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# SEMEL IN VITA: DESCARTES' STOIC VIEW ON THE PLACE OF PHILOSOPHY IN HUMAN LIFE

David Cunning

In his June 1643 letter to Princess Elizabeth, Descartes makes a claim that is a bit surprising given the hyper-intellectualism of the *Meditations* and other texts. He says that philosophy is something that we should do only rarely. Here I show how Descartes' recommendation falls out of other components of his system—in particular his stoicism and his views on embodiment. A consequence of my reading is that to an important degree the reasoning of the Fourth Meditation is the imprecise reasoning of a not-yet-Cartesian meditator.

In the early stages of articulating his ethical views to Princess Elizabeth, Descartes makes a claim that might seem a bit odd against the background of the hyper-intellectualism of the *Meditations*. He says,

I am almost afraid that Your Highness may think that I am not now speaking seriously; but that would go against the respect which I owe her and which I will never cease to show her. I can say with truth that the chief rule I have always observed in my studies, which I think has been the most useful to me in acquiring what knowledge I have, has been never to spend more than a few hours a day in the thoughts which occupy the imagination and a few hours a year on the thoughts which occupy the intellect alone. I have given all of the rest of my time to the relaxation of the senses and the repose of the mind.<sup>1</sup>

In the Second Meditation Descartes emphasizes our nature as thinking things, and we might expect that his views on how best to live would be commensurate with that nature. However, he recommends to Elizabeth that philosophy be done sparingly. He himself appreciates the unexpectedness of the recommendation. He is a philosopher, and someone who throughout his corpus speaks to the height of philosophical activity, but he says that for the most part it should be avoided.

In this paper I do four things. In section one, I lay out Descartes' place in a tradition in which minds and intellectual activity are regarded as far superior to bodies and bodily activities. Descartes embraces some of this tradition, but he thinks that bodies have been undervalued. In section two, I consider Descartes' stoicism and the pillars of his system that entail it. I argue that it is from this stoicism, in conjunction with his view that finite wills are often frustrated by bodily processes, that he generates the view that philosophy is to be done sparingly. In section three I consider the objection that for Descartes finite wills are wholly



unconstrained. I conclude with a brief discussion of Descartes' status as an anti-philosophical philosopher.

# I

There are a number of places in which Descartes represents the mind and its activities as more exalted than the activities of the body. For example, he writes that

[B]ecause nobody except God knows everything perfectly, we have to content ourselves with knowing the truths most useful to us. The first and chief of these is that there is a God on whom all things depend. . . . The second thing we must know is the nature of our soul. We must know that it subsists apart from the body, and is much nobler than the body, and that it is capable of enjoying countless satisfactions not to be found in this life.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of the Third Meditation he says that one of these satisfactions results from disembodied reflection upon the greatness of God.<sup>3</sup> For the time being, however, we are stuck in "the prison of the body."<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, it is

this same contemplation [of the divine majesty], albeit much less perfect, [that] enables us to know the greatest joy of which we are capable in this life. (AT 7:52)

In the 1 November 1646 letter to Chanut, Descartes says that if it did not have the ability to experience passions,

our soul would have no reason to wish to remain joined to its body for even one minute. . . .<sup>5</sup>

When he repeatedly refers to Gassendi as *Flesh* in *Fifth Replies*, he is certainly not intending a compliment.<sup>6</sup> On the flipside, Gassendi is not imagining things when he assumes that Descartes would prefer to be identified as *Mind*.<sup>7</sup>

Descartes regards the mind and its pursuits as more noble than those of the body. However, he allows that body has *some* value, as presumably he should if he is also going to hold that the extended universe is a creature of God. He says that we would have no reason to wish to remain joined to our bodies if we did not have the ability to experience passions, but of course we do have the ability to experience passions. He thus writes that

the pleasures of the body are minor. . . . However, I do not think that they should be altogether despised, or even that one should free oneself altogether from the passions.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, he says that there are benefits to having passions and that a person is better off for taking advantage of these:

[T]he pleasures common to it [the soul] and the body depend entirely on the passions, so that persons whom the passions can move most deeply are capable of enjoying the sweetest pleasures of this life.<sup>9</sup>

The pleasure that accompanies a passion is not the qualitative equal of the pleasure of a disembodied mind, but in this life we are not disembodied.

Descartes is not alone among rationalist-minded thinkers in placing a higher value on mind than body. In the Platonic tradition, "the true philosopher despises" bodily things.<sup>10</sup> The body "keeps us busy in a thousand ways because of its need for nurture" (66b), and "makes us too busy to practise philosophy" (66d). Accordingly, "the philosopher frees the soul from association with the body as much as possible" (64e–65a). For Socrates, souls are invisible, intangible, indivisible, and divine, and bodies are their opposite (78b–80b). Because a soul is what activates a body, a soul is active, and its opposite (body) is "death" (105c–e). Later figures then absorb the view that body is a low-grade kind of being. In "On Beauty," Plotinus offers an extended diatribe against the body.<sup>11</sup> His disciple Augustine continues the barrage:

How highly do you value th[e] will? You surely do not think it should be compared with wealth or honours or physical pleasures, or even all of these together. . . . Then should we not rejoice a little that we have something in our souls—this very thing that I call a good will—in comparison with which those things we mentioned are utterly worthless . . . ?<sup>12</sup>

For Augustine, body is so bad that sin consists in turning our attention away from eternal things to things that are temporal and corporeal (27).

This kind of thinking finds its way into the seventeenth century as well. The Cartesian (and Augustinian) philosopher Nicholas Malebranche calls on us to resist the allure of the bodies that surround us and look instead to the "land of ideas."<sup>13</sup> In the course of defending his occasionalism, he infers from the "immutable law that inferior things serve superior ones" that bodies cannot act upon souls.<sup>14</sup> Malebranche's contemporary Ralph Cudworth argues that bodies are at the bottom of the hierarchy of creatures:

There is unquestionably, a *Scale or Ladder of Nature*, and Degrees of *Perfection and Entity*, one above another, as of *Life, Sense, and Cogitation*, above *Dead, Senseless and Unthinking Matter*; or *Reason and Understanding* above *Sense, &c.*<sup>15</sup>

Cudworth agrees with Malebranche that bodies cannot act upon souls, but he also holds that "it is not so decorous in respect of God . . . [to] do all the meanest and triflingest things himself drudgingly."<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, He does not attend to corporeal affairs.<sup>17</sup> Anne Conway defends the view that body is so terrible that God would not, and did not, create it:

how can any dead thing proceed from him or be created by him, such as mere body or matter . . . ? It has truly been said that God

does not make death. It is equally true that he did not make any dead thing, for how can a dead thing come from him who is infinite life and love? Or, how can any creature receive so vile and diminished an essence from him (who is so infinitely generous and good) . . . ?<sup>18</sup>

For Conway, God only creates souls, and so the everyday objects that surround us are something other than what we thought.<sup>19</sup> Descartes is clearly in the tradition of these thinkers. He takes body to be of some value, but it is not as exalted as mind.

