
Charles George Boysen
Loyola University Chicago

1958

Recommended Citation
http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/1546

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.
Copyright © 1958 Charles George Boysen
THE INNATE IDEA IN THE LATER PHILOSOPHICAL WORKS
OF RENÉ DESCARTES: ITS DEVELOPMENT,
NATURE, AND FUNCTION

by

Charles George Boysen

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

June

1958
Charles George Boysen was born in Chicago, Illinois, on March 8, 1930.

He was graduated from Thornton Township High School, Harvey, Illinois, in June of 1948. He graduated from Thornton Junior College, in Harvey, in June, 1951. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Buffalo in June of 1953.

From 1954 to 1956 the author taught fifth grade at Roosevelt Elementary School in Dolton, Illinois. He began his graduate studies at Loyola University in September, 1955.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Chapter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. The importance of epistemologies</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. The Cartesian Revolution</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. The application of the mathematical method of reasoning to philosophy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. The importance of the innate idea</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>THE IDEA AND ITS DEVELOPMENT</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. The types and sources of the ideas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. The images of things</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Acts of the will</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Physical sensations</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Eternal truths</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Universal ideas</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. The sources of the ideas</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. The unimportance of the adventitious idea in the quest for truth</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. The innate idea</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Descartes' distrust of the external senses</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. The external senses as a source of error</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. The discrepancy between sense knowledge and intellectual knowledge</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. The disbelief that any ideas can come through the senses</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Waking is like sleeping, our thoughts are like our dreams</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Extra-mental reality can not be translated into ideal reality</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. The theory of representative perception</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Descartes' acceptance of sense images for the practical life of man</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. The role of the imagination in the development of the innate idea</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Definition of the imagination</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. The distinction between the imagination and the intellect</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. The denial of the imagination as a contribution to intellectual knowledge</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. The role of the intellect in the development of the innate idea</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. The definition of thought</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. The lumen naturale ........................................... 23
3. The lumen naturale "inspects" the innate idea ................ 25
4. Clearness and distinctness ..................................... 27
5. The will and the innate idea ................................... 28
6. The growth of knowledge ....................................... 28
7. Summary of the Cartesian process of knowing ................. 30

III. THE RELATION BETWEEN THE INNATE IDEA AND EXTRA-
MENTAL REALITY .................................................. 31

A. God assures the conformity of mind and extra-
mental reality .......................................................... 32
   1. God assures the existence of an external world .......... 32
   2. God verifies the veracity of the lumen naturale .......... 34
   3. God assures the truth of the innate idea ................. 35
   4. Descartes' "theoretical conformity" between the mind and reality ......................................................... 36

B. Descartes' distinction of the kinds and degrees of reality
   1. "Objective reality" and "formal reality" ..................... 37
   2. Objective (extra-mental) reality can not be translated into formal (ideal) reality ......................... 38

C. The theory of representative conception ........................ 40
   1. Resume of sensation ........................................... 41
   2. Sense images "stimulate" the production of innate ideas ................................................................. 42

D. The idea is related to reality by a judgment .................. 44
   1. The rerum imaginant ............................................ 44
   2. The will refers the rerum imaginant to extra-mental reality ........................................................... 46
   3. The aliquid etiam amplius .................................... 46
   4. The "referential qualities" of the innate idea ............ 47
   5. The necessity for the innate ideas to be related to extra-mental reality ....................................... 47

IV. THE IDEA AND TRUTH .............................................. 49

A. The meaning of truth for Descartes ............................ 49
   1. Truth as the conformity between thought and objects ........ 50
   2. The nature of Cartesian truth as seen from an examination of Cartesian error .......................... 51
   3. The causes of error ............................................ 52
4. The relation of the will and the intellect to error ................................ 54
5. The Cartesian conception of truth .............................................. 55
B. The Cartesian criteria for the truth of the idea .............................................. 56
   1. Clearness and distinctness ...................................................... 57
   2. The veracity of God ............................................................ 59
   3. The incapability of doubting ................................................ 60
   4. The subjectiveness of the criteria of truth ..................................... 60

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS ...................................................................... 62

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................. 69
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

From the time that the author first began his philosophical studies, it seemed that he was always attracted by theories of knowledge. The most probable explanation of this is that, through the study of a thinker’s epistemology, a key is very often provided with which one can understand the remainder of a philosopher’s thought. This is not necessarily always true, but it has proven to be the case with this investigator in his study of Plato, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas. But besides being rewarding in itself, and besides being a method of gaining an insight into a thinker’s work, the study of epistemologies has yielded further fruit. For through his theory of knowledge, one often reveals his particular conception of the nature of reality. Thus, Plato was prone to urge that subjective or ideal experience was the only reality, whereas St. Thomas admitted the existence of both an extra-mental reality and an ideal reality. This difference of opinion among these eminent philosophers proved most interesting, and the writer decided to investigate other major philosophers along with their theories of knowledge, to try to discover how they resolved this problem of the nature of reality, and how their epistemologies reflected their solutions to the problem.
According to many, one of the most important philosophers after St. Thomas was René Descartes, the great French thinker who lived from 1596 to 1650, and so a study of Descartes was begun. After reading various of Descartes' works, the writer decided that a more intensive study of Descartes' epistemology was called for. For it was soon seen that Descartes was a revolutionary who advocated the return to subjectivism and idealism, and the overthrow of the predominant scholasticism of his times. But why, however, did Descartes choose to do away with the combined wisdom of Aristotle and St. Thomas? To answer this question will draw us closer to the statement of our own problem.

Simply stated, we can say that although Descartes' early training in the humanities and the sciences had been scholastic in nature (at the Jesuit school of La Flèche in France), his early acquaintance with philosophy in general had sufficed to show him that there was an appreciable amount of uncertainty on many philosophical issues. At least two influences contributed to this conclusion. One influence was his own philosophical experience, for within this field debate about various contemporary problems seemed to rage on endlessly and inconclusively, and the truth or certainty which Descartes began to seek so earnestly seemed to him to be in large part absent from philosophical thought. But there was another more positive influence, and this stemmed from Descartes' interest in mathematics. His mathematical studies had progressed considerably, and he found that in
mathematics he experienced the certainty and assuredness which he found lacking in philosophy. Gradually, therefore, it became apparent to Descartes that the application of the mathematical method of reasoning to philosophy and also to the other sciences might very well result in two highly worthwhile consequences: (1) it would bring certainty into the discipline of philosophy, and (2), it would unify the various sciences by the use of a common method of reasoning. Such aims were, without a doubt, both highly commendable and greatly to be desired, but in order to achieve such purposes, Descartes saw that it would be necessary for him not merely to revise various of the heretofore accepted philosophical principles, but also to doubt of all knowledge which he had previously held to be true. He felt he had to begin anew with the establishment of certain and true philosophical first principles upon which he could build his own new intellectual edifice. He says as much at the very beginning of Meditation I of his *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

It is now some years since I detected how many were the false beliefs that I had from my earliest youth admitted as true, and how doubtful was everything I had since constructed on this basis; and from that time I was convinced that I must once for all seriously undertake to rid myself of all the opinions which I had formerly accepted, and commence to build anew from the foundation, if I wanted to establish any firm and permanent structure in the sciences.  

---


2 Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, eds., *Oeuvres de Descartes*
As we shall soon and in greater detail point out, the first philosophical principles upon which all else should be built were, for Descartes, the clear and distinct and innate ideas. These innate ideas thus form the foundation stones upon which all else depends. For this reason then, we have chosen to examine Descartes' innate ideas, their development, how they are used by the mind, their relation to extra-mental reality, and finally, their role in the Cartesian conception of truth. By an examination and evaluation of such fundamental elements as the innate ideas, we hope to provide a key for a greater understanding of Descartes' epistemology in particular and his philosophy in general.

A few more preliminary remarks are called for, and then we shall launch into the thesis proper. First of all, the writer has chosen the *Meditations on First Philosophy* (published first in 1641) and the *Principles of Philosophy* (published first in 1644) as the texts from which he will work because these represent Descartes' most mature reflections on his epistemology. References to Descartes' *Reply to Objections* and *Notes Directed Against a Certain Programme* will be made from time to time, but only because these two short works are simply elaborations of the material found in the *Meditations* and the *Principles*. There

(Paris, 1897-1910), VII, p. 17: "Animadverti iam ante aliquot annos quam multa, insuntae etate, falsa pro veris admirerim, et quam dubia sint quaequeque istis postea superextruxi, se prorsus funditus omnia semel in vita esse evortunda, atque a prima fundamentis denuo inchoandum, si quid aliquando firmum et mansurum cupiam in scientiis stabilire . . . ."
is nothing essentially new or different in the *Replica* and the *Notes*. The author has also chosen the *Meditations* and the *Principles* because of their unity of thought. A period of only three years separates the publication of the above two works, during which time no other major work was published; and, the contents of both works therefore represent a mature, unitary whole, rather than two distinct works.

Our second remark concerns the use of abbreviations in the footnotes. For our purposes, the initials H.R. will stand for the Haldane-Ross English edition of Descartes' philosophical works, and the initials A.T. will denote the Adam-Tannery compilation of the works of Descartes in the original Latin and French. Actually, the Haldane-Ross translations are from the Adam-Tannery Latin and French compilations. As was the custom in his time, Descartes wrote most of his works in Latin, and they were translated into French, which translations he approved. In the course of our thesis, however, we will use the original Latin whenever possible, for the French translations have often proven to be incomplete. The English translations of Descartes in the body of the text are from the Haldane-Ross translation, except where otherwise specified.

---

CHAPTER II

THE IDEA AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

In order to obtain an adequate view of the manner in which the idea is produced and used in Descartes' philosophy, the writer has thought it wise to trace the idea as it is made use of by the various elements in Descartes' psychological system, namely, the external senses, the imagination, and the intellect. However, since the innate idea seems to be the only type of idea which Descartes deemed sufficient for the establishment of a new body of philosophical knowledge, we shall only look closely at its characteristics and uses. In this chapter, we shall try to see also why Descartes did not emphasize the senses or the imagination in his own epistemology. And finally, we shall study the role which the intellect plays in knowing the innate ideas.

A. THE TYPES AND SOURCES OF THE IDEAS

From an attentive perusal of Descartes' later works, it can be found that Descartes at different times includes various intellectual and, what we could even term volitional, constructs under the general heading of ideas. One of the first of these classifications can be found in his Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation III, where he states
it is requisite that I should divide my thought into certain kinds, and that I should consider in which of these kinds there is, properly speaking, truth or error to be found. Of my thoughts some are, so to speak, images of the things and to these alone is the title 'idea' properly applied; examples are my thought of a man or of a chimera, of heaven, of an angel, or . . . of God. But other thoughts possess other forms as well. For example in willing, fearing, approving, denying . . . and of the thoughts of this kind some are called volitions or affections, and others judgments.

