SUBJECTIVE IMMEDIACY IN DESCARTES' *MEDITATIONS*: PARTICIPATION, INTUITION, AND THERAPY

By

MICHAEL G. SILVA

Bachelor of Arts

Oklahoma State University

Stillwater, Oklahoma

1995

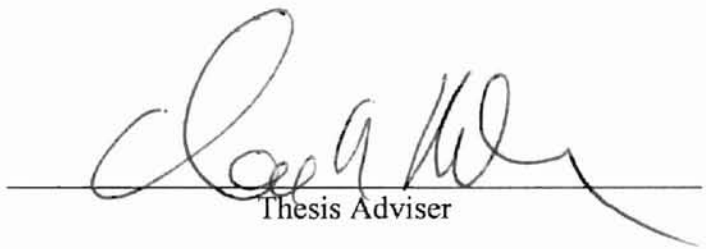
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
December, 1999

SUBJECTIVE IMMEDIACY IN DESCARTES'

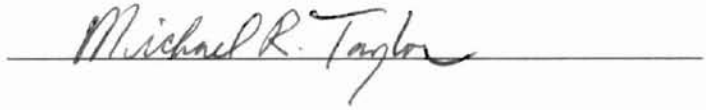
MEDITATIONS: PARTICIPATION.

INTUITION, AND THERAPY

Thesis approved:



Thesis Adviser



Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With utmost glee I am now privileged to give thanks to those who have provided me with so much during my period of "thesis-ing." I received support and encouragement from my family, friends, and Laurie. Those in South Dakota watched over me in spirit the whole way. My father proofed and helped maintain momentum. The Department was patient with me and blessed me with a great "job." Doren put up with me and grimaced at me long enough for me to get most of my stuff into a reasonable semblance of a stack and in the process also taught me a good deal about things that have nothing to do with dead French scientists. Dr. Taylor had me read more books and asked the questions that were too big. Mike bequeathed much red ink upon my pages. Murry Hodgson fought a victorious battle against The Ruler. Her invaluable help saved my philosophical life and the remaining part of my sanity. I am inestimably grateful to all of you. Thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> Much that has been written recently, especially on Descartes and especially in English, it seems to me, is so narrowly confined to the terms of the late 20th Century debate that the real Descartes is simply left aside altogether. And, since we are products of our past, that means we not only miss Descartes in his own terms, but ourselves, too. In the narrowness of our own perspective we miss not only our historical target but the reflective awareness of our own beliefs that should be the aim of philosophy. (Grene 1985, 3)

The Western world of philosophy has been spinning in circles since the days of Aristotle. Metaphysics, epistemology, and logic trace and retrace orbital paths. Since before the Enlightenment, the problems of foundations, criteria of knowledge, and the quest for certainty have plagued philosophers. (Rorty 1979) There have been notable exceptions to the continuing whirl, for example Kant's Copernican revolution as described in the *Critique of Pure Reason.* (Kant 1998, 110) But, for the most part, since the Classic masters of philosophy asked the big questions, there has not been much progress. Notably, the world that Descartes attempted to move is the same one in which contemporary thinkers live, with Aristotle's circles replaced by the ellipses controversially introduced by Johannes Kepler in 1609 and later accepted as science following the publication of Newton's *Principia.*

Then as now, there is in all pursuits of knowledge a "boot strapping" problem. One must lift oneself out of the mire of doubt and delusion while not slipping into the

ease of overconfidence and yet stand firmly upon something—the sticking point is where to stand. René Descartes faced just these problems. He lived and thought in a world spinning in circles, literally as well as figuratively, and in dire need of a firm place to stand. He foresaw the doom of Scholasticism and understood the necessity of some sort of bulwark against the skeptics. He hoped to provide a foundation of certainty for both Catholicism and science and thereby also respond to the unrelenting doubting of the skeptics. With the lever of reason and a fulcrum of one unwavering point of absolute certainty, Descartes thought he could move the world. "Archimedes used to demand just one firm and immovable point in order to shift the entire earth; so I too can hope for great things if I manage to find just one thing, however slight, that is certain and unshakable." (Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch (CSM) II, 16) The goal was to find an immovable, indubitable point of reference by which the world could be surveyed and then rebuilt from the "ground up" with precision and certainty. So too, modern scholars have tried to nail down certainty, or at least what counts for knowledge, in religion and the sciences. A plethora of attempts have been made, discussed, and rejected. In sum, Descartes' philosophical tradition is probably no closer to realizing his goal even after roughly three hundred years of work.

Therefore, it is time to look back to the founder of the modern philosophical tradition in hope of breaking out of the circling pattern. First and foremost, this will require renewed attention to what he had to say. Probably the largest failing of Descartes' readers, both from his own time and the present, was (and is) an unwillingness

or inability to listen to him. In failing to do so, they found objections that, according to Descartes simply did not apply to his work. The preeminent example of this took the form of the charge of circularity from Mersenne, Arnauld, and Gassendi. In all three cases, Descartes responded with the distinction between explanation and demonstration, that is synthesis and analysis. (CSM II, 110, 171, 274) Descartes was aware of the possibility of this kind of misinterpretation of his work, and as will be seen, he warned his readers of it in his preface to them, and he explained himself afterwards, specifically in his "Replies to Second Objections." However, even to this day, the same charge is leveled against him.

Even after Descartes' efforts, philosophy's circle repeats. Why? It is the contention in this project that an answer to this question, and hopefully a better understanding of his philosophy, can be found in the process of breaking the myth of the Cartesian circle. Most of the Cartesian philosophical world languishes under the following basic reading of the *Meditations*. If clarity and distinctness are reliable, then God is not a deceiver. If God is not a deceiver, then clarity and distinctness are reliable. This is viciously circular and thus philosophically bankrupt. While many have posited this reading, the canonical statement to this effect comes from Margaret Wilson, who puts it as follows:

> Descartes claims to see by the light of nature that deceptiveness is incompatible with perfection. Now what can this mean except that he sees—perspicuously or clearly and distinctly—a manifest contradiction in conjoining the ideas of (complete) perfection and deceptiveness? But if he cannot trust them, the proof is not possible. In other words, the argument can proceed only by presupposing what it is ostensibly trying to prove: that

> perceptions of a very high degree of evidence or perspicuousness can be relied on. (Wilson 1978, 131)

This is the classic myth of the Cartesian "boot strapping" problem, Descartes' inability to banish the demon deceiver once he has summoned it. That is, until it is known that God exists and is veracious, the demon deceiver reigns. However, while under the auspices of the evil genius, God cannot be found and thus clarity and distinctness remain untenable. Such analysis portrays Descartes as having the difficulty of needing on the one hand clarity and distinctness, and God on the other; but because of this, not obtaining either of them.

As always, when evaluating a mode of analysis one should keep in mind the assumptions behind the mode in question. Finding and countering the assumptions in this case will hopefully lead to a better understanding of Descartes' work, or at least a starting point from which one can listen more carefully to his words. First, and foremost, Wilson takes Descartes to be making an argument. The language of "proving" in addition to the use of the term "argument" itself demonstrate this point adequately, especially when taken in conjunction with the general approach of her work. Further, in the Preface to *Descartes*, Wilson refers to her project as an interpretive commentary on "the *Meditations* argument." (Wilson 1978, vii) Additionally, she notes that while the *Meditations* are "presented in the style of colloquial autobiographical narrative," the reader should guard against being taken in by this. Rather, she maintains that the reader should see that Descartes' first person narrative is "not in the least relevant to the philosophical purpose of the *Meditations*." (Wilson 1978, 4) Overall, Descartes' work is

one of argumentation and as such he is moving from premises to conclusions in a strictly logical, deductive manner, where "deduction" bears the modern connotations. More or less, in the United States, this is the slant of the current research in this area of the history of philosophy. (Cottingham 1986; Wilson 1978; Frankfurt 1970, Kenny 1968; Doney 1955) In essence it notes a major aspect of the *Meditations*, that of Descartes' choice of presentation and style, and then promptly turns a deaf ear and dismisses it as irrelevant and distracting.

This stance flies in the face of Descartes' injunctions. Descartes openly and straightforwardly professed to have written actual meditations in setting down his crowning philosophical work. He plainly described his intentions and his choice of titles in the following terms:

> I wrote 'Meditations' rather than 'Disputations,' as the philosophers have done, or 'Theorems and Problems,' as the geometers would have done. In doing so I wanted to make it clear that I would have nothing to do with anyone who was not willing to join me in meditating and giving the subject attentive consideration. For the very fact that someone braces himself to attack the truth makes him less suited to perceive it, since he will be withdrawing his consideration from the convincing arguments which support the truth in order to find counter-arguments against it. (CSM II, 112)

However, three of his peers, or at least three of the thinkers who Mersenne recruited to critique Descartes' work, ignored the title and found a collection of (circular) arguments. Descartes foresaw this possible difficulty and therefore placed a direct, forceful statement of his requirements for his readers. He wrote in the "Preface to the Reader,"

> I would not urge anyone to read this book except those who are able and willing to meditate seriously with me, and to withdraw their minds from the senses and from all preconceived opinions. Such readers, as I well know, are few and far between. Those who do not bother to grasp the proper order of my arguments and the connection between them, but merely try to carp at individual sentences, as is the fashion, will not get much benefit from reading this book. (CSM II, 3)

Simply, Quibblers need not bother themselves or Descartes in regard to the *Meditations*. Nor should those that focus on arguments in the sense that each needs to be taken apart premise by premise in order to see whether the conclusion is contained within them. The author requires a holistic approach and with it, Descartes hoped, comes a particular understanding of his project.

For example, the language of logic employed by Descartes, as seen in his use of the word "argument," is to be expected given the nature of the topic, yet it is not necessarily revealing about the overall work or the intent of the author. Effective communication within the philosophical and theological community requires it. Quite purposefully, Descartes dedicated this work to the Sorbonne, in many respects the gatekeepers of theology and, given the historical period, all of the rest of "mainstream" natural philosophy. It also was the case that the thinkers called upon to proffer objections included three theologians (Caterus, Mersenne, and Arnauld), a Jesuit and his superior (Bourdin and Dinet respectively), and two philosophers (Hobbes and Gassendi). Although this three-fold categorization is superficial at best, all of the objectors are well versed in logic, theology, and natural science. Simply put, if Descartes did not use this language, his work would not even have been considered and thus, could not possibly have made any impact whatsoever. Moreover, the order of the day was that of logic and one can hardly describe metaphysics without a fair measure of logic's language, and the accepted terms of the tradition.

However, on the topic of Descartes' use of categories of terminology, it is worth noting that Descartes also used the metaphysical language of the Schools, yet he was hardly engaged in Scholasticism. Quite the contrary, he attempted a not-so-subtle revolution against the Schools. So, there is a precedent set in Descartes' thought for using a language while not adopting the underlying tradition or foundations. Additionally, his hesitancy to put the *Meditations* into a syllogistic format points out his deviation from the logic of the day. Specifically, if Descartes wished to proceed from premises to conclusions, then he could and would have in the main text rather than after the request for him to do so by Reverend Father Mersenne in the Second Replies. (CSM II, 113–120) Moreover, he refers to a distinction between demonstration and explanation in regard to presentation or language. The distinction between these two mirrors his larger one between analysis and synthesis. This division cuts between the initial revelation of intuition and the logical retracing of steps. Thus, if the *Meditations* are primarily a work of demonstration, it follows that the diction of logic remains primarily that: diction.[1]

A correlative example of Descartes' objectors seeming disregard for his words is the lack of attention paid to the recurrent "psychological" asides that are liberally interspersed throughout the "real philosophy" of the *Meditations*. Included in this class of passages are the references to the flow of time (especially the notes pertaining to the requirements of time spent in thought away from the text itself). Additionally, many

[1] A more thorough examination of demonstration and explanation as parts of the analytic/synthetic

descriptions of the narrator's state of mind, emotional state, and other such "reactions" to the progress of the project are pervasive in the text. For example,

> "So serious are the doubts into which I have been thrown as a result of yesterday's meditation that I can neither put them out of my mind nor see any way of resolving them. It feels as if I have fallen unexpectedly into a deep whirlpool which tumbles me around so that I can neither stand on the bottom nor swim up to the top. Nevertheless, I will make an effort and once more attempt the same path which I started on yesterday." (CSM II, 16)

The tacit, and overt in the case of Wilson, abandonment of such passages can be seen as a direct consequence of the "*Meditations*-as-argument" tradition. Roughly, the presence of the "I" as narrator and the psychological "asides" do not conform to Wilson's classical, dichotomous structure of premises and conclusions. Hence, and rather like Locke's "secondary qualities," they are relegated to the status of irrelevant details, significant only to the extent that they might mislead the reader. As Grene's criticism points out,

> There seems to be a temptation in much of this [i.e. contemporary Anglo-American philosophical—M.S.] literature to be distracted by the delights of analytical debate from a more judicious historical perspective and hence (as I believe) from more adequate philosophical reflection. (Grene 1985, 4)

Thus, it is not necessarily the case that Descartes is exclusively, or even primarily, crafting arguments or "disputations." Moreover, the above mentioned "details" may not merely be afterthoughts of a creative arguer. Rather, they may provide the essential clues to an alternate and fruitful understanding of Descartes' thought. (Rorty; 1986; Kosman 1986; Hatfield 1986; Marlies 1978; Hintikka 1967)

Yet, for the most part, Descartes scholars are in the business of trying to formulate arguments or reformulate Descartes' own "arguments" in order to save him from various

---

distinction will be found in the third section of this essay.

charges including circularity. (Wilson 1978, Frankfurt 1970; Gerwirth 1970; Kenny 1968; Doney 1955) While some of these attempts are quite engaging and at times intriguing, it seems that this whole venture boils down to misplaced effort, even when they are well thought out, clearly articulated, and seemingly accurate if Descartes is engaged in such an "argument." Although Descartes employs the language of argumentation, there remains sufficient reason to think that Descartes was not necessarily crafting arguments. Hence, there exists the possibility of retaining the language of logic in the *Meditations* while simultaneously enacting a significant shift away from the syllogistic analysis of the Schools. The present project pertains to showing that there is such a shift and that it takes the form of actual, narrated meditations. At least for the time being, Descartes' own insistence on the novelty of his method and the hesitancy with which he put the *Meditations* into a syllogistic form can be seen as reasons for examining this alternate reading.

Furthermore, many historical and at least one contemporary analog exist for comparison to a Cartesian alternative to argumentation. Historically, Plato's allegory of the cave overshadows all other examples of a philosophical exposition that is not an argument. Additionally, the content of the allegory and the progression from ignorance toward wisdom through education serve only to establish the precedence and effectiveness of philosophy that demands self-examination by the reader without recourse to logic or argumentation.

There is also reason to think that stories of a mystic or intuition-based nature were far from being mere history. For instance, Blaise Pascal was a contemporary of Descartes and the two of them even exchanged letters dealing with the sixteen-year-old Pascal's treatise on Conic Sections. Pascal pointedly demonstrated the limitations of argument and logic with his famous wager. While it is the case that the wager is outlined in the language of logic and argumentation, his point is that such approaches, like those of utility and rational choice analysis, are insufficient to deal with matters of first philosophy. Notably, the basis for the *Pensées* was Pascal's own mystic conversion experience of November 1654. (Fletcher 1954) It should also be remembered that Descartes began his philosophical enterprise following his famous dream in the "stove-heated room" of November 1619. (CSM I, 4–5) According to John Cottingham, this dream is the impetus for the *Meditations*, which might best be understood as a "divine mission." (Cottingham 1986, 10) This is akin to the religious experiences of Pascal and Plato's recurrent references to Socrates' inner voice and dreams. Also relevant is the Neo-Platonic tradition based upon the meditative work of St. Augustine, where faith is stressed above reason. Finally, the influence of many leading Church fathers and theologians exerted itself along these lines. Setting the question of whether Descartes fits in such a schema aside, it remains the case that there is a meditational tradition of mystical or intuition-based positions and that such thought was occurring during Descartes' period.[2]

[2] Notice that only the source of inspiration is mystical. It is not claimed herein that the

To return to the alternative, it will be posited that, simply put, Descartes was narrating an actual set of meditations for his readers. (Kosman 1986) It seems plausible to say that Descartes broke with his immediate tradition, while also maintaining that those he left behind did not realize that he was doing so. Objectors in his day, as well as those of today, simply did not find what they did not expect to find. Rather, and as one might expect, they found what they were trained to see. That is to say, in the *Meditations* Descartes was working towards the culmination of the insight garnered in the stove-heated room while his contemporaries were working from their training in Scholasticism, natural philosophy, or skepticism. By and large, his critics stayed their courses and retained the tools of interpretation that had served them well along their varied paths. Descartes, on the other hand, can be seen as attempting to move beyond or away from their lines of thought and was doing so with many of their tools, distinctions, and at least to a certain extent, in contrast to their examples and methods. Much more on this will come in the pages to follow, but first, a couple of introductory remarks on the relative lack of exploration of the *Meditations* as consisting of something other than argumentation and, more particularly, as actual meditations.

Why is there this conspicuous absence of alternative approaches in both the 17th and 20th centuries? First, there is an important similarity between the early to mid 1600s

---

Meditations is a genuine recount of the experience Descartes had in the stove-heated room or at any other time. However, it is claimed that this text was written as a meditation for its readers. He penned a pedagogical text for the *Sorbonne's* approval. Thus, it was with future "students" in mind that the title, content and progression of the *Meditations* were drafted. Similarly, while Pascal's thought was spurred on by mystic influences, the *Pensées* were not an account of his conversion. The same is the case with St.

and the modern world. Convergent with Wilson's analysis, logic, in particular the formal logic of argumentation was (is) the language of philosophy, especially in the realm of metaphysics. During Descartes' time, the Schools dominated education, natural philosophy, theology, and the like. The foundations of the Schools were Latin and logic. Just as none could enter Plato's Academy lacking geometry, so too none could participate in the intellectual realm without being steeped in syllogistic argumentation. The same is true of a broad swath of academia. Granted, the logic of today is greatly expanded and significantly more powerful. Still the relevant bit is that all are trained and expected to be conversant in argumentation, the language of logic. As it was with Aquinas and Ockham, so it is now with Russell and Kripke.

Additionally, then, as now, it is easier to deal with arguments than to trouble oneself with anything that resembles a meditation. With arguments, it is purely a matter of evaluation of the internal logic and the acceptability of the premises, that is, in the most simplistic of terms: if it is a good argument, then it stands and if not, then not. Typically, the formal nature of arguments keeps their content at a conveniently safe distance from the reader thereby leaving the reader largely untouched in any meaningful way. For example, various proofs in geometry strikingly resemble the arguments found in philosophy. At best, geometrical proofs and formal logic are puzzles, pedantic tools for the honing of up-and-coming minds, or tools for the solution of rigorously defined pragmatic or theoretical problems. A reduction of the questions of the existence of God

---

Augustine's *Confessions*, for though they are largely autobiographical, much embellishment and

and the nature of the soul to this level also reduces the content of the questions to the level of puzzles, tools, or "fill-in-the-blank solutions." Remaining strictly within the sphere of logic, the main goals are mere elegance, simplicity, and possibly the general aesthetic associated with working the problem out to conclusion. Also, arguments are, more or less, easily rendered innocuous either by way of definitions or by the (sometimes merely assumed) presence of various counter arguments or examples. In either case the "sting" or "weight" of the argument is removed.[3]

None of this can be the case with actual meditations. If a work is actually taken as a meditation, then one must actively embrace the work so that one can be "touched" by it. That is, the reader, in this realm, cannot just read offhandedly or for pleasure, as one does on one's couch, but rather must engage the whole of the work. This requires effort, work, struggle, and, in a word, change. It becomes a matter of a simultaneous examination of one's self by way of the text. This is neither merely about the reaction of the reader nor the content on the pages, but rather about the active participation in the process of learning set forth by the guiding hand of the author. The expected outcome is

---

retrospection lie within his pages as well as his defense against the charge of Manichaeism.

