RESTORING THE THEOCENTRISM OF DESCARTES' *MEDITATIONS*

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Abstract

This thesis aims to establish the theocentrism of René Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*. The common interpretation of contemporary scholars understands the *Meditations* as a primarily epistemological text, in which the focus is on the self – or *ego*. This has perpetuated an image of Cartesian thought as egocentric or individualistic; most significantly, this interpretation has secularized Cartesian thought. This idea of a secular egocentrism has been so widely accepted that even Pope John Paul II, a prominent voice within the Catholic Church – the Church to which Descartes belonged – has criticized Descartes as responsible for inaugurating 'the great anthropocentric shift' in Western thought. In this thesis, I will defend Descartes against the misguided claims made by Pope John Paul II and other commentators by returning to the text of the *Meditations* itself. Through this analysis, it will become evident that the secular egocentric view of the text is unsubstantiated. Furthermore, the metaphysical focus and primacy of God will be brought into focus. Thus, establishing the fundamental theocentrism of the *Meditations*.

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Introduction

Over the years, the common interpretation of Descartes' philosophy has continued to evolve. As Cartesian scholar John Cottingham explains, the common interpretation of Cartesian thought in contemporary scholarship is one of a secular work, in which all mention of God is reduced or eliminated in order to produce a Cartesian model fit for our secular post-modern era (Cartesian Reflections, 254-255).

However, the secular readers of Descartes were not the only ones to criticize and misinterpret his texts. The Catholic Church, the Church to which Descartes belonged all his life, has been one of Descartes' harshest critics from the time of his earliest publications. In the seventeenth century, during Descartes life, the Church found issue in Descartes' rejection of Aristotelian philosophy, which had been adapted to explain many doctrines and dogmas within the Church. The major issue of Descartes' philosophy arose from his attempt to explain the dogma of transubstantiation. Ultimately, this would land some of Descartes' works on the Catholic Church's *Index of Prohibited Books*, where it would remain until the list's dissolution.

The Catholic Church in the contemporary era has likewise reserved its favour of Aristotelian principles and distaste for Cartesian thought. However, the reasons for the distaste have evolved with the current secularization of Cartesian philosophy. The most notable of contemporary Catholic voices is the late pope John Paul II, who heavily criticized Descartes as the figure who "inaugurated the great anthropocentric shift in philosophy" (51). This individualist reading of Descartes has been further perpetuated by Descartes scholars such as Christia Mercer, Lawrence Nolan, and Amy Schmitter.

However, commentators such as Desmond Clarke and John Cottingham have argued against the late pope's interpretation of the early modern philosopher. Clarke even addresses

Pope John Paul II's as "a good example of how mistaken one can be" in their understanding of Cartesian philosophy (601). The only way to address what Clarke describes as a "caricature" of Descartes' philosophy is to "refer back to what Descartes actually wrote" (602).

In this thesis, I aim to defend Descartes against the accusation of Pope John Paul II that Descartes' philosophy has "inaugurated the *great anthropocentric shift in philosophy*" (51). Further, I will argue that a correct reading of Descartes' philosophy, in particular within the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, establishes Descartes' theocentric understanding of existence, thus calling for a shift in focus back to the theocentrism in our interpretation of Cartesian thought. In order to accomplish this, I will be following the broad outline set by commentators such as Cottingham[1].

In the first chapter, I will introduce the text and the reception of Descartes' *Meditations* in order to create a foundation for my argument. I will begin with an exposition of the First Meditation in which Descartes outlines his task for the text. Following this, I will contrast Descartes' aim for the Meditations with the aim of his previous published work *Discourse on Method*; here I will distinguish between the intended metaphysical focus of the *Meditations* and the epistemological focus of the *Discourse*, as well as examine Stephen Menn's differentiation between the style of these texts. Next, I will discuss the reception of Descartes' philosophy following its publication in the 17th Century. In this section I will address the early controversy that surrounding Descartes' philosophy in the context of the time period according to the biographical and historical insights of Stephen Gaukroger and Tad Schmaltz. With the concerns of Descartes' contemporaries established, I will then proceed to discuss the concerns raised by contemporary thinkers on Cartesian thought. More specifically, I will introduce the criticisms

[1] As well as Clarke and Gueroult.

raised by Pope John Paul II – that of the alleged anthropocentric nature of Cartesian philosophy. While I will begin to address some of these criticisms in the first chapter, the majority of these criticisms will be addressed in the following chapters.

In the second chapter, I continue my close reading of the *Meditations* by presenting an exposition of the Second Meditation, where Descartes establishes his first two explicitly stated truths – that he exists and that he exists as a thinking thing. In the exposition, I will also examine the wax discussion, which Margaret Wilson explains is important for demonstrating that the mind is known more than the body. Following this, I will examine the, arguably, most discussed aspect of Descartes' writings; that is, the cogito. In this discussion I will address the transition of the cogito from the form of 'I think, therefore I am' in the *Discourse* to 'I am, I exist' in the *Meditations*. In this discussion, I will examine Pope John Paul II's interpretation of the cogito as Descartes establishing thought with existence, which I will then contrast with Anthony Kenny's analysis that "a thing is not to be identified with its essence" (66). Finally, I will review Edwin Curley's explanation for the transition and Harry Frankfurt's approach to the cogito of the *Meditations* before presenting my own hypothesis for the transition.

In the third chapter, I will examine Descartes' establishment of something external to himself in the Third Meditation. By the end of the Third Meditation, Descartes is able to move his epistemological task forward by asserting the certainty of his knowledge of the existence of God – a Being both external and independent of him. As we will see, Descartes is able to drawn this conclusion through his understanding of a lacking in his own nature, which I will identify as an *implicitly* stated third truth in addition to the previous two explicitly stated truths about his existence as a thinking thing. This implicit third truth will act as a foundational premise that Descartes will build his causal argument upon. Starting with his recognition of his lacking nature and the idea of the Infinite – or God – that he has, Descartes will proceed to inquire into the

author of this idea. After recognizing that his lacking nature prohibits him from being the source of his idea of God, he turns to external sources. Ultimately, Descartes will conclude that only God Himself can be the author of the idea of the Infinite; thus, necessitating God's existence, and in turn, the existence of an external and independent Being. Once Descartes is confident as to the author of his idea of the Infinite, he begins to contemplate how he received his idea of God. Through this contemplation, Descartes is able to conclude that the idea of God is "innate in me, just as the idea of myself is innate in me" (AT VII 51; C. 41)[2]. Thus, while the Third Meditation makes a highly significant progression in the epistemological task of the *Meditations*, it also brings the primary metaphysical focus of the *Meditations* into light. While framed through establishing an epistemology, the Third Meditation is equally a task of establishing metaphysical truths, in particular in understanding the nature of the soul and its relationship to God. While I will touch on this briefly in chapter three, the majority of this discussion will be developed in chapter four.

In chapter four, I will explore more in-depth Descartes' increasing knowledge of his own nature. As we will see, the understanding of his nature as a 'thinking thing' develops into that of a soul, on which is imprinted the idea of God. As already established, this idea of God is an innate idea, which Descartes likens to "the mark of the [C]raftsman stamped on [H]is work" (AT VII 51; C. 41). This discussion will not only examine Descartes' increased knowledge of the nature of his being, but also the relationship between him and God, his Creator and Preserver. In examining this relationship, we will begin to see that for Descartes, God is both externally and

[2] Citation for the primary text refers first to the *Oeuvres de Descartes* (Adam-Tannery) volume and page number; then to the corresponding page number in the Cottingham translation of *Meditations on First Philosophy*. When 'CSM' is used after the semi-colon, I am referring to *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* volumes I or II (denoted before page number). When 'CSMK' is used after the semi-colon, I am referring to *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* volume III.

independently existing for himself; however, Descartes's nature in relation to God exists externally but is dependent on the Infinite. This dependence therefore establishes an intimate and personal relationship between the Creator and the created that advances the argument for a theocentric reading of the *Meditations*. To further this argument, I will then proceed to discuss Descartes' use of natural light, or reason, in relation to God. Throughout contemporary scholarship on Descartes, thinkers such as Pope John Paul II, Christia Mercer, and Saja Parvizian have maintained an exclusivity of God from reason, which has allowed for the secularization of Cartesian thought. Within this camp of thinkers, the late pope and Mercer argue for an interpretation of the *Meditations* that asserts Descartes' use of natural light removed from God, while Parvizian argues that Descartes could not have invoked reason alone due to the innateness of his idea of God, and therefore must have been aided by a form of indirect divine intervention, not reason. Both these understandings, however, propose a false dilemma that God and reason are mutually exclusive. Therefore, I will argue that God and reason, or natural light, are not mutually exclusive, but rather in relationship with one another, and, in fact, natural light itself is a form of indirect divine intervention. Thus, Descartes utilizes reason in his escape from skepticism, but this does not necessitate a removal of God, and thus does not contradict the theocentric reading of the text that I propose. Finally, I will re-visit the discussion of the cogito from chapter two in order to illustrate that the order of discovery of truth in the *Meditations* does not assert a hierarchy of importance. Rather, Descartes explains, "the method and order of discovery is one thing, and that of exposition is another" (AT V 153; CSMK 338). Through this discussion, I will follow Martial Gueroult and John Cottingham in arguing that it is not the self, but God that is primary in the *Meditations*, thus replacing the anthropocentric interpretation of the text in favour of the intended theocentrism of *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

Chapter One

The First Meditation and the Reception of Cartesian Thought

In his *Meditations on First* Philosophy, Descartes sets out to "establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last" (AT VII 17; C. 15). The method he uses to accomplish this is skepticism- by withholding assent from anything he once held to be true that he could find any doubt. From here he hopes to be able to build his beliefs back up, upon a solid foundation of truth. As will become evident, neither the goal of this journey nor the method of doubt which Descartes employs are unique to his philosophy. Philosophy itself seeks to establish what is true, and skepticism had been around long before Descartes. So, what then makes Descartes' philosophy stand out? What has sparked the criticism that surrounds his work? We can begin to see the answers to these questions when we turn our attention to the method Descartes employs in his attempt to climb his way out of this skepticism – that is, rationalism. As we will see in the upcoming sections, Descartes is rejecting the long-favoured Aristotelian idea of knowledge acquired through the senses, or a sense-based understanding of the world in favour of establishing a non-empiricist foundation of knowledge (Larmore 19). Not only did this rejection lead to much of the criticism and controversy that surrounded his work, but it has also contributed to the persistent image and interpretation of Cartesian philosophy that continues to be perpetuated today; that of a secular philosopher (Cottingham, Cartesian Reflections 255).

This image of Descartes as a secular philosopher is one that is not only painted by contemporary philosophers looking to categorize and adapt Cartesian thought into our current system of philosophy; which isolates the idea of God to the branch of philosophy of religion. However, as Descartes scholar John Cottingham asserts, the image of Descartes as an "anti-

religious force" is one that has also been reinforced by the Catholic Church – that Church to which Descartes himself was a member (Cartesian Reflections 255-256). Of those within the Catholic Church who have perpetuated this image, perhaps one of the most notable in this contemporary era of philosophy, is Pope John Paul II. Pope John Paul II, as we will see later in this chapter and throughout this paper, raises a number of criticisms towards both Descartes' philosophy itself and what he argues are implications that followed the adoption of Cartesian thought. The most notable of which is Pope John Paul II's accusation that Descartes inaugurates of "the *great anthropocentric shift in philosophy*" (51).

In this chapter, I will provide the background and set-up for my thesis argument by examining Descartes' journey into skepticism and his rationalist approach to establishing truth as well as the reception of his writings. In order to achieve this, I will first provide an exposition of the First Meditation in Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* which outlines the task Descartes' sets out to achieve throughout the rest of the text. Following this, I will compare this task as established in the *Meditations* to the task outlined in Descartes' earlier publication *Discourse on Method* in order to emphasize the metaphysical focus of the *Meditations*. Next, I will examine the reception of Descartes' philosophy in the seventeenth century, with particular attention paid to the response of the Catholic Church at this time. Then, I will proceed to discuss the reception of Descartes' philosophy by Pope John Paul II as a representative of the modern response of the Catholic Church. This will be accomplished by addressing a series of claims the late Pope makes in his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, that he uses to support his accusation of anthropocentrism within Descartes' works. With these claims as well as a proper understanding of Descartes' task of the *Meditations* established, I will proceed to defend against two of these claims: (1) that Descartes "marks a new era in the history of European thought" and

(2) that 150 years following Descartes, the "fundamentally Christian" tradition of European thought had "already been pushed aside" (John Paul II 51, 52)[3].

1.1 Descartes' Aim in the *Meditations*

In order to eventually achieve our goal of restoring the theocentric role of God within the *Meditations*, we first must understand the task Descartes wishes to undertake in this work. To do this, we must turn our attention towards the First Meditation. Prompting the task that he is about to take on in the *Meditations*, Descartes recalls being "struck" some years ago by the realization of "the large number of falsehoods" that he had accepted in his youth (AT VII 17; C.15). Descartes' next realization is that these falsehoods that he had accepted had became the foundation upon which he built up all his other beliefs, thus resulting in all his held beliefs being doubtful (AT VII 17; C.15). While an increase of age and wisdom likely contributed to Descartes' discovery of his false beliefs, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that the scientific discoveries and reactions to those discoveries that occurred during Descartes' life could have also been a major contribution to his realization of the falsehoods he has accepted – for example the discovery and subsequent suppression of heliocentrism (Gaukroger 292). Descartes' response to these realizations, which he asserts to be a necessary response, was that he must, once in his life, "demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations" in hope that he will be able to "establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last" (AT VII 17; C.15). So begins Descartes' journey into skepticism. Descartes clarifies that he is not attempting to show that each one of his beliefs are false, which would be an impossible undertaking; instead,

[3] The remainder of the claims of Pope John Paul II will be addressed throughout the following chapters as our exposition of Descartes' text continues.

he will proceed by withholding "assent from opinions which are not completely certain and indubitable" and treat those opinions as ones that are "patently false" (AT VII 18; C.15). Furthermore, Descartes establishes that it is unnecessary for him to examine each belief one by one to find traces of doubt, but rather to examine the foundations of his beliefs; since "once the foundations of a building are undermined, anything built upon them collapses of its own accord" (AT VII 18; C.16). So, his task for the Meditations has been established; he is to examine the foundations of his beliefs and in whichever of these opinions he finds any trace of doubt, he is to withhold assent from them. In doing this Descartes hopes to establish a new foundation for his believes, one that is firm, lasting, and free of doubt.

Now, Descartes begins his examinations of the foundations of his beliefs. The first key foundation that Descartes puts to the test is the use of his senses. Until now, all that Descartes has accepted as true has been what he has acquired from or through the senses (Larmore 19; AT VII 18; C.16). However, Descartes is quite aware that he has been deceived by his senses before and so asserts that "it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once" (AT VII 18; C.16). Thus, since the senses have been known to deceive us in some instances, the senses are not something that we should trust completely. The question we might next be tempted to ask is 'to what degree of trust we should have in the information we receive through our senses'. However, this is not a question we should be wasting our time contemplating at this point if we are to follow Descartes' guidelines. As already stated, Descartes' approach to this task is to withhold assent from anything that cannot be completely trusted. Thus, according to the guidelines he has set for himself, Descartes must not only withhold from assenting to the use of the senses in acquiring knowledge, but he must also treat this opinion as "patently false" (AT VII 18; C.15). The way in which Descartes justifies his doubt in the senses is not a primary concern

of this section so I will not spend anymore time examining this point, however, what is of importance to us is to understand the effects that follow Descartes' new-found doubt in the senses.