Descartes, however, goes even farther than this and includes even physical sensations under the heading of thought. For, as he says in Meditation VI,

all these sensations of hunger, thirst, pain, etc. are in truth none other than confused modes of thought which are produced by the union and apparent intermingling of mind and body. 

But Descartes is not excessively interested in these ideas arising from the union of mind and body. Or rather, it might be more truthful to state that Descartes spoke out forcefully against the notion that philosophical truth could come from sense knowledge, which had been an important axiom in the scholastic


2A.T. VII, p. 81: "Nam certe isti sensum sitis, famae, doloris, etc., nihil aliud sunt quam confused quidam cogitandi modi ab unione et quasi permixtione mentis cum corpore exorti."
tradition up until that time.

In addition to the ideas which are the images of things, and those which are volitions, judgments, or even physical sensations, Descartes had yet another kind of idea to add to his collection, namely, the eternal truth or verity. We find these mentioned in Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy*, Part I, *Principles* XLVIII and XLIX. Here again we find that Descartes is making a distinction between kinds of ideas. The distinction he makes here, however, is between the ideas which represent things which have existence outside of our minds and those ideas called eternal truths which only have existence within our minds. An example of an eternal truth can readily be seen in the proposition *ex nihilo nihil fit*, which Descartes describes as a "certain eternal truth which has its seat in our mind, and is a common notion or axiom." These eternal truths have an important function in guiding both our intellectual development and our everyday lives. Leon Roth puts it quite aptly when he describes such truths as

---

3 *A.T. VIII*, p. 22: "Quaeque sub perceptionem nostram cadunt, vel tanquam res, rerumque affectiones quasdam, consideramus; vel tanquam aeternas veritates, nulam existentiam extra cogitationem nostram habentes."


"the mind's native equipment in the work of thought."  

Descartes has still another kind of idea, but this one is somewhat similar to the eternal truth: it is the universal idea. Apparently the universal idea arises because of a certain need, a need which the mind has in the process of thinking, the need for short cuts in thought. He states this function of a universal idea thus:

Universals arise solely from the fact that we avail ourselves of one and the same idea in order to think of all individual things which have a certain similitude; and when we comprehend under the same name all the objects represented by this idea, that name is universal.  

But he was not satisfied with merely enumerating the various types or kinds of ideas; he was immensely interested in the sources of these ideas, however.

There is no doubt in Descartes' mind that ideas are caused, or have some source or origin somewhere, for as he says, "it is impossible for us to have any idea of anything whatever, if there is not within us or outside of us, an archetype . . . ."  

---

6 Leon Roth, Spinoza, Descartes, and Maimonides (Oxford, 1924) p. 33.

7 Princ. I, LIX, A.T. VIII, p. 27: "Flunt haec universalia ex eo tantum, quod una et eadem idea utamur ad omnia individua, quae inter se similia sunt, cogitandi: ut etiam unum et idem nomen omnibus rebus per ideam istam repraesentatis imponimus; quod nomen est universale."

8 Princ. I, XVIII, A.T. VIII, p. 12: "... sed neque etiam in nobis ideam sive imaginem ullius rei esse posse, cuius non alii-subi, sive in nobis ipsa, sive extra nos, Archetypus aliquid, omnes eius perfectiones repersa continens, existat." We are merely
the problem of the sources of the ideas, and, in particular of
that kind of idea which is used by the mind in its search for
truth, is a vexing one for Descartes, and he spends much time in
attempting to solve it. Briefly, there are three sources for the
ideas in Descartes' schema: (1) ideas may be adventitious, or
proceed from certain objects which exist outside of the individ-
ual; (2) they may be factitious, or formed out of one's own
mind (e.g., the ideas of sirens, hippographs, etc.); or (3), they
may be innate, that is, they may be somehow inborn in the mind.9

With regards to his intentions to arrive at philosophical truth
or knowledge, Descartes hardly pauses to consider if the facti-
tious idea can fill the role of keystone upon which a body of
scientific knowledge could be established. On the other hand,
both the adventitious idea and the innate idea are in serious
contention for this role, and Descartes finds it necessary to
eliminate one of them. The choice does not seem at all difficult
for him, and he chooses to disregard the adventitious idea. Let
us try to understand some of Descartes' reasons for doing away
with the adventitious idea.

interested here in showing that Descartes believed that all ideas
were caused. We shall examine his concept of an "archetype,"
however, in Chapter III.

innatae, aliae adventitiae, aliae in me ipso factae mihi viden-
tur . . . ."
In the first place, that these adventitious ideas seem to come from outside of us, and that we seem to note that our ideas of objects are similar to, or are somehow connected with these external objects, is a lesson taught to us by nature. We have a certain "spontaneous inclination" to make a connection between our idea of a particular extra-mental object and the object itself. But we should not follow these spontaneous inclinations or "natural impulses," Descartes warns us, for following them can often be morally disastrous for an individual.  

Descartes tries in somewhat similar ways to show that adventitious ideas conduce to error, but he is never too convincing in his attempts. One of his attempts, nonetheless, does lead him rather subtly into a presentation of his case for the innate idea. 

[So] perhaps [Descartes theorizes] there is in me some faculty fitted to produce these ideas, even though it is not yet known by me, just as, apparently, they have hitherto always been found in me during sleep, without the aid of any external objects.  

\[\text{\textsuperscript{10} Med. III, A.T. VII, p. 39: } \ldots \text{ sed quantum ad impetus naturales, iam asse olim ludicavi me ab illis in deteriorem partem fulisse impulsaum, cum de bono eligendo ageretur, nec video cur illadem in ulla alia re magis fidam.}\] If the reader will note Descartes' argument at this point, he will find that Descartes was attempting to prove that spontaneous inclinations should not be followed in the intellectual order because when they have often been followed in the moral order, persons have been led astray. His conclusion is erroneous, however, since restrictions in the moral order need not hold true for the intellectual order.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{11} Med. III, A.T. VII, p. 39: } \ldots \text{ ita forte etiam aliquam alia est in me facultas, nondum mihi satis cognita, istorum idearum effectrix, ut hactenus semper visum est illas, dum somnio, absque ulla rerum externam ope, in me formari.}\]
This statement by Descartes now leads us to a consideration of the innate idea and its primacy in Descartes' epistemology. But, Descartes gives us pause, and we are faced with several problems at the very outset of such a consideration, in that (1) the meaning of "innate idea" is somewhat unclear, and (2) the meaning of "innate idea" is open to a bit of interpretation.

Concerning the meaning of innate, Descartes himself offers at least three possibilities: (a) that the faculty for the formation or apprehension of such ideas is inborn; (b) that the ability to form them is innate; and (c), that the ideas themselves are innate. Partial evidence that the faculty is held to be innate is found in Meditation III, wherein Descartes speculates on the existence of some faculty fitted to produce these ideas without the assistance of any external things.\(^{12}\) Descartes seems to imply this when again in the Notes Directed Against a Certain Programme he states that he

never wrote or concluded that the mind required innate ideas which were in some sort different from its faculty of thinking; but when I observed the existence in me of certain thoughts which proceeded, not from extraneous objects nor from the determination of my will, but solely from the faculty of thinking which is within me . . . .\(^{13}\)

\(^{12}\)Ibid.

\(^{13}\)A.T. VIII, pp. 357-58: "Non enim unquam scripsi vel indicavi, mentem indigere ideis innatis, quae sint aliquid diversum ab aliquo facultate cogitandi; sed cum adverterem, quasdam in me esse cogitationes, quae non ab objectis externis, nec a voluntatis meae determinationes procedebant, sed a sola cogitandi facultate, quae in me est . . . ."
Norman Kemp Smith interprets Descartes on this particular point as follows: Descartes probably did not intend that man have a special faculty for producing these special ideas. It is more in keeping with Descartes' ambitions that all men,

owing to their sharing in the natural light of reason, have direct cognitive access to certain primary ideas, and that these, even when not separately attended to, are everpresent to them. 14

Another interpretation of the meaning of innate is that the ability to produce such ideas is innate. If we look in the Notes once again, we see that Descartes likens the production of such ideas to a baby's "disposition or propensity" for contracting certain diseases. 15 Thus, we might be tempted to assume from this that only the ability to form such ideas is inborn, and not that the ideas themselves are instilled in the mind from birth. But Descartes does not let us even accept the former view as his only meaning of innate, for in still other places he speaks of innate notions 16 or of ideas from nature. 17

---


15 A.T. VIII, p. 358: "... quadem dispositione aive facultate ad illos contrahendos."


If we follow the lead of other Cartesian commentators in this matter, we too should delimit the meaning of innate so that it will extend only to (a), an innate ability of the mind to produce or come forth with a certain idea from out of its recesses, and (b), the innate idea itself, instilled or implanted in the mind from birth, and awaiting the mind's action to bring it forth and to so act upon it that knowledge results. Our main concern for the remainder of the paper will be the innate idea itself.

But concerning these innate ideas, we find that they include both those mental objects or images which represent objects outside of the mind, and also the eternal truths, maxims, or principles of thought which have no existence outside the mind. For our purposes, we shall mean the former type of idea, the innate mental image, when we refer to the innate idea within the course of this paper. And, by the innate idea, we will always mean a mental object or image which represents some extra-mental object to the mind. The purpose of this innate idea is to enable the mind to arrive at philosophical truth.

B. DESCARTES' DISTRUST OF THE EXTERNAL SENSES

In general, the purpose of any sincere philosopher in philosophizing is the pursuit of truth. This most certainly was true of Descartes. Likewise, a philosopher in beginning to philosophize
attempts to base his reasoning upon the most trustworthy premises he can find available. Descartes was also in agreement with this, but, unlike the schoolmen before him, Descartes could not accept the teaching of the schoolmen that contended that "there is nothing in the understanding which has not previously been in sense-perception." Descartes viewed the senses as a distinct source of error on many occasions, and he was therefore determined that his philosophy would not be based on conclusions derived from such erroneous sources.

But Descartes was not satisfied with merely closely scrutinizing or verifying all information received through the senses; he was unwilling to accept any sense knowledge whatsoever, and, as a result, he was forced of necessity to look for some other source of philosophical truth. As we have already seen, this source was the innate idea. Now, however, let us look much closer at the process by which Descartes rejected the data of the senses.

Descartes was openly opposed to the scholastic philosophy of his day and to the interminable inconclusive discussions which never led, in his estimation, to either certainty or to the discovery of any new knowledge. The new philosophy which he

19A. Boyce Gibson, *The Philosophy of Descartes* (London, 1932), p. 177: "[Descartes] was in full revolt against the scholastic dictum that 'there is nothing in the understanding which has not previously been in sense perception,' and he held it to be responsible for all contemporary evils both in science and in theology."

