**Abstract**

How can Descartes's First Meditation conclude that all current and currently prospective results of the meditator's inquiries are doubtful without depriving subsequent Meditations of their not at all doubtful results? The problem cannot be addressed by received interpretations of the First Meditation that fail to credit its sound extended central argument. The problem cannot be solved by current commentaries that interpolate so-called "cogito reasoning" in place of the Second Meditation's opening argument for the meditator's announced "Archimedean" conclusion. A solution acknowledges the contribution from the *Meditations*' genre of dramatic monologue. This study must depart from otherwise reliable English and French translations to credit both the problem posed by the First Meditation and its solution.

**Key Terms**

epistemic concepts, Dream Argument, God and mathematics, skepticism, Archimedean argument, knowledge
Descartes's First Meditation imposes a pressing, currently neglected problem of reconciling its central argument that concludes that all the meditator’s current and currently prospective results are doubtful with subsequent Meditations’ results that are not at all doubtful. The problem cannot be addressed by received interpretations that fail to acknowledge that the extended central argument the First Meditation provides for its conclusion is sound. Neither can it be solved by current commentaries that interpolate so-called “cogito reasoning” in place of the Second Meditation’s opening argument for the meditator’s announced “Archimedean” goal of an initial result that is “one thing... certain and unshakeable.” (24)¹ To credit both the problem posed by the First Meditation and its solution, this study must depart from otherwise reliable English and French translations and acknowledge the contribution from the Meditations’ generally overlooked genre of dramatic monologue.

The drama of the First Meditation unfolds in three parts. The beginning introduces a dedicated and accomplished inquisitive meditator who recounts her practical rationale for initiating the Meditations’ inquiry in first philosophy. The middle conducts a sound extended argument with three main premises that applies the meditator’s specified epistemic concepts as well as the theist concept in the meditator’s avowed religious creed of a maximally powerful, benevolently purposive God. Following her extended argument’s conclusion, the denouement displays an effect of conducting her First Meditation’s inquiry in its closing portrait of the meditator as a powerless prisoner. The Meditations’ drama that continues into a Second Meditation portrays its meditator’s epistemic conceptual renovation that enables the meditator to resume her inquiry in subsequent Meditations.

¹ Parenthetical page references are to volume 7 of Descartes: 1964. Unless indicated, translations are by Cottingham from volume 2 Cottingham (tr.): 1984.
BEGINNING

Predicament

The opening of the First Meditation reports a discovery by her scientific inquiries that much earlier locked its meditator in a predicament that continues to deprive her of any “firm and enduring [firmum & mansurum] results in the sciences”:

It has already been some years since I discovered [Animadverti] how many falsehoods I accepted as true since my youth and how doubtful is whatever I erected [superextruxi] afterwards on them. (17) ²

Discovery of any result elevates it to the epistemic level of results the discoverer knows. That is, restated using the Meditations’ non-factive, undefined epistemic expression: elevates to the epistemic level of results that for her are “not at all doubtful [non liceat dubitare].” (21) In the Meditations’ non-colloquial epistemic vocabulary, abbreviations for “not at all doubtful” include, among others, “most true [maxime verum]” (18) and “certain [certa]”(18, 20). It follows that the Meditations’ non-colloquial epistemic use of its term “certain” is non-factive; that is, that a result is certain does not imply that it is true, so the certainty of a result that is certain can have implications that do not follow from that result alone.

Immediately, the meditator reveals how her discovery, far from routine, blights all accumulated and prospective results of her current inquiries in the sciences. The certain results of her current inquiries depend for their epistemic status as certain on having been, as she says, “erected [superextruxi]” on the truth of results that include some that her discovery revealed are false. In the same architectural figure, the meditator adds that these certainly false implications belong to her current sciences’ “first foundations [primis fundamentis].” So there are certainly false implications that follow from the non-factive certainty of her current and currently prospective

₂ Cp. “Some years ago I was struck by [“Animadverti”] the large number of falsehoods that I had accepted as true in my childhood...” (tr.) Cottingham.
sciences’ certainly true results; the “first foundations” of her current and currently prospective sciences are certainly false. An epistemically unstable consequence of the discovery the meditator reports at the First Meditation’s start consequently reveals all current and prospective certainly true results of her current sciences to be also certainly not certain. The project in first philosophy the meditator announces that sets a goal of “firm and enduring \([\text{f firmum & mansurum}]\) results in the sciences” aims to remedy this condition. The meditator’s quest for firm and enduring results duly seeks certainly true results in sciences that rest on “first foundations” that are not certainly false. 3 The firm and lasting results she aims for are certainly true and do not have the second-order epistemic property of being also certainly not certain.

Why not suppose instead that those foundational implications her discovery revealed to be certainly false are consequences that follow, not from the non-factive certainty of her inquiries’ results but rather from their truth? Or suppose that it is factive certainty that the meditator ascribes to her previously accumulated certain results? Or suppose the foundations implicated in the certainty of her science’s results are simply false? Each would imply that her accumulated results of prior inquiries are all merely uncertain. Then, the meditator would have no good reason to quit her prior scientific inquiries or to undertake the Meditations’ inquiry in first philosophy. Why not suppose the meditator aims for certain results that are also certainly certain, that is, aimed to add foundations for her inquiries that are themselves certain? The reason is just that the announced discovery that opens the First Meditation did not reveal that her prior inquiries in the sciences rest on foundations that are not certainly true. Rather, she reported “how many falsehoods” she discovered in the foundations of

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3 Margaret Wilson translates “Animadverti” literally, “I noticed,” and she credits the First Meditation’s start with initiating a philosophical inquiry discontinuous with the meditator’s previous inquiries. Nevertheless, she comments: “The beginning of the Meditation does not need to be read so literally...” (Wilson 1978: 1). Janet Broughton denies that the First Meditation starts with “beliefs and goals we can see as fully rational” (Broughton 2002: 3). John Carriero acknowledges “the first paragraph as Descartes’s attempt to provide a motivation for the project,” but adds: “I do not believe he [Descartes] expects this motivation to be fully available to the meditator” (Carriero 2009: 28).
her prior inquiries in the sciences. Duly, the goal she announces of “firm and enduring” results in the sciences aims for certainly true results that are not also certainty not certain and foundations for the certainty of her results in the sciences that are not certainly false.

Method

The meditator’s discovery that the opening of her First Meditation reports locked her in a predicament. The certainly false foundation of her current inquiries in the sciences barred any escape that would add to her current accumulation of certainly true results in the sciences, as no certainly true addition to her current results could avoid being also certainly not certain, none could have firm and enduring certainty. So the practical solution for the meditator’s problem of escaping her opening predicament requires that she quit her prior acquisitive inquiries that exclude her from achieving any results that are firm and enduring. Also, her evident dedication to inquiry prohibits any plan that is not inquisitive. Her practical solution that concludes the First Meditation’s beginning deliberation adopts the First Meditation’s method that is both inquisitive and purgative.  

