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Descartes on Unknown Faculties and Our Knowledge of the External World*

Lex Newman

Descartes introduces his skeptical arguments, in the First Meditation, in an order of increasing strength. First, the narrator-mediator notices that judgments concerning the nature of small and distant objects are unreliable; later, that even sensory judgments about large and close objects are in doubt—this after considering an argument related to madness and another related to dreaming; finally, that no judgments resist doubt—the renowned Deceiver Hypothesis is introduced, a skeptical device intended to undermine not only the judgment that an external, corporeal world exists, but even the most certain judgments in mathematics.¹

For each of these skeptical problems (with the exception of the madness worry), Descartes provides an argument in the later (epistemologically constructive) Meditations that is its complement. He provides an argument that our sensory ideas of corporeal things do not resemble the external objects that cause them (regardless of size and distance); an argument intended to solve the problem of dreaming; another to prove the existence of the external, corporeal world; and an argument to establish the veracity of judgments based on clear and distinct perception.

In this paper, I focus on the complementary pair that concerns the problem of the existence of the external, corporeal world. According to (what I shall call) the standard interpretation, the problem is generated only by the strongest of the First Meditation skeptical arguments, the Deceiver Hypothesis;² it is then dismissed in

*I am especially indebted to Alan Nelson for extensive criticism of earlier drafts of this paper. I have also benefited from suggestions by Paul Hoffman, Nicholas Jolley, David Smith, Marleen Rozemond, Ermanno Ben-civenga, Albert Casullo, Mark van Roojen, and an anonymous referee for the *Philosophical Review*. And I received very useful criticisms in discussion of the paper in a Department of Philosophy Colloquium at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

¹This account is not without its critics. For instance, in his "The Role of the Malignant Demon," *Studia Leibnitiana* 8 (1976): 257–64, John Cottingham argues that mathematical truths are not in fact questioned by the First Meditation arguments and that the Deceiver Hypothesis adds nothing new to the skeptical work of the earlier dreaming passage.

²It appears there are two principal reasons for the widespread view that

the Sixth Meditation by means of a straightforward undoing of the First Meditation skeptical problem—corporeal substance must be the cause of our sensory ideas, since God has been shown to be no deceiver.

I want to challenge the standard interpretation and argue that Descartes has included another pair of complements, a pair that takes center stage in his treatment of our knowledge of the external, corporeal world. The skeptical part is a doubt raised in the madness and dreaming passage of the First Meditation: it questions the existence of the corporeal world by appeal to the possibility of unknown, mental faculties, an appeal that foreshadows Descartes's theory of innate ideas. The epistemologically constructive part occurs as an essential step in the Sixth Meditation proof of the existence of the external, corporeal world: it is intended to rule out the possibility of unknown, mental faculties by means of the transparency doctrine of the mind—the thesis that there is nothing in the mind of which we are not aware.

In what follows, I begin with an examination of the Sixth Meditation argument, in order to clarify the unknown faculty worry and its prominent role in Descartes's treatment of the problem external, corporeal world. I begin here, since an understanding of the Sixth Meditation argument helps elucidate the First Meditation skeptical worry it discharges. I then consider the First Meditation account itself, defending my reading of the madness and dreaming passage. And following this, I discuss the relationship between the

the existence of the external world is not questioned until the introduction of the Deceiver Hypothesis. First, most commentators hold that the primary aim of the dreaming passage is to raise the worry about whether we are awake. Cf., for example, E. M. Curley, *Descartes Against the Skeptics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), chap. 3; Bernard Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1978), 51–53; and Peter J. Markie, *Descartes's Gambit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 108–19. So understood, the Dreaming Argument is often thought to presuppose an external world in which to wake up. Second, a popular reading of the passage introducing the Deceiver Hypothesis has it that the existence of the external, corporeal world is being called into question—for the first time—by this more radical doubt. Margaret Wilson, for example, in her *Descartes* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 16f., appeals to this reading for her view that it is merely the nature, but not the existence, of the external world that is in doubt as a result of the dreaming passage.

Dreaming Argument, as typically understood, and the argument I propose in connection with unknown faculties.

1. Unknown Faculties and the Argument for the External World

Descartes's Sixth Meditation argument proceeds by process of elimination. The possible options for the cause of sensory ideas include

- (a) something internal to the mind, or
- (b) something external to the mind, either
 - (i) corporeal substance,
 - (ii) some other created substance, or
 - (iii) God.

Baldly stated, all options except (b)(i) are eliminated, thereby establishing the existence of the external, corporeal world.

Far from being an artless clarification of the implications of having established that God is no deceiver—as the standard interpretation supposes—the argument provides a subtle example of Descartes's orderly procedure.³ Distinguish the following two theses: first, that my sensory ideas of body are, at least in part, caused by something external to me, and second, that there exists an external, corporeal world. I shall refer to these as the External Cause Thesis and the Corporeal Existence Thesis, respectively.⁴ Descar-

³In the Second Replies, Descartes describes the orderliness of his procedure, noting that “the items which are put forward first must be known entirely without the aid of what comes later; and the remaining items must be arranged in such a way that their demonstration depends solely on what has gone before” (AT 7:155, CSM 2:110). Cf. also AT 7:9–10.

‘AT’ refers to *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: J. Vrin, 1964); ‘CSM’ refers to *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); ‘CSMK’ refers to volume 3 of CSM, for which Anthony Kenny is a contributing translator. References to both AT and CSM are to the volume and page.

⁴The two theses are logically independent. Not only is the denial of the External Cause Thesis consistent with the truth of the Corporeal Existence Thesis, the truth of the External Cause Thesis is consistent with the denial of the Corporeal Existence Thesis, since my sensory ideas of body may be transmitted to me directly from God (or some other noncorporeal substance).

tes's proof for the Corporeal Existence Thesis proceeds in three stages in which ordering is crucial. Before Descartes's meditator can argue (in the third stage) that the external cause of his sensory ideas is corporeal substance, he must first rule out the possibility of a fully nativist explanation of these ideas, a possibility taken seriously in the early Meditations. And so, in the second stage of the proof, the meditator argues for the External Cause Thesis by an appeal to introspection, an appeal which hinges on the transparency of thought. But this step presupposes yet more work. Before the meditator can successfully appeal to a procedure of introspection, he must first know that his whole essence is thought. And so, in the first stage of the proof, he argues for his own thinking nature and the real distinction between it and corporeal nature.⁵

Before reconstructing the Sixth Meditation argument, I want to trace the meditator's earlier efforts to establish the Corporeal Existence Thesis. His initial effort is explained in the Third Meditation. Concerning his ideas of "the earth, sky, stars, and everything else" that he "apprehended with the senses," the meditator concedes: "I used to assert" that "there were things outside me which were the sources of my ideas" (AT 7:35, CSM 2:24–25). But since First Meditation doubt has left him unsure whether anything external exists, he reexamines the argument that originally led him to affirm the Corporeal Existence Thesis, an argument that turns on the independence of his will from his sensory ideas (i.e. those that seem to be adventitious):

I know by experience that these ideas do not depend on my will, and hence that they do not depend simply on me. Frequently I notice

⁵Midway through the Fourth Meditation, the meditator is still in doubt whether his own thinking nature "is distinct from this corporeal nature or identical with it" (AT 7:59, CSM 2:41). Though much of the groundwork for establishing the real distinction is laid in the Second Meditation, it is not until the Sixth Meditation that Descartes thinks he has all the premises he needs (cf. AT 7:13, 7:129, 3:266, and 3:272). Even when finally in place, however, the conclusion that mind and body are distinct substances does not entail the Corporeal Existence Thesis, since Cartesian dualism concerns the ontological independence of mind and body but not their real existence. In the Principles I.60, Descartes says that we know that "two substances are really distinct simply from the fact that we can clearly and distinctly understand one apart from the other"; and this we can know of mind and body "even though we may not yet know for certain that any extended or corporeal substance exists in reality" (AT 8a:28, CSM 1:213).

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them even when I do not want to: now, for example, I feel the heat whether I want to or not, and this is why I think that this sensation or idea of heat comes to me from something other than myself, namely the heat of the fire by which I am sitting. (AT 7:38, CSM 2:26)⁶

In matters relating to the good, however, he often experiences inclinations that seem both to originate from some internal faculty (within him) *and* to oppose his will, a fact which undermines the argument:

Then again, although these [seemingly adventitious] ideas do not depend on my will, it does not follow that they must come from things located outside me. Just as the impulses which I was speaking of a moment ago seem opposed to my will even though they are within me, so *there may be some other faculty not yet fully known to me, which produces these ideas without any assistance from external things.* (AT 7:39, CSM 2:27; italics mine)

The expressed worry is that his mind may have the faculty of producing his sensory ideas, even though introspection reveals no such potential.⁷ I shall hereafter refer to this as the Unknown Faculty Doubt (UFD):

UFD: I have reason to worry that the sensory experiences that I take as normal and waking are produced by some unknown, internal faculty (without any assistance from external things).

Because of UFD, he opts to withhold judgment about the Corporeal Existence Thesis:

[I]t is not reliable judgement but merely some blind impulse that has made me believe up till now that there exist things distinct from myself which transmit to me ideas or images of themselves through the sense organs or in some other way.

But it now occurs to me that there is another way of investigating

⁶Cf. also the Sixth Meditation, AT 7:75.

⁷In his *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet*, Descartes explains that he is supposing that “the term ‘faculty’ denotes nothing but a potentiality” (AT 8b:361, CSM 1:305).

whether some of the things of which I possess ideas exist outside me.
(AT 7:39–40, CSM 2:27)

While this other way is taken as showing that God exists, it is unsuccessful in establishing the Corporeal Existence Thesis,⁸ and another effort is not attempted until midway through the Sixth Meditation.⁹

In his prelude to the Sixth Meditation proof, the meditator reiterates the role of UFD in undermining his initial argument, while suggesting that his earlier doubts might now be unwarranted:

And despite the fact that the perceptions of the senses were not dependent on my will, I did not think that I should on that account infer that they proceeded from things distinct from myself, since I might perhaps have a faculty not yet known to me which produced them.

But now, when I am beginning to achieve a better knowledge of myself and the author of my being, although I do not think I should heedlessly accept everything I seem to have acquired from the senses, neither do I think that everything should be called into doubt. (AT 7:77–78, CSM 2:53–54)

As we shall see, the reference, here, to an increased knowledge of himself and of God forebodes the argument to come.

I turn now to the argument itself, and I summarize the first stage as follows.