20Ibid., pp. 177 ff.
proposed would not only conduce to certainty and lead to new discoveries, but it would also do away with a major source of uncertainty and error, namely, sense knowledge. Descartes banished sense knowledge in the following manner:

Little by little he called attention to the discrepancy which often exists between the image of a thing as it comes through the senses, and our concept of this same thing. For example, as coming through one's senses, the image of the sun represents a very small object to us, but man knows the sun to be a very large celestial body.21

But from this strong distrust of sense knowledge, Descartes now moves to a positive disbelief that any ideas whatsoever can come through the senses. He does this in several ways. First, in Meditation I, Descartes goes so far as to compare our thoughts while awake to our dreams during sleep, on the grounds that sleeping can't be distinguished from waking.22 But furthermore, since our dreams do not proceed from extra-mental objects, why then should our ideas during our waking moments necessarily come from

---


22A.T. VII, p. 19: "Quasi scilicet non recorder a similibus stigmatibus me alias in somnis fuisset delusum; quaedum cogito attentius, tam plane video nunquam cortis indiciis vigiliam a somno posse distinguere ut obstupescam, et fere hic ipse stupor mihi opinionem somni confirmet."
A second argument against sense knowledge appears in Meditation III, where Descartes asserts that ideas can have only "objective reality" (realitas objective) and that extra-mental objects can have only "formal reality" (realitas actualis sive formalis). Moreover, a cause can transmit only its own kind of reality, according to Descartes, and so we find that an extra-mental object cannot cause an idea.24 Descartes then takes refuge in the hypothesis that perhaps one idea is caused by another, regressing back not infinitely, but until one archetypal idea is reached, which idea contains somehow both formal and objective reality.25 Having shown, at least to his own satisfaction, that an idea does not come to him from extra-mental reality, Descartes also discounts himself as the idea's cause, and this can only leave, as he puts it, "another being ... which is the cause of this idea."26 And this, for Descartes, is God.

23 Med. VI, A.T. VII, p.77: "Quibus etiam duas maxime generales dubitandi causas super adieci: prima erat, quod nulla uae quam dum vigilo, me sentire crediderim in quo eadem..."

24 Med. III, A.T. VII, p. 41. Descartes' conceptions of objective and formal reality will be examined more fully in Ch. III.


26 ibid.: "Nemo si realitas objectiva alicuius ex mea ideis sit tanta ut cortus sim candem nec formaliter nec eminenter..."
Descartes' break with the senses is now complete, and he is now satisfied that no idea used in the advancement of philosophical knowledge can come through the senses. That is, the mind of a man seeking after certain philosophical truth will dwell upon only the innate ideas, which are, so to speak, suitable and proper for the conduct of such a search. It can be seen, therefore, that a mind in knowing an extra-mental world will have no direct relationship with that world: the mind is enclosed within itself, and it will know only the idea of external reality which is innate in the mind, but never the idea which comes from external reality. This theory of knowing has been called the theory of representative perception, for a mind closed off from everything outside of itself can know only indirectly the representations or images of reality, and can never have direct knowledge of reality.

But the problem of the mind's relation to things outside itself was never satisfactorily settled for Descartes, and he found that he had to eventually make concessions to the senses. He never went so far as to accept them as the seeds of philosophical

\[ ... \]

\[ ... \]

in me esse, nec proinde me ipsum eius ideae causam esse posse, hinc necessario sequi, non me solum esse in mundo, sed aliquam aliam rem, quae istius ideae est causa, etiam existere."

---

27 *Reply to Objections V, A.T. VII, p. 381*: "Interim autem non concedo ideae *latarum* figurarum [i.e., geometrical figures] nobis unquam per sensum *fuise* illasae, ut vulgo omnes sibi persuadent."

truth—he retained the innate ideas for this exalted purpose—but he did condescend to modify his earlier stand that all sense images should be distrusted. In Meditations VI, therefore, and in the Principles, Part I, Principles III and IV, we find Descartes admitting that sense images are important for the composite whole of man (i.e., the body and soul combined) in the everyday, practical conduct of his life, but that in the quest for truth, one should continue to doubt one's senses. 29 However, even in the everyday process of sensation, Descartes is still unwilling to grant to sense images free and eventual access into the intellect, but these sense images transmit something which gives the mind "occasion to form ... ideas, by means of an innate faculty." 30 A sensation is thus an innate idea awakened within the mind on the occasion of some change that takes place in the body. 31 But actually, the Cartesian problem of sensation and the theory of occasionalism which it gives rise to are not

29 Med. VI, A.T. VII, pp. 77-78: "Nunc autem, postquam incipio melipsum meaeque authores originis melius nosse, non quidem omnia, quae habere videor a sensibus, puto esse temere admittenda; sed neque etiam omnia in dubium revocanda." Cf. Ibid., p. 83: "... quia nonpe sensuum perceptionibus, quae proprie tantum a natura datae sunt ad menti significandum quaesam composito, cuius pars est, commoda sunt vel incommoda ... ."

30 Notes Directed Against a Certain Programme, A.T. VIII, p. 359: "... sed quia tamen aliquid incessauerunt, quod ei dedit occasionem ad ipsas, per innatum sibi facultatem, hoc tempore potius quam alio, efformandas."

31 Etienne Gilson, The Unity of Philosophical Experience (New York, 1937), p. 163.
our present concern, and we shall return to these topics in our
discussion of the innate idea's relation to extra-mental reality.
It is sufficient to see that Descartes had immense difficulties
in explaining the role of the senses in our daily lives, as well
as in explaining away the relation of the senses to intellectual
knowledge.

G. THE ROLE OF THE IMAGINATION IN THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEA

Just as Descartes had attempted to show that the external
senses had nothing to do with philosophical truth, so too did he
try to prove that the imagination had nothing to offer to the
quest for certain knowledge. In this way, Descartes was seeking
to reinforce his theory that the mind could turn only within it-
self to find such ideas as would aid a seeker after unshakeable
philosophical and scientific principles.

When Descartes defines the imagination, we find that he does
not consider it as an internal sense, but rather does he regard
it as a certain operation or function of the intellect. Accord-
ing to him, the intellect in imagining contemplates the "corpor-
cal forms" (i.e., the sense images), which forms apparently come
to the mind by way of the external senses, but, since such forms
are in the senses, they are in no way able to enter the intell-
lect.32 This act of imagining, like the scholastic conception of

32See, II, A.T. VII, p. 28: "... quia nihil aliud est
the imagination, can be a re-presentation of an absent extra-
mental object. As an example, Descartes tells us that when a
geometrical figure is imagined, the attention of the mind is ap-
plied to the various sides of the figure, as well as to the space
enclosed within the sides, so that the figure appears to be pre-
sent to the "eyes of the mind."
But this process of imagina-
tion is also unlike the scholastic conception of imagination,
mainly in that it is an action by the intellect rather than an
internal sense, but also in the fact that for Descartes, the im-
agination is an unnecessary rather than necessary element in his
nature. For since the intellect can attend either to the cor-
poreal form or the innate idea of the same extra-mental object,
the intellect will always choose the innate idea and thus be
assured of truth.

In the above discussion, we have not only seen how Descartes
and the scholastics differed in their definitions of imagination,

imaginari qua rei corporeae figuram, seu imaginem, contemplari."
And also, *Reply to Objections* V, A.T. VII, p. 384: "... non
concede *ideas imatarum figuram nobis unquam per sensum fuisse
illipsea ... ."

examine differentiam quae est inter imaginationem et puram in-
tellectionem. Nempe, exempli causa, cum triangulum imaginor,
non tantum intelligo illud esse figuram tribus lineis comprehen-
sam, sed simul etiam istas tres lineas tanquam praesentes acie
mentis intueor, atque hoc est quod imaginari appelle."

imaginandi quae in me est, prout differat a vi intelligendi, ad
mei iissius, hoc est ad mentis meae essentiam non requiri ... ."
but we have also seen how the imagination is distinguished from 
pure intellect by Descartes. For in the first place, the act 
of imagining directs the attention of the mind outward, whereas 
in what we term pure intellect, the mind is turned within to 
contemplate or attend to the innate ideas. And secondly, the 
mind in turning outward can attend only to the corporeal forms 
or images (which come to the mind by way of the senses but which 
cannot enter the mind), whereas, once again, in intellect, the 
mind contemplates the mental objects which have been instilled 
therein.

Thus, the imagination, right along with the external senses, 
has been discarded by Descartes, and two tremendously valuable 
elements in the scholastic theory of knowledge are ruled out in 
order that Descartes can give to the intellect and the innate 
ideas the sole task of arriving at philosophical truth. Let us 
now examine this interaction of the mind and the ideas in the 
quest for truth.

D. THE ROLE OF THE INTELLECT IN THE 
DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEA

In general, by the word "thought" Descartes meant not only 
the process of understanding, but also the processes of willing, 
imaging, and feeling.35 We are not concerned with all of these

35Princ. I, IX, A.T. VIII, p. 7: "Cogitationis nomine, in-
tellige illa omnia, quae nobis consciis in nobis flunt, quatenus, 
ecorum in nobis conscientia est. Atque ita non modo intelligere, 
velle, imaginari, sed etiam sentire, idem est hic quod cogitare,"
different functions, but we are far more interested in the processes of understanding and willing as they make use of the innate idea. Descartes himself refines his definition of thought later so as to include but two main divisions: awareness by way of the intellect, and the various movements of the will. We shall first look closely at the relationship between the cognitive portion of the intellect and the idea, and then we shall bring in the will's contribution to knowing.

Descartes describes the process of pure intellecction (i.e., without the functions of sensing, imagining, or willing) as taking place when the

mind in its intellectual activity in some manner turns on itself, and considers some of the ideas which it possesses in itself. 

The name which Descartes gave to the mind was the lumen naturale, certainly not an original title, but at least expressive of the Cartesian process of understanding. For the lumen naturale is very similar to a physical light which, when it is shone upon a certain object, discloses the various attributes of the object to sight. Therefore, the lumen naturale is an

36Princ., I, XXXII, A.T. VIII, p. 17: "Quippe omnes modi cogitandi, quos in nobis experimur, ad duos generales referri possunt: quorum unus est perceptio, sive operatio intellectus; alius vero volitio, sive operatio voluntatis."

37Med. VI, A.T. VII, p. 73: "... mens, dum intelligit, se ad seipsum quodammodo convertat, respiciatque aliquam ex ideis quae illi ipsi insunt ...."