With Descartes' rejection of the senses, he has toppled a key foundation of the knowledge he has built up in his life time. As Descartes has already anticipated, this collapse of a foundation will subsequently lead to the collapse of all the beliefs which have been built upon this foundation. So, we must now look at which of Descartes' beliefs have collapsed with his rejection of the senses. He begins this contemplation by suggesting that even if the particulars of what he experiences - such as the motion of stretching out his hand - through his senses are doubtful, the information the senses communicate "must have been fashioned in the likeness of things that are real" (AT VII 19; C.17). So, even if Descartes is unable to trust his senses to tell him that he is sitting by the fire, surely the content of these experiences must have at least some basis in reality; such as the general existence of things like "eyes, head, hands, and the body as a whole" even if he himself has none of these (AT VII 20; C.17). Descartes further considers that even if these things are truly "fictious and unreal" they must still have elements of something even simpler that occur in reality, such as colours; "these are as it were the real colours from which we form all the images of things, whether true or false, that occur in our thought" (AT VII 20; C.17). What, then, does this translate to in terms of what has collapsed with the use of sense? For Descartes, this results in the doubt of "corporeal nature in general"; which includes "extension; the shape of extended things; the quantity, or size and number of these things; the place in which they may exist, the time through which they may endure, and so on" (AT VII 20; C.17). So, as a result of the collapse of the senses, all that is encompassed in corporeal nature is now to be treated as false.

Descartes then explains that a reasonable conclusion one can make following this rejection of corporeal nature is that the "disciplines which depend on the study of composite things" are then also doubtful (AT VII 20; C.17). The examples of these disciplines that he provides are "physics, astronomy, [and] medicine" (AT VII 20; C.17). The disciplines that survive Descartes' doubt at this point, which do not rely on information provided by the senses, include arithmetic and geometry. These subjects, according to Descartes, "deal only with the simplest and most general things, regardless of whether they really exist in nature or not, contain something certain and indubitable" (AT VII 20; C.17). This includes knowledge such as "two and three added together are five", since this seems to remain true whether or not anything in the corporeal world exists in reality (AT VII 20; C.17).

While at this point these subjects seem to withstand Descartes' demolition of his beliefs, they will not be untouched for long. The collapse of these "certain and indubitable" disciplines will coincide with the collapse of another foundation of his previously held beliefs. This foundation is that "there is an omnipotent God who made me the kind of creature I am", which Descartes describes as "firmly rooted" and a "long-standing opinion" (AT VII 21; C.17). Descartes contemplates two possible doubts related to this foundation. The first of these doubts is in regards to God's nature, more specifically in the belief that it is in God's nature not to deceive us. Upon examining the relationship between God and our knowledge, Descartes suggests that we cannot be certain that God, through His authorship of our being, "has not brought it about that I too go wrong every time I add two and three or count the sides of a square" (AT VII 21; C.18). In attempt to settle this doubt, Descartes raises the point that if God is "supremely good", as we believe Him to be, then it would be inconsistent with His nature "to have created me such that I am deceived all the time" (AT VII 21; C.18). Countering this point, Descartes addresses the fact

that he knows that he is deceived "even occasionally", and thus God has allowed these occasional deceptions which seems "equally foreign to [H]is goodness" (AT VII 21; C.18). This realization is enough for Descartes to doubt the supremely good nature of God and allow for the possibility of constant deception in what he has previous described as "the simplest and most general things" (AT VII 20-21; C.17-18). As a result, the disciplines of arithmetic and geometry, and others which do not rely on the senses, which were once safe from Descartes' doubt, have now collapsed with his belief that God would not allow us to be constantly deceived.

Before moving on from his examination of God as a foundation of his previously held knowledge, Descartes examines one more area of doubt, perhaps a more obvious doubt; that is the potential to doubt the existence of God entirely, not just doubt in the goodness of His nature. Descartes considers denying the existence of a God who is all powerful, rather than having to assume a God with a deceitful nature, would allow him to avoid the situation he finds himself in now; where everything is uncertain. So, for the purpose of this examination, Descartes will temporarily assume the position that "everything said about God is a fiction" (AT VII 21; C.18). If this is the case, according to Descartes, then it must follow that "I have arrived at my present state by fate or chance or a continuous chain of events, or by some other means" (AT VII 21; C.18). In other words, Descartes' original cause, if not God, must be something "less powerful" (AT VII 21; C.18). And since Descartes has already established that "deception and error seem to be imperfections" in his nature, then it follows that the less powerful Descartes' original cause, "the more likely it is that I am so imperfect as to be deceived all the time" (AT VII 21; C.18). So, the same beliefs that have collapsed with Descartes' doubt in the "supremely good" nature of God, will in the same way collapse if we are to question the existence of God entirely instead of only an aspect of His nature (AT VII 21; C.18). Therefore, regardless of the route of doubt he

takes, Descartes finds himself "finally compelled to admit that there is not one of my former beliefs about which a doubt may not properly be raised" (AT VII 21; C.18).

With the collapse of the foundations of his knowledge and everything which was built upon them, Descartes finds himself with nothing left to which he is able to assent to at this point. He then takes time to reaffirm what these doubts means for the task he is undertaking; that anything he is able to doubt, which now includes all of his former beliefs, he must withhold assent from and treat at false so that he can rebuild his beliefs on foundations which only include the truth (AT VII 22; C.18). He asserts that he must work against allowing his old beliefs to trickle back into his mind and contaminate this process (AT VII 22; C.18). To do this, he "will suppose that not God, who is supremely good and the source of truth, but rather some evil malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me" (AT VII 22; C.19). With this in mind, Descartes will soon start the next part of his task and begin again to build up a foundation for knowledge that can withstand doubt and cannot be a deception of the malicious demon.

1.2 Descartes' Task as Outlined in *Discourse on the Method*

As John Cottingham points out for both him and many other Descartes' scholars, context is of increasing importance for proper interpretation of Cartesian thought (Cottingham, "Context, History, and Interpretation" 42). The importance of context, he continues, is twofold: first is the "the importance of reading Descartes' best-known works in the wider context of his philosophical and scientific writings as a whole", and second is the importance of "studying these writings in the context of their time" (Cottingham, "Context, History, and Interpretation" 42). Understanding

the context of Descartes' *Meditations* in both these senses is something that I will make use of throughout my analysis in this paper. To begin, let us put the task of the *Meditations* in context of one of Descartes' other major philosophical work, *Discourse on the Method*.

Prior to publishing *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes published *Discourse on the Method* in 1637, where he describes this same journey in which he states that he will "devote myself solely to the search for truth" (AT VI 31; CSM. I.126). Part Four of the *Discourse* contains a summarized version of the *Meditations* that he will later publish in 1641. Both the *Discourse* and the *Meditations* contain a rejection of all previously held beliefs, an establishment of a first known indubitable truth of Descartes' own existence, an understanding of this existence as a mind, an establishment of the existence of God, and the subsequent establishment of his previously held beliefs (AT VI 31-40; CSM. I.126-131).

However, despite this overlap, there is a significant difference between these two texts. The *Discourse*, which was originally published in French, emphasizes the epistemological aspect of this undertaking by explaining the method itself that Descartes has employed for this task. While the *Meditations*, originally published in Latin, still maintains the epistemological significance of this undertaking, but also, and even primarily, raises the issue of the metaphysical realities and implications of this intense epistemology. As the complete title of the work – *Meditations on First Philosophy in which are demonstrated the existence of God and the distinction between the human soul and the body* – suggests it is not the *method* of establishing truth that is of focus in this particular work[4], but rather it is the *application* of his previously discussed method in order to establish a philosophy of *being* and *substance*[5].

[4] As that has already been discussed in Descartes' previous publication, *Discourse on the Method.*
[5] This distinction will be important for our discussion throughout the remainder of this thesis.

So, while these two texts both outline the same task being undertaken, they differ in the area on which they primarily focus. While there is certainly a mix of both epistemological and metaphysical conclusions being drawn in both works, we must keep in mind the context of the *Discourse* as a primarily epistemological work and the *Meditations* as a primarily metaphysical work. This differing emphasis between the epistemological and the metaphysical is one that will be reoccurring throughout this thesis.

To help us more fully understand this epistemological-metaphysical difference we should also look at the style of how these texts were modelled as well. In his discussion of the genre of the *Discourse* and *Meditations,* Stephen Menn explains that the *Meditations* "are formally modelled on earlier 'spiritual exercises' such as those of Augustine's *Confessions*" (142) as well as those of St. Ignatius of Loyola (Jolley 399). As Michael Jacovides explains, the text of the *Meditations* can be seen as a set of "preparatory exercises that cleanse the mind of obscurities introduced by lifelong gullibility" and will allow for the existence of God to shine through (610). By contrast the Discourse falls into the genre of "intellectual autobiography" (Menn, "Discourse and its Genre" 146). So, the *Meditations*, in its proper context, should be understood as a *kind* of spiritual exercise that engages fully in its metaphysical contents, while the *Discourse* acts as a type of autobiography in which Descartes recounts in laymen terms the method of the task which he undertakes.

Further, another difference between these texts is their intended audiences. As Descartes alludes to in his opening sentence of Part Four, the *Discourse on Method* is written for everyone, whether a scholar or not, and so excludes any material that he believes would be too difficult from the common person to comprehend (AT VI 31; C. I. 126). By contrast, the *Meditations* was intended for an academic audience, as Descartes thought it might be "too metaphysical and

uncommon for everyone's taste" (AT VI 31; C. I. 126). Further evidence of this is the original language of publication of each text; the *Discourse* being published in French – the language of the laymen – and the *Meditations* in Latin (Gaukrorger 322).

1.3 Reception of the 17th Century Catholic Church

With the *Meditations* put into context with another of Descartes' works, we can now begin to examine the historical context of the text by discussing the reception of the *Meditations* during the time of its publication; more specifically, the reception of the work by the Catholic Church at this time.

Like any notable philosophical work, Descartes' *Meditations* received a variety of responses following its publication, continuing until after the death of the author. Given the significance of Descartes' writings in the development of the modern philosophical tradition, the conversation around his *Meditations* is one that continues into contemporary philosophical discourse as well. This, of course, is due to the break with tradition that Cartesian philosophy is often credited with. Through responses of both objection or support, Cartesian philosophy has come to be known as a breakthrough-point between antiquity and modernity, eventually earning Descartes the title of "father of modern philosophy" (Jolley 393).

Of the various responses that Descartes' philosophy received in the years following publication, it is no surprise that one of the voices on the matter was that of the Catholic Church, given the importance of the institution of the Church at that time. Most notable of the Catholic Church's response to Cartesian philosophy was the placement of certain editions of his work on

the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (Index of Forbidden Books) in 1663, after Descartes' death (Schmaltz, Seventeenth-century Responses 199).

As we will explore in closer detail in an upcoming section of this chapter, it was neither Descartes' skepticism nor his use of an evil demon that would lead to the labeling of his books as dangerous for the faithful; rather it was his attempt to explain the dogma of transubstantiation that landed him on the Index (Gaukroger 357). This was a significant issue for the Church at this time due to the prominence of the doctrine of the Eucharist during the Protestant reformation and the counter-reformation (Schmaltz, Radical Cartesianism 27).

1.4 Reception of Pope John Paul II as a Representative of the Contemporary Church

1.4.1 Pope John Paul II's Claims about Cartesian Philosophy

As Tad Schmaltz asserts, the perception of Descartes in the twentieth and twenty-first century is one that varies greatly from the perception of Descartes during his own time and by his immediate successors (Schmaltz, Radical Cartesianism 27). The Descartes of contemporary philosophy, according to Schmaltz, is "the Descartes of the first two Meditations, someone preoccupied with hyperbolic doubt of the material world and the certainty of knowledge of the self that emerges from the famous cogito argument" (Radical Cartesianism 27). This is very much the Descartes that Pope John Paul II was familiar with. As Cottingham explains, the Church, through Pope John Paul II, moved past the threat of Cartesian physics on the doctrine of the Eucharist, but instead places Descartes at the centre of blame for the "moral collapse" of the twentieth century; which includes the "rise of totalitarianism" and the "erosion of family values" (Cartesian Reflections 257). While Pope John Paul II does not directly attribute these specific

ideas to Descartes' own philosophical writing – and rightly so – he does acknowledge them as consequences that followed the "*great anthropocentric shift in philosophy*" that he alleges begins with the writing of Descartes (51).

In support of his accusation of Descartes' "*great anthropocentric shift in philosophy*", Pope John Paul II makes a series of claims against the seventeenth-century philosopher. I will review the claims in the order in which they will be addressed in this thesis. By the end of this thesis, I will not only defend Descartes against each of these claims in order to demolish the foundation on which Pope John Paul II's accusation rests, but further I will demonstrate that this accusation is rooted in a false and misguided interpretation of Descartes' philosophy which maintains an essential and important theocentrism that cannot be ignored.

The claims against Descartes made by Pope John Paul II in his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* are as follows:

(1) Descartes "marks the beginning of a new era in the history of European thought" (51).
(2) "About 150 years after Descartes, all that was fundamentally Christian in the tradition of European thought had already been pushed aside" (52).
(3) Descartes "split thought from existence and identified existence with reason itself: 'Cogito, ergo sum'" (38).
(4) Descartes "turns his back on metaphysics and concentrates on the philosophy of knowledge" (52).
(5) Descartes is "the father of modern rationalism" (52).
(6) For Descartes, "only that which corresponds to human thought makes sense" (51).

1.4.2 Descartes Marks a New Era in European Thought

The first two claims made by Pope John Paul II are not false, but rather taken out of their proper context. These are the claims that (1) Descartes "marks the beginning of a new era in the history of European thought" and (2) that "about 150 years after Descartes, all that was fundamentally Christian in the tradition of European thought had already been pushed aside" (John Paul II 51, 52).

Let us begin by addressing this first claim – that Descartes "marks the beginning of a new era in the history of European thought" (John Paul II 51). This is a statement neither I nor the majority of Descartes scholars would completely refute. However, understanding the way in which Descartes marks out this new era is crucial to our understanding of how and if the acceptance of this claim will pave the logical path to Pope's John Paul II's ultimate conclusion of the anthropocentric shift initiated by Descartes. One of areas of Descartes' philosophy that tends to receive attention is his method of skepticism. However, the use of skepticism is not original to only Descartes. As Charles Larmore explains, the use of skepticism to expose the possibility of error and to "call into question various claims to knowledge" was employed long before Descartes, both by the ancient Greeks and Medieval thinkers; although the Greeks did not go so far as to call into doubt "the existence of an external reality" (17-18). Christia Mercer further asserts that Descartes' use of the evil demon figure as the source of purposeful deception is not original to Descartes' philosophy either. Rather, she argues that this malicious deceiver appears first in the mediative work of St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle* – a work that Descartes would have likely been familiar with (Mercer, Descartes' Debt 2545, 2551-2552). Rather, where Descartes' philosophy broke with tradition was his rejection of empiricist principles which formed "the very basis of Aristotelian philosophy" (Larmore 19). This rejection of established

Aristotelian principles, and the subsequent replacement of Cartesian principles, is what would later cause difficulty in Descartes' attempt to reconcile the dogma of transubstantiation with his philosophy.

The next claim we will examine is Pope John Paul II's assertion that "about 150 years after Descartes, all that was fundamentally Christian in the tradition of European thought had already been pushed aside" (52). The soundness of this claim I will not argue, as it is outside my scope of knowledge, and frankly irrelevant to the point I will now make. What I will refute is the implication within this claim that this removal of all things Christian within European thought is a result of Descartes and his works. To imply such, as I believe this claim intends, neglects the significance of events preceding and during Descartes' lifetime. The first of these major events was the Protestant reformation and counter-reformation. Undoubtably, the protestant reformation – a mass separation of Christians from the Catholic Church – would have significantly reduced the authority of the Church and likely resulted in a crisis of faith for the population; which is further evidenced by the "re-Christianization" efforts of both the Catholic and Protestant Churches in the sixteenth century (Gaukroger 27-28). The second major event that Pope John Paul II neglects to consider is the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. The Scientific Revolution, in particular the increasing interest in the Copernican hypothesis (heliocentrism), threated the position of the Church and the authority of the Bible during this period; this threat is evident given the Catholic Church's official condemnation of supporters of this theory such as Galileo Galilei in 1633 (Gaukroger 291). Given that both these events, independent of and even preceding Descartes' influence, offer insight into the beginnings of the turn away from a Christian foundation of European thought, it is unsubstantiated to place Descartes as the sole origin of this turning point.

