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Meaning and Objective Being: Descartes and His Sources

CALVIN NORMORE

I

The view that concepts are mental words and that thinking them is the forming of mental sentences was a commonplace within late Scholasticism. Though Descartes never explicitly adopts such a picture of thought, what he says about thinking can be explored with such a picture as a guide and many of the problems that arise for an account of the functioning of Cartesian ideas are also problems that arise for theories of the meaning and the reference of linguistic expressions. This suggests that some of the more striking features of Descartes' account of ideas may be features designed to provide an account of those aspects of thinking whose analogues for language are explored within theories of meaning and of reference. This essay is a partial exploration of that suggestion.

Descartes' doctrine of ideas is out of fashion. We do not think meaning is in our heads or that reference requires (something like) causal contact with the referent. Add these worries to the more traditional ones about the way ideas stand between us and the world and one has a strong case, at least prima facie, for consigning to the scrap heap a view that makes peculiar mental quasi entities, which are both private and innate, central to cognition. But this judgment of Descartes' view may be both unfair and wrong. Descartes develops a surprisingly powerful and sophisticated attempt to explain why think-

ing is informative and why it is informative about objects. Any adequate theory must deal both with issues of meaning and issues of references. When it is considered as an attempt to do both of these tasks, Descartes' view is not only ambitious but also attractive.

Thoughts, like words, refer and mean. A theory of reference is a theory of what expressions are about—a theory about how, in general, expressions connect with the world and, in particular, with which features or parts of the world an expression connects. It can crudely be distinguished from a theory of meaning, a theory about what a speaker or hearer who is proficient in the language understands. In the light of this distinction, we can further distinguish two extreme theories.

The "purely referential" theory is inspired by the view advanced in William Ockham's *Summa Logicae*, but has affinities with a number of twentieth-century accounts as well. This theory divides expressions into syncategorematic terms like *and*, *not*, *on*, and *all* and categorematic expressions like *man*, *moon*, and *man on the moon*. Categorematic expressions in turn divide into absolute and connotative. Connotative terms are made up of absolute terms and syncategoremata. If *man* and *moon* are absolute terms, *man on the moon* would be an example of a connotative term. Absolute terms are rigid designators. They pick out certain objects, the ones to which they are first applied, and if they are proper absolute terms that is all they do. If they are general terms, absolute terms pick out the objects to which they are first applied and all others of the same kind. Absolute terms have no a priori criteria of application; they are like labels.

The second extreme theory concentrates on the holism of meaning. With this second theory, picture language becomes like a map without a legend. Expressions mean what they do in virtue of their relations to other expressions and refer as they refer in virtue of what they mean. The bigger and more detailed the map, the fewer bits of the world it could plausibly be a map of. One might dream of a map so rich that only one way of assigning referents to its symbols would preserve accuracy, a map so rich it could only map one terrain. Similarly, one might hope that perhaps only one way of assigning meaning to words would give us a language whose analytic sentences are all true.

The hope associated with the second theory of language is almost surely vain. If the only constraint on meaning is that it determine reference in such a way that all the analytic sentences (or for that matter any consistent set of sentences) of the language come out true, then if the language is first-order or can be modeled in set theory, there will be many adequate models of any consistent set of its sen-

tences. There will therefore be many ways of assigning referents (and, if that is what determines reference, meanings) to its terms that will meet the constraint.

But the first, purely referential picture of language suffers a difficulty akin to the one we've just seen, namely that, even if the references of rigid terms are fixed, one could be completely deceived about how they are fixed. Since absolute terms have no a priori criteria of application, I may be completely wrong about which interpretation of the terms is picked out and still accept exactly the same sentences. I believe that Jonah was a man. If "Jonah" in fact referred to a dog and "man" referred to dogs, there would be a (peculiar sense) in which my belief would be true. And yet surely I would be deeply deceived.

The lesson suggested by these difficulties is that, if it is to justify our confidence that we know what we are talking about, our account of meaning must be richer than either the quantificational holist or the pure referentialist will allow. We need to get at least some meaning back inside our heads so that what determines reference can both connect firmly to the world and be grasped a priori. It is this Janus-like role that Descartes intended his ideas to play.

II

Although the Third Meditation is subtitled "of God, that he exists," by far the greater part of it is devoted to the nature and behavior of ideas. The proof of God's existence emerges as an application of a general account of ideas.

Having turned his attention to himself at the very beginning of the Third Meditation Descartes discovers that he is certain that he is a *res cogitans* and that "those modes of thinking which I call sensings and imagining insofar as they are only some modes of thinking are in me." He then adduces his rule of certainty "that everything is true which I clearly and distinctly perceive."

