is as contrary to the divine essence as a world with creatures for whom error is unavoidable.

Descartes thinks (2) rests on a conceptual mistake, but unless the mistake is rectified the undisputed fact of occasional error will impede any efforts to establish finally an omnipotent deity. Thus, on the heels of the Third Meditation effort, the meditator is confronted with absurdity. Descartes opens the Fourth Meditation by revisiting the problem, thereby setting the stage for a discussion of theodicy in which (2) is to be challenged.

### 1.2. Descartes's theodician strategy

Among the inherited doctrines on which Descartes relies is the thesis that *being* is intrinsically good in that it comes from God. Evil, and indeed all defect/imperfection, are not positive beings but instead result from an *absence* of being—much as one is tempted to construe darkness as nothing more than the absence of light.<sup>10</sup> Following in the Aristotelian tradition, Descartes distinguishes two varieties of imperfection: *imperfect instances* of a kind, and *imperfect kinds*. Only the former *need* involve intolerable imperfection for which an omnipotent creator would have no MSR, a claim I'll try to motivate with the craftsman analogy.

A product is imperfect in one sense if it malfunctions. This is imperfection in the *instance*. It is imperfect in another sense insofar as it lacks the perfection of a more deluxe model (or perhaps an entirely different product), whether actual or merely possible. This is (comparative) imperfection in the *kind*. In this latter sense, the defect need involve none other than a design limitation of the sort to which all creatures are susceptible: every product is essentially limited, even when produced by God. In contrast, the former variety of imperfection (*viz.* imperfection of instances) is intolerable in the context of an omnipotent manufacturer: since we admit of MSRs for such malfunction only if we believe it to result, at least in part, from some relevant limitation in the power or knowledge of the manufacturer, God would have no such MSR. Given the "nature of God," Descartes writes, "it seems impossible that he should have placed in [us] a faculty which is not perfect of its kind, or which lacks some perfection which it ought to have" (CSM 2:38, AT 7:55). This intuition, that malfunctioning products are irreconcilable with an omnipotent manufacturer, provides Descartes the leverage he thinks is needed in his eventual appeal to  $\phi$ -type circumstances (in his epistemological program).

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<sup>10</sup> Non-being theses date back at least as early as Plato, and their application to the problem of evil is developed in the medieval period by (among others) Plotinus (cf. *Enneads* I.8), Augustine (cf. *Enchiridion* ch. 11f), and Thomas (cf. *Summa Theologica* (hereafter *ST*) 1.48.3).

Descartes expresses the distinction between these two varieties of imperfection in the Aristotelian jargon of *privation* and *negation*.<sup>11</sup> In the *Categories*, Aristotle writes:

We say that that which is capable of some particular faculty or possession has suffered privation when the faculty or possession in question is in no way present in that in which, and at the time at which, it should naturally be present. We do not call that toothless which has not teeth, or that blind which has not sight, but rather that which has not teeth or sight at the time when by nature it should.<sup>12</sup>

Relating the distinction to evil, Thomas observes:

[A]n evil means the displacement of a good. Not that every absence of a good is bad, for it can be taken in a negative and in a privative sense. The mere negation of a good does not have the force of evil, otherwise it would follow that wholly non-existents were bad, also that a thing was bad because it did not possess the quality of something else, a man, for instance, who was not swift as a mountain-goat and strong as a lion. The absence of good taken deprivatively is what we call evil, thus blindness which is the privation of sight. (*ST* 1a.48.3)

Both varieties of imperfection involve a negation of being. *Privative* defect renders beings imperfect instances of their kinds. *Purely negative* defect renders whole kinds as imperfect.<sup>13</sup>

An acceptable theodicy must avoid the attribution of privation to the omniperfect manufacturer (as this that would entail contradiction). Descartes thus invokes a special case of creaturely privation to which Scholastics also appeal. As Thomas writes, privation “is found in a special manner in rational creatures possessing will”: it involves the kind of “shortcoming that falls under the control of the will” (*ST* 1a.48.5). The craftsman analogy is again useful. Consider a car without anti-lock brakes, one whose wheels have locked-up resulting in a collision. Culpability might lie with the manufacturer—perhaps a mistake in the manufacturing process rendered the lock-up inevitable. Culpability might instead lie with the driver for misusing the brakes—perhaps failing to use them in the manner prescribed for driving on slippery surfaces. Descartes argues, in effect, that judgment error is more like this second case, in that the culpable privation lies in the misuse of our will: “our errors, if considered in relation to God, are merely negations; if considered in relation to ourselves they are privations” (CSM 1:203, AT 8a:17); God would “not give me the kind of faculty which would ever enable me to go wrong while using it correctly” (CSM 2:37–38, AT 7:54).

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<sup>11</sup> In my use of jargon, my primary aim will be to facilitate an understanding of Descartes, rather than a faithful rendering of the texts of Aristotelians.

<sup>12</sup> Ch. 10. In the *Metaphysics*, he adds: “negation means just the absence of the thing in question, while in privation there is also employed an underlying nature of which the privation is asserted” (bk. 4, ch. 2).

<sup>13</sup> Where ‘pure’ indicates the defect is non-privative.

To help distinguish this user-culpable variety of privation from the manufacturer-culpable variety, Descartes sometimes refers to the latter as *positive imperfection*.<sup>14</sup> Were my faculties lacking some perfection (i.e. being) needed for truthful judging, the positive being it has—its design—would unavoidably tend towards error. Rendered unavoidable in this positive manner, such error would need be attributed to God since everything positive comes from God. But, as Descartes writes, since God is no deceiver there would “be a contradiction that anything should be created by him which positively tends towards falsehood” (CSM 2:103, AT 7:144).<sup>15</sup>

Though Descartes regards positive imperfection as incompatible with the divine essence, he recognizes that even some purely negative imperfection might be problematic. The craftsman analogy helps bring this out. Grant that the driver of the car, in our earlier scenario resulting in collision, has failed to use the brakes in the prescribed manner. And grant further that the brakes have no positive imperfection *in that* they work flawlessly when used in the prescribed manner. Nonetheless, if the level of skill required to use them in the prescribed manner (e.g. on wet surfaces) is excessive, it would seem that the manufacturer bears some culpability for the collision—a *fortiori* where anti-lock brake technology is available. Likewise, grant that our faculties of judging do not malfunction when used correctly. Even so, if the level of skill required to avoid error (e.g. in sensory contexts) is excessive, it would seem that the manufacturer of our cognitive faculties bears some culpability—a *fortiori* if our manufacturer is omnipotent, and can thus avail itself of all manner of anti-error technology. By Descartes’s own lights, using our cognitive faculties in the prescribed manner requires such great expertise that he recommends we “devote several months, or at least weeks” to the First Meditation alone (CSM 2:94, AT 7:130), a Meditation that prepares us to be able to withhold assent so as to avoid error. It would seem, then, that Descartes owes us more than an argument establishing that our faculties of judging are free from positive imperfection. He must also address whether an omnipotent manufacturer would have an MSR for endowing us with faculties that render us highly susceptible to error. As I read him, he does.

A final clarification of important distinctions will help us appreciate his theodician strategy:

Two categories of defect/imperfection relative to a product:

(a) privative imperfection, i.e. imperfection of instances; two cases:

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<sup>14</sup> In the Fifth Replies, for example, Descartes complains that Gassendi erroneously assumes “that our being liable to error is a positive imperfection [*positivā imperfectione*], when in fact it is simply (especially with respect to God) the negation of greater perfection among created things” (CSM 2:258, AT 7:376).

<sup>15</sup> In the *Principles* 1.29, Descartes adds that “it is a complete contradiction to suppose that [God] might deceive us or be, in the strict and *positive* sense, the cause of the errors to which we know by experience that we are prone” (CSM 1:203, AT 8a:16; my italics).

- (i) privative in relation to the manufacturer, i.e. positive imperfection;
- (ii) privative in relation to the user;
- (b) purely negative imperfection, i.e. imperfection of kinds.

Type (ai) imperfection is essentially incompatible with the divine essence; type (b) is not, since it involves no positive imperfection (as Descartes characterizes it). If, however, type (b) imperfection renders the product susceptible to misuse (thus enabling type (aii) imperfection), its occurrence is problematic—especially in the context of an omnipotent manufacturer.

The Fourth Meditation theodicy mirrors these concerns. Descartes first argues that judgment error results from our own misuse of will rather than from positive imperfection. He then argues that God might well have an MSR for purely negative imperfection—that there might be the requisite explanation why God produced kinds so imperfect as to facilitate the misuse of will that results in error. Granting the overall argument, the First Meditation supposition (in (2)) motivating the problem of error is shown to be false: the moral implications of occasional error owed to creaturely misuse are very different than those of systematic error owed to positive imperfection.

