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Descartes' Concept of Will

by

Andreea Mihali

Master of Arts, University of Toronto, 2002

Thesis

Submitted to the Department of Philosophy

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

Doctor of Philosophy

Wilfrid Laurier University

2007

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on Descartes' concept of will. Following the Scholastics Descartes takes the will, alongside intellect, to be the main faculty of the mind. The essence of the Cartesian mind is thinking. Most Cartesian scholars take this to mean that for Descartes the essence of the mind consists of thoughts as objects of awareness. I argue that willing is not just another type of thought on a par with conceiving, imagining, and having sensory perceptions but that willing is as much an essential feature of the Cartesian mind as awareness. Without willing there would be no thinking; willing pertains to the essence of the mind.

For Descartes, the will is so free it can never be constrained; an unfree will is a contradiction in terms. If willing pertains to the essence of the mind and if the will is essentially free then freedom pertains to the essence of the mind. We are essentially free beings; we would not remain the types of individuals we are now without freedom. Descartes wants to evaluate our volitional performance in different circumstances while taking into account different factors: the types of ideas involved, before/after an act of will is elicited, and the overall goal of our eliciting an act of will. Given these numerous factors he works with a threefold concept of freedom of will: freedom of spontaneity, freedom of indifference due to a balance of reasons and freedom of perversity.

Although we cannot be deprived of freedom we can fail to exercise our wills and thus be deprived of the rights free will affords us. The rights in question are to receive credit and praise for our conduct, both cognitive and practical. Exercising our free will

affords us the right to be praised for obtaining knowledge and for regulating our passions. Descartes' emphasis on the role of the will in the theoretical realm (making assent an act of will) and in the practical sphere (making desire an act of will) is tantamount to viewing knowledge and our personalities (or pragmatic selves) not as blessings but as accomplishments, although a benevolent God has endowed us with faculties especially well-suited for arriving at the truth and for pursuing the good.

For Descartes, believing the truth is not an automatic process resulting from our mental make-up but the result of properly investigating the matter, paying attention and deliberately applying the appropriate common notion (thought, extension or the union between mind and body). Similarly, leading an embodied human existence is more than acting on the guidance of our appetites and emotions; it means using reason and experience to keep emotions in check and integrate them into a coherent pragmatic self. Both in believing the truth and in creating a pragmatic self we manifest ourselves as *agents*: what we do is not only *up to us* but obtains *because of us*.

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Introduction

The aim of this dissertation is to provide a detailed analysis of the concept of will in Descartes' works. Although Descartes' views on the freedom of the will have been the topic of much philosophical attention, a comprehensive study of the will and its role in both the theoretical and the practical domains is both lacking and worth undertaking. So far, Descartes' writings have been the subject of investigation in two main directions: on the one hand, his metaphysical, epistemological and scientific works were given priority to the detriment of his practical views. On the other hand, within Descartes' theory of mind, the intellect has taken precedence over the other faculties of the soul. I think that reconsidering the importance of the will in Descartes' works is an excellent way of bringing relatively neglected elements of his thought to light.

First, paying attention to the practical role of the will will allow us to reinstate Descartes' practical philosophy to its proper place in Descartes' system. The will's practical function consists in fighting the passions (which is the main goal of morality according to Descartes). Second, a careful analysis of the function of the will in the Cartesian agent's mental economy reveals not just the rationalist but also the voluntarist aspects of Descartes' philosophy. The will is just the mind in its active capacity so the functioning of all mental faculties (intellect, imagination, memory, and sense perception) is dependent on the will.

I see my project as part of a certain trend in Cartesian Studies attempting to

develop a more inclusive interpretation of Descartes' views and their place in the history of philosophy.¹ I believe such a study will fill a gap in the existing secondary literature on Descartes, as recent commentators touch on this issue in passing or just in part. For instance, Husain Sarkar argues that Descartes says "disproportionately little" about the will given its enormous importance in his system (Sarkar 249). In this dissertation I will situate the will in our mental economy as conceived by Descartes and I will show that it is the will that bridges the gap between the theoretical and the practical spheres. My argument can best be outlined through a summary of the individual chapters composing my dissertation.

Chapter I is an outline of Descartes' theory of mind. I begin by saying a few things about mind in general followed by a characterization of the intellect in general. Then I distinguish between a broad and two narrow senses of intellect. In the broad sense the intellect is the faculty of ideas; in the first narrow sense, the intellect is the faculty of deduction and it can be helped or hindered by the other faculties of the mind (e.g. imagination, memory). Finally, the functioning of the intellect in both its broad and narrow sense is made possible by the intellect as light of nature; the light of nature is the intellect in the second narrow sense. The light of nature contains innate ideas which regulate all thought. Having presented the way the intellect works, I turn to the will and its features. The will provides attitudes towards the ideas of the intellect.

¹ Representative of this trend is Lilli Alanen's *Descartes's Concept of Mind*. She describes her intentions as follows: "Descartes's conception of mind or thought is remarkably broad- yet largely due to a long standing interest in his epistemological views, attention has been almost uniquely centered on the intellect- on the mind as a purely thinking thing- and its role in the pursuit of knowledge. The ambition of this book is to correct the current picture of Descartes's view of the mental by drawing attention to aspects that others have largely ignored" (Alanen 2003, 1). While Alanen focuses on the passions and the concept of embodied intentionality I will concentrate on the will.

In Chapter II I show that the will pertains to the essence of the mind: in *Meditation II* when Descartes spells out what being a thinking thing involves, he mentions willing, affirming, denying. I argue that willing is not on equal footing with other types of thought (like imagining, sense perception and pure thought) but that it is on equal footing with awareness. Willing is not just an object of awareness, whenever we are aware of something we are also willing something. I make my case for willing as part of the essence of the Cartesian mind by bringing to light the role of the will at all the key junctures of the *Meditations*. I identify four such junctures: the introduction of the *cogito*, the assertion of the pivotal role of clear and distinct ideas, the arguments for God's existence, and the claim that we have a propensity to believe that our ideas of sensible things come from those things.

In Chapter III I briefly present the three types of freedom of the will Descartes works with (freedom of spontaneity, freedom of indifference, and freedom of perversity). I maintain that Descartes needs a threefold concept of freedom because he works with two separate models of control, one based on the principle of alternative possibilities and another based on agent causation. Next, I tackle the strange distinction that Descartes introduces in the 2nd letter to Mesland between acts of will *before* they are elicited and acts of will *after* they are elicited. I argue that Descartes introduces this distinction as a way of distinguishing between beliefs and actions arrived at accidentally and beliefs and actions for which we can be praised or blamed. Next, I test the coherence of Descartes' threefold conception of freedom of the will by applying it to particular cases (e.g.

hyperbolic doubt, the wax example, and imagination). I will conclude that Descartes' complex treatment of freedom is due to the complexity of the subject matter, and, although not devoid of difficulties, it is cogent and interesting.

Chapter IV deals with Descartes' theory of judgment. I begin by presenting two main objections to Descartes' splitting judging into an act of the intellect and an act of the will: it has been argued (for instance by John Heil) that belief-formation is not a two-tiered process. Other authors (e.g. Hobbes) have contended that even if judging does involve two components, the will plays no role in this process. Next, I inquire why Descartes advances the controversial view that assent is an act of the will, not the intellect. Cartesian scholars have proposed several answers to this question: theological reasons (stemming from applying the free will defense to epistemic matters in an attempt to exonerate God from any guilt for error); reasons pertaining to the ontology of the mind and the structure of mental states as propositional attitudes; and epistemological reasons having to do with justification. I will argue that only taken together can these three kinds of reasons succeed in doing justice to the complexity of Descartes' views.

The role of the will in the practical sphere is the focus of Chapter V. While in the theoretical sphere it was the will in the mode of assent that was paramount, in the practical realm it is the will in the mode of desire that plays the most important role. First, I provide a characterization of the two senses of desire, passionate and volitional desire. Then, following the role and importance Descartes gives to passions during his creative life, I divide his moral views into three distinct stages: a "morality" based on instinct; the

provisional morality of the *Discourse*; and the final morality, contained in the *Passions* and the *Correspondence*, the apex of which is self-creation. Self-creation involves harmonizing one's emotions into a coherent structure and in so doing the agent is the ultimate source of the resulting "*affective repertoire*" (Williston 2003a, 309). An important aspect of controlling the passions is identifying their causes and the causal sequences they are involved in; this yields theoretical judgments. The fact that controlling the passions happens by way of their causes makes it clear that the will's practical function is dependent on the will's theoretical function. Self-creation involves virtues; virtues are dispositions of the will that arise as a result of the sublimation of passionate desires.

Chapter I

The Cartesian Theory of Mind- an outline

In the *Fifth Set of Objections* Gassendi contends that in saying that the mind is “a thing that thinks” Descartes fails to advance beyond already accepted views and contributes nothing to our understanding of the kind, consistency and organization of the thinking substance (AT VII, 266; CSM II, 186)². Even though Descartes dismisses Gassendi’s remarks as “a lot of grumblings” not requiring a reply (AT VII, 357; CSM II, 247), they could be interpreted in two ways: Gassendi could be charging Descartes with merely glossing over the very important issue of the mind’s nature and features or he could be questioning the originality of Descartes’ views on the matter.

In this chapter I will show that Gassendi’s accusations taken in the first sense are not quite warranted as Descartes does address the issues of the mind’s nature and functions in several of his works, even though the answers he provides are not always without difficulties. I present an outline of Descartes’ theory of mind and in so doing I draw significantly on Lilli Alananen’s *Descartes’s Concept of Mind* (2003). This chapter will have seven sections: I begin by saying a few things about mind in general followed by a characterization of the intellect in general. Then I distinguish between a broad and two narrow senses of intellect. In the broad sense the intellect is the faculty of ideas; in

² Parenthetical references to Descartes’ works use the following abbreviations:

AT: Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, eds., *Oeuvres de Descartes*, 2nd ed., 11 vols. (Paris, Vrin/C.N.R.S., 1974-86).

CSM: John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, trans., *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. I and II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

CSMK: John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny, trans., *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

the first narrow sense, the intellect is the faculty of deduction and it can be helped or hindered by the other faculties of the mind (e.g. imagination, memory). Finally, the functioning of the intellect in both its broad and narrow sense is made possible by the intellect in the second narrow sense, the light of nature. The latter contains innate ideas which regulate all thought. Having presented the way the intellect works, in section VI I turn to the will and its features. The main function of the will is to provide attitudes towards the ideas of the intellect. Section VII will consist of concluding remarks.

I. Main features of the mind

Descartes modifies the traditional scholastic understanding of the soul as tripartite (composed of a vegetative, a sensitive and a rational part) and retains the term “soul” exclusively for the rational aspect of the mind. In the *Discourse on Method* Descartes takes such a rational soul to be explanatorily necessary for an account of our linguistic and adapting abilities.³ The essence of this rational soul is thinking. Gassendi may have been aware of thinking as pertaining to the mind, however it is unlikely that his notion of thinking was the same as Descartes’, who construes it so broadly as to include sensing and imagining. The latter are not part of the essence of the mind as they are body-dependent. The soul is really distinct from the body but also substantially united with it. The faculties of the Cartesian soul are the ones traditionally attributed to all three parts composing the scholastic soul: intellect, will, imagination, memory and sense perception.

³ In *Part V* of the *Discourse on Method* Descartes states: “But it is not conceivable that such a machine [having the same form as the human body] should produce different arrangements of words so as to give an appropriately meaningful answer to whatever is said in its presence, as the dullest of men can do”. Then, Descartes contrasts acting “through understanding” with acting “from the disposition of organs”. He states: “For whereas reason is a universal instrument which can be used in all kinds of situations, these organs need some particular disposition for each particular action; hence it is for all practical purposes impossible for a machine to have enough different organs to make it act in all contingencies of life in the way in which our reason makes us act” (AT VI, 56; CSM I, 140).

Below I briefly present each of these faculties and the relations between them.

Descartes uses the terms “mind” and “soul” interchangeably even though in the *Geometrical Exposition* he claims to prefer “mind” to “soul”: “I use the term ‘mind’ rather than ‘soul’ since the word ‘soul’ is ambiguous and is often applied to something corporeal” (AT VII, 161; CSM II, 114). For him the soul is one, not made of parts: “For there is within us but one soul, and this soul has within it no diversity of parts: it is at once sensitive and rational too...” (AT XI, 364; CSM I, 346)⁴. Descartes relegates to the body and its mechanical functions many of the tasks traditionally attributed to the vegetative and sensitive parts of the soul:

In order to explain these functions [the digestion of food, nourishment and growth of the limbs, the reception by the external sense organs of different qualities, the internal movements of the appetites and passions, and the external movements of all the limbs], then it is not necessary to conceive of this machine as having any vegetative or sensitive soul or other principle of movement and life, apart from its blood and its spirits, which are agitated by the heat of the fire burning continuously in the heart- a fire which has the same nature as all the fires that occur in inanimate bodies (AT XI, 202; CSM I, 108)⁵.

In *Meditation II* Descartes claims that nothing corporeal belongs to the nature of the mind; ⁶ in *Meditation VI* he goes on to propose a substantial union between mind and

⁴ see also AT XI, 379; CSM I, 352

⁵ In *Treatise on Man* from which this passage is taken Descartes states that taking the human body to be a machine is just a hypothesis. However, in the *Discourse* he refers the reader back to this work without any mention of the hypothetical character of the explanations of the structure and functioning of the human body. The idea of the mechanical functioning of the human body is taken for granted in the rest of Descartes’ works. For instance, in a letter to Regius dating from May 1641 Descartes calls the view that attributes 3 parts to the soul “heretical” and explains that: “There is only one *soul* in human beings, the *rational soul*; for no actions can be reckoned human unless they depend on reason. The *vegetative power* and the *power of moving the body*, which are called the *vegetative* and the *sensory souls* in plants and animals, exist also in human beings; but in the case of human beings they should not be called *souls*, because they are not the first principle of their actions, and they belong to a totally different genus from the *rational soul*. The *vegetative power* in human beings is nothing but a certain arrangement of the parts of the body ...” (AT III, 372; CSMK 182).

⁶ In the *Passions of the Soul* Descartes provides the following criteria for distinguishing between body and soul: “anything we experience as being in us, and which we see can also exist in wholly inanimate bodies, must be attributed only to our body. On the other hand, anything in us which we cannot conceive in any

body, a union much closer than that of a pilot to her ship and manifesting itself most prominently through our passions and emotions. It is a contentious issue among commentators what this union entails in terms of the functioning of the mind: it may entail that, as Descartes himself sometimes states and as Margaret Wilson argued, even in our current embodied state, the pure intellect makes no use of and is completely separated from both the body and any mental but body-dependent faculties (Wilson 181). Or, it may mean that in a disembodied state it would still be possible for the intellect to function but given our embodiment, the intellect is closely conjoined to the body so that for every intellectual and volitional process (like the internal emotions) there is a corresponding movement of the animal spirits at least in the brain, if not affecting the whole body. Given Descartes' statement in the *Passions* that "each volition is naturally joined to some movement of the [pineal] gland" (AT XI, 32; CSM I, 344; a. 44), I think the latter alternative is more in keeping with Descartes' overall project.

Descartes shares with his Scholastic predecessors the division of faculties (e.g. intellect, will, imagination, memory, sensation- mentioned in the *Rules*) and emotions. In the *Meditations* Descartes also mentions the faculty of judgment. However, these faculties are not viewed as different kinds of soul but as modes, as modifications of a single mental substance (Alanen 2003, 79). For Descartes the two main faculties (potentialities or functions) of the soul are: the intellect -the passivity of the mind - and

way as capable of belonging to a body must be attributed to our soul" (AT XI, 329; CSM I, 329; a. 3). According to this passage, the soul is discovered as the anti-body.

the will -the mind's activity (AT III, 372; CSMK182)⁷. The intellect, also called the faculty of knowledge, has to do with reasons while the will, also called the faculty of choice, has to do with inclinations. These two faculties interact: the lack of reasons in the intellect goes hand in hand with indifference in the will (AT VII, 59; CSM II, 41).

Therefore, for Descartes, the mind is that component of ourselves which enables us to talk, adapt and be circumstance-responsive. The mind is unitary, incorporeal but united to a body that Descartes construes in a mechanical manner. Its essence is thinking and it possesses several faculties, intellect, imagination, sensory perception, memory and will.

II. Main features of the intellect

I start my inquiry into the faculties of the Cartesian soul with the intellect as all the other faculties are in some way dependent on the intellect: the will is dependent on the intellect to provide the contents for its affirmations or denials; imagination, memory and sense perception are dependent on the intellect in that, as *Meditation VI* tells us, they all presuppose an intellectual act as part of their definition⁸: in order for them to qualify as mental states or processes they have to make use of an idea, the mind has to direct itself to the part of the brain where the animal spirits have carved the paths constituting

⁷The same point is made in several other places in Descartes' works and sometimes indirectly: in article 17 of the *Passions* (AT XI, 342; CSM I, 335) Descartes does not explicitly mention the intellect but refers to "various perceptions or modes of knowledge" which I take to be modes of the intellect because the intellect is described as the "faculty of knowledge" in the *Meditations* (AT VII, 56; CSM II, 39).

⁸"I find in myself faculties for certain special modes of thinking, namely imagination and sensory perception. Now I can clearly and distinctly understand myself as a whole without these faculties; but I cannot, conversely, understand these faculties without me, that is without an intellectual substance to inhere in. This is because there is an intellectual act included in their essential definition" (AT VII, 78; CSM II, 54).

the corporeal bases of these psychophysical states.

Descartes sometimes equates “mind” with “intellect” and “reason”. In *Meditation II* when the meditator is trying to decide what follows from the *cogito* Descartes states: “At present I am not admitting anything except what is necessarily true. I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks; that is *I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect or reason-* words whose meaning I have been ignorant of until now” (AT VII, 27; CSM II, 18- my emphasis). I will identify the general features of the intellect; then I distinguish between a broad and two narrow senses of the intellect and analyze each.

In the broad sense the intellect is just the mind that can be imprinted upon by the senses and by God. We thus obtain two of the three types of ideas⁹ that Descartes mentions: the adventitious ones (usually produced by the activity of the senses) and the innate ones stamped on our minds by God. In the case of adventitious ideas the mind is passive. In the case of innate ideas the mind is passive while they remain latent but some activity on its part is needed if they are to begin having an active part in the mind’s economy. The third type of ideas that Descartes mentions is constituted by factitious ideas. These are put together by the intellect itself performing certain operations (e.g. deductions, generalizations, etc), by the intellect aided by the imagination or by the imagination alone (e.g. sirens, hippogriffs).

Descartes views the intellect as immaterial; as different only in degree not kind

⁹ Ideas are defined as the form of a given thought the immediate perception of which makes me aware of the thought. I will talk in detail about ideas and their relation to the intellect in the section dealing with the broad sense of the intellect, below.

from the divine intellect; as finite but perfect of its kind; as inclined towards the truth and as passive (but only with qualifications). It is also devoid of parts. Its different faculties are not parts of the mind but the whole of the mind performing certain functions: “As for the faculties of willing, of understanding, of sensory perception and so on, these cannot be termed parts of the mind, since it is one and the same mind that wills, and understands and has sensory perceptions” (AT VII, 86; CSM II, 59). The intellect’s function is performing acts of perception, e.g. sensory perception, imagination and pure understanding¹⁰: “Now all that the intellect does is to enable me to perceive the ideas which are subjects for possible judgments” (AT VII, 56; CSM II, 39).

Thus the intellect as a faculty is immaterial and works with incorporeal objects. In *Meditation IV* imaginable things are distinguished from those that are the “objects of the intellect alone and are totally separate from matter” (AT VII, 53; CSM II, 37). In *Meditation II*, the intellect is the one performing the “mental scrutiny” of the wax. Mental scrutiny is distinguished from “vision or touch or imagination” and categorized as either imperfect and confused or clear and distinct (AT VII, 31; CSM II, 21). Descartes concludes: “I now know that even bodies are not strictly perceived by the senses or the faculty of the imagination but by the intellect alone, and that this perception derives not from their being touched or seen but from their being understood” (AT VII, 34; CSM II, 22).

The difference between the human and the divine intellect is one of degree not of kind. Descartes uses the arithmetical analogy of a number raised to the second or fourth

¹⁰ (AT VIII A, 17; CSM I, 204)

power versus an infinite number to clarify how our intellect and all other attributes that we have in common with God compare to their divine counterparts (AT VII, 137; CSM II, 98). However, in humans understanding and willing are distinct mental acts (as pertaining to different faculties) while in God understanding and willing are one single act. The distinction between understanding and willing is a modal distinction in us, but only a conceptual one in God's case. While it is possible for us to entertain an idea without assenting to it or to make mistakes in assenting to an idea, these are not options applicable to God. We need a standard against which to measure to truth or falsity of a proposition and we also need the proposition prior to taking a stand on it. God, as Descartes explains in the *Sixth Set of Replies*, created both the standard and the proposition: he willed that a certain proposition obtain and this divine act of will brought about its truth (AT VII, 432; CSM II, 291).

The human intellect is a finite faculty as there are countless things that fall beyond its reach (as such is the nature of a created intellect- AT VII, 60; CSM II, 42), but it is a faculty free of defect, perfect of its kind (like all the faculties bestowed on us by a veracious, benevolent God). The intellectual faculty that God endowed us with cannot but tend towards the truth (AT VII, 146; CSM II, 104)¹¹:

It follows from this [the fact that God is supremely truthful and the giver of all light] that the light of nature or faculty of knowledge which God gave us can never encompass any object which is not true in so far as it is indeed encompassed by this faculty, that is, in so far as it is clearly and distinctly perceived. For God would deserve to be called a deceiver if the faculty which he gave us was so distorted that it mistook the false for the true, even when using it properly (AT VIII A, 16; CSM I, 203).

However, Descartes sometimes mentions errors that we make "by a defect of our

¹¹ The intellect is inclined to the true (AT VIII A, 21; CSM I, 207)

intellect” (e.g. attributing to God individual attributes without the simplicity and unity that holds them together- AT VII, 137; CSM II, 98). The defect in question could simply be the fact that our intellect is finite and prone to errors of omission, not to ones of misrepresentation. This would not contradict the *Meditations*’ contention that “since my understanding comes from God, everything that I understand, I undoubtedly understand correctly” (AT VII, 58; CSM II, 40).

In the *Meditations* the intellect perceives ideas that are subject for possible judgments and thus is passive. In the *Principles* the operations of the intellect are generally called perceptions. According to the *Passions* (AT XI. 342; CSM I, 335) we have to equate the intellect with the passive faculty of perception. However, in the three grades of sensory response passage from the *Sixth Set of Replies*, Descartes takes the intellect to be an active power as it makes rational calculations about the size, shape and distance of a stick. He also seems to be taking the intellect to be the one forming judgments: when we make a judgment for the first time we attribute it to the intellect (AT VII, 437-458; CSM II, 295). The intellect is the one that judges in the *Rules*, as well (AT X, 420; CSM I, 45). In other passages from the *Rules* intuition and deduction are described as actions of the intellect (AT X, 368; CSM I, 14).

How can a passive faculty have actions? Is Descartes contradicting himself in asserting in some places that the intellect is passive and in others that it is active? This is an important aspect of Descartes’ theory of mind as the intellect represents the passivity of the mind and the will is the mind’s activity (AT III, 372; CSMK 182); they are

modally distinct, they represent different modifications of the mental substance. However, if both the intellect and the will are active, there does not seem to be any reliable way of distinguishing between the two. This, in turn, would affect Descartes' whole theory of mind, and, by extension, his whole epistemological project. There are three ways we could solve this difficulty: either (1) by distinguishing with Vere Chappell between a loose and a strict sense of the term "act"; or between a loose way of talking about actions, beside the technical one (i.e. by drawing a distinction between "actions" and "acts" of the mind). Or, (2) by taking Descartes to have changed his views of the intellect over time. Or, (3) by drawing a distinction between different senses of the term intellect. I will analyze all these three alternatives below.

(1) According to Chappell, "act in [Descartes'] writings has two different senses, in this case one broader or looser, the other narrow and strict. It is, then, only in the strict sense that volitions alone, and not all perceptions, are acts of the mind" (Chappell 1986, 182). Chappell points to Descartes' distinguishing between *actus* and *actio*: *actus* is synonymous with operation, event, occurrence and applies to all thoughts (Chappell 1986, 181); while *actio* usually conveys "the strong sense of 'performance by an agent' (Chappell 1986, 196)¹². Similarly to Chappell, I will take every mental faculty to have acts (e.g. particular ideas are acts of the intellect; particular imaginings are acts of imagination, etc.), I will distinguish between "acts"

¹² "There is some tendency on Descartes' part to use the word '*actio*' when he wants to convey the strong sense of 'performance by an agent', and to reserve '*actus*' for the broader meaning. See the letters to Regius dated May 1641 (AT III, 372; K, 102) and December 1641 (?) (AT III, 454-455) for examples of '*actio*' and the letter for Arnauld, 29 July 1648 (AT V, 221; K, 235) for one of '*actus*', used in this way. There are a few passages, however, in which '*actio*' too seems to have the broad sense; see, e.g. *Meditation II*, 26; HR I, 151" (Chappell 1986, 196).

of a given faculty and “actions” of the mind. Only volitions are “actions” of the mind: only volitions are both mental acts and mental actions.

The criterion of activity consists in whether or not two opposing mental events of the same kind split the soul if happening simultaneously and with regard to the same object. Given the above conditions, only volitions threaten the unity of the soul so it is only volitions that are called actions. We can entertain several ideas at the same time without mental unity being threatened. However, if we are to obtain correct results in our reasoning we are advised to limit our intellectual field to as few propositions as possible thus insuring a fuller encompassing by the mind (which facilitates intuition). We are thus advised to treat ideas like volitions: one (or as few as possible) at a time¹³.

Another possibility is to take the intellect as an active faculty but to allow for mental activity to come in degrees. In this case the will would be more active than the intellect especially because of its influence on conduct and bodily actions. Perhaps Descartes used the term “active” only in reference to the highest degree of mental activity, to volitions, without intending to deny that the intellect could exhibit this feature but to much lesser degree. The difference between the two alternatives proposed above consists in what the criterion for activity is taken to be: an ontological consideration pertaining to what factors have or lack the ability to split an immaterial substance, on the one hand, versus motivational considerations that constitute the starting point of external effects.

¹³ However, in Descartes’ moral theory we are advised to treat desires like (theoretical) beliefs: change desires to fit the world not the world to fit desires.

(2) The second alternative is to say that Descartes simply changed his mind over time or that he unsystematically used any meaning that would on a given occasion suit his purposes. Descartes refers to intuition and deduction as operations of the intellect as early as the *Rules* and in the *Meditations* he combines references to both the activity and the passivity of the intellect. However, in the *Passions* and the *Principles*, Descartes mostly refers to the intellect as passive. Therefore, Descartes' views on the intellect could have evolved from a faculty that has both active and passive functions (in the *Rules* and the *Meditations*) to one that is passive because the active aspects have been attributed to another faculty, i.e. the will (in the *Passions* and the *Principles*).

Yet, as Kenny notices¹⁴, the will cannot be the power that conjoins different ideas in propositions describing states of affairs that do not obtain because assent is described as the main function of the will; as it is possible to connect certain ideas without assenting to the result in question, the connection has to be the work of a faculty different than the will. This interpretation of the will as having a joining function that goes together with its assenting function seems to be confirmed by a passage from the *Rules* where Descartes describes the will as a type of impulse that joins together simple ideas into complex ones, while the whole joining process is said to seldom be a source of error (AT X, 424; CSM I, 47). I take this to mean that most of the time when the will joins

¹⁴ “But it is not clear, in Descartes' system, what faculty is responsible for linking together non-corporeal ideas which do not belong together in reality: e.g. what links the ideas together in the idea that mind is a rarefied body? In Gassendi, one might think, it is the will that links these ideas together, just as it is the will which judges the composite idea so formed to be true. But this will not apply in the case of Descartes, whose will makes no such judgment, and who yet in order to reject the judgment has to put the two ideas together in the sentence ‘The mind is not a rarefied body’” (Kenny 1972, 14).

together several ideas into a complex one, the will also assents to the resulting complex idea and the judgment thus obtained is most of the time true. Thus, if it is not the will that puts together ideas that constitute the basis for false judgments, the only remaining alternative is to take the intellect as the power responsible for actively connecting together at least some ideas.

However, just because in the *Rules* Descartes takes the will's joining function to be truth-preserving and thus needs to allow the intellect to actively combine ideas that give occasion for error, does not mean that he endorses the same view in his later works. That this is still his view in the *Meditations* we learn from the *First Set of Replies* where Descartes states: “[f]or I can see quite well that *this idea has been put together by my own intellect which has linked together all bodily perfections*” (AT VII, 118; CSM II, 84- my emphasis).¹⁵ Therefore a position that depicts the intellect as wholly passive is untenable.

Finally, the alternative that Descartes switches from an active to a passive intellect depending on the context and situation (with this change of mind being not a question of emphasis but an intention of excluding the opposite aspect) should only be accepted as a last resort, when all the other alternatives have failed to stand up to scrutiny. Given the central role the notion of intellect plays in all of Descartes' works, lack of consistency in this respect would have completely undermined his own

¹⁵ In the passage from the *First Set of Replies* just quoted Descartes attempts to defend his version of the ontological argument by drawing a distinction between possible and necessary existence. Possible existence belongs to everything we clearly and distinctly perceive, even to those ideas that we ourselves put together; while necessary existence belongs to God alone. It is impossible to attribute necessary existence to anything else, for instance to a perfect body because a perfect body is just an idea put together by our imperfect intellects.

philosophical and scientific efforts (as science is supposed to be erected on philosophical foundations). However, below I will show that Descartes *is* consistent in his use of the term intellect in both its passive and active senses.

(3) There doesn't seem to be enough textual evidence to decide whether Descartes operates with a distinction between "acts" and "actions" or whether mental activity comes in degree with the term "action" being reserved for the peak of such activity, i.e. volitions. It may also be the case that Descartes uses the terms "active" and "passive" having in mind different systems of reference. Because attitudes, which pertain to the will, are taken to be the paradigm of mental activity, whenever the intellect is compared to the will, the intellect is "passive" as it works with ideas, not with attitudes. However, different stages can be identified and compared within the economy of the intellect; a distinction between a broad and a narrow sense of the term "intellect" can help us here: only in its broad sense (as a faculty of awareness or faculty of ideas) is the intellect passive.

Within this broad sense of the term "intellect" only innate ideas, while dormant, are entirely passive. All the other ideas involve some degree of activity as, taken materially, they are acts of the mind. (I will return to the interplay between ideas taken materially and ideas taken objectively, between mental acts and mental contents, below). In a narrow sense the intellect is an active power with operations of its own. This distinction is completely in keeping with Descartes's statement: "[T]he power through which we know things in the strict sense is purely spiritual... In all these functions, the

cognitive power is sometimes passive, sometimes active; sometimes resembling the seal, sometimes the wax” (AT X, 415; CSM I, 42). Finally, the intellect is the faculty of clear and distinct ideas, the light of nature.

Intellect qua faculty of deduction is more active than intellect qua faculty of awareness and intellect qua repository of dormant innate ideas but passive, when compared to the will. The intellect always undergoes something when compared to the will but it sometimes undertakes and does things when compared to itself at a previous stage. Moreover, whenever the mind qua intellect undertakes and does things (e.g. performs deductions), intellectual activity is initiated and maintained by an act of the will; intellectual activity is dependent on volitional activity.

This threefold distinction between intellect in the broad sense, intellect in the narrow sense and light of nature allows us to solve the difficulty that Kenny identifies when it comes to Gassendi’s position that the mind is a rarefied body (AT VII, 376; CSM II, 259). While Gassendi takes “the mind is a rarefied body” to be a true proposition, Descartes considers it false and does not assent to it. However, the connection between ideas of mind and rarefied body still needs to be made even by Descartes in order for the proposition to be put together and subsequently rejected. As assent is the main function of the will and assent is absent in Descartes’ case, the will is not the one forming the proposition “the mind is a rarefied body”. The solution is to make the intellect in the mode of supposition¹⁶ (or “conjecture” as Descartes calls it in the *Rules*¹⁷) the faculty

¹⁶ I will return to supposition as an act of the intellect that presupposes an act of will in Chapter II when dealing with the problem of doubt.

accomplishing the conjoining of the ideas of mind and rarefied body. I take supposition to be one way in which the intellect in the narrow sense operates.

The intellect joins together ideas of mind and rarefied body to form the proposition “mind is a rarefied body”; this proposition is put forward for an examination of the intellect but it is neither assented to, nor yet denied. As Descartes notices in the *Rules* and in the *Fifth Set of Replies*¹⁸ there are two conditions that need to be met in order for the results of the intellect’s operations to constitute the basis for true judgments: the component ideas have to be clearly and distinctly perceived and the actual linking of the components has to be correct (AT X, 410; CSM I, 39). Thus it is not enough for the ideas of mind and of rarefied body to be clearly and distinctly perceived; they have to be correctly linked as well. Appealing to the light of nature Descartes realizes that in this case the components of the proposition “the mind is a rarefied body” are not correctly linked, therefore he rejects the proposition.

I conclude that, along with the will, the intellect is the mind’s most important faculty.¹⁹ It is immaterial, different only in degree from God’s intellect, finite but perfect of its kind and inclined towards the truth. Descartes identifies passivity as the specific

¹⁷ “Nothing that we put together in this way [by conjecture] really deceives us, so long as we judge it to be merely probable, and never assert it to be true; not for that matter does it make us any wiser” (AT X, 424; CSM I, 47-48).

¹⁸ AT VII, 377; CSM II, 259

¹⁹ I characterize intellect and will as the “main faculties” of the mind as, taken in a broad sense, the intellect is the faculty of ideas and all other faculties involve ideas: the will is dependent on ideas as contents for its affirmations and denials and the other faculties of the mind (imagination, memory, sense perception) involve an idea as part of their essential definition. I will have more to say about intellect as the faculty of ideas in section III of this chapter. I take the will to be the second of the mind’s “main faculties” because, as I will argue in Chapter II, it pertains to the essence of the mind: without willing there would not be thinking.

difference setting the intellect apart from the other mental faculties, and especially from the will. Intellectual passivity comes in degrees: with respect to innate ideas the intellect is fully passive while they remain in a dispositional state; with respect to simple natures which are objects of intuition, the intellect is active. The same applies to components of deductive chains. As light of nature the intellect can be more or less passive depending on whether the rules of thinking it contains are deliberately or implicitly applied. I will now analyze the three senses of the intellect that have emerged in this analysis starting with the intellect in the broad sense.

III. Intellect in the broad sense

Taken in a broad sense the intellect is passive, it is simply a repository of ideas. I equate the intellect in the broad sense with the faculty of ideas taken in general and with the faculty of awareness.²⁰ As ideas are representational, being described as “as if images of things” (AT VII, 37; CSM II, 25), I will investigate the relation between the representational character of ideas (their intentionality) and awareness. I will argue that for Descartes both awareness and intentionality are characteristics of the mental while not being part of a definition of thought and that they are interdependent. As thought is a primitive notion, it is not further analyzable into more elementary components: intentionality and awareness only flesh out what thinking involves.

I start by briefly presenting Descartes’ theory of ideas; then I analyze Descartes’ concept of awareness and link it with some contemporary theories. Clarifying the Cartesian concept of awareness is important for the purpose of this dissertation because

²⁰ Below I will argue that only in a very narrow sense can the intellect be equated with the faculty of clear and distinct ideas, as Kenny wants to do (Kenny 1972, 14).

Descartes takes thoughts as objects of awareness to pertain to the essence of the mind. Since, in Chapter II, I will argue that willing pertains to the essence of the Cartesian mind, it is important to first get a clear understanding of awareness as the specific aspect of the mental that Descartes explicitly takes to constitute the essence of the mind.

“Idea” is defined as “the form of any given thought, immediate perception of which makes us aware of that thought” (AT VII, 160; CSM II, 113). Ideas can come from different sources: “I use the term ‘idea’ to apply to what is established by reasoning as well as anything else that is perceived in any manner whatsoever” (AT VII, 185; CSM II, 130). In *Meditation III* Descartes takes “ideas” and “thoughts” to be synonymous (AT VII, 35; CSM II, 24). In the *Preface to the Reader* Descartes distinguishes between ideas taken materially (as operations of the intellect) and ideas taken objectively (as the things represented by those operations - AT VII, 8; CSM II, 7). Ideas taken objectively divide into innate, adventitious and self-created. Beside ideas properly so called we also encounter ideas that have various “additional forms” (e.g. volitions, emotions and judgments). I will also say a few things about each of the categories of ideas mentioned here.²¹

Vere Chappell characterizes ideas taken materially and objectively as follows:

An idea in the material sense of the word is a mental *act* or event, something that occurs in the mind. An idea in the objective sense, by contrast, is something upon which the mind is directed, a mental *object*... Ideas_m and ideas_o, furthermore are related, in that the latter are things represented by the former... [Ideas_m and ideas_o] are not distinct entities at

²¹ The category of innate ideas will be described in the part of this chapter dealing with the intellect in the narrowest sense possible (i.e. the light of nature); the adventitious ideas make a brief appearance here as the kind of ideas that can be materially false; the factitious ideas are the topic of the section on the intellect in the narrow sense (i.e. the faculty of intuition and deduction). Judgments are the subject of Chapter IV; while emotions will be addressed in Chapter V.

all- not one individual thing and then a second different one- but are rather one thing on the one hand, and an aspect or component of that same thing on the other. The idea_m and the idea_o only differ from one another, to use Descartes' own expression, by a 'distinction of reason' (Chappell 1986, 178-179).

Ideas taken materially have formal reality as they are just modifications of the mental substance. Ideas taken objectively, on the other hand, have only objective reality. Objective reality is the kind of being things have when contained in the intellect.²²

In agreement with Alanen²³ and contra Chappell²⁴, I take seriously Descartes' statements according to which there is a sense in which all that goes on in the mind (including volitions) are ideas²⁵. In this sense it seems that taking the intellect in the broad sense as the faculty of ideas means reverting to Descartes' position in *Meditation II* where intellect and mind were equated. Later distinctions and qualifications (like the distinction between the intellect as passive i.e. the faculty of perceptions and will as active i.e. the faculty of volitions) qualify but do not contradict this broadest possible view of the intellect (mind). For instance in the *Passions*, Descartes maintains that because we cannot will anything without at the same time perceiving that we are willing it, volitions can be called passions. However, they are not so called as names are given according to what is nobler and, in keeping with tradition, volitions are nobler than

²² Two main views of objective reality have been put forth: a mental entity versus a feature of the thing as thinkable, that by which we know versus that which is known. These two views have been endorsed by Chappell and Alanen respectively. For Alanen: "Objective reality is the represented reality of the thing itself and cannot, therefore, belong to ideas as representational acts, that is to ideas taken materially as acts of the mind... in thinking of the sun it is not my thought that has objective reality but the sun when thought of" (Alanen 2003, 130).

²³ Alanen 2003, 114

²⁴ The reason Chappell denies volitions the status of ideas is his emphasis on passages, like the *Preface to the Reader* (AT VII, 8; CSM II, 7), where Descartes characterizes ideas taken materially as operations of the intellect, which Chappell explicates in terms of passivity of the mind (Chappell 1986, 195-196).

²⁵ "I claim that we have ideas not only of all that is in our intellect, but also of all that is in the will. For we cannot will anything without knowing that we will it, nor could we know this except by means of an idea; but I do not claim that the idea is different from the act itself" (AT III, 295; CSMK, 172).

perceptions (AT XI, 339; CSM I, 334; a. 19).

Having established that all that goes on in the mind falls under the category of idea broadly construed, I now turn my attention to the further divisions of ideas. They divide into as-if-images of things ("it is only in these cases that the term 'idea' is strictly appropriate"- AT VII, 37; CSM II, 25), and ideas that have various additional forms (emotions or judgments- AT VII, 37; CSM II, 25). Ideas properly so called do not represent by copying their objects: "Ideas in the human mind are as it were images because, like the divine exemplars, they represent real or possible beings: in both cases their representative function is explained through some kind of likeness between the thing and the idea. But it is not, Descartes insists, a pictorial likeness that could be copied materially" (Alanen 2003, 119).

As we saw above, ideas taken objectively have different degrees of objective reality but they never lack it completely. When an idea is not only caused by something but also represents its cause²⁶, the degree of objective reality an idea has is directly proportional to the formal reality of its cause: ideas representing substances have more objective reality than ideas representing modes and ideas representing infinite substances have more objective reality than ideas representing finite substances. The more objective reality an idea contains the more the will is inclined to assent to the idea in question. This shows a connection between the degree of objective reality of an idea and the truth or falsity of the corresponding judgments. The falsity thus obtained is formal falsity and

²⁶ For instance, my idea of a red apple could be caused by my seeing a red apple or it could be caused by God. In the former case, I have an idea of the red apple caused by the red apple; in the latter case, I have an idea of the red apple caused by God.

applies to judgments only.

Material falsity applies to ideas only. As I will take all ideas in the proper sense of the term to be representational and to have some (no matter how minute) degree of objective reality, we need another way of accounting for material falsity than the one consisting in taking materially false ideas to completely lack objective reality. In *Meditation III*, material falsity is introduced as characterizing ideas representing non-things as things (AT VII, 43; CSM II, 30). Lilli Alanen explains this notion: "An idea is materially false if it can provide subject matter for error. To provide subject matter for error is the same as to provide subject matter (give occasion) to false judgments" (Alanen 2003, 158).

Ideas cannot be true or false as long as we don't "refer them to anything else": "for whether it is a goat or a chimera that I am imagining, it is just as true that I imagine the former as the latter" (AT VII, 37; CSM II, 26). Formal falsity arises only when an additional form is added to the form an idea already has by the very fact that it is an act of the mind:

In the context of the *Meditations*, referring is not an alternative way of representing but part and parcel of the representational act, that is, it is one of the 'various additional forms' ideas can take as formally real acts of thinking, namely volitions or emotions, and affirmations or denial (that is, judgments). Sensations too clearly belong on this list. Referring an idea to its apparent cause takes different forms depending on the mode of representing considered, on whether the thought is a volition, sensation, emotion or judgment. It is in referring the content of my idea, which in itself is without falsity, to a presumed particular cause that falsity and error arise (Alanen 2003, 187).

I will take all ideas to be representational²⁷. However, as the concept of thought that Descartes works with is so multifaceted and as thought and idea are used interchangeably, the representationality involved in each idea has to match the kind of thought under scrutiny. Intentionality differs for the diverse types of ideas: pure thoughts represent differently than sensations and sensations differently than emotions, moods, etc. Pure thoughts are propositional and represent either the natures of things (immaterial and material) or laws of thinking. Sensations signal the presence of external things to us; while passions represent which external things are beneficial or detrimental to us and in what manners²⁸. By taking this position I am agreement with Lilli Alanen who states:

[M]y view is that even sensations instantiate some kind of prereflective intentionality, in advising the mind of the presence and changes in external bodies acting on the senses. If having an object is essential to phenomena that are intentional, emotions surely meet these conditions...[Cartesian emotions] instantiate, I will argue, a special kind of embodied intentionality (Alanen 2003, 171).

All ideas are about some thing or other and I always know both that I have them and what they are about, although their object may be grasped only very obscurely; intentionality and awareness are characteristic of all thoughts. For Descartes, we become aware of a thought by directly perceiving its form which is called “idea”. Awareness²⁹

²⁷ “Unlike some recent commentators [e.g. Margaret Wilson (1978) , Calvin Normore (1986)], I take representation to be a general feature of all ideas: they all represent or are about something even when, as with sensory ideas, there is no telling what thing they are about. Sensory ideas do not lack objective reality but rather are so obscure that their objective reality cannot always be distinguished from their material or formal reality as mental acts. But however obscure and confused they may be, they are still ideas in Descartes’s restricted sense of the term” (Alanen 2003, 148).

²⁸ “Sensations function as signs, and as such indicate something that we need to be aware of and cannot figure out in any other way...Sensations and other thoughts caused by the body represent whatever they represent by virtue of a contingent quasi-causal connection instituted by nature, but they have no determinate, distinctly conceivable content that could be analyzed in terms of purely mental or purely material modes-the only ones we have a distinct grasp of” (Alanen 2003, 163).

²⁹ I will use the terms “consciousness” and “awareness” interchangeably as Descartes does not have much by way of a theory of consciousness taken as a technical term by contemporary theories of consciousness. Awareness is for him a kind of immediate “knowledge” that is an intrinsic feature of all mental states and processes.

cannot be a part of the definition of “thought” as this is one of the innate ideas mentioned in *Meditation III*, the understanding of which “seems to derive simply from my own nature” (AT VII, 38; CSM II, 26). In the *Principles*, “thought” is numbered among the simple natures that are self-evident and only rendered more obscure by logical definitions (AT VIII A, 8; CSM I, 195-196).

Descartes is (in)famous for having maintained that there is nothing in the mind of which we are not in some way aware. The awareness in question is a type of reflexive consciousness and applies to all mental acts. As in the case of intentionality, Descartes’ concept of awareness has to match the different kinds of thought he identifies. In order to account for the way we are aware of innate ideas while they remain at the dispositional stage and for those ideas that leave no memory traces³⁰, Descartes works with “a very attenuated sense of consciousness” (Alanen 2003, 83).³¹

Alanen argues that for Descartes “awareness” was used mostly with the sense of “immediate knowledge” that enjoys transparency and a kind of limited incorrigibility.³²

³⁰ As is the case with thoughts that occur in early childhood when the brain has such a soft structure that traces cannot last and thus memories cannot be formed, although the thoughts themselves are conscious while occurring.

³¹ I think there are five types of consciousness common to both Descartes’ theory of mind and to contemporary theories, taking into account the types of objects that we can be aware of: extra-mental and mental objects. Our awareness of extra-mental objects can be phenomenal consciousness and access consciousness (in roughly Ned Block’s sense of the term as outlined in “On a Confusion about the Function of Consciousness”, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, vol. 18, no.2, 1995). Our awareness of mental objects can be, going from simple to complex: reflexive consciousness, reflective consciousness (additional thoughts bearing on first-order thoughts) and/or awareness of a self (apparent mostly in Descartes’ practical writings and of which I treat in Chapter V where I attribute to Descartes a morality of self-creation).

³² “[A]s soon as I think of something, I am noninferentially aware of what I am presently thinking about... this certainty does not entail a full epistemological transparency and incorrigibility of thoughts... As for transparency, it is no doubt characteristic of some thoughts, notably of clear and distinct propositional thoughts. But clearness and distinctness represent a norm or an ideal, not a common property of thinking. A large part of our conscious thoughts are obscure and confused, yet we are aware of them and cannot doubt

By taking Cartesian awareness to be a kind of immediate knowledge Alanen places it in the category of “reflexive consciousness”:

Of the various features discussed by contemporary philosophers as characteristic of the mental, the closest to the kind of awareness accompanying thought in Descartes’s wide sense is the reflexivity that Harry Frankfurt takes to be distinctive of consciousness and that he describes as a secondary awareness of primary differentiating responses to stimuli. ‘To hear a sound consciously, rather than to respond to it unconsciously, involves being aware of hearing it or being aware of the sound as heard’... ‘the self-consciousness in question is a sort of *immanent reflexivity* in virtue of which every instance of being conscious grasps not only that of which it is an awareness but also the awareness of it’ (Alanen 2003, 100).

In *Identification and Wholeheartedness* Frankfurt acknowledges that there are not two distinct acts of awareness: first the awareness of the sound and then the awareness of the awareness of the sound as this would be just the beginning of an infinite regress. Rather Frankfurt maintains that the awareness of the sound renders itself “visible” (Frankfurt 2005, 162)³³.

This type of awareness is “consciousness’s awareness of itself” and qualifies both the object and the act of thought. “Not only the acts of thought but the very activity of thinking- as in performing judgments or focusing one’s attention- is self-reflexive, and renders itself, like the source of light in the metaphor Frankfurt uses, visible when enlightening other things” (Alanen 2003, 101). The presence of this type of awareness in all thought is what allows Descartes to state at the end of *Meditation II* that the mind is

having one confused thought after another, even when, as may be the case with sensory perceptions, we are unable to tell what they are about. Awareness, like clearness and distinctness, comes in degrees, and the Cartesian notion of thought is broad enough to cover all sorts of mental states, from actually entertained distinct and transparent ideas to the most confused and even unconscious feelings” (Alanen 2003, 99-100).³³ “The claim that waking consciousness is self-consciousness does not mean that consciousness is invariably dual in the sense that every instance of it involves both a primary awareness and another instance of consciousness which is somehow distinct and separable from the first and which has the first as its object. That would threaten an intolerably infinite proliferation of instances of consciousness” (Frankfurt 2005, 162).

much better known than the body because for every single external object that the intellect comes to know it obtains implicit reaffirmation of its existence and its main features, incorporeality and thinking. Moreover, the sheer number of instances of sensible knowledge accompanied by awareness serves to strengthen and deepen our knowledge of the nature of our minds, although the mind has more and better purely mental ways of knowing itself.³⁴

In this section I have established three main points. (1) The intellect in the broad sense can be identified with the faculty of ideas. (2) The most important features of ideas are intentionality and awareness. (3) Descartes' discussion of material falsity does not require us to conclude that sensory ideas are non-representational.

IV. Intellect in the narrow sense and its interaction with other faculties

In its broad sense the intellect was described as the faculty of awareness or faculty of ideas in general. In its narrow sense the intellect is the faculty of invented ideas and more specifically the faculty of deduction because the results of deduction are invented ideas and because deduction is the paradigmatic mental operation when it comes to the broadening of our knowledge. As Descartes sees it, intuition provides the building blocks for all our knowledge but it is the intellect through deduction that ensures the transition

³⁴ "For if I judge that the wax exists from the fact that I see it, clearly this same fact entails much more evidently that I myself also exist. It is possible that what I see is not really the wax; it is possible that I do not even have eyes with which to see anything. But when I see, or think I see (I am not here distinguishing the two), it is simply not possible that I who am now thinking am not something. By the same token, if I judge that the wax exists from the fact that I touch it, the same result follows namely that I exist... and in view of this I know plainly that I can achieve an easier and more evident perception of my own mind than of anything else" (AT VII, 33-34; CSM II, 22-23).

from one item of knowledge to the next (although, as I will show below, in a second instance deduction is often reducible to intuition).