⁸Prior to proving the existence of God by means of the famous causal principle—“that there must be at least as much in the efficient and total cause as in the effect of that cause” (AT 7:40, CSM 2:28)—the meditator attempts to prove the Corporeal Existence Thesis by the very same means. On the basis of the principle, he notes: “If the objective reality of any of my ideas turns out to be so great that I am sure the same reality does not reside in me, either formally or eminently, and hence that I myself cannot be its cause, it will necessarily follow that I am not alone in the world, but that some other thing which is the cause of this idea also exists” (AT 7:42, CSM 2:29). As it turns out, however, neither his sensory ideas of corporeal substance (AT 7:43–44) nor his clear and distinct ideas of corporeal substance (AT 7:44–45) are such that they could not have originated from some faculty of his own mind. And so, this unsuccessful effort at establishing the External Cause Thesis serves merely to reinforce UFD.

⁹There is an attempt at establishing the existence of corporeal things that occurs early in the Sixth Meditation, an argument based on a consideration of the operations of the imagination (AT 7:71–73). However, Descartes thinks it supports only a “probable conjecture,” and he dismisses the conclusion as “only a probability” (AT 7:73, CSM 2:51).

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- (1) I am a substance whose whole essence is thought and am really distinct from corporeal (extended) substance.

The secondary literature treating the details of Descartes's argument for the real distinction of mind and body is immense. Since my aim at present is to focus on that portion of Descartes's argument that has been neglected in the literature—the role of unknown faculties—I shall offer no defense of the first stage of Descartes's argument.

Establishing (1) serves as a partial refutation of UFD. UFD invokes the following possibilities concerning the relationship between the meditator's own thought and the faculty causing his sensory ideas of body:¹⁰ (a) his thought and the faculty are both modes of the same substance,¹¹ (b) his thought is a mode of the faculty, (c) the faculty is a mode of his thought, or (d) the faculty just is his thought. But (1) eliminates (a) and (b), since the meditator now knows he (qua thinking thing) is not a mode of any substance. It is in the second stage of the argument that options (c) and (d) are addressed.

At first glance, the argument of the second stage appears to be a rehash of the meditator's former, naive effort at establishing the existence of external things. In that effort, the fact that his seemingly adventitious sensory ideas came to him independently of his will—as established by introspection—was taken as inadequate grounds for inferring an external cause of such ideas, precisely because of UFD. And yet, here in the Sixth Meditation argument, the meditator infers that the faculty causing his sensory ideas is external to him, since, as he says, “the ideas in question are pro-

¹⁰Our *sensory* ideas (qua their objective reality) of body are not ideas of the essence of body, as the earlier wax passage is supposed to show; nor are they ideas of the essence of mind. At best, then, they are ideas of modes, though it is not until later in the Sixth Meditation that the meditator discovers what these modes are referred to (AT 7:82–83; cf. *Principles* I.48). As such, it is consistent with Descartes's causal principle (namely, that there be as much formal reality in the cause of an idea as there is objective reality in the idea itself) that the causes of our sensory ideas are themselves modes.

¹¹By this point in the Meditations, the conception of (created) substance as “a thing capable of existing independently” (of any other creature) has been articulated (AT 7:44, CSM 2:30), as has the relationship of substance to mode (cf. AT 7:44–45).

duced without my cooperation and often even against my will” (AT 7:79, CSM 2:55). Our problem, then, is to understand why Descartes thinks this independence of such ideas from one’s will—as established by introspection—succeeds in the Sixth Meditation where it failed in the Third.

Though the text of the Sixth Meditation is somewhat unclear, Descartes elsewhere refers to the transparency doctrine of mind, according to which *there is nothing in the mind of which we are not aware*, and says that he intended it to be a consequence of the claim in (1): “What I say later, ‘nothing can be in me, that is to say, in my mind, of which I am not aware’, is something which I proved in my *Meditations*, and it follows from the fact that the soul is distinct from the body and that its essence is to think” (AT 3: 273; CSMK, 165–66).¹² The payoff, according to Descartes, is that transparency of thought guarantees that introspection will reveal the operations of all mental faculties (known or unknown); that is,

- (2) For any faculty (known or unknown) in me, I am aware of it when its operations occur.

In the Third Meditation, the meditator had not yet established that his *entire* essence was thought, a fact that renders introspection inconclusive;¹³ in the Sixth Meditation, (1) having been established, introspection might succeed.

¹²This comes from a letter to Mersenne (31 December 1640) in which, among other things, he and Mersenne are discussing amendments to the text of the First Replies. Among the First Replies items they discuss is a reference, by Descartes, to the transparency doctrine (AT 7:107). Though I have been unable to locate this letter from Mersenne as extant, it appears that Mersenne had inquired as to where, in the *Meditations*, Descartes proves the doctrine.

¹³In the Third Meditation, Descartes *does* invoke the transparency doctrine, but he is careful to add a qualification: “For since I am nothing but a thinking thing—or at least since I am now concerned only and *precisely with that part of me which is a thinking thing*—if there were such a power in me, I should undoubtedly be aware of it” (AT 7:49, CSM 2:33–34; italics mine). Though, as the Second Meditation is supposed to show, “we do not recognize anything corporeal” in the soul, Descartes does not yet think he has *established* “that there is nothing corporeal in the soul” (AT 9a:215, CSM 2:276; cf. note 5 above). Descartes thinks this Third Meditation appeal to transparency is legitimate precisely because it occurs in a context where the possibility of unknown *corporeal* faculties has been bracketed (AT 7: 107).

In his “Descartes on Unknown Faculties: An Essential Inconsistency,”

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Descartes has in mind two (partial) definitions, those of *thinking thing* and *thought*, which serve as intermediate premises in the inference from (1) to (2): (i) any operation (including those of unknown faculties) attributed to a *thinking thing* is itself a thought; (ii) there is no *thought* “of which we are not aware at the very moment when it is in us” (AT 7:246, CSM 2:171). Concerning (i), the meditator remarks (immediately following the proof for (1)):

Besides this, 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 act¹⁴ included in their essential definition; and hence I perceive that the distinction between them and myself corresponds to the distinction between the modes of a thing and the thing itself. (AT 7:78, CSM 2:54)

An understanding of a mode always presupposes an understanding of the principal attribute (the essence) of the substance in which it inheres,¹⁵ and the meditator now knows himself to be an essentially thinking thing. He acknowledges that

Journal of the History of Philosophy 6 (1968): 245–56, David Fate Norton argues, of this same Third Meditation passage, that it is inconsistent with the Third Meditation worry about unknown mental faculties (that is, UFD). The charge of inconsistency rests on the mistaken supposition that Descartes thinks transparency extends to the meditator’s *whole* essence at this stage in the *Meditations*. It is not until (1) is established, in the Sixth Meditation, that the meditator knows in what his whole essence consists.

¹⁴In referring to an intellectual act (*intellectionem*), Descartes is not referring to action as opposed to passion, but to an actuality as opposed to a mere potentiality or faculty. As such, he uses ‘act’, in this context, to refer to a thing’s operations or modes or ways of being.

¹⁵In the *Principles* I.53, Descartes writes that “each substance has one principal property which constitutes its nature and essence, and to which all its other properties are referred. Thus extension in length, breadth and depth constitutes the nature of corporeal substance; and thought constitutes the nature of thinking substance. Everything else which can be attributed to body presupposes extension, and is merely a mode of an extended thing; and similarly, whatever we find in the mind is simply one of the various modes of thinking” (AT 8a:25, CSM 1:210).

there are other faculties (like those of changing position, of taking on various shapes, and so on) which, like sensory perception and imagination, cannot be understood apart from some substance for them to inhere in, and hence cannot exist without it. But it is clear that these other faculties, if they exist, must be in a corporeal or extended substance and not an intellectual one; for the clear and distinct conception of them includes extension, but does not include any intellectual act whatsoever. (AT 7:78–79, CSM 2:54–55).

Thus, all faculties (potentialities) of mind are actualized as thoughts (of some mode or other). As for (ii), Descartes says, of the term ‘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 7:160, CSM 2:113)

As formulated, however, (2) does not look to be enough to guarantee that introspection will rule out UFD. In order to be sure that the cause of my sensory ideas is not some unknown faculty in me, I would need not merely an awareness of my faculties whose operations are occurring, but an awareness of them *as* causes; but (2) guarantees only the former, not the latter. Let me introduce Descartes’s terminology and then restate the objection in his terms. Every faculty of the mind can be regarded as either active or passive; the mind’s active faculties are those whose operations *bring about* the operation of some other faculty (be it mental or corporeal), and the mind’s passive faculties are those whose operations *are brought about by* some other faculty (be it mental or corporeal).¹⁶ The objection, then, is this: I can be sure

¹⁶In a letter to Regius, Descartes explains this action-passion distinction by analogy to body: “[W]e call it an ‘action’ when the motion is considered in the body that imparts the motion, and a ‘passion’ when it is considered in the body that is moved. It follows from this that when the terms are extended to immaterial things, there is something in such things which has to be considered as analogous to motion. So we should use the term ‘action’ for what plays the role of a moving force, like volition in the mind, while we apply the term ‘passion’ to what plays the role of something moved, like intellection and vision in the same mind” (AT 3:454–55; CSMK, 199).

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that my sensory ideas have not been caused by some unknown active faculty in me only if the transparency doctrine allows an awareness of my active faculties *as active* on the occasion of their operations. Transparency must allow that, by introspection, I can detect the manner in which my ideas come to me—actively or passively.

From a letter to Hyperaspistes, it appears that Descartes recognizes this need, and that he is supposing that introspection does in fact reveal this: “I proved the existence of material things not from the fact that we have ideas of them but from the fact that these ideas *come to us in such a way as to make us aware that they are not produced by ourselves*” (AT 3:428–29, CSMK 193; italics mine). Since having an awareness of whether an operation of my mind has been produced by me (qua thinking thing) just is the having of an awareness of whether it is an *activity* of my mind, I want to reconstruct the second stage of Descartes’s Sixth Meditation argument around a version of the transparency doctrine that allows for this. I formulate the second stage as follows:

- (2)' For any active faculty (known or unknown) in me, I am aware of it (as active) when its operations occur. [(1)]
- (3) Since my faculty of sensing is passive, I can experience sensory ideas only when some active faculty cooperates with it in causing the ideas.
- (4) If the active faculty causing my sensory ideas of corporeal substance were in me, I would be aware of it (as active) when experiencing sensory ideas of corporeal substance. [(2)',(3)]
- (5) When experiencing involuntary sensory ideas of corporeal substance, I am not aware of their active cause.
- (6) The active faculty causing my involuntary sensory ideas of corporeal substance is not in me. [(4),(5)]

The version of transparency in (2)' does not require an awareness of causal relations between mental operations, but merely an awareness of individual mental operations *as causes* (or *as caused*). Descartes thinks such an awareness follows from (i) and (ii), since *activities* of the mind are themselves mental operations:

since they are mental operations, they are thoughts; since they are thoughts, we have awareness of them. For (2)' to be false, there would have to be some leftover *doing*, in virtue of which the operation in question is an activity of the mind, but concerning which transparency does not provide the requisite awareness. But for this to be the case, this leftover *doing* is itself either an operation of which I am unaware, or else an operation of which I am aware but which I misidentify. The former is ruled out by (i) and (ii). And Descartes thinks the latter is ruled out by the incorrigibility of the mental, as the meditator explains:

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; 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. 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 even non-existent, that does not make it any less true that I desire them. (AT 7:37, CSM 2:26)

For Descartes, 'willing' is the name we use to describe the mind's activities or *doings* (cf. AT 3:372), and "we experience them as proceeding directly from our soul and as seeming to depend on it alone" (AT 11:342, CSM 1:335). The only way I can fail to be aware of the *doing* that is causing my sensory ideas is if it is not itself an operation of my mind. There *is* something left over, according to Descartes, if the fact that my arm goes up, and my awareness of its doing so, are subtracted from the fact that I raise my arm, and that something is an activity of the mind of which I have an awareness—an awareness *as a doing*.¹⁷

Consider (3). As the meditator observes:

Now there is in me a passive faculty of sensory perception, that is, a faculty for receiving and recognizing the ideas of sensible objects; but I could not make use of it unless there was also an active faculty,

¹⁷Since the nature of thought and thinking substance remains the same whether one is awake or asleep, the implications of and (2) and (2)' extend not only to waking experiences but to dream experiences as well (cf. *Principles* I.9).

