ESSAYS *on the* PHILOSOPHY *and* SCIENCE *of* RENÉ DESCARTES

Edited by

STEPHEN VOSS

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To

Karen, Amarantha, Serenity, Tamara, and Julie

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Veyrins, France S.V.
May 1992

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Abbreviations

Works frequently cited in text and in notes have been identified by the following abbreviations:

AT	Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, eds. *Oeuvres de Descartes.* 11 vols. Paris: new presentation: CNRS and Vrin, 1964–76 (referred to by volume, page, and, sometimes, line).
CSM	John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, trans. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes,* 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985–86.
CSMK	Cottingham, Stoothoff, Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny, trans. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes.* Vol. 3: The Correspondence. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
HR	Elizabeth Haldane and G. R. T. Ross, trans. *The Philosophical Works of Descartes.* 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931.

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1972), *Epicure et son école* (1976), *Descartes: Textes et Débats* (1984), and *Descartes et le rationalisme* (6th ed. 1992).

In 1985 Geneviève Rodis-Lewis was awarded the Grand Prix de l'Académie Française for the totality of her work on Descartes. Her current project is a biography, *Descartes sur le chemin de la vérité.*

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and "mécanique des signes" which accompanied the rise of a classical science of language and of languages, and to evaluate the possibility of applying to the knowledge of signs the methods that have been applied to gain knowledge of the natural world.

STEPHEN VOSS is coauthor of "The Structure of Type Theory," *Journal of Philosophy* (1980) and author of "Understanding Eternal Life," *Faith and Philosophy* (1992). He has produced English editions of Descartes's *The Passions of the Soul* (1989) and *The Leibniz-Arnauld Correspondence* (forthcoming). His current project is *Metaphysics, Morals, and Passion,* a book on developments in Descartes's thought after the *Meditations.*

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Essays on
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1
Introduction

In his philosophy and science, René Descartes was able to construct a world so capacious that anyone who studies his ideas well can live there—can acquire a unique understanding of our common world by examining it from his perspective. The community of scholars inhabiting the Cartesian world is now more than 350 years old. Each generation, in its distinctive way, discovers new resources in Descartes's world and makes its own contribution to our understanding of it. The present book is rich with such contributions, at once expressive of the present moment in scholarship and of the immutable natures specified by the Cartesian text.

This volume's publication helps celebrate the 350th anniversary of the second edition of the *Meditations.* It originated in my conviction that Americans ought to join in celebrating the 350th anniversary of the *Discourse on Method.* As Henri Gouhier observed in 1987 in opening a major conference in Paris, "three and a half centuries after the publication of the *Discourse* and the *Essays,* the land of Descartes is not simply the one we know today as France." In that spirit I arranged a similar conference in 1988 at the old Sainte Claire Hotel in San Jose, which created an opportunity to advance Descartes scholarship by bringing together an immensely diverse range of people linked by interest in Descartes's world. This book is inspired by that conference.

These essays move the cutting edge of work on Descartes. They provide new answers; sometimes they even ask new questions. In this Introduction I enumerate some of the new currents in Descartes scholarship—the new approaches to Descartes's world—which they exemplify.

Above all, this book conveys a sense of history that is new to Descartes studies. Decades ago Etienne Gilson, in *Études sur le rôle de la pensée médiévale dans la formation du système cartésien,* and then Ferdinand Alquié, in *La Découverte métaphysique de l'homme chez Descartes,* called attention to a decisive development in the philosopher's thought around 1629. Here their hypothesis is strikingly extended: a third of these essays—those by Dennis Sepper, Jean-Pierre Séris, John Schuster, Evert van Leeuwen, Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, Gary Hatfield, and Daniel Garber—independently document specific developments in his thought at that time.