To pursue her strategic goal of firm and enduring results by inquisitive means, the meditator resolves to implement a tactical method of winnowing her prior inquiries’ accumulated results. She disregards any means that would proceed by hiking the epistemic level a result must attain to qualify as certainly true, presumably for the reason that her prior scientific inquiries already set a maximal epistemic level. Also, she leaves aside likely interminable reassessments that would reapply all her prior sciences’ means of epistemic assessment and could promise no more than to reveal errors her individual prior assessments committed. She implements her purgative tactical plan rather by adopting a non-permissive general acceptance rule that would have her retain only “completely certain” results. She thus resolves implicitly to banish hypotheses, probable conjectures, as well as any results the least doubtful that served her prior acquisitive scientific inquiries. The meditator concludes her First Meditation’s beginning practical reasoning:

4 The First Meditation’s strategic goal for its purgative inquiry of “firm and enduring results” aims to improve the epistemic quality of the meditator’s inquiries. On the contrasting goals of ancient and renaissance Pyrrhonian skeptical purgative inquiry, see Michael Frede 1987.
Reason now persuades me that I should hold back my assent from opinions that are not completely \textit{plane} certain and indubitable just as carefully as I do from those which are patently \textit{aperte} false. (18)

Here, the meditator's practical conclusion declares her tactical project of both reassessing her accumulated results of prior scientific inquiry that aims to winnow her results and of a task that awaits the First Meditation's denouement, of withdrawing belief from results that fail to withstand her reassessment.

Presently, the meditator makes clear that her method is not applicable to opinions for which she claims no level of certainty, such as the opinion she reports that specifies the epistemic concepts current available to her, a maxim she presently announces, and her theist long-standing avowed mere opinion. (21) Of course, her belief that she is meditating, and the like, is similarly exempt.

By declaring that "reason now persuades" her to adopt the purgative tactic of her inquisitive plan for escape from her opening predicament, the meditator concludes the practical argument that initiates her as inquirer in first philosophy. Here, she also declares the end to the temporizing that had postponed the start of her purgative inquisitive plan:

...but this task appeared enormous \textit{ingens opus}, and I waited to attain an age of maturity when no subsequent time would be more suitable for tackling such inquiries. This led me to put off the project for so long that I would now be to blame if by pondering over it any further I wasted the time still left for carrying it out. (17)

The end of her temporizing lends urgency to the \textit{Meditations'} postponed inquiry, as it launches the meditator's purgative tactic, governed by the method of doubt, in an inquisitive effort that she has now ensured will be her "once in a lifetime" foray into first philosophy.

For the committed inquirer who is locked in a predicament that bars the way to her stated goal of adding any firm and enduring results, or, that is, to her goal of certainly true results that are
not also certainly uncertain, the meditator’s tactic of purgative inquisitive reassessment offers a hope of escape, but no promise. Optimally, an outcome of the meditator’s inquisitive winnowing will yield a residue of positively reassessed certainly true results that could prove to be firm and lasting. In estimating the risk in undertaking her project of first philosophy the meditator may presume that the outcome can be no worse than her predicament at the start because she assumes her inquiry in first philosophy will remain reversible. Whether her presumption is true awaits the answer that the Meditations’ dramatic action portrays.

MIDDLE: Acquired Certainty

The First Meditation’s extended central argument implements the meditator’s tactical inquisitive project of reassessment governed by her adopted method of inquiring. Her tactic advances as an argument with three main premises. The meditator introduces the first premise after she declines as likely interminable any piecemeal reassessment of the original evidential bases of each of her accumulated certainly true results. Her architectural figure already supplies her means for reassessment that is general, as she explicitly rehearses: “Once the foundations of a building are undermined, anything built on them collapses of its own accord.” Again, her use of “foundations” applies to implications that follow from the non-factive certainty of her accumulated certain results. So her proposal to address “the basic principles on which all my former beliefs rested” articulates a foundational principle implicated in the non-factive certainty of her previously accumulated and currently prospective certainly true beliefs. This principle plainly was not among those unspecified results that her earlier, previously cited discovery revealed to be certainly false. Here, the meditator uses “most true” as another non-factive epistemic term for “not at all doubtful” to confide that:

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5 Contrast the non-tactical, strategic employment in Discourse on the Method of a method of doubt: “to see if I was left believing anything that was entirely indubitable” (AT vi, 31/CSM I, 127). The outcome reports: “I noticed that while I was trying thus to think everything false, it was necessary that I, who was thinking this, was something” (32/127). The First Meditation’s strategic goal of firm and enduring results is absent from Descartes’s Discourse on the Method.
Of course [Nempe], whatever I had admitted until now as most true [maxime verum] I accepted either from the senses or through the senses [vel a sensibus, vel per sensus]. (18)

These necessarily sensory epistemic concepts “from the senses or though the senses” that the meditator retains from her prior inquiries in the sciences are the epistemic concepts her First Meditation’s extended central argument applies. Here, the meditator’s nominally disjunctive label for her epistemic concepts introduces no distinction. Following its Dream Argument however the First Meditation’s extended central argument does provide the distinction I label below: between acquired certainty from the senses or though the senses that applies to results such as that I am seated and non-acquired certainty from the senses or through the senses that applies to results such as that 2+3=5.

The meditator’s avowal that specifies her current epistemic concepts serves the First Meditation’s extended central argument as its initial main premise:

(1) Any result that can be certain for the meditator has certainty from the senses or through the senses.

The First Meditation helps confirm that (1) has the status of the meditator’s opinions, in part, by offering no argument to support (1) and by exempting (1) from the meditator’s accumulated certain results that are subject to her First Meditation’s reassessment. It may be that prior to her First Meditation, the meditator never before acknowledged her current and long-standing exclusive reliance on her necessarily sensory epistemic concepts “from the senses or through the senses.”

The First Meditation casts (1) as the initial main premise in its central argument that reports the meditator’s currently available epistemic conceptual resources. Together with premise (1), the observation that the meditator is irreversibly a human sometime dreamer supplies the subordinate Dream Argument that concludes at main premise (2) that deprives the meditator of all results with acquired certainty from the senses or though the senses. The First Meditation supplies a subordinate
two-part argument to derive the central argument’s remaining main premise (3), that denies the meditator has any non-acquired certain results, from premises contributed by the meditator’s avowed religious creed. The fully general conclusion of the sound extended central argument the First Meditation’s announces (4), that the meditator lacks any current or currently prospective certain results.