[3] For instance, one might come upon five proofs for the existence of God as penned by St. Aquinas. One could read through them and form a decent if somewhat superficial understanding of them and then merely recall some bathroom scrawl such as "'God is dead.' –Nietzsche". After the passing recollection, the five proofs drift out of consciousness or are at least placed upon the mental shelf labeled "logic toys." Notice that the exact same two "positions" could be flipped without any disruption in the example whatsoever. with the slight exception of the improbability of finding Thomisms on a bathroom wall. Though probably, the most common manner in which arguments are discounted is the "but that is just what 'x' says, but 'y' and 'z' argue otherwise" method. Additionally, the same process can take place, albeit with a higher degree of education or at least intellectualization, at the level of definition. At this level definitions are traded, qualified, and typically rejected because of differing assumption-level intuitions, which are basically unalterable and unexaminable. In any of these cases, one need not listen, give heed, or

a self-altered reader who has grown or gained some sort of enlightenment. Simply put, Descartes might have recognized that minds are not changed through argumentation.

Meditation as an interpretive tool, if it provides a fruitful and cogent story, then it might also be a candidate for the breaking of the circle in both senses. First, meditating does not heed the categorical analysis of logic that underpins the charge of circularity. In short, logicians would be committing a category mistake by forcing the *Meditations* into a pigeonhole that does not apply to it. Thus, one may well escape the bounds of the myth of the Cartesian circle. Second, meditation in a larger sense may also break free from the more encompassing circling patterns of philosophy at large. That is, if the initial sketch work that has been outlined here proves helpful, then some of its general characteristics may be of assistance in the larger questions of philosophy. For instance, as simple as it sounds and as hard as it is to do, listening and reading along with the speaker or author could very well help. At the very least such an approach may yield potentially revealing interpretations that may short circuit some of philosophy's more common epicycles. Moreover, rather than missing the historical Descartes in addition to our contemporary selves, as Marjorie Grene put it, philosophy may well benefit from a broader perspective.

consider discounted or countered arguments. That is, nothing in the game of argumentation needs to be experienced or lived. Descartes wants his meditative points to be experience and lived.

Subjective Immediacy

Thus it becomes time to determine whether Descartes can plausibly be seen as treating his readers as being of a particular metal, who can recognize and follow his "meditating" as he guides them. The benchmark of the viability of this project, as discussed earlier, is the question of circularity. This problem is understood to be paradigmatic, such that it is intimately tied to the overarching interpretive schema of "*Meditations* as argument." Basically, if the problem can be undone, then hopefully, so too can the schema. Therefore, the counter-proposal and basis for a revision of the canonical interpretation must be introduced. It will be argued that underpinning the "*Meditations*-as-meditations" position is a grand convergence of the elements that meet in subjective immediacy and can be seen at three interlaced levels of interpretation and in three crucial facets of his thought.

Before proceeding to the levels and facets some explanation of the previous phrase is required. Subjectivity in this instance is to be understood as the basic, first-person perspective of a rational, thinking being who possesses linguistic capacity. (Descartes' reliance upon general concepts as a basis from which to work necessitates the inclusion of language in subjectivity.) This is also a requirement of personal and genuine involvement. That is, no one can grasp it for another and it must not be impersonalized by a "reserved critical distance," the aloofness of logic, or the fleetingness of mere curiosity. Overall, the *Meditations* are a "hands on" project, where "my" hands are better

understood as "my" mind. For purposes of this project, the self will be understood as "thin," in a sense that coincides with Descartes description of the essential self as merely a "thinking thing" bereft of all other assumed or experienced attributes or qualities.[4] For this project, such a reading seems justified by the reductionist effect of metaphysical doubt. The methodological doubt set out in the First Meditation radically limits what one can rely upon as certain. This applies no less to the self than to all of the rest of the contents of one's mind.

This sense of subjectivity provides the platform for immediacy—a direct, experiential awareness or enlightenment, such that the grasping performed by the mind must be done from the first-person perspective. That is, the immediate is that which the subject reaches and is the result of the subject's involvement in the meditation. The vision of the *Meditations* rests on of immediacy as it is used here. As "I" must be the one to see for myself so too do the insights gained thereby belong to "me." The enlightenment to which "I" am brought becomes mine as "I" experience or participate in its realization. "I" am the means to the awareness of that which is immediate and meditation is what allows "me" to open "my" eyes. If nothing else can be learned from Descartes, ordered, systematic thought should be. At the level of assumptions and

[4] *The Flight to Objectivity* by Susan R. Bordo contains the preeminent example of a "robust" self. Her work is firmly situated in the continental tradition of Heidegger and Husserl. While this tradition is of general philosophical interest, the understanding of the self found therein does not seem to accurately capture Descartes' conception of it. As such, the relative merit of a rendering of the cogito in light of *Da-sein* falls well beyond the pale of the current project. *Da-sein* is closely linked with other Heideggerian concepts, specifically being-in-the-world-with-others. Such notions are quite misplaced in attempts to understand Descartes' focus on the ego of the *cogito*, at least in *Meditations* One through Five. (The world

direction of focus, one must be especially aware of method and attentive to detail. With these things in mind, proper emphasis upon immediacy as used here is at least an appropriate reminder of something easily forgotten.

The three levels of analysis are the literary, the epistemological, and the metaphysical. As a (1) literary work the *Meditations* can be analyzed stylistically, structurally, and within a tradition. The written-word platform of "the meditation" in conjunction with the supporting tradition constitutes this level of analysis. Metaphorically, the literary is the container of the content of the text. The container is then passed to the reader so that he may open it and imbibe the contents. In the case of meditations there is a curious resemblance between the container and the contents. The text serves both as the subject material for the meditation and as a guidebook on how to get at the subject material. Additionally, meditations provide a guide or role model in the form of the narrator who provides temporal and psychological cues in addition to philosophical direction. For example, " . . . Since the habit of holding on to old opinions cannot be set aside so quickly, I should like to stop here and meditate for some time on this new knowledge I have gained, so as to fix it more deeply in my memory." (CSM II 23) The apparent or reported self-examination by the narrator is intended to lead to an actual self-examination on the part of the reader and this process is the very one mapped out in the body of the text.

---

and others may return in *Meditation* Six, and with its possible return, more "robust" notions of self may become more applicable.)

Accordingly, there are two simultaneous movements in the *Meditations*. On the one hand, the reader is to follow the path laid out by Descartes and thereby vicariously engage in "Descartes' experience," or at least the purported experience of Descartes' narrator. On the other, and in a manner analogous to a "thought experiment," the reader is to engage in the text in such a way as to have his own experience. The interrelation between these two movements lies at the point of the tracing out of the steps along the path of the *Meditations*. That is, Descartes as author and guide points out and in a certain manner provides an example of how to follow the path. At the same time, the reader and follower must be the one to actually take the step in question. That is, Descartes can describe the content, the rationale behind, and the psychology of a certain portion of his work. However, it remains for the reader to sit back and do the mental labor required to actually imagine the chiliagon and then sit back and do the mental labor of intellectually grasping the chiliagon. The same is the case for the other particular examples, or thought experiments, as well as for the overall understanding of the work. As such and with Descartes' narrator serving the role of trail guide, the reader should not merely follow along, but rather clear his own trail along the markers set out by Descartes. The difference between these two is one of actually working through the problems and examples and not just "going through the motions." Traditionally, meditative writings are the kinds of books that require successive intervals of intense reading and intense contemplation. These interlacing or overlapping aspects of meditational writing are the reason why the literary level is relevant and of interest.

This is also a work of (2) epistemological relevance, and thus the methodological and foundational elements contribute to the understanding of the whole. Descartes' endeavor is, ultimately, one of solidification of foundations for all knowledge. The *Meditations* can be read as a demonstration of the Cartesian method as laid out in the *Discourse*. This is, by the way, no ordinary demonstration for it is, as noted previously, a personally guided tour for which epistemology is one of two crucial elements of both observation and exercise. The metaphysical level constitutes the other and it will be discussed next. Descartes' intended roadmap of this tour leads the reader away from the excesses of skepticism; general epistemological naïveté; and/or the misplaced preeminence of the senses as seen in the Schools. At the same time, the path proceeds with an unrelenting refocusing of the mind which, according to Descartes, reveals not only the progression of the story toward the importance of certainty, but also the standards of knowledge by which certainty can be attained. One must practice clearing one's mind of the naïve, common notions and either skeptical or Scholastic prejudices that lead one away from that which is clear and distinct (i.e. "certain"). Descartes standards for knowledge stem from the vision metaphor, such that "enlightenment" requires one to open one's eyes (or turns toward the light) and to exercise one's capacity to see. Also, visionism and the facet of intuition overlap significantly. Overall, according to Descartes, attention to the text yields insight into epistemological foundations and thereby keeps the reader on the path blazed by the narrator. In this way, the reformation of epistemology found in the *Meditations* is both revealed and practically

implemented as an operant standard for continued progression. If the reader is meditating, then it is through this intersection of revelation and practice where the subject immediately grasps and applies the Cartesian method for obtaining certainty.

Finally, the epistemology is intertwined with a (3) metaphysical position that includes the immortal soul and the existence of God. The latter is the creator of the former, who is subjectivity as it has been described earlier. In essence, Descartes intended the *Meditations* to be a process of clearing away all of the diversions, obstacles, and prejudices so that the divinely created soul can know its true self. Then, with its newly grasped understanding of itself, it proceeds to the insight that it also knows something of its Creator, and derivatively, some of the created world. That is, for Descartes, the reader, and the author, are created souls. They bear the stamp of their Maker, who provided them with minds capable of knowing truth. (CSM II, 35) God and the soul form the platform for all else in Descartes' philosophy, science, and epistemology. However, he cannot simply begin with them, both must be demonstrated. All such knowledge is the project of man and, as a created being, both knowledge and the knower depend fully and completely on the existence and power of God. (CSM II, 35) The metaphysical element in the *Meditations* is the beginning (in terms of creation and the author's intentions), middle (literally), and end (in terms of conclusions and climax of the work) of the entire meditational process.

The proposed interrelationship of these elements is as follows: the literary serves as the vehicle for the epistemological reformation that terminates in metaphysical

enlightenment and its ensuing insights. For purposes of the current undertaking, these are the three fruitful levels of analysis with which one can come to a new and holistic interpretation of Descartes' *magnum opus*.

The current analysis is relevant to the extent that it applies to and accounts for at least the following three facets of Descartes' *Meditations*: the request for and apparent necessity of participation, experiential intuition, and his agenda of pedagogical therapy. Descartes requests the (a) participation of the reader explicitly and implicitly. There are direct reminders of the importance of attentiveness while the personable presence of a narrator tacitly enjoins the reader by speaking in the first person. In participating, the reader goes through various experiences, or at least an ordered set of related thought experiments. Often the narrator describes to the reader the author's own, at least supposed, experience. Such "personal asides" can be understood as hints about how the experience of the *Meditations* should proceed. Plainly, the goal of these comments is to draw the reader into the text.

Once the reader enters the meditation, then it is a matter of actually considering a piece of wax, a chiliagon, mountains and valleys, how one deals with sensation in dreams, etc. It is this sense of engagement, of working through problems, which is absolutely fundamental to meditating. For example, unless one genuinely sits down and labors over picturing a chiliagon, the point and the ensuing insight never arrive. Of course, the famous methodological doubt cannot play its epistemic role unless the reader actually "doubts" along the lines that Descartes' narrator describes. The same is the case

with the other examples from the *Meditations*, such as the wax, the valley, and the like. It is of special interest to note that in the section entitled "Postulates" Descartes specifically asks his "readers to ponder on all the examples that I went through in my *Meditations*, both of clear and distinct perception, and of obscure and confused perception, and thereby accustom themselves to distinguishing what is clearly known from what is obscure. This is something that is easier to learn by examples than by rules . . . " (CSM II, 116) Descartes pays great attention to his examples and uses precisely the right example to illustrate the exact point he is after. The examples proffered by Descartes are not merely demonstrative in nature they are actually thought experiments which cannot stand on their own; they require the assistance of the reader, if they are to yield insight *via* experience.

The directed experience, experimental or otherwise, is aimed at evoking the reader's insight, or (b) intuition, along the lines of the principles of first philosophy. For Descartes, intuition is the ability of the attentive, engaged mind to recognize truth. (CSM I, 13, 51) Recognition in this instance is visual in nature. Descartes is a product of the Platonic metaphor as developed in the *Republic* and seen throughout the progression of Western philosophical tradition. Additionally, the thought of St. Augustine exudes the language of light and illumination. Basically, it is only in the presence of light that the viewer can behold truth. Poor or no illumination interferes with sight. Also, factors like the orientation of the viewer and whether one's eyes are open, properly acclimated, trained and so on affect one's "visual" capacity and acuity.

However, Descartes is not a blind follower of the tradition; the metaphor is appropriate in regard to his conception of mind. For Descartes, the mind is an eye that is not subject to the obfuscation of materiality. (Hatfield 1986) Sight is inextricably bound to the one looking and as such is tied to subjectivity as described previously. Furthermore, sight is the preeminent metaphor for immediacy. As Descartes points out, it is that which is indistinct (that is not directly presented to sight) and that which is unclear (that is covered, veiled, blurred, obscure, etc.) which is hard to see. For instance, the examples of the cloaked figure, the melting wax, the size of the sun, and the shape of the tower are all attempts to focus and refine the reader's intuition. Generally, a sight-based language is ubiquitous in Descartes' thought and this evinces the strength with which this metaphor held him.

Moreover, intuition, for Descartes, is not easy. Just as there are tricks that the eyes play on the inexperienced observer, so are there tricks that the mind plays on the inexperienced thinker. Naïveté is challenged throughout the *Meditations* both in terms of sight as sensation and as intuition. Thus, Descartes crafts examples or thought experiments to wean the reader away from his senses and toward intuition. Not just any intuition though, for it is only intuition with clarity and distinctness that is acceptable and must be accepted. Thus, training arises as one of the major goals of this work. The training takes the form of meditative therapy.

Descartes uses the two previous facets of the *Meditations*, as the venue and the capacity respectively, to supplant skepticism and Scholasticism with his own

epistemology and metaphysics. The excision of the old and the implantation of the new comprise the pedagogical movement of Cartesian (c) therapy.[5] Epistemological certainty resists the heretofore unending doubts and hesitancies of the skeptics, while the new metaphysics of mind undermines the priority of Aristotelian sensation, as seen in his and the ensuing Scholastic doctrine that nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses. (Aristotle 1984, De Anima 429a18-29, 432a3-14; Aquinas 1964, 1 qu. 12, arts. 11-12; qu. 84, art 7; qu. 85, art. 1) In each case, meditation by a subject, the reader, removes the bad habits that are taken to be common sense. The naïveté that begins during childhood and is only exacerbated in the Schools yields to examination. Through practice the subject learns new, good habits of perceiving matters, that is, with clarity and distinctness. The advent of true, immediate knowledge cements Descartes' victory over the two rival traditions. All of this is done through meditative therapy. The notions of habit, practice, unlearning, and learning point in the direction of a therapeutic element in the *Meditations*.

Moreover, the examples are specifically crafted and presented as therapeutic in nature. For instance, one of the best uses of an example in philosophical writing is the wax example from the Second Meditation. In less than a full paragraph, Descartes lays out an example that by and large destroys the Schools' position that, "Nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses." Although the wax example does not prove Descartes' position to be true, at the very least it points in the direction he wishes to go,

[5] Examples of philosophy as therapy are available, including: Wittgenstein 1969, St. Augustine

that is, toward the direct mental intuition or perception of truth freed from the obscurity of sensation. Additionally, the more one contemplates the polymorphic wax, the more one realizes that the Schools' cherished "abstraction" is insufficient to cope with the matter at hand. This weaning process, coupled with a positive replacement for that which is cast aside, is the heart of the therapeutic facet of the *Meditations*.

Overall, the relation of the facets is as follows: the means of participation lead the reader away from the "erroneous" ways of the Schools and the skeptics and toward the positive content of the therapy. The standard by which the progression is measured is the clarity and distinctness of one's intuition. To this extent, these three facets capture much of the substance of Descartes' *Meditations*.

The three levels (1–3) and three facets (a–c) converge at a node referred to previously as subjective immediacy. Additionally, each of the three corresponds with its sequential partner. First, the literary and the participatory characteristics provide the means with which, the reader enters into meditation. Moreover, the requirement of participation demands a suitable literary treatment, and a meditation fits this role well. Second, epistemology and intuition are linked through an overlapping reliance on standards and the search for foundations. The capacity of intuition in the Cartesian mind is not enough by itself. According to Descartes, the proper epistemological certainty and standards for this certainty must be found and used for the truth to be recognized. These are, for him, clarity and distinctness. Finally, therapy utilizes these very same standards

---

1993, and Heidegger 1996. With regard to Cartesian studies, see Hatfield 1986 and Marlies 1978.

to root out prejudice and naïveté and thereby arrive at the metaphysics that, ultimately, is the foundation for Descartes' entire undertaking. That is, his metaphysics is the end that determines the course of his therapy, so that the metaphysics of old is replaced by the certainty of the new.

In this interpretation, subjective immediacy encapsulates the means and the result, in terms of the created embodied soul (not in the Aristotelian sense), of Descartes' *Meditations*, and this claim is reinforced at all three levels of analysis. It does this to the extent that it brings them together in terms of meditation. However, for the time being, each of the facets of each of the levels introduced above requires explanation.

CHAPTER II

THE LITERARY LEVEL AND PARTICIPATION

While Descartes held high regard for science and the tools of logic, argumentation, and mathematics, he did not forget that stylistic matters are of eminent importance even, or rather especially, for philosophers. Unfortunately, many philosophers, like Wilson, have forgotten this and as such, the second chapter will begin by picking up where they left off, or rather with what they left out, in hopes of escaping their circles. As was pointed out in chapter one, the titles selected by Descartes for his works and the genres in which they were penned display the labor of a conscientious author who wrote with his target audience in mind. In the case of the *Meditations*, as noted in the first chapter, the title was purposely set apart from the "disputations" of the philosophers and the "treatises" of the mathematicians. That being said, it seems possible that rather than an account of the *Meditations* in terms of an argument, an actual meditational interpretation is what he intended, or is at least fruitful for understanding his work. The possibility of finding converging evidence along the lines of literary analysis and philosophical interpretation invites investigation. When matters of interpretation are at issue, one must resort to cases, examples and textual support. This section will thus focus primarily upon the meditational tradition and whether Descartes has a place in that

tradition, and the textual support for evaluating the *Meditations* as meditations. Thus it is time to return to the examples and begin building from there. Thus far, these include mere mention of matters of style, mode of address, and overt references to meditating. For the sake of an expanded, orderly exposition, this section will deal with the first of the levels of analysis, the literary, which will lead to the first of the facets, participation. These will then be compared with subjective immediacy in order to ascertain its initial feasibility as an interpretive tool.

The vast array of styles and forms of writing employed by Descartes, while impressive in its own right, also bespeaks the broad erudition of an author who possesses remarkable insight and ability regarding his own scholarship as well as that of his audience. For example, in the words of John Cottingham, ". . . [Descartes'] aim in the *Discourse* was 'not to teach the method but merely to speak about it', and that this is why he chose the label 'discourse' rather than 'treatise'." (Cottingham 1986, 13) The tone and the choice of languages that went into crafting the *Rules* also evince his care in choosing style, genre, title, and diction. Scholars comprised the audience of this work; thus Descartes writes in their language, Latin, and uses a philosophical, rhetorical structure as would befit them. The *Discourse*, it should be noted, was written in French for a more popular audience. In his scientific works Descartes continues this pattern of attentiveness to what others may consider details. Extrapolation from these and other such bits of stylistic or literary analysis lends credence to the position that the *Meditations* were written, and should be understood, as meditations. Finally, Descartes explicitly describes

his intentions regarding his literary choices, for example he wrote, "the style of writing that I selected was one which I thought would be most capable of generating such attention." (CSM 1990, 112) Therefore, Descartes carefully deliberated about his writing in relation to the expected reception by his audience(s) and the desired affect on them.