Several authors shed light on Descartes by pointing to relations with his historical context. Marleen Rozemond, Stephen Voss, Alan Gabbey, and Marjorie Grene display for comparison the views of authors who worked with

Descartes's questions—predecessors, contemporaries, and successors. To take one example, Rozemond investigates the relation of Descartes's doctrine that the mind is incorporeal to the rest of his work, and employs above all the historical setting of his thought about mind in considering whether he aimed more at refuting attempts to explain mind mechanistically or at correcting scholastic defenses of immortality.

These essays reflect a steady growth in catholicity within Descartes scholarship during the past decade or two, as Anglo-American and continental scholars have sought to learn from one another. Thus, two of the most important recent interpretations are Jean-Luc Marion's *Sur la théologie blanche de Descartes* and Jean-Marie Beyssade's *La Première philosophie de Descartes*. Each investigates the consequences of a fundamental doctrine—respectively, the creation of the eternal truths and knowledge of God, and the continuity of time. These books are not written only for French scholars or read only by them. In the same way, in the decade since Edwin Curley's *Descartes Against the Skeptics* and Margaret Wilson's *Descartes* appeared, their results have been incorporated into continental scholarship. A glance at the notes in this volume will show the acceleration of that cross-fertilization. In particular, Stephen I. Wagner develops the French scholar Martial Gueroult's interpretation of the distinction between a substance's power and its modes in an entirely new direction, by demonstrating its capacity to dispel some of the air of mystery from the doctrine of mind–body interaction. Séris enters into dialogue with those Anglo-Americans who imagine Descartes to anticipate theories of the convergence of machine and language. Sepper incorporates continental studies to shed light on the conceptions of imagination in the early writings. Schuster does the same in arriving at an understanding of the early writings about method. Grene fruitfully extends Gilson's comparison between Descartes and Harvey on the heart and blood. These essays provide especially vivid models for dialogue between what used to be two largely distinct interpretive traditions.

This book significantly advances such dialogue. For it is still true that only a tiny proportion of the output of continental scholars is available in English. Even linguistic adepts find that work with foreign languages requires downshifting. So we are proud to be able to present six works originally written in French. Sometimes these articles stem from continental scholarly traditions; see the essays by Henry, Marion, and Rodis-Lewis. Sometimes they make use of traditions pioneered in the English-speaking world; see the essays by Jean-Marie Beyssade, Michelle Beyssade, Jean-Pierre Séris, and once again Rodis-Lewis. Thanks to their essays here, these six authors become more accessible to the English-speaking part of the land of which Henri Gouhier has spoken.

In particular, this book makes newly available in English a radical approach to Cartesian phenomenology. In a series of studies that includes the present essay, Michel Henry has asked whether Descartes's text supports a distinctive phenomenology that posits nonrepresentational conscious states prior to the *ekstasis* separating consciousness from its object. Jean-Luc Marion examines the application of this strategy to the passion of generosity por-

trayed in *The Passions of the Soul,* aiming to produce a broader understanding of Descartes's *cogito.*

The book represents growing catholicity in another way. Historians of philosophy on the one hand and historians and sociologists of science on the other speak and listen to one another here. It is increasingly clear that Descartes's philosophy cannot be understood apart from his aims and achievement in physics. He told Mersenne on 28 January 1641 that his metaphysics was meant to contain the foundations of a new physics, and destroy the foundations of the old. He wrote in the 1647 preface to the *Principles of Philosophy* that his philosophy was like a tree—its root was metaphysics, its trunk was physics, and all of the fruit of his philosophy grew on branches sprouting from that trunk. Voss argues that one of the metaphysical principles governing mind–body interaction has specific implications for physics as well. Daniel Garber investigates how Descartes can consistently make use of experience in science and as a rationalist require certainty of scientific belief. Rodis-Lewis and Gary Hatfield scrutinize the fundamental question of the theological validation of scientific knowledge.

