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Doubt, certainty, and the Cartesian Circle.

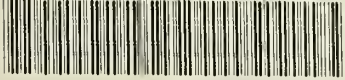
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DOUBT, CERTAINTY, AND THE CARTESIAN CIRCLE

A Dissertation Presented

By

Robert Stephen Welch, II

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

February 1983

Philosophy

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DOUBT, CERTAINTY, AND THE CARTESIAN CIRCLE

A Dissertation Presented

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There are a number of individuals to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. Each member of my committee contributed in various ways to my undertaking and completing this dissertation. I first encountered the problem of the Cartesian Circle in a seminar given by Vere Chappell. Portions of Chapters III and IV began as a paper for that seminar. Robert Sleigh provided encouragement to take on this task long after I had dropped a prior dissertation topic. In fact, without his support I would not have started all over again. Fred Feldman was particularly helpful. As my committee chairman, his suggestions for revisions and his patience and willingness to provide me with additional time to write and revise are all things for which I am grateful. It was his article, a discussion of which appears in Chapter IV, which prompted me to think in terms of distinguishing between kinds of doubt and certainty in the Meditations. James Leheny also provided encouragement, particularly when I would despair of ever completing my task. I would also like to thank the University for granting me a leave of absence to complete a second draft. There are many others to whom I am also grateful for their support, encouragement, and assistance, including Julie Lansner, who typed the final copy. Finally, a very special thanks is due to Patricia Welch

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ABSTRACT

Doubt, Certainty, and the Cartesian Circle

(February 1983)

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Ever since Arnauld and others first pointed it out in their objections to Descartes' Meditations, philosophers have concerned themselves with what appears to be a vicious circle: that the principle of clarity and distinctness which is employed to validate God's existence is itself in need of a guarantee which only God's existence can provide. In general, contemporary commentators proposing solutions to this problem can be divided into three camps: first, there are those who see reason as autonomous for Descartes and the principle of clarity and distinctness as needing no guarantee. By 'autonomy of reason' I mean that the faculty by which the Cogito and other of Descartes' first principles are perceived is not in need of any verification of its inability to err. Second, there are those who see reason as only partially autonomous for Descartes with that part validating the proof of God's existence which in turn

validates that aspect of reason which is not autonomous. Third, there are those who see reason as non-autonomous and who argue for distinctions in the concepts of certainty and doubt in order to avoid the circle.

In this dissertation I present the problem by drawing directly from the Meditations and the Objections and Replies and I outline the strategy I will employ in dealing with the problem. I proceed to discuss in turn each of the aforementioned three positions, the arguments offered by proponents of each, and the criticism of each, both my own and those found in the literature of the problem. Taking the third position, the non-autonomy of reason, as my starting point, I then present my own interpretation of Descartes' strategy which, I argue, succeeds in circumventing the problem of circular reasoning and in overcoming the objections raised against others.

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INTRODUCTION

In Meditation I Descartes sets forth reasons which will allow him to "doubt about all things. . ." ¹ and having systematically attempted to do this, turns in Meditation II to seek that which is indubitable and discovers that he, Descartes, exists as a thinking being. Using this discovery as a basis for further investigation Descartes concludes at the beginning of Meditation III that:

I am certain that I am a thing which thinks; but do I not then likewise know what is requisite to render me certain of a truth? Certainly in this first knowledge there is nothing that assures me of its truth, excepting the clear and distinct perception of that which I state, which would not indeed suffice to assure me that what I say is true, if it could ever happen that a thing which I conceived so clearly and distinctly could be false; and accordingly it seems to me that already I can establish as a general rule that all things which I perceive very clearly and very distinctly are true. ²

Having asserted the doctrine of clarity and distinctness Descartes immediately appears to cast doubt upon it.

¹The Philosophical Works of Descartes, transl. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. T. R. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), Volumes I and II (hereafter abbreviated as HR I and HR II). HR I, p. 140.

²Ibid., p. 158.

But when I took anything very simple and easy in the sphere of arithmetic or geometry into consideration, e.g. that two and three together made five, and other things of the sort, were not these present to my mind so clearly as to enable me to affirm that they were true? Certainly if I judged that since such matters could be doubted, this would not have been so for any other reason than that it came into my mind that perhaps a God might have endowed me with such a nature that I may have been deceived even concerning things which seemed to me most manifest. But every time that this preconceived opinion of the sovereign power of a God presents itself to my thought, I am constrained to confess that it is easy to Him, if He wishes it, to cause me to err, even in matters in which I believe myself to have the best evidence. And, on the other hand, always when I direct my attention to things which I believe myself to perceive very clearly, I am so persuaded of their truth that I let myself break out into words such as these: Let who will deceive me, He can never cause me to be nothing while I think that I am, or some day cause it to be true to say that I have never been, it being true now to say that I am, or that two and three make more or less than five, or any such thing in which I see a manifest contradiction. And, certainly, since I have no reason to believe that there is a God who is a deceiver, and as I have not yet satisfied myself that there is a God at all, the reason for doubt which depends on this opinion alone is very slight, and so to speak metaphysical. But in order to be able altogether to remove it, I must inquire whether there is a God as soon as the occasion presents itself; and if I find that there is a God, I must also inquire whether He may be a deceiver; for without a knowledge of these two truths I do not see ³ that I can ever be certain of anything.

³Ibid., pp. 158-159.

I shall hereafter refer to this passage as the Circle Passage.

Descartes then proceeds to argue for the existence of a non-deceiving God. Although he never explicitly employs the doctrine of clarity and distinctness to support the premises of his argument, its use is implicit in the following:

And we cannot say that this idea of God is perhaps materially false and that consequently I can derive it from naught (i.e. that possibly it exists in me because I am imperfect), as I have just said is the case with ideas of heat, cold and other such things; for, on the contrary, as this idea is very clear and distinct and contains within it more objective reality than any other, there can be none which is of itself more true, nor any in which there can be less suspicion of falsehood. 4

Having demonstrated to his own satisfaction that a non-deceiving God exists, Descartes, in Meditation IV, appears to use this demonstration to guarantee the veracity of clear and distinct perceptions.

. . . for as often as I so restrain my will within the limits of my knowledge that it forms no judgment except on matters which are clearly and distinctly represented to it by the understanding, I can never be deceived; for every clear and distinct conception is without doubt something, and hence cannot derive its origin from what is naught, but must of

⁴Ibid., p. 166. (Italics mine)

necessity have God as its author - God, I say, who is supremely perfect, cannot be the cause of any error; and consequently we must conclude that such a conception (or such a judgment) is true. 5

This guarantee is stated explicitly in Meditation V.

But after I have recognized that there is a God - because at the same time I have also recognized that all things depend upon Him, and that He is not a deceiver, and from all that have inferred that what I perceive clearly and distinctly cannot fail to be true . . . 6

Ever since Arnauld⁷ and others⁸ first pointed it out in their objections to Descartes' Meditations, philosophers have concerned themselves with what appears to be a vicious circle: that the principle of clarity and distinctness which is employed to demonstrate the certainty of God's existence is itself in need of a guarantee which only the certainty of God's existence can provide.

In the second set of objections the following point is made:

Thirdly, since you are not yet certain of the aforesaid existence of God, and yet according to your statement, cannot be certain of anything or know anything clearly and distinctly unless previously you know certainly and clearly that God

⁵Ibid., p. 178.

⁶Ibid., p. 184. (Italics mine)

⁷HR II, pp. 79-95.

⁸Ibid., pp. 24-29.

exists, it follows that you cannot clearly and distinctly know that you are a thinking thing, since, according to you, that knowledge depends on the clear knowledge of the existence of God, the proof of which you have not yet reached at that point where you draw the conclusion that you have a clear knowledge of what you are.

While the accusation of circular reasoning is not explicitly stated in the foregoing passage, it is there to be drawn out. Had Descartes' critics directed their attention to questioning the clarity and distinctness of God's existence rather than that of the Cogito, the question of circularity would have been more apparent. Descartes' reply is unpromising.

Thirdly, when I said that we could know nothing with certainty unless we were first aware that God existed, I announced in expressed terms that I referred only to the science apprehending such conclusions as can recur in memory without attending further to the proofs which led me to make them. 10

This leads us to believe that the principle of clarity and distinctness does not need the guarantee provided by the certainty of an existent non-deceiving God. But further in the same replies Descartes also asserts:

. . . in the case of our clearest and most accurate judgments which, if false,

⁹Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 38.

could not be corrected by any that are clearer, or by any other natural faculty, I clearly affirm that we cannot be deceived. For, since God is the highest being He cannot be otherwise than the highest good and highest truth, and hence it is contradictory that anything should proceed from Him that positively tends toward falsity. But yet since there is nothing real in us that is not given by God (as was proved along with His existence) and we have, as well, a real faculty of recognizing truth, and distinguishing it from falsehood (as the mere existence in us of true and false makes manifest), unless this faculty tended toward truth, at least when properly employed (i.e. when we give assent to none but clear and distinct perceptions, for no other correct use of this faculty can be imagined), God, who has given it to us, must justly be held to be a deceiver.

Thus you see that, after becoming aware of the existence of God, it is incumbent on us to imagine that he is a deceiver if we wish to cast doubt upon our clear and distinct perceptions; and since we cannot imagine that He is a deceiver, we must admit them all as true 11 and certain.

This passage appears to place the principle of clarity and distinctness again in need of support.

Descartes' vacillation does not end here. Later in the same replies he reasserts the position which he maintained in his initial reply to his critics.¹²

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 40-41.

¹² Ibid., p. 42.

In the fourth set of objections M. Arnauld makes a similar point.

The only remaining scruple I have is an uncertainty as to how a circular reasoning is to be avoided in saying: the only secure reason we have for believing that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true, is the fact that God exists.

But we can be sure that God exists, only because we clearly and evidently perceive that; therefore prior to being certain that God exists, we should be certain that whatever we clearly and 13 evidently perceive is true.

Descartes' response is again unenlightening.

Finally, to prove that I have not argued in a circle in saying, that the only secure reason we have for believing that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true, is the fact that God exists; but that clearly we can be sure that God exists only because we perceive that, I may cite the explanations that I have already given at sufficient length in my reply to the second set of Objections, numbers 3 and 4. There I distinguished those matters that in actual truth we clearly perceive from those we remember to have formerly perceived. For first, we are sure that God exists because we have attended to the proofs that established this fact; but afterwards it is enough for us to remember that we have perceived something clearly, in order to be sure that it is true; but this would not suffice, unless we knew that God existed and that He did not deceive us.¹⁴

¹³Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 114-115.

Given the unsatisfactory nature of Descartes' replies to his critics, a number of contemporary Cartesian scholars have attempted to provide interpretations of Descartes' enterprise that would enable him to avoid the accusations of circular reasoning. In general, these Cartesian commentators can be divided into three camps. First, there are those who see reason as autonomous for Descartes and the principle of clarity and distinctness as needing no guarantee. By 'autonomy of reason' I mean that the faculty by which the Cogito and other of Descartes' first principles are perceived is not in need of any verification of its inability to err. Second, there are those who see reason as only partially autonomous for Descartes with that part validating the proof of God's existence which in turn validates that aspect of reason which is not autonomous. Third, there are those who see reason as non-autonomous for Descartes and who argue for distinctions in the concepts of certainty and doubt in order to avoid the Cartesian Circle.

In the chapters that follow I present the strategies of selected representatives from each of the three camps. For each account including my own I pose questions related to five topics treated in the Meditations. The first concerns the range of doubt raised in Meditation I. For

example, what kind of beliefs and/or what faculties does the doubt affect? Is there a distinction in degree or kind between categories of beliefs, e.g., between doubts about empirical beliefs and non-empirical ones? The second concerns the achievement of the Cogito in Meditation II. For example, what does that achievement provide us with? What is the relationship, if any, between the Cogito and other first principles? Between the Cogito and the principle of clarity and distinctness? What kind or level of certainty is achieved with the Cogito? The third concerns the role of the principle of clarity and distinctness in Meditation II and III. For example, what is its relationship to the Cogito and other first principles? To the certainty which Descartes is attempting to achieve? To the demonstration of God's existence and non-deceiving nature? The fourth concerns the doubt raised in the Circle Passage in Meditation III. For example, what beliefs and/or faculties are called into doubt? What is the relationship between this doubt and that raised in Meditation I? The fifth topic concerns the arguments for the existence and non-deceiving nature of God in Meditation III and IV respectively. For example, what does Descartes achieve with these arguments? How does he achieve it? What role

does the Cogito and other first principles play in these arguments?

In the first chapter I discuss the strategies offered by the proponents of the autonomy of reason in Descartes' enterprise. For example, A. K. Stout and Willis Doney each argue that God's existence is needed by Descartes to verify only the memory of clear and distinct perceptions. Merrill Ring argues that the scope of doubt in the Meditations extends only to empirical knowledge claims. I cite Harry Frankfurt's substantive objections to the memory thesis and Peter Schouls' objections, particularly ones derived from textual evidence, against the empirical interpretation. I also offer my own criticisms of Ring's interpretation.

In the second chapter I discuss the strategies offered by the proponents of the partial autonomy of reason. For example, George Nakhnikian argues that circular reasoning is unavoidable only if one fails to distinguish between Descartes' considered doctrine and an aberrant view which Descartes sometimes appears to hold. John Morris distinguishes between certain technical terms which he contends Descartes used with comparative precision and consistency. These distinctions provide Morris with a basis for arguing that only certain aspects of reason are ever called into doubt. Peter Schouls' strategy is similar to that of

Morris although the distinctions which he draws from Descartes' writings differ from those which Morris draws. I cite Schouls' criticism of Morris' interpretation and offer my own criticisms of each of the three accounts.

In the third chapter I discuss the strategies of two proponents of the non-autonomy of reason in Descartes' enterprise. Harry Frankfurt distinguishes between doubting the truth of a proposition and doubting the relationship between a proposition's indubitability and its truth. Alan Gewirth distinguishes between two types of certainty and argues that the Cogito allows Descartes to achieve the first type which Descartes uses in turn to achieve the second. I offer criticisms of each interpretation and point out certain features which show some promise of pointing to a solution to the problem of the circle.

In the fourth chapter I discuss the strategies of two additional proponents of the non-autonomy of reason in Descartes' enterprise. Anthony Kenny distinguishes between two types of doubt and certainty and employs the distinctions to develop a strategy quite similar to that proposed by Gewirth. Fred Feldman also distinguishes between two types of doubt and certainty although the distinctions are based on much different concepts than those of either Gewirth or Kenny. I suggest difficulties which each

interpretation encounters and also point to certain features, particularly from Feldman's account, which will prove helpful in developing my own interpretation.

In the fifth chapter I draw upon certain features from Gewirth's, Kenny's, and Feldman's accounts to develop a strategy of my own. I distinguish between three types of doubt and certainty and argue that such a distinction allows my account to avoid the difficulties which I have raised for other proponents of the non-autonomy of reason in Descartes' enterprise.

C H A P T E R I

Among the first contemporary defenders of Descartes is A. K. Stout. In "The Basis of Knowledge in Descartes"¹ Stout defends the autonomy of reason for Descartes and argues that the doubt raised in the Circle Passage early in Meditation III concerns only the accuracy of one's memory of clear and distinct perceptions. Demonstrating the existence of a non-deceiving God removes cause for that doubt and validates that accuracy.

Stout does not explicitly consider question (1) but his response would presumably be that the doubt raised in Meditation I ranges over all beliefs, both empirical ones, e.g., beliefs of physics, astronomy and medicine, and non-empirical ones, e.g., beliefs of mathematics and geometry. The former are doubtful because they rely on sense perception, the latter because they presuppose that extension exists. ". . . if a corporeal world did not exist mathematics would simply be an elaborate deception. . ." ² The

¹A. K. Stout, "The Basis of Knowledge in Descartes," Mind Vol. 38 (1929), pp. 330-342, 458-472. (Reprinted in Descartes: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Willis Doney, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, (1967), pp. 169-194. References will be to the Doney text.)

²Ibid., p. 176.

spectre of an all-powerful demon is raised precisely to cast doubt on the corporeal world in general and extension in particular.

While there appears to be no apparent distinction in kind between the doubt raised against empirical beliefs and that leveled against non-empirical ones for Stout, he does point to a difference in degree. ". . . the former are doubtful compared with the latter. . ."³ Which faculties are open to doubt on Stout's view is unclear. Obviously the faculties of the senses are untrustworthy. But beyond that Stout does not address the issue of whether any of the mind's reasoning faculties, e.g., intuition, deduction, etc., are being questioned in Meditation I.

Stout's response to question (2) would be that one truth can be established in the face of the powerful demon hypothesis. The one truth that cannot be doubted is that of one's own existence, for in order to be deceived one must exist; indeed the very fact that one is deceived demonstrates one's existence.⁴ What role then does Cogito ergo sum play in the rest of Descartes' schema for Stout? To answer that and demonstrate what, in Stout's view,

³Ibid., p. 177.

⁴Ibid., p. 172.

Descartes achieves in Meditation II we must first look at what Stout's response would be to question (3).

A straightforward interpretation such as I suggested in the Introduction would point to the principle of clarity and distinctness as a universal test of truth being derived from Cogito ergo sum, the general rule being reached, as it were, from the examination of a single instance. Stout admits that Descartes' words imply this sort of an interpretation, one which in Stout's view leads inevitably to a circular argument. It is not, however, what Descartes intended. Stout argues:

. . . he [Descartes] holds that what I perceive is self-evident and while I am perceiving it I cannot doubt its truth. I may expect to find the same general conditions present in all truths that appear to me self-evident, and, having found them, I may give them the names "clearness and distinctness"; and they may then serve me as a guide in trying to discover self-evident propositions. But these conditions can never be the guarantees of the truth of the self-evident propositions they condition.⁵

Stout points to passages in Meditation V to support his claim that Descartes did not consistently maintain that when one clearly and distinctly perceives a proposition he argues from its clearness and distinctness to its truth.

And even although I had not demonstrated this [that all I know clearly is true],

⁵Ibid., p. 171.

the nature of my mind is such that I could not prevent myself from holding them to be true so long as I conceive them clearly . . . 6

For the rest, whatever proof or argument I avail myself of, we must always return to the point that it is only those things which we conceive clearly and distinctly that have the power of persuading me entirely. 7

On Stout's view then it would appear that the clarity and distinctness passage early in Meditation III represents only a stage in Descartes' thought, to be superseded by a more adequate explanation.

What then is Stout's response to question (3)?

According to Stout the general principle of clarity and distinctness ". . . must be established to overcome a doubt to which every clear and distinct perception is liable, not when we are attending to it, but when we reflect upon the general conditions of our knowledge."⁸ The principle is not, in Stout's view, either derivable from specific instances of clear and distinct perceptions such as the Cogito or the test of truth of those perceptions.

What is called into doubt in the Circle Passage is not then the truth of specific clear and distinct percep-

⁶HR I, p. 180. Stout's translation differs slightly from that of Haldane and Ross, but not in any significant way.

⁷Ibid., p. 183.

⁸Stout, op. cit., p. 172.

tions, i.e., the Cogito and other first principles. Rather it is the truth of an argument's conclusion that one remembers deriving clearly and distinctly but to which one is no longer attending. "While I was attending to the proof I was incapable of doubting; now I can doubt, and my doubt cannot be overthrown unless I can prove that if there be an all-powerful Being He cannot deceive me."⁹ Rather than the principle of clarity and distinctness being employed to demonstrate God's existence, it is the reverse. It is from the demonstration of God's existence and nature alone that the principle can be derived.

Does this mean that without that demonstration specific clear and distinct perceptions may be false even though one may be unable to doubt them while attending to them? Stout admits that this is a possible interpretation, one that Descartes may have held at times; but it is one that still leads to circularity.¹⁰ Any demonstration of God's existence is no more certain than any other clear and distinct perception; whatever doubt may infect the latter even in only an indirect way also impugns the former.

This consequence, on Stout's view, forced Descartes, at least at times, to reject the hypothesis that an all-

⁹ Ibid., p. 173.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 174-175.

powerful deceiver could undermine the certainty of clear and distinct perceptions and to maintain that the only doubt raised by that hypothesis is directed toward the accuracy of one's memory of clear and distinct perceptions. Under this interpretation the doubt raised in the Circle Passage is not doubt about the truth of correctly remembered clear and distinct perceptions no longer being attended to, it is doubt about whether the perceptions one recalls attending to were actually clear and distinct.

The demonstration of God's existence is needed to overcome that doubt. And in contrast to the previous interpretation this does not involve circular reasoning. The certainty of the demonstration of God's existence is not open to doubt even when one is no longer clearly and distinctly perceiving it.

But, one may ask, does not the demonstration of God's existence fall prey to the doubt raised in the Circle Passage? Stout attempts to respond to this possibility by distinguishing three orders of memory in Descartes' epistemology:

(a) That which is so certain as not to depend upon the authority of God - as, for instance, when . . . an atheist may know the equality of the angles of a triangle to two right angles (the proof of which involves memory in the sense of retentiveness). (b) That which does not mislead, but without reference to God would be open to speculative doubt.

(c) That which is actually misleading
and therefore cannot depend on God's 11
veracity . . .

In an argument in which each premise is understood separately, and the conclusion reached with only the last step directly being attended to, the memory of previous steps in the argument is that of reminiscence (type (b)) and the entire process is deduction. In a situation in which one is directly attending to an entire argument, the act of perceiving the entire process from premise to conclusion is one of intuition and it involves the memory of retentiveness (type (a)).

But does the argument demonstrating God's existence in Meditation III involve memory of type (a) or type (b)? If the latter, then Descartes is back in a circle. If type (a), then the circle is avoided. Stout's point is:

It is true that the first or causal proof seems to occupy the whole of the third Meditation, and the ontological argument the greater part of the fifth. But the "proofs" themselves are in each case brief and clear, if we separate them from the preliminary matter which 12
clears the ground for them.

We are now in a position to return to question (2). Stout's interpretation of Descartes places the Cogito in a much less important position than it is traditionally

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 183-184.

¹² Ibid., p. 188.

placed in Descartes' epistemology. The principle of clarity and distinctness cannot be derived from it without falling prey to circular reasoning. It is true that the Cogito is the initial principle to overcome the doubt raised by the evil demon hypothesis in Meditation I, but beyond that it appears to have no status for Stout above other first principles that are also perceived clearly and distinctly. All achieve equal certainty. None fall prey to the doubt raised in the Circle Passage in Meditation III.

The principle of clarity and distinctness also has a diminished role in Stout's interpretation. The principle is not needed to guarantee the truth of other specific clear and distinct perceptions or the demonstration of God's existence. That demonstration as well as first principles like the Cogito are in no need of such a guarantee.¹³ In Stout's view reason, for Descartes, must be held as autonomous and in no need of any such guarantee.

Willis Doney also presents a well reasoned case for the autonomy of reason in Descartes. In "The Cartesian

¹³In fact, as Stout points out (p. 174), the doubt raised in the Circle Passage is better met by a direct appeal to God's veracity than by an appeal to a rule derived from God's veracity. This leaves the rule without any epistemic function in the Meditations. Its presence under Stout's interpretation becomes superfluous.

Circle"¹⁴ Doney distinguishes between what one might, at the present time, clearly and distinctly perceive to be true and what one might recall having perceived clearly and distinctly to be true. The former is in no need of the assurance provided by the demonstration of an existent, non-deceiving God on Doney's view. But the latter, since memory is involved, requires precisely that assurance. This distinction allows one to clearly and distinctly perceive that just such a God does exist which in turn vindicates one's memory of clear and distinct perceptions.

Unlike Stout, Doney addresses question (1) directly.

In Meditation I Descartes asserts:

. . . as I sometimes imagine that others deceive themselves in the things which they think they know best, how do I know that I am not deceived every time that I add two and three, or count the sides of a square, or judge of things yet simpler, if anything simpler can be imagined? 15

Doney acknowledges the temptation to interpret "things yet simpler" as referring to those beliefs which rely on intuition. But both examples cited refer to operations that could take some time, e.g., adding numbers and counting sides. Doney's point is that each involves movement of

¹⁴Willis Doney, "The Cartesian Circle," Journal of the History of Ideas Vol. 16 (1955), pp. 324-338.

¹⁵HR I, p. 147.

thought during which a mistake of memory could occur.

In neither case is it clear that he [Descartes] was questioning a belief based on intuition. It seems more likely that these beliefs were the result of reasoning of some sort. No doubt they could be known by intuition. But from the references to adding, counting, and judging it appears that he had in mind situations in which, as a matter of fact, these beliefs were not based on intuitions. 16

Still, Descartes' remarks could mean that nothing requiring more than intuition could be known without knowledge of God; and this in turn could still involve circular reasoning if a demonstration of God's existence required more than intuition. Doney's claim is that even this weaker position is not one which Descartes held.

Doney's argument against this weaker position is somewhat more complicated. In arguing for the doubtfulness of beliefs based on sense perception Descartes employed the following principle:

If some beliefs resting on evidence of a certain sort turned out to be mistaken, then any belief resting on evidence of the same sort was doubtful. 17

Now this principle works quite well with any beliefs only if one cannot distinguish those instances in which one is mistaken from those in which one is not mistaken. And it

¹⁶Doney, op. cit., p. 330.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 331.

is the dream argument in Meditation I which provides this condition. If I can never ascertain with certainty whether I am presently perceiving that p (where p is some belief based on my senses) or asleep and dreaming that I am perceiving that p , then every belief based on sense perception is open to doubt.

However, this condition cannot be fulfilled, according to Doney, when it comes to beliefs based on reason.

If at times he [Descartes] had erred, his error could have been prevented had he attended carefully enough to what was going on in his mind at the time. He could have seen that his conclusion was not based on a clear and distinct perception of the demonstration, but depended, at least in part, on memory. Knowing that conclusions of this sort were often mistaken, he could have withheld his consent. The mistakes which had evoked his doubts were of a detectable kind. There had been no mistakes when he had clearly and distinctly perceived the reasons for his conclusions. So he could not argue, as he had about perceptual beliefs: sometimes mistaken, therefore always possibly 18 mistaken.

And Doney concludes:

Thus the problem raised in the first meditation was not one of justifying reason, although Descartes sometimes suggested that it was in order to impress upon those who were precipitous and indiscriminating in

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 332.

their judgments that their certainty 19
was precarious.

We now have a complete response to question (1). The doubt raised in Meditation I ranges over all beliefs based on sense perception and on those beliefs which are the conclusions of arguments whose steps involve memory. Beliefs which rely on intuition and/or deduction alone are not subject to that doubt.

What then of question (2)? Unlike Stout, Doney has very little to say about the Cogito. As a last question in his article Doney asks, ". . . why did Descartes think of the Meditations as an argument proceeding from knowledge of his own existence to knowledge of God's existence and finally to absolute certainty in mathematics and natural philosophy?"²⁰ Why was the Cogito prerequisite to Descartes' knowledge of God's existence when the latter was obvious, in Doney's view, on inspection of his idea of an infinitely perfect being? Doney's response is:

The priority of the cogito can be easily explained. The first proof of God's existence was a posteriori from the existence of the idea of an infinite and perfect Being. Descartes would have to know that the effect existed in order to infer the cause. The second [proof] was an inference

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 333.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 336.

from the existence of res cogitans to God as the cause. 21

In Meditation II then we have, on Doney's view, the certainty of reason (at least qua the faculty of intuition) affirmed and the Cogito established to provide a necessary premise in the argument for God's existence in Meditation III (and later in Meditation V as well). Presumably for Doney the Cogito has no epistemic status distinct from that of other first principles. Its only unique feature is its role in Descartes' methodology.

Doney's position on question (3) is similar to Stout's. The principle of clarity and distinctness is both provisional and uncertain prior to the demonstration of God's existence. But Doney arrives at this position by means of a different route. Whereas Stout points to textual evidence to demonstrate that Descartes did not intend for the Principle to be derived from the Cogito and other first principles (and hence to be used as a general test of truth), Doney provides a different reason for rejecting such a notion:

The answer cannot be, simply, that the rule was an induction universal in scope and that God's veracity was the justification of such an induction. For Descartes believed that other universal propositions could be known without this guarantee: e.g., the principle of causation used in the first two proofs

²¹Ibid., p. 338.

of God's existence. The answer lies in another direction. On Descartes' view, although all clear and distinct ideas were true, not all true statements could be clearly and distinctly perceived to be so. Some of them could not be so perceived within the compass of a single intuition. The rule about all clear and distinct ideas was just such a statement. To know that any idea was true, this idea had to be present to his mind. To know that all were true, all of them would have had to be present at once. This was humanly impossible. Therefore, an assertion about the truth of all clear and distinct ideas was dependent on knowledge of God's veracity.²²

With respect to question (4) Doney's treatment of the Circle Passage also differs from Stout's. When Descartes states:

But in order to be able altogether to remove it [doubt], I must inquire whether there is a God. . . and if I find that there is a God, I must also inquire whether He may be a deceiver; for without knowledge of these two truths I do not see that I can ever be certain of anything.²³

Doney maintains that Descartes was using 'certain' in a different sense here than he was using in the preceding Meditations. The certainty achieved in Meditation II with the Cogito and other first principles involves the impossibility of doubt at the time one's perceptions are being attended to. The sense of 'certain' in the above passage

²² Ibid., p. 335.

²³ HR I, p. 159.

involves the impossibility of doubt at any time. Any truth could be doubted when not being attended to.

While Doney does not expand upon this distinction between two senses of certainty except to note that in his reply to the second set of objections Descartes admitted that even an atheist could be certain (presumably in the sense used in Meditation II) of some things, it is of some passing interest since it foreshadows a distinction expanded upon later by certain Cartesian commentators discussed in Chapters III and IV.

Although Doney does not discuss any of the arguments for God's existence, it seems clear from his account of Descartes that his response to question (5) would be that the certainty achieved in Meditation II with the Cogito, the principle of causation, and other first principles provides Descartes with sufficient grounds for establishing God's existence. Either the arguments can be based upon intuitions present to the mind or they require proofs. If it is the former and they are perceived clearly and distinctly, then Descartes is certain that God exists and is no deceiver. If it is the latter and the steps in the arguments can eventually be encompassed in one intuition, avoiding any reliance on memory, then Descartes is equally certain. Once God's existence and nature are established, memory of clear and distinct perceptions is validated.

While Doney and Stout differ in the arguments and textual evidence they offer in support of their respective interpretations, it is clear from their positions on the five questions I raise that their accounts of Descartes do not differ appreciably. Each maintains that the problem raised by Descartes in the Meditations was not one of justifying reason. Rather, it was one of justifying the memory of clear and distinct perceptions. And there are a number of difficulties with this kind of an account, which for brevity's sake I will refer to as the memory thesis. From both Doney's and Stout's presentations it is clear that some textual evidence exists for which interpretations can be made consistent with the memory thesis. Descartes' responses to his critics' charges of circular reasoning indicate that he believed memory to be involved in some way. But a fair amount of textual evidence exists which indicates that the involvement of memory was, for Descartes, something other than that which the memory thesis suggests. This textual evidence is pointed out by Harry Frankfurt in "Memory and the Cartesian Circle."²⁴

If we look carefully at one of Descartes' replies to the second set of objections, we find him saying:

²⁴Harry Frankfurt, "Memory and the Cartesian Circle," Philosophical Review Vol. 71 (1962), pp. 504-511.

There are other matters that are indeed perceived very clearly by our intellect, when we attend sufficiently closely to the reasons on which our knowledge of them depends, and hence we cannot then be in doubt about them; but since we can forget those reasons, and yet remember the conclusions deduced from them, the question is raised whether we can entertain the same firm and immutable certainty as to these conclusions, during the time that we recollect that they have been deduced from first principles that are evident; for this remembrance must be assumed in order that they may be called conclusions. 25

Frankfurt's point is:

The accuracy of the recollection is taken for granted, as Descartes himself points out; if it were not taken for granted, there would be no occasion for doubt at all. Descartes's problem is not whether memory is reliable, but whether what is recollected. . . is sufficient to establish the truth of the conclusion in question. What he doubts is whether the remembered fact that something was once proven entitles one to be certain now of the truth of what was then proven. God is not, then, invoked to guarantee the reliability of memory. In fact, the reliability of memory must be accepted in order to generate the doubt God is called upon 26 to dispel.

In his Conversation with Burman there is further evidence that Descartes assumed, rather than questioned, the reliability of memory in overcoming metaphysical doubt.

²⁵HR II, pp. 42-43. (Italics mine)

²⁶Frankfurt, op. cit., p. 511.

Burman states:

But someone will declare; after I have demonstrated the existence of God, and of a God who is no deceiver, I can say, not that my intellect deceives me, with the rectitude God has given it, but that my memory deceives me, because I believe that I remember something which in reality I do not remember; memory itself²⁷ has failings.

Descartes replies:

Concerning memory I can say nothing: it is up to each man to determine, by his personal experience, whether or not he has a good memory. And if he has doubts about it, he ought to make use of notes or of some such aid. ²⁸

And Frankfurt argues:

If Descartes had intended his proof of the existence of a veracious God to establish the reliability of memory, he would surely not have responded in this way to Burman's remarks. He would have pointed out that the doubts about memory expressed by Burman had been rendered unnecessary by the demonstration that a veracious God exists. Burman clearly mentioned the doubt about memory as something that had not been dealt with by the proof of the veracious God's existence, as if he were calling attention to a new difficulty not disposed of by the proof. Descartes implicitly agrees to this when he fails to deny it and, instead, offers a rather commonsensical bit of advice about the

²⁷ Oeuvres de Descartes, ed. Charles Adams and Paul Tannery (Paris, 1957) VIII, 21 (Latin), Vol. IXB, p. 43 (French). The translation is taken directly from Frankfurt, op. cit., p. 510.

²⁸ Ibid.

use of memory. . . These are hardly the comments of a man who regards the reliability of memory as a basic metaphysical problem, much less as one which he had recently solved. They suggest vividly that Descartes' attention was directed to quite different matters, in which the problem of the reliability of memory was one of only 29 incidental concern.