This sense of the intellect marks an increase in both the level of activity on the part of the mind (as in its broad sense the intellect was either passive or performed simple acts like perceiving what was happening in the mind) and in the level of complexity of the intellectual acts (from simple perceptions to information-processing acts). Intellect in the narrow sense is the faculty of deduction. The other mental operations that Descartes mentions (generalization, enumeration, etc) ensure the smooth functioning of deduction (e.g. intuition by providing the elements composing deductive chains, memory by insuring the access to successive steps involved in deduction, and enumeration by insuring the completeness of deductive chains).

Intellect as the faculty of deduction plays an important role in the argument I develop in Chapter III, more specifically in the section dealing with the Source model of control. There I argue that ideas differ from volitions not only because they are less active but also because the agent has less control over the former than over the latter. The control the agent has over the occurrence, content of and attitude towards an idea are the criteria Descartes uses to distinguish between ideas and volitions, on the one hand, and between several types of ideas, on the other. The category of invented ideas (of which ideas resulting from deduction constitute a subclass) is one category of ideas over which we have control in terms of occurrence and content: it is up to the agent whether or not to initiate a deductive chain and, once initiated, whether or not attention and mental focus

are sufficiently maintained to bring about results. While intellect qua faculty of deduction is more active than intellect qua faculty of awareness, it is dependent on the will for initiating and maintaining the operations of deduction. However, the actual deducing process (i.e. realizing the entailment relations between the different components of the deductive chain) is an exclusively intellectual process that takes place in accordance with strict laws; over this part of the process we have no control. Therefore, the more control we have over the content of an invented idea the greater the probability that it is not the result of a deductive chain but of an imaginative process.

In describing the intellect in the narrow sense I begin by arguing that the category of factitious ideas has to be extended to include not just the results of the imagination (e.g. sirens, hippogriffs, chimeras) or the intellect aided by the imagination but also the results of any complex intellectual operations. Invented ideas can result from the combination of either innate ideas or adventitious ideas (i.e. ideas obtained from the senses). These invented ideas can be put together by the intellect through deduction, or through the dispositions of the corporeal imagination (which is a type of impulse). In other words, this category of ideas necessarily refers only to the means of obtaining the ideas in question; it refers strictly to the order of discovery and not to the way the world is. Finding out if these ideas have external referents is a further step, different from the actual conjoining process marking the creation of an idea. This extension of the category of invented ideas is in keeping with Descartes' statements in a letter to Mersenne dating from 16 June 1641:

I use the word 'idea' to mean everything which can be in our thought, and I distinguish three kinds. Some are adventitious, such as the idea we commonly have of the sun; *others are constructed or made up, in which class we can put the idea which the astronomers*

construct of the sun by their reasoning; and others are innate, such as the idea of God, mind, body (AT III, 383; CSMK 183- my emphasis).

It seems that all fictitious ideas are factitious but not all factitious ideas are fictitious (sheer inventions).

Adventitious ideas can be used as parts that are further combined to form invented ideas. Leaving the category of adventitious ideas aside, according to Descartes there are several ways in which something can come to be contained in an idea: first, through a “fiction of the intellect”; second, by belonging to “the true and immutable nature of a thing” (AT VII, 119; CSM II, 85). In the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* Descartes divides the natures things can have into simple or composite. Simple natures are either intellectual, corporeal or mixed (applying to both intellectual and corporeal things). Simple natures constitute the objects of intuition and are the components for the composite ones. Ideas resulting from “a fiction of the intellect” compose the category of invented ideas.³⁵ All distinct ideas represent possible things, even chimeras and sirens are possible things insofar as they are distinctly perceived (AT VII, 119; CSM II, 85).

The conjunctions between simple natures can be either necessary or contingent. The necessary conjunctions are ones in which one component is implied in the concept of another. In the case of a contingent conjunction the relation between the terms is not

³⁵ This entails that the result of a valid deduction is a “fiction”, where “fiction” refers to the method of arriving at a certain result not the fact that there is no real, external correspondent of the result of the mental operation of deduction.

inseparable. Descartes lists three main types of methods of composition: impulse³⁶, conjecture and deduction (AT X, 419-424; CSM I, 44-47).³⁷ Deduction can never lead to error unless the deductive chain is so long and intricate that it cannot be held in our memory without being broken down, thus breaking the continuous movement of thought ensuring the necessity of the conclusion (AT X, 424-425; CSM I, 47-48).

According to Descartes the only things we can know are the simple natures and the combinations among them (AT X, 422; CSM I, 46). Intuition provides not only the components for deduction but also the necessary connections between the steps making up the deductive chains (AT X, 425; CSM I, 48). Intuition is self-evident and certain (AT X, 420; CSM I, 45); the proposition that is intuited has to be clear and distinct and must be understood in its entirety at once (AT X, 407; CSM I, 37). By intuition Descartes means “the conception of a clear and attentive mind”; it is an easy, distinct mental operation that proceeds solely from the light of reason and gives indubitable results. Its being simpler than deduction makes it more certain than deduction. Examples of things each one of us can intuit include one’s existence, one’s thinking, that a triangle is bounded by just three lines, and a sphere by a single surface, etc (AT X, 368; CSM I, 14).

In order for deduction to yield certain propositions it depends on intuition to provide not only the components but also the link between them (AT X, 369; CSM I, 14-

³⁶ There are three kinds of “impulse”: influence by a higher force (like God), influence by our own free will and impulses of the corporeal imagination.

³⁷ As methods of composition, impulse, conjecture and deduction can be compared with respect to their error-inducing properties: conjecture never makes us err as long as we take the conclusions thus obtained to be merely probable. As for impulse, its potentiality to produce erroneous results depends on the specifics of the three categories involved: higher forces do not induce us into error; our own free will rarely leads us into error but our imagination often does so (AT X, 424-425; CSM I, 47-48).

15). The main difference between intuition and deduction consists in that “we are aware of a movement or a sort of sequence in the latter but not in the former, and also because immediate self-evidence is not required for deduction, as it is for intuition; deduction in a sense gets its certainty from memory” (AT X, 370; CSM I, 15).

Intuition is described by analogy with vision and narrowing one’s visual field to a single object (AT X, 401; CSM I, 33). The ability to narrow one’s mental field comes in degrees: some are “born with a much greater aptitude for this sort of insight than others; but our minds can become much better equipped for it through method and practice” (AT X, 402; CSM I, 34). Our ability to perform deduction is also subject to improvement. We can exercise “our power of discernment...in the methodical deduction of one thing from the other” by engaging in “weaving, carpet-making, or the more feminine arts of embroidery...Human discernment consists almost entirely in the proper observance of such order” (AT X, 404; CSM I, 35). There are deductive chains that through repetition can be reduced to simple intuitions but there also are deductive chains so long and intricate or involving such disconnected propositions that they cannot be so reduced (AT X, 388-390; CSM I, 25-26).

In *Rule Eight* Descartes states: “[W]hile it is the intellect alone that is capable of knowledge, it can be helped or hindered by three other faculties, *viz.* imagination, sense-perception and memory” (AT X, 398; CSM I, 32)³⁸. When the intellect acts on its own, this is an act of understanding. When the intellect together with imagination applies itself

³⁸ The same point is made in *Rule Twelve* where the intellect is referred to as the only faculty “capable of perceiving the truth, but it has to be assisted by imagination, sense perception and memory if we are not to omit anything which lies within our power” (AT X, 411; CSM I, 39).

to the sensible data contained in the common sense, the result is an instance of sense perception. Sense perception is the source of adventitious ideas which constitute the components of invented ideas, ideas put together by means of imagination. In case the intellect turns towards the imagination and its contents, two types of mental act are possible: if the intellect simply considers the contents of the imagination, then we remember; if the intellect combines the contents of imagination into new figures, then we are engaged in imagining. Descartes emphasizes the unity of the mind as a faculty of knowledge, “According to its different functions, then, the same power is called either pure intellect, or imagination, or memory, or sense-perception” (AT X, 415-416; CSM I, 42).

Imagination and memory have already made an appearance in this chapter. Above I mentioned the category of invented ideas and I further divided its ideas into invented but possibly veracious and the purely fictitious ones (e.g. sirens, hippogriffs). The fictitious ones are the products of imagination. However, imagination is also a necessary tool for problem-solving in mathematics (AT VII, 64; CSM II, 44-45); it provides reasons for proving the possible existence of our bodies (AT, VII, 73; CSM II, 51); and it has a practical function in passion-formation (AT XI, 487; CSM I, 403; a. 211). I will return to the faculty of imagination in Chapter III when I test the coherence of Descartes’ threefold concept of freedom (freedom of spontaneity, freedom of indifference and freedom of perversity). I will argue that imagining processes are dependent on the will for their inception and continuation and that they can constitute the bases for both true and false judgments, depending on their objects. Sometimes Descartes presents imagination as

sharing a physiological basis with memory (AT X, 414; CSM I, 41-42; AT X, 417; CSM I, 43).

Memory was already mentioned above as being essential to the necessity of deduction³⁹. Memory marks the continuity of our mental lives; ensures the smooth functioning of our intellect and its operations. It performs these functions by using associative procedures. Descartes also draws a distinction between an intellectual and a corporeal type of imagination and memory, respectively. Intellectual imagination is mentioned with reference to God and his faculties in *Meditation IV* (AT VII, 57; CSM II; 40). Corporeal memory is dependent on folds in the brain; while intellectual memory depends on the soul alone (AT III, 48; CSM K 146)⁴⁰.

Above I showed that the category of invented ideas includes ideas resulting from both external and innate sources; these adventitious and innate ideas can be combined in several ways: through impulse (dispositions of the corporeal imagination, higher power, free will), through conjecture and through deduction. Only conjecture and deduction are operations performed by the intellect. As conjecture mostly facilitates inquiry, we are left with deduction starting from both adventitious and innate ideas as the main way of broadening our knowledge. The intellect in the narrow sense is the faculty of deduction. Deduction involves successive steps and, as Descartes states in *Rule IV* “deduction in a sense gets its certainty from memory” (AT X, 370; CSM I, 15).

³⁹ Intellectual memory is the kind of memory active in deductive processes as the “inner wiring” ensuring the linking of the diverse premises and thus the necessity of the conclusion.

⁴⁰ See also AT III, 798-799; CSMK 216; AT III, 84; CSMK 148

V. The light of nature

We have seen so far that in the broad sense intellect is the faculty of ideas in general or the faculty of awareness; in a first narrower sense the intellect is the faculty of invented ideas with deduction performing the linking process giving rise to these ideas; finally, in the second narrow sense, the intellect is the faculty of innate ideas, a faculty making possible both awareness and deduction. Innate ideas pertain to the very nature of our minds, making them what and how they are; moreover, it is the natural light that reveals to me that there is nothing in my mind of which I am not aware (AT VII, 107; CSM II, 77). Innate ideas form what could be referred at as the *inner (incorporeal) wiring* responsible for my mental operations including deduction. The intellect as light of nature is also equated with the faculty of knowledge and the mind in its infallible capacity, as far as it is possible for finite beings as ourselves and as underwritten by God's veracity and benevolence.

In *Meditation III* Descartes describes innate ideas as follows: "My understanding of what a thing is, what truth is, and what thought is, seems to derive simply from my own nature" (AT VII, 38; CSM II, 26). Innate ideas (e.g. geometrical truths, God) are known by the power of our own native intelligence, without any sensory experience (AT VIIIB, 166-167; CSMK 222). I have argued above that all ideas are representational; the innate ones represent true, immutable and eternal essences (AT III, 383; CSMK 183). They are self-evident (AT III, 424; CSMK 190) and extracting diverse aspects from them enlarges our knowledge (AT III, 383; CSMK 183). I take innate ideas to be dispositions: "when we say that an idea is innate in us, we do not mean that it is always there before us. This would mean that no idea was innate. We simply mean that we have within

ourselves the faculty of summoning up the idea” (AT VII, 189; CSM II, 132).

Additionally, innate ideas have a pattern-recognition function; they make possible the reception into the mind of data provided by the senses: Descartes tells us that without the idea of a triangle already present in our minds we would not be able to recognize triangles in the external world (AT VII, 381-382; CSM II, 262). The impossibility of processing sensible data in the absence of an appropriate purely mental concept may be all that a controversial passage from *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet* claims. There, referring to ideas obtained from the senses, Descartes states:

[T]here is nothing in our ideas which is not innate to the mind or the faculty of thinking, with the sole exception of those circumstances which relate to experience, such as the fact that we judge that this or that idea that which we now have immediately before our mind refers to a certain thing situated outside us. We make such a judgment... because [these things] transmit something which, at exactly that moment, gives the mind occasion to form these ideas by means of the faculty innate to it (AT VIII B, 359; CSM I, 304).

Descartes tells us that it is neither possible (or easy, as he sometimes puts it), nor necessary to give a list of eternal truths because a mind freed from preconceived opinions cannot fail to recognize them once the occasion arises to think about them (AT VIII A, 24; CSM I, 209). Examples of such truths discovered on various occasions by the natural light include: the fact that my idea of God could not have come from me (AT VII, 47; CSM II, 32); that the distinction between preservation and creation is only a conceptual one (AT VII, 49; CSM II, 33); that all fraud and deception depend on some defect (AT VII, 52; CSM II, 35), etc. Some of these examples seem indeed to be intuitively true; however, others (like the causal principle of ideas) seem to be ad hoc, conjured up to buttress problematic aspects of Descartes' arguments.

When innate ideas are properly used, they lead to our distinguishing the true from the false (AT VI, 27; CSM I, 124). Therefore the light of nature is the faculty of discerning between the true and the false and the criterion of truth used in these operations⁴¹. It thus seems that when Descartes equates the light of nature with the faculty of knowledge he means different things depending on the context: qua faculty of knowledge, the light of nature is equated with the intellect, i.e. the content-providing faculty; and other times Descartes takes the light of nature in an enlarged sense so as to include the will (because in *Meditation III* the faculty of judging is composed of intellect + will).⁴² This broader sense of the term “light of nature” is important for my purpose because the volitional side of the light of nature (which consists in being commanded to assent to whatever is revealed by the natural light) plays a significant role in my argument that the will pertains to the essence of the mind. I will return to these issues in section V of Chapter II.

So far I argued that in the broad sense the intellect is the faculty of ideas in general or the faculty of awareness (as everything that happens in the mind falls under the category of “idea” and, for Descartes, there is nothing in the mind of which I am not in some way aware). In the narrow sense the intellect is the faculty of invented ideas when ideational joining takes place through deduction. Finally, the intellect as light of nature

⁴¹ About the latter Descartes states: “I have no criterion for [my truths] except the natural light” (AT II, 598; CSMK 139).

⁴² Knowledge in the proper sense is constituted by idea+ act of will, knowledge amounts to true judgment; knowledge in the loose sense is just the idea provided it is not materially false to such a degree that no matter how careful one were a true judgment is next to impossible (but Descartes never mentions an idea that is this obscure) and finally, in an even looser sense, knowledge means “immediate knowledge”, i.e. the aspect of every single mental act that makes the mind aware of it. Taking into account the latter sense of “knowledge”, the intellect as the faculty of immediate knowledge is just the intellect in the broad sense. In the *Discourse* reason is described as the power of distinguishing the true from the false and equated with the power of judging well (AT VI, 2; CSM I, 111).

provides the normative underpinnings of all mental operations as innate ideas regulate and make possible both awareness and deduction. From the three categories of ideas that Descartes works with, only adventitious ones are missing from this analysis. While adventitious ideas may figure as components of deductions, the reason they make only scarce appearances in my characterization of the intellect is their dependency on the senses. But so far I have been concerned with the intellect only in its immaterial, not its embodied, state.

VI. The will

After characterizing the intellect and its ideas, I now turn to the will and its functions. For Descartes the will is dependent on the intellect for its functioning since without an idea there is nothing on which the will can take a stand (either pro or con), and act. Above I characterized the intellect in the broad sense as the faculty of ideas in general. Therefore the will is dependent on the intellect in general to provide it with contents, i.e. ideas pertaining to all three of the categories (innate, adventitious and factitious).

The will also interacts with the intellect in the narrow sense, i.e. the faculty of deduction. If Descartes is wedded to the claim that deduction is not an operation that can be performed wrongly, although we may fail to make the connection between certain ideas if we do not see it, then the results of the deductive process are always correct. Or, in *Meditation IV* Descartes states that clear and distinct ideas compel the will into giving its assent. We can consequently infer that the results of deduction “compel” the will,

using “compel” in a sense that remains to be clarified.

As for the intellect as the light of nature, one of the senses that emerged for it was the intellect as the faculty of knowledge. This sense, in turn, was further divided into the content-providing faculty and the faculty of distinguishing the true from the false. Taken in the former sense, the light of nature produces only clear and distinct ideas which “compel” the will. In the latter sense the light of nature is broad enough to include the will (AT VI, 2; CSM I, 111).

In these introductory remarks I approach the will's presence, its importance and the roles it plays in Descartes' works. Then I provide a characterization of the will's main features. In Descartes' writings the term “will” refers to both the human and the divine will. My main concern is with the human will and its interactions with the other faculties of the soul on the one hand, and with the body, on the other. I will refer to the divine will only in passing, and by comparison with the human will (especially when doing so will provide useful clarification of the intricate aspects of the human will).

The concept of will is one of the most intriguing aspects of Descartes' philosophy: the will is described as infinite (AT VII, 57; CSM II, 40), a necessary part of the process of judging (AT VII, 56; CSM II, 39), and the main component in controlling the passions (AT XI, 363-364; CSM I, 345; a. 45, 46). I begin my analysis of the will with an overview of the occurrences of the term “will” in Descartes' works. Then, I present the main features Descartes attributes to the will as a faculty of the soul.

The concept of the will makes only scarce appearances in Descartes' writings before the *Meditations*. The will is mentioned only a few times in the *Rules* (e.g. faith is considered an act of will- AT X, 370; CSM I, 15); it appears in the *Discourse* with reference to conduct and to our desiring only what our intellect presents to us in the form of something possible and good (AT VI, 26-27; CSM 124-125). The will is also the topic of two of Descartes' letters to Mersenne. In one of them, dating from 1637 (AT I, 366; CSMK 56) Descartes clarifies what he means by "it is enough to judge well to act well" and advances the idea that willing is a way of thinking. In the other letter to Mersenne (1639) Descartes asserts the infinity of our will: "God has given us a will which has no limits. It is principally because of this *infinite will* within us that we can say we are created in His image" (AT II, 628; CSMK 141-142, my emphasis). The infinity of our will is explicated in this letter as the desire we have for the possession of every perfection we can conceive of.

In the *Meditations* the will and its modes are mentioned with reference to judging and error. In the *Passions* the will's practical role is emphasized. As Descartes' interest slides towards emotions and conduct, the will's capacity to control the passions is the aspect that takes precedence. The *Principles* combine elements from the *Meditations* when dealing with the will in the theoretical realm and aspects that appear in the *Passions* too, when treating of the practical use of the will. The famous letters to Mesland (AT IV, 111-121; CSMK 233-236; AT IV, 173-175; CSMK 244-246) bring to light the will's freedom to reject a clearly perceived good or truth.

In a letter to Elisabeth dating from 1646 (AT IV. 353-355; CSMK 282), Descartes discusses the relation between human freedom of will and divine foreknowledge and shows how the will can be both free and dependent. God has ordained everything from the beginning of time: he has given us the inclinations our will exhibits and has clearly ordered the things that we are to encounter; He also knew the actions to which our will will determine us given those circumstances. However, God has not forced those actions or those choices on us. In this sense, we are still free.

Descartes characterizes the will as the whole mind, not one of its parts,⁴³ in its active capacity, while the faculty of perception is the mind in its passive function: "For strictly speaking, understanding is the passivity of the mind and willing is its activity; but because we cannot will anything without understanding what we will, and we scarcely ever understand something without at the same time willing something, we do not easily distinguish in this manner passivity from activity" (AT III, 372; CSMK 182). As the will is just the whole of the mind when performing a certain function and as the mind is indivisible, so is the will: "For since the will consists simply of one thing which is, as it were indivisible, it seems that its nature rules out the possibility of anything being taken away from it" (AT VII, 60; CSM II, 42).

All human faculties are free of defect; about the faculty of willing Descartes states: "the power of willing...is both extremely ample and also perfect of its kind" (AT

⁴³ "[T]he mind is utterly indivisible" (AT VII, 86; CSM II, 59). "For there is within us but one soul, and this soul has within it no diversity of parts: it is at once sensitive and rational too, and all its appetites are volitions " (AT XI, 364; CSM I, 346).

VII, 58; CSM II, 40). The scope of the will is wider than that of the intellect and the lack of coordination between these two powers is the reason we sometimes err (AT VII, 58; CSM II, 40). Error pertains to judgments not to ideas (AT VII, 37; CSM II, 26)⁴⁴; with respect to judging there seems to be either an inconsistency or a change of position on Descartes' part as he attributes assent to the understanding before the *Meditations* and to the will in the *Meditations*.

In the *Rules* Descartes states: "there can be no truth or falsity in the strict sense except in the intellect alone" (AT X, 496; CSM I, 30). As truth and falsity pertain to judgments, judgments have to pertain to the intellect. This conclusion seems to be supported by Descartes' own pronouncements: "...we distinguish the faculty of understanding by which things are known and intuited, from that by which it judges in affirming and denying" (AT X, 420; CSM 45). On the other hand, in *Meditation IV* judging consists of a combination of understanding and willing:

Next, when I look more closely at myself and inquire into the nature of my errors (for these are the only evidence of some imperfection in me), I notice that they depend on two concurrent causes, namely on the faculty of knowledge which is in me, and on the faculty of choice or freedom of the will; that is, they depend on both the intellect and the will simultaneously (AT VII, 56; CSM II, 39).

Given the differences apparent in the passages just quoted, the question arises whether Hiram Caton is right to argue that there is no shift between the *Rules* and the

⁴⁴ "Now as far as ideas are concerned, provided they are considered solely in themselves and I do not refer them to anything else, they cannot strictly speaking be false... Thus the only remaining thoughts where I must be on my guard against making a mistake are judgments. And the chief and most common mistake which is to be found here consists in my judging that the ideas which are in me resemble, or conform to, things located outside me" (AT VII, 37; CSM II, 26). Although material falsity is one type of error that pertains to ideas, in the *Fourth Replies* Descartes explicates the notion of material falsity as providing "subject-matter for false judgments" (AT VII, 233-234; CSM II, 163) thus reducing error pertaining to ideas to error pertaining to judgments.

Meditations concerning the problem of the will. Citing the passage from the *Rules* mentioned above (AT X, 420; CSM 45) Caton argues that the difference between Descartes' position expressed in the *Rules* and the one from the *Meditations* is more a terminological than a substantive disagreement. Caton contends that in the *Rules* Descartes explicitly distinguishes between entertaining ideas and pronouncing judgment on those ideas; and although the mind in its judging aspect is not referred to as "will" as is the case in the *Meditations*, the later terminology is anticipated (Caton 101). Anthony Kenny, on the other hand, contends that, when writing the *Meditations*, Descartes suddenly and unexpectedly changes his mind about the will making judging an act of will (Kenny 1972, 5).

Even though textual evidence is far from conclusive I tend to side with Caton and read in the distinction between a pure act of knowing and an intellectual act of judging a precursor of the more radical distinction between perceiving (as an act of the intellect) and judging (as an act of will). A broader question arises at this point: is the change of position Kenny mentions equivalent to Descartes' moving from a more traditional, intellectualist view of the process of judging to a more voluntarist approach? And does Caton's contention amount to Descartes' having a voluntarist bent all along? Caton believes that Descartes "complements a necessitarian theory of truth with a voluntarist theory of error" (Caton 88). As I see it, at the time he wrote the *Meditations*, because of the emphasis on the role of the will (which I address in Chapter II), Descartes was an epistemic voluntarist. I agree with Caton that Descartes proposes a voluntarist theory of error but I disagree with Caton's contention that Descartes' theory of truth is

necessitarian. I also disagree with Kenny's reading of Descartes' freedom of spontaneity as entailing a lack of alternatives open to the epistemic agent as long as the agent pays close attention to the reasons pushing her in one direction. Kenny maintains that only by distracting our attention can we go in the opposite direction. I will argue that there are always alternatives open to the agent since even when a clearly perceived truth pushes our assent in one direction *absolutely* speaking we can go in the opposite direction.

The intellect and the will as faculties of the mind not only cooperate in the process of judging but they can also be compared. According to the *Conversation with Burman*, through introspection everyone can find out that "the will is greater and more godlike than the intellect"⁴⁵ (AT V, 159; CSMK 342). The will's superiority over the intellect is also implicit in *Meditation IV* where we are told that by experience everyone can realize that our will is not limited in any way and that any further increase of its freedom is inconceivable, but that an increase of our intellect is easily conceived of (AT VII, 57; CSM II, 39-40).

We have to distinguish between the faculty of will and its actualizations, between "will" and "volition(s)". In *Meditation IV*, while discussing error as a privation depending on me and not on God, Descartes states: "The privation, I say, lies in *the operation of the will* insofar as it proceeds from me, but *not in the faculty of will* which I received from God..."(AT VII, 60; CSM II, 41- my emphasis). Volitions are a kind of thought; they are

⁴⁵ The superiority of the will over the intellect is one of the tenets of medieval voluntarism. Descartes' endorsement of this view is one of the important reasons why Descartes can be considered a voluntarist.

ideas in the broader sense of the word⁴⁶:

Other thoughts have various additional forms: thus when I will, or am afraid, or affirm, or deny, there is always a particular thing which I take as the object of my thought, but my thought includes something more than the likeness of that thing. Some thoughts in this category are called volitions or emotions⁴⁷ (AT VII, 37; CSM II, 26).

Volitions are also accompanied by corresponding perceptions, “[f]or it is certain that we cannot will anything without thereby perceiving that we are willing it” (AT XI, 343; CSM I, 336).

Descartes preserves the medieval idea that our will has an inclination towards the good:

For since our will tends to pursue or avoid only what our intellect represents as good or bad, we need only to judge well in order to act well, and to judge as well as we can in order to do our best- that is to say, in order to acquire all the virtues and in general all the other goods we can acquire (AT VI, 28; CSM I, 125).

The canonical statement about the will is from *Meditation IV*:

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

The will has several modes: assent and denial, mentioned in the *Meditations*; and doubt, implicitly taken as a mode of the will in the *Meditations* and explicitly numbered among the modes of willing in the *Principles* (AT VIII A, 17; CSM I, 204). These three modes refer to the will acting in the theoretical sphere. While the *Meditations*’ “to pursue or avoid” seem to designate the will’s practical modes, the *Principles* bring desire and

⁴⁶ If we take “idea” to designate everything that is immediately perceived by the mind (AT VII, 181; CSM II, 127)

⁴⁷ There is an element of desire common to volitions and emotions: “As for the will and the emotions, here too one need not worry about falsity; for even if the things which I may *desire* are wicked or non-existent, that does not make it any less true that I *desire* them” (AT VII, 37; CSM II, 26- my emphasis).

aversion into the picture (AT VIII A, 17; CSM I, 204).

The will is the whole of the mind in its active capacity, "our volition which is the only, or at least the principal, activity of the soul" (AT XI, 339; CSM I, 333). Lilli Alanen sees Descartes working with two kinds of volitions: when only the rational activity of the soul is taken into account, volitions are "self-caused"⁴⁸ and when all the motions of the embodied Cartesian soul are considered, volitions are "caused externally by the body" (Alanen 2003, 211-212). Both self-caused and bodily-caused actions of the soul are called "volitions" because they are "experienced as motions or inclinations of one and the same soul" (Alanen 2003, 212) and because they involve assent: fully realized, in the first case, or possessing certain features that can induce it, in the second. The difference between these types of volitions consists in the degree of control I have over them. The self-caused volitions are under my strict and direct control. Volitions caused externally by the body are passions of the soul which Descartes characterizes as inclinations of the will; over them I only have indirect control.

Taking into account their effects, Descartes distinguishes between two kinds of volitions: those terminating in the soul itself ("as when we will to love God or generally speaking, to apply our mind to some object which is not material") and those terminating in the body, "as when our merely willing to walk has the consequence that our legs move and we walk" (AT XI, 342; CSM I, 335). The associative functioning of our mind is, in Descartes' opinion, the explanation for the will's ability to control the body: "Each

⁴⁸ "We experience [volitions] as proceeding directly from the soul and as seeming to depend on it alone" (AT XI, 342; CSM I, 335).

volition is naturally joined to some movement of the gland, but through effort or habit we may join it to others” (AT XI, 361; CSM I, 344)⁴⁹.

The will has a role to play in multiple mental processes ranging from cognitive processes (belief-formation, directing attention and imagination) to practical processes (controlling the passions, initiating voluntary action). The will’s functions are reducible to the will’s modes as applied in specific circumstances: belief includes assent or dissent as one of its components; attention/imagination can be initiated and sustained by way of a judgment like “I want to remember/imagine X” which in turn is already connected with the appropriate movements of the spirits. In such cases the relation of attention and imagination to the will is one of inclusion of one of the will’s modes (i.e. assent or denial). Due to their strong motivational influence passions are even called volitions in a loose sense.

Belief depends on the will: if we take belief to be equivalent to judgment, the will as assent or denial is a part of judging. In the *Principles*, Descartes states: “In order to make a judgment...the will is also required so that, once something is perceived in some manner, our assent may be given” (AT VIII A, 18; CSM I, 204).

The process of imagining a certain object is usually initiated by a volition to imagine the object; this volition moves the gland in such a way as to send animal spirits to those areas of the brain where the objects can be represented (AT XI, 344; CSM I, 336). In the *Passions of the Soul* Descartes also describes imagining processes that can be

⁴⁹ This is also the mechanism that allows us to control the passions. I will return to this in Chapter V.

set in motion by accidental movements of the animal spirits. Animal spirits make their way by chance through certain pores rather than others and this results in dreams or day-dreams (AT XI, 344-345; CSM I, 336, a. 21). Therefore, imagining can be either deliberate (dependent on volitions) or accidental (dependent on fortuitous movements of the spirits).

Similarly, attention is commanded by the will. As defined in the *Passions of the Soul*, attention is a body-dependent activity as animal spirits are directed towards certain areas of the brain where certain images are carved: “[W]hen we want to fix our attention for some time on some particular object, this volition keeps the gland leaning in one particular direction during that time” (AT XI, 361; CSM I, 344). Wonder is another source of attention⁵⁰: “wonder is a sudden surprise of the soul which brings it to consider with attention the objects that seem to it unusual or extraordinary” (AT XI, 380; CSM I, 353, a. 70). Descartes maintains that when we first notice an object previously unknown to us, we will retain it in our memory only if “the idea of it is strengthened in our brain by some passion, or perhaps also by the application of our intellect as fixed by our will in a special state of attention and reflection” (AT XI, 384; CSM I, 355, a. 75). This state of attention and reflection is also recommended as the proper way to free ourselves from wonder as much as possible, once the knowledge to which wonder inclines us was acquired (AT XI, 385; CSM I, 355, a. 76). As I will show in Chapter II in the section on clarity and distinctness, Descartes uses “attention” in both the strict sense outlined above and in a looser sense. In the looser sense, attention is equated with “turning one’s mental gaze” and “focus”, especially when it comes to purely intellectual objects.

⁵⁰ I thank Dr. Deborah Brown for bringing this to my attention.

Passions are volitions in a loose sense (AT XI, 364; CSM I, 346). Passions present things in a far brighter light than they really are and that is why they must be kept in check. It is the will that fights the passions, however, it can do so only indirectly by using representations connected to the passions we want to arouse in ourselves and opposed to the passions we want to extinguish (AT XI, 363-364; CSM I, 345). The control we have over the passions is not only indirect but also incomplete. Due to their physiological bases which involve a continuous movement of animal spirits, we cannot fight the passions directly while they are at full strength. All we can do in such circumstances is combat the effects of the passions; in order to eliminate the root of the passion we must wait until the movement of the spirits has slowed down (AT XI, 364; CSM I, 345). What makes a soul weak or strong is its rate of success in this battle against the passions (AT XI, 367; CSM I, 347). The key to controlling the passions, according to Descartes, is generosity as both a virtue and a passion. As a virtue it pertains to the will, as do all virtues which Descartes describes as habits of the soul (AT XI, 445-446; CSM I, 384).

The human will "considered as will in the essential and strict sense" (AT VII, 57; CSM II, 40) resembles the divine will. Experience shows me that the will I possess is unrestricted; furthermore, it is inconceivable that my will could be more perfect or greater than it already is (AT VII, 57; CSM II, 40). The inconceivability only applies to my finite

intellect so Descartes seems to be saying that we can have "moral certainty"⁵¹ about the broadness of our will being as great as it can be. In the *Principles*, he takes a step further: the human will is described as infinite "in a certain sense" (AT VIII A, 18; CSM I, 204) and in this respect is as broad as God's⁵². The divine will (unlike the human will) is identical with the divine intellect and the divine omnipotence: "we must suppose... that there is always a single identical and perfectly simple act by means of which he simultaneously understands, wills and accomplishes everything" (AT VIII A, 14; CSM I, 201).

I conclude that the will is one of main faculties of the Cartesian soul. Although dependent on the intellect which provides the contents for acts of the will (like assent and denial), the will is more perfect than the intellect. While the intellect is finite, the will is infinite. The will is the whole of the mind as active; it is indivisible, free of defect, and inclined to the true and the good. Acts of will are called volitions and they can be distinguished by their origin and end-point. Volitions can be self-caused or caused externally by the body; they can terminate in the soul or in the body. The will has both theoretical and practical functions. Belief-formation, directing attention and initiating acts of imagination and memory are examples of theoretical contributions. Regulating the passions and initiating voluntary corporeal actions fall under the will's practical role.

⁵¹ "[S]ome things are considered as morally certain, that is, as having sufficient certainty for application to ordinary life, even though they may be uncertain in relation to the absolute power of God" (AT VIII A, 327; CSM I, 289-290).

⁵² "The will on the other hand, can in a certain sense be called infinite, since we observe without exception that its scope extends to anything that can possibly be an object of any other will- even the immeasurable will of God" (AT VIII A, 18; CSM I, 204).

VII. Conclusions

In this chapter I provided an outline of several central aspects of Descartes' theory of mind. According to Descartes, we are composites of immaterial minds and material bodies. Our minds are responsible for our abilities to speak and adapt. Our minds are unitary; their essence consists of thinking and they possess several faculties (e.g. intellect, will, imagination, memory and sense perception) which are not parts but modes of the mental substance. The main faculties of the mind are intellect and will. The human intellect is different only in degree from the divine intellect. It is finite but perfect of its kind, it is passive (but only with qualifications) and it is inclined to the true. I distinguished between three senses of "intellect" in Descartes' works: a broad sense, a narrow sense and light of nature. In the broad sense the intellect is the faculty of ideas; the main features of ideas are awareness and intentionality. In the narrow sense the intellect is the faculty of deduction. As light of nature, the intellect contains the normative underpinnings of all mental operations.

The other main faculty of the mind according to Descartes is the will. The will is just the whole of the mind in its active capacity. Qua will, the mind provides attitudes towards ideas presented by the intellect; therefore the will is dependent on the intellect for its functioning. It is infinite since we can take a stand towards any idea put forward by the intellect. The will has both theoretical and practical functions. The will plays a part in belief formation, directing attention, initiating imaginings and memory retrieval. The will also regulates our passions and initiates voluntary corporeal actions. Before turning to a detailed analysis of the theoretical and practical roles of the will, I will first look at the relation between thinking and willing. Given the multiplicity of its roles, just how

important to the cognitive mental economy of the Cartesian agent is this will in virtue of which she resembles God?

Chapter II

Sum Res Volans: the Centrality of Willing for Descartes

In *Meditation II* Descartes identifies “thought” as the essence of mind:

Thinking? At last I have discovered it- thought; this alone is inseparable from me. I am, I exist- that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking...I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks (AT VII, 27; CSM II, 18).

Within the context of the *Meditations*, the certainty that thought constitutes the essence of his mind is not obtained until *Meditation VI*. There, due to the divine guarantee,

simply by knowing that I exist and seeing at the same time that absolutely nothing else belongs to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing, I can infer correctly that my essence consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing (AT VII, 78; CSM II, 54).

Most commentators⁵³, following Descartes himself⁵⁴, take this to mean that the essence of the mind is constituted by thoughts as objects of awareness. In this chapter I argue that willing is as much part of the essence of the Cartesian mind as awareness, that willing is not just a type of thought but whenever thinking occurs it invariably involves both awareness and willing. Descartes is as much a *res volans* as a *res cogitans*.

This chapter will have six sections. In the first five sections I show that willing pertains to the essence of the mind to the extent that Descartes and we, if we want to follow him, are engaged in Cartesian meditation. I will make my case by showing that the

⁵³ Representative of this view is Anthony Kenny (*Descartes*, New York, Random House, 1968).

⁵⁴ In the *Geometrical Exposition* Descartes explicates “thought” through the notion of awareness: “*Thought*. I use this term to include everything that is within us in such a way that we are immediately aware of it. Thus all the operations of the will, the intellect, the imagination and the senses are thoughts” (AT VII, 160; CSM II, 113).

cogito, clarity and distinctness, the arguments for the existence of God, the arguments for the existence of material things and the light of nature viewed as instinct depend on the will. Then, in section VI, I extend the scope of my discussion to include the ordinary person and provide concluding remarks.

The presence and importance of the will in our everyday lives are obvious and they infiltrate Descartes' examined views and the procedures used to obtain them. Descartes establishes what belongs to the essence of a thing by determining what is inseparable from that thing, what that thing cannot exist without, or that the elimination of which would change the thing beyond all recognition. The procedure he uses to find out what pertains to his own essence consists of eliminating features of himself such as the attributes he previously took to pertain to the nature of a body; these are followed by nutrition, movement and sense perception, which are all body dependent. He finds it impossible to eliminate thinking from himself so he concludes that thinking pertains to his essence⁵⁵ (AT VII, 27; CSM II, 18). In *Meditation VI* Descartes seems to continue this process of elimination by excluding imagination and sense perception from his essence since although they are thoughts, they are body-dependent thoughts (AT VII, 78; CSM II, 54)⁵⁶. Below I propose to continue the process of elimination on Descartes' behalf and inquire whether it is possible to leave out the will as well. Could Descartes achieve any of

⁵⁵ Descartes does not use the term "essence" to refer to what is inseparable from himself until *Meditation VI*.

⁵⁶ Descartes first eliminates imagination: the power of imagining which is in me "is not a necessary constituent of my own essence, that is, of the essence of my mind" (AT VII, 73; CSM II, 51). Then, he lumps together imagination and sensory perception: "Now I can clearly and distinctly understand myself as a whole without these faculties; but I cannot conversely understand these faculties without me, that is without an intellectual substance to inhere in" (AT VII, 78; CSM II, 54).

the things he does in the *Meditations* without a will? Is it even possible to conceive an act of thought with no volitional aspect?

It is my contention that Descartes could not separate willing from himself. I make my case for willing as part of the essence of the Cartesian mind by bringing to light the role of the will at all the key junctures of the *Meditations*. I identify four such key aspects: the *cogito*, the clarity and distinctness of some of our ideas, the arguments for God's existence, and the propensity to believe that my ideas of sensible things come from those things. Then, I bring to light the normative underpinnings of all these key aspects of the *Meditations* by interpreting the mind's inclination towards the true and the good as the volitional aspect of the light of nature, which, in turn contains the laws of all thinking.

The goal of Descartes' *Meditations* is to establish science on certain and unshakeable foundations. The first item of knowledge known with certainty is the *cogito*; from the *cogito* Descartes extracts the clarity and distinctness rule which, in turn, derives its viability from the divine guarantee. Only because God exists and is not a deceiver is it possible to trust that our clear and distinct ideas map the world. God has also endowed us with a propensity to conclude from our ideas of sensible things to the existence of those things in the external world. More generally, God has given us an innate bias towards the true and the good. All these key points of the *Meditations* involve the will.

By bringing to light the pivotal role of the will in the economy of the *Meditations* I come close to Peter Schouls' approach in *Human Nature, Reason, and the Will in the*

Argument of Descartes's Meditations (Schouls 175). Schouls emphasizes the primacy of the will (as active) over reason (as passive) in the *Meditations* by interpreting the introduction of the evil genius, the attention necessary for the *cogito*, the determination of imagination to propose hypotheses and the suspension of judgment as acts of will. My goal, however, is very different from Schouls'. His intention is to show that the extension of doubt in *Meditation I* is due to Descartes' views of human nature as involving both intellectual and volitional aspects. According to Schouls these Cartesian views of human nature come from Descartes' pre-doubt period and are validated through doubt (Schouls 164). My purpose in this chapter is to argue explicitly for the will as part of the essence of the Cartesian soul by continuing on Descartes' behalf the process of elimination that led him to conclude that thinking was inseparable from himself. Unlike Schouls I make no claims as to whether or not Descartes possesses a pre-doubt conception of human essence that is subjected to doubt and emerges unscathed.

Having shown that the will pertains to the essence of the Cartesian mind qua meditator, I broaden the scope of my argument to the will's pertaining to the essence of the mind as such. I take into account the case of the ordinary person both in the pre- and the post-doubt case. The pre-doubt ordinary person, as described in *Meditation VI*⁵⁷ and in the *Principles*⁵⁸, is an Aristotelian of sorts, trusting the evidence of the senses and believing there is nothing in the mind that was not first in the senses. The post-doubt person has internalized the procedures put forth in the *Meditations* and thus spontaneously applies the clarity and distinctness rule. In both these cases, the will is

⁵⁷ AT VII, 74-76; CSM II, 51-53

⁵⁸ AT VIII A, 35-36; CSM I, 218-219

prominent as assent, as focus and attention. Assent is paramount in such circumstances as a disengaged attitude is difficult to attain; most of the time, we automatically take a stand and thus all thought has a volitional side. The pre-and post-doubt person has desires that she acts on and is also experiencing acting deliberately; or, voluntary action is a sign of the will. Therefore, the ordinary person's mental life includes the will as an essential aspect. I begin by showing that the Cartesian inquiring mind is essentially a *thinking and willing thing*.

I. The will and the cogito

Meditation I starts with Descartes' declared intention of demolishing all his opinions. Doubt emerges as a more economical procedure (both in terms of time and resources) than establishing patent falsity; "some reason for doubt" is enough for rejecting any opinion⁵⁹. Moreover, Descartes opts for attacking the basic principles of beliefs and thus rejecting whole classes instead of individual opinions. The result of this process will be the *cogito*. The will is essential in clearing the way for the *cogito* by ensuring the continuation of the process of doubt (listed among the modes of willing in the *Principles*⁶⁰), until only evidential factors enter into the formation of beliefs. In

Meditation I Descartes states:

I must make an *effort* to remember it [to withhold my assent from these former beliefs just as carefully as I would from obvious falsehoods, if I want to discover any certainty].
My habitual opinions keep coming back, and, *despite my wishes*, they capture my belief,

⁵⁹ "But to accomplish this, it will not be necessary for me to show that all my opinions are false, which is something I could perhaps never manage. Reason now leads me to think that I should hold back my assent from opinions which are not completely certain and indubitable just as carefully as I do from those which are patently false. So, for the purpose of rejecting all my opinions, it will be enough if I find in each of them at least some reason for doubt. And to do this I will not need to run through them all individually, which would be an endless task...I will go straight for the basic principles on which all my former beliefs rested" (AT VII, 18; CSM II, 12).

⁶⁰ (AT VIIIA, 17; CSM I, 204)

which is as it were bound over to them as a result of long occupation and the law of custom... In view of this, I think it will be a good plan *to turn my will in completely the opposite direction and deceive myself*, by pretending for a time that these former opinions are utterly false and imaginary. I shall do this until the weight of preconceived opinion is counter-balanced and the distorting influence of habit no longer prevents my judgments from perceiving things correctly (AT VII, 22; CSM II, 15- my emphasis).

As the will is continuously active in the process of doubting, it could not be affected by the doubt, no matter how widespread. Descartes never doubts that he has a will in the same way he never doubts the existence and reliability of his reason. On this point I once again differ from Peter Schouls who argues that Descartes does extend the process of doubt to both reason (in its “compositive”⁶¹ and intuitive functions) and to the will. He interprets the *cogito* as establishing not only the existence of the I but also the reliability of reason in its intuitive function. He also takes the beginning of *Meditation II* to depict an experience of extreme passivity which he equates with doubting the existence and efficacy of free will. Descartes escapes this situation by supposing that passivity is not the ultimate state of being as it is due to doubt which was self-imposed (Schouls 165, 169-170).

The will is not just present throughout the process of doubting but is involved in an arduous struggle with itself: habit (“my habitual opinions”, “the distorting influence of habit”) and “my wishes” battle for supremacy, while the meditator sides with his wishes. I take “wish” and “desire”, which Descartes lists as an act of will in the *Principles*⁶², to be equivalent. This struggle is reiterated with every single kind of belief under scrutiny

⁶¹ I use the term “reason in its compositive function” following Peter Schouls who contrasts it with reason in its intuitive function. The latter grasps self-evident items, “absolutely simple aspects of knowledge”. Schouls takes reason in its compositive function to be a reference not only to deduction but also to the intellectual aspects of imaginings and sense perceptions (Schouls 167).

⁶² AT VIIIA, 17; CSM I, 204

although Descartes envisages a happy ending, “the weight of my preconceived opinions is counter-balanced and the distorting influence of habit no longer prevents my judgment from perceiving things correctly” (AT VII, 22; CSM II, 15). In *Meditation IV* we are told that the strategy worked, its success is offered as a precedent for the usefulness of the procedure while the effort needed to achieve results in the first instance is downplayed. As Descartes endorses an internalist model of justification, it is not just the fact that there are reasons in favor of a certain belief but also the way those reasons are seen by the agent that counts towards the formation of a certain belief. Although there may be probable reasons pointing towards X, if the agent sees those reasons as *conjectures* rather than *certain and indubitable reasons*, this way of evaluating reasons changes the direction of the will’s assent from pro to con. “[T]he mere fact that I found that all my previous beliefs were in some sense open to doubt *was enough* to turn my absolutely confident belief in their truth into the supposition that they were wholly false” (AT VII, 59; CSM II, 41- my emphasis).

Assent here is implicitly taken to be controlled by the will as, although it is very difficult, it is always in my power to “*resolutely guard against assenting to any falsehood*” (AT VII, 23; CSM II, 15- my emphasis). Both the struggle and the eventual balance attained must bring the will to the forefront of the meditator’s awareness so that doubting he has a will while “stubbornly and firmly persisting in this meditation”⁶³ would be as self-defeating as doubting he has reason while entertaining this very thought. The

⁶³ That “the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds and all external things are merely the delusions of dreams which he [the evil genius] has devised to ensnare my judgment. I shall consider myself as having no hands, or eyes, or flesh, or blood, or senses, but as falsely believing that I have all these things” (AT VII, 23; CSM II, 15)

difference between these two scenarios consists in that the latter is attempted while the former is not explicitly taken up.

In the *Synopsis* Descartes describes the process of doubt as the mind using its own freedom (AT VII, 12; CSM II, 9). In *Meditation II*, while acknowledging the seriousness of the doubts raised so far and his inability to envisage any solution for finding something certain, Descartes “will make an effort and once more attempt the path which I started on yesterday” (AT VII, 16; CSM II, 16). The effort mentioned in this passage signals the presence and activity of the will. Moreover, in listing the things affected by doubt only memory seems to pertain to the mind.

What does doubting something mean according to Descartes? If, as he explains to Bourdin⁶⁴, it means not committing oneself either to the truth or the falsity of the proposition in question, why the emphasis in *Meditations I and II* on turning the will in the completely opposite direction as soon as something seems merely probable? Doesn't this amount to either convincing oneself of its falsity or just supposing it to be false? If the latter alternative is what Descartes has in mind then doubting is an act of the intellect, not the will. If the former is what he means then there does not appear to be any definite commitment, just an effort to go against a probable proposition. It seems that Descartes mistakes an act of the intellect (supposing) for a previous act of the will (focusing attention) on which it is dependent. However, I will argue below that Descartes takes doubt to be composed of supposition plus the effort needed to continue supposing a

⁶⁴ “What I said was that doubtful items should not be regarded as having any more basis than those which are wholly false; but this was so as to enable us to dismiss them completely from our thought, and not so as to allow us to affirm first one thing and then its opposite” (AT VII, 462G; CSM II, 310).

certain idea, to refrain from assenting to it: the agent exerts her will to prevent an act of assent from being formed and forces the mind to be content with an act of the intellect instead. Moreover, Descartes' modal and conceptual distinctions allow for mental acts to be categorized as both acts of the intellect and acts of the will depending on the criterion of taxonomy: according to the end-result (they are perceptions) or according to their starting point (they are initiated by the will). I take supposition to be one such hybrid mental state.

Supposition is “an act of the intellect and not of the will, and shows all the more that we neither believe it nor want it believed” (AT V, 9; CSMK, 316)⁶⁵. The same point is repeated in a letter to Buitendijck: “For what is thus imagined and attributed hypothetically is not thereby affirmed by the will to be true, but is merely proposed for examination to the intellect” (AT IV, 64; CSMK 230). Also, in the *Meditations*, supposition follows upon the exertion of the will to go against the habit of assenting to highly probable opinions (AT VII, 22; CSM II, 15). Supposing has both volitional and intellectual aspects.

Despite the lack of cognitive commitment to the truth or falsity of a proposition, supposition can be considered an attitude because it has the appropriate structure (“*I suppose that X*”) and because it has a motivational impact. Attitudes pertain to the will as I will argue in Chapter IV where I characterize the will as the attitude-providing faculty; so supposition pertains to the will as well by being initiated, commanded and maintained

⁶⁵ The supposition Descartes is referring to in this letter is the existence of an evil genius as a means to prove that God is not a deceiver.

in action by the will. Had supposition not been an attitude we would be completely indifferent with respect to its object, we would simply notice it and move on. However, the passages just quoted make it clear that for Descartes the role of supposing that X is to motivate further inquiry with the goal of getting to the truth about X.