Truth and falsity, then as now, are ordinarily properties of judgments or sentences and it would be natural to suppose the scope of the clarity and distinctness rule to be judgments. Strictly speaking that is true, but Descartes also admits

> . . . some other material falsity in ideas when they represent a nonthing as a thing [*cum non rem tanquam rem repraesentant*]: so for example the ideas which I have of heat and cold are so little clear and distinct that from them I am unable to learn whether cold may be a privation of heat or heat a privation of cold or both may be real qualities or neither. And because there can be no

ideas which are not as if to be of things [*Et quia nullae ideae nisi tanquam rerum esse passunt*] if it is indeed true that cold is nothing other than the privation of heat the idea which represents that to me as something real and positive would not be called false without merit and so of the others. (AT VII, 43–44)[1]

Descartes' claim that "there can be no ideas which are not as if to be of things" is, as Margaret Wilson noted, the claim that ideas as such have what she calls "representational character." They "are received by the mind *as if exhibiting to it* various things or as if making things *cognitively accessible*."[2] For Descartes, ideas are not *merely modi cogitandi* ready to be reflected upon. They purport to be about things, and it is this purporting that makes material falsity possible.

In the *Conversation with Burman* Descartes indicates that an idea is not materially false because it represents a nonexistent as an existent, but rather that an idea is materially false when what it represents (that is, what it purports to be an idea of) does not have the *reality* it seems to have.

For example: I may consider the idea of colour, and say that it is a thing or a quality; or I may say that the colour itself, which is represented by this idea, is something of the kind. For example, I may say that whiteness is a colour; and even if I do not refer this idea to anything outside myself—even if I do not say or suppose that there is any white thing—I may still make a mistake in the abstract, with regard to whiteness itself and its nature or the idea I have of it. (JC, 11)[3]

Ideas that are not clear and distinct may be materially false. They will be materially false if what they represent is not as represented. Whiteness, for example, is represented by our usual idea of it as a color—which is a quality—but it is Descartes' view that the only real qualities of matter are size, shape, and motion. Hence our usual idea of whiteness is materially false.

This discussion raises two questions. The first concerns the notion of reality at work here and the second concerns the ontology which Descartes supposes in his examples.

The notion that there are degrees of reality is an ancient one which is enshrined in medieval speculation through Anselm of Canterbury's discussion in his *Monologion*, of the pure perfections, and is developed by John Duns Scotus and his followers. It is, I believe, closely related to the notion of ontological dependence and it applies in the first instance not to objects but to natures. A nature A has a higher degree of reality than a nature B if when we analyze B we discover that it depends on A, that is, if an adequate account of what B is requires a reference to its dependence on A.

For Descartes God has the highest degree of reality. That is because God is absolutely independent. God could exist without anything else. Below God in the ontological hierarchy come finite mind(s) and extension. What each of these *is* cannot be adequately described without mentioning each one's relation to God. Next in turn come the modes of minds and the modes of extension. The natures of these in turn canot be adequately described without mentioning that they are modes of minds and extension, respectively. They have, thus, less reality than minds and extension themselves.

It is not the case that to have reality is to exist. Descartes, for example, thinks the chimera has reality but doesn't exist. But ideas that represent what has reality are ideas that could represent things. While having reality does not entail existing it does entail possibly existing. I will return to this connection further on.

The discussion of material falsity in Meditation III is part of Descartes' program for getting us to reject the "commonsense" ontology of things and their accidents in favor of an ontology in which the only real properties are "mathematicized": If this is so then we have reason to think that our ideas will have a surface structure and a deep structure. On the surface we will find ideas of whatever the commonsense ontology posits, but these ideas will be of two kinds. One kind, those ideas which are clear and distinct, will be ideas of the ingredients of the new ontology. The others, those ideas which are obscure or indistinct, will be so because they reduce structure—they represent a privation (which is a complex of a positive idea and a negation) as something positive, or a sensation (which is a complex motion) as something simple.

The possibility that ideas may represent without there being anything that is represented raises the question of the nature of the property of representing which ideas are said to have. What is it about an idea that makes it as if to be of things [*tamquam rerum esse*].

The key to answering this question lies in Descartes' remark that "some of these [thoughts] are as if images of things, to which ones alone the name of idea applies properly" (AT VII, 37). In making this claim Descartes is availing himself of a rich Scholastic tradition of discussion of the character of images. One prominent position within late Scholasticism requires that an image be causally dependent on the thing imaged and appropriately similar to it. These are jointly necessary and sufficient for one object to be an image of another. In this view, there is nothing intentional about the image relation: if the causal and similarity conditions are met, one thing is just an image of another.

The view that ideas are like images leads Descartes in what may seem to us a curious direction—namely, to distinguish between the

formal and the objective realities of ideas. He is attempting to determine whether "some of those things the ideas of which are in me exist outside me" (AT VII, 40). If ideas are modifications of thinking, Descartes claims there is no hierarchy among them. But when we consider them as representations, they can be hierarchically arranged according to their degrees of objective reality.