A current interpretation that supposes the First Meditation’s argument recurs to Scholastic Aristotelian epistemology overlooks premise (1) and expressly denies that the First Meditation is entitled to its announced conclusion (4): “...when Descartes claims in the First Meditation the doubtfulness of all his former beliefs ... he is issuing something of a promissory note...”(Carriero 2009: 34-5, 45). Commentaries that overlook (1) and impute to the meditator a proto-Humean epistemic restriction to an evidential basis exclusively of sensory data would also deprive the First Meditation of its sound central argument for (4). (Stroud 1984: 6-7; Newman 2016: 3.2) These interpretations allow the meditator to retain knowledge of her current experiences and knowledge that she exists. Similarly, commentaries that attribute so-called “Cartesian skepticism,” although they interpolate versions of the denouement’s evil genius supposition to serve as false “skeptical hypotheses,” nevertheless cannot credit the First Meditation with its fully general conclusion (4). (Klein 2015)

Maxim

Following her introduction of premise (1), the meditator supplements her newly adopted inquisitive method with a modest, general prudential precept that enjoins withholding complete trust from any sometime deceiver:

... it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived [deceperunt] us even once.

(18)

The meditator adopts an epistemic version of this unconditional practical precept that applies to basic sources of certain results, as a maxim:

(Maxim) Treat any result from a source that sometimes deceives as somewhat doubtful.
The Maxim serves the First Meditation’s argument by imposing some epistemic demotion, if only minimal demotion, on all results from any original source that even sometimes deceives. Since her adopted method of inquiry applies to results even minimally below the epistemic level of certainty, addition of the Maxim serves to implement the meditator’s adopted method both by demoting all results from any sometime deceiving original source to the epistemic level of certainly false results and by requiring the meditator to treat them as results that are certainly false.

Presently, the argument for premise (3) specifies original sources of certainty for her results that satisfy her concept of non-acquired certainty from the senses or through the senses. The sole original sources of the acquired certainty from the senses or through the senses that premise (2) addresses are her senses.

Is the meditator ever deceived by her senses? The First Meditation introduces the Dream Argument by first clarifying this question.

**Deceive or mislead**

The First Meditation, but not current English or French translations of the First Meditation, explicitly distinguishes deceiving from misleading. The meditator uses the term “fallere” to report that her senses have been sources of some errors about acquired certain results:

> But from time to time I have found that the senses mislead [fallere], and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived [deceperunt] us even once [hos autem interdum fallere deprehendi, ac prudentiae est nunquam illis plane confidere qui nos vel semel deceperunt.] (18).

Somewhat misleadingly, the meditator follows her report that the senses mislead [fallere] by adding the endorsement of her Maxim that applies just to sources that deceive [deceperunt]. Here “fallere” cannot be translated as “deceived” without condemning her irreversibly fallible senses as deceivers. It would follow immediately that the meditator is permanently deprived of certainly true results to which her senses contribute. Then, her First Meditation’s Dream Argument would be superfluous and
the Sixth Meditation’s provision of certainly true results to which her senses contribute would be impossible.

Duly, she again uses the term “mislead [fallere]” and, notably, abstains from using the Maxim's term “deceive” [deceperunt] when she reports some examples in which her visual senses lead her to err. In such cases:

... the senses occasionally mislead [fallere] us with respect to objects that are very small or in the distance ...

The meditator presently specifies sensory “distinctness” as one of the “certain signs [certis indiciis]” her senses themselves provide that can enable her to correct errors, or to avoid erring about gaining certainty of targets that are “very small or in the distance.” 6 Such sensory distinctness could mark the last line on an ophthalmologist’s eye chart about which a subject can acquire a result that is certain. The meditator could report that a line she finds too blurry to read lacks “sensory distinctness.” When her senses themself thus enable her to correct or to avoid an erroneous claim to acquire certainty, her senses merely mislead. Duly, about occasions when she errs by presuming to gain certainty of targets “very small or in the distance,” the meditator does not say she is deceived [deceperunt], but rather that she is misled [fallere].

Subsequently, the meditator again contrasts benign misleading with deceiving, and confirms her prior application of this distinction. Errors about gaining certainty that their source enables her to correct are misleading, as they do not imply the source is a deceiver. Her Sixth Meditation says:

... the very fact that God is not a deceiver [fallax], and the consequent impossibility of there being any falsity in my opinions which cannot be corrected by some faculty supplied by God, offers me a sure hope that I can attain the truth even in these matters. (80).

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6 The Second Meditation coins “clear and distinct” to label a mark that is not sensory. (31)
Here, following the theist conclusion that the Third Meditation’s argument introduces, her divine source cannot deceive “on pain of contradiction.” Her source can allow errors that the meditator is divinely equipped to correct. Evidently, the same divine provision would also enable the meditator to anticipate and avoid erring, so she would be again merely misled by her divinely provided faculties, not deceived. (47)

Unfortunately, standard translations use the one term “deceive”/“trompé” for both the First Meditation’s cognate of deceive “deceperunt” and for its two initial occurrences of “fallere.” If routine errors about gaining results with acquired certainty from the senses or through the senses were cases of deception, her Maxim and inquisitive method would require the meditator to conclude immediately that all her results with acquired certainty from the senses or through the senses must be demoted. Consequently, not only would her First Meditation’s Dream Argument then be superfluous. Also, contrary to the Sixth Meditation’s close, the fact that her fallible senses yield any erroneous results would suffice to bar the meditator’s senses from contributing to her gaining any results with acquired certainty, permanently. (79f.) The First Meditation provides that the

7 “But from time to time I have found that the senses deceive [fallere], and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived [deceperunt] us even once. Yet although the senses occasionally deceive [fallant] us with respect to objects which are very small or in the distance, there are many other beliefs about which doubt is quite impossible, even though they are derived from the senses....” (tr. Cottingham). (Fr.): “... or j’ai quelquefois éprouvé que ces sens étaient trompeurs, & il est de la prudence de ne se fier jamais entièrement à ceux qui nous ont une fois trompés” (AT ix-1: 14). “I have noticed that the senses are sometimes deceptive, and it is a mark of prudence never to place our complete trust in those who have deceived us even once” (tr.) Cress. “Yet I have found that these senses sometimes deceive me, and it is a matter of prudence never to confide completely in those who have deceived us even once” (tr.) Heffernan. “Now I have sometimes caught the senses deceiving me; and a wise man never entirely trusts those who have once cheated him” (tr.) Anscombe and Geach. For (tr.) Haldane and Ross, see below.
meditator’s errors about gaining acquired certainty of too small and too distant targets merely mislead. Are there, in addition, examples in which the meditator’s senses do deceive her?