Finally, Frankfurt points out:

Indeed, it is easy to show that after Descartes had proven God's existence and veracity he still did not take the reports of memory as guaranteed. In the Principles of Philosophy, for instance, God's existence and veracity are demonstrated in principles XIV, XVIII, and XXI of Part I. In principle XLIV of Part I, Descartes says that "it is frequently our memory that deceives us by leading us to believe that certain things had been satisfactorily established by us."³⁰ Thus he reaffirms the very doubt that Doney claims had been removed by the proof of God's existence. Nowhere, in this passage or in subsequent ones, does Descartes retract or qualify this 31 warning about memory.

There are two additional objections that I would like to raise against the memory thesis, both of which are also mentioned by Frankfurt. First, the memory thesis relegates the Meditations to a rather insignificant role in both Descartes' epistemology and his metaphysics. When

²⁹ Ibid., p. 510.

³⁰ HR I, p. 236.

³¹ Frankfurt, op. cit., p. 507.

Descartes states in the introduction that "In the first Meditation I set forth the reasons for which we may, generally speaking, doubt about all things . . ." ³² the impression given is that something more important than the reliability of memory is at issue.

Second, taken literally the memory thesis commits Descartes to the infallibility of memory at least where clear and distinct perceptions are concerned. But consider a situation in which I recall only very vaguely that I once clearly and distinctly perceived that p. If I have successfully demonstrated God's existence and nature, the memory thesis makes it impossible for me to err in my recollection. Particularly in light of the textual evidence offered by Frankfurt, it seems highly unlikely that Descartes was committed to such an extreme consequence.

The temptation to reduce the scope of doubt in Descartes' Meditations in order to allow him to avoid the accusation of circular reasoning is a strong one. Reducing the scope of doubt to the memory of clear and distinct perceptions is unsatisfactory for the reasons I have given above. I would now like to turn to a much different approach which shares with the memory thesis only the autonomy of reason for Descartes.

³²HR I, p. 140.

Most Cartesian commentators agree that Descartes' attempt to establish a foundation for his beliefs which would not fall prey to even the merest of doubts was motivated by his opposition to skepticism. One commentator, Merrill Ring in "Descartes' Intentions,"³³ offers a novel interpretation in which the target of Descartes' arguments, particularly in Meditation I, is not simply the skepticism so popular in his time; it is the principle of empiricism upon which the arguments of both skepticism and scholasticism were founded. Descartes' aim, in Ring's view, is not to cast doubt on beliefs based on the faculty of reason, it is to cast doubt on the empiricist grounds for claiming such beliefs are either certain or uncertain. And if the faculty of reason is not being questioned, then the accusation of circular reasoning need not arise.

Ring's response to question (1) is extensive. In fact, virtually his entire article is devoted to discussing the role of Meditation I in Descartes' task. The doubt raised in Meditation I ranges over all beliefs because, at the time, all his beliefs are grounded in the senses. Descartes first proposes, "I shall. . . address myself to

³³Merrill Ring, "Descartes' Intentions," Canadian Journal of Philosophy Vol. III (1973), pp. 27-49.

the general upheaval of all my former opinions."³⁴ And rather than examine each and every opinion, Descartes suggests that, "owing to the fact that the destruction of the foundations. . . brings with it the downfall of the rest of the edifice, I shall only . . . attack those principles upon which all my former opinions rested."³⁵ And what, asks Ring, is that foundation or principle upon which rest all of the opinions Descartes holds? "All that up to the present time I have accepted as most true and certain I have learned either from the senses or through the senses. . ."³⁶ Ring argues that when Descartes states first that he means to doubt all, this must be understood in light of his further comment that everything he has to doubt was acquired through the senses. Ring's point is that Descartes is not simply to be taken as providing a technical device to avoid the otherwise impossible task of doubting each individual belief. Rather, he is to be

³⁴HR I, p. 144. Ring uses the Anscombe and Geach translation (Descartes: Philosophical Writings, transl. and ed. Elizabeth Anscombe and Peter Geach, Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., New York (1954)). I will continue to use the Haldane and Ross translation in my treatment of Ring's interpretation. The Anscombe and Geach version is a much less literal translation. If Ring's analysis is to have any credence, it should fair equally well with the Haldane and Ross version.

³⁵Ibid., p. 145.

³⁶Ibid.

taken literally. It is not all beliefs that are to be doubted but all and only beliefs acquired through the senses.

Ring suggests that there are additional reasons to support his contention that something other than the traditional interpretation of the scope of doubt in Meditation I is taking place. He points to other Cartesian commentators' recognition that something is amiss in Meditation I. For example, L. J. Beck in The Metaphysics of Descartes³⁷ transforms "all beliefs" into "most beliefs" and "nearly all beliefs." Anthony Kenny in Descartes: A Study of His Philosophy³⁸ points to a number of instances in which certain beliefs, those revealed by the light of nature, seem to fall outside the scope of doubt. Kenny's conclusion is that Descartes failed in the execution of his doubt. Ring's conclusion is that Descartes never intended the scope of doubt to be so extensive.

Ring also points to Descartes' responses to the sixth set of objections as evidence in support of his thesis. In response to the following objection:

. . . it does not appear altogether certain that we exist, from the fact

³⁷L. J. Beck, The Metaphysics of Descartes; A Study of the Meditations, Clarendon Press, Oxford (1965) pp. 56, 64.

³⁸Anthony Kenny, Descartes: A Study of His Philosophy, Random House, New York (1968).

that we think. For in order to be sure that you think, you ought to know what to think, or what thinking, is, and what your existence is; but since you do not yet know what these things are, how can you know that you think or exist? 39

Descartes replies:

It is indeed true that no one can be sure that he knows or that he exists, unless he knows what thought is and what existence. . . . When, therefore, anyone perceives that he thinks and that it thence follows that he exists, although he chance never previously to have asked what thought is, nor what existence, he cannot nevertheless fail to have a knowledge of each sufficient to give him assurance on this score. 40

With the reference to knowledge of things prior to the Cogito Ring claims further support for his contention that the evil demon in Meditation I does not cast as large a shadow of doubt as is often maintained.⁴¹

Ring's position on question (2) is that the Cogito is Descartes' first truth dealing with the existence of things.

³⁹HR II, p. 234.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 241. Descartes also makes this point in Principles of Philosophy: Part I, X (HR I, p. 222).

⁴¹Ring's treatment of Meditation I does not end at this point. He goes on to provide an account of how the evil demon hypothesis functions on his interpretation. It is a very interesting account. But it lies outside the scope of the five questions which I raise for each interpretation. Suffice it to say that, although he provides some textual evidence consistent with his thesis, Ring does not offer any which actively supports it.

Ring distinguishes all objects of knowledge for Descartes into two classes: those that deal with things existent and those that deal with the eternal truths and that have no existence outside our thought. Meditation I leaves us with only the latter untainted by doubt. Skepticism with respect to the existence of things remains to be defeated and the achievement of the Cogito is the first step in the removal of that skepticism. When Descartes asserts:

And when I stated that this proposition I think, therefore I am is the first and most certain which presents itself to those who philosophise in orderly fashion, I did not for all that deny that we must first of all know what is knowledge, what is existence, and what is certainty, and that in order to think we must be, and such like; but because these are notions of the simplest possible kind, which of themselves give us no knowledge of anything that exists, I do not think them worthy of being put 42 on record.

Ring concludes, "It is quite clear here that the primacy of the cogito is only with respect to existence."⁴³

On Ring's view the Cogito's primacy is only methodological (although in a much different way than it was for either Doney or Stout). The Cogito has no special epistemic status: ". . . there were, as far as Descartes was

⁴²HR I, p. 222.

⁴³Ring, op. cit., p. 48.

concerned, prior certainties which he could legitimately, and did in fact, appeal to."⁴⁴

With respect to questions (3), (4), and (5), all Ring has to say can be found in a brief postscript to his interpretation:

My aim in this paper has been to tell a tale about Descartes' intentions, about what he attempted to doubt, the function of the demon and the status of the cogito, which is different than that usually told. The story does not, of course, end here. Among the problems which remain is that of the nature of the divine guarantee with the associated question of circularity. While the issues that properly arise in connection with these matters are so numerous that it is manifestly impossible to discuss them here, it seems desirable to finish with some remarks on how these problems look from the perspective of the argument just concluded. The matter of God's guarantee has always arisen in the context of a belief that the doubt in the First Meditation was intended to be universal, that when the doubt was fully drawn, all ideas and principles were under a cloud of suspicion. So the problem has always seemed to be one of guaranteeing the adequacy, the truth if you will, of the principles employed and the concepts involved in proving God's existence and with that view the question of circularity inescapably arises. But my tale points in a different direction. Descartes might well construe the innate concepts and principles to be rock-bottom and think that what needs to be guaranteed are not those ideas, no suspicion having been cast upon them and no doubt about

⁴⁴Ibid.

them being possible, but that the material world will conform to them.⁴⁵

Thus, we have no inkling of what Ring's response to question (3) might be. As to question (4) what is called into doubt in the Circle Passage would presumably be beliefs about the material world. And in response to question (5) Ring might maintain that the demonstration of God's existence and benevolent nature removes that 'slightest doubt' about the existence of material objects.

As attractive as Ring's interpretation of Descartes might be on first reading, there are a number of problems with it, some of which are discussed by Peter Schouls in "The Extent of Doubt in Descartes' Meditations."⁴⁶ As we saw earlier, Ring cites a crucial passage from Meditation I in which Descartes commits himself to, "attack those principles upon which all my former opinions rested."⁴⁷ Immediately following the quotation Ring asks, "What is that foundation or principle of all the opinions he

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 48-49.

⁴⁶ Peter Schouls, "The Extent of Doubt in Descartes' Meditations," Canadian Journal of Philosophy Vol. III, (1973). Many of Schouls' criticisms are based in part on his own interpretation of Descartes which will be presented in Chapter II. Given that I am critical of his account, however, it would be unfair to employ his strategy to argue against Ring. Thus, I am limiting any reliance on Schouls to textual matters only.

⁴⁷ HR I, p. 144.

holds?"⁴⁸ As Schouls points out, Ring moves from "those principles" to "that principle" without comment. Ring offers no argument in support of his move; yet it constitutes the very basis upon which he initiates his interpretation.

Furthermore, there is textual evidence elsewhere which indicates that such a move might very well be unwarranted. Earlier in his Synopsis of the Six Following Meditations Descartes states, "In the first Meditation I set forth the reasons for which we may, generally speaking, doubt about all things and especially about material things. . ."⁴⁹ If doubt about "all things" is to be limited to only "all things acquired through the senses," it is, at the very least, odd that Descartes would need the qualifier "especially about material things."

Schouls suggests that evidence exists elsewhere in Descartes' writings which makes explicit the need for a validation of reason. In Principles of Philosophy, Part I Descartes argues that God exists (Principle XIV and XVIII) and that it is a contradiction to suppose that God could be a deceiver (Principle XXIX). Principle XXX then states, "And consequently all that we perceive clearly is true, and

⁴⁸ Ring, op. cit., p. 30. (Italics mine)

⁴⁹ HR I, p. 140. (Italics mine)

this delivers us from the doubts put forward above."⁵⁰

Descartes then says in support of this principle:

. . . the light of nature . . .
 can never disclose to us any object
 which is not true, inasmuch as it
 comprehends it, that is, inasmuch as
 it apprehends it clearly and distinctly.
 Because we should have had reason to
 think God a deceiver if He had given
 us this faculty perverted, or such
 that we should take the false for the
 true (when using the faculty aright).⁵¹

Schools' point is that the "consequently" in Principle XXX is there precisely because "all that we perceive clearly is true" is derived from preceding arguments for God's existence and non-deceiving nature. And if clear and distinct perceptions are not immune from doubts until such arguments have been given, then the possibility of a malevolent deceiver casts doubt on beliefs acquired through the faculty of reason.

There are other problems with Ring's account. His remarks which have a bearing on questions (4) and (5) suggest that the doubt expressed in the Circle Passage extends only to beliefs about the material world. Yet it would seem that there is more to the doubt than that. Descartes specifically mentions mathematical propositions involving the addition of two and three and "any such

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 231.

⁵¹Ibid.

thing" as examples of those things for which there exists the slightest 'metaphysical' doubt prior to demonstrating God's existence. It is difficult to see how such propositions involve the existence of the material world.

Furthermore, not all of the first principles, all of which appear to fall prey to this doubt, involve or presuppose the existence of material objects.

There is also the textual evidence cited by Doney and Stout in favor of the memory thesis. While the thesis goes too far in its claims, nevertheless, particularly in his replies to his critics, Descartes does talk about the doubt attending to clear and distinct perceptions when one is no longer attending to them. Unless Ring views the faculty of memory as a sensing faculty, it is difficult to see how his account would satisfactorily treat such textual points.

Although part of the attractiveness of Ring's interpretation of Descartes lies in the historical setting that he provides for it, one still has the impression that much more is at stake than just attacking both skepticism and scholasticism by arguing against the empiricist principle upon which each is based. The alternative provided by Ring's interpretation is nothing more than dogmatic rationalism.

In fact, any interpretation of Descartes which takes as its basic assumption the autonomy of reason will be

undesirable for the very same reason. The failure of any such approach to gain widespread support as both an attractive interpretation of Descartes in general and one which successfully allows him an escape from the charges of circular reasoning, has prompted a number of Cartesian commentators to consider interpretations in which reason is only partially autonomous. It is to consideration of such interpretations that I shall now turn.

C H A P T E R I I

In an attempt to demonstrate that Descartes need not plead guilty to the charge of circular reasoning, George Nakhnikian, in "The Cartesian Circle Revisited,"¹ distinguishes between what he views as Descartes' considered doctrine and an aberrant view that Descartes sometimes appears to hold in the Meditations and elsewhere.

The aberrant view is that even the most clearly and distinctly intuited propositions are not really known to be true except by those who know that God exists and that He cannot be a deceiver. This applies to all propositions. . . it does not exempt the propositions, "I am conscious," "I exist," "If I am conscious then I exist," . . . 2

Nakhnikian refers to a number of passages³ including the Circle Passage as evidence that Descartes says or implies what amounts to the aberrant view.

¹George Nakhnikian, "The Cartesian Circle Revisited," American Philosophical Quarterly Vol. 4 (1967) pp. 251-255.

²Ibid., p. 251.

³His method of referencing is an odd one. Rather than referring directly to the text he cites footnotes from another article. "See Leonard Miller, "Descartes, Mathematics, and God," The Philosophical Review, vol. 66 (1957), pp. 451-465, n. 3-8." The references are as follows: (3) Norman Kemp Smith, Descartes' Philosophical Writings (London, 1952; hereafter written K.S.), p. 145; (4) K.S.,

In contrast to the aberrant view is Descartes' considered doctrine. According to Nakhnikian there is evidence that Descartes held the more reasonable view that some clear and distinct perceptions are not open to doubt, even if the existence of a deceiving demon is possible. He argues:

There are places in Descartes' writings where he says that we can know certain propositions incorrigibly even if an evil demon is deceiving us about other things. For example, we can know incorrigibly that we, ourselves, exist. For how can the demon deceive me about anything at all unless I exist. So that we can know incorrigibly and without having to know that God exists such a conditional as this: If I am 4
deceived at all, then I exist.

Nakhnikian elucidates further the contrast between Descartes' considered doctrine and the aberrant view by pointing out certain distinctions that Descartes makes in his use of certain terms:

pp. 214-215, 246, 247; (5) H.R. II, pp. 226, 248, 250-251; (6) H.R. I, pp. 220, 231; (7) Letters to Mersenne: 15 April, 1630, 6 May, 1630, 27 May, 1630, 27 May, 1638; Letter to Mesland: 2 May, 1644; Letter to Arnauld: 29 July, 1648; (8) Letter to Mesland, 2 May, 1644.

⁴Nakhnikian, op. cit., p. 251. Nakhnikian does not indicate where those places are. Presumably they would include selected passages from the Meditations (e.g., HR I, pp. 140, 150, 151, 152 (and perhaps 158), 160-161) and the Principles of Philosophy Part I, VII and X (HR I, pp. 221, 222).

Descartes uses "scire" as a technical term for knowledge of theorems, i.e., of demonstrated conclusions. In this application of the word, scientia is contrasted with notitia or cognoscentia (immediate apprehension of "first principles"). Descartes also uses "scientia" another way in which scientia is the opposite of persuasio. 5

As evidence of the latter distinction Nakhnikian points to the following assertion by Descartes:

. . . if we lack knowledge of God, we can pretend that they [remembered conclusions derived from premises no longer being attended to] are uncertain even though we remember that they were deduced from clear principles; because perhaps our nature is such that we go wrong even in the most evident matters. Consequently, even at the moment when we deduced them from those principles, we did not have scientific knowledge (scientia) of them, but only a conviction (persuasio) of them. I distinguish the two as follows: there is conviction [persuasio] when there remains some reason which might lead us to doubt, but scientific knowledge [scientia] is conviction [persuasio] based on an argument so strong that it can never be shaken by any stronger argument. Nobody can have the latter unless he also has 6 knowledge of God.

In light of these distinctions the aberrant view is that:

⁵ Ibid., p. 252.

⁶ From a letter to Regius, May 24, 1640 (Anthony Kenny, transl. and ed., Descartes: Philosophical Letters, Clarendon Press, Oxford (1970). p. 74.

. . . we must know (scientia vs. persuasio sense) as a theorem (scientia vs. notitia or cognoscentia sense) that the principle of clarity and distinctness is true. This suggests that even the "first principles" known by notitia or cognoscentia are no more than mere persuasio in the absence of knowledge (scientia, as the opposite of both notitia and persuasio) that God exists,⁷ and is not a deceiver.

And this view, Nakhnikian argues, gets Descartes in a vicious circle, for in the Synopsis to the Meditations Descartes himself admits that:

. . . it is requisite that we know [scire] that all the things which we conceive clearly and distinctly are true in the very way in which we conceive them; and this could not be proved previously to the Fourth Meditation. 8

And since the first argument for God's existence occurs in Meditation III, Descartes appears to be saying that he must know (scientia) that God exists in order to know (scientia) that the principle of clarity and distinctness is true. But also according to the aberrant view, no matter how clearly and distinctly Descartes perceives the "first principles" (and especially the premises of the argument for God's existence), he cannot know (scientia) them to be true unless he knows (scientia) that all his

⁷ Nakhnikian, op. cit., p. 252.

⁸ HR I, p. 140. Haldane and Ross translate scire as "may be assured." Nakhnikian's point is that such a translation ignores the technical distinctions which, he is arguing, Descartes makes.

clear and distinct perceptions are true.

The alternative to the aberrant view for Nakhnikian is as follows:

Now suppose that we do not assume the aberrant view. That is, we suppose that whether or not we know that God exists, some clearly and distinctly perceived propositions are, and are known to be, true. God is needed so that we can deduce that all clearly and distinctly perceived propositions are true. Then it is open to Descartes to say that the premises from which he deduces God's existence and veracity are clear and distinct propositions that are known to be true per se. . . The system I find in the Meditations becomes circular if, and only if, we add to it the aberrant view that no clear and distinct intuition is known to be true except by those who know that God exists and that 9 He is not a deceiver.

While Nakhnikian does not discuss the extent of doubt in Meditation I in his article, if we turn to his much more extensive treatment of Descartes in An Introduction to Philosophy¹⁰ (from which his article is taken almost verbatim), we can determine his position with respect to question (1).

⁹ Nakhnikian, op. cit., pp. 254-255.

¹⁰ George Nakhnikian, An Introduction to Philosophy, Alfred Knopf, New York (1967). cf. particularly Parts II and III, pp. 65-241 which deal almost exclusively with Descartes and the Meditations.

In his treatment of the dream argument in Meditation I Nakhnikian employs a number of technical terms, some of which must be explained in order to understand his interpretation of Descartes. The first two are "psychological indubitability" and "logical indubitability." In reference to them he says:

In the Meditations, one finds at least two distinguishable senses of 'indubitable'. There is the "psychological" sense, in which an indubitable proposition is one from which we are unable to withhold assent. There is also the "logical" and profoundly important sense in which a proposition is indubitable for me only if it is one that I am fully justified, and cannot be mistaken, in believing, solely on the basis of ¹¹ the evidence I have right now.

About "psychological" indubitability Nakhnikian says:

For example, I look in a certain direction and am unable to withhold assent from the proposition that there is a wall in front of me. You may easily convince me that this proposition might have been false. But to believe that the proposition might have been false is not the same thing as to doubt it now. I cannot at the same time be certain that there is a wall in front of me and doubt that there is one there. That is a logical impossibility: doubt and certainty about the same proposition are mutually exclusive. Yet I can grant, while still being certain that there is a wall in front of me, that there might not have been one there. What is more, while still

¹¹ Ibid., p. 67.

being certain that there is a wall in front of me, I can readily grant that my believing that there is does not entail that there is. Thus "psychological" indubitability is incompatible with doubt, but not with the belief that what I am now certain of might have been false, nor with the admission that my now believing it to be true is not enough to guarantee that it is true.¹²

As an example of "logical" indubitability Nakhnikian suggests:

. . . an instance of "logical indubitability [is] I am certain that I exist. I grant that I might not have existed. If I did not exist, then I would not be believing that I exist. This is equivalent to saying that, from my believing that I exist, it follows that I exist. In other words, my believing that I exist is itself the guarantee that I do exist.¹³

The distinction appears to be that while the "psychological" indubitability of a belief does not guarantee that I could not be mistaken, the "logical" indubitability of a belief does.

Nakhnikian proceeds to suggest that Descartes' own words provide some ground for thinking that by "logical" indubitability he had in mind the following definitions that Nakhnikian suggests for the notion of 'in corrigibility':

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

- (N1) p is incorrigible for S at $t =_{df}$
- (i) It is possible that at t S believes attentively that p , and
 - (ii) "At t S believes attentively that p " entails "At t S knows that p ".
- (N2) at t S believes incorrigibly that
- $p =_{df}$
- (i) At t S believes attentively that p , and
 - (ii) "At t S believes attentively that p " entails "At t S knows that p ".¹⁴

Each definition employs another of Nakhnikian's technical terms that he defines as follows:

- (N3) at t S believes attentively that $p =_{df}$
- (i) At t S is paying attention to matters that are relevant to the truth or falsity of p , including attention to his own sensations, if they are relevant,
 - (ii) among them stands revealed and open to S evidence for p , and
 - (iii) at t S occurrently believes that p .¹⁵

Finally we have Nakhnikian's use of the term 'perceptual proposition'. About it he says:

I shall define 'perceptual proposition' as meaning a proposition that ascribes to physical objects (e.g., tables and

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 75.

chairs) or to physical phenomena (e.g., claps of thunder, flashes of lightning, rainbows, flames, afterimages) visual, tactual, gustatory, auditory, or olfactory properties or relations. These, in turn, I shall define as being properties or relations whose presence in, or absence from, the objects or phenomena to which they are ascribed, it is logically possible to ascertain at any given time by looking, touching, tasting, 16 listening, or smelling.

Turning to the dream argument, Nakhnikian's interpretation provides Descartes with three conclusions. The first is that no perceptual proposition is incorrigible for anyone. The second is that no one knows incorrigibly that he himself is not dreaming. And the third is that no one knows incorrigibly that any given perceptual proposition is true. Nakhnikian points out that these conclusions, although derived from premises consistent with the text, are inconsistent with Descartes' general aims in the Meditations that follow the first, i.e., they are too strong, particularly the second and third conclusions.¹⁷

The evil demon argument in Meditation I goes even further. It is concerned with "whether or not we can know

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 68-69.

¹⁷ Nakhnikian suggests that by relaxing the criterion of knowledge which he suggests for Descartes one could derive conclusions compatible with Descartes' aims. The consequence, however, creates problems for Descartes. Unfortunately, an adequate account of this is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

propositions that, if they are known at all, are not known 'from the senses or through the senses,' e.g., mathematical propositions."¹⁸ The conclusion of the evil demon argument, on Nakhnikian's interpretation, is that while "There are mathematical propositions that are incorrigible for anyone, e.g., 'A square has four sides.' There are, on the other hand, mathematical propositions that are corrigible for anyone."¹⁹ This is, of course, Nakhnikian's interpretation of Descartes' considered view. While it is clear that the aberrant view entails that the evil demon casts doubt on even the most evident mathematical propositions, Nakhnikian offers no textual evidence from Meditation I that supports the aberrant view.²⁰

On Nakhnikian's account, then, the only propositions which escape the doubt raised in Meditation I are those mathematical propositions which are incorrigible for anyone. Such propositions are necessarily true, but they do not entail the existence of an external world. 'A square has four sides' does not entail that any square objects exist.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 115.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 133.

²⁰ In fact, his analysis of the evil demon argument purports to demonstrate the impossibility of the aberrant view with respect to mathematical propositions (cf. pp. 127-129).

Nakhtnikian terms such propositions 'hypothetical' to distinguish them from propositions that are 'existential', i.e., that entail the existence of something.

The achievement of Meditation II on Nakhtnikian's account is the demonstration of incorrigible propositions which are contingently true and which imply the existence of something. Among such propositions is the Cogito. But aside from demonstrating that at least one incorrigible contingent proposition implies the existence of something, what does the achievement of the Cogito provide for Descartes on Nakhtnikian's account?

One response is that the conclusion of the Cogito, 'I exist', is also incorrigible. Descartes asserts in Meditation II:

So that after having reflected well and carefully examined all things, we must come to the definite conclusion that this proposition: I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time that I pronounce it, or that I mentally 21 conceive it.

And when criticized about the apparent deductive nature of the achievement of the Cogito, Descartes responds:

He who says, 'I think, hence I am, or exist,' does not deduce existence from thought by a syllogism, but, by a simple intuition of the mind, recognizes

²¹HR I, p. 150.

it as if it were a thing that is known per se. 22

Nakhnikian argues:

In order for me to know "by a simple intuition of the mind" that I exist, it is necessary that there be a certain entailment, but an entailment, and not an inference. "I think" . . . entails "I exist." But in order to intuit the fact that I exist I do not have to infer that I exist from the fact that I think. It is sufficient that I believe attentively that I exist. It is impossible for me to believe attentively that I exist and not to know it. By our definition of attentive belief, if I believe attentively that I exist, then I have some evidence for the proposition "I exist." But if I have any evidence at all for "I exist," then I have conclusive evidence for it. For unless I did exist, I could have no evidence whatever for any proposition. Hence, if I believe attentively that I exist, it follows that I am fully justified, and cannot be mistaken, in believing that I exist. From that, in turn, it follows that I know incorrigibly that I exist. 23

Having demonstrated the incorrigibility of 'I exist', Nakhnikian argues, Descartes cannot employ the hypothesis of the evil demon (which is raised again in the Circle Passage in Meditation III) to defeat his certainty that he

²²HR II, p. 38. Nakhnikian's translation "intuition of the mind" is from the Latin version of the Meditations. Haldane and Ross, presumably relying on the French version, translate the phrase as "act of mental vision."

²³Nakhnikian, An Introduction to Philosophy, p. 139.

exists. Thus, Nakhnikian finds no textual evidence in Meditation II to support the aberrant view and much reason to reject it. But what about the Cogito's relationship to other first principles? About this Nakhnikian says:

. . . his [Descartes'] argument for saying that "I exist" is "indubitable" is that, even if there is an evil demon, and he is deceiving me about many things, he cannot deceive me about my own existence because (and this is the crux of Descartes' argument) "The evil demon is deceiving me" entails "I exist." He is assuming an entailment to show that "I exist" is "indubitable." But is there any reason why this entailment is metaphysically certain, if "This is a square" entails "This has four sides" is not? There is no such reason. These two entailments stand or fall together. Either both of them are necessarily true or neither one of them is. . . . Besides, it is obvious that both entailments are necessarily true. . . . Descartes is simply mistaken whenever he proceeds as if he can explain the special status of "I exist" or of "I think" without knowing beforehand that certain other propositions are necessarily true, self-evident,²⁴ and incorrigible for him. . . .

Thus, according to Nakhnikian, there are no features of the Cogito that give it an epistemic status distinct from that of other first principles. But its role is not thereby insignificant. There is its contingency and the entailment of one existent thing:

²⁴Ibid., pp. 143-144.

. . . the cogito propositions are examples of propositions that provide incorrigible knowledge of the existence of a contingent mental entity, without the necessity for any assumptions as to the existence of God or material objects. 25

Before turning to Meditation III, however, one comment on the role of the principle of clarity and distinctness is needed. It is obvious that for Nakhnikian the principle is not demonstrated until Meditation IV. Therefore it has no function in either Meditation II or III.²⁶

Turning to question (4) we can readily identify what is called into doubt in the Circle Passage on the aberrant view. It is the incorrigibility of any and all clear and distinct perceptions. But what is called into doubt on Descartes' considered view? Nakhnikian never explicitly tells us. He does, however, provide us with some clues. In one place he says:

Descartes has created for himself three major technical problems, and he believes that they can all be solved if, and only if, it can be proved that God exists. The three problems are: the justification of memory, the problem of justifying perceptual beliefs,

²⁵ Ibid., p. 153.

²⁶ Nakhnikian has a number of interesting things to say about the principle (cf. pp. 97-104, 107-109, 115-118, and elsewhere), but since it has no function on his account in getting Descartes out of the vicious circle, a discussion of its role is beyond our scope.

the problems posed by the evil demon 27
postulate.

Elsewhere Nakhnikian says:

The fairest and most generous interpretation of Descartes is that God is needed to guarantee the truth of some, not all, of our clear and distinct perceptions. Specifically, Descartes thinks that God is needed to guarantee the truth of (1) all our clear and distinct perceptual judgments, (2) all our clear and distinct perceptions of our own states of wakefulness, (3) all clear and distinct memory impressions, and (4) all clear and distinct perceptions of [corrigible] mathematical 28 propositions. . .

Assuming that the dream and evil demon arguments in Meditation I effectively cast doubt about perceptual beliefs and corrigible mathematical propositions respectively, the Circle Passage casts doubt, then, on memory and the principle of clarity and distinctness itself.

The just cited passages from Nakhnikian also point to what the demonstration of God's existence and benevolent nature is intended to achieve. We have already seen how that achievement is to be reached. Assuming the considered view:

. . . it is open to Descartes to say that the premises from which he deduces God's existence and veracity are clear

²⁷ Ibid., p. 167.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 175.

and distinct propositions, which do not need God's guarantee. 29

Now Nakhnikian is of the opinion that neither the causal argument in Meditation III nor the ontological argument in Meditation V achieves what Descartes intends for it to achieve. But the failure does not involve circular reasoning. "The proofs of God's existence. . . are riddled with problems, but circularity need not be one of them."³⁰

Nakhnikian concludes:

The system that I have attributed to Descartes is not circular. It is simply incomplete, and perhaps uncompletable; but it is certainly not inescapably circular. 31

Nakhnikian's account is an interesting one. The technical distinctions that he argues for may prove helpful in considering interpretations to come, particularly the distinction he draws between two senses of 'indubitable'. Although the distinction is not used to any advantage by Nakhnikian in his interpretation, it foreshadows distinctions made by later Cartesian commentators. But his account is a difficult one to assess. By developing the thesis of

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 239-240.

³⁰ Nakhnikian, American Philosophical Quarterly, p. 255.

³¹ Nakhnikian, An Introduction to Philosophy, p. 240.

two views each of which Descartes held at various times (but presumably not simultaneously), Nakhnikian has put himself in the position of being able to say with respect to any textual evidence which is inconsistent with his interpretation of Descartes' more considered view, "Ah, but that is the aberrant view being espoused."

There are some critical comments, however, that can be made about Nakhnikian's account. The first is that Nakhnikian does not indicate in which passages Descartes explicitly expressed his more considered doctrine. I suggested a few myself.³² However, in each instance where Descartes can be found making an assertion supporting the considered view, he follows those assertions with ones that confirm the aberrant view.³³ In fact, Nakhnikian points to no instance in which Descartes appears to hold the considered view without later contradicting it (with the aberrant view) within the same work. He as much as admits this:

The overall impression is that Descartes is not wholly consistent. There is evidence that he is not altogether comfortable with the aberrant view,

³²Cf. note 4 above.

³³For HR I, p. 140, cf. p. 140; for HR I, pp. 150, 152, cf. pp. 158-159; for HR I, p. 160-161, cf. p. 178; for Principles VII and X, cf. XXX.

but there is also evidence that he never gave it up. 34

Seen in this light Nakhnikian's account is not one that interprets Descartes' writings in a manner consistent with the text and succeeds in allowing him out of the circle, as he leads us to believe when he says in the beginning of his article:

. . . a circle. . . exists if, and only if, we assume that a certain aberrant view is part of Descartes' considered doctrine. 35

The textual evidence would appear to indicate that the aberrant view is an inescapable part of Descartes' doctrine. Nakhnikian gives himself away when, prior to arguing for the considered doctrine, he says, "Descartes ought to have disowned the aberrant view. . ." ³⁶ Perhaps he ought to have, but the evidence indicates that he did not. Whether or not Descartes' failure to deny what Nakhnikian views as an aberrant view inevitably leads to a vicious circle remains to be seen. ³⁷

³⁴ Nakhnikian, American Philosophical Quarterly, p. 252.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 251.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 253.

³⁷ Nakhnikian does offer one line of reasoning within his later article (cf. p. 254) to demonstrate that, on the aberrant view, a vicious circle is inescapable. He does so in criticizing an interpretation offered by Harry Frankfurt which I discuss in the next chapter. At that

A second criticism is that throughout Nakhnikian's more extensive treatment of Descartes, the considered doctrine receives minimal textual support with respect to matters other than clarity and distinctness. Nakhnikian does contend frequently that his interpretation is exegetically accurate. But he develops premises for arguments without demonstrating what specific textual evidence supports them. For example, in providing six premises for the dream argument, he states parenthetically, "I believe, it is needless to say, that (1)-(5) can be attributed to Descartes without qualification."³⁸

Finally, Nakhnikian admits that the textual evidence indicates "Descartes was not wholly consistent." In fact, I argue that given Nakhnikian's thesis of two views, the textual evidence indicates that Descartes was entirely inconsistent. This could very well be the case. But before committing myself to this undesirable consequence, I would like to consider some alternative interpretations.