> For without doubt those which exhibit substances to me are something more and, so I may say contain more reality objectively in themselves than those which represent only modes or accidents; and again that through which I understand some highest God, eternal, infinite, omniscient, omnipotent, and the creator of all things which there are besides himself certainly has more objective reality in itself than those through which finite substances are exhibited. (AT VII, 40)

The next step in the argument is to claim a principle connecting causes and their effects:

> For it is manifest to the natural light that there should be at least as much being [*esse*] in an efficient and total cause as in the effect of that cause. (Ibid.)

and to extend it to the objective reality of ideas and the causes of that:

> And this not only is clearly true of those effects of which the reality is actual and formal but also of ideas in which only objective reality is considered. (Ibid., 41)

Moreover just as the cause of something that is actual must be something actual so, surprisingly, must the cause of the objective reality of an idea be something actual.

> Nor ought I to suspect that since the reality which I consider in my ideas may be only objective, it is not necessary that the same reality may be formally in the causes of those ideas but suffices if it is in them also objectively. For inasmuch as this objective mode of being applies to ideas from their nature so the formal mode of being applies to the causes of the ideas, at least the first and principal one from their nature. (Ibid.)

This passage contains the core of Descartes' argument. It is because it is of the nature of the first and principal cause of an idea (or perhaps more accurately of the objective being of an idea) to be real formally that he can conclude that the cause of an idea of infinite perfection must be infinitely perfect, that is, must be God.

A superficial reading of this crucial passage might suggest that all

ideas have objective reality, indeed that it is of the nature of an idea to have objective reality. But in his reply to Arnauld, Descartes clearly says something that entails the denial of this. Arnauld objects to Descartes' doctrine of material falsity with this argument:

> For what is the idea of cold? Cold itself inasmuch as it is objectively in the intellect. But if cold is a privation it cannot be in the intellect through an idea whose objective being is a positive being. Therefore if cold is only a privation there will never be a positive idea of it and so none which is materially false. (AT VII, 206)

Descartes' reply is that the idea of cold is not cold itself objectively in the intellect

> . . . for it often happens in obscure and confused ideas among which those of heat and cold are to be numbered that they are referred [*referantur*] to another thing [*quid*] rather than to that of which they are in truth the idea. Thus if cold is only a privation, the idea of cold is not cold itself as it is objectively in the intellect but another thing [*quid*] which is wrongly taken for that privation; certainly it is some sensation [*sensus*] having no being outside the intellect. (Ibid., 233)

The idea of cold then does not contain objectively the privation that is cold, but contains (is referred to) a sensation, which is the sort of thing for which the distinction between being objectively and being formally does not arise.

Riverside Park has formal reality (that of a mode of extension) and it exists. If I think about it, that is, form the idea of Riverside Park, then it has objective reality as my idea. In Descartes' view my sensation is an *ens positivum*, a positive being, but it has no being outside the intellect. Suppose then that I feel warm (that there is a sensation of warmth in me). Suppose that I think about it—think, for example, that this sensation of warmth is pleasant. Do I now form an idea in which the sensation of warmth is present objectively? If that were what happened then the epistemological transparency so crucial to getting the Cartesian program going would be undermined. On the assumption that it is not what would happen, my idea of this sensation of warmth is just the sensation itself. Descartes does not, of course, hold that thinking about feeling warm is feeling faintly warm. There may be all sorts of ideas of a sensation other than the sensation itself. But it seems a sensation is an idea of itself. While Descartes never actually says this, he claims that in some cases ideas are not distinct from their objects. He writes

> I claim that we have ideas not only of all that is in our intellect, but also of all that is in the will. For we cannot will anything without knowing that we will it, nor could we know this without an idea; but I do not claim that the idea is different from the action itself. (K, 93; Letter to Mersenne, 28 January 1641)

It is a good thing that Descartes does not believe that the distinction between objective and formal reality extends to all ideas. In Meditation III Descartes claims of ideas that

> . . . if indeed they are false, that is, represent no things, it is known to me by the natural light that they proceed from nothing, that is they are not in me from any cause other than something lacking in my nature. (AT VII, 44)

But from this and the principle that there is no more reality objectively in the effect than formally in the cause we can conclude at once that there is no more than zero reality objectively in false ideas. It follows, as Margaret Wilson has shown, that we must distinguish the representative character of Cartesian ideas from their objective reality. All ideas represent, or purport to be about, something. Some ideas really represent something and it is those which have objective reality.

If the Cartesian dream of an a priori science can be realized, there must in principle be a way of telling whether an idea has objective reality or not. Descartes thinks he has such a method but what he says leaves it unclear just what it is. Of his idea of God in Meditation III he says

> . . . since it is maximally clear and distinct and contains more of objective reality than any other there is none more true in itself nor in which less suspicion of falsity arises. (AT VII, 46)

This makes it sound as though both clarity and distinctness and fullness of objective reality are grounds for thinking an idea true; but one needs to have grounds for thinking an idea true to be justified in thinking it has objective reality. This is not devastating. The problem with materially false ideas is that they are so obscure there is no telling what they contain objectively. But Descartes thinks that his idea of God is clear enough for him to see that it is certainly about an infinite being of the greatest perfection. But since the content of that idea specifies its object uniquely, in seeing that its objective content is the infinite being, one sees that it has the maximum objective reality. When an idea is clear and distinct, we can see how it represents—whether it represents by presenting us with an object objectively, or simply by itself being an object of a certain kind. Because this distinction is manifest we can tell when we require an explanation for the objective reality of an idea.