### *1.3. Part one of the theodicy: error is not owed to positive imperfection*

According to Descartes, judgment results from the interplay of two subfaculties: the intellect and the will. Thus the candidates for positive imperfection are the parts and their composition. Descartes begins with the parts.<sup>16</sup>

The intellect is found to be free of positive imperfection. Insofar as it contributes to judgment, it performs without malfunction: “All that the intellect does is to enable me to perceive the ideas which are subjects for possible judgements; and when regarded strictly in this light, it turns out to contain no error in the proper sense of that term” (CSM 2:39, AT 7:56).<sup>17</sup> And though

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<sup>16</sup> There is much of philosophical interest to explore in Descartes’s theory of judgment, but inasmuch as numerous commentators have already done so (cf. note 6 above), I shall in general confine my discussion of the theory to those matters that are central to the theodicy, or that otherwise anticipate the eventual demonstration of the truth criterion. In an effort to forestall at least some objections, however, I want to locate myself (without argument) on two issues that have troubled interpreters. First, I think the two-faculty account is best read as applying to assent as opposed to belief—arguably, belief is entirely a function of the intellect (save perhaps that the will helps with *attention*). Second, to the extent that the *Meditations* advances a voluntarist doctrine concerning creaturely assent, I take it that the doctrine applies only *negatively* (it is within our *direct* voluntary control to *withhold* assent only, but not to give assent) and with *exceptions* (we cannot but assent when our perception of a matter is clear and distinct).

<sup>17</sup> A malfunction of the intellect (insofar as it contributes to judging) would occur only if the content to which I *seemed* to be attending, as the subject of a possible judgment, were not the content to which I were *in fact* attending. But Descartes thinks this kind of error is not possible, in keeping with his doctrine of the incorrigibility of the mental—a doctrine expounded in the Second and Third Meditations (see AT 7:29 and 37). I can be mistaken

limited in scope (i.e. in the range of matters understood), this limitation is not, *per se*, evidence of positive as opposed to purely negative imperfection.<sup>18</sup> As the meditator thus concludes, though the intellect may fail, in that “countless things may exist without there being any corresponding ideas in me, it should not, strictly speaking, be said that I am deprived [*privatus*] of these ideas, but merely that I lack them, in a negative sense” (CSM 2:39, AT 7:56).

The will is also found to be without positive imperfection, and on this count Descartes thinks there is the least room for dispute. Says the meditator, “I think it is very noteworthy that there is nothing else in me which is so perfect and so great that the possibility of a further increase in its perfection or greatness is beyond my understanding” (CSM 2:39, AT 7:56–57); indeed, “the will simply consists in our ability to do or not do something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid)” (CSM 2:40, AT 7:57)—an ability that Descartes thinks is unassailable.

Granting that neither the intellect nor the will is positively imperfect when considered in isolation, it remains to be shown that there is no such defect in the design of their cooperation.

So what then is the source of my mistakes? It must be simply this: the scope of the will is wider than that of the intellect; but instead of restricting it within the same limits, I extend its use to matters which I do not understand (CSM 2:40, AT 7:58).

At issue is whether this scope disparity is a positive imperfection as would render error unavoidable:

If, however, I simply refrain from making a judgement 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 (CSM 2:41, AT 7:59–60).

Error results from misuse of the will, and Descartes thinks he establishes a set of instructions for correct use. In short,<sup>19</sup>

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as to the *truth* of the content to which I am attending, but not as to *whether* I am attending to that content.

<sup>18</sup> As the meditator observes, back in the Third Meditation, some such limitation is essential: “even if my knowledge always increases more and more, 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” (CSM 2:32, AT 7:47).

<sup>19</sup> Bear in mind, at this stage of the Fourth Meditation, that (3) enjoys no divine guarantee—it has not been derived from theological premises. (This will prove important in Section 2.1.) Rather, the compatibility of the divine essence with error is under investigation. This error-avoiding rule, in (3), is advanced in an effort to show that our faculties of judging have no positive imperfection; that error (insofar as we’re aware of it) can be avoided if we use our faculties correctly. In context, this consequence is needed in order to *clear the divine name*.

- (3) I am using my faculty of judging in the correct manner (so as to ensure the avoidance of error) if and only if I withhold assent except when my perception of a matter is clear and distinct.<sup>20</sup>

And given (3),<sup>21</sup> thinks Descartes, there is no evidence that our composite faculty of judging is positively imperfect since it does not malfunction when used correctly;<sup>22</sup> error *is* avoided when we withhold assent in the prescribed manner.<sup>23</sup> What follows from God's essence is not that the faculty of judging is uniformly inerrant, but that it "tend towards the truth" on those occasions "when we use it correctly" (CSM 2:103, AT 7:144).

In this incorrect use of free will may be found the privation which constitutes the essence [*formam*] of error. The privation, I say, lies in the operation of the will in so far as it proceeds from me, but not in the faculty of will which I received from God, nor even in its operation, in so far as it depends on him. (CSM 2:41, AT 7:60; cf. AT 8a:19)

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<sup>20</sup> Since, according to Descartes, we're able to exercise the ability to withhold assent on exactly those occasions when our perception is not clear and distinct, the prescription in (3) entails that we *should* withhold assent whenever we *can*. To wit (and this is alluded to at AT 7:59), I am correctly using my faculty of judging exactly when I follow the Method of Doubt. Invoking a common-sense foundationalism (inspired by an architectural metaphor), the First Meditation meditator concludes that he ought to "hold back [his] assent from opinions which are not completely certain and indubitable" (CSM 2:12, AT 7:18); the (comparatively subtle) Fourth Meditation inquiry yields what amounts to the same result.

<sup>21</sup> It is somewhat unclear how strong an argument Descartes thinks he has advanced, in support of (3)—whether he intends that it is clearly and distinctly established, or instead that it rests on an argument to the best explanation.

<sup>22</sup> Discussions concerning whether a thing is positively imperfect inevitably presuppose a final cause—some *telos* for which it was designed. The meditator's working presumption is that his intellect and will were designed for the purpose of error-free judgment. Yet, for all he knows, at this stage of the *Meditations*, there may be some other end, apart from judgment, for which the will and the intellect were designed, and concerning which they *are* positively imperfect; indeed, at this juncture, the meditator has not yet ruled out the possibility that within him occur a variety of mental operations (perhaps involving the will or the intellect) of which he is unaware (cf. Newman 1994). For his present purposes, however, this need not concern Descartes. Since the specific worry under consideration (without which a theodicy would be unnecessary) concerns whether the faculties of judging are positively imperfect *insofar as* they result in judgment error, Descartes need only show that they are not positively imperfect *to this extent*.

<sup>23</sup> For all the meditator yet *knows* (at this stage of the *Meditations*), he may be in error even on those occasions when his perception of a matter is clear and distinct, even if such error would escape his detection—indeed his comprehension. (Bear in mind that the results of the Third Meditation theistic arguments intended to subdue such metaphysical doubts (at least, where motivated by the Deceiver Hypothesis) are on hold, pending the outcome of the theodicy.) But though the success of the larger anti-skeptical project requires that Descartes address this *hypothetical* category of error (prompted by metaphysical doubt), the only category of error that the present stage of the theodicy need address is *discernible* error—i.e. that precise error by which one generates the *reductio* discussed in Section 1.1.

Were the faculty of judging incapable of being misused it might be a more perfect kind, but all Descartes needs to show, in this first stage of the theodicy, is that it is a perfect instance—that it is not positively imperfect. Since error is avoided with correct use, in accordance with (3), Descartes thinks he's met the burden.

#### 1.4. Part two of the theodicy: God might have an MSR for allowing error

It remains to be shown whether God has an MSR for having produced such an imperfect kind of creature—one so prone towards error, albeit owed entirely to purely negative defect. Descartes expounds his case by rejoining likely objections. Again, the candidates for consideration are the parts and their composition.

The first objection concerns the scope of the intellect. Since we could have been endowed with a more perfect kind of intellect, namely one with wider scope (thereby limiting the scope disparity between the intellect and the will), an omnipotent creator would have no MSR for not doing so. Descartes's rebuttal is perhaps too brief, but I think it is best read as a *reductio* on the critic's supposition that God would have no MSR for creating a kind of intellect with less-wide scope than is otherwise possible. The supposition results in the absurd (though formally consistent) claim that there would be no MSR regardless of how perfect an intellect were produced: no matter how wide its scope, a yet wider scope would remain possible (cf. note 18); "it is in the nature of a finite intellect to lack understanding of many things, and it is in the nature of a created intellect to be finite" (CSM 2:42, AT 7:60). This, of course, does not yet discharge the worry that there is some minimum degree of perfection below which an omnipotent creator would have no MSR. The response to this residual worry comes below.

