Abstract

This study credits Descartes's Meditations with a linear central argument that can achieve its meditator's announced goal for knowledge in prospective mathematical sciences. The argument starts from the Second Meditation's opening argument that provides premises with an epistemic feature that enables the central argument to advance to its theist conclusion free of vicious circularity. Nevertheless, not only do standard translations obscure the Second Meditation's opening argument. Also, the original and long-standing 'Cartesian Circle' Objections picture Descartes's Meditations as a circle, but misinterpret their target passages at the Third Meditation's start and at the Fifth Meditation's close. These ostensible impediments to crediting the Meditations' linear central argument each overlooks or misconstrues the technical epistemic terms the Meditations specifies, and all comply with the unchallenged current assumption that the Meditations' central argument can be consistent with teleological religious theism.

Keys

modern science and God, foundations of knowledge, Cartesian Circles, the Meditations' theism

THE SHAPE OF DESCARTES'S MEDITATIONS

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Descartes's Meditations provides a linear central argument for its meditator's announced goal of knowledge in prospective mathematical sciences that is 'firm and enduring [firmum & mansuram]' (17). The argument starts from premises the Second Meditation's opening argument endows with the epistemic feature 'unshakeable [inconcussum] certainty' that ensures the central argument can advance free of vicious circularity. Unfortunately, not only do standard translations obscure the Second Meditation’s opening argument in part by neglecting the Second Meditation’s interchange of epistemic with alethic modal terms. Also, the original and long-standing ‘Cartesian Circle’ Objections that picture Descartes's Meditations a circle misinterpret their target passages at
the Third Meditation's start and at the Fifth Meditation's close. Currency of these ostensible impediments to crediting the Meditations' linear central argument depends in part on overlooking or misconstruing the technical epistemic terms the Meditations specifies and on the unexamined assumption that the Meditations' central argument can be consistent with teleological religious theism.2

Section 1 contrasts the Second Meditation's opening argument for its announced 'Archimedean' conclusion with interpretations and commentary that follow the Second Meditation's standard translations. Unfortunately, standard translations overlook the Second Meditation's interchanges of its Latin cognates of alethic 'necessity' with cognates of epistemic 'certainty.' The resulting distortions of the argument's premises and its Archimedean conclusion have effectively obscured the Second Meditation's opening argument, deprived the Meditations' central argument of premises with the 'unshakeable certainty' that enables the central argument to advance free of vicious circularity, and prompted received interpretations' interpolation of extraneous so-called 'cogito reasoning.' Relief from the standard mistranslations and attention to the Second Meditation's opening argument's defined technical epistemic term 'unshakeable certainty' clears an obstruction that would stifle the Meditations' extended central argument at its start.

This study treats the Second Meditation's seminal opening argument only as it bears on the Meditations' central argument.

Section 2 cites the meditator's pressing question for the Third Meditation's introductory passage that asks whether her newly won unshakably certain results of the Second Meditation bar her from ever achieving her announced goal of results in prospective mathematical sciences that are firm and enduring. Nevertheless, Descartes's Replies not only decline to correct the Cartesian Circle allegation in Mersenne's Second set of Objections that overlooks the Third Meditation's introductory passage's pressing question and misunderstands its target sentence and its defined technical epistemic term 'quite certain [plane certus].’ Descartes also declined even to acknowledge that any Objection addresses the Third Meditation’s introductory passage. The explicit decisive rebuttal section 2 credits to the Reply Descartes gives Mersenne’s additional ‘Atheist Mathematician’ Objection
confirms this study’s answer to why Descartes’s *Replies* withhold his readily available rebuttal to Mersenne's Cartesian Circle *Objection*.

Section 3 credits Descartes’s *Reply* with a condensed rebuttal that corrects the famously posed Cartesian Circle *Objection* in which Arnauld interprets the Fifth Meditation’s close as conceding that the *Meditations*’ central argument is viciously circular. The *Objection* not only overlooks the Fifth Meditation’s problem of retaining the certainty the *Meditations* provides to all the meditator’s newly earned known results, including her prospective firm and enduring results in mathematical sciences. Arnauld’s *Objection* also neglects the Fifth Meditation’s technical use of ‘self-evident’ and of its defined epistemic term ‘perfect knowledge’ with the result that his Cartesian Circle allegation misinterprets the Fifth Meditation’s solution, too.

Section 4 adds a brief coda.

1.

**Archimedean goal**

The opening argument of the Second Meditation pursues its meditator’s announced ‘Archimedean’ goal of an initial result with certainty that is ‘unshakeable.’ She aims for:

one thing, however slight that is certain and unshakeable [*certum ... & inconcussum*]. (24)

The meditator introduces her Archimedean candidate C(J) that attributes to (J), ‘I am, I exist,’ certainty and is exempt from the First Meditation’s extended argument that demoted all her prior certain results.³ The argument that opens the Second Meditation imposes a series of requirements that assess whether her Archimedean candidate C(J) achieves the meditator’s goal of a single initial result that has specifically ‘unshakeable’ non-factive certainty. The final requirement adds the definition I note below of her Archimedean goal’s epistemic term ‘unshakeable certainty’ and confirms that the meditator’s technical use of her terms for epistemic certainty is indeed non-factive.

One requirement of the Second Meditation’s opening argument confines the results that can achieve her Archimedean goal solely to C(J). This requirement, which I call the opening argument’s
Persuasion Test, would exclude candidates such as certainty that I think, certainty that I doubt or imagine, or sense, and the like. The meditator could be persuaded that she is not thinking, in case she somehow became persuaded that nothing thinks, duly inferred that she is not thinking, and became persuaded of her conclusion. Similarly, she could be persuaded that she has no body or that she does not doubt or sense or imagine by first becoming persuaded of something that implies she lacks a body or does not doubt or sense or imagine. If somehow she became persuaded that nothing at all exists, she could infer that she does not exist, and she could entertain the thought that (J) is false. By becoming persuaded of something that implies that (J) is false, could she be persuaded that she does not exist?

But I have persuaded [persuasi] myself that there is absolutely nothing in the world, no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies; then have I done the same for I exist, too [none igitur etiam me non esse]? (25) 4

Her answer credits her candidate with passing its Persuasion Test:

... If I have persuaded myself of something, then necessarily [certe] I was. (25)

No, she cannot be persuaded of anything that persuades her that (J) is false.

Here, the meditator’s rationale for her answer uses ‘certe’ idiomatically as an alethic term to report that the inference the meditator draws follows necessarily. The meditator has a capacity to infer necessarily, from her having the thought <that I am persuaded> to conclude <that (J) is true>.5 So the Archimedean candidate is ‘one thing, however slight’ that passes the opening argument’s Persuasion Test.

Unfortunately, standard translations overlook the Second Meditation’s idiomatic usage that allows interchange of cognates of epistemic ‘certainly’ with terms cognate with alethic ‘necessarily.’6 Interpretations that follow standard cognate epistemic translations of ‘certe’ in the last quoted passage impose on the meditator the erroneous claim that her being persuaded of something or
other suffices for her to be certain of \((J)\). Further, these interpretations fail to confine the Second Meditation’s opening argument to endorsing solely the meditator’s candidate \(C(J)\), and they would thwart the meditator’s announced pursuit of certainty that is specifically unshakeable.