38Princ., I, XXX, A.T. VIII, p. 16: "Atque hinc sequitur, lumen naturae, sive cognoscendi facultatem a Deo nobis datam,
intellectual light which is given to man by God, and as a result, it can never be perverted if it is always used properly. The conditions for using it properly will occupy us in a moment, but first we should stress the point that the all-important function of the mind is for Descartes suggestive of a process of seeing the ideas, rather than of a process of making or abstracting them. The *lumen naturale* is quite passive in its operation, and the cognitive process for Descartes is very similar to vision. Thus, the ideas and also the relationships between various ideas can be discerned or disclosed to us by the *lumen naturale*, but the ideas never pass through an evolutionary process such as that employed by St. Thomas, coming from and through the senses, and, by way of abstraction from the phantasm, residing finally in the intellect. For Descartes, the work of the *lumen naturale* in shining upon the ideas constitutes the major portion of the entire

nullum unquam objectum posse attingere, quod non sit verum, quatenus ab ipse attingitur, hoc est, quatenus clare et distinct percepitur."


40 Kemp Smith, p. 63.

41 *Ibid.* p. 238: "Here, then, we have one main point, in regard to which Descartes, in all his writings, from start to finish, is definite and consistent; that in cognitive awareness the understanding is 'patiently' receptive. It is never creative of its ideas. It may indeed combine or separate them, and in doing so discern certain relations as holding between them. In respect of the ideas themselves, and of their interrelations, it is, however, always purely contemplative; they are the 'objects' which the *lumen naturale*, i.e., our native power of immediate awareness, discloses to us." See also p. 22.
process of knowing.

The process by which the lumen naturale shines upon the ideas so that the mind may know them was originally termed "intuition" by Descartes,

the conception which an unclouded and attentive mind gives us so readily and distinctly that we are wholly freed from doubt about that which we understand. Or, what comes to the same thing, intuition is the undoubting conception of an unclouded and attentive mind, and springs from the light of reason alone; it is more certain than deduction itself, in that it is simpler, though deduction . . . cannot by us be erroneously conducted.42

In his later works, Descartes does not appear to change the meaning of an intuitive act, i.e., an act whereby the lumen naturale plays upon an idea so that the mind can come to understand, but he does, as Kemp Smith points out, change the name of the act from "intuition" to "inspection of the spirit."43 The latter

42Rules for the Direction of the Mind, A.T. X, p. 12: "Je comprends par intuition ... la conception d'un esprit sain et attentif, si facile et si distincte qu'aucun doute ne reste sur ce que nous comprenons; ou bien, ce qui est la même chose, la conception ferme qui naît dans un esprit sain et attentif des seules lumières de la raison, et qui, plus simple, est conséquemment plus sûre que la deduction elle-même, que cependant, comme nous l'avons remarqué plus haut, ne peut être mal faite par l'homme."

43Kemp Smith, p. 226, n. 1: "Whereas the terms 'experience' and 'judgment' continue to be used in the Meditations and the Principles, Descartes, we find, has thought good to discontinue using the term 'intuition' . . . . In its place, in the sentences (Med., A.T. VII, pp. 31-2) in which it would have been quite fittingly employed, there is substituted both in the original text and in the French translation, the term 'inspection.' . . . Haldane and Ross (I, p. 155) have not followed Descartes in this change of terminology; inspection they translate as intuition."

It is quite interesting to note that Haldane and Ross in
term, inspection, does not seem to vary from the former one in any appreciable way, except that it is a bit more pictorial ("solius mentis inspectio"), and, it also seems to connote more activity in the knowing process, in that the lumen naturale must apparently play about over the various attributes of an idea (or ideas) as it brings these attributes to the mind's attention. The Cartesian lumen naturale does not, as we have said, create ideas by the abstraction of a species from a phantasm, but, as we shall soon see, the lumen naturale can perceive relationships between various of the ideas, and in this way separate or combine ideas so that knowledge may increase. Descartes is almost forced to allow the mind at least this much creativity.

Through the steady contemplation of an idea, and through the observation of more and more properties in an idea, we come to know an idea much better. But now Descartes is faced with a problem, for he has denied the sense idea any access to the mind from the outer world, and he cannot say, with the Thomists, that since the idea came from reality to the mind through the senses, the mind is therefore in conformity with reality. Descartes must look for other conditions or criteria of truth, and one criterion

---

translating Descartes' Rules for the Direction of the Mind comment that the word "'Intuitus' is but sparingly used in Descartes' later writings" (Rule III, H.R. I, p. 7). However, in these later works---such as the Meditations and Principles---Haldane and Ross translate the word "inspection" as "intuition," presuming apparently that inspection and intuition connote the same mental process (see H.R. I, p. 155, n. 2).
of several which he makes use of is the criterion of clearness and distinctness.

Descartes defines clearness and distinctness thus:

I call that clear which is present and apparent to an attentive mind, in the same way as we assert that we see objects clearly when, being present to the observing eye, they operate on it with sufficient strength. However, the distinct is that which, since it is clear, is so disjoined (sejuncta) and cut off (praecissa) from all other [ideas] that it contains within itself nothing but what is clear.

Therefore, if the lumen naturale is so directed to a certain idea that the various features of the idea appear in "high relief," so to speak, to the mind, or, if all of the various attributes of the idea are ascribed to it which should be ascribed to it when the idea is present to an attentive lumen naturale, then the idea is perceived clearly. And, if the lumen naturale can "distinguish accurately that which [the idea] does comprehend from all other notions," the idea is distinctly perceived.45

Descartes would be prone to term any clear and distinct idea

---

44 *Princa*, I, XLV, A.T. VIII, p. 22: "Claram voco illam, quae menti attendenti praesens et aperta est; sicut ea clare a nobis videri dicimus, quae, caulo intuenti praesentia, satis fortiter et aperta illum movent. Distinctam autem illam, quae, cum clara sit, ab omnibus alis ita sejuncta est et praecissa, ut nihil plane aliud, quam quod clarum est, in se continetur." (The English translation in the text above is the author's.)

45 *Princa*, I, LXIII, A.T. VIII, p. 31: "... et non distinctionis sit conceptus ex eo quod pauciora in eo comprehenderamus, sed tantum ex eo quod illa quae in ipso comprehenderimus, ab omnibus alis accurate distinguamus."
as a true idea, but "truth" has a wider and more extended meaning as the will is brought into and related to the knowing process. For when the idea is "seen" in utmost clarity and distinctness by the lumen naturale, there follows in the will "a great inclination" or movement. This volitional movement is actually a judgment of either affirmation or denial concerning the information which the lumen naturale has about the idea, and when the will so judges, the process of knowing is completed. In order for the knowing process to result in truth, in addition to the clearness and distinctness which is required in the perception of the idea, the will in judging must be circumscribed by or be in strict accordance with the information coming from the clear and distinct perception. If the will in judging should not rest upon or be guided by the information received from the contemplation of the idea, the will's act of judging is faulty and error rather than truth is the result.

The process of knowing has in large part been accounted for, except for a discussion of the growth of knowledge. Should the mind be able to work with only single idea, intellection would be a slow and tedious process. This is why Descartes speaks in

46 See note 36.

47 Med. IV, A.T. VII, p. 59: "... sed quis ex magna luce in intellectu magna consecuta est propensio in voluntate, atque ita tanto magis sponte et libere illud credidi, quanto minus sit ad istud ipsum indifferens."

48 Consult Chapter IV for a fuller discussion of the will's relation to truth and error.
different places about "deduction," "demonstration," "inference," and similar processes, all of which point to a necessary connectedness between certain ideas. Descartes says quite simply that from certain clear and distinct ideas, other ideas can be derived.\textsuperscript{49} This is similar to stating that from well-established premises one can derive certain conclusions. However, how can ideas enter into any relationships if it is required of them that they be clear and distinct? Descartes gives no simple answer to this problem, but A. E. Gibson gives what may well be a sound solution. In the early stages of knowledge, Gibson explains, each idea has to be distinct in order for it to be true, but once its truth has been established, and in order for knowledge to grow, there is nothing which says that an idea cannot enter into a system with other similar ideas. The new complex or system of ideas then becomes the subject of a new intuition or inspection by the lumen naturale, which shines now upon the group of ideas and their inter-connections, and obtains information from such a complex.\textsuperscript{50} The ideas may be bound together into a system because of some

\textsuperscript{49}Princ., I, XIII, A.T. VIII, p. 9: "[Mens] inventit etiam communes quasdam notiones, et ex his varias demonstrationes componit, ad quas quamdui attendit, omnino sibi persuadet esse veras. Sic, exempli causa, numerorum et figurarum ideas in se habet, habetque etiam inter communes notiones, quod si aequalibus aequalia addas, inde exaurgent aequalia, et similes; ex quibus facile demonstratur, tres angulos trianguli aequalis esse duobus rectis, etc.; ac proinde haec et tali sibi persuadet vera esse, quamdui ad praemissas, ex quibus ea deduxit, attendit."

\textsuperscript{50}Gibson, pp. 158-59.
common attributes found among them, just as the notion of "heat" may bring together the ideas of fire, stove, and oven.

We can now summarize the Cartesian process of knowing, as it involves the innate idea, the lumen naturale, and the will. To begin with, the lumen naturale in shining upon the idea (or, the ideas and their connections, if we accept Gibson's theory) directly apprehends certain attributes of the ideas. When these ideas and their attributes are observed by the lumen naturale under the conditions of clearness and distinctness, the ideas are seen as true, and the will is inclined to make a judgment whereby it either affirms or denies the information gleaned from the ideas. Such an affirmation or denial of information is either true or false, according as the will in its movement is either in accordance with or not in accordance with the information of the lumen naturale.

This then is how an idea is known by the mind. But, as Descartes admits, this entire process would be utterly futile if the idea did not in some fashion reflect or represent external reality. We have already seen that Descartes' innate ideas have not had their origin in extra-mental reality, and yet, Descartes maintains that his ideas do represent the outside world. Let us turn to Descartes' solution to this problem, the problem of how ideas which do not come from reality can yet be in accord with reality.
CHAPTER III

THE RELATION BETWEEN THE IDEA
AND EXTRA-MENTAL REALITY

The philosophy of Descartes abounds with problems, some of which he managed to "solve" (that is, to his own satisfaction), but many more of which he left to posterity. The majority of these problems stems from Descartes' desire either to ignore or destroy that which he considered useless in the Aristotelian-Thomistic intellectual heritage, and from his subsequent attempts to strike out on his own and establish a certain body of scientific truth. Descartes had very ambitious aims, for the body of scientific truth he wished to establish included psychology, medicine, and various other sciences. In brief, his procedure for doing away with the old and building the new was as follows:

Since there were many so-called "truths" in his own knowledge which he found were lacking in certitude, Descartes decided that he must empty himself of all which he had once held as true, and then, casting about for and finding at least one certain and indubitable truth, he would build his philosophical system upon this one truth. As it turned out, the one indubitable truth that he discovered was his famous cogito ergo sum; and, upon this he soon established the "fact" that there was a God. It is at this point that we wish to resume our inquiry,
for since Descartes denied that our ideas originated in the senses, he was compelled to insure the conformity of mind and reality in some other way. This "other way" was through the instrumentality of God, and it is to an examination of this instrumentality that we now turn.