"Nor", moving to the next objection, is there "cause for complaint on the grounds that God gave me a will which extends more widely than my intellect" (CSM 2:42, AT 7:60). Had God limited its scope, *ipso facto* the will would have been rendered a less perfect kind.<sup>24</sup>

The final line of objection concerns the intellect-will composite. In view of our aptitude to err, it seems that God could have, and thus should have, done better. Some kinds seem so repugnant as to have no MSR. A passage from Gassendi is suggestive:

It is certainly no fault in a workman if he does not trouble to make an enormous key to open a tiny box; but it is a fault if, in making the key small, he gives it a shape which makes it difficult

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<sup>24</sup> Descartes can also be read as offering the stronger reply that any limitation in the will's scope would render it an imperfect *instance*: he writes that "it seems that its nature rules out the possibility of anything being taken away from it" (CSM 2:42, AT 7:60), a claim that can be taken to mean that to limit the will's scope would be to *deprive* it of a perfection it should naturally possess (rendering it positively imperfect).

or impossible to open the box. Similarly, God is admittedly not to be blamed for giving puny man a faculty of judging that is too small to cope with everything, or even with most things or the most important things; but this still leaves room to wonder why he gave man a faculty which is uncertain, confused and inadequate even for the few matters which he did want us to decide upon. (CSM 2:218, AT 7:314)

Before considering Descartes's reply, I want to clarify two lines of response that he does not offer but both of which provide a somewhat tempting reading of the texts. The meditator's remark that, in having freewill, it "means that there is in a sense more perfection in me than would be the case if I lacked this ability" (CSM 2:42, AT 7:60–61), might be thought to show that freewill is supposed to provide God the MSR for producing errant creatures. On this account, error is taken as a necessary concomitant of genuine freewill, yet Descartes concedes the contrary:

I can see, however, that God could easily have brought it about that without losing my freedom, and despite the limitations in my knowledge, I should nonetheless never make a mistake. He could, for example, have endowed my intellect with a clear and distinct perception of everything about which I was ever likely to deliberate; or he could simply have impressed it unforgettably on my memory that I should never make a judgement about anything which I did not clearly and distinctly understand. (CSM 2:42, AT 7:61)

It is also tempting to read Descartes as appealing to the principle of plenitude,<sup>25</sup> especially in view of the popularity of plenitude accounts amongst the medievals. Accordingly, God augmented the variety in creation precisely in order to augment the good of the creation as a whole. Says Thomas, God

brought things into existence so that his goodness might be communicated to creatures and re-enacted through them. And because one single creature was not enough, he produced many and diverse, so that what was wanting in one expression of the divine goodness might be supplied by another, for goodness, which in God is single and all together, in creatures is multiple and scattered. Hence the whole universe less incompletely than one alone shares and represents his goodness. (*ST* 1a.47.1)

As such, the perfection of the creation, as a whole, benefits from an especially fine-grained continuity between created kinds; so fine-grained, perhaps, as to include even error-prone kinds, thus providing the MSR for the creation of our world.

Descartes's actual reply involves neither an appeal to freewill nor to plenitude—though I have yet to justify the latter claim. Instead, he appeals to another inherited doctrine,<sup>26</sup> the principle of organic unities—a principle that

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<sup>25</sup> As does Calvert (1972).

<sup>26</sup> One that finds expression in Plato (cf. the *Laws* bk. 10) and is developed by the medievals for purposes of theodicy.

allows that the good of a whole may be enhanced by decreases in the perfection of its parts.<sup>27</sup> Says the meditator,

Had God made me this way [inerrant], then I can easily understand that, considered as a totality, I would have been more perfect than I am now. But I cannot therefore deny that there may in some way be more perfection in the universe as a whole because some of its parts are not immune from error ...<sup>28</sup> (CSM 2:42–43, AT 7:61)

For all we know, urges Descartes, the creation—as a whole—is more perfect in virtue of our faculties of judging being a less perfect kind.<sup>29</sup>

To the extent that the principle of plenitude allows that decreases in the perfection of parts (i.e., of kinds in the parts) may add to the perfection of a

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<sup>27</sup> In terminology I borrow from G. E. Moore, in view of the similarity between his principle and Descartes's. In one of Moore's formulations, the principle is defined as the thesis "that the intrinsic value of a whole is neither identical with nor proportional to the sum of the values of its parts" (1988, 184). I take talk of "parts" to apply not only to local hunks of being but also to local distributions of being.

<sup>28</sup> According to Plotinus, "we are like people who know nothing about the art of painting and criticise the painter because the colours are not beautiful everywhere, though he has really distributed the appropriate colours to every place" (*Enneads* III.2.11; cf. also III.2.3). Thomas adds: "God and nature and any agent do what is better for the whole, and for each part as subserving the whole, yet not in isolation ... That whole composed of the universe of creatures is the better and more complete for including some things which can and do on occasion fall from goodness without God preventing it." (*ST* 1a.48.2)

<sup>29</sup> Notwithstanding the account of the Fourth Meditation (in which the meditator says that "there is no doubt that [God] always wills what is best" (CSM 2:38, AT 7:55)), there are both textual and doctrinal reasons to suppose that Descartes rejects the principle of the best (*vis-à-vis* the kind of world to actualize); that he holds, instead, that—for all we know—God may have an MSR for bringing about *any* arbitrary world absent positive imperfection.

The textual consideration stems from a remark to a correspondent (2 May 1644) concerning the Fourth Meditation account: "I do not know that I laid it down that God always does what he knows to be the most perfect, and it does not seem to me that a finite mind can judge of that. But I tried to solve the difficulty in question, about the cause of error, on the assumption that God had made the world most perfect, since if one makes the opposite assumption, the difficulty disappears altogether" (CSMK 232, AT 4:113). This is consistent with Descartes's practice of using the voice of his meditator-spokesperson to express all manner of views—whether those he means to debunk, or his own doctrines, or, as in the present case, views he means to assume for the sake of argument. Notice too that Descartes's actual Fourth Meditation appeal to organic unities commits him to nothing stronger than that, for all we know, God has an MSR for producing errant kinds, since doing so renders the world *more* perfect (*major perfectio*, AT 7:61), rather than that it renders the world *most* perfect.

The doctrinal consideration is this: it is plausible to suppose that Descartes rejects that the notion of a most perfect world is coherent. His Third Meditation discussion of the intellect commits him to the doctrine that a *most perfect created intellect* is incoherent (see note 18 above). Arguably, Descartes holds the same with regard to a *most perfect created world*. Indeed, according to Thomas, such a world—*qua* most perfect set of particulars/parts—is incoherent, since there is infinite distance (as it were) between God and any possible creature (*Scriptum super Sententias*, 1.44.1.2). Thomas does allow, however, that for any given world—*qua* set of parts—there is a most perfect *ordering* (cf. *ST* 1a.25.6). For a helpful discussion of Thomas' view, see Kretzmann (1991).

whole, it is similar to the principle of organic unities (as invoked by Descartes), but there are important differences. First, the principle of plenitude explains increases in the perfection of a whole—as are owed to decreases in the parts—only in *ceteris paribus* contexts in which the comparatively imperfect parts are *added to* the whole (without displacing existing parts).<sup>30</sup> But Descartes's appeal to organic unities allows that such increases in the perfection of the whole might be explained even where the comparatively imperfect parts *displace* otherwise existing parts. Second, though the principle of plenitude provides an *a priori* explanation as to why a world is more perfect with the addition of errant kinds than without (*ceteris paribus*), Descartes's application of organic unities turns on an appeal to human ignorance: *for all we know*, our world is better (with error) than it would otherwise be. Indeed, given our essentially finite, creaturely perspective, the problem is far worse: for all we *could* know, our world is better than it would otherwise be.

We have now seen both parts of Descartes's Fourth Meditation theodicy. Granting that both stages succeed, his argument undermines the claim in (2) on which the problem of error (as characterized in the First Meditation) is based.

### 1.5. Burden of proof

Given my account, Descartes's theodicy may seem inconsonant with the Method of Doubt. According to the objection I have in mind, the meditator cannot accept a theodicy as dubious as that which I have reconstructed, one whose second stage turns on the claim that, for all we know, God has an MSR for having created our world. Rather, as it would seem, the Method of Doubt requires that Descartes produce a decisive argument showing that the creator *does* have the requisite MSR. I believe the objection is unfounded, but I shall have to introduce a pair of distinctions to make my case.