**Dream Argument**

Initially, the meditator offers the example in which she is seated holding papers in her own hands to illustrate cases in which, far from deceiving, her senses do not even mislead:

But although the senses sometimes mislead [*fallant*] us about objects which are very small or in the distance, there are many other things that plainly cannot be doubted, even though they are derived from the senses – for example, that I am here, sitting by the fire, wearing a winter dressing-gown, holding this piece of paper in my hands…(18)

To introduce the Dream Argument, the meditator asks, as if rhetorically, how she could err about whether the hands that hold the paper before her are her hands:

... for what reason could it be denied that these hands and this entire body are mine? (18)

The meditator’s answer may initially appear to be no less obviously false than a denial that “these hands and this entire body are mine.” She could commit such extravagant errors about her own body, she answers, in case she was afflicted by the condition of victims of a type of psychosis:

... whose brains are impaired by such an unrelenting vapor of black bile that they steadfastly insist that ... they have heads made of clay, or that they are pumpkins or made entirely of glass. (19)

A pathological victim who is convinced his own body is a pumpkin or whose senses fail to correct his conviction that a clay pot is his own head presents a condition in which a subject is barred from adding acquired certainty of results, including results such as that the hands holding papers before him are his own hands. Sufferers from this psychotic condition are similarly disabled from acquiring
certainty about any bodies in their surroundings. The meditator protests that she suffers from no such pathological condition:

But these people are insane [amentes]... (19)

To be sure, the meditator is not afflicted as are those whose “brains... [are] impaired by... an unrelenting vapor of black bile.” Immediately, however, the meditator qualifies her protest with the unexceptionable observation that she is a human sometime dreamer:

[I am]... a human who is accustomed to sleep at night and to experiencing in my dreams the very same things, or now and then even less plausible ones, as these insane people do when they are awake. [For example]... that I am here, clothed in my dressing gown, seated next to the fireplace -- when in fact I am lying undressed in bed. (19)

While she dreams, the meditator acknowledges, she is in the psychotic condition of those she cited as insane. Her errors while dreaming about gaining certainty of the posture, location, and surroundings of her own body exhibit her temporary epistemic disability that prevents her senses from serving as a source of any acquired certain results about her own body or its surroundings. Generally:

(D-prin) When she acquires certain results about her body or its surroundings she cannot be dreaming.

The question she initially posed rhetorically she now answers by specifying how she can err about whether "these hands and this entire body are mine." The answer is that just because she is a human sometime dreamer her senses are indeed sometimes disabled from serving as sources of her acquired certain results. When she is dreaming her senses do allow her to err about gaining certainty that she is seated holding papers in her own hands, and they do not contribute to her gaining any certain results about her own body or surroundings. Of course, the pathological psychotic condition
that afflicts madmen is also dissimilar to the condition of the meditator when she dreams, since the meditator's dreaming is a psychotic state that is temporary.

Is the meditator deceived when she dreams she gains acquired certainty from the senses or through the senses that she is seated holding papers in her own hands? Of course, she does not ask whether, while dreaming, her senses can mark the occasion as one when they are not competent to supply any results with acquired certainty. The meditator asks, rather: on occasions when she is not dreaming, can she have some way of telling that she is indeed not dreaming? In her First Meditation, and so long as she is confined to her epistemic concept of acquired certainty from the senses or though the senses, the sole source of any such way of telling must be her senses. If there is some solely sensory feature that can mark occasions when she is not dreaming, then, when she lies in bed dreaming she acquires certainty that she is seated holding papers in her own hands, her error would be another example in which her Maxim does not apply; she would once again be merely misled, not deceived.

The meditator's initial, too hasty answer to the question whether the basic source of her results' acquired certainty can again be absolved of deceiving nominates the same sensory mark that would absolve her senses of deceiving when she is merely misled about targets too distant and too small for her senses to yield certainty:

... Right now my eyes are certainly wide-awake when I gaze upon this sheet of paper. This head which I am shaking is not heavy with sleep. I extend this hand consciously and deliberately, and I feel it. Such things would not be so distinct \textit{distincta} for someone who is asleep. (19)

Immediately, this initial answer, that sensory distinctness marks her condition of wakefulness, earns the meditator's derisive retraction:
... as if I did not recall having been deluded [delusum] on other occasions even by similar thoughts in my dreams. As I consider these matters more carefully, I see so plainly that being awake can never be distinguished from sleep by certain indications [certis indiciis]... (19)

Sensory distinctness cannot suffice to mark occasions when she is not dreaming, and her pause to “consider more carefully” may allow her silently to deny that there can be any sensory feature that marks such occasions. Later, she cites the general basis for this denial:

...every sensory experience I have ever thought I was having while awake I can also think of myself as sometimes having while asleep. (77)

In the First Meditation, consequently, on occasions when she dreams she acquires certain results from the senses or through the senses about her body or its surroundings, the meditator’s senses cannot be acquitted of deceiving.

Her Maxim can then apply to demote all her current and currently prospective results with acquired certainty from the senses or through the senses. The First Meditation’s Dream Argument concludes:

(2) None of the meditator’s current or currently prospective results have acquired certainty.

Together with premise (1), it follows that the meditator’s newly derived premise (2) deprives the meditator of all her current and currently prospective results with certainty from the senses or through the senses that she could acquire only when she is not dreaming. I’ll call such certainty “acquired certainty.”

**Reversible**

Near the Sixth Meditation’s close, when the meditator returns to the topic of dreaming, she will have retained her Maxim and the non-permissive acceptance rule of the Method of Doubt that the start of her Second Meditation’s inquiry adapts to serve in an acquisitive role. (24) Also, she will
have demonstrated in the Second Meditation’s opening argument for its Archimedean conclusion her then newly won command of epistemic concepts that include a concept of acquired certainty that is not certainty from the senses or through the senses. Thereafter, her senses can contribute as one of multiple sources, or as a component of a single complex source of the meditator’s prospective results with acquired certainty. She will then no longer be restricted to solely sensory marks of when she is not dreaming, so the Sixth Meditation can at last claim a fallible and utterly routine way of telling when she is not dreaming:

But when I distinctly see where things come from and where and when they come to me, and when I can connect my perceptions of them with the whole of the rest of my life without a break, then I am fully certain that when I encounter these things I am not asleep but awake.

(90)

Provided she has not somehow adopted some restriction that again confines her every way of telling when she is not dreaming to solely sensory marks, her necessarily erroneous dreams of acquiring certain results about her body and its surroundings can at last be merely misleading, not deceiving.