1.5 Summary

So, as we have discussed in this chapter, the *Meditations* differs from Descartes' preceding publication, the *Discourse*, due to it's metaphysical focus. In the text, Descartes puts into use the epistemological system of skepticism developed in the *Discourse* in order to establish a metaphysics that is firmly rooted in truth and free of doubt. Furthermore, we have examined how the reception of Cartesian philosophy by the Catholic Church in the 17th century differs from that of the contemporary era. While both time periods expressed concerns and criticisms of the text, the focus of these concerns shifted from a concern in Descartes ability, or lack-there-of, to properly explain the Dogma of transubstantiation to a concern of a perceived anthropocentric nature of the text and turn away from Christian thought in general – concerns raised by Pope John Paul II. As we have established, there is an exaggeration in the criticisms of the late pope as to Descartes' role in the shift towards anthropocentricism, in regards to both the extent of originality in his works as well as a neglect to consider significant events – preceding Descartes' influence – of the early modern era, such as the Protestant Reformation, that were accompanied by a dwindling influence of the Church in Europe at the time. While we have made progress in establishing Descartes' aim in the *Meditations* and well as understanding the context in which the work was published, we have yet to establish anything beyond a radical doubt and the dissent of all of Descartes' previously held beliefs. However, as we begin our examination of the Second Meditation in chapter two of this thesis, we will begin to see Descartes' re-establishment of indubitable truths, beginning with the cogito.

Chapter Two

The Second Meditation and the Cogito

At the end of the First Meditation, Descartes has not only found himself in a state of complete doubt which has collapsed the entirety of what he had taken to be true throughout his life, but goes further in protecting himself from adopting false beliefs by implementing the malicious demon; whose role is to actively deceive Descartes. Descartes uses this malicious demon to help him maintain his skepticism in establishing truth instead of falling back into the errors he had previously accepted. This is the position Descartes finds himself in at the beginning of the Second Meditation.

As we will see in this chapter, Descartes reaches a pivotal moment in the Second Meditation when he establishes his first truths, that will lead to him re-establishing many others. The first of these truths is, of course, the cogito; "Ego sum, ego existo" as written in the Second Meditation (AT VII 25.12). Here, in the midst of his desperation to find anything free of doubt, Descartes finally grasps the first thing free of doubt or possible deception, that he, whatever he is, must exist in some capacity (AT VII 25; C.21). From here, Descartes is careful not to be overly eager in establishing exactly what he exists as. After a careful consideration of what he can be sure of about the nature of his existence, Descartes establishes his second truth- that he is "a thing that thinks" (AT VII 28; C.24). Descartes describes this thinking thing as a "thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions" (AT VII 28; C.24)[6].

[6] Excerpt from term paper for PHIL 6012 in Fall 2021 with Dr. Suma Rajiva.

In this chapter, I will present a close reading of the Second Meditation in which Descartes asserts the cogito as his first established truth. Following this exposition, I will conduct a more in-depth analysis of the formulation of the cogito that appears in the *Meditations* in comparison to its formulation in the *Discourse*. In doing so, I will refute Pope John Paul II's claim that through the cogito, Descartes "split thought from existence and identified existence with reason itself" (38). In fact, I will argue that the cogito of the *Meditations* should be understood as a foreshadowing of the relationship between the soul and God that Descartes will expose in the Third Meditation.

2.1 Beginning Descartes' Ascent Out of Skepticism

2.1.1 Establishing the First Explicit Truth

Descartes begins this Second Meditation by picking up where he leaves off in the First Meditation; in a state of doubt so severe that "it feels as if I have fallen unexpectedly into a deep whirlpool which tumbles around me so that I can neither stand on the bottom nor swim up to the top" (AT VII 24; C.20). Despite this, Descartes is determined to continue his effort to find his way out of the skepticism that he finds himself surrounded by; or, if he cannot overcome this skepticism, he at least hopes to "recognize for certain that there is no certainty" (AT VII 24; C.20). However, Descartes remains hopeful that just as "Archimedes used to demand just one firm and immovable point in order to shift the entire earth; so too can I hope for great things if I manage to find just one thing, however slight, that is certain and unshakeable" (AT VII 24; C.20).

Before Descartes sets out to find this one certain and unshakable thing, he reminds us of the guidelines he has set for himself in the previous Meditation: "anything which admits of the

slightest doubt I will set aside just as if I had found it to be wholly false" (AT VII 24; C.20). Furthermore, Descartes reminds us that he has taken on the mentality that everything he sees is a deception, and that he can trust neither his memories or his senses, and that "body, shape, extension, movement and place are chimeras" (AT VII 24; C.20). However, before jumping to the conclusion that the only truth is that "nothing is certain", Descartes contemplates the possibility that there might be something else, aside from the things he has listed, "which does not allow even the slightest occasion for doubt" (AT VII 24; C.20-21).

In search for this possible indubitable truth, Descartes begins an examination of his thoughts. He begins this examination by posing the question "is there not a God, or whatever I may call him, who puts into me the thoughts I am now having?" (AT VII 24; C.21). This is of interest to Descartes since if it were the case that either God or the malicious demon are the author of these thoughts, regardless of the veracity of the thoughts, then the existence of this being, as well as Descartes as the receiver of these thoughts, would be necessary and certain. However, Descartes is quick to point out that this need not be the case since he could himself be the "author of these thoughts" (AT VII 24; C.21). Since this is a possibility, the existence of a being independent from Descartes is not at this point to be considered "certain and unshakeable", but is rather subject to doubt and to treated as false (AT VII 24; C.20-21). However even with the author of these thoughts being unclear, what is clear is that there is a receiver, or possessor, of these thoughts- that is Descartes himself. As Descartes recognizes, this indicates that he must be *something* (AT VII 24; C.21). Here, Descartes is beginning to move towards the "one firm and unmovable point" that he has been seeking (AT VII 24; C.20). With this in mind, Descartes reminds himself that he is to uphold that he has "no sense and no body" and contemplate this in relation to his perceived existence (AT VII 24-25; C.21). In order to proceed from here,

Descartes asks himself whether he is "so bound up with a body and with senses that I cannot exist without them" (AT VII 25; C.21). Furthermore, even if he is able to reconcile his existence unbound by a body and senses, he must also wonder if his current rejection of anything and everything in the world must also include himself (AT VII 25; C.21). Descartes response to all these ponderings is "no: if I convinced myself of something then I certainly existed" (AT VII 25; C.21). From here, Descartes invokes his safeguard from false beliefs to ensure that he is not mistaking deception for truth. He does this by considering if his perceived existence can be a result of "a deceiver of supreme power and cunning who is deliberately and constantly deceiving" him (AT VII 25; C.21). In regards to this concern, Descartes' response is similar: "I too undoubtedly exist" (AT VII 25; C.21). Since Descartes is the subject of the deception of the malicious demon in this case, it is necessary, and thus undoubtable, that he exists as something, whatever that may be. Descartes, with confidence in this conclusion that he has drawn, asserts: "if he is deceiving me, and let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something" (AT VII 25; C.21).

Through this series of questioning, Descartes is finally able to establish his first truth: "so after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind" (AT VII 25; C.21). As we will see, although this is a seemingly "boring" and even unoriginal truth[7], the significance of it must be emphasized (Markie 141). As we will see, this first truth is necessary for Descartes in both his epistemological and metaphysical pursuits (Markie 141).

[7] Markie describes this first truth "as uninteresting as the claim that fish do not need bicycles" as well as addressing a lack of originally "since Augustine anticipates him" on a first truth such as this. However, the importance of this first truth is emphasized.

2.1.2 Establishing the Second Explicit Truth

As the Second Meditation continues, after he has undoubtedly established his existence, Descartes continues his contemplation with the aim of understanding the nature of what he knows he exists as. Descartes is still in the process of climbing out of skepticism, so this examination of the nature of his being must follow the same guidelines he has used to establish his existence (AT VII 25; C.21). Descartes must maintain his doubtful attitude if he is to undoubtedly establish what he exists as. So, at this point in his Meditations, Descartes knows – by the fact that he is doubting, and thus thinking – that he "necessarily exists" but does "not yet have a sufficient understanding of what this 'I' is" (AT VII 25; C.21).

Descartes outlines his plan for this examination:

> I will therefore go back and meditate on what I originally believed myself to be, before I embarked on this present train of thought. I will then subtract anything capable of being weakened, even minimally, by the arguments now introduced, so that what is left at the end may be exactly and only what is certain and unshakeable (AT VII 25; C.21).

In accordance with this plan, Descartes begins by examining what he formerly believed himself to be; that is a man (AT VII 25; C.21). He then asks himself what a man is and proposes "a rational animal" as a possible response (AT VII 25; C.21). Of course, this mention of 'a rational animal' is referencing Aristotelian tradition, that which Descartes is rejecting throughout the *Meditations* (Larmore 19). In keeping with his rejection of Aristotelian philosophy, Descartes does not accept this understanding of a man as the starting point of his examination. The reasons he gives for this are that by establishing a man as a rational animal, it would be necessary for him to then ask "what an animal is" as well as "what rationality is"; Descartes asserts that by asking these questions it will lead him "down the slope to other harder ones" that he does not have the time to investigate at this point (AT VII 25; C.21).

As an alternative to investigating this popular understanding of 'man', Descartes decides to "concentrate on what came into my thoughts spontaneously and quite naturally whenever I used to consider what I was" (AT VII 25-26; C.21). According to Descartes, when he used to consider what he was, his primary thought was that he had a body (AT VII 26; C.21). When considering his nature, Descartes tells us that he first thought of "a face, hands, arms, and the whole mechanical structure of limbs which can be seen in a corpse" (AT VII 26; C.21). The nature of this body, for Descartes, was something that he thought he knew distinctly:

> If I had tried to describe the mental conception I had of it, I would have expressed it as follows: by a body I understand whatever has a determinable shape and a definable location and can occupy a space in such a way as to exclude any other body; it can be perceived by touch, sight, hearing, taste or smell, and can be moved in various ways, not by itself but by whatever else comes into contact with it (AT VII 26; C.22).

After considering his body in relation to his nature, Descartes tells us that he began to consider that he was "nourished", "moved about", and "engaged in sense-perception and thinking"; which are all actions that he attributed to the soul (AT VII 26; C.21-22). In regards to the nature of the soul, Descartes admits that he had not given it much consideration, and if he did, thought it to be "something tenuous, like a wind or fire or ether, which permeated my more solid parts" (AT VII 26; C.22). In comparison to the body, the nature of the soul was not as easily distinguished for pre-*Meditations* Descartes.

In his contemplation of what he is now, Descartes must keep in mind the possibility that he is being deceived and the consequences of that possibility (AT VII 26; C.22). In regards to the former clarity and distinctness of the body in relation to the nature of his being, it now becomes doubtful and unclear as to whether he possesses "even the most insignificant of all the attributes which I have just said belong to the nature of a body" (AT VII 26-27; C.22). When contemplating this question in light of his skepticism, Descartes asserts "I scrutinize them, think

about them, go over them again, but nothing suggests itself; it is tiresome and pointless to go through the list once more" (AT VII 27; C.22). Here, Descartes reaffirms that there is nothing in relation to the body that he can confirm as part of his nature, despite the revelation of his necessary existence. Now, Descartes turns his attention to the attributes that he used to assign to the soul; these are nutrition, movement, sense-perception, and thinking (AT VII 26-27; C.21-22). Descartes' examination begins with nutrition and movement; however, he is quickly able to assert that without a body, "these are mere fabrications" (AT VII 27; C.22). Next, Descartes considers sense-perception: "this surely does not occur without a body, and besides, when asleep I have appeared to perceive through the senses many things which I afterwards realized I did not perceive through the senses at all" (AT VII 27; C.22). Moving on to the last attribute assigned by Descartes to the soul, thinking, Descartes believes he has finally learned something of his nature:

> At last I have discovered it – thought; this alone is inseparable from me. I am, I exist – that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking. For it could be that were I totally to cease from thinking, I should totally cease to exist (AT VII 27; C.22).

Affirming that he is only admitting what is "necessarily true", Descartes concludes that "I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks" (AT VII 27; C.22). Descartes goes on to describe this 'thing that thinks' as "a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason" (AT VII 27; C.22-23). In understanding his nature in this way, Descartes reaffirms that he is "a thing which is real and which truly exists" (AT VII 27; C.23). And in regards to the kind of thing that is this real and existing thing, which Descartes has just established to be thinking in its nature, he suggests that it is "a thinking thing" (AT VII 27; C.23). With this, Descartes has established his second foundational truth of the *Meditations* – that he exists as a thinking thing (AT VII 27; C.23).

After establishing that he exists as a thinking thing, Descartes ponders what else he may be. For now, Descartes will turn to what his imagination tells him he may be; that is a body or a

kind of "wind, fire, air, [or] breath" (AT VII 27; C.23). However, Descartes concludes that he is not "that structure of limbs which is called a human body" nor is he "some thin vapour which permeates the limbs"[8] as he has already supposed these things to be nothing (AT VII 27; C.23). Descartes admits that it may be possible that he may indeed be the things he has just discarded, but since he "can make judgements only about things which are known to me" and these things are not yet known, he makes the decision to move on from this particular point (AT VII 27; C.23). Descartes, at this point, is certain of his existence as *something*, and as such, if this *something* "is understood strictly as we have been taking it, then it is quite certain that knowledge of it does not depend on things of whose existence I am as yet unaware" (AT VII 27-28; C.23). Here, Descartes realized his mistake in utilizing imagination, since imagination implies a "fictitious invention" (AT VII 28; C.23)[9]. To use his imagination in this case, Descartes argues, would be "as silly as saying 'I am now awake, and see some truth; but since my vision is not yet clear enough, I will deliberately fall asleep so that my dreams may provide a truer and clearer representation'" (AT VII 28; C.23).

However, the question as to what exactly his nature is still remains. The understanding of his nature is something that Descartes will continue to gradually develop over the remainder of the *Meditations*. As we will see in the upcoming chapters of this thesis, the Third Meditation uncovers many important aspects of his nature. However, for now, Descartes can conclude that he is a thinking thing; "a thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions[10]" (AT VII 28; C.24).

[8] Note that Descartes is not here referring to a *soul* in its proper nature, but rather a materialized representation of a soul that is found in the imagination.

[9] The inability of the imagination in grasping the nature of a thing will be further discussed through the upcoming wax demonstration.

[10] See Alanen, 'The Second Meditation and the Nature of the Human Mind' in the *Cambridge Companion to Descartes'* Meditations. In regards to sensory perceptions, Descartes is able to conclude that while he must withhold assent from the *objects* of his sensory perceptions, the experience of *having* sensory perceptions "is simply thinking" (AT VII 29; 24).

2.1.3 The Wax Demonstration

Following this Descartes enters into his famous discussion of a piece of wax. The objective of this discussion, as Margaret Wilson explains, "is to defend the claim that the mind is not less 'distinctly' known" than the body as well as re-affirm favour for the faculties of the mind in acquiring knowledge over the senses and imagination (67-68).

Descartes begins this discussion by examining a piece of wax that "has just been taken from the honeycomb" (AT VII 30; C.25). Descartes describes the wax based on his sensory perceptions of it: the wax "tastes of honey", has the "scent of the flowers", there is an evident "colour, shape, and size", "it is hard, cold, and can be handled without difficulty", and "if you rap it with your knuckle it makes a sound" (AT VII 30; C.25). This, according to Descartes, demonstrates clearly that the particular body that is this piece of wax "has everything which appears necessary to enable a body to be known as distinctly as possible" (AT VII 30; C.25).

However, Descartes asks us to observe this clear and distinct perception of the wax when it is put by the fire. Now, this same piece of wax has changed: "the residual taste is eliminated, the smell goes away, the colour changes, the shape is lost, the size increases; it becomes liquid and hot; you can hardly touch it, and if you strike it, it no longer makes a sound" (AT VII 30; C.25). Despite this, Descartes argues, it must be admitted that the same wax remains (AT VII 30; C.25). The question that then remains, according to Descartes, is "what was it in the wax that I understood with such distinctness?" (AT VII 30; C.25).