**Deceiver hypothesis**

The Archimedean candidate \(C(J)\) must clear the additional requirement that a maximally powerful Deceiver Hypothesis imposes:

\[
\ldots \text{a deceiver -- otherwise unknown -- of supreme power and supreme cunning who sedulously always deceives me. (25)}
\]

The meditator’s Archimedean candidate could retain its certainty of \((J)\) in case the Deceiver Hypothesis were true, as she says:

\[
\text{In that case I undoubtedly exist, if he is deceiving me. (25)}
\]

The hypothesis that there is such a Deceiver would not be thus consistent with the Archimedean candidate if the non-factive certainty that \(C(J)\) attributes implied that there is some additional certain result that contributes evidential support to \(C(J)\), or that some principle is true that credits clear and distinct perception with generating the certainty of \((J)\), or that any version of theism is true. Most generally, the non-factive certainty that \(C(J)\) attributes does not imply that the Deceiver hypothesis is false. Of course, the hypothesized Deceiver could exert its power to make it the case that there is no meditator and there are no certain results, so the certainty that \(C(J)\) attributes may be understood as non-factive certainty that lacks any implications, aside from implications that follow trivially, such as that there is a meditator who is certain. This certainty that the meditator’s Archimedean conclusion presently endorses as ‘unshakeable’ is non-factive certainty that lacks any non-trivial implications.

Separately, the Second Meditation’s opening Archimedean argument adds that the Archimedean candidate has an additional independence from the hypothesized Deceiver. Necessarily, if she thinks that \((J)\), then \((J)\) is true:
Let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something (25).

It is impossible that the meditator have the thought <that (J)> if (J) is not true. The Persuasion Test has already excluded 'I think,' 'I doubt,' 'I sense,' and such. So the Second Meditation’s opening argument does not raise questions of whether the meditator’s beliefs that she thinks or that she doubts enjoy an infallibility that immunizes against the hypothesized Deceiver or whether she can have a certainty about her thinking or doubting consistent with the Deceiver Hypothesis.

**Archimedean conclusion**

The conclusion credits the meditator’s Archimedean candidate C(J) with attaining her goal of a single result (J) that is unshakably certain:

So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, I am I exist, is certainly *necessario* true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind. (25)

The Archimedean conclusion retains both separate outcomes of the Archimedean candidate’s encounter with the hypothesized Deceiver: her having unshakeable certainty of (J) is independent of, neither implies nor is implied by, her believing or ‘conceiving in my mind’ that (J). So the conclusion can credit the meditator with knowledge of (J), in case her being unshakably certain that (J) when she also believes that (J) and (J) is true could suffice for knowledge that (J).

Crucially, the unshakeable certainty that the conclusion attributes to (J) is first-order certainty, and the conclusion itself is not an additional certain result. Consequently, for the Archimedean candidate to satisfy requirements sufficient for the meditator to conclude that C(J) is true, it is not also required that it be certain that the requirements are satisfied.

The conclusion uses a cognate of ‘necessary’ as an epistemic term to credit the Second Meditation’s opening argument with achieving its meditator’s stated Archimedean goal of ‘just one
thing, however slight, that is certain and unshakeable.’ (24) Unfortunately, standard translations of the Archimedean conclusion read ‘necessario’ as its alethic cognate. Their results saddle the Second Meditation’s opening argument with superfluous repetition of a result already established, that necessarily if she thinks <that (J)> then (J) is true, or with an inconsequent and false conclusion that the meditator exists necessarily. In either case the mistranslation contributes to further obscuring the Second Meditation’s opening argument and consequently to depriving the Meditations’ central argument of premises with unshakeable certainty. Standard translations that thus obscure the Second Meditation’s opening argument for the meditator’s announced Archimedean goal contribute to the currently pervasive interpolations of extraneous so-called ‘cogito reasoning.’ These misattributions must acknowledge the absence from the Meditations of the indelible Cartesian slogan that appears in Descartes’s exoteric works, and they must grant that reasoning can yield knowledge of the conclusion ‘I am,’ only if its premise ‘I think’ is certain or known. At the Second Meditation’s start however ‘I think’ is not certain for the meditator, since her First Meditation’s argument concluded that, without exception, there is ‘not one of my former beliefs about which doubt may not properly be raised.’ (21) Margaret Wilson duly proposed a requirement for interpolations of cogito reasoning or ‘the cogito’: ‘No matter how one interprets the cogito, one is going to have to recognize eventually that Descartes does ascribe... epistemological... transparency to his thought-states’ (1978: 53). However, the certainty of the premise ‘I think’ that is dependent on such transparency could not be unshakeable certainty; so such ‘cogito reasoning’ would not convey to its conclusion certainty that is unshakeable. Any result that such salvaged so-called ‘cogito reasoning’ could earn for the meditator would lack the unshakeable certainty indispensible for the Second Meditation’s results’ service as premises in the Meditations’ linear central argument.  

Questions for consideration elsewhere ask, inter alia, how the Second Meditation adds further unshakably certain results, how those results serve the Third Meditation’s arguments for the Meditations’ version of theism, and how the outcome establishes that the Deceiver Hypothesis is false. This study turns next to the Third Meditation’s introductory opening passage where the Cartesian Circle allegation by Mersenne’s Second set of Objections imputes a concession of vicious circularity in the Meditations’ central argument.
Third Meditation

The deliberation that opens the Third Meditation proceeds in stages to introduce and answer the question the meditator confronts following her Second Meditation: Is she now equipped to quit her current inquiry in first philosophy to pursue the certainly true results she aims for in prospective mathematical sciences? Her initial response follows an inventory of some Second Meditation results to address a preliminary version of the question:

I am certain that I am a thinking thing. Do I not therefore also know what is required for my being certain about anything? In this primary cognition [prima cognitione] there is simply a clear and distinct perception of what I affirm... [This]...would not suffice to make me certain of the truth of the matter if it could ever turn out that something that I perceived with such clarity and distinctness was false. (35)

Her question asks specifically whether some epistemic principle can be elicited from her initial certain results that she would be entitled to apply to yield certain results in prospective mathematical sciences. She voices a candidate general epistemic principle that 'I seem [videor] be able to lay... down [statuere] as a general rule':

(Clarity Principle) Whatever is clearly and distinctly perceived is certain.

This necessarily true principle endorses 'clear and distinct perception' as generating certain results, she says: 'Clear and distinct perception would not suffice to make me certain of the truth of the matter, if it were possible that something I did clear and distinctly perceive were false.' (35) On behalf of this Clarity Principle, the meditator denies that false sensory perceptions blemish its record, just because such perceptions are not clear and distinct. Here, unfortunately, the Third Meditation's start prompts some interpreters mistakenly to suppose the meditator's answer to the question of
whether she already can safely adopt this Clarity Principle is, Yes. Thus, ‘reliabilist’ interpretations do avoid requiring that the Clarity Principle already be certain prior to the conclusion of the Fourth Meditation’s argument that does confer unshakeable certainty on the principle. Unfortunately, these interpretations suppose the meditator adopts the Clarity Principle as true at the Third Meditation’s start, based on a current record of having in fact endorsed only clear and distinct results that are true. However, as section 2 noted, such a Clarity Principle is vulnerable to the Second Meditation’s Deceiver hypothesis. Consequently, the Meditations could not advance a linear central argument that concludes the Deceiver Hypothesis is false from premises that depend for their certainty on the Clarity Principle.