We are now witnessing a burgeoning interest in Descartes's rhetoric. It arises in part from a new concern in general among philosophers, critics, social scientists, and historians with rhetorical aspects of texts; and in part from an older but persistent concern about Descartes's sincerity. Sincerity is, perhaps, some kind of relation between intention and text. But many kinds of intention are possible and Descartes writes many kinds of text, from dialogue to treatise to manual to mediation to letter to, most interesting of all, discourse. He clearly intends to teach a method for doing science, but in what manner and with what self-consciousness and sincerity does he mean to teach it? Is there a connection between the narrative style of the *Discourse* and the respective claims it makes for philosophy and science? What is it about his historical falsehoods concerning his career in science that makes them look true? What is it about his intentions that might make his falsehoods means to realizing them? It is such questions that Evert van Leeuwen and John Schuster raise in their studies of the central works in which Descartes advertises a scientific method.

To take the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* as an accurate depiction of Descartes's scientific procedures may stand in the way of understanding them. To take the *Discourse* either as autobiography or as treatise on method in science may obscure the place it reserves for philosophy. Understanding the structure of the false historical claims that Descartes makes for his method may help us understand their rhetorical success. Understanding the genres he employs in recommending his method may help us understand his conception of the way in which philosophy provides the foundation for science.

We are beginning to gain a clearer view of the organic relation between Descartes's outlook and its intended human benefits. Three branches—mechanics, medicine, and morals—sprout from the trunk of physics, each yielding its own kind of fruit. Gabbey, Grene, and Marion examine topics within these respective branches, and each helps us see more clearly Des-

cartes's way of approaching such practical topics. Gabbey considers how the author could have described mechanics both as part of the trunk and as a branch. By tackling this structural aspect of the tree, he brings unexpected clarity to the status that mechanics came to possess after the Middle Ages.

Descartes's aim to preserve human life is now acknowledged as a significant motive for his work. In Part VI of the *Discourse* he articulates a vision of a "practical philosophy" which might be used to "make ourselves, as it were, masters and possessors of nature"—a philosophy desirable "most importantly for the maintenance of health, which is undoubtedly the chief good and the foundation of all the other goods in this life" (AT VI, 62; CSM I, 142–143). The value of medicine rests directly on the applicability of physics to the human body. But Grene shows that we have as yet only an incomplete understanding of the approach to the body that generated Descartes's specific doctrine about the circulation of the blood, and his specific objections to that of Harvey.

In the end, as he wrote to Chanut on 15 June 1646, Descartes came to think that his thought was fruitful above all in morals: "What little knowledge of physics I have tried to acquire has been a great help to me in establishing sure foundations in morals. Indeed I have found it easier to reach satisfactory conclusions on this topic than on many others concerning medicine, on which I have spent much more time. So instead of finding ways to preserve life, I have found another, much easier and surer way, which is not to fear death." (AT IV, 441–442; CSMK, 289) If he writes his last major work, the *Passions*, "as a physicist" (AT XI, 326; CSM I, 327) he intends it to serve as a prolegomenon for morals. The passions are means for gaining what is of intrinsic value in human life—the determination to make good use of one's free will, a determination which is the prime prerequisite for the master passion of generosity. Marion tests Henry's distinctive interpretation of Cartesian phenomenology by applying it to generosity as well. If the Second Meditation presents the fact of appearance nonrepresentationally, might not the *Passions* present free will similarly? Might it then begin to approach the traditional philosophical ideal—apparently abandoned twelve years earlier in the *Discourse*—of a wisdom whose domain includes both fact and value?

Finally, the book represents a heightened courage to examine the text more carefully, to place more weight upon it, to submit to more exacting standards of interpretive validity. For example, Edwin Curley sheds new light, by a close examination of familiar passages, on the idea of metaphysical certainty and the idea of a valid ground for doubt. The doctrine that clear and distinct perception in the case of the *cogito* provides a criterion for truth in general has often disturbed readers, but Michelle Beyssade's exquisite care with the text reveals unsuspected subtlety and strength into Descartes's conception. Henry displays a sensitivity to the Second Meditation that is comparable to her sensitivity to the Third, in developing a distinctive account of the uniqueness of *cogito*-like situations. Willis Doney examines the Fifth Meditation's a priori argument for the existence of God, in the light of a dispute between Descartes and Caterus over its nature; and by adjudicating the dispute he reveals with greater clarity

the outlines of the argument. And Jean-Marie Beyssade devotes characteristically sensitive scrutiny to Descartes's accounts of the ways in which it may, and may not, be possible to understand God's nature, and demonstrates that allegations of contradiction are premature.