In answering this question, Descartes is quick to conclude that none of the features that he arrived at through the senses could be the distinctness of the wax that he understood, as everything perceived by the senses of "taste, smell, sight, touch or hearing" have now been

altered (AT VII 30; C.25). From here, Descartes turns to aspects of the wax that he had imagined aside from the those directly perceived by the five senses; these aspects are extension, flexibility, and changeability (AT VII 30-31; C.25). He begins by addressing what is meant by 'flexible' and 'changeable'. Are these characteristics, Descartes asks, the image he pictures in his imagination of the piece of wax "changing from a round shape to a square shape, or from a square shape to a triangle shape?" (AT VII 31; C.25). This cannot be what is meant, Descartes insists, since he is able to "grasp that the wax is capable of countless changes" and "yet I am unable to run through this immeasurable number of changes in my imagination"; more simply, there is some faculty that allows Descartes to grasp the flexibility and changeability of the wax, but it is not his imagination (AT VII 31; C.25). Likewise, the extension of the wax cannot be grasped by the imagination, as "I would not be making a correct judgment about the nature of wax unless I believed it capable of being extended in many more different ways than I will ever encompass in my imagination" (AT VII 31; C.25). So, Descartes concludes that he must "admit that the nature of this piece of wax is in no way revealed by my imagination", but rather, it is "the mind alone" with the capacity to perceive the wax (AT VII 31; C.25). Through this contemplation of what is perceived in the wax, Descartes explain that what was before an "imperfect and confused" perception has become "clear and distinct" (AT VII 31; C.26).

In her analysis of the wax demonstration, Wilson states that it is neither the senses nor imagination, but only the mind "that is capable of conceiving the possibility of innumerable variations; sense and imagination are restricted to the determinate, or to a limited series of determinates" (79). As such, it was the senses and imagination that left Descartes with his "imperfect and confused" perception of the wax, and that the less we attend to sense and imagination, and the more we rely on the mind, the more "clear and distinct" our perception of

the wax becomes (Wilson 79). For Wilson, this discussion of the wax is not only an affirmation of the reliability of the intellect of the senses, but also that

> Descartes takes his discussion of the wax to provide the basis for a more curious and, in a sense, even more fundamental and controversial claim: namely, that 'nothing can be more easily or more evidently perceived by me than my mind'; that I know the nature of my mind 'more distinctly' than any body (82).

In order to reaffirm what has just been established by the wax demonstration, Descartes compares the wax demonstration to an example of men crossing the square. Descartes describes that when he looks out his window, "I normally say that I see men themselves, just as I say that I see the wax" (AT VII 32; C.26). However, upon reflection, Descartes admits that he does not *see* anything more than "hats and coats", which for all he knows could in fact be concealing "automatons" (AT VII 32; C.26). Thus, it is more his sense of sight that tells him that he is seeing men cross the square, but instead it is that he *judges* that there are men crossing the square; "and so something which I thought I was seeing with my eyes is in fact grasped by the faculty of judgement which is in my mind" (AT VII 32; C.26).

Through these examples, Descartes is demonstrating a failed move outward from himself. His attempt at grasping a perception through outward means has led him back to the mind, or the self; bringing him back to his currently only established truth – the cogito. However, as we will see in the Third Meditation, Descartes will eventually be able to make that move outward from himself; this will be accomplished through his recognition of the need for something greater than himself, the Infinite.

2.2 Understanding the Cogito in Relation to God

The cogito in the *Meditations* is the pivotal moment for Descartes. The cogito acts as his first step out of skepticism, and provides a starting point from which he will build his doubt-free knowledge. This is common understanding between every reader of Descartes, even if the interpretations of the understanding of the cogito differ[11]. Pope John Paul II offers his own understanding of the cogito and its significance in anthropocentric shift he claims is a result of Cartesian thought. In this section, we will review the late pope's understanding of the cogito before I offer my own understanding of this pivotal moment in the *Meditations* as a foreshadowing of the relationship between the soul and God that Descartes begins to explore in the Third Meditation.

According to Pope John Paul II, through the cogito – 'cogito, ergo sum' as he cites – Descartes "split thought from existence and identified existence with reason itself" (38). Explaining this further, he contrasts his interpretation of Cartesian thought with that of St. Thomas Aquinas: "how different from the approach of Saint Thomas, for whom it is not *thought which determines existence, but existence*, 'esse', *which determines thought* (John Paul II 38). So, for Pope John Paul II, the cogito is an assertion not only of thought being prior to existence, but also of existence being synonymous to reason.

There are a few a few issues with Pope John Paul II's interpretation of the cogito. The first is that despite the *Meditations* being the only work of Descartes that the late pope refers to

[11] In the upcoming section, we will review some of these interpretations. This will include: Kenny's understanding of the cogito as an epistemological foundation; Curley's understanding that the cogito of the *Meditations* as a systematical approach by Descartes to assert his existence without having to provide further justification; and Frankfurt's understanding that the 'Ego sum, ego existo' is not an equivalent formulation of 'cogito, ergo sum' and as such the preconceived notions of the 'cogito, ergo sum' should not be imposed upon it.

by name, the version of the cogito that he quotes does not appear in the work. Rather, the famous 'I think, therefore I am' in this form appears in the *Discourse on Method* ("je pense, donc je suis") and the *Principles of Philosophy* ("cogito, ergo sum"), which are both primarily epistemological works (AT VI 32.19, AT VIII 7.8). In the *Meditations*, a metaphysical work[12], the cogito takes on a new form "Ego sum, ego existo" – "I am, I exist" (AT VII 25.12). Notably, there is no reference to thought or thinking within the 'cogito' of the *Meditations*; given this, it is not possible for Descartes to "split thought from existence" in the *Meditations* through the cogito as Pope John Paul II claims, quite simply because the cogito of the *Meditations* makes no reference to thought (38). So, Pope John Paul II makes two mistakes here, the first being the use of the incorrect formulation of the cogito, and the second is his attribution of metaphysical consequences on an epistemological statement.

Though not explicitly stated, it is quite possible that the conclusion arrived at by Pope John Paul II also takes into account Descartes' explicit classification of his being as a 'thinking thing'. Even if we were to entertain this idea and re-assess Pope John Paul II's claim and the conclusion drawn, we will still see that the late pope has drawn a mistaken conclusion. To understand why this is, we shall turn our attention to an issue addressed by Anthony Kenny:

> A thing is not to be identified with its essence. When Descartes says that his essence is thinking, he does not mean that he can use "I" and "thought" as synonyms. The essence of a substance is something that substance *has* (66).

As such, we cannot validly conclude that Descartes is suggesting his existence to be synonymous with thought or reason. Rather, Kenny suggests, the cogito, from an epistemological view, provides Descartes with three things: (1) the certainty of his own existence, (2) "a general criterion for truth and certainty", and (3) the ability "to discover his own nature" (63-63).

[12] As discussed in Chapter One, see page 13.

With this in mind, I would now like to propose what I believe to be a more faithful interpretation of the cogito, specifically the cogito of the *Meditations*. In order to do this, I will compare and contrast the varying forms of the cogito which appear in the different texts. Thus, it is worth noting that what is widely accepted as Descartes' formulation of the cogito in the *Meditations* – Ego sum, ego existo – does not even contain the term of the label it bears (Frankfurt 76). As Harry G. Frankfurt explains, there is no "exactly equivalent statement" to the infamous cogito within the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, and therefore, Frankfurt suggests that we "take Descartes's text on its own terms and to approach it without preconceptions based on the speculation that *cogito ergo sum* adequately formulates its meaning" (76).

Before I present my understanding of the varying formulae of the cogito, I would like to examine Edwin Curley's attempt to explain the transformation of the cogito. Curley suggests that Descartes' transition from the cogito of the *Discourse* to that of the *Meditations* is due to no more than a systematical approach by Descartes as to what he is able to claim without further justification (37). The "I think", Curley suggests, leaves room for the objection "and how do I know that I think"; whereas "I exist" can reach its conclusion based only on a hypothesis that 'I am thinking', thus, "the 'I think' is not a premise which Descartes is responsible for justifying" (37). So, to Curley the changing cogito is the result of nothing more than a systematic attempt of Descartes to defend his first established truth from potential critics[13].

While I appreciate Curley's analysis of the changing cogito, I do not agree that this encompasses the entirety of Descartes' choice to transition from the "cogito, ergo sum" formula to "Ego sum, ego existo"[14]. Curley's investigation of the various formulae of the cogito is

[13] Excerpt from term paper for PHIL 6012 in Fall 2021 with Dr. Suma Rajiva.
[14] "cogito, ergo sum" being the Latin translation of "je pense, donc je suis" that appears in the *Discourse on Method.*

conducted through an analysis of its changing parts. While this is not a problem in and of itself, focusing only on what has changed in the formulation of the cogito can limit the lens through which we examine these changes. So, I propose that rather than focusing on what Descartes discarded in this first truth, I propose we examine the part of the cogito that Descartes chose to keep in both variations. As we will see, this will help us understand the *Ego sum, ego existo* as a cogito more suited to the metaphysical task of the *Meditations*. The only part of the cogito that survives the transition from *Discourse* to *Meditations* is the 'I am'[15].

By turning our attention towards the surviving part of the cogito, the role of God – not only in the *Meditations* as a whole, but also in understanding the nature of the thinking thing – becomes evident. From my own experience as someone who ~~has~~ was raised with some form of Catholic education, as with presumably most people who are familiar with some form of Judeo-Christian tradition, the term 'I am' immediately directs my thought to God – or the Infinite as Descartes refers to Him later in the *Meditations*. This is because within Judeo- Christian traditions, this term is used by God to describe Himself[16]. Given the Jesuit education Descartes received at La Flèche and his own Catholic faith, it seems both reasonable to assume and likely that Descartes would have been aware of this use of the term 'I am' (Gaukroger 38-39). It is then worth considering if Descartes could have had this Biblical reading in his mind while crafting the cogito, especially the cogito of the *Meditations*. As I will demonstrate in the upcoming paragraphs, examining the cogito through this lens sheds new light on Descartes' first truth, especially in understanding the relationship between the Cartesian thinking thing and God.

[15] Excerpt from term paper for PHIL 6012 in Fall 2021 with Dr. Suma Rajiva, with edits.
[16] Exodus 3:14, John 8:24, John 8:58.

When we examine this remaining part of the various formulae, we can see changes within this section also. The first notable difference is the positioning of the 'I am'. In the "cogito" formula of the *Discourse* – "I think, therefore I am" – the 'I am' is found at the end of the statement (AT VI 32; C.I.127). Here, the 'I am' acts as a sort of conclusion: I think… therefore, I am. This cogito aligns with popular interpretations of the importance and focus on the self in Cartesian philosophy; Descartes is first and primarily establishing his existence, and from there is he is later able to establish the existence of God. However, the cogito of the *Meditations* places the 'I am' at the beginning of the statement – "I am, I exist" (AT VII 25; C.21). In this phrasing of the cogito, the existence of God precedes the existence of the self. Descartes, is in a way, saying "God is… so, I exist"[17]. While Descartes has not yet established the existence of God at this point in the *Meditations*, the cogito in the Second Meditation, in its wording, may act as a foreshadowing to the re-establishment and importance of God in the upcoming Meditation[18].

There is further evidence that supports this reading of the cogito is we examine the Latin versions of both formulae. The Latin versions of these two variations gives interesting insight into the 'I am' in the cogito as well. While, of course, the *Discourse* was originally published in French, the Latin version, which is found in Descartes' later publication *Principles of Philosophy*, states "ego cogito, ergo sum" (AT VIII 7.8). The 'I am' in this version of the cogito takes on the more typically seen Latin form of 'sum'. When we compare this to the cogito of the *Meditations*, originally published in Latin- "Ego sum, ego existo", we see the 'I am' take on the form of 'Ego sum' (AT VII 25.12). This addition of 'Ego' acts as an emphasis on the 'I' of the 'I am'[19]. This

[17] This point will be explicated further in the fourth chapter of this thesis, when I discuss the relationship between God and the thinking thing, after the existence of God has been established (see page 73).
[18] This foreshadowing will become more evident as we move through our examination of the Third Meditation in Chapter Three and Chapter Four.
[19] Excerpt from term paper for PHIL 6012 in Fall 2021 with Dr. Suma Rajiva, with edits.

emphasis of "*I* am" may be an indication of Descartes' appeal to God through the cogito. More importantly, this may indicate the presence of God from the very beginning of Descartes' escape from skepticism. God is not only present in this first truth, but God is the basis of this important first truth[20].

2.3 Summary

In this chapter, we have examined the beginning of Descartes' ascent out of skepticism through his firm establishment of the existence of the self. This declaration of his own existence has become a central and infamous component of Cartesian thought and is known as the 'cogito'. Even though the cogito appears in various formulae throughout Descartes' different publications, the form of 'I think, therefore I am' has become the most popularized. However, this is not the form of the cogito that appears in Descartes' most famous work, the *Meditations*. This has led to thinkers such as Pope John Paul II to infer meaning from the earlier form of the cogito onto the text the *Meditations*. While scholars such as Edwin Curley have addressed the varying formulae, these attempts still seem to fall short of addressing a metaphysical significance within the transition from 'I think, therefore I am' to 'I am, I exist'. As I have suggested, and as will be re-visited later in this thesis, this transition signifies an appeal to God and a foreshadowing of the relationship between the soul and God that will be understood beginning in the Third Meditation.

[20] In anticipation of a possible rebuttal that this emphasis of "*I* am" may actually reinforce egocentricism of the late Pope's criticism of the cogito; I would like to counter that given the prominence of Christianity and the fact that through his travels Descartes carried the Bible and Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* with him (Gaukroger187), it would be safe to assume that Descartes would not only have been familiar with the exact term of "ego sum" appearing in the Vulgate (Latin Bible) as the name of God, but could further anticipate the backlash from the Catholic Church if he were to use that exact term, in Latin, to emphasize reference to himself. However, as is generally accepted by scholars, Descartes was careful to stay out of trouble with the Church (Gaukroger 355-356). For this reason, I do not think it plausible that Descartes would be emphasizing '*Ego* sum' if he wished to reference himself, and would instead opt for the less consequential 'sum'.

In order for us to better understand this significance, we will now proceed to examine the Third Meditation, where the metaphysical nature of Descartes' task becomes evident.

Chapter Three

The Third Meditation and Descartes' Causal Proof

By the end of the Second Meditation, Descartes is able to begin his ascent out of skepticism and establishes his first two truths: (1) that he exists, (2) that he exists as a thinking thing. However, by the Third Meditation, it seems that Descartes has established another, implicitly stated, truth. That is, that he exists as a *lacking* thinking thing. This implicit third truth, although not given as much attention as the first two, plays a vital role in the task of the Third Meditation. In the Third Meditation, Descartes is trying to move beyond the knowledge of his own existence and begin his search to establish something external from himself. In order to accomplish this, Descartes must understand his own nature in order to make a judgement on whether the things he perceives are merely creations of his own mind, or if their origin is external from himself. This is where the understanding of the lacking within his nature becomes important. As any reader of Descartes knows, the Third Meditation is where Descartes first establishes the certainty of his knowledge of the existence of the Infinite, or God. As we will see in this chapter, Descartes is able to do this through the recognition of his own lacking, and thus, his finitude. It is the contrast in his own nature to that of the Infinite that allows for Descartes to know for certain the existence of something external to him.

In this chapter, I will discuss Descartes' implicit establishment of this important third truth that he exists as a *lacking* thinking thing. Following this, I will continue with an exposition of Descartes' causal proof for the existence of God that follows from Descartes' recognition of his lacking. Finally, at the end of this chapter, I will discuss Pope John Paul II's claim that Descartes "turns his back on metaphysics and concentrates on the philosophy of knowledge" (52).