**If he so desired**

Immediately, the meditator disputes the assumptions on which her question rests. She does not however simply recall that the certainty the Second Meditation provides to its results does not in fact rely on ‘simply a clear and distinct perception of what I affirm,’ and that the Second Meditation’s results do have unshakeable certainty that is non-factive and free of any non-trivial implications such as that the Clarity Principle is true. Instead, she questions whether the Clarity Principle is false, whether clear and distinct perception can fail to generate results that are certain and whether her cognitive capacities that contribute to her Second Meditation’s certain results can be deceptive.

Her answer recalls examples, ‘very simple and straightforward in arithmetic or geometry,’ that were demoted from their prior certain epistemic status by the First Meditation’s argument. She can now say, in terminology the Second Meditation introduced, that her very simple results in mathematics such as 2+3=5 are currently both ‘clear and distinct’ and not certain. In the First Meditation’s argument she observed, about results such as that 2+3=5, that her religious ‘long-standing opinion that there is an all-powerful God who made me the kind of creature that I am’ (21) implies it is possible that her incapacity even to dream that 2+3 has a sum other than 5 could be a deceptive means to some purposively benevolent divine end. Similarly, for her reliance on clear and distinct perception to generate her certainty that 2+3=5 or make it ‘most evident’ that 2+3=5:
Indeed, the only reason for my later judgment that … [results in arithmetic and geometry such as that 2+3=5] were open to doubt was that it occurred to me that perhaps some God [aliquem Deum] could have given me a nature such that I was deceived even in matters which seemed most evident. (36)  

At the Third Meditation’s start the meditator retains her religious belief that she confided in the First Meditation that there is a purposively benevolent God. Previously, the First Meditation’s argument avoids acknowledging explicitly that the reason this religious creed commits her to grant that she can be ‘deceived even in matters’ such as that 2+3=5 is just that the God of her avowed religious opinion is purposive. Here, the Third Meditation’s introductory passage is explicit:  

And whenever my preconceived belief in the supreme power of God comes to mind, I cannot but admit that it would be easy for him, if he so desired, to bring it about that I go wrong even in those matters which I think I see utterly clearly [manifestissima viderentur]. (36)  

As means to some benevolent divine end, the purposeful God of the meditator’s avowed religious creed could so endow her that she is deceived about even simple results in mathematics, ‘if he so desired.’ The religious opinion she retains following the First Meditation continues to deprive her of certainty of results in mathematics, including that 2+3=5, and to contradict the Clarity Principle that credits clear and distinct perception with generating certainty of results in mathematics.  

The first stage of her Third Meditation’s opening deliberation thus acknowledges explicitly a Clarity Principle that is implicated in her non-factive certainty that 2+3=5, which may thus be said to belong to the ‘foundation’ of knowledge that the meditator pursues of results in prospective mathematical sciences, is inconsistent with the teleological theism of the meditator’s currently retained religious creed. The question for her deliberation asks whether she is currently prepared to quit her inquiry in first philosophy that has occupied the First and Second Meditation to take up inquiry in prospective mathematical sciences. The non-factive certainty of her results in prospective sciences has implies that include that the Clarity Principle is true and that it is impossible that ‘God
could have given me a nature such that I was deceived even in matters which seemed most evident.’ Her considered answer from the first stage of her Third Meditation’s opening deliberation is an unqualified, No.

Contrast Descartes’s popular presentation in his earlier Discourse on the Method. There, the autobiographer does generalize to assess as true a Clarity Principle that he takes to be instanced by his certainty of a single example. The example is the indelible Cartesian slogan absent from the Meditations:

I [the autobiographer in Discourse on the Method] observed that there is nothing at all in the proposition ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’ to assure me that I am speaking the truth, except that I see very clearly that in order to think it is necessary to exist. So I decided that I could take it as a general rule that the things we conceive very clearly and very distinctly are all true... (AT vi 33, CSM i 127).

As he proceeds directly to launch his Discourse on the Method’s topic of theism by reflecting on his own condition as a ‘being not wholly perfect,’ the autobiographer anticipates no threat to the Clarity Principle. This omission exempts the Discourse on the Method from the project of the Meditations’ central argument.

Her Third Meditation’s opening deliberation has a second stage.

On the other hand

The meditator silently chose to retain her avowed religious opinion that she has a purposively benevolent creator when she expressly renewed her commitment to persevere in her adopted inquiry in first philosophy at her Second Meditation’s start. (24) There, consequently, she left unchallenged her First Meditation’s conclusion that reassessed her results in arithmetic and geometry as uncertain. The second stage of her Third Meditation’s introductory deliberation initiates a challenge to this choice when the meditator turns from questions of the epistemic status of results such as 2+3=5 to a question that she says is about ‘the things themselves':
Yet when I turn to the things themselves which I think I perceive very clearly, I am so convinced by them that I spontaneously declare: let whoever can do so deceive me, he will never bring it about that I am nothing, so long as I continue to think I am something; or make it true at some future time that I have never existed, since it is now true that I exist; or bring it about that two and three added together are more or less than five, or similar things in which I see a manifest contradiction. (36)

This ‘turn to the things themselves’ produces a select list of results that have, the meditator says, negations in which she sees a ‘manifest contradiction.’ These results, each currently uncertain for the meditator, include a previously cited unexceptionable result she summons from the Second Meditation’s opening argument, cited above, that denies the hypothesized Deceiver or any being, however powerful, can ‘bring it about that I am nothing, so long as I continue to think I am something.’ The meditator also lists a principle of temporal asymmetry that she neither previously claimed is certain nor previously stated, and an example from among her currently uncertain results in mathematics, that 2+3=5. (32)

Notable omissions from results the second stage of her deliberation lists as having manifestly self-contradictory negations include ‘I am, I exist,’ which is a result the Second Meditation credits with unshakeable certainty, the Clarity Principle the Third Meditation’s introductory deliberation already introduced that the Fourth Meditation’s argument subsequently derives, and the theist conclusion of arguments in the Third Meditation and Fifth Meditation. After the second stage of the Third Meditation’s opening deliberation the Meditations does not recur to this feature of having ‘a manifestly contradictory negation.’

**Reconsidering**

The first stage of the meditator’s deliberation acknowledges that the non-factive certainty of her prospective results in mathematics implies that the Clarity Principle is true and that the teleological theism of her previously avowed religious opinion implies that the Clarity Principle is false. Her deliberation’s second stage credits some results, including 2+3=5, with having manifestly contradictory negations. The meditator’s deliberation here takes stock:
And since I have no cause to think that there is a deceiving God, and I do not yet even know for sure \textit{satis sciam} whether there is a God at all, any reason for doubt which depends simply on this supposition \textit{opinione} is very slight \textit{valde tenuis} and, so to speak, metaphysical. (36)

So far, she bases her current lack of certain results in mathematics and her dim prospects in mathematical sciences on her avowed religious mere opinion that implies the Clarity Principle is false and the related possibility that ‘God could have given me a nature such that I was deceived even in matters which seemed most evident.’