Another point to bring out is that Descartes intended this work to be adopted by the Sorbonne as a textbook for the next generation of (natural) philosophers and theologians. Given the subject matter of first philosophy, special attention must be paid to the method of approach. Unlike multiplication tables, first philosophy cannot be memorized. Unlike a skill of some sort, it cannot be adopted by practice or habit. Unlike the technical aspects of the arts and sciences, it cannot be a matter of becoming informed, that is, of the absorption of various facts. Unlike typical understandings of politics, ethics, and aesthetics, it is not a matter of persuasion or argumentation. That is to say, unless knowledge of the soul and God are merely a matter of indoctrination or a pure affair of divine revelation, an individual, personal struggle with the subject must be undertaken. The questions of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul do not have easy answers and grappling with such questions is not a pursuit to be lightly undertaken.[6] For the time being, only the difficulty of the subjects in question, and the resultant requirement for personal struggle will be dealt with. The metaphysical content

[6] Philosophers of today have the benefit of time, Hume, Kant, Kierkegaard, and Russell to verify that argumentation is insufficient to logically demonstrate the existence of God. Descartes did not. However, during the same span of time, Pascal (with his famous wager) used argumentation to point out the ineffectuality of logic in regard to God's existence. Thus, it seems at least plausible that Descartes was

will be analyzed and incorporated into this interpretation later. With metaphysical pedagogy in mind, it seems reasonable, possibly even required, that Descartes write in a meditative style.

privy to a similar insight, attempted to escape the bonds of Scholastic argumentation, and turned instead to a meditational approach.

The *Meditations* as Meditations

To continue, the inclusion of the objections and replies serves as a ready made set of examples from which one can learn how to read the *Meditations* as Descartes intended. This is a crucial point because debate, especially in the form found in the Schools, hardly seems appropriate for Descartes' position if his "argument" is actually a logical demonstration of the things he set out to prove. Under this interpretation, discussion should come to a close with the last paragraph. However, at the end of the *Meditations* proper, not only is it not at a close, but objections are purposely included, even, according to Descartes, extraordinarily poor sets of objections. It is in this light that Descartes may have written that

> For the objections, it is a good idea to call them 'First Objections,' 'Second Objections,' and so on, and then to put 'Replies to the Objections' rather than 'Solutions' so as to leave the reader to judge whether my replies contain solutions or not. Let those who give false answers call them 'Solutions;' for it is usually those who are not nobly born who boast the loudest of their nobility. (CSM III, 175)

It is evident that Descartes is continuously concerned with the presentation and reception of his works. The concern in this case stems from keeping the reader involved in evaluating both the "Objections" and "Replies" and thereby honing their own ability to follow Descartes. Therefore, the presence of objections and the author's replies seems better understood as some sort of guidebook that points out pitfalls to be avoided and praises proper paths.

Various "trial runs" at understanding the body of the *Meditations* are included. They stem from a variety of some of the great religious, scientific, social thinkers of the

day. In respect for his objectors and in accordance with his goal of guiding his reader, Descartes closes his preface with the following:

> The objections they raised were so many and so varied that I would venture to hope that it will be hard for anyone else to think of any point—at least of any interest—which these critics have not touched on. I therefore ask my readers not to pass judgement on the *Meditations* until they have been kind enough to read through all of these objections and my replies to them." (CSM II, 8)

The objections together with Descartes' responses, by which one can evaluate one's own progress or reading ability. Thus, from beginning to end—"Preface to the Reader" to "Objections and Replies"—one can read the *Meditations* with an eye for literary and stylistic "details" that can be woven into a whole cloth of trying to understand the author's intention in writing meditations.[7] Of course only an examination of the work at hand will allow one to determine if the evident conscientiousness in his earlier works holds for the work under consideration.

Two promising paths lead toward the proposed conclusion. The first draws its evidence from the established tradition of meditational writing that originated with the Stoics, and in particular, Marcus Aurelius' "book to himself." The other will attempt to identify areas of consonance between Descartes' *Meditations* and the meditative tradition. To return to the first path, as is noted by L. Aryeh Kosman, the body of

---

[7] An amazing collection of scholarship on the topic of the "Objections and Replies" can be found in *Descartes and His Contemporaries: Meditations Objections and Replies*. ed. Roger Ariew and Marjorie Grene, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1995. On page 20 of "The Objections in Cartesian Metaphysics", Jean-Luc Marion supports the holistic interpretation claimed here with the following. "Not only would it be illegitimate to read the *Meditations* in abstraction from the *Objections* and *Replies*, with which they intentionally form an organic whole, but it would also be wholly illegitimate to read them otherwise than as replies to the objections evoked by the *Discourse on Method*. Far from being soliloquy or solipsism, Cartesian thought, insofar as it obeys a logic of argumentation, is inscribed in its very origin in the responsorial space of dialogue."

meditational writings shares two primary characteristics with the Cartesian *Meditations*. "Reflexive awareness," that is, self-knowledge and self-examination, and hence subjectivity, are the focus of the project as a whole. (Kosman 1986, 22) Notice that this shifts the primary emphasis away from the usual points of contention, which include: skepticism, foundationalism, dualism, ontology, and the like. That is, rather than have the focus centered upon the positions, it is a summons to actually struggle with and ultimately adopt the positions; thereby making them one's own. Moreover, the subject material ceases to be primarily the stuff of demon deceiver's, pieces of wax, and the like, rather it becomes the reader himself and the his insights. In Descartes' words,

> I will now shut my eyes, stop my ears, and withdraw all my senses. I will eliminate from my thoughts all images of bodily things, or rather, since this is hardly possible, I will regard all such images as vacuous, false, and worthless. I will converse with myself and scrutinize myself more deeply; and in this way I will attempt to achieve, little by little, a more intimate knowledge of myself. (CSM II 1990, 24)

Accordingly, the questions and problems change, as do the possible answers and solutions.

Additionally, meditations aim at salvific purification. Typically, the one meditating moves toward a spiritual cleansing and salvation. However, in Descartes' *Meditations* a more philosophical interpretation is required. Kosman suggests that "epistemological salvation" is what is at stake here. (Kosman 1986, 22) Instead of purifying and cultivating the soul for the life hereafter, Descartes entreats his reader to perform a thorough self-cleansing so that one's mind is not muddied and muddled by the senses. That is to say, Descartes attempted to save knowledge and truth from the "sins"

of obscurity and indistinctness. This salvation applies to both the spiritual realm and the material realm, and it should be remembered that this is a primary goal that is most obviously visible in the transition between Meditations 2 and 3.

The summary of the Second Meditation and the beginning of the Third Meditation evince a notion of epistemological purification. Descartes writes,

> I now know that even bodies are not strictly perceived by the senses or the faculty of imagination but by the intellect alone, and that this perception derives not from their being touched or seen but from their being understood... but since the habit of holding on to old opinions cannot be set aside so quickly, I should like to stop here and meditate for some time on this new knowledge I have gained, so as to fix it more deeply in my memory. (CSM II 1990, 22–3)

Herein lies the source of error, epistemological "sin," and the path toward redemption, the intellect alone. Descartes also pays close attention to the process of purification, that is, taking the required time and effort to unlearn the bad habit of reliance upon the senses and imagination and their subsequent replacement with mind as the seat of knowledge. He continues to describe this process in the beginning of the Third Meditation on the heels of the introduction of the truth of clear and distinct perception.

> 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. Yet I previously accepted as wholly certain and evident many things which I afterwards realized were doubtful. What were these? The earth, sky, stars, and everything else that I apprehended with the senses. But what was it about them that I perceived clearly? Just that the ideas, or thoughts, of such things appeared before my mind. Yet now I am not denying that these ideas occur within me. But there was something else which I used to assert, and which through habitual belief I thought I perceived clearly, although I did not in fact do so. This was that there were things outside me which were sources of my ideas and which resembled then in all respects. Here was my mistake; or at any rate, if my judgement was true, it was not thanks to the strength of my perception. (CSM II 1990, 24–5)

This seems to be the working out of the erroneous ramifications of the old, naïve habits based on the senses and the first tentative steps toward adopting the Cartesian mind-based

approach. The author, after reviewing examples of previously accepted "knowledge," recognizes his fall into error and also a path to truth, that is epistemic salvation—clear and distinct perception.

The adoption of an interpretation involving such "salvation" will require that Descartes be seen as part of the meditative tradition. (Hatfield 1986; Rorty 1986; Frankfurt 1970) In terms of the call to participation and the implementation of a meditational style, the current undertaking is in fundamental agreement with Amélie Oksenberg Rorty and Gary Hatfield. Both of these experts utilize their considerable knowledge and skill to argue convincingly that Descartes is firmly rooted in this tradition.

Rorty draws upon modern scholarship on the meditational genre and describes it as consisting of the reflexive and the reflective wherein "the author transforms himself by following a staged reflection, a self-reform though self-examination." (Rorty 1986, 2) The emphasis is not solely upon the author though, for the author also serves as the guide for the reader as he travels the author's path. In the case of the *Meditations*, Descartes' purpose remains somewhat ambiguous in Rorty's estimation. Descartes stands between what Rorty calls the interpretive meditation and the radical transformation. The degree to which the *praxis* of the reading affects one's daily—that is, moral, political, and practical—life determines whether the meditation is radical or merely interpretive. On the surface, Descartes claims as his own very little that would qualify as radically transforming, yet it still remains the case that his entire project is one of anti-Scholastic subversion. Herein lies the ambiguous nature of the *Meditations*; he provides no

delineation between the scientific, religious, moral, practical, or other realms. Thus it is difficult to see where he is headed and whether or not he leaves some, most, or all of his past behind as he transforms himself through meditating. (Rorty 1986, 3–4) The distinction between the radical and the interpretive meditation serves as a touchstone for one's analysis of Descartes' project as to how far he was willing or at least wanting to go.

Rorty gleans a second set of categories from the tradition, the ascensional and the penitential meditation. The ascensional meditation stems from Platonic and neo-Platonic sources of whom the most famous is St. Augustine. The emphasis and tone are of exhortation, admonition, celebration, and prayer. Light, clarity, illumination, and vision comprise the major metaphors of this style of mediation. There is an emergence from a state of confusion and an entrance into a realm of clarity. Error is a matter of confusion and as such the reform required is not as harsh as one based upon willful error. The author leads the reader along the path that leads to the light of a cosmic nous. As one meditates one moves further from confusion and closer to that which is more real, more perfect. (Rorty 1986, 4–5)

In contrast, the penitential meditation attempts to redeem a fallen, perverse reader and this requires that the author direct or manipulate the reader toward and through a revelatory catharsis. The reader must be shown his guilt and must face the despair inherent in his wretched state. Additionally, cleansing oneself of guilt and error must be diligently and continuously pursued, for the penitent reader never escapes his despair and there always remains a basis for backsliding. Ultimately, there is to be a fundamentally

new beginning either the life or the understanding of one's life that follows the penitential meditation. St. Ignatius of Loyola is presented as the classic figure in the development of penitential, spiritual meditations. (Rorty 1986, 5–6)

Notice that both the ascensional and penitential may be either radical or interpretive and while the ambiguity between the latter pair remains, Descartes draws upon both of the former. The metaphor of light and vision that stemmed from the ascensional theories laid out by St. Augustine provided much of the language of the intended reformation. Yet, to the extent that Descartes sees the epistemological condition of man to be one of abject falsity and naïveté, he opts for the clean break of the penitential category. Being more severe than mere confusion, the errors of his philosophical age required a retraining and strengthening of the will so that old habits did not resurface and so that clarity and distinctness could be rigorously maintained. The requirement for new foundations also plays well to the penitential mode, as does greater separation between author and reader. Descartes has completely transformed at least his own interpretation of the world, the self, and God. Thus, he begins the *Meditations* from a much different place than does his reader, who is still steeped in either skepticism or Scholasticism. Overall, Rorty concludes that the penitential mode is more prevalent in Descartes writing. (Rorty 1986, 6–7; Frankfurt 1970, 4)

The categories and explanation of the tradition provide a platform for understanding Descartes' *Meditations* as meditations. Rorty demonstrates that there is a tradition from which Descartes can be seen to be working. Many of the flourishes and

details fall in line when one adopts her interpretation. In particular, the written meditation specifically entreats the reader to sincerely and seriously "join in" or participate. The enjoinment of the reader begins in the "Preface to the Reader" where Descartes describes his intended audience and provides the requisite *caveats* concerning attentiveness and meditative reading, and continues throughout the work in his insistent use of the first person perspective. (CSM II 1990, 8) Additionally, with the exception of the Sixth Meditation, all of them begin and end with a personal account of what is to be done and how it is to be approached. At the close of the final Meditation, Descartes shifts from his heretofore constant usage of "I" and "me" to "we" and "us." (CSM II 1990, 62) This shift in Descartes' mode of address may be a sign of an expected convergence of author and reader that consummates the meditation. In any case, the personalizing effect that arises out of his autobiographical style lends itself quite well to having the reader substitute himself for the "I" of the author, thereby fully joining or participating in the process of meditation.

One of the ramifications of the first person perspective constitutes a constant reminder that one cannot meditate from afar. Additionally, the "I" of the author cannot meditate for another, specifically the reader whose own "I" must partake. Such aspects coincide with Descartes' specific directions to the reader as referenced in the previous section. Descartes narrates the unfolding of the *Meditations*. He also includes what could be considered personal asides to his audience that point out his own (possibly rhetorical) anxiety, the trouble areas, and the passage of subjective time. For example,

one could see him pushing back his chair after a long bout of thinking and writing as he pens the final words of the Third Meditation. He writes:

> I should like to pause here and spend some time in the contemplation of God; to reflect on his attributes, and to gaze with wonder and adoration on the beauty of this immense light, so far as the eye of my darkened intellect can bear it. For just as we believe through faith that the supreme happiness of the next life consists solely in the contemplation of the divine majesty, so experience tells us that this same contemplation, albeit much less perfect, enables us to know the greatest joy of which we are capable in this life. (CSM II 1990, 38)

Not only does this quotation show the personal, experiential process that Descartes puts forth, it also places heavy emphasis upon vision and the "mind's eye." The sight metaphor as well as the asides and the first person perspective are usually seen as some kind of window dressing or at most flowery extras. However, when viewed from the standpoint of the meditational tradition, personal guided reader participation and repeated mention of psychological, maybe even spiritual, matters are to be expected.

Gary Hatfield also made significant contributions to establishing a place for Descartes in the meditative tradition. He posits that they are cognitive exercises based upon the spiritual model developed by St. Augustine. The purpose of the exercises is to free one's mind from the naïve reliance and acceptance of sense experience and thereby allow one to focus on the source of clarity and distinctness, the intellect. Hatfield, quite importantly, points out that this genre and this method are in line with and probably necessitated by his theory of mind. (Hatfield 1986, 47) While this is crucial to the current project, it is not yet time for its complete treatment. However, another of his insights does have immediate relevance.

Hatfield draws a structural link between the traditional meditation and Descartes' meditation. According to the tradition, there are three stages through which the meditator must travel. The purgative stage comes first and it subdues the flesh so that sin, particularly that regarding the senses and sensuality, is recognized and cast aside. Second, the illuminative stage is entered after completing the cleansing found in the first. The second stage is the positive step toward insight into that which is divine, in terms of revelation, the presence of the moral soul, and the example of Jesus Christ. This is a stage of awareness and knowledge, which is put into practice by seeking to be consonant with the divine will. Last is the unitive stage, the pursuit of a union with God. The preceding three stages are remarkably paralleled in the *Meditations*. A radical purging of the senses is the primary aim of the First Meditation. The arrival of the cogito and the knowledge of God in the Second and Third Meditations provide the basis for the illuminative stage. Then, in the Fourth Meditation, one learns of the proper relation between the will and the intellect so that one can align one's will with that of the divine. (Rorty 1986, 49) It is also the case that the Fifth and Sixth Meditations round out the story by providing ramifications and further explanation of that which came in the first four. (CSM II 1990, 9–11) Generally speaking, the progression of the Cartesian, cognitive *Meditations* follows that of the traditional spiritual ones.

At the level of literary analysis one final note is worthy of attention and calls for an examination of three significant points of departure from the traditional, religious meditation. Hatfield succinctly summarized them. First, and most obviously, in contrast

to St. Augustine and St. Ignatius, these are epistemic meditations. That is, rather than a wrangling with religious matters, they dwell upon the questions and foundations of knowledge. Second, Descartes informs the meditator that this process must be done once in a lifetime. He puts it as follows in a letter to Her Highness, Princess Elizabeth:

> I believe that it is very necessary to have properly understood, once in a lifetime, the principles of metaphysics, since they are what gives us the knowledge of God and of our soul. But I think also that it would be very harmful to occupy one's intellect frequently in meditating upon them since this would impede it from devoting itself to the functions of the imagination and the senses. I think the best thing is to content oneself with keeping in one's memory and one's belief the conclusions which one has once drawn from them. (CSM III 1990, 228)

This is hardly the devotional, or to use Rorty's category, penitential, attitude with which the highly spiritual meditator would approach God. In regard to the ascensional tradition, the merest glance at the first page of St. Augustine's *Confessions* reveals the glaring difference between the two. It reads,

> Great art thou, *O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Thy power, and of Thy wisdom there is no number*. And man desires to praise Thee. He is but a tiny part of all that Thou hast created. He bears about him his mortality, the evidence of his sinfulness, and evidence that *Thou dost resist the proud*: yet this tiny part of all that Thou hast created desires to praise Thee." (St. Augustine 1993, 3)

The profound contrast in diction and approach is evident. Finally, and correlative to the second, there is a general theme of independence or autonomy on the part of Descartes, or the reader for that matter. The human mind, while being of divine creation, knows and sees by and through its own intuition and judgement. Knowledge is never relegated to the realm of grace as it is in the spiritual meditations. (CSM II 1990, 54–5) The total submission and abject humility of St. Augustine is absent. Herein, the differences are as

enlightening as the similarities. Both decry the simplicity of a book of arguments. Rather, it is the case that proper placement within a rich tradition seems indicated by the general similarities as well as the noteworthy differences. While the points of divergence fit with what one would expect from a philosophical rather than religious meditation, the overlapping points of structure, progression, metaphor, and method provide a basis for claiming membership in the tradition.

In sum, the philosophical meditation, as it has been applied to the Cartesian *Meditations*, is constituted by the following significant features. There is an entreaty to the reader in regard to an involved and highly individualized struggle with "first principles" of some sort, for the current topic these are God and the nature of the soul. Included in this struggle are intense introspection, Kosman's "reflexive awareness," and reform or some form of at least tacit instruction as to how to go about reading the text and dealing with its contents. Descartes proceeds explicitly in this regard, others do not, but all in all, there is an understood meditative approach that is to be adopted by the reader in the case of meditations.

Meditation and Participation

Having traced Descartes back to a meditative tradition, a return to the second path is in order. This line of discussion focuses on the author's statements as to his intentions toward and requirements of his audience. Two citations leap to the fore as instances of Descartes specifically speaking to just this question. The first comes from, and this is interesting in itself, the "Preface to the Reader." While one might surmise that the phrase "to the reader" is a mere statement of the obvious, one may just as well, or perhaps better, understand it as a reminder of the central importance of the full attentiveness of the reader. Having said that, Descartes announces his subject matter and the very sort of reader he had in mind.