On Nakhnikian's interpretation, those instances in which Descartes appears to doubt certain propositions which

time I will present Nakhnikian's argument and explain why I believe it fails to demonstrate the inescapable consequence of circular reasoning on the aberrant view.

³⁸Nakhnikian, An Introduction to Philosophy, p. 83.

he earlier claimed were certain are treated as aberrant. Other Cartesian commentators also wishing to ascribe a limited or partial autonomy of reason to Descartes have devised much different strategies to account for the apparent inconsistencies. Among them is John Morris. In "Cartesian Certainty"³⁹ he argues that the charge of circularity rests on a serious misapprehension of what Descartes was about.

Like Nakhnikian, Morris draws attention to certain terms that he claims Descartes uses with comparative precision and consistency. In Morris' case these technical terms are: 'eternal truth', 'common notions', and 'natural light'.

The first reference to 'eternal truths' occurs in a letter to Mersenne in which Descartes first mentions the extent of God's omnipotence.

The mathematical truths which you call eternal have been laid down by God and depend on Him entirely no less than the rest of his creatures. Indeed to say that these truths are independent of God is to talk of Him as if He were Jupiter or Saturn and to subject Him to the Styx and the Fates. Please do not hesitate to assert and proclaim everywhere that it is God who has laid down these laws in nature just as a king lays down laws in his kingdom.

³⁹ John Morris, "Cartesian Certainty," Australasian Journal of Philosophy Vol. 47 (1969) pp. 161-168.

There is no single one that we cannot understand if our mind turns to consider it. They are all inborn in our minds [mentibus nostris ingenitae] just as a king would imprint his laws on the hearts of all his subjects if he had enough power to do so. 40

In order to better understand what the term 'eternal truth' means, Morris suggests that one must understand what 'truth' means to Descartes. About the latter Descartes says:

. . . it is a notion which is so transcendently clear that it is impossible not to know what it means. . . the meaning of the word could certainly be explained to those who do not understand the language, and they could be told that this word 'truth', in its proper signification, denotes the conformity of the thought with the object. . . 41

From this Morris concludes:

In its 'proper' meaning for Descartes, then, truth is a binary relationship between thought and object, the relationship of conformity. An 'eternal truth' would then be one for which this relationship always holds. It would express a thought to which objects always conform. Descartes' 'eternal truths' might also have been called 'universal' or

⁴⁰ Letter to Mersenne, April 15, 1630 (Kenny, op. cit., p. 11). Morris provides his own translation. It does not differ in any appreciable way from that of Kenny. Morris also suggests referring to the May 6 and May 27 letters to Mersenne of the same year.

⁴¹ From the Letter to Mersenne, October 16, 1639 (Ibid., pp. 65-66). The translation is Morris'. It does not differ appreciably from Kenny's.

'absolute', because they are supposed to hold in all possible worlds, and because we cannot conceive of their contraries. Descartes, however, prefers to call them 'eternal' and to derive them, in part, from the unchanging character of God. 42

Among the examples that Morris suggests are 'eternal truths' for Descartes are:

Each particle preserves its own state until acted upon by another.

Each particle tends to move in a straight line.

Every collision preserves the same amount of motion.

Every mountain must have a valley.

Two and three must equal five.

What does Descartes mean, then, when he says that 'eternal truths' were created by God? Morris suggests:

First, God has willed that nature obey certain laws, which operate eternally and without change. Second, he has given us the ability to recognize the eternal truths whenever we conceive them clearly and distinctly. Third, God has established an exact conformity between these conceptions and their objects. It is because of this conformity that we call them truths. The conformity is guaranteed by the proof that God is not a deceiver. 43

⁴²Morris, op. cit., p. 163.

⁴³Ibid.

But what exactly is the nature of this guarantee? Morris does not state it explicitly, but he does proceed to argue:

If God were a deceiver, then this conformity might not hold. There might be a mountain which did not have a valley. The objects of our mathematical theorems might not be true. When two objects are 'joined with' three objects, the result might not be five objects. . . . A square might not have four sides, a triangle might not have three sides. Descartes readily admits that we cannot imagine what such a world would be like, but this proves nothing about the real nature of our world. If God were a deceiver, it would be quite within his power to make this world which behaved in ways which violate the laws of mathematics, logic, and Cartesian physics.

We can go even further. In the extreme case, although we seem to perceive an external world, everything outside our thought could be an illusion. Although we seem to remember the past, God could have created us at the present moment, complete with all our present memories of a wholly fictitious past. 44

Although Morris does not discuss the scope of doubt in Meditation I, I believe we are now in a position to hazard a guess on what his response to question (1) would be. The dream argument presumably casts doubt on beliefs based on sense perception. The evil demon argument casts doubt on beliefs that are based on reason. This doubt extends to beliefs about mathematical propositions and may even extend to beliefs concerning the 'eternal truths'. It is not

⁴⁴Ibid.

clear, however, from Morris' account whether doubt about this last class of beliefs occurs in Meditation I or in the Circle Passage in Meditation III.

Before attempting to determine Morris' position with respect to question (2), it is necessary to complete our analysis of the two remaining technical terms that he maintains Descartes employed.

There is, Morris claims, a general class of objects of knowledge which, for Descartes, are known with certainty prior to knowledge of God's existence and nature. This class consists of 'common notions'. Morris argues:

In the Rules for the Direction of the Mind (and later in the Principles), 'common notions' are said to state the invariable relations between the objects of knowledge. They are 'common' in that they refer to more than one idea, and serve to link these 45 ideas together.

If we look at Rule XII, for example, we find Descartes saying:

. . . common notions. . . are . . . bonds for connecting together the other simple natures, and on whose evidence all the inferences which we obtain by reasoning depend. The following are examples: -things that are the same as a third thing are the same as one another. So too: -things which do not bear the same relation to a third thing, have some diversity from each

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 165.

other, etc. As a matter of fact these common notions can be discerned by the understanding. . . unaided. 46

Morris concludes that in the Rules 'common notions' "are simply the links between our present thoughts, functioning somewhat like rules of inference."⁴⁷ In the Principles a similar analysis is provided and one very important example is added. Descartes says:

When we apprehend that it is impossible that anything can be formed of nothing, the proposition ex nihilo nihil fit is not to be considered as an existing thing, or the mode of a thing, but as a certain eternal truth which has its seat in our mind, and is a common notion or axiom. 48

If we look closely at this statement and examine Principles XLVIII and L as well, the term 'common notion' seems to be used interchangeably with the term 'eternal truth'. In a footnote Morris explains that the Latin edition of the Principles does contain the words "eternal truths"; but in the later French edition (which Descartes revised) the word "eternal" has been removed. He argues that the Haldane and Ross translation is in error here. As further evidence Morris points to the Conversation with

⁴⁶HR I, pp. 41-42.

⁴⁷Morris, op. cit., p. 165.

⁴⁸HR I, pp. 238-239.

Burman in which Descartes states, when questioned about this passage in the Principles, that by 'eternal truths' he means those which are called 'common notions'. And Morris claims, "'Eternal truth' is never said to be equivalent to 'common notion' in any other place."⁴⁹

Morris concludes from all this that:

. . . the common notions are of rather a different logical type from the eternal truths. The eternal truths refer to entities which are not my present thoughts. They say something like 'There is no mountain without a valley'. A mountain, whatever it is, is not a thought. Since God is all-powerful, he could make a mountain without a valley, and thus deceive us about the truth of this principle. But the common notions are supposed only to state the relations between our thoughts or concepts. We cannot be deceived about them, because there is no conformity between a thought and an external object, which could be falsified by the evil genius. 50

We might ask, however, by what faculty do we come to know the common notions? Morris' response is this: we know that the common notions are true because we recognize the relationships between our own thoughts. Cognoscere, which Morris translates as "to know by acquaintance," is the term used to describe this recognition. The faculty

⁴⁹Morris, op. cit., p. 165. (cf. note 13.)

⁵⁰Ibid.

with which we 'know by acquaintance' is given a technical name, 'natural light'. Morris' claim is that "Descartes. uses the expression 'natural light' in the Meditations and the Principles with a technical meaning, which he explains as an instinct, faculty, or disposition to recognize the truth."⁵¹ Morris goes on to argue:

We are never deceived about what the natural light reveals to us, because there is no point at which deception can enter. No matter how extreme Descartes makes his doubts appear, there is almost no point anywhere in his writings where he even counts it as possible that we could be deceived about the natural light. 52

With these last two technical terms, 'common notions' and 'natural light', Morris provides an interpretation that allows Descartes to avoid circular reasoning. As we saw earlier, one example of a common notion provided in the Principles is the principle, ex nihilo nihil fit (nothing can come from nothing). It is by means of this principle that Descartes deduces his own existence from the fact that he thinks. Morris contends:

⁵¹Ibid., p. 166. In footnote 14 Morris refers to the following passages to support his contention: Meditation III (HR I, pp. 160-161); Principles Part I, XXX (HR I, p. 231); Letter to Mersenne, October 16, 1639 (Kenny, op. cit., pp. 65-67).

⁵²Ibid.

I know directly and indubitably that my own thoughts exist, while I am thinking them. These thoughts must be the modes of something, since nothing comes from nothing, and therefore I must exist. 53

Once the Cogito is established, Descartes can move to demonstrate that God exists. Morris argues:

I know directly that my own thought of God exists. But this idea cannot be less perfect than its source, since all its infinite perfection must come from somewhere, and nothing can come from nothing. Therefore, the source of my idea must be God and must exist. 54

We are now in a position to suggest a response for Morris to question (2). Until the Cogito is successfully demonstrated, the only certainties that Descartes has are the common notions revealed by the natural light. The Cogito establishes, for the first time, the existence of one thing, an entity that thinks. Those thoughts must also exist. Among them is the thought of God. This suggests that although the Cogito has an epistemic status that is more certain than that of the eternal truths, it is not first among Descartes' knowledge claims. That status must be reserved for the common notions. The significance of the Cogito on Morris' account is that it is the very first

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 167. (cf. HR I, p. 163.)

step in a series of deductions that culminates in the proof of an existent, benevolent God.

With respect to question (3), Morris does not have much to say about the principle of clarity and distinctness.

At one point he says:

. . . he [Descartes] wishes to show that our clear and distinct conceptions are all true.

For this, he requires a proof, which will show that God is not a deceiver, and that the world is not in the hands of some evil genius, who destroys the conformity between our clear and distinct conceptions, and the objects to which they refer.⁵⁵

This suggests that the principle of clarity and distinctness plays no role in achieving certainty prior to the demonstration of God's existence.

I suggested earlier that it is not clear from Morris' account whether doubt about eternal truths is established by the evil demon argument in Meditation I or in the Circle Passage in Meditation III. The textual evidence would make either alternative consistent with Morris' thesis. Presumably the principle of clarity and distinctness is among those principles toward which doubt is directed in the Circle Passage.

Morris' response to question (5) would be that, once it is proven that God exists and is no deceiver, the doubt

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 164.

raised by the evil demon hypothesis in Meditation I and in the Circle Passage is removed. How God's existence is proven has already been demonstrated.

I know directly that my own thought of God exists. But this idea cannot be less perfect than its source, since all its infinite perfection must come from somewhere, and nothing can come from nothing. Therefore, the source of my idea must be God and must exist. ⁵⁶

As we have seen, once the Cogito has been established Descartes can eventually conclude (using the faculty of natural light) that his thoughts, particularly that of God, exist. The common notion ex nihilo nihil fit has already been revealed by that faculty. By using this faculty yet again he can now deduce that God exists. Once His existence is demonstrated, the same common notion and faculty can be employed to demonstrate that God is no deceiver.

Morris argues:

Deception is a form of error and . . . error is not a positive existence but is simply nothing, a gap or a lack. But this nothing cannot come from God, since nothing comes from nothing, and God is perfect being, without gaps or lacks. Therefore, God is not the source of error. ⁵⁷

Morris' conclusion is:

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 167.

⁵⁷Ibid.

The set of principles upon which his proof of God depends are not at all the same as the 'eternal truths' of mathematics, geometry, and physics, which he is attempting to validate. His proof thus does not depend on what he is attempting to prove. 58

Descartes may succeed in avoiding circular reasoning on Morris' account, but, as Morris points out, he does so only by making a particular illegitimate move early in the Meditations. The faculty of 'natural light' is applicable only to 'common notions' which, in turn, avoid the doubt imposed by a deceiving demon only because they express relationships between ideas in the mind and never refer to something outside the mind. But the principle, ex nihilo nihil fit, is a causal principle which does not merely express a relationship between ideas in the mind, but expresses a relationship between things. In the proof of God's existence the principle expresses a relationship between my idea of God and God Himself. Now while my idea of God may be solely within my mind,⁵⁹ its cause is outside my mind. Thus, the 'natural light' cannot provide the

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 164.

⁵⁹ Morris does not think this to be the case. "My idea is not considered merely as a mode of my mind, but as a thing in its own right, which must have a cause." (p. 167).

certainty that we need for this principle, and hence for this proof. If Descartes gives up the certainty, according to Morris, he faces circularity. If he maintains that the certainty is still there, he retreats to dogmatism.

Morris believes Descartes chose the latter move.

One might object to Morris' account on the following grounds. According to Morris, Descartes cannot be defended from the charge of circular reasoning by arguing for a limited or partial autonomy of reason without making him into a dogmatist. But perhaps what is at fault is not Descartes' epistemology, but the strategy which attributes to him the need to exclude at least some of his beliefs or faculties from doubt. However, there are other reasons for rejecting Morris' interpretation. In "Cartesian Certainty and the Natural Light"⁶⁰ Peter Schouls suggests one such reason.

As we have seen, it is essential for Morris to demonstrate that the infallibility of the faculty of 'natural light' is never questioned by Descartes. In fact, Morris asserts at one point, "We are never deceived about what the natural light reveals to us, because there is no point at

⁶⁰Peter Schouls, "Cartesian Certainty and the Natural Light," Australasian Journal of Philosophy Vol. 48 (1970) pp. 116-119.

which deception can enter."⁶¹ If it were otherwise, Descartes could not escape the vicious circle given Morris' interpretation. But at another point Morris asserts that "Descartes never - or almost never - falls into this vicious circle."⁶² This qualification suggests that a closer look at Morris' account of 'natural light' is in order. As Schouls points out, Morris has to acknowledge one passage in which the natural light does not escape being doubted. Morris says:

No matter how extreme Descartes makes his doubts appear, there is almost no point anywhere in his writings where he even counts it as possible that we could be deceived about the natural light. 63

In a footnote Morris acknowledges that "The exception is at Principles, I, 30. I do not have an explanation for this passage."⁶⁴ In the passage in question Descartes asserts:

Whence it follows that the light of nature, or the faculty of knowledge which God has given us, can never disclose to us any object which is not true, inasmuch as it comprehends it, that is, inasmuch as it apprehends

⁶¹Morris, op. cit., p. 166.

⁶²Ibid., p. 164.

⁶³Ibid., p. 166. (Italics mine)

⁶⁴Ibid. (cf. note 15)

it clearly and distinctly. Because we should have had reason to think God a deceiver if He had given us this faculty perverted, or such that we should take the false for the true (when using the faculty aright). 65

Now this principle follows others which demonstrate God's existence and non-deceiving nature. Thus, the opening statement implies that the infallibility of the faculty of natural light is dependent on, rather than prior to, God's existence and nature. Furthermore, the phrase "if He had given us this faculty perverted" strongly suggests the possibility that a deceiving God could cause us to err in using this faculty. This passage casts doubt upon Morris' account.

There is at least one additional problem as well. Morris claims that on his account the difficulty that Descartes faces is employing the principle ex nihilo nihil fit to demonstrate God's existence. The problem is that the principle does not meet the criteria for something to be a common notion and thereby immune to doubt. But on Morris' account the principle is also employed to demonstrate the Cogito. If it is inappropriate in one application, it would presumably be inappropriate in both. If so, then on Morris' account it seems that Descartes must resort

⁶⁵HR I, p. 231.

to dogmatism not only to demonstrate God's existence, but also to demonstrate his own. And that strikes me as extremely counter-intuitive.

In the aforementioned critique of Morris' account Peter Schouls suggests that where Morris went wrong was in his treatment of the technical term 'natural light'. He suggests that, whereas 'reason' and 'natural light' are often used interchangeably by Descartes, 'natural light' is never equivalent to 'intuition' as Morris would have it. In his article "Descartes and the Autonomy of Reason"⁶⁶ Schouls provides a more extensive analysis of the function of reason in Descartes' philosophy and he argues for some important distinctions which, he claims, clarify the role of God's existence in the Meditations and enable Descartes to avoid the charge of circular reasoning.

In examining the functions of reason for Descartes, Schouls points to the role of intuition and deduction. Early in the Rules for the Direction of the Mind Descartes states in Rule III:

. . . we shall here take note of all those mental operations by which we are able. . . to arrive at the knowledge

⁶⁶Peter Schouls, "Descartes and the Autonomy of Reason," Journal of the History of Philosophy Vol. 10 (1972) pp. 307-322.

of things. Now I admit only two, 67
viz. intuition and deduction.

Again in Rule IV in discussing how "we may arrive at the knowledge of all things," he states that "no science is acquired except by mental intuition or deduction."⁶⁸

And finally in Rule IX he concludes:

We have now indicated the two operations of our understanding, intuition and deduction, on which alone we have said we must rely in 69
the acquisition of knowledge.

Schouls concludes from this that for Descartes neither intuition nor deduction alone is identical with reason. But together they "express the essence of reason."⁷⁰ It is also important to note, claims Schouls, that 'deduction' for Descartes is something other than Aristotelian deduction. To support this contention he points to Descartes' rejection of syllogistic reasoning as a method for discovering truth. Descartes states:

. . . the syllogistic forms are of no aid in perceiving the truth about objects, it will be for the reader's profit to reject them altogether and to conceive that all knowledge whatsoever, other than that which consists in the simple and naked intuition of

⁶⁷HR I, p. 7.

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 9, 10.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 28.

⁷⁰Schouls, Journal of the History of Philosophy, p. 311.

single independent objects, is a matter of the comparison of two things 71 or more, with each other.

The distinction between intuition and deduction is also well documented in Descartes' writings. In the Rules he asserts:

. . . intuition . . . is more certain than deduction . . .

Hence now we are in a position to raise the question as to why we have, besides intuition, given this supplementary method of knowing, viz. knowing by deduction. . . we distinguish this mental intuition from deduction by the fact that into the conception of the latter there enters a certain movement or succession, into that of the former there does not. . . But the first principles themselves are given by intuition alone, while, on the contrary, the remote conclusions are furnished 72 only by deduction.

Thus, intuition and deduction can be distinguished by three criteria: certainty (one is more certain), time (one is immediate, the other involves duration and movement), and their objects (one gives first principles, the other remote conclusions).

Up to this point Schouls has provided a rather traditional interpretation of Cartesian reason. He goes on, however, to argue that a distinction can be made for Descartes between two kinds of intuition.

⁷¹HR I, p. 55.

⁷²Ibid., pp. 7, 8.

The kind of intuition described so far I will call intuition₁. There is another kind of intuition which I will call intuition₂. Intuition₁ and intuition₂ have in common that the act of intuition occurs instantaneously and hence excludes successive movement and memory. They differ in that whereas the object of intuition₁ is simple and hence not subject to division or analysis, the object of intuition₂ is compound and can be divided or analysed. Intuition₂ therefore is more closely related to deduction than is intuition₁. In fact, whereas intuition₁ is in no way dependent on deduction, intuition₂ can occur only after deduction has taken place. 73

Schouls cites certain passages in which he claims Descartes refers to intuition₂. Descartes says at one point:

. . . those propositions. . . which are immediately deduced from first principles are known now by intuition, now by deduction, i.e. in a way that differs according to our point of view. But the first principles are given by intuition alone. . . 74

And Schouls argues:

Since the first principles cannot be derived through deduction, that is, are simple, the intuition through which we know them is intuition₁. Propositions which are in any way deduced from what is simple cannot themselves be simple. They will vary in complexity, depending on how far they are removed from the simples from which they are ultimately

⁷³Schouls, Journal of the History of Philosophy, p. 313.

⁷⁴HR I, p. 8.

derived. It is possible, especially with short deductions, to come to see the different steps involved in the deductive process in a single glance. When propositions are "immediately derived from first principles" the deductive process involves one step only. Hence in such an instance it will not be difficult to grasp the entire deductive process in a single intuition. Intuition then has as object something compound, that is, 75 it is intuition₂.

Descartes says in Rule VII:

. . . deduction frequently involves such a long series of transitions from ground to consequent that when we come to the conclusion we have difficulty in recalling the whole of the route by which we arrived at it. . . To remedy this I would run them over from time to time, keeping the imagination moving continuously in such a way that while it is intuitively perceiving each fact it simultaneously passes on to the next; and this I would do until I had learned to pass from the first to the last so quickly, that no stage in the process was left to the care of the memory, but I seemed to have the whole in intuition before me at the same time. 76

And Schouls contends, "'The whole' thus held in a single intuitive grasp is, again, compound, and intuition is intuition₂." 77

⁷⁵Schouls, Journal of the History of Philosophy, p. 314.

⁷⁶HR I, p. 19.

⁷⁷Schouls, Journal of the History of Philosophy, p. 314.

The distinction, Schouls contends, is not brought into sharp focus in the Rules because Descartes is not concerned here with metaphysical doubt. Throughout the Rules Descartes considers both kinds of intuition infallible. But in the Meditations, when metaphysical doubt is introduced, there is no indication that it affects intuition₁ and many indications that it does not. Therefore, let us now turn to Schouls' treatment of the Meditations, particularly his account of the alleged circle.

In response to question (1) Schouls maintains that Descartes has no difficulty rejecting sense experience for he realizes (presumably through the dream argument) that the senses sometimes deceive him and, therefore, that what is derived from the senses is dubitable. The main reason for the rejection of the physical sciences by Descartes is traditionally thought to be that they involve observation and experimentation. This, claims Schouls, is not the major reason that the sciences fail to withstand the metaphysical doubt to which they are subjected in Meditation I (presumably through the evil genius hypothesis). He argues:

. . . Descartes' position is that observation and experimentation play no role in the construction of any of the sciences. Moreover, if man's understanding were more powerful, better trained, less beset with prejudices, man would be able to deduce all of the sciences from his

first principles. The point is, rather, that deduction is necessary to gain scientific knowledge and that, even though for a well-trained scientist much of a particular science may eventually fall within a single intuitive grasp, the object of such intuition will always be composite.⁷⁸

I take Schouls to be referring here to intuition₂ which, on his account, will require the demonstration that God exists in order for certainty to be achieved.

But what about mathematical propositions? At one point Schouls contends that mathematics "differs from the other sciences in that its subject matter is simple."⁷⁹ This suggests that mathematical propositions are known by intuition₁ and ought to be immune to doubt. However, Schouls also maintains that when the evil genius is introduced in Meditation I:

. . . the doubt is possible because mathematics is the science which manipulates [the objects of mathematics] by relating them and drawing inferences from them. Deduction, composition, or demonstration is as essential to mathematics as it is to any other science. 80

On Schouls' view, then, when I add two and three or count the sides of a square, I am involved in a process from which

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 317, 318. (cf. HR I, pp. 208-209, 229, 269, 299, 306, and HR II, p. 375.)

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 318.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

I either deduce or intuit the propositions 'two and three are five' or 'a square has four sides'. If I deduce them, they are not immune to doubt. But even if I intuit them, the object of my intuition is not simple. Thus, my intuition is intuition₂ and subject to doubt. In Meditation I doubt arises about beliefs based on reason as well as about beliefs based on sense perception, but for reasons that are very different from those traditionally attributed to Descartes.

What then of the Cogito? Schouls' position is similar to that of Morris. While the Cogito has no epistemic status prior to that of other first principles perceived by means of intuition₁, its significance lies in the fact that it provides Descartes with an example of an entity whose existence is demonstrated solely by means of intuition₁. And this result provides Descartes with a starting point from which he can proceed to validate intuition₂ and deduction. Schouls says:

It would be a mistake to conclude at this point that, since none of the objects of intuition₁ are susceptible to metaphysical doubt, the Cogito is not in some sense unique. . . . Descartes places all objects of intuition₁ beyond the grasp of the evil genius but, because the reductio ad absurdum of universal skepticism necessarily involves making one of them, the Cogito, explicit, the Cogito alone becomes the natural point of departure for the validation of deduction and intuition₂. Of all objects

of intuition₁, it is the Cogito alone in which there is no distinction between idea and what it is an idea of. Hence the Cogito is the first certainty involving existence. . . ⁸¹

Before turning to an examination of just how the achievement of the Cogito provides Descartes with a basis for successfully demonstrating God's existence, some comment on how the principle of clarity and distinctness fits into Schouls' schema is called for. Schouls' position with respect to question (3) should be fairly clear, although he makes little mention of the principle in his article. In passing he says at one point:

. . . God [becomes] the guarantor of the truth of a certain class of complex ideas, namely of those that are clear ⁸² and distinct.

Given his distinction between two kinds of intuition, I take Schouls to be suggesting that the principle of clarity and distinctness ranges over both intuition₁ and intuition₂ (and perhaps deduction as well). With the former no doubt arises, but not so with the latter. A guarantee of their truth is required. Knowledge of an existent, benevolent God provides this guarantee. Thus, for Schouls, the principle itself plays no role in Meditation II or III in

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 319, 320.

⁸² Ibid., p. 320.

demonstrating God's existence or in achieving metaphysical certainty.

With respect to question (4), oddly enough Schouls does not discuss the Circle Passage. Since he states quite explicitly that metaphysical doubt is raised in Meditation I by the evil genius hypothesis, it is not clear on Schouls' account why the doubt is resurrected again in Meditation III. One possibility might be that Descartes was warning the reader that the achievement of the Cogito in Meditation II was insufficient to achieve metaphysical certainty with respect to complex clear and distinct perceptions. If so, the Circle Passage becomes a stylistic device serving a methodological purpose only.

We now come to question (5). How do we get from the Cogito to the existence of God? Schouls argues:

In a sense, it can be said that in the Cogito we are conscious of God rather than of ourselves for, as Descartes puts it, "I have in me the notion of the infinite earlier than the finite-to wit, the notion of God before that of myself" (HR 1, 166). The important point to note, however, is that nothing follows from the idea of the infinite unless we introduce the causal principle, unless we agree that "it is manifest by the natural light that there must at least be as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in its effect" (HR 1, 162). And the causal principle is one of the propositions which is intelligible per se (HR 2, 54), which cannot be derived and hence is an object of intuition₁. Thus we cannot get to

God-the-guarantor-of-reason unless
we presuppose the validity of intui- 83
tion₁.

And what does the demonstration of God's existence provide?
For Schouls we gain the certainty of intuition₂ and deduc-
tion and all the beliefs gained by means of each which were
cast into doubt back in Meditation I.

Schouls concludes:

Our way of gaining knowledge of what
is complex stands in need of validation.
This validation introduces the talk
about God. But I have argued that such
validation is possible only if intuition₁
is autonomous.

. . . I have argued that there is much
evidence in Descartes' writings that he
held reason to be [partially] autonomous.
If reason is autonomous, the "Circle" 84
does not exist.

While I find the distinction between two kinds of
intuition both interesting and plausible, its use in
getting Descartes out of the circle I find questionable.
There are also two additional problems that I find with
Schouls' account. For example, I find Schouls' treatment of
mathematics in Meditation I dubious. There are instances in
the Meditations where Descartes gives at least the appear-
ance of placing mathematical propositions on the same level

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 321, 322.

as the Cogito and other first principles. For example, in the Circle Passage Descartes states:

Let who will deceive me, He can never
 cause me to be nothing while I think
 that I am, or some day cause it to be
 true to say that I have never been, it
 being true now to say that I am, or
 that two and three make more or less ⁸⁵
 than five. . .

In this passage Descartes seems to be putting at least one mathematical proposition on the same epistemic basis as the Cogito. Now, if the Cogito does not fall prey to the doubt of the evil genius, then neither should the mathematical proposition. And if the latter does, then so should the former. Quite frankly I do not find Schouls' argument for placing mathematical propositions within the class of objects of intuition₂ convincing.

The problem just discussed points to a second objection which I have to Schouls' presentation. I find the absence of any discussion or treatment of the Circle Passage disappointing. Here is one place where Descartes at least appears to be casting doubt on even the most evident propositions, including the Cogito. At the very least it would have been helpful in assessing Schouls' account to see a careful explanation of how Descartes' assertions in that passage can be interpreted in a manner consistent with

⁸⁵HR I, p. 159.

Schouls' schema.

Neither of the two objections just given poses insurmountable problems for Schouls. I believe the following one does. The most telling problem has to do with the move which Schouls has Descartes making from the Cogito to the demonstration of God's existence. The only way in which the conclusion that God exists can be certain is if it is achieved through intuition₁. Yet the objects of intuition₁ are supposed to be simple on Schouls' account. Schouls has failed to provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate that intuition₁ can be used to conclude that a non-deceiving God exists. And I don't believe he can consistently do so. While Descartes steadfastly maintains that the Cogito is not a deduction,⁸⁶ he does state explicitly in various places that the existence of God is something which he has proven by means of an argument or proof:

In the third Meditation it seems to me that I have explained at sufficient length the principle argument of which I make use in order to prove the existence of God. 87

Schouls may be correct in arguing that the causal principle which Descartes employs to prove that God exists is known per se, that is, through intuition₁. It remains to be

⁸⁶HR II, p. 38.

⁸⁷HR I, p. 141.

demonstrated that the application of that principle does not involve a need for intuition₂. In fact, the textual evidence indicates that Descartes considered the demonstration of God's existence in Meditation III to be in the form of an argument. Arguments have premises and conclusions. Even if Descartes is able to attend to the entire argument in a single perception, on Schouls' interpretation Descartes' intuition is intuition₂, not intuition₁. Circular reasoning does not appear to have been circumvented by Descartes on Schouls' interpretation.

I have presented three distinct attempts to interpret Descartes, all of which share a common perspective. Each sees Descartes' only escape from circular reasoning lying in the direction of a partial autonomy of reason. I have attempted to demonstrate that none of the three proves satisfactory. In the next two chapters I will consider certain Cartesian commentators who argue for the non-autonomy of reason in Descartes' philosophy.

C H A P T E R I I I

Among the first contemporary Cartesian commentators to suggest that Descartes' primary goal in the Meditations is the defense of reason, that is, that no aspect of reason is autonomous, is Harry Frankfurt. In "Descartes' Validation of Reason"¹ Frankfurt distinguishes between doubting the truth of a proposition and doubting the relationship between a proposition's indubitability and its truth. His contention is that many Cartesian commentators equate the two in Descartes' writings and some are thereby led to conclude that Descartes was guilty of circular reasoning. Since his article is concerned solely with matters relating to questions (4) and (5), in order to determine his position on questions (1), (2), and (3) we must turn to his more extensive treatment of Descartes in Demons, Dreamers and Madmen: The Defense of Reason in Descartes's Meditations² in which he also develops his position with respect to Meditations I and II.

¹Harry Frankfurt, "Descartes' Validation of Reason," American Philosophical Quarterly Vol. 2 (1965) pp. 149-156.

²Harry Frankfurt, Demons, Dreamers and Madmen: The Defense of Reason in Descartes's Meditations, Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc. New York (1970).

Frankfurt argues that from the very start Descartes appears to be making a distinction between doubting those beliefs that may be false and doubting those beliefs that are uncertain. Descartes states near the beginning of Meditation I:

. . . reason already persuades me that I ought no less carefully to withhold my assent from matters which are not entirely certain and indubitable than from those which appear to me manifestly to be false, if I am able to find in each one some reason to doubt, this will suffice to justify my rejecting the whole. 3

On the basis of this Frankfurt suggests:

As the First Meditation gets under way, then, Descartes's concern apparently shifts from considerations of truth and falsity to those of certainty and doubt . . .

. . . in [the early passages of the First Meditation] Descartes is concerned mainly with the distinction between the certain and the doubtful. It is in terms of this distinction, rather than in terms of the distinction between true and false, that he undertakes to decide what to believe. 4

Frankfurt's position on question (1) is this:

³HR I, p. 145. Kenny provides his own translation. I will refer to his only in the event any difference between his and that of Haldane and Ross point to something fundamental in Kenny's interpretation.

⁴Frankfurt, Demons, Dreamers and Madmen, pp. 25, 26.

Descartes ends the First Meditation doubting all propositions concerning perceptual objects and, indeed, skeptical of the very existence of the material world.⁵

The dream argument accomplishes some of this for Descartes.

Frankfurt argues:

The import of the dream argument is that even if Descartes makes the most generous assumptions and supposes that he is a normal perceiver who obtains sensory data under conditions favorable in every respect discoverable by the senses, he cannot be certain that the sensory data he obtains will be veridical. Even when it is attempted under the most suitable conditions that the senses can select, discrimination between veridical and non-veridical data with the senses alone remains uncertain.⁶

The dream argument by itself, however, gives us neither doubt about all propositions concerning perceptual objects nor doubt about the existence of the material world. That uncertainty remains to be demonstrated by the evil demon argument. Frankfurt claims:

. . . his [Descartes'] observation that the distinction between wakefulness and dreaming is uncertain did not affect beliefs in the reality of various simple and universal things- "corporeal nature in general and its extension, the shape of extended things, . . ." and so on. . . . The dream argument also left intact the supposition that there is a material

⁵Ibid., p. 15.

⁶Ibid., p. 42.

world: the conclusion Descartes drew from his consideration of dreams was merely that we cannot distinguish with certainty between real material objects ⁷ and those that are dreamed.