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either in me or in something else, which produced or brought about these ideas. (AT 7:79, CSM 2:54–55)

That the faculty of sensing is passive would not have been challenged by Descartes's contemporaries, as the tradition of holding that the senses require stimulation in order to produce sense perception dates back to the ancients. Quite aside from the tradition, introspection reveals, of the seemingly adventitious ideas that the meditator calls 'sensory', that they are not activities of his mind.

The claim in (4) is a consequence of (2)' and (3).¹⁸ Given that my awareness of intellectual operations extends to whether they are active, I would be aware of *bringing about* my sensory ideas, were they being actively caused by some faculty of me (qua thinking thing).

The justification of (5) comes by means of introspection. On the occasion of involuntary sensory ideas, I take a phenomenological inventory of my mind, and find that the active cause of the ideas is not there.¹⁹ Indeed, to say that a sensory experience is involuntary is just to say that I am aware of no activity of mine that is bringing it about—Descartes holds, of the mind, that “only its volitions are activities” (AT 4:113–14, CSMK 232).

(6) follows from (4) and (5). Since I am not aware of any *doings* whose contents specify the bringing about of the sensory ideas in question, no such activity is in me.²⁰ And this establishes the External Cause Thesis.

¹⁸There is, of course, an additional assumption involved in the inference, namely, that the operations of the active faculty in question are simultaneous with the sensory ideas in relation to which they are active. Since Descartes rejects the possibility of action at a (temporal) distance, he supposes “it is contradictory that there should be a passivity without an activity for even a single moment” (AT 3:428, CSMK 193).

¹⁹In the case of *voluntary* sensory ideas (voluntary imaginings), I *am* aware of an active cause. Descartes holds that brain events are also active with respect to these ideas, since the needed memory is located in the brain (cf. *Passions* I.1 on the relational aspect of the action-passion distinction). But in such cases, my volitional activity provides what is, in effect, the triggering active cause.

²⁰Now one might worry that this interference does not go through, since it may be possible that acts of willing are sometimes unsuccessful, as in the following scenario: Suppose I am aware of the *doing* that aims at bringing about the idea of a triangle, and yet, unknown to me, this same activity turns out to be the active cause of the sensory ideas that I take as “involuntary.” If this is possible, then one might have volitional awareness

But this faculty cannot be in me, since clearly it presupposes no intellectual act on my part, and the ideas in question are produced without my cooperation and often even against my 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 (as I have just noted).²¹ (AT 7:79, CSM 2:54–55)

By introspection, then, the meditator is able to deal with the two remaining options invoked by UFD concerning the relationship between his own thought and the faculty causing his involuntary sensory ideas of body:²² both (c) and (d) can now be ruled out with respect to the *active* faculty causing these sensory ideas. Having established that his *whole* essence is thought, the argument by introspection now succeeds where the Third Meditation effort failed.

Before moving on to the third stage of the argument, I want to point out that there is nothing said, in the second stage, that is incompatible with the theory of innate ideas, even though Des-

of the sort specified in (2)' without thereby being aware of *which* passivities the volition was in fact bringing about. One obvious solution would be to further strengthen the transparency doctrine so as to allow for an awareness of mental-to-mental causal relations. I suspect that Descartes holds some such account, but since the texts are inconclusive I have relied on the weaker statement of the doctrine in (2)'.

²¹In the *Principles* II.1 version of the argument for the Corporeal Existence Thesis, Descartes appears to arrive hastily at the External Cause Thesis—in a manner quite insufficient to rule out UFD—and then focus primarily on what is, in the Sixth Meditation account, the third stage. But in fact the *Principles* account is not so reckless as this: the counterpart to the first stage (of the *Meditations* account) is established in *Principles* I.8, and the transparency of mind is elucidated in I.9. These establish the central claims that would be needed to rule out UFD.

Bear in mind, as well, that the two works are written in very different styles—the *Meditations* is written much more according to the method of analysis than is the *Principles*. The Sixth Meditation account occurs in the context of a highly systematic treatment of radical doubt, which is given only perfunctory treatment in the *Principles*. Whereas proving the incorporeality of the mind and its real distinction from the body are important metaphysical tasks in the *Meditations*, Descartes treats them in summary form in the *Principles*. This is consistent with his characterization of the latter (that is, that portion in which such matters are treated) as an abridged version of the material in the *Meditations* (AT 5:291).

²²Namely, (c) the faculty is a mode of his thought, and (d) the faculty just is his thought.

cartes characterizes innate ideas not only as potentialities or faculties (AT 8b:361), but as faculties which simple introspection may not reveal. In his reply to Hobbes, Descartes clarifies that “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 7:189, CSM 2:132). Yet, according to Descartes, though we are potentially aware of the eternal truths with which God has stocked our minds, in many cases we remain unaware of them (*Principles* I.49–50). As he writes to Hyperaspistes (August 1641), “I do not doubt that everyone has within himself an implicit idea of God, that is to say, an aptitude to perceive it explicitly; but I am not surprised that not everyone is aware that he has it or notices that he has it. Some people will perhaps not notice it even after reading my *Meditations* a thousand times” (AT 3:430, CSMK 194). As we have seen, the transparency doctrine is incompatible with unknown operations, but it does not rule out the possibility of unknown faculties that remain merely potential (cf. AT 7:246–47). The argument of the second stage, then, is not intended to rule out all unknown faculties, but only the possibility that an unknown faculty is an actor in the production of our involuntary sensory ideas. And this is enough to refute UFD, at least insofar as UFD induces a *fully* nativist explanation of these sensory ideas: whether we are awake or asleep, the active cause of our involuntary sensory ideas must come from something external, though an *otherwise* nativist account remains a possibility.

We now have two of the three stages of Descartes’s argument for the Corporeal Existence Thesis. Granting that he has shown the *externality* of the cause of involuntary sensory ideas, Descartes needs only to establish its *corporeality*; his argument for this occurs in the third stage. Since it is the second stage that is of interest to the thesis that I am pursuing in this paper, my treatment of the third stage will be cursory.²³

- (7) The active faculty causing my involuntary sensory ideas of corporeal substance is one of the following:

²³For a more elaborate treatment see Daniel Garber’s *Descartes’ Metaphysical Physics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 71ff.

- (i) corporeal substance,
 - (ii) some other created substance (external to me), or
 - (iii) God. [(1),(6)]
- (8) Since God is no deceiver, (ii) and (iii) are ruled out.
- (9) The active faculty causing my involuntary sensory ideas of corporeal substance is corporeal substance. [(7),(8)]

The options in (7) are intended to be exhaustive. That they are follows in part from (6)—having ruled out the possibility of an active cause internal to the meditator; in part from (1)—corporeal substance turns out to be external to the meditator; and in part from having proven, in the Third Meditation, that he (the meditator) is not God.

The key to this stage of the argument is the appeal to divine benevolence in (8), an appeal that presupposes elements of the theodicy earlier worked out in the Fourth Meditation.²⁴ Granting (8), (9) follows, and with it the truth of the Corporeal Existence Thesis.

But since God is not a deceiver, it is quite clear that he does not transmit the ideas to me either directly from himself, or indirectly, via some creature which contains the objective reality of the ideas not formally but only eminently. For God has given me no faculty at all for recognizing any such source for these ideas; on the contrary,

²⁴In my “Cartesian Theodicy and the Criterion of Truth” (unpublished), I offer an analysis of the Fourth Meditation theodicy Descartes relies on here. One consequence of the theodicy is that God (as an essentially omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being) is compatible only with those judgment errors that we have the capacity to correct. Since, then, we are inclined to think (concerning the options in (7)) that (i) is the case rather than (ii) or (iii), and we are incapable of correcting our error (on the assumption that we are in error), it follows that we are not in error—since “God is not a deceiver,” there is a “consequent impossibility of there being any falsity in [our] opinions which cannot be corrected by some other faculty supplied by God” (AT 7:80, CSM 2:55–56). This explains, in part, why UFD is not included as a fourth option in (7) and eliminated along with (ii) and (iii) by the appeal to benevolence in (8): on the assumption that an unknown mental faculty is the active cause of our involuntary sensory ideas, and thus that (i) is false, we *do* have the capacity, thinks Descartes, for correcting the resulting error—namely, by means of introspection, as occurred in the second stage of the argument.

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he has given me a great propensity to believe that they are produced by corporeal things. So I do not see how God could be understood to be anything but a deceiver if the ideas were transmitted from a source other than corporeal things. It follows that corporeal things exist. (AT 7:79–80, CSM 2:55)

The argument establishes that the active cause of *all* involuntary sensory ideas is corporeal substance, and it does so even though the meditator is not yet sure what his own body is like (assuming he has one). Descartes holds that even nonveridical, involuntary sensory ideas are actively caused by corporeal substance, as he explains in the *Passions*:

Among the perceptions caused by the [human] body, most of them depend on the nerves. But there are some which do not and which, like those I have just described [voluntary imaginings], are called 'imaginings'. These differ from the others, however, in that our will is not used in forming them. Accordingly they cannot be numbered among the actions of the soul, for they arise simply from the fact that the spirits, being agitated in various different ways and coming upon the traces of various impressions which have preceded them in the brain, make their way by chance through certain pores rather than others. Such are the illusions of our dreams and also the day-dreams we often have when we are awake and our mind wanders idly without applying itself to anything of its own accord.²⁵ (AT 11:344–45, CSM 1:336)

Indeed, it is critical that the argument apply to the case of dreams, since at this stage of the Sixth Meditation the meditator has not yet ruled out the possibility that he is at present asleep.²⁶

2. The Standard Interpretation Revisited

Recall that according to the standard interpretation,

(A) skeptical doubts about the Corporeal Existence Thesis

²⁵Cf. also AT 6:141 and 3:424–25. To the extent that dreams are thought to be actively caused by the motion of various spirits, humors, and vapors in the body, Descartes is in agreement with the Aristotelian view (cf. *Summa Theologica* 1a.111.3, 1a.84.8, and *De Somniss* II 461a).