As supposing is an act of the intellect and doubting is an act of the will, they appear to be modally distinct, because intellect and will are different modes of the mind. In the *Principles* a modal distinction obtains between two modes of the same substance, or between a mode and the substance in which it inheres⁶⁶. However, in the *Passions* Descartes provides examples of passions (which are just obscure ideas, i.e. acts of the intellect) that can be taken as volitions and vice versa: perceptions of volitions, the perceptions resulting from *the soul's application* to imagine something nonexistent or *to consider something purely intelligible* (AT XI, 343-344; CSM II, 335-336). Doubting fits the latter description as the object of doubt is an already formed belief, i.e. something “purely intelligible”, although the initial belief may be about corporeal objects.

According to these examples there are at least *some thoughts*⁶⁷ that deserve both these qualifications (obscure ideas and acts of the will) and as such are only conceptually distinct⁶⁸. As these thoughts are only conceptually distinct the way they are perceived will be a matter of perspective on our part. That this is Descartes' meaning when it comes

⁶⁶ “A modal distinction can be taken in two ways: firstly, as a distinction between a mode, properly so called, and the substance of which it is a mode; and secondly, as a distinction between two modes of the same substance... The second kind of modal distinction is recognized from the fact that we are able to arrive at knowledge of one mode apart from another, and vice versa, whereas we cannot know either mode apart from the substance in which they both inhere” (ATVIII, 29; CSM I, 214).

⁶⁷ I emphasize “some thoughts” because the faculties producing these thought remain modally distinct.

⁶⁸ A conceptual distinction is recognized “by our inability to perceive clearly the idea of one of the two attributes if we separate it from the other” (AT VIII, 30; CSM I, 214).

to supposing is confirmed by the already mentioned letter to Buitendijck where Descartes distinguishes between doubt as pertaining to the intellect and doubt as pertaining to the will. Doubt pertains to the intellect when it is assessed in terms of *possibility/impossibility*; while doubt pertaining to the will is evaluable in terms of *permissibility/impermissibility*. Doubt is *possible* when reasons pointing in a certain direction amount to a less than “evident proof”; doubt is *permissible* when the goal towards which it is directed is worthwhile, e.g. when we doubt in order to ensure that the result of our inquiries is true knowledge but *impermissible* when, like the Skeptics, we doubt just out of stubbornness and for the sheer sake of doubting, because we wish to remain in doubt. Descartes calls the first type of volitional doubt “doubt as a means”, and the second, “doubt as end” (AT IV, 63; CSMK 229).⁶⁹

It is clear, given Descartes’ emphasis on the strenuous nature of the process of doubt and his statement in the *Fourth Replies* that it takes effort to exercise a faculty⁷⁰, that he takes the presence of effort as a clear sign of the will. In *Meditation IV* Descartes claims to know by experience that the freedom of his will is not restricted in any way and he may be making reference to the now completed process of doubt. Also, in the *Principles*, with reference to the process of hyperbolic doubt, he will claim that we have an innate idea of the freedom of our will⁷¹.

⁶⁹ In this letter Descartes answers his correspondent’s question “whether it is ever permissible to doubt about God- that is, whether, in the order of nature, one can doubt of the existence of God” ((AT IV, 63; CSMK 229). Above I extended Descartes’ remarks concerning the possibility and permissibility of doubting about God to all objects of doubt.

⁷⁰ “[W]hen we concentrate on employing one of our faculties, then immediately, if the faculty in question resides in our mind, we become actually aware of it” (AT VII, 247; CSM II, 172).

⁷¹ (AT VIIIA, 19-20; CSM I, 206).

Not only is the effort to not assent to merely probable opinions indispensable for getting the mind in the right state but once Descartes realizes that he cannot but exist as long as he is thinking he immediately gives his assent, which is an act of will. The *cogito* is an intuition not an argument⁷² (not a deduction to use Descartes' terminology) so there are no steps involved but only an instantaneous realization that *I am, I exist*.⁷³ The mind does not need to make the additional effort of attending to the steps composing an argument as, in the case of the *cogito*, there are no such steps⁷⁴. The mind struggles to keep up the doubting process and then automatically assents to the necessary proposition *I am, I exist*. The assent given to this necessary proposition, although not temporally distinct from the intuition but part and parcel of it, remains an act of will.

I conclude that the process of doubt is an exhausting process; its initiation and continuation depend on the will but also involve intellectual aspects: doubt and supposition are aspects of the same process and when sufficiently maintained they lead to the *cogito*. Once the latter is discovered the agent spontaneously assents to the proposition *I am, I exist*; and the act of assent is an act of the will.

⁷² In the *Rules* Descartes states: "Thus everyone can mentally intuit that he exists, that he is thinking, that a triangle is bounded by just three lines, and a sphere by a single surface, and the like. Perceptions such as these are more numerous than most people realize, disdaining as they do to turn their minds to such simple matters" (AT X, 368; CSM I, 14).

⁷³ Reading the *cogito* as an intuition, not an argument is in agreement with Hintikka's performative interpretation. Hintikka explicates the *cogito* as follows: "In Descartes's argument the relation of *cogito* to *sum* is not that of a premise to a conclusion. Their relation is rather comparable with that of a *process* to its *product*. The indubitability of my own existence results from my thinking of it almost as the sound of music results from playing it or (to use Descartes's own metaphor) light in the sense of illumination (*lux*) results from the presence of a source of light (*lumen*)" (Hintikka 61).

⁷⁴ I return to the problem of deduction and the successive steps it involves below when dealing with clarity and distinctness.

II. Clarity and distinctness and the will

Above the will turned out to be involved in the *cogito* in a twofold manner: as doubt and as assent. From the *cogito* Descartes extracts the clarity and distinctness rule (AT VII, 35; CSM II, 24). I contend that the clarity and distinctness of our ideas is conditional on the activity of the will: clarity and distinctness depend on concentration, focused attention, in other words on the will.

The intellect simply perceives ideas; it is a passive power that only reflects whatever comes its way. It is the will that not only directs it to different objects, but is also responsible for the length of time the intellect attends to a certain object and for the attention given to it (e.g. whether it is only one or several objects that are considered, or one or several aspects of a single object). The more attentively we attend to an object the clearer our perception of it. The clarity and distinctness of our ideas depends on the will because: (1) clarity depends on the will; and (2) distinctness never occurs without clarity, as Descartes explains in the *Principles*⁷⁵. This interplay between intellect and will is presupposed in the dynamics of the *Meditations*, but spelled out in Descartes' later works only.

The clarity and distinctness of our ideas depend on attention in different ways depending on the object under scrutiny: first, a difference arises depending on whether the object under consideration is material or purely intellectual. I need to draw a distinction on Descartes' behalf between a strict and a loose sense of the term "attention".

⁷⁵ "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" (AT VIII A, 22; CSM I, 207-208). Using the example of pain Descartes establishes that a perception can be clear without being distinct but not the other way around.

In the strict sense attention is a body-dependent activity which involves the intellectual inspection of brain carvings; while in the loose sense “attention” refers to focus and considering purely intellectual objects (like doing math without picturing anything in the imagination). Second, if the object under scrutiny is a simple nature, the mental grasp is clear and distinct as soon as we attend to it; however, if the object is a complex one, then the clarity and distinctness of our idea depends on a process of reducing the object as close to a simple nature as possible. The apex of such a reducing procedure is arriving at the essence of the object in question.

Combining the two criteria, intellectual/material object and simple/complex object we obtain the following cases. As simple natures are purely intellectual, the only type of attention involved in clearly and distinctly perceiving such objects is attention in the loose sense, mental gaze attending to the object in question. Complex objects can be either intellectual (like deductive chains) or material (e.g. externally existing material objects of which we perceive several aspects). In the case of complex purely intellectual objects only attention qua mental focus is involved; however, it must be prolonged and it involves several steps, unlike the contemplation of simple natures which we grasp instantaneously. When it comes to material objects, we usually perceive multiple features. In the wax example Descartes turns his mental gaze on the piece of wax. This is an act of attention in the strict sense as brain carvings facilitate the representation of the wax. Then, using attention in a loose sense, i.e. purely mental focus, Descartes gradually and with difficulty disregards all aspects of the wax but extension. Below I will analyze

the cases of simple intellectual objects, complex intellectual objects and complex material objects, respectively.

In the *Principles* clarity is defined as the property of an idea that is present and accessible to an attentive mind; while distinctness involves the ability to sharply separate an idea from others (AT VIII A, 22; CSM I, 207). Presence to the mind depends on turning our mental gaze towards an object, while being able to separate an object from others follows from maintaining our mental focus on that object. There are two conditions for increasing our chances of possessing clear and distinct ideas: first, we must isolate only a few aspects of an object and focus on them (AT VII, 113; CSM II, 81)⁷⁶. Second, the longer and more carefully we examine something, the clearer and more distinct our perception of it will be (AT VII, 42; CSM II, 29).

With respect to isolating only a few aspects of an object, Descartes uses the analogy between only confusedly seeing the whole of the sea due to our limited vision and a more clear and distinct view obtained by fixing our gaze on some part of it. He often refers metaphorically to our deliberately considering a certain object as turning our mental gaze⁷⁷ or our mind's eye⁷⁸ towards it: "so long as I think only of God, and turn my whole attention to him, I can find no cause of error or falsity. But when I turn back to myself, I know by experience that I am prone to countless errors" (AT VII, 54; CSM II, 38).

⁷⁶ Fixing our mental gaze on something, on "some part of [it] at close quarters" is a precondition of clarity and distinctness (AT VII, 113; CSM II, 81).

⁷⁷ "Yet when I turn to the things themselves" (AT VII, 36; CSM II, 25).

⁷⁸ "That is, when I turn my mind's eye upon myself" (AT VII, 51; CSM II, 35).

When it comes to the second condition, “my nature is also such that I cannot fix my mental vision continually on the same thing, so as to keep perceiving it clearly” (AT VII, 69; CSM II, 48). An idea is “obscure or confused “when it contains some element of which we are ignorant” (AT VII, 147; CSM II, 105). Clarity and distinctness come in degrees: my idea of God is the truest and most clear and distinct of all my ideas (AT VII, 46; CSM II, 32). Clarity and distinctness can be circumscribed to a certain domain given a certain purpose: sensory perceptions are sufficiently clear and distinct to inform the mind of what is beneficial and detrimental to the composite (AT VII, 83; CSM II, 57).

While all our ideas need our attention (i.e. we need to attend to them) in order to become clear and distinct, not all of them need our prolonged attention to acquire clarity and distinctness.⁷⁹ In the *Second Set of Replies* Descartes mentions perceptions of the intellect that are “so transparently clear and at the same time so simple that we cannot ever think of them without believing them to be true” (AT VII, 146; CSM II, 104). I take these perceptions to be intuitions: attending to them is enough to convince us of their truth. In the same passage from the *Second Replies* he further refers to “other truths which are perceived very clearly by our intellect so long as we attend to the arguments on which our knowledge of them depends”. I think this is a reference to deductions: we must attend not only to the result but to the sequence of reasoning steps which depend on memory. Once we do not attend to the arguments any longer but still remember the

⁷⁹ While clarity and distinctness are properties that come in degrees (i.e. we have ideas that are more or less clear and distinct than other ideas) there are categories of ideas that can never be rendered clear and distinct. Such confused ideas are sensory ideas and passions: both sensations and passions are sufficiently clear for their purposes which are to signal to the mind the presence of beneficial or detrimental objects but these types of ideas can never become distinct.

conclusion, the latter perceptions need the divine guarantee to ensure their truth (AT VII, 146; CSM II, 104).

Turning one's mental gaze, applying one's mind are not accidental but deliberate moves; they are in my power, which for Descartes means controlled by the will (AT VII, 38; CSM II, 26). That this is Descartes' meaning is confirmed in the *Passions* where volitions properly so called are defined as "actions of the soul which terminate in the soul itself, as when we will to love God or, generally speaking, *to apply our mind to some object which is not material*" (AT XI, 343; CSM I, 335- my emphasis). In *Meditation VI* the difference between the intellect and the imagination is drawn in terms of *my mind's turning* inwards, towards itself versus outwards, towards the body (AT VII, 74; CSM II, 51- my emphasis). The difference between intellect and imagination as faculties of the mind lies in the additional effort of which I am aware when I imagine something (AT VII, 73; CSM II, 51). Although this effort is not explicitly attributed to the will, I think imagination consists in an act of will that redirects my mental gaze from inside outward, towards a material object⁸⁰. In the *Passions* the process of imagining something we have never seen starts with a volition, the volition is connected with a movement of the gland; the latter drives the spirits towards areas of the brain where paths representing the thing are carved (AT XI, 361; CSM I, 344).

⁸⁰ Another alternative would be to allow for a minimum threshold of effort that indicates the will's contribution to a mental act. However, this would not only present serious difficulties of quantification (how do we accurately determine when a mental effort is strenuous enough?), but there is no indication of such a distinction in Descartes' works.

Attention in the strict sense is also commanded by the will; it is a body-dependent activity as animal spirits are directed towards certain areas of the brain where certain images are carved and the flow of spirits is maintained for the intended time (AT XI, 361; CSM I, 344). The difference between volitions terminating in the soul itself and acts of attention seems to consist in a difference between their objects, immaterial versus material objects. While both imagination and attention are initiated by the will⁸¹, the difference between them lies in that imagination performs the initial brain carving that represents a new object, while attention is a revisiting of already existing patterns.

Both the initiation of the intellectual inspection of an object and the quality of the resulting perception depend on the will. During the piece of wax episode Descartes states:

Let us concentrate, take away everything which does not belong to the wax, and see what is left: merely something extended, flexible and changeable...And yet...the perception I have of it is a case not of vision or touch or imagination- nor has it ever been, despite previous appearances- but of purely mental scrutiny; and this can be imperfect and confused, as it was before, or clear and distinct as it is now, depending on how carefully I concentrate on what the wax consists in (AT VII, 31; CSM II, 20-21).

Attending to the piece of wax is an act of attention in the strict sense as it involves material aspects (e.g. brain carvings corresponding to the colour, taste, smell, shape of the wax). “Taking away everything which does not belong to the wax” means disregarding those brain carvings and focusing exclusively on extension; this process is an act of attention in the loose sense, an act of mental focus. The “scrutiny of the mind” mentioned in the passage quoted above involves judgment as the example of the men and automata

⁸¹ Not all imagining processes are deliberate, some of them may be initiated by random movements of the spirits (AT XI, 345; CSM I, 336).

makes clear⁸², although at this point in *Meditation II* Descartes is not yet aware of the fact that “the faculty of judgment which is the mind” is composed of intellect and will.

I conclude that when the mind turns its mental gaze to a certain object, this is an act of the will. If the object is immaterial, the act involved is one of mental focus. If the object is also simple, then the idea obtained due to my attending to the object is clear and distinct. If the object is immaterial but complex, the act involved is one of mental focus but I need to maintain my mental gaze on it for some time and break the object down into simpler components before obtaining a clear and distinct idea. If the object is material, the initial act is one of attention in the strict sense as attending to brain carvings is needed. The process through which the mind sets aside all aspects of the object that can be eliminated from it without changing the object beyond all recognition is an act of mental focus. The result of this process of elimination constitutes the basis for judgment. Rendering an idea clear and distinct involves turning one’s mental gaze (with or without brain carvings) towards the object, maintaining mental focus (when dealing with complex objects), which can be difficult and thus involves the will as effort, and finally, assenting to the resulting idea.

⁸² “We say that we see the wax itself, if it is there before us, not that we judge it to be there from its colour and shape; and this might lead me to conclude without more ado that knowledge of the wax comes from what the eye sees, and not from the scrutiny of the mind alone. But then if I look out the window and see men crossing the square, as I just happen to have done, I normally say that I see the men themselves, just as I say that I see the wax. Yet do I see any more than hats and coats which could conceal automatons? I *judge* that they are men. And so something which I thought I was seeing with my eyes is in fact grasped solely by the faculty of judgment which is in my mind” (AT VII, 32; CSM II, 21).

III. The will and the proofs for the existence of God

We saw above that according to Descartes the certainty of conclusions resulting from intricate deductive chains depends on God's veracity (AT VII, 146; CSM II, 104). Heeding his own advice to examine as soon as the opportunity arises whether there is a God and if he is a deceiver⁸³, in *Meditation III* Descartes formulates two arguments for the existence of God. Each argument includes a step depending on the will's contribution: doubt, desire, want and lack are attributed to the will and taken as signs of imperfection in me. The will is not only an impetus towards something better and more perfect than myself, i.e. God, but the ways in which the will acts are also the sure sign of the distance between myself and God.

Both arguments unfold in a familiar Cartesian manner: starting from a list of alternatives that Descartes considers exhaustive, he eliminates all but one option. The first argument starts from my idea of God whose objective reality is so great that it could only have been caused by God (because Descartes works with a causal principle that requires "as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in the effect of that cause"⁸⁴):

All these attributes are such that, the more carefully I concentrate on them, the less possible it seems that they could have originated from me alone. So from what has been said it must be concluded that God necessarily exists (AT VII, 45; CSM II, 31).

My idea of God cannot be obtained by negating my idea of the finite; it cannot be materially false because perfection and imperfection are not on an equal footing when it

⁸³ "For if I do not know this, it seems that I can never be quite certain about anything else" (AT VII, 36; CSM II, 25).

⁸⁴ "For where, I ask, could the effect get its reality from, if not from the cause? And how could the cause give it to the effect unless it possessed it? It follows from this both that something cannot arise from nothing, and also that what is more perfect- that is, contains in itself more reality- cannot arise from what is less perfect. And this is transparently true... also in the case of ideas, where one is considering only...objective reality" (AT VII, 40-41; CSM II, 28).

comes to the degree of reality they contain; and it cannot result from my idea of a potentially limitless increase in my knowledge (potentiality implies both failure to have attained perfection and the impossibility of actually ever attaining it because increasing in perfection by means of successive steps means that further increase will always be possible). Here the will appears in the guise of “doubt and desire” in the very first step of the argument:

I clearly understand that there is more reality in an infinite substance than in a finite one, and hence that my perception of the infinite, that is God, is in some way prior to my perception of the finite, that is myself. For how could I understand that I doubted or desired- that is, lacked something- and that I was not wholly perfect, unless there were in me some idea of a more perfect being which enabled me to recognize my own defects by comparison? (AT VII, 46; CS M II, 31)

The only way the meditator could see doubt and desire, which are acts of will, under the description of lack and imperfection is by implicitly employing a standard of comparison, i.e. perfection as pertaining to God. Thus the idea of perfection is not obtained by a simple logical operation of negation but rather perfection and my perception of it have priority and make possible my perception of the finite. I take the priority in question to stand for “(ontological) superiority” and “condition of possibility”, not temporal priority. It is not that we first perceive God’s perfection and infinity and only subsequently (in the order of time) perceive ourselves but rather that the perception we have of ourselves as volitionally imperfect is already coloured by an idea of which we become explicitly aware only later on⁸⁵.

⁸⁵ Descartes allows for such a scenario, for example, at the beginning of *Meditation III* where he wants to see if there are things within himself that he hasn’t yet noticed (AT VII, 35; CSM II, 24). Moreover, as a result of the two arguments for the existence of God in *Meditation III* Descartes concludes that his idea of God is innate (AT VII, 51; CSM II, 35). In the *Third Set of Replies* he will characterize innate ideas as dispositions: they are not continuously before the mind but we have the capacity to summon them up (AT VII, 189; CSM II, 132).

The second argument is intended as reinforcement for the first and goes from my existence as a being having the idea of God to God as my creator (and to my idea of God as the mark of the craftsman on his work):

If one concentrates carefully, all this is quite evident by the natural light. But when I relax my concentration, and my mental vision is blinded by the images of things perceived by the senses, it is not so easy for me to remember why the idea of a being more perfect than myself must necessarily proceed from some being who is in reality more perfect. I should therefore like to go further and inquire whether myself, who have this idea, could exist if no such being existed (AT VII, 47; CSM II, 32-33).

The alternatives for the source of my being are myself, my parents, or other beings less perfect than God. My parents cannot have caused me as they seem to have simply informed the matter that was to become my body but had no influence whatsoever on me as a thinking thing. If a being less perfect than God caused me then the ultimate cause of that very being must be God (on pain of regress). Several beings could not have caused me because I would lack the unity and simplicity I see my idea of God as possessing. The only alternatives left are God and myself.

In eliminating himself as the source of his being Descartes states: "Yet if I derived my existence from myself, then I should neither doubt nor want, nor lack anything at all; for I should have given myself all the perfections of which I have any idea, and thus I should myself be God" (AT VII, 48; CSM II, 33). According to this passage no one powerful enough to bring oneself into existence as a thinking thing would voluntarily settle for imperfection manifested as doubt and want. Moreover, if I had brought myself into existence, I would have the power to maintain myself in existence. As I lack the power to maintain myself in existence, this means I did not have the power to bring myself into existence and something else must have created me. The result of these two

arguments is not only that God exists but also that he is no deceiver, as deceit would be incompatible with divine perfection, which was part of the initial definition of God (AT VII, 51-52; CSM, II, 35).

In *Meditation IV*, when summarizing the two arguments for God's existence Descartes presents doubt not as part of the premises involved in the proofs but as a catalyst for bringing my idea of God from a dispositional to an occurrent stage. Although Descartes mentions the idea of God in *Meditation III* before the two arguments for his existence⁸⁶, here he makes it seem that without doubt and desire he would never even have come across the idea of God.

And when I consider the fact that I have doubts, or that I am a thing that is incomplete and dependent, *then there arises in me a clear and distinct idea* of a being who is independent and complete, that is, an idea of *God* (AT VII, 53; CSM II, 37- my emphasis).

Once the idea is discovered, doubt and desire have a further role to play in proving that God himself caused my idea.

Therefore Descartes concludes that God exists because self-examination reveals that his desiring and doubting are signs of imperfection and God must be the standard used to arrive at such an evaluation. Moreover, he doesn't have the power to maintain

⁸⁶ Descartes has an idea of God from his pre-doubt stage. In *Meditation III* Descartes mentions God as maybe giving him a nature so as be deceived all the time, which would have been easy for Him given the preconceived belief in His supreme power. Then Descartes states that he has no cause to think that there is a deceiving God, and doesn't even know for sure whether there is a God but he must examine these matters as certainty seems be impossible without this knowledge (AT VII, 36; CSM II, 25). The idea of God is listed as an idea properly so called (AT VII, 37; CSM II, 25). Descartes' understanding of a supreme God is an idea having more objective reality than ideas of finite substances (AT VII, 40; CSM II, 28). The idea of God then appears when Descartes attempts to find if there is anything else besides himself in the world: "Among my ideas, apart from the idea which gives me a representation of myself, which cannot present any difficulty in this context, there are ideas which variously represent God, corporeal and inanimate things, angels, animals and finally other men like myself" (AT VII, 43; CSM II, 29).

himself in existence, thus God exists as his creator and supporter. Now that God's existence is proven, Descartes thinks he can see a way forward to the knowledge of other things, like material objects.

IV. The will and the proof for the existence of bodies

Having proven the existence and veracity of God, Descartes attempts to reinstate his opinions about the external world. He proceeds by bringing back and analyzing secondary properties (like colours, tastes, sensations of heat) which have been omitted from the argument so far (as the piece of wax example makes clear). In *Meditation VI* the will is presented as powerless to control sensations because I am unable to experience them whenever I want. This lack of control suggests that the causes of these ideas are external objects existing independently of me. The will has a strong propensity to believe that external things are indeed the causes of my sensations; this propensity, underwritten by God's veracity, plays a crucial role in the argument for the existence of external things. Without such a propensity Descartes would not be able to progress beyond the uncertainty expressed in *Meditation III* about whether or not his adventitious ideas are truly caused by external things.

In *Meditation III* Descartes takes the example of heat and describes his inability to not feel heat while sitting by the fire⁸⁷. He explicates this inability in terms of independence of his sensation from his will and infers that the source of his sensation is

⁸⁷ In the *Passions of the Soul* Descartes admits that we have some control over moderate sensations and passions: "The soul can prevent itself from hearing a slight noise or feeling a slight pain by attending very closely to some other thing, but it cannot in the same way prevent itself from hearing thunder or feeling a fire that burns the hand" (AT XI, 364; CSM I, 345; a. 46).

something different from himself, which transmits to him its own likeness (AT VII, 38; CSM II, 26). Descartes judges this way because “a spontaneous impulse leads [him] to believe it”, not because it was revealed by the natural light. In *Meditation VI* while rehearsing “all the things which [he] previously took to be perceived by the senses, and reckoned to be true” Descartes makes the same point and refers to the will as “consent”⁸⁸. When making these remarks in *Meditation III* Descartes hasn’t yet proven the existence and veracity of God so he cannot trust the impulse in question especially given that he had the experience of other natural impulses which proved to be very poor guides of conduct⁸⁹ (AT VII, 39; CSM II, 27).

Thus during his pre-doubt period and “apparently taught by nature” Descartes concluded that his sensations were caused by external things transmitting their likeness; that he had a body; and, in Scholastic fashion, that there was nothing in the intellect that had not come from the senses (AT VII, 75-76; CSM II, 52-53). Despite the reasons for doubting the information obtained through the senses (perceptual illusions, phantom limb syndrome, dreaming and the evil genius) Descartes uses these very considerations as premises in his argument for the existence of external bodies. The faculty of sensory perception Descartes notices within himself is passive, it simply recognizes without producing the ideas of sensible objects. The cause of these ideas must therefore be an

⁸⁸ “For my experience was that these ideas [hardness and heat, tactile qualities, light, colours, smells, tastes, etc] came to me quite without my consent, so that I could not have sensory awareness of any object, even if I wanted to, unless it was present to my sense organs; and I could not avoid having sensory awareness of it when it was present” (AT VII, 75; CSM II, 52).

⁸⁹ “But as for my natural impulses, I have often judged in the past that they were pushing me in the wrong direction when it was question of choosing the good, and I do not see why I should place any greater confidence in them in other matters” (AT VII, 39; CSM II, 27).

active faculty. This active faculty cannot be in him as it presupposes no intellectual act and, at times, acts against his will.

So the only alternative is that it is in another substance distinct from me- a substance which contains either formally or eminently all the reality which exists objectively in the ideas produced by this faculty (AT VII, 79-80; CSM II, 55).

The reason these considerations carry argumentative weight is the addition of a strong propensity towards believing that the causes of his sensations are external things (not God or other creatures “more noble than a body”- AT VII, 79-80; CSM II, 55), a propensity that can be trusted because God was proven to be veracious. If the source of my ideas of external things was God or other creatures I should have a faculty suited for informing me of this source. In *Meditations IV* and *VI* God’s veracity was explicated in terms of a high ratio of success at arriving at the truth when properly using a faculty and in terms of having the alternative of corroborating the results of one faculty by using one or several other faculties.⁹⁰

I can be sure that there is no such faculty in me because if such a faculty were in me, when I try to exercise it, it would become active (AT VII, 246-247; CSM II, 172)⁹¹. In attempting to find out whether or not corporeal objects exist, I am presumably mustering all my resources appropriate to such a task; still, the propensity to believe that external things cause my sensory ideas is the only one that comes to light. As I lack alternative faculties, it must be the case that the one I do possess, the propensity to take

⁹⁰ (AT VII, 61-62; CSM II, 62-63); (AT VII, 89; CSM II, 61-62)

⁹¹ “But it must be noted that, although we are always actually aware of the acts or operations of our minds, we are not always aware of the mind’s faculties or powers, except potentially. By this I mean that when we concentrate on employing one of our faculties, then immediately, if the faculty in question resides in our minds, we become actually aware of it, and hence we may deny that it is in the mind if we are not capable of becoming aware of it” (AT VII, 246-247; CSM II, 172).

external objects as the causes of my sensible ideas, is the one liable to bring about correct results, when properly used. These remarks about the absence of another faculty for recognizing the source of my sensible ideas respond to a worry raised in *Meditation III* that there may be “some other faculty not yet fully known to me, which produces these ideas without any assistance from external things” (AT VII, 39; CSM II, 27).

The great propensity to believe that my sensations were caused by external things is just an application to a class of cases of the more general propensity of the will Descartes mentions in *Meditation IV* to follow “a great light in the intellect”, i.e. to assent to clear and distinct ideas (AT VII, 59; CSM II, 41). The Cartesian will is not impartial but has an inbuilt bias towards the true and the good. Some things naturally prompt the will; they incline it towards giving its assent⁹². Although sensations and passions are not clear and distinct per se (when taken as accurately representing the world), they are sufficiently clear and distinct for their purpose which is to indicate what is beneficial and detrimental to ourselves as unions of mind and body (ATVII, 83; CSM II, 57). Therefore, even in their case the will is inclined to follow a clarity and distinctness of sorts.

As I am passive with respect to my sensory ideas they must come from an active principle. That principle cannot be in me because God would then be a deceiver. God’s veracity and benevolence as cashed out throughout the *Meditations* require him to

⁹² The challenge is to accurately distinguish between propensities that truly incline the will towards the true and the good and those that only seem to do so (judgments made since childhood with any rational basis- AT VII, 83; CSM II, 57- and true errors of nature- AT VII, 85; CSM II, 57). Judgments made since childhood “without any rational basis” can be corrected if one keeps to the rigorous discipline resulting from the process of doubt; while the true errors of nature (an example of which is the case of the dropsy sufferer) are justifiable by appeal to God’s benevolence and omniscience coupled with the need to take into account not just the individual but the general good (AT VII, 89; CSM II, 61).

provide me with sufficient resources, either in the form of one faculty or a complex of several faculties, for arriving at the truth. When it comes to my sensory ideas the only available resource is my propensity to believe that they are caused by external things. This propensity is just a particular case of the general inclination towards the true and the good which is one of my default settings. Although in *Meditation III* Descartes distinguishes between a *spontaneous impulse* leading me to believe that my sensory ideas come from external things and the *natural light* revealing indubitable information (AT VII, 38-39; CSM II, 26-27), it turns out that both the spontaneous impulse of *Meditation III* (which I equate with the great propensity of *Meditation VI*) and the natural light pertain to my nature.

V. The light of nature as instinct

In this section I argue that the will's inclination towards the true and the good is just the volitional side of the light of nature. The natural light has a volitional component: truths revealed by the light of nature have a high level of volitional attractiveness which is why Descartes refers to reason as a type of instinct (AT II, 599; CSMK 140). Our minds are so fashioned by God that they have a normative basis composed of intellectual and volitional laws: the intellectual laws are contained in the natural light which is the precondition of all thinking; on the volitional side, *my nature* urges me "assent to the teachings of the natural light".

Taking into account the components involved, we have to draw a distinction

between a broad and a narrow sense of “nature” as applied to the meditator.⁹³ In the broad sense “nature” refers to the totality of things bestowed on me as a composite of mind and body by God (AT VII, 82; CSM II, 57). In the narrow sense, “nature” is identical with “essence” consisting *solely* in being a thinking thing (AT VII, 78; CSM II, 54).⁹⁴ I maintain that both the broad and the narrow senses of “my nature” include volitional elements.

According to *Meditation VI*, “my nature” in the sense of “the totality of things bestowed on me by God” teaches me in three ways: it teaches me about purely intellectual matters through the natural light; it teaches me about purely corporeal matters; and it teaches me about what is beneficial or detrimental to me as a composite of mind and body (AT VII, 82; CSM II, 57). The latter category of teachings of nature is the one given most attention in *Meditation VI*. My nature “vividly” teaches me that I have a body; that pain signals something wrong with the body; that hunger and thirst are signs of food and drink deprivation, respectively. Using these and other sensations nature also teaches me about the intermingling between the mind and the body. Nature also instructs me about the existence of other bodies and about their potential for advantage or harm

⁹³ My distinction between a broad and a narrow sense of “nature” differs from Descartes’ way of employing these terms. In *Meditation VI* Descartes takes “my nature” in the broad sense to mean “the totality of things bestowed on me by God” (AT VII, 80; CSM II, 56); compared to this “my nature” including whatever pertains to me as a combination of mind and body is “more limited” (AT VII, 82; CSM II, 57). Above I used nature in the broad sense as whatever refers to the composite and nature in the narrow sense as what pertains to the mind alone. In other words, Descartes’ broad sense of nature consists of: what pertains to the mind+ what pertains to the body + what pertains to the composite; while my broad sense of nature consists of what pertains to the composite and my narrow sense of nature consists of the essence of the mind.

⁹⁴ From the *cogito* coupled with the elimination of attributes that he thought away, in *Meditation II* Descartes concludes *sum res cogitans* (AT VII, 27; CSM II, 18). In *Meditation IV* Descartes raises the question whether his thinking nature is identical with the idea of corporeal nature he notices he possesses (ATVII, 59; CSM II, 41). In *Meditation VI*, during the real distinction argument he uses ‘essence’ and ‘nature’ interchangeably.

(ATVII, 81; CSM II, 56).

The teachings of nature mentioned here can be classified as information-providing (e.g. “you have a body”, “there exist other bodies”) and advice-giving (e.g. “if you feel hungry, eat some food”; “if you feel thirsty drink water”, “avoid hurtful bodies”, etc). The semantic content of these ideas is informational and instructional, respectively. The same applies to the semantic content of the teachings of the natural light: innate ideas inform me what thought is, what a thing is, etc (AT VII, 38; CSM II, 26); and, by analogy with the pieces of practical advice above, my nature commands me with respect to purely intellectual matters: “assent to what is revealed by the natural light”. In particular instances, this is manifested not so much as an explicit command but mostly as “a great light in the intellect” followed by “a great inclination in the will”. Compelled assent is the normative aspect of clear and distinct ideas.

Above I mentioned the role of the will in the functioning of other mental faculties like imagining (redirecting the mental gaze to brain carvings), sense perception (redirecting the mental gaze to external objects), and supposing (inhibiting commitment which is an act of the will and substituting it with an act of the intellect). These faculties presuppose norms provided by the natural light: all thinking depends on innate ideas, which exist in us potentially (AT VIII B, 361; CSM I, 305).⁹⁵ This is most obvious in the

⁹⁵ In *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet* Descartes states: “When he says that the mind has no need of ideas, or notions or axioms which are innate, while admitting that the mind has the power of thinking (presumably natural or innate), he is plainly saying the same thing as I, though verbally denying it. I have never written or taken the view that the mind requires innate ideas which are something distinct from its own faculty of thinking. I did, however, observe that there were certain thoughts within me which neither came to me from external objects nor were determined by my will, but which came solely from the power of thinking within me; so I applied the term ‘innate’ to the ideas or notions which are the forms of these

case of higher thought which is regulated by rules of rationality and consistency contained in the intellect as natural light. In *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet* Descartes gives the example of the principle of transitivity, a common notion which is universal and bears no affinity to corporeal motions (AT VIIIIB, 359; CSM I, 304). He takes the huge difference between sense data (be they auditory, visual, etc) and our ideas of the objects providing the sensory information as proof that such ideas cannot be produced out of sense data.

The teachings of the natural light are either implicit or explicit: as implicit, they are the very norms of rationality and higher thinking (i.e. reasoning). These norms can be made explicit and be verbally formulated. The teachings of the natural light are not just intellectual contents but also manifest a certain attraction, the agent is inclined to assent to them. “My nature” also “urges”⁹⁶ me to assert them. That both my nature as composite of mind and body and my nature as natural light issue commands is confirmed by their characterization as types of “instinct”.

In a *Letter to Mersenne* from 13 November 1639 Descartes makes reason a special kind of impulse probably emphasizing the innateness, immediacy and spontaneity of the natural light. We are told in that letter that there are two kinds of instincts: one characteristic of us as human beings, purely intellectual in nature and called “natural light” or “mental vision”. The second kind of instinct is due to our animal nature; it is an impulse towards the preservation of the body and enjoyment of bodily pleasures. The

thoughts in order to distinguish them from others, which I called ‘adventitious’ or ‘made up’” (AT VIIIIB, 358; CSM I, 303).

⁹⁶ AT VII, 84; CSM II, 58

former kind of impulse should be trusted while the latter should not always be followed (AT II, 599; CSMK 140).

In *Meditation III* the natural light is opposed to “natural impulses” that are internal to me but opposed to my will. Natural impulses are deceptive and heeding them means falling into error and sin. On the other hand, whatever the light of nature reveals cannot in any way be open to doubt (AT VII, 38-39; CSM II, 26-27). The “natural impulses” of *Meditation III* and “teachings of nature qua composite” of *Meditation VI* would have to be included in the “animal nature instinct” category mentioned above. *Meditation VI* shows how the teachings of nature are necessary for our corporeal well-being as pointers for quick resolution of situations where knowledge by way of clear and distinct ideas is difficult or impossible to obtain. However, the teachings of nature are not infallible as shown by phantom limb syndrome and dropsy (AT VII, 82-86; CSM II, 56-59). Moreover, sometimes the teachings of nature make us pay too much attention to our bodies and not enough to our souls and moral natures (AT XI, 430- 431; CSM I, 376). Their epistemic fallibility and overemphasis on our corporeal nature to the detriment of our moral nature may be the reasons why the *Letter to Mersenne* recommends not following our animal instincts all the time, and the *Passions* direct us to “use experience and reason [which is another kind of instinct] in order to distinguish good from evil and know their true value” (AT XI, 431; CSM I, 376).

From these considerations we can infer that, if the will were just an accidental aspect of ourselves, there would be no thinking. As things stand now, the natural light

works in the background making possible all thinking, reveals to me information that is fully indubitable and commands me to assent to those pieces of information. I take this to further support my case for the will as included in the essence of the Cartesian mind.

VI. Conclusions

In this chapter I have retraced Descartes' steps in the *Meditations* starting from the hyperbolic doubt stage, where the will was used to ensure the continuation of the process of doubt. Next came the clarity and distinctness rule and I argued that a necessary condition for clarity and distinctness in our ideas is attention due to the will. The arguments for God's existence followed: here desire and doubt figure as part of the premises. I then showed that the argument for the existence of sensible objects turns on a propensity underwritten by divine veracity. Finally, the propensity to believe that my ideas of sensible things were caused by those very things is a particular case of the general inclination towards the true and the good manifested by the will. I interpreted the will's inclination towards the true and the good as the volitional side of the light of nature; the light of nature is the normative basis of all thought.

The will appears at all of these stages as effort, as the deliberate settling of one's mental gaze on an object, as focus, as inclination and/or as assent. Given this broad range of functions, if the elimination process that led Descartes to the conclusion that thinking is inseparable from him were continued, it would not be possible to think away the will. Having a will is constitutively necessary for being an inquiring thing, in Descartes' specific sense of this term. As Descartes' intention in the *Meditations* is to prove that

thinking is the essence of the mind *tout court*, not just the mind engaged in the meditating process, in order to make willing coextensive with thinking (in so far as it pertains to the essence of the Cartesian mind) I need to briefly consider the differences between the meditator and the ordinary person.

Although neither the pre-doubt, nor the post-doubt epistemic agent is engaged in the same types of mental activities as the meditator, willing is still a central and indispensable component of their mental lives. Often, the will marks our engagement with and commitment to a certain proposition or state of affairs. The attitude of detachment and disengaged contemplation of an idea is difficult to achieve and, when achieved, it is the result of the agent's effort of always keeping the will in check. Thus, whether engaged or disengaged, thought has a volitional facet.

Moreover, we turn our mental gaze towards a certain object; we focus our attention, no matter how inconstantly, on it; and we assent to it. We also experience desires for certain things, desires on which we sometimes act. Whenever these desires become effective we have tacitly assented to them. The will is doubly involved in desiring as desire is one of the primitive passions and as such it is an inclination of the will; and it is also numbered among the modes of the will in the *Principles*. Apart from implicit assent, we often deliberately undertake and do things: in such cases of voluntary action, the will is undoubtedly present. Although we may not be aware that all these aspects of our lives involve the will until we go through the meditating process, once we do engage in meditation, we realize that thinking always presupposes willing.

Therefore, paying close attention to Descartes' practice and despite the fact that he does not state this explicitly, the will pertains to his essence as a thinking thing. In the *Meditations* Descartes emerges not just as *res cogitans* but as *res volans* as well; and, the latter feature of himself, so prominent in the *Passions*⁹⁷, is already present in the *Meditations*. In focusing attention, in choosing and acting the agent experiences herself as active. However, as I argued in Chapter I, activity is also a feature of the intellect, especially when the narrow sense of the intellect is considered. The difference between intellect and will consists not simply in being active but in a specific kind of activity, in *free activity*. In focusing attention, in choosing and acting the agent experiences herself as *being free*.

⁹⁷ As Deborah Brown argues (Brown 28)

Chapter III

Descartes' Threefold Conception of Freedom

In the previous chapter I argued that the will pertains to the essence of the Cartesian mind as every act of thinking has a volitional aspect. In *Meditation IV* Descartes takes the essence of the will to consist in freedom; he describes the human will in its essential sense as the ability to do or to not do (that is to pursue or avoid, to assert or deny).⁹⁸ From these two considerations we can infer that freedom pertains to the essence of the mind; therefore a proper understanding of Descartes' theory of mind requires a thorough analysis of his theory of freedom.

This chapter will have six parts: in Part I, I briefly present the three types of freedom of the will Descartes works with (freedom of spontaneity, freedom of indifference and freedom of perversity). I maintain that Descartes needs a threefold concept of freedom because he works with two separate models of control, one based on the principle of alternative possibilities and another based on agent causation. Parts II and III will contain analyses of these two models of control. We are immediately aware of the freedom of our acts of will, however determining to which category (spontaneity, indifference, perversity) each belongs is more difficult and subject to errors. Descartes introduces the distinction between acts of will *before* they are elicited and acts of will *after* they are elicited to confirm what we took to be the case from a subjective

⁹⁸ As Kenny argues, Descartes' interest in establishing the essence of a certain object (e.g. mind or body) is Scholastic in spirit as is the notion of essence with which he works (whatever makes a certain thing the kind of thing it is). The essence of the mind is identified as thinking, while the essence of the body is extension. However, Descartes also refers to the essence of the will and the essence of certain emotions (e.g. love), the essence of error (privation). With reference to faculties (e.g. the intellect, the will), Descartes carefully states that he does not take them to be "things" because "things" are equivalent to "substances" while faculties are "modes" of substances (AT VII, 224; CSM II, 158).

perspective. Analyzing the before/after distinction as applied to acts of will is the focus of Part IV of this chapter. I argue that Descartes introduces the before/after an act of will is elicited criterion as a way distinguishing between beliefs and actions arrived at accidentally and beliefs and actions for which we can be praised or blamed.

In Part V I test the coherence of Descartes' threefold conception of freedom of the will by applying it to particular cases. I will interpret hyperbolic doubt as a case of freedom of perversity; the wax example as a case of seeming freedom of perversity that leads to a provisional conclusion about extension as the essence of bodies; and imagination as a potential case of either freedom of indifference (judged from the perspective of their potential results as both true and false judgments may ensue) or freedom of spontaneity (depending on their goals and their objects, e.g. solving math problems). In Part VI I will conclude that Descartes' complex treatment of the freedom of our will is due to the complexity of the subject matter, and, although not devoid of difficulties, it is cogent and interesting.

1. Three types of freedom

Sifting through Descartes' works one finds the following ranking in terms of freedom: animals, humans, and God. For Descartes freedom is ontologically grounded; plants aside, the scale of being entails a parallel scale of freedom. According to Descartes' letter to Mesland dating from 2 May 1644⁹⁹, animals are not free as they do not possess a positive power of self-determination but only a negative power of not being

⁹⁹ I will refer to this letter as the 1st letter to Mesland.

constrained (AT IV, 117; CSMK 234).¹⁰⁰ The next step in this freedom hierarchy is constituted by humans who possess freedom described as a real and positive power to determine themselves. Then comes God who is supremely free and indifferent. God does not need an object towards which to take an attitude (like we do) as in God intellect and will are one and the same: by one single act he brings something about the goodness of which does not precede the divine act but is instituted through it (AT VII, 431-432; CSM II, 291).¹⁰¹

In the Cartesian corpus there are three main senses of freedom of the human will: freedom of spontaneity, freedom of indifference and freedom of perversity.¹⁰² I will clarify these three types of freedom and how they relate to one another and I will inquire into Descartes' reasons for using three distinct types of freedom. This whole chapter makes a case for the existence of philosophically substantial reasons motivating Descartes' theory of freedom. I will show, *pace* Gilson¹⁰³, that these reasons do not simply amount to Descartes' desire to ingratiate himself with both the Oratorians and the Jesuits of his time in order to ensure a good reception of his published works.¹⁰⁴ I contend it was not opportunism that made Descartes propose his threefold conception of freedom

¹⁰⁰ "As for animals that lack reason it is obvious that they are not free, since they do not have this positive power to determine themselves; what they have is a pure negation, namely the power of not being forced or constrained" (AT IV, 117; CSMK 234).

¹⁰¹ (ATVII, 435-436; CSM II, 293-294).

¹⁰² Descartes does not use the terms "freedom of spontaneity" and "freedom of perversity". However, he does use the term "*spontaneum*" (AT IV, 175; CSMK 246). "Freedom of perversity" is a phrase Anthony Kenny coined (Kenny 28) to refer to the indifference that in the 1645 Letter to Mesland Descartes describes as "the positive power which we have to follow the worse although we see the better" (AT IV, 174; CSMK 245).

¹⁰³ Etienne Gilson, *La Liberté Chez Descartes Et La Théologie*, Paris, F. Alcan, 1913.

¹⁰⁴ This view is also endorsed by Caton 94-95

of the will and I argue, contra Kenny¹⁰⁵, that this conception is coherent and has important consequences for the rest of Descartes' system. In particular, the possibility of epistemology broadly construed and Descartes' ethical views hinge on his theory of will. Descartes' whole epistemological system is threatened if spontaneity does not reliably track the truth. Similarly, Descartes' keenness to impute responsibility to epistemic and moral agents is thwarted if perversity is not a viable alternative. I will show the cogency of Descartes' views on freedom of the will by bringing together Descartes' many remarks on this topic and fitting them into a unified picture.

Descartes states in the *Passions* that the will is so free that it can never be constrained. This means that every single act of will manifests freedom. Maybe Descartes works with three types of freedom in order to substantiate this claim; maybe he wants to ensure that the conditions for at least one of them are satisfied in every case, in the same way in which, having declared that the essence of the mind is thinking, he defines thought so broadly as to ensure that at least one type of thought is in effect (either understanding, or willing, or imagining, or sensing).¹⁰⁶ While this may be one of Descartes' reasons for his threefold conception of freedom, in my opinion his main reasons lie elsewhere.

¹⁰⁵ Kenny 1972, 31

¹⁰⁶ Descartes claims, of course, that the converse is the case: he declares thinking to be the essence of the mind *because* at least one type of mental act, like imagining, sensing, understanding or willing, is always in effect.

Systematically¹⁰⁷, the Cartesian approach to free will starts from the essence of the will and is fleshed out by taking into account several factors: the objects of the will, time considerations (*before* and *after* acts of will are elicited) and end results (the agent's goal may be either to obtain true judgments or to prove the freedom of her will). As Descartes wants to evaluate the agent's volitional performance with respect to each of these factors, several types of freedom come into play: when objects of the will are taken into account, freedom of spontaneity and freedom of indifference make their appearance; when end results are considered, freedom of spontaneity and freedom of perversity come to light.

The agent is presented as reacting differently to different kinds of perceptions because Descartes employs different notions of volitional control; this, in turn, is a consequence of the need to explain the multiple functions of the will. Although *control as alternative possibilities* (PAP) is the starting point of a systematic approach to the problem of the Cartesian will, it also becomes clear that it is not enough that there be alternative possibilities. Acts of will are not just acts of choice; in Chapters I and II I already mentioned the role of the will in belief acquisition, directing attention, controlling the passions, etc. Explaining this diversity of volitional functions requires more than just alternative possibilities because in directing attention (for instance) the agent not only chooses on what object to focus but also needs to accomplish the action of turning and maintaining her mental gaze on the object of her choice. I contend that there are two models of control at work in Descartes' writings, models prominent in contemporary

¹⁰⁷ This is not the order in which Descartes himself approaches the topic of the will but rather a speculative attempt on my part to reconstruct the whole picture of the will and its freedom by bringing together Descartes' diverse remarks.

views of free will: one describes the will in terms of alternative possibilities and the other takes the will to be the ultimate source of my actions.

The first model of control Descartes works with makes access to alternative possibilities a condition for freedom of the will and is an incompatibilist position on free will. “According to PAP, doing something freely implies being able to do otherwise; freedom consists in a two-way power to do or not do” (Ragland, 377). This is exactly the way Descartes describes the will in *Meditation IV*: “the will simply consists in our ability to do or not do something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid)” (AT VII, 57; CSM II, 40). In Descartes’ case, PAP implies being able to give or withhold assent to a perception of the intellect. An incompatibilist approach to PAP maintains that “if our every choice were predetermined, we could never choose otherwise and hence would not be free” (Ragland 378). I read Descartes as saying that our choice of whether or not to give or withhold our assent is not predetermined; that we can choose otherwise that thus we are free.

The Source model requires that the agent be the ultimate source of her actions. This model of control is mostly used in incompatibilist approaches, although a weak version (one that requires that the agent be only the mediate, not the ultimate source of one’s action) is compatible with compatibilist theories. The PAP and Source models carry weight independent of each other, although they can also complement each other. If an agent has access to the relevant kind of alternative possibilities, Source imposes as a further condition that the agent be the one who ultimately determines which of the

alternatives obtains. On the other hand, if the relevant type of alternatives is missing, provided the agent is the ultimate source of her actions, she still qualifies as free according to Source (McKenna 2004).

When applied to Descartes, these notions of control are interdependent: the Cartesian agent supplies the alternatives open to herself (assent, deny, withhold)¹⁰⁸ and is the ultimate source of her actions. I will argue that the cooperation between these two models of control in Descartes' works makes Descartes an incompatibilist. Both these models are mentioned in article 37 of the first part of the *Principles* where Descartes states that our having the alternative to choose whether or not to assent to clear ideas makes us *authors* of our own actions and more praiseworthy than if we could not but assent (AT VIII A 18-19; CSM I, 205).