A. GOD ASSURES THE CONFORMITY OF MIND AND EXTRA-MENTAL REALITY

The early philosophical assumptions of Descartes were quite radical. Thus, for instance, we find that he called into doubt not merely the certainty of our knowledge, but also the very existence of extra-mental reality itself. For him, there had to be proof that the world existed, and, we see that eventually this proof came from God. As Descartes puts it, man discovers in himself the God-given inclination or even compulsion to believe that sense images come to him from extra-mental objects, and there is no reason to believe that God should desire to deceive man through such an inclination. Therefore, acknowledging God's goodness along with this inclination which He has given to man, Descartes asserts in Meditation VI that we should accept as a fact that some of our sense images do come from the world around us. However, Descartes still clings to his system of

\[1\text{A.T. VII, pp. 79-80: "Cum enim nullam plane facultatem mini dederit ad hoc agnosceendum, sed contra magnam propensionem ad credendum illas a rebus corporeis emitti, non video qua ratione posset intelligi ipsam non esse fallacem, si aliunde quam..."}\]
innate ideas, and he does so implicitly in the very next statement in Meditation VI:

However, they [external objects] are perhaps not exactly what we perceive by the senses, since this comprehension by the senses is in many instances very obscure and confused; but we must at least admit that all things which I conceive in them clearly and distinctly, that is to say, all things which, speaking generally, are comprehended in the object of pure mathematics are truly to be recognized as external objects.2

The way has therefore been left clear for Descartes: God's goodness assures us that our sense ideas do bring us into contact with the world which exists outside of our minds, but, these very same senses in a way prevent us from truly knowing the essence of reality which is only made known to us through pure intellection, that is, through the operation of the lumen naturale on the innate ideas. Thus, there is always a "veil of sense" which obscures reality, and prevents the mind from knowing, in a philosophical sense, the essence of reality.

Having verified the existence of an external world, Descartes


2A.T. VII, p. 80: "Non tamen forte omnes tales omnia existunt, quales illas sensu comprehendo, quoniam ista sensuum comprehensio in multa valde obscura est et confusa; sed saltem ilia omnia in illis sunt, quae alia et distincte intelligo, id est omnia, generaliter specenta, quae in curas Matheseōs objecto comprehenduntur."
moves a step closer to assuring the conformity of mind and reality by claiming that man’s reason or lumen naturale cannot be fallacious. His main basis for this assertion is that a good God could not deceive man by placing within his nature a faulty mind. However, despite the “fact” that God has given to man a power by which man can know the externally real, Descartes is unwilling to grant to reason the infallible ability to know, for man himself can use his lumen naturale either properly or improperly. The correct use of reason undoubtedly means recourse to the innate ideas, viewing the innate ideas under the conditions of clearness and distinctness, and, the use of a judgment by the will based upon the ideas, as the will affirms or denies the truth of the ideas.

The third and last way that mind and world are assured of conformity is through the innate ideas themselves. However, Descartes warns us that the bare fact of these ideas being innate does not assure us that we can place our full faith in them. He enumerates several reasons for this.

3Prima IV, CCVI, A.T. VIII, p. 328: “... quod Deus sit summe bonus et minime fallax, atque ideo facultas quam nobis dedit ad verum a falso judicandum, quoties ex recta utimur, et quid eius aper distincte percipimus, errare non possit. Tales sunt Mathematicae demonstrationes; tali est cognitio quod res materiales exsistent; et talis sunt evidentia omnia ratiocinii, quae de ipsis fiunt.” Descartes extends this inability to err to the faculty of judging, which like the lumen naturale, also must be used properly: “Deinde exterior quando in me esse judicandi facultatem, quam certa, ut et reliqua omnia quae in me sunt, a Deo accepta, cumque ille nolit me fallere, tales profecto non dedit, ut, dum ea rebus utor, possim unquam errare.” (Med. IV, A.T. VII, pp. 53-54)
For instance, although the very terms which he uses for the innate idea all signify the quality of being inborn, and therefore of most likely being deposited in the minds of men by God, Descartes is continually urging that these same innate ideas be inspected by men under the conditions of clearness and distinctness. If one could place absolute faith in the innate ideas in themselves, one would need no corrective measures such as clearness and distinctness. But since there is always the possibility that man will mistake sense images for innate ideas, and therefore reason from such images, man is compelled to use certain procedures which, for Descartes at least, will assure him that he is inspecting the innate ideas.

In addition, Descartes would probably urge the safeguards of clearness and distinctness because even though all men have the disposition for forming or producing the innate ideas, not all men will be as adept as others in emancipating themselves from sense knowledge and thereby dwelling upon the innate idea. Because it can be misused, or, perhaps not even used at all (e.g., when sense images are preferred to innate ideas), the innate idea gives us no absolute assurance, therefore, that mind and reality

\(^4\) Med. III, A.T. VII, p. 37: "... ideae... innatae..."

\(^5\) Kemp Smith, p. 246.
conform. Descartes never openly admitted this fact, but he very probably realized it to a large degree, for he urges in numerous places throughout his works that in order to obtain truth, the ideas of sense must be disregarded in favor of the innate ideas, which must always be "seen" clearly and distinctly.

In any case, Descartes feels that he now has ample proof that there can be no disparity between his reason and the world, for (a) a world does exist outside of his mind, (b) because of God's goodness, the mind of man can function properly and can come to certain conclusions about the external world, and (c), the mental objects of the mind, the innate ideas, have come from God and if they are used correctly, they can assist the mind immeasurably in arriving at knowledge.

Nonetheless, there is one major difficulty in all of the above reasoning, and that is that, at best, Descartes has succeeded only in establishing what we might call a "theoretical conformity" between mind and non-mind. There is still lacking a positively assured experiential conformity between his thoughts and the world, a conformity attested to by the weight of experience, as well as by reason, and we are of the opinion that Descartes may have realized this difficulty. For gradually, Descartes seemed to be accepting the testimony of the senses. He conceded the existence of an extra-mental world, and he also granted the practical usefulness of sense images. But here he stopped, for in order for him to go any further, he would have
had to discard his theory of innate ideas, and this he could not do without ruining his entire philosophy. Therefore, we are faced with a philosopher trying to preserve the idealistic tenets of his philosophy, while still admitting a few realistic elements into it. Let us try to see, therefore, if by so doing Descartes was better able to assure the conformity between the mind and reality, and yet hold on to his basic philosophical presupposition that our ideas are innate.

The possibility for a direct connection between the mind and reality may lie within any one of three sources: (1) within Descartes' distinction between the kinds and degrees of reality; (2) within the theory of representative perception; or (3), within his theory of judging. It will pay us then to make a closer examination of each of these theories. We will begin with Descartes' views on mental and extra-mental reality.

B. DESCARTES' DISTINCTION OF THE KINDS AND DEGREES OF REALITY

One of Descartes' basic arguments for proving that sense experience and intellectual ideas were non-continuous was founded upon his distinction between ideal reality and extra-mental reality. In Cartesian terminology, ideal reality became known as objective reality\(^6\) and extra-mental reality was called actual

\(^6\) *Med. III, A.T. VII, p. 41*: "... de ideis, in quibus consideratur tantum realitas objective."
or formal reality.\textsuperscript{7} (For our own convenience, we shall continue to use the terms ideal reality and extra-mental reality in place of the terminology of Descartes.) Quite logically, Descartes was of the opinion that these two realities were of different kinds or orders, and, that as a result of this basic difference, extra-mental reality could in no way be translated into ideal reality. As we have already observed in Chapter II, this was one of Descartes' main arguments against the reception of sense ideas into the intellect.

The impossibility of extra-mental reality to be translated into ideal reality should stop us from inquiring further in this direction as to any direct relation between the two types of reality, except for the assertion by Descartes that there exists a proportional relationship between the idea of a certain object and the extra-mental object itself.\textsuperscript{8} That is, Descartes appears to postulate a hierarchy of extra-mental reality, leading from

\textsuperscript{7}Ibid.: "Nam quamvis ista causa [an extra-mental cause] nihil de sua realitate actuali sive formalis in seam ideam trans-fundat . . . ."

\textsuperscript{8}Étienne Gilson, Études sur le rôle de la pensée médiévale dans la formation du système Cartésien (Paris, 1930), p. 203: "En soi, l'idée d'une substance n'est ni plus ni moins une idée que celle d'un accident, l'idée de Dieu n'est qu'un mode de ma pensée comme l'est l'idée de la matière; mais dans ce qu'elles représentent, ces idées ont une valeur très diverse, car l'idée de la substance contient objectivement beaucoup plus de réalité que celle de l'accident et celle de Dieu plus que celle de la matière. Sans doute, cette réalité objective n'est pas de même ordre que celle de choses, qu'elle représente, mais elle lui est exactement proportionnelle."
non-being to accidents to substances to God Himself, such that accidents have more of extra-mental reality than non-being, and substances have still more, and so on. This scale of extra-mental reality is then matched by a scale of ideal reality, and we are then able to say that the idea of a substance has more of ideal reality than the idea of an accident, etc. The two scales are thus different in kind, but similar in degree.

One might expect Descartes, in continuing his logical reasoning from the above, to state that since external and internal reality are in proportional agreement when it comes to the degree of reality, an external substance is thus the cause of the idea of this same substance, and an extra-mental accident causes an ideal accident, and so forth. But because of his insistence that extra-mental reality cannot be transmitted to ideal reality, Descartes cannot oblige us. Instead, to account for the origin of those ideas which match so perfectly extra-mentally real objects, he asserts that ideas cause each other, thus transmitting nothing but ideal reality to one another. The chain of idea-causes is not infinite, however, and at the very last we come to what Descartes terms an "archetype," a cause of the ideas which contains the whole of reality, meaning both extra-mental and

---

9 Med. IV, A.T. VII, p. 54: "... tanquam medium quid inter Deum et nihil ... ."

ideal.¹¹ Descartes says nothing more about this archetype, and we are left in the dark as to whether it is itself a special kind of idea implanted in the mind by God, or whether it is God Himself, or what it is.

We therefore have a cause of the ideas, and the cause embodies in some way both external and internal reality, but the cause seems more than ever to be some stop-gap of an explanation contrived by Descartes to answer one of the most embarrassing questions ever put to him: how the mind and the world are connected. Descartes' answer to this question, from the viewpoint of his so-called "formal" and "objective" reality, is highly unsatisfying, but it is not the only attempt at an answer that we find within his epistemology, because there is still, within his theory of sensation, a possible answer to this most pressing problem. We shall continue with a further examination of this theory.