According to a well-known passage in Part V of the *Discourse,* language is a sure sign of mind. But Séris extracts a distinctive doctrine about language from texts less thoroughly studied, and displays its role in Descartes's doctrine of the distinction between humans and machines. Margaret Wilson devotes typically careful study to passages concerning the perception of primary and secondary qualities, in search of Descartes's doctrine about what the senses and the intellect each contribute to knowledge. Rodis-Lewis, as is her style, uncovers meaning in phrases that the most scholarly are accustomed to ignoring.

All nineteen authors impose upon their work standards of fidelity to Descartes's text that are higher than those typical only a generation ago. Some devote such care to the text that they break new ground in the understanding of passages we thought we knew already. All in their own way constitute good reason to celebrate anew the world of René Descartes.

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I

CARTESIAN PHILOSOPHY: ITS FOUNDATIONS IN THE *COGITO* AND THEOLOGY

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2

Certainty: Psychological, Moral, and Metaphysical

Edwin Curley

My purpose in this paper is to comment critically on the program elaborated in Peter Markie's recent book, *Descartes's Gambit,*[1] and to respond to criticisms Markie there makes of my own book, *Descartes Against the Skeptics.*[2] My hope is that this exchange may actually shed some light on Descartes, but each reader must judge that for herself.

The "gambit" Markie refers to in his title is Descartes's attempt to deduce a metaphysical theory of the self from premises about his knowledge of himself. The epistemological premises are that I am certain that I think, that I am certain that I exist, and that I am uncertain that I have a body. The metaphysical theory of the self derived from these premises is, roughly, that I am a thinking, nonextended substance capable of existing apart from its body. Markie maintains that Descartes himself held that these metaphysical conclusions could be deduced from these epistemological premises without establishing God's existence and veracity, provided we are willing to settle for something less than absolute certainty about our conclusions.[3] The bulk of his book is an attempt to show how this might be done, drawing on various definitions, epistemic principles, and metaphysical assumptions,[4] but not drawing on any of the specific metaphysical assumptions about causality and perfection familiar to students of Descartes from the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Meditations.

I shall be concerned with this larger project only tangentially. Markie maintains that the key to Descartes's gambit is his position on the nature and content of certainty. This, he says,

> is the basis for his defense of his premises about self-knowledge. . . . It provides the principles that enable him to move from those premises to intermediate conclusions about the logical possibility of his existing in some ways and not others, from which he derives his theory of the self. (p. 30)

Most commentators on Descartes, he thinks, have overlooked the importance of his theory of certainty to his overall strategy, and those who have not overlooked its importance have still not given a proper account of Cartesian certainty (p. 30). Whether or not this is an accurate assessment of the current

state of Cartesian scholarship, Markie clearly does give an account of Cartesian certainty more detailed than, and quite different from, any I am aware of in the literature. It raises some very interesting questions, which deserve to be discussed, even if, as I think, Markie's approach to these questions is thoroughly wrong-headed.

Three Species of Certainty

Markie distinguishes three species of certainty which Descartes recognizes—psychological, moral, and metaphysical—and offers the following definitions of these kinds of certainty:

> *p* is psychologically certain for *S* = df *S* believes *p* and *S* is unable to doubt or deny *p*. (p. 56)
>
> *p* is a moral certainty for *S* = df (1) believing *p* is more reasonable for *S* from the standard epistemic perspective than denying *p* or doubting *p*, and (2) believing some proposition *q* is more reasonable for *S* from the standard perspective than believing *p* only if *q* is a metaphysical certainty for *S*. (p. 37)
>
> *p* is a metaphysical certainty for *S* = df (1) believing *p* is more reasonable for *S* from the standard epistemic perspective than doubting or denying *p*, and (2) it could never be more reasonable for *S* to believe some proposition *q*, than it is at present for *S* to believe *p*. (p. 39)