Descartes’s popular works contrast with the First Meditation’s inference from the irreversible fact that the meditator is a characteristically human sometime dreamer, together with her reversible current epistemic concepts that premise (1) records. The First Meditation’s Dream Argument infers that the meditator’s senses sometimes deceive, then applies her Maxim to conclude (2), that the meditator lacks any results with acquired certain from the senses or through the senses. The Dream Argument is both sound and reversible, because premise (1) is true of the meditator in the First Meditation and not in Sixth Meditation. Contrast the autobiographer in Discourse on the Method. He assumes without argument that “our senses sometimes deceive us,” and he concludes irreversibly “that nothing was such as they [our senses] led us to imagine” (AT vi, 32; CSM i 167). Descartes’s Principles of Philosophy adopts the same conclusion given just the irreversible fact that “in sleep we regularly seem to have sensory perception of, or to imagine, countless things which do not exist anywhere” (AT viia 6; CSM i 193-4).
Replies

Descartes’s *Third Replies* rebut Hobbes’s *Objections* to the First Meditation that take Descartes to subscribe to an irreversible doctrine that “there is no criterion enabling us to distinguish our dreams from the waking state and veridical sensations” and that disparage the First Meditation’s Dream Argument for rehearsing trite Platonic doctrine of “uncertainty in sensible things.” (171) Descartes’s *Reply* declines to restate the First Meditation’s argument for (2). Instead, his rebuttal contrast the *Meditations*’ argument with Platonic doctrine by noting that Hobbes overlooks the diagnostic feature of the Dream Argument:

Partly I [Descartes] introduced the arguments so that I could reply to them in the subsequent Meditations…. I could not have left them out, any more than a medical writer can leave out the description of a disease when he wants to explain how it can be cured. (172)

The analogue of a disease Descartes diagnoses is not the temporary psychotic state common to humans who sometimes sleep. It is evidently the meditator’s current commitment to her avowed specifically sensory current concept of acquired certainty “from the senses or through the senses.” The symptom that the Dream Argument describes and diagnoses, but Descartes’s * Replies* do not restate, is the First Meditation’s insatiable requirement that the meditator have a mark of when she is not dreaming that is solely sensory. The treatment for Descartes’s medical writer to prescribe would include excision of the meditator’s current epistemic concept of acquired certainty from the senses or through the senses. To Hobbes’s further complaint that Descartes’s target employs the senses “without exercising our reason in any way,” (171) Descartes’s * Replies* could add that although there is something the meditator fails to exercise in the First Meditation, it is not her reason. Rather, it is the conceptual capacity she first exercises in the Second Meditation when she earns her initial acquired certain results that do not instance her prior concept of acquired certainty from the senses or through the senses.

Contrary to characteristic Platonic doctrines that Hobbes and other commentators have imputed to the *Meditations*, the senses’ fallibility is accommodated in the First Meditation’s Dream
Argument that explicitly contrasts results that merely mislead with results that deceive. Also, when the Sixth Meditation subsequently argues for crediting the meditator with acquired certainty the excision has been accomplished, as it is specifically not acquired certainty from the senses or through the senses that she claims of “the existence of material things.”

Barry Stroud’s standard interpretation of the Dream Argument employs a translation that collapses the First Meditation’s distinction between deceiving and misleading. Nevertheless, Stroud expressly declines to attribute reasoning that would lead readers from the observation standardly mistranslated as if the meditator says about too small and too distant targets that her fallible senses deceive. Stroud says, “Descartes’s negative assessment of all his sensory knowledge does not depend on such reasoning.” (Stroud 1984: 9) Stroud’s alternative locates the start of the Dream Argument at the meditator’s report that she is seated holding papers in her hands. This interpretation bypasses the Meditations’ distinction between deceiving and misleading, the First Meditation’s account of dreaming as temporary psychosis, as well as both the meditator’s Maxim and her statement of premise (1) that the meditator understands to restrict her to solely sensory marks of when she is not dreaming. Stroud nevertheless does derive a skeptical conclusion, by crediting the example in the meditator’s report that she is seated as setting “the most favorable conditions for reliable operation of the senses as a source of knowledge.” Stroud declares the conclusion he derives from the Dream Argument conditionally, but with an antecedent that he leaves unchallenged: “Descartes would be perfectly correct in saying ...[that] we could never tell we are not dreaming, if he were also right that knowing that one is not dreaming is a condition of knowing something about the world around us.” If this necessary condition for knowledge of such things applies in Descartes’s First Meditation, it also applies in the Sixth Meditation. Stroud acknowledges that the conclusion that follows on his interpretation of the Dream Argument is irreversible: “[It] can never be given a satisfactory solution.”

8 “…but it is sometimes proved to me that these senses are deceptive” (tr.) Haldane and Ross (1955, vol. i 145).

9 For attribution of a so-called “lunacy argument” and discussion of a dispute with Foucault by Derrida 1978, see Broughton 2005: 44-63.
Rather, to “find a way to reject the problem -- I [Stroud] think that is our only hope” (Stroud 1984: 33). As noted above, however, the Meditations can subsequently solve the problem Stroud attributes to the First Meditation of “knowing anything about the world around us on the basis of the senses...” because the First Meditation’s Dream Argument can derive its preliminary conclusion (2) only given (1). And, provided subsequent Meditations supplant (1) by allowing that the meditator can earn results with acquired certainty that is not acquired certainty from the senses or through the senses.

The First Meditation’s Dream Argument derives its central argument’s second main premise (2) from the meditator’s report of her current epistemic conceptual resources and her irreversible condition as a human sometime dreamer. Any certain results the meditator retains after she concludes her argument for premise (2) must certainty that is independent of whether or not she is dreaming.

**Middle: Non-acquired Certainty**

**Suppose I’m dreaming**

To continue her inquiry in first philosophy, the meditator must comply with the Dream Argument’s conclusion. Duly, she adopts the assumption that will govern the balance of the First Meditation’s central argument: “that I am dreaming.” (19) This false supposition serves solely to codify the Dream Argument’s soundly derived conclusion (2) that has already deprived the meditator of any results with certainty she can acquire only when she is not dreaming. Do there remain any results that both satisfy premise (1) and are consistent with her supposition? Her answer nominates some “perspicuous truths” as having certainty untouched by the Dream Argument:

10 *Cp. “...I see no real escape from the conclusion of the dream argument” (Curley 1978: 68).*

11 In the Fifth Meditation the meditator recalls: “...before, when I was completely preoccupied with the objects of the senses, I always held that the most certain truths of all were the kind that I recognized clearly in connection with shapes, or numbers, or other items related to arithmetic or geometry, or in general to pure and abstract mathematics” (65).
... Whether I am awake or asleep, two and three added together are five, and a square has no more than four sides. (20)