C. THE THEORY OF
REPRESENTATIVE PERCEPTION

In Chapter II, we stated the theory of representative perception quite briefly. We said that a mind closed off from extra-mental reality could never directly know that reality, but that it could only know the representative ideas of extra-mental

¹¹Ibid., p. 42: "... archetypii, in quo omnis realitas formaliter continetur, quae est in idea tantum objective."
reality which it had within itself. In the case of Descartes, these representative ideas are the innate ideas. We also noted above how Descartes managed to reason to what we called a "theoretical conformity" between these innate ideas and reality, but we also commented on the inadequacy of this theoretical conformity. Now then, can we find a more direct and assured relation between Cartesian reality and the Cartesian mind?

If the reader will recall our discussion of sense knowledge in Chapter II, he will remember that Descartes agreed to the validity of sense knowledge and also to its use and even necessity for the composite soul-body in its daily practical affairs. Our examination of the imagination showed us, however, that while the mind could turn outward to contemplate corporeal forms (i.e., images which have come to the mind by way of the senses), these corporeal forms could in no way enter the mind.12 We might ask at this point, however, whether or not the corporeal forms in the imagination, or, the images which come to the mind from the senses, can have any effect whatsoever on the mind, even though these corporeal forms do not enter the mind. In his Notes Directed Against a Certain Programme, Descartes gives us a partially affirmative answer, for even though he argues that the ideas of

12Reply to Objections V, A.T. VII, p. 387: "Ad imaginationem vero, quae non nisi de rebus corporeis esse potest, opus quidem esse specie quae sit verum corpus, et ad quam mens se applicet, sed non quae in mente recipiatur."
external things that are in the mind cannot come to us by the senses. 13 still, sense images can transmit or send "something" 14 into the mind which gives the mind occasion to form the innate ideas, 15 which innate ideas then correspond both to the external objects and to the sense images of those objects. Descartes does not elaborate on this point, and consequently, we are forced to draw our own conclusions from this short passage.

For one thing, we can conclude that there is some slight connection between the mind and the world, because the sense image (which has itself arisen from extra-mental objects) in penetrating to the mind but no further, acts as some sort of stimulus which has as its reaction the bringing forth of an innate idea by and from the intellect. If we were to press Descartes on this point, we might question him as to the nature of the relation between stimulus and response, because it would appear at first glance that many of the elements from the sense image must somehow be transmitted into the mind. But Descartes does not permit a full translation of sense image into innate idea, and so we must try to be satisfied with the sense image in

---

13 A.T. VIII, p. 358: "...nullarum rerum ideas, quales eas cogitatione formamus, nobis ab illis exhiberi."

14 Ibid., p. 359: "...aliquid immiserunt ... ."

15 Ibid.: "...aliquid immiserunt, quod ei dedit occasionem, per innatam sibi facultatem, hoc tempore potius quam alio, efformandas."
the role of stimulus and nothing more.

An example of this process can be obtained from Descartes' *Reply to Objections V*, where he tells us that even though we "see" before us a triangle drawn on a piece of paper, what we are really seeing is not the triangle on the paper but the innate idea of a triangle which the exterior triangle has called forth from within the mind. 16

After a fashion, Descartes has thus preserved the integrity of his epistemology. Sense images cannot penetrate into the intellect, leaving the way clear for the mind to know only the innate ideas, which have been guaranteed to be true by God, as long as man takes certain precautions with them. Descartes continues to maintain that these innate ideas are representations of extramental things, 17 but that they are representations is still due to the artificially contrived relationship established to replace the errors which often arise in sense knowledge. As we have just seen, the connection between the mind and the surrounding world is not vouched for to any great degree by the world impinging on

---

16 A.T. VII, p. 382: "Sed quia iam ante in nobis erat idea veri trianguli, et facilius a mente nostra, quam magis composta figura picti trianguli, concipi poterat, idcirco, visa ista figura composta, non illam ipsam, sed potius verum triangulum apprehendimus."

the mind via the senses, and, although the mind-reality relationship was supposedly sustained by a reasoned or theoretical conformity which Descartes fabricated, the whole problem of a link between the mind and reality was still sorely in need of solution. However, we now at least have a hint as to where we should search for an answer. Since a sufficient connection has not been made from reality to the mind, the only remaining course lies in the mind making contact with reality through some intellectual function. In other words, although reality cannot impinge directly on the mind, perhaps the mind through some one of its actions can relate itself directly to the external world. This too, however, hints at a sort of artificiality, but it was one of the only courses, if not the only course, left open to Descartes.

D. THE IDEA IS RELATED TO EXTRA-MENTAL REALITY BY A JUDGMENT

Descartes approaches the problem of the mind's relation to reality by asking, in Meditation III, where truth or falsity is to be found. In answer to his own question, Descartes begins to distribute his thoughts into certain kinds. The first kind includes the "images of things," or the rerum imaginæ, and to

18A.T. VII, p. 37: "...et in quibusdam ex illis veritas aut falsitas proprie consistat, inquiram."

19Ibid.: "... omnes meas cogitationes in certa genera distribuam..."
these rerum imaginées, the name "idea" is most properly applied. But, Descartes tells us, if these rerum imaginées be considered only in themselves, and are not referred to anything besides themselves, these ideas cannot be said to be false. Descartes here leaves unmentioned, however, a very important conclusion, namely, that if these rerum imaginées are not referred to anything outside themselves, neither can they be true, understanding "true" here in its meaning of a relation between mind and reality.

Besides the rerum imaginées, Descartes goes on, there are other thoughts within his mind which have other forms, as when "I will, I fear, I affirm [or] I deny." And when he thus wills, or fears, or affirms, he states that he always apprehends in his mind "something as the subject of my thought," (i.e., some idea under the inspection of the lumen naturale), but, in addition to the idea under inspection, in willing or judging, he "embraces in thought something even more than this similitude of a thing."
In other words, Descartes asserts that judging is an active movement of the mind whereby we pass beyond the mere image of a thing (that is, its similitude) and relate or refer the mind to reality itself. We thus embrace reality through judging. If we are correct in our interpretation of Descartes in this passage, it can be said, therefore, that a judgment holds for more than the idea or image itself: it holds for reality (although, it must certainly be admitted that one can make judgments about one's thoughts which do not pass outside of oneself).

The writer is inferring much from Descartes' use of the term aliquid etiam amplius in the above passage. The reason for this is fairly obvious. For when Descartes speaks of judging, he speaks of it as a mental act whereby the mind transcends itself and refers its ideas to extra-mental reality. Some basis, however, is needed whereby the mind can do this, and, divine assurances aside, it seems that the doctrine of the aliquid etiam amplius best allows of this being done. To the writer, this aliquid etiam amplius signifies that the will in judging is determined in its action not only by the representational characteristics which are present in the idea (and which serve to re-present extra-mental reality to the lumen naturale), but also that the will in judging simultaneously is (1) determined by what we

25 It must be remembered that Descartes, when he speaks of the "mind," includes both will and lumen naturale within the mind's compass.
shall call the referential qualities of the idea, and (2) relates these referential qualities of the idea to external reality. Let us elaborate on this process.

Although Descartes held that the inspection of the clear and distinct idea by the lumen naturale was highly essential to the knowing process, the knowing process seems not to have been complete until the mind had been in some way related or referred to independent existence. Descartes began to see, the writer believes, that this was the true fruit which one can call knowledge, and anything less than the conjunction of reality and mind fell short of knowledge. Hence, Descartes began to attribute more and more to the innate idea. He had assigned to it the quality of being able to re-present external reality when he invoked God's goodness as an assurance that the innate ideas, since they come from a non-deceiving God, are valid representations of the world. But, valid representations alone are not sufficient for the purposes of constructing a new body of knowledge as Descartes intended, and so he felt that if he was to "get out of his mind," and make his newly discovered knowledge hold for reality itself, the ideas must then have within themselves a referential quality which assures their application to the extra-mental world. The judgment makes this application, and the will relates the ideas to reality by way of the referential qualities. This, the writer feels, is what Descartes meant when he described a judgment as an embracing or an inclusion.
in thought of more than the re-presentational quality of an idea (*similitudo*): a judgment also includes an *aliquid etiam amplius*, i.e., an acknowledgment of the referential qualities of an idea and a relation of the referential qualities of the idea to that external reality which is beyond the idea.

Descartes asserts that he can never deceive himself when he merely contemplates the innate idea itself, but he states that error or deception does arise when the mind judges the ideas to be conformable to the world outside of himself. Error does not spring from this mere act of judging itself, however, but rather from a judgment which is not circumscribed by the information stemming from the ideas. There are thus a series of preliminary precautions that one can take in knowing, e.g., refusing sense images, inspection of a clear and distinct innate idea, etc., but, the act by which knowledge can result, that is, judgment itself, can go awry because of the refusal, inability, etc. of the will to be guided by the information and referential qualities arising from the inspection of an idea by the *lumen naturale*.

We are, however, getting into the subject matter of our next chapter, the relation between the idea and truth, and so we will defer further discussion of this matter until then.

---

26 *Med. III, A.T. VII, p. 37*: "Praecipuus autem error et frequentissimus qui posset in illis reperiri, consistat in eo quod ideas, quae in me sunt, judicem rebus quibusdam extra me positis similes esse sive conformes . . . ."
CHAPTER IV
THE IDEA AND TRUTH

Since the explicit or implicit task which every philosopher sets about to complete is the acquisition of truth, and since the serious seeker after truth very often defines or describes that which he seeks, it is not out of line with our intentions to look for Descartes' definition of truth. But after determining what Descartes meant by truth, we shall then turn our discussion to an examination of the manner in which the innate idea functions within such a definition.

A. THE MEANING OF TRUTH
FOR DESCARTES

In both his Meditations and Principles, we find that Descartes is usually unhesitating in his listing of various definitions which will be of aid to the reader in the latter's understanding of Cartesian philosophy. But there are times when it seems as if a less rigorous Descartes takes up pen and ink to affirm that, for some experiences, a philosopher does more harm than good when he attempts to define them. Such experiences are perfectly simple in themselves and natural to us, Descartes says, and all people everywhere will have at least a non-verbalized understanding of such terms as: "I am certain," "I exist," "I
know," and so forth. Attempts may be made to frame definitions for such terms, but Descartes felt that, if this were done, many universal experiences would then be rendered obscure.

Truth falls in this latter category, Descartes thought. But, in a letter to Father Mersenne (one of Descartes' many correspondents) dated October 16, 1639, Descartes does offer a somewhat formal definition of truth. Therein he defines truth as the compatibility of thought with its objects. This certainly sounds realistic, but from what we have written above about Cartesian idealism, and from the injunctions which Descartes has himself given against trying to define naturally known and simple experiences, we should pause to examine his definition to see if he really adheres to it in a realistic sense, or whether he has another meaning for it.