\textbf{Resolution and rationale}

The resolution of her deliberation acknowledges a threat. If her Second Meditation’s results imply that the meditator’s still current, previously avowed religious creed is true that there is a purposive deity, it will follow from unshakably certain premises that the Clarity Principle is false and that it is possible that God could have given her a nature that allowed her to be deceived even in matters which ‘seemed most evident.’ The outcome would be unshakeable certainty that there is a purposive deity and unshakeable certainty that the Clarity Principle is false. So a foundational principle implicated in the non-factive certainty of results in prospective mathematical sciences would be certainly false. This threat would exclude her prospective mathematical sciences from adding any minimally acceptable certainly true results that are not also certainly not certain; bar her from achieving her announced goal of firm and enduring results in the sciences.

Her resolution to relieve this threat at last recalls that the certainty of her prospective mathematical results is inconsistent not only with the meditator’s ‘old opinion that there is an omnipotent God \textit{qui potest omnia}’ that she treats as maximally powerful, but also with atheist cosmolgies that assign her a less powerful cause. The First Meditation specified ‘fate or chance or a continuous chain of events, or by some other means’ (21). The threat to prospective mathematical sciences the meditator acknowledges would be realized, in case the unshakeable results of her Second Meditation imply either atheism or a teleological theism such as the meditator’s previously
avowed religious opinion. Subsequently, the Meditations’ central argument’s tasks must include enabling the meditator to consider an alternative to either her having a less than maximally powerful non-theist source or her being a creature of a purposive God that is also maximally powerful.

Prudently, the meditator resolves her deliberation by postponing inquiry in mathematical sciences. She resolves, rather, to relieve the threat, for all she currently knows, that she is bound to derive from her Second Meditation’s unshakably certain results either a conclusion that theism is false or a conclusion that there is a God that can deceive ‘if he so desired.’ Duly, she resolves to resume inquiry in first philosophy:

As soon as the opportunity arises, I should examine whether there is a God, and, if there is, whether he can be a deceiver. (36)

The meditator uses her newly coined epistemic term to label ‘quite certain’ not only the firm and enduring results she seeks in mathematics that have non-factive certainty that lacks any certainly false implications so they are certainly true results that are not also certainly doubtful. ‘Quite certain’ also applies to results of her Second Meditation and to their implications that have unshakeable certainty from which there follow no non-trivial implications at all. She adds this summary of her rationale for her deliberation’s resolution:

For if I am ignorant of this ['whether there is a God, and, if there is, whether he can be a deceiver'] it seems that I can never be quite certain [plane certus] of anything else [de nulla alia]. (36)

Unless she can conclude that neither atheism nor a teleological theism follows from her current unshakeable quite certain results of the Second Meditation, then for all she knows her current results bar her prospective mathematical sciences from attaining firm and enduring quite certain results, by imposing unshakeable certainty that the foundation of her prospective mathematical sciences is false. 22
Notably, the meditator resolves to pursue unshakeable certainty that there is a non-purposive deity just to relieve the threat that her current unshakably quite certain results contradict a principle in the foundation of her prospective mathematical sciences, and not at all because the foundation of mathematical sciences includes certainty of the Clarity Principle and certainty that there does not exist a God who can deceive ‘if he so desires.’ Prudently, she postpones inquiring in mathematical sciences to resume her inquiry in first philosophy.

The Third Meditation’s opening deliberation does not conceal its acknowledgement that any theist conclusion implicated in the results of her Second Meditation that does not deprive her prospective mathematical sciences of firm and enduring quite certain results must contradict the meditator’s previously avowed religious opinion. This implication suffices to account for why Descartes’s Replies are at pains to avoid directing added attention to the Third Meditation’s introductory passage. Duly, Descartes’s Reply to the Cartesian Circle Objection in Mersenne’s Second Set of Objections is studiously diversionary.

Mersenne

Mersenne’s Second set of Objections misinterprets the sentence that closes the Third Meditation’s four-paragraph introductory passage as a concession that the meditator can have no other knowledge unless she first knows that God exists:

[You, the meditator, are] … not yet certain of the existence of God, and you say that you are not certain of anything, and cannot know anything clearly and distinctly until you have achieved clear and certain knowledge of the existence of God. It follows from this that you do not yet clearly and distinctly know that you are a thinking thing … (125) 23

Since the Second Meditation’s results do not include knowledge that God exists, Mersenne’s Objection interprets the meditator as implicitly conceding that she arrived at her Third Meditation devoid of certain results. It follows further that the Third Meditation’s arguments for theism would require premises that could be known only if the arguments are viciously circular. Received commentators who share Mersenne’s interpretation include some who would deny the meditator is committed to
its implications. Janet Broughton glosses the prefatory expression, ‘it seems \textit{videor},’ as cancelling the implication of general dubiety that would follow: ‘The ‘seems’ here indicates that Descartes is not certain what to say about whether everything is in doubt’ (2002: 182). Some, who evidently share Mersenne’s view of his target’s dire implications, condemn the \textit{Meditations’} project for permitting any knowledge that does not suffice for second-order knowledge. (Prichard 1950: 84–6; 1912: 21–37) Still others dismiss Mersenne’s target sentence as an aberration where Descartes ‘digs himself a pit so deep there can be no climbing out’ (Van Cleve 1979: 68–9 n. 30).

Descartes was fully equipped to correct the widely shared misinterpretations of Mersenne’s target sentence in the Third Meditation’s opening deliberation and of its technical epistemic term ‘quite certain.’ The result would dispel Mersenne’s Cartesian Circle \textit{Objection} that mistakenly supposes his target says that knowledge of God is necessary for any other knowledge. The correction however could not avoid drawing renewed attention to the Third Meditation’s opening deliberation and its exposure of the result that teleological religious theism is inconsistent with the foundation of prospective mathematical sciences.

\textbf{Prudent resolution}

Should it be objected that not only is it true, for all the meditator knows at the Third Meditation’s start, that results of her Second Meditation are inconsistent with the foundation of mathematical sciences. Also, so far as the meditator knows, results of the Second Meditation lack any results at all for theism. Could she equally prudently quit inquiry in first philosophy and immediately initiate inquiry in mathematical sciences? An answer must recur to the First Meditation’s start.

The meditator would be imprudent if she did not pursue relief from the threat she acknowledges at the close of the Third Meditation’s opening deliberation, because it is a threat that would return her to the same predicament she sought to escape when she initiated inquiry in first philosophy at the First Meditation’s start, to which she has invested her efforts in the First and Second Meditations. The meditator began inquiry in first philosophy with an aim specifically ‘to establish firm and enduring \textit{[firma & mansura]} results in the sciences.’ The devastating ‘discovery \textit{[Animadverte]}’ that opens the First Meditation reports: ‘...how many falsehoods I accepted as true since my youth and how doubtful is whatever I erected \textit{[superextruxi]} afterwards on them.’
(17) 27 Her report acknowledges that results of her prior scientific inquiries depend for their epistemic status as results that are not at all doubtful [non libet dubitare] or, that is, that depend for their being results that have non-factive certainty, on their being ‘erected [superextruxi]’ on implications of their non-factive certainty. Among those implications are some, which the Meditations does not further specify, that her announced discovery established are certainly false. The meditator applies the same architectural idiom to add that these certainly false implications of the non-factive certainty of her results belong to her sciences’ ‘foundation [primis fundamentis].’(18) So her announced goal for first philosophy of achieving ‘firm and enduring [firmum & mansurum] results in the sciences’ aims for sciences that have a foundation that is not certainly false and for results in the sciences that consequently lack the intellectually repugnant, unstable feature of her prior scientific inquiries that the meditator aimed to relieve; that is: certainly true results that are also certainly not certain. In the Third Meditation’s terms, the ‘firm and enduring’ results that the First Meditation announces as the meditator’s goal are included, together with unshakably certain results, among results that are ‘quite certain.’