3.1 The Implicit Third Truth

As we discussed in the previous chapter, Descartes is able to begin to overcome his skepticism and establish indubitable truths. The first of these truths is that he must necessarily exist given that he is doubting (AT VII 25; C.21). This first acknowledgement of his existence has, of course, come to be known as the cogito; which takes on the form of "I am, I exist" in the *Meditations* (AT VII 25; C.21). From here, Descartes contemplates what it is that he might exist as, which leads him to establish his second truth, that he exists has a "thinking thing" (AT VII 27; C.23). However, these are only the truths that Descartes establishes explicitly. A continued reading into the Third Meditation reveals that Descartes has implicitly established a third truth. That is, that he exists as a *finite* thinking thing (AT VII 46; C.36)[21]. Unlike the explicit truths established in the Second Meditation, Descartes does not give an explanation as to how he has arrived at the establishment of his finitude. Although this is not a point that Descartes explicitly states as he does with the preceding truths, there is a definite understanding of a lacking within his nature in the First Meditation, as evident by his recognition of doubt as an imperfection (AT VII 48; 38). This is evident in Descartes' discussion of his nature after his establishment of his own existence through the cogito: "I am, I exist- that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking. For it could be that were I totally to cease from thinking, I should totally cease to exist" (AT VII 27; C.22). As John Cottingham explains, there is an important recognition within this line that, despite the self-awareness established through the cogito, this self-awareness is "a tiny flickering candle of certainty that could be extinguished at any minute" (258-259). Thus,

[21] Excerpt from term paper for PHIL 6012 in Fall 2021 with Dr. Suma Rajiva.

prompting Descartes to recognize the "frail, temporary nature" of his existence (Cottingham, Cartesian Reflections 258)[22].

While Descartes is not yet attaching the label of 'finite' to his nature as a thinking thing at this point in the *Meditations*, the recognition of a possible lacking in his nature is most certainly present here. This firm labelling occurs in the Third Meditation, as he begins his contemplation of the origin of his idea of the Infinite. While it is unclear when this recognition of lacking becomes an assertion of finitude, the importance of this implicitly established truth, the truth of his finite and lacking nature, is clear. The understanding of his nature as finite plays a significant role in guiding the discussion of the Third Meditation, as well as the eventual establishment of things external to Descartes himself. The investigation into the idea of the Infinite is built upon Descartes' premise that he exists as a finite thinking thing[23]. Thus, not only is it reasonable to assume the establishment of this third implicit truth, but furthermore, it is reasonable to assert that the importance of this truth is comparable to the two prior explicitly established truths.

3.2 The Causal Proof for the Existence of God[24]

Descartes begins the Third Meditation by recalling everything that he is certain of at this point:

> "I am a thing that thinks: that is, a thing that doubts, affirms, denies, understands a few things, is ignorant of many things, is willing, unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions (…) In this brief list I have gone through everything I truly know, or at least everything I have so far discovered that I know" (AT VII 34-35; C.28).

[22] Of course, some scholars would disagree with this understanding of "frail" or "temporary" self-awareness, such as Anthony Kenny, for whom the cogito demonstrates a much more stable self-awareness (61).
[23] Excerpt from term paper for PHIL 6012 in Fall 2021 with Dr. Suma Rajiva.
[24] The validity of Descartes' causal argument has been called into question in much contemporary scholarship in metaphysics. However, given the aim of this thesis, these critiques will not be addressed.

He also reminds his reader that he can be certain that he has sensory perceptions even though the objects of these experiences have no existence external from himself (AT VII 34; C.28). From here, Descartes tells us that he will examine if there is anything else that he has not noticed (AT VII 35; C.28). In order to accomplish this, Descartes addresses the doubts which have caused him to withhold assent so far.

The first of these is objects that he had perceived "with such clarity and distinctness" that then turned out to be doubtful or false (AT VII 35; C.28-29). There are two parts to this claim that Descartes will address. The first is that there are things that he perceives with clarity and distinctness; things like "the earth, sky, stars, and everything else that I apprehend with the sense" (AT VII 35; C.29). In regards to this claim, Descartes reminds us that this experience – these ideas occurring within him – is not something he is denying (AT VII 35; C.29). There is no doubt in his *perception* of these things, but rather in the accompanying judgement in this claim. That is, that this perception means that these things exist outside of himself; and that these objects themselves were the source of his ideas (AT VII 35; C.29). This judgement remains in doubt for Descartes at this stage, and so he continues to withhold assent from the existence of these objects externally from his perceptions of them.

Descartes' next area of inquiry is to revisit areas of knowledge that are not acquired through the senses. As we discussed in the first chapter, this includes knowledge in subjects such as arithmetic and geometry (AT VII 21-22; C.18). Descartes specifies that he will revisit "something very simple and straightforward" in these disciplines to see if he is able to relieve some of his doubts that had kept him from assenting to these pieces of knowledge in the First Meditation. The example he gives is the proposition that "two and three added together make five" (AT VII 36; C.29). Of course, this proposition, and others like it, do not face the same

challenges as assenting to the existence of objects externally from Descartes' ideas of them; as there is no existence of an external object necessary to affirm that two plus three equals five. Instead, these claims, if true, would be true whether or not anything at all existed in the world. Furthermore, Descartes admits that he had seen "these things clearly enough to affirm their truth" (AT VII 36; C.29). However, what had caused these things to be "open to doubt", according to Descartes, was the possibly of being in a constant state of deception due to "some God" creating his nature to be as such (AT VII 36; C.29). Descartes states:

> But whenever my preconceived belief in the supreme power of God comes to mind, I cannot but admit that it would be easy for him, if he so desired, to bring it about that I go wrong even in matters which I think I see utterly clearly with my mind's eye (AT VII 36; C.29).

While contemplating this thought, Descartes admits that while it is a possibility that there could be a God who is the cause of his constant deception, he has no reason to assert that this is the case, or even "whether there is a God at all" (AT VII 36; C.29). However, even though the doubt surrounding this matter is slight, it still exists, and as a result Descartes can still not assent to arithmetic and geometric truths so long as this slight doubt remains. Thus, Descartes recognized his next step in his investigation, and his focus for the Third Meditation:

> But in order to remove even this slight reason for doubt, as soon as the opportunity arises I must examine whether there is a God, and, if there is, whether [H]e can be a deceiver. For if I do not know this, it seems that I can never be quite certain about anything else (AT VII 36; C.30).

To begin this line of investigation, Descartes decides that he must "classify my thoughts into definite kinds" (AT VII 37; C.30). The first kind of thought Descartes discusses is that which he calls by the term "idea" (AT VII 37; C.30). In simple terms, Descartes describes the kind of thought called 'idea' as "images of things" (AT VII 37; C.30). Some examples of ideas that Descartes gives are when he thinks of "a man, or a chimera, or the sky, or an angel, or God" (AT

VII 37; C.30). In regards to the nature of 'idea', according to Descartes, we are to understand them as "solely in themselves", as they do not refer to anything else (AT VII 37; C.30). Given this understanding of the nature of an idea, Descartes concludes that ideas "cannot strictly speaking be false"; even if the object of the idea is confused for another or is itself non-existent, it cannot be anything but true that the possessor of this idea, does in fact have an image of said object (AT VII 37; C.30). Descartes likens this understanding to that of a desire; even if the object I am desiring is non-existent, it is no less true that I desire that object (AT VII 37; C.30).

The mistake Descartes warns that we cannot make in regards to ideas is that "the ideas which are in me resemble, or conform to, things located outside of me" (AT VII 37; C.30). Rather, ideas themselves, should be considered "simply as modes of my thought, without referring them to anything else" (AT VII 37; C.30). Ideas that are viewed in this manner, according to Descartes, "could scarcely give me any material for error" (AT VII 37; C.30).

With an understanding of the nature of ideas established, Descartes turns his attention to the origins of these ideas. To begin this discussion, Descartes recalls the apparent origins of his ideas. The first of these being "innate", or deriving from one's own nature; this includes the understanding of things such as truth and thought (AT VII 38; C.30-31). The second is ideas originating from things located outside of ourselves, that are "adventitious"; these includes ideas such as hearing a noise, seeing the sun, or feeling the fire (AT VII 38; C.30-31). Lastly, are those "invented by me"; such as sirens and hippogriffs (AT VII 38; C.30-31). However, Descartes reminds us that these are only the apparent origins of his ideas. It is possible, Descartes argues, that what he believes to be ideas with adventitious origins are actually innate or invented by himself. Thus, at this point, the true origins of these ideas are not clearly perceived (AT VII 38; C.31).

From here, Descartes spends some time in contemplation of the reason for the apparent origin of ideas to be something external from him. In response to this, Descartes puts forth that "nature has apparently taught me to think this" (AT VII 38; C.31). Further, it seems that his experiences tell him that these ideas of eternal things seem as though they do not depend on his will; for example, Descartes experiences the sensation of the heat from the fire beside him whether he wants to or not (AT VII 38; C.31). So, it seems that "the thing in question transmits to me its own likeness rather than something else" (AT VII 38; C.31).

Having identified why external origins seems to be the case for these kinds of ideas, Descartes must now turn his attention towards the question of whether or not this is a strong enough argument for origins of certain ideas to be correctly attributed to something outside of himself (AT VII 38; C.31). In doing so, Descartes is sure to clarify his understanding that "nature has taught me to think this" is not to be confused with a truth being revealed by natural light – such as the truth established in the cogito – which "cannot in anyway be open to doubt" (AT VII 38; C.31). In contrast, that which "nature has taught me to think" simply means "that a spontaneous impulse leads me to believe it", and is therefore open to doubt (AT VII 38-39; C.31). Descartes now turns to analyse the argument that ideas of this nature do not depend on his will, but rather something external. In examining this claim, Descartes admits that it does not follow that simply because something does not depend on his will that they must then come from something outside of himself (AT VII 39; C.31). To explain this, he relates back to his natural impulses, which "seem opposed to my will even though they are within me"; thus, the origin of these ideas could be attributed to "some other faculty not yet fully known to me, which produces these ideas without any assistance from external things" (AT VII 39; C.31-32). Furthermore, Descartes reminds us that even if these ideas came from external objects, "it would not follow

that they must resemble those things"[25] (AT VII 39; C.32). All this, Descartes concludes, is "enough to establish that it is not reliable judgement but merely some blind impulse that has made me believe up till now that there exist things distinct from myself which transmit to me ideas or images of themselves through the sense organs or in some other way" (AT VII 40; C.32).

After recognizing that this line of thought – that is ideas being "considered simply as modes of thought" – produces no "recognizable inequality" among these ideas in regards to the source of origin, Descartes decides to re-focus his examination of 'ideas as modes of thought' to ideas as "images which represent different things" (AT VII 40; C.32). If we view ideas this way, according to Descartes, "it is clear that they differ widely" (AT VII 40; C.32). To explain the differences between ideas, Descartes writes:

> Undoubtedly, the ideas which represent substances to me amount to something more and, so to speak, contain within themselves more objective reality than the ideas which merely represent modes or accidents. Again, the idea that gives me my understanding of a supreme God, eternal, infinite, <immutable,> omniscient, omnipotent and the creator of all things that exist apart from [H]im, certainly has in it more objective than the ideas that represent finite substances (AT VII 40; C.32-33).

According to Thomas Vinci, this "*hierarchy principle"* is an essential element in Descartes' upcoming proof for the existence of God (88). Given this understanding of objective reality, Descartes is able to revisit his examination of the origin of his different ideas. Along with the understanding of the differing levels of objective reality within different ideas, this examination will be based on the premise that "there must be at least as much <reality> in the efficient and

[25] The example Descartes provides to illustrate this point is that of the sun:

> For example, there are two different ideas of the sun which I find within me. One of them, which is acquired though the sense and which is a prime example of an idea which I reckon to come from an external source, makes the sun appear very small. The other idea is based on astronomical reasoning, that is, it is derived from certain notions which are innate in me (or else it is constructed by me in some other way), and this idea shows the sun to be several times larger than the earth. Obviously both these ideas cannot resemble the sun which exists outside me; and reason persuades me that the idea which seems to have emanated most directly from the sun itself has in fact no resemblance to it at all (AT VII 39; C. 32).

total cause as in the effect of the cause" (AT VII 40; C.33). This premise paired with the hierarchy principle, according to Vinci, will lead to Descartes' establishment of God (89). This relationship between a cause and its effect, according to Descartes, is one that can be known "by the natural light" (AT VII 40; C.33). To support this, Descartes explains that an effect can only get its reality from its cause, and that cause can only give to the effect so long as it also possesses (at least) that same reality (AT VII 40; C.33). From here, he asserts that two things must follow; that "something cannot arise from nothing, and also that which is more perfect – that is, contains in itself more reality – cannot arise from what is less perfect" (AT VII 40-41; C.33). Descartes states that this notion is true both in cases of "effects which possess actual or formal reality" as well as with ideas "where one is considering only objective reality" (AT VII 41; C.33). To illustrate this further, Descartes uses the examples of a stone and heat:

> A stone, for example, which previously did not exist, cannot begin to exist unless it is produced by something which contains, either formally or eminently everything to be found in the stone; similarly, heat cannot be produced in an object which was not previously hot, except by something of at least the same order <degree or kind> of perfection as heat, and so on. (AT VII 41; C.33).

Descartes continues these examples in relation to ideas and objective reality. He explains that the "*idea"* of a stone or heat is not able to exist in him unless that idea is put there by a cause that contains equal or greater objective reality as he "conceives to be in the heat or the stone" (AT VII 41; C.33). However, it should be noted that while the cause of this idea "does not transfer any of its actual or formal reality to my idea", it should not be assumed that the cause of the idea is any less real than the idea; "an idea, imperfect though it may be, is certainly not nothing, and so it cannot come from nothing" (AT VII 41; C.33).

The conclusion Descartes draws from this examination is as follows:

> If the objective reality of any of my ideas turns out to be so great that I am sure the same reality does not reside in me, either formally or eminently, and hence that I myself cannot

> be its cause, it will necessarily follow that I am not alone in the world, but that some other thing which is the cause of this idea also exists. But if no such idea is found in me, I shall have no argument to convince me of the existence of anything apart from myself. For despite a most careful and comprehensive survey, this is the only argument I have so far been able to find (AT VII 42; C.34).

After drawing this conclusion, Descartes begins an investigation into ideas that represent things other than himself; which include corporeal things, animals, other men like himself, angels, and God (AT VII 43; C.34). In regards to his idea of corporeal things, Descartes asserts that he sees "nothing in them which is so great <or excellent> as to make it seem impossible that it originated from myself" (AT VII 43; C.34). This, according to Descartes, is because there are very few things within these ideas that he can perceive clearly and distinctly (AT VII 43; C.34-35). In relation to his ideas which represent things such as animal, other men, and angels, Descartes understands that these ideas are able to be derived from the ideas he has of himself, corporeal things, and of God; thus, it is not a necessity for the cause of these ideas to be something apart from himself (AT VII 43; C.34). This, then, leaves only the idea of God (AT VII 45; C.36).

In order for Descartes to understand whether the idea of God could originate within himself, he must understand what is meant by the word 'God'. Descartes understands 'God' as "a substance that is [I]nfinite, <eternal, immutable,> independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful, and which created both myself and everything else (if anything else there be) that exists" (AT VII 45; C.36). According to Jean-Luc Marion, there are two characteristics within Descartes' definition of God that are of increased importance for his upcoming argument in the Third Meditation – these are God's Infinity and incomprehensibility[26] (173). As Marion points

[26] The incomprehensibility of God will become more evident in our upcoming discussion on the distinction between grasp and understanding.

out, Descartes' emphasis of the incomprehensibility of God echoes the concept of "*via negativa* of theology" (173).

From his contemplation of this understanding of what precisely his idea of God is, including His incomprehensibility, Descartes asserts that the more he thinks about these attributes of God, "the less possible it seems that they could have originated from me alone"; this is because of his recognition of the lacking in his nature (AT VII 45; C. 36). If it is the case that this idea could not have originated from Descartes himself, we should then conclude that "God necessarily exists" (AT VII 45; C. 36). While Descartes, at this point, has already stated the argument he wishes to prove in this section, he will spend the next pages of this Meditation defending his premise that the idea of God could not have originated from himself due to his lacking nature.