III

Almost all of the research on Scholastic background of this aspect of Cartesianism has focused on Descartes' debt to Thomas or to Francesco Suarez. There is reason for this. Descartes was educated in a Jesuit College (La Flèche) and the Jesuits were heavily influenced by the intellectual climate of the Spanish universities. In Spain, Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* had largely replaced the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard as the keystone of theological training: Aquinas's thought had indeed moved to the center of Scholasticism. Suarez and Aquinas are among the few Scholastics whom Descartes mentions by name. But Thomism was not the only current within sixteenth-century Scholasticism and Suarez was far from the dominant intellectual figure. Because Descartes was concerned not to appear learned in Scholastic philosophy, and because we now know little about late Scholasticism, it is difficult to know where to turn. Rather than working back from Descartes I propose to begin in the fourteenth century and work forward.

The problem of objective being and its relation to being simpliciter arises within medieval philosophy within two contexts. The first is a context in debt to the *Timaeus*. In the *Timaeus* the Demiurgus looks to the *eidoi* to fashion the universe. The Forms have whatever ontological status they have independent of any mind. Philo of Alexandria in his *De Opificio Mundi* moves the Forms into the Divine Mind and there through the influence of Clement of Alexandria and others they are firmly lodged by the time of Augustine. They lodge uneasily, though, because the multiplicity of forms troubles the simplicity of the divine mind.

The second context within which objective being appears is that of accounting for informative thought. Alexander of Aphrodisias' *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima* develops the doctrine that to understand something is literally to have its form in the intellect. Now of course the form cannot be in the intellect in the way in which it is in matter or we would literally become what we thought about. So it must be there in some unusual way. This problem and the related problem of how we can understand general terms if everything is particular seems to have inspired Avicenna's doctrine that a nature is in and of itself neither general nor particular. (Cf. *Sufficientiae*, pt. 1.) When it exists *in rebus* it is a particular, when it is *in intellectu* it is general.

But that is all prehistory and is assumed by the actors in the story I want now to tell. That story begins with Book I, Distinction 35, of Duns Scotus' *Commentary on the Sentences* where he asks the question "Whether in God there are eternal relations to everything knowable as quidditatively known."

Scotus' answer is that God is related to the knowable things in the third mode of relation (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 6, 258, para. 31).[4] This sort of relation is one which can be created or destroyed without change in at least one of the relata. Scotus claims that God does not change when He creates and when He determines what can be created (in an instant of nature). It is this last claim—that what *can be* created is dependent on God—which makes Scotus' position striking. He writes:

> . . . it can be conceded that there are eternal relations in God to things known [*cognita*] but not prior naturally to those things known as objects [*in ratione obiectorum*]. This can be maintained thus: God in the first instant [of nature] understands his essence under a simply absolute [non-relational] concept [*ratione*]; in a second instant he produces a stone in esse intelligibili and understands the stone so that there is a relation in the stone understood to the divine understanding but still no relation in the divine understanding to the stone but the divine understanding terminates the relation of the stone as understood to it. (Ibid., vol. 6, 258, para. 32)

A little later Scotus adds, speaking of "idea" in a sense he attributes to Augustine, "it seems that the stone understood can be called an idea" (ibid., vol. 6, 261, para. 40).

Scotus employs an account of knowledge in terms of objects with some sort of *esse cognitum* for the human intellect as well. For example in his *Lectura* I (Distinction 36, Question 1) he writes:

> . . . if it were supposed that I had been from eternity and that from eternity I had understood a rose then from eternity I understood a rose according to its *esse essentiae* and according to *esse existentiae* and however it had no *esse* except [*esse*] *cognitum*. . . . Hence the terminus of understanding is *esse essentiae* or *esse existentiae*—and however that which is the object of the understanding has only *esse diminutum* in the understanding. (Ibid., vol. 6, 469, para. 26)

A little later in the text he replies to the objection that if something is produced it must have *esse reale*. He replies:

> . . . it should be said that such is the being of something produced according as such a producing *esse* produces itself; here however a thing has *esse entitatem* in a respect [*secundum quid*] as it founds a relation of reason and therefore there is produced intelligibly [*intelligibiliter*] that whose *esse* is in a respect [*secundum quid*]. (Ibid.)