The hypothesis of an evil demon is introduced to cast doubt on those very beliefs that escaped the doubt raised by the dream argument. Descartes states:

Nevertheless I have long had fixed in my mind the belief that an all powerful God existed by whom I have been created such as I am. But how do I know that He has not brought it to pass that there is no earth, no heaven, no extended body, no magnitude, no place, and that nevertheless (I possess the perceptions of all these things and that) they seem to me to exist just exactly as I now see ⁸ them?

And Frankfurt concludes that "[This] passage about an omnipotent deity. . . raises for the first time the possibility that there are no material objects at all."⁹

But what about the truths of mathematics? On the one hand Descartes states:

. . . whether I am awake or asleep, two and three together always form five, and the square can never have more than four sides, and it does not seem possible that truths so clear and apparent

⁷ Ibid., p. 69.

⁸ HR I, p. 147.

⁹ Frankfurt, Demons, Dreamers and Madmen, p. 69.

can be suspected of any falsity (or 10
uncertainty).

This passage seems to place clear and distinct perceptions at least beyond the doubts raised by the dream argument.

On the other hand, Descartes concludes his introduction of the omnipotent deceiver (quoted on the previous page) by asserting:

And, besides, as I sometimes imagine
that others deceive themselves in the
things which they think they know best,
how do I know that I am not deceived
every time that I add two and three,
or count the sides of a square, or judge
of things yet simpler, if anything 11
simpler can be imagined?

In this passage it appears that Descartes is suggesting that the omnipotent deceiver hypothesis casts doubt on those mathematical propositions that escaped the doubt of the dream argument by being perceived clearly and distinctly.

Frankfurt's contention is that the appearances are very misleading. First, with respect to the passage that appears to place clearly and distinctly perceived mathematical propositions beyond the doubt raised by the dream argument, Frankfurt argues that the phrase which Haldane and Ross translate as "clear and apparent" does not

¹⁰HR I, p. 147.

¹¹Ibid.

indicate that Descartes was referring to clear and distinct perceptions. The Latin phrase is perspicuae veritates, which Frankfurt suggests may be translated as 'clear truths'. Frankfurt contends that Descartes generally uses the adjective clarus when speaking of clear and distinct perception. The French translation uses apparent rather than clair. Frankfurt hypothesizes that Haldane and Ross attempt to play it safe by offering a translation that combines both the Latin adjective and the French. The result is a most misleading translation.

Frankfurt also points to two passages that support his interpretation. The first is in the Conversation with Burman in which Descartes contends that in Meditation I he is considering someone who is only beginning to philosophize and who attends only to those things with which he is acquainted, that is, through the senses.¹² The second is from Descartes' replies to the seventh set of objections in which he states:

I said at the end of Meditation I
that everything which I had not yet com-
prehended with sufficient clearness could
be doubted by us. . .

¹²Conversation with Burman (cf. translation by Frankfurt, Demons, Dreamers and Madmen, p. 62.)

¹³HR II, p. 266.

Frankfurt concludes that the passage "hardly leaves any room for doubt that nothing discussed in the First Meditation is taken to be clearly and distinctly perceived."¹⁴

But if it is not the self-evident nature of mathematical propositions that is being doubted, precisely what is being doubted with respect to such propositions? Frankfurt's response is similar to that of Merrill Ring whose account was discussed in Chapter I. It is that Descartes conducts his discussion of mathematical propositions from the point of view of naive empiricism, inadequacies of which he is attempting to expose.

Thus, although Descartes ends Meditation I doubting all propositions concerning perceptual objects and the existence of the external world and mathematical propositions based on an empiricist principle, this accomplishment should not be construed as establishing that no sensory beliefs or mathematical propositions can be certain. On Frankfurt's account it is that:

The critique is designed to show, at the most, that no such beliefs can reasonably be regarded as certain by someone who has no resources other than those provided by common sense. But even if the senses cannot themselves provide a foundation for the sciences, it is another question entirely whether certainty in sensory

¹⁴ Frankfurt, Demons, Dreamers and Madmen, p. 64.

[and mathematical] matters can reasonably be attained once a sound philosophical foundation for knowledge has been constructed. 15

Turning to question (2), Frankfurt claims that among the achievements of the Cogito is the establishment of his existence as something which is inferred rather than self-evident to him. This is consistent with two of Frankfurt's general claims: one, that Descartes is attempting to validate reason rather than assuming that some aspect of it, and therefore some propositions, are beyond the need of any justification; and two, that Descartes is concerned at this point in his enterprise with demonstrating, not the truth of certain propositions, but the indubitability of those propositions. Thus, the purpose of the inference in the case of the Cogito is not to prove that sum is true, but to establish that his existence is certain or indubitable in a rather unusual sense. And Frankfurt proceeds to distinguish between certain senses of indubitability.

Although [Descartes] does not assert that sum is indubitable in the descriptive sense of the term- according to which what is indubitable is what cannot in fact be doubted by anyone- there are other senses of indubitability as well. In particular there are normative senses, according to which what is indubitable is what there is no reason to doubt or what there can be no reason

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 48-49.

to doubt. Descartes's intention. . .
 is, as a matter of fact, to assert that
sum is indubitable in a normative sense.¹⁶

If I understand Frankfurt's explanation, the descriptive sense of 'indubitable' can be defined as follows:

p is indubitable =_{df} for any person, S , p
 cannot be doubted by S .

Unfortunately, Frankfurt does not explain in what sense a proposition cannot be doubted, nor does he provide any examples of propositions that are indubitable in the descriptive sense.¹⁷

Frankfurt elucidates the peculiar certainty of sum by contrasting it with the indubitability (presumably normative) of various other types of statements. He describes three. The first consists of logically contingent statements which, when they are true, may be known with certainty. As examples he suggests statements about the sensory content of experience such as 'S feels a pain'. The belief that a pain is occurring may be regarded as beyond S's doubt. But in instances when S does not feel a pain, it is quite reasonable for S to doubt 'S feels a pain'. Frank-

¹⁶Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁷Given the comparison he makes between the indubitability of sum and that of necessary truths shortly thereafter, there is some reason to believe that he had the latter in mind as examples of statements which are descriptively indubitable.

furt concludes that statements about the sensory content of experience can be indubitable on some occasions and dubitable on others.

The second type consists of empirical statements for which a person may have sufficient evidence on a given occasion to render such a statement indubitable, while the absence of such evidence on other occasions would make it reasonable for the statement to be doubted.

The third type consists of statements that are rendered true by the act of asserting them. As an example Frankfurt suggests 'I am making a statement'. He argues:

Because of their self-confirming character, statements of this sort cannot be made falsely. Nevertheless there are occasions when they can reasonably be doubted or when they can be known to be false. When I am not making a statement, I may know that I am not. There may be circumstances in which I am simply not sure whether what I am doing constitutes making a statement, and in those circumstances I can reasonably doubt 18 whether I am doing so.

Frankfurt's conclusion is that in each of the three types of statements just considered there are certain conditions under which such statements can be considered indubitable. There are also certain conditions under which such statements can be considered dubitable. But such is not the

¹⁸Ibid., p. 104.

case for sum. Frankfurt's contention is that for Descartes it is logically impossible for there to be an occasion on which a person considers the statement sum and on which the statement is false. The indubitability of sum is thereby different from that of the types of statements just considered. Frankfurt summarizes the distinction as follows:

The certainty of beliefs concerning the content of consciousness is, as it were, contingent upon the occurrence of those contents. But the certainty of sum is not contingent in this way, since a person can never be aware that he does not exist. ¹⁹

There is an additional achievement of the Cogito. While the uniqueness of the indubitability of sum distinguishes it from the other contingent statements discussed above, that uniqueness does not distinguish it from certain other statements such as logically necessary truths. They share this uniqueness in that it is contradictory to suppose that someone considers them while they are false or that someone believes them falsely. What distinguishes sum from logically necessary truths is that the latter are:

. . . entirely formal in content and involve no assertion of existence; sum, on the other hand, is a synthetic and logically contingent statement in which the existence of something is

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 107.

asserted. This renders it of greater 20
relevance to Descartes's inquiry.

Thus, on Frankfurt's account the Cogito has no epistemic status above that of other first principles. Its uniqueness lies both in its demonstration of at least one existent entity and in its role in establishing a rule of evidence for Descartes more reliable than those of sensory evidence which were rendered dubious in Meditation I. The rule of evidence that Descartes develops is, of course, the principle of clarity and distinctness.

Turning to question (3), it is important to understand that on Frankfurt's account the principle of clarity and distinctness is not derived from the paradigmatic indubitability of sum. According to Frankfurt it is the move from sum to sum res cogitans that provides Descartes with the principle. It is as a result of this move that Descartes states, "From this time I begin to know what I am with a little more clearness and distinctness than before. . ."²¹ How is this increase achieved? Frankfurt maintains:

Descartes achieves it by arranging a precise coincidence between what he ascribes to himself and the character that he recognizes as necessarily

²⁰Ibid., p. 105.

²¹HR I, p. 153.

belonging to an object whose existence
can be rendered indubitable by the cogito argument. 22

Frankfurt suggests that perceiving a proposition clearly and distinctly is a matter of recognizing it as 'necessarily true', not in the sense that its denial would be self-contradictory, but in the sense that no coherent grounds for denying the proposition are consistent with the perceiver's basis for believing it. And Frankfurt concludes:

When a person perceives something clearly and distinctly, his basis for believing it is so complete that no additional evidence could strengthen it. Since there is nothing further that he must consider, there is no reasonable basis for him to withhold assent or to doubt. His clear and distinct perception consists in the recognition that this is the case. 23

We are now in a position to suggest a response to question (3). The principle of clarity and distinctness provides Descartes with a rule of evidence for determining which propositions are indubitable. But is the principle

²²Frankfurt, Demons, Dreamers and Madmen, p. 123. Frankfurt develops this part of his thesis far more extensively than my brief account of him would indicate. But the important question for our purposes is not how or whether Descartes succeeds in achieving the principle of clarity and distinctness, it is how that principle (presumed achieved) assists him in achieving metaphysical certainty.

²³Ibid., p. 124.

itself an acceptable rule of evidence, that is, is it true? This question brings us to the Circle Passage and the metaphysical doubt raised within.

Frankfurt's position on question (4) is that the doubt raised in the Circle Passage is doubt about whether a proposition's indubitability, established by the clarity and distinctness with which it was perceived, is compatible with its being false. To put it another way, the doubt is about whether what is clearly and distinctly perceived is true.

. . . Descartes' metaphysical doubt is precisely a doubt whether being false is compatible with being indubitable. His position is that as long as the demon remains a possibility, we must acknowledge that what we intuit may be false. But he also holds that we cannot doubt the truth of what we intuit while we are perceiving it clearly and distinctly. 24

Frankfurt points to a number of passages to provide textual evidence for his interpretation. With respect to clear and distinct perceptions Descartes asserts in a letter to Regius:

[That the truth of axioms which are clearly and distinctly conceived is self-evident] is true, during the time they are clearly and distinctly

²⁴Frankfurt, American Philosophical Quarterly, p. 150. A similar distinction is made by Kenny whose account I discuss in the following chapter.

conceived; because our mind is of such a nature that it cannot help assenting to what it clearly conceives. But. . . if we lack knowledge of God, we can pretend that they are uncertain even though we remember that they were deduced from clear principles; because perhaps our nature is such that we go wrong ²⁵ even in the most evident matters.

Elsewhere Descartes warns:

. . . before a man knows that God exists, he has an opportunity of doubting everything (viz. everything of which he does not have a clear perception present in his mind, as I have a number ²⁶ of times set forth). . .

These passages together with the Circle Passage, Frankfurt claims, seem to be clear enough statements that Descartes is concerned with the possibility that even what is indubitable may be false. Although nowhere does Frankfurt explicitly state it in such terms, it appears that he is attributing to Descartes the need to demonstrate, that is, to remove the slightest doubt about, the veracity of the following principle:

(F1) For any proposition p , that p is indubitable for S at t entails that p is true.

Frankfurt's position on question (5) is that the role

²⁵Letter to Regius, May 24, 1640. (cf. Kenny, op. cit., pp. 73, 74.)

²⁶HR II, p. 333.

of the arguments for God's existence and non-deceiving nature is to remove once and for all any remaining reason for doubting the relationship between the indubitability and the truth of all clear and distinct perceptions. But precisely how is this to be achieved? We may recall that Arnauld's point was:

. . . the only secure reason we have for believing that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true, is the fact that God exists.

But we can be sure that God exists, only because we clearly and evidently perceive that; therefore prior to being certain that God exists, we should be certain that whatever we clearly and evidently perceive is true.²⁷

Frankfurt's contention is that if to be certain of something is to be unable to doubt it, then on his account God's existence can be certain for Descartes without his knowing yet whether his clear and distinct perceptions are true.

Frankfurt argues:

For if we perceive that God's existence follows from premises that are at the same time also clearly and distinctly perceived, then while these perceptions occur we will be unable to doubt that God exists even if we do not know that whatever is clearly and distinctly 28 perceived is true.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 92.

²⁸ Frankfurt, Demons, Dreamers and Madmen, p. 171.

But what about situations in which someone is not attending to such arguments? At first glance it would seem that God's existence and the veracity of clear and distinct perceptions are no longer certain. Frankfurt acknowledges that Descartes wants to maintain that once it has been demonstrated that God exists, He is no deceiver, and all clear and distinct perceptions are true, one need not continue to clearly and distinctly attend to such demonstrations in order to retain the divine guarantee that indubitability entails truth. Frankfurt suggests a close examination of Descartes' position on this matter reveals what has been achieved. In Meditation V Descartes asserts:

But after I have recognized that there is a God. . . and that He is not a deceiver, and from that have inferred that what I perceive clearly and distinctly cannot fail to be true- although I no longer pay attention to the reasons for which I have judged this to be true, provided that I recollect having clearly and distinctly perceived it, no contrary reason can be brought forward which could ever cause me to doubt of its truth; and thus I have a true and certain knowledge of it. 29

And Frankfurt argues:

Notice what he [Descartes] claims to be the case when he recollects having perceived that God guarantees the truth of what is clearly and distinctly perceived. He claims that then "no contrary reason can be brought forward

²⁹HR I, p. 184.

that could drive me to doubt." He does not assert that when he recollects having perceived that his principle of evidence is true he cannot then experience doubts as to its truth. Nor does he deny what is in any case surely not deniable - that he can always state that he doubts it. His point is rather that any such statement will be logically capricious: he cannot, Descartes claims, have a reason for the doubt. 30

But the question still remains: Why is it unreasonable to doubt God's existence and all that follows from it when someone is no longer attending to the arguments that demonstrate it, while such doubt is not unreasonable in previous instances of clear and distinct perceptions?

Frankfurt's response is that with respect to all other clear and distinct perceptions there exists one and only one reason for ever doubting them and even that reason is only a slight one, a mere possibility. Once that reason has been removed, Descartes no longer has any reason to doubt. In other words, Descartes has demonstrated that reason provides no basis for suspecting that what is perceived by means of reason may be false. Frankfurt's contention is that:

When reason is used in the most impeccable manner, the conclusion to which it leads excludes the possibility that there is an omnipotent demon; indeed, it excludes the possibility that man's

³⁰ Frankfurt, Demons, Dreamers and Madmen, pp. 172-173.

being derives from a source that is in any way defective in power or in perfection. Descartes has undertaken to show that reason provides no basis for doubting what is clearly and distinctly perceived. . . . 31

Once the sole remaining reason for metaphysical doubt has been removed, any remaining doubt is without basis, or in Frankfurt's words "utterly capricious."

This interpretation enables Frankfurt to put Descartes' entire enterprise into a particular perspective. As we have seen in discussions of other interpretations, Descartes is concerned with the problem of skepticism. In Frankfurt's view the classical gambit of the skeptic is to demonstrate that the use of reason leads inevitably to the conclusion that reason is unreliable. In other words, the skeptic offers a reductio ad absurdum by assuming the reliability of reason and using this assumption to demonstrate that there are very good, strong reasons to doubt that reliability. Descartes' task is to demonstrate that the use of reason can provide us with a demonstration that no reason exists for us to doubt that reliability. For Frankfurt what is essential in Meditation III is not just the demonstration that a benign God exists, but, more importantly, the demonstration that reason gives us such results. Frankfurt concludes:

³¹Ibid., p. 173.

It is evident that Descartes's argument does not suffer from the commonly charged circularity. Metaphysical doubt concerns the truth of what is clearly and distinctly perceived, and the removal of this doubt is effected without assuming that what is clearly and distinctly perceived is true. It is removed simply by the knowledge that a certain demonstration has been successfully accomplished. This knowledge is, of course, that certain things have been clearly and distinctly perceived. But that the truth of these things be supposed is not required, and so the question is not begged. All that is relevant to the removal of metaphysical doubt is that the skeptic's reductio be discovered not to materialize and this discovery can be made and recalled without anything clearly and distinctly perceived being supposed to be true. 32

If we return to principle (F1), on Frankfurt's interpretation Descartes has succeeded, not in proving the truth of (F1), but in removing all grounds for doubting (F1). As Frankfurt points out, Descartes admits:

What is it to us, though perchance some one feigns that that, of the truth of which we are so firmly persuaded, appears false to God or to an Angel, and hence is, absolutely speaking, false? What heed do we pay to that absolute falsity, when we by no means believe that it exists or even suspect its existence? We have assumed a conviction so strong that nothing can remove it, and this

³²Ibid., p. 177.

persuasion is clearly the same as 33
perfect certitude.

One point should be made before turning to an assessment of Frankfurt's account. Frankfurt mentions that a distinction exists between two senses of indubitability, a descriptive and a normative sense. There is another distinction implicit in his account. And this distinction has a corresponding one with respect to doubt. The doubt of Meditation I is doubt about whether one's beliefs are certain. The doubt of Meditation III is doubt about the relationship between certainty and truth. Thus, the indubitability achieved in Meditation II with the Cogito, sum, sum res cogitans, and other first principles is distinct from the certainty achieved by the demonstration that a non-deceiving God exists. Part of the distinction, which I am suggesting is implicit in Frankfurt's account, is accurate, as I hope to demonstrate in discussing Feldman's account later in Chapter IV. Part of the distinction is inaccurate, as I hope to show in discussing the accounts of Gewirth and Kenny shortly. I mention the distinction because it has a bearing on a criticism of Frankfurt's account offered by Nakhnikian in his article that I discussed in the preceding chapter.³⁴ Nakhnikian contends

³³HR II, p. 41.

³⁴Cf. Chapter II, particularly note 37.

that Frankfurt is mistaken in assuming, that in successfully demonstrating the removal of reasons to doubt the veracity of clear and distinct perceptions, Descartes has avoided circular reasoning. Nakhnikian claims that there are two necessary conditions for a successful demonstration:

- (i) There exists a relevant valid deductive argument and
- (ii) The premises of this argument are true.

Nakhnikian's contention is that one knows with metaphysical certainty that a demonstration exists only if he knows with metaphysical certainty that conditions (i) and (ii) are satisfied.

If Frankfurt's position is that the normative indubitability of the premises of the argument for God's existence provides Descartes with metaphysical certainty of the conclusion, then Nakhnikian's criticism is a valid one. And, in fact, there is some reason to believe that this is a position which Frankfurt holds. If metaphysical doubt is doubt about the veracity of clear and distinct perceptions and the normative indubitability of the conclusion that God exists removes that doubt, thereby providing us with metaphysical certainty that He exists and that all one's clear and distinct perceptions are true, then Frankfurt's interpretation is open to Nakhnikian's criticism.

But Frankfurt's position need not be interpreted in this way. Consistent with his account, metaphysical doubt could be defined in terms of the existence of one proposition, that a malevolent omnipotent deity exists, the possibility of which casts doubt on the veracity of all clear and distinct perceptions. Metaphysical certainty, in turn, could be defined in terms of the normative indubitability that such a proposition is false. Thus, the normative indubitability that God exists and is no deceiver makes it indubitable, in the appropriate normative sense, for Descartes that the proposition, a malevolent omnipotent deity exists, is false. As a result all normatively indubitable propositions, that is, all clearly and distinctly perceived propositions, become metaphysically certain. None of this is worked out by Frankfurt, nor do I intend to do so at this point. Interpretations yet to be considered, particularly Feldman's, examine this kind of an approach in considerable detail. My point is simply that Frankfurt's account need not fail in allowing Descartes to avoid circular reasoning for the reasons Nakhnikian suggests. There is, however, one presupposition of Nakhnikian's criticism which does bear on Frankfurt's account, an evaluation of which I shall now consider.

As I indicated prior to considering Nakhnikian's criticism, Frankfurt ends his account by suggesting that Descartes was less concerned with whether clear and distinct perceptions are true than with whether any reasons exist for believing otherwise. The last passage I quoted from Descartes' replies to the second set of objections is interpreted by Frankfurt as committing Descartes to a coherence, rather than a correspondence, theory of truth. With respect to that passage Frankfurt contends:

Descartes evidently recognizes that his position entails that from our knowing something with perfect certitude it does not follow that it is, "speaking absolutely," true. . . .

What he suggests is that if something that is perfectly certain may be absolutely false, then the notions of absolute truth and absolute falsity are irrelevant to the purposes of inquiry. His account makes it clear that the notion of truth that is relevant is a 35 notion of coherence.

But Frankfurt is mistaken in attributing a coherence theory of truth to Descartes. Ignoring for the moment the passage

³⁵ Frankfurt, Demons, Dreamers and Madmen, p. 179. When Nakhnikian argues that conditions (i) and (ii) must be known with metaphysical certainty, I take him to be using 'know' in the sense that 'S knows that p' entails that p is true. Frankfurt may have been of the opinion that his postscript attributing a coherence theory of truth to Descartes circumvents Nakhnikian's criticism, although he does not explicitly say so. But he would be mistaken. Nakhnikian is correct even on a coherence theory of truth.

he cites, there is at least one statement made by Descartes elsewhere that appears to contradict explicitly Frankfurt's interpretation. As was pointed out in the discussion of Morris' account in the preceding chapter, Descartes states in a letter to Mersenne:

. . . the word truth, in the strict sense, denotes the conformity of thought with its object and that when it is attributed to things outside thought, it means only that they can be the objects of true thoughts. . . 36

It seems quite evident that in this passage Descartes is committed to a correspondence, rather than a coherence, theory of truth.

The textual evidence just cited indicates that Frankfurt's explanation of the passage from the replies is incorrect. But then, what might Descartes be suggesting? One possible explanation is that Descartes is considering the position of someone who, for the purposes of discussion, pretends that clear and distinct perceptions are false. And Descartes' response is that one need not pay any attention to such pretension since we have no reason to even suspect it to be the case.

There is one additional criticism I wish to make of Frankfurt's account. He defines the normative indubita-

³⁶Letter to Mersenne, October 16, 1639. (cf. Kenny, op. cit., pp. 65-66.)

bility achieved in Meditation II in terms of "what there is no reason to doubt or what there can be no reason to doubt."³⁷ He claims later that to perceive a proposition clearly and distinctly is to perceive that "there is no reasonable basis for him to withhold assent or to doubt."³⁸ But metaphysical certainty is also explicated in terms of such a basis. The argument for a benevolent God that exists (which establishes metaphysical certainty) demonstrates that "reason provides no basis for doubting."³⁹ I agree with Frankfurt that the certainty achieved in Meditation II has an epistemic component. But his failure to distinguish adequately between the doubt achieved in Meditation I (which the certainty in Meditation II overcomes) and the doubt raised in Meditation III makes the corresponding distinction between normative indubitability and metaphysical certainty unclear.

Consider a particular proposition that is clearly and distinctly perceived by Descartes prior to his demonstration that a benevolent God exists. According to Frankfurt's analysis, to perceive a proposition clearly and distinctly is to perceive that there is no reasonable basis

³⁷Cf. page 87 this chapter.

³⁸Cf. page 92 this chapter.

³⁹Cf. page 98 this chapter.

to doubt the proposition. If no reason exists to doubt it, then the proposition is normatively indubitable for Descartes. But the hypothesis of a deceitful deity does provide a reason for doubting the proposition. Why then does the proposition remain normatively indubitable while metaphysically uncertain? On the other hand, if the hypothesis of a deceitful deity does not provide a reason to doubt the proposition in question, why isn't the proposition metaphysically as well as normatively indubitable? The lack of clarity concerning the distinction between doubt removed by normative indubitability and that removed by metaphysical certainty makes it appear that either some clearly and distinctly perceived propositions are metaphysically certain prior to the demonstration of God's existence (since there exists no reason to doubt them) or, even while attending to such propositions clearly and distinctly, we can be aware of a reason to doubt them and, hence, they are not indubitable even in the normative sense.

Either alternative is undesirable. The former would commit Descartes to a partial autonomy of reason and as such would be inconsistent with Frankfurt's overall interpretation. And, as I demonstrated in Chapter II, it is inconsistent with the textual evidence. The latter alternative would prevent Frankfurt's interpretation from

allowing Descartes out of the circle.

For the reasons I have just given I do not believe Frankfurt has provided a satisfactory interpretation of Descartes. However, the distinction that he argues for between the indubitability achieved in Meditation II and the certainty achieved in Meditation III is instructive. It points to an approach to Descartes that, I shall argue later, succeeds in freeing him from apparent circular reasoning. I would now like to turn to a consideration of another account of Descartes that makes explicit a distinction between two types of certainty in the Meditations.

Perhaps the first Cartesian commentator to make an explicit distinction between two types of certainty in the Meditations is Alan Gewirth. In "The Cartesian Circle"⁴⁰ and "The Cartesian Circle Revisited"⁴¹ Gewirth develops an account of Descartes' enterprise in terms of this distinction which he claims allows Descartes to avoid the accusation of circular reasoning. And in order to understand Gewirth's position with respect to questions (1), (2), and

⁴⁰ Alan Gewirth, "The Cartesian Circle," Philosophical Review Vol. 4 (1941), pp. 368-395.

⁴¹ Alan Gewirth, "The Cartesian Circle Revisited," Journal of Philosophy Vol. 67 (1970), pp. 668-685.

(3), it is necessary to begin with an explanation of what Gewirth means with respect to one type of certainty.

Gewirth sometimes terms one type of certainty 'intuitional' certainty, other times 'psychological' certainty.⁴²

I shall use the latter. About this type of certainty

Gewirth has the following to say:

Intuitional certainty consists in the mind's immediate and unfailing assent to, or the belief in the truth of, whatever it intuits or directly perceives clearly and distinctly: "I am of such a nature that so long as I very clearly and distinctly perceive something I cannot refrain from believing it to be true" (HR I, p. 183). Descartes emphasizes, however, that this intuitional certainty is a fact only about the mind's reaction to a perception, and is not of itself a sufficient guarantee of the perception's truth; hence he insists that even intuitional certainties are not the same as metaphysical certainty, since they leave open a possible reason for metaphysical doubt and hence require 43 guarantee by God.

Since the notion of psychological certainty appears to be intimately connected with the notions of clarity and distinctness, in order to determine precisely what Gewirth

⁴²In his initial article, Gewirth uses the term 'psychological'. In his later article he uses 'intuitional'. In a response to certain criticism made by Kenny, Gewirth again uses the term 'psychological'. Thus, all textual evidence points to the two terms as being interchangeable for Gewirth.

⁴³Gewirth, Journal of Philosophy, p. 672.

means by psychological certainty, some light should be shed on what he takes the notions of clarity and distinctness to be. About the latter he says:

Clearness and distinctness are internal qualities, in that they characterize perceptive acts and ideas in relation to one another. To put it briefly, an idea and a perceptive act are clear and distinct when the mind in perceiving the idea is aware of the idea's contents and logical relations, and when it attributes to the idea that and only that which is justified by those contents and relations. 44

Gewirth appears to be suggesting, among other things, that the relationship between psychological certainty and clarity and distinctness is this:

(G1) A proposition p is psychologically certain for S at t if and only if S clearly and distinctly perceives that p at t .

But what then is the relationship, if any, between either clarity and distinctness or psychological certainty and truth? Gewirth continues:

Truth, on the other hand, is an external quality, since it consists in a relation of "conformity" between an idea or thought and an extra-ideational thing or object. From this it follows not only that clearness and distinctness are not the same as truth but also that the mind can ascertain whether its perceptions are clear and distinct without ascertaining whether they are true. 45

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 680.

⁴⁵Ibid.

Given that the mind can ascertain whether its perceptions are clear and distinct without ascertaining whether they are true, one might be led to believe that Gewirth is claiming that the psychological certainty of a proposition doesn't involve any certainty of the truth of that proposition. This is precisely the point that Kenny makes in his criticism of Gewirth's account.⁴⁶ But to do so would be wrong. Gewirth wishes to make a distinction between the certainty of the truth of a proposition and the truth of that proposition. Psychological certainty involves the former but not the latter. Gewirth, in a rejoinder to Kenny, asserts, "Kenny is right in pointing out that psychological certainty as well as metaphysical certainty concerns truth. . ."⁴⁷ But this should not be construed as an admission by Gewirth that Kenny is correct and he (Gewirth) was wrong, for in his second article he asserts:

Moreover. . . the mind cannot have present clear and distinct perceptions, or intuitions, without irresistibly believing them to be true (intuitional certainty). . . 48

⁴⁶Anthony Kenny, "The Cartesian Circle and the Eternal Truths," Journal of Philosophy Vol. 67 (1970), pp. 685-700. (cf. p. 687).

⁴⁷Alan Gewirth, "Descartes: Two Disputed Questions," Journal of Philosophy Vol. 68 (1971), pp. 288-298. (cf. p. 294).

⁴⁸Gewirth, Journal of Philosophy Vol. 67, p. 680.

Each of the passages from Gewirth's account concerning psychological certainty and clarity and distinctness respectively makes it quite clear that at the time of a clear and distinct perception it is impossible to doubt the veracity of that perception. Indubitability then is a crucial notion in Gewirth's interpretation of Descartes. This notion has at least two possible interpretations, one epistemic, the other psychological. As we saw in the discussion of Frankfurt's account the epistemic notion involves a lack of reasons for doubting.

This may be what Gewirth has in mind when he discusses metaphysical certainty and doubt because, as we shall see shortly, he continually stresses Descartes' reasons for doubting. But I don't believe that this is what he had in mind for psychological certainty for two reasons. First, he never mentions reasons when discussing psychological certainty. Second, he clearly views Descartes as maintaining that clarity and distinctness involves the inability to refrain from believing. But an epistemic interpretation of indubitability does not presuppose any such inability to refrain from believing. One can withhold assent without reasons being required. Furthermore, one might not be able to bring oneself to doubt the truth of a proposition even though there is sufficient evidence evident to him to warrant his doubting the truth of said proposition.

Psychological indubitability, however, refers precisely to the state of a person's mind in which no doubt can manifest itself, in other words, an inability to doubt. Hence, psychological indubitability appears to be what Gewirth has in mind.

What then of the relationship between indubitability and clarity and distinctness? Quite clearly it cannot be one of equivalence since there could be a number of propositions whose truth someone could be unable to doubt without having the requisite clear and distinct perceptions. For example, a parent might be unable to doubt a child's honesty and yet have no clear and distinct perception that the child is honest. In fact, there may even be evidence to the contrary which is evident to the parent who is unwilling to acknowledge that evidence. Clearly, however, indubitability is a necessary condition for clarity and distinctness. Gewirth argues:

When a clear and distinct perception, in the sense thus far indicated, is actually present to the mind, when, in other words, an idea is being intuited, and not merely remembered, such intuition arouses in the mind an utter conviction that the idea is true. 49

This suggests that the relationship between clarity and distinctness and indubitability is as follows:

⁴⁹Gewirth, Philosophical Review, p. 371.

(G2) A proposition p is clearly and distinctly perceived by S at t only if p is indubitable for S at t (i.e., S is unable to refrain from believing that p at t).

Conditions (G1) and (G2) by substitution give us:

(G3) A proposition p is psychologically certain for S at t only if p is indubitable for S at t.

Is there a type of doubt in Gewirth's account which corresponds to psychological certainty? The only mention of doubt that is distinguished from his notion of metaphysical doubt occurs within the context of a discussion about other interpretations of Descartes. Gewirth states:

This kind of doubt, which Descartes himself calls "metaphysical," is of a different order from the operational and conceptual doubts discussed above. Both these kinds of doubts are strictly confined to internal considerations, that is, to the mind's operations on its own ideas or perceptions and to the conceptual characteristics of the propositions that result from those operations. But the metaphysical doubt, which bears on truth, is concerned with external 50 considerations. . .

According to Gewirth, operational doubt is directed toward instances in which the mind performs operations that are not intuitions, i.e., not genuine, immediate clear and distinct perceptions. An example of one such operation

⁵⁰Gewirth, Journal of Philosophy Vol. 67, pp. 675-676.

would be memory. Conceptual doubt is directed toward those necessary connections that the mind intuits as holding between simple natures. Mathematical propositions are examples of those things that are subject to conceptual doubt.

At first glance either of these would seem to make an ideal candidate for a type of doubt corresponding to psychological certainty. But to suggest this would be to misread Gewirth entirely. First, both conceptual doubt and operational doubt are examples of interpretations of metaphysical doubt that Gewirth is explicitly rejecting. Second, a notion of psychological doubt would have no role in his interpretation of the Meditations. To see why this is the case we must now turn to a consideration of Gewirth's position on question (1).

In the earlier of his two articles Gewirth divides Descartes' enterprise in the Meditations into four main parts: (1) the universal doubt with which Descartes' enterprise begins; (2) the intuition of the Cogito, and the inferring therefrom of the general rule of clarity and distinctness; (3) the renewal of the universal doubt (in the Circle Passage); and (4) the series of clear and distinct perceptions, the conclusion of which is the clear and distinct perception of the existence and veracity of

God.⁵¹ Now the doubt which arises just prior to the argument for an existent veracious God is obviously metaphysical doubt. Since Gewirth states that the doubt raised therein is a "renewal of the universal doubt," the 'universal doubt' raised in Meditation I must be metaphysical in nature. And from his statements it is apparent that this doubt is intended to extend to all propositions including mathematical ones. He contends, however, that the entire procedure in Meditation I does not involve doubting any clear and distinct perceptions. Were it otherwise, he contends:

. . . the mathematical propositions impugned [later in Meditation III] could not be doubted; for logically they are clear and distinct, and were the mind attending to them directly it would be psychologically compelled to assent to them as true. 52

And in support of this Gewirth cites Descartes' remarks in his reply to the seventh set of objections. "In the first Meditation I supposed that I was not attending to whatever I clearly perceived."⁵³ Thus, Gewirth does not need to establish a notion of psychological doubt. One and only one doubt, the metaphysical one, suffices.