To begin this defense, Descartes discusses the attribute of substance in the idea of God. Here, Descartes explains to his reader that while the idea of substance can be found within himself because he himself is a substance, this is not the case for an Infinite substance (AT VII 45; C. 36). This is because Descartes understands himself to be a finite substance, and thus could not have generated this idea of Infinite substance; instead, it must have "proceeded from some substance which really was [I]nfinite" (AT VII 45; C. 36). In simpler terms, a finite substance can only generate ideas of finite substance, not of an Infinite substance. So, any idea of an Infinite substance must be generated by an Infinite substance. Since Descartes has determined himself to be a finite substance, this idea of the God – an Infinite substance – could not have generated from himself, thus necessitating the existence of an Infinite substance; that is God.

From here, Descartes, who is likely aware of potential objections to this argument, discusses at length the crucial premise of his argument: that a finite thing cannot generate the idea

of the Infinite. This discussion consists of Descartes refutation of various potential sources for this idea that are not the Infinite Himself.

The first of these possibilities is that Descartes' idea of the Infinite is generated through the negation of his own finitude (AT VII 45-46; C. 36). An example of this is arriving at the idea of darkness through a negation of light; similarly, one could argue that the idea of the Infinite is arrived at through negating the finite (AT VII 45; C. 36). However, Descartes argues that this cannot be the case with his idea of the Infinite. This is because "there is more reality in an [I]nfinite substance than a finite one", according to Descartes (AT VII 45; C. 36). Given this understanding, it follows that perception of the Infinite must precede perception of the finite[27] (AT VII 46; C. 36). In other words, an idea of finitude may be arrived at through the negation of the Infinite, but an idea of the Infinite cannot be arrived at through the negation of finitude (Gueroult 130). To further explain this, Descartes recounts how he was able to identify himself as a lacking thing – something that doubts, desires, and is imperfect – due to his having of an idea of something wholly perfect – that is the Infinite – that allowed him to recognize his defects in comparison (AT VII 46; C. 36). Therefore, it cannot be said that the idea of the Infinite is arrived at through a mere negation of Descartes' own finitude.

A second potential source for the idea of the Infinite that Descartes considers is simply that the idea came from nothing (AT VII 46; C. 37). This supposes that the idea of God is "materially false and so could have come from nothing" (AT VII 46; C. 37). However, as we have already established, the idea of God – the Infinite – "contains in itself more objective reality than any other idea" (AT VII 46; C. 37). Furthermore, it is "utterly clear and distinct"; meaning that

[27] This point is reaffirmed in Descartes' reply to the objection of Gassendi: "it is false that the [I[nfinite is understood through the negation of a boundary or limit; on the contrary, all limitation implies a negation of the [I]nfinite" (AT VII 365; CSM. 252)

"whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive as being real and true, and implying any perfection, is wholly contained in it" (AT VII 46; C. 37). During this discussion, Descartes also clarifies the distinction between 'grasping' and 'understanding'. To grasp, according to Descartes is to comprehend all of the attribute of the object in question; while to understand an object, one need not fully grasp it[28] (AT VII 46; C. 37). So, applying these ideas to our idea of God, one need not fully grasp the idea of the Infinite to have a clear and distinct idea, but rather he need only to understand the Infinite, thus maintaining the incomprehensibility of God (AT VII 46; C. 37). Given this reasoning, Descartes asserts that we cannot conclude that the idea of the Infinite comes from nothing.

The next possibility that Descartes analyses as a potential source for his idea of God is himself. Since Descartes has already established that he as a finite thing cannot alone generate the idea of the Infinite, he instead turns his attention to the possibility that he himself is something greater than he has understood himself to be (AT VII 47; C. 37). More specifically, that Descartes himself – as the thinking thing – possess, *potentially,* the qualities that he perceives in God, and thus can be the source for this idea (AT VII 47; C. 37). It is important to note here that Descartes is contemplating his possession of these attributes potentially, not in actuality. This means that he would have the *potential* to possess these qualities, but does not possess them in actuality; so, this does not change the current nature of Descartes' being as he has discussed it to this point of the text. Rather, this view would be complimentary to what Descartes knows of himself given the "gradual increase in my knowledge" (AT VII 47; C. 37). So while Descartes admits he would not have reached this point presently, this argument would assert that Descartes' being is "increasing

[28] According to Descartes, one can 'understand' something without 'grasping' it. In a letter to Father Mersenne, Descartes explains: "in the same way we can touch a mountain with our hands but we cannot put our arms around it (…) To grasp something is to embrace it in one's thought; to know something, it is sufficient to touch it with one's thought" (AT VI 152; CMSK 25).

more and more to [I]nfinity" (AT VII 47; C. 37). If it is the case that Descartes possesses these attributes of God in potentiality, then he should be able to reach the conclusion that he, Descartes, is the author of the idea of God, rather than needing the Infinite Himself. However, this argument cannot be made; this is because of the nature of the Infinite. While Descartes believes that it is correct to acknowledge the attributes of the thinking thing that are only present in potentiality rather than actuality, this is "all quite irrelevant to the idea of God" (AT VII 47; C. 37). This is because the idea of God "contains absolutely nothing that is potential" (AT VII 47; C. 38). So, instead of implying a potential to attain the attributes of the Infinite, the "gradual increase of knowledge that Descartes observes in himself "is itself the surest sign of imperfection" (AT VII 47; C. 38). Furthermore, Descartes acknowledges that even if his knowledge is always increasing more and more, it would "never reach the point where it is not capable of a further increase"; and thus, could never be Infinite itself (AT VII 47; C. 38). Whereas Descartes' idea of God understands Him as a One whose perfection cannot be added to – that is, He is truly Infinite (AT VII 47; C. 38). Thus, it is not the case that the idea of God could have been generated from Descartes himself given the nature of his being: "and finally, I perceive that the objective being of an idea cannot be produced merely by potential being, which strictly speaking is nothing, but only by actual or formal being" (AT VII 47; C. 38). Since Descartes has already established himself as a finite being incapable of authoring his own idea of the Infinite, Descartes must again conclude that there could be no other cause for his idea of the Infinite other than the Infinite Himself.

Having established this, Descartes takes a brief pause to assess his contemplation on this matter:

> If one concentrates carefully, all this is quite evident by the natural light. But when I relax my concentration, and my mental image is blinded by images of things perceived by the

> senses, it is not so easy for me to remember why the idea of a being more perfect than myself must necessarily proceed from some being which is in reality more perfect (AT VII 47; C. 38).

Through this contemplation, Descartes not only begins to recognize this idea of the Infinite as a significant part of the nature of his being, but also begins to question whether he himself could exist if the Infinite Himself does not exist. This marks a shift in the discussion from the first part of Descartes' causal proof – what generated the idea of the Infinite – to the second part of the proof – could anything besides God be the cause of the existence of the thinking thing. So, Descartes adjusts his focus from the cause of his idea of the Infinite to the cause of his own existence, as a being with the idea of the Infinite (AT VII 47-48; C. 38). The possibilities of where Descartes could have derived his existence from, given his nature, are himself, his parents or "some other beings less perfect than God", or God Himself; Descartes also makes a note that these are the only options since it is impossible for there to be a being more perfect than God (AT VII 48; C. 38).

Descartes first examines whether it is possible that he derived his existence from himself, coming into existence from nothing (AT VII 48; C. 38). Here, Descartes asserts that if he had derived his existence from himself – independently of any other being – then it would follow that "I should neither doubt nor want, nor lack anything at all"; thus, Descartes would himself be God (AT VII 48; C. 38). It must also not be mistaken, according to Descartes, that these attributes were too difficult to generate and that is why Descartes could generate his existence without being God – rather Descartes argues that it is more difficult to "emerge out of nothing than merely to acquire knowledge of the many things of which I am ignorant" since that knowledge is "merely an accident of that substance" (AT VII 48; C. 38):

> And if I had derived my existence from myself, which is a greater achievement, I should certainly not have denied myself the knowledge in question, which is something much

> easier to acquire, or indeed any of the attributes which I perceive to be contained in the idea of God; for none of them seems any harder to achieve. And if any of them were harder to achieve, they would certainly appear so to me, if I indeed got all my other attributes from myself, since I should experience a limitation of my power in this respect (AT VII 48; C. 38-39).

Therefore, given that that Descartes is lacking attributes that are easier to acquire than his own existence with his known nature, Descartes can conclude that he did not create himself from nothing. Through this discussion, it becomes evident that this recognition of lacking in his own nature not only allows him to establish certainty of the knowledge of an external Being as the cause of his idea of the Infinite, but also leads Descartes to ponder his own cause; which at this point he concludes is not himself.

Next, Descartes contemplates the supposition that he has "always existed as I do now", and thus does not need to consider any creator or origin (AT VII 48; C. 39). However, he does not need to give this matter much thought to realize that this still does not relieve him from the task of determining how he – a lacking being with an idea of the Infinite – came to be. This is because of Descartes' realization that "a lifespan can be divided into countless parts, each completely independent of the other, so that it does not follow from the fact that I existed a little while ago that I must exist now" (AT VII 49; C. 39). Rather, there must not only be a cause which created him at some origin point, but there must be a cause that "creates me afresh at this moment" – in other words, a cause that preserves his being (AT VII 49; C. 39). Furthermore, Descartes suggests that it is evident that "the same powers and action" are necessary to both create something anew as well as "preserve anything at each individual moment" of its existence; thus, "the distinction between preservation and creation is only a conceptual one" (AT VII 49; C. 39). This realization slightly adjusts Descartes' approach to his investigation of his cause, since whatever has caused him, must also be able to preserve his being as it is.

Similar to his previous argument, Descartes concludes that he can neither create nor preserve his own being independent of another cause. Descartes arrives at this conclusion given his understanding of his nature. Given that he understands himself to be a thinking thing, Descartes argues, it follows that he would be aware of any power within him that would enable him to create and preserve his existence (AT VII 49; C. 39). Since Descartes experiences no such power, he can "recognize most clearly" that he "depends on some being distinct from" himself (AT VII 49; C. 39).

However, this alone does not necessitate that this distinct being that creates and preserves his being must be God; so, Descartes must now examine the possibility that he was produced by "other causes less perfect than God", such as his parents (AT VII 49; C. 39). This discussion relies on the previously established premise that "there must be at least reality in the cause as in the effect" (AT VII 49; C. 39). So, if Descartes' cause is a being other than God Himself, this being must, at least, also be a thinking thing with an idea of the Infinite (AT VII 49; C. 39). A being – or beings – such as parents would fulfill this requirement since we would suppose them to have the same, or similar, nature as their effect. However, as Descartes has already concluded, this kind of being cannot be the cause of itself (AT VII 49; C. 39). So, even if we were to accept other thinking things as the cause of Descartes' being, we would still need to wonder about the cause of those beings (AT VII 50; C. 40). Of course, this leaves the same two options as to the cause of Descartes' cause: God or another being who is not God but possesses the idea of God. If the cause of Descartes' cause is not God, then we have introduced another cause for whom the same question of origins must be raised, thus creating an infinite regress (AT VII 50; C. 40). However, Descartes quickly concludes that an infinite regress is "impossible here" since he is not

only looking for the cause that "produced me in the past, but also and more importantly, the cause that preserves me at the present moment" (AT VII 50; C. 40).

Next, Descartes examines the possibility that "several partial causes" led to his creation, or perhaps that his idea of God is the result of several different ideas combined (AT VII 50; C. 40). What this would mean, according to Descartes, is that "all the perfections [within the idea of the Infinite] are to be found somewhere in the universe, but not joined together in a single being, God" (AT VII 50; C. 40)[29]. Descartes' response to this, is that "the most important of the perfections" that belong to God, is unity, simplicity, and inseparability of all His attributes (AT VII 50; C. 40). Further, Descartes argues that it is not possible that he would have been able to connect these independent attributes together to create an idea of an Infinite being: "for no cause could have made me understand the interconnection and inseparability of the perfections without at the same time making me recognize what they were" (AT VII 50; C. 40).

Once more, Descartes returns to the discussion regarding his parents as his causation; this time Descartes supposes that everything he once believed about them is true (AT VII 50-51; C. 40). Through this examination, Descartes reaffirms that even if his parents were his cause, "it is certainly not they who preserve me" (AT VII 50; C. 40). If anything is to be attributed to them, Descartes argues that is the placement of "certain dispositions of matter" that contain his being – that is the mind, or soul (AT VII 50-51; C. 40). So, it is possible that his parents are the cause of his physical being, if he has one, but they cannot be the cause of his being as he understands it; that is, they cannot be the cause of the thinking thing[30] (AT VII 51; C. 40).

[29] Material in square brackets added for context.

[30] This is consistent with the understanding of St. Thomas Aquinas on the generation of the human person; in the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas explains that the intellect cannot be generated from other men, "but only through creation by God" (S.Th. Ia, q.118, 2 co.).

Overall, through this discussion, Descartes is able to conclude that, given his understanding of his nature as a thinking thing with the idea of God, or the Infinite, there is "very clear proof" for the existence of God (AT VII 51; C. 40). As a summary of the causal argument made in the Third Meditation, Saja Parvizian provides the following syllogism:

> (1) There exists in Descartes' mind an idea of God, that is, an idea with infinite objective reality that represents actual infinite formal reality.
>
> (2) As a finite substance, Descartes does not have enough formal reality to cause an idea with infinite objective reality (i.e., the idea of God).
>
> (3) The idea of God can only be caused by a substance with infinite formal reality.
>
> ∴ God exists. (142).

3.3 The Idea of God as Innate in the Thinking Thing

After concluding that God must be the cause of his existence, and the author of the idea of the Infinite that he has, Descartes uses the final paragraphs of the Third Meditation to discuss *how* he came to receive this idea from God. Descartes is quick to conclude that he has not acquired the idea of God through the senses, as the idea "has never come to be unexpectedly", which he asserts is typical of things "perceivable by the senses" (AT VII 51; C. 40). Next, Descartes argues that this idea did not come from himself either. His reasoning for this being that he is "unable either to take away anything from it or to add anything to it" (AT VII 51; C. 40-41). Thus, Descartes asserts that the remaining options is that this idea must be innate within him, "just as the idea of myself is innate in me"[31] (AT VII 51; C. 41).

[31] "Just as the idea of myself is innate in me" – this is an important addition to understanding the role of God in the Mediations and refuting the anthropocentric reading of the text, as Descartes is asserting that the idea God is accompanying that very first truth he established of his own existence, further revealing the relationship between God and the thinking thing. This point will be returned to and expanded on in the next chapter.

This conclusion is not an unexpected one for Descartes. Rather, he asserts that "it is no surprise that God, in creating me, should have placed this idea in me to be, as it were, the mark of the craftsman stamped on his work" (AT VII 51; C. 41). Descartes further argues that God's creation of him, as a being with the idea of the Infinite, gives a "very strong basis for believing that I am somehow made in his image and likeness" (AT VII 51; C. 41). Perhaps more importantly, Descartes suggests that he perceives this likeness through the same faculty that allows him to perceive himself (AT VII 51; C. 41). In an almost poetic fashion, Descartes explains that:

> when I turn my mind's eye upon myself, I understand that I am a thing which is incomplete and dependent on another and which aspires without limit to even greater and better things; but I also understand at the same time that [H]e on whom I depend has within [H]im all those greater things, not just indefinitely and potentially but actually and infinitely, and hence that [H]e is God (AT VII 51; C. 41).

In this passage, Descartes does much more than merely describe *how* he received the idea of the Infinite; he is also understanding the relationship between his being and the Infinite; this lacking in his nature is now beginning to be recognized as a dependence[32]. For now, it is important that we understand the explicit argument of the Third Meditation; that is, Descartes' causal argument for the existence of God.

Descartes, as he begins to conclude this Meditation, reminds us of this argument. As shown through the Third Meditation, Descartes understands that in order for him to exist as he does – a lacking thinking thing with an idea of the Infinite – it is necessary for God, the Infinite, to exist (AT VII 52; C. 41). God, as Descartes understands Him to be, is "the possessor of all the perfections which I cannot grasp, but can somehow reach in my thought, who is subject to no

[32] This is a discussion we will return to in a later part of this thesis.

defects whatsoever" (AT VII 52; C. 41). Finally, Descartes concludes the Third Meditation by pausing to contemplate the Infinity that is God (AT VII 52; C. 41).