To doubt *p*, here, is to neither believe it nor deny it. By the standard epistemic perspective Markie means the perspective of someone who accepts the imperative: believe all and only the truth with regard to the matter under investigation. According to Markie's Descartes, the standard epistemic imperative is the appropriate one to follow when we engage in practical affairs (p. 60). But when we engage in an inquiry into truth, we ought to adopt a further policy, combining the standard epistemic imperative with what Markie calls the Cartesian imperative: place under the special heading of "science" all and only what is metaphysically certain and true (p. 60). We still aim to believe all and only true propositions, but we classify our beliefs as scientific only if we think them also metaphysically certain.

Markie has arranged his definitions in such a way that metaphysical certainty entails moral certainty, but not conversely. All metaphysical certainties are moral certainties, but not all moral certainties are metaphysical certainties (p. 39). And there is, as he puts it, "a void between moral and metaphysical certainty," in the sense that no morally certain proposition is more reasonable than another unless it is also metaphysically certain.

There are no logical connections between psychological certainty, on the one hand, and moral and metaphysical certainty, on the other. The latter two concepts involve an evaluative element:

> To tell someone a proposition is a moral or metaphysical certainty for her is to tell her that, from the standard epistemic perspective, she *ought* to believe it . . . (p. 56),

even though a morally certain proposition (unlike a metaphysically certain proposition) might be false (p. 53). Psychological certainty, by contrast, is a purely factual concept, with no evaluative implications. So psychological certainty is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for either moral or metaphysical certainty, at least insofar as this is a matter of definition and logic (p. 56). It is, in fact, the case that all metaphysical certainties are psychological certainties, but this is not because of the nature of these concepts. It is because God has so arranged it (p. 57).

Psychological Certainty

Now, although Descartes does not have the label "psychological certainty," it's clear that he uses a concept like the one Markie defines, and that it is a very important concept in the *Meditations*. So, for example, Descartes writes in the Fifth Meditation,

> I am of such a nature that, so long as I perceive something very clearly and distinctly, I cannot but believe it to be true. . . . E.g., when I consider the nature of a triangle, it appears most evident to me, imbued as I am with the principles of Geometry, that its three angles are equal to two right angles, and I cannot but believe this to be true, so long as I attend to its demonstration.[5]

Although the example here is of a proposition which is perceived clearly and distinctly as a result of a demonstration, elsewhere Descartes gives examples of propositions which

> are so clear and at the same time so simple that we can never think of them without believing them to be true, e.g., that I, while I think, exist, that what is once done cannot be undone, and others concerning which it is manifest that we have this certainty.[6]

So some propositions are psychologically certain in their own right, without consideration of any other propositions. Others are psychologically certain because we are psychologically certain that they follow from psychologically certain propositions.

One thing particularly interesting here is the connection between clear and distinct perception and psychological certainty. Later in his book (pp. 187–190) Markie gives an account of clear and distinct perception in terms of psychological certainty, an account which has the consequence that all and only clear and distinct perceptions are psychologically certain.

I have no problem with Markie's definition of psychological certainty or with the connection he makes between it and clear and distinct perception. I defined essentially the same concept myself—though I spoke of descriptive indubitability or assent-compelling propositions (DATS, 94n, 119, etc.)—and

I made essentially the same connection Markie does between psychological certainty and clear and distinct perception (DATS, 119). My main criticism of Markie would be that the notion of psychological certainty enters into his account of Descartes's theory of certainty rather as an afterthought,[7] and that perhaps as a result, he does not give it enough of a role to play. I think it is much more closely connected with metaphysical certainty than he does. My grounds for holding that will appear as we proceed.