The meditator cannot even dream a sum of 2+3 other than 5 or a square without 4 sides. Generally, "perspicuous truths" with certainty consistent with her supposition that she is dreaming have negations even her dreams cannot represent. The meditator’s hypothetical explanation of how her senses enable her to earn results with certainty that is consistent with supposing she is dreaming offers a comparison. As pictures depend on elementary “real colors from which we form all the images of things, whether true or false,” so her capacity for sensory representation depends on “simple and universal” elementary ingredients. Her hypothetical explanation’s list of elements starts with “corporeal nature in general, and its extension; also, the figure of extended things...” Her capacity for sensory representation, to which she attributes these elementary ingredients, may be credited with preventing her from even dreaming erroneous results in arithmetic and geometry. She says:

... all other disciplines which depend on the study of composite things, are doubtful: while arithmetic, geometry and other subjects of this kind, which deal only with the simplest and most general things, independently of whether or not these things exist in nature, contain something certain and indubitable. (20)

This explanation, whether at all accurate, credits her certain results that are consistent with the supposition that she is dreaming just to the meditator’s endowed capacity for sensory representation. It follows that the source of her certain results that are immune to the Dream Argument is none other than the source of her sensory capacities. That is, the source of her certain results that she cannot even dream are false is the original source of the meditator herself.

The certainty of these results may be said to be non-acquired certainty from the senses or through the senses. Notably, truths such as 2+3=5 that have such non-acquired certainty just because
they have negations the meditator is unable to dream share a matching vulnerability. The Dream Argument can demote results from their status of having acquired certainty only because the meditator is actually deceived on some occasions when she dreams that she gains acquired certainty from the senses or through the senses. In contrast, the meditator’s non-acquired certainty of results in arithmetic or geometry is vulnerable to the mere possibility that she is deceived by the original source of her cognitive capacities. Further, an error about her having a result with such non-acquired certainty is one that the meditator could not anticipate, avoid, or correct, so any such error would deceive, not merely mislead. She adds, rhetorically:

It seems impossible that such perspicuous truths should incur any suspicion of being false. (20)

Nevertheless, it is just such a suspicious that her two-part argument for premise (3) raises and sustains.

**Religious theism**

The argument applies the concept of an all-powerful God that is a purposefully benevolent creator, which the meditator says she keeps “fixed in my mind.” She avows this long-standing opinion as her current religious creed:

...[a] long standing opinion that there is an all-powerful God [*qui potest omnia*] who created me as I am. (21)

Preliminary to her two-part argument, the meditator acknowledges that the God of her religious creed has a level of power that can make it that there is “no Earth, no heavens, no extended thing, no figure, no magnitude, no place, while at the same time ensuring that all these things appear to me to exist just as they do now...” (21) However, since she adds that these components serve her explanation “regardless of whether they exist in nature or not,” she can have results with non-acquired certainty despite this possibility. Her argument for demoting the meditator’s results that
have non-acquired certainty is independent of whether such entities “exist in nature or not.” She adds:

What is more, just as I consider that others sometimes go astray in cases when they think they know perfectly, how do I know that God has not brought it about that I too go wrong [fallar] every time I add two and three...? (21)

Because the meditator herself cannot even dream a sum of 2+3 other than 5, she poses this suspicion by comparing herself to others whom she contends do err in “cases when they think they have the most perfect knowledge.” Whether she has results with non-acquired certainty depends on the divine source of the meditator and her senses. To the question of whether it is possible that this divine source of her sensory capacity ever deceives her, the meditator’s initial answer notes that her religious creed includes in her concept of God purposive benevolence:

But perhaps God would not have allowed me to be deceived [decipi] in this way, since he is said to be supremely good. (21)

This crediting of supreme goodness to her source prompts the meditator to a variant of a standard theodicy by questioning how such a God can “allow me to be deceived even occasionally”:

But if it were inconsistent with his goodness to have created me such that I am deceived all the time it would seem equally foreign to his goodness to allow me to be deceived even occasionally; yet this last assertion cannot be made. (21)

The false assertion that “cannot be made” is that an all-powerful benevolent God so created the meditator that she has never been deceived. Of course, the occasion the Dream Argument previously reported belies “this last assertion.” The God of her religious creed did in fact allow her to be deceived on that previously reported occasion. According to a tradition that endorses the meditator’s
religious creed, this divine deception can be reconciled with God's benevolence in case deception of the meditator served as means to some benevolent divine end. Thus, the meditator infers it is also possible that her benevolent God also allowed her to be deceived when he provided her capacities that equip her for non-acquired certainty of results in arithmetic and geometry. Notably, the same possibility of deception, as means to a divine benevolent end, would remain in case divine ends were indifferent or malevolent. Consequently, the possibility that she is deceived about having non-acquired certainty of results in arithmetic and geometry follows from the implication of her avowed religious opinion that her original source is purposive. The meditator concludes it is possible that the God of her religious creed sometimes deceives her about having non-acquired certainty in mathematics, rhetorically: “how do I know that God has not brought it about that I too go wrong [fallar] every time I add two and three...?” (21) This possibility that God as also allowed her to be deceived about results such as that 2+3=5, together with her Maxim, bars her having any results that depend for their non-acquired certainty just on the meditator’s God-given faculties.

In the First Meditation, as in the Meditations generally, the meditator studiously abstains from acknowledging explicitly that her non-acquired certainty of results such as 2+3=5 is inconsistent with her avowed religious opinion that God is purposive. The exception is in the Third Meditation’s introductory passage where she accurately recalls how the First Meditation’s argument deprived her results in mathematics of non-acquired certainty: 12

The only reason for my later judgment that they [2+3=5 or “similar things”] were open to doubt was that it occurred to me that perhaps some God could [potuisse] have given me a nature such that I was deceived [deciperer] even in matters which seemed most evident. (36)

The same religious conception remains the meditator’s idea of a God both maximally powerful and purposively benevolent throughout the Second Meditation and in the Third Meditation’s opening

12 For discussion of this key passage for the Meditations’ central argument, see [reference omitted].
passage. There, the meditator acknowledges explicitly that such a deity that can deceive “if he so desired” has barred her from having non-acquired certainty of results in mathematics:

... 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 [siquidem velit], to bring it about that I am deceived [decipere] even in those matters which I think I see utterly clearly with my mind’s eye. (36)