The First Meditation cannot be supposed instead to open when the meditator is deprived of all certainly true results, just because the First Meditation’s extended central argument must not be deemed superfluous and it does conclude that the meditator lacks any certain results. (22) Also, lack of certain results would be no good reason to quit her prior inquiries in the sciences. Neither can the meditator’s aim for inquiry in first philosophy be relief from lack of results with second-order certainty or to add foundations that are certainly true. Her opening discovery reports not that results in the foundations of her prior sciences are not certainly true, but that they are certainly false. She aims rather for sciences on foundations that are not certainly false; thus, for results ‘firm and enduring’ or certainly true results that are not also certainly not certain.

The meditator could not prudently decide in the Third Meditation’s introductory deliberation to resume inquiry in mathematical sciences when, so far as she knows, she may be once again stuck in the same predicament from which she aimed to escape when she took up the First Meditation’s inquiry in first philosophy. For all she knows at the Third Meditation’s start she is again
barred from achieving any minimally acceptable quite certain results in mathematical science; now barred by the unshakably quite certain results of her Second Meditation.

**To Mersenne**

The Cartesian Circle allegation in Mersenne’s *Second set of Objections* misinterprets the technical epistemic term ‘quite certain’ in his target sentence and neglects the target’s role in the Third Meditation’s opening deliberation that is to summarize the meditator’s rationale for resuming her paused inquiry in first philosophy. Nevertheless, the decisive rebuttal available to Descartes’s *Reply* that would correct the misinterpretations and dispel Mersenne’s Cartesian Circle *Objection* would also renew attention to the *Meditations*’ sole explicit acknowledgement that its central argument cannot be consistent with teleological religious theism. Rather than rebut, Descartes’s *Replies* divert attention from the Cartesian Circle allegation that aims at the Third Meditation’s introductory passage. Descartes’s heavily diversionary *Reply* to Mersenne rehearses his forthcoming rebuttal to the Cartesian Circle *Objection* that Arnauld aims at the Fifth Meditation. As I discuss below, Descartes’s *Reply* to Arnauld corrects the erroneous appearance of a concession of vicious circularity that Arnauld famously queries in the Fifth Meditation. Here, however, the response to Mersenne’s Cartesian Circle *Objection* from Descartes’s *Reply* is utterly irrelevant:

> When I said that we can know nothing for certain [*nihil nos certo posse scire*] until we are aware [*cognoscamus*] that God exists, I expressly declared that I was speaking only of knowledge [*scientia*] of those conclusions which can be recalled when we are no longer attending to the arguments by means of which we deduced them. (140)

The Third Meditation speaks not at all of ‘knowledge [*scientia*] of those conclusions which can be recalled ...’ This *Reply* evidently has served effectively to suppress additional attention by diverting readers from the revelatory Third Meditation passage that Mersenne’s Cartesian Circle allegation misinterprets to Descartes’s non-revelatory *Reply* to Arnauld’s Cartesian Circle allegation. 28

Before turning to Arnauld’s *Objection* and the Fifth Meditation, I briefly note the decisive rebuttal Descartes’s *Reply* gives to an additional allegation in Mersenne’s *Second set of Objections.*
Descartes’s Reply again deploys, under an additional label, the Meditations’ defined epistemic concept initially labeled ‘firm and enduring certainty.’

**Atheist Mathematician**

Mersenne’s Atheist Mathematician Paradox objects that the Meditations imposes a requirement for having knowledge of geometry that is irrelevantly devotional:

...an atheist is clearly and distinctly aware that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles; but so far is he from supposing the existence of God that he completely denies it. (125)

Mersenne supplies a report of the argument this mathematician directs against all versions of theism and appends his request that Descartes refute the argument.29 Descartes displays no hint of irony in granting that the implication Mersenne imputes would be intolerably paradoxical. Nevertheless, Descartes neither acknowledges the substance of this mathematician’s argument for atheism nor complies with Mersenne’s request that he refute it. Instead, Descartes’s Reply resolves the paradox by applying the Meditations’ epistemic distinction between generic certainly true results and results that the First Meditation cited as ‘firm and enduring’ and the Third Meditation includes under its label ‘quite certain.’ Here, Descartes adds yet another defined technical epistemic term for certainly true results that are not also certainly not certain:

The fact that an atheist can be clearly aware [clare cognoscere] that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles is something I do not dispute. But I maintain that this awareness of his is not true knowledge [veram scientiam], since no cognition [cognitio] that can be rendered doubtful seems fit to be called knowledge [scientia]. (141)

Descartes’s solution credits the atheist mathematician with expert results that are ‘cognitiones’ or certainly true results and denies that this mathematician who ‘completely denies’ the existence of God can have results that qualify as ‘scientiae’ or ‘true knowledge.’ Descartes specifies that a result is
not true knowledge if it ‘can be rendered doubtful.’ As the First Meditation argues, and the Third Meditation’s introductory deliberation confirms, one implication of the non-factive certainty of any expert result in mathematics is that atheism is false. This mathematician’s argument for atheism would provide him non-factive certainty of its conclusion. So the non-factive certainty of the mathematician’s certainly true expert results would have a certainly false implication. Consequently, all his certainly true expert results would also be certainly not certain. It follows that his certainly true expert results are not scientiae, and it remains that his certainly true expert results are cognitiones. Descartes’s solution to the Atheist Mathematician paradox applies the same epistemic concept, here labeled ‘scientiae,’ that the Meditations initially employed to announce the meditator’s aim of ‘firm and enduring’ results in the sciences.

It should not be objected that the mathematician Mersenne introduces is not entitled to non-factive certainty of his atheist conclusion. Mersenne cannot be supposed to have treated the mathematician’s argument for atheism as worthy of his request that Descartes refute it, unless he himself found it compelling enough to earn for its atheist conclusion non-factive certainty.

Descartes’s solution ensures that a mathematician who merely opines that all versions of theism are false as well as a mathematician who maintains an agnostic uncertainty about theism can each retain their titles to scientiae of their expert results. The mathematician Mersenne introduces is barred from expert results that are scientiae by his non-factive certainty that theism is false. Would a similarly expert mathematician also be reduced to mere cognitiones who advanced an argument in theology that left him certain, not that theism generally is false, but that teleological religious theism is true? Descartes’s response to the Atheist Mathematician objection allows him to avoid exposing his positive answer to this question. Unlike the rebuttal available to the Cartesian Circle Objection that aims at the Third Meditation’s opening passage, Descartes can relieve the Atheist Mathematician Objection without directing attention to any passage that acknowledges that the certainty of a mathematician’s cognitiones or expert results that are certainly true is inconsistent with not only atheism, but also teleological religious theism.

Could Descartes have intended instead, by saying the mathematician’s expert results ‘can be rendered doubtful,’ just that his argument for atheism leaves his certainly true expert results merely
doubtfully certain? An answer that identifies scientiae with second-order certainties would require that foundations of mathematical sciences include certainty that atheism is false. However, to add certainty of theism as a requirement for a mathematician’s having scientia of expert results would exacerbate the alleged paradox that Descartes’s rebuttal dispels. 30

3.