I argue that the interplay between these two models coupled with the actual circumstances in which the agent finds herself give rise to different ratios of PAP to Source models of control: while both these principles apply to the will, depending on the circumstances, one of them will be more apparent than the other from a first-person perspective. The result is Descartes' three different concepts of freedom of the will: freedom of perversity- PAP prominent, Source in the background; freedom of indifference- roughly equal ratio of PAP to Source; and freedom of spontaneity- Source

¹⁰⁸ Assent is the positive form of theoretical commitment; denial is the negative form of theoretical commitment; and withhold refers to taking no stand whatsoever, neither pro nor con. For instance, if I have a red apple in front of me, the alternatives available to me are: assent (forming the judgment "I believe there is a red apple in front of me"); denial (forming the judgment "I do not believe there is a red apple in front of me") and withhold (forming no judgment whatsoever about the red apple in front of me).

prominent, PAP in the background. Having identified Descartes' motivations for proposing three types of freedom I will now briefly present these types.

Looking at Descartes' works, especially the *Meditations*, the two letters to Mesland¹⁰⁹, the *Principles* and the *Passions*, we can identify a systematic progression in Descartes' treatment of the will: in the *Meditations* the will is said to consist in affirming or denying, pursuing or avoiding (AT VII, 57; CSM II, 40). In *Meditation IV*, another component necessary for the will's activity comes to light: a perception of the intellect (AT VII, 60; CSM II, 41). Descartes thinks an idea is a necessary condition for any activity of the will because of intuitions about the structure of thought as involving an object and an attitude (a topic I hinted at in Chapter I when treating of the intentionality of all ideas and which, applied directly to the will, will be the focus of Chapter IV). Then, the quality of the perception in question (clear and distinct or obscure) is shown to have an influence on the act of will: the clearer my perception of X, the more reasons pointing to X, and the more I incline towards¹¹⁰ X (AT VII, 59; CSM II, 41). In *Meditation V* Descartes justifies this connection between our volitions and the quality of the preceding ideas by an appeal to our nature (AT VII, 65; CSM II, 45)¹¹¹. Natural knowledge and divine grace (AT VII, 58; CSM II, 40) are freedom-enhancing features¹¹², while a balance

¹⁰⁹ These letters date from 2 May 1644 and 9 February 1645.

¹¹⁰ I address the issue of the will's inclination in Chapter V when dealing with passions of the soul as inclinations.

¹¹¹ "[T]he nature of my mind is such that I cannot but assent to these things [those of which I am clearly aware], at least so long as I clearly perceive them" (AT VII, 65; CSM II, 45). Also, in *Meditation IV*, Descartes states that "a great light in the intellect is followed by a great inclination in the will" (AT VII, 59; CSM II, 41).

¹¹² "Neither divine grace, nor natural knowledge ever diminishes freedom; on the contrary, they increase and strengthen it. But the indifference I feel when there is no reason pushing me in one direction rather than another is the lowest grade of freedom; it is evidence not of any perfection of freedom, but rather of a defect in knowledge or a kind of negation" (AT VII, 58; CSM II, 40).

of reasons and external determination (some cases of which, I will argue, are reducible to indifference as balance of reasons) are freedom-diminishing features.

Two of the types of freedom Descartes works with, freedom of spontaneity and freedom of indifference, are introduced to mark the connection between acts of will and the quality of perceptions preceding them: freedom of spontaneity is manifested when the idea that precedes the act of will is clear and distinct; while freedom of indifference obtains when there are as many reasons pro and con. Freedom of indifference is said to be not so much a sign of perfection of freedom as a defect in knowledge (AT VII, 58; CSM 40). To these two types of freedom the letter to Mesland from 9 February 1645¹¹³ adds another type of indifference, the ability to reject a clearly perceived truth and good.

In *Meditation Four*, freedom of spontaneity is described as my inclining more in one direction because reasons point that way or because God so determined my internal disposition. This type of freedom comes in degrees, is independent of my being inclined both ways and only external compulsion represents an impediment to it (AT VII, 57-58; CSM II, 40).

Descartes goes on to characterize freedom of indifference as “the lowest grade of freedom” resulting from my not being more inclined in one direction rather than another (AT VII, 58; CSM II, 40). Freedom of perversity (as Kenny termed it) is the latest addition to Descartes' theory of will. Writing to Mesland in 1645, Descartes reiterates the sense of indifference given in the *Meditations* and adds another type of indifference

¹¹³ From now on I will refer to this letter as the 2nd letter to Mesland.

characterized as a power of self-determination in the presence of alternative possibilities. This type of indifference is overarching, covering both cases that fall under freedom of indifference qua balance and freedom of spontaneity: indifference in the second sense applies to all actions ranging from situations where I am not pushed more to one side rather than the other to situations in which I am more inclined to one side due to reasons pointing in that direction. When there are more reasons to one side, I can always refrain from assenting to a clearly perceived truth if I want to prove the freedom of my will. Refraining from admitting a clearly perceived truth is a possibility open to me only from an absolute point of view; from a moral standpoint, this possibility is moot (AT IV, 173; CSMK 245).

Having outlined the course of a systematic approach to the will and its freedom, I will now look in more detail at the essence of the will. The 1645 Letter to Mesland describes freedom as a power of self-determination in the presence of contraries, contraries elucidated, similarly to *Meditation IV*, as to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid. PAP is present in all three Cartesian types of freedom because the essence of our will is explained in terms of alternative possibilities, to affirm or deny.

PAP is important for our freedom of indifference due to epistemic balance: we have the ability to choose either of the alternatives, although the correct course in theoretical matters is to suspend judgment. I will argue that PAP is present in the background when it comes to freedom of spontaneity: the starting point of this scenario is the same as for the case of perversity (we can either pursue a clearly perceived good or

reject it), however in this case we choose to follow our inclinations and pursue the clearly perceived good. PAP is also present in freedom of perversity: I will argue that although we have the ability to choose either of the alternatives, we choose to reject a clearly perceived truth because we consider it a good thing to prove the freedom of our will by so doing.

II. PAP

McKenna describes PAP as follows:

A natural way to think of an agent's control over her conduct at a moment in time is in terms of her ability to select among, or choose between, alternative courses of action. This picture of control stems from common features of our perspectives as practical deliberators settling on courses of action. If one is choosing between voting for Gore as opposed to Bush, it is plausible to assume that her freedom with regard to her voting consists, at least partially, in her ability to choose between these two alternatives. On this account, acting with free will requires *alternative possibilities*. A natural way to model this account of free will is in terms of an agent's future as a garden of forking paths branching off from a single past (McKenna 2004).

The principle of alternative possibilities Descartes works with involves: several alternatives towards which one attitude is possible (e.g. fighting or running) and one object towards which several attitudes may be taken (e.g. one proposition that can be assented to or denied or with respect to which judgment may be withheld). The possibility of taking several attitudes towards an object may be one of the reasons Descartes states that the scope of the will is broader than that of the intellect (AT VII, 58; CSM II, 40).

If several attitudes need to be available to the agent who enjoys free will in the Cartesian sense it seems that the compelled assent view presented in *Meditation IV* raises

a serious problem. If, as *Meditation IV* maintains, whenever we perceive something clearly and distinctly we cannot but assent to it, assent is the only attitude available to the agent in such a situation and thus PAP does not apply to the essence of the will as I argued above. Moreover, even if there are other alternatives available to the agent presented with a clear and distinct idea, how would one go about choosing one of the other alternatives? What would rejecting a clearly perceived truth really entail? I will now address both these problems, starting with the availability of more than assent as a possible attitude towards a clear and distinct idea.

C.P. Ragland proposes the following way of preserving PAP as applicable to the essence of the Cartesian will: he distinguishes between *alternatives of indifference* (being inclined or motivated both ways); and *alternatives of self-determination* (lack of external determination). We do not have alternatives of indifference if the idea that the intellect presents us with is clear and distinct but we do possess alternatives of self-determination in such a case. Having alternatives means being able to do otherwise than one does or did. *Alternatives of indifference* and *alternatives of self-determination* involve different senses of “could have done otherwise”. In the case of alternative of indifference, “‘I could have done otherwise’ means ‘I had reason or motive for doing otherwise’.

Whenever the will is indifferent, it has alternative possibilities in this sense, because it has motives both pro and contra a course of action”. Ragland explicates ‘could have done otherwise’ in the case of alternatives of self-determination as “external forces did not determine me to do what I did” (Ragland 386).

Ragland applies the distinction between alternatives of indifference and alternatives of self-determination to the *cogito*: “When Descartes says he could not but judge the *cogito* true, he means he has no reason to do otherwise, that all his inclinations were on the side of assent. But he states explicitly that he was not determined by any external force” (Ragland 386). Ragland presents several ways of interpreting “determined” and “external force” but does not reveal his own position. I agree with his general strategy for showing that PAP applies to the essence of the Cartesian will, although, as I will show below, I read self-determination along incompatibilist lines: I maintain that the Cartesian agent could have done otherwise not only because there are no external factors determining her choice but also because, although she has reasons pointing in one direction, she can always choose to go in the opposite direction.

According to Ragland, when “an act of will is determined” is read along incompatibilist lines as equivalent to “an external force sufficiently causes the act of will directly or indirectly” and when the external force referred to is the intellect, one obtains “the radical freedom interpretation”: “the claim that Descartes lacked alternatives of indifference- that he had no reason or motive for doing otherwise- means that for him to do otherwise would be immoral or irrational, but not psychologically impossible” (Ragland 387). Ragland attributes the radical interpretation view to Alanen whose views I present next.

Alanen argues that assent and rejection of a clearly perceived truth are alternatives always open to the agent, including in *Meditation IV*. Even when all reasons available to

the agent point in one direction and thus she is inclined to go that way, she can choose the opposite course and act against her inclinations. The difference between *Meditation IV* and the Mesland letters is that, in *Meditation IV*, assent is emphasized while rejection is only presupposed because the purpose of the *Meditations* is to find the truth, not to prove how free the will is (Alanen 2003, 246). In agreement with Alanen, in the following paragraphs I will show that, despite the opinions of many Cartesian scholars (e.g. Alquié¹¹⁴), the 2nd letter to Mesland does not constitute a radical shift in Descartes' views on the will but in fact closely follows the position Descartes presented starting with *Meditation IV*. A detailed analysis of the 2nd letter to Mesland is important to my purpose in this section as I want to show that PAP applies to the will even in situations where there are more reasons pointing in one direction; the 2nd letter to Mesland is the one place where Descartes most forcefully emphasizes that there are *always* alternatives open to the agent.

The purpose of the 2nd letter to Mesland seems to be to bring further support for Descartes' contention that indifference as balance of reasons is the lowest degree of freedom. He begins by appealing to PAP: indifference as balance of reasons presupposes alternative possibilities and is just a type alongside cases where there are more reasons pro or con. Before acts of will are elicited, freedom of perversity is the prominent type of freedom¹¹⁵. The 2nd letter continues with Descartes' contrasting two scenarios: being commanded by another versus following one's own judgment. The command consists in

¹¹⁴ *La découverte métaphysique de l'homme*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950.

¹¹⁵ Here I am only interested in showing that even in the presence of clear and distinct ideas there are alternatives different than assent that are available to the agent. I will address the before/after distinction in the fourth section of this chapter. I mention the before/after distinction here because my analysis closely follows the layout of the 2nd letter to Mesland.

a prohibition against doing something. We are freer when we follow our own judgment. Following one's own judgment is further divided into being balanced between reasons pro and con, on the one hand, and having more reasons on one side, on the other. We are freer when there are more reasons on one side. Being commanded by reason is completely different from being commanded by another. When we follow the course that has more reasons in its favor we determine ourselves more easily. If we follow the opposite, we make more use of the positive power to determine ourselves.

Next, Descartes returns to the scenario where we are being commanded by somebody else. This scenario is further fleshed out in that the command consists of something we would not do spontaneously. In such a case we are said to be indifferent (in the sense of balance of reasons) because we are torn between not doing what we are commanded to do and doing it. Not doing what we are commanded to do is supported by our judgment that these things are difficult to do; doing it is supported by our judgment that it is good to do what we are commanded to do. The difference between Descartes' first example of being commanded by another and this one seems to consist in our having an opinion of our own concerning the matter (in the first case) while, in the second case, having no set opinion on the matter but only evaluating it from other points of view (e.g. difficulty of fulfillment, the value of obeying authority, etc).

In *Meditation IV* where Descartes clarifies the initial description of the will in terms of a feeling of lack of external determination, he follows this remark with a phrase about indifference due to epistemic balance. Maybe his intention here- as in the 2nd letter

to Mesland- was to reduce the external determination scenario to one of epistemic balance. This interpretation may receive some support from the fact that at this point in the *Meditations* the existence of only two things has been proven: the meditator and God. Thus external influence referred to may be a command issued by God. Descartes may be saying that we feel that we are not externally determined because external influences can play a role in our deciding what to do and what to believe only by becoming reasons. For instance, if someone commands us to do something, the way we relate to the content of the command will determine our conduct (whether to obey or disobey the command).

Descartes concludes the 2nd letter to Mesland by identifying freedom of spontaneity as the only type of freedom involved during the time an act of will is elicited and he equates it with voluntariness. How should we understand Descartes' position here? The fact that he does not mention freedom of perversity (despite his statement at the beginning of the letter that it is always open to us to refrain from affirming a clearly perceived truth) cannot be an omission on his part as he specifically excludes any type of indifference¹¹⁶. The "spontaneity" mentioned here involves ease of operation and lack of alternatives, lack of alternatives that seems to threaten my reading of the essence of the will as conforming to PAP. Ragland notices the same difficulty and argues that a weaker version of PAP is needed, one that requires PAP to apply only before an act of will is elicited. Descartes' reason for the lack of alternatives is: "for what is done cannot remain undone as long as it is being done" (AT IV, 175; CSM K 246). Here Descartes is making a logical point: there are no alternatives that would preserve the type of freedom being

¹¹⁶ "But freedom considered in the acts of the will at the moment when they are elicited does not entail any indifference in either the first or the second sense; for what is done cannot remain undone as long as its being done" (AT IV, 174; CSMK 246).

manifested. If the agent initially assents to X and X is clear and distinct (e.g. $2+2=4$), this would be an instance of freedom of spontaneity; if the agent were to assent to nonX now (e.g. $2+2$ do not make 4), that would be an act of denial of X and thus of freedom of perversity.

In saying that there are no alternatives available to the agent performing an act of assent, Descartes is also repeating a point about the automatic character of assent: for an ordinary person assent is implicit and almost indistinguishable from the mental processes preceding it, i.e. entertaining an idea or deciding on a course of action.¹¹⁷ After all, driving a wedge between the intellectual presentation of an idea and the assent given to it is one of the objectives of the process of doubt in the *Meditations*. The meditator tries to buy himself more time in order to better examine things precisely because once assent gets underway it has already been accomplished. The availability of alternatives also depends on the agent's overall goal, pursuing the truth or rejecting it: if the agent is committed to finding the truth, a clear and distinct idea may appear to leave her no choice but to endorse it. On the other hand, if the agent is committed to proving the freedom of her will, endorsing a clear and distinct idea will not appear to go without saying anymore.

Although Descartes does not provide any details as to how the agent would go about rejecting a clearly perceived truth, the question arises about the feasibility of such a feat. After having struggled to not assent to merely probable opinions, struggled to

¹¹⁷ In the *Sixth Replies* Descartes states: "The reason for this is that we make the calculation and judgment at great speed because of habit, or rather we remember the judgments we have long made about similar objects; and so we do not distinguish these operations from simple sense perception" (AT VII, 438; CSM II, 295).

remember the new clarity and distinctness criterion and make it its own, the mind finally finds some tranquility and some sense of facility in following its “considered” inclinations (“considered” as they result from transparent reasons). However, the mind once again finds itself struggling when deciding, in a luciferian manner, to reject a clearly perceived truth. I contend that this is a possible endeavor provided the mind has a plan whose objective is the rejection of clearly perceived truths and goods, and provided it sticks to such a plan.

Putting in place procedures whose reliable functioning ensures a desired result is often used by Descartes. His method of finding the truth and his provisional morality both presented in the *Discourse* are two such examples; another one is the sequence of steps involved in making our ideas clear and distinct (reject information coming from the senses and focus the mind on some object at close quarters¹¹⁸). In the penultimate article of the *Passions* Descartes stresses the need for careful preparation taking place prior to the attack of the passions if the mind is not to be completely invaded by the tumultuous agitation due to the spirits (AT XI, 486:CSM I, 403 a.211). Also in article 48 of the first part of the *Passions* the proper weapons for fighting the passions are firm and determinate judgments bearing on the knowledge of good and evil, judgments that the will has resolved to follow in guiding its behavior. Souls that possess such judgments and resolutely stick to them are successful in fighting the passions and are called strong (AT XI, 367: CSM I, 347).

¹¹⁸ AT VII, 145-146:CSM II, 103-104

I maintain that a similar strategy applies to the perverse rejection of a clearly perceived truth. Taking advantage of the planning-for-the-future feature of the will, the agent sets herself the goal of rejecting the truth and resolves to stick to her plan.¹¹⁹ The paradoxical character of actually putting into practice such a plan is nicely described by Lilli Alanen. Alanen argues that whenever the agent is prompted by a clear and distinct idea to give her assent, she is free to do nothing; Alanen explicates “nothing” as: either not eliciting any act (withholding judgment altogether) or as doing something that turns out to be no thing, not at all what the agent thought it would be. Doing nothing in the first sense means refraining from taking any stand, either pro or con, towards a certain proposition. Doing nothing in the second sense means “turning to nothing: willing what is not”; as Descartes describes error as a privation, assenting to something erroneous means in fact assenting to what is not, going against the laws of good and rationality. Although it may seem to the agent like she is doing something in rejecting the laws of rationality, this is as much an illusion as moving an amputated limb.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ The emotional reactions accompanying such a resolution would have to be completely opposed to generosity: the agent in question knows that nothing truly belongs to her but the freedom to dispose her volitions but feels within herself a firm and constant resolution to use her will *badly* (AT XI, 446; CSM I, 384). As this involves nothing which depends on somebody else the agent must feel a certain satisfaction which is an internal emotion (AT XI, 441; CSM I, 381); however, the esteem she feels is unjustified (because the will is being used badly) so satisfaction is accompanied by vanity (AT XI, 449; CSM I, 385) Perversely rejecting a clearly perceived truth brings about anti-generosity.

¹²⁰ “Being able to do nothing can be taken in two ways. The doings we are talking of here are, primarily, acts of will: assenting to or denying a proposition, pursuing or avoiding whatever course of action presents itself as the right thing to do. In that context being able not to do anything means having the ability to refrain from eliciting any of the acts to which we are most inclined at the moment. We have that ability in all circumstances, whether we exercise it well or badly, or by cowardice neglect to exercise it at all. For any act of will, there is the possibility at the time of its actualization not to will. Whatever in fact we will, we are responsible for it because we could have not willed... It is not clear what exercising it in such cases (refusing assent to evident perceptions) really means, and this brings us to the second sense of doing nothing, which may be of some help here. Doing nothing can mean doing something that turns out not to be anything- not to be anything one thought one was doing... In such cases, the power not to act turns into not-doing-anything in the second sense- it is literally a turning to nothing: willing what is not. This may be unintelligible, but no more nor less than the much discussed case of the Fallen Angel or the Original Sin, which were often ‘explained’ in terms of wanting to be God, wanting one’s will to be like God’s, unbound by any commands, putting up one’s will against God’s command, or if one prefers, against the laws of

Rejecting a clearly perceived truth might also seem impossible because clarity and distinctness depends on the will, as I already argued in Chapter II, and such an effort seems futile or self-defeating if a plan to reject the result is already in place. However, if proving the freedom of one's will is one's purpose, exerting volitional effort both in establishing the clarity of an idea and in subsequently rejecting it, might be very appropriate. The irrationality of the gesture does not count against it as the whole point of the enterprise is to reject the values of truth and goodness as already established by God and appoint one's will as the new source of value.

However, according to the *Sixth Replies*, God created not only all things, bodies and minds, but also all standards of value. God's institution of values is dependent on his omnipotence. We, on the other hand, are finite beings who find the scale of values already established. While we are free to act against those values, in so doing our acts qualify as wrong. We may want to reject the whole scale of values instituted by God but we are still subject to them and incapable of replacing them. The standards of truth and goodness are integral to our nature; all thinking and willing takes place in virtue of these norms (AT VII, 435-436; CSM II, 293-294). To no longer be subject to these norms, we would have to completely refashion our minds, which we lack the power to do.

rationality... [Humans doing this] are under the illusion of willing something, an illusion of exercising an ability they do not have, comparable, perhaps, to that of persons who think they are moving an amputated limb" (Alanen 256).

Therefore, Descartes was right to maintain that it is *always* open to us to reject a clearly perceived truth provided, as I argued above, one puts together a strategy for so doing and sticks to it. No such strategy was in effect in the *Meditations*; on the contrary, the goal of the meditator was to transform into second nature *accepting* a clearly perceived truth once discovered. Given this intended goal it is no wonder, as Alanen points out, that we find no mention in the *Meditations* of the ability we have to jeopardize our own efforts of ridding ourselves of falsehoods accepted since childhood and establishing science on a solid foundation.

III. Source

From a first-person perspective, the most common experience of our freedom comes from experiencing ourselves as active, as undertaking and doing things. Often, the availability of alternatives takes second place to our experiencing ourselves as that on which an action depends.¹²¹ Stephen McKenna refers to this as the Source model of control and defines it as follows:

An agent's control consists in her playing a crucial role in the production of her actions. Think in terms of the transparent difference between those events that are *products of one's agency* and those that are merely bodily happenings... *Control is understood as one's being the source whence her actions emanate.* On this model, a *Source* model of control, one's actions issue from one's self (in a suitable manner)...What is meant here by an ultimate source, and not just a source? *When an agent is an ultimate source of her action, some condition necessary for her action originates with the agent herself.* It cannot be located in places and times prior to the agent's freely willing her action (McKenna 2004- my emphasis).

¹²¹ PAP is often more emphasized than Source because Descartes favors assent from among the modes of the will. In turn, this preferential status of assent is due to Descartes' reductive efforts: as I will show in Chapter IV, Descartes tries to work with as small a number of mental entities, faculties, attitudes, etc as possible without diminishing the effectiveness of his analyses. Or, as I pointed out in Chapter I, all the functions attributed to the will (e.g. belief- acquisition, imagination, attention, controlling the passions) involve assent.

For Descartes, McKenna's *necessary condition for action originating with the agent* is represented by volitions: volitions are actions of the soul and by way of volitions I influence other thoughts and external actions. McKenna's description of control as Source comes close to Descartes' distinction between actions and passions of the soul: we are the source of our actions when the latter are something that we undertake as opposed to something that we undergo. Activity is a sign of control. As volitions are actions of the soul, they are controlled in the Source sense. This has been traditionally known as *agent causation*.

Below I present Descartes' understanding of a Source model of control and the use he makes of this notion. Source is the criterion used to distinguish between different mental processes: first, between ideas and volitions; second, between different categories of ideas (innate, adventitious and invented); and third, between authentic and inauthentic volitions. Source as used in the Cartesian theory of mind has important consequences for Descartes' theory of freedom: I show that voluntariness, which Descartes sometimes equates with freedom, is a version of Source. Voluntariness is a more general notion than any of the three types of freedom Descartes works with (freedom of indifference, freedom of spontaneity, freedom of perversity) so further considerations must be brought in to decide which of the three types of Cartesian freedom in fact obtains. However, establishing that an act is voluntary constitutes an important step in this process.

In *Meditation III* the meditator appears to be the source of all his ideas when they are taken materially: "In so far as the ideas are <considered> simply <as> modes of thought there is no recognizable inequality among them: they all appear to come from

within me in some fashion” (AT VII, 40; CSM II, 27-28). However, as Vere Chappell notices¹²², the relation between my ideas taken materially and myself is more one of belonging to a substance as ideas are modes of the intellect; while Source as control concerns the relation between myself as agent and some effects I bring about. Whether I cause them or something else does, all ideas belong to the mind qua substance.

In *Meditation III* and in the *Second Replies*¹²³ Descartes states that we are (our nature is) the source of our idea of God but God is its cause as he implanted it in our minds when he created us. Like the idea of God, volitions seem to come from us as well; we seem to be their source too. In the *Passions* volitions are experienced as “proceeding directly from our soul and seeming to depend on it alone” (AT XI, 342; CSM I, 335).¹²⁴ A few articles later more forceful language is used: volitions are “caused by the soul itself”, in order to distinguish them from passions which are caused by movements of the spirits (AT XI, 350; CSM I, 339). In these passages from the *Passions* Descartes seems to take source and cause as being equivalent. While both ideas and volitions *depend* on us, volitions seem to be caused by us in a way different than even those ideas that we do cause, e.g. the invented ones. It seems that I am the source of both my idea of God and of

¹²² Chappell 1994, 184

¹²³ (AT VII, 51; CSM II, 35); (AT VII, 133; CSM II, 96; “hanc ideam mihi esse innatam, sive non aliunde quam a meipso mihi advenire”).

¹²⁴ Vere Chappell remarks that for Descartes God is not only the cause of our innate idea of God but the cause of our volitions as well. First, God created us and our faculties of willing, and second, God “is responsible for every volition by concurring in all of the actions of minds” (Chappell 1994, 184). “It now looks as if we have two distinct conditions for the performance of any volition, each of which is sufficient as well as necessary: on the one hand, that some created mind produce it; on the other, that it come from God”. Chappell suggests that we solve the difficulties thus raised by considering “the action of God to be not sufficient for the performance of any volition, but only necessary therefor” (Chappell 1994, 190). As support for his proposal he cites Descartes’ letter to Elisabeth of 6 October 1645, “the slightest thought could not enter a person’s mind *without* God’s willing...that it should so enter” (Chappell 1994, 190). Because of the reference Descartes makes in *Meditation IV* to God’s concurrence to all volitions that are something, i.e. not those aspects that make them errors, I agree with Chappell’s proposed solution (AT VII, 61; CSM II, 42).

my volitions, while being the cause of my volitions and my invented ideas only. Source, for Descartes, seems to be a broader concept than cause. The control that makes me the source of my thoughts¹²⁵ involves the ability to influence a thought's occurrence¹²⁶, its content and/or the attitude I can take towards it.

This threefold ability to influence thoughts is crucial to agency as Descartes conceives it because he takes certain mental events (volitions) to be paradigm cases of our exercising our agency. As Linda Zagzebski remarks, while nowadays the example of choice when it comes to intentional action is raising one's arm, this was not the case for a long time in the history of philosophy. In a tradition including Aquinas and Descartes, and which may even go back as far as Aristotle, mental actions represented the typical case of intentional actions (Zagzebski 2001, 143). Agency involves awareness, control and causal connections; for something to qualify as an action it must be brought about in a causal way; the cause must be aware of itself and it must be in control of its own causal powers. Being in control of one's powers means being able to exercise them or refrain from exercising them; exercising them in different manners, etc. This type of control is what sets apart agents from non-agential causes which have a set way of bringing about effects given certain background conditions.

¹²⁵ In the *Discourse*, the third maxim of Descartes' provisional morality includes the claim that "nothing lies entirely within our power except our thoughts" (AT VI, 25; CSM I, 123). In clarifying the third maxim Descartes uses mostly the example of desire: what we desire is in our power as we only desire what is possible and convincing ourselves of the impossibility of everything external eradicates the desire.

¹²⁶ Vere Chappell makes a similar point: "[V]olitions depend on the minds whose actions they are. This dependence is partly a matter of simply belonging to a substance, in the way that any attribute does. Since volitions are not merely attributes but actions, and therefore events, there is more to their dependence than this. They owe not only their being but their occurrence at particular times to the minds they belong to: minds produce or perform their volitions as agents, besides possessing them as substances" (Chappell 1994, 184).

The ability to influence a thought in all three senses mentioned above (occurrence, content and attitude) plays an important role in the economy of the *Meditations*: the criteria used for classifying thoughts into kinds in *Meditation III* are: the structure of thoughts as propositional attitudes and the presence or lack of control over ideas (AT VII, 37; CSM II, 26). I will return to the structure of thoughts as propositional attitudes in Chapter IV. Here I am interested in the control over ideas criterion. Descartes first distinguishes between ideas as images of things and thoughts having additional forms: for instance, according to him, I am more active when I desire something than when I entertain the idea of a goat. Descartes takes volitions to be more active than ideas because volitions include ideas but also come with a level of activity of their own. Within the broader category of ideas as images of things, differences in the way we are able to influence either the occurrence and content determine three categories of ideas: the ones over whose occurrence I have no control are adventitious; those having contents beyond my control are innate; and, finally, the ideas I can influence both in terms of occurrence and content are factitious.

With the additional forms comes an increased level of control. In this category Descartes lumps together emotions and volitions; however he will subsequently attempt to set them apart by fine-tuning his notion of control as Source. Emotions have a tight hold on us and thus seem to stem from us. However, if we take the time- which often is lacking when it comes to emotions and acting on them- to carefully apply the criteria of control (occurrence, content, and attitude) we realize that emotions are not controlled in the Source sense. I need to draw a distinction between authentic and inauthentic volitions. Authentic volitions are initiated and caused by the soul alone and are thus absolutely in

the mind's power. Inauthentic volitions are just passions that we mistake for volitions due to the strong internal demands they make on us: they are caused by something else (e.g. movements of the spirits, external objects, etc) but they appear to be caused by the agent.¹²⁷

As Descartes states in the *Discourse*, there is nothing that is truly in our power except our thoughts. I take this to mean that we are in control of our thoughts and I interpret control in an incompatibilist Source way: I control my thoughts because a necessary condition for each and every one of my thoughts originates with me. There are three main aspects of a thought that are subject to my control: its occurrence, its content and the attitude we can take towards it. The occurrence and content of a thought fall under Source, while the occurrence of a thought and the attitude we can take towards it fall under PAP. PAP accounts for our role as decision-makers, while Source accounts for our role as accomplishers of our decisions. I will now analyze the way I can control a thought's occurrence, content and attitude, in this order.

In the context of treating of the category of adventitious ideas Descartes states: "in addition, I know by experience that these ideas [which I take to be derived from things existing outside me] *do not depend on my will, and hence that they do not depend simply on me*" (AT VII, 38; CSM II, 26). I have no control over the occurrence of sensations so they must depend on external objects. Although this is not the only or even the most important consideration leading Descartes to the conclusion that there are external objects that cause the sensory ideas he has, it is one consideration. Using it

¹²⁷ I will return to the problem of passions as inauthentic volitions in the next chapter when dealing with the will as the attitude-providing faculty and with emotions which are, together with volitions, part of the "additional forms" category.

Descartes is able to distinguish (at least provisionally) sensations, which are a subclass of adventitious ideas, from his other ideas. In *Meditation VI*, after proving the existence of external objects, he is able to distinguish adventitious ideas from his other ideas with certainty.

I also have no control over the content of my idea of God. I am incapable of adding anything to it¹²⁸ although I am capable of finding out new aspects. However, this does not amount to changing the idea of God but to making it more clear and distinct (AT III, 383; CSMK 184). I also lack control over the content of clear and distinct ideas of geometrical figures; however, I do have control over whether or not I turn my mental gaze on them as “they can be thought of at will” (AT VII, 64; CSM II, 44). In *Meditation V* these are presented as having true and immutable natures which I am unable to modify (AT VII, 64; CSM II, 45)¹²⁹. This provides a criterion for differentiating innate ideas from the rest. The ideas over whose contents I do have control are the invented ones.

I also have control over the giving and withholding of assent; my ability to give or withhold assent reveals the presence of alternative possibilities and thus a PAP model of control. PAP is mentioned here as it works in tandem with Source, as will become clear by the end of this chapter. In *Meditation IV*, during Descartes’ efforts to exonerate God from any blame for human error, he takes the privation that constitutes the essence of error as depending solely on me: it does not require God’s concurrence (because it is not

¹²⁸ “And it [the idea of God] was not invented by me either; for I am plainly unable to take away anything from it or to add anything to it. The only remaining alternative is that it is innate in me, just like the idea of myself is innate in me” (AT VII, 51; CSM II, 35).

¹²⁹ “This is clear from the fact that various properties can be demonstrated of the triangle, for example that its three angles equal two right angles, that its greatest side subtends its greatest angle, and the like; and since *these properties are ones which I clearly recognized whether I want to or not*, even if I never thought of them at all when I previously imagined the triangle, it follows that they cannot have been invented by me” (AT VII, 64; CSM II, 45- my emphasis).

a thing) but it does involve “an imperfection in me to misuse that freedom [to assent or not to assent] and make judgments about matters which I do not fully understand” (AT VII, 61; CSM II, 42). In *Meditation III* errors are described as false judgments and thus include volitions. Errors stem from me: in choosing (PAP) to assent to an idea that is not clear and distinct, I am the Source of the ensuing error.

Volitions meet two out of the above three criteria (control over occurrence, content and attitude) and thus are the freest of our thoughts. Volitions taken in the strict sense of actions of the soul occur only if I want them to; I am the ultimate source of their occurrence. I take the content of a volition to be the idea towards which a stance is taken, and thus (except for the ideas of the imagination) we lack control over a volition’s content which is supplied by the intellect. However, Descartes explicitly states that we have control over our volitions, which I equate with attitudes (AT XI, 445; CSM I, 384; a.152); that volitions are absolutely within the soul’s power (AT XI, 359; CSM I, 343; a.41).

In Chapter II I argued that the will pertains to the essence of the mind as every thought has a volitional facet. Although all thoughts have a volitional aspect it is still possible to rank them according to how much control they involve: volitions properly so called are brought about directly by the agent, while invented ideas are brought about only indirectly. Both volitions and invented ideas presuppose the possession of previous ideas; however, they differ in that in the case of volitions only the will is required to be active. Invented ideas, on the other hand, not only presuppose that we already possess the components that will be recombined but require the presence of an act of will to initiate

the combining process and of an act of the intellect and/or imagination to accomplish the actual linking.

Whenever Descartes mentions authorship, mastery over ourselves or our passions, control over our volitions, or absolute control over ourselves, the model of control implicitly referred to is Source. The absolute control we have over ourselves, mentioned in the *Passions*, amounts to ruling a small portion of our mental life in the same manner God rules everything there is, by fiat: my willing it so makes it so. In article 152 of the *Passions* Descartes depicts free will as making us *masters of ourselves* and in a sense similar to God, provided we do not lose the rights this free will affords us through cowardice (AT XI, 445; CSM I, 384). There is a huge difference between God and us, hence the “in a sense” qualification in the quote above. In God there is no split between willing and performing the action, God has 100% efficiency rate and, when it comes to volitions, so do we: nothing can prevent our willing something; not even God can prevent our willing something as he made this wholly dependent on our will (A TXI, 439; CSM I, 380; a.146).

The question now arises if the will is in control of its own acts, doesn't this represent a case of infinite regress?¹³⁰ If I will X, in order for my willing to be under my control it seems that it needs to be the object of another act of will, it seems that I must will to will X. The second willing, if it is controlled by me, must be the object of a third act of will. And so on, *ad infinitum*. However, the will is not in fact threatened with an infinite regress when it is in control of its own act because in order for my assent to X (which is an act of will) to be an act that I control I need to decide to assent to X.

¹³⁰ This is a concern that David Owens expresses (Owens 2000b, 80).

However, in deciding to assent to X I have already assented to X. But in order to decide to assent to X I need not decide to decide because the will is able to determine itself. The Cartesian will is a power of self-determination. This self-determination is similar to the performativeness exhibited in the *cogito*: in order to stop the infinite regress of epistemic justification Descartes resorts to self-certifying beliefs like *I am, I exist* (which is necessarily true whenever I conceive it in my mind). In the same vein, in order to stop an infinite regress of willing to will X Descartes endows the agent with the ability to be the ultimate source of her willings. Randolph Clarke characterizes the agent's relation to her willings when she is their ultimate source as "a relation of producing, bringing about or making happen" relation in which an enduring substance stands to an event (Clarke 2005, 411).

We can see from the above that the ultimate examples of my exercising my agency are authentic volitions. They have several features: they are operations of the mind characterized by awareness of their objects (which they derive from the ideas they encompass) and of themselves as mental acts (AT XI, 343; CSM I, 336); control (as I am the ultimate source of my volitions); and, in the case of volitions terminating in the body, a capacity to influence behavior (they are motivating factors). Volitions are not only controlled (because they are caused by the agent who has alternative possibilities available to her) but through them we extend control to other types of thoughts and to our bodies and external circumstances.

Source as necessary condition(s) for action originating with the agent and voluntariness as lack of other-determination are two ways of describing the same

phenomenon: for actions that are not random, being determined by something else or originating with me exhaust all possibilities. This is corroborated by Alanen's and Kenny's interpretations of voluntariness. Alanen takes voluntariness to be equivalent to a lack of external determination: an action is voluntary if it proceeds from an internal, as opposed to an external, principle¹³¹. Anthony Kenny takes the voluntary to be equivalent to what conforms to our desires (Kenny 1972, 9). Lack of external determination and conformity to one's desires (doing something because we want to do it) are two sides of the same coin: the former constitutes an experience in negative terms (lack of other-determination) while the latter reveals in positive terms my own activity and power of self-determination. Alanen's "internal principle" is equivalent to Kenny's "desire". As desire qua act of will stems ultimately from me, it is therefore McKenna's necessary condition for action originating with the agent. As Descartes numbers desire among acts of will, desires are volitions. Therefore volitions are a necessary component of "actions"; "actions" do not occur without my willing that they occur.

Voluntariness is equated with self-determination in the 1st letter to Mesland. The *Geometrical Exposition* also equates voluntariness and freedom by stating that "the will of a thinking thing is drawn voluntarily and freely (for such is the essence of will) but nevertheless inevitably, towards a clearly known good" (AT VII, 166; CSM II, 117). Descartes' reply to Hobbes includes the claim that "if we simply consider ourselves¹³², we will all realize in the light of our own experience that voluntariness and freedom are one and the same thing" (AT VII, 191; CSM II, 134).

¹³¹ "[V]oluntary action- action whose principle is within the agent and not in external forces" (Alanen 222).

¹³² Without attempting to reconcile our freedom with God's preordination of all things

Article 37 of Part I of the *Principles* also equates what is free with the voluntary while making alternative possibilities a condition of this type of freedom¹³³. As voluntariness is a version of Source and for Descartes voluntariness depends on alternative possibilities, then Source and PAP work together in Descartes' theory of will: I cause a certain thought- the most obvious type of control involved is Source; I choose the attitude a certain thought contains- the most obvious type of control involved is PAP; I cause a certain thought's content- the most obvious type of control involved is Source. However, when I cause a certain thought, I could have abstained from so doing (PAP); when I choose an attitude, it is I who does the choosing so the thought originates with me, I am its Source; and finally, when I put together components of a new thought, I could have abstained from so doing or I could have opted for a different way of combining the elements involved (hence PAP).

IV. Temporal criteria

Having described the will's functioning starting from its essence and going through its objects (ideas or perceptions); the agent's volitional responses (the attitudes) to perceptions; and the connections between the quality of perceptions and the attitudes one takes towards them, in the 2nd letter to Mesland Descartes introduces a temporal criterion for evaluating acts of will in terms of freedom: *before* an act of will is elicited and *after* it is elicited. The will is a power or potentiality of the soul so to elicit an act of will means to bring a certain inclination from potentiality to act. "Before" the act of will

¹³³ "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" (AT VIII A, 19; CSM I, 205).

is elicited freedom of perversity and freedom of spontaneity rank higher than freedom of indifference as balance of reasons, without being ranked among themselves.

Initially, Descartes takes indifference as balance to not even be applicable to such cases. However, certain cases of external determination (like being commanded by another to do something we would not do spontaneously) are reworked and reduced to balance of reasons: deciding to do what one is commanded to do has in its favor that it is good to do what one is commanded to do; however, one can also decide not to do what one is commanded because it is difficult. In this way, one has reasons both for and against doing something one is commanded to do (AT IV, 173-174; CSMK 245). Finally, Descartes evaluates the concluded acts of will and crowns freedom of spontaneity as the highest degree of freedom because of the ease of operation and the quality of the results, truths already assented to or goods pursued (AT IV, 174-175; CSMK 245-246).

Introducing a *before* temporal criterion strikes us as a strange move because it seems unclear how one could say anything about an action that hasn't yet been accomplished. Descartes introduces the *before* temporal criterion due to the experiential, first-person character of information about the will. When in the 2nd Letter to Mesland Descartes introduces the distinction between freedom *before* an act of will is elicited and freedom *after* an act of will is elicited he is simply drawing on the experience of the *Meditations*. The reevaluation of opinions held since childhood happens *after* acts of will involved in assenting to those opinions happened. "I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my lifetime, to demolish everything completely and start again right from

the foundations” (AT VII, 17; CSM II, 12). The reason I referred to the “reevaluation” of all beliefs (while Descartes talks about “demolishing” everything) is that Descartes does not reject all beliefs in bulk and arbitrarily but provides reasons for renouncing different types of beliefs.

As Descartes is set on ridding himself of all his former opinions without intending to remain in a belief-free state he will need a “*before* beliefs are acquired criterion” as well. An example of this criterion at work is “the meticulous check” described towards the end of *Meditation VI*. Here Descartes indicates that considerations relevant to correcting beliefs are important for acquiring beliefs that are true and justified from the very beginning (AT VII, 89; CSM II, 61).¹³⁴ The steps that must be taken if one is to be certain that a belief is not false include having recourse to more than one sense, using memory and intellect to corroborate the information of the senses; and adding the divine guarantee to ensure that we are free from error (AT VII, 90; CSM II, 62).¹³⁵

As the case of the *Meditations* shows, in the case of judging, acts of will are evaluated in terms of freedom *after* they are elicited by their end-results, the truth or falsity of the resulting judgment. I contend that before they are elicited, some acts of will are considered free because they so appear to the agent who takes a completely internal perspective. Before an act of will is actually accomplished, all that is apparent to the

¹³⁴ “This consideration is the greatest help to me, not only for noticing all the errors to which my nature is liable, but also for enabling me to correct or avoid them without difficulty” (AT VII, 89; CSM II, 61). Here I am extending Descartes’ pronouncements from errors of the senses and doubting whether we are awake or asleep to all types of theoretical error.

¹³⁵ “And I ought not to have even the slightest doubt of their reality if, after calling upon all the senses as well as my memory and my intellect in order to check them, I receive no conflicting reports from any of these sources. For from the fact that God is not a deceiver it follows that in cases like these I am completely free from error” (AT VII, 90; CSM II, 62).

agent is its potential, one can evaluate the judgments that could be formulated given the circumstances and the idea presented by the intellect. The *before* perspective is a first person perspective. For Descartes, access to information about the will and its features is a first person endeavor.

In the *Fifth Replies*, Descartes diagnoses Gassendi's denial of the existence of free will as a lack of first person experience of the faculty, experience easily accessible to anyone willing to pay close attention to the operations of one's own mind (AT VII, 377; CSM II, 259). This experience, which I equate with Descartes' *before* an act of will is elicited criterion, constitutes the first step in and the basis of any taxonomy and theory of the will; it involves freedom indicators and freedom-enhancing features of our mental states which are later checked against different criteria (external, more objective) and finally systematized. The subsequent evaluation of an act of will in accordance with objective criteria constitutes Descartes' *after* an act of will is elicited criterion for evaluating the freedom acts of will possess.

Descartes is not satisfied with evaluating only the judgments or the actions that result from those acts of will because he wants to distinguish between truths and good actions accidentally arrived at and those instances for which we can receive credit. If an act of will seemed easy to the agent who immediately assented, the agent is blameworthy regardless of the truth or falsity of the result because the agent formed the judgment while being ignorant of its grounds. If the act of will seemed easy to the agent who took the time to investigate the nature of the reasons pushing her into assenting and gave her

assent only if those reasons withstood scrutiny, she is praiseworthy. Cases in the latter category constitute authentic freedom of spontaneity.

If rejecting the idea proposed by the intellect seemed difficult to the agent who immediately rejected it, then the agent is blameworthy regardless of the truth or falsity of the resulting judgment, because the agent formed the judgment while being ignorant of its grounds. If rejecting the proposed idea seemed difficult to the agent who took the time to determine that the idea really is clear and distinct, and only subsequently dissented from it, then she is even more to blame than in the case of prematurely rejecting an idea. Cases of the latter kind constitute authentic freedom of perversity.

Acts of will that seemed indifferent before being elicited (because they had as many reasons for as against them) always lead to the agent being blamed regardless of the resulting judgment because conclusive grounds for belief-formation are lacking. I will now analyze in detail the before and after acts of will are elicited criteria for evaluating the freedom our acts of will possess.

In *Meditation IV* Descartes refers to the experience that informs him that his will is not restricted in any way: “I cannot complain that the will or freedom of choice which I received from God is not sufficiently extensive or perfect, since I know by experience that it is not restricted in any way” (AT VII, 56; CSM II, 39). Experience also makes it inconceivable for Descartes that there could be any greater faculty than his free will: “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” (AT VII, 57; CSM II, 40). The same appeal to experience appears in the *Fifth Replies* but now it is only the freedom of the will that is the object of experience, not its limitlessness and conceivability. By attending to the actions the mind performs within itself Descartes experiences his freedom and declares himself very pleased with it (AT VII, 377; CSM II, 259). In the *Principles of Philosophy* the freedom of our will is described as self-evident, as an innate common notion, and it is said to be experienced even during the most extensive doubt possible, doubt which includes the supposition of a supremely powerful and deceitful author of our being (AT VIII A, 20; CSM I, 206).

The experience we have of our free will includes the awareness that accompanies every mental state¹³⁶ and a certain “feeling”, an example of which is the feeling of lack of external determination that Descartes mentions in *Meditation IV*.¹³⁷ This experience contains freedom markers, features of the will that are prominent and easily detectable from a first-person perspective. Following Descartes’ 2nd Letter to Mesland I take *ease of operation* and *effort* to be such freedom markers.

For a greater freedom consist either in a *greater facility* in determining oneself or in a *greater use of the positive power which we have of following the worse although we see the better*. If we follow the course which appears to have more reasons in its favor, we determine ourselves more easily; but if we follow the opposite, we make more use of the positive power (AT IV, 174; CSM I, 245- my emphasis).

¹³⁶ “For it is certain that we cannot will anything without thereby perceiving that we are willing it” (AT XI, 343; CSM I, 335).

¹³⁷ “The will simply consists in our ability to do or not to do something (that is to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid); or rather, it consists simply in the fact that when the intellect puts something forward for affirmation or denial or for pursuit or avoidance, our inclinations are such that *we do not feel we are determined by any external force*” (AT VII, 57; CSM II, 40- my emphasis).

Descartes seems to be working with the following scheme of the interaction between intellect and will: the agent is able always to determine herself as long as the intellect puts forward a perception; however, Descartes makes it sound like there is a minimal threshold that the combination perception + act of will has to pass in order for an action to ensue. The more the intellect contributes, the less the agent has to exert her will, i.e. the clearer and more distinct the idea, the easier the action seems to the agent. And conversely, the more obscure the idea, if assent is to obtain, the more the agent has to use her will so as to compensate for the intellect's shortcomings. This, however, turns out not always to be the case as there are situations when the agent easily determines herself to pursue what turns out to be a falsehood or when she chooses to make the enormous effort of rejecting the true and the good.¹³⁸

If both *ease* and its contrary, *effort*, are freedom indicators, it seems that nothing could function as an unfreedom indicator. This is in agreement with Descartes' statement that when it comes to the will, compulsion is impossible. No matter what we do we cannot lose our freedom which is the basis of responsibility, although we can lose the rights this freedom affords us if we are cowards (AT XI, 445; CSM I, 384). However, this does not mean that we cannot be mistaken about how free our actions are: we can be mistaken about the quality of our reasons and as we react in a certain way in accordance with the quality of our reasons, a mistaken evaluation of the complex reasons + act of will is possible. Mistakes happen with respect to the complex idea + act of will because

¹³⁸ Given Descartes' statement in *Meditation V* that our minds are so constituted by nature that nothing truly convinces us but what is clear and distinct, I take rejecting the true and the good to always require strenuous effort. Even Satan chose to reject the true and the good not because they were difficult to follow but due to pride: he wanted to be the source of value regardless of whether this was more or less difficult than following the already established standards.

we take a consequence of clarity and distinctness (i.e. ease of operation in assenting) to be a necessary and sufficient indicator of clarity and distinctness. However, ease can be caused in other ways as well, e.g. bad epistemic habits.

The contrast between *ease* and *effort*, both being freedom indicators, is present in the *Meditations* as well. In the previous chapter I already mentioned Descartes' statement in the Synopsis that in *Meditation II* "the mind uses its own freedom and supposes the non-existence of all the things about whose existence it can have even the slightest doubt" (AT VII, 12; CSM II, 9). Apart from this introductory remark it seems that the first explicit mention of the will's freedom comes in *Meditation IV*. However, towards the end of *Meditation I* we find that it is in our power to "resolutely guard against assenting to any falsehoods".

But this is an *arduous undertaking*, and a kind of *laziness* brings me back to normal life. I am like a prisoner who is enjoying an *imaginary freedom* while asleep; as he begins to suspect that he is asleep, he dreads being woken up, and goes along with the pleasant illusion as long as he can. In the same way, I happily¹³⁹ slide back into my old opinions and dread being shaken out of them, for fear that my peaceful sleep may be followed by hard labour when I wake, and that I shall have to toil not in the light, but amid the inextricable darkness of the problems I have now raised (AT VII, 23; CSM II, 15).

The laziness that makes the meditator *spontaneously*¹⁴⁰ slide back into her old opinions is an inability or unwillingness to keep up the level of effort required for not assenting to merely probable reasons. It is a lack of effort due to (bad) epistemic habits. We thus need to distinguish between authentic ease of operation (spontaneity) and inauthentic ease of operation (bad habits leading to laziness)¹⁴¹. Both these cases involve

¹³⁹ *sponte*

¹⁴⁰ "*Sponte*" is the Latin term that Descartes uses here and that CSM translate as "happily".

¹⁴¹ In the section dealing with the Source model of control I drew a distinction between *authentic* volitions and *inauthentic* volitions (passions). Here I distinguish between *authentic* and *inauthentic* spontaneity and

effortlessness and the presence of reasons but only spontaneity involves good reasons (i.e. ideas that are clear and distinct). This distinction between laziness and authentic spontaneity supports Descartes' use of a temporal criterion for free acts of will.