3.4 Restating the Metaphysical Task of the *Meditations*

At this point in the discussion, I would like to discuss Pope John Paul II's claim that Descartes "turns his back on metaphysics and concentrates on the philosophy of knowledge", known as epistemology (52). This – the perceived epistemological focus of the *Meditations* – is a common misunderstanding of contemporary readers of Descartes, that invoke a variety of responses to the text. While Pope John Paul II expressed a discontent in what he sees as an over-focus on epistemology, secular commentators have expresses discontent for a *failure* to stick with the epistemological task. This has led commentators such as Amy Schmitter to describe the Third Meditation's causal proof for the existence of God as "philosophical irk" (149). Similarly, Lawrence Nolan argues "that Descartes' epistemic project in the *Meditations* falls apart in the Third Meditation" due to his effort to establish the causal proof (127). So, it seems that the Third Meditation has left many commentators discontent; some because of a perceived over-concentration on the epistemological task, and others because of a perceived abandonment of the epistemological task.

However, what is actually leading to the discontent of all of these commentators is neither of these things; rather, it is their own misperceptions of Descartes' task. Descartes neither over-concentrates nor abandons the epistemological task of the *Meditations* because that was never the primary aim of the text. As we must recall from our earlier discussion, the *Meditations* is

primarily a work of metaphysics[33]. It is the *Discourse*, not the *Meditations*, which Descartes published prior that aims to establish his epistemology. The *Meditations*, on the other hand, aims to utilize that epistemology in order establish a firm system of metaphysics. The Third Meditation is where this metaphysical task becomes intensely evident. While it is true that the First Meditation and Second Meditation tend to have a more apparent epistemological focus, this does not dictate the aim of the text as a whole. When commentators hyper-focus on these first two Meditations, as Pope John Paul II, Nolan, and Schmitter have, they become distracted and expect an epistemological work rather than a metaphysical one. While the Third Meditation offers advancement to Cartesian epistemology by allowing Descartes to establish the first external and independently existing thing from himself, the discussion of the Third Meditation also offers something more. Once more, the Third Meditation acts as the turning point of the *Meditations on First Philosophy* where the primary goal of the text comes to light. It becomes clear that the epistemological task undertaken by Descartes in the early parts of the *Meditations* is done so in order to pave the way for his metaphysics, it is not meant to stand alone in this text. If we expect an epistemological masterpiece from the *Meditations*, we are sure to be disappointed, as that is not what it was written for. However, when we read the *Meditations* as a work of metaphysics, we can see what the text truly has to offer.

Thus, we must remind ourselves that the *Meditations* is a work of metaphysics. We must not let an isolated interpretation of the First and Second Meditations distract us from Descartes' central focus. Descartes does not 'turn his back' on metaphysics to elevate epistemology; rather, he develops and utilizes an epistemology that will allow him to establish a firm metaphysics with an unshakeable foundation.

[33] See Chapter One, page 13.

3.5 Summary

In this chapter, we have seen the text begin to take a metaphysical turn in the Third Meditation; it becomes evident that Descartes is merely utilizing his epistemological system, developed in the *Discourse*, to build an unshakable metaphysics. This shift begins through Descartes' discussion of his nature; what begins as a technical list of faculties belonging to the mind in the Second Meditation, becomes an implicit recognition of a lacking in his nature by the beginning of the Third Meditation. This recognition of lacking, or finitude, allows Descartes to establish the certainty of his knowledge of the existence of God, the Infinite. This certainty of the existence of God is not only significant in establishing something external and independent of himself, but even more, it allows Descartes to further understand his own nature and the nature of the relationship between him and God. This relationship between the mind, or soul, and God is one that we will examine in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

God as Cause and Preserver of the Soul

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the main task Descartes undertakes in the Third Meditation is to establish a stance on the existence of God. This discussion results in Descartes' causal argument for the existence of God, which subsequently allows Descartes to establish another truth. Of course, as the *Meditations* continue, this establishment of God allows Descartes to rebuild many beliefs that he found doubt in. Given the nature of this thesis and argument, this is not something we will be discussing. Rather, in this section, I would like to focus on the metaphysical implications of the Third Meditation. More specifically, we will be examining how Descartes' contemplation of the Infinite allows him to further his understanding of his own nature, while also revealing the intimate relationship between Descartes and his Creator through that nature. As we will see through this examination, the theocentrism of the *Meditations* becomes increasingly evident.

In order for us to see how Descartes' understanding of his nature has advanced throughout the Third Meditation, it is necessary for us to remember what Descartes' understanding of his nature was prior to the discussion of the Third Meditation. I began the previous chapter by addressing Descartes' implicitly established truth that becomes a pivotal premise for his causal argument. This, of course, is that Descartes exists as a *lacking* thinking thing. This implicit truth not only sets up Descartes' argument in the Third Meditation, but it also encompasses the entirety of Descartes' understanding of his own nature up to this point. To briefly recall our previous discussion, towards the end of the Second Meditation, Descartes become aware of, and introduces his reader to, a sort of lacking in his nature: "I am, I exist- that is certain. But for how

long? For as long as I am thinking. For it could be that were I totally to cease from thinking, I should totally cease to exist" (AT VII 27; C.22). From this passage, we can piece together a picture of what exactly Descartes knows about his nature by the end of the Second Meditation – that is, that he exists as a lacking thinking thing.

In the Third Meditation, Descartes provides a more detailed account of what he understands a thinking thing to be: "a thing that doubts, affirms, denies, understands a few things, is ignorant of many things, is willing, unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions" (AT VII 34-35; C.28). This, as Descartes points out, covers everything that he understands of his nature so far (AT VII 35; C.28). As I have already mentioned, the Third Meditation is a pivotal point of the *Meditations* because of Descartes' establishment of something independent from himself, but it is also extremely important in its development of Descartes' understanding of his own nature. Moreover, the discussion of the Third Meditation also reveals the relationship between this independently established Being – that is God or the Infinite – and Descartes himself. Though a relatively brief discussion, Descartes makes it clear that God is a Being whose existence is independent of his own (though Descartes' being is not independent of God), but also a Being with whom Descartes shares an intimate relationship with (AT VII 47-52; C.38-41).

In this chapter, I will revisit some key passages from the Third Meditation in order to emphasize the important revelations about both Descartes' nature and his relation to the Infinite. Through this discussion, we will analyse the idea of God as innate within the thinking thing, as well as the thinking thing's dependence on God for not only its creation, but also its preservation. In order to further establish the theocentrism of the *Meditations* and address claims of Descartes the secular rationalist, I will discuss the role of God in Descartes' use of 'natural light'. Ultimately, by the end of this chapter it will become evident that God exists not merely as something external and independent of Descartes, but as a Being on Whom Descartes' entire

existence is reliant; thus, re-establishing the theocentric lens through which it is proper to read the *Meditations*.

4.1 Understanding the Thinking Thing as a Soul in Relationship with God

To begin, let us revisit some key passages from the Third Meditation; this time through the lens of nature and relationship, rather than merely establishing premises for a causal argument.

Fairly early on in the Third Meditation, Descartes discusses ideas that he has of various things; this includes ideas of other men, the sky, and even ideas of angels and God (AT VII 37; C. 30). As we have previously discussed, Descartes' acknowledgement of, specifically, this idea of God paves the way for Descartes causal argument. Before that, however, this new awareness tells Descartes, and us, more about the nature of the thinking thing. Along with being a doubting, affirming, willing, understanding yet ignorant, thinking thing, Descartes also recognizes himself to be a thing who has in himself an idea of God – that is, of the Infinite. (AT VII 34-35; C.28). This is significant because of the already established understanding of his nature – his lacking, or finitude. Understanding his nature as a lacking thinking thing with an idea of the Infinite, is significant in more ways than one for Descartes in the *Meditations*. The first, as addressed by Descartes in the Third Meditation, is the epistemological significance. As we discussed in the previous chapter, this idea of the Infinite had by a finite being, allows Descartes to establish the existence of something external and independent from himself, in this case God (AT VII 45; C. 36). However, Descartes' discussion of the idea of the Infinite in relation to his own finitude does not end with this. He furthers the discussion by addressing the metaphysical significance of his idea of God and the establishment of God's existence. We will examine this significance through the lens of the relationship between Descartes and this externally established Being. As we will

see, this discussion reveals that while God exists independently of Descartes, it is not the case that Descartes, the thinking thing, exists independently of God.

The discussion of this relationship is imbedded throughout Descartes' argument in the Third Meditation. Given that I have already discussed Descartes' establishment of God in-depth in the previous chapter, I will not revisit every aspect of the argument here, rather I will revisit only the sections that will aid us in advancing our understanding of the metaphysical implications of this argument.

To begin, I would like to revisit the passage where Descartes discusses the possibility that his idea of God could have resulted from a negation of his own being (AT VII 45-46; C. 36). In this section of the Third Meditation, Descartes contemplates if it is possible that he arrived at his idea of the Infinite simply by negating the finitude he understands to be part of his own nature (AT VII 45; C. 36). Through this contemplation, Descartes does more than merely conclude that one cannot arrive at Infinity by negating finitude – since there is "more reality in an [I]nfinite substance than in a finite one" – rather, due to this same reason, the opposite is true: we can arrive at finitude through the negation of the Infinite (AT VII 45-46; C. 36). Further, Descartes recognizes that this is how he came to understand the finitude of his own nature: "for how could I understand that I doubted or desired – that is, lacked something – and that I was not wholly perfect, unless there were in me some idea of a more perfect being which enabled me to recognize my own defects by comparison" (AT VII 46; C. 36).

We cannot therefore say that the idea of God is a result of a negation of finitude, but rather, Descartes' recognition of his own finitude is a direct result of the negation of the perfection contained within this idea of the Infinite (Gueroult 130). In this way, Descartes asserts, "my perception of the [I]nfinite, that is God, is in some way prior to my perception of the finite, that is myself" (AT VII 45-46; C. 36). This reveals a kind of dependence on God in order for

Descartes to properly understand his own being, a dependence on the Infinite that we will see become a recurring point in the remainder of the Third Meditation.

Following this first revelation of the relationship to God, Descartes continues his investigation into the existence of God, and, as discussed in the previous chapter, he is able to indubitably establish the existence of God as something external and independent from his own being. However, once this is established, the discussion of the Third Meditation makes a slight shift. At this point, Descartes becomes concerned with the question of how, or where, he has derived his own being (AT VII 48; C. 38). Of course, his understanding of his nature soon leads him to conclude that it is not logically possible for him to derive his existence from himself, and thus, Descartes is not his own cause. This leads to the understanding of another significant attribute of his nature; that is, that while Descartes may exist externally from his cause, he may not exist *independently* of his cause.

This understanding of the dependent nature of his being, is evident in the following passage:

> A lifespan can be divided into countless parts, each completely independent of the others, so that it does not follow from the fact that I existed a little while ago that I must exist now, unless there is some cause which as it were creates me afresh at this moment – that is, which preserves me. For it is quite clear to anyone who attentively considers the nature of time that the same power and action are needed to preserve anything at each individual moment of its duration as would be required to create that thing anew if it were not yet in existence. Hence, the distinction between preservation and creation is only a conceptual one (AT VII 49; C. 39).

Here, Descartes acknowledges that his cause, cannot only be the cause of his initial existence, but also the cause of his every moment, a cause which created and now preserves his being. We can contrast this to the Second Meditation where Descartes, still aware of the lacking of his nature, ponders the extent of his existence: "I exist – that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking. For it could be the case that were I totally to cease from thinking, I should totally

cease to exist" (AT VII 27; C. 22). In the Third Meditation, as Descartes better understands his nature and relationship to God, he replaces his outdated hypothesis that so long as he is thinking he must exist, with the understanding that it is not himself, but God who preserves his being. So, while Descartes exists externally, he does not, and cannot, exist independently of his cause. While at this point in the discussion Descartes had not yet established his cause, we, of course, know that he will soon establish God as his cause and preserver (AT VII 50; C. 40). Therefore, it is God with whom Descartes has this dependent and continual relationship with.

This relationship and its significance become even more evident as Descartes ponders the question of *how* he received the idea of the Infinite. As we have already discussed, this contemplation leads Descartes to conclude that the idea of God is innate in him (AT VII 51; C. 41). Descartes, even further, makes a direct comparison that the idea of God is innate in him "just as the idea of myself is innate in me", which emphasizes the significance of this idea of God in comparison to Descartes' first established truth, the cogito (AT VII 51; C. 41). Descartes' likens this innateness of the idea of God to "the mark of the craftsman stamped on his work" (AT VII 51; C. 41). Furthermore, Descartes argues that "the mere fact that God created me is a very strong basis for believing that I am somehow made in [H]is image and likeness, and that I perceive that likeness, which includes the idea of God, by the same faculty which enables me to perceive myself" (AT VII 51; C. 41). Here, Descartes' understanding of his nature as a thinking thing becomes deepened. In a sense, this understanding of his nature as being made in the image and likeness of God, allows us to move past the understanding of his nature as merely a "thing that thinks" to a *soul*[34]; since at this point Descartes has not only established his *dependency* on God,

[34] It "is not what we call our body, but what we call our soul or our thought" (AT IXB 10; CSM 184). This demonstrates the interchangeability of the terms soul/mind/thinking thing for Descartes.

but has further established he was made in the *image* of his Creator, and thus has a *likeness* to God that is more evident through the term soul[35].

To summarize what he has learned of the nature of the human soul thus far, Descartes asserts:

> I understand that I am a thing which is incomplete and dependent on another and which aspires without limit to even greater and better things; but I also understand at the same time that [H]e on whom I depend has within [H]im all those greater things, not just indefinitely and potentially but actually and infinitely, and hence that [H]e is God (AT VII 51; C. 41).

In the passage above, Descartes recaps what has already been established, that his being is incomplete and dependent on God, and in this way is in a continual relationship with God. What is more, this passage also introduces another aspect of his relationship with God. According to Descartes, we "aspire without limit to even greater and better things" and God, by definition of His nature, "has within [H]im all those greater things" (AT VII 51; C. 41). From this we know that the relationship between the soul and God is beyond mere dependence and preservation of existence, but also that the entire being of the thinking thing is oriented towards its Creator – that is, we aspire towards God, and it is part of our very nature to be in relationship with Him; thus, establishing an unavoidable theocentrism.

[35] While at this stage Descartes has only established his own being and God's Being, we can speculate that if Descartes is to establish other men with his same nature, they would also be made in the image and likeness of God. So, while Descartes is writing in terms of the meditator's recognition of his own personal nature, we know that these things are true, not only of his own soul, but of the human soul. And so, this examination of the nature of his being, is equally as much an examination into the nature of our being as human beings. This continual and dependent relationship between God and Descartes is one that exists between each one of us and God. As such, the nature of the human being is oriented towards God.

4.2 The Relationship Between Natural Light and the Infinite

One of the most notable aspects of Descartes' Meditations is his continuous appeal to '*lumen naturale'* – natural light. Throughout contemporary scholarship, there have been various interpretations of Descartes' appeal to natural light, or reason, in his establishment of metaphysical truths. In particular, the relationship between the role of natural light and God has been a topic of discussion for many scholars, including Pope John Paul II. In addition to the accusation of Descartes marking the shift in towards anthropocentric thought, Pope John Paul II addresses Descartes as "the father of modern rationalism" (52). This modern rationalism according to the late pope is the elevation of reason to the extent that "only that which corresponds to human thought makes sense" (51). In his interpretation of Descartes' appeal to natural light, in similar fashion to his interpretations of many other aspects of Descartes' thought, Pope John Paul II separates and removes God from the context in order to present a secular picture of Cartesian philosophy. As we have already seen in other instances, the removal of God from Cartesian thought is unfounded, and there is no exception in this case. As we will see in this section, while Descartes does employ rationalism and uses natural light as his primary tool for establishing truth, it is not the case that a removal of God from reason follows. Rather, through an examination of Descartes' appeal to natural light, the necessary relationship between God and reason will be exposed.