The problem of error (and of evil in general) and the effort at solving it both come in stronger and weaker versions. On the solution side, (what I am calling) "strong" theodicies rest on a specific proposal for an MSR that would explain the occurrence of error in the actual world; "weak" theodicies propose, instead, that we cannot rule out there being some such MSR.<sup>31</sup> On the problem side, the worry may be formulated as a logical or an evidential problem. According to the logical problem, the occurrence of error is logically incompatible with the existence of an omniperfect creator—thus providing for a demonstration of the impossibility of God's existence. This is the version of

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<sup>30</sup> For example, the principle of plenitude provides an explanation of why world *W*, with parts *a*, *b*, and *c*, is less perfect than world *W'*, with parts *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d*. But it is not applicable to comparisons between the same world *W* (with parts *a*, *b*, and *c*) and a world *W''*, with parts *a*, *b*, and *d*.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Plantinga's distinction between a *theodicy* for evil and a *defense* of evil (1974, 28).

the problem that Descartes introduces in the First Meditation. According to the evidential problem, “even if it is *possible* that God has a morally sufficient reason for creating the sort of world we experience ... the facts of evil constitute *evidence* against the hypothesis that the world was created, and is governed, by an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God.”<sup>32</sup>

In the context of the *Meditations*, it is sufficient that Descartes offers a weak theodicy in response to the logical problem. On the problem side, only the logical problem *could* have any force: on the heels of the Third Meditation in which Descartes purports to establish, with demonstrative certainty, the existence of an omniperfect being, the evidential problem does no damage—a successful demonstration of *p* is not undermined by a merely probable argument that not-*p*. The logical problem, however, is enough to force the meditator to suspend judgment concerning the Third Meditation demonstration (i.e. when not attending to it) until further inquiry can resolve the tension in supposing an omniperfect creator of a world with error. On the solution side, a successful weak theodicy is sufficient to thwart the logical problem: successfully making the case that, for all we know, there is no inconsistency between error and the divine essence discredits the claim that we know there to be one.

#### 1.6. *The privation-negation distinction and $\phi$ -type circumstances*

I claimed, at the outset, that Descartes needs to establish the following:

- (1) If I should be in error in  $\phi$ -type circumstances, God would be a deceiver.

We are now in position to make headway in understanding  $\phi$ -type circumstances—a result we’ll need in the subsequent effort to reconstruct the proof of a criterion of truth.

In view of the epistemic character of the appeal to organic unities, the only species of imperfection that Descartes *could* rule out as incompatible with the divine essence is positive imperfection. Indeed, Descartes’s rather tortuous explanatory moves, *vis-à-vis* the possibility of our having positive imperfection, are requisite to the constructive phase of his theistic epistemology. The theistic steps in the epistemological program depend on (1), and (1) depends on being able to establish a species of error with which the divine essence is incompatible. Suppose Descartes had taken a weak epistemic stance when he confronted the possibility of our faculties having positive imperfection. For instance, suppose he had argued (nothing stronger than) that, for all we know, our cognitive faculties have no positive imperfection; or that, for all we know, God has an MSR justifying the production of crea-

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<sup>32</sup> Adams and Adams (1990, 16); cf. Pike (1963, 192ff).

tures with positive imperfection. Had Descartes made such an argument, he'd be unable to establish (1). In turn, the theistic component of his epistemology would be stillborn. He would be unable to rule out the possibility that God is compatible with *all manner* of judgment error.

An interpretive principle thus emerges:

- (4) Descartes asserts that God would be a deceiver if  $p$  were false (i.e. if the meditator's assent to  $p$  were to result in error) only in circumstances in which positive imperfection in the meditator's faculty of judging would contribute to such error.<sup>33</sup>

Because of (4), (1) must be understood in terms of positive imperfection. And since, in the final analysis, every claim to knowledge (*scientia*) in the *Meditations* rests on (1), all such knowledge claims must be understood in terms of positive imperfection.

As I noted at the outset, Descartes thinks that his Fourth Meditation results "need to be known both in order to confirm what has gone before and also to make intelligible what is to come later" (CSM 2:11, AT 7:15). As we've now seen, the Fourth Meditation theodicy is needed to reconcile an apparent contradiction resulting from the Third Meditation proof of God. It is also needed to make sense of Descartes's appeals to God as no deceiver, in connection with (1) and (4). We have yet to cash-in the notion of a  $\phi$ -type circumstance for a truth criterion specified in terms of clarity and distinctness. I want now to turn to that part of Descartes's project. Our interpretive principle, (4), will prove especially fruitful in reconstructing the argument.

## 2. The criterion of truth

Descartes's most famous formulation of a truth criterion is in terms of clarity and distinctness, and I shall hereafter refer to this criterion as the "C&D Rule". As Section 2 unfolds, my defense of a number of theses will emerge: the conclusion that the C&D Rule is divinely guaranteed is not drawn until the last paragraph of the Fourth Meditation; the theodicy provides steps that are essential to the demonstration of the C&D Rule; and the C&D Rule rests on a yet more fundamental truth rule, one that helps explain central Sixth Meditation inferences.

### 2.1. Why a further argument for the C&D Rule is needed

Two passages might tempt one to suppose that Descartes intends to establish the C&D Rule at an earlier point than the last paragraph of the Fourth Meditation. In both cases, an argument in support of a criterion of clarity and dis-

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<sup>33</sup> I am assuming that expressions such as "God would be a deceiver" are typically elliptical for some such as "God, who is omnipotent and omniscient, would be a deceiver."

tinctness *is* advanced, but in neither case does the argument yield the desideratum.

The first passage occurs early in the Third Meditation:

I am certain that I am a thinking thing. Do I not therefore also know what is required for my being certain about anything? In this first item of knowledge [*cognitione*] there is simply a clear and distinct perception of what I am asserting; this 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. So I now seem to be able to lay it down as a general rule that whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true. (CSM 2:24, AT 7:35)

Many commentators focus on this passage,<sup>34</sup> with an eye towards the following account. (Call this the “cogito-derived” account.) The meditator’s (above) reflections on clarity and distinctness—as the epistemic ground of the *cogito*—are intended to establish that the C&D Rule is credible, barring the discovery of a doubt that defeats its credibility. It is then discovered (two paragraphs later) that, though the Deceiver Hypothesis *does* undermine the C&D Rule, it is the *only* sceptical hypothesis that provides any reason for doubt. Thus, subsequent to refuting the Deceiver Hypothesis (later in the Third Meditation), the unconditional credibility of the C&D Rule is thereby established.

There are serious problems with this account,<sup>35</sup> not the least being that, when synopsising his own case for the C&D Rule, Descartes in no way alludes to the cogito-derived account; instead, he explicitly states that the C&D Rule is established in the Fourth Meditation (AT 7:15). Nor does he avail himself of the cogito-derived account, when pressed by the second objectors as to the veracity of clear and distinct perception; rather, he responds with a Fourth Meditation line of argument (reconstructed below, in Section 2.3) that is in no way derivative of the above Third Meditation passage. The problem with the cogito-derived account is that, in context, Descartes is claiming not that the Deceiver Hypothesis (and equivalent doubts) provides the only reason for doubting the credibility of the C&D Rule, but that it provides the only reason for doubting the credibility of the particular, “very simple and straightforward” matters intuited “utterly clearly”—those that *fall under* the C&D Rule, as “for example that two and three added together make five, and so on” (CSM 2:25, AT 7:36). Yet the express ground for the overly optimistic conjecture,<sup>36</sup> concerning the status of the general rule (the C&D Rule), is not that it is perceived clearly and distinctly. The conjecture rests instead on a hasty generalization from one instance—an induction insufficient to establish the C&D Rule even subsequent to refutation of the Deceiver

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. note 4 (above) for references to secondary literature in which this passage is treated.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Bennett (1990, 91ff), who considers and rejects a series of (what he characterizes as) “disasters for the derivation of the truth rule on AT 7.35” (93).

<sup>36</sup> ... *jam videor pro regulâ generali posse statuere ...*

Hypothesis.<sup>37</sup> But in view of the constraint (imposed by the Method of Doubt) to regard, as if false, matters that are in the least respect doubtful, the burden of a charitable interpretation—a burden that cogito-derived accounts fail to meet—is to show how the meditator arrives at clarity and distinctness of the C&D Rule.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Descartes purports to ground the C&D Rule in a divine guarantee: he thinks he shows that the divine essence is incompatible with our being in error when we're relying on the C&D Rule (cf. AT 7:144).<sup>39</sup> But given the cogito-derived account, the only premises available to the meditator, on the topic of the incompatibility of the divine essence with error, are those advanced in the First Meditation, those whereby *all* error is assumed to be incompatible with an omniperfect deity. (Recall (2) from Section 1.1.) As such, the only results that the meditator *could* draw prior to the Fourth Meditation are either that we never err (thus rendering superfluous the C&D Rule) or that the divine essence eventually will be established as compatible with all manner of error (thus ruining the C&D Rule). No wonder Descartes says that “it was not possible to prove [the C&D Rule] before the Fourth Meditation” (CSM 2:9, AT 7:13). The above Third Meditation passage seems best read as intended to *suggest* the criterion that will emerge as the eventual mark of the truth—if anything will.

The second tempting passage is one we have already considered (in Section 1.3). It occurs in the Fourth Meditation where Descartes advances (3), the rule for correct judging:

- (3) I am using my faculty of judging in the correct manner (so as to ensure the avoidance of error) if and only if I withhold assent except when my perception of a matter is clear and distinct.