Freedom before acts of will are elicited is either freedom of perversity (if the action seems difficult) or freedom of spontaneity (if the action seems easy). Before an act of will is elicited we may feel free but be only imaginarily free. In *Rule XII* Descartes describes judgments made through impulse, a variety of which is freewill, as resulting not due to good reasons but only because they are caused by something else (AT X, 424; CSM I, 47); the scenario described in *Rule XII* seems to be exactly what happens in the case of ease due to repetition. The lack of effort may be due to habit not clear and distinct ideas.¹⁴² In other words, ease is just a stand-in for whatever causes it: either repetition over a long period of time resulting in entrenched ways of reacting to certain circumstances or following one's natural inclination towards the true and the good.

In the same vein, in the *Third Set of Objections*, Hobbes argues that everyone who is convinced of a certain matter claims to have a clear and distinct idea; however, this turns out to not always be the case. That is why, Hobbes continues, spontaneity

later on I will use the distinction *authentic/inauthentic* perversity. The only feature these distinctions share is the criterion used to draw them: the terms characterized as *inauthentic* fail to meet certain conditions: passions are not controlled in the occurrence, content, attitude respect; fake spontaneity does not involve clear and distinct ideas; while fake perversity is not rejection of clear and distinct ideas. I do not take *inauthentic* spontaneity and *inauthentic* perversity to involve *inauthentic* volitions.

¹⁴² In *Meditation I* from where the passage about effort and laziness is taken, clear and distinct ideas, either real or apparent, are not yet an issue. They come into play only starting with the beginning of *Meditation III* where Descartes extracts the clarity and distinctness rule from the *cogito*. C.P. Ragland argues that when the meditator declares that he feels undetermined by any external force he really is undetermined because the experience in question is part of the experience of freedom that Descartes characterizes as clear and distinct (Ragland 381). This seems to go against my reading of laziness as a sign of facility and imaginary freedom. However, when due to bad habits we feel a certain operation as being easy and thus free when in fact it isn't, the experience in question is not, in fact, clear and distinct.

guarantees only the intensity of one's commitment to a certain idea, not the truth of the resulting belief (AT VII, 192; CSM II, 134). Descartes himself acknowledges that it is possible to be mistaken about whether or not an idea we think is clear and distinct really is so, as not all who think they possess clear and distinct ideas do so in fact (AT VII, 462; CSM II, 310¹⁴³). Therefore it becomes important to evaluate an act of will after it has been elicited and confirm whether the idea involved was really or just apparently clear and distinct. This subsequent evaluation is even more important in the practical realm where clarity and distinctness is impossible to obtain due to the need to act immediately.

Moreover, the closing paragraph of the 2nd Letter to Mesland also mentions an ease of operation: during the time an act of will is elicited voluntariness, spontaneity and freedom are one and the same thing and freedom consists in ease of operation only. There are two ways in which we may interpret Descartes' remarks here: as there is no mention of the presence of a clear and distinct idea until the very last phrase of the letter where Descartes provides an example, Descartes may be alluding to a type of "spontaneity" of sorts that all acts of will exhibit by the very fact that they are elicited. Or, maybe the presence of a clear and distinct idea was presupposed all along, in which case we would have a case of authentic spontaneity.

If Descartes does not make clear and distinct ideas a necessary condition for "spontaneity", this would mean that the mere fact that the agent settled the deliberation questions (if deliberation was involved, i.e. if the case before the eliciting of the act was one of indifference as epistemic balance) or determined herself to either follow the

¹⁴³ (AT VII, 192; CSM II, 135).

evidence or go against it. Compared to the struggle that may have preceded the act, eliciting the latter feels “easy” to the agent, it is a moment of respite. The facility thus felt may prove to be a mere illusion when viewed in light of the end-results as only clear and distinct ideas engender authentic spontaneity.

Textual evidence does not help us determine if Descartes presupposes clarity and distinctness in the whole closing paragraph of the 2nd letter to Mesland or whether he adds it only in the very last phrase. The final phrase may just reinforce using an example the point that clarity and distinctness are conditions of spontaneity or it may present a particular case of a larger scenario by showing that authentic spontaneity is just one possible type of spontaneity. If spontaneity is signaled by the facility of operation and, as I argued above, facility can be caused in several ways it seems that relief at having ended the deliberation process may be one of its causes, just as habit and authentic clarity and distinctness can. However, facility is not a reliable indicator of authentic spontaneity. Authentic spontaneity involves two conditions: clarity and distinctness of the idea involved and ease in eliciting the appropriate attitude of the will. If only ease of operation is apparent to the agent, characterizing the act of the will that the agent is inclined towards as “spontaneous” means mistaking a necessary consequence of clarity and distinctness for a sufficient consequence.

A similar scenario takes place in the case of freedom of perversity whose sign I identified above as effort. It is necessary to evaluate an act of will that manifests freedom of perversity because “effort” may be either the sign of the difficulty of rejecting a clearly

perceived good or the sign that a different faculty than the intellect (e.g. imagination) is at work. The presence of effort in our mental lives does signal the activity of the will, as I already argued in Chapter II. In order to establish whether we are dealing with the freedom characteristic of rejecting the good or the freedom of the act of will involved in imagining something, we must take into account more considerations than just the effort.

The effort involved in imagination differs from the one involved in rejecting a clearly perceived truth in several respects. First, there is a difference in intensity: it is more difficult to go against the best evidence than to imagine a triangle. Second, they have different baselines: when it comes to rejecting a clearly perceived truth, we are naturally led to follow the evidence and this makes the action easy¹⁴⁴. While in the case of imagination, what comes easy to the mind is to wander.¹⁴⁵ Thus the different results of putting effort into our actions: if we struggle to reject a clearly perceived truth the result is a wrong action or a false belief; if we make an effort to imagine a triangle (for instance) the result is a successful act of visualization conducive to solving mathematical problems. Here, like above, it is the end results that settle the dispute between authentic and apparent perversity having effort as their marker: the first scenario is a case of authentic freedom of perversity; the second depicts a burgeoning freedom of spontaneity.

¹⁴⁴ I am interested here only in the “authentic” type of ease, the one that above was linked to freedom of spontaneity conducive to true beliefs and I leave out the ease due to repetition as we are not “naturally” but “habitually” led in that direction.

¹⁴⁵ This point is made repeatedly in the *Meditations*: in *Meditation II*, Descartes allows his mind to wander so that it submits more easily to being restrained within the bounds of truth when the time comes (AT VII, 30; CSM II, 20); also in *Meditation V* we are told that the nature of our mind is such that it cannot keep its attention focused on the same object for a long time so as to keep perceiving it clearly (AT VII, 69; CSM II, 48).

Authentic freedom of perversity involves two conditions: a clear and distinct idea and an act of will of rejection which appears difficult to the agent. However, if the agent only perceives the difficulty of eliciting a certain act of will and from here concludes that the difficulty is the consequence of rejecting a clear and distinct idea, she is jumping to conclusions. The difficulty of eliciting an act of will as the criterion for placing an act in the category of freedom of perversity yields unreliable results. Distinguishing authentic and fake perversity starting from ease/difficulty is different from distinguishing between authentic and fake spontaneity. In the case of fake/authentic spontaneity the question is whether or not ease is a reliable indicator of clarity and distinctness; in the case of fake/authentic spontaneity the question is whether what the agent engages in is an act of will or the act of another mental faculty.¹⁴⁶

The same before-during-after scheme is used in Descartes' recipe for controlling the passions from the closing articles of the *Passions*. In article 211 Descartes divides our strategies into prophylactic attempts, directing one's attention to opposing reasons while the passion is in force, and emotional and rational evaluation subsequent to the passion. The first step is constituted by "forethought and diligence...by striving to separate within ourselves the movements of the blood and spirits from the thoughts to which they are usually joined" (AT XI, 486; CSM I, 403).

¹⁴⁶ Another reason why Descartes uses the before-during/after scheme may have to do with the distinction mentioned in article 18 of the *Passions* between volitions that terminate in the soul itself and volitions that terminate in the body (AT XI, 343; CSM I, 335). Volitions that terminate in the body have effects that seem to call for a post facto evaluation because the efficacy of the initiating volitions is not guaranteed: for instance, not every time we want to walk, do we succeed in walking. As corporeal effects depend on more factors than just our wanting to bring them about, the role of a subsequent evaluation of the effects is to confirm the presence and timing of all the conditions required for a certain effect.

When the passions are already underway we can take action to counteract them: “when we feel our blood agitated in this way” we should remember that passions idealize their objects and “distract ourselves by other thoughts until time and repose have completely calmed the disturbance in our blood”. If immediate action is required, “the will must devote itself mainly to considering and following reasons which are opposed to those presented by the passion, even if they appear less strong” (AT XI, 487; CSM I, 403)¹⁴⁷. While Descartes does not mention it in this article, once a certain situation is over, other passions (like satisfaction, remorse, regret, etc) occur together with reflection on our performance. These constitute the “after” aspect of the scheme above.

I conclude that Descartes introduces the *before/after* acts of will are elicited criterion for evaluating the freedom acts of will exhibit because he wants to ensure that acts of will that result in true/false beliefs and good/bad actions are also blameworthy and praiseworthy, as opposed to accidentally arrived at. The *before* criterion refers to a first-person evaluation of a potential act of will. Before an act of will is elicited we may be mistaken about whether it is really spontaneity or really perversity we are dealing with. Due to the pressure of things to be done which does not always allows us to stop and make a meticulous check¹⁴⁸ we take shortcuts: we jump from the ease of an act of will to taking an idea to be clear and distinct and we assent to it; we also jump from the effort involved in an act of will to thinking we are dealing with a case of perversity. That is why the *after* criterion refers to evaluating the quality of the resulting belief or action: only if

¹⁴⁷ This consideration of opposing reasons is very similar to the meditator’s turning her will in completely the opposite direction by deceiving herself and not assenting to simply probable ideas (AT VII, 22; CSM II, 15). In both cases the aim is to attain a certain balance from where rational beliefs and actions may ensue.

¹⁴⁸ AT VII, 90; CSM II, 62

the resulting judgment or action is of the appropriate kind and arrived at taking the appropriate steps, can we decisively categorize the act of will involved either as spontaneous (assenting to X seemed easy to the agent and the resulting judgment is true) or as perverse (rejecting X seemed difficult to the agent and the resulting judgment is false).

V. Applying the threefold scheme of freedoms to specific cases

If the will is so free that it can never be constrained and if freedom constitutes the essence of the will then all acts of will are free. As Descartes identifies three kinds of freedom, freedom of perversity, freedom of indifference due to epistemic balance and freedom of spontaneity, all acts of will have to fit into this threefold scheme. There are textbook cases (like assenting to a clear and distinct idea- the paradigmatic case of freedom of spontaneity) but there are also more problematic cases (like directing one's mental gaze or the effort involved in imagination or supposition). The latter are the most philosophically rich and the ones I will analyze here. I will look at the examples of hyperbolic doubt, the piece of wax, imagination and the passions. I begin by arguing that the process of hyperbolic doubt of the first two *Meditations* is an instance of freedom of perversity, if viewed from the *before* perspective, but an instance of potential freedom of spontaneity if regarded from the *after* point of view.

1. Hyperbolic doubt

The volitional conflict of *Meditation I* between habit and wishes can be read as an instance of freedom of perversity. Freedom of perversity is characterized in the 2nd Letter

to Mesland as a positive power to follow the worse although we see the better. Engrossed as the meditator still is in the senses and used to take the information they provide for the truth, it seems foolish and certainly difficult to follow a different criterion of truth (the mind reveals the truth). What he sees as the better at this point are his habitual opinions (e.g. that the wax is known by way of sight, and smell, and hearing, etc) and what he follows is the worse, a sensation-independent truth (e.g. that it is the intellect that perceives the wax). His aim in so struggling is to attain a situation of balance between his habitual opinions and the new way of seeking the truth; he seems to aim for a case of freedom of indifference, not as a goal in itself but as a provisional step on his way to compelled assent (assent to clear and distinct ideas only).

Thus the trajectory of the *Meditations* seems to be: making ample use of freedom of perversity in an attempt to provisionally secure freedom of indifference which will turn to freedom of spontaneity under the weight of evidence and due to volitional conversion (i.e. because the meditator made his own the clarity and distinctness rule). However, we need to take another perspective as well: only viewed from the point of view of an unreflective person (i.e. “before” the act of will is elicited) is the will’s freedom while engaged in this struggle a case of freedom of perversity. From the perspective of the successful meditator (i.e. from the end-result, i.e. “after” the act of will was elicited) the freedom exhibited here is a burgeoning freedom of spontaneity. According to the distinction I drew between authentic and fake freedom of perversity, the freedom exhibited by the meditator while in the process of doubting all her former beliefs is a case of fake perversity if the difficulty of doubting is the only consideration taken

into account. Moreover, even if effort is not the only consideration taken into account, the ideas the meditator rejects do not meet the clarity and distinctness requirements as outlined later in the *Meditations*. This is an additional point supporting my characterization of this case as one of fake perversity. This is only the broad intrigue of the *Meditations*. We now have to look at what happens in particular cases like the wax example and imagination.

2. Provisionally establishing the essence of material objects

In *Meditation II* when he introduces the wax example Descartes confesses that he is still tempted to consider the ideas provided by the senses as more distinct than those coming from his own mind, although the *cogito* proves otherwise.¹⁴⁹ He sees the better (ideas originating from the mind, of which so far he has only come upon his idea of the “I” and of thinking in its different forms, are clearer) but follows the worse (assents to ideas of the senses) - exact replica of the freedom of perversity case from the 2nd letter to Mesland. However, instead of struggling to bring his will to order he decides to go along with the illusion of there being more certainty in the senses, to give his mind free rein.¹⁵⁰ By so doing he devises a *reductio* argument showing that it was the mind all along providing his ideas.

The argument starts from Descartes’ perceiving the colour, taste, smell and sound of the piece of wax in normal conditions; the results of these instances of sense perception are compared to the ones obtained once the piece of wax is heated. Due to the

¹⁴⁹ (AT VII, 29; CSM II, 20). .

¹⁵⁰ (AT VII, 29; CSM II, 20).

differences of each pair of sensations (i.e. sight of the wax at normal temperature and sight of the wax once heated) and given the fact that we want to maintain that it is the same piece of wax perceived under different circumstances, we are forced to conclude that the wax is different from our perceptions of it and we were wrong to think that our senses are the instruments that give us access to the wax. As a result of this argument Descartes declares himself back to where he wanted, “without any effort” (AT VII, 34; CSM II, 22).

The lack of effort is due to Descartes’ shrewdly allowing himself to be carried where his “worse” inclinations took him; then, by persevering in that train of thought and using only requirements of consistency he turns the situation on its head: it was only an illusion that external things are perceived by the senses. In fact they are perceived through a purely mental scrutiny and what the intellect understands is that they consist of extension, which in *Meditation VI* will be proven to be the essence of material things. What we have here is a case of using freedom of perversity as a means for attaining freedom of spontaneity (assenting to the idea that it is the intellect that perceives the extension of material objects).

3. Imagination

The acts of will involved in other mental processes (like imagination, supposition, etc) can be evaluated in terms of freedom in several ways. First, taking into account the “*before* they are elicited” criterion, they can all be lumped together under freedom of indifference as potentially leading to either true or false judgments. However, this is too

vague an evaluation so additional factors must be brought in to clarify the scenario. When considering their objects together with the “*before* they are elicited” criterion, acts of imagination may have different results: mathematical objects tend to give rise to clearer ideas than corporeal objects and thus have more chances of leading to freedom of spontaneity.

These different results reflect the twofold function of imagination in the theoretical realm: sometimes it is an aid to the intellect by supplying the imagistic support that facilitates problem-solving in mathematics (or other sciences involving quantity); it is also the fictive faculty active in dreaming and everyday corporeal combinatorics (resulting in beings like sirens and hippogriffs). These two functions of the imagination are truth-seeking/truth-preserving; and reality-enlarging respectively. Non-existent beings put together by our imagination enlarge reality as, although they have no correspondent in the extra-mental world, they are not nothing but have objective being derived from the formal reality of our own minds.

In *Meditation II* Descartes wants to find out if there may be more to himself than just thinking. He proposes to use his imagination and even though this undertaking will prove to be misguided as the faculty in question will turn out to be unsuited for such a task, the time spent in this attempt is not altogether lost as it reveals something about the faculty of imagination. In this passage Descartes seems to vacillate between two senses of the term imagination: on the one hand imagination is taken to be the mental faculty creating and handling images, “contemplating the shape or image of a corporeal thing”

(AT VII, 28; CSM II, 19). On the other hand, imagination is equated with the faculty of fiction or “fictitious invention” (AT VII, 28; CSM II, 19).

Although Descartes sometimes seems to equate the two senses of imagination, they should be clearly distinguished as not all cases of imagistic thought are cases of sheer invention. If they were, the results of all uses of imagination would be invented ideas like sirens and hippogriffs. This would contravene Descartes’ claim that the imagination is a legitimate, necessary and truth-preserving capacity of grasping corporeal things (AT III, 691; CSMK 227), of problem solving in mathematics (AT VII, 72; CSM II, 51) and of use in general as long as we keep within the confines of what imagination presents us with without making broader claims (AT X, 424; CSM I, 47).

The truth-seeking function of imagination goes hand in hand with a potential freedom of spontaneity; while the everyday combinatorics function of imagination may occasion either true or false judgments: false judgements result when we assent to the ideas that we ourselves have created, while true judgments result from our assenting only to judgments about the acts of imagining, not to their results. When we only form judgments like “I believe I am imagining a chimera now” (as opposed to “I believe there is a chimera in the next room”), provided that is the mental act we are involved in, we are still manifesting freedom of spontaneity, although a low-grade spontaneity. When we assent to ideas that were invented by means of imagination we are in error and, although the act of assent seems easy or even goes unnoticed by the agent, evaluated “*after* it has been elicited”, it turns out to be a case of fake spontaneity.

IV. The case of the passions

It is interesting to note that in the *Passions*, unlike in the *Meditations* and the *Letters*, Descartes seems to be working with a concept of freedom of the will that is not further divided into species.¹⁵¹ This cannot be due to his giving up his threefold concept of freedom as both spontaneity and indifference appear in the *Principles*. The reason Descartes works in the *Passions* with a unified version of freedom has to do with the representational content of the passions. The latter are obscure and confused ideas that make very intense internal demands on us due to their physiological underpinnings. The freedom manifested in our reacting to the passions has to be divided into three categories depending on the protagonist of the scenario: for the ordinary person (i.e. Descartes' weak soul) the prima facie reaction is fake spontaneity; for the sage-in-training the immediate reaction consists of freedom of indifference; for the sage, something approaching freedom of spontaneity may be possible depending on the particular circumstances.

The immediate reaction of the will to the passions is a case of "inauthentic spontaneity" as characterized above: unless we are very careful and armed with determinate judgments about good and evil and the resolve to follow them, we will *easily* consent to our passions. However, no matter how prepared we are, passions cannot be rendered as clear and distinct as the ideas that are the bases for our theoretical judgments. Therefore, full blown spontaneity is out of the question in the practical realm.

¹⁵¹ In article 170 of the third part of the *Passions* Descartes does seem to make reference to indifference. The latter, however, is not the kind of freedom we enjoy with respect to our passions but the beneficial effect irresolution may have (AT XI, 459; CSM I, 390).

Freedom of perversity seems also applicable in the case of passions: a scenario similar to the doubt of the *Meditations* unfolds here as well. Viewed from the point of view of the passion and the agent engrossed in it, resisting the passion is a case of perversity; viewed from the perspective of the sage, not resisting the passion is the case of perversity, while resisting it might seem like a burgeoning freedom of spontaneity. The freedom of spontaneity in question approaches the one from the theoretical realm, the clearer we make the idea composing the passion, without ever quite attaining that level. There is another alternative to be taken into account, that of the sage-in-training. For the reflective person who is not yet as experienced as the sage deliberating about whether or not to give in to a passion means being torn between opposing alternatives. The solution to escaping this “miserable state” depends once again on the will.

The difference between consenting to a passion and consenting to a merely probable idea consists in the additional aspects needed for further clarifying the ideas involved or making up for its lack of clarity: in the case of the probable idea, the intellect as directed by the will renders it clearer. For probable ideas we have the sequence: will as attention, intellect, will as assent. In the case of the passion, it is the will that makes up for the lack of clarity through the control it exercises. The difference between a probable theoretical idea and a passion is a consequence of the difference between the true and the good. As we have no idea of the good independent of the control of the will, the will is further involved in resisting a passion: it is also the criterion of the good. Resisting a

passion involves the sequence: will as judgment about good and evil, will as control, intellect, will as consent.

The light of nature is sometimes equated with the faculty distinguishing between the true and the false; it accomplishes this by using itself as a criterion¹⁵² and the fact that we possess an innate idea of the truth may also be an asset¹⁵³. In the practical realm, the will uses itself as a criterion to settle the passionate dispute: if the passion in question can be controlled, the object causing it qualifies as a good for the agent and thus the passion may be assented to and acted on. In article 146 of the *Passions* Descartes states: “we must therefore take care to pick out just what depends only on us, so as to limit our desire to that alone” (AT XI, 439; CSM I, 380). This piece of advice about the proper way to form desires is very similar to Descartes’ injunction about judgments, to restrict our assent to what we clearly and distinctly perceive.

VI. Conclusions

In this chapter I argued that Descartes needs a threefold conception of freedom of the will because he wants to evaluate the will’s performance under different circumstances and take into account different factors: the quality of the ideas involved, the end-results, before, during and after acts of will are elicited. Freedom of the will emerges as too complex a feature to be captured by a single view of freedom. I pieced together Descartes’ scattered remarks on the will and its freedom and fitted them into a coherent picture. If my argument is successful, Gilson/Caton’s contention that it was

¹⁵² About the latter Descartes states: “I have no criterion for [my truths] except the natural light” (AT II, 598; CSMK 139).

¹⁵³ AT VII, 38; CSM II, 26

opportunism that led to Descartes' threefold conception of freedom and Kenny's charge of inconsistency have to be rejected.

For instance, if an idea presented by the intellect appears to be clear and distinct, *before* an act of will is elicited, it seems easy to the agent to assent to the idea in question. Ease is a sign of freedom of spontaneity; however, ease may also be the result of habit. Only by reevaluating once again the initial idea, *after* having assented to it, can we be sure of the truth of the judgment thus formed. If the idea stands up to scrutiny, we can conclude that the freedom of will manifested in this case was freedom of spontaneity; and this is what the *Meditations* are all about: reevaluating already accepted beliefs. Someone who has gone through their arduous discipline will increase her chances of only assenting to clear and distinct ideas to begin with. Authentic spontaneity is the key to Descartes' theory of knowledge. What exactly does it mean to argue that assent is an act of will applied to the theoretical realm? Does Descartes mean that we only believe something if we want to? How does believing something only if we want to square with the function of belief which is to map the world?

Chapter IV Descartes' theory of judgment

Judgment is so important to Descartes' system, as Byron Williston argues, as to be the genus of all Cartesian modes of willing.

Given the centrality of judgment to Descartes' general theodicean concerns in *Meditation Four*, the best way of thinking of judgment is that it is the genus of all the operations of the will as they are brought to bear on the contents of the intellect. And depending on the type of idea being offered, these operations can assume any one of the 'forms' listed in the *Principles*- desire, aversion, denial, or doubt (Williston 2003b, 311).

In *Meditation IV* Descartes tells us that it is evident by the natural light that in the process of judging the perception of the intellect should always precede the determination of the will (AT VII, 60; CSM II, 41). To ensure the coordination of these two faculties and thus the avoidance of error, the proper order of mental operations consists of an act of the intellect temporally prior to an act of will. As in the previous chapters I have already dealt with ideas, especially with clear and distinct ideas, in this chapter I am interested in the act of the will involved in the judging process.

This chapter will have six parts. In Part I, I present two main objections to Descartes' splitting judging into an act of the intellect and an act of the will: it has been argued (for instance by John Heil) that belief-formation is not a two-tiered process. Other authors (e.g. Hobbes) have contended that even if judging does involve two components, the will plays no role in this process. Next, I inquire into Descartes' reasons for advancing the controversial view that assent is an act of the will, not the intellect. Cartesian scholars have proposed several answers to this question: theological reasons

(stemming from applying the free will defense to epistemic matters in an attempt to exonerate God from any guilt for error); reasons pertaining to the ontology of the mind and the structure of mental states as propositional attitudes; and epistemological reasons having to do with justification. I will argue that only taken together can these three kinds of reasons succeed in doing justice to the complexity of Descartes' views. Analyzing the theological, ontological and epistemological reasons for Descartes' making assent an act of will, will be the topics of Parts II, III and IV respectively.

Descartes' emphasis on the role of the agent that came to light in the previous chapter while dealing with the freedom of the will is once more brought to our attention due to Descartes' epistemic reasons for making assent an act of will. In Chapter III I argued that Descartes takes the agent to be the ultimate source of her "actions" and that he uses the *before/after* acts of will are elicited distinction as a procedure for checking which judgments qualify as knowledge. In Part IV of this chapter I argue that for Descartes the agent is justified in holding a belief when she obtained it by fulfilling her epistemic duties. Obtaining justification for a belief is something the agent actively does and it is up to her, controlled by her. In Part V, I will show that Descartes' position on assent as an act of will prefigures normative approaches to human nature and makes Descartes a proto-Kantian thinker: the agent controls the process of obtaining knowledge by intentionally conforming to norms of rationality that are part of her very nature. The consequence of this line of reasoning is a domain-specific view of knowledge. Knowledge of the mind, the body and the union is regulated by the respective primary notions. Part VI will consist of concluding remarks.

1. The role of the will in judging

In this section I show that the three types of reasons mentioned above (theological, ontological and epistemological) are arrived at as an attempt on Descartes' part to meet and/or prevent two main objections to his theory of will: (1) the process of believing doesn't seem to be composed of two terms as Descartes states in *Meditation IV*. (2) We do not seem to have control over what we believe: even if the will were one of the components of judging, judgment is not a voluntary matter.

(1) It is not surprising that Descartes distinguishes between two components of judging as the view recurs in the tradition from the Stoics, who distinguish between *phantasia* and *sunkatathesis* (presentation and assent), through Aquinas' distinction between apprehension and assent. John Heil focuses his critique of Descartes on this dual aspect of judging. He finds a counterexample to Descartes' splitting the process of judging into two aspects: perceptual beliefs do not fit Descartes' model.

I wish to suggest that perceiving is non-contingently a matter of belief acquisition. This is not to say that perception might not involve a good deal more as well. It suggests, in any case, that the two-tiered characterization of belief formation advanced by Descartes, whatever its merits, does not apply to ordinary perceptual belief. *We do not first perceive our surroundings, then come to hold beliefs about what we perceive. The original perceptual experience is itself epistemic, belief-saturated.* It is not, of course, that beliefs acquired in this way are always true. Perceptual error is common enough (Heil 360- my emphasis).

What is original with Descartes is attributing the second component of judging (i.e. assent) to the will. Despite the novelty of this view, among the objectors to the *Meditations* "only Gassendi seems to have objected [to Descartes' making judgment an

act of the will], and that not in his first objections, but in his Instances¹⁵⁴” (Kenny 1972, 7). Heil claims that adding an act of will to the process of forming perceptual beliefs is explanatorily superfluous. Previous beliefs and interactions with one’s environment are enough to account for the process of belief formation. Moreover, we do not perceive any such volitional act when we form sensible beliefs, so it is not there.

Descartes would agree that most of the time, especially during the pre-doubt period, the act of assenting is automatic and thus goes unnoticed; he would, however, disagree with concluding that no act of will is involved because we fail to notice it. In the *Sixth Replies* he states:

The only difference is that when we now [once we have attained the age of reason] make a judgment for the first time because of some new observation, then we attribute it to the intellect; but when from our earliest years we have made judgments, or even rational inferences about the things which affect our senses, then, even though these judgments were made in exactly the same way as those we make now, we refer them to the senses. The reason for this is that we make the calculation and judgment at great speed because of habit, or rather we remember the judgments we have long made about similar objects; and so we do not distinguish these operations from simple sense perception (AT VII, 438; CSM II, 295).

Here Descartes seems to be attributing judgment to the intellect; however, he is probably referring only to the content of an eventual judgment; once an act of will is added to this content we obtain a complete judgment. Leaving this aside, this passage makes it clear that it is possible, due to multiple reasons (e.g. not reaching the age of reason, lack of experience, habit and speed) to miss a step involved in judgment-formation: it is not only the senses that are involved in sense perception but the intellect as well and, we might add, the will too once we take the facts presented by the senses and

¹⁵⁴ ““To avoid confusion the intellect and the will should be so distinguished that whatever concerns cognition and judgment should be attributed to the intellect, and whatever concerns appetite and choice should be attributed to the will”” (Kenny 7).

corroborated by the intellect to be the case. Therefore, what Heil takes to be the correct view of judging (it pertains to the intellect and does not involve two components), Descartes takes to be the mistaken view.

In the passage from the *Sixth Replies* quoted above Descartes outlines his three grades of sensory response view: when we perceive a stick in water that appears bent, first our sensory organs are stimulated by rays of light reflected off the stick; then the mind is signaled that sensory stimulation is taking place; and finally, the intellect concludes that the stick only appears bent but is not so in fact. Descartes' objectors argue that when we conclude that the stick only appears crooked, it is the sense of touch that corrects the inaccuracies of the sense of sight. However, Descartes points out that the agent needs a reason for trusting his sense of touch and not his vision; such a reason is supplied by the intellect only: "But the sense alone does not suffice to correct the visual error: in addition we need to have some degree of reason which tells us that in this case we should believe the judgment based on touch rather than that elicited by vision" (AT VII, 439; CSM II, 296). Therefore, according to Descartes, judging involves an act of will although we often fail to notice it. The reasons why we do not always become aware of the will's role in judging range from youth, lack of experience, habit and speed.

(2) Heil draws a distinction between a normative reconstruction of the process of belief formation, on the one hand, and the actual acquisition of beliefs on the other. He states: "The phenomenology of belief, then, as distinct from its epistemological conceptualization, looks distinctly non-voluntary" (Heil 357). There is considerable

tension between our ordinary ways of thinking about belief: on the one hand, we take ourselves to be doxastic agents, and on the other we “seem largely at the mercy of [our] belief-forming equipment. An adequate account of belief must, I think, make this tension intelligible, must, if possible, illuminate its source” (Heil 357).

The tension Heil identifies between belief-acquisition as a non-voluntary process dependent on our sensory apparatus and belief-justification as a normative reconstruction appears in Descartes’ contrast between the pre-doubt belief-acquisition procedures and the reevaluation of all beliefs in the *Meditations*. Heil’s non-voluntary process of belief acquisition is similar to the Cartesian pre-doubt belief-acquisition procedures; while Heil’s normative reconstruction is similar to acquiring beliefs once the process of doubt is completed. Byron Williston has shown that the *Meditations* constitute Descartes’ attempt to substitute an internalist paradigm of justification¹⁵⁵ of a class of beliefs (those pertaining to metaphysics¹⁵⁶) for the externalist paradigm¹⁵⁷ used since childhood (reliance on the authority of one’s teachers and one’s senses). Once the reevaluation is completed, new beliefs pertaining to the metaphysical domain are supposed to be acquired using internalist principles of justification. On the other hand, scientific beliefs

¹⁵⁵ “According to internalists, nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief. Another way to put the point is to say, with Rorty, that knowledge and justification consist solely in a privileged relation of propositions rather than a relation between something propositional on the one hand and something non-propositional on the other” (Williston 2004, 358).

¹⁵⁶ Williston points out that, in order for the reevaluation procedure to get off the ground, Descartes must insulate from doubt some beliefs like some beliefs of commonsense (e.g. I am not dreaming now) and logical principles (e.g. the principle of noncontradiction, modus ponens, etc- Williston 2004, 366).

¹⁵⁷ “[E]xternalism places the reasonableness or justification of a belief in the relation between the believer and the world rather than the relation between subjectively accessible propositions” (Williston 2004, 359).

will still require externalist criteria of justification, although they will be different than the ones used previously.¹⁵⁸

According to Heil, perceptual beliefs depend on our previous beliefs and on our current interaction with the environment. Belief acquisition is not a passive process but depends on the activity of inquiring and gathering information. What does involve an act of will, and the control that goes with it, is not the acquisition of beliefs but more generally the choice of procedures leading to those beliefs: “The ‘responsible’ agent is, roughly, one who gets about the activity of information gathering in a *suitable* fashion... The notion of ‘epistemic responsibility’ attaches to the undertaking of appropriate procedures” (Heil 362-363).

Similarly to Heil, Amy Schmitter mentions the will’s role within the Cartesian method as an inquiring procedure. She takes Descartes’ “doxastic voluntarism” to be just one aspect of a broader tendency on Descartes’ part to “treat theoretical reason by analogy with practical reason” (Schmitter 106).¹⁵⁹ “From the point of view of the subject-agent who seeks the truth, figuring out how things stand requires figuring out what to *do* to find out how things stand. And deciding how to go about any theoretical investigation requires the same sort of versatile, particularized practical wisdom as does practical activity” (Schmitter 106).

¹⁵⁸ “As I see it, Descartes is in Meditation One employing an internalist criterion of justification instrumentally against a kind of externalism. Although this issues- in Meditation Two and beyond- in the establishment of some metaphysically certain first principles, its chief purpose is to prepare the mind to accept the claims of science that is itself ultimately justified according to externalist standards. In other words, internalism and skepticism that is its accompaniment are mere vehicles for moving us from unreliable externalist assumptions to reliable ones” (Williston 2004, 367).

¹⁵⁹ Another such aspect, and the one Schmitter focuses on, is Descartes’ taking both theoretical and practical reasoning to be “motivated and measured by the train of our passions” (Schmitter 106).

Both Heil and Schmitter attribute only an indirect role to the Cartesian will in the theoretical realm. Among the objectors to the *Meditations* only Hobbes¹⁶⁰ expresses concern about our apparent lack of control over what we believe. Hobbes states:

Further, it is not only knowing something to be true that is independent of the will, but also believing it or giving assent to it. If something is proved by valid arguments, or is reported as credible, we believe it whether we want to or not. It is true that affirmation and denial, defending and refuting propositions, are acts of will; but it does not follow that our inner assent depends on the will (AT VII, 192; CSM II, 134).

Hobbes' objection starts along the lines of "no choice so no act of will": we believe willy-nilly both valid arguments and credible reports. Then, in arguing that inner assent is not an act of will but that affirmation and denial are, Hobbes seems to be taking affirmation and denial to be external expressions of acts of inner assent. If this reading is correct, Hobbes' point is very close to that of Bernard Williams who argues that what we believe is not subject to our decision, only what we say we believe is under our control (Williams 1973, 147)¹⁶¹.

In responding to Hobbes' objection, Descartes shrewdly refers only to assenting to clear and distinct ideas:

As for the claim that we assent to things which we clearly perceive, whether we want to or not, this is like saying that we seek a clearly perceived good whether we want to or not. The qualification 'or not' is inappropriate in such contexts, since it implies that we both will and do not will the same thing (AT VII, 192; CSM II, 135).

¹⁶⁰ Kenny also mentions Gassendi's statement in his *Instances*: "To avoid confusion the intellect and the will should be so distinguished that whatever concerns cognition and judgment should be attributed to the intellect, and whatever concerns appetite and choice should be attributed to the will" (Kenny 6 quoting AT VII, 404).

¹⁶¹ "From the notion of what belief is, then, we arrive at one connexion between belief and decision, namely the connexion between full-blown belief and the decision to say or not to say what I believe, the decision to use words to express or not to express what I believe. This is, however, a decision with regard to what we say or do; it is not a decision to believe something" (Williams 1973, 147).

Despite his succinctness and abruptness, Descartes' point here might refer either to what being an act of will involves in terms of control or to evaluating an act of will in terms of rationality or irrationality. André Gombay takes Descartes to refer in this passage to the distinction between *acts of will* and *acts bestowable at will*¹⁶² because not all acts of will are initiated by the will (Gombay 3). However, as I argued in Chapter III, I take control to be implicit in every act of will and thus I read the above passage as making a point about the evaluation of acts of will.

I take Descartes to be saying that it is absurd not to will to believe the truth given the objective of the *Meditations* to find what can be believed with certainty and thus establish a solid basis for science. In his response to Hobbes Descartes does not take into account the possibility of perversely rejecting a clearly perceived truth for the sheer sake of proving the freedom of one's will, as he will do in the letters to Mesland. This neglect on Descartes' part is not surprising given Descartes' previous and clearly stated commitment to the truth and given his assumption that his readers share this commitment (he makes it clear that only those that are ready to seriously meditate with him should read the *Meditations*)¹⁶³; thus irrationality was not a viable option at this time.

However, Hobbes' point was probably that *even if we wanted to resist believing a clearly perceived truth, we couldn't*. Hobbes' objection to Descartes' making judgment an act of will was supported by an appeal to experience: as a matter of experience we see

¹⁶² I take Gombay's distinction between *acts of will* and *acts bestowable at will* to be that between *acts elicited by the will* and *acts commanded by the will* but accomplished by other faculties.

¹⁶³ "...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 mind from the senses and from all preconceived opinions" (AT VII, 9; CSM II, 8).

that it is only the expression of our acts of inner assent that is under our control. The reason Descartes does not explicitly take up Hobbes' remarks concerning control might be that he takes it as evident that the will is in control of our mental acts: as I showed in the previous chapter when dealing with PAP and Source, whichever acts the agent performs she could have abstained from performing and thus it was up to her whether to perform them or not. All acts of will were chosen and controlled by the agent, if only implicitly. The Stoic idea of an implicit choice or assent present in all our beliefs goes hand in hand with the Augustine-inspired remarks from the *Passions* that the will is so free that it can never be constrained¹⁶⁴: even when the agent assents to a clearly perceived truth, this is not a case of compulsion by means of clarity and distinctness (as Hobbes assumed when stating that "we believe it whether we want to or not") because the agent could have abstained from assenting.

Hobbes' contention that believing is not under our control is shared by David Rosenthal. Unlike Heil, Rosenthal agrees that there are two components to every judgment as Descartes conceives of mental acts as propositional attitudes: ideas provide contents while acts of assent are attitudes. These are the ontological reasons for Descartes' making assent an act of will. Rosenthal contends that "Descartes' explanations of what it is to be a thinking thing make it clear that he regards *all thinking as the holding of a mental attitude toward some propositional content. Even sensing and feeling, insofar as they are genuinely mental, have the structure of propositional attitudes*" (Rosenthal 150- my emphasis).

¹⁶⁴ AT XI, 359-360; CSM I, 343

The second component of judgments is an act of will because, as Rosenthal argues, Descartes conceives assent by analogy with desire, which we intuitively attribute to the will. This is just another instance of Descartes' tendency, identified by Amy Schmitter, to model theoretical matters on practical patterns. If assent is an act of will and all acts of will have control as an inherent feature (as I have already argued) then assent involves control and with control comes responsibility. We can be praised or blamed for assenting to a certain idea. Classical internalism draws a close connection between epistemic responsibility and belief justification: we are justified in holding a belief if we fulfill our epistemic duties in acquiring it. These are the epistemic reasons for Descartes' attributing assent to the will. The epistemological reasons hypothesis for attributing assent to the will is endorsed by Alvin Plantinga and David Owens. On the other hand, if we are responsible for our beliefs, God isn't. These are theological reasons, a proponent of which is Étienne Gilson.

I conclude that for Descartes judging consists of two components: an idea pertaining to the intellect; and assent which is an act of will and thus is under our control. The reasons why Descartes attributes assent to the will are ontological, epistemological and theological. Ontological reasons include Descartes' conception of all thought as holding some mental attitude towards a propositional content. Epistemological reasons reveal the close connection that classical internalism, of which Descartes is a proponent, draws between belief-justification, fulfilling one's epistemic duties and control due to the will. Finally, theological reasons concern exonerating God for any responsibility for human error. Theological reasons are the first to be analyzed below.

II Theological reasons

It is usually argued by Cartesian commentators that Descartes' reasons for attributing assent to the will (despite the venerable Stoic tradition that made it an act of reason) are theodicean in nature: he wanted to exonerate God from any responsibility for human error. God is not to blame for evil or error because humans are. Blame is applicable only to what is under our control and control is accomplished by the will. Therefore, argues Gilson,¹⁶⁵ given Descartes' two-tiered view of the process of judging and given the fact that he attributes ideas to the intellect, the only way to endow the will with a role in the process of judging is to make assent an act of the will. However, as Kenny convincingly argues, attributing assent to the will is not the only solution to the difficulty of assigning responsibility for error. We can still be held responsible for error if the role of the will in judging is only indirect: judging involves an idea and an act of assent; however, assent pertains to the intellect but is commanded by the will. We err because, instead of following the evidence, we choose to take into consideration other factors, like desires.

Humans were created by a benevolent and veracious God so every faculty they possess is perfect of its kind. As Descartes notices at the beginning of *Meditation IV* this appears to prove too much as it seems to entail that we can never go wrong. However, as a matter of experience we often make mistakes when it comes to acquiring beliefs and when we act; therefore the question arises as to what makes error possible. The traditional response to this problem is to make human will the source of our errors in the practical sphere: we act badly because we want to. Some Cartesian commentators (e.g.

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in Kenny 1972, 8-10

Gilson) argue that Descartes extends the role of the will in making mistakes from the practical to the theoretical realm: we acquire false beliefs due to our using our wills badly. The specific way in which we use our wills badly consists in giving our assent, which is an act of the will, to ideas that are not clear and distinct.

However, as Anthony Kenny showed, arguing that Descartes made assent an act of will in order to shift blame from God to us is equivalent to conceiving the voluntary too narrowly: responsibility applies not only to acts elicited by the will but also to acts initiated by the will but completed by other faculties. Thus, it would have been enough for Descartes to make the will command the act of assent without making assent pertain to the will per se. Had he taken this less controversial and already accepted way of dealing with the problems of error and sin, Descartes would have simply rehearsed Aquinas' arguments from the *Summa* where assent is described as an act of the intellect but under the command of the will. Aquinas states:

If, therefore, that which the reason apprehends is such that it naturally assents thereto, e.g. the first principles, it is not in our power to assent or dissent to the like: assent follows naturally, and consequently, properly speaking, is not subject to our command. But some things which are apprehended do not convince the intellect to such an extent as not to leave it free to assent or dissent, or at least suspend its assent or dissent, on account of some cause or other; and in such things assent or dissent is in our power, and is subject to our command (ST I-II Q.17, a.6).

Command is described by Aquinas as an act of the intellect that includes and presupposes an act of will (ST I-II Q.17, a.1). In turn, being under the command of the will makes something a suitable object of praise or blame: "Now an action is imputed to an agent, when it is in his power, so that he has dominion over it: because it is through his will that man has dominion over his actions, as was made clear above" (ST I-II Q. 21, a.2). The passage Aquinas refers to clarifies the way an action is subject to the will:

“Now an action is voluntary in one of two ways: first, because it is commanded by the will, e.g. to walk, or to speak; secondly, because it is elicited by the will, for instance the very act of willing” (ST I-II, Q. 1. a.1).

In its essential points, Descartes’ position is similar to Aquinas. According to Aquinas assent to “first principles” follows naturally and is not subject to our command. For Descartes assent to “clear and distinct ideas” follows naturally and, provided we are committed to finding the truth, is not subject to our command.¹⁶⁶ I take Aquinas’ reference to things that do not convince the intellect to be a description of a case of Cartesian freedom of indifference as epistemic balance. For both Aquinas and Descartes, in such cases assent is in our power. Both Aquinas and Descartes explicate “in our power” as “subject to the will”. Aquinas’ acts “elicited by the will” correspond to Descartes’ “actions of the soul which terminate in the soul itself” (AT XI, 343; CSM I, 335, a.18). Aquinas’ acts “commanded by the will” correspond to Descartes’ volitions that terminate in the body (AT XI, 343; CSM I, 335, a.18). The examples for the category of corporeal voluntary actions both authors give include “walking”.

For both Aquinas and Descartes, responsibility extends to all that is voluntary; the voluntary includes both acts elicited by the will and acts commanded by the will. Therefore, Descartes must have more than theodicy in mind when he makes assent an act of will. The additional considerations that determined Descartes to attribute assent to the

¹⁶⁶ As I have argued in Chapter III I read Descartes as maintaining that there are always alternatives open to the agent. However, once the agent has chosen to follow the rules of rationality and has made truth her goal, assent to clear and distinct ideas follows naturally.

will are identified by scholars like Kenny and Rosenthal as intuitions about propositional attitudes. To these I now turn.

III. Propositional attitudes and the will

Above I analyzed John Heil's contention that Descartes was wrong to make the process of judging a composite of two parts, an idea and an act of will. Anthony Kenny takes a stance opposite to Heil: he argues that Descartes was right in finding two components to the process of judging. In this section I will argue, following Kenny and Rosenthal, that Descartes' splitting judging into idea and assent is a result of intuitions about mental acts as propositional attitudes. I will also show that Descartes attributes assent to the will because he conceives assent (as the theoretical version of commitment) by analogy with desire (as the practical version of commitment).

When listing the modes of the will in *Meditation IV*, Descartes lumps together desire and assertion. Kenny contends that, in Descartes' view, these types of mental acts share some common features: a special voluntariness and a type of commitment assessable in terms of rightness or wrongness. The special status of desire and judgment comes from their guaranteed success; they are a sort of performatives. "Judgment and desire¹⁶⁷ are, on Descartes' theory, the only acts we perform if and only if we want to perform them. Walking is something which we do only if we want to; but not every time we want to walk do we succeed in walking" (Kenny 1972, 10).

¹⁶⁷ I take it that Kenny here refers to desire not as a passion (e.g. irresistible cravings, sexual desire, etc) but as a mode of the will (e.g. desiring world peace, taking world peace as one's proposed goal).

Kenny finds medieval roots for the Cartesian way of conceiving the process of judging. He contends that Descartes follows the distinction between matter and form when he splits judgment into an idea and an act of will; and that an illuminating comparison is that between the medieval-inspired Cartesian idea-act of will scheme and Frege's distinction between "the sense of a sentence" and "the assertion of a sentence". Following Frege, R. M. Hare introduced the distinction between "a *phrastic* (which contains the descriptive content of the sentence) and a *neustic* (which marks the mood of the sentence)" (Kenny 1972, 10).

Kenny uses the latter distinction to clarify and show the cogency of Descartes' idea-act of will distinction: "The perceptions of the intellect, it might be said, are concerned with the unasserted phrastics; an affirmative judgment is as it were the mental attachment of the neustic 'yes' to the phrastic presented by the intellect" (Kenny 1972, 11). However, Kenny warns us that "The comparison between Descartes' perception and Hare's phrastics ... though illuminating needs qualification" (Kenny 1972, 14). The qualification Kenny refers to comes from the possibility that not all ideas are propositional as Descartes counts among ideas single terms also: mind, horse, etc are ideas. Or, according to Kenny, we cannot attach a neustic to a name standing alone. Descartes, on the other hand, seems to maintain that even such ideas can be asserted and in such cases, the assertion would consist of the extra-mental existence of the referent of the idea in question (Kenny 1972, 13-14).

Coming to the similarities between Hare's neustic and Descartes' acts of will, Kenny finds what he thinks is the main reason for Descartes' making judgment an act of will: *we can assent to both propositions and proposals*. Kenny takes the examples of a command, "Jones shut the door", and rewrites it to fit the phrastics-neustic schema, "Shutting of the door by Jones, please". According to the phrastics-neustic schema, the response to this command is "Shutting of the door by Jones, yes". As "yes" can function as a proper response to both a command ("yes, I will") and a descriptive proposition ("yes, that is the case"), this means that both commands and assertions occasion attitudes of assent. These attitudes may be sincere or insincere, right or wrong.

It is this, I think, which provides the main justification for Descartes' treatment of judgment as an act of will. For what is it, after all, to ascribe particular actions to one or another faculty? It is to group those actions together in virtue of common features of description and assessment that apply to them. If we take together all those mental activities which can have rightness or wrongness ascribed to them, we will find that they include all those activities which Descartes ascribed to the will and exclude those which he ascribed to the intellect (Kenny 1972, 15).

Kenny's argument is supported by Descartes' own pronouncements. In distinguishing between doubt as an act of the intellect and doubt as an act of the will, the criterion Descartes uses is evaluation in terms of possibility/impossibility for acts of the intellect and permissibility/impermissibility for acts of the will. Doubt as an act of the will is permissible as a means to attaining additional and clearer knowledge about God, but impermissible as an end (as is the Skeptic's case who aims at remaining in her doubting state) (AT IV, 63; CSMK 229). The permissible variety of doubt is further characterized as "doing something altogether pious and honorable"; while the person engaged in the impermissible kind of doubt "sins gravely" (AT IV, 63; CSMK 229). As it is not implausible to generalize the permissibility criterion from doubt to all modes of

willing and given the fact that Descartes uses permissible/impermissible interchangeably with pious/sinful, we can conclude that Kenny was right in stating that Descartes attributes to the will all acts that are subject to moral evaluation.

However, Kenny identifies the “fundamental defect in [Descartes’] theory of judgment as an act of will” (Kenny 1972, 17). This has to do with Descartes’ neglecting to take into account the different directions of fit of assertion and desire. “So, in general, in assenting to a proposition, we place an onus on a phrastic to match the world; in assenting to a command or project we place an onus on something non-linguistic (primarily, our own actions) to match a phrastic” (Kenny 1972, 17). Kenny takes Descartes to be right in splitting judging into two elements but wrong in attributing error to the will. It is the intellect that provides the content of the judgment (the phrastic in Hare’s terminology) and in speculative judgment it is the phrastic’s job to match the world; if it doesn’t it is the intellect that should be faulted, not the will (i.e. the element providing the act of assent).

In arguing that Descartes blames the wrong faculty Kenny seems to be in agreement with Gassendi who, in the *Fifth Set of Objections* states: “The scope of both faculties [the intellect and the will] is equal, and error arises instead from the fact that *the perception of the intellect is faulty and the judgment of the will is faulty*” (AT VII, 315; CSM II, 219- my emphasis). Kenny finds it surprising that Descartes fails to notice the

different directions of fit of the true and the good.¹⁶⁸ The problem is that the true, which is the object of the intellect, and the good, which is the object of the will, are different kinds of value; and while it seems appropriate to fault the will for errors in pursuing the good because there is something to be done to avoid them, the same does not apply to the true. David Owens, whose views I analyze in the next section, expresses similar concerns and I will return to the response Descartes might have to these charges when dealing with Owens' interpretation.