²⁶The supposition that he might be asleep begins in the First Meditation (cf. AT 7:19 and 7:23) and remains in place until the very end of the Sixth Meditation where it is then challenged (AT 7:89f.).

are generated only by means of the Deceiver Hypothesis, and

- (B) these same doubts are dismissed (in the Sixth Meditation) by means of a straightforward undoing of the First Meditation skeptical problem—corporeal substance must be the cause of our sensory ideas, since God has been shown to be no deceiver.

The foregoing analysis of the Sixth Meditation argument shows that (B) is in fact false. Rather than straightforwardly undoing the external world doubts (which by hypothesis have been) engendered by the Deceiver Hypothesis, the argument proceeds in an exceedingly circuitous manner—one which leaves room for the possibility of a mitigated version of nativism. In fact, I want to argue, (B) must be false on pain of undermining Descartes's theory of innate ideas.

Distinguish the following two causal claims:

- (10) The active cause of my sensory ideas lies with external, corporeal substance.
(11) The ultimate source of the images in my sensory ideas lies with external, corporeal substance.

The skeptical device that questions the Corporeal Existence Thesis must call (11) into doubt—not merely (10)—since that any external, corporeal matter is involved at any stage in the production of my sensory ideas entails the truth of the thesis, and since many of Descartes's readers hold that there is nothing in the intellect which was not previously in the senses.²⁷ Granting (A), then if (B) were true—that is, if the Sixth Meditation proof were a straightforward undoing of the First Meditation worry—the conclusion of the Sixth Meditation argument would entail that (11) is true—at least, to the extent that one initially held to some version of (11);²⁸ moreover, its truth could be established directly,

²⁷Indeed, Descartes intends the meditator to be, in part, a spokesperson for the Aristotelian: "I had nothing at all in the intellect which I had not previously had in sensation" (AT 7:75, CSM 2:52). See note 55 below.

²⁸It would, since if *X* provides my *only* grounds for doubting *Y* or *Z*, then subsequent to establishing that not-*X*, I no longer have grounds for doubting *Y* or *Z*.

rather than by means of the oblique strategy actually employed—one which focuses on the active cause of our sensory ideas. But as we have seen, not only is Descartes's argument not direct, its conclusion only establishes (10). (11) never is reinstated in the *Meditations*, and there is good reason for this: (11) is incompatible with the theory of innate ideas. Descartes holds not only that the quantitative ideas of geometry are innate, but that “the ideas of pain, colours, sounds and the like must be all the more innate if, on the occasion of certain corporeal motions, our mind is to be capable of representing them to itself, for there is no similarity between these ideas and the corporeal motions” (AT 8b:359, CSM 1:304).²⁹

This very same defect that encumbers (B) also forestalls any effort to salvage the standard interpretation even as far as (A). Whether or not the meditator bothers to take explicit notice, the truth of (11) remains a consequence of divine benevolence so long as the Deceiver Hypothesis (as the standard interpreter holds) offers the only grounds for questioning (11).

This tension with the theory of innateness could be resolved, if the meditator had grounds, independent of the Deceiver Hypothesis, for doubting (10) and (11). In that case, so long as only a belief of (10) were specifically restored, there would be room for Cartesian nativism. It is not mere happenstance that in his Sixth Meditation argument, Descartes leaves UFD intact to an extent that allows for a mitigated version of nativism. Nor is it coincidence that UFD is a sufficiently potent skeptical device to undermine the Corporeal Existence Thesis: by questioning the External Cause Thesis, UFD thereby casts doubt on the Corporeal Existence Thesis, since the very motivation for the belief in an external, corporeal world stems from the belief that we have sensory interaction with such a world.³⁰ In section 4, I argue that UFD is in fact Descartes's trump card in generating the problem of the external, corporeal world, and I defend the following interpretive hypothesis in opposition to (A):

(C) Skeptical doubts about the Corporeal Existence Thesis are initially raised (in the First Meditation) in the mad-

²⁹Cf. also *Optics*, AT 6:130–31, and *Principles* IV.198.

³⁰This holds all the more for Descartes's Aristotelian audience.

ness and dreaming passage, in connection with a worry about unknown faculties.

In the two clearest texts dealing with UFD, the worry about an unknown faculty is explicitly referred to dreams: “There may be some other faculty not yet fully known to me, which produces these [sensory] ideas without any assistance from external things; this is, after all, just how I have always thought ideas are produced in me when I am dreaming” (AT 7:39, CSM 2:27). In the Second Meditation, skeptical doubts about the Corporeal Existence Thesis are also referred to dreams: “Now I know for certain both that I exist and at the same time that all such images [of corporeal things] and, in general, everything relating to the nature of body, could be mere dreams” (AT 7:28, CSM 2:19).

Up to now, I have argued that (B) is false and that its complement (A) has less explanatory value than (C) vis-à-vis the theory of innate ideas. In section 4, I shall argue that (C) has more explanatory value than (A) vis-à-vis the relevant First Meditation (and other Cartesian) texts. But first I want to establish that there is important historical precedent associating UFD with madness and dreaming, an association I later exploit in my defense of (C).

3. Madness and Dreaming: The Skeptical Tradition

The Academy opposed the Stoic doctrine according to which there is a class of privileged perceptions immune to error—the so-called cognitive or kataleptic impressions.³¹ As an essential part of the Stoic doctrine, nonveridical presentations could never be confused with cognitive impressions, a view that was systematically attacked by the Academics (led by Arcesilas and later by Carneades). Cicero reports that those in the Academy would

first attempt to show the possibility that many things may appear to exist that are absolutely non-existent, since the mind is deceptively

³¹For a careful treatment of this debate, see Michael Frede, “Stoics and Sceptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions,” in *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). It is worth noting that the Stoic cognitive impressions are a precursor to Descartes’s own clear and distinct perception.

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affected by non-existent objects in the same manner as it is affected by real ones. (*Academica* II 47)³²

This strategy was thought to undermine the Stoic doctrine of the inerrancy of cognitive impressions:

Some presentations are true, others false;³³ and what is false cannot be perceived. But a true presentation is invariably of such a sort that a false presentation also could be of exactly the same sort; and among presentations of such a sort that there is no difference between them, it cannot occur that some are capable of being perceived and others are not. Therefore there is no presentation that is capable of being perceived. (*Acad.* II 40–41)

The claim here brings to mind a version of Leibniz's principle of substitutivity applied to perceptual indistinguishables: if there are instances from two different classes of sensory perceptions which are qualitatively indistinguishable, we are justified in inferring exactly the same things from the one class as from the other.³⁴ I shall call this the Academic Skeptical Thesis (AST):

AST: If some sensory experiences of kind *X* are qualitatively indistinguishable from those of kind *Y*, and I have reason to suppose that those of kind *X* are produced in an untrustworthy manner, then I have reason to worry that those of kind *Y* may be produced in an equally untrustworthy manner.³⁵

³²From the H. Rackham translation (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933).

³³While we take *true* and *false* to be properties of propositions, the ancients took them to be properties of perceptions as well (cf. our use of 'veridical' and 'nonveridical').

³⁴Cf. also *Acad.* II 56–58 and 49–50.

³⁵If, for any *X*-type experience, it were wholly indistinguishable from any *Y*-type experience, the supposition that these really are distinct kinds would be problematic. (Cf., e.g., J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), chap. 5.) But the Academics did not deny that there are sufficient grounds for us to make discriminations between the two kinds of experiences in order to classify them as distinct; consider, for instance, that we discriminate between those experiences we call dreams and those we call waking, in part, on the basis of waking-up experiences (cf. *Acad.* II 51–52).

According to AST, we would be unjustified in inferring that external objects cause the sensory experiences we take as normal, waking ones, if there were a second class of experiences, qualitatively indistinguishable from the first, for which we were unwilling to make such an inference—"the man who has a presentation of the true and the false that is common to both cannot have any criterion or any mark of truth at all" (*Acad.* II 33).³⁶

Since there are such classes of nonveridical perceptions (qualitatively indistinguishable from those we take as normal and waking), the veracity of normal perception was called into doubt in accordance with AST. The classes of perceptions that the Academics cited were those experienced in madness and dreams.³⁷

³⁶In this respect, the strategy of the Academics differs from a standard Pyrrhonian tactic with respect to the reality of sensible objects. While the skeptical attitude of the Academics towards cognitive impression is based on *similarity*, the Pyrrhonian attitude in such contexts is typically based on *difference*. The Pyrrhonian suspends judgment towards both *x* and *y*, since they differ and there is no criterion for preferring the one over the other—as with the tower in the distance that appears round from one perspective while square from another. Cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* I 87–89, 100–17, II 53–54, and 58–60.

³⁷Note also that Thomas cites Augustine as appealing to the following argument, one that undermines the veracity of the senses by appeal to madness and dreams:

[E]verything that we sense by means of the body we also receive in images, even when the things are not present to the senses (as for instance in sleep or in a rage). Yet we cannot distinguish by means of the senses whether we are perceiving the sensible things themselves or false images, and nothing can be perceived which is indistinguishable from what is false. (*Summa* 1a.84.6, trans. Paul T. Durbin (Blackfriars edition, 1964, vol. 12))

And Henry of Ghent appealed to the following version of AST:

No-one possesses certain and infallible knowledge of the truth unless he can distinguish the truth from what has only the appearance of truth, for if he is unable to tell the true from the false or from what appears to be true, he can still be in doubt whether he is being deceived or not. (Scotus, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Allan Wolter (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 101.)

Henry was later challenged on this by John Duns Scotus; at issue between them were the perceptions of madness and dreaming (cf. *ibid.*, 118f.). (For an informative study of Henry's familiarity with Cicero's *Academica*, see Charles B. Schmitt's *Cicero Scepticus: A Study of the Influence of the Academica in the Renaissance* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972), 39–41.)