> I . . . treat the whole of First Philosophy. . . I would never advise anyone to read it excepting those who desire to meditate seriously with me, and who can detach their minds from the affairs of sense and deliver themselves entirely from every sort of prejudice, I know too well that such men exist only in small number. But for those who, without caring to comprehend the order and connections of my reasonings, form their criticisms on detached portions arbitrarily selected, as is the custom with many, these I say, will not obtain much profit from reading this Treatise. (CSM II 1990, 8)

Along the lines of meditation, several intriguing facets shine though. First, he specifically requires his reader to meditate seriously. One could take this as a mere rhetorical device, yet meditation is hardly necessary for grinding through axiomatic proofs or strings of syllogisms. Once the proofs have been constructed, a purely mechanical mindset is superior for their review (e.g. my computer can to it better than I). On the other hand, Descartes' *Meditations* attempt to evoke specific experiences in the reader, as seen in the examples of the chiliagon, the piece of wax, and most pointedly in

the *cogito*. Thus, meditation, in terms of involved participation in "cognitive exercises" or "thought examples," far exceeds the bounds of mere logico-deductive proofs.

Second, there is an element of purification and possibly redemption or salvation to the notion of detachment from the senses and other prejudices. The presence of deliverance from preconceptions also alludes to the possibility of improved "reflexive awareness." In particular, the intense introspection, especially in regard to the existence of God and the nature of the soul as the foundation of certainty, demanded by Descartes cannot be accomplished with the bad Scholastic or skeptical habits still in place. That is, neither hasty reliance upon the senses, nor pedantic, dialectical debate, nor a refusal to seriously join in the Cartesian project results in the meditational approach he repeatedly describes. Thus, Descartes advocated extended breaks between, or even during, particular meditations so that the reader would have sufficient time to not only understand but radically alter his mode of thought in regard to knowledge at large, and the nature of the soul and God in particular. Habits and preconceptions need to be changed so that error cannot creep into the mind of the reader. Meditation is the method adopted by Descartes to facilitate these changes and reform the minds and thoughts of his audience.

Third, the emphasis that rests upon the text as an organic, ordered whole, falls more easily on the side of meditation than on argument; for in argumentation any of the particular proofs or premises should be scrutinized completely and should stand on their own merit. Rhetorically speaking, it is certainly the case that arguments can be nested in

an organic fashion, yet such a conglomeration, even if unified, does not escape the possibility of untangling them and having them stand on their own. Wrangling with various premises and lemmas and so forth however does not address one of the most significant factors found in the *Meditations*, Cartesian order. In the meantime, suffice it to say that argumentation and meditation both stand in need of proper ordering. Neither can be done without it. However, the order required by each is different. Validity governs the order of logic while, in Descartes' terms, discovery governs the analytic order of the *Meditations*. Validity requires that the premises of the argument contain the content of the conclusion. Discovery, finding new insight, cannot possibly proceed in this fashion for there is nothing in the conclusion of an argument that was not already present at its onset. The order of discovery must progress beyond its starting points lest nothing new be found. Thus meditation, not argumentation, comes closer to describing the Cartesian project.

Rather than alluding to argumentation Descartes again points out, in the Second Replies, the intention that this work be treated as a meditation with the goal of removing prejudices. He writes:

> I rightly demand special attention on the part of my readers and have purposely chosen a special style of writing which I considered most suitable for this aim. . . I think it quite fair to ignore altogether and despise as of no weight the criticisms of people who are unwilling to meditate with me and instead persist in holding their preconceived views. I know how difficult it is for anyone—even someone who gives it his full attention and who is really seriously trying to discover the truth—to keep before his mind the whole compass of my *Meditations* and at the same time grasp each part, both of which must, in my opinion, be achieved if the full point of my work is to be comprehended. (CSM II 1990, 111)

Notice that the one meditating must labor arduously against the preconceptions that they hold and that one must be completely attentive. Both points fit quite well with the themes of reflection and salvation found in the meditational tradition. Also, the emphasis on the part and the whole converges with both Descartes' own method and with the requirements of meditative self-examination. Indeed, in the preface to the reader, Descartes specifically enjoins the reader to include an examination of the objections and his replies to them before concluding the project of meditation. (CSM II 1990, 8) This establishes the relevance of the quoted passage and defines the bounds of the organic whole. Finally, the effort pointed out by the request for seriousness in both passages points toward a notion of struggle on the part of the reader.

It is this struggle that is the essence of the meditation in many ways and as such Descartes seems to be the reader's trailblazer and taskmaster. Alternatively, Descartes adopts the role of what could be called a "therapist" in regard to this struggle. The notion of therapy will be crucial in the pages to follow, because of the effort and concentration required by this enterprise. One must recognize one's preconceived notions as erroneous and make the effort necessary to reform them. For the time being, the two lines of analysis provide justification that the *Meditations* are best understood as meditations. The establishment of a place in a literary tradition and the provision of decent evidence that this was the author's intention converge at a point that indicates that this is a fruitful means of unpacking a philosophically problematic work.

However, all of this matters not, unless the element of participation is also included in one's reading of Descartes' *Meditations*. All of the literary devices, modes of presentation, stylistic adaptations are of no use without the attentiveness he requires of his reader. This attentiveness or participation bridges the chasm between words on a page and the insight Descartes thinks he can impart to his audience. The text itself holds the material to be meditated upon; it contains guidance as to how to approach such a meditation, yet it cannot do the actual meditation. Only the reader can devote himself, his time, and his mind to the path laid out by Descartes. Such devotion hearkens back to that which was referred to earlier as subjective immediacy in that the reader can enter into an actual meditation only by way of participation. Denial of attention on the part of the reader results in the premature death of the *Meditations* at the literary level. That is, the text at that point becomes a desiccated husk of definitions, postulates, axioms, propositions, corollaries, and the like.

Meditation and Analysis

The list of elements of the husk just described comes from the Second Set of Replies under the heading "Arguments proving the existence of God and the distinction between the soul and the body arranged in geometrical fashion." In this section, Descartes adopts the "synthetic style" with a bit of trepidation. His hesitancy stems from a desire to "prevent anyone supposing that what follows [i.e. the Arguments...in geometrical fashion] is adequate on its own. Anyone who thinks this may give less careful attention to the *Meditations* themselves." (CSM II 1990, 113, 111) Hence, much significance lies in the distinction between the geometer's approach and the one adopted in the *Meditations* proper. In this distinction lies the difference between an adequate and an inadequate understanding of Descartes' thought or teachings.

Earlier in the Second Replies, Descartes explains his understanding of two terms, analysis and synthesis; the difference between these two is the difference between meditation and geometry. In Descartes words:

> Analysis shows the true way by means of which the thing in question was discovered methodically and as it were *a priori*, so that if the reader is willing to follow it and give sufficient attention to all points, he will make the thing his own and understand it just as perfectly as if he had discovered it for himself. But this method contains nothing to compel belief in an argumentative or inattentive reader; for if he fails to attend even to the smallest point, he will not see the necessity of the conclusion. (CSM II 1990, 110)

> Synthesis...employs a directly opposite method where the search is, as it were, *a posteriori* (though the proof itself is often more *a priori* than it is in the analytic method). It demonstrates the conclusion clearly and employs a long series of definitions, postulates, axioms, theorems and problems, so that if anyone denies one of the conclusions it can be shown at once that it is contained in what has gone before, and hence the reader, however argumentative or stubborn he may be, is compelled to give his assent. However, this method is not as satisfying as the method of analysis, nor does it

> engage the minds of those who are eager to learn, since it does not show how the thing in question was discovered. (CSM II 1990, 110–11)

These are two forms of demonstration for Descartes and that too is an important word. (Recker 1993) In the case of geometry, one presents all of the parts of the proof and if they are all consistent, then the conclusion is considered to have been shown. Notice that this is a passive "being shown" and not an active "seeing for oneself," as is the case with analysis. The essential characteristic in the analytic demonstration consists in actively grasping something to the point of it seeming like it were one's own discovery. This is not in the sense that one has the "feeling" of being an intrepid explorer, but rather that one has the sense of "I figured it out for myself," even if one had help along the way. (Curley 1986, 155–57) This is the difference between following a recipe and doing science. It is also the difference between a litany and a meditation.

Another crucial distinction between analysis and synthesis is their respective orders and orderings. Martial Gueroult wrote the book on the Cartesian concept of order. It is entitled *Descartes' Philosophy Interpreted According to the Order of Reasons*. As he described it,

> The *Meditations* is not, in effect, dry geometry, but the initiation of one soul by another soul acting as its guide. Furthermore, it is easy to confuse that order with the order of synthesis; and that contamination is almost unavoidable because of the comparisons one does not fail to make with texts that are governed by the synthetic order. However, this confusion is nullifying, because the two orders are opposed. In fact, the order of analysis is the order of discovery, and thus it is the order of the *ratio cogniscendi*: it is determined according to the requirements of our certainty; and the linkage of conditions renders it possible. The synthetic order, on the other hand, is what is established between the results of science; these results are the truth of the thing. It is, therefore, the order of the *ratio essendi*, the one according to which things are related in themselves, with respect to their real dependence. (Gueroult 1984, 9)

Discovery, as it is used here, requires the participation and attentiveness so that "our certainty" can be achieved. It is only in accordance with the order of analysis that the discoverer can see the discovery for himself. The requisite personal involvement in combination with the notion of compulsion results in recognition of truth. The discovery aspect of analysis stands directly opposed to Descartes' notion of synthesis, which at the onset contains all of the truths within the definitions and givens. From that point, the synthetic approach only unpacks that which it was given so as to state explicitly all of the particular truths lodged therein. There is nothing new in synthesis; only in analysis can new knowledge or truths be found. Analysis must then precede synthesis. The novel thus discovered could then be put into the form of definitions and givens and thereby contributes to the synthetic method. This tidbit of sequencing may prove quite useful in dealing with the question of Cartesian circularity. Under the auspices of the current discussion of circles within philosophy, a proper understanding of ordering and method employed by Descartes may provide a path out of the orbitals of the 17th and 20th centuries. However, as the preceding examination has revealed, this path can only be open to the meditating subject.

Thus, the discussion of participation, in terms of analysis, leads directly back to subjective immediacy and further provides clues as to how to approach the *Meditations*, and possibly philosophy itself. Methodologically, the Cartesian *Meditations* provide an example of how one should read a work of analysis, that is meditation. One should take

on an attitude of discovery and attempt to make the insights to be had, one's own. As such, the ties with subjective immediacy require explicit enumeration at this point.

First, the "hands on" aspect of analytic discovery should be apparent. Second, discovery requires the presence of the meditator up close and personal and this denies the distance that one could and would want to maintain with regard to the synthetic approach. Third, and this almost goes without saying, Descartes' "making it one's own," corresponds directly to the sense of "mine-ness" introduced under subjective immediacy. Finally, discovery must take the form of a direct, experiential insight if it is to bear the status of necessity or compulsion. The necessity of participating in a meditation lies at the heart of this exegesis. The experience of self-reflection can only be achieved if the reader is attentive to the text and as such reads it in a self-involved manner. That is, the reader must be intellectually involved or engaged for anything resembling a meditation to take place. Whereas, keeping the text at a distance completely disrupts this sort of reading. Subjectivity is one's capacity to close this distance and to adopt a stance of engagement with the text. In this sort of reading, one does not merely evaluate; one experiences the unfolding of the "story" related by the guide—the author. Thus, with these things in mind, Descartes' analytic meditating coincides with subjective immediacy as it was described at the end of the first chapter.

Having proceeded to such a conclusion, it comes time to move on to the next two points to be examined, the epistemological level and the facet of intuition. Herein, the case will be made that the method of analysis and discovery is coherent in regard to

Descartes' *Meditations*. That is to say, the standards and faculty of knowledge to be reviewed in the following section stem from and are consistent with the meditative interpretation in this section. For instance, intuition must be able to discover, in the relevant sense. The epistemological stance must encompass that which is to be discovered and the capabilities of the immediately participating subject.

CHAPTER III

INTUITION AND EPISTEMOLOGY

> I do not wish to consider what others have known or not known. I am content to observe that even if all the knowledge that can be desired were contained in books, the good things in them would be mingled with so many useless things, and scattered haphazardly through such a pile of massive tomes, that we should need more time for reading them than our present life allows, and more intelligence for picking out the useful material than would be required for discovering it on our own. (CSM II 1990, 401)

The preceding chapter demonstrated how it could be seen that the fundamental notion of participation gave rise to the literary method of meditation. In the following section, Descartes' understanding of mind, and specifically the faculty entitled intuition, supports a participatory model and gives rise to his epistemology. The mind possesses the ability to recognize truth; the faculty that allows for this recognition is intuition. Descartes describes the function of this faculty in various ways including "analyticity," the power of discovery and novelty, and immediacy and certainty. The order of analysis and thereby the possibility of discovery are the elements of Descartes' philosophy that may well allow an escape from circularity. (CSM II 1990, 110, 171, 274)

Cartesian Analysis

The modes of description just listed, in particular analysis, stand in opposition to the "synthetic" method of argumentation as a route to truth or understanding. The essential point of departure for these two methodologies lies in the distinction between truth as a proposition of logic and as that which is "seen" with the "mind's eye." At least the language and possibly the distinction have their beginnings in the *Rules*. (CSM I 1990, 54) Both of these are metaphors in that they are, in a sense, models of the way the world is.[8] (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 3–4, 7) However, the commitments and ramifications of each proceed in different directions. Descartes chose the path of "visionism." A possible explanation and description of possible reasons for that choice will follow.

Seen in general terms, there is a marked divergence from the tradition of the Schools, and much of the subsequent tradition, in the Cartesian tradition. Truth, for the Schools and many that followed Descartes, including Kant and the ensuing analytic tradition, rests in particular judgements about particular statements or propositions. This can be seen in the predicate logic of the Aristotelian syllogism and the propositional calculus that is characteristic of the modern analytic tradition. Grene crystallized this point when she stated that the " . . . Cartesian method cannot be understood in terms of any propositional logic whether classical or post-Fregean . . . [because—M.S.] . . . the

locus of truth has shifted from the judgements, or proposition, beloved of the School, to clear and distinct ideas." (Grene 1985, 54) That is, truth is contained in ideas for Descartes; ideas that may never be expressed even to oneself. (Chappell 1986) They are intuition-based experiences that reside in the mind, and if another has a similar or the same experience then he too will see the truth. Otherwise, for Descartes, just so many symbols or words circulate on the page or in the air.[9]

Also, and again in broad terms, sensory perception of some sort stands as the paramount criterion for truth, or in the modern parlance, the basis for all possible falsifiability. Simply put, the senses allow one to "cash in" one's claims about the world. However, in Descartes' philosophy, judgement is an aspect of the will and as such is merely a matter of assent or dissent, while the intellect or reason perceives truth. Error arises out of the formation of particular judgements, specifically hasty ones. In cases of truth, the intellect recognizes that which is true and only as a byproduct does the will, as judgement, have a role and even that one is forced. Additionally, the criterion for truth

---

[8]Both attempt to use various symbols and analogies in order to systematically organize and describe the world. Both are non-literal attempts at altering or improving man's understanding of himself and his world. Both describe one thing in terms of another. Such is the form and function of metaphor.

[9] See, for instance, the letter to Mersenne dated 16 October 1639 where Descartes says, "Of course it is possible to explain the "meaning of the word" [truth] to someone who does not know the language, and tell him that the word 'truth,' in the strict sense, denotes the conformity of thought with its object, but that when it is attributed to things outside thought, it means only that they can be objects of true thoughts, either ours or God's. But no logical definition can be given which will help anyone to discover its nature. I think the same of many other things which are very simple and are known naturally, such as shape, size, motion, place, time, and so on: if you try to define these things you only obscure them and cause confusion. For instance, a man who walks across a room shows much better what motion is than a man who says 'It is the actuality of a potential being in so far as it is potential', and so on." (CSM III, 139)

also changes with Descartes in that he replaces sensory perception with clarity and distinctness of intuition or ideas. (Grene 1985, 8, 14)

As Grene points out, there is a significant difference between the mental act of judging and the resultant judgements. That is, Descartes is specifically interested in the process or act of judging, especially in regard to clear and distinct intuiting. The experience or act of judging is not in itself propositional in nature, nor is it required that it ever be formulated in propositions. Simply put, judging is beheld in the mind and is not necessarily uttered or expressed. Even if the resultant affirmation or denial of particular statements is adopted, this can only be formulated after the intellect or intuition has performed its function. This distinction provides for a sharp contrast with the Aristotelian logic that preceded Descartes and also the Kantian tradition that followed. The experience of judging something like the *cogito* necessarily begins from the subjective perspective with Descartes, but this is not necessarily the case with the examination of objective statements found in most of the rest of the Western tradition. (Grene 1985, 5-6)

This break with the tradition and its emphasis on the level of action or experience puts upon Descartes' readers a requirement for participation and the effort that goes with it. That is to say, the Cartesian project is one of involvement as described in the previous section. Passive collections of symbols on the page or floating through one's consciousness do not suffice for the author who states that, "in the vast majority of issues about which the learned dispute, the problem is almost always one of words." (CSM I

1990, 54) Descartes attempted to get behind the disputed words by setting out the thought experiments he found necessary to lead the way to truth. In many ways, the *Meditations* are this set of pre-planned exercises designed to evoke experiential insight, helping his audience "see it" for themselves with their own "eyes," instead of toying with just so many words.

Of course, as noted before, Descartes uses logical language and propositions in the *Meditations*. This is absolutely required so that expressiveness and direction are present in his work. However, this entails neither that it is an analytic project, in the modern sense, nor that it be construed as an enterprise of syllogistic or propositional logic. It should also be remembered that Descartes warns his readers against taking his thought out of context or trying to understand it in a piecemeal fashion on a somewhat regular basis, beginning in the "Preface to the Reader."[10] (CSM II 1990, 8) With this reminder, it is time to continue with the distinctions that delineate the two methods.

Out of this divergence come some possible explanations of the purposes of each method. The Schools proceeded by way of the "synthetic" method. By and large this is the method of the geometer as established by Euclid. It is also the method employed in Aristotle's system of syllogistic logic. The syllogism, of course, formed the basis of the logic of the Schools as well. Descartes in no way denigrated this method, neither in terms of geometry nor in those of syllogism. Rather, he reminded his readers that all

[10] It should also be pointed out at this time that the vast majority of current Cartesian scholarship deals with Descartes' work in terms of propositions and argument forms. Any brief foray into the stacks evinces this claim. The list of possible examples of this line of thought unfortunately includes Rorty 1986.

tools have their intended tasks, synthesis as well as analysis. (CSM II 1990, 355) He did however decry the usage of syllogism in the "dialectic" of the Schools wherein "stock arguments" won debating points in the midst of a distinct absence of serious philosophy. (CSM II 1990, 186; Cottingham 1986, 6)

Rather than proceed from premises to their necessary conclusions, Descartes in the *Meditations* attempts to arrive at the substance of the premises that will be used later in explanation. Within the body of his text, he leads the reader toward these premises in such a way that the reader sees the truth of the matter at hand for himself. Descartes, in the Second Replies, gave an excellent explanation of this process

> When someone says 'I am thinking, therefore I am, or I exist,' he does not deduce existence from thought by means of a syllogism, but recognizes it as something self-evident by a simple intuition of the mind. This is clear from the fact that if he were deducing it by means of a syllogism, he would have to have had previous knowledge of the major premise. . . yet in fact he learns it from experiencing in his own case that it is impossible that he should think without existing. It is the nature of our mind to construct general propositions on the basis of our knowledge of particular ones. (CSM II 1990, 100)

In the act of experiencing, recognizing, or intuiting the *cogito* the reader sees that it is so. Only after this realization occurs can the mind reconstruct the grasped truth in such a way as to formulate premises, major, minor, or otherwise, and then derive the necessary conclusion. This is the distinction between the analytic and synthetic methods. Notice also that the sight metaphor allows for "visual" recognition under conditions of clarity and distinctness. Vision also carries the requisite self-evincing surety in like circumstances. Finally, one must see with one's own mind's eye, thereby participating as

the subject in all such acts or experiences of insight. Herein lies a convergence between visionism and analysis.