David Rosenthal maintains that Descartes' view of the process of judging fits the folk psychology picture of our mental lives. Concerning the role of propositional attitudes, Rosenthal has a position that is similar to but stronger than Kenny's because Rosenthal thinks that Descartes took *all mental acts to be propositional attitudes*. Rosenthal takes Descartes' splitting judging into an idea and an act of will to be an attempt on Descartes' part to extricate himself from the contradiction the divine guarantee of *Meditation III* had plunged him into. If judgment were the act of a single faculty error would be impossible because all faculties are created by an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God and thus are perfect of their kind. But error is pervasive in our lives. So judging has to be the product of more than one faculty because although the two faculties are perfect of their kind, the coordination between them isn't.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸The notion of onus of match appears in Descartes' moral theory: "My third maxim was to try always to conquer myself rather than fortune; to change my desires rather than the order of the world' (*Discourse*, part 3)" (Kenny 17).

¹⁶⁹"[T]he particular analogy with traditional theodicy is highly misleading as a model for understanding the problem Descartes meant his theory to deal with. What is crucial is not the way in which freedom does or does not figure in our judging, but whether the faculty of judging is a single, unified aspect of our mental nature" (Rosenthal 131).

According to Rosenthal, the role Descartes attributes to the will in faulty judging is not about responsibility but about logical consistency: the question is not about who is to blame for error but about how to square two aspects of Descartes' views, the presence of error and the alleged perfection of our cognitive faculties¹⁷⁰. Rosenthal thinks Descartes investigated the nature of errors in *Meditation III* when dividing his thoughts into ideas properly so called and "others" (volitions and judgments):

Descartes' division here is clearly based on the structure of propositional attitudes. Judgments, being true and false, must be propositional. But they also involve an aspect in addition to the representative character they share with ideas, an aspect exemplified by desiring, fearing, affirming and denying. *The additional aspect must therefore be the mental attitude that, together with propositional content, constitutes all mental acts.* And, since these mental acts result from adding a mental attitude to an idea, ideas must be propositional contents (Rosenthal 133- my emphasis).

So Descartes attributes these two different aspects present in judgments to two different faculties: ideas to the intellect and attitudes to the will.

Attributing ideas to the understanding is unproblematic; but why take the will as the faculty supplying attitudes? Rosenthal thinks that in the additional forms passage Descartes starts from desire and generalizes its structure to apply to assertions as well: desiring is clearly an act of will, so it is only natural to make the opposing attitude (aversion) an act of will also. There are also similarities between desire and belief: (1) Desire and belief are experienced in varying intensities; (2) these intensities depend on the respective objects of desire and belief; and (3) with respect to both desire and belief we have the ability to change our minds (Rosenthal 136-138).

¹⁷⁰ "So my faculty of judging is that aspect of my mental nature which is responsible for my errors. Since my errors 'argue that there is some imperfection in me', that imperfection must pertain to my faculty of judging. But I can have no faculty that is not perfect of its kind. So, if my faculty of judging is a single, undifferentiated aspect of my mental nature, we have a contradiction. An aspect of my nature that, by the divine guarantee, is perfect of its kind, gives rise to errors and is thus imperfect" (Rosenthal 132).

Rosenthal concludes that the additional forms in question are attitudes and that they are due to the will which thus becomes the attitude-providing faculty. However, the list of attitudes mentioned in *Meditation IV* and repeated in the *Principles*, if exhaustive, seems unfit to do justice to the multitude of attitudes that make up our mental lives. Descartes only mentions four such attitudes: assent and denial, desire and aversion. One can reply to this objection by pointing to the reductive character of Descartes' efforts. As Rosenthal notices, Descartes uses the smallest number of faculties necessary for accounting for our mental economy. The same seems to be the case when it comes to attitudes. In one way or another, the many attitudes active in our mental lives involve cognitive or conative commitments, either pro or con.

Having explained why Descartes attributes assent to the will, Rosenthal further clarifies the role of willing in desiring and believing. When we desire and believe something we can either *control* the object of our desire and belief; or we can be *gripped or overcome* by it¹⁷¹. As what we believe does not appear to be up to us as what we desire is and given the fact that there are objects that are so attractive as to make the control we have whether to desire them or not almost or entirely non-existent, Rosenthal favors the *gripping* aspect of willing: most of the time we lack control over what we desire and believe (Rosenthal 138). Rosenthal's distinction between *controlling* a desire or a belief and *being gripped* by it is similar to Byron Williston's distinction between an *active* and

¹⁷¹ Descartes makes this distinction in the 2nd letter to Mesland: the more reasons we have pointing to one alternative, the easier it is for us to determine ourselves to that course of action; the fewer reasons we have, the more use we must make of the positive power we possess of determining ourselves (AT IV, 174; CSMK 245).

a *passive willing*. Passive willing is an attitude (mode of the will) completely determined by the quality of its object (i.e. a clear and distinct idea that compels our will into assenting); while in active willing there is more than one possible attitude that can be sincerely taken up as there may be reasons pushing me in both directions (Williston 2003b, 15).¹⁷²

Rosenthal's *gripping* and Williston's passive willing are versions of a Source model of control. In Chapter III I argued that voluntariness is a type of Source and Rosenthal explicitly links *gripping* to voluntariness. Also, in both Rosenthal's and Williston's case external determination is lacking: when I elicit an act due to being *gripped*, it is I who accomplish the act of will; I am its ultimate source. Rosenthal's *controlling* function of the will and Williston's active willing fall under PAP.¹⁷³ Taking "the voluntary as paradigmatic of freedom" Rosenthal concludes that freedom from external compulsion is more important than the degree of control we have over our mental acts. The broadness of the will (its "infinity") comes from its ability to provide an attitude for any propositional content it encounters and not from controlling the manner in which it acts. However, given the arguments presented in the previous chapter, I maintain that even *gripping* is a type of control and it is dependent on PAP: when I form a belief concerning something that, due to the clarity and distinctness of the idea

¹⁷² Williston also distinguishes between authentic and inauthentic passivity: judgments involve passive willing while errors involve active willing. According to Williston, illusory passivity is a form of activity subjectively obscured.

¹⁷³ In Chapter III I argued that in Descartes' system PAP and Source are interdependent models of control. In stating that *gripping* and *controlling* are versions of Source and PAP I only identified the model of control that is most prominent without intending to exclude the other.

involved, seems to leave me no choice but to assent, it is always up to me to withhold judgment, for instance by turning my attention to something else.

The role Rosenthal sees Descartes as attributing to the will in judgment-formation is not to form conative attitudes¹⁷⁴ but to qualify judgments: one cannot eliminate token-reflexive elements (e.g. I, now, here) from mental and speech acts without loss of expressive power; and the referents of these token-reflexive elements are not pinned down by the understanding alone (Rosenthal 145-146). As Rosenthal does not provide any clarification on this point, I take his point to be that the Cartesian will has a referent-identifying function: it is the will that grasps (and/or determines) the specific combinations between simple natures. Descartes states in the *Rules* that all knowledge consists of simple natures and the combinations between them and in a letter to Mersenne from 22 July 1641 that all that does not involve an act of will is innate (AT III, 418; CSMK 187)¹⁷⁵.

The wax example shows that reducing sensible data or intricate arguments to their primitive components is the job of the intellect guided by the will which ensures the beginning and continuation of the process. However, if this were all there is to knowing an object, it would be impossible to distinguish between particular material objects (as

¹⁷⁴ “Descartes’ theory is not that to judge or believe we must first perform some conative mental act. It is that the faculty of will contributes the mental attitudes that enter into judging and believing, just as it contributes the mental attitudes that go into desires, decisions and the like. On this theory, the will cannot produce desires and decisions on its own, but only in tandem with the understanding. The will is simply that mental capacity by virtue of which I incline (*propedeo*), in one direction or another, with respect to various propositional contents” (AT VII 57-58) (Rosenthal 141).

¹⁷⁵ “Altogether, I think that all those [ideas] which involve no affirmation or negation are innate in us; for the sense organs do not bring us anything which is like the idea which arises in us on the occasion of their stimulus, and so this idea must have been in us before” (AT III, 418; CSMK 187).

they are all chunks of extension) or between mental objects (as they are all modifications of the mental substance). The only possible distinction would be between material types and mental types, not between tokens. Therefore establishing the individual combinations of simple natures and qualifying our judgments accordingly are jobs of the will.

Additional support for Rosenthal's contention that the Cartesian will has a referent-identifying function comes from Descartes' distinguishing between innate ideas, which pertain to the intellect, and judging which pertains to "the determination of the will" (AT VIII B, 363; CSM I, 307); the determination of the will which is part of judging is linked to circumstances relating to experience. In *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet* Descartes states: "there is nothing in our ideas that is not innate to the mind or the faculty of thinking, with the sole exception of *those circumstances which relate to experience, such as the fact that we judge that this or that idea which we now have immediately before our mind refers to a certain thing situated outside us*" (AT VIII B, 358-359; CSM I, 304- my emphasis).¹⁷⁶

In this section I argued that Descartes makes assent an act of will because he wants to account for the difference between entertaining an idea and making a judgment, being committed to the truth of a proposition. He attributes assent to the will because he models theoretical commitment on its practical counterpart: he starts from desire and taking into account certain similarities (e.g. varying intensities, the connection between intensity and the object of one's belief or desire; and our ability to change our minds), he

¹⁷⁶ In Chapter I I argued that in this passage Descartes is not claiming that all ideas are innate but rather that innate ideas have a pattern-recognition function: processing sense data requires innate ideas in the form of common notions.

concludes that desire and assent share one more feature, they are both types of commitment (theoretical and practical, respectively) and thus pertain to the same faculty, the will.

IV. Epistemic responsibility

We saw above that Rosenthal takes the lack of external determination and not *control* to be the decisive factor when it comes to the freedom manifested in the process of judging. In this section I will analyze the views of two philosophers (Alvin Plantinga and David Owens) who emphasize the notion of control and its role in Descartes' theory of judgment. Here is Plantinga: "on the Cartesian-Lockean deontological conception of justification, whether S's beliefs are justified, obviously, is up to S and *within her control*" (Plantinga 15- my emphasis). However, Rosenthal's and Plantinga's position will turn out to be closer than one would first expect, as Plantinga takes Descartes to propose only a weak notion of control over belief, one that allows us to influence belief indirectly by choosing the procedures leading to beliefs.

The importance of control emerges in the context of Descartes' statement that it is our duty to assent only to clearly and distinctly perceived ideas. When sufficient clarity and distinctness are lacking the only correct conduct is withholding assent; assenting in such a case constitutes a fault, regardless of the result achieved.¹⁷⁷ Taking into account such passages from Descartes Plantinga states:

¹⁷⁷ "If, however, I simply refrain from making a judgment in cases where I do not perceive the truth with sufficient clarity and distinctness, then it is clear that *I am behaving correctly and avoiding error*. But if in such cases I either affirm or deny, then *I am not using my free will correctly*. If I go for the alternative which is false, then obviously I shall be in error; if I take the other side, then it is by pure chance that I arrive at the truth, and *I shall still be at fault* since it is clear by the natural light that the perception of the intellect should always precede the determination of the will" (AT VII, 59-60; CSM II, 41- my emphasis).

The first thing to see is that for Descartes and Locke the notion of duty or obligation plays a central role in the whole doxastic enterprise... According to Descartes, being justified is being within our rights, flouting no epistemic duties, doing no more than what is permitted. We are justified when we regulate or order our beliefs in such a way as to conform to the duty not to affirm a proposition unless we perceive it with sufficient clarity and distinctness (Plantinga 12-13).

According to Plantinga internalism presupposes that what makes a belief warranted are factors internal to the believer: factors of which the agent can be *aware* and to which she has some kind of *special* access (Plantinga 5-6). In order to uncover the connection between deontologism and internalism Plantinga draws a distinction between objective and subjective duty. Objective duty is the duty we in fact have as determined by divine command (in the case of the divine command theory) or the greater good (in the case of utilitarianism) or by some other criterion. Subjective duty is what we nonculpably perceive to be our duty, the aspect which makes us blameworthy if we don't fulfill it or praiseworthy if we do. With this distinction Plantinga proceeds to formulate three "internalist motifs".

The first internalist motif is a version of the principle "ought implies can": "Epistemic justification (that is, subjective epistemic justification, being such that I am not blameworthy) is entirely up to me and within my power" (Plantinga 19). The second internalist motif states: "For a large, important, and basic class of objective epistemic duties, objective and subjective duty coincide" (Plantinga 20). The third internalist motif, less well defined, refers to "personal internalism" (calling attention to the way in which my beliefs, desires, experience, and aims are crucial to me as a person- Plantinga 23). This motif deals with our having privileged access only to those mental states that are internal to us in the sense of being essential to our personhood.

If we apply these three internalist motifs specifically to Descartes' case we get: (1) it is our subjective duty to assent only to clear and distinct ideas; (2) it is evident by the natural light that assenting only to clear and distinct ideas is our objective duty as well (because we cannot be non-culpably ignorant about the clarity and distinctness of our ideas); and (3) we have privileged access to clear and distinct ideas: what allows us to know that a proposition is justified is what makes it justified (i.e. clarity and distinctness). Plantinga attributes to Descartes a weak version of doxastic voluntarism: we have control over what we believe only in situations of epistemic balance. However, he thinks we should not add doxastic voluntarism as a fourth internalist motif:

perhaps epistemic deontology implies a doxastic voluntarism of *some* sort, a sort of weak doxastic voluntarism; but it does not as such imply that there are any beliefs at all such that merely by an act of will I can either acquire or lose or withhold them. One who construes justification deontologically need not believe that it is ever my duty, in given circumstances, to believe or withhold a given proposition... perhaps it is my duty to adopt or strive to adopt policies of a certain sort. It is within my power to adopt policies that influence and modify my propensities to believe (Plantinga 24).

Plantinga's tracing classical internalism (of which Descartes is a main proponent) to epistemic duties that it is up to us whether to fulfill or not connects nicely with Alanen's contention that the will's commitment to the true and the good is the free eliciting of the will's natural inclination, inclination that is part of our *moral* and *rational* nature (Alanen 2003, 245).¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ "The inclination to pursue it [the moral good] is part of our moral nature, and so is the power to elicit or not elicit this inclination. The same holds for the inclination to the true, which is part of the nature of our reason itself, and here too it is up to us to elicit such inclination or not" (Alanen 245).

In agreement with Plantinga, Owens argues that Descartes' reasons for attributing judging to the will in *Meditation IV* have to do with justification and epistemic responsibility and only seem to be related to theodicy:

But Descartes needs his theory of judgment for reasons which have nothing to do with letting God off the hook. He, like most Enlightenment philosophers (Hume excepted), is a firm adherent of two ideas: (a) each individual is responsible for the rationality of their beliefs and is at fault where their beliefs are unjustified and (b) such intellectual responsibility requires intellectual freedom, we can be held to account for our beliefs only in so far as they are under our control (Owens 2000a, 18).

Owens claims that Descartes makes judging an act of will because Descartes wants to impute responsibility for beliefs to the agent; or, on the Cartesian view, responsibility is only applicable to what is subject to the will (Owens 2000b, 101). In characterizing Descartes' views in this manner Owens has in mind passages where Descartes explicitly links responsibility and free will: "For we can be reasonably praised or blamed only for actions that depend upon this free will" (AT XI, 445; CSM I, 384)¹⁷⁹.

In this part of the chapter I will show that a careful reading of Descartes and Owens (one that interprets Descartes along strong voluntarist lines which allow us to freely commit ourselves to the pursuit of the truth by eliciting our natural inclination towards the true and the good) reveals them to have closer views than Owens acknowledges: they both agree that responsiveness to reasons is what determines the

¹⁷⁹ Someone might object to the use of this passage to make a point about theoretical matters as the passage has to do with passions, volitions and conduct, that is, with practical matters. However, Descartes makes similar statements about theoretical matters. For instance in the *Appendix to Fifth Objections and Replies*: "And since making or not making a judgment is an act of will... it is evident that it is something in our power" (AT VII, 204; CSM II, 270).

limits of our responsibility in the epistemic realm.¹⁸⁰ Despite the coincidence of the end point of their theories of epistemic control, Owens rejects Descartes' views on the matter.

Owens' argument, in outline, seems to go as follows: Descartes' will-based notion of epistemic control is incoherent but it can be modified to obtain a judgment-based account of control called reflective control. This latter account is coherent but wrong as it proposes a superfluous step in our belief-acquisition: there is nothing reflection on evidence can incline us to believe that we would not already believe due to an unreflective awareness of the same evidence. Therefore, responsiveness to reasons is enough to account for our belief acquisition and our epistemic responsibility extends to acquiring epistemic virtues that help our responsiveness to reasons.

Owens' reasons for proposing the modification of a will-based notion of control into reflective control are: flaws in the will-based account and the higher explanatory power of the model of reflective control. On the first point Owens claims that the will lacks a role in belief acquisition as we cannot choose what we believe; even if the will played a role in belief acquisition, it would not give us the kind of responsibility we are after as it can act only in accordance with practical not epistemic norms: according to Owens, if the will played a role in belief-acquisition, it would consist of choosing beliefs because they appear desirable. Moreover, Owens depicts the juridical theory of responsibility as modeling too closely the will-based account of epistemic control on the will-based account of action while overlooking an essential difference: the good is a

¹⁸⁰ I take Owens' responsiveness to reasons to be equivalent to Descartes' spontaneous assent to clear and distinct ideas.

different kind of goal than the truth. Owens' second reason for preferring reflective control to control by the will is because it provides a unified account of control by applying to our freedom of action, our freedom of will and our freedom of belief (Owens 2000b, 84).

I will offer a point by point critique of Owens' arguments that will show that Descartes' will-based notion of epistemic control is coherent and that, if this is Owens' only reason for replacing it with a judgment-based notion of control, it needs no such replacing. Moreover, a judgment-based and a will-based notion of control can be compatible: for Descartes judging involves the will and this makes a judgment-based account dependent on the will and further dependent on a will-based account of control, given that control is implicit in every genuine act of will. I will conclude by showing how our responsiveness to reasons is conditional upon a will-based notion of control.

I begin with a few terminological remarks clarifying what Owens means by will, control by the will, reflective control, responsiveness to reasons and juridical theory of responsibility. Then I analyze and refute (some) of the flaws Owens finds with the epistemic role of the Cartesian will. According to Owens, "The will enables us to coordinate our actions over time as neither desires nor practical judgments could...The will commits the agent in a way that his desires and judgments do not: the will is an executive phenomenon" (Owens 2000b, 78-79). Descartes would agree with the description of the will as a faculty of commitment.

The difference between Owens' judgment-based and will-based accounts of control is that between a normative judgment and an executive decision:

'Decision' might refer to a practical judgment- the judgment that I *should* raise my hand. On the other hand, 'decision' could refer to an executive event, the formation of an intention, a state which ensures that I *will* perform the act decided upon when the time comes... The former reading leads to a *judgment-based or intellectualist notion of practical freedom*, the latter to a *will-based or voluntarist notion* (Owens 2000b, 78-my emphasis).

Applied to belief, a will-based account of control would entail believing at will, acquiring beliefs "with a view to the desirability rather than the probability of the belief" (Owens 2000b, 80).

Reflective control is a type of judgment-based account of control. According to a reflective control theory, we are responsible for our belief that X if reflection on the reasons for believing that X can motivate us to acquire the belief. "Reflective motivation links the discipline of reason with control by reflection: we are responsible for our beliefs because we have the capacity to determine what we believe by reflecting on our reasons" (Owens 2000b, 21). Still, according to Owens, the role of reflection in motivating us to acquire a certain belief is superfluous and reasons-responsiveness, our ability to acquire a belief if evidence points in that direction, to modify our belief if evidence changes and to completely renounce it if the evidence no longer supports believing, is enough.

What Owens calls "the juridical theory of responsibility" establishes a close connection between responsibility and freedom: "[F]reedom is about control, and control

is a power to move things” (Owens 2000b, 101)¹⁸¹. According to Owens’ description of the juridical theory, we are responsible only for what is under our (direct) control (Owens 2000b, 121), while control is interpreted as “subject to the will”. Here Owens is correct in taking the Cartesian account of control to mean subject to the will but wrong in taking only *direct* control to satisfy the requirements for responsibility. After all, we are responsible for how we respond to our passions even though we only have indirect control over them¹⁸².

Having clarified the main concepts I move to an analysis of Owens’ reasons for rejecting the Cartesian will-based account of epistemic control. I will present and reject four such reasons: first, Owens claims that the agent can be held only practically but not epistemically responsible for beliefs acquired due to non-evidential factors, like desire. Second, according to Owens the true and the good are very different ends; pursuing the truth cannot be one among the agent’s ends as the function of the truth is not to further the agent’s goals but to mirror the world. Third, Owens argues that the will acts arbitrarily unless commanded by practical judgments. And finally, for Owens the Cartesian theory of will is implausible because the will does not play the role Descartes attributes to it in the judging process. I will now look in detail at these objections.

(1) Owens tells us that Descartes mistakenly thinks we are responsible for beliefs formed through the influence of non-evidential factors, like desire. These factors are acts

¹⁸¹ When talking about the juridical theory of responsibility Owens is referring to Enlightenment philosophers in general, not specifically to Descartes.

¹⁸² Owens would grant this as he takes responsibility for our emotions, which are not under our direct control, not to be a part of the juridical theory of responsibility even though many of its proponents would endorse this idea (Owens 2000b, 116).

of will exercising a form of control independent of reflection on evidence (Owens 2000b, 58-59). A form of control independent of reflection on evidence is problematic according to Owens because only reflection takes place in accordance with epistemic norms; desire conforms to rules of practical reason. So, according to Owens, if we are held responsible for the beliefs acquired under the influence of desire we can only be considered liable for their undesirability or wrongness, but not for their falsity.

I have three points in response to Owens on this issue. First, Descartes' view of the will as inclined towards both the true and the good amounts to making the will subject to both epistemic and practical norms. I contend that endowing the will with a theoretical function is part of Descartes' attempt to provide a normative approach to mind and rationality. Descartes would probably have no objections, as Owens does, to deriving epistemic responsibility from moral responsibility, as in *Meditation IV* error is treated as a kind of sin (AT VII, 58; CSM II, 41). Granting for now Descartes' subjecting the will to both epistemic and practical norms, if we understand the will's freedom of perversity as a capacity we have to reject a clearly perceived truth, a capacity that we possess but never actualize as such *while remaining rational agents*, Descartes' attributing assent to the will becomes a relatively innocuous maneuver.

Given the will's initial commitment to the true and the good (commitment freely entered into by eliciting the will's initial inclination towards the true and the good), in the case of clear and distinct ideas, it is a simple matter of terminology which mental faculty performs the act of assent (especially if we take into account Descartes' emphasis on the

unity of the mind: it is one and the same mind that has ideas and wills).¹⁸³ The case of epistemic balance is more problematic and I will return to it below when dealing with Owens's rejection of Descartes' epistemic voluntarism.

Second, Owens seems to draw a distinction between *influencing* and *binding*: according to Owens, the will can influence and cause things but it has no authority. An intention (which Owens takes to be an act of will) is not binding in the same way a practical judgment is. Only practical reason is authoritative, the will is an executive power: practical reason issues commands about what we ought to do and the will executes those commands. As a matter of fact (and experience) we are unable to choose our beliefs the way we choose alternative courses of action; therefore belief is beyond the control of the will. However, this is not a conceptual truth: there is nothing in the concept of will or belief precluding this type of connection between the two.

Unlike Bernard Williams, Owens does not maintain that there is a logical contradiction in envisaging our choosing our beliefs. He states this in so many words: "In principle, the will could directly cause anything at all" (Owens 2000b, 80). By making this statement Owens comes very close to Descartes' own pronouncements in the second

¹⁸³ On this matter I agree with Lilli Alanen who states: "For Descartes, the talk of will and intellect as separate faculties is just talk: the mind is indivisible, and it is one and the same thing that in perceiving is passive and in judging or willing is active. The will is just the intellect acting. Ideas may be presented or even imposed on the intellect, but the intellect is an active power able to determine itself, to direct its attention, and to choose at all times which thoughts to focus on and which to neglect, without other restraints than its own span of attention and memory. It is this very capacity of self-determination that Descartes has in mind when he writes in the *Passions of the Soul* that 'the will is by its very nature so free that it can never be constrained' and that the thoughts he calls 'actions' as opposed to passions- that is, the thoughts depending only on the mind itself- are 'absolutely within its power' (AT XI, 359; CSM I, 345)" (Alanen 102).

letter to Mesland¹⁸⁴ where we are told that even though morally speaking we cannot reject a clearly perceived truth while attending to it, *absolutely speaking we can*. Still, according to Owens, inducing beliefs directly, by means of basic acts, would still not give us the type of control over belief appropriate for imputing responsibility because inducing beliefs directly would still only conform to practical norms (Owens 2000b, 85).¹⁸⁵ The way I read him, Descartes would disagree with Owens' contention that the will is factual, "an executive phenomenon" as opposed to binding and authoritative (features that practical reason possesses). Below I will show that while the Cartesian will does cause and influence things (e.g. thoughts and by means of thoughts corporeal motion), it acts within the normative space of reasons, not the mechanical space of causes.

Third, in order to clarify the relation between error and irrationality in Descartes I must draw a threefold distinction on Descartes' behalf between three different types of error: (a) the apple example that Descartes gives to Gassendi in the *Fifth Set of Replies* is a scenario of error due to improperly qualifying our judgments¹⁸⁶. The impetus of the will makes it presuppose more content than actually is perceived. What we do perceive are the colour and odor of the apple, the smoothness of its skin but we do not perceive that the

¹⁸⁴ Owens does not seem to ever mention the two letters to Mesland that have so much troubled Cartesian scholars because of the voluntarist bent they propose. He limits his discussion to the *Meditations* and to the *Objections and Replies*, which might explain the intellectualist reading of Descartes he provides.

¹⁸⁵ "Can belief ever be induced directly, by means of a basic action? On the answer to this query hangs the extent of our practical responsibility for belief. Suppose my beliefs were like bits of bodily agency in that I usually could bring them about without doing anything else first. That would widen the scope of our *practical* responsibility for belief considerably. But my concern is exclusively with our responsibility to conform our beliefs to (unconditional) epistemic norms and no amount of actional control over belief could underwrite that responsibility. So far as I can see, the truth or falsity of the claim that we can induce beliefs by means of basic acts has no significance for epistemology, internalist or otherwise" (Owens 2000b, 85).

¹⁸⁶ Descartes states: "[W]hen you judge that an apple, which may in fact be poisoned, is nutritious: you understand that its smell, colour and so on are pleasant, but this does not mean that you understand that this particular apple will be beneficial to eat; you judge that it will because you want to believe it" (CSM II, 259; AT VII, 377).

apple would be nutritious; we *infer* that the apple would be good to eat, without being aware of the poison it contains. (b) In the epistemic balance situation where the proper doxastic attitude is suspension of judgment, if the will proceeds nonetheless to form a judgment, we are in error. In *Meditation IV* Descartes gives an example of indifference: our wondering if we might after all have a body, if “the thinking nature which is in me, or rather which I am, is distinct from this corporeal nature or identical with it” (AT VII, 59; CSM II, 41). In this case it seems that Gassendi’s will tilted the balance in favor of one of the two alternatives (I am identical with my body). The difference between (a) and (b) consists mainly in that forming a true judgment is possible in the first case if we make the effort to properly qualify our judgment but, at the point in the *Meditations* where the example is brought up, there isn’t enough evidence to justifiably form a true judgment in the second case, no matter how hard we tried.

(c) The case of perversity where we choose to prove the freedom of our will by rejecting a clearly perceived truth. The first type of error is by far the most common and Descartes refers to it in the *Principles* when explaining that no one wishes to go wrong but everyone wishes to give one’s assent to something in which error is sometimes to be found (AT VIII A, 19; CSM I, 206). The first type of error is not a case of irrationality but one of ignorance, of forming a belief in the absence of sufficient evidence and without being aware of lacking it. The apple example could become an instance of irrationality if there is a huge disproportion between the evidence (the content perceived by the intellect) and the attitude we take towards it. For instance, if I form the judgment “this apple is nutritious” after witnessing my neighbor placing poison inside the apple,

my judgment qualifies as a case of irrationality. However, if we assume that most beliefs are formed without blatantly flying in the face of evidence, only the last two types of error are cases of irrationality on the part of the believer. We are culpable for all three types of error; the difference in culpability between the three types of errors described above is one of degree: we are less culpable for errors due to ignorance than for errors resulting from tilting the epistemic balance to one side for non-evidential reasons; and finally, we are most to blame for forming a belief just for the sake of proving the freedom of our wills.

Owens focuses his attack on scenario (b) and gives the example of forming the belief that the number of stars is odd even though there is no conclusive evidence pointing in that direction (Owens 2000b, 18). In both Descartes' and Owens' examples we lack sufficient evidence to form a belief using only evidential considerations; according to Descartes' hypothesis¹⁸⁷ we have not yet stumbled upon reasons conclusively showing either that the mind is, or that it isn't distinct from the body. In Owens' example, there is not enough scientific data to show either that the number of stars is odd, or that it is even.

Descartes' own tentative explanation of forming beliefs in situations of inconclusive evidence occurs towards the end of *Meditation IV* where he mentions our

¹⁸⁷ Descartes gives this example in *Meditation IV* after having provisionally established that nothing belongs to the mind except for thinking and thus nothing corporeal belongs to it. In *Meditation III* he has proven that God exists and is not a deceiver. Although the elements are in place for the real distinction argument Descartes does not present such an argument until *Meditation VI*. This may be the reason he hypothesizes in *Meditation IV* that there is no legitimate way to say whether the mind is distinct from or identical with the body.

inability to fix our attention on the same thing for a long time as the main cause of our failure to “withhold assent on any occasion when the truth of the matter is not clear” (AT VII, 62; CSM II, 43). In the mind-body distinction hypothesis from *Meditation IV*, we begin by being aware that we can clearly and distinctly perceive neither the identity nor the distinction between mind and body. We are also aware that in such situations we should withhold judgment and we do withhold it. However, if we are like Gassendi, as our mind’s attention slides towards other things, we overlook the initial lack of clarity and distinctness of the relation between mind and body; and we form the belief that mind and body are identical.

For his part, Owens argues that it is impossible on evidential considerations alone to decide when the reasons in favor of a certain belief are sufficient. We also need non-evidential factors (like the limitations of our own cognitive resources, time constraints). He calls these pragmatic factors and has them acting at the non-reflective level of mere awareness. These non-evidential factors combine with the evidential ones giving the appearance of conclusive grounds (Owens 2000b, 50).

By leading to the formation of beliefs in situations when evidential considerations are not enough, Descartes’ diverting attention and Owens’ pragmatic factors probably play the same role in belief-formation. However, Descartes would maintain that, in a situation like the one above, we are able deliberately to form a belief (by sheer force of will); Owens, on the other hand, thinks no belief could be *deliberately* formed because reflection on non-evidential factors is incapable of motivating us to believe. According to

Owens, a belief is still formed, although not deliberately but due to factors acting below the threshold of consciousness.

(2) Owens' first objection to Descartes' will-based theory of control referred to the impropriety of imputing epistemic responsibility to the agent who acquires beliefs under the influence of desire or other non-evidential factors. Owens' second important objection to Descartes stems from the essential difference between the true and the good as ends. In Owens' view, the will is not only motivation-preserving but also ends-promoting: "An action is subject to the will because it is an event whose function is to promote the agent's ends... Thus I implicitly argued that beliefs are not subject to the will, that they are not free in that sense. They escape the control of the will because their function is not to promote the agent's objectives" (Owens 2000b, 77). Or, truth cannot figure as an end among others; believing is not an action that aims at the truth¹⁸⁸, thus the insufficiency of a will-based account of control and the need for a reflective control theory. Owens intends to show that a will-based version of control, although applicable to action, is unsuitable as an account of both intellectual and practical freedom (Owens 2000b, 77).

However, I interpret Descartes as saying that resolving not to settle for mere suppositions or probabilities but to be content only with true opinions is one of the most important decisions we are faced with; following the truth is one among others of the agent's goals. This is the position the Cartesian meditator endorses at the beginning of

¹⁸⁸ "Believing is not an action with truth as its goal, which is why it is not under our reflective control in the way action is. Pursuing truth in belief is nothing like seeking the good through action" (Owens 2000b, 35).

Meditation I: the meditator sets truth as his only goal. This ability to decide whether or not to follow the truth is an aspect of Descartes' voluntarism: having the ability to deliberate not only about means but also about ends (e.g. truth) is one of the tenets of medieval voluntarism. Medieval thinkers also take the true and the good to include each other which establishes a closer connection between epistemic and practical responsibility than Owens allows for.

(3) Owens identifies two more problematic aspects of a will-based account of epistemic control: the will seems to act arbitrarily, at its own whims unless commanded by practical judgment. Furthermore, being an act of will does not necessarily mean being in control.

In principle, the will could directly cause anything at all. But the mere fact that something is produced by my will, that my will motivates it, does not put me in control of it. I am in control of it only when my judgment as to whether it ought to be produced at will can determine whether it is produced at will. I am in control of the products of my will when the will itself is under my reflective control... And the agent exercises control by means of higher order normative judgments about what ought to happen. These judgments are arrived at by applying the relevant norms, so norms do constrain what can happen at will in the sense of that phrase which connotes control and therefore (on the juridical theory) responsibility (Owens 2000b, 80).

According to Owens, the will cannot be under the will's control because this would lead to a regress. But this is not a real threat to Descartes' theory of will because control is implicit in every act of will. For every single act of will that the agent elicits, she could have refrained from eliciting or she could have elicited the totally opposite. Moreover, every single act of will stems from the agent as its ultimate source. As I argued in Chapter III when dealing with a Source notion of control, the agent is the one that brings forth her acts of will; the latter are under the agent's control and there is no

infinite regress involved in willing: in willing to X, I do not need to will to will X, because pure acts of will are performatives. If I want to assent to “ $2+2=4$ ”, I have already assented to “ $2+2=4$ ”; and if I want to want to assent to “ $2+2=4$ ”, wanting to want is unnecessary for the success of my action; wanting to want to assent to “ $2+2=4$ ” is just a reendorsement of my initial decision to assent.

For Owens, the reasons for preferring a judgment-based account of control to a will-based one are: it happens that we are so constituted as to be reasons-responsive and the will acts with no regard for any norms whatsoever or only with regard to practical norms. Descartes would agree that we are reasons-responsive but would point out that this is due to a commitment of the will, not solely to a matter of mental constitution. The spontaneity of the will that Descartes emphasizes so much is conditional upon a lack of perversity on our part: at any moment we could have chosen to reject a clearly perceived truth. Thus it is simply not true as far as Descartes is concerned that “[b]y adopting a voluntaristic conception of control one effectively abandons the idea that we can exercise control over belief” (Owens 2000b, 82).

Owens rejects the Cartesian theory of will as implausible (Owens 2000a, 18). He questions the role of willing in the judgment-making process as described by Descartes in *Meditation IV*. He states:

So I am accountable for error because I am misusing my free will when I affirm something on the basis of inconclusive evidence. A fully rational person just could not assent to a proposition for which there is inconclusive evidence: evidence is the only reason for belief, and inconclusive evidence will leave him indifferent. But why should inconclusive evidence leave him indifferent? And why should it deprive him of true freedom in forming a belief, if he can go ahead and form beliefs anyway? (Owens 2000b, 58).

If an agent forms a belief when conclusive evidence is lacking, doing so deprives her of “true freedom”. Owens is puzzled by the role “true freedom” plays in Descartes’ theory because it seems that the agent can still form beliefs even when “true freedom” is lacking and she can still be held accountable in such cases. Owens seems to think that three factors are necessary for the formation of beliefs for which the agent may be justifiably held accountable: first, conclusive evidence; second, assenting in accordance with the evidence; and third, true freedom as a feature of the act of assent that follows the evidence. When any one of these factors is lacking, Owens argues that belief-acquisition should not be possible. However, for Descartes belief-acquisition is possible in the absence of any of these three factors. Owens’ proposed solution to this dilemma consists in the replacement of “freedom as subjection to the will” with the notion of reflective control (Owens 2000b, 58).

As shown in Chapter III, the term “freedom of will” has a manifold meaning in Descartes’ works. What is necessary for accountability is freedom of the will, the will’s ability to assert or deny, to pursue or avoid (which *Meditation IV* presents as the very essence of freedom). Owens’ “true freedom” is just a success term: it is a retrospective evaluation of the will’s performance in a certain situation; “true freedom” refers to freedom *after* an act of will has been elicited (as I argued in Chapter III in the section on *Temporal Criteria*). If, after forming the judgment, we realize that the will’s performance was satisfactory, that the idea assented to is indeed clear and distinct, this positive evaluation reverberates to the act of will that constituted the judgment.

For Descartes, the will can act without reasons, it can determine itself to action but in a *rational* agent it commits itself to acting in accordance with reasons. If we keep this in mind, Descartes would agree with Owens when he states:

To sum up, we can now see that the key concept for any theory of responsibility should be responsiveness to reasons, not agency or control. As well as actions, I am accountable for those states of mine (beliefs, desires, and emotions) that are governed by reason, at least where I am capable of responding to those reasons. Neither the scope of the will, nor the power of reflection determines the boundaries of responsibility. Virtue and vice are matters of my responsiveness to different sorts of reasons- ethical virtues concern ethical reasons, epistemic virtues concern epistemic reasons- and I am praised or blamed accordingly (Owens 2000b, 126).

Here is how reasons-responsiveness works in Descartes' case. Due to our mental make-up we are reasons-responsive, as a result of which we form beliefs that seem to be mostly true, to describe accurately the way the world is. At this stage belief-acquisition appears an automatic process. I equate this stage of reasons-responsiveness with the pre-doubt condition of the Cartesian meditator. However, we discover that we have endorsed many falsehoods; we begin reflecting on the process of belief acquisition and we thus arrive at hyperbolic doubt. Once doubt reaches rock bottom and we arrive at the *cogito* we return¹⁸⁹ to reasons-responsiveness with the important difference that it is now reflectively grounded.

Cartesian reasons-responsiveness is based on the norms of thinking and rationality which are innate in us and which we discover by means of the light of nature. The light of nature may be obscured by our senses and our poor education (as in the pre-doubt period)

¹⁸⁹ In saying that we return to reasons-responsiveness I do not mean that we ever relinquished it completely, but only that during the process of doubt it was not the most important consideration. Once we arrive at the *cogito* reasons-responsiveness recaptures centre-stage with the important qualification that it is now much stricter than before: in the theoretical sphere only ideas that are clear and distinct are to be accepted.

or it may be working at peak efficiency (as in the post-meditation stage). Therefore I conclude that, when carefully analyzed, the Cartesian description of the will is not implausible and that the similarity between Owens' and Descartes' reasons-responsiveness is genuine despite the fact that Owens' account includes neither the dualism, nor Descartes' details of the inner workings of our minds.

V. A normative account of human nature

In light of Owens' criticisms of Descartes' theory of will and its relation to belief-acquisition and belief justification, it is important to clarify the relation between the Cartesian will and the normative domain. Alanen situates Descartes in a trend of thought initiated by Duns Scotus that attempts to provide a "non-naturalistic account of moral agency" by placing the will in "the logical space of reasons" and out of the order of natural causes, either efficient or final (Alanen 239). In agreement with Alanen, I argue that "reasons" pertain to the domain of the mind and "causes" pertain to the domain of the body and thus are irreducible to one another. Then I show that reading Descartes as a proto-Kantian thinker is preferable to interpreting him as a proto-Humean, as Cottingham does (Cottingham 348).

A reason represents evidential support for a certain proposition *p*, and, given Descartes' internalism, it can only fulfill such a function when it is perceived as such. When addressing the issue of reasons, causes and their relation Bernard Williams distinguishes between a "rational connexion" and a "causal connexion" between two

propositions p and q; only sometimes is a causal connection a rational connection as well.

He states:

The point I want to make is that where the connexion is rational- that is, not only does he believe that p because he believes that q, but we and he, can also say 'p because q'- that does not stop the 'because' in 'A believes that p because he believes that q' from being causal. The fact that there is a rational connexion between p and q does not mean that there is not a causal connexion between A's believing p and his believing q (Williams 141-142).

As Robert Imlay points out, reasons do not pertain to the essence of the will as understood by Descartes. In *Meditation IV* when comparing the human will with its divine counterpart, Descartes states:

For although God's will is *incomparably greater than mine, both in virtue of the knowledge and power that accompany it* and make it more firm and efficacious, *and also in virtue of its object*, in that it ranges over a greater number of items, nevertheless it does not seem any greater than mine when considered as will in the essential and strict sense (AT VII, 57; CSM II, 40- my emphasis).

As knowledge and power just "accompany" the will, Imlay concludes that reasons are not part of willing itself. If reasons pertained to the essence of the will, it would be impossible to have an act of will without reasons bringing it about. However, as reasons do not pertain to the essence of the will all that is needed for an act of will to be elicited are an idea put forward by the intellect and the agent's decision to take a stand with respect to the presented idea. It is only because reasons do not pertain to the essence of the will that freedom of perversity, which consists in acting against reasons, is possible. (Imlay 1982, 89).

Above I took "cause" as pertaining to the corporeal realm. My reading seems threatened because Descartes talks about the causes of our ideas (e.g. the cause of our idea of God is God himself). Also, the causal principle "Now it is manifest by the natural

light that there must be at least as much <reality> in the efficient and total cause as in the effect of that cause” is taken to be a common notion that is applicable to both the physical and the mental realms (Descartes allows for the possibility of ideas causing other ideas- AT VII, 42; CSM II, 29). The difficulty can be removed if we draw a distinction on Descartes’ behalf between a broad and a narrow construal of “cause”.

Broadly construed “cause” covers both realms and the only requirement it has to conform to is the causal principle quoted above. The narrow definition of cause refers to physical, mechanical causes only. Of course, causes that straddle the two realms would have to be very different than mechanical causes; this may be the reason why in some passages Descartes gestures towards occasionalism. For instance, in *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet* he maintains that all our ideas are innate and that external objects are just occasions for the actualization of dormant mental dispositions (AT VIII B, 358-360; CSM II, 304). The difference between reasons and causes has to be situated not in their different ontological status, mental versus physical (as there are mental causes too) but in a normative aspect.

The fact that rational and causal connections can coexist shows that my account of control as Source is compatible with the will’s functioning in the space of reasons. By way of the will the agent influences the occurrence, content and attitude taken towards a certain thought but in so doing the agent voluntarily conforms to norms that are part of her very nature. The important distinction here is the one between natural or non-agential causes and agent-causation. As I argued in Chapter III when dealing with the Source

model of control natural causes have a pre-set way of bringing about effects given certain background conditions; agents, on the other hand, causally bring about effects but are also able to refrain from acting, are aware of their powers, and possess the ability for self-reflection.

At the beginning of this chapter I mentioned Heil's contention that a suitable account of belief has to reconcile the normative aspects of belief formation and evaluation with the phenomenology of belief acquisition which makes belief something that happens to us, not something that is within our control. Descartes' ability to strike a balance between these two seemingly incompatible aspects is one of the merits of his view on belief, according to Cottingham and Imlay. Imlay¹⁹⁰ expresses this in terms of the reducibility of epistemology to psychology while Cottingham conceives of them as running parallel. Here is Cottingham:

This, Descartes appears to be saying, is just the way we are, the way we are made: the *lux rationis*, the light of reason, is also called the *lumen naturale*, the natural light; and its operation within the human psyche is quite appropriately described in causal terms, as determining our belief (Cottingham 348).

The role of reasons in belief acquisition and epistemic freedom go hand in hand: according to Cottingham's compatibilist reading of Descartes, reasons *determine* our beliefs. To Cottingham this is almost a prefiguring of Hume's ideas especially if we take into account Descartes' mentioning our *natural propensity* to assent to clear and distinct

¹⁹⁰ "Truthful appearances- or so Descartes would have it- are causally determinant for the mind that receives them because they are proxies for the corresponding truths themselves which in turn derive their causal efficiency from their divine creator...And because truthful appearances are irresistible in the way that they are and because the causal chain is what it is, irresistibility is ipso facto converted into evidence for truth. There is at this level of generality in any case no real distinction between psychology and epistemology. The latter has been both naturalized and supernaturalized with a vengeance" (Imlay 1996, 221).

ideas. It is not clear however how far Cottingham is willing to take the similitude between Descartes and Hume. After all, Hume takes the laws governing our belief-formation to be psychological laws. We may call them “laws of reason” but in that case animals are rational too as they function in accordance with the same laws.

Lilli Alanen, on the other hand, emphasizes the priority of the normative in Descartes’ views on belief. The mental and the physical are separate realms each with its own laws. The laws governing the mental sphere are not psychological laws but logical laws imprinted on our minds by God.¹⁹¹ Yet, they are only preconditions of rationality: attending to them and following them are up to us; the fact that we are endowed with freedom of perversity makes irrationality an option possible every time we form a belief. Forming beliefs in accordance with the common notions requires effort on our part as well as “reflective, *voluntary* commitment”.

This makes Descartes a pre-Kantian thinker, rather than a prenaturalist of a Humean kind: the necessity that constrains thinking is not one of causal regularity or habit, but of obligation and commitment to norms constitutive of rationality... By looking into yourself when withdrawing from the external world, you are not left with subjective, private impressions, but with the resources required to discover what is common and universal, like the laws of number and reasoning, which are evident to all rational beings (Alanen 2003, 105-106).

I take the interpretation of Descartes as a proto-Kantian to better account for Descartes’ commitment to both the real distinction between mind and body and to their

¹⁹¹ “If there seems to be no room for normativity (and certainly not for final ends or tendencies to the good) in Descartes’ conception of physical nature, this is because the normative is moved by him to the realm of the mental. The source of the norms is God, who institutes them and inscribes them in the human minds, who as free agents are responsible for subjecting themselves to those laws and following them. The order of causes and the order of reasons, as distinct and irreducible realms, is thereby each in place. If what demarcates the latter is normativity, and if the necessity regulating the order of reasons differs from the mere regularity of the order of causes in being mediated by attitudes of acknowledgement and commitment expressed in our conduct and speech as autonomous agents, then all the important elements for a normative account of human nature seem to be in place too, or at least importantly prefigured, in the Cartesian account of mind” (Alanen 2003, 110-111).

substantial union. This double commitment goes hand in hand with a domain-specific view of knowledge: knowing what pertains to the mind is accomplished by way of the intellect and conceptualized using “mind” as the primary notion¹⁹²; knowledge of physical objects requires not just the intellect but the imagination too and the main primitive notion is “body”; and finally, knowledge properly so called, that is using clear and distinct ideas, cannot be obtained when it comes to the union between mind and body. However, we can use our experiences of the union to get information and the appropriate primary notion here is that of “union”¹⁹³.

In order to obtain genuine knowledge about each of these domains and to avoid errors we must be very careful not to commit category mistakes but to apply to each domain the primary notion appropriate for it: “I observe next that all human knowledge consists solely in clearly distinguishing these notions and attaching each of them only to the things to which it pertains. For if we try to solve a problem by means of a notion that does not pertain to it, we cannot help going wrong” (AT III 665; CSMK 218).

VI. Conclusions

In this chapter I have explored the role Descartes attributes to the will in the theoretical realm. I argued that the will supplies the attitudes that enter into belief

¹⁹² Primitive notions are “as it were the patterns on the basis of which we form all our other conceptions” (AT III, 665; CSMK 218).

¹⁹³ “First of all I distinguished three kinds of primitive ideas or notions, each of which is known in its own proper manner and not by comparison with any of the others: the notions we have of the soul, of body and of the union between the soul and the body... I observe one great difference between these three kinds of notions. The soul is conceived only by the pure intellect; body (i.e. extension, shapes and motions) can likewise be known by the intellect alone but much better by the intellect aided by the imagination; and finally what belongs to the union of the soul and the body is known only obscurely by the intellect alone or even by the intellect aided by the imagination, but is known very clearly by the senses” (AT III, 691-692; CSMK 226-227).

formation and I equated these attitudes with the additional forms Descartes mentions in *Meditation III*. Then I inquired into Descartes' reasons for making an act of will part of belief acquisition. I argued that Descartes' reasons for attributing to the will a role in the process of belief formation were at once theological, ontological and epistemological. Theological reasons would not have been enough to determine Descartes to make assent an act of will but coupled with the ontological and epistemic reasons they are part of a cumulative case.

Attitudes pertain to the will and the presence of the will is a necessary component for attributing responsibility for one's beliefs to the agent. We have thus a threefold connection between epistemic deontologism- epistemic voluntarism- internalism. Being justified in holding a certain belief means fulfilling one's epistemic duty with respect to that belief and fulfilling that epistemic duty is always up to us: we can always relinquish the pursuit of our duty in favor of proving the freedom of our will but this would come at the price of our rationality.

It is not so much a question of shifting responsibility for errors from God to us but rather of assuming responsibility for one's beliefs. However, Descartes needs God as a guarantor of the clarity and distinctness rule. Without a non-deceiving God we cannot be sure that our ideas map the world. Given the importance of clarity and distinctness and its dependence on God's veracity, theological aspects are present in the epistemic and ontological reasons for attributing assent to the will.

When dealing with reasons pertaining to the ontology of the mind, reasons that determined Descartes to make assent an act of the will, I argued following Rosenthal that Descartes models theoretical commitment on practical commitment, i.e. desire. It is now time for me to look in detail at the practical role of the will.

Chapter V Descartes' Moral Theory

In the previous chapter, following Alanen, I interpreted one of the motivations behind Descartes' attributing a role to the will in judgment formation as an attempt to provide a normative account of human nature. As I argued in Chapter II "my nature" has a twofold meaning in Descartes' works: my nature qua mind and my nature qua embodied being; the will pertains to my nature in both these senses. Norms are applicable to both of these "natures": qua mind I am subject to laws of rationality and morality; qua composite of mind and body, besides these norms, I also possess value-pointers in the form of appetites and passions. As passions are not always perspicuous indicators of value, reason and experience are used to compensate for their shortcomings.