Markie on Moral and Metaphysical Certainty

Markie's main textual support for his definitions of moral and metaphysical certainty is a passage toward the end of Part IV of the *Discourse on Method:*

> Finally, if there are still people who are not sufficiently persuaded of the existence of God and of their soul by the reasons I have adduced, I want them to know that all the other things which they perhaps think they are more sure of, such as their having a body, or there being stars and an earth, and things of that kind, are less certain. For although one may have a moral assurance of these things, which is such that it seems that one cannot doubt them without being extravagant, nevertheless, when it is a question of metaphysical certainty, one also cannot deny, without being unreasonable, that there is sufficient reason for not being entirely sure of them, from having noticed that in sleep one can, in the same way, imagine that one has another body, and that one sees other stars, and another earth, without there being any of these things. (AT VI, 37–38)

This is, I think, an interesting passage, but it does not give us very much to go on. Descartes here deploys the distinction between moral and metaphysical certainty without really explaining it, as if it were a philosophical commonplace which stood in no need of explanation.

Still, it would seem we could say, on the basis of this passage, that if you have only moral certainty, then you have something less than complete or perfect certainty; there will be some reason for not being entirely confident of the proposition you are morally certain of, even if it may not be the sort of reason you would ordinarily pay much heed to, such as the possibility that you might be dreaming. Nevertheless, if you've got moral certainty about something, you're in a pretty good epistemic situation. It would be extravagant to deny the proposition you are morally certain of. It must be more than just more probable than not.

These considerations would seem to me to speak against arranging the definitions of moral and metaphysical certainty in such a way that metaphysical certainty implies moral certainty. That is a feature Markie seems to think an advantage of his account (p. 39). But when you have metaphysical certainty, you have no reason to doubt the proposition you are metaphysically certain of. When you have moral certainty, you do have some reason for doubt, or at least you can, in the sense that there is a reason someone could

propose to you, even if you haven't thought of it yourself, and might even have been incapable of thinking of it yourself.

Markie fleshes out his account of moral certainty (p. 35) by appealing to a passage in the First Meditation in which Descartes says of the beliefs which have been challenged by the dream and deceiver arguments that they are

> indeed, in some measure doubtful . . . but nevertheless, very probable, and such as it would be much more consistent with reason to believe than to deny . . . (AT VII, 22)

and appealing to a passage early in the Sixth Meditation in which Descartes says (of the hypothesis that there is some body to which the mind is so joined that it can apply itself to examine it whenever it pleases)

> I easily understand, I say, that the imagination can be produced in that way, if the body indeed exists; and because no other equally appropriate way of explaining that presents itself, I conjecture from that with probability that [some? this?] body exists, but only with probability . . . (AT VII, 73).

Descartes does not in fact use the terms "moral certainty" or "metaphysical certainty" in either of these passages, but Markie comments that he "might have put his point differently," by saying that the beliefs in question were morally but not metaphysically certain.

I have some difficulty about Markie's construction of these passages. In the case of the First Meditation passage, at that point of the argument the beliefs in question have supposedly been rejected, in conformity with the methodological requirement that we should withhold our assent from any proposition we find some reason for doubting (AT VII, 18). Descartes acknowledges that it is in fact very difficult to comply consistently with this requirement, so strong is the force of habit and so strong is the evidence for the beliefs. But if we take him at his word, he does not at that stage believe that he has a body, that there is a sky, earth, and so on. If at that stage in his reflections he no longer believes these things, I would have thought it would follow that he is no longer morally certain of them, though he no doubt was morally certain of them initially. It seems to me just anomalous, as a piece of linguistic usage, to say "I am morally certain of that, but I don't believe it." The most we should say of the passage in the First Meditation, I think, is that Descartes's evidential situation is such that, if he did believe the propositions in question, he would be entitled to claim moral certainty about them.[8]

As regards the passage in the Sixth Meditation, it seems to me that, given his own definition of moral certainty, Markie should hesitate to cite that case as one where Descartes would claim moral certainty. Moral certainties are supposed to be *much* more reasonable to believe than to doubt or deny, so much so, according to Markie, that they fall just short of being metaphysical certainties. But all Descartes says in the passage in the Sixth Meditation is that at that stage of the argument his evidence for the existence of bodies makes it a probable conjecture that there are bodies. So in that case believing that

there are bodies may not be much more reasonable than denying or doubting it.