The temptation is to suppose that (3) just *is* the desired C&D Rule, a reading that has the benefit of putting the proof of the C&D Rule in the Fourth Meditation. The problem for this account is that (3) does not (and, in context, *could* not) have a divine guarantee: the argument from which (3) derives cannot be represented as drawing in any way on the divine essence; to the contrary, (3) is advanced for theodician purpose in an effort to vindicate that God is a possible being (cf. note 19 above). Later in the Fourth Meditation (given the interpretation I am defending), Descartes again advances a proof for a truth

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<sup>37</sup> Indeed, this early Third Meditation passage is consistent with the coherentist interpretation of Frankfurt (he offers a cogito-derived account) who writes: “Descartes’s reasoning in the *Meditations* is designed not so much to prove that what is clearly and distinctly perceived is true, as to establish that there are no reasonable grounds for doubting this” (1970, 178–79).

<sup>38</sup> By the time of the Fifth Meditation, Descartes claims to have “amply demonstrated” the C&D Rule (CSM 2:45, AT 7:65).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Williams’s discussion (1978, 188).

rule. It is this later effort that Descartes intends to produce the requisite divine guarantee, and the effort to which I now turn.

## 2.2. *The explicit Fourth Meditation proof of the C&D Rule*

With theodicy in hand, the meditator's very next step is to offer the following argument (in the last paragraph of the Fourth Meditation):

[A] The cause of error must surely be the one I have explained; for [B] if, whenever I have to make a judgement, I restrain my will so that it extends to what the intellect clearly and distinctly reveals, and no further, then it is quite impossible for me to go wrong. This is because [C] every clear and distinct perception is undoubtedly something [*est aliquid*],<sup>40</sup> and hence cannot come from nothing, but must necessarily have God for its author. Its author, I say, is God, who is supremely perfect, and [D] who cannot be a deceiver on pain of contradiction; hence [B] the perception is undoubtedly true. (CSM 2:43, AT 7:62; text markers added)

Assuming the passage non-enthymematic, the argument amounts to the following (the lettering of the steps correlates with the text markers above):

(C) Every clear and distinct perception has positive being and hence comes from God.

(D) God is not a deceiver.

∴ (B) If I clearly and distinctly perceive that *p*, then *p* is true.<sup>41</sup> [(C), (D)]

∴ (A) The earlier explanation (that which led to (3)) of the cause of error is correct. [(B)]

First, notice that the inference from (B) to (A) confirms my earlier claim (in Section 2.1): Descartes distinguishes the argument in support of (3) from that in support of (B) (the C&D Rule); the proof of (B) reinforces the explanation on which (3) is based. Second, notice that the argument for (B) is surely an enthymeme.<sup>42</sup> My primary aim, in Section 2.3, is to uncover the missing premise(s) needed to complete this argument.

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<sup>40</sup> The French, here, reads "something real and positive" (*quelque chose de réel et de positif*).

<sup>41</sup> Some of Descartes's formulations of the C&D Rule suggest that what is guaranteed is concept containment/exclusion (cf. AT 7:65,78, and 115–16), rather than the truth of propositional contents. I shall assume that all such talk of clearly and distinctly perceivable concept containment/exclusion is translatable into talk about the truth of propositional contents. Also, Descartes uses "perceive"/"perception" (*percipio/perceptio*) with much wider scope than is the current practice in philosophy: for Descartes, to perceive *X* is, roughly, to be aware of *X*, and as such, the objects of perception may include concepts, propositions, sensory qualia, or the like.

<sup>42</sup> As stated, (B) simply does not follow from (C) and (D). And the most obvious candidate for an implied premise is a claim that Descartes surely rejects, namely: If a perception has positive being, and hence comes from God, then, since God is no deceiver, the con-

### 2.3. Patching-up the proof with some help from the Second Replies and (4)

While responding to concerns (voiced by the second objectors) about the C&D Rule, Descartes offers remarks strikingly similar to those in the last paragraph of the Fourth Meditation (I have marked the similarities with primed text markers):

[D'] Since God is the supreme being, he must also be supremely good and true, and it would therefore be a contradiction that anything should be created by him which positively tends towards falsehood. [C'] Now everything real which is in us must have been bestowed on us by God (this was proved when his existence was proved); moreover, we have a real faculty for recognizing the truth and distinguishing it from falsehood, as is clear merely from the fact that we have within us ideas of truth and falsehood. [B'] Hence this faculty must tend towards the truth, at least when we use it correctly (that is, by assenting only to what we clearly and distinctly perceive, for no other correct method of employing this faculty can be imagined [*fingi potest*]). [D'] For if it did not so tend then, since God gave it to us, he would rightly have to be regarded as a deceiver. (CSM 2:103, AT 7:144)

Along with the similarities, there are supplemental remarks: the content of the D' passages goes beyond that in D, and B' includes more than B. As I shall argue, when the work of the theodicy is taken into consideration the enthymematic Fourth Meditation passage is best read as containing these supplemental remarks implicitly.

I reconstruct the argument from the above Second Replies passage as follows:

- (5) God exists [as omnipotent and omniscient] and is no deceiver. [D']
- ∴ (6) It is impossible that any faculty bestowed on me by God has positive imperfection. [(5); D']
- (7) My faculty of judging has been bestowed on me by God. [C']
- ∴ (8) It is impossible that my faculty of judging has positive imperfection. [(6),(7)]
- (9) Were I in error when using my faculty of judging in the correct manner (i.e. according to the only account of correct use that can be imagined), then my faculty of judging would have positive imperfection. [B', D']
- ∴ (10) I am not in error when using my faculty of judging in the correct manner (i.e. according to the only account of correct use that can be imagined). [(8),(9)]

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tent perceived is true. Descartes must reject this, since *every* perception (*qua* mode of mind) has positive being—no matter how obscure and confused.

(11) I am using my faculty of judging in the correct manner (i.e. according to the only account of correct use that can be imagined) if and only if I withhold assent except when my perception of a matter is clear and distinct. [(3); B']

∴ (12) I am not in error if I withhold assent except when my perception of a matter is clear and distinct. [(10),(11); B']

The inferences to (8), (10), and (12), are trivial. (5) and (7) are results of Third Meditation arguments, both of which are available to the meditator subsequent to the theodicy which vindicates the divine essence. That leaves (6), (9), and (11) to be explained.

The supplemental content of the Second Replies text (*viz.* that which exceeds the explicit remarks of the enthymematic Fourth Meditation passage) is expressed in (6), (9), and (11). And each of these claims is elucidated by consideration of the theodicy of the Fourth Meditation. The incompatibility of positive imperfection with the divine essence explains the inference from (5) to (6). The interpretive principle in (4) (discussed in Section 1.6) explains why (9) is implied by D' and B': in such passages, Descartes must be understood as invoking the notion of positive imperfection. And (11) is none other than a more precise formulation of (3) (itself advanced as part of the effort at theodicy). In Section 2.4, I'll return to the matter of why Descartes thinks (9) is true and the importance of the awkward parenthetical clause appearing in (9), (10), and (11); for now, I'll note only that I am preserving the awkwardness of Descartes's own remarks (see the second parenthetical clause in the block quote above).

Since all of the supplemental remarks derive from the theodicy, they are natural candidates for implicit premises to read into the argument of the problematic (enthymematic) passage occurring in the final paragraph of the Fourth Meditation. And in doing so, the argument there exactly parallels that which I have reconstructed in (5) thru (12). I thus propose we read that problematic Fourth Meditation passage as follows:

The cause of error must surely be the one I have explained [*viz. the explanation based on the scope disparity, an account that suggests the correct-use rule in (3)*]; for if, whenever I have to make a judgement, I restrain my will so that it extends to what the intellect clearly and distinctly reveals, and no further, then it is quite impossible for me to go wrong. This is because every clear and distinct perception is undoubtedly something, and hence cannot come from nothing, but must necessarily have God for its author. Its author, I say, is God, who is supremely perfect, and who cannot be a deceiver on pain of contradiction [*though an otherwise omnipotent creator surely would be a deceiver were I in error in such circumstances, since my faculty of judging would be positively imperfect*]; hence the perception is undoubtedly true. (CSM 2:43, AT 7:62)

The first interpolation is intended to capture lines (3) and (11); in context, the text must be read this way, since the cause of error (as proposed in (3)/(11)) *is*, as the meditator says, “the one I have explained”. The second interpolation is intended to capture lines (6) and (9); given our interpretative principle, (4), the appeal to God as no deceiver must be understood in terms of positive imperfection. Since, then, (12) entails the C&D Rule, it turns out, upon taking into consideration the work of the theodicy, that the Fourth Meditation demonstration of the C&D Rule falls neatly into place.