We have thus an interesting exchange between my two "natures": my "mental" nature is used as a system of checks and balances for my embodied nature. In the *Passions* this exchange is presented as the interplay between passions as referred to the soul (AT XI, 432; CSM I, 377; a.139) and passions as referred to the body (AT XI, 430; CSM I, 376; a.137), while the point of view of the mind-body composite appears in the relation between passions and desire (because desire leads to action- AT XI, 436; CSM I, 379; a.143). In this chapter I will show that the interplay between my two natures is paradigmatically exemplified by the interaction between *desires*: the desire we possess qua minds (mentioned among the modes of willing in the *Principles*) and the desire we possess qua composites of mind and body (one of the six primitive passions in the *Passions of the Soul*).

This chapter will have four parts. Part I consists of a characterization of the two senses of *desire* and is composed of three sections. I plan to show that there are three ways in which volitional and passional desire can interact: (1) passional desire is simply a perception of volitional desire; (2) volitional desire accompanies passional desire (on the model outlined in article 190 of the fourth part of the *Principles* where natural appetites are described as accompanied by correspondent volitions); and (3) the will consents to the passion of desire. In Part II, following the role and importance Descartes gives to the passions during his creative life, I divide his moral views into three distinct stages: a “morality” based on instinct; the provisional morality of the *Discourse*; and the final morality, contained in the *Passions* and the *Correspondence*, the apex of which is self-creation.

Self-creation involves harmonizing one’s emotions into a coherent structure and in so doing the agent exercises control understood in the Source sense, the agent is the ultimate source of the resulting *affective repertoire*. An important aspect of controlling the passions is identifying their causes and the causal sequences they are involved in; this yields theoretical judgments. Self-creation involves virtues of which I treat in Part III; I show that for Descartes virtues are dispositions of the will that arise as a result of the sublimation of passional desires. Part IV will consist of concluding remarks.

I. Two senses of desire

All passions have three main aspects: representational content (they are obscure ideas); an additional form (which makes them inclinations of the will); and physiological underpinnings (animal spirits causing and maintaining the passions). The continuous action of the animal spirits causing the passions is the feature that renders them both obscure and so vividly present to the mind as to require strenuous effort to divert the mind's attention to something else. Although they are obscure ideas, passions resemble clear and distinct ideas because they are accessible to the mind and incorrigible.

Passions display a certain kind of incorrigibility:

Thus often when we sleep, and sometimes even when we are awake, we imagine certain things so vividly that we think we see them before us, or feel them in our body, although they are not there at all. But even if we are asleep and dreaming, we cannot feel sad, or moved by any other passions, unless the soul truly has this passion within it (AT XI, 349; CSM I, 338; a. 26).

Wakefulness and sleep have a bearing only on statements about the external existence of the referents of our ideas and only in so far as the referents of our ideas are not clearly and distinctly perceived. Both passions and clear and distinct ideas seem to share an independence from the waking or sleeping state of the perceiver: whether we are awake or asleep, if we feel sad then we are sad and if we perceive clearly and distinctly that $2 + 2 = 4$ then the proposition $2 + 2 = 4$ is true (AT VII, 462; CSM II, 310)¹⁹⁴.

¹⁹⁴ “[E]verything that anyone clearly and distinctly perceives is true, although the person may from time to time doubt whether he is dreaming or awake, and may even, if you like be dreaming or mad. For no matter who the perceiver is, nothing can be clearly and distinctly perceived without its being just as we perceive it to be, i.e. without being true” (AT VII, 462; CSM II, 310).

The structure of passions as representational content and attitude emerges from the additional forms passage of *Meditation III* (AT VII, 37; CSM II, 26). The physiological background of the passions is spelled out in the *Passions*. Before turning to the passion of desire I will spend some time analyzing these features that all passions share (i.e. representational content, additional form and physiological underpinnings) as this will pave the way for clarifying the passions' relation to the will.

When dealing with the additional forms passage from *Meditation III* Rosenthal seems to only take into account desire as an act of the will, but desire is also an emotion, a passion of the soul. In the additional forms passage, Descartes explicitly refers to emotions and lists fear- another passion which in the *Passions* is described as a species of desire¹⁹⁵ - immediately after desire. In order to better understand the function and features of these additional forms when it comes to emotions I will now analyze Hobbes' objection to Descartes' contention that a passion (fear) or a judgment contains more than the image of its object. Hobbes states:

For what is fear of a charging lion if not the idea of a charging lion plus the effect which this idea produces in the heart, which in turn induces in the frightened man that animal motion which we call 'flight'? Now this motion of flight is not a thought; so the upshot of that fear does not involve any thought, apart from the thought that consists in the likeness of the thing feared. And the same applies to willing... affirmation and denial add nothing to simple thoughts except perhaps the thought that the names involved in the assertion denote the very things which the person making the assertion takes them to denote. But this is not a case of thought's including more than the likeness of a thing; it is a case of its including the same likeness twice (AT VII, 182; CSM II, 128).

In response to this objection Descartes "see[s] nothing here that needs answering" (AT VII, 182; CSM II, 128) because according to him the difference between merely seeing

¹⁹⁵ (AT XI, 376; CSM I, 351; a. 59).

a lion and being afraid of it is self-evident (and the same applies to the difference between seeing a man run and silently asserting to oneself that one sees him running). However, Hobbes' objection is based on a different view of what a passion is, what asserting involves and more generally of what an attitude consists in and to what faculty it should be attributed.

Hobbes seems to take passions as composed of ideas of objects and the physiological effects those objects have on us. Descartes adds to this a further component, a mental correspondent of the physiological reaction. Coming to the problem of assertion Hobbes takes it to consist of the verbal, nominal repetition of the idea of the object without anything new being added. Thus according to Hobbes in this passage, attitudes are either physiological processes or verbal renditions but not mental acts.

How are we to understand Descartes' example of fear as involving an additional form? Does he mean that passions involve attitudes? If so, where do these attitudes come from: the will or the intellect? Passions are obscure ideas and thus pertain to the intellect; and according to Descartes the intellect is able to provide some attitudes like suppositions¹⁹⁶ (AT V, 9; CSMK, 316). Still, there is also the passage of the *Passions* where Descartes states that all the soul's appetites are volitions (AT XI, 364; CSM I, 346; a. 47). Are we entitled to generalize from this and maintain that all passions are volitions? If so what does Descartes mean by this? Passions incline the soul to want things that are useful for the mind, the body or the union. Those inclinations are not different from the ideas

¹⁹⁶ In Chapter II I showed that, although supposition has the structure of a propositional attitude, it is an act of the intellect preceded by and dependent on an act of the will.

that initiated them but are just different aspects of those ideas; they do not pertain to a different faculty even though they are called “inclinations of the will”. “The inclinations of the will” are just ideas viewed under a different aspect: they are highly attractive ideas, ideas that have attitudinal potential.¹⁹⁷

Due to its double function as both a passion and an act of will, the passion of desire is important for my purposes here. I will provide a detailed analysis of passional desire including its origin and its function as action motivator before turning to volitional desire and its interaction with passional desire. Desire is one of the six primitive passions of the soul and is defined as follows: “The passion of desire is an agitation of the soul caused by the spirits which disposes the soul to wish, in the future, for the things it represents to itself as agreeable” (AT XI, 392; CSM I, 358; a.86). All passions are obscure ideas that signal things good for us (AT XI, 372; CSM I, 349, a.52) both as embodied beings (AT XI, 430; CSM I, 376; a.137) and as moral agents (AT XI, 462; CSM I, 391; a.173).

Thus there are two possible origins of desire: with respect to the body, bodily pleasure causes joy; joy produces love; love causes desire (AT XI, 430; CSM I, 376; a.137). With respect to the soul: the sequence is love-joy-desire (AT XI, 430; CSM I, 376; a.137). Desire seems to involve some acquisitive bent, the possession of a certain good: as soon as there is a lack that we want filled, desire sets in (AT XI, 389; CSM I, 357; a.82). It is future oriented and can be both an inclination to change (it makes us want

¹⁹⁷ On the other hand, volitions and judgments are ideas in a certain sense. “For example, when I want something, or am afraid of something, I simultaneously perceive that I want, or am afraid; and this is why I count volition and fear among my ideas” (AT VII, 181; CSM II, 127).

to acquire a good we don't yet have) or to preserve the status quo (we want to keep the goods that we already have- AT XI, 375; CSM I, 350; a. 57).

All passions involve a loop: they happen in the body as a movement of the spirits (that we may or may not become aware of), are felt in the soul (as perceptions or feelings), then they have a bodily effect, and finally they strengthen the mental component. Desire is one of the most active passions: it produces extreme agitation because of the spirits that it sets in motion and has physical effects (like trembling, blushing, listlessness). Desire “agitates the heart more violently than any other passion, and supplies more spirits to the brain” (AT XI, 403; CSM I, 363; a.101). It is mostly outwards-oriented: it prepares the body to act by inducing mobility and agility in the body: “[W]hen the soul desires anything, the whole body becomes more agile and ready to move than it normally is without any such desire. Moreover, when the body is in this condition, the desires of the soul are rendered stronger and keener” (AT XI, 411; CSM I, 367; a.111).

The most important function of desire is to motivate us to act. Love, hatred, joy, sadness can govern behavior by producing desire in us (AT XI, 436; CSM I, 379; a.143). They indicate the goal but, in fact (as Descartes tells Elisabeth) the motivational component is the pursuit of the internal satisfaction an action or a good can give us: “for the supreme good is undoubtedly the thing that we ought to set ourselves as the goal of all our actions, and *the resulting contentment of the mind is also rightly called our end*,

since it is the attraction which makes us seek the supreme good" (AT IV, 275; CSMK 261- my emphasis).¹⁹⁸

Following one's desires blindly is what Moran calls taking a theoretical (or third-person) stance towards oneself. It means looking at the passions as something that simply happens to us, something that we undergo and have no control over (Moran 56). This fits the description of weak souls:

The weakest souls are those whose will is not determined in this way to follow such judgments [about good and evil], but constantly allows itself to be carried away by present passions. The latter, being often opposed to one another, 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. Thus, when fear represents death as an extreme evil which can be avoided only by flight, while ambition, on the other hand depicts the dishonor of flight as an evil worse than death, these 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 (AT XI, 367; CSM I, 347, a. 48).

A deliberative stance, on the other hand, amounts to seeing the passions as up to us, to some extent (Moran 56). As it is clearly stated in its definition, *passional desire* simply "disposes" the soul to want certain things. Sometimes it can be very persuasive, almost compelling. However, the last word should belong to the will. I now turn to *volitional desire*.

Volitional desire is the mode of the will by means of which we commit ourselves to practical pursuits. I take the main difference between *passional* and *volitional desire* to consist in the presence versus the absence of the animal spirits as causes of desire: *passional desire* has the movement of the animal spirits as its proximate cause, while

¹⁹⁸ Descartes makes the same point in another letter from the same period (AT IV, 277; CSMK 261).

volitional desire is caused by the agent who in bringing it about manifests control as Source. Explicitly mentioned volitional desire makes only a scarce appearance in Descartes' works; in the *Principles of Philosophy* he states: "desire, aversion, assertion, denial and doubt are various modes of willing" (AT VIII A, 17; CSM I, 204; a. 32). It is interesting that passionate desire has no opposite while here it seems that aversion is intended as the opposite of desire. In the *Passions* aversion is a species of hatred- hatred related to ugly things (AT XI, 392; CSM I, 358; a.85).

What is the function of the modes of the will mentioned in the *Principles*? In Chapter IV I mentioned that I will take judgment to be the genus of operations of the will; desire is just one form these judgments can take. I read Descartes as saying that desires contain beliefs; in order to distinguish "I desire X"; "I hate Y" from theoretical judgments ("I believe X") we would have to suppose that they mean: "I believe X is good and I believe possessing it would be good for me". These judgments are of a special kind, they are not simply theoretical judgments but the starting point of action. It is not that I somewhat abstractly consider X good and move on to different things but rather that considering X good has motivational impact: I am drawn to X and am disposed to do things in order to bring X about or obtain it.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ Although in the *Discourse* Descartes states that we can only desire something that is possible and good in some regard, if we take seriously Descartes' remarks on freedom of perversity we have to admit that we can reject a clearly perceived good. In the 2nd letter to Mesland Descartes states that if we choose to reject a clearly perceived good we do so because we consider it a good thing to prove the freedom of our will by so doing. However, I argued that proving the freedom of our will is not situated higher on the objective scale of values but is in fact wrong and entails rejecting the whole scale and wanting to substitute one's own will as a new source of value. When we choose to reject a clearly perceived good we embrace an evil qua evil, not due to ignorance but with full knowledge of what we are doing. The equivalence between "I desire X" and "I believe X is good and I believe possessing it would be good for me" holds provided proving the freedom of our will is not our main goal. Moreover, embracing an evil qua evil is not an alternative available to us when it comes to voluntary bodily action because control of the body is dependent on and

Desire is an important component of our mental economy (as the only one that can impel us to act and as the chief object of morality), but in the *Passions of the Soul* Descartes rarely mentions volitional desire explicitly. Article 146 may hint at it when talking about “the things that do not depend on us in any way, we must never desire them with passion, however good they may be”. Desiring without passion could mean desiring as a pure act of will or it could simply be a figure of speech meaning “desiring them not too much”. The French original reads: “que notre désir ne s'y occupe point” and this would amount to “not to desire them at all”, we shouldn’t even bother about such things.

In defining passional desire Descartes sometimes refers to volition too: “Finally, the passion of desire has this special characteristic: the volition to acquire some good or avoid some evils sends the spirits rapidly from the brain to all the parts of the body which may help to bring about this effect, and especially to the heart and the parts which supply most of its blood” (AT XI, 407; CSM I, 365; a.106). As we see from article 47, the will can push the gland which in turn can have effects on the body, effects that sometimes reverberate in the soul. In this example volitional desire is the cause of passional desire: this would be an instance of a passion (desire) as referred to the soul, i.e. caused by mental means, not by the animal spirits.

Having presented passional and volitional desire, I will now explore three alternatives for the relation between desire as volition and desire as a passion: (1)

accompanied by passions which have an in-built benefit/harm indicator. We cannot passionately desire an evil qua evil, although we can passionately desire something we only mistakenly think is good.

passional desire is simply the perception of volitional desire; (2) passional desire is caused by volitional desire and (3) passional desire is endorsed by the will. These models correspond to the different manners in which passions can be aroused in the soul. In article 51 of the *Passions* Descartes mentions the possible primary causes of the passions: external objects or random movements of the spirits causing passions that should be evaluated by reason and accepted or rejected by the will. In several articles Descartes refers to the soul as consenting to passions (a. 46, 137, 138); the soul's consent represents model 2 above. Another possible primary cause of the passions is some action of the soul (which I equate here with forming judgments about good and evil). In this case passional desire can simply be the perception of volitional desire (mode 1 above) or volitional desire is the origin of actions, passional desire is just the catalyst (model 3 above). The latter case would explain Descartes' reference to volitions accompanying sensations (AT VIII A 317, CSM I, 281).

The first scenario I will analyze involves passional desire as the perception of volitional desire. Desire as a mode of will is involved in the formulation of a judgment: e.g. I want to rehearse the ontological argument. As only mental resources are involved, our awareness of wanting to rehearse the ontological argument constitutes passional desire (AT XI, 342; CSM I, 335; a.17). In this scenario, although the body is not involved in any way "passional desire" is called "passional" to mark its passivity; we are dealing here only with "passion" in the broad sense of the term.

Byron Williston has argued that

Descartes is in the *Passions* implicitly employing the concept of desire in the same way he did in the *Principles*. According to this usage as it appears in the *Passions*, desire is that which links the narrowly passionate perceptions of the intellect to the will. It directs us both in the movement toward suitable objects and (as aversion) away from unsuitable ones, the two most basic functions of human action. This drive is the sine qua non of the body-soul system which releases the passions-emotions qua perceptions into determinate forms of behavior. Desire and desire-as-aversion are to perceptions of passion as assent and denial are to sensory perceptions...I submit therefore that when he speaks of desire as a passion he is referring to our perception of an act of will (Williston 1999, 44-45).

I will argue that this best applies to cases of purely intellectual objects of desire (e.g. desires a disembodied agent has or my desire for knowledge) where the movements of the spirits characteristic to desire as a passion are lacking; for cases of desire where movements of the animal spirits are present Williston's account is incomplete as he only mentions the first cause of passional desire, i.e. volitional desire.²⁰⁰

In article 19 Descartes states: "But because this perception is really one and the same thing as the volition, and names are determined by whatever is most noble, *we do not normally call it a 'passion', but solely an action* (my emphasis)". If passional desire is just the perception of volitional desire, this constitutes a flagrant exception to Descartes' own sayings. Williston notices this difficulty and argues that Descartes does fail to follow his own rule as presented in the passage just quoted. I want to argue that Descartes is in fact following his own rule and calls desire "a volition", according to what is more noble.

²⁰⁰ AT XI, 372; CSM I, 348:a.51

I will now consider a situation of desire as pure volition and I will show that Williston's reading of passionate desire as a perception of volitional desire is correct when applied to this type of case. In a letter to Chanut Descartes gives the following example:

[I]f the soul perceived that there are many fine things to be known about nature, it would be infallibly impelled to love the knowledge of those things, that is, to consider it as belonging to itself. And if it was aware of having that knowledge, it would have joy; if it observed that it lacked the knowledge, it would have sadness; and if it thought it would be a good thing to acquire it, it would have desire (AT IV 602; CSMK 306).

At first, love is simply a prospective joining: we only *consider* ourselves joined with the object of our love. Following the Scholastic distinction between nominal and real, I call this a nominal joining. Desire is needed if we are to bring this "nominal" joining to its "real" accomplishment. This interpretation is supported by the way Descartes distinguishes between love and desire in article 81 of the *Passions of the Soul*: "And if we judge that it would be beneficial to possess an object or to be associated with it *in some manner other than willingly*, then we desire it: and this, too, is one of the most common effects of love" (my emphasis). The other manner referred to here cannot be "unwillingly". In the letter mentioned above Descartes says:

Intellectual love consists simply in the fact that when our soul perceives some present or absent good, which it judges to be fitting for itself, it joins itself to it willingly (*de volont *), that is to say, it considers itself and the good in question as forming two parts of a single whole. Then, if on the one hand the good is present- that is, *if the soul possesses it or is possessed by it, or is joined to it not only by its will but also in fact and reality in the appropriate manner*- in that case, the movement of the will which accompanies the knowledge that this is good for it is joy; if on the other hand the good is absent, then the movement of the will which accompanies the knowledge of its lack is sadness; while the movement of the will which accompanies the knowledge that it would be a good thing to acquire it is desire. All these movements of the will which constitute love, joy, sadness and desire, insofar as they are rational thoughts and not passions, could exist in our soul even if we had no body (AT IV, 601-602; CSMK 305-306).

This passage makes it clear that the initial joining performed by love takes place on a purely mental plane and it is similar either to a judgment of value or to wishful

thinking: I *consider* myself to be a part of a whole the other part of which is the object of my love, I *imagine* a whole. We could suppose that the soul was attending to judging that kind of knowledge worthy and only afterwards turned its attention to whether it had it or not. As Descartes also refers to the actual having of that good, the love in question was not a “real” joining of the soul to the object of its love, from the very beginning.

Judging is also a joining: an idea and a mental attitude are put together and form a whole. I am my soul and my soul, as a whole, wills. Therefore, my will joins with an object to form a whole. It is true that in article 79 of the *Passions* Descartes distinguishes between judgments, the emotions caused by those judgments and the passion of love. Still, I want to argue that when I love something I form the judgment “I believe that X is good so that I consider myself and X as forming a whole”; “I believe that X is good not just abstractly but good for me”.²⁰¹ Then the question arises: do I have X? Yes, joy ensues. No, sadness ensues and I desire to acquire X.

In a disembodied state, love, joy, sadness and desire are “movements of the will”, “rational thoughts and not passions” (AT IV, 602; CSMK 306). So, intellectual desire is volition. In this case, the perception of desire as volition is the passion of desire: “There is nothing in all these movements of the will which would be obscure to it [the soul], or anything of which it would fail to be perfectly aware, provided it reflected on its own thoughts” (AT IV, 602; CSMK 306).

²⁰¹ According to Descartes, when I love something, I and the object of my love pool our value resources: by forming a whole with the object of my love I become more perfect, provided the object of my love truly is good and does not just appear to be good (AT XI, 432; CSM I, 377, a.139).

Putting aside disembodied minds desiring knowledge and embodied minds dealing with incorporeal objects (e.g. God or the ontological argument), an embodied mind that wants to accomplish something by bodily means needs the help of passionate desire. The complete causal chain leading to passionate desire goes as follows: volitional desire puts into motion the animal spirits which travel to all bodily organs that can help bring about the desired effect; among those organs is the heart which sends some of the spirits back to the brain where they strengthen the idea of the desired object (I take this specific component of the causal chain to be passionate desire properly so called) and then travel to the muscles ensuring the continuity of the action whose effect is desired.²⁰²

Moreover, if desire were an act of will, as Williston argues, it is unclear what to make of the many species Descartes attributes to passionate desire. Are they perceptions? Are they volitions? If they are volitions, because courage is a species of desire, I should not need intermediary representations (reasons, objects or precedents- AT XI, 363; CSM I, 345; a.45) to arouse it in me. My decision to fight the lion should automatically trigger the movements of the spirits which, according to the text, constitute the passion of courage. The necessity of intermediary steps when it comes to controlling desire, whether in arousing it or in keeping it in check, shows that passionate desire is more than the perception of volitional desire.

When desire as a mode of will is aroused in us by some judgment about good and evil, we have the succession: judgment of good, love (nominal union with the object of the judgment- I argued above that I take these two as one single step but I continue to

²⁰² AT XI, 406; CSM I, 365; a. 106

mention them both because Descartes does) and desire as volition (Williston 1999, 304). The passion of desire can at first be a simple perception of volitional desire. By itself the will is capable of making the body perform some but not all of the actions it deems necessary to achieve its goal. Descartes gives the examples of dilating the pupils (AT XI, 362; CSM I, 344; a.44). For actions like dilating the pupils we need to focus on the goal, not the task. Desire as volition makes the leap from the nominal to the real better if accompanied by the passion of desire, facilitating the movement of the body and strengthening the volition itself. The will cannot produce the passions directly. Representations already associated with the movement of the spirits must be used as intermediaries (for instance the representation of the goal or of the pros and cons, or of precedent similar situations- AT XI, 363; CSM I, 345; a.45).

To further clarify this, I will now present a modified version of Descartes' lion example (AT XI, 363; CSM I, 345; a.45). Suppose I live in Africa in a village that is often attacked by lions. I see older people fighting and sometimes dying in the attempt to protect the village and I form the judgment: Fighting to protect the village is good; I desire to fight to protect my village, if need be. This is a volitional desire, the natural result of that judgment. (I assume that I am not a hunter- or a professional soldier- even though this can hardly be the case in an African village-, that it is the first time that I am faced with such a challenge). However, when the day finally comes and I get to put my decision into practice, I see a lion and my first reaction is to want to flee. (Descartes explains in article 47 how this is not a conflict between the will, on the one hand and the passion of fear, on the other. I am not interested in the actual conflict here).

Unless I am successful in buttressing my volition to fight the lion with the passion of courage, I will not be able to accomplish anything: “Courage... is a certain heat or agitation which disposes the soul to accomplish the task it wants to perform” (AT XI, 460; CSM I, 391; a.171). Of course, I will not be able simply to order myself to feel courage. I will have to remind myself of the glory and joy I will feel afterwards, of the handsome rewards that others before me obtained for performing such a deed, etc.

In cases such as this, (where there is no natural inclination towards heroic deeds and no acquired habit for reacting in dangerous situations -AT XI, 460; CSM I, 391; a.171), passional desire increases the efficiency of the action and sometimes is the very condition for it. If originating in true judgments of good and evil passional desires accompanying volitional desires cannot be bad. When the judgments from which passional desires spring are uncertain or when the passions spring from no judgments at all, we risk wasting mental and physical energy on attempts to act directed towards goals that have no chance of success. Sometimes Descartes talks as if the resources of our mental energy are limited and we should not waste them on desires whose objects and /or goals are beyond our control (AT XI, 437; CSM I, 379; a.144). That is why we need to differentiate as clearly as possible between what depends on us and what doesn't. To that kind of situation I now turn.

The third kind of interaction between volitional and passional desire consists of passional desire first aroused in us by some cause other than a judgment about good and

evil (e.g. external object, accidental movement of the spirits, etc); we do not act on it immediately but try to find whether it would benefit or harm us. The deliberative process enters into action here. In an embodied condition, we have not only passions proper but also appetites like thirst. In a letter to Chanut, Descartes distinguishes between the sensation of dry throat and the desire to drink: “in thirst the sensation of the dryness of the throat is a confused thought which disposes the soul to desire to drink, but is not identical with that desire” (AT IV, 603; CSMK 306).

Taking into account the *Passions*, the sequence is: sensation of dryness of the throat, sadness, and desire to drink. The dryness of the throat is not a passion but the desire to drink is. The spirits push against the gland giving the body the necessary impulse to alleviate its thirst and also make us desire water even more badly, which can even intensify the sensation of dry throat. According to Descartes “The most the will can do while this disturbance is at full strength is not to yield to its effects and to inhibit many of the movements to which it disposes the body” (AT XI, 364; CSM I, 345; a.46).

We should not rush to drink immediately but consider whether there any pros and cons: we might have dropsy, or the only drink available could be alcoholic thus intensifying the sensation of thirst instead of quenching it, etc. If there are no serious objections to our satisfying our thirst, only then should we drink. This example is, of course, trivial as most of the time when thirsty we are not in any special circumstances and we automatically take a drink. However, the process of deliberation must be only possible, not actual, or it might already have become a habit. Descartes recommends that

we become so accustomed to assessing which passions are really beneficial for us as to make the deliberation process automatic.

In this part of the chapter I characterized passional and volitional desire. Passional desire is one of the six primitive passions, it is future-oriented and it inclines us to want the things that it represents to us as agreeable; it is the decisive motivating factor of external action for which it prepares the body. Volitional desire is a mode of the will that enters into judgments about practical matters marking our commitment to act in a certain way. I explored three possible patterns of interaction between passional and volitional desire. I argued that in cases of disembodied thought passional desire is just the perception of volitional desire, both being acts of the will. The second model of interaction between passional and volitional desire is one in which passional desire is caused by a judgment of good and evil and increases the efficiency of the external action that was our intended goal. Finally, I analyzed the case of passional desires to which we consent and which become effective because of this consent.

A thorough analysis of passional and volitional desire is important because for Descartes controlling desire is the chief utility of morality (AT XI, 436; CSM 1.379, a. 144) while “the chief use of wisdom²⁰³ lies in its teaching us to be masters of our passions” (AT XI, 488; CSM I, 404; a.212). To Descartes’ views on morality and their relation to his views on the passions of the soul I now turn.

²⁰³ In the Dedicatory letter to Elisabeth prefacing the *Principles of Philosophy* wisdom is defined as an interlinking of genuine virtues, virtues conforming to true knowledge- AT VIII A, 2-3.

II. Cartesian morality

For Descartes, passions provide not only the need and opportunity for us to fight them (and thus develop a morality) but also the means, the weapons. Passions also play an important role in explaining a shift in Descartes' way of conceiving the self. This, however, is only the final picture of the passions. During different stages of Descartes' career they have different roles and degrees of importance and I believe that exploring them can bring useful clarifications to our understanding of Cartesian morality.

I will argue that several conceptions of morality are found in Descartes' works. They are, in chronological order²⁰⁴: a "Pyrrhonian provisional morality" (as described in Marshall 2003) that we can attribute to the protagonist of article 71 of the first part of the *Principles*; the more famous provisional morality that the young man of the *Discourse* endorses; and the morality developed in the *Passions of the Soul* (which I will take to be Descartes' final morality).

I will take the term "morality" in Marshall's broad sense: "that constellation of beliefs, values, and ideals to which one defers at the most basic level, both in guiding one's choices- choices of individual actions, specific plans, policies, and even styles of life- and in justifying these choices, both to oneself and, where called upon, to others" (Marshall 1999, 16). I will show that the "Pyrrhonian provisional morality" can in this case hardly be called a morality as it is simply conduct based on passions. The Cartesian provisional morality will prove to be arrived at on epistemic considerations (the deceitful

²⁰⁴ This ordering of the different conceptions about morality is just my attempt to show the progress of Descartes' way of thinking about moral issues.

nature of the knowledge obtained through the senses and arguments from relativity concerning moral issues). Finally, passions have the lead in Descartes' final morality which can very well be captured by Nietzsche's idea of giving style to one's character.

1. Short-pants morality?

Judging by Descartes' position on the origin of our preconceived opinions in the *Principles* and in the *Meditations* it would seem that (because of the close connection with the body) childhood makes one an Aristotelian materialist in the theoretical sphere and a Pyrrhonist in the practical realm. For Descartes, an Aristotelian materialist would be someone who takes secondary properties to be primary ones: "For all of us have, from our early childhood, judged that all the objects of our sense-perception are things existing outside our minds and closely resembling our sensations, i.e. the perceptions we had of them" (AT VIII A, 32; CSM I, 216, a. 66). I will argue that the regulation of behavior by appetites can hardly be called a morality.

"In our early childhood the mind was so closely tied to the body that it had no leisure for any thoughts except those by means of which it had sensory awareness of what was happening to the body....It ... merely felt pain when something harmful was happening to the body and felt pleasure when something beneficial occurred" (AT VIII A, 35; CSM I, 218). Feeling pain will be described in the *Passions of the Soul* as a natural appetite, a passion in the broad sense (AT XI, 347; CSM I, 337; a.24)²⁰⁵ or, together with

²⁰⁵ "The various perceptions or modes of knowledge present in us may be called [the soul's] passions, in a general sense, for it is often not our soul which makes them such as they are, and the soul always receives them from the things that are represented by them" (AT XI, 342; CSM I, 335; a.17).

pleasure, as causing the passions of joy and sadness (AT XI, 430; CSM I, 376; a.137). A child's life is determined and completely governed by passions.

Children live in the realm of immediacy; they take everything at face value (hence the preconceived opinions about external objects and their secondary properties taken as primary properties) and they simply react to stimuli in the same way animals do: "For all the animals devoid of reason conduct their lives simply through bodily movements *similar* to those which, in our case, usually follow upon the passions which move our soul to consent to such movements" (AT XI, 431; CSM I, 377; a.138- my emphasis). Even though Descartes notices a difference between the human passions and the correspondent animal movements, namely the soul's consent, in the human case children can hardly be seen as capable of consent as they don't have the full use of their reason. (I will return to this problem below).

"A narrowly self-preservative 'ethic' can be deduced fairly easily from this picture" (Williston 2003a, 304). I want to argue that this 'ethic' is similar in content to the Pyrrhonian default morality as described by John Marshall: "[T]he skeptic's default morality²⁰⁶ is a constellation of motivational propensities entirely detached from beliefs of any kind" (Marshall 2003, 198). Living and acting without belief is exemplified by Pyrrho, "moved by natural impulses, e.g., to drink when thirsty, and acquired habits, of which some track custom and law" (Marshall 2003, 198).

²⁰⁶ According to Marshall, a default morality is the morality that automatically kicks in once the process of doubting all one's former beliefs has done its work.

Even if both the Pyrrhonist and children simply react to stimuli having no other rule of conduct, they differ greatly in the way they came to hold this “morality”. The Pyrrhonist endeavored to doubt everything, completely giving up any beliefs, including those about good and evil. Children, on the other hand, are governed by the body’s self-regulatory system which “operates without long-range memory: its responses are relatively immediate, directed by and to its present condition” (Rorty 522). They may lack beliefs if we take belief to be the equivalent of reflectively acquired Cartesian judgments. As the three grades of sensory response passage from the *Sixth Replies* makes clear, children only gradually get to exercise their abilities (AT VII, 438:CSM II, 295-296).

Initially, children act on impulse and even if their behavior is regulated in this way, their actions cannot properly amount to a morality. If we called this regulation of behavior a morality we would have to extend it to animals and this would be unacceptable according to Descartes, as animals are for him just automata. Obviously this is just the first step in a child’s moral development as only very young children are confined to simply reacting to their environment. As they grow up, a commonsense morality is passed on to them by their parents and educators. They learn to deliberate and to act appropriately to circumstances. This way they get close to the Pyrrhonian default morality which acknowledges law and custom as binding moral rules.

Besides children, there is another category of people who exhibit features similar to the Pyrrhonist. I am referring to the weak souls who are constantly carried away by

present passions (AT XI, 367; CSM I, 347; a.48). They lead a life governed by passions and probably conform to social norms too. Yet, like children, they also lack the extreme doubting characterizing a true Pyrrhonian and cannot be described as such.

2. Morality at twenty-three

The process of doubt that was lacking in the children's version of Pyrrho's provisional morality makes its appearance in the *Discourse*. In the second part of the *Discourse* Descartes states:

We were all children before being men and had to be governed for some time by our appetites and our teachers, which were often opposed to each other and neither of which, perhaps, always gave us the best advice... But regarding the opinions to which I had hitherto given credence, I thought that I could not do better than undertake to get rid of them, all at one go, in order to replace them afterwards with better ones, or with the same ones once I had squared them with the standards of reason (AT VI, 13-14; CSM I, 117).

Theoretical doubt forces Descartes to adopt a provisional morality in which appetites (which are passions only in a broad sense) lose their guiding role without disappearing completely. They are replaced by some passions proper²⁰⁷, found in the motivation leading Descartes to doubt in the first place (cognitive uncertainty caused by passions like irresolution, remorse, regret) and in the moral rules that compose Descartes' provisional morality (not as providing the leadership as was the case for customs and social norms to which the Pyrrhonist endeavors to comply, but as what should be fought and kept under strict control). The young Descartes becomes aware of appetites and passions as occasions for error and starts taking steps to avoid further cognitive mistakes. At the same time, he realizes the unpleasantness of the ways external objects and his own

²⁰⁷ Passions of the soul are "those perceptions, sensations or emotions of the soul which we refer particularly to it, and which are caused, maintained and strengthened by some movements of the spirits" (AT XI, 349; CSM I, 338; a.27).

actions are reflected and felt inside his own soul. This motivates him to avoid the causes of such feelings; these feelings are passions (e.g. remorse, irresolution). Having summarized Descartes' way of proceeding from a short-pants morality to his provisional moral code, I will now analyze in detail the steps involved in this trajectory starting with the process of doubt in the *Discourse*.

There is an important difference between the Skeptic's doubt and Descartes': Descartes' only goal is to attain certainty and doubt is only an instrument in this pursuit (AT VI, 29; CSM I, 125). The object of his doubt is provided by the opinions he received through education. The sensory perceptions and the passions that have been directing conduct throughout childhood now seem suspect to the young Descartes (as they are just confused ideas). His doubt is intended as a gradual and lengthy process: "For I had begun at this time to count my own opinions worthless, because I wished to submit them all to examination" (AT VI, 22; CSM I, 122).

In the practical realm, Descartes claims that acquaintance with the laws and customs of other people makes him question the adequacy of the ones he had been brought up to respect, if this adequacy was based only on "example and custom" (AT VI, 10; CSM I, 116). Doubting his moral and practical ideas could have taken Descartes in four different directions. First, had he taken the process very seriously, doubting everything (both theoretical and practical, both sensible and intelligible) he would have been led to a version of Pyrrhonism left behind since childhood. The important difference is that, at this point, his Pyrrhonism would have been arrived at through a process of

doubt deliberately endorsed. This solution is unacceptable to Descartes because it leads to behavior that neglects common prudence (as becomes clear from the *Preface* to the *Principles*²⁰⁸).

Second, had he rejected the process of doubt completely and focused on certainty of a sensible kind, he would have hit on a species of Epicureanism; in such a case the information and satisfaction stemming from the senses would be paramount. He rejects this alternative because of the deceptive nature of our senses (AT IXB, 6; CSM I, 182). Third, had he taken the process of doubt only as far as information of the senses (in both the theoretical and the practical realm), he would have headed towards a morality based on “ascetic values”, a morality grounded on a complete rejection of anything sensible²⁰⁹. This is an alternative that he does not even consider but I believe it is a natural extension of the ones he does consider: if he is willing to mention complete trust in the senses why not entertain the possibility of complete distrust in them? In fact, in the *Meditations* he does take up such a possibility but only in the theoretical sphere. In practical matters, he prefers a fourth alternative. To avoid inactivity²¹⁰ he formulates a provisional morality preserving much of the commonsense morality that he was inculcated with since childhood (Marshall 2003, 220).

²⁰⁸ “Some of those who were in favor of doubt extended it even to actions of life, so they neglected to employ common prudence in their behavior” (AT IXB, 6; CSM I, 182).

²⁰⁹ As described by Nietzsche in the *Genealogy of Morals* (GM 1, 6).

²¹⁰ For Descartes inactivity refers to the time spent in deliberation instead of in action, as would have been appropriate (AT VIIIA, 5; CSM I, 193; a.3).

The idea of a provisional morality also appears in the prefatory letter to the French Edition of the *Principles*²¹¹. There, as in the *Discourse*, the provisional morality is devised to allow the searcher after truth to get on with his everyday life. The search for first principles, equated with philosophy, is sandwiched here between two moralities: the provisional one and a perfect morality, one that is the apex of scientific development (according to the tree metaphor- AT IXB 14; CSM I, 186).

[T]he study of philosophy is more necessary for the regulation of our morals and our conduct in this life than is the use of our eyes to guide our steps. The brute beasts, who have only bodies to preserve, are continually occupied in looking for food to nourish them; but human beings, whose more important part is the mind, should devote their main efforts to the search for wisdom, which is the true food of the mind (AT IXB, 3-4; CSM I, 180).

In the *Principles* Descartes simply mentions the provisional morality without going into any details about it. In the *Discourse*, on the other hand, he states: “Likewise, lest I should remain indecisive in my actions while reason obliged me to be so in my judgments, and in order to live as happily as I could during this time, I formed myself a provisional moral code consisting of just three or four maxims” (AT VI, 22; CSM I, 122). The first maxim is to respect the laws and customs of his country; and to guide himself by the opinions of the most sensible persons. The second refers to judging the best he can and acting resolutely on his judgment even if it is uncertain. The third rule concerns the control and change of his own desires rather than the world. And finally, the fourth presents Descartes’ decision to continue his quest for truth.

The first rule provides Descartes with examples and recipes of right conduct to be applied to particular situations of his everyday life. The fourth rule gives the general

²¹¹ AT IXB, 13; CSM I, 185-186.

context of Descartes' life at this time (a scholar faces very different challenges than a soldier or a farmer). However, the second and third of the four rules composing the Cartesian provisional morality are important for my purpose here as they are the ones providing the connection between the previous stage of Descartes' moral life and what is yet to come.

In the rest of this section I will show that it is with the help of the passions that Descartes attempts to provide a response to the *apraxia* objection raised against the Sceptics. The impossibility of certainty in the practical domain does not entail complete inactivity because one can guide one's actions by one's best judgments and compensate through resoluteness, both a passion and a virtue, for the lack of certainty. Moreover, two other passions help the agent escape the impasse resulting from lack of certainty: the avoidance of remorse and regret. This is achieved using the Stoic method of tailoring one's desires to fit the world and not the other way around.

Passions occasioned the doubt in the first place²¹². Doubt now precludes the searcher after truth from being content with a mere simulacrum of certainty. In the second moral rule of the *Discourse* Descartes states that if we cannot find what is certain in a given situation we have to make do with the most probable. The same idea is reiterated in the *Principles*: "As far as ordinary life is concerned, the chance for action would frequently pass us by if we waited until we could free ourselves from our doubts and so we are often compelled to accept what is merely probable" (AT VIII A, 5; CSM I,

²¹² The reason Descartes began to doubt was his wanting certainty in the sciences but what made him realize he lacks such certainty were the passions.

193; a.3). We cannot always find certainty because of the hectic nature of our lives and of the conflicting reports we get from our senses and our passions. In conditions of uncertainty (which they often generate) passions give us some directions, they point the way- at least approximately- thus preventing us from being completely stuck. Passions are value-pointers but can also be very unreliable; that is why Descartes recommends that we use reason and experience to correct them (AT XI, 431; CSM I, 377; a.138).

John Marshall calls Descartes' provisional morality a probabilism and inscribes it in the Skeptical tradition of provisional moralities. According to Marshall, if the provisional morality is not to collapse to Pyrrhonism, the moral agent has to have more than a simple propensity to act in a certain way and must do more than simply react to stimuli. Yet, because of doubt, the moral agent lacks an appropriate moral criterion. The solution Marshall proposes is to allow the propensity for action to probably "track the truth". This provisional moral criterion is subjective and in Descartes' case is founded on his cognitive optimism. The young man of the *Discourse* finds himself inclined to act in a certain way but does not yet know whether such an inclination appears in other agents as well, or whether it inclines him towards the right action. However, due to Descartes' conviction that our ideas map the world, that it is ultimately possible to obtain the truth about reality, he takes his inclination as leading him to the right action.

Marshall states: "Descartes will remain uncertain of the truth of his practical judgment. I take him to imply that, uncertain as he may be, his sincere and carefully deliberated practical judgment is probably true" (Marshall 2003, 223). This leaves

Descartes open to arguments from relativity but he was confident that his morality had at least some antecedent probability of being true²¹³. He was convinced that we can make up for our lack of certainty in the theoretical sphere, not by suspending belief- like the Skeptics- but through “robust belief” (Marshall 2003, 226), which is an act of will. And robust belief is exactly what the third rule of his provisional morality recommends.

Passions are involved in Descartes’ provisional morality in yet another way: adopting a provisional moral code helps him ward off irresolution and preclude remorse and regret from affecting him. In the *Passions* irresolution, regret and remorse are particular passions of the soul²¹⁴. Descartes may not have been aware of irresolution, remorse and regret as passions by the time he wrote the *Discourse* but he subsequently realizes both the vastness and the importance of this problem and addresses it in the *Passions*. We can conclude that Descartes didn’t become interested in the passions of the soul all of a sudden once he reached maturity but that his interest grew constantly through a continuous clarification and revision of his philosophical position. Passions, and their status for the philosophical problem of practical reasoning, were in a latent form present since his interest in achieving cognitive certainty made him suspicious about the senses and the material they provide for our sensory awareness, even though only his final morality pins them and the problems that arise with them down.

²¹³ Marshall compares Descartes’ provisional morality to the provisional morality devised by Philo of Larissa and finds many similarities between the two (commitment to a correspondence theory of truth, their vulnerability to the objection against a subjective moral criterion that is supposedly connected to objective truth, etc). I will return to the objectivity of the true and the good below.

²¹⁴Particular or specific passions of the soul are “species” of the six primitive passions (wonder; love and hatred; desire; joy and sadness) “which are, as it were, [their] genera”- AT XI, 443; CSM 1, 383, a. 149).

In this section I showed that during his youth Descartes endorses a provisional morality the purpose of which is to ensure the smooth unfolding of his everyday life while he engages in the process of doubting all his opinions. Some passions like desire, remorse, regret, irresolution are central to Descartes' provisional morality; these passions serve a negative role: they are what the agent is advised to keep in check (desires) or avoid (e.g. irresolution, remorse, regret).

3. Mature years

Descartes adopted his provisional morality in the hope of improving it once his theoretical inquiry would have yielded fruit (AT VI, 27-28; CSM I, 124). The question is: why didn't he ever doubt the content of this provisional morality? Did he not get around to it due to lack of time? (If this were the case we would have to conclude that there is no final Cartesian morality). Did he really dislike writing on moral issues? Or did he think that once certainty was attained in the theoretical sphere it will automatically influence practical issues? I believe that the latter alternative is the closest to Descartes' views. I do not mean that theoretical certainty automatically entails certainty in moral issues. All I want to say is that theoretical certainty has a bearing on practical issues because practical judgments have a theoretical component. Theoretical certainty serves as a regulative principle for practical matters. On this point I agree with John Marshall who has argued that there is such a thing as a Cartesian final morality and that it is found in the *Correspondence* and the *Passions of the Soul*.

Marshall believes that “[t]here is... no difference in content or thrust between the earlier and the later morality” (Marshall 1998, 75). He notes however that “[i]n the later works, [Descartes] shifts the emphasis away from vacillation of will owing to uncertainty to vacillation owing to unregulated passions” (Marshall 1998, 80). According to Marshall the main difference between the final and the provisional morality is the status of reason: by the time he wrote the *Passions* Descartes was confident to have proven reason to be a reliable cognitive faculty (Marshall 1998, 75). Marshall maintains that in the *Discourse* when Descartes proposes the rules of his provisional morality he takes it for granted that reason is a reliable cognitive faculty and that whatever it reveals by way of practical norms the agent should abide by. However, according to Marshall, in the *Meditations* reason itself is subjected to doubt and emerges as reliable. This validation of reason itself does not however influence the content of Descartes’ final morality which comprises rules very similar to the provisional code.

I will argue that the differences between Descartes’ provisional and final morality concern not only the status of reason but also the function and relevance of the passions for the moral agent. Because of the stronger emphasis on the passions which should not be extirpated but only carefully controlled, I interpret the apex of Descartes’ final morality as enjoining an ideal of self-creation: each one of us should endeavor to harmonize one’s emotions so that they provide us with the sweetest pleasures of this life. I begin by examining the rules of Descartes’ final morality.

Marshall proves the continuity of the two Cartesian moralities by showing how the rules of right conduct that Descartes formulates in the *Passions* and the *Correspondence* are almost identical in content with the rules of the *Discourse*. The final morality is composed of three maxims: (1) judge as well as you can; (2) act resolutely; (3) limit your desires to what is entirely in your power and reflect on divine Providence to get consolation when things don't turn out the way you wanted. The third rule of the provisional morality becomes the rule recommending *virtue* defined as resoluteness²¹⁵.

All three rules involve the passions. Passions cloud our judgment by presenting things in a far brighter light than they really are, so they interfere with the first rule. Passions can influence the will and prevent us from accomplishing what reason tells us is best under the circumstances, thus making us irresolute. Finally, desires are our most active and disruptive passions; acting unreflectively on our desires means expending valuable mental and physical resources and leaving ourselves open to regret and irresolution. Desires constitute the last link in the chain leading to action and as the closest to the will they can do the most damage. That is why we should only form desires for objects that are in our power; and the first step in this process consists in gaining as much knowledge as possible about the passions: “[the] power to act well is one we develop to its maximum degree through our understanding of the nature and use of the passions” (Marshall 1998, 73). Understanding the passions will lead us beyond the moral rules, to a deeper level of moral development.

²¹⁵ Virtue is still defined in terms of habits (AT VII, 454; CSM I, 387-388; a.161) but Descartes uses the term in both a loose and a technical sense: the loose one refers to the traditionally accepted virtues (courage, wisdom, etc), while the technical meaning refers to the disposition of the will to stick to the best judgment available under the circumstances, as if it were the most certain (AT VII, 446; CSM I, 384; a.153).

Even though the differences in content between Descartes' provisional and final morality are small, the final morality marks a further step in Descartes' thought. Pressed by the persevering and astute questions of Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, Descartes finally reflects seriously on moral issues. If all the good of this life depends on the passions, as he states in the final article of the *Passions* (AT VII, 488; CSM I, 404; a.212), Descartes comes to realize that his previous view of human nature was incomplete. Therefore he shifts the emphasis from the moral rules themselves to what is needed for us to abide by them, to the prerequisites of our respecting the rules: if passions are carefully kept in check and harmonized into a coherent self-identity this entails an automatic satisfaction of the requirements contained in the rules of Descartes' final morality. My goal here is to show that in the *Passions* we can see the seeds of a morality as self-creation. To support my hypothesis I need to establish that the *Passions* illustrate a turn in Descartes' ideas about the self and for this I will draw on Christine Korsgaard's arguments about the unity of agency and identity. Then, using Nietzsche's ideas about giving style to one's character, I will clarify what this new self looks like and how it is created.

Action and deliberation make an agent see himself in a different light. The second moral rule prescribes firm action. If action is to be distinguished from events and "mere behavior" it has to spring from the identity of an agent seeing that action as up to him, not as just something that happens to him. If this is the kind of action the second rule recommends, as I believe is the case, conformity to this rule presupposes a coherent

identity. In the *Passions* Descartes emphasizes repeatedly the need for and praiseworthiness of stability of mood and disposition, tranquility of mind and predictability of reaction. The reason for this emphasis may have to do with substantiality: the mind and the body are united and form a substantial union. This union is not a third kind of substance; maybe the more continuous and stable psychologically and morally we become, the closer we get to a *moral substance*. This *moral substance* couldn't be just the stable, immortal Ego described in the *Meditations*²¹⁶ because of its inability to account for the individuation of different minds. (Amelie Rorty says about this ego that it "is any rational mind whatever, without distinctions of persons"- Rorty, 515).

I contend that Descartes' project in the *Passions* is to humanize and flesh out the metaphysical and very sober ego of the first five *Meditations*. The "I" that is discovered starting with the *cogito* is a purely immaterial and immortal mental substance which experience reveals as united with a material body. This is the self that Rorty refers to as the "we" in order to emphasize that there are two components, the mind and the body forming a substantial union. The union between the two substances comes about through the institution of nature and the main connecting procedure consists of volition-movement of the pineal gland pairs. However, this pre-established linking of mental and physical events is insufficient for ensuring the good functioning of our lives for two main reasons. First, the volition-movements of the pineal gland pairs brought about by the institution of nature are insufficient for proper responses to the diversity of situations we

²¹⁶ In *Meditation VI* with the introduction of sensations Descartes already starts fleshing out the new view of the self that is the focus of the *Passions*.

are faced with. Second, naturally instituted connections between volitions and movements of the gland cannot account for cultural differences. Descartes mentions that the pairings of volitions-motions of the pineal gland can be changed through habituation²¹⁷; it thus seems that these changes are not only possible but in fact necessary.