Scotus' doctrine requires that intentional objects, objects with *esse cognitum* or *esse diminutum*, be caused. The consequence being that objects of thought are in some sense distinct from the mind thinking them, which provoked a reaction. His close student and admirer William of Alnwick devotes five careful *Questiones Disputatae* to the subject. The burden of these questions is to show that the divine ideas are just the divine essence in so complete a way that it makes no sense to speak of them as produced by God. Alnwick is noteworthy not only because he focuses his criticism on the most striking similarity between the Cartesian and Scotist views but because he is, so far as I have been able to discover, among the first and perhaps the first to use the formal and objective terminology in this connection. In asking how the same thought can be a thought of many distinct things, if cognition and *esse cognitum* are the same, Alnwick replies:

> I answer that for some things to be distinguished in being known [*esse cognito*] or being represented [*esse repraesentato*] may happen in two ways: in one way formally . . . [while] . . . in another way some things can be understood to be distinguished in being known [*esse cognito*] objectively because the cognition of them terminates at those distinct things or at the distinction between them. (Alnwick 26)[5]

So far the debate centered on objects of intentional intellectual acts like thinking. But it was soon extended to the status of hallucinations, apparent motion, and other sensory phenomena, and to the status of the objects of statues and paintings. Alnwick himself took the second step—persistently conflating the *esse cognitum* of Scotus's stone with the *esse repraesentatum* of a statue of Caesar. The first step was taken by Peter Aureoli who used the full panoply of illusions and hallucinations to argue for an *esse apparens*.[6] Among the examples Aureoli employed are virtual mirror images (examples he borrowed from Al-Hazen's *Perspectiva*). Objects of thought were in the mind, Aureoli argued, as images are in a mirror. The mirror account of mind is here employed in a precise and technical way.

The next step in the dialectic is the fourteenth-century debate between William Ockham and Walter Chatton, which led to Ockham's conversion away from a Scotist position to one quite different.

Ockham's interest in the queston of objective reality seems to have been motivated both by theological concerns about how God could know particulars and by epistemological worries.

Ockham begins (Primum Sentenitiarum, Distinction 2, Question 8) by considering how we could think about nonexistents including uni-

versals.[7] He concludes that such nonexistents must have *esse cognitum* or *esse objectivum*. Once he has this device available he then extends it (ibid., D. 25 Q. 5) to an account of how God knows each thing, existent or not, and from there to his account of how *we* know particulars. In this early view, for me to be aware of you or of a particular whiteness (note the extension to sensory qualities) is for you or that whiteness to be objectively in my mind.

Walter Chatton objected to objective-existence theories on three grounds. First he charged that they compromised direct realism by making the object of awareness the thing with *esse objectivum* (*Lectura* I, Distinction 3, Question 2).[8] Second, he claimed that objectively existent entities could neither be created nor destroyed (Prol., Q. 2). And, third, he claimed that they are redundant. This last claim is based on the following argument.

If *a* is distinct from *b*, then *a* can exist without *b*. Therefore, if an act of thought were distinct from its intentional object it can exist without it.

But if an act of thought existed without its intentional object it wouldn't be a thought of anything.

This is absurd.

Therefore the intentional object of an act of thought is not distinct from the act of thinking and need not be posited in addition to it.

But Chatton's ultimate argument against the objective-existence theory is to put forward an alternative. He claims that acts of thought are acts-of-thinking-of-a-golden-mountain and are directed to their real objects by their properties, not by being connected to intentional objects.

Ockham accepts Chatton's view in his *Quodlibets* (IV, Question 19) but never quite gets around to explaining how it might work for God, and so even for Ockham's followers the doctrine that there is an ontological status that is the being-of-being-an-object-of-thought remained attractive.

It seems then that as early as 1340 all the ingredients of the Cartesian theory of formal and objective reality—including at least some anticipation of a causal principle connecting the two modes—were in place. It remains only to connect them up with "idea" in the wide Cartesian, rather than in the narrow Augustinian, sense.

Although the conventional wisdom is that Descartes' use of "idea" marks a sharp break with tradition, there is reason to think that there was already a move in that direction much earlier. Francis Mayronnis used "idea," and (in I *Sent.*, D. 36, Q. 3) the enormously influential Durandus of St. Pourcain claims:

It remains therefore that an idea in us is only the object of our intellect on account of which it is necessary to say proportionately that in God an idea . . . is only the object of the divine intellect.[9]

This is not yet the single inner world in which "bodily and perceptual sensations, mathematical truths, moral rules, the idea of God, moods of depression and all the rest of what we now call 'mental' were objects of quasi-observation."[10] It is however a step towards that view, and a step away from the view that individual ideas are exemplars.

There remains the question of spelling out the medieval theory of imagery which underlies Descartes' conception of idea, and the problem of clarifying the notion of eminent containment employed in Descartes' claim that it is only in the case of God that one can argue from the objective reality of the idea to the existence (as contrasted with the formal reality) of its object.

IV

Descartes claims that ideas are "as if images of things" (AT VII, 37). He frequently denies that ideas are similar in nature to images in the imagination (HR II, 37, 52; K, 105). But how can an idea be both like an image and different in kind from anything in the imagination?