Interestingly enough, this is also the point at which analysis most closely resembles the dialectic of Plato, the originator of the sight and light metaphor. As has been pointed out by others, notably E. M. Curley and Mike Marlies, there is a significant sense of Socratic discursiveness in the *Meditations*. (Curley 1986; Marlies 1978) That is, in ways reminiscent of the geometry "lesson" in the "Meno," Descartes' method of analysis functions like the Socratic method. Tentative positions are put forth and discussion ensues. The purpose of the discussion is to "lead" the reader, or the slave boy, to a resolution of the problem in such a manner that the reader finds it himself. In this way, Descartes, like Plato, bequeaths a sense of discovery upon his audience. Both set their interlocutors on paths that must be trod, if the "lessons" are to be learned. (CSM II 1990, 285, 263)

Discovery

A second point to be examined lies in Descartes' demand for discovery and novelty in philosophical investigation. As noted in the Second Replies, the synthetic method merely extracts conclusions already contained in the premises. That being so, there is nothing added to knowledge or understanding, because everything available to the synthetic method must be present in the given premises. However, if an explanation of an already understood matter is required, the synthetic method is the tool for the job. On the other hand, the ability to understand new things requires the analytic method and its capacity for discovery. (CSM II 1990, 110–1) This line of thought is echoed later in no uncertain terms as seen in the following warning:

> The most important mistake our critic [Gassendi] makes here is the supposition that knowledge of particular propositions must always be deduced from universal ones, following the same order as that of a syllogism in Dialectic [Scholastic logic]. Here he shows how little he knows of the way in which we should search for truth. It is certain that if we are to discover the truth we must always begin with particular notions in order to arrive at general ones later on (though we may also reverse the order and deduce other particular truths once we have discovered general ones). (CSM II 1990, 271)

In this way both methods may work together, but only after analysis has set the foundation from which synthesis can proceed.

Similarly, in the Seventh Replies, Descartes finds Bourdin guilty of deviating from his path. In the Second Replies, as noted in the previous section, Bourdin inquires along the lines of rules of inference, premises, and progression of arguments. For the most part Bourdin, in a most genteel fashion, sets about twisting what he takes to be premises so that he can purposely tread unintended trails. As a Jesuit and child of the

Schools, Bourdin read carefully and did notice Descartes' requests for meditating, clearing the mind, and the like. However these entreaties are met with derision.[11] As such, as Grene points out,

> Bourdin (Seventh Objections) has failed to grasp (as indeed the authors of the Second Objections had also) that Descartes' method is meant to be one of discovery, not argument—of seeking, not proving from already accepted truths. Bourdin wants logical demonstrations starting from first truths and moving to conclusions; Descartes wants to give him a road to truth . . . but logical proofs, for Descartes, are just what are not needed. They do not go anywhere. Like the Red Queen of a later century, they can only run very hard to stay in the same place. So they never solve any problems. (Grene 1985, 136)

At the heart of this matter is a distinct divergence of method. For the time being, let it be understood that Descartes remained steadfast in regard to his method and corrected many of his critics when it came to understanding and using his method, particularly with respect to its role as a vehicle for discovery.

Discovery plays a significant role in Descartes undertaking, thus, if nothing new is added to philosophy, religion, or science, then his whole endeavor would have been for naught. It seems that he recognized the tendencies in the Schools that led to vacuous formal philosophy, and he found this insufficient. To revitalize the intellectual world in which he lived, something new must be found. There must be new insights and a new

[11]The following is rather typical of the whole of the Second Objections. "Do you mean to regard it as certain that two and three do not make five? Do you mean this to be certain, and to appear as certain to everyone—so certain that it is safe even from the tricks of the evil demon? You laugh and say 'How could any sane man arrive at that idea?' But what is the alternative? Will our statement be doubtful, then following your rule I will believe and state that it is false and I will asset the opposite: I will assert that two and three do make five. I shall behave in the same way when it comes to my other beliefs; and since it does not seem to be certain that any body exists, I shall say 'No body exists;' and since the statement that no body exists is not certain, I shall then turn my will in completely the opposite direction and say 'Bodies do exist.' And so bodies will both exist and not exist at the same time." (CSM II 1990, 307)

method to make such insight available. In light of these requirements, Descartes offers his new method, analysis, as a means to make discoveries. (Cottingham 1993)

A necessary ramification of attempting to pave a "road to truth" is discovery of some kind. However, discovery can be misleading. Recall that the discovery of which Descartes speaks is not the one of breaking new ground or exploring new facets of the human condition. Rather the discoveries in question are those contained within the realm of pedagogy—new people learning old subjects. Descartes wrote the *Meditations* as a textbook. Arguably, the discoveries he is so insistent upon focus upon the content of the School's formal training. That is, he is attempting to ground the premises he found casually adopted and accepted by so many for so long. These include the existence and immortality of the soul, the existence and goodness of God, and the existence and nature of the material world. In this vein, Descartes describes his work by saying, "everything in my philosophy is old; for as far as principles are concerned, I accept only those which in the past have always been common ground among all philosophers without exception, and which are therefore the most ancient of all." (CSM II 1990, 392) The principles remain constant; it is the method and the teaching that are in actuality "new" at least with respect to the Schools.[12]

The method of teaching in the Schools resembled rote memorization of a specific litany followed by utilization of that collection of facts in debate and the construction of new arguments. In contrast, Descartes employed a method of "cognitive exercises," or

"thought experiments" to bring his points to light. Descartes was not, at least primarily, interested in the manipulation and shuffling of facts or major and minor premises. Thus, memorization and organization of facts did not enter into the *Meditations*. He was most concerned with personal insight into the nature of the soul, God, and the nature of the material world. After the fact, such insights can be dealt with in terms of argumentation and the formulation of propositions. However, before the fact, one must see these sorts of things for oneself. For instance, "I think, I am" in conjunction with the tacit assumption of the major premise "All thinking things exist" is a valid argument form. However, as was argued earlier, the essence of the *cogito* cannot be shown to someone else; it is *self*-evident. An author or a teacher can point toward it, but the reader or student must see it for himself. This is because it is only from the first-person perspective that one can recognize it as true.

While on the topic of the *cogito* as it relates to argumentation, a return to the order of reasons presented by Gueroult will illuminate not only the crucial role of discovery but also epistemologically eliminate the myth of the Cartesian circle. As was hinted at in the second chapter, the order of reasons (analysis) may provide for an escape from circularity. To begin with, one must recognize that according to Descartes' order of essence there can be no circularity for in the beginning there was God and from God came all else including man. Circularity can only intrude upon the order of reasons, that

[12] It should also be kept in mind that the sciences do produce new results and new knowledge. However, these only come after they are firmly rooted in Descartes' metaphysics.

is man's attempts at understanding the order of essence. Thus, in terms of an answer to Descartes' objectors, Gueroult posits the following:

> The reciprocal independence of the series of the Cogito [the order of reasons—M.S.] and the series of God [the order of essence—M.S.], and their crisscrossing at a given point. We encounter a nature that reveals itself to our intuition as a foundation finding a point of support in itself, and not in us, imposing itself on me, in spite of myself, irresistibly testifying about its objective validity by getting me to touch the Other directly with myself. If God is the ultimate condition of certainty, it must be that at a given moment this certainty manifests itself in me as unconditioned and appears in consequence as no longer depending on conditions emanating from the subject. . . . This solution...arises indisputably an internally felt constraint that led Descartes to state 'my thought does not impose any necessity to things but on the contrary, the necessity that is in the thing itself, meaning God's existence, determines me to have this thought. (Meditation 5 AT IX 53) (Gueroult 1984, 170)

In these terms, the only place from which Descartes can start is his own consciousness. Being conscious, being a subject, or being a "thinking thing" absolutely necessitates existence, *self*-evidently. Thus, the first step in the order of reasons is reason, the human mind's ability to recognize its own consciousness. This is the first discovery. Additionally, the nature of this discovery takes the mind a step further. That is, in recognizing that the certainty, the truth, of my existence does not depend upon me, rather it is determined externally by the source of that certainty, namely God. It is at the juncture of certainty that the order of reasons and the order of essence intersect because, it is at this point that reason knows that which is true, or real. Thus, there is not a circle, but a realization by an imperfect being about the essence of his existence.

To the extent that knowledge is possible at all, there must be illumination, true light that the self can only see for itself. This light, the basis for certainty comes from outside of the subject, and Gueroult describes it by saying that,

> It is evident that the true cannot arise from the false. If, beginning with the Cogito, we can rise to the level of God, upon which the Cogito is in fact founded, that is possible only with the help of true light: the light that illuminates itself can only be the true light. From this stems the absolute necessity, after having already used for the Cogito itself the principle 'in order to think one must exist,' to appeal to the principle of causality, the principle of the correspondence of the idea with what is ideated, and the principle of judgements of perfection on contents, all principles that emanate directly from the true light of God. The demonstration of the true God must necessarily rest on principles actually established in him, but whose validity cannot be established before the conclusion (before the positing of God), although their validity is recognizable before that. (Gueroult 1985, 172)

The very possibility of truth as seen from the human perspective, the order of reason, requires that there be certain recognizable principles at work, specifically those listed by Gueroult. That those principles are at work and that the mind can know them is enough to see that human reason is insufficient to explain or fully comprehend all that is. The remainder, that is the source for the human condition and its insufficiency, and the principles under which it can know, is God. Seeing that God exists, from the perspective of the order of reason, must come prior to His establishment. Thus, the recognition of God, the source of truth and true principles, precedes human reason in the order of essence and thus cannot be known through the order of that reason until the mind comes to grips with its own existence and condition. In light of the self's ability to recognize these truths, veracity and the God that insures it are established with certainty from the point of view of the meditating Cartesian self. This is the crucial discovery required of Descartes' readers and thus, by way of analysis, the circle breaks.

The combination of Gueroult's interpretation of the two orders with analysis understood in terms of meditational discovery dispels the myth of the Cartesian circle. The myth built upon the "bed rock" of logico-dedutive propositions falls apart

once it is recognized that Descartes neither intended nor needed to build upon syllogistic thought. Logic provides only so many paths back to the premises and this is not so with the discovery entailed by analysis. Escape, while barred by the traditional approach, could be realized with Descartes well-ordered meditation which aimed at an intuitive understanding of the nature of the human condition. In keeping with Gueroult's analysis, the "I" never needs to "leave itself" in order to understand its divine origin. Thus the demon deceiver cannot intrude as it can under the auspices of synthesis. Therefore, if attentiveness and diligence accompany the meditator, he is in no way trapped within the *cogito*. Rather, he can discover the light of truth and thus the way out of himself.

Gueroult's analysis also brings the discussion to the topic of the "illuminative" nature of the discoveries of which Descartes speaks. These are the ones that only the reader can find, or rather, "see" for himself. The language of light and vision again pervade his writings and, in regard to the process of personal discovery found in the method of analysis, it seems reasonable to take it as his paradigm metaphor and as such as an interpretive tool. Thus examined, the *Meditations* form a series of progressive, not circular, demonstrations—thought experiments—which intentionally lead the reader to the discoveries seen by Descartes.

Immediacy

The strongest link with the vision metaphor lies in the Cartesian emphasis on the immediacy of intuition. Here also lies the basis of Cartesian epistemology in the "criteria" or conditions of clarity and distinctness. (CSM II 1990, 35) Ultimately, Cartesian certainty and, with it, his epistemology, are grounded in self-evident clear and distinct intuition. The vehicle of clarity and distinctness is immediacy; that is, right here, right now and without any intervening obscurity, this is certain. The primary difficulty lies in honing the intellect so that it can attain such perceptiveness. As John Cottingham puts it, "[Descartes'] central idea was a very simple one: that the truth, so far from being shrouded in mystery, was readily accessible to the ordinary human intellect, if only it could be directed rightly." (Cottingham 1986, 22) The *Meditations* contain the exercises Descartes sees as necessary to circumvent deception and to root out unconscious assumptions and thereby to let the mind see truth. Accordingly, once the false paths of the Schools and the skeptics fall to his radical doubt, the reader is left with one of the two paradigm examples of immediacy, the *cogito*. (CSM II 1990, 25) (God is the other.)

Immediacy seems to have two senses. First, there is the straightforward sense of "without separation in either time or distance." Second, there is also a sense of "unmediated," in that, just as no thing should come between the perceiver and the perceived, so too, no one should come between them either. This it seems could be an

explanation of Descartes' heretofore unheard of emphasis on "Everyman."[13] That is, "A good man is not required to have read every book or diligently mastered every thing taught in the Schools." Rather the goal is to "bring to light the true riches of our souls, opening up to each of us the means whereby we can find within ourselves, without any help from anyone else, all the knowledge we may need for the conduct of life." (CSM II 1990, 400) To attain this goal it is required that all of the false doctrines and unsound foundations are removed and then replaced with the immediate certainty of the Cartesian system. The nature of this mind that can recognize truth will be further examined in the section to come. In the meantime, the Cartesian mind can grasp truth all by itself, if properly oriented. This is the personal or subjective side of the *Meditations* and its link with immediacy, that is, the unmediated. It should also be stressed at this point that, to the extent that the sight metaphor has been instrumental in describing Descartes' project, seeing is always "mine" and if one is to meditate, one must "see for himself."

Along these lines, and to return to the first sense of immediacy, the vision metaphor plays a primary role here in terms of intuition. A canonical description of the faculty of intuition will highlight Descartes' emphasis on the language of sight and light in conjunction with and as an explanatory metaphor for the function of his mind. John

[13] However, Plato's treatment of women in the *Republic* and the "Symposium" is a noteworthy exception. There are of course other examples as well, however, for Descartes' time period, this is a remarkable step in the direction of democratic thought. Also, "Everyman" is the standard translation of the name Polyander who is one of the three characters in *The Search for Truth by Means of the Natural Light*—a posthumously published and incomplete work.

Cottingham provided such an account, and it will be taken as adequately representative of a standard discussion of intuition.

As Cottingham describes it, intuition is intellectual cognition of the simplest and most direct kind. Additionally, it is not to be confused with the contemporary sense of the word, which conjures up images of "New Age" prattle and misunderstood Eastern mysticism. In the language of the 17th Century, intuition referred to the faculty associated with the "mind's eye" and was commonly understood in terms of "seeing," "gazing," and "looking upon." As he points out, the language of vision combines the sight-based metaphor of mind and the language of the "natural light" or the "light of reason." The ramifications of the chosen metaphor, in terms of epistemology, include a need for good lighting, careful, concerted looking, and discrete objects of observation. (Cottingham 1986, 25)

Descartes describes it as follows:

> Now some of these perceptions [of the intellect alone] are so transparently clear and at the same time so simple that we cannot ever think of them without believing them to be true. The fact that I exist so long as I am thinking, or that what is done cannot be undone, are examples of truths in respect of which we manifestly possess this kind of certainty. For we cannot doubt them unless we think of them; but we cannot think of them without at the same time believing they are true, as was supposed. Hence we cannot doubt them without at the same time believing they are true; that is, we can never doubt them. (CSM II 1990, 104)

The successful execution of clear and distinct intuition brings together immediacy of perception (paradigmatically sight) and indubitable certainty. Just as, with the proper qualifications, "seeing is believing" so to, with the proper direction, "intuiting is

knowing." The object or idea must be held directly before the locus of perception. The perceptive faculty, if properly directed, then recognizes truth.[14]

In regard to the conception of intuition as the "mind's eye," it may be helpful to work with an example of a simple, naïve sense experience. Take for example a common everyday experience like looking at a spork. Now, a spork in its everyday appearance is a single piece of white plastic that, at the end of a rather flat and not-so-sturdy handle, combines the tines of a fork and the bowl of a spoon. When one holds a spork with one's own hand and looks upon it with one's own eyes, one should (all things being equal) say, if asked what color it is, "It is white." If asked, "How do you know?" one responds, "Look for yourself." If the other person says that it is not white, then there is something wrong with him or there is something funny going on in the situation. If one is asked if one is sure, then the proper response is a raised eyebrow, because the question does not make sense, given a normal situation. As far as this work goes, recognition—in the way one automatically recognizes the color of a spork—stands as a reference point from which to work. Possibly something along the lines of "insight" may work as well, when moving from the literal vision to the metaphorical one.

Granted there could be strange circumstances involved, such as colored glasses, odd lighting, congenital defects, transflux variations in the holographic fields and so

[14]For purposes of wrestling with the terminology of clarity and distinctness, consider the following: "I call a perception 'clear' when it is present and accessible to the attentive mind—just as we say that we see something clearly when it is present to the eye's gaze and stimulates it with a sufficient degree of strength and accessibility. I call a perception 'distinct' if, as well as being clear, it is so sharply separated from all other perceptions that it contains within itself only what is clear." (CSM I 1990, 207)

forth. The strangeness of the examples only serves to highlight the point that Descartes' criteria of clarity and distinctness do not fit the material realm as well as they fit the intelligible one. That is to say, given the incredible powers of imagination in the creation of hypothetical examples, one only indicates the inherent "messiness" of the material world. There can always be something else going on, or something else that has been overlooked. The distinction between this world and the world of the mind, as Descartes describes it, is that of clarity and distinctness. For instance, in the mental realm, a person sees the *cogito*, then that is it. It is recognized as true and accepted simultaneously. It is just like the spork and the color white, only there are no hypothetical examples or "messiness" to overcome. One just "sees" it and that it is so and that it is not any other way.

However, limitations exist for the sight metaphor and its fruitfulness with reference to the current story. First and foremost, one must not take it too literally for ideas, the contents of mind, are not all images for Descartes. In fact, he attacks the notion of resemblance between ideas and objects in his scientific writings as well as in the *Meditations*. (CSM I 1990, 165-7, 81-2) Additionally, one must not include the materiality of all things literally visible, for the two examples that Descartes always falls back upon are those of God and the *cogito*. These two are neither material nor literally visible for Descartes. Finally, the inherent indistinctness that can accompany the senses should also be left behind. Descartes provides several excellent examples on this matter, including the tower or statue viewed at a distance, a ghost pain suffered by an amputee,

and dreaming. (CSM II 1990, 53) On the other hand, the wax example can be seen as an example of the failure of the senses to clearly grasp a perceived object. That is, the senses only provide so many "snapshots" (regardless of the particular faculty) and thus fail to link all of the actual or possible iterations that the wax can assume. Thus, a clear understanding of the wax cannot be had by the senses; the mind's ability to comprehend the wax in terms of extension, regardless of the particular shape, color, smell, etc., provides clarity.

Overall, it is the requirements of the vision metaphor that give rise to the epistemological criteria of clarity and distinctness. One gets a good look at things when the conditions are such that the object to be observed is directly in front of the viewer's eyes. Also, it must be the case that no odd lighting or lenses obscure the object. Finally, the eyes themselves should be in good operating condition. If these things hold, then the naïve sense experience should work, and the spork, or whatever, should be correctly recognized. In terms of the "mind's eye," the same sorts of strictures apply if taken metaphorically. The object of thought must be held at the center of the intellect. There must be a complete lack of preconceptions that could interfere and obscure the object. Last, the mind must be directed in the proper fashion so that bad habits, from childhood or the Schools, do not skew the mind's ability to recognize truth.

Rather than sporks, Descartes deals primarily with his paradigm examples, God and the *cogito*. Descartes is a careful writer as has been noted previously. This is so especially in the case of example selection and description. Now, behind his emphasis on

these two examples lies the basis for his insights in epistemology and metaphysics. God and the *cogito* are the archetypes of knowledge for Descartes because, to use his terminology, their material and objective reality and status are co-extensive. That is, they are basically one and the same and differ only in aspect.[15] (Chappell 1986) In something more closely resembling ordinary language that means that in "I think, I am" the thing represented in the thought and the mental act of representation exactly correspond. The "I" in the *cogito* is the object of thought when one thinks about oneself thinking. The same "I" is the thinker and the thought. In this way, the presence of representation in thought requires that there be in reality a "re-presenter," that is, an "I" that exists.