If this interpretation is correct, Descartes makes the move from a metaphysical to a pragmatic unity of the self. Still, he does not give up his view of the mind as an immortal, non-extended, thinking substance. The *Principles* were written not long before the *Passions* and in the first part Descartes reiterates these ideas about the soul labeling them “first principles”. These two conceptions of the self coexist in Descartes’ writings as I will soon show. In the *Passions* Descartes unveils the process that makes a moral agent aware of his identity which, in fact, is created only in this process. I will show that Descartes’ requirements for a moral life are the same as Korsgaard’s requirements for a unitary personal identity.²¹⁸ Korsgaard identifies three such conditions: first, acting by bodily means requires that the agent settle conflicts between one’s various motives because the agent possesses only one body. Second, the agent does not simply wait for conflicts between her motives to resolve themselves but adopts a deliberative stance and actively decides the outcome. Third, no metaphysical grounding is necessary for the self-identity resulting from the two conditions mentioned above; all that is needed is that the agent identify with the principle or way of choosing that helped her decide between her conflicting desires and motives. Autonomy, being a “law unto oneself” emerges as

²¹⁷ (AT XI, 369; CSM I, 348; a. 50); (AT XI, 362; CSM I, 344; a. 44)

²¹⁸ I must state right away that I am not interested in Korsgaard’s Kantian take on the self and moral issues but only in the very plausible idea that deliberation makes us aware of ourselves as unitary moral agents.

Korsgaard's third condition for a pragmatic identity. I will now look in detail at Korsgaard's three conditions and how they apply to Descartes.

Descartes' rule of virtue ("act resolutely in accordance with the best available judgment") is mirrored in Korsgaard's need to act by bodily means. "First, there is the raw necessity of eliminating conflict among your various motives... You are a unified person at any given time because you must act and you have only one body with which to act" (Korsgaard 1989, 110). Descartes stresses the need for a coherent emotional constitution by bringing to light the consequences of allowing oneself to be led by passions: passions that are not kept in check "jostle" the will in opposite ways, they make it incline now towards one thing, the next moment towards another. The result is a soul enslaved and miserable (AT XI, 367; CSM I, 347, a.48). While Descartes describes only the mental aspect of this emotions-led agent, given the close connection between passions and the body, it would seem that an agent in this condition is incapable of continuous and consistent action. The only interval available for completing an external action would be the duration of a passion; or, passions and their physiological underpinnings are described as constantly changing. If actions change as soon as passions that have completely free rein change, it seems that not even the simplest actions would ever be completed.

However, animals function as a result of physiological movements analogous to the ones that in our case bring about the mental events constituting the passions of the soul (AT XI, 369; CSM I, 348; a. 50). As a result of such purely corporeal movements,

animals are able to survive and act in diverse ways. The only problem that Descartes identifies with the animal way of accomplishing actions conducive to self-preservation has to do with falling prey to lures (AT XI, 431; CSM I, 377; a. 138). It follows from this that an emotions-ruled human agent would be capable of actions that lead to her self-preservation but would be incapable of deliberate, fully efficient actions.

Korsgaard continues:

The second element of this pragmatic unity is the unity implicit in the standpoint from which you deliberate and choose... When you deliberate, it is as if there is something over and above your desires, something that is *you* and that *chooses*... The idea that you choose among your conflicting desires, rather than just wait to see which one wins, suggests that you have reasons for or against acting on them (Korsgaard 1989, 110-111).

For Descartes, deliberating about which passions to follow and which to free our minds of, choosing between different passions, settling conflicts between them means focusing on the representational content of passions, treating them like ideas of the intellect, in other words manifesting the PAP and Source versions of control with respect to them. The result of deliberation or choice (PAP) is brought about by the agent (Source). Taking a deliberative stance towards one's emotions means that actions springing from these emotions are caused by the agent; this form of causation is agent causation. Descartes describes *not* taking a deliberative stance towards one's emotions as exhibiting vicious humility, an inability to refrain from regrettable actions *as if* one lacked the full use of one's free will (AT XI, 450; CSM I, 386, a.159- my emphasis). Failing to exercise one's free will means forfeiting the rights such an exercise give us; I take these rights to be the rights to receive credit or discredit for our actions, i.e. the rights to consider ourselves and be considered by others full-blown moral agents.

Deliberation and choice are constituents of the first and third Cartesian moral rules. The I that deliberates and chooses and with whom the agent identifies is for Descartes his free will; and the feeling resulting from this identification is the passion of generosity²¹⁹ (as Lisa Shapiro has convincingly argued- Shapiro 258). This is in accord with Amelie Rorty's argument that the unity of the embodied being is due to the will's activity (Rorty 528).

Although the existence of a metaphysical basis is not a requirement for Korsgaard's pragmatic self, it turns out that, in Descartes' case, there actually is a metaphysical basis for the I, but it is not essential for its practical functioning. Korsgaard states:

This means that there is some principle or way of choosing that you regard as expressive of yourself, and that provides reasons that regulate your choices among your desires. To identify with such a principle or way of choosing is to be a 'law to yourself' and to be unified as such. This does not require that your agency be located in a separately existing entity or involve a deep metaphysical fact. Instead it is a practical necessity imposed upon you by the nature of the deliberative standpoint (Korsgaard 1989, 110-111).

I take Korsgaard's principle with which the agent identifies to be equivalent with the psychic order that the Cartesian agent attempts to establish with regard to her passions; Williston calls this psychic order an agent's *affective repertoire*. The Cartesian agent has had the experience of her free will by exercising it in deliberation and action. Deliberation and critical scrutiny can take place on two levels: first, an agent deliberates about various matters; then she deliberates about her own self and creates herself

²¹⁹ Generosity is a particular passion that causes one's self-esteem to be "as great as it legitimately may be". It is composed of the knowledge that the only thing truly belonging to us is our free will and of the feeling of constant resolution to use our will well (AT XI, 446; CSM I, 384, a.153).

(afterwards, she deliberates taking this as a constant). In both cases she needs “decisive and sound judgments of value” and “bringing [her] passional dispositions themselves in line with considered judgments concerning good and evil- so that [she] is appropriately passionate only about those things that truly merit the passion in question” (Marshall 1998, 102).

An agent’s affective repertoire is defined as “that set of desires and emotional dispositions that pattern the agent’s moral attention in specific ways” (Williston 2003a, 309). On this reading, the *Passions of the Soul* make us think of a person who has taken upon him or herself the task of deliberately harmonizing the different aspects of his or her personality. The Cartesian sage as described by Williston would be the example of the most successful such endeavor (Williston 2003a). Williston describes the sage as an accomplished Cartesian scientist and an efficient passions controller. These two characteristics of the sage are interdependent: the sage possesses knowledge about the portion of the world with which she is involved; this knowledge amounts to identifying the causes of things. The sage commits herself to pursuing only those things whose causes are ultimately tracked back to herself, despite the fact that her passions impel her towards following other things as well (Williston 2003a, 310).

Due to the structuring of the sage’s desires in accordance with the best available moral knowledge, one could say about the sage what Nietzsche said about Goethe, that he or she created him or herself (TI, *Skirmishes of an Untimely Man* 49). In the *Gay Science* Nietzsche describes the process of self-creation as follows:

To "give style" to one's character—a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan... Here a large mass of second nature has been added, there a piece of original nature has been removed:—both times through long practice and daily work at it... In the end, when the work is finished, it becomes evident how the constraint of a single taste governed and formed everything large and small... It will be the strong and domineering natures that enjoy their finest gaiety in such constraint and perfection under a law of their own (Nietzsche 1974, 232).

The Nietzschean and the Cartesian agents involved in giving style to their character follow the same sequence of steps: they start by getting a clear idea of themselves and the resources they have available; then they modify some aspects of themselves, replace others completely, and add new ones. All this is achieved through patient and repeated effort (practice and daily work for Nietzsche, habituation for Descartes). For Descartes, removing the ugly parts would amount to getting rid of those passions that are harmful most of the time (e.g. fear²²⁰). The Cartesian reinterpretation of some other ugly parts could be the process of sublimation the result of which is the birth of different virtues. By "sublimation" I mean the process of ridding the passions of their physiological underpinnings while preserving their representational contents and their motivational force.²²¹ For instance, a frightening object usually arouses the passion of courage in me and I feel inclined to stay and fight. However, in a virtuous person the same object will motivate her to fight but she will feel neither the blood rushing through her veins, nor the hatred of the object and anger at having been adversely affected by it, as is the case with the passion of courage; or, even if the virtuous person does feel emotions similar to an ordinary person, they will not be the main sources of motivation

²²⁰ "In the case of fear or terror, I do not see that it can ever be praiseworthy or useful" (AT XI, 463; CSM I, 392; a.176).

²²¹ By using "sublimation" in this way I am taking my cue from Freud who used the term to refer to the channeling as opposed to the blocking of impulses. Sublimation is passion transformed from a lower to a higher state.

for the ensuing action. The virtuous person will be calm and composed and will rationally assess the situation, including strategies about the best way to approach the enemy. Both the getting rid of annoying passions and the sublimation process are realized by taking advantage of the associative character of the passions, as I will argue in Part III of this chapter. The birth of different virtues could also be subsumed under Nietzsche's "a large mass of second nature has been added" rubric.

The results of such a creative process fall in two categories, for both Nietzsche and Descartes: strong and weak characters²²². Both authors further divide the strong character category in two types: for Nietzsche, there are strong characters who exhibit good taste and strong characters having bad taste.²²³ For Descartes there are strong characters guided by true judgments about good and evil²²⁴, on the one hand, and strong characters guided by passions that proved effective²²⁵, on the other. Moreover, for Descartes the goal of self-creation is the achievement of self-satisfaction. For Nietzsche self-satisfaction may not be the goal of self-creation but seems to be one of its consequences²²⁶. The main difference between Nietzsche and Descartes consists in the way the final products of the self-creative endeavor are evaluated: according to esthetic criteria for Nietzsche, versus objective moral criteria for Descartes. While in the *Gay Science* Nietzsche does not go into details about what a strong character exhibiting good

²²² "Conversely, it is the weak characters without power over themselves that hate the constraint of style... Such spirits... are always out of shape and interpret their environment as free nature: wild, arbitrary, fantastic, disorderly, and surprising" (Nietzsche 1974, 233).

²²³ "In the end, when the work is finished, it becomes evident how the constraint of a single taste governed and formed everything large and small. Whether this taste was good or bad is less important than one might suppose, if only it was a single taste!" (Nietzsche 1974, 232)

²²⁴ AT XI, 367; CSM I, 347, a. 48

²²⁵ AT XI, 368; CSM I, 347; a. 49

²²⁶ "For one thing is needful: that a human being should attain satisfaction" (Nietzsche 1974, 233).

taste would look like, Descartes offers a detailed description of the generous person to which I now turn.

The Nietzschean and the Cartesian agents involved in self-creation start by unambiguously knowing themselves, including both their strengths and their weaknesses. When dealing with generosity Descartes mentions the stability of the generous person's idea of herself and her self-worth. Although the generous person recognizes that wealth, honor, intelligence, knowledge, beauty qualify as perfections, and although the agent is aware of where she stands with respect to financial, intellectual and physical resources by comparison with others, these factors seem to be "very unimportant", she recognizes that they are not what matters morally. Therefore, she views herself neither as less worthy than the influential, smarter and handsomer persons she comes in contact with, nor as worthier than those less fortunate than herself (AT XI, 447; CSM I, 384; a.154).

The generous person is free of contempt for anyone; she is more inclined to excuse the mistakes of others and to attribute those mistakes to a lack of knowledge rather than to the lack of a virtuous will. Generosity entails an egalitarian perspective on ourselves and others: reflection "on the infirmity of our nature and on the wrongs we may previously have done, or are capable of doing" makes us not prefer ourselves to anyone else. As we are all endowed with free wills, we all have the same potential when it comes to using our wills well. This egalitarian perspective is the virtue of humility. Generosity also goes hand in hand with guaranteed efficacy in our actions and with great results: because the agent knows what resources she has at her disposal, she will only undertake

those actions of whose results she is certain. Generosity results in an altruistic mind set: disregarding one's own self-interest goes hand in hand with good manners like politeness and obligingness.

Generosity is key to controlling all the passions because it stresses the will's disengagement from anything that does not depend ultimately on us. For instance, the generous person has control over her desires because desires are good when stemming from true judgments about good and evil. Whatever the agent can control is good for her and she can control only those things whose causes can be traced back to herself. Therefore, the generous person only desires with passion what depends on herself.

The generous person will not experience the improper type of jealousy because jealousy arises due a disproportion between the value we attribute to a certain object (e.g. some belongings, a function, a lover) and the actual reasons for our evaluating the object in that way. A miser is improperly jealous of his hoard, according to Descartes, because the latter is not worth the trouble of safeguarding. Jealousy arises from suspicion and distrust, from our stressing too much reasons pointing towards a potential loss of a certain object (AT XI, 457-459; CSM I, 389-390; a.167-169). Only somebody uncertain about what depends on herself will be prone to overstressing such reasons.

The generous person does not experience envy of the improper kind. Envy "is a kind of sadness mingled with hatred, which results from our seeing good coming to those we think unworthy of it" (AT XI, 467-468; CSM I, 394; a.182-183). When we desire a

good that somebody we think unworthy possesses, we are envious. Envy is excusable provided it is directed at the improper distribution of this good, and not to its possessor. Sometimes envy is felt because the possessor of the envied good, although he deserves it, prevents our own acquisition of it. Envy of the latter type is improper and the generous person will not feel it because the impossibility of acquiring an object is enough to make her not desire it.

The generous person does not hate other people. Hatred was described as the soul's inclination to want to be separated from objects presented to it as harmful. "In the case of hatred...we consider ourselves alone as a whole entirely separated from the thing for which we have an aversion" (AT XI, 387; CSM I, 356; a.79-80). The generous person may hate another's evil habits and want to be separated from them; however she will not hate the person who possesses those bad habits because even that person is endowed with free will. The generous person esteems everyone as possessors of a free will like her own.

The generous person will also be free from anger because she does not esteem highly what depends on others; moreover, the generous person refrains from letting her enemies know they have succeeded in injuring her (AT XI, 448; CSM I, 385; a.156). Anger is hatred towards those who have tried to harm us. It is a very violent passion because "the desire to ward off harmful things and to avenge oneself is the most compelling of all desires" (AT XI, 477-478; CSM I, 399; a. 199). In article 203 of the third part of the *Passions* Descartes imposes a stronger condition for the preservation of

the generous person's inner balance: our enemies should not be able to hurt us at all if the absolute control over ourselves is to be preserved.

The generous person is free of fear because she is confident in her own virtue. Fear consists of coldness, "disturbance and astonishment of the soul which deprives it of the power to resist the evils which it thinks lie close at hand". The principal cause of fear is surprise (AT XI, 463; CSM I, 392; a. 176) but the generous person is unlikely to be surprised very often. She achieves such a stable psychic constitution based on knowledge of the world and of herself that new objects are usually reducible to earlier and already categorized cases; she will thus be prepared "for any eventuality".²²⁷ The surprise that the generous one will not feel is just an excess of wonder; the latter does play a positive role in the process of self-creation.

For Descartes the passion of wonder plays the most important part in adding new pieces of second nature. As Williston has explained, for each agent, a balance needs continuously to be struck between the status quo and the new. Wonder determines us to turn our attention to some new element but it is generosity that has the last word in deciding whether it will be accepted or not in the agent's affective repertoire. "Generosity is then a general disposition governing the elements of an agent's affective repertoire". It determines what is good for the embodied mind and preserves the status quo. Wonder, on the other hand, keeps us open to new goods and new experiences.

²²⁷ In a letter to Elisabeth from May 1646 Descartes adds to experience and knowledge exercises of the imagination as a means of preparing ourselves for any eventuality. He states: "I do not consider it necessary to have an exact knowledge of the truth on every topic, or even to have foreseen in detail all possible eventualities, which would doubtless be impossible. It is enough in general to have imagined circumstances more distressing than one's own and be prepared to bear them" (AT IV, 411; CSMK 287).

There will in this case be a kind of dialectic between wonder and generosity, where the latter discovers value relevant to the agent's interest and the former insures that the agent nevertheless remains open to novel forms of contact and composition with external objects. There is thus a tight and possibly tense interplay between the affective repertoire and the wondering mind (Williston 2003a, 311).

The result of a sound psychic equilibrium is tranquility, both a virtue and a passion; as passion tranquility is the sweetest joy there is.²²⁸

The results of this interplay between wonder and generosity will yield different results from agent to agent: the affective repertoire that is used as a standard of comparison for new object-emotion complexes is different from person to person; the situations one finds oneself in are different thus resulting in different components being proposed for the agent's consideration; finally, there are differences in the innate resources one is endowed with. For Descartes generosity is related to noble birth, which, in turn, is tightly connected with nobility of soul; however, a poor innate endowment in this area can be compensated for as a result of a good upbringing (AT XI, 453-454; CSM I, 387-388, a.161).

Nietzsche's enterprise differs from Descartes in being aesthetically motivated. Nietzsche mentions that all this is part of an artistic plan involving removing some ugly parts, reinterpreting others till they seem sublime; and saving what cannot be transformed for distant views. Descartes on the other hand has a moral goal in mind. He is looking for ways to achieve self-perfection. When viewed from a moral perspective Nietzsche's

²²⁸ I do not claim to find any Nietzschean correspondent for the Cartesian dialectic between wonder and generosity even though an argument could be made that Nietzsche's praise of brief habits refers to the management of the new and the old, favoring the new- Nietzsche 1974, 236-237.

enterprise of self-creation seems to be a version of moral subjectivism as the only criterion taken into consideration is one of consistency between the parts of the self involved in giving style to her character. The important thing for Nietzsche is coherence of the final product, our being able to tell that it is the result of a single taste, either good or bad (this is only of secondary relevance). For Descartes the coherence of one's personality is to be measured against objective standards of good and evil. By comparing Descartes' efforts of controlling the passions to Nietzsche's giving style to one's character, and given the diversity of possible results it seems that Descartes' morality of self-creation has to be a version of moral subjectivism as well. However, the Cartesian good is independent of the agent's preferences and desires.

The objectivity of the good is ensured by God's veracity. God has imprinted all humans with a tendency towards the true and the good. The human inclination towards the true and the good is manifested at both the purely mental and the embodied level: qua pure minds, we are endowed with natural light which is an infallible capacity to track the truth, provided it is not impeded by preconceived opinions and the activity of the senses; qua embodied beings we are endowed with sensations and passions which function as teachings of nature helping us navigate the world of sensible objects and other people where theoretical certainty is unobtainable. If the different objects of these tendencies towards the truth and the good did not harmonize in some way God would be a deceiver. But in *Meditation IV*, Descartes has already established that God is no deceiver (AT VII, 53-54: CSM 2.37) so the good is objective. The objectivity of the good stems from its origin in God's will and from our being teleologically directed towards the good, again

due to God's having created us this way. However, the existence of objective moral standards is compatible with diversity provided the theory includes a core of common moral rules, standards or principles that are binding on all people at all times. For Descartes the core of objective moral standards is built around the criterion of the good which is procedurally spelled out, whatever I can control is good for me at a certain time and given the circumstances. The diversity that Descartes' moral theory allows for is the result of the way the good is apprehended and of the various possibilities of applying the rules composing Cartesian morality.

The first source of diversity in the moral domain as conceived by Descartes stems from the way the good is apprehended. The moral agent apprehends the good as *his* good, which constitutes Descartes' attempt to sketch a version of motivational internalism (Williston 2003a, 306). Williston has argued that Cartesian good is understood in terms of control: whatever I can control is good for me. Williston classifies goods as first and second order goods. The first-order good is self-perfection and the second-order good is virtue. The good as control is not the definition but simply the criterion of the good (just as truth as evidence is not the definition of the truth). The agent comes to realize what he can control by unraveling the causal chains of whatever he happens to want. Whatever cannot be influenced by an action on his part in terms of occurrence, content of and attitude towards a certain thought is beyond his control and he should not desire it.

The second source of diversity in the Cartesian moral realm is the application of the rules composing Descartes' final morality to particular cases and individuals. The

way these rules are applied will yield different results. Above I argued that the process of personalizing these rules, of making them fit one's own situation and personal features is what Descartes is trying to describe in the *Passions of the Soul*. Different agents will conform differently to the rule "judge as well as you can" because they have different intellectual resources, different attention-spans and different levels of control over giving their assent. "Act resolutely", Descartes' second rule, will also be conformed to in diverse ways due to different persons having souls more or less strong and/or having been habituated to react differently to different situations. And finally, reflection on divine providence as a source of consolation for thwarted desires will be more or less efficient from person to person.

III. Desire and virtue

In the previous section of this chapter I presented the Cartesian correspondents of the aspects involved in Nietzsche's process of self-creation; I took Nietzsche's reinterpretation of some parts of our personalities and his addition of pieces of second nature to be equivalent to the Cartesian process of sublimation that results in virtue. I will now look in detail at the way virtues are born according to Descartes. I argue that virtue is closely connected with desire, both passional and volitional. To clarify the relation between virtues and desires we have to take into account the role of motivation in both cases: all passions (including desires) *incline* the soul towards objects deemed good; virtues, on the other hand, are habits described as *dispositions of the will*. They share the same associative character but the associations have different components. In the case of the passions movements of the gland are associated with mental states. In the case of virtues, volitions are associated with external situations. They also involve some looping

effect: enhancing of the mental state due to the movements of the spirits (for the passions) and enhancing due to practice (for virtues- AT XI, 453-454; CSM I, 387-388; a.161).

Not all habits are virtues. Habits are entrenched associations between some movements of the gland and some thoughts. In article 44 of the *Passions*, Descartes mentions both naturally joined movements of the spirits and volitions (contracting the pupils) and acquired ones (learning to speak- an association between an action of the soul and some ideas). Linda Zagzebski distinguishes between simple habits and virtues: virtues are “deep qualities of a person, closely identified with her selfhood” (Zagzebski 1996, 103). She identifies two components of virtue: a motivation to bring about a certain end and a reliable ratio of success in reaching that end. Motivation has “an aspect of desire but it includes something about *why* a state of affairs is desired, and that includes something about the way my emotions are tied to my aim” (Zagzebski 1996, 130).

I suggest that volitional desire is a component of virtue, while being just a sublimation of passional desire. Volitional desires are critically assessed passions that were already endorsed by the will. Together with the kinds of situations in which they have already proven effective, they become standard responses. Passions are just the training for virtue; through trial and error we come to discover which strategies of action work and which don't. Descartes mentions several virtues that have correspondent passions (e.g. generosity). In some cases, the instantiations of virtues as dispositions to act in a certain way, the processes by which those dispositions are actually put into

practice are passions. For instance, self-satisfaction or tranquility is a habit of those who steadfastly pursue virtue; the particular instance of satisfaction we feel when we have performed an action we consider good is a passion (AT XI, 472; CSM I, 396; a.190). In the case of generosity, the difference between the virtue and the passion consists in accompaniment by a movement of the spirits (AT XI, 453-454; CSM I, 387-388; a.161).

If we take the modified version of the lion example again, the person fighting the lion for the first time needed the movement of the spirits to accomplish his goals. Following Zagzebski²²⁹ I will call this *a courageous act*: it was performed by imitating the act of other persons that were successful at fighting lions, and was motivated by the judgment that it is a good thing to fight to defend one's village together with the wish for glory and rewards. Starting from a true judgment of good, "Fighting lions to protect the village is good" the agent feels moved to fight the lions. However, when faced with the actual situation his first reaction include fear and a desire to flee and save himself. If he is to be successful in staying and fighting he must represent to himself things usually connected with the passion of courage which eventually will arouse courage in himself.

The role of passionate courage is to provide additional motivation as the motivation

²²⁹ Zagzebski takes the difference between an *act of virtue* and a *virtuous act* to consist solely in the success of the former and the failure of the latter in reaching its end. An act of compassion, according to Zagzebski, "successfully brings about the beneficent effect on the sufferings of another that the virtue of compassion aims to produce. The desired alleviation of suffering occurs because of those features of the act that make it compassionate (namely, its compassionate motive) and the fact that what the agent does is what a compassionate person with understanding of the situation would be inclined to do in such circumstances...the failure of the act to attain its end prevents it from having a significant morally desirable feature, and there is a distinctive sort of praise that the agent would not be given *for* performing the act" (Zagzebski 1996, 249). I want to modify Zagzebski's distinction between an *act of virtue* and a *virtuous act* and apply it to Descartes. Applied to Descartes the difference between an *act of courage* and a *courageous act* lies in motivation: while both acts may be successful in reaching their ends, an *act of courage* stems from a non-overridable motivation resulting from judgments about good and evil. A *courageous act* is the result of an overridable motivation resulting from judgments about good and evil; the act is successful in reaching its end because the agent brings in additional pieces of motivation (e.g. desire for rewards and glory) to prevent the initial motivation from being overridden.

stemming from the judgment that it is good to fight lions to protect the village is in danger of being overridden by opposing passions and desires. Passional courage is needed to reinforce the initial motivation and to ensure the success of his action.

Zagzebski's *courageous act* is the act accomplished by a Cartesian strong soul guided by previous passions that proved effective (AT XI, 368; CSM I, 347; a.49): due to lack of practice, truth proves insufficient as motivation-provider so other considerations (like the desire for glory and rewards) are brought in to tip the motivational balance.²³⁰

An *act of courage*, on the other hand, would really spring from our desire to fight the lion and even if it had the spirits as a prop, it wouldn't need them to ensure that one stays and fights when the time comes. Descartes' sage accomplishes *acts of courage* (not just *courageous acts*): the judgment that it is good to fight lions to protect the village moves the agent to action. When faced with the lion he does not feel fear as he is confident in his own virtue (i.e. resoluteness to stick to his decision to stay and fight). His decision will result in his yielding the weapon. Because the latter process is associated with the passion of courage, the animal spirits which ensure the movement of his limbs, will eventually also cause the passion of courage. The latter is only a by-product of the physiological processes that ensure the external efficacy of his fighting the lion but has no motivational role in bringing about the action of fighting. However, due to the looping

²³⁰ Here is how Descartes describes the steps involved in the passion of courage and the action of fighting the lion that courage gives rise to: we notice the shape of an animal; this shape resembles other things that have been harmful to the body and thus is viewed as "terrifying" and causes anxiety. Anxiety is followed by courage if three conditions are met: the appropriate temperament of the body and strength of the soul together with a history of protecting ourselves by defense from harmful things. The passion of courage is aroused after spirits from the image of the terrifying animal are sent to the limbs causing them to fight and to the other organs (including the heart) and then back to the brain reinforcing the passion of courage (AT XI, 357-358; CSM I, 342-343; a. 36,37, 38).

action of the animal spirits from the heart to the limbs and brain, the passion of courage has a role in the continuation of the fighting process.

The differences between a *courageous act* and an *act of courage* are: motivation (judgment that fighting is the right thing to do together with hope for beneficial consequences like material rewards or glory, versus accomplishing the act because it is the right thing to do); habituation and ratio of success (virtuous acts may be the first instances of acting in a certain way and have a lower ratio of success than acts of virtue). However, acts of courage are only motivationally independent of passional desires; the judgment that it is a good thing to fight to protect one's village must arouse passional desire in us if our hands and legs are to continue moving and yielding the weapon. In other words, for Descartes, the continuation and efficacy of our actions and their tangible consequences depend on passional desire.

This example is not quite appropriate as for Descartes courage is not a virtue, but simply a passion. However, given the fact that he characterizes virtue as resolution and says nothing about how we individuate the different virtues²³¹, perhaps we could accept as virtues the commonly accepted ones, emphasizing their being repetitive and recipes for success²³².

²³¹ Except in a letter where he says that virtues are individuated by their objects (AT IV, 265; CSMK 257)

²³² It might be objected that Descartes is not at all concerned with success. However, he does recommend experience as a criterion for keeping the passions and check (AT 431; CSM I, 377; a.138) and he specifically says that success is guaranteed if we correctly determined the objects of desire that depend on us from those that don't (AT XI, 437; CSM I, 379; a.144.)

IV. Conclusions

Passional desire inclines the soul to want those things that are deemed good for the body-mind union and impels us to act. It is produced and strengthened by the animal spirits. It has bodily effects and prepares the body for action. The second type of desire is simply a mode of the will. I argued that its main function is to form first-person propositions that satisfy the transparency requirement (“I desire X” means “X is good and I am committed to bringing it about”). Three possible relations between volitional and passional desire were considered here: first, the perception of volitional desire is passional desire, when it comes to purely intellectual desire (which Descartes identifies with volitional desire). Second, I analyzed a situation where passional desire arises from volitional desire which in turn is part of a judgment about the good. Third, I identified volitional desire with the will’s endorsement of passional desire.

Next, in an attempt to gain a better understanding of Descartes’ views of the passions and their role in his moral theory, I offered a systematic reconstruction of Descartes’ morality. Only pieces of the picture thus obtained are to be found in Descartes’ writings. I tried to match the chronological and the moral steps of a fictional character’s development. Taking as an example and a guide Descartes’ own narrative from the *Discourse* and patching episodes from his other writings I arrived at a picture that could be called “Genealogy of morals from passions or how to give style to one’s character”. I highlighted the Cartesian evolution of the concept of morality from an instinctual guide to behavior (not spelled out and not theoretically justified during childhood) through a clearly delimited morality having as its declared goal to ensure the

smoothness of everyday life during theoretical enquiry (during Descartes' youth) to a morality that would still guide behavior but emphasize the coherence of one's selfhood.

The transition from one stage of this moral development to the next was made using the passions and their role as a guiding thread. The Cartesian moral trajectory that resulted features the Cartesian moral agent moving away from the appetites that control his every move during childhood, away from certain particular passions (irresolution, regret and remorse) during youth to realizing the potential of the passions and putting them to good use during his mature years. Judging by the principles of conduct, the progression seems to be from no rules through conformity to some rules, to self-creation. At the level of self-creation there are three types of rules: first, the norms regulating the functioning of our wills; these are not deliberately applied but function in the background. Second, the rules composing Descartes' final morality are internalized by the agent and their requirements are automatically met when the more immediate goal of harmonizing the passions is attained. Third, there are rules of thumb that the agent comes to discover through trial and error. Examples of such rules are: seek the mean; cultivate passions closely connected with the will; seek stability and tranquility.

Coming to the notion of self-creation, I showed how the "I" is first experienced as a pragmatic unity during deliberation. In this respect the Cartesian agent resembles Korsgaard's agent. This pragmatic unity has a metaphysical basis that Descartes does not emphasize (as, starting from any action taken not as a bodily but as a mental phenomenon, the Cartesian agent can hit on the cogito). The challenge to introduce order

and structure in the soul is guided by an ideal figure (the Cartesian sage and the person that gives style to her character in Nietzsche's case).

Finally I argued that virtue, which was the prominent notion in Descartes' recipe for harmonizing the passions, includes volitional desire, that virtue is modeled after the associations that constitute passions. Passional desires are hybrid states on two levels: first, they are psychophysical states (they happen in the body as movements of the spirits and are felt in the soul as agitations). Second, the passions' mental component is both representational as passions are obscure ideas and volitional as they motivate us. Passions incline the soul towards assenting to an object represented as good or bad for us. The process of sublimation that gives rise to virtues involves a twofold redirection of emphasis: stressing the mental component of passions to the detriment of their corporeal aspect. Then, within the mental aspect of the passion, the motivational takes precedence over the representational without completely obliterating the latter. As counselors to the will, passions and virtues are different only in degree, not kind: even though virtues are devoid of movements of the spirits, in certain cases the actualization of virtues amounts to the correspondent passions (e.g. self-satisfaction, generosity).

Given this reading of Descartes' views on the passions, Descartes could almost have written the following passage from Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols*:

There is a time with all passions when they are merely fatalities, when they drag their victim down with the weight of their folly—and a later, very much later time when they are wedded with the spirit, when they are 'spiritualized'. Formerly one made war on passion itself on account of the folly inherent in it: one conspired for its extermination—all the old moral monsters are unanimous that '*il faut tuer les passions*'... To exterminate the passions and desires merely in order to do away with their folly and its unpleasant consequences- this itself seems to us today merely an acute form of folly. We no longer

admire dentists who *pull out* the teeth to stop them hurting ... But to attack the passions at their roots means to attack life at its roots (Nietzsche 1971, 42).

Descartes is not a passion-plucker because absolute mastery over the passions is obtainable for even the weakest souls provided we employ sufficient ingenuity in training and guiding them (AT XI, 370; CSM I, 348; a.50). Descartes also assures us that he is not advocating a virtue that is so “inimical to pleasure” as to be suitable only for depressed or disembodied people (AT IV, 276; CSMK 261). Moreover, even if we wanted to extirpate the passions like the Stoics we couldn’t because they are indeed “the roots of life”: for Descartes life means embodiment, i.e. the union between soul and body. This union is maintained for as long as the main organs function properly and the fire in the heart continues burning. The latter brings with it the production of the animal spirits which are an essential component in causing the passions. Therefore embodiment presupposes the passions as benefit/harm indicators; passions constitute the preconditions for corporeal voluntary action and are the training for virtue.

Conclusions

The main claim of this dissertation has been that the will is the pivotal concept of Descartes' philosophy. The will is the whole of the mind in its active capacity; it is inclined to the true and the good; it exhibits a threefold kind of freedom; and it has both a theoretical function (assenting to ideas, the result of which is judgments) and a practical role (fighting the passions and initiating voluntary bodily actions). The contribution to Descartes scholarship this dissertation aimed for is fourfold: (1) a novel approach to Descartes' theory of mind; (2) a systematic reconstruction of Descartes' theory of freedom along incompatibilist lines; (3) a reading of Descartes' theory of judgment according to which Descartes makes assent an act of will because he wants to impute epistemic responsibility to the agent; and (4) an interpretation of Descartes' practical philosophy with special emphasis on Descartes' final morality as a morality of self-creation.

(1) I have argued that a revision of the way we interpret Descartes' theory of mind is necessary in order to accommodate a central place for the will since without willing there would be no thinking; willing pertains to the essence of the Cartesian mind. In a letter to Mersenne from May 1637 Descartes addresses the issue of the relation between willing and thinking as the essence of the mind: "You argue that if the nature of man is solely to think, then he has no will. I do not see that this follows; for willing, understanding, imagining and sensing and so on are just different ways of thinking, and all belong to the soul" (AT I, 366; CSMK 56). In light of the arguments I presented in

Chapter I, Descartes' response to Mersenne is either insufficient or disingenuous. I argued that thinking usually involves engagement, a commitment either for or against a certain proposition or state of affairs. For Descartes, commitment is an act of will. Entertaining, contemplating a proposition without taking a stand towards it is difficult to achieve and is ultimately dependent on the will as effort, focus and directing attention. Therefore, engaged or disengaged thinking depends on willing. Willing can be either initiating and fecund or reactive and validating. In its initiating quality, the will is the source of all mental activity: it constitutes the starting points of other mental acts (e.g. imagining, supposing, etc). In its reactive quality, the will functions as assent given to theoretical and practical propositions.

(2) My dissertation also proposed a reading of Descartes' theory of freedom along incompatibilist lines. I claimed that Descartes' incompatibilism is provable along two lines following the two models of control he works with: PAP (the principle of alternative possibilities) and Source (agent causation). My reading of Descartes' theory of freedom has the advantage of accounting for the three types of freedom Descartes works with (freedom of spontaneity, freedom of indifference and freedom of perversity) and of making sense of the strange distinction between acts of will *before* they are elicited and acts of will *after* they are elicited. The "*before* an act of will is elicited" perspective is a first person perspective and consists of evaluating the potential of an idea to form judgments. The "*after* an act of will is elicited" perspective constitutes a check not only of the results obtained through assenting to an idea but also of the procedure followed to get there: if assenting to an idea seemed easy to the agent who took the time to

investigate the matter carefully and made sure that ease was a consequence of clarity and distinctness, then- if the resulting proposition is true- the agent is praiseworthy.

(3) I interpreted Descartes' epistemology and the role he attributes to the will in the theoretical sphere as a voluntarist epistemological twist motivated mainly by Descartes' concern to impute responsibility to the agent. Knowledge is not the natural result of our cognitive apparatus but is an accomplishment; it consists of reasons-responsiveness, where "reason" stands for evidence arrived at in a procedurally correct manner, i.e. following the steps involved in rendering an idea clear and distinct. I also argued that this makes Descartes a proto-Kantian thinker and marks his attempt to supply a normative account of human nature. Descartes proposes a domain-specific view of knowledge dividing the cognitive sphere into mental, corporeal and mixed. Cognitive success results from voluntarily applying the common notion appropriate to each realm (mind, body and union, respectively) and from working with the appropriate faculties (intellect, intellect+ imagination, senses).

Finally, (4) regarding Descartes' practical views I argued that Descartes' final morality as presented in the *Passions of the Soul* can be described as a morality of self-creation. Descartes recommends not eradicating the passions in Stoic manner but integrating them in a coherent *affective repertoire*. Descartes' moral theory is an attempt on his part to marry a form of internalist theory of motivation with an objectivist view of moral value. Judgments about good and evil are sources of moral motivation. Good and evil are independent of the agent's desires and preferences, although the agent

apprehends the good by way of what she can control. Only in the virtuous person are judgments about good and evil sources of non-overrideable moral motivation.²³³ The sage-in-training and the ordinary person need passions as additional sources of motivation in order to be successful at bringing about the desired effect.

This analysis of the concept of will opens many interesting directions of inquiry that could not be pursued here. One such direction which would considerably improve our understanding of Descartes' views has to do with situating Descartes' views in a broader historical context. First, there is the issue of the ancestry of the concept of will Descartes works with. Second, the question arises as to the sources of inspiration for Descartes' moral theory and of the moral theories he prefigures.

(I) Regarding the lineage of the Cartesian concept of will I think the most important thinkers to mention are Augustine, Aquinas and Duns Scotus. Their influence on Descartes' theory of will is prominent in all its main aspects: in his way of conceiving the will, its functions and its threefold freedom (freedom of perversity, freedom of indifference and freedom of spontaneity). I do not claim that the views of these three thinkers directly influenced Descartes. Many of these ideas were current and widely circulated so Descartes may have been in contact with them due to the intellectual climate of his time.

²³³ I do not mean that in a virtuous person judgments about good and evil *necessitate* the agent to follow the good and shun the evil as presented by the intellect. It is always open to the agent to not act at all or to act against her better judgments. By non-overrideable moral motivation I mean that, provided the agent does not decide to pursue a different goal (e.g. to prove the freedom of her will) but sticks to her commitment to the true and the good, she does not need further motivation in order to be successful in her actions.

One facet of Descartes' thought where his debt to Augustine is very prominent is the description of the will as the whole of the mind in its active capacity, dependent on a prior act of the intellect (perception for Augustine), and having control as one of its intrinsic features. A similar view is found in Scotus, himself influenced by Augustine. Descartes' contention that all appetites are volitions (AT XI, 364; CSM I, 346) also reminds us of Augustine for whom the will is both experiencer and controller of emotions. Also, the functions Descartes attributes to the will are inspired by Augustine's ideas. According to Richard Sorabji²³⁴, Augustine not only realized the first important synthesis of the aspects that we nowadays consider essential to the notion of will (freedom, responsibility, will-power, ubiquity in all action) but also greatly broadened the concept itself by adding new functions. Many of the functions he added²³⁵ to the will are found in Descartes' treatment of the will: belief, attention, imagination, passions are in some way or other connected with the will. Augustine deals with these functions of the will by describing the will as the binding factor in mental processes (by analogy with the Holy Spirit in the economy of the Trinity). It should also be noted here that despite the similarity of the functions attributed to the will, there is a huge difference between Descartes and Augustine: for Augustine the will is essentially a perverted will, while for Descartes it is one of our perfections, specifically the aspect that most makes us resemble God.

²³⁴ I should note here that Sorabji takes the will to be "a desire with a special relation to reason and a number of functions associated with it... The functions include two important clusters, freedom and responsibility on the one hand and will-power on the other" (Sorabji 321). To what extent this will be a problem in dealing with Descartes who takes desire to be a type of willing (and not the other way around) is something I will come back to.

²³⁵ Sorabji 336-337

Without ever acknowledging it, Descartes is also indebted to Augustine's theory of will when it comes to the will's overarching commitment to the true and the good, commitment freely entered into, reinforced with every single act elicited and different from the mere inclination the will naturally has towards these values. While Augustine, Aquinas and Scotus agree that the will is inclined to the good, the will's freely committing itself to it is an Augustinian idea. When looking at the roots of Augustine's own ideas of commitment one finds Stoic and Platonic elements closely intertwined.

Augustine's concept of *voluntas* is best approached through the Stoic ideas with which he was familiar. Recognizing these ideas as both resembling and differing from his own, we shall see how, in the concept of *voluntas* as elsewhere, he transposes much inherited Stoicism into a form of Platonism, highlighting the fundamental orientation of each human being and emphasizing love over both want and obligation in his account of moral agency (Rist 33).

Following Rist's suggestion, I see Augustine's views on commitment and assent of the will as similar to the Stoics' in that he emphasizes the need for detachment from sensible goods, but unlike the Stoics' in that, similarly to Plato's *Symposium*, he stresses the need for strong attachment to God and eternal things. For Augustine the will is the power that shows one's overarching commitment to either eternal or temporal things²³⁶, commitment repeatedly manifested and renewed with every single choice we make and every single act we accomplish. The commitment in question influences all our actions and establishes a kind of policy for the whole of our lives. It is possible to switch between a pro-God and a pro-ourselves and created things policy, as both Augustine's conversion and Adam's fall prove. In the *Meditations* Descartes gives an epistemic twist to this type of overarching commitment: the value one clings to is the truth and the goal of the policy

²³⁶ "'Do you love earth?' Augustine asks. 'You will be earth. Do you love God...?'" (Rist 37).

based on such a commitment (the clarity and distinctness rule) is the establishment of science on solid foundations.

Descartes' general position on the will's freedom is that the will is so free that it can never be constrained, a position that has an Augustinian flavour. Coming to the particular types of freedom of the will, Descartes owes to Aquinas a clear concept of voluntariness (what proceeds from an internal principle and is preceded by knowledge), a concept taken for granted when Descartes states that voluntariness, spontaneity and freedom are one and the same thing (AT IV, 175; CSMK 246)²³⁷. The Cartesian notion of "freedom of spontaneity" described in *Meditation IV*²³⁸ as the compulsion to assent to clear and distinct ideas can be equated with voluntariness as described by Aquinas: the determining principle is internal to the agent and the action of the will is preceded by knowledge. The Cartesian "freedom of indifference" understood as the will's not being determined to any of the alternatives presented to it by the intellect is also prefigured by Aquinas: according to Aquinas the will has the ability to go either way because the intellect is unpersuaded and thus deliberation is necessary (ST I-II, q. 6, a. 2). Ingham & Dreyer refer to Scotus' taking the will's indifference with respect to opposite effects as an imperfection (Ingham & Dreyer 97), while Descartes takes freedom of indifference (arising from epistemic balance) to be the lowest degree of freedom.

²³⁷ The same point is made in the Geometrical exposition: "The will of a thinking thing is drawn voluntarily and freely (for this is the essence of will) but nevertheless inevitably, towards a clearly known good" (AT VII, 166; CSM II, 117).

²³⁸ "This is because the will simply consists in...the fact that when the intellect puts something forward for affirmation or denial or for pursuit or avoidance, our inclinations are such that we do not feel we are determined by any external force" (AT VII, 57; CSM II, 40).

"I could not but judge that something which I understood so clearly was true; but this was not because I was so compelled to judge by any external force, but because 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" (AT VII, 59; CSM II, 41).

Descartes' freedom of perversity is influenced by Duns Scotus' ideas of "synchronic contingency" (which is the basis of the will's acting according to the principle of alternative possibilities) and his views of the will's power of self-determination: the will is responsible for eliciting its inclinations. In the second letter to Mesland, Descartes refers to the will as a "positive faculty of determining oneself" (AT IV, 173; CSMK 245). Alanen claims that Descartes works with Scotus' distinction between "the tendency towards an end and the actualization of that tendency", that he conceives the will as having the ability "to elicit or not elicit its acts independently of its natural tendencies and inclinations" (Alanen 2003, 237-239). Alanen proposes "interpreting the account of will Descartes gives in the Fourth Meditation and later in light of Scotus's distinction between a natural, passive inclination to the good or happiness and an active power to elicit or not elicit it" (Alanen 2003, 244). Descartes seems to go even further than Scotus since in the second letter to Mesland he allows for the possibility that the will is free to reject a clearly perceived truth and embrace an evil without mistaking it for the good, while Scotus does not admit that the will is able to embrace evil qua evil, but only to refrain from acting in such a situation (Scotus 160).

Which of the above influences on Descartes' thought is emphasized goes hand in hand with the way Descartes' views on the freedom of the will are interpreted. Scholars stressing Aquinas' influence take Descartes to be an ethical determinist; those giving more importance to the Scotistic aspects of the Cartesian thought place Descartes in the voluntarist camp. Ethical determinism is the view that the human will has a necessary

inclination toward the good and it is only free to choose between alternatives that are not entirely supported by reasons (Alanen 2003, 234). This is the view that Thomas Aquinas endorsed and is the classic Scholastic view without being the only view about the will advanced in Scholasticism. Ethical voluntarism was proposed as an alternative and according to Bonnie Kent it has five tenets: (i) the will is nobler than the intellect; (ii) happiness is more an activity of the will than of the intellect; (iii) human freedom depends more on the will than on rationality; (iv) the will is free to act against the intellect's judgment; (v) it is the will, not the intellect that commands the body and the other powers of the soul (Kent 96).

I contend that Descartes meets all the above five requirements and thus qualifies as an ethical voluntarist. That the will is superior to the intellect Descartes states in so many words in his *Conversation with Burman* (AT V, 159; CSMK 342). Commentators who think that Descartes is an ethical determinist will readily point out that it is uncertain how much credit we should give to this piece given the fact that it was not written by Descartes himself. However, this is just one of the many occurrences of Descartes' voluntarist tendencies and as such, only one aspect in a cumulative case for voluntarism.

Descartes endorses (ii) also: in the *Passions of the Soul* he makes tranquility (*ataraxia*) a virtue; as all virtues are dispositions of the will, tranquility depends on the will as well (AT XI, 471; CSM I, 396). As tranquility is the sign of happiness in this life²³⁹ and tranquility depends on the will, so does happiness. Freedom is not only attributed to the will but it is one of its essential features. Therefore Descartes meets the

²³⁹ "the satisfaction of those who steadfastly pursue virtue" (AT XI, 471; CSM I, 396)

third requirement listed above. That the will, through the means of the animal spirits, commands the body, is stated clearly in the *Passions* (AT XI, 342; CSM I, 335)²⁴⁰. The controversial point is (iv): whether or not, in Descartes' opinion, the will is free to act against the intellect's judgment or, against its better reasons (as Descartes made judgment an act of will). In the second letter to Mesland Descartes states that we are free to reject a clearly perceived truth provided we consider it a good thing to prove the freedom of our will by so doing. I take this as strong enough evidence for the claim that the will is able to go against the intellect's dictates, although, as I showed in Chapter III, working out the details of such a scenario is difficult and at times involves paradoxical aspects.

(II) The second line of inquiry that could not be pursued in this dissertation but which would go a long way towards a more complete picture of Descartes' views concerns the historical roots of his moral theory. Descartes' views on the happy life, on virtue and its role in controlling the passions bring him close to Aquinas, and thereby to traditional virtue ethics. However, Descartes' theory of mind, including the description of the volitional (motivational) element of emotions (an Augustinian motif), and of the will as a power of self-determination (a Scotist influence), are key to understanding Descartes' contention that the only thing that counts morally is quality of our will (a tenet of the later good will ethics).

As I argued in Chapter V, Descartes' moral theory deals with action and the associated problem of irresolution due to too much deliberation. An action is resolute but not precipitous when it springs from a harmonious emotional repertoire. *Passions*

²⁴⁰ 5 above

(defined as mental states having corporeal causes) ensure that we act, while virtues (habits of the soul) maximize our chances of acting in the right manner. A harmonious emotional repertoire is the result of the will's controlling and harmonizing our emotions; the attendant self-satisfaction or tranquility is the sweetest joy there is and the sign of happiness in this life.

Happiness follows the attaining of the supreme good, according to both Descartes and Aquinas. For the former, "happiness consists solely in the contentment of the mind" and can be considered the goal of all our actions (AT IV, 277; CSMK, 262). While this has a Stoic flavor, it is also close to Aquinas' "imperfect happiness", happiness obtainable in this life and through our natural powers (Aquinas 1969, 75). According to Descartes, virtue is a necessary and sufficient condition for happiness; for Aquinas, virtue is a necessary but not sufficient condition for happiness as it involves some external goods that enhance it, without being essential to it. Virtue is a good habit productive of good works and depends solely on us. Both thinkers defend the anti-Stoic position of the compatibility between moderate emotions and virtue and the Aristotelian view of virtue as the mean between two vices.

Descartes' reasons for not remaining within the confines of virtue ethics consist of intuitions about the type of will necessary for legitimately imputing responsibility to the agent. Following Scotus, the Cartesian will is a power inclined to the good but it is free to reject it even when clearly perceived; free to act or not act, to pursue X or nonX; and self-determined (AT IV, 173-174; CSMK, 245). The contrast with Aquinas lies not only in

the will's self-determination and freedom of alternative possibilities, but also in Descartes' equating appetites with volitions (thus following Augustine), and relegating all virtues (viewed as species of resoluteness) to the will (AT IV, 277; CSMK, 262). Once we join to resoluteness the knowledge that the only thing for which we can be praised or blamed is our free will, we acquire the Cartesian virtue of "generosity" (which is much more than giving liberally). Similar to Augustine's person of good will who esteems her will above any external goods (Augustine 1968, 99), the generous person has mastery over her negative passions (envy, jealousy, hatred, fear, anger), appropriate self-esteem (due to a clear idea of her own self-worth), and equal esteem for others (as they are all endowed with free will).

Cartesian generosity includes elements of moral universalism: all human beings have the same potential moral status as they are all endowed with free will. The similarity between Cartesian moral thought and Kantian good will ethics is also clear in programmatic statements making a good will the only thing for which we ought to be praised (AT XI, 445; CSM I, 384) and the only thing good without qualification (Kant). The difference between Kant and Descartes seems to be one of emphasis: the Kantian good will binds itself to act out of pure respect for the moral law in such a way that interest and inclination are not the main motivational sources. Descartes takes the passions to be essential to our physical and moral perfection, and when kept in check, they constitute viable sources of moral motivation.

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