The Background of the Cartesian Distinction

Earlier I observed that in the *Discourse* Descartes seems to deploy the distinction between moral and metaphysical certainty as if it were a commonplace, which stands in no need of explanation. And indeed, Descartes is using terms here which he might expect a philosophically sophisticated audience to be familiar with. As Gilson points out in his commentary on the *Discourse,* where the French has ". . . *une assurance morale* . . . ," the Latin has ". . . *certitudo, ut loquuntur Philosophi, moralis* . . . ," a certainty of the kind the philosophers call moral.[9] Neither in his commentary nor in his *Index Scholastico-Cartésien*[10] does Gilson cite any philosopher earlier than Descartes in whom the concept of moral certainty is found. But in the *Index* he does cite a passage from Chauvin's *Lexicon*[11] in which a threefold distinction is made:

> An act of the intellect is said to be morally certain when it assents to a truth which, although it can happen otherwise, is nevertheless so constant that doubt about it is contrary to good principles of action [*bonis moribus*] . . . , [I am said to be] physically certain when I assent to an object firmly, on account of an immutable principle in nature, or . . . to a truth which, although it is possible to think otherwise, is most constant, so long as the order of nature remains the same . . . and [I am said to be] metaphysically certain when I assent firmly to an object which is presented to me in such a way that it cannot be otherwise even by the absolute power of God, or when I assent to a truth which cannot even be thought otherwise. (*Index,* 334)

Though this *Lexicon* is post-Cartesian, it clearly records scholastic usage, since it conceives judgment as an act of the intellect rather than the will. One interesting question it raises is "why is it that what had been a threefold distinction in the scholastics becomes a twofold distinction in Descartes? That is, why does Descartes recognize a distinction between moral and metaphysical certainty, but not between these two kinds of certainty and the physical certainty which for the scholastics had been intermediate between them?"

Now I think we can see why this might have happened if we look at the scholastic manuals whose usage Chauvin's *Lexicon* records. Consider the following passage from Arriaga:

> Certainty is three-fold, moral, physical, and metaphysical. Moral certainty is what we have when our reasons are indeed fallible physically [i.e., scientifically], though infallible morally speaking, i.e., almost infallible, as, for example, the certainty I have about the existence of Naples, from what has been said by so many knowledgeable and honest men who assert it and make me certain that Naples exists, although, because it is not physically impossible that they should all lie, I am not physically certain of this existence. . . .

> Physical certainty is what rests on physical principles [*principiis physicis*] which cannot, in accordance with the nature of the thing [*res*], be otherwise, as, e.g., the certainty I have about Peter's running, which I see; for the thing [*res*] really can be otherwise, at least by [God's] absolute power, insofar as God can miraculously make it appear to me that Peter is running, even though he is not really running; and he can do the same in other matters; therefore, that certainty is not called metaphysical and supreme, but natural or physical. Finally, metaphysical certainty is that by which the object is presented in such a way that in relation to every power it cannot be otherwise, as the certainty I have about God's existence, or about such principles as *Each thing either is or is not,* or *Things which are the same as a third thing are the same as each other,* and the like, or about all the mysteries revealed by God, which cannot be false, even in relation to God's absolute power.[12]