## II

In this section I consider Descartes' stoicism and its implications for the question of the extent to which an embodied mind should do philosophy.<sup>20</sup> In effect I am following up on Descartes' claim that although the "satisfactions" of the mind are enormous, for the most part they are "not to be found in this life." We should instead rest content with the goods that are open to us.

As it is for Leibniz and Spinoza, for Descartes stoicism is the ethical theory that best squares with the doctrine of divine immutability.<sup>21</sup> He says to Elizabeth,

[t]he first and chief of [the truths most useful to us] is that there is a God on whom all things depend, whose perfections are infinite, whose power is immense and whose decrees are infallible. This teaches us to accept calmly all the things which happen to us as expressly sent by God. Moreover, since the true object of love is perfection, when we lift up our minds to consider him as he is, we find ourselves naturally so inclined to love him that we even rejoice in our afflictions at the thought that they are an expression of his will.<sup>22</sup>

It is true that some of us might entertain a standard of goodness according to which not everything that happens is good. If so, we are not taking into account all of the relevant data, and the judgments that we make in the light of this standard will be hasty.<sup>23</sup> We must also take into account, and indeed privilege, the unrevisable axioms of metaphysics (e.g., that God is perfect and immutable). When we take the right kind of perspective on events we see that

there is nothing to show that the present life is bad. . . .<sup>24</sup>

We see that

[t]rue philosophy . . . teaches that even amid the saddest disasters and most bitter pains we can always be content, provided that we know how to use our reason.<sup>25</sup>

Descartes' God preordains all events from eternity, and His immutable will does not depart from the preordained order.<sup>26</sup> What happens will happen anyway, and in addition it will be good.<sup>27</sup> Descartes writes,

In my view, the way to reach the love of God is to consider that he is a mind, or a thing that thinks; . . . we must also take account of the infinity of his power, by which he has created so many things of which we are only a tiny part. . . . Finally, we must weigh our smallness against the greatness of the created universe. . . . If a man meditates on these things and understands them properly, he is filled with extreme joy. . . . Joining himself willingly entirely to God, he loves him so perfectly that he desires nothing at all except that his will should be done. Henceforth, because he knows that nothing can befall him which God has not decreed, he no longer fears death, pain or disgrace. He so loves this divine decree, deems it so just and so necessary, and knows that he must be so completely subject to it that even when he expects it to bring death or some other evil, he would not will to change it even if, *per impossible*, he could do so. He does not shun evils or afflictions, because they come to him from divine providence; still less does he eschew the permissible goods or pleasures he may enjoy in this life, since they too come from God. He accepts them with joy, without any fear of evils, and his love makes him perfectly happy.<sup>28</sup>

For Descartes, stoicism is the ethical theory that best squares with the doctrines of divine immutability and divine omnibenevolence.

Another feature of stoicism that Descartes finds attractive is the emphasis that it puts on decreasing the extent to which our wills are subordinated to bodily influences. Descartes speaks to the control of the body over the will in a number of passages. For example, he says to Elizabeth that

each person wants to make himself happy; but many people do not know how to, and often a bodily disposition prevents their will from being free. . . . [There is] nothing more distressing than being attached to a body which altogether takes away its freedom.<sup>29</sup>

In *Passions of the Soul*, he speaks again of the body as limiting the freedom of the will and says that in some cases the will is enslaved:

[opposing passions] pull the will first to one side and then to the other, thus making it battle against itself and so putting the soul in the most deplorable state possible. . . . [The] two passions jostle the will in opposite ways; and since the will obeys first the one and then the other, it is continually opposed to itself, and so it renders the soul enslaved and miserable.<sup>30</sup>

For Descartes, passions are caused by motions on the pineal gland.<sup>31</sup> As passions incline the will, corporeal motions are sometimes in charge of how the will inclines.

A passion is just one example of a corporeal effect that influences the will. Descartes also holds that corporeal processes are responsible for the ambivalence that a will undergoes after adopting a new belief in place of an old one. In the First Meditation, he speaks of the power of long-standing commitments to

keep coming back, and, despite my wishes, [to] capture my belief, which is as it were bound over to them as a result of long occupation and custom.<sup>32</sup>

Descartes holds more generally that no matter how much philosophical reflecting we do, our pre-philosophical conceptions work to hold their ground:

In later years the mind is no longer a total slave to the body, and does not refer everything to it. Indeed, it inquires into the truth of things considered in themselves, and discovers very many of its previous judgements to be false. But despite this, it is not easy for the mind to erase these false judgements from its memory; and as long as they stick there, they can cause a variety of errors. For example, in our early childhood we imagined stars as being very small; and although astronomical arguments now clearly show us that they are very large indeed, our preconceived opinion is still strong enough to make it very hard for us to imagine them differently from the way we did before.<sup>33</sup>

The cognitive processes that Descartes is mentioning here are largely physiological. Imaginings are “shadows and pictures of” the bodies that we encounter in sensation,<sup>34</sup> and both involve the soul inspecting a figure on the pineal gland.<sup>35</sup> A sensation always occurs independently of our will; the soul inspects a figure that has been traced on the pineal gland by bodies that pass through the nerves.<sup>36</sup> When we *imagine* something the figure is traced either by a volition of the soul or, in less intentional cases, by bodies in the brain that as a result of purely mechanistic processes trace figures that are similar to the ones normally traced through the nerves.<sup>37</sup> In the latter kind of case, will and imagination can work at odds. When we want to imagine something, we have a volition that makes

the [pineal] gland lean . . . first to one side and then to another, thus driving the spirits towards different regions of the brain until they come upon the one containing the traces of the object we want to remember.<sup>38</sup>

If, as sometimes occurs in the case of imagination, something other than our will drives the spirits to appropriate traces in the brain, we might recall an opinion that we have habitually affirmed and have assumed is indubitable. In particular, when we do philosophy and so talk and think about things like God, bodies, and the soul, the discussion will lead us to remember our “preconceived opinion[s]” about these, to ill-effect.<sup>39</sup> If Descartes holds that the physical causes of a particular memory can be in place independently of our will, he would expect that many of us would stagger in the course of doing philosophy.