The term *image* is used in a rather technical sense within Scholasticism. It enters philosophical discussion by two avenues—commentaries on Genesis (1, 27): "And God created man to his image," and commentaries on Augustine's claim that the human mind is an image of the Trinity (e.g., in Peter Lombard's *Sentences;* I, Distinction 3). The text from Genesis is usually glossed in the light of the sentence that precedes it, which speaks of making man in God's image and likeness and so encourages a distinction between image [*imago*] and likeness [*similitudo*]. Because it presupposes that one immaterial thing can be an image of another, Lombard's discussion of Augustine encourages severing the link between images and perception.

How the distinction between an image and a mere likeness is to be drawn was a matter of controversy during the Middle Ages. Some (William Ockham, for example) held that an image was a likeness produced intentionally by an artisan, or at least used by an agent to call the thing imaged to mind. Others, like Francesco Suarez, insist that "an image involves two relations, one of similarity and one of being produced with that similarity" (*De Mysterio Trinitatis*, bk. 9, chap. 9, p. 5; *Opera Omnia*, 25:747).[11]

Descartes is in the second of the Scholastic traditions. Cartesian images are both similar to and causally connected with what they image, and Cartesian ideas, which are "as if" images, both resemble and are causally connected with what they are ideas of. It is this double relation that enables ideas to play their Janus-like role. Because ideas are connected causally with their objects, they are *about them*, and so there is a nonholistic constraint on "reference." Because ideas resemble their objects, having the idea is having information about the object, and so there is a nonreferential aspect to "meaning."

But just how are the relevant relations of causality and similarity to be spelled out and what role does the concept of objective reality play?

In the Third Meditation Descartes divides ideas into fictitious, adventitious, and innate (HR, 160). Fictitious ideas are always constructed from others by operations of the mind and so their properties should be determined by the powers of the mind and the properties of the ideas out of which they are constructed. Adventitious and innate ideas are thus fundamental. Of adventitious ideas Descartes remarks in the Third Meditation that "even if they proceed from things distinct from me it does not follow that they should be similar to those things" (AT VII, 329). And, as he points out in the *Principles* and in the *Notes Against a Certain Programme,* strictly speaking "nothing reaches our mind from external objects through the organs of sense besides certain corporeal movements" and "even these movements and the figures which arise from them are not conceived by us in the shape they assume in the organs of sense" (HR I, 443). Even the resemblance or similarity of adventitious ideas to the objects conceived is thus not produced by those objects operating on our senses. How then is it produced?

The traditional Scholastic use of the term *idea* is to refer to the exemplars in the mind of God, the divine ideas God creates by looking to these exemplars. But how is it that when God looks to the (a?) horse-exemplar and creates, the creature is a horse and not, say, a goat? Part of the answer should be the conceptual point that, if looking to an exemplar is the way God produces a goat, then that exemplar is a goat-exemplar and not a horse-exemplar. That is just what it is to be an exemplar of a particular sort. Another part of the answer might be had from a story about the nature of the causal connection. Within the scholastic philosophies, the paradigm of causal activity is reproduction. In reproduction among plants and animals, it was believed, it is only if the cause is defective or if something obstructs its activity that an effect not of the same kind as the cause is produced.

In artistic reproduction the prototype or model from which the artist works plays the role of one of the parents in organic reproduction. If the activity is not random but rational, then the effect produced will be of the same kind as the prototype, and only when the skill employed is defective or obstructed will something not of that kind be produced. When an artist works not from a model but from an idea nothing crucial to the account changes. An artist working from an idea may behave just like one working from a model. God is an artist whose skill is neither defective nor capable of being obstructed. Therefore God's products are of the same kind as the divine ideas from which God works. This story and the earlier conceptual point converge to suggest that God's creations and the divine ideas are of the same kind.

Our ideas of things do not usually function as exemplars. If they are causally related to things it is usually as effects rather than as causes. Yet our innate ideas are furnished us by the creator of the objects themselves. Since these ideas are not part of our nature, God does not create them in us simply by creating us. It is plausible to suppose that God furnishes us with an idea of something by looking to the divine idea of that thing and creating a mode of our minds. But if that is so then our ideas are just as much effects of the divine ideas as are the things themselves. In whatever sense the causal relation preserves resemblance our ideas resemble the divine ideas and so, where the divine ideas have been used as exemplars, resemble the objects themselves.

In what does the similarity of idea and object consist? Within the Scholastic tradition, for two things to be similar is for them to have properties in common. But what properties could an idea, a mode of mind, have in common with, say, a mode of extended substance?