---

1Princ. I, X, A.T. VIII, p. 8: "Et saepe adverdi Philosophos in hoc errare, quod ea, quae simplicissima erant ac per se nota, Logicae definitionibus explicare conarentur; ita enim ipsa obscuriora reddabant."

2Letter to Mersenne, A.T. II, pp. 596-97: "Ainsi on peut bien expliquer quid nominis a ceux qui n'entendent pas la langue, et leur dire que ce mot verité, en sa propre signification, denote la conformité de la pensée avec l'objet, mais qui, lors qu'on l'attribue aux choses qui sont hors de la pensée, il signifie seulement que ces choses peuvent servir d'objets a des pensées veritables, soit aux nostres, soit a celles de Dieu; mais on ne peut donner aucune définition de Logique que aide a connaître sa nature. Et je croi le même de plusieurs autres choses, qui sont fort simples et se connaissent naturellement, comme sont la figure, la grandeur, le mouvement, le lieu, le tems, etc., en sorte que, lors qu'on veut définir ces choses ou les obscurcist est on s'embarrase. Car, par exemple, celui que se promene dans une salle, fait bien mieux entendre ce que c'est que le mouvement, que ne fait celui que dit: est actus entis in potentia prout in potentia, et ainsi des autres."
A careful search shows us that although the letter which contained this definition was written in 1639—two years before the publication of the *Meditations*, and six years before the publication of the *Principles*—we can find nowhere in the latter two works any mention of a formal definition of truth such as that given in the letter. This seems odd. That a man would offer his definition of truth and afterwards not follow it in his search for truth most certainly presents a problem. Since, therefore, the Cartesian definition of truth as the compatibility of thought with its objects seems not to have appeared among the philosophical definitions given by Descartes in his *Meditations* and *Principles*, our task seems to be manifold: (1) we must try to discern whether or not Descartes made use of the formal definition he gave in his letter to Father Mersenne; and (2), if he did use it, we must try to find out if he dis­guised it or somehow gave it his own interpretation; or (3), we must try to discover if Descartes made use of some other definition of truth; and (4) if he did, we should try to deter­mine what it was.

In our reading of Descartes' two works cited above, we have often come upon the words "true" and "truth," but we have found that Descartes tells us very little about their nature. On the other hand, Descartes goes into great detail when he speaks of error, and, we have found, to our surprise, that we can actually acquire a considerable understanding of Cartesian truth by an
examination of Cartesian error. Let us proceed with such an examination.

Descartes discusses at various times and in various places what he calls the causes of error. For example, it will be remembered from Chapter II that Descartes saw in the intellect's reliance on sense ideas a very distinct and major cause of error. Descartes at other times mentions that the prejudices of childhood, the fatigue which the mind often succumbs to, and other causes also result in deception. However, as far as our search for the Cartesian definition of truth is concerned, the uses of the senses, the prejudices of childhood, etc., all seem to be rather remote causes of error. For there seem to be within Descartes' epistemological elements more immediate and more proximate causes of error, which arise from the inter-functioning of the will and the intellect.

---


4 Upon examination of the Cartesian sources of error in knowledge, it occurred to the writer that a division could be made in these causes. The senses, fatigue, prejudice, etc. all seemed to be remote causes—remote in time, importance, and effect—whereas the will's interaction with the *lumen naturale* was an immediate or proximate cause of error; proximate on the same bases of time, importance, and effect. At this point in our thesis, we are only interested in the proximate cause of error.
As to these **proximate causes of error**, Descartes held them to lie somewhere within the inter-functioning of the will and the idea. In his fourth Meditation, Descartes begins an investigation of the nature of truth and falsity, and, since he turns first to an examination of error, we shall do likewise.

To begin with, Descartes considers that both the will and the intellect are gifts from God, and going back once more to his thesis that a good God never deceives, he proclaims that no imperfections can lie in either of these faculties if they are **considered in themselves**, and, if in addition they are used correctly.⁵ There is the possibility, of course, that the intellect will not function as it should, and that the innate ideas will not be inspected by the **lumen naturale** as they should be, but this is no reason to attribute any malice or deception to God. The fault lies with man, Descartes states, in that man makes imperfect use of a faculty faultless in itself. And then too, because of the many inscrutable divine actions which transcend man's knowledge,⁶ God cannot be criticized for "depriving" men of certain innate ideas. It is simply that some men do not possess various ideas, whereas other men do and thus might be said

⁵See, IV, A.T. VII, pp. 53-55.

⁶Ibid., p. 55: "Cum enim iam sciam naturam meam esse valde infirman et limitatam, Dei autem naturam esse immensam, incomprehensibilem, infinitam, ex hoc satis etiam scio innumerabilia illum posse quorum causas ignorem . . . ."
to have a greater faculty for knowing.\footnote{Ibid., p. 56: "Nam per solum intellectum percipio tantum ideas de quibus judicium ferre possum, nec ullus error propriè dictus in eo praecisè sic spectato reperitur; quamvis enim in-numerae fortasse res existant quarum ideas nullae in me sunt, non tamen proprie illis privatus, sed negative tantum destitutus . . . ."} If the intellect is used properly, there is no doubt that whatever ideas are inspected by the \textit{lumen naturale} are inspected correctly, and so there can be no error here.\footnote{Ibid., p. 56: " . . . nam quidquid intelligo, cum a Deo habeam ut intelligam, procul dubio recte intelligo, nec in eo fieri potest ut fallar."} But should the innate ideas \textit{not} be inspected as they should be, that is, should they not be seen as clear and distinct, we have then placed our finger on one of the immediate or proximate causes of error. To Descartes' way of thinking, in not pushing through to a clear, distinct inspection of the ideas, the \textit{lumen naturale} has not functioned properly, and a certain type of error results. But there is another kind of error which can occur in the knowing process, and this comes about through the conjunction of the will and the idea in an act of judgment.

Descartes himself explains how certain errors depend on a combination of two concurrent causes, the will and the intellect.\footnote{Ibid., p. 56: "Deinde, ad me proprius accedens, et quales-nam sint errores mei (qui soli imperfectionem aliquam in me arguant) investigans, adverto illos a duabus causis simul concurruntibus dependere, nempta a facultate cognoscendi quae in me est, et a facultate eligendi, sive ab arbitrii libertate, hoc est ab intellectu et simul a voluntate."} Errors, he says,
come from the sole fact that since the will is much wider in its range and compass than the understand-
ing, I do not restrain it within the same bounds, but extend it also to things which I do not under-
stand; and as the will is of itself indifferent to these, it easily falls into error and sin, and chooses the evil for the good, or the false for the true.10

In examining the above quotation, we must remember that Descartes thought that the human will was a faculty that was without limit or constraint,11 far more than the intellect, the imagination, or any other faculty or power of a human being. For this reason, it could either extend itself far beyond the bounds of clearly and distinctly known knowledge, or, it could curtail itself so that it affirmed or denied only that which the lumen naturale knew clearly and distinctly. The essence of falsehood or error is therefore found in a will act which judges about any idea which is insufficiently known by the intellect.

We can now derive a definition of truth from the above dis-
cussion. For just as error lies in a judgment which is not based upon clear and distinct ideas, when Descartes spoke of truth in its fullest sense, he meant that conformity between the judgment

10Ibid., p. 58: "Unde ergo nascentur mei errores? Nempe ex hoc uno quod, cum latius pateat voluntas quam intellectus, illam non intra eosdem limites contineo, sed etiam ad illa quae non intelligo extendere; ad quae cum sit indifferens, facile a vero et bono deflectit, atque ita et fallor et pecco."

11Ibid., p. 56: "Nec vero etiam queri possum, quod non sa-
tis amplam et perfectam voluntatem, sive arbitrii libertatem, a Deo acceperim; nam sane nullis illam limitibus circumscribi ex-
perior."
and the innate idea which results from a will act wholly in accordance with the information obtained from a clear and distinct idea. If we are correct in assuming that this is Descartes' definition of truth, we are able to say that, in a way, truth for him was the compatibility between the mind and its objects. But we must understand by this that Descartes includes the will and its actions within the realm of the mind, and, that by objects Descartes can mean the innate ideas within the mind, rather than extra-mental objects. His definition is scholastic, but his interpretation is strictly his own.

Since the innate idea thus seems to be such a key element in Descartes' search for truth, we wish to examine once again, but in greater detail, the methods by which Descartes validates the innate idea. We wish to do so for three reasons: (1) to see what his criteria for truth were; (2) to try to understand where such criteria came from; and (3), to try to re-establish his reason or reasons for adhering to such criteria.

B. THE CARTESIAN CRITERIA FOR THE TRUTH OF THE IDEA

In this section, we shall be discussing truth, but we are not using herein the same definition of truth which we used in the previous section. Our previous definition defined truth in its widest possible meaning as the conformity existing between a judgment and the innate ideas. Here, however, we will use the
more restricted meaning of truth which Descartes used when he was speaking about the truth of the innate ideas. This latter meaning of truth is, as it were, a "preliminary" stage of conformity which involves the lumen naturale and the innate ideas, and it must exist before the will can be brought into conjunction with the innate ideas. It can therefore be said of both of Descartes' conceptions of truth—the truth of the judgment and the truth of the innate idea—that they represent a compatibility between thought and the objects of thought, as Descartes himself stated in his letter to Father Mersenne. But, we must understand that Descartes very probably made this definition fit his own epistemology. That is, by "thought" he could have meant either the will or the lumen naturale, and by "objects" he very probably meant the innate ideas. Therefore, to speak of truth as the conformity existing between thought and the objects of thought can mean, for Descartes, either (1) the conformity of the will and innate ideas in an act of judgment, or (2), the conformity of the lumen naturale and the innate ideas. In either instance an ideal conformity must be understood, not a conformity between the ideal and the extra-mental.

One of the most frequently used criteria of truth and perhaps also the most important one for Descartes is the criterion of clearness and distinctness, which has been called by some the internal criterion of truth. We find Descartes stating in many places throughout the Meditations and the Principles that an
idea, in order to be true, must be clear and distinct, but it is only in Principle XLV of Part I of the Principles that he offers us his definition of "clear and distinct."

I call that clear, he states, which is present and apparent to an attentive mind, in the same way as we assert that we see objects clearly when, being present to the observing eye, they operate on it with sufficient strength. However, the distinct is that which, since it is clear, is so disjoined (sejuncta) and cut off (praecisa) from all other ideas that it contains within itself nothing but what is clear.12

Clearness thus seems to connote a relationship between the lumen naturale and the innate idea such that the idea is immediately present before the lumen naturale, and, the lumen naturale can so inspect the idea that various features or attributes of the idea show up plainly to it. However, while certain portions of the idea may be "seen" as clear by the lumen naturale, there may be other portions of the idea which remain in obscurity. Therefore, when the entire idea is "seen" clearly by the lumen naturale, it is also said to be distinct, meaning that it is entirely separated from other obscure ideas on the basis of its clarity.13

---

12Princ. I, XLV, A.T. VIII, p. 22: "Claram voco illam, quae menti attendenti praesens et aperta est: sicut ea clare a nobis videri dicimus, quae, oculo intuenti praesentia, satis fortiter et aperta illa movent. Distinctam autem illam, quae, cum clara sit, ab omnibus alia ita sejuncta est et praecusa, ut nihil plane aliud, quae quod clarum est, in se contineat." (The English translation in the text above is the author's.)