Our embodiment also interferes with our ability to do philosophy in so far as we are almost constantly bombarded with perceptions of sensible bodies. In the Fifth Meditation, Descartes remarks that one of the things that keeps us from a clear and distinct perception of God’s existence is that

"the images of things perceived by the senses . . . besiege my thought on every side . . . ." <sup>40</sup> Our perceptions of such bodies make it very difficult for us to turn our attention to anything else:

We know by experience that our minds are so closely joined to our bodies as to be almost always acted upon by them; and although when thriving in an adult and healthy body the mind enjoys *some* liberty to think of other things than those presented by the senses, we know there is not the same liberty in those who are sick or asleep or very young. . . . I have no doubt that if it [the mind] were released from the prison of the body, it would find [its innate ideas] within itself. <sup>41</sup>

A significant part of what it is to do philosophy, according to Descartes, is to attend to principles and ideas that do not "accord with the senses." <sup>42</sup> We must divorce ourselves from sensible objects, <sup>43</sup> but to do so is to fight and resist our embodiment and to live and re-live the conflict between the truth and our long-standing commitments. This kind of torment and frenzy is not to be encouraged:

happiness consists, it seems to me, in a perfect contentment of mind and inner satisfaction, which is not commonly possessed by those who are most favoured by fortune, and which is acquired by the wise without fortune's favor. So *vivere beate*, to live happily, is just to have a perfectly content and satisfied mind. <sup>44</sup>

As a stoic Descartes regards tranquility of mind as an end in itself. <sup>45</sup> He thinks that "free will is in itself the noblest thing we can have, since it makes us in a way equal to God," <sup>46</sup> but he does not thereby think that our freedom consists in the independence that marks the divine will. This is instead a standard to which we should aspire. <sup>47</sup> One way that we can protect the will from disturbances is by working on the body to keep our passions in moderation. <sup>48</sup> Another is to have a firm and unwavering resolve to do what we take to be best in a given situation, and to appreciate that because that is the most that a finite mind can do, we should never feel regret if things turn out poorly. <sup>49</sup> Another is to direct the will from circumstances that are bound to wreak havoc on it. <sup>50</sup>

According to Descartes, an embodied mind is not suited for philosophical reflection. Not only do episodes of philosophical reflection disturb the will, they will be counter-productive if they are not brief, and if they are not few and far between:

[o]ur nature is so constituted that our mind needs much relaxation if it is to be able to spend usefully a few moments in the search for truth. Too great application to study does not refine the mind, but wears it down. <sup>51</sup>

In the course of doing philosophy, the influences of the body inevitably present themselves and make us think in ways that interfere with our progress. We remember our pre-conceived opinions, and in our weakened



state regard them as plausible. We become agitated, and ambivalent, and our attempts to press ahead will yield at best diminishing returns.<sup>52</sup> Simply put, philosophy is not for us. We might regret that we can only do so much of it, but as a stoic Descartes thinks that we should conform our wills to the reality in which we find ourselves:

we should not reckon the time which we could have spent on instructing ourselves by comparison with the number of hours we have had at our disposition but rather, I think, by comparison with what we see commonly happens to others, as an indication of the normal scope of the human mind.<sup>53</sup>

There are activities that are more suitable for an embodied mind, and we should pursue those instead.<sup>54</sup> We must appreciate what is possible for us and what is not, and adjust our desires accordingly.<sup>55</sup>

### III

A potential problem for the argumentation of section two is that there are passages in which Descartes appears to insist that finite wills are free in a libertarian sense.<sup>56</sup> That argumentation depends on the premise that finite wills are often constrained and even enslaved by bodily processes, but if Descartes is a libertarian he does not accept this premise. Indeed, if finite wills are radically free, and if the activities of the mind are more exalted than those of the body, it is not clear why we should not exercise our libertarian freedom and do as much philosophy as possible.

One passage in which Descartes might appear to be supporting a libertarian view of human freedom is in his 1645 letter to Mesland. There, he says that

absolutely speaking . . . it is always open to us to hold back from pursuing a clearly known good, or from admitting a clearly perceived truth, provided we consider it a good thing to demonstrate the freedom of our will by so doing.<sup>57</sup>

One of the reasons that this passage might appear to be evidence for the view that Descartes is a libertarian is that in other texts he is explicit that clear and distinct perceptions are utterly will-compelling.<sup>58</sup> If it is always open to us to refrain from admitting a clearly perceived truth, it must be possible for us to resist compulsion in any other situation as well.<sup>59</sup>

An examination of the larger context of the passage in the Mesland letter shows that it is not evidence that Descartes holds that finite wills are free in a libertarian sense. In the previous letter to Mesland Descartes had said that

I agree with you when you say that we can suspend our judgment; but I tried to explain in what manner this can be done. For it seems to me certain that a great light in the intellect is followed by a great inclination in the will; so that if we see very clearly that a thing is good

for us, it is very difficult—and on my view impossible, *as long as one continues in the same thought*—to stop the course of our desire.<sup>60</sup>

Descartes' view that clear and distinct perceptions are will-compelling is the view that so long as the intellect has a clear and distinct idea, it is impossible for the will to refrain from affirming it.<sup>61</sup> What it is for a finite mind to clearly and distinctly perceive X is for its intellect to have a clear and distinct idea of X and for its will to affirm X, but *while* the intellect is presenting this clear and distinct idea, the will cannot stop affirming it to turn its attention to something else. Instead, another idea must be put in place of the clear and distinct idea, and by something other than the will. As Descartes says by way of qualification in the February 1645 letter, we suspend judgment when something else distracts the will from a clear and distinct idea—for example the desire to exhibit our freedom.<sup>62</sup> The correspondence with Mesland does not provide any evidence that Descartes is a libertarian.

A second piece of apparent evidence for the view that Descartes has a libertarian account of human freedom is that he thinks that we merit praise and blame for what we do. He says in *Principles* I:37,

We do not praise automatons for accurately producing all the movements they were designed to perform, because the production of these movements occurs necessarily. It is the designer who is praised for constructing such carefully-made devices; for in constructing them he acted not out of necessity but freely. By the same principle, when we embrace the truth, our doing so voluntarily is much more to our credit than would be the case if we could not do otherwise.<sup>63</sup>

This passage does not reflect the view that Descartes is a libertarian. He indeed suggests that a necessary condition of meriting praise or blame is being able to “do otherwise,” but he is not thereby committed to the view that we are *always* able to do otherwise. The passage even raises questions about the unrestrictedness of finite will in cases of action in which we do merit praise or blame. Descartes says that when we embrace the truth, we do so voluntarily and merit praise. However, he also holds that we cannot help but affirm what we clearly and distinctly perceive, and one of his most pronounced statements of this view appears just a few sections after *Principles* I:37, at AT 8A:21. If we cannot help but affirm what we clearly and distinctly perceive, and if our affirmations of clear and distinct perceptions are still voluntary and free, then voluntariness is not a matter of libertarian freedom.<sup>64</sup>

The remaining evidence for the view that Descartes holds that finite wills are wholly independent is the representation of freedom in the Fourth Meditation. Before considering that evidence, however, it is important to note that even if the Fourth Meditation conflicts with the view that finite wills are often determined by bodily processes, the latter view is the predominant one in his corpus. We have considered numerous passages that reflect this view, and neither the Mesland letter nor *Principles* I:37 speaks against it.<sup>65</sup> Still, it would be preferable if there was a natural way of reading the Fourth Meditation that did not have Descartes contradicting himself.