At the Fourth Meditation’s close the Meditations’ central argument has credited the meditator with having earned unshakable certainty of a theist conclusion that implies that the Archimedean argument’s skeptical Deceiver Hypothesis is false. The Fourth Meditation has added her unshakeable certainty both that a Clarity Principle is true (62) and that her cognitive faculties are not products of any possible deceiver. So the meditator has achieved her First Meditation’s announced goal of securing firm and enduring certainty for results in the sciences, by establishing that the foundation for certain results in prospective mathematical sciences is not certainly false. Her achievement has relieved the threat the meditator confronted at the Third Meditation’s start when the meditator prudently set out to discover whether or not implications of her Second Meditation’s results condemn her prospective mathematical sciences to have foundations that are certainly false. There is nevertheless a new problem the Fifth Meditation acknowledges that threatens to deprive the meditator of her newly secured firm and enduring certainty of her prospective results in mathematical sciences as well as her Second Meditation’s unshakably certain results and their implications. Unfortunately, Arnauld’s Objection overlooks the problem and misinterprets the Fifth Meditation’s solution.

**Arnauld’s Objection**

Arnauld’s Cartesian Circle *Objection* famously poses ‘one further question’:

How [does] the author avoid… reasoning in a circle when he says we are sure that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true only because God exists. But we can be sure that God exists only because we clearly and distinctly perceive this. Therefore, before we are certain
that God exists, we ought to be certain that whatever we clearly and distinctly perceive is true. (214)

Arnauld’s question interprets as a concession of vicious circularity a target with two occurrences in the Fifth Meditation. The first follows the Fifth Meditation’s argument that concludes, rhetorically, that the Meditations’ version of theism is ‘self-evident’: ‘What is more self-evident [ex se est apertius] than that ... God - - to whose essence alone existence pertains - - exists?’ (69) The meditator glosses the Fifth Meditation term ‘self-evident,’ to which I return presently, then adds a sentence that excites Arnauld’s Objection:

That the certainty about other things so depends on this [theist conclusion] that without it nothing else can be perfectly known [perfecte sciri]. (69)

A second occurrence of his target that Arnauld interprets as a concession of vicious circularity elaborates:

Thus I [the meditator] see plainly that the certainty and truth of all knowledge depends on the one cognition of the true God [ab una veri Dei cognitione pendere], to such an extent that I was incapable of perfect knowledge [perfecte scire] about anything else until I knew him. (71)

Descartes’s Reply does not protest Arnauld’s disregard of both his target’s technical epistemic term ‘perfect knowledge’ and his target’s reference to the ‘self-evidence [...ex se est apertius]’ that the Fifth Meditation’s unique ‘cognition of the true God’ provides. Instead, Descartes begins his corrective rebuttal by citing a distinction that applies to the specific retention problem the Fifth Meditation both raises and solves, but Arnauld’s Cartesian Circle Objection overlooks:
I [Descartes] drew a distinction between what we in fact perceive clearly and what we remember having perceived clearly on a previous occasion. (246)

This retention problem arises at the start of her Fifth Meditation when the meditator has earned unshakeable quite certain conclusions of the Meditations’ linear central argument. Her unshakably certain conclusions include the version of theism the Third Meditation’s arguments introduce that assigns the meditator a divine source that ‘on pain of contradiction’ cannot deceive. (47) Also, her Fourth Meditation’s argument supplies her unshakably certain Clarity Principle (62), so the meditator has shed her inhibition against relying on ‘what we in fact perceive clearly’ to generate firm and enduring quite certain results in prospective mathematical sciences free of certainly false foundations. Retention of previously firm and enduring certain results must accommodate the meditator’s irreversibly limited memory. Particularly, the meditator can forget her Third Meditations’ arguments for theism and its conclusion. Then, she would be susceptible to seduction by an argument for atheism such as the Atheist Mathematician propounds or by some argument for a conclusion that implies there exists the God of the meditator’s earlier avowed religious creed who can deceive ‘if he so desires’. Either argument could impose on the meditator non-factive certainty that the Clarity Principle is false or impose non-factive certainty, as she says, ‘that I have a natural disposition to go wrong from time to time in matters which I think I perceive as evidently as can be.’ (70) Then, her remembering that she was certain of a result in mathematics that previously was firm and enduring would provide her a result that currently is certainly true but also certainly not certain. Results the meditator retains, or recalls, in mathematical sciences would be once again deprived of certainty that is firm and enduring. Despite the achievement of her Meditations’ central argument through the Fourth Meditation, the meditator’s certainly true results in prospective mathematical sciences would fail to satisfy a minimal epistemic requirement that condemns certainly true results that are also certainly not certain.

Somewhat misleadingly, the meditator’s presentation of the Fifth Meditation’s retention problem adopts an oversimplified terminology. The Fifth Meditation labels her ‘fall into doubt about its truth’ the outcome of the meditator’s succumbing to the threat to her retaining and recalling
results with certainty that is firm and enduring. (70) She describes this outcome as lapse into ‘mere shifting and changeable opinions’ about which she can ‘easily fall into doubt.’ (69) This oversimplification evidently stems from the meditator’s current exclusive attention in the Fifth Meditation to the certainty of her newly secured firm and enduring and unshakably certain results. The example that introduces the Fifth Meditation’s retention problem employs this conflated epistemic terminology and confirms that it is her retention of firm and enduring certainty of prospective results that is at risk when she forgets her Third Meditation’s theist conclusion:

For example, when I consider the nature of a triangle, it appears most evident to me... that its three angles are equal to two right angles; and so long as I attend to the proof, I cannot but believe this to be true. But as soon as I turn my mind’s eye away from the proof, then in spite of still remembering I perceived it clearly, I can easily fall into doubt about its truth, if I am without knowledge of God. For I can convince myself that I have a natural disposition to go wrong from time to time in matters which I think I perceive as evidently as can be. (70)

Forgetting her Third Meditation’s arguments and the Meditations’ version of theism they previously enabled her to derive would leave the meditator vulnerable. She would be susceptible to becoming convinced by extraneous arguments that supply non-factive certainty that the Clarity Principle can be false or, as she says, to ‘convince myself that I have a natural disposition to go wrong from time to time in matters which I think I perceive as evidently as can be.’ The outcome would allow the meditator’s memory of a result in geometry that previously had firm and enduring certainty to yield a current certainly true result that is also certainly not certain or certainly doubtful. This outcome she abbreviates here as her current ‘doubt about the truth’ of the result in geometry. Of course, her lapse into non-factive certainty of either atheism or teleological theism does not deprive her of results in mathematics that are certainly true, it does deprive her of any certainly true results that are not also certainly not certain. Her lapse would impose a foundation for her currently prospective mathematical sciences that is certainly false. Having forgotten her Third Meditation’s theist conclusion and no longer remembering the Third Meditation’s arguments, she would be unable to
dispel extraneous arguments' non-factive certain conclusions that contradict the Clarity Principle.
The results she retains, that previously were quite certain results in mathematics, would all revert to
the same epistemic condition that afflicted her inquiries in the sciences when she initially undertook
the Meditations' inquiry in first philosophy and that she again deliberately sought to avoid by
resuming inquiry in first philosophy following the Third Meditation’s introductory deliberation. The
meditator’s more general statement of the Fifth Meditation’s retention problem confirms the threat
to her prospective quite certain results:

... the memory of a previously made judgment may come back when I am no longer
attending to the arguments which led me to make it. So other arguments may occur to me
that overthrow [dejicerent] my opinion, if I were ignorant of God [si Dei ignorarem]; and I
should thus never have true and certain knowledge about anything, but only shifting and
changeable opinions. (69)

Again, her use of the terms 'shifting and changeable opinions' refers to certainly true results in
mathematical sciences that are also certainly not certain. Without current knowledge of the God her
Third Meditation introduces, her firm and enduring prospective results in mathematics are thus
vulnerable.