#### 2.4. *The more fundamental truth criterion to which Descartes appeals*

Returning to (9), I want to pursue Descartes’s reasons for accepting it—a pursuit that will suggest a more fundamental rule of truth on which Descartes is leaning. I shall hereafter refer to this more fundamental truth rule as the Inclination-Without-Correction Rule (IWC Rule) which I formulate as follows:

- (13) *p* is true, if I clearly and distinctly perceive that:
- (i) I am positively inclined to assent to *p*; and
  - (ii) I have no faculty/capacity for correction by which I could ascertain that not-*p*.

On my account, conditions (i) and (ii) are, at bottom, the  $\phi$ -type circumstances that (together with appeals to the divine essence) ground *all* positive knowledge claims in the *Meditations*, including knowledge of the C&D Rule itself.

In the very same Second Replies passage from which (5) thru (12) is taken, Descartes appeals to the IWC Rule while defending the C&D Rule. The context is this. The second objectors complain, in effect, that Descartes fails to establish a divine guarantee of the C&D Rule because he does not rule out the possibility that God might “treat men as a doctor treats the sick, or a father his children.” In such cases, continue the objectors, “there is frequent deception though it is always employed beneficially and with wisdom.” And thus, for all Descartes has shown, God might likewise employ deception—perhaps, indeed, we’re occasionally deceived even concerning matters that we perceive clearly and distinctly. (CSM 2:90, AT 7:126) The objection is especially serious, since the real possibility that God would resort to such deception is fatal to Descartes’s epistemology (cf. Section 1.6 above).

As often occurs, Descartes’s reply to his objectors helps clarify some aspect of the *Meditations* that would otherwise remain obscure. In this case, the response sheds light on the precise circumstances under which he thinks positive imperfection occurs, thus helping to clarify the ground of (9). In the reply, Descartes draws an analogy between his efforts (in the Fourth Meditation) to reconcile deception relative to *judgment* and his efforts (in the Sixth

Meditation) to reconcile deception relative to *bodily behavior*. In both cases, the credibility of the positive inclinations with which the creator has endowed us are in question:<sup>43</sup> in the one case, inclinations stemming from our intellectual nature urge us towards truthful judging; in the other, inclinations stemming from our composite nature urge us towards beneficial behavior.<sup>44</sup> As Descartes argues, the divine essence is compatible with our having *positive* (and thus God-given) yet *misleading* inclinations—a claim that is somewhat surprising, in ways brought out by the analogy with doctors. Presumably, ordinary doctors resort to deception (e.g. to create a positive frame of mind in the patient) precisely because they lack the knowledge or the power needed to otherwise ensure proper healing. Since, however, an omniperfect doctor would not want for such technology, the analogy helps reinforce the suspicion that an omnipotent doctor would have no MSR for calling on deception. Nonetheless, Descartes holds that God can endow us with errant inclinations without thereby rendering us positively imperfect, so long as we’re also endowed with a means for correcting such error. In the absence of any means of correction, however, it would render us positively imperfect, and this is the basis of the IWC Rule (stated in (13)). As Descartes explains, God does allow that we are sometimes deceived, as when a person with dropsy has “a *positive impulse [impellitur positive]* to drink which derives from the nature God has bestowed on the body in order to preserve it” (my italics); and yet, as

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<sup>43</sup> Descartes uses a variety of expressions when referring to what I am calling a positive inclination: in the Third Meditation he refers to “natural impulses” (*impetus naturales*) by which one may have been “pushed” or “impelled” (*fuisse impulsum*) (AT 7:39); in the Fourth, an “inclination” or “propensity” in the will (*propensio in voluntate*) (AT 7:59); in the Sixth, a “great propensity to believe” (*magnam propensionem ad credendum*) (AT 7:79–80), a “real or positive propensity” to believe (*realis sive positiva propensio*) (AT 7:83), and being “impelled by nature” (*a natura impellitur*) (AT 7:84). Even merely probable reasoning may positively incline: the Fourth Meditation meditator remarks, of probable conjectures, that they may “pull me [*me trahant*] in one direction” (CSM 2:41, AT 7:59).

<sup>44</sup> As he writes to Mersenne: “For my part, I distinguish two kinds of instinct. One is in us *qua* human beings, and is purely intellectual: it is the natural light or mental vision. ... The other belongs to us *qua* animals, and is a certain impulse of nature towards the preservation of our body, towards the enjoyment of bodily pleasures, and so on” (CSMK 140, AT 2:599).

Though the texts are somewhat unclear, Descartes appears to hold that some of our inclinations to judge are not *positive* in the sense of coming from God, but instead result from improper (privative) use of our faculties of reasoning and judgment—resulting “not from nature but from a habit of making ill-considered judgements” (CSM 2:56, AT 7:82). For instance, we’re typically inclined to suppose that objects *are* just as they *seem* in sensory experience: the tendency is to suppose, as the meditator observes, “that stars and towers and other distant bodies have the same size and shape which they present to my senses” (CSM 2:57, AT 7:82). After further reflection, however, the meditator adds that “although a star has no greater effect on my eye than the flame of a small light, that does not mean that there is any *real or positive inclination* in me to believe that the star is no bigger than the light; I have simply made this judgement from childhood onwards without any rational basis” (CSM 2:57, AT 7:83; italics added). Cf. *Principles* 1:71.

Descartes continues, “this is not inconsistent with the goodness or veracity of God, and I have explained why in the Sixth Meditation” (CSM 2:102, AT 7:143). Descartes intends that due consideration of his Sixth Meditation treatment of dropsy-type error establishes a number of relevant points, including that we’re bound to be misled occasionally given our composite nature (involving mind and body); and that, notwithstanding this design limitation, God made sure that we’re misled on those occasions as would have the least negative impact on our overall well-being. More to our present concern, Descartes evidently thinks that a due consideration of his treatment provides, as he has his the meditator say,

the greatest help to me, not only for noticing all the errors to which my nature is liable, but also for enabling me to correct or avoid them without difficulty. (CSM 2:61, AT 7:89)

It is precisely this *capacity to correct error* that Descartes emphasizes in his defense of the C&D Rule in the context of replying to the second objectors. His reply establishes that he thinks this capacity for correction (which renders condition (ii) of the IWC Rule unfulfilled) distinguishes dropsy-type error from the circumstances apropos to the C&D Rule:

In the case of our clearest and most careful judgements, however, this kind of explanation [as I offer for dropsy error] would not be possible, for if such judgements were false they *could not be corrected by any clearer judgements or by means of any other natural faculty*. In such cases I simply assert that it is impossible for us to be deceived. Since God is the supreme being, he must also be supremely good and true, and it would therefore be a contradiction that anything should be created by him which positively tends towards falsehood [*positive tendat in falsum*].<sup>45</sup> (CSM 2:102–3, AT 7:143–44; italics mine)

Descartes is here leaning on the IWC Rule: condition (ii) is stated explicitly, and the larger context concerns whether God could allow us to be mistaken in our “clearest and most careful judgements”—judgments which are formed only if condition (i) holds. In such cases, namely where (i) and (ii) are both fulfilled), “it is impossible for us to be deceived.” And why so? The passage suggests that the IWC Rule follows from the impossibility of positive

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<sup>45</sup> There are two readings of this last claim: (a) it would be contradictory that the faculty of judgment should *generally* tend towards falsehood; (b) it would be contradictory that it should tend towards falsehood on any *particular* occasion. The discussion of dropsy may seem to suggest (a), since the correction, there, involves the move away from a particular judgment towards a general judgment. But this would be to confuse two different applications of the particular-general distinction. In the context of the discussion of dropsy, the distinction is applied to the content, *p*, to which one is inclined; in the context of whether (a) or (b) is the correct reading, the distinction concerns how often God can tolerate error owed to positive imperfection—whether he can allow that positive imperfection results in error on some particular occasions, so long as it does not generally result in error. Clearly, reading (b) must be the right one: any and all positive imperfection is incompatible with the divine essence (as we have seen), yet reading (a) allows that the faculty sometimes tends towards falsehood.

imperfection together with the following claim (again, our interpretive principle, (4), proves useful): My faculty of judging would be positively imperfect, if  $p$  were false even though I clearly and distinctly perceived that,<sup>46</sup>

- (i) I am positively inclined to assent to  $p$ , and
- (ii) I have no faculty/capacity for correction by which I could ascertain that not- $p$ .

And since the divine essence rules out the possibility of positive imperfection, (13) is a consequence.

The awkward parenthetical clause in (9) is plausibly read as invoking conditions (i) and (ii).<sup>47</sup> Condition (i) is implied, since the Fourth Meditation explanation of error based on the scope disparity is taken as being so persuasive. And Descartes thinks (ii) holds, since (as he says in the Second Replies), “no other correct method of employing this faculty [of judging] can be imagined” (2:103, AT 7:144). Under these circumstances, namely  $\phi$ -type circumstances, the explanation of error must be correct on pain of positive imperfection.