⁵¹Gewirth, Philosophical Review, p. 379.

⁵²Ibid., p. 380.

⁵³HR II, p. 266.

Gewirth's position on question (2) is that the Cogito is the initial first principle with which Descartes achieves psychological certainty. He states:

. . . the cogito rests more exclusively upon a psychological basis than does any other intuition, since it expresses simply that the thinker's thinking implies his existing. Hence, . . . the cogito becomes the principle and the most cogent proposition of metaphysics; in an exposition following the order of intuitively perceived certainties, the cogito is the presupposition of every 54 other cognition.

What the Cogito accomplishes is explained by Gewirth as follows:

The cogito is not the major premise of an argument of which the general rule is the conclusion, but it is simply the instance which leads the mind explicitly to hit upon or discover the 55 rule in that context.

The rule in question is, of course, the principle of clarity and distinctness. And this brings us to question (3).

Gewirth's response to question (3) is that:

The rule, then, is. . . the general expression of what has been experienced in the particular instance of the cogito: that clear and distinct perceptions are so coercive in their effect upon the mind that the mind cannot help assenting to them as true at the time

⁵⁴Gewirth, Philosophical Review, p. 382.

⁵⁵Ibid.

that it has such perceptions. The metaphysical proof of the truth of clear and distinct perceptions, through the existence of God, still remains to be attained. 56

For Gewirth, then, clarity and distinctness provides Descartes with psychological certainty. But it does not provide him with metaphysical certainty. That remains to be achieved by demonstrating that God exists and is no deceiver. And this, explains Gewirth, is why Descartes claims not to have established the truth of that principle until Meditation IV.

In order to determine Gewirth's position with respect to questions (4) and (5), we must now turn to his explication of metaphysical doubt and certainty. As we saw earlier in his explication of psychological certainty, he contrasted it with metaphysical certainty. To reiterate:

. . . intuitional certainty. . . is not of itself a sufficient guarantee of a perception's truth; hence, he [Descartes] insists that even intuitional certainties are not the same as metaphysical certainty. . . 57

About metaphysical doubt Gewirth asserts:

. . . metaphysical doubt concerns only the truth of clear and distinct perceptions. . .

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 382-383.

⁵⁷ Gewirth, Journal of Philosophy Vol. 67, p. 672.

DOUBT, CERTAINTY, AND THE CARTESIAN CIRCLE

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It must be emphasized that the metaphysical doubt concerns only whether clear and distinct perceptions are true. . . 58

One plausible interpretation of the distinction that Gewirth is attempting to make between metaphysical certainty and psychological certainty is that while we are clearly and distinctly perceiving a particular proposition we are unable to doubt (in the psychological sense) the truth of that proposition (given condition (G2)), we can still doubt (in the epistemic sense, i.e., we can still have reason for doubting) the truth of the proposition that we clearly and distinctly perceived. In other words, psychological certainty entails psychological indubitability about a particular proposition, but it does not entail epistemic indubitability about the relationship between the clarity and distinctness of that proposition and its truth. This distinction suggests that the following conditions are implicit in Gewirth's account:

(G5) A proposition p is metaphysically doubtful for S at t if and only if (i) p is not psychologically certain for S at t, or (ii) it is possible that (p is clearly and distinctly perceived by S at t and p is false).

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 680.

(G6) A proposition p is metaphysically certain for S at t if and only if (i) p is psychologically certain for S at t, and (ii) it is not possible that (p is clearly and distinctly perceived by S at t and p is false).

(I will comment on the notion of possibility in (ii) later.)

Gewirth's response to question (4) is now apparent. The hypothesis of a deceiving God that is raised in the Circle Passage casts doubt on the veracity of clear and distinct perceptions. He argues:

Descartes's hypothesis of a deceiving God, which. . . is his only reason for doubting that clear and distinct perceptions are true, is and is set forth as ⁵⁹ a reason.

At this point we might be tempted to conclude that Gewirth's response to question (5) is that the psychological certainty of the premises and hence the conclusions of the arguments demonstrating that God exists and is no deceiver removes that reason for metaphysical doubt and thus provides metaphysical certainty that all our clear and distinct perceptions are true. But if we recall Nakhnikian's point with regard to Frankfurt's account discussed earlier in this chapter, this response won't do. And Gewirth is aware of this. He warns:

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 681.

. . . the very nature of Descartes's metaphysical problem requires a passage from psychological to metaphysical certainty: requires, that is to say, that the conclusion be more certain than its premises, not in the sense of having greater psychological certainty, but in the sense of having a metaphysical certainty which they initially lack.

. . . since in the course of the metaphysical argument even intuitions are declared subject to metaphysical doubt, any conclusion achieved by their means, even if its matter be metaphysical certainty, will be similarly dubitable. The mind will still, so to speak, be only psychologically certain of its metaphysical certainty. . . 60

How then does Gewirth propose to circumvent this problem? To determine that we must return to his response to question (4). He contends that the hypothesis of a deceiving God is Descartes' only reason for metaphysical doubt. He argues further:

We must now ask about the status of the reason on which Descartes's metaphysical doubt rests. Obviously, he does not set it forth as true, let alone as necessarily true. He calls it a "valid and meditated reason." But what is the criterion of this validity? It is that the hypothesis of a deceiving God may be clear and distinct. For there are no other criteria of validity available to Descartes. 61

⁶⁰Gewirth, Philosophical Review, pp. 378, 379.

⁶¹Gewirth, Journal of Philosophy Vol. 67, p. 681.

Based on this contention Gewirth's response to question (5) is as follows:

Descartes's metaphysical argument proceeds to show, by the use of clear and distinct perceptions, that the hypothesis of a deceiving God on which the metaphysical doubt rests is not clear and distinct. The proposition that is perceived to be clear and distinct is rather that, since God is supremely perfect, he is not a deceiver, ⁶² that is, he is veracious.

But how does this response get us to the truth of clear and distinct perceptions? Gewirth acknowledges that his account thus far leaves such a question unanswered. He admits:

But what has this to do with truth? Are we to say that "God is not a deceiver" is true? If we do say this, then how can this truth be derived from the proposition's clearness and distinctness without begging the question? If we do not say that it is true, then how does it help to prove that clear and distinct perceptions are true? ⁶³

His response is:

In answer to these questions, it must be kept in mind that the proposition "God is a deceiver" (GD) is a validating reason for "Clear and distinct perceptions are not true" (-(CT)) only insofar as GD purports to be clear and distinct. Hence, if one can show (by using clear and distinct perceptions) that GD is not clear and distinct, but that what is clear and distinct is rather -(GD), then one has removed the

⁶²Ibid., p. 682.

⁶³Ibid.

only validating reason for $\neg(\underline{CT})$.
 Thereby too one has validated \underline{CT} ,
 that is, that clear and distinct per-
 ceptions are true, for since one has
 removed the only reason for doubting
 or rejecting it, it is now completely
 indubitable. 64

This suggests that we can attribute the following definition
 to Gewirth's account:

(G7) p is a validating reason for S at t to
 doubt that q is true =_{df} (i) it is possible
 that (p is clearly and distinctly perceived
 by S at t), and (ii) p provides S with
 sufficient evidence to believe at t that
 q is false.

(I will comment on the notion of possibility in (i) later.)

The account given thus far indicates that while condi-
 tions (G5) and (G6) are consistent with Gewirth's account,
 they do not adequately capture his intentions. Neither
 incorporates the notion of a validating reason which,
 according to Gewirth, Descartes employs in attempting to
 achieve epistemic indubitability about the relationship
 between the clear and distinct perception of a proposition
 and its truth. But by employing definition (G7) I believe
 I can provide a more accurate interpretation of what Gewirth
 intends metaphysical doubt and certainty to mean. Consider
 the following definition:

64 Ibid.

- (G8) p is metaphysically doubtful for S at t =_{df} (i) p is not psychologically certain for S at t , or
 (ii) p is clearly and distinctly perceived by S at t and (Eq) (q is a validating reason for S at t to doubt that p is true).
- (G9) p is metaphysically certain for S at t =_{df}
 (i) p is psychologically certain for S at t , and
 (ii) \neg (Eq) (q is a validating reason for S at t to doubt that p is true).

Definitions (G8) and (G9) can be used to demonstrate how Gewirth's account avoids the difficulty suggested by Nakhnikian and acknowledged by Gewirth. The psychological certainty of the premises and hence the conclusions of the arguments for God's existence and non-deceiving nature do not give us metaphysical certainty of either the conclusions or the veracity of clear and distinct perceptions directly. Rather, the psychological certainty of the conclusions removes the only validating reason for metaphysical doubt. Thus, condition (ii) of definition (G9) is fulfilled. As a result all psychologically certain propositions, that is, all propositions which are clearly and distinctly perceived, become metaphysically certain.

Thus, Gewirth's position on question (5) is not dissimilar from that of Frankfurt. On Frankfurt's account what Descartes has succeeded in demonstrating is that we have no reason to doubt that our clear and distinct percep-

tions are true. On Gewirth's account what Descartes has succeeded in demonstrating is that we have no good reason to doubt our clear and distinct perceptions. Does Gewirth's account, therefore, fall prey to the same criticisms that I offered against Frankfurt's account? To determine this I shall now turn to an assessment of Gewirth's interpretation of Descartes' enterprise in the Meditations.

One criticism of Frankfurt was that he was mistaken in attributing a coherence theory of truth to Descartes. Does Gewirth's account succumb to the same criticism. I think not. We may recall that Gewirth states:

Truth. . . is an external quality,
since it consists in a relation of
"conformity" between an idea or
thought and an extra-ideational 65
thing or object.

Thus, Gewirth explicitly acknowledges that Descartes subscribes to a correspondence theory of truth.

But there remains the question of how 'possibility' in clause (i) of definition (G7) is to be interpreted. One interpretation is logical possibility. On this interpretation the logical possibility of the proposition 'GD is clearly and distinctly perceived' makes that proposition a validating reason for Descartes to doubt the veracity of his

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 680.

clear and distinct perceptions. And by definition (G8) his clear and distinct perceptions are metaphysically doubtful. Once he has demonstrated the logical impossibility of 'GD is clearly and distinctly perceived', Descartes has removed the one validating reason for metaphysical doubt and by definition (G9) he has achieved the metaphysical certainty that his clear and distinct perceptions are true. But how is Descartes to demonstrate the logical impossibility of 'GD is clearly and distinctly perceived'. Gewirth would have to maintain that it is entailed by the contingent proposition '-(GD) is clearly and distinctly perceived'. This interpretation would also give the contingent proposition 'GD is not clearly and distinctly perceived' the status of a necessary truth. Thus, if possibility in clause (i) is interpreted as logical possibility, (G7) is seriously flawed.

A second interpretation of possibility in clause (i) is epistemic. This is suggested by Gewirth's emphasis on reasons for doubting for Descartes. Since metaphysical doubt is doubt with reasons, perhaps the possibility is metaphysical in nature. Consider the following:

(G10) p is a metaphysical possibility for S at t
 $t =_{df} \neg p$ is not metaphysically certain
 for S at t .

(G11) p is a metaphysical impossibility for S
 at $t =_{df} \neg p$ is metaphysically certain for
 S at t .

On this interpretation the metaphysical possibility of 'GD

is clearly and distinctly perceived' makes that proposition a validating reason for Descartes to doubt the veracity of his clear and distinct perceptions. And by definition (G8) his clear and distinct perceptions are metaphysically doubtful. Once Descartes has demonstrated the metaphysical impossibility of 'GD is clearly and distinctly perceived', he has removed the one validating reason for metaphysical doubt and by definition (G9) he has achieved the metaphysical certainty that his clear and distinct perceptions are true. But how is Descartes to demonstrate the metaphysical impossibility of 'GD is clearly and distinctly perceived'? According to definition (G11) he must demonstrate the metaphysical certainty of 'GD is not clearly and distinctly perceived'. But this puts Descartes in the position of having to make a particular proposition metaphysically certain by clearly and distinctly perceiving it in order to make metaphysically certain that his clear and distinct perceptions are true. This is clearly circular; metaphysical possibility will not provide a satisfactory interpretation of possibility in clause (i) of definition (G7).

A third alternative is to interpret the possibility as psychological. This interpretation is suggested by Gewirth himself when he asserts:

. . . the "valid and meditated reasons"
upon which the [metaphysical] doubt is
based are . . . regarded not as meta-

physically certain or true, but as
psychologically cogent because
 possibly clear and distinct. . . 66

On the basis of this I suggest the following:

(G12) p is a psychological possibility for S
 at t =_{df} ¬p is not a psychological
 impossibility for S at t.

(G13) p is a psychological impossibility for
 S at t =_{df} ¬p is a psychological
 certainty for S at t.

On this interpretation the psychological possibility of 'GD
 is clearly and distinctly perceived' makes that proposition
 a validating reason for Descartes to doubt the veracity of
 his clear and distinct perceptions. By definition (G8) his
 clear and distinct perceptions are metaphysically doubtful.
 Once Descartes has demonstrated the psychological impossi-
 bility of 'GD is clearly and distinctly perceived', he has
 removed the one validating reason for metaphysical doubt
 and by definition (G9) he has achieved the metaphysical
 certainty that his clear and distinct perceptions are
 veracious. How is the psychological impossibility of 'GD
 is clearly and distinctly perceived' achieved? By demon-
 strating that ¬(GD) is clearly and distinctly perceived
 Descartes has demonstrated that 'GD is not clearly and
 distinctly perceived' is psychologically certain. And by

⁶⁶Gewirth, Philosophical Review, p. 392. (Italics mine)

definition (G13) we obtain that 'GD is clearly and distinctly perceived' is a psychological impossibility for Descartes. The circularity encountered with a metaphysical interpretation of possibility in definition (G7) is avoided with a psychological interpretation.

But is definition (G7) thereby free of other problems? I think not. Let us recall Gewirth's account of Descartes' procedure (with the notion of psychological possibility in mind):

GD is a validating reason for -(CT) only if it's psychologically possible that 'GD is clear and distinct'. Hence if one can show that GD is not clear and distinct but that what is clear and distinct is -(GD) , then GD is no longer a validating reason for -(CT) .

But how does Descartes show that GD is not clear and distinct? He cannot do so in a straightforward manner. If a person S is not attending to a proposition p , then p is not clear and distinct. Descartes must demonstrate it by proving that its negation is clear and distinct. What I am suggesting is that the following condition can be attributed to Descartes:

(G14) A proposition p is clearly and distinctly perceived by S at t only if $\text{-}p$ is not clearly and distinctly perceived by S at t .

The latter part of Gewirth's explanation of Descartes' procedure is consistent with (G14). That is, we can interpret ". . . one can show that GD is not clear and distinct but that what is clear and distinct is -(GD). . ." as meaning "one can show that GD is not clear and distinct by showing that what is clear and distinct is -(GD)." But Gewirth's notion of a validating reason unnecessarily complicates the matter. By proving that -(GD) is clear and distinct, Descartes is demonstrating that GD is not clear and distinct. But given definition (G7) what Descartes ends up demonstrating is that 'GD is not clear and distinct' is psychologically certain. But given condition (G1) Descartes can succeed in demonstrating this if and only if he demonstrates that 'GD is not clear and distinct' is perceived clearly and distinctly. And the need to clearly and distinctly perceive the lack of clarity and distinctness of a proposition is an unnecessary complication.

Where did Gewirth go astray? Anthony Kenny in "The Cartesian Circle and The Eternal Truths"⁶⁷ suggests that Gewirth's notion of a validating reason is not supported by textual evidence. Granted that Descartes does state near the close of Meditation I that:

⁶⁷Kenny, op. cit.

. . . there is nothing in all that I formerly believed to be true, of which I cannot in some measure doubt. . . for reasons which are very powerful and maturely considered [validae rationes]. 68

Kenny contends that 'validae' does not mean 'valid' in any technical sense but merely 'strong'. He points to Descartes' comment in his replies to the seventh set of objections, "For we may well enough be compelled to doubt by arguments that are in themselves doubtful. . .,"⁶⁹ to support his contention that for Descartes a reason can be valida while dubia. In the Circle Passage Descartes also asserts, ". . . the reason for doubt. . . is very slight, and so to speak metaphysical."⁷⁰

In his rejoinder to Kenny, Gewirth cites two additional passages in support of his interpretation of the notion of a validating reason. In the first, a letter to Buitendijck, Descartes asserts:

. . . one may pretend that God is a deceiver - even the true God, but such that he is not known sufficiently clearly to oneself or to the other persons for whose sake one forms this hypothesis. 71

⁶⁸HR I, pp. 147-148.

⁶⁹HR II, p. 277.

⁷⁰HR I, p. 159.

⁷¹Letter to Buitendijck, 1643. (cf. Kenny, op. cit., p. 145.) The translation quoted is Gewirth's. It does not differ appreciably from that provided by Kenny.

Gewirth claims that Descartes is obviously suggesting that the hypothesis is thought to be possibly clear and distinct at this point. But the only way the passage can be interpreted consistent with Gewirth's claim is to attribute the clause "such that he is not known sufficiently clearly" as referring to the pretension of God as a deceiver and to translate "not known sufficiently clearly" as "possibly clear and distinct." On the other hand, if we read the passage as attributing the clause to the true God, all we are committed to is the pretension of a deceiving God in the absence of a clear and distinct perception to the contrary. On this reading there is nothing to suggest that the pretension must be possibly clear and distinct.

The second passage to which Gewirth points occurs in the Discourse on Method in which Descartes states:

. . . in trying to discover the error
or uncertainty of the propositions which
I examined, not by feeble conjectures,
but by clear and assured reasonings. . . ⁷²

Gewirth maintains that by "clear and assured reasonings" Descartes is referring to tentatively or possibly clear and distinct perceptions, the hypothesis of a deceiving God being one such possibility. Now there are two ways to read this passage. One is that by clear and assured reasoning Descartes is not referring to clear and distinct percep-

⁷²HR I, p. 99.

tions. If so, then Gewirth is mistaken in suggesting that this passage supports his interpretation of the notion of a validating reason. On the other hand, if by clear and assured reasoning Descartes does mean clear and distinct perceptions, then it is not their possibility which makes them validating reasons but their actuality. On this interpretation Descartes is asserting that the reasons for uncertainty are clear and distinct, not possibly clear and distinct. This interpretation suggests that if Descartes has the notion of a validating reason in mind, its explication is not captured by (G7), but by the following:

(G7') \underline{p} is a validating reason for S at t to doubt that \underline{q} is true =_{df} (i) \underline{p} is clearly and distinctly perceived by S at t, and (ii) \underline{p} provides S with sufficient evidence to believe at t that \underline{q} is false.

On this interpretation of the notion of a validating reason it is not the existence of such a reason which causes metaphysical doubt, it is the possibility that such a reason exists. How this possibility is to be explicated remains to be seen. Feldman suggests one alternative which will be examined in the next chapter. I will suggest another in Chapter V. My point here is that such an interpretation is consistent with Descartes' description of metaphysical doubt in the Circle Passage. It may not be consistent with his description of doubt near the close of Meditation I.

As we have seen, Gewirth interprets that doubt as metaphysical doubt. In this I believe he is mistaken. As I intend to demonstrate in Chapter V, Descartes is not concerned with metaphysical doubt until the Circle Passage in Meditation III. The doubt raised in Meditation I is something other than metaphysical doubt. Gewirth's failure to realize that there exists a type of doubt corresponding to psychological certainty leads him to conclude that metaphysical doubt is raised in Meditation I. And that conclusion, in turn, leads him to develop a notion of validating reason which, I have argued, is confused, unnecessarily complicated, and lacking in textual support.

Would an account of Descartes' enterprise which includes a notion of psychological doubt provide an interpretation adequate to circumvent circular reasoning? To determine this I will consider next one such account, that offered by Anthony Kenny.

C H A P T E R IV

The first Cartesian commentator to distinguish between two types of doubt which correspond to two types of certainty in the Meditations is Anthony Kenny. These distinctions are made in both the aforementioned article, "The Cartesian Circle and Eternal Truths," in which he comments on Gewirth's account, and in his earlier and more extensive treatment of Descartes' philosophy in Descartes: A Study of His Philosophy.¹ Because the terms he employs to distinguish between the two types of doubt and certainty not only differ from book to article but also are not at all well defined, it will prove helpful to provide a more explicit explication of the terms before attempting to determine Kenny's position on the five questions that I raise for each interpretation of Descartes.

In his commentary on Gewirth's account, Kenny distinguishes between psychological doubt and psychological certainty on the one hand and metaphysical doubt and metaphysical certainty on the other. Interestingly enough he attributes both distinctions to Gewirth. Kenny states:

¹Anthony Kenny, Descartes: A Study of His Philosophy, Random House, New York (1968).

He [Gewirth] distinguished between psychological doubt (which is contrasted with the certainty of clear and distinct perception) and metaphysical doubt (which concerns the truth of what is clearly and distinctly perceived). 2

But I have argued in the preceding chapter that not only does Gewirth fail to identify any type of doubt corresponding to psychological certainty, such a doubt would play no role in his explanation of Descartes' purpose in the Meditations, for on Gewirth's account it is metaphysical doubt that is raised from the very start in Meditation I. Kenny is apparently reading something into Gewirth's account which is not there. Kenny goes on to say:

I agree with Gewirth that the type of doubt that Descartes says is possible concerning clear and distinct perceptions is a different type of doubt from that which he says is impossible. . . 3

This suggests that principles (G1), (G2), and (G3) which I attributed to Gewirth also hold for Kenny. They are:

- (K1) p is psychologically certain for S at t if and only if S clearly and distinctly perceives that p at t.
- (K2) p is clearly and distinctly perceived by S at t only if p is indubitable for S at t (i.e., S is unable to refrain from believing that p at t).

²Kenny, Journal of Philosophy, p. 686.

³Ibid.

(K3) p is psychologically certain for S at t only if p is indubitable for S at t .

What then are we to suggest as sufficient and necessary conditions for psychological doubt? Kenny's comments are not altogether helpful. At one point in his article he states:

Psychological doubt and metaphysical doubt are not, strictly, doubt about the same proposition. The propositions Descartes is psychologically certain about at the beginning of the Third Meditation are the particular propositions he clearly and distinctly perceives. . . . What Descartes is metaphysically doubtful about is the general proposition, that whatever he intuits most evidently is true. This general doubt may cast doubt on the particular propositions; but the doubt it casts is only a second-order, implicit doubt.⁴

This suggests that psychological doubt is doubt about specific propositions. But it tells us little else. In his more extensive treatment of Descartes Kenny mentions in passing:

Once something has been shown to me by natural light, Descartes says, I cannot doubt it; but another person who sees less clearly may doubt the very same proposition.⁵

This suggests that we might interpret psychological doubt in terms of the negation of psychological certainty:

⁴Ibid., pp. 687-688.

⁵Kenny, Descartes, p. 179.

(K4) p is psychologically doubtful for S at t if and only if p is not clearly and distinctly perceived by S at t .

Principle (K4) allows a proposition to be psychologically doubtful for a person in two ways: one, when the proposition is not being attended to; and two, when it is being attended to but not clearly and distinctly.

Turning to the notions of metaphysical doubt and certainty, one discovers that, aside from the quoted passage referring to metaphysical doubt as a second-order doubt, Kenny does not have anything more specific to say about such doubt in his article. If we refer to his earlier work, we discover that there exists no mention of psychological doubt or certainty, only metaphysical doubt, metaphysical certainty, and something called Cartesian certainty. About the first two, Kenny at one point asserts:

. . . notice that the [Circle] passage suggests a distinction between a first-order doubt and a second-order doubt.
 . . . this second-order doubt is the metaphysical doubt that cannot be removed except by proving the existence of a
 veracious God. 6

This passage makes it clear that the metaphysical doubt discussed in his later article is precisely the metaphysical doubt being articulated here. About Cartesian certainty Kenny has this to say:

⁶Ibid., pp. 183, 184.

It is not enough, for Cartesian certainty, that I should here and now unhesitatingly make a true judgment on the best possible grounds. It is necessary also that I should be in such a position that I will never hereafter have reason to withdraw that judgment. ⁷

At this point one might be tempted to conclude that Kenny has three types of certainty in mind: psychological, metaphysical, and Cartesian. But to do so would be to misinterpret Kenny entirely. In the passage just quoted referring to Cartesian certainty, Kenny continues:

Whenever I clearly and distinctly perceive something, I cannot help judging that it is so, and this will be a true judgment made on the best possible grounds. But until I have proved the veracity of God, I cannot be sure that I shall not hereafter withdraw this judgment under the influence of the metaphysical suspicion of the omnipotent deceiver. If what I have clearly and distinctly perceived was a demonstrated conclusion, I may later doubt it while explicitly thinking of it. If it was not a conclusion but an [indubitable] axiom, I shall never change my mind about it while it is actually before my mind, but I can doubt it indirectly by doubting whatever seems most evident to me. While the possibility of even this second-order doubt remains, I cannot be said to be certain. ⁸

The latter part of this passage which stipulates what is necessary for Cartesian certainty makes it quite clear that

⁷ Ibid., p. 192.

⁸ Ibid. (Italics mine)

the certainty in question is being contrasted with the second-order doubt which Kenny has repeatedly termed metaphysical doubt. Thus, it is equally clear that Cartesian certainty is nothing more and nothing less than metaphysical certainty.

Before attempting to provide any formal interpretations of what either metaphysical doubt or certainty mean for Kenny, it will prove helpful to examine some of the comments he provides to distinguish between metaphysical certainty and psychological certainty. In contrasting the lack of certainty raised in the Circle Passage in Meditation III with the indubitability achieved for certain axioms in Meditation II, Kenny asserts:

In the passages we considered earlier in which Descartes spoke of certain axioms as being indubitable, we must take him to have been speaking of the possibility of first-order doubt. For his examples in the Third Meditation make clear that no axioms are immune to second-order doubt. First-order indubitability is not considered by Descartes as being, by itself, a guarantee of truth; still less does he use "indubitable" as equivalent to "true." The second-order doubt is precisely the question whether first-order indubitability is compatible with falsehood. God's truthfulness resolves the second-order doubt by showing that what is indubitable is true. 9

⁹Ibid., p. 184. (Italics mine)

Now if we take the notion of first-order doubt and corresponding indubitability to be referring to psychological doubt and certainty respectively, and second-order doubt and corresponding certainty to be referring to metaphysical doubt and certainty respectively, then Kenny's account thus far sounds very much like Gewirth's. That is, we might be tempted to suggest that principles (G5) and (G6) hold for Kenny's account as well as for Gewirth's:

- (K5) p is metaphysically doubtful for S at t if and only if (i) p is not psychologically certain for S at t, or (ii) it is possible that (p is clearly and distinctly perceived by S at t and p is false).
- (K6) p is metaphysically certain for S at t if and only if (i) p is psychologically certain for S at t, and (ii) it is not possible that (p is clearly and distinctly perceived by S at t and p is false).

But Kenny argues otherwise. "I think, however, that Gewirth's account of the contrast between psychological and metaphysical certainty is misleading."¹⁰ How is it misleading? Kenny suggests:

But it is misleading to contrast metaphysical certainty with psychological certainty by saying that metaphysical certainty concerns truth. For psychological certainty also concerns truth:

¹⁰Kenny, Journal of Philosophy, p. 686.

to be certain of something is to be
certain that it is true.¹¹

Now I have already argued in the previous chapter that Kenny is mistaken in attributing such a position to Gewirth. However, the distinction between psychological certainty and metaphysical doubt, i.e., between first-order indubitability and second-order doubt, which Kenny offers in contrast to Gewirth, suggests that principles (K5) and (K6) fail to capture Kenny's intentions.

In a passage quoted earlier Kenny suggests that "What Descartes is metaphysically doubtful about is the general proposition, that whatever he intuits most evidently is true." This suggestion is also made in Kenny's earlier work.

. . . notice that the [Circle] passage suggests a distinction between a first-order doubt and a second-order doubt. Take the proposition "What's done cannot be undone." If I explicitly think of this proposition, Descartes says, I cannot at that moment doubt it, that is, I cannot help judging that it is true. However, though I cannot doubt this proposition while my mind's eye is on it, I can, as it were, turn away from it and doubt it in a roundabout manner. I can refer to it under some general heading, such as "what seems to me most obvious"; and I can raise the whole question whether everything that seems to me most obvious may not in fact be false. I cannot, while explicitly thinking of it, believe

¹¹Ibid., p. 687.

it to be false or even suspend judgment about its truth. But until I know that I was made by a veracious God, I can wonder whether my whole intellectual faculty may not be radically deceptive - including that feature of it that is its inability to entertain first-order doubt about . . . axioms of this kind. The axioms are thus generically doubtful while severally indubitable. While in doubt about the author of my nature, I do not know whether the light of nature is a true light or a false light. This second-order doubt is the metaphysical doubt that cannot be removed except by proving the existence¹² of a veracious God.

On the basis of this passage I suggest the following interpretation of metaphysical doubt for Kenny:

(K8) p is metaphysically doubtful for S at t if and only if (i) p is psychologically doubtful for S at t , or (ii) p is clearly and distinctly perceived by S at t and S is not psychologically certain that all his clear and distinct perceptions are true.

Is principle (K8) consistent with other textual evidence in Kenny's account? In his later article Kenny asserts:

Descartes can entertain the thought
 (1) For some p , I clearly and distinctly perceive that p , but not p .
 but he cannot entertain any thought that would be an existential instantiation of (1). He can also entertain the thought
 (2) For some p , I clearly and distinctly

¹²Kenny, Descartes, pp. 183-184.

perceived that p , but not $\neg p$.
and he can entertain certain existential
instantiations of (2).¹³

In order to determine how Kenny's comments here apply to principle (K8) I must introduce the notions of psychological possibility and impossibility in precisely the same manner as I did for my explication of Gewirth's account.

(K12) p is a psychological possibility for S
at $t =_{df}$ $\neg p$ is not a psychological
impossibility for S at t .

(K13) p is a psychological impossibility for
S at $t =_{df}$ $\neg p$ is a psychological
certainty for S at t .

If Descartes can entertain the propositions expressed by (1) and (2) in the passage just quoted, then each is a psychological possibility for him. Thus, their negations, i.e.,

(1') For all p , if I clearly and distinctly
perceive that p , then $\neg p$.

(2') For all p , if I clearly and distinctly
perceived that p , then p .

are psychologically doubtful for Descartes. And this is precisely the state of affairs expressed by condition (ii) of principle (K8). Thus, I contend that principle (K8) captures Kenny's concept of what metaphysical doubt means for Descartes.

¹³Kenny, Journal of Philosophy, p. 689.

Given our success with metaphysical doubt for Kenny, we might be tempted to propose that metaphysical certainty be interpreted in terms of the negation of metaphysical doubt, that is,

(K9) p is metaphysically certain for S at t if and only if (i) p is psychologically certain for S at t, and (ii) S is psychologically certain that all his clear and distinct perceptions are true.

In essence then, principle (K9) states that a person is metaphysically certain about a particular proposition provided that he is psychologically certain about both the proposition and the veracity of all his clear and distinct perceptions.

Does (K9) meet Kenny's needs? Unfortunately, it does not. The metaphysical certainty achieved at a given time is dependent upon the psychological certainty at that time that all one's clear and distinct perceptions are true. But suppose one is not attending to the general proposition. According to principle (K4) the general proposition is, therefore, psychologically doubtful, that is, it is not psychologically certain. Hence, by principle (K8) one no longer has metaphysical certainty. And we may recall that to support my argument for equating metaphysical certainty with Cartesian certainty, I noted that Kenny maintains:

It is not enough, for Cartesian certainty, that I should here and now unhesitatingly make a true judgment on the best possible grounds. It is necessary also that I should be in such a position that I will never hereafter have a reason to withdraw that judgment. . .

What Descartes seeks, then, is a state of mind that is in a certain sense immutable. 14

This suggests Kenny is maintaining that the following condition must hold for metaphysical certainty:

(K14) p is metaphysically certain for S at t only if $\neg(Et')$ (t' is later than t and p is psychologically doubtful for S at t').

But according to principle (K4) a proposition is psychologically doubtful when it is not being attended to.

Principles (K4) and (K14) do not give us that immutable state which Kenny contends Descartes is seeking.

Kenny himself does not provide a clue as to how this immutable state is to be achieved. Having made the claim, he proceeds with an analysis of Descartes' task which we shall examine when discussing question (5). But nothing in the analysis or in the textual evidence he provides points to how the immutable state is to be achieved.

¹⁴Kenny, Descartes, p. 192.

In "Anthony Kenny and the Cartesian Circle"¹⁵ Fred Feldman and Arnold Levison take Kenny to task on this point. They contend:

If this interpretation of Kenny's is correct, then according to him the goal of Descartes' speculation concerning the veracity of God was solely to make it the case that he should never again have reason to change his mind about what he had once intuited. ¹⁶

Feldman and Levison argue that it is implausible to attribute such an unrealistic goal to Descartes. They offer three reasons why the proof of a veracious deity will fail to provide the immutable state stipulated by Kenny. The first involves a situation in which Descartes intuits that two and three are five after proving God's existence. Later he forgets the proof but recalls the intuition. Doubts that he now has about God's nature should defeat the metaphysical certainty of his intuition. The second involves a situation in which Descartes intuits a complex mathematical proposition after proving God's existence. Later he forgets that he had the intuition but he correctly recalls the proof. On the basis of other evidence he may very well come to doubt the truth of the mathematical

¹⁵ Fred Feldman and Arnold Levison, "Anthony Kenny and the Cartesian Circle," Journal of the History of Philosophy Vol. 9 (1971), pp. 491-496.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 496.

proposition. Thus, he should no longer be metaphysically certain about it. The third involves a situation in which he comes to doubt one of the premises in the first argument for God's existence and he decides to use the ontological argument in its place. Feldman and Levison conclude:

Possibilities such as these are so obvious that Descartes could hardly have missed them. So it seems unlikely that he brought in the veracious deity "to show that he will never have reason to change his mind about what he has once intuited." 17

In a rejoinder, Kenny acknowledges the points raised by Feldman and Levison.