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Then, since the mind is capable of entirely self-originated motion, as is manifest by our faculty of mental imagination and by the visions that sometimes appear to men either when asleep or mad, it is probable that the mind may also be set in motion in such a manner that not only it cannot distinguish whether the presentations in question [the Stoic cognitive impressions] are true or false but that there really is no difference at all between them: just as if people were to shiver and turn pale either of themselves as a result of some mental emotion or in consequence of encountering some terrifying external object, with nothing to distinguish between the two kinds of shivering and pallor, and without any difference between the internal state of feeling and the one that came from without. (*Acad.* II 48)

The claim, here, is that some faculty or potentiality of the mind might be responsible for cognitive impressions, just as some such faculty was thought responsible for the presentations experienced by madmen and dreamers. The *entirely self-originated motion* remark suggests a total lack of assistance from external objects, the (full) causal story being referred to some internal capacity. We have here an occurrence of UFD being generated from AST in conjunction with an appeal to madness and dreaming.³⁸

According to Cicero's account, the Stoics, recognizing what was at stake, responded to the skeptical arguments of the Academy by obstinately rejecting the claim of indistinguishability:

Consequently there is only one way of routing the difficulty about

³⁸In the later Montaigne, who was influenced by both the Pyrrhonian and the Academic traditions, we find an appeal to dreaming which (like that in the Academics) invokes the skeptical worry that the very same kind of mental capacities or faculties that account for sleeping experiences may also account for waking ones:

Those who have compared our life to a dream were perhaps more right than they thought. When we dream, our soul lives, acts, exercises all her faculties, neither more nor less than when she is awake . . . Since our reason and our soul accept the fancies and opinions which arise in it while sleeping, and authorize the actions of our dreams with the same approbation as they do those of the day, why do we not consider the possibility that our thinking, our acting, may be another sort of dreaming, and our waking another kind of sleep? ("Apology for Raymond Sebond," in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 451)

Notice there is an implicit appeal, here, to something like AST: since in sleep it seems I am awake, perhaps my waking experiences are no more credible than my sleeping experiences.

unreal presentations, whether depicted by the imagination, which we admit frequently to take place, or in slumber or under the influence of wine or of insanity: we shall declare that all presentations of this nature are devoid of perspicuity, to which we are bound to cling tooth and nail. For who when feigning to himself an imaginary picture of some object, the moment he bestirs himself and recalls his self-consciousness does not at once perceive the difference between perspicuous presentations and unreal ones? The same applies to dreams. (*Acad.* II 51)³⁹

Arcesilas, in turn, pressed the arguments showing “that no presentation proceeding from a true object is such that a presentation proceeding from a false one might not also be of the same form,” and, continues Cicero, “this is the one argument that has held the field down to the present day” (*Acad.* II 77–78).⁴⁰

As I hope to show, it is no coincidence that Descartes appeals to madness and dreaming in the First Meditation. In his Second Replies, he informs us not only of his familiarity with the skeptical literature,⁴¹ but also that he views his own First Meditation arguments as a rehash of the arguments of the Academics and Sceptics (AT 7:130); he adds, in the Third Replies, that he “was not trying to sell them as novelties” (AT 7:171, CSM 2:121).⁴²

³⁹Cf. also *Acad.* II 52–54.

⁴⁰In their later sequel to the Academic-Stoic debate, Scotus took much the same position as the Stoics (in his response to Henry of Ghent): Scotus denied that the experiences of dreams and madness are in fact indistinguishable from waking experiences (*Philosophical Writings*, 118–19).

⁴¹And there is additional evidence, in his correspondence, of a familiarity with Cicero, Augustine, Montaigne, and others from the skeptical tradition. In his *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), chap. 9, Richard H. Popkin discusses Descartes’s precursors from the skeptical tradition. See also Curley’s *Descartes Against the Sceptics*, chap. 1, where he amplifies on a number of striking parallels between Montaigne and Descartes.

⁴²M. F. Burnyeat, in “Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed,” *Philosophical Review* 91 (1982): 3–40, has argued that no ancient skeptic worried that the whole totality of our sensory perceptions might be false (that idealism might be true and there might be no external world). Given the scope of Cartesian doubt, says Burnyeat, if it is the result of a “rehash of ancient skepticism, the implied claim is that the traditional material supports a doubt more radical than the traditional skeptic had dared suppose” (37). First, I should point out that in my remarks, thus far, I have made only the relatively weak claim that in Cicero we find ancient skeptics who appealed to madness and dreaming in order to generate a worry akin to UFD. But this is not (yet) the radical Cartesian doubt that Burnyeat has in mind, a doubt that carries with it the Cartesian

4. Madness and Dreaming: Unknown Faculties in the First Meditation

I want now to defend a reading of the First Meditation madness and dreaming passage according to which Descartes is proposing a skeptical argument, for UFD, similar to that presented by Cicero. And by establishing UFD, the argument serves as the initial ground of the meditator's doubts concerning the Corporeal Existence Thesis. I shall hereafter refer to the following as the Unknown Faculty Argument:⁴³

(AST) If some sensory experiences of kind *X* are qualitatively indistinguishable from those of kind *Y*, and I have reason to suppose that those of kind *X* are produced in an untrustworthy manner, then I have reason to worry that those of kind *Y* may be produced in an equally untrustworthy manner.

view of the mind. Despite, however, that in my presentation thus far I am not at odds with Burnyeat, it seems to me that Burnyeat's thesis is worth disputing. In his *Contra Academicos* (bk. III, chaps. 10–11), Augustine attributes to Carneades a skepticism about the existence of the world—a worry his Carneades raises on the basis of a consideration of madness and dreaming. In his rejoinder to Carneades, Augustine argues that we cannot doubt the existence of the world so long as we limit 'world' to the scope of appearances. Since, then (as Burnyeat concedes (28–29)), we find in Augustine a notion of the mental which is similar to that of the later Descartes (one that turns on the subjectivity of experience), it is not so obvious that the more radical "Cartesian" doubt was a later invention. While there seems little doubt that Descartes's use of 'idea' is an innovation, the worry that we are trapped behind a veil of mind-stuff or dream-stuff (whatever these turn out to be) seems not to be.

⁴³Wilson (*Descartes*, 17ff.) has also noticed that the usual treatments of the dreaming passage seem not to capture Descartes's full intent, and the differences between my Unknown Faculty Argument and her interpretation of the dreaming passage may appear to be only cosmetic. While I am motivated by many of the same considerations that worry her, the differences between us are in fact substantial. First, on her reading the dreaming passage is *not* instrumental in raising doubts about the Corporeal Existence Thesis. Second, she does not read the madness passage nor the painter analogy as part of the argument of the dreaming passage. Third, she identifies no connection between the dreaming passage and (what I am calling) UFD. And fourth, she conflates (in both her First and Sixth Meditation treatments) what I take Descartes to intend as two distinct dream-related skeptical doubts. My own position on each of these four counts emerges at various stages of the present paper.

- (12) There are sensory experiences that I take to be non-veridical that are qualitatively indistinguishable from those that I take as normal and waking.
- (13) The experiences in (12) that I take to be nonveridical may be produced by some unknown internal faculty (without any assistance from external things).
- (UFD) I have reason to worry that the sensory experiences that I take as normal and waking are produced by some unknown, internal faculty (without any assistance from external things). [(AST),(12),(13)]

Before looking to the relevant First Meditation passages, I want to look briefly at other texts that suggest my Unknown Faculty Argument. First, consider that, while reiterating his earlier First Meditation doubts, the Sixth Meditation meditator says:

[E]very sensory experience I have ever thought I was having while awake I can also think of myself as sometimes having while asleep; and since I do not believe that what I seem to perceive in sleep comes from things located outside me, I did not see why I should be any more inclined to believe this of what I think I perceive while awake. (AT 7:77, CSM 2:53)

This just is the Unknown Faculty Argument with AST left implicit and (12) instantiated by the case of dreams. Second, notice that Hobbes, in the Third Objections, reads the Unknown Faculty Argument into the First Meditation and supposes that it undermines the Corporeal Existence Thesis—neither move is protested by Descartes:

From what is said in [the First] Meditation it is clear enough that there is no criterion enabling us to distinguish our dreams from the waking state and from veridical sensations. And hence the images we have when we are awake and having sensations are not accidents that inhere in external objects, and are no proof that any such external object exists at all. So if we follow our senses, without exercising our reason in any way, we shall be justified in doubting whether anything exists. (AT 7:171, CSM 2:121)

Third, the dream passages in the *Discourse* and in the *Principles* both

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suggest the Unknown Faculty Argument. In the *Discourse*, Descartes writes:

Lastly, considering that the very thoughts we have while awake may also occur while we sleep without any of them being at the that [sic] time true, I resolved to pretend that all the things that had ever entered my mind were no more true than the illusions of my dreams.⁴⁴ (AT 6:32, CSM 1:127)

And in the *Principles* I.4, Descartes infers that we have reason to doubt “about the existence of the objects of sense-perception,” since “in our sleep we regularly seem to have sensory perception of, or to imagine, countless things which do not exist anywhere; and . . . there seem to be no marks by means of which we can with certainty distinguish being asleep from being awake” (AT 8a:5–6, CSM 1:194).

Moving on to the First Meditation dialectic itself,⁴⁵ consider the first premise of the Unknown Faculty Argument. Descartes does not explicitly state AST in the First Meditation. But since it is not explicitly stated in any of the other texts just cited, this is hardly an objection to my reading.

As with the Academics, Descartes’s case for (12) is based on an appeal to madness and dreaming. He begins with madness:

Yet although the senses occasionally deceive us with respect to objects which are very small or in the distance, there are many other beliefs about which doubt is quite impossible, even though they are derived from the senses—for example, that I am here, sitting by the fire, wearing a winter dressing-down, holding this piece of paper in my hands, and so on. (Again, these hands, and my whole body—how can their existence be denied?)⁴⁶ Unless perhaps I were to liken myself

⁴⁴In the *Discourse*, the option of supposing that the Corporeal Existence Thesis is called into question by the Deceiver Hypothesis is not available, since the Deceiver Hypothesis is never introduced.

⁴⁵In my interpretation, I rely heavily on the view that in the *Meditations*, Descartes often advances his doctrines in dialectical fashion; cf. E. M. Curley, “Analysis in the *Meditations*: The Quest for Clear and Distinct Ideas,” in *Essays on Descartes’ Meditations*, ed. Amélie O. Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 157f. More specifically, I understand the First Meditation skeptical arguments to mature by means of skeptical proposals followed by protests followed by rejoinders or revisions.

⁴⁶I have relied on the Anscombe-Geach translation here (in the angle brackets). CSM render *Manus vero has ipsas, totumque hoc corpus meum esse*,

to madmen, whose brains are so damaged by the persistent vapours of melancholia that they firmly maintain they are kings when they are paupers, or say they are dressed in purple when they are naked, or that their heads are made of earthen ware, or that they are pumpkins, or made of glass. But such people are insane, and I would be thought equally mad if I took anything from them as a model for myself. (AT 7:18–19, CSM 2:13)

As typically read, the madness passage presents us with an interpretive dilemma. According to the usual reading, Descartes is here proposing the worry that we might *actually be* mad. If so, then either Descartes thinks he is dismissing the worry in the brief, closing remark of this passage, or he does not (as the subsequent paragraph can be read to suggest). If we suppose that Descartes intends to dismiss the worry here, his effort is deficient; given his procedure of methodological doubt, Descartes owes us much more than the summary refutation here offered.⁴⁷ On the other hand, if we

qua ratione posset negari? as ‘Again, how could it be denied that these hands or this whole body are mine?’ But the translation is strained. First, the singular *meum* is taken as the complement of the plural ‘these hands and body’ rather than as the complement of the singular ‘this body’. Second, the context favors Anscombe-Geach. The meditator’s worry is not whether his body is *his*. None of the examples suggest this. Moreover, the passage indicates that the worry initially raised by madness is renewed after consideration of dreaming. Yet dreaming is not typically taken as questioning whether our apparent bodies are ours. Nor does the conclusion drawn from the dreaming passage suggest that it is. Rather, the conclusion drawn suggests a worry about existence.