The contradiction would be egregious, and would be present in what is arguably his philosophical masterpiece.

In the Fourth Meditation Descartes defines will as “our ability to do or not do something” (AT 7:57) and emphasizes that when exercising will “we do not feel we are determined by any external force” (ibid.). He contrasts will with intellect, the other faculty involved in judgment. Whereas intellect is limited, in that “countless things may [and of course do] exist without there being any corresponding ideas in me” (AT 7:56), will is “not restricted in any way” (AT 7:57). Finite will is independent, and *so* independent that it is with respect to will, and not limited intellect, that human minds most resemble God (ibid.). The “scope of the will is wider than that of the intellect” (AT 7:58), and it is in the extent of the gulf between them that Descartes locates the source of human error. There is no denying that the Fourth Meditation view of freedom is to some degree libertarian. However, it is not necessarily the view that Descartes endorses in the final analysis.

There are a number of passages in the *Meditations* that reflect that in it the meditator is gradually advancing from a position of confusion to a position of clear and distinct perception.<sup>66</sup> In the First Meditation, the meditator advances the view that “[w]hatever I have up till now accepted as most true I have acquired either from or through the senses” (AT 7:18). This is not evidence that Descartes accepts that view, and he in fact holds that our opinions about bodies are in part a matter of “purely mental scrutiny.”<sup>67</sup> In the Second Meditation the meditator announces that he “will use [his] imagination” (AT 7:27) to know himself better. This is not evidence that Descartes accepts the view that we know our minds via imagination, and he in fact thinks that to use the imagination to know the soul is like “trying to use one’s eyes in order to hear sounds or smell odours.”<sup>68</sup> Later in the Second Meditation the meditator avers that “general perceptions are apt to be somewhat more confused” than particular ones (AT 7:30). Upon further meditation, he appreciates that the nature of body is perceived by the mind alone and adds that

I am speaking of this particular piece of wax; the point is even clearer with regard to wax in general. (AT 7:31)

In the Fourth Meditation, the meditator considers that

whenever we are inquiring whether the works of God are perfect, we ought to look at the whole universe, not just at one created thing on its own. (AT 7:55)

Descartes himself holds that when we are inquiring whether the works of God are perfect, it is sufficient that we appreciate that for something to be good is just for it to be authored by God. The meditator of the Fourth Meditation is not there yet.<sup>69</sup>

In the *Meditations* Descartes is proceeding as a teacher. As he puts it, the method of the *Meditations* is a “method of instruction.”<sup>70</sup> He is aware that his student is not yet a Cartesian, and he is aware that the first-person reasoning of his student would reflect this.<sup>71</sup> So will Descartes’ attempts to instruct him:

The philosopher knows that it is often useful to assume falsehoods instead of truths in this way in order to shed light on the truth, e.g. when astronomers imagine the equator, the zodiac, or other circles in the sky, or when geometers add new lines to given figures. Philosophers frequently do the same. If someone calls this 'having recourse to artifice, sleight of hand and circumlocution' and says it is unworthy of 'philosophical honesty and the love of truth' then he certainly shows that he himself, so far from being philosophically honest or being prepared to employ any argument at all, simply wants to indulge in rhetorical display.<sup>72</sup>

Descartes thinks that in some cases what it means to be philosophically honest is to employ whatever pedagogical devices are necessary to help a student arrive at philosophical truth. Otherwise he would not arrive at it:

A philosopher would be no more surprised at such suppositions of falsity than he would be if, in order to straighten out a curved stick, we bent it round in the opposite direction.<sup>73</sup>

In *Fourth Replies*, Descartes notes that in demonstrating the properties of a sphere Archimedes would attribute to spheres properties that they cannot possibly have. Rather than criticize that method, Descartes says that it was the

comparison between a sphere (or other curvilinear figure) and a rectilinear figure that enabled Archimedes to demonstrate various properties of the sphere which could scarcely be understood otherwise. (AT 7:241)

Descartes reports that in the Third Meditation he is doing the same thing when he explains God's self-creation in terms of efficient causation even though talk of God as the efficient cause of Himself "involves an evident contradiction" (AT 7:242). He admits that such talk is confused, but

[n]onetheless, all the above ways of talking, which are derived by analogy with the notion of efficient causation, are very necessary for guiding the natural light in such a way as to enable us to have a clear awareness of these matters. (AT 7:241)

In the Third Meditation again, he illustrates the way in which our sensory ideas might represent non-things as things in terms of an idea of cold that represents cold as existing mind-independently, when perhaps it is only the absence of mind-independent heat (AT 7:43–44). Many of Descartes' readers would allow that heat exists mind-independently, but Descartes himself thinks that like all such qualities it exists only as a sensation.<sup>74</sup> And in the First Meditation, he allows that it is possible that God is a deceiver, and from the first-person point-of-view concludes that the prospect of hyperbolic doubt is based on "powerful and well thought-out reasons" (AT 7:21–22). Of course, it is totally incoherent:

take the case of someone who imagines a deceiving god—even the true God, but not yet clearly enough known to himself or to the others for whom he frames his hypothesis. Let us suppose that he does not misuse this fiction for the evil purpose of persuading others to believe something false of the Godhead, but uses it only to enlighten the intellect, and bring greater knowledge of God's nature to himself and to others. Such a person is in no way sinning in order that good may come. There is no malice at all in his action; he does something which is good in itself, and no one can rebuke him for it except slanderously.<sup>75</sup>

Descartes considers his students to be very confused, and in his attempts to help them to overcome their confusion he will sometimes make use of it so long as it is there. One of his aims in the *Meditations* is to guide us to the clear and distinct perceptions of metaphysics. His views on what our minds are like before we do philosophy entail that if he simply presents us with these perceptions we will bat them away.