Granting this account, the IWC Rule grounds the C&D Rule in virtue of grounding (9). Though in reply to the second objectors, Descartes offers a meta-level proof (as we’ve seen)—one in which the IWC Rule is applied to another proof (*viz.* the earlier argument for (3))—the C&D Rule may also be derived straightforwardly from the IWC Rule without appeal to (3). Clause (i) of the IWC Rule holds: when the perception of  $p$  is itself clear and distinct there is “a great inclination in the will” (CSM 2:41, AT 7:59), so great as to

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<sup>46</sup> Since the appeal, here, is to clarity and distinctness *qua* rule of evidence, rather than *qua* rule of truth, the appeal does not conflict with my claim that the IWC Rule is more fundamental than the C&D Rule. This (evidential) appeal is needed, since, given both the Method of Doubt and the Fourth Meditation inquiry into the cause of error, the meditator is obliged to withhold assent unless his perception is clear and distinct (cf. note 20 above). That appetites, such as that specified in condition (i), are (according to Descartes) clearly and distinctly perceivable is established in the *Principles*: concerning “sensations, emotions and appetites,” Descartes writes that “these may be clearly perceived provided we take great care in our judgements concerning them to include no more than what is strictly contained in our perception—no more than that of which we have inner awareness” (CSM 1:216, AT 8a:32); he later adds that “pain and colour and so on are clearly and distinctly perceived when they are regarded merely as sensations or thoughts” (CSM 1:217, AT 8a:33). I shall have more to say, below, about the clarity and distinctness requirement *vis-à-vis* condition (ii).

<sup>47</sup> The plausibility of (9) is—with some strain—supported by our analogy to ordinary manufacturers. Consider that there are cases in which car manufacturers are responsible for our inclinations as to the proper use of their products, as when they design pictorial icons for various of the car’s features (e.g., a picture of a horn, where one should press to sound the horn). In such cases, if the icon would naturally incline one towards error, and the manufacturer provided no means by which the errant inclination could be corrected (e.g., with instructions in the owner’s manual), it is plausible to suppose that we would judge that the car is positively imperfect.

impose an irresistible psychological urge to assent (cf. AT 7:36, 7:65, and 7:69). Clause (ii) also holds: in that the denial of a clearly and distinctly perceived  $p$  involves “manifest contradiction [*repugnantiam*]”<sup>48</sup> (CSM 2:25, AT 7:36), we cannot make intelligible sense of correcting such  $p$  by a clearer judgment.

The IWC Rule promises also to ground judgments stemming from less impressive inclinations. So long as an inclination is *positive*, it provides a degree of epistemological leverage towards truth in conjunction with the IWC Rule. As such, conditions (i) and (ii) might be fulfilled even where  $p$  expressed a hypothesis, a scenario germane to Descartes’s Sixth Meditation moves (discussed below, in Section 2.5).

To sum up, I take Descartes to hold that the IWC Rule is epistemically prior to the C&D Rule. When pressed by the second objectors, as to *why* the C&D Rule is guaranteed, Descartes responds with the IWC Rule. Furthermore, line (9) (and the IWC Rule on which it rests) is implicit in the Fourth Meditation demonstration of the C&D Rule (so I have argued). Finally, the C&D Rule can be derived from the IWC Rule, though the IWC Rule cannot be derived from the C&D Rule. I turn now to a brief consideration of the explanatory power of my account for the Sixth Meditation.

### 2.5. *The prominence of the IWC Rule in the Sixth Meditation*

Though this is not the place for a detailed (and needed) treatment of Descartes’s Sixth Meditation, I do at least want to establish the value of the IWC Rule in explaining two of the central arguments there: the argument for the existence of the external, corporeal world, and the argument by which the meditator purports to establish that he is not dreaming.<sup>49</sup> The IWC Rule warrants clear and distinct conclusions that might otherwise appear to be the result of risky inferences in which the meditator is straying from the rigorous standards of the Fourth Meditation.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> I take it that *manifest repugnancy* need not be understood as involving formal contradiction, a claim supported both by the translation options (for *repugnantia*) and Descartes’s own examples (at AT 7:36) among which is the *cogito*.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. also Newman (1997).

<sup>50</sup> Curley writes: “In the Fourth Meditation Descartes had maintained that God would be a deceiver only if what we falsely believed were something we could not but believe [i.e., something we perceived clearly and distinctly]. If we gave our assent wrongly to a proposition we were merely inclined to believe (albeit very strongly), the fault would be ours for misusing our will, not God’s. By the Sixth Meditation Descartes’s ethic of belief is considerably less Pelagian.” (1978, 229–30) As I have in effect argued, Descartes’s God is considerably less tolerant of misguided inclinations than Curley supposes—even resistible inclinations may (in accordance with the IWC Rule) provide the basis of correct judgment. Nonetheless, there is an *apparent* tension: As urged in the Fourth Meditation (cf. (3), the rule for correct use), one is *misusing* one’s faculty of judging if one assents to matters that are less than clear and distinct. Yet, since perceptions falling short of clarity and distinctness may satisfy condition (i) of the IWC Rule, the latter rule seems

In the final stage of his Sixth Meditation argument for the existence of an external, corporeal world, the meditator reduces, to three, the logically possible options for an external cause of his involuntary sensory ideas: (a) actual corporeal substance, (b) God, or (c) some kind of creature distinct from body (AT 7:79). But, says the meditator, “since God is not a deceiver” both (b) and (c) can be ruled out,

for God has given me no faculty at all for recognizing any such source for these ideas; on the contrary, he has given me a great propensity to believe that they are produced by corporeal things. (CSM 2:55, AT 7:79–80)

For those readers expecting Descartes to eliminate the incorrect options by an express appeal to the C&D Rule, this inference should seem quite mysterious. The C&D Rule alone does not warrant the conclusion. Suppose the meditator were (somehow) able to avail himself of the C&D Rule in absence of the underlying Fourth Meditation principles I am attributing to Descartes. In that case, there would be no basis for eliminating options (b) or (c)—at least, none that would survive the Method of Doubt. This shortcoming would arise in that the meditator’s initial<sup>51</sup> evidential basis for his judgment is not that he clearly and distinctly perceives that (a) is the correct option, nor that he clearly and distinctly perceives that (b) and (c) are both incorrect; instead, his basis is that he has “a great propensity to believe” that (a) is correct. As such, the C&D Rule does not warrant a clear and distinct judgment as to the correctness of any of the three options.<sup>52</sup> As we are now in position to appre-

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to license the formation of judgments on occasions that amount to a *misuse* of one’s faculty of judging. It would seem, if we take seriously the Fourth Meditation standard of *correct use*, that the Sixth Meditation meditator is engaged in systematic abuse of his faculty of judging.

The apparent tension dissolves when one distinguishes the psychological inclination to assent from the content towards which one is inclined. For Descartes, *whether* I am inclined to assent to *p* is something I may perceive clearly and distinctly, even if my perception *that p* is itself less than clear and distinct. (Cf. note 46.) But in order to invoke the IWC Rule, *vis-à-vis* the content *p*, the meditator’s initial perception of *p* (that which is antecedent to the invocation) need only be clear and distinct in the former, but not the latter sense. His subsequent perception (that which results from invoking the IWC Rule) is upgraded to clarity and distinctness in the latter sense.

Given that the IWC Rule licenses inferences to claims with empirical content, the extent to which Descartes is (as the received view has it) a *strong* foundationalist is not at all straightforward. Indeed, in *Principles* 3:43–44 and 4:205–6, Descartes looks to be arguing, of the *a posteriori* part of his physics, that the divine guarantee could—in principle—extend to such claims. On a plausible reading of these texts, the respect in which Descartes thinks his *a posteriori* account falls short of the requisite rigor concerns condition (ii) of the IWC Rule. Indeed, Descartes’s claims that the *Meditations* provide the foundation for his physics (cf. the letter to Mersenne of 28 January 1641) may well be intended to refer to the *entire* project—including the *a posteriori* part.

51 I mean to use ‘initial’ in the same sense as I do in note 50, where I distinguish between the meditator’s *initial* and *subsequent* perception of *p*.