It is true that the French version supports the CSM translation: *Et comment est-ce que je pourrais nier que ces mains et ce corps soient à moi . . . ?* But notice that at the end of the dreaming passage *nec forte etiam nos habere tales manus, nec tale totum corpus* is rendered by the French version as *et pensons que peut-être nos mains ni tout notre corps ne sont pas tels que nous les voyons*—again changing the worry from one about the existence of objects to one about their nature. Burman, on the other hand, reports Descartes as saying of the entire passage that it is “dealing primarily with the question of whether anything has real existence” (AT 5:146, CSMK 333). I am aware of no decisive grounds for treating Burman as any more or less authoritative than the French version of the *Meditations*.

⁴⁷Anthony Kenny, in his *Descartes: A Study of His Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1968), suggests that the madness worry is “not pursued, possibly because it might seem offensive to the reader” (29). Wilson notes that the dismissal of the madness worry is “rather arbitrary” given that Descartes “is prepared to doubt that he’s awake” (*Descartes*, 23). And Harry Frankfurt, in *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), proposes that Descartes “simply dismisses the possibility of his own madness with the remark that it would not be reasonable for him to en-

suppose that Descartes is not here dismissing the worry, then we are left with the problem of understanding why he thinks the observation (in the subsequent paragraph) that we sometimes have crazy dreams is supposed to motivate the worry that we are insane.

This dilemma can be avoided, as the text supports an alternative reading. Rather than the worry that I might actually be mad, the worry is that for all I know my own sensory perception may be no more veracious, being on no better footing,⁴⁸ than that of the madman. The assumption is that while madmen take their own sensory experience as normal and veridical—as do we—the rest of us know they are deranged, as Descartes’s examples convey: they perceive themselves as “dressed in purple when they are naked,” or even “that they are pumpkins.” The aim of the doubt is to make the meditator worry that his own sane world is no better connected with external reality than the madman’s world. And as such, the appeal to madness seems best thought of as the initial skeptical proposal—intended to support (12) and (13)—in the larger dialectic of the passage.

The meditator flippantly dismisses the comparison to the madman, only to renew it promptly as the dialectic proceeds to a consideration of dreams. At first glance, the very suggestion that insanity serves as a suitable benchmark for appraising his own sanity seems absurd. On second thought, however, the meditator notices that his own dream experiences are at least as bizarre as those he calls insane.

tain it” (37). According to Frankfurt, in raising the problem of madness Descartes has raised a worry about reason itself. And, thinks Frankfurt, the meditator cannot but assume his own sanity, for “if he were to begin by suspending the judgment that he is reasonable, he would be unable ever to reestablish his confidence in his own ability to carry out his task. For if he were to entertain doubts about his own rationality, he would naturally be bound to suspect any reasoning by which he might attempt to establish his sanity” (38). Granting Frankfurt’s reading, it should surprise us that Descartes reintroduces the worry about reason itself in conjunction with the Deceiver Hypothesis (as Frankfurt holds). Frankfurt’s eventual explanation is that the meditator “properly supposes himself free of all defects or deficiencies that would render him *less qualified than others* to conduct the inquiry [as in madness]. But he does not, of course, suppose that he is exempt from incapacities *uniformly affecting all human minds* [as suggested by the Deceiver Hypothesis]” (83, italics mine).

⁴⁸*nisi me forte comparem nescio quibus insanis . . .* (AT 7:18).

A brilliant piece of reasoning! As if I were not a man who sleeps at night, and regularly has all the same experiences while asleep as madmen do when awake—indeed sometimes even more improbable ones. (AT 7:19, CSM 2:13)

Since the initial dismissal of the comparison to the madman was justified by appeal to the disparity between madness and sanity—they think “they are pumpkins,” and the like—it is appropriate that the meditator sarcastically describes such dismissal as *a brilliant piece of reasoning* subsequent to the observation that his own dream experiences are “indeed sometimes even more improbable.”

Though Descartes views the cases of madness and dreaming as having the same skeptical force—madness being in some sense the waking counterpart to dreaming⁴⁹—he wisely presses dreaming as the paradigm case in support of (12) (focusing on it exclusively in his other less detailed treatments of the Unknown Faculty Argument).⁵⁰ The appeal to dreams is more persuasive, as everyone has experienced a realistic dream.

⁴⁹Cf. the *Optics*, where he explains that at the level of physiology the (active) causal mechanism of each is largely the same (AT 6:141).

⁵⁰An exception is *The Search for Truth*, where Descartes again raises the madness worry. Eudoxus (Descartes’s spokesperson) asks of Polyander, have you

never seen one of those melancholic individuals who think themselves to be vases, or take some part of their body to be enormous; they will swear that what they see and touch is just as they imagine it to be. To be sure, a good man would be indignant if you told him that his beliefs cannot have any more rational basis than theirs, since he relies, like them, on what the senses and imagination represent to him. But you cannot take it amiss if I ask whether you are not, like all men, liable to fall asleep, and whether you cannot think, while asleep, that you are seeing me, that you are walking in this garden, that the sun is shining—in brief, all the things of which you now believe you are utterly certain. Have you never heard this expression of astonishment in comedies: ‘Am I awake or asleep?’ How can you be certain that your life is not a continuous dream, and that everything you think you learn through your senses is not false now, just as much as when you are asleep? (AT 10:511–12, CSM 2:407–8)

The similarities between this account and the reading I am offering of the First Meditation are noteworthy. First, the worry here is not whether we are actually insane, but whether our sense perception might be no more reliable than that of the insane. Second, the appeal to insanity is intended to support the same claim as the appeal to dreaming. Third, the appeal to insanity is not pursued since it is less persuasive than the case of dreaming. And fourth, the argument raises the worry that some unknown faculty or potentiality of the mind may produce waking experiences in the manner that dream experiences are produced—it does so by implicit appeal to AST.

The dialectic continues:

How often, asleep at night, am I convinced of just such familiar events—that I am here in my dressing-gown, sitting by the fire—when in fact I am lying undressed in bed! Yet at the moment my eyes are certainly wide awake when I look at this piece of paper; I shake my head and it is not asleep; as I stretch out and feel my hand I do so deliberately, and I know what I am doing. All this would not happen with such distinctness to someone asleep. Indeed! As if I did not remember other occasions when I have been tricked by exactly similar thoughts while asleep! As I think about this more carefully, I see plainly that there are never any sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep. The result is that I begin to feel dazed, and this very feeling only reinforces the notion that I may be asleep. (AT 7:19, CSM 2:13)

Both the fact and the manner of Descartes's emphasis on (12) here seem best explained by the nature of the historical debate. Recall that the Stoic (antiskeptical) strategy was to "cling tooth and nail" to the claim that the presentations of madness and dreams "are devoid of perspicuity," and the response of the Academy was to stress "that no presentation proceeding from a true object is such that a presentation proceeding from a false one might not also be of the same form." Historically, then, AST has not stood in need of justification; (12) has. For the same reasons the Academics emphasized the indistinguishability claim, so does Descartes.⁵¹ Moreover, since the Stoic response to the Academy was to appeal to a lack of *perspicuity* in nonveridical perception, Descartes focuses on examples which are typically thought of as instances of notably perspicuous perceptions—such as that I am presently seated by a fire, wearing a winter robe, holding a piece of paper in my hand, etc.⁵² While the naive empiricist will readily admit deception concerning the unperspicuous perception of

⁵¹For an interesting account of how Scotus and Ockham fare against the skeptical arguments of the Academy, see Marilyn McCord Adams, *William Ockham* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), chap. 14; see especially 578 and 591f. where she concludes of both that they are specifically susceptible to the indistinguishability problem that my (12) brings out.

⁵²Cf. G. E. Moore, in his "A Defense of Common Sense," where he suggests that it is claims including precisely this sort—the location of one's body, what one is wearing, what one is holding in one's hands, etc.—which constitute "obvious truisms" that he "*know[s]*, with certainty, to be true" (*Philosophical Papers* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 32–33).

“objects which are very small or in the distance,” he is not likely to concede this of the close-up and familiar examples Descartes chooses. In effect, Descartes thinks he establishes that

(12)' There are sensory experiences that I take to be nonveridical that are qualitatively indistinguishable from those that I take as my most perspicuous,

which, if accepted, would leave little doubt in his readers that (12) is the case.

Consider (13). On the basis of the dreaming passage, Descartes advances the dialectic by having his meditator say: “Suppose then that I am dreaming, and that these particulars—that my eyes are open, that I am moving my head and stretching out my hands—are not true. Perhaps, indeed, I do not even have such hands or such a body at all” (AT 7:19, CSM 2:13). This remark seems best understood as conveying the meditator’s initial suspicion (in the larger dialectic of the passage) that the Corporeal Existence Thesis is in doubt, even though the remark does not strictly entail it. It is suggestive that in *The Search for Truth*, a similar remark (in the context of a consideration of dreams) does in fact signal the worry about the Corporeal Existence Thesis:

I shall apply my mind to the task of doubting whether I have not been dreaming all my life, and whether all the ideas I thought capable of entering my mind only by way of the senses were not in fact formed by themselves, just as similar ideas are formed whenever I am asleep, and I know that my eyes are shut, my ears closed, and in short, that none of my senses help to form them. *Thus I shall be uncertain not only about whether you are in the world and whether there is an earth or a sun; but also about whether I have eyes, ears, a body, and even whether I am speaking to you and you are speaking to me.* In short, I shall doubt everything. (AT 10:514, CSM 2:409; italics mine)

Also, in connection with (13), it is worth rehashing the meditator’s Third Meditation testimonial, since it lends support to reading (13) into the First Meditation account:

There may be some other faculty not yet fully known to me, which produces these ideas without any assistance from external things; this

is, after all, just how *I have always thought* ideas are produced in me when I am dreaming.⁵³ (AT 7:39, CSM 2:27; italics mine)

(13) does not, however, go unchallenged. While the untutored man of common sense may hold to this causal story of dreams, the same cannot be said of the Aristotelian. And so, as the First Meditation dialectic advances to its next step (the painter analogy), Descartes expounds the likely objection to (13) in order to rebut it.