Even although she cannot even dream any sum of 2+3 other than 5, and although she can see results such as 2+3=5 “utterly clearly with my mind’s eye,” the purposively benevolent God of the meditator’s religious creed could so endow her that is deceived about having non-acquired certainty about such results, “if he so desired.” This incendiary outcome evidently acknowledges explicitly the First Meditation’s result that the meditator’s religious theism is irreconcilable with her having non-acquired certainty of results in prospective mathematical sciences. Presently, the second part of the First Meditation’s argument for its main premise (3) adds that the “supreme power” of the God of the meditator’s avowed religious creed is the maximal power that the meditator can comprehend in the First Meditation. Any less powerful source of the meditator is a version of atheism. The First Meditation thus anticipates that the Meditations cannot provide the meditator prospective non-acquired certain results in mathematical sciences if its central argument can retain the meditator’s religious concept of a God both maximally powerful and purposive. (Cf. [reference omitted])

Elsewhere, Descartes’s “Synopsis” of the Meditations anticipates that the First Meditation’s arguments present “reasons … which give us possible grounds for doubt about all things, especially material things, so long as we have no foundations for the sciences other than those which we have had up till now.” (2) Descartes declines to specify that the foundations that subsequent Meditations must replace include not only main premise (1) that articulates the meditator’s current epistemic concepts but also the meditator’s avowed religious creed that implies that a God could be both maximally powerful and purposive. Descartes’s earlier Discourse on the Method includes no hint of the First Meditation’s argument that obliges the meditator to deny she has non-acquired certain
results in mathematics. There, the autobiographer argues for demoting his certain results in mathematics, as if in earnest, just from his own asserted lack of accomplishment in geometrical reasoning. (ATvi32/CSMi127) The argument Descartes gives in Principles of Philosophy I, 5 for denying certainty to “even mathematical demonstrations” adopts as its mere assumption that there are examples in which we have been deceived. There, Descartes cites “this omnipotent God who created us” but does not add that this God is purposive. 13 Of course, it should be expected that Descartes would avoid acknowledging the inconsistency of his meditator’s religious theism with the non-acquired certainty of prospective results in mathematical sciences, where he can avoid it.

Nevertheless, received interpretations presume that the version of theism subsequent Meditations defend can be consistent with the teleological religious theism that the meditator avows in the First Meditation. Among them are interpretations that presume a task for subsequent Meditations is to conclude that God is benevolent, even although the First Meditation already provides that God is purposefully benevolent. 14 Also, benevolence could not relieve a purposive God of the possibility it employs deceptive means.

The meditator’s religious creed implies that the purposive God that implies a possibility that the meditator’s faculties are deceptive and demotes all her results with non-acquired certainty is “all-powerful.” Evidently, she understands an “all-powerful” being to have power that is maximal, since in the First Meditation the only alternatives the meditator can entertain to the deity “…firmly rooted in my mind… [that is] an all-powerful [qui potest omnia] God who made me the kind of creature that I am” assign her non-purposive original sources that have less than maximal power. (20)

**Atheist alternatives**

13 Neither the “creation of eternal truths” doctrine that Descartes introduces elsewhere, nor the status of 2+3=5 as a necessary truth take part in the First Meditation’s argument that deprives the meditator of certain results in mathematics, cp. Wilson 1978: 136; Wagner 2014.

14 Cf. Newman 2016: sec. 3.2. Cp. “By the end of the First Meditation Descartes is holding that all his beliefs are rendered ‘uncertain’.... He will ultimately attempt to remove the Deceiver Hypothesis by proving that he is in the hands of an omnipotent, benevolent being...” (Wilson 1978: 35).
The less than maximally powerful alternatives the meditator can consider in the First Meditation are versions of atheism. Here, the meditator avoids associating herself with even a supposition of explicit atheism, by imputing these alternatives to others:

These people might suppose that I came to be what I am either by fate, or by chance, or by a connected chain of events, or by some other way. (21)

From the only alternatives the meditator can consider to her avowed version of theism, it also follows that her sensory capacities fail to provide results with non-acquired certainty, as she argues. The less powerful her supposed source, the more likely are the meditator’s cognitive capacities to condemn her to be sometimes deceived about having non-acquired certain results. She says:

Because to be misled and to err [falli & errare] are specific [quaedam] imperfections, the less power they [sc., the atheists’ suppositions] assign to my original author [originis meae authorem], the more probable it is that I am so imperfect as to be always misled [semper fallar]. (21)

Supposing she has an original source with less than maximal power, her commission of some error about having a result with non-acquired certainty is then probable and hence possible. Any error about her having a result with non-acquired certainty is one the meditator could not anticipate or correct. So her error would not merely mislead; she would be deceived. The meditator must conclude, given that her conception of an all-powerful, purposively benevolent creator includes having maximal power, that the only alternatives to her having a purposive divine creator also ensure she is sometimes deceived about results with non-acquired certainty. \(^\text{15}\) Then, the meditator’s

\(^\text{15}\) Plantinga’s widely discussed argument against versions of Naturalism in epistemology would conclude, from current evolutionary accounts of her origin that are not supplemented by teleological theism, that the meditator’s cognitive faculties are generally misleading or unreliable (1993: 216-37; 2002,
Maxim applies to deprive her of non-acquired certainty of all results that depend for their certainty on her having a non-divine original source.

The central argument’s third main premise follows, either in case the meditator is a creature of a maximally powerful purposive original cause, such as the purposive God of her avowed religious creed, or in case she has a less powerful origin:

(3) The meditator lacks any results that have non-acquired certainty from the senses or through the senses.

In the First Meditation, and through the Second Meditation, it remains the meditator’s long-standing religious concept of a purposive and maximally powerful deity that prevents her from considering any additional alternative to either teleological theism or atheism neither of which is consistent with the meditator’s avoiding the possibility of being deceiving and her prospects for non-acquired certainty of results in mathematical sciences. Whether the meditator can earn results in mathematical sciences that fulfill her epistemic goal of firm and enduring certainty in the sciences depends in part on whether subsequent Meditations can replace the theism of the meditator’s avowed theist creed. The First Meditation anticipates that Descartes’s Meditations will not reconcile religious theism with prospective mathematical sciences, but will match the anti-teleological sciences of nature with the Meditations’ version of theism.

Notably, the First Meditation’s two-part argument for main premise (3) not only suffices to deprive the meditator of non-acquired certainty from the senses or though the senses. The argument for (3) applies more generally to any result with non-acquired certainty. The First Meditation’s argument for (3) would also suffice to exclude non-acquired certainty that a thinking capacity or some supposed intuitive faculty would suffice to provide.


**Conclusion**

The First Meditation’s central argument concludes with the meditator’s concession that tactical purgative reassessment by her inquiry in first philosophy has spared none of her intellectually unstable previously accumulated certainly true results:

I am finally compelled to admit that there is not one of my former beliefs about which a doubt may not properly be raised [*de quo non liceat dubitare*]... (21)

This outcome not only disappoints the meditator’s plan to winnow from the accumulated certain results of her prior inquiries in the sciences some certainly true results that she may then be entitled to endorse as firm and enduring. Her conclusion deprives all her current and currently prospective results of inquiry of certainty:

(4) For the meditator no current or currently prospective result of inquiry is certain.