13We must not forget to mention though, that Descartes did leave room in his epistemology for relationships between the ideas. These relationships need not be something separate from the ideas,
In addition to the above internal criterion of truth, there are several commentators who have detected the presence of an external criterion of truth in Descartes' theory of knowledge. This external criterion is the veracity of God, Who, besides being the One to place the innate ideas in the mind of man, also verifies (1) man's ability to know and (2) the existence of an extra-mental world which can be known. It will be remembered, however, that God's existence was one of the first things that Descartes could know with certainty after his own existence, and so it seems that the existence of God, Who is the external criterion of truth, is actually dependent upon the internal criterion, i.e., the ability to know the truth if the innate ideas are seen clearly and distinctly. The view that God's existence is dependent upon the Cartesian reasoning process is erroneous, for in order that the system of methodic doubt be absolutely rigorous, Descartes doubted the existence of all things, even that of God. The strange thing is, however, that even while a philosophically rigorous Descartes is doubting of God's existence, at the same time he feels in an "unphilosophical" way that God is verifying his method, his faculty of reason, and, his use of the innate ideas. It is as if one already knows that 4 plus 5

but they can be various attributes which are present in different ideas, and which serve to link ideas together.

equals 9, but that one is constrained to prove it mathematically in order that it can be used in one's further mathematical reasonings. Perhaps then, even though Descartes appears to rely heavily on the internal criterion of the clear and distinct idea, in all reality he leaned just as much upon God's veracity. In fact, perhaps he founded more things on God's veracity than a philosopher has a right to do.

There is a third criterion of truth which Descartes used, and this has been termed the negative criterion; it states that those things are true about which one is incapable of doubting. For example, since I cannot doubt either my own existence or that of God, it must be true that both God and I exist. However, this criterion also seems to depend upon the internal criterion, in that whatever idea is inspected and then appears as clear and distinct is therefore a true idea, and its truth cannot then be doubted. In addition, since God verifies our innate ideas, if an idea is "seen" as clear and distinct, we can then judge it to be a true representation of extra-mental reality, and, we cannot doubt that our idea is true in itself, or that it represents an external object.

There is at least one general observation which we have concerning all of Descartes' criteria for truth, and that is that they are all internal or subjective. Without doubt, it is only fitting that we should expect these types of criteria from a thinker who was previously trained in and also put great faith
in mathematics. But on the other hand, we have the right to ask if such subjective mathematical criteria can be applied to philosophy, which seeks and purports to know external reality. The criterion of clearness and distinctness is a direct outgrowth of Descartes' mathematical studies, and it actually has no place in a philosophy of nature, where that nature exists outside the mind. At the very most, Descartes' clear and distinct idea is simply a clear and distinct idea, and not a true idea, where true is taken to mean the conformity between external and internal reality. In a like manner, the criterion of God's veracity is a subjective criterion with no basis in extra-mental reality. Descartes has reasoned that only his innate ideas are true, and he has also reasoned that these ideas are true because God has given them to man. But both these conclusions are products of Descartes' mind, and, once again, have no reliable basis in extra-mental reality. And lastly, the criterion of the incapacity to doubt is strictly a subjective criterion. Many people in the time of Columbus may have found it impossible to doubt the proposition that the world was flat, but this did not make the proposition true. In summing up therefore, we must state again that all of Descartes' criteria for truth were subjective, and thus heir to all of the ills which accompany an idealistic philosophy. We shall discuss the consequences of this conclusion in the following chapter.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Before we comment upon the findings of our paper, let us briefly summarize its main points.

With regards to the development of the innate idea, we discovered that Descartes, in order to avoid all sources of error in his quest for the truth, entirely disregarded the sense image's contribution to philosophical knowledge and dwelled instead upon the innate idea. He argued that the innate idea was placed in the mind by God and therefore it had to be a true representation of extra-mental reality. But in order for its truth to be "seen" and appreciated by man, the mind of man (the lumen naturale) must "inspect" the idea and "see" the idea clearly and distinctly. When this was done, the idea and its various attributes were then regarded as true.

The idea's relation to extra-mental reality was verified by an all-good and undeceiving God, but we suggested that perhaps Descartes saw some deficiency in this conclusion and therefore posited an active relation of the idea to reality through a judgment.

And finally, in our discussion of the idea and truth, we saw how Descartes defined truth as the conformity of mind and object; but we tried to show how Descartes may have interpreted
this as meaning either a conformity between the will and the innate idea in judging, or, as a conformity between the lumen naturale and the innate idea. In either case, we noted the complete idealism behind both types of conformity, as well as in Descartes' various other criteria of truth.

In general, we can say that this aura of subjectivity pervades practically the whole of Descartes' epistemology. Except for his approval of sense images for practical living, there is not one element of his theory of knowledge which does not take its rise from Descartes' own thought processes. That is, Descartes has no direct recourse to extra-mental reality either for (a) that which he knows, or for (b) proof that his knowledge is true knowledge, i.e., that it is in conformity with external reality. In other words, both the innate idea which Descartes knows and the methods for assuring that these ideas are true make no direct reference to the world outside the mind. If we review each of the main points about the innate idea just mentioned (i.e., its development, its relation to reality, and its use in Descartes' definition of truth), we will see how true this is.

For example, let us consider first the development of the innate idea. If we examine the arguments which Descartes put forth to disqualify the sense images as a source of knowledge and to lend credence to the innate idea, we can see that these arguments do not convince in the least. Let us see why. In the
first place, there is reason to question the information of the
senses from time to time, but such information must be rectified
by the other senses and by the intellect, rather than discarded
completely as Descartes would have us do. Secondly, it would
take an enormous stretch of the imagination to call the state of
sleeping entirely similar to the state of waking. There are
elements of similarity between the two states, it is true, but
there are also elements of dissimilarity which should normally
prevent us from assuming that that which is true of sleeping is
also true of waking. Therefore, and in the third place, we can-
not say that our thoughts while waking come from inside of us,
just as our dreams supposedly do when we are asleep. For in
addition to making waking and sleeping equivalent psychological
states, we are assuming, with no proper justification for doing
so, that all of the material for our dreams arises from our
mind. And finally, in the fourth place, Descartes has no proof
for his statement that extra-mental reality cannot be translated
into ideal reality. This is a very important point, and if Des-
cartes would have been more aware of the tremendous implications
of his assertion, perhaps he would not have gone as far as he
did. It is possible that Descartes did begin to realize how
unconvincing his arguments were, for he did finally see fit to
accept the testimony of the senses for everyday living. Probab-
ly the reason that he did not reinstate the senses entirely is
because to do so would have meant a revamping of his entire
philosophical system, and "regressing" to scholasticism once again.

Difficulties also arise when we try to "know" the innate idea. The main reason for this is that with nothing except the criteria of clearness and distinctness to guide us to the truth, there is nothing to differentiate an idea which has some counterpart in extra-mental reality from one which has been created by the intellect but which does not mirror the external world. The danger stemming from this particular facet of Descartes' epistemology is apparent: Descartes could very easily impose upon extra-mental reality the contents and constructions of his own mind, with no more justification for doing so than the assumption that an all-good God cannot give to us either faulty innate ideas or a faulty lumen naturale.

But this brings us to a consideration of the idea's relation to the external world. As we have seen in Chapter III, Descartes allows of no way in which reality can impinge itself on the mind or for the experience of the senses to be translated into intellectual knowledge. For that matter, Descartes could not even say that that which he knew was external reality; he would be forced to admit that the only thing he knew was the innate idea, and not reality. We suggested that Descartes may have had a link with the outside world through his acts of judging. But, a will act when it referred an idea to extra-mental reality usually came after the lumen naturale inspected and knew the idea
as an idea, and so we still have to conclude that Descartes could never know extra-mental reality directly. For first the idea is known as an idea, and only after being known in itself is it referred indirectly to external reality by the will. It is still the idea which is being known directly, and not reality. Therefore, even though Descartes may have had some notion that his epistemology was leading into the untenable position of solipsism, and, although he may have attempted to avoid such a position (e.g., by his acceptance of sense images for everyday living, and also through the relation of extra-mental and ideal reality through an act of judgment), he was not successful in escaping such a position. We have already stated why escape was impossible: Descartes had already committed himself too far along the path of subjectivism. He may have taken a few measures to try to avoid the errors arising from such an extreme position, but, we have said that very possibly the correction of all the errors stemming from Descartes' idealistic approach may have led Descartes back into the scholastic fold—and one wonders if Descartes was trying to avoid this perhaps even more than solipsism. And so, if our interpretation of Descartes' epistemology is correct, we find the man in a dilemma: at first trying to escape the ill effects of a scholasticism he considered unproductive of scientific knowledge, and later, trying to avoid the errors which his own system produced.

But to continue with our summary of the main points in our
paper, we might say that perhaps a concern for the nature of truth should have occupied more of Descartes' time than it did. As we suggested earlier, the various criteria for truth all spring from Descartes' overwhelming and absorbing interest in mathematics. If an idea is "inspected" and is "seen" to be simple, clear, and distinct, one is, as it were, naturally compelled to assent to the truth of the idea. But this is not the same as the logical assent which accompanies a mind truly conformed to reality. Only a mathematician can be content with a natural connectedness between ideal propositions, propositions which need have no basis nor counterpart in extra-mental reality. But that which mathematics is chiefly unconcerned with, namely, the extra-mental world, must be the chief concern for the philosopher. Therefore, if the philosopher gives his assent to certain "clear and distinct" ideas, with no regard as to whether or not such ideas do mirror reality, he cannot be defended from the charge that he is living in a world of dreams. One can be sympathetic with Descartes' desire to unify the sciences by a common method of reasoning, such as is offered by mathematics; but such sympathies must give way to the important realization that the sciences, one and all, seek as their common goal knowledge about extra-mental reality. The method of reasoning used by Descartes does not give us this knowledge.

Here then we are forced to part company with Descartes. We are thankful for having encountered his philosophy, not because
it helps us to any great extent in explaining reality, but rather in that it gives us cause to appreciate even more the intellectual heritage of Aristotle and St. Thomas which it tried so hard to destroy.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. PRIMARY SOURCES


II. SECONDARY SOURCES


----- The Unity of Philosophical Experience. New York, 1937.


APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Charles George Boysen has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Philosophy.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

June 10, 1958

[Signature of Adviser]