One approach to this problem is to focus on the relational properties of the idea and the object and to attempt to locate the idea among other ideas in a way isomorphic to the way the object is located among other objects. But this approach requires taking relations as real, and there is strong pressure within Scholasticism to resist the reification of relations. A very different approach would be to claim baldly that objects and properties can have more than one ontological status and to identify the divine ideas with the objects themselves. On this approach the divine idea of a particular just is that particular with *esse objectivum,* and the divine idea of a nature just is that nature with *esse objectivum.*

There is a close connection between *esse objectivum* and possible existence for Descartes. In the *Rationes* appended to the Replies to the second set of Objections to the *Meditations,* he lays it down as an

axiom that possible or contingent existence is contained in every idea or concept of a thing other than God and that necessary and perfect existence is contained in the idea of God (AT VII, 166). Thus if an idea has objective reality, and is thus *of* a thing, that thing possibly exists. This suggests the equation of the objective reality of an idea with the objective existence (the *esse objectivum*) of its object and the objective existence of an object with the possible existence of that object. The objective reality of an idea of something is then just the possible existence of that thing.

One advantage of this approach is that it connects Descartes' views on objective reality with his views about modality, and so explains why he thinks that objective reality of an idea requires a formally real cause. Descartes believes that not only all that is actual but also all that is possible depend on the divine will. If there were no God nothing would be possible and, had God decided other than as He did, what is possible would be other than as it is. If possible existence requires an actual cause and the objective reality of an idea is just the possible existence of its object, then the objective reality of an idea will require an actual cause that was formally a real cause. And that is Descartes' view.

The equation of the objective reality of an idea of something with the possible existence of that thing invites one to wonder how the criterion of clarity and distinctness could work for ideas. How, on the basis of having a certain mental mode, could one tell that some object is possible? Perhaps the simplest (and perhaps the most naive) way of connecting a mode of mind with an object in such a fashion that the existence of the mode guarantees the possibility of the object is to suppose that the mode just is a contact with the (possible) object. This move was available within the tradition. Indeed it is just this approach which Ockham and his followers take to the problem of how there can be many divine ideas and one utterly simple divine mind. Ockham (in I *Sent.*, D. 35) equates the divine idea of a thing with the thing itself as a possible object, and supposes God to be acquainted with it. To suppose Descartes to have taken this option might be to underestimate the force of the claim that ideas are *modes* of mind, but it was an available option.

Not all of the problems for "Suarezian" theories of imagery arise from puzzles about similarity. It is a central feature of late Scholastic accounts of causation that whatever can be produced through secondary causes can be produced by God acting alone. One consequence of this is that, if ideas are effects, it cannot be both that they are of whatever produced them and that there is an infallible phenomenolog-

ical mark of what they are about. This would pose a serious problem for a theory that hoped to show a general connection between ideas and the existence of the causes of their objective reality. It could be, for all that the objective reality of ideas shows, that there exists only God and the mind having the ideas, and that all the ideas are produced by God directly.

But this is not a problem for Descartes. He is concerned to argue that from the objective reality of our ideas we can infer the existence of God and not the existence of anything else. We can infer to the reality of other things but that, if the argument above is sound, is just their possible existence. For something to be possible only God's power need be actual. Only in the special case of God, Descartes argues in the Fifth Meditation, does possible existence entail actual existence.

It is to deal with the case of an idea of something that does not actually exist but which would, if it did exist, have properties which God does not have, that Descartes distinguishes between having a property formally and having it eminently. If God had not created extended substance, the idea of extended substance would still have objective reality. Moreover we could still have such an idea even though there would be no actual extended thing to cause it. Extended substance would exist eminently, but not formally, in God. The notion of eminence at work here is closely connected with that of degrees of perfection. Central to it is an analogy with someone who has the power to lift, say, one hundred pounds. This person also has the power to lift fifty pounds. The power to lift fifty pounds is not, in this case, really distinct from the power to lift one hundred pounds; if it were, God could conserve the power to lift one hundred pounds while destroying the power to lift fifty, and that is impossible. The power to lift fifty pounds is contained eminently in the power to lift one hundred just because in lifting one hundred one lifts fifty and then some. To apply the analogy one must conceive of an object as a collection of characteristics which, like ontological independence, come in degrees. Something that possesses one of these characteristics to a degree thereby possesses it to all lesser degrees, and something that possesses each of a set of characteristics to degrees greater than n thereby contains eminently anything which has essentially only those characteristics and each of them to a degree less than or equal to n. God gives to each creature every characteristic it has. Since nothing can give what it does not have, every characteristic a creature has must be either a characteristic which God has or must be in some sense reducible to (supervenient on ?) characteristics which God has

and has to at least the same degree as the creature. Thus God contains every creature formally or eminently.

V

In the Third Meditation Descartes is conjuring with the stock-in-trade of late medieval metaphysicians: God, univocal causality, formal and objective reality, and formal and eminent containment. These items are employed in the deconstruction of the ontology of Scholastic common sense. They are also employed in the construction of an account of thought which makes its operation out to be piecemeal rather than holistic and which centers on the notion that an idea is a presentation of the very object represented. This suggests a Descartes firmly rooted in a Scholastic tradition which is deeply in debt to Duns Scotus and closely allied with fourteenth-century developments in epistemology and in the theory of meaning. This makes the problem of Descartes' immediate sources and the question of his originality even more puzzling.