52 The meditator would have no grounds for rejecting what the later Berkeley regards as the correct alternative, namely option (b). Leibniz (among others) appears to think that

ciate, this otherwise mysterious inference is rendered intelligible if construed as an appeal to conditions (i) and (ii) of the IWC Rule. The “great propensity to believe” fulfills condition (i).<sup>53</sup> The further claim, that “God has given me no faculty at all for recognizing any such source [as (b) or (c)] for these ideas,” fulfills condition (ii). Together, these claims provide the basis for the judgment that (a) is the correct option.<sup>54</sup>

Turning our attention to the end of the Sixth Meditation, and Descartes’s effort to solve the dreaming problem, the IWC Rule again explains the inferential work. On a standard reading of the passage (one that is mistaken), Descartes is offering a wholly naturalistic solution to the problem of dreaming; the reading finds *prima facie* support from the following passage:

I now notice that there is a vast difference between [dreaming and waking], in that dreams are never linked by memory with all the other actions of life as waking experiences are. ... But when I distinctly see where things come from and where and when they come to me, and when I can connect my perceptions of them with the whole of the rest of my life without a break, then I am quite certain that when I encounter these things I am not asleep but awake. (CSM 2:61–62, AT 7:89–90)

On this account, Descartes’s solution to the dreaming problem is thought to rest (solely) on a continuity test: since continuity with past experiences holds only for one’s waking experiences but not one’s dream experiences, checking for the requisite continuity provides a means for knowing that one is awake.

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Descartes would (indeed, *does*) have grounds for eliminating option (b), but complains that Descartes never does argue against option (c): “The core of [Descartes’s] argument is this: The reason for our sensation of material things is outside us; therefore, these sensations come to us either from God, or from some other agent, or from the things themselves. They do not come from God, if these things do not exist; for otherwise God would be a deceiver; they do not come from another agent—*this he forgot to prove*; therefore they come from the things themselves, which therefore must exist. It may be answered that the sensations may come from an agent other than God; for just as, for some weighty reasons, he permits other evils, he may also permit this deceit, without thereby becoming a deceiver ...” (1965, 41; my italics)

<sup>53</sup> It is by no means clear that Descartes is entitled to assert this “great propensity to believe” option (a), though I’ll not be able to address such concerns here.

<sup>54</sup> Given Descartes’s brand of representational realism in connection with standard mechanist doctrines (which he endorses), it is crucial that the divine essence turn out compatible with ubiquitous but erroneous judgments to the effect that the real qualities of bodies *are* just as they *seem* in *sensory experience*. As noted earlier (cf. note 44), Descartes can be read as denying that such inclinations (as to suppose that objects *are* as they *seem*) are genuinely positive inclinations. On this reading, condition (i) of the IWC Rule is unfulfilled where *p* expresses such claims as, e.g., that apples are *red* just as they seem, that stars have the same relative *size* as they seem, and the like. Even barring this interpretation, Descartes can protect his appearance-reality distinction by blocking condition (ii)—he thinks he can show (and indeed has shown) how to correct the inclination to judge that objects are as they seem. The wax passage, for instance, is supposed to show that “none of the features” (presumably, determinate as opposed to determinable features) that the meditator arrives at “by means of the senses” are part of the essence of the wax (CSM 2:20, AT 7:30).

This “solution” prompts two obvious objections (both of which are raised by Hobbes, AT 7:195–96). First, it seems one could dream the requisite continuity. Second, this solution is available to the atheist since it involves no appeal to divine veracity (indeed, it could have been offered in the First Meditation).

On closer inspection, however, it turns out that Descartes’s proposed solution includes theistic steps intended to complement the appeal to continuity. In context, the dreaming passage comes on the heels of Descartes’s treatment of drosy-type error (as discussed in Section 2.4 above). The treatment of drosy is supposed to shed light on Descartes’s proposed solution of the dreaming problem. The dreaming passage opens with the meditator discussing his *ability to correct sensory error*:

I can almost always make use of more than one sense to investigate the same thing; and in addition, I can use both my memory, which connects present experiences with preceding ones, and my intellect, which has by now examined all the causes of error. Accordingly, I should not have any further fears about the falsity of what my senses tell me every day; on the contrary, the exaggerated doubts of the last few days should be dismissed as laughable. This applies especially to ... my inability to distinguish between being asleep and being awake. (CSM 2:61, AT 7:89)

Referring to the worry (that he is dreaming) as “exaggerated” suggests that he is *strongly inclined* to think he is awake. As such, he needs only to establish condition (ii) of the IWC Rule and he’ll have a divine guarantee of being awake. Thus, says the meditator (speaking of sensory appearances),

when I distinctly see where things come from and where and when they come to me, and when I can connect my perceptions of them with the whole of the rest of my life without a break, then I am quite certain that when I encounter these things I am not asleep but awake. And I ought not to have even the slightest doubt of their reality if, *after calling upon all the senses as well as my memory and my intellect in order to check them, I receive no conflicting reports from any of these sources*. For *from the fact that God is not a deceiver* it follows that in *cases like these* I am completely free from error. (CSM 2:62, AT 7:90; my italics)

Central to the inference is the meditator’s effort to ascertain the correctness of the judgment towards which he is inclined by means of his various faculties: the inclination is sufficient to warrant the judgment that he is awake, provided his faculties do not enable him to ascertain that he is instead dreaming.<sup>55</sup> On my account, the *cases like these* to which Descartes refers are those where conditions (i) and (ii) of the IWC Rule are both satisfied—namely,  $\phi$

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<sup>55</sup> One might have thought it implausible to establish that one is dreaming (especially given that, in accordance with the IWC Rule, condition (ii) need be clearly and distinctly perceived). But as Descartes writes, when “we are asleep and are aware that we are dreaming, we need imagination in order to dream, but to be aware that we are dreaming we need *only the intellect*” (CSM 2:248, AT 7:358–59; my italics).

type circumstances. The continuity test *is* involved in Descartes's procedure, but it plays an ancillary role to condition (ii).<sup>56</sup>

Condition (ii) turns out to be much more problematic in Descartes's treatment of the dreaming problem than in his argument for the existence of the material world. The meditator's respective levels of confidence, in the two cases, reflect the complication involved. When arguing for the existence of the material world, Descartes regards it as decisive that condition (ii) holds, and a decisive conclusion is drawn. When arguing as to how he can know that he is awake, Descartes adds an important caveat in concession of how onerous a task it is to establish condition (ii):

But since the pressure of things to be done does not always allow us to stop and make such a meticulous check, it must be admitted that in this human life we are often liable to make mistakes about particular things, and we must acknowledge the weakness of our nature. (CSM 2:62, AT 7:90)

### 3. Conclusion

Evidently, it strikes most readers of the *Meditations* that the Fourth Meditation amounts to a detour from what is otherwise an orderly, foundationalist project. I have argued, to the contrary, that the Fourth Meditation is as significant to the larger epistemological project as Descartes represents it—a representation that, recall, includes the following:

In the Fourth Meditation it is proved that everything that we clearly and distinctly perceive is true ... (CSM 2:11, AT 7:15)

[Indeed] it was not possible to prove this [the truth criterion] before the Fourth Meditation. (CSM 2:9, AT 7:13)

These [Fourth Meditation] results need to be known both in order to confirm what has gone before and also to make intelligible what is to come later. (CSM 2:11, AT 7:15)

My account of the Fourth Meditation explains each of these claims. I have located Descartes's proof of the C&D Rule in the final paragraph of the Fourth Meditation. As I have argued, it is not possible to establish a divine

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<sup>56</sup> As for the other of Hobbes' objections—viz., that one could dream that one is checking one's faculties in accordance with (ii)—Descartes's reply is, in effect, that though this might *seem* possible, God cannot allow it to happen on pain of allowing positive imperfection. Descartes acknowledges that, by appeal to the continuity test, the atheist can also “infer that he is awake on the basis of memory of his past life.” The atheist, however, “cannot know that this criterion is sufficient to give him the certainty that he is not mistaken, if he does not know that he was created by a non-deceiving God.” (CSM 2:137, AT 7:196) Establishing that both (i) and (ii) of the IWC Rule are fulfilled is of no use to the atheist, because he cannot establish the credibility of the IWC Rule. Likewise, Descartes allows that the atheist geometer can demonstrate theorems of geometry, and do so with clear and distinct certainty. But since atheists cannot establish the credibility of the C&D Rule, their clear and distinct demonstrations do not provide them *scientia*.

guarantee of the C&D Rule before the Fourth Meditation: the Fourth Meditation treatment of theodicy is needed (in view of the problem of evil/error, raised in the First Meditation) to confirm the conclusion of the Third Meditation proof of God, and, moreover, to advance the principle that an omnipotent creator is incompatible with positive imperfection; both of these results are needed as premises in the demonstration of the C&D Rule. Without the theodicy and the truth criteria it helps ground (the C&D Rule and the IWC Rule), the subsequent proofs purporting to establish divinely guaranteed knowledge claims would be unintelligible: Descartes's claims as to what follows from the conclusion that God is no deceiver can only be understood in light of the work of the theodicy. Far from a detour, the Fourth Meditation is an integral part of Descartes's broader, orderly project.

The IWC Rule has further interesting applications to post-Cartesian skeptical problems: it suggests Cartesian solutions to Hume's problem of induction, the brains-in-a-vat hypothesis, the private language problem, memorial justification, and the like. I leave it to the reader to apply the IWC Rule to these cases.

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