The same story is to be told in regard to God as seen in the Third Meditation. In fact, the example of the knowledge of God's existence is taken by Descartes to be the clearest and most distinct of all things. Again, as it was with the *cogito*, in human knowledge of the existence of God there is a complete convergence between material and objective reality. That is, there is a direct correspondence between the actual object of human understanding and the representation of that object, in this case God. While Descartes does go through a list of attributes, the underlying essence of God is perfection. The human mind can represent this perfection to itself even though it does not fully grasp

[15] Descartes, in the "Preface to the Reader," states that, "...there is an ambiguity in the word 'idea'. 'Idea' can be taken materially, as an operation of the intellect, in which case it cannot be said to be more perfect than me. Alternatively, it can be taken objectively, as the thing represented by that operation; and this thing even if it is not regarded as existing outside the intellect, can still, by virtue of its essence, be more perfect than I can. As to how, from the mere fact that there is within me an idea of something more perfect than me, it follows that this thing really exists, this is something which will be fully explained below." (CSM II 1990, 7) The rest of the explanation comes in the Third Meditation. It should also be born in mind that while the human mind can conceive of God it cannot grasp Him.

this perfection. The fact that complete knowledge of such a representation is well beyond the ability of the mind and yet can still take place requires that the source of the perfection that is represented lie outside of the mind. That outside source must contain the perfection that is represented and thus must be perfect and existent. That is to say, the mind, in the contemplation of its contents, must recognize that there is the thought of a perfect being and that such perfection is well beyond the confines of the human condition of finitude. Since the idea had to come from somewhere and that somewhere must be of a certain level of perfection itself, the conclusion must be, according to Descartes, that God is the source and does exist. [16]

Epistemologically speaking, the root of certainty for the human mind is this correspondence between the object thought and the mental representation of it. When the fit is perfect, acceptance is had in regard to the idea recognized as true. This acceptance operates similarly to the spork example in that, one sees that it is white and that is that. One does not have the chance to decide otherwise. The two perfect matches Descartes provided in the *Meditations* were God and the *cogito*. The goal he set for himself was to build the entirety of human knowledge on these two cornerstones. The standard by which to evaluate all other bits of knowledge comes directly from these two examples. The clarity and distinctness of some certain perception depends entirely upon the degree to which its material and objective realities coincide. The material world and sensory

[16] Notice all of this description is merely explanation after the fact, if this line of thought is not actually experienced, then none of the explanation could take its place. In Descartes' terms, while it is the case that the explanation must be synthetic, the derivation of that which is to be explained must be analytic.

perception remain muddled until it is seen that God is the guarantor of such matters. Once the veracity of God is clearly and distinctly recognized, then all knowledge, that is actual knowledge, can be perceived correctly. This includes everything, even mathematics.

Not only are these the two paradigm examples, they are also the knower and that which is known, respectively. That is, the "I" of the *cogito* is the human mind, that is the knower. God is the creator and sustainer of all that is and is thus the source of all things knowable, including the "I." (CSM II 1990, 37) From the basis of this "thinking thing" all knowledge can follow, if the mind is carefully and attentively directed.

At this point, a further aspect of Descartes thought, that of therapy, must be introduced in conjunction with an expanded discussion of the underlying metaphysics. The metaphysics as the root of all that comes afterward shapes the rest of the Cartesian enterprise. It is the order of essence known from the human perspective of the order of reasons. The metaphysics of God provides, among other things, the basis for the epistemology, the existence and nature of the intellect, and the material world in which the mind dwells. Descartes' God allows for knowledge and underpins all claims to truth. The mind, as crafted by God, can know. The metaphysics of God and the "I" of the *cogito* determine what counts as significant and true. It also gives rise to the process by which one can know. This process is what will be referred to as Cartesian therapy. It is the process by which one learns how use his intellect or "mind's eye" in such a way as to

recognize truth. This is an active, personally involved process of unlearning naïve, distorted habits and garnering new ones that result in clear and distinct mental "seeing."

CHAPTER IV

THERAPY: THE ROAD TO METAPHYSICS

> I think that all those to whom God has given the use of this reason have an obligation to employ it principally in the endeavour to know him and to know themselves. That is the task with which I began my studies; and I can say that I would not have been able to discover the foundations of physics if I had not looked for them along that road. (CSM III 1990, 22)

The epistemological reformation proposed by Descartes results in an altered understanding of the world, God, and man. The Cartesian world will be left behind, however, as indicated in the quote, the examination of this thing called God, and the Cartesian self must precede physics anyhow. Thus, the story continues with another reformation, this one concerns metaphysics and is accomplished through the process of therapy.

It is proposed here that the primary objective of the *Meditations* is that of therapy. The explanatory power of the metaphor of "therapy" lies in its reference to the long hard hours that one endures in order to live or be better. It is also applicable in terms of the Cartesian narrator's role as guide, or rather therapist, the one that leads the way. In sketchy terms, the notion of therapy applies in its Cartesian instantiation to philosophy, specifically metaphysics and epistemology, rather than to various psychoses. That is, rather than getting to the bottom of any of a number of psychological issues, misperceptions, etc., Descartes intended to aid his readers in getting to the bottom of the

nature of truth, knowledge, man (the reader himself at least), and God. The first two, for the most part, were dealt with in the previous section. The last two, while certainly involved with truth and knowledge, are in line for their own turn in the foreground.

Before entering the realm of metaphysics, it is time to analyze Descartes' possible method for broaching the topics of God and the self—therapy. Martha Nussbaum traced out a brilliant model of the historical and philosophical metaphor of therapy in *The Therapy of Desire*. She focused upon the Aristotelian and the Hellenistic ethical traditions of the Epicureans, Stoics, and Skeptics, however, the general schema she developed is also well suited in the case of Descartes' metaphysics and epistemology as seen in the *Meditations*.[17] She examined the classical medicinal metaphors that began, at least for her purposes, with Aristotle. In a certain sense, these metaphors can be extended to Descartes in that the Greek term "psychiatry" forms a bridge between the medical and the philosophical. Descartes attempted to be a psychiatrist, that is, "soul-healer," one who promotes the health or betterment of the soul as is the case in the *Meditations*.

A concise summary of the essential aspects of the metaphor of therapy is provided in the first chapter of Nussbaum's work. Her outline will be followed from start to finish and compared to the Cartesian project at each step in order to ascertain whether there is reason to interpret the *Meditations* in terms of her schematic presentation of the historical

[17] While it is the case that there are ethical ramifications in the *Meditations*, such matters seem to be pursuant to Descartes' emphasis on epistemological method and metaphysical foundation(s). As such, this significant question is best left for pursuit at another time.

metaphor of medicine. Following this analysis, the subject matter of Descartes' approach, as seen in his metaphysics, will be addressed.

To begin with, Nussbaum maintains that "Arguments have a *practical goal*; they are directed at making the pupil better, and can be assessed for their contribution to this end." (Nussbaum 1994, 46) For instance, in Descartes' thought there is a strong analogy between sin and error, both of which should be avoided or overcome for improved health of the soul. He wrote:

> So what is the source of my mistakes? It must be simply this: the scope of my 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. Since the will is indifferent in such cases, it easily turns aside from what is true and good, and this is the source of my error and sin. (CSM II 1990, 40–1)

Adherence to goodness and truth define the healthy soul. They are the prime requisites for the man of God who is the man of science (i.e. knowledge). If Descartes can establish the foundations for certainty in the realms of religion and science, then he has provided the basis for all ensuing practical matters. Additionally, the project of the *Meditations* brings one to the truths, as Descartes sees them, of God and the nature of the soul. Given his culture and time period, nothing could be of more importance or relevance. The process by which one develops such a soul, according to Descartes, is found within his *Meditations*. Thus it seems reasonable to conclude that there is a large element of practicality and practical application in Descartes' text.

Second, and closely tied to the first, is Nussbaum's idea that therapeutic arguments, "are what we might call *value-relative*: that is, at some level they respond to

deep wishes or needs of the patient and . . . are to be assessed in accordance with their success in doing this." (Nussbaum 1994, 46) The benefits found above hold sway within this category as well, which is merely to say that religious insight and its related freedom from epistemological error qualify, in Descartes' project, as the expected needs and desires of his readers. Moreover, the purported compulsion to accept various insights, given sufficient meditation for the purposes of clarity and distinctness, speaks to the topic of need on the part of his readers as well. For example, Descartes stated that his "nature is such that so long as I perceive something very clearly and distinctly I cannot but believe it to be true." (CSM II 1990, 48) The nature that he claims for himself should not be construed as something that is particular only to him. This nature is the only nature created by God and it thus is the human nature, as Descartes conceived it. The commonality and universality of human nature will be taken up in the next category of analysis, however the notion of compulsion, based upon one's nature, coincides with Nussbaum's category of the needs of the "patient." Herein, Descartes, coming from the perspective of a common humanity describes both what that nature is and how it works. Most of the discussion of this topic belongs in the section on metaphysics to follow, but at least for now, Descartes' description of human nature in conjunction with his pedagogical approach yield a story that must deal with the natural needs and normative wishes of the reader. (Ariew and Grene 1995)

Third, "medicinal" writings " . . . are *responsive to the particular cases*: just as a good doctor heals case by case, so good medical argument responds to the pupil's

concrete situation and needs." (Nussbaum 1994, 46) There are two ways to go about dealing with this category. The first is that Descartes completely refuses to even consider the concrete situation of his reader. The second is that Descartes covers it completely. The rationale behind these apparently antithetical lines of thought rests in Descartes conception of the human condition. He sees that there is one, and only one, human situation. There are many ways to be wrong about this situation and there are many paths that can be traveled in order to arrive at the right understanding of one's situation, although, it is safe to say that all of them will ultimately require the clarity of mind necessary to perceive God and the *cogito*. As such, the *Meditations*, in part, were written in such a manner as to, hopefully, reveal the universal and common human nature, or situation. The metaphysical doubt introduced in the First Meditation serves, in one of its facets, to remove all possible sources of variation and deviation from the "norm." That is, the radical doubt sweeps away all possible experiential, sensory, and social differences that could be possessed by his readers.[18] In doing so, all that remains at least initially, as examined in the Second and following Meditations, is language, the contents of mind, and the *cogito*. From this distilled situation the *Meditations* proceed to tell a unified story that applies to all "concrete" situations.

To return to the dichotomy, if one thinks that this establishment of a universal position is cheating in some way, then Descartes did not deal with particular concrete

[18] "I will suppose then, that everything I see is spurious. I will believe that my memory tells me lies, and that none of the things that it reports ever happened. I have no senses, body, shape, extension,

situations at all. That is, he effaced all such situations and replaced them with an illusory one of his choosing. On the other hand, his common situation may be taken as at least typical, as human, and in this case he can be seen as legitimately dealing with an actual, albeit universalized, human situation. However, in either case, it still follows that he treats (well or poorly) the subject of particular concrete situations.

Additionally, in either case, the narrator of the *Meditations* provides an example of a "concrete" situation, complete with reference to environment, the passage of time, and descriptions of various psychological states.[19] The presence of the narrator and the personalizing affect of Descartes' use of the first person can be taken as means to engage the reader in an "individualized" way. That is, if Descartes can get the reader to replace the "I" of the narrator with his own "I," then the particularity of the reader is addressed in the text. (Kosman 1986) (It is also of passing interest that the rhetorical approach involved here may approximate the universalizing effect brought on by Descartes' hyperbolic doubt.) Thus, Descartes can be read as a writer addressing the particularity of his audience, even if the address is an attempt to lop off that which would typically be called upon to evince claims of individuality.

Nussbaum presents the three preceding characteristics as required of all philosophical analogies to medicine or therapy and all three can be seen in various ways in Descartes' *Meditations*. The following five characteristics, according to her analysis,

---

movement and place are chimeras. So what remains true? . . . *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind." (CSM II 1990, 16-7)

are more controversial and again each must be examined with reference to Descartes' position and how closely it coincides with the metaphor of therapy. To continue with the fourth characteristic, Nussbaum claims that, "Medical arguments, like bodily medical treatments, are *directed at the health of the individual*, as such, not at communities or at the individual member of a community." (Nussbaum 1994, 46) To put this into Cartesian terms, Descartes' philosophy, at least superficially, is individualistic to the point that his texts are sometimes cited as the historical source for the problem of other minds and solipsism.[20]

Additionally, the narrator's "I," once it is introduced, is solitary and remains so until the last page of the *Meditations* where it becomes a "we." (CSM II 1990, 62) Until then, the account of the meditative process remains completely focused upon the "I." Freedom from all distractions (noise, children, friends, etc.) is required for the intensely attentive reading, introspection, and thinking that Descartes demands.[21] Thus, if there are any figures in the history of philosophy that direct their attention toward the individual, Descartes fits among that number.

---

[19] For specific examples either glance at the introduction or conclusion of just a couple of the Meditations or return to chapter two of this work.

[20] A deeper reading of the *Meditations* includes recognition of the incredible amount of correspondence and discussion that Descartes entered into in regard to his science as well as his metaphysics. The "Objections and Replies" are an essential part of the *Meditations*, as are the *Rules* and the *Discourse*, the latter was particularly accurately named (by the way, two objections to this work can be found at the beginning of the *Meditations*). The problem of other minds, as it is seen in the time since Descartes, would probably fall into the "no sane person has ever seriously doubted these things" category. (CSM II 1990, 11) However, all of this flies far beyond what is to be dealt with here.

[21] The requirements placed upon the reader by Descartes can be found in chapter 2.

Fifth, in Nussbaum's analysis of "the medical argument, the *use of practical reason is instrumental*. Just as the doctor's technique is no intrinsic part of what the goal, health, *is*, so too the philosopher's reasoning is no intrinsic part of what the good human life itself is." (Nussbaum 1994, 46) To turn to the *Meditations*, if all that was required of the reader rested in grasping the examples and the flow of the text, then Descartes would not maintain that his

> Readers not just take the short time needed to go through it, but to devote several months, or at least weeks, to considering the topics dealt with, before going on to the rest of the book. . . . The method [of drawing the mind away from the senses and toward metaphysical matters—M.S.] is such that scrutinizing it just once is not enough. Protracted and repeated study is required to eradicate lifelong habit of confusing things related to the intellect with corporeal things, and to replace it with the opposite habit of distinguishing the two. (CSM II 1990, 94)

Time is required and habits must be changed; these things must be enacted by the individual and each reader that decides to pursue this course must follow it in his own way, at his own pace, and in relation to his own experience.[22] Thus, while the particular, practical reasoning found in the *Meditations* is crucial, at least in terms of a starting point for the reader's journey toward certainty, it does not (and cannot) constitute the "patient's" health. Only the reader's own participation in meditation allows for his proper, that is, healthy, thinking.

Sixth, "*The standard virtues of argument*—such as consistency, definitional clarity, avoidance of ambiguity—*have, in medical argument, a purely instrumental value*. As with the procedures of the medical art, they are no intrinsic part

of the goal." (Nussbaum 1994, 46) Significant attention to this matter is provided in chapter three of this project that deals with epistemology. The citations and argumentation there adequately defend the position that the typical understanding of deductive argumentation is misplaced in reference to the *Meditations*. Moreover, while the *Meditations* are exceptionally well ordered, it is not the case that they constitute an argument (or a collection of arguments) in the traditional sense of the word. (Gueroult 1984)

While the terminology of "argument" is present in Nussbaum's work, and argumentation in her sense certainly includes logico-deductive proofs and rigor, she also makes it quite clear that the role of medicinal, or therapeutic, philosophy requires much more from the author or thinker. For instance, she states that,

> Medical philosophy, while committed to logical reasoning, and to marks of good reasoning such as clarity, consistency, rigor, and breadth of scope, will often need to search for techniques that are more complicated and indirect, more psychologically engaging, than those of conventional deductive or dialectical argument. It must find ways to delve into the pupil's inner world, using gripping examples, techniques of narrative, appeals to memory and imagination—all in the service of bringing the pupil's whole life into the investigative process. (Nussbaum 1994, 35)

Descartes' writing, especially in light of the analysis given in this work, fits well within the list of possible attempts to deal with the complications of pedagogy.

Seventh, Nussbaum states that, "In medical argument, as in medicine, there is a marked *asymmetry of roles*: doctor and patient, expert authority and obedient recipient of authority." (Nussbaum 1994, 46) In the *Meditations*, Descartes' narrator acts as a guide

---

[22] For example, Descartes states in the Second Replies that he "cannot force upon this truth [the existence of God—M.S.] on [his] readers if they are lazy, since it depends solely upon their exercising their

for the reader, the "follower." The "Preface to the Reader" includes instructions or requirements for the proper reading of the *Meditations*. The Objections and Replies that follow the six meditations critique and attempt to correct improper readings, and in many cases this is done with a call for attentiveness or serious meditation. The *Meditations* themselves assume and evoke a meditative, that is student or "follower" approach by the reader.[23]

Finally, "In medical argument, the teacher *discourages scrutiny of alternative views*. Just as a doctor does not urge the patient to experiment with alternative medications, so the teacher does not encourage cognitive pluralism." (Nussbaum 1994, 46) Descartes attempted to rescue the whole of philosophy and intended to do so with clear and distinct perception that provided certainty and truth, and thus knowledge. (CSM II 1990, 81) If nothing else, the Cartesian project is one of certainty—complete certainty without reservations, partiality, or doubts. This conception of philosophy does not offer itself up as merely a rival for other competing stories.

For example, Cartesian truth and knowledge arise out of a correction of thought so that one comes to see things properly. For Descartes, the misconceptions and prejudices endemic to the "sloppy" thought of the Scholastic tradition, the skeptics, and those unaware of (or unconcerned with) philosophical inquiry results in poor thinking and the unrecognized acceptance of flawed foundations. In the Schools, one of their essential

---

own powers of thought." (CSM II 1990, 97)

[23] See the section of this work dealing with participation for a more complete treatment of these claims.

(and misguided) doctrines lies in the area of reliance upon sensation. Descartes responded by saying that,

> The demonstration of geometrical truths are readily accepted by anyone, since they accord with the use of our senses. Hence there is no difficulty there, except in the proper deduction of the consequences, which can be done even by the less attentive, provided they remember what has gone before. . . In metaphysics by contrast there is nothing which causes so much effort as making our perceptions of the primary notions clear and distinct. Admittedly, they are by their nature as evident as, or even more evident than, the primary notions which geometers study; but they conflict with many preconceived opinions derived from the senses which we have got into the habit of holding from our earliest years, and so only those who really concentrate and meditate and withdraw their minds from corporeal things, so far as possible, will achieve perfect knowledge of them. (CSM II 1990, 111)

The remedy for such erroneous thinking is attentive meditation and a purposeful redirection of the mind away from old, self-deceiving habits toward that which is free from deception, that which is clear and distinct. The notion of therapy describes this conscious process of improvement that is at the center of the Cartesian project.

Overall, at each level, Descartes' *Meditations* fit into Nussbaum's schematic presentation of the philosophical and historical usage of the therapeutic model. In light of the story of the *Meditations* as meditations, this may not be surprising, because meditation can itself be understood as a form of therapy. Accordingly, the complimentary and mutually reinforcing aspects of the metaphors of therapy and meditation are recognizable in their points of overlap; both are goal-oriented, process-based, practical, and introspective.

To begin with, both develop over time in a progressive, goal-oriented manner. The goal is understood to be prior to the initiation of the process, at least by the leader of the meditation or the therapist. Both can be evaluated in terms the normative standards

determined by the direction and the content of the "sessions." That is, both possess a negative aspect and a constructive one. In the case of the *Meditations*, the negative aspect is readily apparent in Descartes' radical doubt—it aims at removing all naïveté and prejudice. The constructive portion then begins, and it is based upon the indubitable, *i.e.* the *cogito* and then God. Thus, according to Mike Marlies in "Doubt, Reason, and Cartesian Therapy," the prejudiced "patient" requires a "selective" and "ordered" method.