I think we can see why a passage like this might have seemed problematic to the author of the First Meditation. It assumes that perception generates a belief which is highly reliable, that we are entitled to have a confidence in it just short of the confidence we have in the existence of God or the truths of logic. Presumably this is the case because perception operates according to natural laws (e.g., the laws of optics) which cannot be otherwise, and which naturally produce veridical perceptions. We can readily imagine Descartes objecting: first, there are perfectly natural processes (e.g., dreams)[13] which produce experiences intrinsically indistinguishable from the experiences of ordinary perception and which are nevertheless not veridical; second, if we allow the possibility that God could have supernaturally produced deceptive experiences intrinsically indistinguishable from veridical ones, then it does seem that we need some ground for supposing he has not done this before we assign our experiences a particularly high level of credibility; and finally (to focus only on the issue of physical certainty), if our confidence in the operation of the physical laws involved in the production of these experiences rests on the assumption that they cannot be otherwise, we need some explanation of how this can be so, compatibly with God's omnipotence. Descartes, of course, thinks *he* has an explanation, viz. that the laws of nature are necessary truths because they are an expression of the will of an omnipotent God whose will is immutable. But he does not think his scholastic opponents have any good explanation of this.[14]

By focusing in this way on Arriaga, I do not intend to suggest that *he in particular* influenced Descartes or that he was *the* or even *a* source of the hypothesis of a deceiving creator. Though his *Cursus philosophicus* antedates the *Discourse* and the *Meditations* by several years, there's reason to believe that Descartes had not paid much attention to scholastic philosophy in the twenty-year period between 1620 and 1640.[15] His casual use of the concept of moral certainty in 1637 reflects a reading he had engaged in long ago. I do assume that what we find in Arriaga could be found in other scholastic textbooks, among them those Descartes read at La Flèche. But I do not at present have the time to verify that conjecture.

Descartes on Moral and Metaphysical Certainty

What is most surprising about Markie's account of the concepts of moral and metaphysical certainty is his total neglect of Descartes's most explicit discussion of the distinction, the passage at the end of the *Principles of Philosophy* (IV, aa. 205–206), in which Descartes claims that his physics should seem morally certain even to those who do not accept his metaphysics. I'm going to quote from the French version of this passage here. There are interesting differences between the Latin and French versions, so much so that I find it hardly credible that the translator would have taken such liberties on his own authority. I'll follow Adam and Tannery in italicizing those parts of the passage where the French and Latin differ.

Descartes has just finished saying that at the very least his explanations of the phenomena show how things could have happened, and that even Aristotle did not profess to do more than that:

> Nevertheless, in order not to do wrong to the truth, *by supposing it to be less certain than it is, I shall distinguish here two kinds of certainty.* The first is called moral, i.e., sufficient *to guide our practices* [*moeurs*] *or as great as that of things we are not accustomed to doubt* regarding the conduct of life, although *we know that it could happen, absolutely speaking that they are false.*[16]

At this point Descartes gives two examples of moral certainty. People who have never been to Rome do not doubt that it is a city in Italy, even though they know this only by hearsay, and the people who have told them this may have deceived them. And a person who finds a key to a cryptogram which makes it convey a meaningful message will not doubt that he has found the true meaning of the cryptogram, even though it could be that the author of the cryptogram may have intended a different meaning. This would be so unlikely that it is not morally credible, particularly if the message is a long one.

Only the second of these examples is given in the original Latin version. The addition of the example of the knowledge that Rome is a city in Italy—as possessed by those who have never been there—should by now remind us of Arriaga (whom Descartes may, in fact, have read in his research for the *Principles*). But what is particularly interesting is the assimilation of the two examples. Descartes will go on to claim that his explanations of the phenomena are so comprehensive that they are comparable to the decoding of a *very* long cryptogram,[17] so long that it is not credible that we should be mistaken. And yet, good as Cartesian science is, it is merely in a class with good hearsay, in the absence of the divine guarantee. Only when we have that guarantee, do we have metaphysical certainty:

> *The other kind of certainty is when we think that it is not at all possible that the thing should be other than we judge it.* And it is founded on a *very sure* principle of Metaphysics, *which is* that God being supremely good and the source of all truth, *since it is he who has created us,* it is certain that the *power or* faculty he has given us to distinguish the true from the false is not