We are left with an interpretive decision when it comes to making sense of the claims of the Fourth Meditation. One option would be to say that Descartes is simply contradicting himself in putting them forward. This is certainly a possibility. However, Descartes is inviting us, indeed he is practically begging us, to proceed differently. Outside of the *Meditations* he reflects the view that finite wills are often subordinated to bodily processes. Inside the *Meditations* he is representing the thinking of a meditator who is gradually advancing from a position of confusion, and he is explicit that in assisting the meditator he sometimes resorts to pedagogical devices that are otherwise problematic. One interpretive option is to say that in making the Fourth Meditation claims about the absolute independence of finite will Descartes is contradicting himself. Another is to say that the claims are accepted by the meditator because he is not yet a Cartesian, and that they have a pedagogical function: getting the meditator to appreciate the extent of the gap between what we will and what we understand, for example, and getting him to appreciate that we are not helpless to close it. Descartes certainly holds that we all have an experience of freedom,<sup>76</sup> and he highlights this experience in the Fourth Meditation, but that does not mean that he holds that finite will is not restricted in any way.<sup>77</sup> The ability of the will is to affirm or deny ideas, but it cannot do so unless the intellect considers these ideas: “we cannot will anything without understanding what we will.”<sup>78</sup> A finite will is restricted in many ways, and a disembodied will may well be radically free, but neither of these facts is the focus of the Fourth Meditation.

#### IV

Descartes has often been criticized for regarding the human being as essentially a thinking thing—as a detached ego, alienated from the material world that is so beneath it.<sup>79</sup> There are indeed passages in which he focuses on our nature as thinking things, but in very special circumstances, in which “once in the course of . . . life” (AT 7:17) we attempt to distance our minds from our bodies and arrive at fundamental truths about God

and His creation. Elsewhere Descartes emphasizes that we are embodied human beings, and that our minds and bodies form such a unity that they comprise a substance in their own right.<sup>80</sup> He does *some* philosophy, but his conclusions entail that philosophy is not an activity in which an embodied mind should regularly engage.<sup>81</sup>

Descartes is part of a distinguished tradition of philosophers who are at the same time anti-philosophical. In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant defends the view that things as they are in-themselves are neither spatial nor temporal. Part of the reason that he does this is to help us to mitigate our desire to pursue questions that torment us but that admit of no settled answer:

Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer.<sup>82</sup>

If things-in-themselves are neither spatial nor temporal, and if the only kinds of objects that we can know are spatial or temporal, we can conclude in advance that we cannot know things-in-themselves and so cannot answer questions about ultimate reality. A similar anti-philosophical tendency appears in the work of Wittgenstein. He argues that what it is to do philosophy is to use everyday language to pose questions that that language is ill-equipped to ask. These questions seem to be meaningful, but until we notice that they are not we will continue to ask them, and to no avail.<sup>83</sup> Kant and Wittgenstein of course disagree with Descartes about whether or not we can know anything about ultimate reality. Descartes thinks that we can know that God exists, for example, and that there are extended objects that exist independently of our perception of them. However, all of three of these figures conclude in their capacity as philosophers that our urge to engage in philosophical reflection is in need of moderation.

Descartes is certainly right to hold that anyone who takes seriously the stoic aim of mental tranquility should temper their urge to do philosophy. He of course allows, and in fact insists, that an important part of what it is to be a human being is to be rational. Surprisingly enough, however, he sides with Hume in arguing that our rational side has been over-emphasized and that a plan of life that is suitable for a purely rational being is not a plan of action that is suitable for us.<sup>84</sup> The latter writes,

nature has pointed out a mixed kind of life as most suitable to [the] human race, and secretly admonished them to allow none of these biases [that is, our reasonable side, our sociable side, and our active side] to draw too much, so as to incapacitate them for other occupations and entertainments. Indulge your passion for science, says she, but let your science be human, and such as may have a direct reference to action and society. Abstruse thought and profound researches I prohibit, and will severely punish, by the pensive melancholy which they introduce. . . . Be a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man.<sup>85</sup>

Descartes agrees. He makes a compelling case for the view that in this life we should concentrate on the "relaxation of the senses and the repose of the mind."<sup>86</sup>

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## NOTES

1. "To Princess Elizabeth, 28 June 1643," AT 3:692–93. Here and in the following I use the translations in John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume I*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1985); Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume II*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1984); and Cottingham, Stoothoff, Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume III*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1991). I use "AT" to refer to the pagination in Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, Volumes I–XII, Paris: Vrin (1996).

2. "To Princess Elizabeth, 15 September 1645," AT 4:291–92. Descartes is attempting to capture a number of views in the claim that mind is more "noble" than body: that mental substances are more similar to God than bodies; that minds are more intrinsically valuable than bodies; that intellectual activity is more instrumentally valuable than bodily activity, in that it is our means for arriving at truth; and that intellectual pleasure is of a higher order than bodily pleasure. I attempt to flesh these out over the course of the paper.

3. AT 7:52. Descartes writes that "the supreme happiness of the next life consists in the contemplation of the divine majesty."

4. "To Hyperaspistes, August 1641," AT 3:424.

5. AT 4:538. Below I consider the corollary view that we have *some* reason to wish to remain attached to our bodies.

6. See for example AT 7:354, 357, 359, 360, 361, 364, 385, and 390.

7. See for example *Fifth Objections*, AT 7:265 and 336.

8. "To Princess Elizabeth, 1 September 1645," AT 4:287.

9. *Passions of the Soul* IV:212, AT 11:488.

10. Plato, *Phaedo*, in *Five Dialogues*, trans. and ed. G. M. A. Grube, Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company (1981), 64d–e.

11. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna, Burdett, NY: Larson Publishing (1992), I.6, pp. 44–55.

12. Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. and ed. Thomas Williams, Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company (1993), p. 19.

13. Nicholas Malebranche, *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion*, trans. and ed. Nicholas Jolley and David Scott, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1997), p. 20.

14. Nicholas Malebranche, *The Search After Truth*, trans. and ed. Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Oscamp, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1997), p. 447.

15. Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: F. Frommann Verlag (1964), p. 858. (Note that this was first published in 1678.) See also pp. 156, 157, 648, 857, and 858, and Sarah Hutton, "Cudworth, Boethius and the Scale of Nature," in *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context*, ed. G. A. J. Rogers, J. M. Vienne, and Y. C. Zarka, Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers (1997), pp. 96–99. Kenelm Digby is another important figure in this tradition. He is a mechanist who worries that if complete mechanistic

explanations cannot be offered for phenomena like gravitational attraction or the powers of bodies to make us have sensations that do not resemble those bodies, then the materialist philosopher will be able to argue that in the same way that these somehow happen, bodies somehow think. (See Kenelm Digby, *Two Treatises in the One of Which, the Nature of Bodies; in the Other, the Nature of Mans Soule; is Looked Into: in Way of Discovery, of the Immortality of Reasonable Soules*, Paris: printed by Gilles Blaizot (1644), preface, pp. iii–v.) Digby is desperate to avoid this result, because bodies are of so little value. (See Kenelm Digby, *Private Memoirs*, London: Saunders and Otley (1827), pp. 235–39; and Kenelm Digby, *A Conference with a Lady about Choice of Religion*, London: printed for Henry Herringman (1654), pp. 76–78.)