> His [the prejudiced man—M.S.] faith resides...in "sense," we have somehow to get sense to defeat itself. Having once managed to do this, the man of prejudice would be left with his reason, still, bound, however, by habit to applying itself to *images*. What we would like to do next is to break this residual habit in its turn . . . Thus . . . the force of Cartesian therapy comes from the skeptical arguments which pit bad habits of mind against one another or against themselves. (Marlies 1978, 104)

In addition to building upon the example of naïve sense experience, Marlies' statement demonstrates the Cartesian movement from bad habit to good. Such habits, behaviors, and skills can be evaluated in regard to the way things or people should be psychologically, or metaphysically and epistemologically.

Beyond the various normative standards recognizable in these metaphors, both also elicit process-oriented imagery. Along these lines, there is a great deal of emphasis to be found in the *Meditations* on attentiveness and seriousness in actually meditating along with Descartes' narrator. There are also implications of hard mental labor and concentration that are required when taking up the Cartesian project in earnest.[24] Reinforcing Descartes' direct demands for effort and attentiveness, the intellectual crisis

[24] See the section of this work concerning participation for specific references and citations.

created by the negative aspect of therapy, the hyperbolic doubt, results in (almost) coerced attentiveness, so that some path out of the confusion can be found. So it is with therapy, for at some point the patient must begin to listen, either to himself or to the therapist so that a cure can be affected.

Additionally, as was just noted in regard to the categories discussed by Nussbaum, a very practical bent is exhibited within the Cartesian project, both in terms of one's religious life and also in regard to scientific matters. Moreover, concretely implemented changes in habit, specifically the unlearning of habitual reliance upon the senses and a simultaneously enacted development of one's mental "observation" skills, are high priorities in the *Meditations*. As Marlies points out, "to be possessed of a faculty, and to be able to make proper use of it are two different things." (Marlies 1978, 98) His reference is to reason, and the goal of the *Meditations* is to allow for the correct use of reason. This is a skill that requires practice and the effort that goes with it. Marlies finds it

> Helpful to call the method "therapeutic" because what is implied is that a change is to be worked in the prejudiced man, at whom the method is directed. And this change is much more than a change of opinion—it is a change in his abilities to use his powers of thought, and most especially, a change in the condition of his reason: the repair and invigoration of what prejudice has impaired and enervated. But this, in turn, requires working changes in powerful habits of thought; therefore, we can expect the Cartesian method to be of the sort of method more appropriate to changing habits than opinions. (Marlies 1978, 98)

The method Descartes selected for the alteration of habits and the development of skills is that of meditation and the process by which one reaches the goals of the meditation is that of therapy.

Finally, a large component of introspection pervades both metaphors. One must, at least to begin with, look within and proceed from there. As Gary Hatfield describes it in "The Senses and the Fleshless Eye,"

> The doubt. . . provides a means for suspending judgement about corporeal things and drives one to a last refuge of certainty in the direct apprehension of one's own thought. It serves as a kind of exercise for the mind. (Hatfield 1986, 47)

Hatfield bases his exegesis of the *Meditations* on the literary form of the "spiritual exercise." The "exercises" as he calls them, are of a therapeutic nature with particular emphasis placed upon the "evocation of experiences." He writes, "By carefully arranged settings and preparatory exercises, the reader is brought into the proper state to receive the light of grace (in spiritual meditations) or to perceive the unvarnished truth by the light of nature (in Descartes' cognitive exercises)." (Hatfield 1986, 51) Thus, there is this turning inward so that the reader can himself experience, and thereby accept and understand, the content of the meditative exercise, whether spiritual or philosophical. With regard to the *Meditations*, God and the *cogito* constitute the content and the direction of the therapeutic process. That being the case, it is time to examine them.

Metaphysics: God, the Source

> The Lord has made three marvels: something out of nothing; free will; and God in man. (CSM II 1990, 5)

The quotation above comes from Descartes' early writings and will be used as a theme for the following discussion. The quote brings together God, the infinite Creator, and his creation, man. The priority of the case of human beings and their position relative to their Creator are of crucial importance in the Cartesian project. God, for Descartes, from beginning to end, is the infinite source of all else, the first of the principles found in the *Meditations on First Philosophy.* God is first in the order of essence, "the order of real existence." On the other hand, and in accordance with the order of reasons, man is first as the subject of investigation.[25] Cartesian metaphysics unites the objective, universal reality of God, the Creator, with the finite, subjective existence of human consciousness.

The phrase "God in man" contains the key to understanding Descartes' presentation of metaphysics in its relation to the human condition. Contrary to the order of reasons, this discussion of Descartes' metaphysics will begin with God in his infinity and as the source of light for the human mind. Then, it will move on to the notion of "God in man," a somewhat strange mixture of the finite and infinite. Also examined here will be the Greek word "*nous*" and its relevance to the discussion. It is the only word that

---

[25] Descartes writes, "each thing must be considered in a different order according to whether it is referred to the order of our knowledge or to the order of real existence." (CSM II 1990, 9-11, 163) See Gueroult 1984 for the most insightful account (to the best of my knowledge) of the *Meditations*. The order of essence is the actual order of existence in which God as the Creator of all else is first, however, from the limited perspective of the human mind, the order of reasons proceeds step by step out of confusion, to the *cogito*, next to God, and finally back to the newly comprehensible material world.

brings together the notions of "mind," "perception," and "good sense" in the way that Descartes seems to use and interrelate them. Finally, an account of the Cartesian self or "I" will be outlined.

God: The Source of Light

While not the focus of this essay, the nature of the Cartesian God does deserve an introduction. God, for Descartes, is infinite, that is, without limits. Descartes stated it in this way, "I apply the term 'infinite,' in the strict sense, only to that in which no limits of any kind can be found; and in this sense God alone is infinite." (CSM II 1990, 81) Simply, He is actually without bound, and unlike the God(s) of the philosophers that came before (and for the most part after) Descartes, his God can do anything. (Kenny 1979) Descartes' conception of infinity is probably the defining aspect of his God. This conception of infinity appears and plays a central role in all other attributes attached to his God. Two of these attributes have major roles in the story at hand: understanding and willing. Traditionally, these capacities are discussed in terms of omniscience and *omnipotence*, respectively. However, taking them to the level of their respective capacities allows one to forge a more direct link with one of Descartes' most succinct formulations of his conception of God. He wrote in a letter to Mersenne, "In God, willing, understanding and creating are all the same thing without one being prior to the other even conceptually." (CSM III 1990, 25-6) Above and beyond issues of the unity of God and other such matters, the convergence of infinite understanding and infinite will in the Creator founds Descartes' own conception of God.

Proceeding with the attribute of understanding, Descartes' "God is pure intelligence," (CSM I 1990, 5) in two senses. First, all things are known to God, thus,

there is no blemish or deficiency in the content of knowledge. Second, God is pure reason, untainted by flaw or error. This reason is also described as wisdom thereby adding to mere "factual" knowledge the aspect of having "good sense." For instance,

> In truth it is only God who is perfectly wise, that is to say, who possesses complete knowledge of the truth of all things; but men can be said to possess more or less wisdom depending on how much knowledge they possess of the most important truths. (CSM II 1990, 180)

Notice that the standard for wisdom for man is that of the wisdom of God. He is the source of human wisdom and that wisdom itself is intimately tied to truth, which also has its source in God. The divine is the source and standard of human knowledge and wisdom.

Also, the mind of God gives rise to the world, thus understanding is directly linked to creation. In Descartes' words, "this entire universe can be said to be an entity originating in God's thought, that is, an entity created by a single act of the divine mind." (CSM II 1990, 97) In this way, understanding is intrinsically tied to willing and creation. All that is, was, and will be must, for Descartes, be understood, willed, and created (and sustained) by God and all of these are inseparably unified in one thing.

As the Knower, Willer, and Maker, God is the primordial source of all that is and from the human perspective, all that can be known. With regard to knowledge, this holds in terms of its possibility, actuality, particular content, and the existent objects of knowledge themselves. The contrary also holds. For example, Descartes held that atheists cannot be free from doubt and thus, can only possess fleeting knowledge in the form of ephemeral insights that disappear as soon as the atheist's attention slips. (CSM II

1990, 101) On the other hand, the presence of divine Guarantor allows for enduring knowledge. The very possibility of real understanding in regard to anything whatsoever stems directly from God. In no uncertain terms Descartes described it as follows:

> I plainly see that the certainty and truth of all knowledge depends uniquely on my awareness of the true God, to such an extent that I was incapable of perfect knowledge about anything else until I became aware of him. And now it is possible for me to achieve full and certain knowledge of countless matters, both concerning God himself and other things whose nature is intellectual, and also concerning the whole of that corporeal nature which is the subject-matter of pure mathematics. (CSM II 1990, 49)

Simply stated, God is the source of both truth itself and man's ability to recognize and understand that metaphysical and physical truth. Such are the general terms in which Descartes' God is the Creator of both man and man's capacity to know.

However, a more narrow examination of one aspect of Descartes' God is required for this discussion. In particular, his God is the source of the light for the vision of the mind's eye in addition to being the Crafter of this mind. In regard to matters of faith and of nature, Descartes laid out his position when he stated that,

> The clarity or transparency which can induce our will to give its assent is of two kinds: the first comes from the natural light, while the second comes from divine grace. Now although it is commonly said that faith concerns matters which are obscure, this refers solely to the thing or subject-matter to which our faith relates; it does not imply that the formal reason which leads us to assent to matters of faith is obscure. On the contrary, this formal reason consists in a certain inner light which comes from God, and when we are supernaturally illuminated by it we are confident that what is put forward for us to believe has been revealed by God himself. And it is quite impossible for him to lie; this is more certain than any natural light, and is often even more evident because of the light of grace. (CSM II 1990, 105)

The light of grace beams down directly from God thereby making religious and metaphysical perception realizable. Additionally, according to Descartes, the same is the case with the light that illuminates the natural, physical realm. Furthermore, the light of

grace reinforces and underpins the certain knowledge that is to be found in natural philosophy.[26] That is, Descartes' God illuminates each soul, or mind, thereby providing for both the possibility of human understanding and the realization of that possibility. All knowable matters of faith or of nature, may be clearly seen by man through the light of God. Thus, at the level of the order of reasons, meditating on first philosophy, for Descartes, reveals that God is the first principle, His light shines over his creation and makes it truly knowable to the extent that man can know it if he investigates properly.

[26] The Scholastic overtones in this doctrine are worth noting as Marjorie Grene did when she wrote, " He [Descartes—M.S.] remained an out-and-out Thomist, faithful to the teaching of the Jesuit academy at *La Fléche*. Reason is one source of truth, revelation another; but since our reason itself is of God's making, the two, though separate, are in essential agreement. God is truthful; what He has made and what He has said cannot but harmonize. 'Cannot but' is not quite right, however, since in God there is, for D, no necessity. . . .faith and reason, theology and philosophy, are separate yet harmonious ways to truth." (Grene 1985, 93)

God in Man: Image and Likeness

In accordance with Descartes' initial intuition about the condition of man, it comes time to examine the relationship between the order of essence and the order of reason. That is, between God as the source and the human mind as found in His creation. The Third Meditation holds Descartes' initial response to the question of the divine/human relation. On the heels of his first "proof" of the existence of God, Descartes' narrator inquires as to the source of the idea of God in his mind. He finds that,

> It is no surprise that God, in creating me, should have placed this idea in me to be, as it were, the mark of the craftsman stamped on his work—not that the mark need be anything distinct from the work itself. (CSM II 1990, 35)

Simply put, God is the source here as well. The recognition of this mark, it must be remembered, is above all an idea and requires the ability of thought, or understanding. In sum, it requires mind. That is, the ability to recognize and think about truth, in this instance, the truth of one's own creation and the truth of one's own Creator. As Descartes continued to explain,

> The mere fact that God created me is a very strong basis for believing that I am somehow made in his image and likeness, and that I perceive that likeness which includes the idea of God, by the same faculty which enables me to perceive myself. That is, when I turn my mind's eye upon myself, I understand that I am a thing which is incomplete and dependent on another and which aspires without limit to ever greater and better things; but I also understand at the same time that he on whom I depend has within him all those greater things . . . and hence he is God. (CSM II 1990, 35)

This mark then is on one hand recognition of (God's) perfection, and on the other the understanding of a lack of perfection with the ensuing desire to improve.

Thus, the Infinite demarcates the human condition in at least two ways. First, it is in reference to infinity that Descartes' narrator recognizes the limitations under which he must operate and attempt to know or understand. Second, the recognition of finitude carries with it, as part of the image of God, a desire to improve or heighten one's resemblance to one's origin. To return to the first sense, infinity from the perspective of the human knower functions as the sign of something external, specifically God. That is, something not contained or containable within the self. It is in relation to God, the external Infinity, that the mind can compare itself and thereby outline its limitations or imperfections. Thus, God delimits the Cartesian self from the outside. The self recognizes itself as limited in power, in understanding, etc., as it compares itself to the standard of the Infinite. Finitude then is seen as part of human nature. (Judovitz 1988, 174–5)

Correspondingly, the human condition is constituted by the desire to live up to or emulate this image of God, in terms of infinity. As noted previously, God is the Knower, Willer, and Maker. Therefore, man, even in his finitude, is in a position of striving toward more and more perfect knowledge, choosing, and "creating." For now, the creative abilities of man will be left behind. However, it is of at least passing interest at this point to consider Descartes' mechanistic science in light of "improved making." His influence largely led to the notion that "if we can build it, then we know it; but if we can build it better . . ." and this idea lies at the heart of the Enlightenment and the practices of the modern Western world. However, all of this is far afield of the project at hand.

Currently, the capacities of understanding and willing are more relevant because, in a certain light, they more closely resemble the infinity of God in man. In regard to the understanding, while it is finite in man, it also shares to a certain extent in the infinite in two ways. As seen just a moment ago, it is because of its origins that the human mind can know God. Descartes does not claim that human understanding is capable of completely knowing God, yet there remains limited, faceted knowledge.[27] Moreover, there is nothing in the physical world that is sealed off from human knowledge. As Descartes stated,

> God . . . has laid down these laws in nature just as a king lays down laws in his kingdom. There is no single one that we cannot grasp if our mind turns to consider it. They are all inborn in our minds just as a king would imprint his laws on the hearts of all his subjects if he had enough power to do so. The greatness of God, on the other hand, is something, which we cannot grasp even though we know it. But the very fact that we judge it beyond our grasp makes us esteem it the more greatly . . . (CSM III 1990, 23)

While the human understanding is finite and limited, it can at least potentially encompass the whole world and be acquainted with (know) some of the immensity of God. Ultimately, for Descartes, "Only the understanding (intellect) is capable of perceiving truth." (CSM I 1990, 39) Thus, in general terms, there is a connection between the infinite and man's ability to understand, in terms of content in addition to the "top down" link brought about through God's act of creation.

In the same vein, man's will, while not even miniscule in comparison with God's, retains a connection in kind, if not in magnitude. The capacity to freely choose, even if the efficaciousness of the choosing varies greatly, exists in both cases. Furthermore, of

---

[27] Consider the case that Hobbes, the materialist, brings against Descartes where he denies the

the human powers, volition, according to Descartes, is the most like God and is greater in man than all others. For instance,

> It is only the will, or freedom of choice, which I experience within me to be so great that the idea of any greater faculty is beyond my grasp; so much so that it is above all in virtue of the faculty of will that I understand myself to bear in some way the image and likeness of God. (CSM II 1990, 40)

Thus, just as in the case of the understanding, infinity lies beyond the human condition, yet there exist for Descartes God-given threads of connection with the divine.

In general terms, volition, even of the limited sort possessed by man, greatly separates the human condition from all of the rest of the natural world. For Descartes, the entire physical realm, with the exception of man, is completely determined by the mechanical laws of physics. The world and all its (non-human) occupants are just so many machines, some of almost overwhelming complexity, but mere machines nonetheless. Only beings who transcend the physical and its physics could possess something as divine as the ability to choose. So it is in spite of man's material existence that, at least to a certain extent and by the grace of God, the human condition is linked to the divine as a special creation that possesses the major attributes of God, albeit as finite beings. (CSM I 1990, 141) Finite willing, understanding, and making constitute the "mark" of the Craftsman, that which ties the creature to the Creator, and thereby delimits man and his desire improvement.

---

very existence of the idea of God in man. (CSM II 1990. 127)

Nous in Man

All matters of the image or likeness of God in man, for this reading, can be unified under the Greek term "*nous*." Herein, the sense attached to this word combines three crucial aspects of Cartesian philosophy: mind, perception, and good sense. To begin with, mind is the Cartesian word for soul, and is technically a "thinking thing." (CSM II 1990, 18–19) That is, a substance that thinks and which is constituted by those thoughts, which includes the whole range of mental activities and contents. In the narrator's meditating, he comes to the realization that,

> Thought is an attribute that belongs to me; it alone cannot be separated from me. I am I exist, that is certain . . . to speak accurately I am not more than a thing which thinks, that is to say a mind or a soul, or an understanding, or a reason, which are terms whose significance was formerly unknown to me. I am, however, a real thing and really exist; but what thing? I have answered: a thing which thinks. (CSM II 1990, 18)

The question of "what thing?," is answered in terms of mind, the simultaneous container and the contents of consciousness. That is, the "what" aspect is mind and is to be understood as the substance to which consciousness is attached. This substance is the mind and the various modes that this substance can adopt are thoughts. Thus Descartes' understanding of the mind is that each and every thought or idea that a person has is an operation in the mind, but also that each and every operation of the mind is thought or idea. (Chappell 1986, 181) The mind, for Descartes, is always thinking, always operating, and while the particular thoughts vary widely, the thinking itself remains constant. Seen in terms of thinking, the "what" of mind is better understood as a "how," that is, as an activity.

So the question of the "how" of the thinking thing arises. There are grounds for saying that Descartes' response is "like perception." For instance, Descartes adopted the use of the word "idea" quite purposefully. In his words, "I used the word 'idea' *because* it was the standard philosophical term used to refer to the forms of perception belonging to the divine mind." (CSM II 1990, 127–8) In more general terms, the notion of perception as thought and percept as idea entails, according to Vere Chappell, that, "The characteristic activity of the intellect is perception, and this, together with volition, constitutes thought." (Chappell 1986, 180) This is not to use the term "perception" merely as a synonym of empirical sensation (especially in light of its link to the divine), for, as was detailed in chapter three on epistemology, the language and model of perception pervades Descartes' understanding of knowing and knowledge. Rather, perception here refers to consciousness or awareness at large. That is, to perceive something in the mind is to be aware of it. Thus, following Chappell, ideas, the content and constituents of the mind are perceptions, such that, "The individual operations or acts of the intellect . . . are not merely thoughts but, more specifically, perceptions." (Chappell 1986, 182) Herein lies the link between *nous* in the sense of mind and in the sense of perception. Mind, as thought, is the eye of consciousness and the platform for ideas and Cartesian insight as described in chapter three.

Finally, the idea of "good sense" is constituted by the desire to improve and is therefore governed by truth, either metaphysical or physical in respect to the example at hand. Truth in this case also extends to wisdom, specifically something like a shadow of

the God's infinite wisdom. In its human manifestation, Cartesian good sense, or wisdom, is the starting point for the direction of the mind. Recognition of order and the requirement of order in investigation stem from wisdom. For this reason, Descartes begins the *Rules* with a general statement as to how to "direct the mind with a view to forming true and sound judgements about whatever comes before it." (CSM I 1990, 9) This is a demand for wisdom by Descartes who ended the first of his rules with the following instructions.

> If . . . someone seriously wishes to investigate the truth of things...he should . . . consider simply how to increase the natural light of his reason . . . in order that his intellect should show his will what decision it ought to make in each of life's contingencies. (CSM I 1990, 10)

The *Rules* proceed from this foundation in pursuit of truth, but it should be noted that the ability to recognize the light of truth and to comprehend that truth lies at the bottom of the entire project. Which is to say that wisdom is required to recognize truth, and that it must be nurtured and improved so that epistemologically sound and practically prudent judgements can be made.