Feldman and Levison are correct in thinking that on my view the goal of Descartes' speculation about God's truthfulness is to make it the case that he should never again have reason to change his mind about what he has once intuited. . . .

I think that Feldman and Levison are correct in saying that even the proof of a veracious deity is not sufficient to establish an immutable state of certainty. 18

But, Kenny argues,

It does not seem to me to follow that Descartes was not trying to do so. As he says in both the Second and Sixth replies (HR II, pp. 39, 245) no one can have 'immutable and certain knowledge'

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Anthony Kenny, "A Reply by Anthony Kenny," Journal of the History of Philosophy Vol. 9 (1971), pp. 497-498, p. 497.

unless he first acknowledges that he has been created by a God who has no¹⁹ intention to deceive.

Kenny suggests that to such objections Descartes could have responded that either the proof of a veracious deity was a necessary but not a sufficient condition for immutable certainty or the situations in question are not good reasons to doubt because they rely to some extent on forgetfulness. Kenny maintains that neither response will suffice to make Descartes' epistemology an adequate response to skepticism. However, it is not, he contends, a circular account.

But Kenny need not commit himself or Descartes to the position he does. There exists an interpretation of what Descartes intends by an immutable state of mind that is consistent with the rest of Kenny's account. The two textual references made by Kenny both concern the atheistic geometer. In the latter Descartes asserts:

As to the Atheist's knowledge, it is easy to prove that it is not immutable and certain. For, as I have already in a former place said, in proportion to the impotence assigned to the author of his being, the greater will be his reason for doubting whether he may not be of such an imperfect nature as to be deceived in matters which appear most evident to him. . . .²⁰

The former place referred to is the other textual reference

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 497-498.

²⁰ HR II, p. 245. (Italics mine)

made by Kenny where Descartes asserts:

That an atheist can know clearly that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, I do not deny, I merely affirm that, on the one hand, such knowledge on his part cannot constitute true science, because no knowledge that can be rendered doubtful should be called science. 21

And here there is no mention of immutable states of mind. However, there does exist at the beginning of his remarks on this point certain comments about memory. Descartes states:

Thirdly, when I said that we could know nothing with certainty unless we were first aware that God existed, I announced in express terms that I referred only to the science apprehending such conclusions as can recur in memory without attending further to the proofs which led me to make them. 22

We may recall that there is textual evidence to suggest that Descartes' responses to his critics' charges of circularity, particularly Arnauld's, have something to do with memory, which led some Cartesian commentators to conclude that Descartes was defending the veracity of memory. We have seen in Chapter I that the memory thesis fails both as an adequately full account of Descartes' enterprise and as a means of allowing him to escape circular reasoning.

²¹Ibid., p. 39.

²²Ibid., p. 38.

Nonetheless, his responses point to something going on which involves memory. If in the above passage we interpret Descartes to be maintaining that the reason the atheist does not have true knowledge is that he has no guarantee that his recollections of clear and distinct perceptions are certain, we might reasonably conclude that Descartes is suggesting that metaphysical certainty also guarantees the veracity of correctly remembered clear and distinct perceptions. This in turn suggests, consistent with Descartes' remarks on the matter and with the remainder of Kenny's account, that the demonstration that a veracious God exists provides us not only with metaphysical certainty that all our clear and distinct perceptions are true when we are attending to them, but also with metaphysical certainty that they are psychologically certain even when we are only (correctly) remembering that they were clearly and distinctly perceived. Thus, metaphysical certainty entails that all our clear and distinct perceptions are veracious. It also entails that correctly remembered clear and distinct perceptions are not psychologically doubtful even though they are no longer being attended to clearly and distinctly. This, I contend, is how Kenny should have interpreted Descartes' notion of an immutable state of mind. Consistent with my explication of the rest of Kenny's account, I offer the following in an

attempt to draw out a feature of Kenny's notion of Cartesian certainty:

(K15) p is metaphysically certain for S at t
 $\rightarrow (Et')$ (t' is later than t , and S
 correctly remembers at t' that p was
 clearly and distinctly perceived by S
 at t , and p is not psychologically
 doubtful for S at t' .)

None of the three situations described by Feldman and Levison cause problems for Kenny's account as I have suggested it can be explicated. In the first situation condition (ii) of principle (K9) is not met and hence Descartes is no longer metaphysically certain. In the second situation condition (i) in (K9) is falsified and hence Descartes is no longer metaphysically certain. In the third, the first argument for God's existence no longer provides the necessary psychological certainty required by condition (ii) of (K9). Descartes is therefore no longer metaphysically certain on the basis of that argument.

We are now in a position to apply the distinctions outlined thus far for Kenny's account to the questions that I have raised for each interpretation of Descartes being considered.

We saw in considering Gewirth's account that he has no reason to develop a notion of psychological doubt since, on his account, it is metaphysical doubt that is raised from

the very start in Meditation I. As we have also seen, Kenny explicitly acknowledges a notion of psychological doubt in his account, although he mistakenly attributes a similar notion to Gewirth. We might conclude from this that the type of doubt being raised in Meditation I is primarily psychological rather than strictly metaphysical on Kenny's view.²³ Unfortunately, we would be mistaken. Kenny's response to question (1) is:

So far, I have followed Gewirth in taking Descartes to be expressing fundamentally the same doubt in the Third Meditation as in the First. 24

Since the doubt raised in Meditation III is quite obviously metaphysical, according to Kenny, Descartes is raising metaphysical doubt in Meditation I.

In his earlier work Kenny outlines several steps in Descartes' program of doubt. First, Descartes casts doubt on the veracity of the senses initially by demonstrating that they sometimes mislead us. But since we cannot conclude that it is possible that they always do so from the

²³It is important to note that in any account in which one type of certainty is employed to achieve a second, the doubt which corresponds to the first entails the doubt which corresponds to the second but not vice-versa. Thus, if in Meditation I a proposition, p, is psychologically doubtful, it is also metaphysically doubtful. The question is, therefore, is the doubt in Meditation I primarily psychological or solely metaphysical in nature?

²⁴Kenny, Journal of Philosophy, p. 691.

fact that they sometimes do so, Descartes introduces the dream argument which, according to Kenny, leads to a modest skepticism.

It [the dream argument] calls in doubt all particular sense beliefs and the existence of composite tangible objects, but it leaves intact the claim that "there are some other objects more simple and more universal which are real and true." 25

It is the hypothesis of an omnipotent deceiver which completes the attack on the senses. But what additional beliefs does the hypothesis cast doubt upon? Kenny mentions in passing the possible deception involved in understanding simple natures of extension, size, and place and in the performance of the simplest arithmetical operations. But he does not elaborate further. To determine the range of beliefs over which the omnipotent deceiver hypothesis casts doubt we must refer to his later article in which he contrasts his view with that of Frankfurt.

We may recall that Frankfurt argues that the mathematical propositions upon which doubt is cast in Meditation I are not clearly and distinctly perceived. He offers three reasons in support of his view. First, Haldane and Ross provide a very misleading translation by combining the 'clear' truths of the Latin edition with the 'apparent'

²⁵Kenny, Descartes, p. 32.

truths of the French translation to reach 'clear and apparent' truths. Second, in his Conversation with Burman Descartes remarks that in Meditation I he was considering someone who was just beginning to philosophize. Third, in his replies to the seventh set of objections Descartes states that at the end of Meditation I he had said that everything could be doubted which had not been perceived with sufficient clearness.

Kenny does not respond to the first point. With regard to the second, he claims that Descartes was referring to philosophical axioms rather than to simple truths of arithmetic. In response to the third, Kenny claims that Descartes' remarks do not refer to the entire First Meditation, only to a specific passage within Meditation I. He contends that there are several passages that explicitly contradict Frankfurt's contention and he quotes two. The first is in Meditation V where Descartes asserts:

. . . the nature of my mind is such that I could not prevent myself from holding them [certain geometric truths] to be true so long as I conceive them clearly; and I recollect that even when I was still strongly attached to the objects of sense, I counted as the most certain those truths which I conceived clearly as regards figures, numbers, and the other matters which pertain to arithmetic

and geometry, and, in general, to
pure and abstract mathematics. 26

The second is at the end of the replies to the sixth set
of objections where Descartes says:

. . . before I had liberated myself
from the prejudices of the senses, I
rightly perceived that two and three
make five, that if equals be taken
from equals the remainders are equal,²⁷
and many similar things. . .

Kenny argues:

We know from the Second Replies that
some truths are so simple that they
cannot be thought of without being
doubted [sic]. . . Since these are so
simple that they cannot be thought of
without being clearly and distinctly
perceived. . ., it follows that they
are perceived clearly and distinctly²⁸
by all normal adults.

Thus, if the mathematical propositions doubted in Medita-
tion I are of the sort that are so simple that they cannot
be thought of without being clearly and distinctly per-
ceived, then the doubt that is raised against them can be
nothing less than metaphysical doubt, given principles (K4)
and (K8) which I have attributed to Kenny.

Turning to question (2), Kenny's position is that the
indubitability of the Cogito is achieved in the following

²⁶HR I, p. 180. Kenny offers his own translation. It does
not differ appreciably from that of Haldane and Ross.

²⁷HR II, p. 257.

²⁸Kenny, Journal of Philosophy, p. 692.

manner:

Doubting is one kind of thought; and thought is defined precisely as "whatever takes place within ourselves so that we are conscious of it, in so far as it is an object of our consciousness." Therefore, "if I doubt I know that I doubt" follows, for Descartes, from the definition he has given of thought, of which doubting is a species or mode. . . . Descartes therefore makes it true by definition that if I think, I know that I think. It is here that the indubitability of the premise of "cogito ergo sum" is to be found. 29

The structure of the Cogito is as follows:

At any moment when Descartes is engaged in a conscious activity - say, when he is thinking, doubting, willing, or sensing - the proposition "cogito" is true. Because thought is by definition known to its agent, the proposition is not only true, but also indubitable to Descartes; for what is known cannot be doubted (HR II, p. 276). The premise "cogito" in conjunction with the pre-supposition that it is impossible for that which is thinking to be nonexistent yield the conclusion "sum". Since the premise is indubitable and the conclusion follows by the light of nature, 30 the conclusion too is indubitable.

But we might ask of Kenny, "in what sense is the Cogito indubitable, psychologically or metaphysically?" Although the textual evidence offered thus far points to the former, surprisingly enough it is the latter which Kenny has in

²⁹Kenny, Descartes, p. 49.

³⁰Ibid., p. 51.

mind. He argues:

The propositions never called into question in Descartes' system are those that report the contents of the mind, those that express the mind's consciousness of its own thoughts and ideas. Thus, the premise "cogito" and the presence of the idea of God are not challenged by the second-order doubt. 31

Thus, cogito is the first proposition for which Descartes achieves metaphysical certainty. Sum, on the other hand, is only psychologically certain because it is derived by using the axiom 'to think, one must exist' which on Kenny's view is open to second-order doubt.

What else does the Cogito achieve for Descartes?

Kenny suggests three things:

The cogito provided Descartes with three things. First, it established as certain his own existence. . .

Second, it suggested to him a general criterion for truth and certainty. . .

Third, it enabled Descartes to discover his own nature. I think, therefore I am. But what am I? A 32 thinking thing.

The second achievement of the Cogito leads us to question (3). Kenny's position with respect to the role which the principle of clarity and distinctness plays in Descartes' enterprise is ambiguous. There is textual

³¹Ibid., pp. 185-186.

³²Ibid., p. 63.

evidence that points to the principle as establishing the psychological certainty of certain propositions, among which would be that God exists and is no deceiver. At one point Kenny states:

"Clear and distinct perception," an expression he [Descartes] uses frequently, cannot be regarded as a synonym for "intuition" since the conclusions of deductions may be clearly and distinctly perceived no less than self-evident truths. 33

And at other points Kenny asserts:

. . . anything can be doubted unless it is clearly and distinctly perceived. . . 34

. . . all clear and distinct perception, not just intuition, leads to a certainty that excludes simultaneous doubt. . . 35

Presumably the doubt being referred to is psychological doubt and the certainty, metaphysical certainty.

But there is also textual evidence that suggests that the principle of clarity and distinctness plays no role in establishing the existence of God. In one passage, parts of which have been quoted earlier, Kenny indicates that the propositions never called into metaphysical doubt are those that report the contents of the mind. Among those proposi-

³³ Ibid., p. 175.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 181.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 187.

tions are cogito and the presence of the idea of God. And it is the existence of the idea of God that establishes the existence of God.³⁶ This passage suggests that it is the metaphysical certainty of certain propositions that enables Descartes to be psychologically certain that God is no deceiver.

Additional textual evidence seems to support this interpretation. Consider the following comments by Kenny in various places:

. . . intuition is said to be produced
"by the light of reason alone." 37

Once something has been shown to me by natural light, Descartes says, I cannot doubt it; but another person who sees less clearly may doubt the very same proposition. 38

There are, however, some axioms that no one can doubt at any stage of his life. 39

There is then, a class of specially indubitable axioms. . . smaller than the class of axioms that can be shown by natural light to anybody at any stage. 40

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 185-186.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 176.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 179.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 180.

These remarks suggest that one aspect of reason is not open to even metaphysical doubt. One additional passage seems to support this suggestion.

. . . Descartes does not offer the veracity of God as a ground for accepting the truth of an intuition. It is not because even the veracity of God will not suffice to show that the intuition may not be, absolutely speaking, false, but because the simple intuition by itself provides both psychologically and logically the best grounds for accepting its truth. Thus, there is no circle. Deduction is called into question, and deduction is vindicated by intuition. The truth of particular intuitions is never called in question, only the universal trustworthiness of intuition, and in vindicating this universal trustworthiness only individual intuitions are utilized. There is no single faculty, or single exercise of a faculty, that is vindicated by its own use. 41

Is Kenny, after all, a proponent of the partial autonomy of reason for Descartes? In spite of the textual evidence that suggests so, I don't believe that is what Kenny has in mind. Rather, his response to question (3) is that Descartes' efforts in Meditation II have provided him with the basis for determining which of his perceptions are indubitable. That basis is the clarity and distinctness with which specific propositions are perceived. The principle of clarity and distinctness then indicates which

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 194-195.

specific propositions are psychologically certain for Descartes. We should recall that Kenny does not indicate any place in the Meditations or elsewhere where Descartes raises psychological doubt about specific propositions. This is why he claims that the veracity of intuition is never called into question. Thus, no single faculty or exercise of faculty is called into question. That is not to say that intuition is thereby in no need of any justification. For it is the use of intuition with respect to specific propositions such as the Cogito (and the existence of the idea of God) that demonstrates, to use Kenny's words, "that simple intuition by itself provides both psychologically and logically the best grounds for accepting its truth." But given that the principle of clarity and distinctness extends to deduction, deduction and the universal trustworthiness of intuition is what is called into question. And this brings us to question (4).

In my explication of the distinction that Kenny makes between psychological doubt and metaphysical doubt we already saw his response to question (4). The doubt raised in the Circle Passage is a first-order doubt about only the general proposition that 'whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive is true' and that first-order doubt casts second-order doubt only on specific clearly and distinctly perceived propositions. I suggested that principle (K8)

captures Kenny's intentions.

Kenny's response to part of question (5) is also evident from my earlier discussion of his distinction between psychological certainty and metaphysical certainty. The demonstration that a non-deceiving God exists removes the only reason Descartes has for psychologically doubting the general proposition that 'whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive is true'. The demonstration makes the general proposition psychologically certain for Descartes. All second-order doubt with respect to specific propositions clearly and distinctly perceived is removed. Condition (ii) of principle (K9) is met. Given principle (K1), any proposition that is clearly and distinctly perceived by Descartes is psychologically certain for him. Thus, whenever condition (i) of (K9) is met with respect to a particular proposition, that proposition is metaphysically certain for Descartes.

The demonstration that a non-deceiving God exists also guarantees the psychological certainty of correctly remembered clear and distinct perceptions. If, at a later time, I correctly remember clearly and distinctly perceiving that p , given principle (K15), p remains psychologically certain for me. Thus, situations in which Descartes is not attending to propositions clearly and distinctly do not defeat either the psychological or metaphysical

certainty of those propositions for him. He has achieved the immutable state of mind that I contend Kenny should have attributed to Descartes.

But how is all of this to be achieved? Quite simply, each of the steps in the arguments for God's existence and non-deceiving nature can be perceived clearly and distinctly. Thus, given principle (K1), each is psychologically certain for Descartes. He also perceives clearly and distinctly the logical relationship between the premises and their respective conclusions. The relationship in each argument, then, is also psychologically certain for Descartes. Thus, the conclusions that follow from their respective premises are also psychologically certain for Descartes. These conclusions are employed, in turn, to demonstrate that whatever he clearly and distinctly perceives is true. And this general proposition is thereby psychologically certain for him. Since it was the psychological dubitability of this general proposition which cast second-order, metaphysical doubt on particular clearly and distinctly perceived propositions, once it has been demonstrated that this general proposition is psychologically certain for Descartes, it is no longer psychologically doubtful for him. Thus, it can no longer cast second-order doubt on particular propositions. Thus, all propositions which are psychologically certain for Descartes become

metaphysically certain for him. Kenny concludes:

It is by now clear why there is no circle in Descartes's argument. The clear and distinct perceptions used in the proof of God's existence are perceptions of particular propositions, such as that ideas cannot be more perfect than their archetypes (HR I, p. 163). The veracity of God is used to establish not any particular clear and distinct perception, but the general proposition that whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive is true. 42

Kenny also contends:

Provided that in the proofs for the existence of God no appeal is made to remembered perceptions, there is no circularity in establishing the reliability of remembered perceptions by appeal to the veracity of God, and Descartes is careful to insist that his proofs of God's existence do not depend on memory in this way. 43

In his earlier work Kenny proceeds to demonstrate that although no circularity is involved with his interpretation of Descartes' enterprise, there are other problems for Descartes, among them the lack of a criterion for distinguishing genuinely clear and distinct perceptions from apparent ones. I do not intend to discuss these problems. My task here is to determine whether Kenny's account, as I have presented it, is reasonably consistent with the text

⁴²Kenny, Journal of Philosophy, p. 690.

⁴³Kenny, Descartes, p. 189.

and succeeds in allowing Descartes to avoid circular reasoning as Kenny contends.

Before considering what I take to be a serious objection to Kenny's account I would like to raise three points. The first is that Kenny argues that the doubt raised in Meditation I is metaphysical in nature. In doing so he places himself in opposition to Frankfurt. Since his position with respect to question (1) does not have any bearing on the success or failure of his account in enabling Descartes to avoid circular reasoning, I shall reserve comment until Chapter V where I present my own interpretation of Descartes' enterprise. But it is worth noting that Kenny's explicit mention of psychological doubt is unnecessary. Since such doubt does not play a pivotal role in his interpretation of Descartes' enterprise, his account, like Gewirth's, could have been explicated solely in terms of psychological certainty, clarity and distinctness, and metaphysical doubt and certainty.

The second is that Kenny does not provide a satisfactory explanation of why certain propositions such as cogito escape second-order, metaphysical doubt. Given the nature of metaphysical doubt on Kenny's account, as I have explicated it, every proposition that is clearly and distinctly perceived should be open to such doubt. If the

proposition cogito is a member of the set of all clearly and distinctly perceived propositions, then according to principle (K8) it should also be metaphysically doubtful for Descartes until he is psychologically certain that God exists and is no deceiver. Principle (K8) is not at fault. Kenny's interpretation of metaphysical doubt is inconsistent with his position on the epistemic status of the Cogito.

Finally, as I noted earlier in presenting the distinction between first-order and second-order doubt, Kenny suggests that Descartes found certain propositions generically doubtful while severally indubitable. The suggestion is very misleading. Propositions may be severally indubitable in a first-order way, but they are also severally dubitable in a second-order way. To see this we need only to consider principle (K8). It provides sufficient and necessary conditions for second-order doubt; and those conditions are articulated with respect to specific propositions.

This last point is made by Fred Feldman and Arnold Levison in the aforementioned article criticizing Kenny's account as it is presented in his earlier work. It leads them to suggest that Kenny, in response, might say that his explanation of second-order doubt was defective. They contend:

What he [Kenny] should have said about second-order doubt was not that it is a roundabout way of doubting particular intuitions, but that it is a suspicion that some intuition or other might be false. Thus, to say that Descartes had second-order doubt about his intuitions, in this sense, would be to say:

(a) Descartes suspects (E_p) (he intuits p & p is false).

Kenny might then claim that (a) is consistent with:

(b) $\neg(E_p)$ (Descartes intuits p & he suspects that p is false).

Then Kenny might claim that Descartes' original perplexity was just that (a) and (b) were true of him. That is, he suspected that some of his intuitions might be false, but there wasn't any one in particular, such that he suspected that it was false. 44

Although Kenny does not explicitly acknowledge this suggestion in his later article, there is some textual evidence to suggest that he agrees with Feldman and Levison thus far. Kenny asserts:

Consider the proposition "I cannot doubt what I clearly and distinctly perceive." On Descartes's view, this is true if it means

(3) For all p , if I clearly and distinctly perceive that p , then I cannot doubt that p .

It is false if it means

(4) I cannot doubt that (for all p , if

⁴⁴Feldman and Levison, op. cit., p. 494.

I clearly and distinctly perceive that p , then p). 45

Substituting 'intuits p ' for 'clearly and distinctly perceive that p ', notice the virtual equivalence of (3) and (b) from the two passages just quoted on the one hand, and (a) and the negation of (4) on the other.

Now Feldman and Levison argue that this interpretation of Descartes is open to objection for at least two reasons. First, it is not supported by textual evidence. In the Circle Passage they claim that Descartes is explicitly speaking of doubting the proposition that two and three together make five. Thus, they conclude that (b) is not true of Descartes. And if (b) is not true, then neither is Kenny's (3). Feldman and Levison also argue:

Secondly, if Descartes does suspect that some of his intuitions are false, then, even if there is none in particular at which he can point his finger, still he cannot trust any of them. For on this interpretation he suspects that some intuition or other might be false, but he doesn't know which ones. Therefore, each one of his intuitions is tainted by this second-order doubt. 46

I take Feldman and Levison to be suggesting that although Descartes is unable to entertain any instantiation of (a), nevertheless each of his clear and distinct perceptions is

⁴⁵Kenny, Journal of Philosophy, p. 689.

⁴⁶Feldman and Levison, op. cit., p. 494.

open to doubt, albeit of a second-order nature. They conclude:

Thus it seems that Descartes did call in question the truth of individual intuitions, contrary to Kenny's claim. Kenny is right that Descartes did not doubt them when he was explicitly entertaining them, but nevertheless he doubted them. If this is the only way that metaphysical doubt is understood, Kenny's arguments fail. 47

In "A Reply by Anthony Kenny"⁴⁸ Kenny acknowledges their point that second-order doubt could be doubt about specific propositions, but he claims that Descartes in fact raises only the generic doubt. He contends that the Circle Passage supports rather than refutes his claim, because Descartes explicitly says he judged afterwards that it was possible to doubt and the doubt is directed toward the generic description of "what seemed most obvious."

Now even if we grant Kenny his interpretation of the Circle Passage, he has not succeeded in demonstrating that Feldman and Levison are wrong in contending that Kenny's account is not supported by Cartesian text. We may recall that Kenny contends that metaphysical doubt is raised in Meditation I. And in arguing against Frankfurt's position, he claims that clearly and distinctly perceived proposi-

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Kenny, Journal of the History of Philosophy, p. 495.

tions are called into doubt in that Meditation. One reason for the claim is that some mathematical propositions are so simple that they cannot be thought of without being clearly and distinctly perceived, among them the proposition that two and three make five. But in Meditation I Descartes states:

. . . how do I know that I am not deceived every time that I add two and three, or count the sides of a square, or judge of things yet simpler, if anything simpler can be imagined? 49

Here Descartes is raising doubt about specific propositions. Given that Kenny maintains that metaphysical doubt is raised in Meditation I, he cannot consistently maintain that such doubt is not raised by Descartes against specific propositions.

With respect to Feldman and Levison's second reason for rejecting (b), and therefore Kenny's (3), Kenny gives no direct response. However, in his later article he addresses the issue tangentially. As we saw earlier, Kenny contends:

Descartes can entertain the thought
 (1) For some p, I clearly and distinctly
 perceive that p, but not p.
 but he cannot entertain any thought
 that would be an existential instan-
 tiation of (1). 50

⁴⁹HR I, p. 147.

⁵⁰Kenny, Journal of Philosophy, p. 689.

Note the equivalence of (1) and Feldman and Levison's (a). With respect to (a) I interpreted Feldman and Levison to be suggesting that although Descartes is unable to entertain any existential instantiation of (a), (and therefore Kenny's (1)), nevertheless each clearly and distinctly perceived proposition is open to a second-order doubt. With regard to (1), (and therefore (a)), Kenny argues:

Is there an inconsistency in accepting (1) while rejecting every possible instantiation of it? Perhaps there is; but given the human condition it is a harmless and necessary inconsistency. Every one of us, I imagine, would wish to subscribe to

(5) For some p, I believe that p, but not p.
Yet to accept any instantiation of this would involve one in a version of Moore's paradox. The inconsistency to which the doubting Descartes is committed is no worse than that of anyone who believes⁵¹ that some of his beliefs are false.

I take Kenny to be suggesting that, in response to Feldman and Levison's point, Descartes' inability to entertain existential instantiations of (1) blocks doubt about specific propositions. His analogy to belief I take to be an attempt to demonstrate the reasonableness of his interpretation of Descartes. But the analogy is misleading. Kenny himself admits to a distinction for Descartes between beliefs and clear and distinct perceptions.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 689-690.

. . . we must distinguish clear and distinct perception, which is an act of the understanding, from belief which is not. 52

The reason I can admit to the suspicion that some of my beliefs are false without that admission affecting my conviction with respect to specific beliefs is that my belief claims do not carry the force of conviction that clear and distinct perceptions do. A more appropriate analogy would be between clear and distinct perceptions and knowledge claims. When Descartes entertains the proposition expressed by Kenny's (1) it is tantamount to entertaining the proposition that:

(5') (Ep) (Descartes claims to know that p , and $\neg p$).

Now if I suspect that some of my knowledge claims are false, even though I don't know which ones, it puts all my specific knowledge claims in doubt. Similarly with respect to clear and distinct perceptions, if Descartes suspects that some of his clear and distinct perceptions are faulty, that suspicion makes each such perception questionable.

The impact of this on Kenny's account is serious. We may recall that Kenny claims there is no circle in Descartes' arguments because the clear and distinct perceptions employed in the proofs of God's veracity are

⁵²Kenny, Descartes, p. 181.

perceptions of specific propositions and the veracity of God is used to establish the veracity of not any specific proposition but the general proposition that whatever is clearly and distinctly perceived is true. But my contention is that the only coherent explication of Kenny's interpretation that is consistent with the Cartesian text commits Descartes to doubting specific clear and distinct perceptions. And if I am correct, it is no longer clear that on Kenny's account there is no circle in Descartes' arguments.

While I suggested earlier that Kenny's account could be salvaged from the untenable position which he insists on maintaining with respect to the immutability of Cartesian certainty, I see no similar escape from the second predicament which Feldman and Levison raise for his interpretation of second-order, metaphysical doubt. Thus, I would now like to turn to a more promising account which makes a much different distinction between types of doubt and certainty in Descartes' epistemology.

In "Epistemic Appraisal and the Cartesian Circle"⁵³
Fred Feldman distinguishes between terms of 'practical'

⁵³Fred Feldman, "Epistemic Appraisal and the Cartesian Circle," Philosophical Studies Vol. 27 (1975) pp. 37-55.

epistemic appraisal which include 'practical knowledge', 'practical certainty' and 'practical doubt', and terms of 'metaphysical' epistemic appraisal which include 'metaphysical knowledge', 'metaphysical certainty' and 'metaphysical doubt'. In order to determine Feldman's position with respect to each of the five questions that I have raised for each account of Descartes' enterprise, it is necessary to first provide a careful account of these distinctions which he makes.

Pointing to a passage in which Descartes asserts:

But we must note the distinction emphasized by me in various passages, between the practical activities of our life and an enquiry into truth; for, when it is a case of regulating our life, it would assuredly be stupid not to trust the senses, and those sceptics were quite ridiculous who so neglected human affairs that they had to be preserved by their friends from tumbling down precipices. It was for this reason that somewhere I announced that no one in his sound mind seriously doubted about such matters; but when we raise an enquiry into what is the surest knowledge which the human mind can obtain, it is clearly unreasonable to refuse to treat them as doubtful, nay even to reject them as false, so as to allow us to become aware that certain other things, which cannot be thus rejected, are for this very reason more certain, and in actual truth better known by us.

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⁵⁴HR II, p. 206.

Feldman contends that the distinction Descartes makes between practical activities and an enquiry into truth suggests that certain propositions are sufficiently certain for practical activities but insufficiently certain for an enquiry into truth. The certainty in the former case Feldman calls practical certainty:

. . . if a proposition is sufficiently certain to be accepted for practical purposes, then it is "beyond practical doubt". Another way to put this would be to say that it is "practically certain". 55

But propositions that are practically certain may not be sufficiently certain for the kind of enquiry which Descartes is prepared to undertake in the Meditations. Feldman suggests:

. . . such propositions are open to "metaphysical doubt". They are "metaphysically uncertain". Descartes suggests that when we notice that some propositions are thus open to metaphysical doubt, we may become aware that some others are "more certain" and "better known". These propositions, I believe, may be described as being "metaphysically certain". They are "beyond metaphysical doubt". 56

These distinctions allow Feldman to provide an explanation of Descartes' response to his critics' claim that an

⁵⁵Feldman, op. cit., p. 38.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 38-39.

atheist can know that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles without knowing that God exists.

We may recall that Descartes' response was:

That an atheist can know clearly that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, I do not deny, I merely affirm that, on the other hand, such knowledge on his part cannot constitute true science because no knowledge that can be rendered doubtful should be called science. Since he is, as supposed, an Atheist, he cannot be sure that he is not deceived in the things that seem most evident to him, as has been sufficiently shown, . . . 57

Equating true science with metaphysical knowledge, Feldman contends:

Descartes' view about the atheistic geometer seems to be this. The atheistic geometer does have practical knowledge, and hence the practical certainty, of the fact that the angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. Perhaps his certainty derives from the fact that he has intuited this fact about triangles clearly and distinctly. However, the atheistic geometer does not know very much about God's nature. From his point of view, though he doesn't believe it, there might be a deceptive God. If he should gain some reason to believe that there is such a God, then the justification for his belief in the geometric fact would be undermined. Hence, although his justification is not in fact undermined in this way, it is not as secure as it might be. The atheistic geometer, therefore, does not have metaphysical certainty, or metaphysical knowledge,

⁵⁷HR II, p. 39.

of the fact that the angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles.⁵⁸

Feldman proceeds to offer an analysis of the terms of practical epistemic appraisal.

. . . the fundamental concept of practical epistemic appraisal is the concept of practical certainty. Although I will not offer a definition of this term, I can say a few things that may serve to make its meaning clearer. To say that a proposition, p, is a practical certainty for a person, S, at a time, t, is to say, roughly, that S is justified in believing p at t, or that S has the "epistemic right" to believe p at t, or that p is either self-evident or adequately evidenced for S at t.⁵⁹

Feldman makes three points about practical certainty.

First, it is a purely epistemic concept and not a psychological one. In this his account is clearly to be contrasted with those of Frankfurt, Gewirth, and Kenny. I have some comments to make on this point later. The second point is that practical certainty requires no greater degree of certainty than does ordinary knowledge. "Anyone who knows anything (in the ordinary sense of 'knows') has practical certainty with respect to whatever it is he knows."⁶⁰ Third, propositions that are practically certain

⁵⁸Feldman, op. cit., p. 40.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 41.

Feldman contends:

The concept of practical doubt can be related rather neatly to the concept of practical certainty. To say that a proposition is "practically doubtful" for a person at a time is to say that it is then practically uncertain for him. To say that it is "beyond practical doubt" for him is to say that it is practically certain for him. 61

Feldman also puts special emphasis on definition (1).

He asserts:

The concept of practical possibility, defined in (1), will play an important role in my argument. I believe that this concept is a fairly familiar one, often called "epistemic possibility". We make use of this concept frequently. We might say, for example, of a suspect in an as yet unsolved murder case, that he might be guilty. This is not to say either that it is logically possible, or that it is causally possible that he is guilty. For the former is utterly uninteresting, and the latter is something that we may be in no position to affirm. Rather, it is to say that "for all we know" he is guilty. We are not certain that he is not guilty. In my terminology, we could say that it is a practical possibility for us that he is guilty. 62

Feldman concludes his analysis of the terms of practical epistemic appraisal by considering two principles:

⁶¹Ibid., p. 42.

⁶²Ibid.

- (4) If p is a practical certainty for S at t , and p entails q , then q is a practical certainty for S at t .
- (5) If p is a practical certainty for S at t , and the proposition that p entails q is a practical certainty for S at t , and S infers q from p at t , then q is a practical certainty for S at t .

He rejects (4).

The problem with (4) is that it makes a practical certainty of everything entailed by a practical certainty, even if S fails to see the entailment. From this it follows that every necessary truth is practically certain for anyone who is practically certain of anything.⁶³ This seems implausible.