16. Cudworth 1964, p. 223.

17. See also David Cunning, "Systematic Divergences in Malebranche and Cudworth," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 41 (2003), pp. 348–53.

18. Anne Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Alison P. Coudert and Taylor Corse, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1996), p. 45. Note that this was first published in 1690.

19. Other Early Modern thinkers attempted to upgrade the status of bodies, but were unsuccessful. See for example Margaret Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, ed. Eileen O'Neill, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2001), pp. 90–93, 137, 160, 220–21; and Julien Offray de la Mettrie, *Man a Machine*, trans. and ed. Ann Thomson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1996), pp. 33–35. Cavendish anticipates that her attempts will be unsuccessful; she says that according to its traditional conception body is a dead and low-grade being, and thus her views about body will come off as incoherent (pp. 12–13, 23).

20. Descartes' ethics is composed of a family of stoic doctrines: the view that we should conform our wills to what is fated to occur; the view that tranquility of mind is an end in itself; and the view that we should moderate our passions so that we are not subordinated to them. I consider all of these below. For a discussion of the doctrines as they appear in ancient stoicism, see Marcus Schofield, "Stoic Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. Brad Inwood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2003), pp. 233–56. Descartes might seem to be parting from the stoic tradition in holding that pleasures of the body are worth pursuing, but among the ancient stoics themselves there was disagreement on this matter (Schofield 2003, pp. 255–56).

21. See for example G. W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, in *Leibniz: Philosophical Essays*, trans. and ed. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing (1989), section four, pp. 37–38; and Spiniza, *Ethics*, Appendix to Part I, in *Spinoza: Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley and ed. Michael Morgan, Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co. (2002), pp. 238–43. See also Derk Pereboom, "Stoic Psychotherapy in Descartes and Spinoza," *Faith and Philosophy* 11 (1994), pp. 606–08.

22. "To Princess Elizabeth, 15 September 1645," AT 4:291–92.

23. Descartes actually expects that most of us will embrace such a standard. He thinks that our perceptions of the goodness of things tend to be limited to what we sense to be good for our own preservation (*Principles* I:71, AT 8A:35–36). More generally, Descartes says that "since there is nothing whose true nature we perceive by the senses alone, it turns out that most people have nothing but confused perceptions their entire lives" (*Principles* I:73, AT 8A:37). See also *Second Replies*, AT 7:145.

24. "To Princess Elizabeth, 6 October 1645," AT 4:315.

25. "To Princess Elizabeth, 6 October 1645," AT 4:315–16. See also "To Chanut, 6 June 1647," AT 5:53–56.



26. *Principles* I:40–41, AT 8A:20. See also *Principles* II:36, AT 8A:61. Descartes says in the latter that “God’s perfection involves not only his being immutable in himself, but also his operating in a manner that is always utterly constant and immutable.”

27. Indeed, as a voluntarist Descartes holds that what God wills is good *because* God wills it. See *Sixth Replies*, AT 7:431–32; “For [Arnauld], 29 July 1648,” AT 5:224; Harry Frankfurt, “Descartes on the Creation of the Eternal Truths,” *The Philosophical Review* 86 (1977), pp. 41–42; and Jonathan Bennett, “Descartes’s Theory of Modality,” *The Philosophical Review* 103 (1994), pp. 639–44.

28. “To Chanut, 1 February 1647,” AT 4:608–09. For the ancient stoic view that we should conform our wills to what in fact occurs, see Epictetus, *Handbook*, trans. and ed. Nicholas White, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company (1983), pp. 13, 19; and Seneca, “On the Happy Life,” in *Seneca: Moral Essays, Volume II*, trans. John W. Basore, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (1935), pp. xiv.3–xvi.3, 137–41. It appears that Descartes’ primary written source for such views was Seneca. See “To Princess Elizabeth, 4 August 1645,” AT 4:263–68. Note that there is a tension between Descartes’ voluntarism and his view that we should accept whatever happens because it is good.

29. “To Princess Elizabeth, 1 September 1645,” AT 4:282.

30. *Passions of the Soul* I:48, AT 11:367.

31. See for example *Passions* I:21–26, 31–47 (AT 11:344–49, 351–66).

32. AT 7:22. See also “Preface to the Reader,” AT 7:9; *Principles* I:72, AT 8A:36–37; “To Hyperaspistes, August 1641,” AT 3:424; “To Princess Elizabeth, 6 October 1645,” AT 4:307; *Conversation with Burman*, AT 5:159; “To [Mesland], 2 May 1644,” AT 4:117; and *Principles* I:44, AT 8A:21.

33. *Principles* I:72; AT 8A:36–37. In “Letter to Voetius, May 1643,” Descartes says that “forgetting such [pre-conceived] opinions . . . is virtually never in our power” (AT 8B:37). In the preface to the French edition of *Principles* he speaks of “the problems caused by preconceived opinions, from which no one is entirely free” (AT 9B:12). See also Timothy J. Reiss, “Denying the Body? Memory and the Dilemmas of History in Descartes,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57 (1996), pp. 596–602; and *The World*: “the philosophers are so subtle that they can find difficulty in things which seem extremely clear to other men, and the memory of their ‘prime matter’, which they know to be rather hard to conceive, may divert them from knowledge of the matter of which I am speaking” (AT 11:35).

34. *Passions* I:21, AT 11:345.

35. See *Treatise on Man*, AT 11:176–77.

36. Descartes says that in sensory perception “objects produce certain movements in the organs of the external senses and, by means of the nerves, produce other movements in the brain, which cause the soul to have sensory perception of the objects” (*Passions* I:23, AT 11:346).

37. *Passions* I:20–21, AT 11:344–45. See also *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, AT 10:412–18; “To Princess Elizabeth, 6 October 1645,” AT 4:310; and *Treatise on Man*, AT 11:202.

38. *Passions* I:42, AT 11:360. See also Richard Joyce, “Cartesian Memory,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 35 (1997), pp. 375–93.

39. See also the preface to the *Meditations*, AT 7:9; *Fourth Replies*, AT 7:231; *Second Replies*, AT 7:164; and *Principles* I:49–50, AT 8A:23–24.

40. AT 7:69. See also the Third Meditation, AT 7:47–48.

41. “To Hyperaspistes, August 1641,” AT 3:424. See also *Principles* I:70–73, AT 8A:34–37.