A related threat applies to her remaining quite certain results that are her results in first
philosophy that have unshakeable certainty. A further consequence of the meditator's vulnerability
to adding a certain result that contradicts the Third Meditation's theist conclusion would withdraw
certainty from the premises of the Third Meditation's arguments for the Meditations’ theist
conclusion. Suppose 'I am, I exist' is the premise from which she derived the Third Meditation's theist
conclusion that excludes the skeptical Deceiver Hypothesis. But now she has arrived at certainty that
her theist conclusion is false. It would follow that she should also reassess the premise 'I am, I exist'
as also uncertain. Then, she would be currently deprived of all quite certain results, without
exception for results that had unshakeable certainty. As she declares in her Fifth Meditation’s
conflated terminology: all her results would revert to ‘mere shifting and changeable opinions’ about which she can ‘easily fall into doubt.’ (69)

**Solution**

Her Fifth Meditation’s solution to its retention problem remedies a threatened dire outcome of its meditator’s irreversible susceptibility to forgetting the Third Meditation’s arguments for the *Meditations’* version of theism. Any argument that could tempt the meditator to certainty of a conclusion inconsistent with the Clarity Principle at the foundation of her mathematical sciences contradicts the version of theism that concludes the Third Meditation’s arguments for theism. The Fifth Meditation’s solution thus aims to derive the *Meditations’* theist conclusion in an argument invulnerable to forgetting. The meditator’s announcement of her Fifth Meditation’s argument for its theist conclusion duly declares the argument, together with its conclusion, ‘self-evident’:

> What is more self-evident [*ex se est apertius*] than that the highest being exists, to whose essence alone existence pertains [*ad cujus solius essentiam existentia pertinet*]? (69)

The Fifth Meditation’s account of ‘self-evidence’ compares its argument for theism to some examples in mathematics. Such self-evidence does not imply acceptance on first acquaintance, as an argument for a self-evident result can initially require ‘close attention.’ Renewing certainty of a self-evident result differs from its re-discovery just because initial discovery can require such close attention. Thereafter, however, setting aside cases of completely forgetting, such effort is not required. Particularly, subsequent current knowledge of a self-evident result does not require either remembering the premises from which she derived it, remembering an occasion on which it was perceived clearly and distinctly, or remembering that the conclusion previously was certain. As renewing certainty of a self-evident result does not engage her memory, a self-evident result is not forgettable. Of course, it is not because the meditator somehow keeps them always in mind that her self-evident results are unforgettable. She cannot forget a self-evident conclusion rather just because renewing certainty of a self-evident conclusion reproduces her discovering it initially, as Descartes’s * Replies*, together with the Fifth Meditation, confirm.
Unfortunately, examples the Fifth Meditation offers leave it less than entirely clear that analogues in geometry to its self-evident theist conclusion are similarly independent of the truth of the Fourth Meditation’s Clarity Principle: ‘... for example the fact that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the squares on the other two sides.’ (68) However, where Descartes’s Replies illustrate self-evidence his examples are apt: ‘the number two is even or that three is odd.’ (163) For these examples to be unforgettable requires just that a mathematician’s renewal of his certainty that three is odd have no more dependence on his memory than did its initial discovery. The Fifth Meditation adds a phenomenal supplement to the Replies’ illustrations of self-evident examples from mathematics. Phenomenally, revived certainty of a self-evident result such as that three is odd may be said to be, as it were, anti-déjà vu. That is, when this self-evident result revives a mathematician’s prior certainty that three is odd it is not only unaided by memory, it is unaccompanied by phenomenal features characteristic of remembering. Compare the meditator’s remark earlier in the Fifth Meditation on the deja vu phenomenal feature that applies to ‘the extension of the things quantified,’ which she ‘distinctly imagines.’ She remarks on their memorial phenomenal feature: ‘...on first discovering them it seems that I am not so much learning something new as remembering what I knew before; or it seems like noticing for the first time things which were long present within me although I had never turned my mental gaze on them before’ (64). As a mathematician’s repeated reliance on his knowledge that three is odd lacks a memorial phenomenal feature and enjoys the same immunity to memory’s errors as its initial discovery, so too does the meditator’s revived certainty of the self-evident theist conclusion of her Fifth Meditation’s argument. The result is unaffected by the limitations of the meditator’s memory, and it can occur unaccompanied by phenomenal features that the Fifth Meditation cites as characteristic of occasions when she recollects results that are not self-evident.

The meditator adds, again in the Fifth Meditation’s oversimplified terminology, that the solution leaves no further threats to her retention of previously earned quite certain results:

... even if I am no longer attending to the arguments which led me to judge that this [result in geometry] is true, as long as I remember that I clearly and distinctly perceived it, there are
no counter-arguments which can be adduced to make me doubt it, but on the contrary I have true and certain knowledge of it...[and] of all matters which I remember having demonstrated in geometry and similar things. (70)

So long as she is certain of the Meditations’ version of theism, she fulfills the condition necessary for retaining her the certainty she previously earned of results, here newly labeled ‘true and certain knowledge [veram & certam ... scientiam],’ just by remembering that previously they were certain or that previously she perceived them clearly and distinctly. The Fifth Meditation’s argument for theism adds that the meditator can forget her Third Meditation’s arguments for the Meditations’ version of theism without becoming defenseless against some otherwise tempting arguments that would deprive her both of unshakably certain results in first philosophy and of her prospective mathematical sciences’ firm and enduring ‘true and certain knowledge.’

The solution that the Fifth Meditation’s argument for the Meditations’ version of theism provides its retention problem promotes the meditator’s unshakably certain and her firm and enduring results to ‘perfect knowledge.’ That is, just those unshakably certain and firm and enduring certain results qualify as perfect knowledge that benefit from the Fifth Meditation’s remedy for the threat to the meditator’s retention of her previously earned quite certain results. 31

To Arnauld

Descartes’s rebuttal to Arnauld resumes the Reply that he introduced with studied irrelevance to Mersenne’s Cartesian Circle Object. Descartes protests Arnauld’s Object’s disregard of a distinction that signals the Fifth Meditation’s retention problem: ‘between what we in fact perceive clearly and what we remember having perceived clearly on a previous occasion.’ His Reply then adds this truncated, but not inaccurate summary of the Fifth Meditation solution:

To begin with, we are sure that God exists because we are attending to the arguments which prove this, subsequently it is enough for us to remember that we perceived something
clearly in order for us to be certain that it is true. This would not be sufficient if we did not know that God exists and is not a deceiver. (246)

Attending to the Third Meditation’s arguments for the Meditations’ theist conclusion would protect the meditator’s previously earned unshakably certain results and her prospective firm and enduring results. In case she forgets her Third Meditation’s arguments and theist conclusion, the certainty of her results remains protected by her Fifth Meditation’s provision of self-evident knowledge ‘that God exists and is not a deceiver’ that is immune to forgetting. 32

The rebuttal that the Fifth Meditation provides, and that Descartes’s Reply to Arnauld cites, contrasts with the rebuttal Descartes withheld from his Replies to Mersenne’s Cartesian Circle Objection. Descartes had an equally decisive rebuttal available to the Objection that targets the Third Meditation’s opening deliberation. However, Descartes’s Replies can rebut Arnauld’s Objection without directing added attention to the one passage that explicitly acknowledges the Meditations’ rejection of teleological religious theism.