Feldman contends that (5) captures Descartes' intentions contained in the following passages. In Rule III Descartes asserts:

. . . knowing by deduction, by which we understand all necessary inference from other facts that are known with certainty. 64

In Rule VII he asserts:

. . . if I have first found out by separate mental operations what the relation is between the magnitudes A and B, then what between B and C, between C and D, and finally between

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ HR I, p. 8. (Italics mine)

D and E, that does not entail my seeing what the relation is between A and E, . . . 65

And in Rule XI:

If, after we have recognized intuitively a number of simple truths, we wish to draw any inference from them, it is useful to run them over in a continuous and uninterrupted act of thought, to reflect upon their relations to one another. . . For this is a way of making our knowledge much more certain, . . . 66

Feldman argues:

Descartes apparently means to suggest that a person gains "knowledge by deduction" only if several conditions are fulfilled. For one, he must have "certain knowledge" of the premises. For another, he must make a "necessary inference" from these premises to the conclusion. In this connection, Descartes makes several references to what he calls "a continuous and uninterrupted movement of thought" from the clear and distinct perception of the premises to the clear and distinct perception of the conclusion. 67

And principle (5) is what Feldman proposes for the transfer of practical certainty.

Feldman next provides an analysis of the terms of metaphysical epistemic appraisal. He states:

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19. (Italics mine)

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁶⁷ Feldman, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

The fundamental concept here is "p is a metaphysical certainty for S at t". Roughly, to say that a proposition p is a metaphysical certainty for a person is to say that it is absolutely certain for him - beyond even the most hyperbolic doubt. Not even the "very least ground of suspicion" can be found against it. A proposition is a metaphysical certainty for a person at a time only if he is then "maximally justified" in believing it. The requirements for metaphysical certainty are thus of the same kind as, but considerably more stringent than, the requirements for practical certainty. 68

Feldman makes two points about metaphysical certainty.

First, it is a purely epistemic concept. Like practical certainty it has no psychological component. Second, propositions that are metaphysically certain for a person need not have any metaphysical content. Provided that certain conditions are met, any proposition can be metaphysically certain.

Feldman then introduces some additional terms of metaphysical epistemic appraisal.

- (6) p is a metaphysical possibility for S at t =_{df} \neg p is not a metaphysical certainty for S at t.
- (7) p is a metaphysical impossibility for S at t =_{df} p is a metaphysical certainty for S at t.

68 Ibid.

- (8) \underline{p} is a metaphysical uncertainty for \underline{S} at \underline{t} =_{df} \underline{p} is not a metaphysical certainty for \underline{S} at \underline{t} .

These concepts also fall into the traditional square of opposition and definition (6) captures a concept of epistemic possibility for Feldman. There are also certain connections between the concepts of practical epistemic appraisal and those of metaphysical epistemic appraisal that Feldman stipulates.

- (10) \underline{p} is a metaphysical certainty for \underline{S} at \underline{t} \rightarrow \underline{p} is a practical certainty for \underline{S} at \underline{t} (but not vice versa).
- (11) \underline{p} is a practical uncertainty for \underline{S} at \underline{t} \rightarrow \underline{p} is a metaphysical uncertainty for \underline{S} at \underline{t} .
- (12) \underline{p} is a practical possibility for \underline{S} at \underline{t} \rightarrow \underline{p} is a metaphysical possibility for \underline{S} at \underline{t} .

Feldman then proceeds to explain how, on his account, Descartes intends for one proposition to cast doubt upon another. He suggests:

Descartes holds that a given proposition does not have to be certain in order to make another uncertain. I take this to mean that even if \underline{p} is only a practical possibility, and not at all a practical certainty, it can still suffice to make \underline{q} a metaphysical uncertainty. An example of this sort of case is given, once again, by the atheistic geometer. Since he does not have practical certainty that a deceptive God does not exist, it is a practical possibility for him that one

does. Furthermore, if he did have practical certainty of the existence of a deceptive God, then his clear and distinct perception that the angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles would be, from an epistemic point of view, worthless. For in that case, the practical certainty of the proposition that God is a deceiver would "defeat" or "neutralize" the evidence for the proposition that the angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. He would no longer, in that case, have practical certainty of this latter proposition.

Perhaps we can understand this relation better by reflecting on the epistemic effect of adding the proposition that God is a deceiver to the evidence the geometer has for his belief in the proposition, \underline{r} , that the angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. There is a set of propositions, \underline{E} , that constitutes the evidence upon which the geometer bases his belief in \underline{r} . Every member of \underline{E} is a practical certainty for him, and their conjunction is sufficient to justify his belief in \underline{r} , thus making \underline{r} a practical certainty for him, too. But if \underline{d} , the proposition that God is a deceiver, were added to \underline{E} , then the conjunction of \underline{d} and the members of \underline{E} would no longer be sufficient to make \underline{r} a practical certainty for the geometer. This is so because \underline{d} says, in effect, that God is able and willing to make propositions like \underline{r} false even when evidence like \underline{E} is true. The more reason one has to believe in \underline{d} , the less reason he has to believe in \underline{r} .

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Feldman is now in a position to suggest the following principle for how a given proposition is made meta-

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 45.

physically uncertain by another proposition that is practically possible.

- (9) \underline{p} is a metaphysical uncertainty for \underline{S} at \underline{t} if and only if there is a proposition, \underline{q} , such that (i) \underline{q} is a practical possibility for \underline{S} at \underline{t} ; and (ii) if \underline{q} were a practical certainty for \underline{S} at \underline{t} , that would defeat the practical certainty of \underline{p} for \underline{S} at \underline{t} , thus making \underline{p} a practical uncertainty for \underline{S} at \underline{t} .

And he stipulates further:

- (13) \underline{q} casts metaphysical doubt on \underline{p} for \underline{S} at \underline{t} if and only if \underline{q} is a practical possibility for \underline{S} at \underline{t} , and is such that if it were a practical certainty for \underline{S} at \underline{t} , that would defeat the practical certainty of \underline{p} for \underline{S} at \underline{t} , thereby making \underline{p} a practical uncertainty for \underline{S} at \underline{t} .

We are now in a position to determine Feldman's position with respect to questions (1) through (5). Although Feldman does not specifically discuss the doubt raised in Meditation I, it is fairly easy to determine his position given his discussion of the distinctions between the terms of practical epistemic appraisal and those of metaphysical epistemic appraisal and the textual evidence he cites in support of those distinctions.

In his replies to the fifth set of objections where, on Feldman's view, Descartes is distinguishing practical

certainty from metaphysical certainty, he asserts, "It was for this reason that somewhere I announced that no one in his sound mind seriously doubted about such matters, ..." ⁷⁰ Descartes is referring to the closing remarks of his Synopsis preceding the Meditations. The indication is that the entire Meditations is concerned, not with practical doubt, but with metaphysical doubt.

In his replies to the seventh set of objections Descartes asserts:

I said at the end of Meditation I that everything which I had not yet comprehended with sufficient clearness could be doubted by us. . . . But I did so because there the question was about only that supreme kind of doubt which, I have insisted, is metaphysical, hyperbolic and not to be transferred to the sphere of the practical needs of life by any means. 71

Given Feldman's distinction between practical doubt and metaphysical doubt, and given that the Meditations is concerned with an "enquiry into truth," Feldman is committed to maintaining that practical doubt is not what Descartes is raising in Meditation I. Thus, Feldman is aligned with Gewirth and Kenny and in opposition to Frankfurt with respect to question (1).

⁷⁰HR II, p. 206.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 266. (Italics mine)

Turning to question (2), Feldman's position is that the Cogito is metaphysically certain for Descartes. The only proposition that has the potential to cast metaphysical doubt on other propositions which are practically certain is that 'God is a deceiver'. Yet, with respect to the Cogito, Descartes explicitly maintains that even the practical possibility that God is a deceiver does not defeat the certainty of the Cogito.

But there is some deceiver or other, very powerful and very cunning, who ever employs his ingenuity in deceiving me. Then without doubt I exist also if he deceives me, and let him deceive me as much as he will, he can never cause me to be nothing so long as I think that I am something. 72

In Feldman's terminology Descartes is saying that even if the proposition that God is a deceiver were practically certain for him, it would not defeat the practical certainty that he exists. According to the conditions that Feldman has established for the concepts of metaphysical epistemic appraisal, that he exists is not a metaphysical uncertainty for Descartes whenever he entertains the proposition because the proposition that God is a deceiver does not cast metaphysical doubt on the proposition that he exists. Thus, given definition (8), that he exists is metaphysically certain for Descartes.

⁷²HR I, p. 150.

Similarly, certain other propositions which, if perceived at all, must be perceived clearly and distinctly, escape metaphysical doubt. These include, not the first principles which many Cartesian commentators view as escaping the doubt raised in the Circle Passage, but propositions which express current mental acts such as "I am now thinking." In this Feldman is in agreement with Kenny. We may recall that Kenny also maintained that the propositions never called into question by Descartes are those that report the contents of the mind or those that express the mind's consciousness of its own thoughts and ideas.

What the Cogito and other such metaphysically certain propositions suggest is a rule of evidence for Descartes, namely, that whatever he clearly and distinctly perceives is true. But the rule, unlike the Cogito, does succumb to the doubt raised by the deceptive God hypothesis. Feldman contends:

He [Descartes] is right, I believe, to say that the proposition that God is a deceiver casts metaphysical doubt on many of his clear and distinct perceptions. 73

Thus, Feldman's response to question (3) is that the principle of clarity and distinctness does not play a role in getting Descartes to the conclusions that God exists and is

⁷³Feldman, op. cit., p. 47.

no deceiver.

Feldman's response to question (4) is explicit.

Referring to the Circle Passage, Feldman contends:

As I understand him, what Descartes is suggesting is that prior to the time at which he comes to know of God's existence and nature, there is just one main reason to doubt his clear and distinct perceptions. That is the proposition that God is a deceiver. In my terminology, Descartes' point can be put by saying that prior to the time at which he comes to a satisfactory understanding of the arguments given in the Third and Fourth Meditation, the proposition that there is a deceptive God casts metaphysical doubt for him on the proposition that two plus three equals five, as well as upon other clearly and distinctly perceived propositions. 74

Why the proposition that God is a deceiver should cast doubt on some of Descartes' clear and distinct perceptions Feldman explains as follows:

Since Descartes' understanding of God's nature is, at the time in question, still somewhat rudimentary, he is not yet certain that God is not a deceiver. Hence, the proposition that God is a deceiver is then a practical possibility for Descartes. Furthermore, if it were a practical certainty for Descartes that God is a deceiver, then it would not be a practical certainty for him that two plus three is five. For no matter how clearly and distinctly one may see this latter proposition to be true, such evidence is

⁷⁴ Ibid.

surely worthless if he also has good reason to believe that there is an omnipotent and deceptive God. 75

Thus, according to principle (13), prior to the demonstration that a non-deceiving God exists, the proposition that God is a deceiver casts metaphysical doubt on a number of propositions that are practically certain for Descartes. Given principle (9), each of them is thereby metaphysically uncertain for him.

Feldman's response to question (5) is, in part, this:

. . . once he [Descartes] has given the Third Meditation argument for the existence of God, it becomes a practical certainty for Descartes that God exists. For, we are assuming, the premises of the argument are practical certainties for him, it is a practical certainty for him that they entail the conclusion, and he infers the conclusion from the premises. Hence, according to principle (5), the conclusion is then a practical certainty for him also.⁷⁶

Similarly, the proposition that God is not a deceiver becomes a practical certainty for Descartes. The premises are practically certain for him. The argument's validity is also a practical certainty for him. He infers the conclusion. Hence, again given principle (5), the conclusion is also a practical certainty for him.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 48.

Once this conclusion is a practical certainty, its negation, that God is a deceiver, is no longer a practical possibility for Descartes. As such, the latter proposition no longer casts metaphysical doubt on any of his clear and distinct perceptions.

Does this mean that all Descartes' clear and distinct perceptions are metaphysically certain for him given Feldman's definitions? Not quite; Feldman goes on to demonstrate how Descartes can now be metaphysically certain that all his clear and distinct perceptions are true. Feldman contends:

He [Descartes] attempts, on my view, to deduce this conclusion from a set of premises every one of which is now metaphysically certain. . . . If these premises are now metaphysically certain, and it is also metaphysically certain that they entail the conclusion, and the conclusion is inferred from them, then, it appears to me, the conclusion becomes a metaphysical certainty. Assuming that all this is the case, we can agree with Descartes when he says that "in the Fourth (Meditation) it is shown that all which we clearly and distinctly perceive is true. . . ." (HR I, p. 142) And we can also agree that the 77 argument is non-circular.

Feldman goes on to reconstruct the specific arguments which Descartes employs to demonstrate that God exists and is no deceiver and that all his clear and distinct perceptions

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 50.

are true, but consideration of those arguments is beyond the scope of this work. I have attempted to present the overall structure of his argumentation; it is now necessary to determine whether Feldman's account of Descartes' enterprise succeeds where previously considered accounts failed.

Although I find Feldman's account both ingenious and plausible, there are certain difficulties which I believe it encounters. Feldman admits the following:

In thus making practical certainty a purely epistemic concept, I believe I may be drawing out only one aspect of Descartes' concept of certainty. In his discussions of certainty he sometimes suggests that this concept has a psychological component. For example, he sometimes writes as if a proposition is certain for S only if S is unable to doubt it. But surely one may be psychologically able to doubt a proposition even though he has adequate evidence for it. It appears, then, that the psychological ability to doubt a proposition has little bearing on the central question of whether or not one is warranted in believing it. Thus, I think Descartes would have done better if he had more clearly separated the psychological from the epistemic aspects of his concept of certainty. 78

Feldman is correct in saying that one may be psychologically able to doubt a proposition even though he has adequate evidence to warrant believing it. He could have

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 41.

said further that one may be psychologically unable to doubt a proposition even though he has adequate evidence to warrant doubting it. But the former case could also indicate why, for Descartes, adequate evidence is not strong enough for certainty, at least the kind that clarity and distinctness provide. And the latter case simply indicates that psychological indubitability is only a necessary condition, and not a sufficient one, for some type of certainty. That Descartes would have been better served by distinguishing psychological certainty from epistemic certainty and employing only the latter is true only if Feldman's interpretation succeeds in avoiding circular reasoning and if no account which incorporates the two succeeds.

The point which I have just made does not provide sufficient grounds for rejecting Feldman's account. Unfortunately, the following difficulty does.⁷⁹

In presenting principle (9) Feldman considers and rejects the following principle:

⁷⁹I am indebted to Peter Markie for pointing out this difficulty for Feldman's account to me. His criticism appears in his doctoral dissertation, The Cartesian Circle, University of Massachusetts (1976) and in "Fred Feldman and the Cartesian Circle," Philosophical Studies Vol. 31 (1977) pp. 429-432.

(9') p is a metaphysical uncertainty for S at t if and only if there is a proposition, q , such that (i) q is a metaphysical possibility for S at t ; and (ii) if q were a practical certainty for S at t , that would defeat the practical certainty of p for S at t , thus making p a practical uncertainty for S at t .

Principle (9) requires a proposition to be a practical possibility for someone in order for it to cast metaphysical doubt on another proposition. (9') requires that the defeater proposition be only a metaphysical possibility.

Feldman offers three reasons for preferring (9) to (9'). The first is that (9) is more in keeping with Descartes' statements that reasons for doubt must be powerful and maturely considered,⁸⁰ and that doubt must be based upon clear and assured reasonings.⁸¹ Feldman's contention is that it seems unlikely that a proposition which is a metaphysical possibility but a practical impossibility would count as a powerful and maturely considered reason for doubt or would be construed as a clear and assured reason for doubt.

⁸⁰Cf. HR I, p. 148 and HR II, p. 266.

⁸¹HR I, p. 99.

But Descartes also maintains in various places that any proposition which provides us with even the very least grounds for suspecting the veracity of another proposition counts as a reason for metaphysical doubt. In his replies to the seventh set of objections Descartes states:

It was of this [metaphysical] doubt
also that I said the very least ground
of suspicion was a sufficient reason 82
for causing it.

And in the Circle Passage Descartes says:

. . . the reason for doubt which
depends on this opinion alone is very 83
slight, and so to speak metaphysical.

The reason for doubt is, of course, the hypothesis that a deceiving God exists.

Now if we interpret "the very least grounds" and "the reason. . . is very slight" as referring to metaphysical possibility rather than practical possibility, then there exists equally strong textual evidence to support principle (9') as there does to support (9) as an interpretation of metaphysical uncertainty for Descartes. Feldman's first reason for preferring principle (9) to (9') is not consistently supported by textual evidence.

Feldman's second reason for preferring (9) is that further textual evidence can be derived from a passage at

⁸²HR II, p. 266.

⁸³HR I, p. 159.

the close of Meditation V in which Descartes suggests, according to Feldman, that when a proposition is no longer a practical possibility, it is no longer able to cast metaphysical doubt. But Feldman does not quote the passage in question; he merely footnotes it. If we follow his reference we find Descartes saying:

But after I have recognized that there is a God. . . and that He is not a deceiver, . . . although I no longer pay attention to the reasons for which I have judged this to be true, provided that I recollect having clearly and distinctly perceived it no contrary reason can be brought forward which could ever cause me to doubt of its truth; and thus I have a true and certain knowledge of it.

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Now Feldman could be suggesting that since the proposition that God exists and is no deceiver is recognized or, in Feldman's terms, practically certain, then no contrary reason, i.e., that God is a deceiver, can be brought forward to cause doubt or, again in Feldman's terms, to cast doubt, because the contrary reason is no longer a practical possibility.

But if the arguments for the existence of a non-deceiving God provide Descartes with metaphysical certainty that God is no deceiver, then that God is a deceiver is no longer a metaphysical possibility for him. The passage

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 185. (Italics mine)

simply does not indicate whether in recognizing that there is a God and that He is not a deceiver Descartes is referring to the practical or metaphysical certainty of the proposition in question. Hence, the passage can be interpreted as providing equally strong textual support for principle (9').

In the passage Descartes goes on to say that this same (certain) knowledge extends to other things which he recollects having demonstrated. He then considers what could be alleged against such knowledge claims. He considers three possibilities:

Will it be said that my nature is such
as to cause me to be frequently deceived?

Will it be said that I formerly held
many things to be true and certain which
I have afterwards recognized to be false?

What further objection can then be raised? 85
That possibly I am dreaming. . .?

Now Feldman could be suggesting that since Descartes has acknowledged demonstrating that there is a non-deceiving God, he is now considering other propositions to determine if they cast metaphysical doubt on his clear and distinct perceptions. Each of the propositions, particularly "That possibly I am dreaming," is a practical possibility for Descartes and he demonstrates by his responses that for

⁸⁵ Ibid.

each there is a contrary proposition which is a practical certainty for him and which, thereby, blocks the ability of the three propositions in question to cast metaphysical doubt on other propositions. Thus, Feldman could intend the passage to indicate that practical rather than metaphysical possibility is what Descartes has in mind for one proposition to cast metaphysical doubt on another.

But this won't do. Feldman acknowledges:

Descartes apparently assumes, prior to the proofs of the existence and veracity of God, that no proposition other than the proposition that God is a deceiver cast metaphysical doubt on his clear and distinct perceptions. ⁸⁶

Furthermore, Feldman maintains that "It seems to me that Descartes is not justified in making this rather large assumption."⁸⁷ Thus, his footnoted reference notwithstanding, the just quoted passages cannot be what Feldman had in mind. The only remaining comment which Descartes has to make at the end of Meditation V is as follows:

And so I very clearly recognize that the certainty and truth of all knowledge depends alone on the knowledge of the true God, in so much that, before I knew Him, I could not have a perfect knowledge of any other thing. And now that I know Him I have the means of acquiring a perfect knowledge

⁸⁶Feldman, op. cit., p. 52.

⁸⁷Ibid.

of an infinitude of things, not only of those which relate to God Himself and other intellectual matters, but also of those which pertain to corporeal nature in so far as it is the object of pure mathematics (which have no concern with whether it exists or not). 88

But nothing which Descartes asserts here provides us with a clear indication that the practical rather than the metaphysical impossibility of a proposition is what Descartes has in mind to block that proposition's ability to cast metaphysical doubt on another proposition. In fact, if the perfect knowledge being referred to in the passage is, in Feldman's terminology, metaphysical knowledge, then the passage could also be interpreted as providing textual support of principle (9') rather than (9). Feldman has not succeeded in demonstrating that there is strong textual evidence to support his preference for (9).

Feldman's third reason for preferring (9) is that (9') does not allow Descartes to escape circular reasoning.

A further reason for framing the principle in this way is that, by so doing, we help to provide a conceptual framework within which a solution to the problem at hand may be found. 89

The problem at hand is that of the Cartesian Circle. To see why circularity is not avoided with (9') we must recall

⁸⁸HR I, p. 185.

⁸⁹Feldman, op. cit., p. 46.

that if it is the metaphysical possibility that God is a deceiver which allows the proposition to cast metaphysical doubt on other propositions, then Descartes is forced to prove that God is no deceiver is a metaphysical certainty in order for 'God is a deceiver' to become a metaphysical impossibility. But then Descartes is required to achieve the metaphysical certainty of a particular proposition prior to defeating the metaphysical possibility of the only proposition which casts metaphysical doubt on other propositions. Since the only propositions on Feldman's account which escape the metaphysical doubt cast by the proposition that God is a deceiver are propositions which express current mental acts, and since the premises of the arguments for God's existence and non-deceptive nature are not such propositions, (9') puts Descartes squarely back in the circle.

Given the ambiguity of the textual evidence, in the absence of any reason to specifically reject (9) we might grant Feldman his principle and simply acknowledge that Descartes was sometimes confused on the matter. But there exists, I believe, one very good reason for rejecting (9).

In Meditation I Descartes argues that the proposition that he is sitting by the fire is uncertain for him. Given Feldman's response to question (1), the proposition must be metaphysically uncertain for Descartes. The proposition

constituting his reason for doubt is that he is in bed asleep and dreaming which, given principle (9), must be practically possible for him. With definitions (1) and (3) we obtain that the proposition that he is not in bed asleep and dreaming is practically uncertain for Descartes. But given Feldman's account of the notion of practical certainty and Descartes' distinction between the practical activities of one's life and an enquiry into truth, it would appear that, for both, the proposition that I am not in bed asleep and dreaming is practically certain for me. With (9') this difficulty does not arise since the proposition that I am not in bed asleep and dreaming remains practically certain but metaphysically uncertain for Descartes.

My contention is that Feldman has not provided us with sufficient reason to ascribe (9) to Descartes. In fact, textual evidence in Meditation I and Feldman's own account of the concepts of practical epistemic appraisal in Descartes' writings point to the ascription of (9') to Descartes. But (9') does not allow Descartes to escape the charge of circular reasoning.

For the reasons I have given, I find Feldman's interpretation of Descartes' enterprise less than completely satisfactory. But I find certain distinctions which he makes useful in understanding Descartes and, as I intend to

demonstrate in the next chapter, these distinctions provide a basis upon which an interpretation of Descartes' enterprise can be made which, I argue, avoids the problems raised for accounts discussed thus far.

C H A P T E R V

In the preceeding chapter I discussed two accounts of Descartes' enterprise which attempt to get him out of the Cartesian Circle by distinguishing between two types of doubt and, correspondingly, two types of certainty. One account, Kenny's, defines one type of doubt and certainty in primarily psychological terms. In doing so Kenny acknowledges that he is following the lead of Gewirth, whose account of Descartes was examined in Chapter III. The other account, Feldman's, defines both types of doubt and certainty in purely epistemic terms. In doing so Feldman explicitly acknowledges that he is ignoring one aspect of Descartes' explanation of doubt and certainty, the psychological aspect. I have argued that neither account succeeds in both being consistent with textual evidence and getting Descartes out of the circle.

What I am about to suggest as a more satisfactory Cartesian response to the charges of circularity is a distinction embedded in Descartes' writings between three types of doubt and corresponding certainty. Following Feldman's lead, I shall call the first 'practical doubt' and 'practical certainty'. Following Gewirth's lead, I

shall call the second 'intuitional certainty', (and its converse I shall term 'intuitional doubt'). The third type I shall of course call 'metaphysical doubt' and 'metaphysical certainty'. Again following Feldman's lead, I will offer an analysis of practical doubt and practical certainty in purely epistemic terms. Unlike Gewirth, I will not attempt to analyze intuitional certainty (and intuitional doubt) in primarily psychological terms. Rather, I will argue that each has both a psychological and an epistemic component and that the latter component is logically related to the practical epistemic concepts developed by Feldman. Finally, I will draw upon the concepts of intuitional doubt and certainty which I develop to explain what Descartes intended metaphysical doubt and certainty to mean. I will then use all three distinctions to provide a solution to the problem of the Cartesian Circle.

Feldman is undeniably correct in noting that Descartes makes a distinction between the certainty which is satisfactory for day-to-day matters and that which is required for an enquiry into truth. The passages in which Descartes makes this distinction are quite explicit. As we have already seen, in one such passage Descartes asserts:

But we must note the distinction emphasized by me in various passages, between the practical activities of our life and an enquiry into truth. 1

Elsewhere in the Replies Descartes reminds the reader that:

I said at the end of Meditation I that everything . . . could be doubted . . . But I did so because there the question was about only that . . . doubt which . . . is metaphysical . . . and not to be transferred to the sphere of practical needs of life. . . 2

Finally, in his closing remarks in the Synopsis to the Meditations Descartes distinguishes between those things "which never have been doubted by anyone of sense" but which "are neither so strong nor so evident" and those things which are "most certain and most evident."³

So there exists a distinction, for Descartes, between doubt that attends to practical activities, human affairs, matters involving trust in our physical senses, and the like, and doubt that involves an enquiry into truth. Thus, some propositions are sufficiently certain for Descartes to overcome doubt of the first kind. Following Feldman, I will suggest that

a proposition, p, is a practical certainty for a person, S, at a time, t

¹HR II, p. 206.

²Ibid., p. 266.

³HR I, p. 143.

is roughly synonymous with the following locutions:

S is justified in believing that p at t
S has the epistemic right to believe p at t
p is either self-evident or adequately
 evidenced for S at t.

We may recall that Feldman makes three points about practical certainty. First, it is a purely epistemic concept with no psychological component. Second, the degree of certainty is no greater than that required for knowledge in the traditional sense. Third, the use of the term 'practical' does not suggest that a proposition must have practical value in order to be a practical certainty for someone. In each of these points I am in agreement with Feldman.

Again following Feldman's lead, I shall suggest the following definitions:

- (1) p is a practical possibility for S
 at t =_{df} ¬p is not a practical certainty
 for S at t.
- (2) p is a practical impossibility for S
 at t =_{df} p is a practical certainty
 for S at t.
- (3) p is a practical uncertainty for S
 at t =_{df} p is not a practical certainty
 for S at t.

To say that a proposition is a practical uncertainty for a person at a time is to say that the proposition is practically doubtful for the person at the time.

I shall also propose the following entailments:

- (1') p is a practical certainty for S at t
entails that p is a practical possibility
for S at t .
- (2') p is a practical impossibility for S
at t entails that p is a practical uncer-
tainty for S at t .

With the above definitions and entailments certain concepts of practical epistemic appraisal fall into the traditional square of opposition, i.e., practical certainty and practical impossibility are contraries; practical possibility and practical uncertainty are subcontraries; and practical certainty and practical uncertainty are contradictories, as are practical impossibility and practical possibility.

Finally, I shall also propose the following principle for precisely the same reasons which Feldman does:⁴

- (4) If p is a practical certainty for S at t ,
and the proposition that p entails q is
a practical certainty for S at t , and S
infers q from p at t , then q is a practical
certainty for S at t .

Given the distinction which Descartes makes between the certainty which is satisfactory for practical matters and that which is required for an "enquiry into truth," and presuming that the Meditations are concerned solely with

⁴Feldman, op. cit., pp. 42-43. (cf. Chapter IV, pp. 180-181.)

the latter, we can conclude that the doubt raised in Meditation I is other than practical. Gewirth, Kenny and Feldman contend that it is metaphysical doubt that is raised from the very start of Descartes' enterprise. We may recall, however, that Frankfurt's position is a notable exception in this matter.

In distinguishing between doubt about the truth of a proposition and doubt about the relationship between a proposition's indubitability and its truth, Frankfurt must demonstrate that the objects of the doubt raised in Meditation I can be distinguished from the objects of the doubt raised in the Circle Passage in Meditation III. The metaphysical doubt raised in the Circle Passage is clearly directed against propositions that are clearly and distinctly perceived. If propositions called into doubt in Meditation I are also being clearly and distinctly perceived, then Frankfurt cannot consistently contend that the doubt raised in Meditation I is other than metaphysical.

We may recall that Frankfurt offers three reasons to support his contention that no proposition that is doubted in Meditation I is clearly and distinctly perceived. The first involves the Haldane and Ross translation. Frankfurt argues that the phrase 'clear and apparent' which is being attributed to mathematical propositions in Meditation I is misleading. His contention is that a careful analysis of

both the Latin and French texts does not indicate that Descartes was referring to propositions being clearly and distinctly perceived. The second reason involves Descartes' remarks in his Conversation with Burman to the effect that in Meditation I he was considering someone who was just beginning to philosophize and who attends only to those things with which he is acquainted, that is, through the senses. The third reason involves Descartes' replies to the seventh set of objections in which he states that at the end of Meditation I he has said that everything could be doubted that had not been clearly and distinctly perceived.

We may also recall that Kenny responds to Frankfurt's second and third reasons. With respect to the second reason Kenny claims that Descartes was referring to philosophical axioms rather than to simple truths of arithmetic. In response to the third reason Kenny claims that Descartes' remarks do not refer to the entire First Meditation, only to a specific passage within that Meditation. But neither of Kenny's replies proves his point. At best each indicates that Frankfurt's second and third reasons are not sufficient to establish his claim.

Kenny does offer two additional passages and refers to a third to support his contention that certain mathematical propositions being considered in Meditation I are clearly

and distinctly perceived. The first passage is in Meditation V where Descartes asserts:

. . . the nature of my mind is such that I could not prevent myself from holding them [certain geometric truths] to be true so long as I conceive them clearly; and I recollect that even when I was still strongly attached to the objects of sense, I counted as the most certain those truths which I conceived clearly as regards figures, numbers, and other matters which pertain to arithmetic and geometry, and, in general, to pure and abstract mathematics. 5

The second is at the end of the replies to the sixth set of objections where Descartes says:

. . . before I had liberated myself from the prejudices of the senses, I rightly perceived that two and three make five, that if equals be taken from equals the remainders are equal, and many similar things. . . 6

And Kenny argues:

We know from the Second Replies that some truths are so simple that they cannot be thought of without being doubted [sic]. . . Since these are so simple that they cannot be thought of without being clearly and distinctly perceived. . . , it follows that they are perceived clearly and distinctly by all normal adults. 7

⁵HR I, p. 180.

⁶HR II, p. 257.

⁷Kenny, Journal of Philosophy, p. 692.

Presumably the passage to which Kenny is referring is the following:

. . . there are some [clear perceptions of the intellect] so evident and at the same time so simple, that in their case we never doubt about believing them true: e.g. that I, while I think, exist; that what is once done cannot be undone, and other similar truths. . . For we cannot doubt them unless we think of them; but we cannot think of them without at the same time believing them to be true. . . Hence we can never doubt them without at the same time believing them to be true; i.e. we can never doubt⁸ them.

Now one can interpret each of the three preceding passages from Descartes in a manner consistent with Kenny's position. But an interpretation of each can also be made that fails to support his position. In the quotation from Meditation V Descartes initially asserts that the clear perception of a geometric truth is such that he cannot refrain from assenting to its truth. He then asserts that even when (early in Meditation I) his basis for beliefs was grounded in the senses, he noted that certain propositions were more certain than others. But from the fact that such propositions were more certain than others it does not follow that they had to be perceived clearly and distinctly. One could reasonably contend that Descartes

⁸HR II, p. 42.

meant nothing more than that, even with sense perception as one's sole criterion of evidence, some propositions seem to be more certain than others.

In the passage from the Sixth Replies Kenny interprets Descartes as asserting that if one rightly perceives that two and three make five, then one does so only by perceiving it clearly and distinctly. And since such a perception occurred prior to Descartes' liberation from the senses, the perception was clear and distinct in Meditation I. But the passage does not explicitly say this. If on the basis of evidential criteria other than clarity and distinctness Descartes makes a certain judgment and the judgment is correct, then clarity and distinctness is not a necessary condition for making a correct judgment. To suggest otherwise is to confuse truth with certainty. To make the distinction clearer, consider the following example. I may come to believe that a certain proposition is true on the basis of reading tea leaves. If my belief coincidentally happens to be true, I have made a correct judgment even though the evidence upon which I make the judgment is not sufficient to justify my belief. Similarly, in Meditation I Descartes may correctly perceive that a particular proposition is true even though the basis upon which he makes his judgment is shown to be inadequate to justify his judgment.

Finally, in the passage quoted from the Replies to the second set of objections, Kenny is correct in attributing to Descartes the position that some truths are so simple that they cannot be thought of without being believed to be true. But Kenny moves Descartes from this position to one that holds that some truths are so simple that they cannot be thought of without being clearly and distinctly perceived. And nothing in the Replies to the second set of objections warrants the move that Kenny makes. Furthermore, the examples which Descartes provides of propositions which cannot be thought of without being believed to be true are not the mathematical propositions which Kenny is suggesting. Rather, they are the metaphysical truths which Kenny admits may never have been thought of by a normal adult. Nor is there any evidence in the second replies to suggest that Descartes intended for mathematical truths to have this property. Since Kenny does not provide any additional textual evidence to support his position, I contend that he has failed to demonstrate that Descartes was perceiving mathematical propositions clearly and distinctly in Meditation I.

But if Frankfurt is correct in maintaining that the doubt raised in Meditation I is other than metaphysical, what then is the nature of that doubt? Feldman recognizes one aspect of the doubt raised by the evil demon hypothesis

in both Meditation I and III. In a footnote he says:

In the Meditations, the "Evil Demon Hypothesis" seems to play a primarily psychological role. By reflecting on that hypothesis, Descartes enables himself to counteract his natural tendency to believe practical certainties. 9

Unfortunately, the purely epistemic nature of Feldman's interpretation makes an expanded account of the psychological role in the Cartesian doubt irrelevant to his purposes.