The threefold sense of the term "*nous*" as it is used here as an interpretive device melds three crucial portions of Descartes' thought together: mind, perception, and good sense. This is helpful in terms of unifying seemingly disparate concepts within his thought, which may be a good start regarding the organic understanding of the *Meditations* that he requires of his readers. Moreover, the term "*nous*" yields its most important assistance in forming half of the complimentary relationship between man and the light provided by God.

The relation between Illuminator and the active recipient of the light requires focused attention and further discussion of the understanding, the faculty tied to *nous*. In fact all of the discussion about the understanding that has come before this point falls under the interpretive category of *nous*. To review, the understanding is a God-given finite capacity that is able to recognize truth even about the infinity that is its origin. By way of transition from the source to the knower, Descartes described what was just examined in terms of the order of essence from the perspective of the order of reasons when he wrote,

> If, for example, I consider the faculty of understanding, I immediately recognize that in my case it is extremely slight and very finite, and I at once form the idea of an understanding which is much greater—indeed supremely great and infinite; and from the very fact that I can form an idea of it, I perceive that it belongs to the nature of God. (CSM II 1990, 39–40)

Notice, again, the tension of the human condition as one finds oneself stuck in one's own finitude. Yet, at least limited comprehension of the infinite can be perceived by the mind. The faculty that allows for this understanding is the perceptive mind that has good sense, that is, *nous*.

Additionally, as the receptor of the divine light, the mark stamped upon man by God provides for the universality of the human condition for Descartes. The reader of the *Meditations* and its author have a common, divine origin. Each was created with the same ability to know. As Amélie Rorty noted, at least in regard to first principles, introspection and science overlap significantly. The result is the rational belief that clear and distinct understanding, accomplished by way of *nous*, truly presents the world, the

self, and the God to the human knower. (Rorty 1986, 5) As follows, Descartes provided an example of this in describing the process of insight through the eyes of his narrator.

> I could not but judge that something [the *cogito*] which I understood so clearly was true; but this was not because I was compelled so to judge by any external force, but because a great light in the intellect was followed by a great inclination in the will, and thus the spontaneity and freedom of my belief was all the greater in proportion to my lack of indifference. (CSM II 1990, 41)

The source of the light is God. The ability to adequately cope with the light is *nous*. The result of the recognition of the light and its content, in this case the *cogito*, is truth. Universality comes in with the "great inclination of the will," such that the particularities of the narrator's situation did not, or possibly could not, interfere with the insight and its acceptance. So too for all attentive readers and practiced thinkers, they will arrive at the *cogito*, or whatever other clear and distinct perception they pursue regardless of individual, subjective whims, desires, or other distractions.

The presence of one universal truth from one universal Source suggests one of the lines of thought put forth by Hatfield in "The Senses and the Fleshless Eye: The *Meditations* as Cognitive Exercises." He also uses the term "*nous*" and defines it as "intuitive reason" which is not all that far from the sense it bears in this work. However, he does add to the discussion by linking this term to the thought of Plato. Hatfield posits that,

> Descartes has replaced the Platonic and neo-Platonic conceptions of the intellectual apprehension of eternal truths in terms of transcendental forms, or *archae*, in the divine mind, with his conception of a natural light instilled in the mind by the creator. (Hatfield 1986, 65)

In both the Platonic and the Cartesian cases, *nous*, as intuitive reason, allows for the (albeit limited) knowledge of truth. In addition to pointing out a link to the Platonic tradition, Hatfield brings out the final aspect of the image of God to be examined in this project. Descartes' theory of innate ideas plays an immense role in his understanding of the self and of the mind. Innate ideas form the basic content of human knowledge, God and the soul.

As the source for the initial insights of first philosophy, innate ideas underpin his entire project both in terms of content and theory. On the content side, the importance of God and the soul, or mind, cannot be overstated in regard to Descartes' *Meditations*. Whereas it is not so clear on the theory side. Descartes stated that his

> Principle aim has always been to draw attention to certain very simple truths which are innate in our minds, so that as soon as they are pointed out to others, they will consider that they have always known them. (CSM II 1990, 312)

Again, the link with Plato comes out, this time in connection with something like his doctrine of "recollection." (Cottingham 1986, 144-5) The goal then becomes an extended struggle to get the reader to realize what they already "know" in the sense of innateness, not the sense of present to mind. The idea, put there by God, was always there according to Descartes, it is just a matter of utilizing one's faculties in such a way as to come to grips with it. Once the innate ideas of the soul and God are recognized, then the rest of the Cartesian program is set to fall into place, because recognizing the two initial insights requires that the mind's faculties be used correctly. Once used correctly, the reader then possesses a model for future investigation and knowledge. In this way, innate ideas are

central and bring *nous* (perceptive faculty) and the image of God (percept and nature) together.

Thus, Descartes' "God in Man" is the asymmetric relationship between the Creator and the creation that was cast in His image. This notion forms the crux of Descartes' program to save both religion and science from their respective detractors in that by way of one source, God, both are possible and intelligible to Everyman through the proper employment of *nous*. The innate truths impressed upon the mind by their Creator yield certainty about divine matters and natural philosophy in such a way as to render the investigation of both realms necessary and certain. The recognition of the solid foundation of science in terms of the God given light of the soul provides for knowledge of the material realm in such a way that it must coincide with the dictates of revealed religion. Therefore, the image or likeness born by man and revealed to him by God in light of His special creation of man constitutes the human condition. The mark of the Craftsman, as the capacity of understanding and the content of innate ideas, defines the limited existence of the human natural philosopher.

Man: The "I" of the Mind, the Immediate Subject

At this point it is time to again ask the question, "What is a thinking thing?" Who is this "I" of the mind? It will be argued here that the Cartesian ego is subjective immediacy as introduced at the very beginning of this project. It was introduced, in the first chapter, as an interpretive tool that brought together the three levels and three facets of the *Meditations*. The focus of the phrase centered on the following characteristics: the first-person perspective, personal involvement, direct experiential awareness, and visionism. Each of these will be reviewed in turn in hopes of finding some fruitful overlapping between the Cartesian mind and subjective immediacy.

First, as has been noted, the entirety of the *Meditations* was penned in the first-person perspective and the ramifications of this have been discussed. When the soul, or mind, as Descartes described it, is at issue, the perspective remains unchanged. Thus, Descartes pointedly asks,

> "Is it not one and the same "I" who is now doubting almost everything, who nonetheless understands some things, who affirms that this one thing is true, denies everything else, desires to know more, is unwilling to be deceived, imagines many things even involuntarily, and is aware of many things which apparently come from the senses?...Which of all these activities is distinct from my thinking? Which of them can be said to be separate from myself? The fact that it is I who am doubting and understanding and willing is so evident that I see no way of making it any clearer." (CSM II 1990, 19)

This is the ego in action as per the words of Descartes' narrator. The thinking of the "thinking thing" is constant and is present to the self solely from the perspective of the first-person. That is, all of the questions asked here are addressed to the self by the self. The answer to the question is also from this perspective in the sense that the "I" answers

and also that the "I" answers in terms of itself, its thought, its mind, its understanding. Furthermore, Descartes explicitly links the "ego" with his soul, by which he is what he is. (CSM I 1990, 127-8) Thus, it can be concluded that the Cartesian soul is intractably lodged in the first-person perspective.

Second, the first-person perspective in a certain sense mandates the personal involvement of the narrator, and thus the reader. In addition to this extension of the first category, it should be noted that the "thinking thing" is just that, an active entity entrenched in the present progressive or immediate present tense. As such, Descartes depicts it as a "thing which doubts, conceives, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, imagines, and senses." (CSM II 1990, 19) To cease doing these sorts of things is, for Descartes, to cease to be. It is therefore necessary that one's ego be involved and active particularly in pursuing truth.

Third, subjective immediacy requires direct, experiential awareness. This is the very underpinning of the understanding and *nous* as it was just outlined. Additionally, the fourth aspect of subjective immediacy, the metaphor of vision is the basis for awareness, or rather perception, by the mind. *Nous* brings together the substance of mind, the faculty of the perception of the mind's eye, and the "good sense" that orders and governs its application. Hence, the employment of the understanding by the self requires by its nature that its insights must be directly perceived, and therefore experienced first "hand." Subjective immediacy and the Cartesian ego coincide on all four points and thereby is it is enabled to serve as a unifying concept in Cartesian studies.

Conclusion

As has been shown at every level, literary (chapter 1), epistemological (chapter 2), and metaphysical (chapter 3), and in every facet, participation (chapter 1), intuition (chapter 2), and therapeutic (chapter 3), subjective immediacy can play a significant role as an interpretive device for the *Meditations*. The personal involvement required by Descartes from the perspective of the first-person is simultaneously the requirement for participation and an explanation for his choice of literary mediums. The meditation, steeped in its own literary tradition, (Hatfield 1986; Kosman 1986; Rorty 1986) is one of the best ways to elicit and guide a personally reforming experience in one's reader. Philosophical and religious writers have used it again and again for this purpose. Descartes, a significant figure in both philosophy and religion, had knowledge of this and unabashedly requested intense, attentive meditation from his individual reader in hopes of a reform.[28]

Reformation in the *Meditations* lies initially in the realm of epistemology, as has been seen. Descartes began by undermining the "naïve" reliance upon the senses as seen in the Schools and the lack of affirmative answers as seen in the Skeptics. In their stead, Descartes proposed clear and distinct perception. Descartes' metaphor of vision underpins his understanding of truth as the certainty of clear and distinct perceptions. In regard to discovering truth, Descartes described reason's proper use in terms of the

[28] The reformation itself was discussed in chapter three in regard to epistemology. The requirement meditation, while liberally interspersed throughout this work, received the most attention in chapters one and two.

method of analysis that focused on perceiving the truth for oneself. The immediacy of seeing with "my mind's eye," both in terms of "self-evident" and "unmediated," contribute directly to the relevance and cogency of subjective immediacy as a unifying theme in the *Meditations*.

Finally, after a process of therapy (chapter 3), the Cartesian self, the one who can know, comes to light. In addition to the characteristics outlined by Nussbaum, therapy can be described in terms of being goal-oriented, process-based, practical, and introspective. When examined, both sets of descriptors fit Descartes' *Meditations* and shed light upon the nature of Cartesian meditating. The hard work and self-examination gave rise to a particular understanding of the self as a "thinking thing" that bore the image or likeness of his Creator, God. The resultant metaphysics was delineated in terms of God, the self as God's creation, and the relationship between the two. The God-given mind, that is the self for Descartes, was granted *nous*, the ability to know truth. *Nous* as an interpretive device combined the Cartesian concepts of mind, perception, and good sense under one unified heading. The capacity of *nous*, if used correctly, allowed God's special creations to know about Him, themselves, and the natural world. This is the capacity that provided the basis for the clear and distinct perceptions that constituted Descartes epistemology; it is also the essence of the metaphysical self or soul. As such, it was seen to be understandable in terms of subjective immediacy.

Thus, at each turn, subjective immediacy is present and this brings the story back to the spinning circles with which it began. Margaret Wilson and Marjorie Grene

introduced the topic of circles in regard to the *Meditations* and now at the end of this essay, it is time to revisit them each in turn. Wilson provided the canonical formulation of the Cartesian circle. She also, claimed that the style of the *Meditations* was irrelevant to their "philosophical purpose." Not only is this a prime example of the error of contemporary philosophy in the eyes of Grene, it also demonstrates, in a certain sense, disregard for the text at hand. This amounts to saying that one should not listen to Descartes', the author of the work, and one should not enlist his help in attempting to understand his work.

Granted, a prudent amount of skepticism and critical judgement should be utilized when studying philosophy, or anything else for that matter, yet, that in no way should impede one's ability to actively and attentively seek to listen to the author. Moreover, prudence would also dictate that repeated, emphatic requests, continuous usage of particular metaphors or language (such as the vision metaphors or the use of a narrative "I"), and responses to specific charges merit serious treatment on the part of the reader.

Along these lines and in regard to the project at hand, if, as Descartes requests, language, style, and so forth are included, a much different story emerges. Certainly, the interpretation offered here is not exclusive by any means, yet it does demonstrate that a good deal can be found in the *Meditations* that is simply skimmed over when Descartes is ignored. Additionally, and this bears great significance, the problems found in studies like Wilson's simply disappear in light of a story stressing subjective immediacy, as does the present study. Descartes' insights, once recognized by the reader, follow one from

the other with amazing orderliness, thus there is no room for the looping required in the charge of circularity. Simply put, given Descartes' perspective, the *Meditations* are strictly linear in a way that few other works can claim. This can be seen most clearly in the brilliant work of Martial Gueroult in *Descartes' Philosophy Interpreted According to the Order of Reasons*.[29] (Gueroult , 170–1)

The evaporation of the "problem of circularity" rests upon the notion that it is simply not a Cartesian question. That is, it does not arise at all if one understands the *Meditations* to be meditations. "Cognitive exercises" or progressive "thought experiments" or other ways of filling in the details of the process of meditating do not fall prey to the kinds of logical failings, like circularity, that arguments do. Arguments can be circular; it is a category error to assign the appellation of "circularity" to meditations. Moreover, the meditational interpretation seen here provides sufficient explanation of Descartes epistemology so as to constitute a replacement for "the *Meditations* argument" proposed by Wilson. Not only does the current story cover the same ground as Wilson's; it also melds with the unified whole providing "subjective immediacy interpretation."

Cartesian circles are merely a microcosm of the general philosophical "circuitry" that Marjorie Grene introduced into the discussion. She provided the poignant reminder that, even in light of the burgeoning attention that Descartes has received in the 20th century, for the most part he and his thought have been left behind. Along with

[29] Gueroult's method of interpreting Descartes in terms of order is relevant to the issue at hand. Order is a crucial theme in the *Meditations* and, as has been seen particularly in chapter two, must be included in any holistic treatment of Descartes' work.

Descartes, so have we left ourselves behind for he is part of our history and philosophy. Thus, in many ways, not only have contemporary thinkers ignored the subject of Descartes, so too have they bypassed ramifications of the study of the history of ideas. At the forefront of possible lists of ramifications are Descartes' own attempt at dealing with the "boot strapping" problem (and the resultant charges of circularity (chapter 3)), and the more general problem of how to deal with an exemplary figure in the history of ideas in the first place.

It was noted at the beginning of this project that the question of foundations and thus some semblance of certainty have been and continue to be problematic to say the least. How can one know? What can one know? In terms of "boot strapping," knowledge requires that one escape error somehow, while, at least initially, being in a state of error. Or, how do you know that you know that you know . . . ? Descartes strove to answer these questions and did so in the *Meditations* with the response, "I know that I am and that I am a thinking thing." It must be remembered that Descartes purposely voiced his response to the questions of knowledge in a particular way, with particular words, and defended his story in particular ways. All of these things should be taken into consideration when attempting to understand his work, and this is especially so in light of his specific request that bits and pieces of his writing be excised and examined in reference to the whole.

However, as Grene pointed out, Descartes' has been abandoned by many, even in light of his direct requests and instructions for his readers. In fact, judging by the tone of

his replies, he was serious when he stated that he had no time for those who would not actually meditate with him and work though the text in an intense involved manner. That is, he simply did not take seriously those who would refuse to listen to him and his words. Having been ignored, Descartes and the content of his story remain behind as dead characters on pages. While he was granted the mantle of the "Father of Modern Philosophy," most of what he intended to be an organic whole has been abandoned much to the detriment of his "children." This is not to say that the "real, historical Descartes" has been essentially grasped within this text or that this essay contains the answers to the contemporary quandaries. This simply is not so. However, it has been an attempt to understand the whole of *Descartes' Meditations* in a way that tries to listen to his warnings, requests, rebukes, and advice. Hopefully in this way one may avoid at least some of the circles, Cartesian or otherwise, in 20th century philosophy.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aquinas, St. Thomas. (1964). *Summa theologiae*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Ariew, Roger and Marjorie Grene, ed. (1995). *Descartes and his contemporaries: Meditations, objections and replies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Aristotle. (1984). *The complete works of Aristotle: The revised Oxford translation*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Bordo, Susan. (1987). *The flight to objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Chappell, Vere. (1986). The theory of ideas. In *Essays on Descartes' Meditations*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cole, John R. (1992). *The Olympian dreams and youthful rebellion of Réne Descartes*. Urbana: Illinois University Press.

Cottingham, John. (1993). Cartesian metaphysics and the emergence of modern philosophy. In *The rise of modern philosophy*, ed. Tom Sorell. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Cottingham, John, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, trans. (1990). *Descartes: Selected philosophical writings*. Vol. 1–3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cottingham, John. (1986). *Descartes*. New York: Basil Blackwell Inc.

Curley, E.M. (1986). Analysis in the *Meditations*: The quest for clear and distinct ideas. In *Essays on Descartes' Meditations*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Doney, Willis. (1955). The Cartesian circle. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 3 (June): 324–38.

Fletcher, F.T.H. (1954). *Pascal and the mystical tradition*. New York: Philosophical Library.

Frankfurt, Harry G. (1970). *Demons, dreamers and madmen*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill.

Gerwirth, Alan. (1970). The Cartesian circle reconsidered. *The Journal of Philosophy* 67 (October): 668–85.

Grene, Marjorie. (1985). *Descartes*. Philosophers in Context, ed. Stephan Korner. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Gueroult, Martial. (1984). *Descartes' philosophy interpreted according to the order of reasons*. Vol. 1, *The soul and God*. Translated by Roger Ariew. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Hatfield, Gary. (1986). The senses and the fleshless eye: The *Meditations* as cognitive exercises. In *Essays on Descartes' Meditations*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Heidegger, Martin. (1996). *Being and time*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Hintikka, Jaakko. (1967). *Cogito ergo sum*: Inference or performance? In *Descartes: A collection of critical essays*, ed. Willis Doney. Garden City: Doubleday.

Judovitz, Dalia. (1988). *Subjectivity and representation in Descartes: The origin of modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kant, Immanual. (1998). *Critique of pure reason*. Translated by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kenny, Anthony, trans. (1980). *Descartes: Philosophical letters*. Oxford: Blackwell. Original edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Kenny, Anthony. (1979). *The God of the philosophers*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kenny, Anthony. (1968). *Descartes: A study of his philosophy*. New York: Random House.

Kosman, L. Aryeh. (1986). The naïve narrator: Meditation in Descartes' *Meditations*. In *Essays on Descartes' Meditations*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Marion, Jean-Luc. (1995). The objections in Cartesian metaphysics. In *Descartes and his contemporaries: Meditations, objections and replies*, ed. Roger Ariew and Marjorie Grene. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Marlies, Mike. (1978). Doubt, reason, and Cartesian therapy. In *Descartes: Critical and interpretive essays*, ed. Michael Hooker. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Nussbaum, Martha C. (1994). *Theory of desire: Theory and practice in Hellenistic ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Recker, Doren A. (1993). Mathematical demonstration and deduction in Descartes' early methodological and scientific writings. *The Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 31(2) (April): 223–44.

Rorty, Amélie Oksenberg. (1986). The structure of Descartes' *Meditations*. In *Essays on Descartes' Meditations*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rorty, Richard. (1979). *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

St. Augustine. (1993). *Confessions: Books I–XIII*. Translated by F. J. Sheed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

Wilson, Margaret. (1978). *Descartes*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (1969). *Blue and brown books*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell.

VITA

Michael G. Silva

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: SUBJECTIVE IMMEDIACY IN DESCARTES' *MEDITATIONS*: PARTICIPATION, INTUITION, AND THERAPY

Major Field: Philosophy

Personal Data: Born in Colorado Springs, Colorado, On March 11, 1972, the son of A. Michael and Jeanette Silva.

Education: Graduated from Beresford High School, Beresford, South Dakota in December 1990; received Bachelor of Art in History and Philosophy from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December 1995. Completed the requirements for the Master of Art degree with a major in Philosophy at Oklahoma State University in December 1999.

Experience: Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Philosophy, Oklahoma State University 1995 to 1999.
Judaic and Holocaust Studies in Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel, October 1999 to present.