By crediting the Fifth Meditation’s argument for theism with solving its retention problem, Descartes’s Reply to Arnauld’s Cartesian Circle Objection credits the Fifth Meditation with completing the Meditations’ linear central argument that is unimpeded by the passages that standing Cartesian Circle objections misinterpret as concessions of vicious circularity. In addition, the solution the Fifth Meditation gives its retention problem offers an answer to the standing ancillary question that asks why the Fifth Meditation should add another argument for the Meditations’ theist conclusion.

4.

November 1633

Descartes explained to Mersenne why, on news of the burning of Galileo’s Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems, he suppressed his Le Monde. Interpreters who standardly quote Descartes’s letter where it says, if Copernicus’s theory ‘is false, then so too are the entire foundations of my philosophy’ could cite the same letter where Descartes adds:
... I did not want to publish a discourse in which a single word could be found that the Church would have disapproved of; so I preferred to suppress it [{em Le Monde}] rather than to publish it in a mutilated form.

Descartes did not suppress or mutilate his {em Meditations}. However, his {em Replies to Objections} do divert attention from the passage where the Third Meditation acknowledges explicitly that foundational principles implicated in the non-factive certainty of prospective Seventeenth Century mathematical sciences contradict the teleological theism of the meditator’s previously avowed religious creed.

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1 ‘... stable and likely to last’ (tr.) Cottingham. Parenthetical page references to Descartes 1964 vol. vii are also marginal references in Descartes 1984 vol. ii.


3 For the First Meditation’s argument and the Archimedean candidate’s exemption, see [reference omitted].

4 Cp. ‘But I have convinced myself that there is absolutely nothing in the world, no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies. Does it now follow that I too do not exist?’ (tr.) Cottingham.

5 On the structure and import of this capacity, see [reference omitted].

6 Cp.: ‘...If I convinced myself of something then I certainly existed’ (tr.) Cottingham; ‘But doubtless I did exist, if I persuaded myself of something’ (tr.) Cress. ‘... there is no doubt that I existed, if I convinced myself of anything’ (tr. Williams 1978: 72).

7 The Second Meditation again uses a cognate of ‘necessary’ to mean certain, as the meditator introduces the Second Meditation’s next topic: ‘But I do not yet have a sufficient understanding of what this ‘I’ is, that now certainly [necessario] exists.’ (25) Contrast standard translations: ‘But I do not yet have a sufficient understanding of what this ‘I’ is, that now necessarily exists’ (tr.) Cottingham. (25); ‘But I do not yet understand sufficiently what I am – I, who now necessarily exist. (tr.) Cress.

8 Cp. ‘this proposition, I am, I exist, is necessarily true when ever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind’ (tr.) Cottingham. ‘...this pronouncement ‘I am, I exist’ is necessarily true every time I utter it or conceive it in my mind’ (tr.) Cress.
9 Cp. ‘the necessario is meant to capture experience of seeing that something has to be the case...’ (Carriero 2008: 304).

10 One current interpretation that imputes ‘cogito reasoning’ grants that in the Second Meditation the certainty of its conclusion (J) remains pending subsequent results ‘open to sceptical challenge’ (Sosa 2014: 20).

11 A current interpretation denies any reasoning is needed to supply the Second Meditation’s initial certain results. (Carriero 2009: 77)

12 On some of these topics, see [reference omitted].

13 ‘... it does not have to be true that there is a totally irresistible demonstration of the existence of a benevolent God... [However, although it] is necessary...and also sufficient, it [sc. that there exists such a God] is also not true’ (Williams 1978: 209-10).

14 Cp. ‘[Descartes’s] form of reliabilism appears already early in the Third Meditation... ’ (Sosa 2009: 147).


16 The Second Meditation introduces the Meditations’ expression ‘clear and distinct.’ (31) Her First Meditation characterizes these ‘matters that seemed most evident,’ as results of which she can gain certainty independently of whether or not she is dreaming. (19-20) Cf. [reference omitted].

17 She relieves this disregard for the trio of non-theist alternatives the First Meditation canvassed, presently. (21)

18 The possibility of deception suffices; actual instances, such as the Dream Argument requires to deprive the meditator of certainty that she is seated, are not necessary to deprive the meditator of certainty of results such as 2+3=5 that depend for their certainty just on her endowed cognitive capacities or on the Clarity Principle that credits her clear and distinct perception with generating certainty.

19 Her recollection accurately represents the First Meditation’s argument: that a purposive creator can deceive as means to an end that suffices to deprive the meditator of the certainty of results, such as 2+3=5, that she cannot even dream are false. The First Meditation’s argument specifically credits her purposive creator with benevolence. (21) So the task of the Meditations’ argument for theism cannot be confined to excluding the possibility of a malevolent or of an indifferent God. Cp. Newman 2014: 3.2.

20 Cp. ‘Descartes is not recalling a putative failure of the truth rule [that all clear and distinct perceptions are true] here – at a time when he clearly and distinctly perceived that 2+3=5 and he was either incorrect or doubtful that 2+3=5’ (Carriero 2008: 131).
In the First Meditation the meditator supposes that the god her theist creed credits as ‘all powerful’ is also maximally powerful. There, consequently, the only alternatives she can consider are atheist cosmologies that assign the source of her cognitive faculties less power. (21)

The meditator’s goal for her Third Meditation further confirms that ‘unshakably certain’ is non-factive. Since unshakeable certainty lacks any implications for theism, there cannot be unshakeable certainty that there is a non-purposive deity unless ‘unshakably certain’ is non-factive.

Cp. ‘For without a knowledge of these two truths I do not see that I can ever be certain of anything’ (tr.) Haldane and Ross (Descartes 1955).


‘It must be said, however, that the final sentence of this paragraph ....is an embarrassment for almost any interpretation of Descartes...’ (Van Cleve 1979: 67n).

Cp. ‘...to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last’ (17) (tr.) Cottingham.

Cp. ‘Some years ago I was struck by the large number of falsehoods that I had accepted as true in my childhood...’ (17) (tr.) Cottingham.

The diversion has been an untoward success, as the conflation persists in influential commentary on the ‘Cartesian Circle.’ Cf. Doney 1955.

Mersenne reports: ‘According to the atheist, if God existed...the infinite would exist. But the infinite in every category of perfection excludes everything else what so ever - - every kind of being and goodness, as well as ever kind of non-being and evil. Yet in fact there are many kinds of being and goodness, and many kinds of non-being and evil’ (125).


Cp. ‘For the second mode of cognition [additional to cognitio] Descartes uses the phrases scientia, plane certus, perfecte sciere, and plane nota & certa’ (Carriero 2008: 348).

References


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