There exists additional textual evidence to suggest that the doubt raised in Meditation I is distinct from that raised in the Circle Passage in Meditation III. In Meditation I Descartes asserts:

. . . there is nothing in all that I formerly believed to be true, of which I cannot in some measure doubt, and that not merely through want of thought or through levity; but for reasons which are very powerful and maturely considered. 10

In his Discourse on the Method Descartes states:

. . . in trying to discover the error or uncertainty of the propositions which I examined, not by feeble conjectures, but by clear and assured reasonings. . . 11

⁹Feldman, op. cit., p. 54.

¹⁰HR I, pp. 147-148. (Italics mine)

¹¹Ibid., p. 99. (Italics mine)

In each instance Descartes emphasizes the weight of the reasons brought to bear on the propositions being considered. In each I contend that Descartes is referring specifically to the doubt raised in Meditation I.

In the Circle Passage, however, Descartes characterizes his doubt in the following manner:

. . . the reason for doubt which depends upon this opinion alone [that there is a God who is a deceiver] is very slight,¹² and so to speak metaphysical.

Note that the weight of the reasons for doubt in Meditation III has been reduced significantly.

There is one passage which at first glance contradicts my claim that the doubt raised in Meditation I is other than metaphysical. In his replies to the seventh set of objections Descartes reminds the reader:

I said at the end of Meditation I that everything which I had not yet comprehended with sufficient clearness could be doubted by us, provided we did so for 'reasons that were very powerful and maturely considered.' But I did so because there the question was about only that supreme kind of doubt which, I have insisted, is metaphysical, hyperbolic and not to be transferred to the sphere of the practical needs of life by any means.¹³

These remarks would appear to acknowledge that metaphysical

¹²Ibid., p. 159. (Italics mine)

¹³HR II, p. 266.

doubt is raised at least at the end of Meditation I. However, Descartes goes on to say:

It was of this doubt also that I said the very least ground of suspicion was a sufficient reason for causing it. 14

If we take the comment, "It was of this doubt that I also said. . .," to be referring to his characterization of the doubt raised in Meditation III, we have Descartes maintaining that, on the one hand metaphysical doubt requires very strong reasons, while on the other hand admitting merely slight reasons will suffice for such doubt.

It would appear that Descartes is being inconsistent at this point. But if we keep in mind that Descartes does not make explicit any distinction between the doubt raised in Meditation I and that which is raised in Meditation III, we can resolve the apparent inconsistency. My contention is that Descartes refers to the doubt in each Meditation as metaphysical because he wishes to avoid confusing either doubt with practical doubt. If we view the above passage in light of my contention, we can interpret Descartes' initial remarks as confirming that the doubt raised in Meditation I requires solid reasons. At the same time, Descartes' acknowledgement that the very least grounds of

¹⁴Ibid.

suspicion serve as a sufficient reason for causing doubt can be interpreted as a direct reference to the doubt raised in Meditation III. In short, all the textual evidence can be interpreted as indicating that the reasons for doubt in Meditation I must be stronger than those necessary for doubt in Meditation III.

One might object at this point that, if the doubt raised in Meditation I requires stronger reasons than does the metaphysical doubt raised in Meditation III, then the degree of certainty needed to overcome the former must correspondingly be stronger than that needed to overcome the latter. This would suggest that, if intuitional rather than metaphysical certainty is achieved in Meditation II, it must be stronger, not weaker than the metaphysical certainty achieved in Meditation III. But such an objection would be based on a misperception of the relationship between doubt and certainty. That relationship is an inverse one. For example, one needs rather strong evidence to the contrary to defeat one's practical certainty simply because practical certainty is fairly easy to achieve (and hence rather difficult to defeat). In the case of intuitional certainty, because it is more difficult to achieve, less evidence to the contrary is needed to block it. Finally, metaphysical certainty is the most difficult to attain, hence the slightest evidence to the contrary will

suffice to prevent its attainment.. This, then, is why the reasons for doubt in Meditation I must be stronger than those sufficient for doubt in Meditation III.

We have, then, two distinct reasons for suggesting that the doubt raised in Meditation I is other than that raised in Meditation III. The first is that some textual evidence exists to support the contention that no clearly and distinctly perceived propositions are doubted in Meditation I and no textual evidence to suggest otherwise. The second is that textual evidence indicates that the reasons for doubt in Meditation I must be much stronger than those for doubt in Meditation III. Furthermore, if we consider Feldman's point that the evil demon hypothesis plays a psychological role in enabling Descartes to counteract his natural tendency to believe practical certainties, and keep in mind that such natural tendencies occur in Meditation I, we have a third reason for suggesting that the doubt in Meditation I plays a different role than that in the Circle Passage.

Beyond this there is no textual evidence to suggest what the sufficient and necessary conditions are for the doubt raised in Meditation I. Thus, it may prove helpful to examine the certainty achieved in Meditation II, a certainty which, I shall argue, is to be contrasted with the doubt raised in Meditation I.

There exists substantial textual evidence to suggest that the certainty achieved in Meditation II by means of clear and distinct perception is psychological in nature.

In Meditation V, Descartes asserts:

. . . I am of such a nature that as long as I understand anything very clearly and distinctly, I am naturally impelled to believe it to be true. . . 15

In his replies to the seventh set of objections, Descartes maintains:

So, for example, that as long as we attend to some truth which we perceive very clearly, we cannot indeed doubt it. 16

We may recall that Gewirth and Kenny conclude from such evidence that the certainty achieved in Meditation II with the Cogito and other first principles is primarily psychological in nature. As a result, I suggested the following principles for each.

- (a) p is psychologically certain for s at t if and only if s clearly and distinctly perceives that p at t.
- (b) p is clearly and distinctly perceived by s at t only if p is indubitable for s at t (i.e., s is unable to refrain from believing that p at t).
- (c) p is psychologically certain for s

¹⁵HR I, p. 183. (Italics mine)

¹⁶HR II, p. 266. (Italics mine)

at t only if p is indubitable for
S at t.

I also suggested the following principle for Kenny.

- (d) p is psychologically doubtful for S
 at t if and only if p is not clearly
 and distinctly perceived by S at t.

But we have seen that such principles do not enable Gewirth or Kenny to provide an interpretation of Descartes' enterprise which succeeds in avoiding circular reasoning. Furthermore, there is textual evidence to suggest that something more than psychological is being achieved in Meditation II. At one point in that Meditation Descartes asserts:

. . . there is some deceiver or other,
 very powerful and very cunning, who
 ever employs his ingenuity in deceiving
 me. Then without doubt I exist also if
 he deceives me, and let him deceive me as
 much as he will, he can never cause me to
 be nothing so long as I think that I am
 something. So that after having reflected
 well and carefully examined all things,
we must come to the definite conclusion
 that this proposition: I am, I exist, is
 necessarily true each time I pronounce it,¹⁷
 or that I mentally conceive it.

Here Descartes talks of having reflected well and carefully examined all things. This suggests that the certainty achieved in Meditation II involves reasons. If so, then

¹⁷HR I, p. 150. (Italics mine)

such certainty must have an epistemic component as well as a psychological one.

But what is the nature of this epistemic component? If the doubt raised in Meditation I requires strong reasons, then the certainty achieved in Meditation II, which overcomes that doubt, should presumably also require strong reasons, that is, for a proposition to be what I am calling an 'intuitional certainty' for Descartes, not only must there be an absence of strong reasons to justify doubting that proposition, there must also exist strong reasons to warrant believing it. This is what I take Descartes to be suggesting when he asserts that the proposition "I exist" must be true "having reflected well and carefully examined all things." He considers all the evidence in support of the Cogito and discounts the hypothesis of an evil deceiver since it provides no strong reason for believing otherwise. On the basis of all this he concludes that he is certain of the Cogito's truth. It is not the case that no reason exists to suspect otherwise. In the Circle Passage just such a reason does arise. But it is not a sufficiently strong reason to defeat Descartes' intuitional certainty that the Cogito is true. The doubt that the hypothesis of a deceiving deity casts is so slight that it can only block the metaphysical certainty that Descartes is attempting to ultimately attain.

One might well ask at this point why the deceiver hypothesis does not undermine the certainty of propositions such as the Cogito attained in Meditation II if it does so in Meditation III. My response is that in my view there exists two very different contexts within which the deceiver hypothesis is raised by Descartes. In Meditation II Descartes is searching for a certainty to overcome the doubt supported by strong reasons raised in Meditation I. His examination of his essential nature provides him with certain propositions which possess for him that sought after certainty. No such strong reasons exist to defeat that certainty. He considers the demon hypothesis and discounts it. In fact, he even contends that it provides support for, rather than against, the certainty of the Cogito. Descartes can maintain this position consistent with his later position on the demon hypothesis in the Circle Passage because at this point in his deliberations he is not concerned with either metaphysical doubt or certainty. Only when the epistemic ante has been raised in Meditation III does Descartes step back and reconsider the impact of the demon hypothesis. The hypothesis has not gained any credence; it is still only the most remote of possibilities. However, the requirements for certainty have been raised. Thus, the hypothesis can now be cited as a legitimate defeater which blocks the attainment of that

certainty. The hypothesis does not block the certainty of the Cogito in Meditation II simply because it does not constitute evidence sufficiently strong to defeat the certainty achieved at the time. In short, the demon hypothesis raised in the Circle Passage does not defeat the intuitional certainty of the Cogito for Descartes. It blocks only the metaphysical certainty of the Cogito for him.

Intuitional certainty is stronger than practical certainty. Thus, the evidential requirements for intuitional certainty are more stringent than those for practical certainty. But the evidential requirements for intuitional certainty are less stringent than those for metaphysical certainty since intuitional certainty is weaker than metaphysical certainty. To say that a proposition is a metaphysical certainty for a person is to say that he is maximally justified in believing it. Not even the very slightest doubt can be found against it. To say that a proposition is a practical certainty for someone is to say that he is justified in believing it. To say that a proposition is an intuitional certainty for someone is to say that he has no strong evidence to doubt it and overwhelming evidence for believing it to the point where his conviction, that is, the degree to which he is psychologically confident in his belief, could not be greater. This

is not to suggest that evidence sufficient for a proposition to be an intuitional certainty for a person entails that the proposition is psychologically indubitable for the person. As I pointed out in the preceding chapter,¹⁸ not only may an individual be psychologically able to doubt a proposition even though he has sufficient evidence to warrant believing it, he may be psychologically unable to doubt a proposition even though he has sufficient evidence to warrant doubting it.

Thus, my contention is that Descartes has introduced a concept of certainty in Meditation II which has both a psychological component and an epistemic component. Gewirth and Kenny are correct in pointing to the psychological component of that certainty. Each makes a strong case supported by textual evidence. Difficulties with each account stem in part not from mistakenly attributing a psychological component to the certainty achieved in Meditation II, but from a failure to recognize that a psychological explication provides only a partial analysis of that certainty. Throughout Meditation II Descartes emphasizes the role of reasons in overcoming the doubt raised in Meditation I. Following the achievement of the Cogito Descartes immediately commits himself to discovering those

¹⁸Cf. Chapter IV, pp. 192-193.

aspects of his nature which can be determined with the same degree of certainty as was the Cogito and rejecting all former opinions which can be invalidated by reflecting on the reasons which he brought forward in establishing the certainty of the Cogito. In fact, the primary enterprise in which Descartes engages in Meditation II is not merely to convince himself that certain propositions are true, but to consider reasons why such propositions are certain and reasons why other propositions are questionable.

The intuitional certainty which Descartes first achieves with the Cogito is then extended to other propositions, among them, sum res cogitans. And on the basis of these achievements Descartes develops the principle of clarity and distinctness. He begins:

But what then am I? A thing
which thinks. . .

From this time I begin to know
what I am with a little more clear- 19
ness and distinction. . .

A bit later he remarks:

. . . if the (notion or) perception
of wax has seemed clearer and more
distinct, . . . with how much more

¹⁹HR I, p. 153.

(evidence) and distinctness must
it be said that I now know myself²⁰

Finally, Descartes contends:

I am certain that I am a thing which
thinks; but do I not then likewise
know what is requisite to render me
certain of a truth? Certainly in
this first knowledge there is nothing
that assures me of its truth, except-
ing the clear and distinct perception²¹
of that which I state

And he concludes:

. . . and accordingly it seems to me
that already I can establish as a
general rule that all things which I
perceive very clearly and very dis-²²
tinctly are true.

This last passage suggests that clarity and distinct-
ness is a sufficient condition for the certainty (which I
am calling intuitional certainty) achieved in Meditation
II. Accordingly, I am proposing the following principle:

(5) p is clearly and distinctly per-
ceived by S at t only if p is
an intuitional certainty for S at t.

Given the textual evidence already cited in support of
a psychological component of intuitional certainty, I also
want to maintain the following principle:

²⁰Ibid., pp. 156-157.

²¹Ibid., p. 158.

²²Ibid.

- (6) p is clearly and distinctly perceived by S at t only if p is indubitable for S at t (i.e., S is unable to refrain from believing that p at t).

Now, if intuitional certainty were a purely psychological concept, clarity and distinctness could serve as a necessary condition for intuitional certainty as well. But this would mean that any proposition which is not being clearly and distinctly perceived at a given time would not be an intuitional certainty. My contention is that, once a proposition has been clearly and distinctly perceived by Descartes, that proposition becomes an intuitional certainty for him in the sense that it does not become uncertain merely by virtue of no longer being attended to. Any doubts which Descartes subsequently has in the Meditations about that proposition are metaphysical ones. The following principle is an attempt to capture this suggestion:

- (7) p is an intuitional certainty for S at t only if S would perceive p at t clearly and distinctly if S were to direct his attention to p at t .

While much more needs to be said about intuitional certainty and the role that clarity and distinctness plays, we have reached a point where other concepts related to intuitional certainty can be introduced. The first is intuitional uncertainty. To say that a proposition is an

intuitional uncertainty for a person at a time is to say that the proposition is not an intuitional certainty for the person at the time. To say that a proposition is an intuitional impossibility for a person at a time is to say that its negation is an intuitional certainty for the person at the time. To say that a proposition is an intuitional possibility for a person at a time is to say that its negation is an intuitional uncertainty for the person at the time. The concept of intuitional certainty, uncertainty, possibility and impossibility fall into the traditional square of opposition: Intuitional certainty entails intuitional possibility; intuitional impossibility entails intuitional uncertainty; intuitional certainty and intuitional impossibility are contraries; intuitional possibility and intuitional uncertainty are subcontraries; and intuitional certainty and intuitional uncertainty are contradictories, as are intuitional impossibility and intuitional possibility.

The concepts of clarity and distinctness play an important role in my explication of intuitional certainty and related concepts. Each deserves a fuller account than I intend to give here. Descartes' comments are not altogether helpful. In passages quoted earlier from Meditation V and the replies to the seventh set of objections, the indubitability of clearly and distinctly perceived propo-

sitions is articulated. In his Principles of Philosophy, XLV, Descartes states:

I term that clear which is present and apparent to an attentive mind, in the same way as we assert that we see objects clearly when, being present to the regarding eye, they operate upon it with sufficient strength. But the distinct is that which is so precise and different from all other objects that it contains within itself nothing but what is clear. 23

And in the following principle (XLVI) he adds:

. . . perception may be clear without being distinct, and cannot be distinct without being also clear. 24

An epistemic aspect of clarity and distinctness is suggested by the following comment from the replies to the second set of objections:

There are other matters that are indeed perceived very clearly by our intellect, when we attend sufficiently closely to the reasons on which our knowledge of them depends, and hence we cannot then be in doubt about them. 25

Descartes' comments on the concepts of clarity, distinctness, and intuitional certainty do not indicate the nature of the relationship between these concepts and reasons or evidence. Thus, the epistemic component of

²³Ibid., p. 237.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵HR II, p. 42.

intuitional certainty and related concepts will remain undefined. However, there are certain logical relationships which I wish to propose between intuitional certainty (and related concepts) and the concepts of practical epistemic appraisal. They are as follows:

- (8) \underline{p} is an intuitional certainty for S at t only if \underline{p} is a practical certainty for S at t.
- (9) \underline{p} is a practical uncertainty for S at t only if \underline{p} is an intuitional uncertainty for S at t.
- (10) \underline{p} is a practical possibility for S at t only if \underline{p} is an intuitional possibility for S at t.
- (11) \underline{p} is an intuitional impossibility for S at t only if \underline{p} is a practical impossibility for S at t.

Having provided an explication both of the concepts of practical epistemic appraisal and those related to intuitional certainty, and having suggested some logical relationships which hold between them, I am now in a position to turn to a consideration of the concepts related to metaphysical doubt and certainty.

To say that a proposition is a metaphysical certainty for a person, S, at a time, t, is to say that not even the "very least grounds of suspicion" exist to cast doubt upon its truth. In characterizing metaphysical certainty in this way I am following Feldman's lead. But unlike Feld-

man, I do not wish to maintain that metaphysical certainty is a purely epistemic notion. Because I intend to analyze it in terms both of concepts related to intuitional certainty and concepts of practical epistemic appraisal, metaphysical certainty and concepts related to it will have a psychological component as well as an epistemic one.

Since on my account thus far one cannot attain the intuitional certainty of a particular proposition without having clearly and distinctly perceived it, the metaphysical certainty of a proposition (which entails intuitional certainty of that proposition) involves not only being maximally justified in believing it, but also having unshakeable conviction of its truth whenever entertaining the proposition.

On the basis of this brief account of metaphysical certainty, I can now introduce some related concepts:

- (12) \underline{p} is a metaphysical uncertainty
for \underline{S} at \underline{t} =_{df} \underline{p} is not a metaphysical certainty for \underline{S} at \underline{t} .
- (13) \underline{p} is a metaphysical possibility
for \underline{S} at \underline{t} =_{df} $\neg \underline{p}$ is not a metaphysical certainty for \underline{S} at \underline{t} .
- (14) \underline{p} is a metaphysical impossibility
for \underline{S} at \underline{t} =_{df} $\neg \underline{p}$ is a metaphysical certainty for \underline{S} at \underline{t} .

Leaving metaphysical doubt to be defined shortly, these concepts fall into the traditional square of opposition.

Metaphysical certainty entails metaphysical possibility. Metaphysical impossibility entails metaphysical uncertainty. Metaphysical certainty is the contradictory of metaphysical uncertainty. Metaphysical impossibility is the contradictory of metaphysical possibility. Metaphysical certainty and metaphysical impossibility are contraries. And finally, metaphysical possibility and metaphysical uncertainty are subcontraries.

There are also logical relations which hold between the concepts related to metaphysical certainty and those related to intuitional certainty. They are:

- (15) \underline{p} is a metaphysical certainty for S at t only if \underline{p} is an intuitional certainty for S at t.
- (16) \underline{p} is an intuitional uncertainty for S at t only if \underline{p} is a metaphysical uncertainty for S at t.
- (17) \underline{p} is an intuitional possibility for S at t only if \underline{p} is a metaphysical possibility for S at t.
- (18) \underline{p} is a metaphysical impossibility for S at t only if \underline{p} is an intuitional impossibility for S at t.

Principles (8) through (11), together with principles (15) through (18), give us corresponding logical relations between the concepts related to metaphysical certainty and those of practical epistemic appraisal.

Before defining metaphysical doubt, we must introduce one additional concept - the concept of one proposition casting doubt upon, or defeating the certainty of, another proposition. I have argued earlier that instances where Descartes talks of reasons that are 'very powerful and maturely considered' or 'valid and well considered', he is referring to propositions that serve to cast intuitional doubt on propositions that are practical certainties for him. In the case of metaphysical doubt he suggests that reasons for doubt may be very slight. He does so in the Circle Passage and in his replies to the seventh set of objections when he states:

For we may well enough be compelled
to doubt by arguments that are in
themselves doubtful and not to be
afterwards retained. . . . 26

The concept of an epistemic defeater is employed by Feldman in his explication of metaphysical doubt. On his account a proposition has to be a practical possibility in order to defeat the practical certainty of another proposition. He specifically rejects the notion that the metaphysical possibility of a proposition qualifies that proposition as an epistemic defeater.

I contend that we can interpret the textual evidence

²⁶Ibid., p. 277.

that describes reasons for metaphysical doubt as slight, hyperbolic, and in themselves doubtful as supporting the notion that a proposition must be only an intuitional possibility in order for it to cast metaphysical doubt on the practical certainty of another proposition. In effect, I am proposing the following:

- (19) p is a metaphysical uncertainty for \underline{S} at \underline{t} if and only if (Eq) (q is an intuitional possibility for \underline{S} at \underline{t} and if q were a practical certainty for \underline{S} at \underline{t} then it would defeat the practical certainty of p for \underline{S} at \underline{t} , thereby making p a practical uncertainty for \underline{S} at \underline{t}).

Take the case of the atheistic geometer. On Feldman's view, the atheist can know, in the sense of obtaining practical certainty, the proposition (p) that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. But Descartes acknowledges that the atheistic geometer can also clearly and distinctly perceive that (p). This alone suggests that the degree of certainty is greater than that provided by practical certainty. On my account the proposition (p) is an intuitional certainty for him. But his knowledge is not certain and immutable in the sense of being metaphysically certain, since it is still an intuitional possibility for him that (q) God is a deceiver. Proposition (q) is an intuitional possibility for him

because its negation, ($\neg q$) that God is no deceiver, is not an intuitional certainty for him. Thus, if (q) were a practical certainty for him, that would defeat the practical certainty of (p) for him, thereby making (p) a practical uncertainty for him, i.e., his evidence would no longer be sufficient to warrant his believing that (p).

Given the interpretation of Descartes which I am suggesting, we are now in a position to review my responses to questions (1) through (5).

First, in Meditation I Descartes is attempting to determine if any of the propositions which are practical certainties for him survive the rigors of an 'enquiry into truth'. "In the first Meditation I set forth the reasons for which we may, generally speaking, doubt about all things. . ." ²⁷ The first reason which Descartes considers is the possibility that he is asleep and dreaming.

At this moment it does indeed seem to me that it is with eyes awake that I am looking at this paper; that this head which I move is not asleep. . .; what happens in sleep does not appear so clear nor so distinct as does all this. But in thinking over this I remind myself that on many occasions I have in sleep been deceived by similar illusions, and in dwelling carefully on this reflection I see so manifestly that there are no certain

²⁷HR I, p. 140.

indications by which we may clearly
distinguish wakefulness from sleep²⁸

This consideration is sufficient to warrant doubting beliefs acquired through the senses.

Descartes then considers those propositions whose practical certainty is not tainted by the dream argument.

For whether I am awake or asleep, two and three together always form five, and the square can never have more than four sides, and it does not seem possible that truths so clear and apparent can be suspected of any falsity (or uncertainty).²⁹

These propositions, including mathematical truths, are ones which Descartes, in his naive philosophical posture, is not perceiving clearly and distinctly.

I said at the end of Meditation I that everything which I had not yet comprehended with sufficient clearness could be doubted by us, provided we did so for 'reasons that were very powerful and maturely considered.'³⁰

In Meditation I Descartes is a long way from recognizing the principle of clarity and distinctness as a rule of evidence. He then considers the possibility that an omnipotent evil genius is deceiving him in all his remaining beliefs, particularly those which are practical certainties

²⁸Ibid., p. 146.

²⁹Ibid., p. 147.

³⁰HR II, p. 266.

for him. This hypothesis, together with the dream argument, constitutes the 'very powerful and maturely considered reasons' required to bring about intuitional doubt. Thus, all of Descartes' practical certainties are now intuitional uncertainties for him. Thus, my response to question (1) is that all of Descartes' beliefs are cast into doubt. No distinction is made between doubts about empirical beliefs and doubts about non-empirical ones.

The primary advantage of my account of Descartes' enterprise as it relates to Meditation I is that, given the notion of intuitional doubt for which I have argued, I can consistently maintain that certain propositions such as I am now sitting before the fire and I am not in bed, asleep and dreaming, remain practical certainties for Descartes. Such propositions become intuitional uncertainties but their practical epistemic status remains intact. The advantage of this to my interpretation of Descartes will be explained in much more detail shortly.

With respect to question (2), Descartes discovers in Meditation II that there is at least one proposition, the Cogito, which is an intuitional certainty for him. He examines a number of reasons justifying his belief that he exists and concludes ". . . of a surety I myself did exist since I persuaded myself of something (or merely

because I thought of something)."31 He then considers the strongest reason he can imagine to defeat his belief.

But there is some deceiver or other,
very powerful and very cunning, who
ever employs his ingenuity in deceiving
me. Then without doubt I exist also 32
if he deceives me. . .

Having reflected well and carefully examined all the relevant evidence, Descartes concludes, "I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time that I pronounce it, or that I mentally conceive it."33 The weight of the evidence is sufficiently strong that Descartes' conviction is absolute. Having achieved the intuitional certainty that he exists, Descartes turns to a consideration of his nature and by reflecting on the reasons which he brought forward in establishing the certainty of the Cogito he eventually concludes that sum res cogitans. Again, given the weight of evidence for this belief and the absence of any strong reasons for its negation, Descartes achieves intuitional certainty. Thus, my response to question (2) is that the Cogito provides the initial intuitional certainty which Descartes needs to overcome the intuitional doubt raised in the preceding Meditation. The Cogito also provides the

31 HR I, p. 150.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

basis of determining the intuitional certainty of other propositions including sum res cogitans. But on my view the Cogito does not attain any special epistemic status distinct from that of other first principles.

With respect to question (3), the intuitional certainties achieved in Meditation II provide the basis from which Descartes develops the principle of clarity and distinctness. To reiterate, he begins:

But what then am I? A thing
which thinks . . .

From this time I begin to know
what I am with a little more clear- 34
ness and distinction . . .

A bit later he remarks:

. . . if the (notion or) perception
of wax has seemed to me clearer and
more distinct, . . . with how much
more (evidence) and distinctness must 35
it be said that I now know myself . . .

Finally, Descartes contends:

I am certain that I am a thing which
thinks; but do I not then likewise
know what is requisite to render me
certain of a truth? Certainly in
this first knowledge there is nothing
that assures me of its truth, except-
ing the clear and distinct perception 36
of that which I state . . .

³⁴Ibid., p. 153.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 156-157.

³⁶Ibid., p. 158.

Thus, my response to question (3) is that by the opening of Meditation III Descartes arrives at the conclusion that clarity and distinctness are conditions sufficient for intuitional certainty. And they will play a vital role in establishing the intuitional certainty of the premises and the conclusions in the arguments for God's existence and benevolent nature.

With respect to question (4), in the Circle Passage Descartes raises the hypothesis of the deceptive deity. In the face of the intuitional certainty of his clear and distinct perceptions, the proposition that God is a deceiver is only a very slight reason for doubting his clear and distinct perceptions.

. . . since I have no reason to believe that there is a God who is a deceiver, and as I have not yet satisfied myself that there is a God at all, the reason for doubt which depends on this opinion alone is very slight, and so to speak metaphysical. But in order to be able altogether to remove it, I must inquire whether there is a God . . . and . . . I must also inquire whether He may be a deceiver; for without a knowledge of these two truths I do not see that I can³⁷ ever be certain of anything.

Since Descartes has not yet turned his attention to considering the existence and nature of God, the proposition that God exists and is no deceiver is not an intuitional

³⁷Ibid., p. 159.

certainty for him. Hence, as I have argued, the proposition that God is a deceiver is an intuitional possibility for him. That possibility makes all Descartes' intuitional certainties metaphysically uncertain. Given principle (19), if the proposition that God is a deceiver were a practical certainty for Descartes, that would defeat the practical certainty of all his remaining beliefs, thereby making them practical uncertainties for him. Thus, my response to question (4) is that the doubt raised in the Circle Passage is metaphysical doubt and it is quite distinct from the intuitional doubt raised in Meditation I. Metaphysical doubt does not defeat the intuitional certainties achieved in Meditation II, but the hypothesis of a deceptive God does prevent Descartes from being metaphysically certain that all his clear and distinct perceptions are true.

With respect to question (5), having raised metaphysical doubt about his clear and distinct perceptions, Descartes turns to a consideration of God's existence. He follows a line of reasoning, the conclusion of which is that God exists. The premises of this argument are not metaphysically certain for Descartes. Neither is the conclusion. But Descartes does perceive the premises clearly and distinctly. Hence, they are intuitional certainties for him. He also clearly and distinctly perceives that the conclusion follows from the premises and he clearly and

distinctly perceives the conclusion. Hence, the conclusion that God exists is an intuitional certainty for Descartes.

Once the proposition that God exists is an intuitional certainty for him, Descartes turns his attention to considering the nature of that existent God. He follows a line of reasoning, the conclusion of which is that God is no deceiver.

For, first of all, I recognize it to be impossible that He should ever deceive me; for in all fraud and deception some imperfection is to be found, and although it may appear that the power of deception is a mark of subtilty or power, yet the desire to deceive without doubt testifies to malice or feebleness, and accordingly ³⁸ cannot be found in God.

Once again the premises of this argument are not metaphysically certain for Descartes. However, he does perceive them clearly and distinctly, thereby making them intuitional certainties. Inferring the conclusion, that God is no deceiver, from these premises in a continuous and uninterrupted thought results in the conclusion being perceived clearly and distinctly. Thus, it too is an intuitional certainty for Descartes.

But if the proposition that God is no deceiver is an intuitional certainty, then its negation, the proposition that God is a deceiver, is an intuitional impossibility.

³⁸Ibid., p. 172.

It is, therefore, no longer an intuitional possibility. Hence, it can no longer qualify as an epistemic defeater. And since, for Descartes, the proposition that God is a deceiver is the only proposition which can cause metaphysical doubt, all of Descartes' intuitional certainties become metaphysical certainties.

Descartes is now in a position to demonstrate the metaphysical certainty of all his clear and distinct perceptions. In an abbreviated form³⁹ Descartes' argument is roughly the following:

- (1) Every clear and distinct perception is something.
- (2) Whatever is something is caused by God.
- (3) Whatever is caused by God is true.
- (4) Therefore, every clear and distinct perception is true.

Each of the premises, and therefore the conclusion, is perceived clearly and distinctly by Descartes. Each is, therefore, an intuitional certainty. But since there is no longer any proposition that is an intuitional possibility for Descartes and that casts metaphysical doubt on propositions which are intuitional certainties for him, each of the premises, and therefore the conclusion, is a metaphysical certainty for him. Thus, Descartes has succeeded in

³⁹This form of the argument is to be found in Feldman, op. cit., p. 52.

demonstrating the metaphysical certainty that all his clear and distinct perceptions are true.

The interpretation of Descartes' enterprise that I have just presented leaves a number of questions unanswered. One involves how the epistemic component of intuitional certainty and intuitional doubt is to be explicated. Other than suggesting certain logical relationships between each and between the concepts of practical epistemic appraisal, I have refrained from suggesting any sufficient or necessary epistemic conditions. And I do not have any clear intuitions on how this question might be answered.

A second question concerns how clarity and distinctness are to be fully explicated. Descartes' comments are not altogether helpful; and I have refrained from anything more than suggesting a few logical relationships between clarity and distinctness and intuitional certainty.

A third question concerns the arguments for God's existence and non-deceiving nature and for the veracity of clear and distinct perceptions. I have refrained from developing adequate accounts of these three arguments. Each obviously requires more attention than I have devoted to it in my thesis.

Finally, there is the question of whether my account is, in fact, what Descartes had in mind. I confess that in developing three types of doubt and certainty, the resulting

complexity flies in the face of Ockham's razor. My response is that there exists some textual evidence to support my thesis. I have found none either inconsistent with it or that cannot be interpreted in a manner consistent with it. And more importantly, my interpretation allows an escape from the Cartesian Circle.

There are two additional advantages which I contend my interpretation provides. The first concerns the doubt raised in Meditation I. Those who contend both that metaphysical doubt is raised from the very start of Descartes' enterprise and that the evil demon/deceiving God hypothesis is the only proposition which casts such metaphysical doubt, provide no satisfactory explanation of how the dream argument functions. It clearly functions for Descartes in causing doubt about beliefs based on sense perception. Yet, it doesn't qualify as a cause for metaphysical doubt. On my account, no such problem occurs. The dream hypothesis causes intuitional doubt only. The evil demon/deceiving God initially causes intuitional doubt and later causes metaphysical doubt.

Second, among the interpretations which maintain what I have characterized as the non-autonomy of reason thesis, only Feldman's is clearly non-circular. However, I have argued that among other things it encounters textual difficulties, particularly in Meditation I. More specifi-

cally, I have suggested that the proposition that he is sitting by the fire is uncertain for Descartes. The proposition constituting his reason for doubt is that he is in bed asleep and dreaming. But given Feldman's explication of the concepts of practical epistemic appraisal, the proposition that he is not in bed asleep and dreaming is a practical uncertainty for Descartes. But both Feldman's explication and Descartes' distinction between the practical activities of life and an 'enquiry into truth' indicate that the proposition that I am not in bed asleep and dreaming is a practical certainty for Descartes.

Feldman's only alternative would be to redefine metaphysical doubt in such a way that a proposition which is only a metaphysical possibility (rather than a practical possibility) would qualify to cast such doubt. Unfortunately, this alternative would put Descartes back into the circle.

The account I have presented overcomes this difficulty. The proposition that I am not in bed asleep and dreaming is a practical certainty for Descartes, as is the proposition that I am sitting by the fire. The proposition that I am in bed asleep and dreaming is, on my account, only an intuitional possibility. It can function as a reason for intuitional doubt without affecting either its practical epistemic status or that of its contradiction. Thus, the

account I have presented can provide an explanation of metaphysical doubt without encountering the difficulties which I have suggested for Feldman's account.

For the reasons I have just given, I believe that the interpretation of Descartes' enterprise which I have provided, in spite of its unavoidable complexity, points to a satisfactory solution to the problems of the Cartesian Circle.

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