Aristotelians generally held of sense images, whether those of waking sensation or those of dreams, that they are all traceable to real, external objects.⁵⁴ As Thomas writes, “The source of the imag-

⁵³What counts as *external*, and for whom, are difficult historical problems. While it is clear that, for Descartes, the external world includes even the meditator’s body, it is not so clear how to understand the pre-Cartesian meditator’s view, and his account here of dreams is problematic. Since by this stage of the Third Meditation the meditator is surely in step with the Cartesian view of externality, I suggest we take the meditator to be saying here that he has always thought that dream-stuff (whatever that turns out to be) is produced solely by means of mind-stuff (whatever that turns out to be).

Note also that ‘any’ in ‘without any assistance from external things’ [*absque ulla rerum externarum ope*] underscores an occasionally bothersome problem in the *Meditations*, that of voice. Is the meditator intended to represent the Aristotelian or the untutored man of common sense—or both? It is, after all, false of Aristotelians that they *have always thought* that the causal story behind dreams excludes any reference whatever to external, corporeal things. And in the passage just cited, from *The Search for Truth*, the speaker’s remark that all his ideas might be “formed by themselves, just as similar ideas are formed whenever [he is] asleep,” is equally unAristotelian. Interestingly, in *The Search for Truth* Descartes uses two characters, Epistemon and Polyander (an Aristotelian and a common man, respectively), in order to express the views that in the *Meditations* are expressed in the single voice of the meditator. Predictably, it is Polyander who endorses the above causal story of dreams. Perhaps less expected is that the meditator’s First Meditation claim that “whatever [he has] up till now accepted as most true [he has] acquired either from the senses or through the senses” (AT 7:18, CSM 2:12) need not tag him as Aristotelian: in the *The Search for Truth*, the very same tenet is attributed to Polyander (AT 10:510, cf. also 10:512)—Descartes, in fact, holds that everyone suffers from a preoccupation with the senses (cf. *Principles* I.71). Since in other texts, such as the painter analogy (which we are about to consider), the meditator is surely speaking on behalf of the Aristotelian, it is perhaps best to understand the meditator’s pre-Cartesian persona as schizophrenically vacillating between a schoolman and a commoner.

⁵⁴On this account, the sensible forms of the external objects of waking sensation affect the senses in a manner that Aristotle likened to a signet-ring leaving its impress on a piece of wax (*De Anima* II.12 424a), a process thought to guarantee veridicality (cf. *De Anima* III.3 427b–428a). These affections of waking sensation on the organs of sense were believed to

ination lies in the activity of the senses, for we cannot imagine what we have never perceived by the senses either wholly or in part.”⁵⁵ Thus, the phantasms occurring in dreams are the residual effect of veridical, waking sensation. And we should expect the Aristotelian to object to (13) on precisely these grounds: even in dreams, the ultimate source of the images in our sensory ideas lies with external, corporeal matter.

As a means of addressing this objection, Descartes offers an analogy between the images occurring in dreams and those on the painter’s canvas.⁵⁶ The analogy is presented in two phases: in the first phase Descartes expresses the anticipated objection to (13), and in the second he offers a rebuttal. The first phase proceeds as follows:

Suppose then that I am dreaming, and that these particulars—that my eyes are open, that I am moving my head and stretching out my hands—are not true. Perhaps, indeed, I do not even have such hands or such a body at all. Nonetheless, it must surely be admitted that the visions which come in sleep are like paintings, which must have been fashioned in the likeness [*similitudinem*] of things that are real, and hence that at least these general kinds of things—eyes, head, hands and the body as a whole—are things which are not imaginary but are real and exist. For even when painters try to create sirens and satyrs with the most extraordinary bodies, they cannot give them natures which are new in all respects; they simply jumble up the limbs of different animals. (AT 7:19-20, CSM 2:13)

In effect, the criticism is that the creative talents of the mind include renovation but not innovation. The imagination is capable of creating sirens and satyrs in sleep, but the raw materials for such artistry must trace to previous veridical sensation. In short, there must have been interaction between the senses and external objects or else our ideas of such objects are inexplicable.

Descartes’s strategy for convincing the Aristotelian to adopt (13)

remain even after sensation terminated (*De Somniis* II 459a), thereby allowing the imagination to produce phantasms in sleep. Since, in this context, ‘external’ means external to the organs of sense, this surely counts as external in the Cartesian sense.

⁵⁵*Summa Theologica*, 1a.111.3.

⁵⁶In my own understanding of the painter analogy passage, I have benefited from an unpublished paper by John Carriero, “Painting and Dreaming in the First Meditation.”

DESCARTES ON UNKNOWN FACULTIES

reflects the general method of doubt employed in the *Meditations*, a method whose ground rules are explained in the First Meditation:

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. (AT 7:18, CSM 2:12)

Accordingly, fantastic hypotheses are adopted (such as the Deceiver Hypothesis), no matter how epistemologically disastrous, so long as they are at least *prima facie* possible. The rigorous brand of knowledge Descartes is seeking in the *Meditations* moves the burden of responsibility from the skeptic's corner to that of the person claiming to have true knowledge. Thus, in his defense of (13), Descartes needs only to establish the relatively weak claim that the nativist account *cannot be ruled out*; indeed, "there may be reasons which are strong enough to compel us to doubt, even though these reasons are themselves doubtful" (AT 7:473, CSM 2:319).

In keeping with this strategy, Descartes advances the dialectic, in the second phase of the painter analogy, by offering a fully nativist account as a possible alternative to the Aristotelian account presented in the first phase:

Or if perhaps [the painters] manage to think up something so new that nothing remotely similar has ever been seen before—something which is therefore completely fictitious and unreal—at least the colours used in the composition must be real. By similar reasoning, although these general kinds of things—eyes, head, hands and so on—could be imaginary, it must at least be admitted that certain other even simpler and more universal things are real. These are as it were the real colours from which we form all the images of things, whether true or false, that occur in our thought. (AT 7:20, CSM 2:13-14)

Just as the painter need not fashion the images on her canvas after anything real and existing, perhaps also my own sensory ideas are not fashioned after anything external to my mind. Perhaps things like eyes, heads, and hands (and with them all organs of sense) are imaginary and nonexistent. But if I have no body and no senses, what is the origin of the varied and complex sensory images I

experience? Descartes's answer lies in the analogy. Since the painter needs nothing more than her simple colors as basic building blocks from which to compose more complex images, so perhaps the mind needs nothing more than simple and universal⁵⁷ ingredients from which to compose the complex ideas of sensible objects.⁵⁸ The dissociation of the meditator from his own body (suggested here in the second phase of the analogy) seems a particularly apt way of suggesting the real possibility that our sensory ideas are generated by an internal faculty. The Aristotelian has no decisive grounds for excluding the nativist account, and in the context of hyperbolic doubt this is all that is needed for (13).

The upshot of the Unknown Faculty Argument is a skepticism about the existence of the external, corporeal world: the immediate conclusion of the argument is UFD, and UFD, as we have seen, motivates the more general worry about the Corporeal Existence Thesis. Thus, as the First Meditation dialectic continues, the meditator concludes that “physics, astronomy, medicine, and all other disciplines which depend on the study of composite things, are

⁵⁷The well-known medieval debate over the nature of universals notwithstanding, all Aristotelians would have agreed that universals are objects of thought rather than of the senses.

⁵⁸The meditator proposes that the list of such simple ideas “appears to include corporeal nature in general, and its extension; the shape of extended things; the quantity, or size and number of these things; the place in which they may exist, the time through which they may endure, *and so on*” (AT 7:20, CSM 2:14; italics mine). It is not uncommon for commentators to try to read this list in light of the Cartesian doctrine concerning simple natures; cf., for instance, Jean-Luc Marion, “Cartesian Metaphysics: The Simple Nature,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, ed. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). But such readings seem implausible given that the meditator is under hyperbolic doubt: At this stage of the *Meditations*, Descartes has no right to advance any doctrines (not to mention *Cartesian* doctrines) that are not related to the procedure of doubt—especially given, as we have seen, that the meditator confesses to being an empiricist of some sort rather than a Cartesian. In conversation, Calvin Normore has suggested what seems to me a plausible account of this list, namely, that it would have likely been taken by Descartes's Aristotelian readers to be an elliptical list of Aristotle's ten categories (substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, condition, action, and passion). This suggestion complements my own reading of the passage, since the categories are, for an Aristotelian, the basic building blocks for our conceptual organization of the world; granting the possibility of the nativist account, the categories would be as a color wheel from which some mental faculty might paint the myriad images of material things.

doubtful” (AT 7:20, CSM 2:14). On my reading, they are doubtful because the proper objects of the claims made in such disciplines are the externally existing, material composites that have now been called into question.⁵⁹ Whereas

arithmetic, geometry and other subjects of this kind, which deal only with the simplest and most general things, regardless of whether they really exist in nature or not, contain something certain and indubitable. For whether I am awake or asleep, two and three added together are five, and a square has no more than four sides. (AT 7:20, CSM 2:14)

The proper objects of the claims in arithmetic and geometry are not the composite particulars that UFD has questioned; as such, they are not yet in doubt⁶⁰—a temporary circumstance with the Deceiver Hypothesis on deck.

To conclude my case for reading the Unknown Faculty Argument into the madness and dreaming passage, I want to consider a likely objection to my account. Since my reading results in the Corporeal Existence Thesis being called into doubt prior to the passage introducing the Deceiver Hypothesis, it seems not to square with the latter text:⁶¹

And yet firmly rooted in my mind is the long-standing opinion that there is an omnipotent God who made me the kind of creature that I am. How do I know that he has not brought it about that there is

⁵⁹According to Aristotelian hylomorphic theory, material objects are composites of matter and form, and the knowledge claims from the natural sciences, such as Descartes here mentions, refer to these composite sensible particulars. Says Ockham, “the philosophy of nature deals primarily with sensible substances composed of matter and form”—their propositions stand for real (external and composite) things (*Philosophical Writings*, trans. Philotheus Boehner (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1990), 11).

⁶⁰Aristotelians held that by means of abstraction the objects of mathematics can be understood apart from sensible matter (cf. *Post. Anal.* 81b, *De Anima* III.7 431b, and Thomas’s *Commentary on Boethius’ De Trinitate* q. 5). Adds Ockham, concerning the science of logic, as opposed to the other sciences, its claims refer to mental contents rather than real, material things (*Philosophical Writings*, 12).

⁶¹Cf. Wilson, who cites this as support for the standard interpretation that the Corporeal Existence Thesis is initially called into doubt only by the Deceiver Hypothesis (see note 2 above).

no earth, no sky, no extended thing, no shape, no size, no place, while at the same time ensuring that all these things appear to me to exist just as they do now? (AT 7:21, CSM 2:14)

But the objection is flawed. This text does not show that the Corporeal Existence Thesis is *initially* undermined by the Deceiver Hypothesis; it shows merely that the Deceiver Hypothesis does undermine it. But this is compatible with the view that the list of things here called into question by the Deceiver have already been questioned. On my view, the Deceiver Hypothesis is intended to bolster the previous doubts, those already raised by the weaker skeptical arguments, as well as introduce new ones.⁶² For all the meditator knows (come the end of the First Meditation), the unknown faculty actively causing his sensory ideas might be a faculty of his own mind—as with UFD—or it might be God⁶³ (cf. AT 7: 22–23). Either supposition results in a skepticism of the Corporeal Existence Thesis. And, as we have seen, the (three-stage) Sixth Meditation argument rules out both: the possibility of an unknown internal faculty as the active cause is eliminated by introspection, and the possibility that God is the active cause is ruled out in the third stage of the argument.