NOTES

1. References to AT, HR, and K are explained in the General Bibliography at the beginning of this volume.
2. Margaret Dauler Wilson's *Descartes* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 102.
3. References to *Descartes' Conversation with Burman,* trans. with intro. and comm. by John Cottingham (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) are cited as JC.
4. References to Scotus are to Iohannis Duns Scoti, *Opera Omnia* (Vaticana, 1950). References give volume, page, and paragraph number in that order.
5. References to Alnwick are to the page in Fr. Guillelmi Alnwick, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Esse Intelligibili et de Quodlibet*, ed. P. Athenasius Ledoux, O.F.M. (Quaracchi, 1937).
6. Petrus Aureoli discusses these matters in *In Sent.* I, proem. See Petrus Aureoli, *Scriptum super primum Sententiarum*, ed. E. M. Buytaert (Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1955).
7. References to Ockham are to his Commentary on Lombard's *Sentences* in *Opera Philosophica et Theologica* (Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1974).
8. For Walter Chatton's discussion, see *Lecturae Chaton Anglici in Sententias*, Prol., Q. 2, ed. J. J. O'Callaghan in J. R. O'Donnell, ed., *Nine Mediaeval Thinkers* (Pontifical Institute of Medaeval Studies, Toronto, 1955) and Gedeon Gal, "Gualteri de Chatton et Guillelmi de Ockham Controversia de Natura Conceptus Universalis," *Franciscan Studies* 27 (1967):191–212.

9. Cf. Durandus a St. Porciano, *I Sent.*, D. 36, Q. 3 (Louvain, 1587), p. 222 sqq., quoted in Alnwick (see n. 5), 120.
10. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), 50.
11. References to Suarez are to the *Opera Omnia* (Paris: Vives, 1856–).

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General Bibliography

The standard edition of Descartes' works is *Oeuvres de Descartes*, publies par Ch[arles] Adam et P[aul] Tannery (Vrin, 1957–1974). Vrin prints both the Latin and the French texts of the *Meditations*, Vols. VII and IX. References to this edition are abbreviated as AT. The edition and translation of Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross, *The Philosophical Works of Descartes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; reprinted 1969), is cited as HR. References to *Descartes: Philosophical Letters*, translated and edited by Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) are standardly abbreviated as K. The *Discourse on Method; Optics, Geometry and Meteorology* was translated with an introduction by Paul J. Olscamp (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965). The comprehensive bibliography of works on Descartes is Gregor Sebba's *Bibliographia Cartesiana* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1964). For a sound and selective bibliography on Descartes after 1964, consult the bibliography in Margaret Dauler Wilson's *Descartes* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 245–250. See also the excellent bibliography gathered by Willis Doney, published in Michael Hooker's *Descartes: Critical and Interpretive Essays* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). Another useful source is Stephen Gaukroger's collection, *Descartes: Philosophy, Mathematics and Physics* (Sussex, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1980).

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Ruth Mattern analyzes the account of physical objects presented in the Sixth Meditation, giving close attention to the relation between Descartes' reinstatement of the commonsensical ideas of physical objects and his characterization of the scientific idea of Extension. Frederick Schmitt gives an account of Descartes' foundationalism, distinguishing the principles of science presented in the Sixth Meditation from the substantive assumptions of theoretical physics. Amélie Rorty examines the role that the passions play in Descartes' account of the union of the mind and the body.

A. O. R.

Chronology

1596:	Descartes born in La Huaye, Touraine.
1606–1614:	Studied at the College de la Flèche.
1616:	Studied law at Poitiers.
1618–1619:	Volunteer in the Dutch and Bavarian armies.
1619:	The dream of a scientific philosophy.
1628:	Wrote *Regulae ad directionem ingenii* (published posthumously).
1633:	Galileo condemned.
1634:	*Le Monde et le Traité de l'Homme* (published posthumously).
1637:	*Discours de la Méthode; Optics, Geometry, Metereology.*
1641:	*Meditationes de Prima Philosophia in qua Dei existentia et animae immortalitas demonstratur*. This edition, containing the first six Objections gathered at Descartes' request by Father Pierre Mersenne, was published, along with Descartes' Replies, in Paris. A set of Seventh Objections and Replies was added to the second edition, published in 1642 by Louis Elzevir in Amsterdam. The French translation of the *Meditations* by the Duc de Luynes and that of the Objections and Replies by Clerselier, which appeared in 1647, were (with the exception of the Fifth Objections and Replies) revised by Descartes himself.
1644:	*Principia Philosophiae.*
1649:	Resident at the court of Queen Christina in Stockholm; *Les Passions de l'Âme.*
1650:	Died of pneumonia in Stockholm.