Let us begin by turning our attention towards Christia Mercer's secular interpretation of Descartes' appeal to natural light as outlined in her contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes' Meditations*. In her analysis of Descartes' *Meditations* in comparison to Augustinianism and Platonism, Mercer asserts that Descartes "appropriates much of the language and imagery of Christian spirituality", through the use of terms such as "natural light", while simultaneously leaving out any mention of the root of the Christian meditative tradition, which is

"divine love" (39). Even more so than the neglect of divine love, Mercer argues, is Descartes' removal of divine intervention as "a requisite for illumination" of reason: "Descartes ignores the standard Christian need for intervention and relies instead on a purer form of Platonist intellectualism, according to which the intellect needs no such help" (41). Mercer goes as far to assert that Descartes suggests his "first glimpse of God" is one that he arrived at through his own intellect alone, with no need of "divine help" (41). Mercer's analysis of a God-less rationalism employed by Descartes is a similar interpretation that Pope John Paul II proposes. However, this is far from the unanimous understanding of Descartes' appeal to reason. In order to understand the role of God within Cartesian rationalism, we will look at the analyses offered by other commentators, such as Stephen Menn, Saja Parvizian, and John Cottingham.

In her analysis, Mercer does raise a valid concern of Descartes' use of Christian imagery and appeal to God, while leaving out reference to the *love* of God – a more than important aspect of Christianity. However, Stephen Menn in his book *Descartes and Augustine* provides us with some insight into why this is the case for Descartes. According to Menn:

> There is no question about the fact that Descartes tries to keep revealed theology out of his philosophy. While he everywhere shows the highest respect for Christian theology, he everywhere makes it clear that it is none of his business (322).

The reason for this separation is Descartes' acknowledgement that divine wisdom – such as the understanding of divine love – can only be acquired through grace, and thus is immune to the method he is establishing (323). As such, the *Meditations* as an exercise of truths that can be established by natural light, must stay clear of attempting to establish anything which can only be revealed by the grace of God. Thus, Descartes' lack of mention of divine love is not a rejection of Christian foundations, but rather an act of respect for revealed theology, that which can only be known through grace.

In regards to Mercer's claim that Descartes arrives at the establishment of God, which marks a crucial turning point in his escape from skepticism, through his intellect alone, Saja Parvizian offers a response. According to Parvizian, Descartes' escape from Skepticism cannot be attributed to reason completely independent of God, but was only possible through "*indirect divine intervention"* (143). Parvizian's reasoning for this is due to Descartes' conclusion that he cannot be the cause of his own idea of God, but only God Himself could be (143). Parvizian asserts "given that Descartes cannot be causally responsible for the idea of God, God must have placed the idea of Himself" which therefore necessitates divine intervention, albeit an indirect form, in Descartes' establishment of an external and independently existing Being (143). Due to this, Parvizian argues, "it is misleading to claim that Descartes fully proves—through the natural light—that God exists" (143).

Although Parvizian brings attention to the necessity of God in Descartes' escape from skepticism through the presence of an indirect divine interventionism, he maintains a separation between natural light and God. Although arguing a different point, both Mercer and Parvizian are projecting a modern God-less rationalism onto Descartes' thought. They have both separated natural light and divine intervention as mutually exclusive. As Cottingham explains, for Descartes, "the religious connotations of the imagery of light and darkness would have been inescapable" given the "age of faith" in the seventeenth century (Context, History, and Interpretation 48). This is also not a case where Descartes would be "appropriating" such a term given his purposeful use of the term '*tenebrae*' or 'darkness' which carries a very deep religious significance given its use during the liturgies of Holy Week in describing "the 'darkness' that fell over the land at the death of Christ" (Cottingham, Context, History, and Interpretation 47). In fact, Descartes utilizes this liturgical meaning to signify that "the darkness of ignorance and confusion will be dispelled by the 'immense light' that appears at the end of the Third

Meditation" – 'immense light' referring to God (Cottingham, Context, History, and Interpretation 47). Given this religious significance in Descartes' chosen terminology along with the intimate relationship that we have examined between the soul and God, we must not make the mistake in overlooking the relationship between God and natural light. Reason need not be, and is not, something entirely distanced from God. According to Cottingham, Descartes' "encounter with the divine involves much more than detached, abstract reasoning, and is grounded in something like a directly apprehended relationship, that of creature to creator" (Cottingham, Context, History, and Interpretation 49).

As such, we must not force Descartes to choose between the modern dilemma of reason *or* God, but instead understand the relationship between reason *and* God as is presented to us in the text. We must understand God as "the source of the 'light of reason' that drives Cartesian science", not as something removed from reason (Cottingham, Context, History, and Interpretation 49). As we have seen in the Third Meditation, Descartes begins to understand the foundational and intimate relationship between the nature of his soul and God; God is both Creator and Preserver of Descartes' being on whom is imprinted the mark of the Craftsman, and who is made in the image and likeness of God. And since reason is a faculty of the soul, it is not exempt, but rather participates in this essential relationship between God and man. There is not a choice to be made here between divine intervention *or* reason as Mercer and Parvizian suggest, but rather a clear understanding that reason, by its very nature, participates in a relationship with God; reason itself is a form of indirect divine interventionism.

If we return to Menn's distinction between revealed theology and philosophy, and thus the distinction between natural light and divine wisdom, given what we have just established, we can further see how natural light need not be excluded from partaking in the Divine. As we have said,

the use of natural light partakes in an *indirect* form of divine intervention, so, divine wisdom – that which is revealed only by the grace of God – is thus a form of *direct* divine intervention.

4.3 Revisiting the Discussion of the Cogito

In Chapter Two of this thesis, I argued that the cogito of the *Meditations* – 'I am, I exist" – differs from the form of the cogito of Descartes' preceding and subsequent publications in order to emphasize the metaphysical significance over the epistemological task of the text. Further, I argued that in reading the cogito of the *Meditations* through this metaphysical lens, we can understand it to be a foreshadowing of relationship between God and the soul that becomes evident in the Third Meditation. Now that we have examined this relationship, I would like to revisit the discussion of the cogito.

In Chapter Two, I proposed that the cogito of the *Meditations*, given its Latin form, can be interpreted as "God is, so I exist"[36]. Through our examination of the nature of our soul in relation to God, it became clear that the existence of God necessarily precedes the existence of the being whom He created, in this sense, it is undeniable that God precedes the soul. However, through this examination, it should also become clear that God is also *known* to Descartes before the self is. We will now examine the claim that God is *known* before the self.

To begin, let us look at Descartes' conversation with Burman in 1648, where in discussing the knowledge of God over self Descartes explains that "the method and order of discovery is one thing, and that of exposition is another" (AT V 153; CSMK 338). As such, we must not take the self to be primary to God simply because the self is known first according to the order of discovery in the *Meditations*.

[36] See Chapter Two, page 37.

If we refer back to our examination of Descartes' contemplation of God, we will recall that Descartes' awareness of the lacking nature of his being – which plays a critical role in his establishment of truth – is only realized in light of his idea of God who is wholly perfect[37]. He later discovers that not only is his understanding of self attributed to God, but further that his entire existence is dependent on God. As John Cottingham tells us:

> For Descartes, my own existence may be the first thing I come to know, but as soon as I reflect on it I see that I could at any moment slip out of existence were there not an independent sustaining force to preserve me. I owe my being to God, the infinite Creator of all things (Cartesian Reflections 259).

Given this, we begin to develop a clearer picture of the proper order of exposition. It will always remain the case that the self is established first in the order of discovery in the *Meditations*, but it is primary neither in terms of importance nor existence of. Rather, what is primary in both importance and existence for Descartes, is, always has been, and always will be God Himself.

In the first volume of his book *Descartes' Philosophy Interpreted According to the Order od Reasons*, Martial Gueroult address this exact issue of the primacy of God over the self:

> *In fact, I cannot think of myself without the idea of the perfect*, for originally I have no consciousness of myself except as an imperfect being; and this consciousness is impossible without the prior knowledge of the idea of the perfect: "My notion of the infinite is in some way prior in me to my notion of the finite" (158).

This necessary acknowledgement of the primacy of God within the *Meditations* further imposes itself on the cogito:

> The idea of the perfect is a condition of the cogito, and the perfect being is the absolute reason of my thinking self, a relative nature. If it is thus, if the thinking self can no more be separated from the perfect being than the abstract can be separated from the concrete, or the relative reason from the absolute reason, or a mode from its substance, it is clear that the idea of the perfect, originally present at the core of my self, must also be originally present at the core of the inquiry (Gueroult 158).

[37] See Gueroult, *Descartes' Philosophy Interpreted According to the Order of Reasons*, Volume I, 'The Soul and God, pg. 158-160.

As is evident through this discussion, the self cannot be known apart from the Infinite. Thus, we must not separate the cogito from the Infinite and incorrectly elevate knowledge of self above knowledge of God. When we do separate the cogito from the primacy of God, Gueroult explains we are left with only "an unfinished character that is insufficient by itself, for it cannot conceive itself nor subsist detached from the infinite" (160).

This is exactly where the secular interpretations of the cogito and an insistence on imposing a false primacy of self on Cartesian thought has left us, with an insufficient and incomplete philosophy; which is arguably something that would be completely unrecognizable to Descartes himself. We must put God back in His proper place within Descartes' philosophy, beginning with the understanding that God is primary in importance and reality within the *Meditations*. In this way we can understand even the cogito of the *Meditations* as a declaration of "God is, so I am".

4.4 Summary

As demonstrated in this chapter, the theocentrism of the *Meditations* is evident in many aspects. If we focus on the text itself rather than imposing our own secular interpretations, the primacy of God is exposed. As we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, when we begin to explore the relationship between God and the thinking thing, our understanding of the nature of the thinking thing transitions from a technical list of faculties to that of a soul made in the image and likeness of God that engages in a continual relationship with its Creator. We can understand God as an externally independently existing Being, while the soul is external yet dependent on God. Descartes begins to recognize his relationship with God not only as Creator-created, but God as both his Creator and Preserver. As such his being is entirely dependent on God, and therefore, God precedes the self. Further, even Descartes' utilization of reason has a theocentric

nature. While contemporary scholars have attempted to rid the rationalistic method of the *Meditations* of God, we can see through the use of Descartes' intentional use of the term *'lumen naturale'* that even reason has a relationship to God. As we have discussed, reason, or natural light, can be understood as an indirect form of the indirect interventionism of God, as God is the source of reason for Descartes. Thus, reaffirming the theocentrism of the text. As we have further seen, through this lens, we can examine the cogito in a new light. When we revert back to the theocentric nature of Cartesian thought, his first established truth – the existence of the self – remains primary only in the order of discover, rather than primary in terms of importance or the existence of. Given this, as well as an understanding of the transition between the cogito of the *Discourse* to that of the *Meditations*, we can see the '*Ego sum, ego existo'* as a foreshadowing of the theocentrism that is firmly established in the Third Meditations, but bears significance on the text as a whole.

Conclusion

In his letter to Father Mersenne in March 1642, Descartes expresses a concern: "I see that people find it easy to misunderstand what I write. Truth is indivisible, so the slightest thing which is added or taken away falsifies it" (AT III 544; CSMK 211). As we have seen through the example of Pope John Paul II, these misunderstandings of Descartes' writings have accumulated into interpretation of Cartesian thought that would be entirely unrecognizable to Descartes himself.

Throughout this thesis I have argued against the criticism raised against Descartes by Pope John Paul II in order to dismantle his accusation that Descartes "inaugurated the great anthropocentric shift in philosophy" (51). In addition to my rebuttal of the late pope, I have also examined the *Meditations* through its primary metaphysical aim in order to demonstrate the overwhelming theocentric nature of the work.

In order to achieve this, I presented an analytical exposition of the first three Meditations, in which it becomes clear the epistemological task set in the First Meditation does not set the foundation of Descartes' upcoming epistemology, but rather, it sets the foundation upon which Descartes will build his unshakeable metaphysics; a metaphysics which is rooted in the primacy of God.

In Chapter One, I examined Descartes' intended aim of his *Meditations on First Philosophy* through an exposition of the First Meditation. Further, I distinguished between the epistemological aim of the *Discourse* from the metaphysical aim of the *Meditations*. From there, I analysed the variances in the reception of Cartesian philosophy by the Catholic Church in the 17th Century and the contemporary Catholic Church. As we saw in that discussion, the concerns of the 17th Century Church were largely surrounding Descartes' rejection of Aristotelian

principles and the subsequent worry of compatibility between Cartesian principles with Church dogma, such as that of transubstantiation. Whereas the contemporary concerns, as represented through the concerns of Pope John Paul II, focus on a perceived anthropocentric nature of Cartesian philosophy.

In Chapter Two, I examined Descartes' first ascent out of skepticism in the Second Meditation. Here, Descartes established his first two explicitly stated truths – that he exists, and that he exists as a thinking thing. From here, I discussed the transition of the cogito from the form of 'I think, therefore I am' in the *Discourse* to 'I am, I exist' in the *Meditations*, suggesting this transition follows from the metaphysical aim of the *Meditations*; and further, that this transition foreshadows the important metaphysical truth that is revealed in the Third Meditation, that 'God is, so I exist'.

In Chapter Three, I examined the Third Meditation as the turning point of the text, where the metaphysical nature of the *Meditations* becomes evident. As was demonstrated, the Third Meditation is not only pivotal in allowing Descartes to establish his certainty of the existence of something external and independent of him, but it reveals his reliance on something greater than himself to move past his incomplete knowledge. Here, Descartes presents his causal argument for the existence of God. From which follows an increased understanding of the nature of his own being as containing an innate idea of the Infinite.

In Chapter Four, we examined in-depth this increased understanding of the nature of the thinking thing, and more importantly, the relationship between God and the thinking thing. In this discussion, it became clear that God exists externally and independently of Descartes, but that Descartes, while existing externally, is entirely dependent on God, both in terms of creation and preservation of his being. Moreover, Descartes recognizes that he is made in the image and likeness of God, and as such, his being is oriented towards the Infinite. From here, we also

discussed the relationship between reason, or natural light, and God in order to demonstrate that God need not be excluded from reason, and rather the use of natural light, given its source in God, is a kind of indirect divine interventionism. Finally, we revisited the discussion on the cogito. In this discussion, the incomplete knowledge of the cogito void of God became evident, and primacy of God in both the importance and reality of became unavoidable. Thus, reaffirming once more the theocentrism of the *Meditations*.

This understanding of God as cause and preserver, in whom the thinking thing was made in the image and likeness of, adds a new dimension in which we should view the entirety of the *Meditations* from. While it can be argued that the main metaphysical purpose of the *Meditations* is to establish the nature of the human being, Descartes has shown repeatedly that the nature of man is known only through a primary understanding of the Creator and Preserver of man – that is God. If you remove, or even decrease the significance of God in Descartes' *Meditations*, you are left only with a failing epistemological pursuit that ends with no more than an acknowledgement of the existence of the self. Even so, this acknowledgement is limited to solely my own existence as some *thinking thing* which remains unknowable, since all that Descartes is able to understand beyond this is directly attributed to God. Without a proper understanding of the role of God in this text, we are left with the egocentric, individualistic reading of the *Meditations* that many scholars have come to accept. This anthropocentric nature of Cartesian thought comes from a misunderstanding and neglect of the primacy of God in the Meditations, that even Catholic thinkers have fallen prey to. We, as readers of Descartes, must not reduce the *Meditations on First Philosophy* to only the First Meditation, removed of God. When we remove God from the *Meditations*, it becomes an unrecognizable piece of philosophy. However, when one reads the *Meditations* through the proper lens which emphasizes the significance of God throughout the entirety of the text – from the cogito to the establishment of the external world – we not only

come away with an inspiring epistemological pursuit, but also an important metaphysical account of the nature of our souls and the continual relationship between each one of us and God as our Cause and Preserver. Descartes himself emphasizes this through the concluding words of the Third Meditation:

> I should like to pause here and spend some time in the contemplation of God; to reflect on his attributes, and to gaze with wonder and adoration on the beauty of this immense light, so far as the eye of my darkened intellect can bear it. For just as we believe through faith that the supreme happiness of the next life consists solely in the contemplation of the divine majesty, so experience tells us that this same contemplation, albeit much less perfect, enables us to know the greatest joy of which we are capable in this life (AT VII 52; C. 41).

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