42. *Second Replies*, AT 7:156. Descartes says that the principles and ideas of more sensible disciplines like geometry “are readily accepted by anyone” (AT 7:156), but that “[i]n metaphysics by contrast there is nothing which causes so much effort as making our perception of the primary notions clear and distinct.

... [T]hey conflict with many preconceived opinions derived from the senses which we have got into the habit of holding from our earliest years" (AT 7:157). Of course, to do philosophy is also to derive conclusions from these primary notions. Descartes says to Mersenne that "the principal aim of my metaphysics is to show which are the things that can be distinctly perceived" ("To Mersenne, 30 September 1640," AT 3:192). As Descartes appreciates, this is easier said than done.

43. See for example "Synopsis of the following six Meditations," AT 7:12; *Second Replies*, AT 7:130–31; and *Principles* I:70–75, AT 8A:34–39. Indeed, Descartes says that we do not arrive at philosophical truth by means of the senses: "if there is any certainty to be had, the only remaining alternative is that it occurs in the clear perceptions of the intellect and nowhere else" (*Second Replies*, AT 7:145).

44. "To Princess Elizabeth, 4 August 1645," AT 4:264. See also *Passions* II:148, AT 11:442; *Passions* III:180, AT 11:465–66; and *Passions* III:190, AT 11:471–72.

45. See also Donald Rutherford, "Descartes' Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2003), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/descartes-ethics>. For the ancient stoic view on the aim of mental tranquility, see Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, in *Sextus Empiricus: Selections from the Major Writings on Scepticism, Man, & God*, trans. Sanford Etheridge, and ed. Philip P. Hallie, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company (1985) pp. 41–42; Robert Fogelin, *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press (1994), pp. 3–12; and Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes, *The Modes of Scepticism: Ancient Texts and Modern Interpretations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1985), pp. 166–71.

46. "To Queen Christina, 20 November 1647," AT 5:85.

47. See also Tom Sorell, "Descartes, the Divine Will and the Ideal of Psychological Stability," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 17 (2000), pp. 361–79. In the heading to *Passions* I:50 Descartes says that "there is no soul so weak that it cannot, if well-directed, acquire an absolute power over its passions" (AT 11:368). Descartes' view appears to be that a finite will can be independent of external influences, but only with a great deal of work. See also John Cottingham, "Cartesian Ethics: Reason and the Passions," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 50 (1996), pp. 211–12.

48. For a discussion of the details of Descartes' recommendations for how to adjust the passions, see Cottingham 1996, pp. 204–16.

49. See "To Princess Elizabeth, 18 August 1645," AT 4:277; "To Princess Elizabeth, 1 September 1645," 4:284–85; "To Princess Elizabeth, 15 September 1645," AT 4:295; and "To Princess Elizabeth, 6 October 1645," AT 4:307.

50. Here I am disagreeing with Loeb that "we find in Peirce, Hume, and Sextus, though not in Descartes, the [view] that unsettled states are unpleasant, and hence to be avoided." See Louis Loeb, "Sextus, Descartes, Hume, and Peirce: On Securing Settled Doxastic States," *Nous* 32 (1998), p. 205.

51. "To Princess Elizabeth, 6 October 1645," AT 4:307.

52. Here we might be reminded of a passage in Russell: "In very abstract studies such as philosophical logic, . . . the subject-matter that you are supposed to be thinking of is so exceedingly difficult and elusive that any person who has ever tried to think about it knows you do not think about it except perhaps once in six months for half a minute. The rest of the time you think about the symbols, because they are tangible, for the thing you are supposed to be thinking about is fearfully difficult and one does not often manage to think about it. The really good philosopher is the one who does once in six months think about it for a minute. Bad philosophers never do." See Bertrand Russell, "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism," *Logic and Knowledge*, ed. R. C. Marsh, London: Allen & Unwin (1956), p. 185.

53. "To Princess Elizabeth, 6 October 1645," AT 4:307.

54. We need to do *some* philosophy, according to Descartes. We need to do philosophy to arrive at the right view on how to live, for example. We also need to do philosophy to uncover that God exists and to arrive at the result that "the decay of the body does not imply the destruction of the mind, . . . [so as] to give mortals the hope of an after-life" ("Synopsis of the following six Meditations," AT 7:13). We also need to do philosophy to arrive at proper views on things like color, taste, and pain, so that we can emend our physical sciences in a way that improves our embodied lives (*Principles*, preface to the French edition, AT 9B:13–15).

55. See also *Passions* II:145, AT 11:438. Descartes writes, "Providence is, so to speak, a fate or immutable necessity, which we must set against Fortune in order to expose the latter as a chimera which arises solely from an error or our intellect. For we can desire only what we consider in some way to be possible; and things which do not depend on us can be considered possible only in so far as they are thought to depend on Fortune—that is to say, in so far as we judge that they may happen and that similar things have happened at other times. But this opinion is based solely on our not knowing all the causes which contribute to each effect. For when a thing which we considered to depend on Fortune does not happen, this indicates that one of the causes necessary for its production was absent, and consequently that it was absolutely impossible and that no similar thing has ever happened, i.e., nothing for the production of which a similar cause was also absent. Had we not been ignorant of this beforehand, we should never have considered it possible and consequently we should never have desired it."

56. I consider these passages below. Some commentators have argued on the basis of them that Descartes is a full-blown libertarian. For example, Moyal writes that "[i]n principle, the Cartesian conception of the will requires that it retain, in all instances, and absolute freedom of choice or assent." (See Georges J. D. Moyal, "The Unity of Descartes' Conception of Freedom," *International Studies in Philosophy* 19 (1987), p. 35.) Alanen says that "it is always possible to turn one's attention to something else. . . . Although it is not clear what the point in so doing would be, other than asserting or demonstrating my freedom, it is essential to Descartes that we are, because of this power to do otherwise, responsible for how we use our attention and power to do otherwise, and that [even] in assenting to a clearly and distinctly seen proposition, we do so voluntarily, and not because we are programmed, like automata, to do so, unable to do the opposite, or refrain from doing anything at all." (See Lilli Alanen, "Intuition, Assent and Necessity," *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 64 (1999), p. 111.) See also Paul Hoffman, "Freedom and Strength of Will: Descartes and Albritton," *Philosophical Studies* 77 (1995), p. 243; Bernard Berofsky, "On the Absolute Freedom of the Will," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 29 (1992), pp. 279–80; Harry Frankfurt, "Concerning the Freedom and Limits of the Will," *Philosophical Topics* 17 (1989), pp. 123–24; Rogers Albritton, "Freedom of Will and Freedom of Action," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 59 (1985), p. 239; and Hiram Caton, "Will and Reason in Descartes's Theory of Error," *Journal of Philosophy* 72 (1975), p. 87.