5. The Dreaming Argument vis-à-vis the Unknown Faculty Argument

Historically, there are two distinct dream-related skeptical problems: (i) the worry that I might now be asleep, since some expe-

⁶²In *The Search for Truth*, Descartes uses the Deceiver Hypothesis in precisely this way. He has Eudoxus say, how do you know “that everything you think you learn through your senses is not false now, just as much as when you are asleep? In particular, how can you be certain of this when you have learned that you were created by a superior being who, being all-powerful, would have found it no more difficult to create us just as I am describing, than to create us as you think you are?” (AT 10:511–12, CSM 2:408)

⁶³Interestingly, in what is perhaps the earliest known historical antecedent of the Deceiver Hypothesis, Cicero reports that one of the issues disputed by the Academics and the Stoics was the possibility of *dreams sent by a deity* who had the power to make nonveridical perception appear veridical (*Acad.* II 47). (Cf. Curley, *Descartes Against the Skeptics*, 68–69.) And in what may be a fourteenth-century antecedent, John Buridan and Nicholas of Autrecourt argued over whether an all-powerful God could deceive us by bringing it about that an even clearer perception than that produced in genuine intuitive cognition (the scholastic counterpart to the Stoic cognitive impressions) would occur in the nonveridical perceptions of dreams (see Buridan’s *Questions on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, bk. II, q.1).

riences I take as dreams are qualitatively indistinguishable from others I take as waking (a problem that dates back to at least as early as Plato's *Theaetetus*); and (ii) the worry that even if I am awake my experience may be no more veracious than when I am asleep, since I may have an unknown faculty that produces waking states in a manner similar to the way dream states are produced (a problem I have traced back as far as the Academics). The two problems are not redundant, though both are parasitic on the same qualitative indistinguishability problem. The problem in (i)—often elaborated as the Dreaming Argument—raises the *universal possibility of delusion*: any one of my sensory experiences might be nonveridical, and the attending sensory judgment false, since I might at that moment be dreaming. The problem in (ii)—which I have referred to as UFD—raises the *possibility of universal delusion*: it might be that all my sensory experiences are delusions, from a God's-eye point of view.⁶⁴

My proposal that we read UFD into the madness and dreaming passage ought not to be viewed as incompatible with holding that some Dreaming Argument such as (i) occurs in the very same passage. Not only have I nowhere questioned the occurrence of (i); the problem in (ii) on which I have focused is generated, in part, because of the indistinguishability problem in (i)—a problem that *is* introduced in the First Meditation.

Because of the differences in (i) and (ii), they are dismissed in separate Sixth Meditation arguments. Having eliminated (ii) in the proof of the Corporeal Existence Thesis, the problem in (i) remains in force, since premise (12) of the Unknown Faculty Argument stands unchallenged;⁶⁵ dreams continue to be, in some cases,

⁶⁴Though worries such as (i) and (ii) inspire charges that Cartesian doubt is incoherent (cf. O. K. Bouwsma's "Descartes' Evil Genius," *Philosophical Review* 58 (1949): 141–51), Descartes was in fact mindful of problems of verifiability and meaningfulness such as have troubled recent philosophers. For instance, in the Second Replies (AT 7:143–45), while responding to an objection that it is possible that God might be, in some absolute sense, a deceiver in spite of what reason shows, Descartes dismisses the worry since there are no conceivable grounds by which our belief in God's benevolence could be corrected. In effect, he dismisses the objection as a pseudoproblem: it is "no objection for someone to make out that [our most certain] truths might appear false to God or to an angel," and we need not "listen to anyone who makes up this kind of story" (AT 7:146, CSM 2:104). For Descartes, the problems in (i) and (ii) are meaningful, precisely because we do have the capacity to solve them.

⁶⁵The ongoing worry in (i), however, does not undermine the credibility

qualitatively indistinguishable from (what are taken as) normal, waking experiences. It is not until the very end of the Sixth Meditation that Descartes finally attempts a refutation of (i).⁶⁶ The Unknown Faculty Argument fails not because of (12), but because of (13): the meditator's prereflective view—that *in dreams his sensory ideas are produced without any assistance from external things*—is shown to be false; whether awake or asleep, the active cause of involuntary sensory ideas is external, corporeal substance. It has not been shown, however, that the passive causes of such ideas are corporeal, and this leaves room for Cartesian nativism.⁶⁷

6. Conclusion

Recall that according to the standard interpretation Descartes's treatment of the Corporeal Existence Thesis turns entirely on the Deceiver Hypothesis: doubts about the thesis are initially raised (in the First Meditation) upon introduction of the Deceiver, and the thesis is reaffirmed (in the Sixth Meditation) by a straightforward appeal to knowledge of God as no deceiver. I have challenged this interpretation, arguing instead that Descartes's treatment of the Corporeal Existence Thesis centers on UFD: doubts about the thesis are initially raised (in the First Meditation) in the madness and dreaming passage, and the thesis is reaffirmed (in the Sixth Meditation) by a three-stage argument in which a partial (but sufficiently strong) refutation of UFD by introspection is an essential step.

Descartes's treatment of UFD fits neatly into the epistemological machinery of the *Meditations*; it adds a cog to the orderly progres-

of the proof intended to refute (ii). Having argued for the existence of a God who guarantees the veracity of clear and distinct perception under all circumstances, the Fifth Meditation meditator observes: "For even though I might be dreaming, if there is anything which is evident to my intellect, then it is wholly true" (AT 7:71, CSM 2:49).

⁶⁶In "Cartesian Theodicy and the Criterion of Truth" I show that the Dreaming Argument is refuted not by challenging the indistinguishability claim in (12), but by appeal to elements of the theodicy earlier expounded in the Fourth Meditation (cf. note 25).

⁶⁷Recall that in establishing the External Cause Thesis, the Sixth Meditation argument rules out UFD only to the extent that *active* unknown mental faculties are eliminated. And while this is inconsistent with (13) as stated, some weaker version of (13)—one that allows that the active causes of sensory ideas are corporeal—remains unchallenged.

sion of First Meditation doubt that complements that existing in the orderly unfolding of knowledge in the later *Meditations*. With the addition of UFD, the skeptical dialectic of the First Meditation progresses as follows: doubts that undermine sensory judgments concerning the nature of small and distant objects leave intact judgments concerning the existence of large and close objects such as “these hands, and my whole body”; the Dreaming Argument then questions the existence of all the objects of any particular sensory experience, while leaving intact the judgment that some such objects exist; UFD then undermines the latter, though it remains the case that “two and three added together are five, and a square has no more than four sides,” and the like; finally, the radical skepticism induced by the Deceiver Hypothesis calls into doubt even the truths of mathematics. In the epistemologically constructive *Meditations*, Descartes rebuts these same skeptical arguments in reverse order, though doubts about the determinate modes of corporeal objects never are dismissed.

The concern with unknown faculties in the *Meditations* figures in Descartes’s larger concerns with the new science—though it has not here been my aim to argue this. Though the full-blown nativism that initially results from UFD is adopted solely because of its skeptical force, it nonetheless foreshadows Descartes’s own mitigated version of nativism. Descartes’s strategy is to begin with a radical skepticism of the senses and then recover knowledge only of what comports with fully mechanical explanation. UFD calls into question whether there even is an external, corporeal world—and with it, all of Aristotelian science. Descartes then reinstates our knowledge of the corporeal world, but the world that emerges from the residue of unresolved First Meditation doubt is conceived with an entirely new nature and an attenuated causal role in the production of sensory ideas: the conception of body that emerges is one stripped of all but the quantitative features amenable to mechanical explanation,⁶⁸ and one whose causal role in sensation

⁶⁸As for the qualitative features from the old conception of body, such as “that the heat in a body is something exactly resembling the idea of heat which is in me; or that when a body is white or green, the selfsame whiteness or greenness which I perceive through my senses is present in the body; or that in a body which is bitter or sweet there is the selfsame taste which I experience, and so on” (AT 7:82, CSM 2:56-57), the First Meditation doubts that undermine the judgment that such features really exist in bodies never are resolved. The Sixth Meditation meditator con-

is limited to that of an active cause. Thus, the meditator qualifies the conclusion of his Sixth Meditation proof for the Corporeal Existence Thesis by observing that the corporeal substances causing his sensory ideas “may not all exist in a way that exactly corresponds with [his] sensory grasp of them” (AT 7:80, CSM 2:55); he does so, since he has not yet ruled out the possibility that he is asleep, and since to the extent that UFD remains unresolved, it leaves in doubt whether there is any resemblance between corporeal objects as perceived and corporeal objects in themselves. In keeping with the new mechanical science, it is false that our ideas resemble⁶⁹ the corporeal motions that occasion them,⁷⁰ and Descartes reinforces the nonqualitative conception of corporeal substance in expounding elements of his own theory of innateness in the Second Meditation discussion of the wax (AT 7:30–31) and in the Fifth Meditation discussion of true and immutable natures (AT 7:63–64).⁷¹ By moving the nonquantitative features of sensation from the domain of the corporeal to the innate domain of the mental, the path is cleared for a fully mechanical science.

UFD is unique among the First Meditation skeptical arguments in that Descartes’s proposed solution is, in large part, one that need not invoke the theological baggage of the *Meditations*. The Cartesian distinction between the internal and the external—the internal world consisting of all and only the events concerning which we have (or potentially have) immediate awareness—has relevance apart from substance dualism. And granting the distinction in these terms, the second stage—(2)’ thru (6)—of Des-

cludes: “Although I feel heat when I go near a fire and feel pain when I go too near, there is no convincing argument for supposing that there is something in the fire which resembles the heat, any more than for supposing that there is something which resembles the pain. There is simply reason to suppose that there is something in the fire, whatever it may eventually turn out to be, which produces in us the feelings of heat or pain” (AT 7:83, CSM 2:57).

⁶⁹Except insofar as they have some determinable size, shape, motion, or other quantifiable features.

⁷⁰Cf. *Principles* I.71, II.4, and IV.197–98; and AT 7:81–82, 7:381–82, and 8b:359.

⁷¹In his unpublished “Descartes on the Innate Idea of Body,” Alan Nelson elaborates on this claim in his treatment of Descartes’s theory of innateness, a treatment from which I have benefited.

DESCARTES ON UNKNOWN FACULTIES

cartes's Sixth Meditation argument is an interesting contender for establishing the existence of an external world (never mind its nature).

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