57. "To [Mesland], 9 February 1645," AT 4:173.

58. See for example *Appendix to Fifth Replies*, AT 9A:205; *Principles* I:43, AT 8A:21; the Fifth Meditation, AT 7:69; "To [Mesland], 2 May 1644," AT 4:116; and *Second Replies*, AT 7:144, 166.

59. See for example Alanen 1999, pp. 112–13.

60. "To [Mesland], 2 May 1644," AT 4:115–16, emphasis added.

61. For example, he says in the *Appendix to Fifth Replies* passage that in cases of clear and distinct perception "something appears so evident to the

understanding that we cannot but believe it" (AT 9A:205). The other passages cited in note 58 are very similar. See also Anthony Kenny, "Descartes on the Will," in *Descartes*, ed John Cottingham, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1998), pp. 149–52; Alan Nelson, "Descartes's Ontology of Thought," *Topoi* 16 (1997), pp. 163–64; and Charles Larmore, "Descartes's Psychologistic Theory of Assent," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 1 (1984), pp. 61–74.

62. AT 4:173. This is also the view in Spinoza, *Ethics* IIP49, scholium. See also Nelson 1997, pp. 171–72.

63. AT 8A:18–19. Alanen (1999, p. 112) appeals to this passage in defense of her view.

64. See also Louis Loeb, *From Descartes to Hume: Continental Metaphysics and the Development of Modern Philosophy*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press (1981), p. 146.

65. Note that these passages span from 1641 to 1649. They do not reflect a change of view later in Descartes' career.

66. Descartes holds that generally speaking the pre-philosophical mind is extremely confused (*Principles* I:66–74): we tend to think in terms of conceptions that do not represent things as they are (AT 8A:35–36), or that are at best far removed from their objects (AT 8A:37–38); we assume that things are real to the extent that they are sensible (AT 8A:35–36), and so conceive of mind and God as sensible when they are not (*Second Replies*, AT 7:130–31); most of us have nothing but confused perceptions our entire lives (AT 8A:37); and we are inclined to reject whatever conflicts with these perceptions (AT 8A:36–37, 24).

67. The Second Meditation, AT 7:31. See also Marleen Rozemond, "The First Meditation and the Senses," *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* 4 (1996), p. 26; and Stephen Menn, *Descartes and Augustine*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1998), p. 225.

68. *Discourse*, Part Four, AT 6:37. See also *Fifth Replies*, AT 7:385.

69. Note that not all of the meditator's confusions are corrected in the *Meditations* itself. Descartes' aims therein are fairly limited—to establish (1) the existence of God, (2) the existence of material things, and (3) the real distinction between mind and body (AT 7:17, 5–16); and to neutralize the confusions that stand in the way of the meditator's grasping of these.

70. *Second Replies*, AT 7:156.

71. Descartes thinks that it is imperative that in the search for truth we take the first-person point-of-view; otherwise, we will not see the truth for ourselves. See *Appendix to Fifth Replies*, AT 9A:208–09.

72. *Fifth Replies*, AT 7:349–50. See also "To Morin, 13 July 1638," AT 2:199.

73. *Fifth Replies*, AT 7:349.

74. See *Principles* I:66–71, AT 8A:32–36; and *Fourth Replies* AT 7:234–35. See also David Cunnig, "Descartes on Sensations and Ideas of Sensations," in *An Anthology of Philosophical Studies*, ed. P. Hanna, A. McEvoy, and P Voutsina, Athens: Atiner Publishing (2006) p. 17.

75. "To Buitendijck, 1643," AT 4:64. See also *Fourth Replies*, AT 7:249. For more on the pedagogical method of the *Meditations*, see David Cunnig, "Descartes on the Immutability of the Divine Will," *Religious Studies* (2003), pp. 83–86; David Cunnig, "True and Immutable Natures and Epistemic Progress in Descartes' *Meditations*," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 11 (2003), pp. 246–48; David Cunnig, "Systematic Divergences in Malebranche and Cudworth," pp. 356–57; and David Cunnig, "Rationalism and Education," *A Companion to Rationalism*, ed. Alan Nelson, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers (2005), pp. 61–81.

76. See for example *Principles* I:41, AT 8A:20.

77. Beyssade also argues that the Fourth Meditation meditator's grasp of his freedom would not be fully refined. See Jean-Marie Beyssade, "Descartes on the Freedom of the Will," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 13 (1988), pp. 83–84.

78. "To Regius, May 1641," AT 3:372. See also "To Hyperaspistes, August 1641," AT 3:432. Spinoza argues that Descartes should accept the view that the scope of the will is the same as the scope of the intellect in *Ethics*, part II, proposition 49, corollary.

79. See for example John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, New York: Dover Publications (1958), pp. 8–9, 282, 289; Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, New York: Harper and Row (1962), p. 72; Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism and Self*, Boston: Beacon Press (1986), p. 174; and Susan Bordo, "Introduction," in *Feminist Interpretations of Rene Descartes*, ed. Susan Bordo, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press (1999).

80. See for example "To Regius, January 1642," AT 3:492–93, 508. See also John Cottingham, "Cartesian Trialism," *Mind* 94 (1985), pp. 218–30; and Paul Hoffman, "The Unity of Descartes' Man," *Philosophical Review* 95 (1986), pp. 339–70.

81. A nice discussion of the problems that are involved in using philosophical arguments anti-philosophically is in Fogelin 1994, pp. 192–204. Descartes is not using philosophical arguments to show that the practice of philosophy is somehow self-undermining; he is arguing instead that the results of proper philosophical analysis entail that such analysis is generally speaking something that we should avoid.

82. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Norman Kemp Smith, Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martins (1965), pp. Avii, 7.

83. For a representative passage, see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, New York, Macmillan Publishing Company (1958), pp. 18–19. See also David Stern, *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2004), pp. 15–21.

84. For a discussion of Hume on this issue, see Barry Stroud, *Hume*, New York and London: Routledge (1977), pp. 11–14.

85. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1999), p. 88.

86. Earlier versions of this paper were read at a meeting of the Cartesian Circle at UC Irvine in February 2004, and at the "Descartes' Concept of a Human Being" workshop at the 2004 ISSEI conference in Pamplona, Spain. I am grateful for comments from participants, especially John Cottingham, Enrique Chavez-Arviso, and Alan Nelson. The paper has also benefited from comments from Diane Jeske and the editor and two anonymous referees of this journal. Finally, I would like to acknowledge generous fellowship support from the National Endowment for the Humanities (2004–2005) and the UCLA Clark Library/Center for 17th- and 18th-Century Studies (Fall 2004).