The central argument’s conclusion (4) applies to results with acquired certainty from the senses or though the senses and to all results with non-acquired certainty. It follows that the inferences the meditator draws in the First Meditation’s argument should not be understood to exercise reasoning abilities that require the meditator to be certain of principles of logic that govern her inferences. Also, because (4) allows no exceptions, the Second Meditation’s initial certain results cannot be understood as certain results that survived the First Meditation’s argument.16

The First Meditation’s central argument contrasts with influential interpretations that attribute to the First Meditation a sequence of skeptical doubts of increasing severity, with

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overlapping outcomes, that ends in a final so-called “Evil Genius Doubt.” 17 The argument that derives (4) in the First Meditation however assigns to premises (2) and (3) separate jurisdictions that are, given premise (1), also exhaustive. The First Meditation’s argument also contrasts with so-called “Cartesian Skepticism” that imputes a pattern of argument that supposes some false skeptical hypothesis deprives a subject’s results of having certainty, just because he lacks certainty that the skeptical hypothesis is false.18 On the contrary, however, the First Meditation’s central argument derives (4) from premises that are true. Premise (1) accurately reports the meditator’s epistemic conceptual resources in the First Meditation. Premise (2) follows, given (1) and that the meditator is a human sometime dreamer. It follows that premise (3) is true, given that the meditator’s original source is either less than maximally powerful or instances her expressed current concept of a purposive God that is maximally powerful. As noted above, the false supposition that the meditator is currently dreaming serves only to codify the result of the Dream Argument, that the meditator’s senses currently can provide no results with acquired certainty. Further, the false Evil Genius supposition can take no part in advancing the First Meditation’s central argument’s conclusion, because the meditator introduces this false supposition in the denouement, after her argument for (4) has already concluded.

**Denouement**

*Malign Genie*

The First Meditation’s two-paragraph denouement exhibits some immediate effects on the meditator of her conduct of the inquiry that landed her with the First Meditation’s central argument’s conclusion (4). To comply with her prudently adopted resolution to abstain from believing her newly demoted results:

17 *Pace* Klein: “Though dreaming doubts do significant demolition work, ....the most powerful of doubts.... take[s] the form of the Evil Genius Doubt” (2015 sec. 3). “The most famous rendering of Descartes’ hyperbolic doubt takes the form of the Evil Genius Doubt” (Newman 2016: sec. 3.2).

18 *Cf.* Luper 2011.
So in future I must withhold my assent from these former beliefs just as carefully as I would from obvious falsehoods. (22)

The meditator needs a plan if she is to withhold her belief from all her previously certain results. She specifies a formidable obstacle she must overcome: “I shall never get out of the habit of confidently assenting to these opinions, so long as I suppose them to be what in fact they are, namely very probable opinions much more reasonable to believe than to deny” (22). How can she meet her conscientiously pursued inquisitive method’s requirement that she treat as “obvious falsehoods” results such as that the hands holding papers before her are her hands and that 2+3=5?

The plan she adopts for withdrawing her belief from all such currently “very probable” results attempts no pointless additional epistemic demotion of her previously certain results. She plans, rather, a variant of the ancient Pyrrhonist balancing exercise that requires her to believe that her previously certain and currently very probable beliefs have negations that are true:

...by pretending \[fingam\] for a time that these former opinions are entirely false and imaginary. I shall do this until the weight of preconceived opinion is counter-balanced and the distorting influence of habit no longer prevents my judgment from perceiving things correctly. (22)

The single extravagant pretense she adopts avoids undertaking a likely interminable separate pretense for each of her demoted beliefs. She first pauses to muster some wishful momentary reassurance that would minimize her estimate of her stake in the outcome of her plan for disabusing her of opinions that formerly were certain:

This is because the task now does not involve action, but only things to be known. (22)
She can wish that pursuit of her purgative inquisitive project in first philosophy did lack practical consequences. Presumably, she would be equipped to protect herself from adverse consequences, in case she could be confident that it remained still up to her whether to quit her inquiry in first philosophy. It was up to her whether to initiate her current inquiry in first philosophy, and no doubt it remained up to her whether or not to interrupt her inquiry’s early stages. Current thoughts the meditator does not yet voice could question however whether her continued inquiry in first philosophy had already imposed constraints on what she can do and what she can attempt.

Just in order to disabuse herself of beliefs that are long standing and newly demoted from their prior epistemic level of certainty, the meditator adopts this one extravagant supposition:

Some malicious demon [genium aliquem malignum] of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to mislead [falleret] me. (23)

This supposed malicious demon has a level of power similar to the purposively benevolent God of the meditator’s religious creed. As already noted, its power could not be deployed to deprive the meditator of certain results, since all are already uncertain. Also, since the meditator’s method of doubt prescribes treating results that are the least uncertain as if they are certainly false, it would be pointless to employ the power of the malicious demon to further demote the meditator’s previously certain results that are currently somewhat doubtful. Rather, the denouement’s malicious demon supposition aims just to disabuse the meditator of her uncertain beliefs, such as her beliefs that she has hands, eyes, flesh and blood, or senses. So that, as she says: “I consider myself as not having hands or eyes, or flesh, or blood or sense, but as falsely believing that I have all these things.” (23) The meditator’s effort to apply this malicious demon supposition to disabuse her of her newly demoted beliefs, such as her beliefs that she is seated and 2+3=5, evidently proves no more than partly successful and laborious to maintain. About her balancing exercise, she concedes that “this is
an arduous undertaking, and a kind of indolence brings me back to normal life [\textit{\& desidia quaedam ad consuetudinem vitae me reducit}].”

\textbf{Prisoner}

With the First Meditation’s closing image, the meditator acknowledges an immediate outcome of her purgative tactical project in first philosophy that has demoted all her current and currently prospective certain results. She is now disabled for any attempt to continue inquiring, either to attempt to advance her adopted inquiry in first philosophy or to attempt to resume her earlier pursuits in her prior scientific inquiries that yielded intellectually repugnant results that lack firm and enduring certainty. She portrays her enervated state as the condition of a prisoner who exerts his currently accessible resources ineffectually to resist waking from his dream of freedom. No sooner does this prisoner realize that the scene he dreamt of an avenue out of his confinement was delusory but his dawning deprives him entirely of any power to attempt to follow its path to freedom. Then, he no longer can try to follow his now vanished avenue of escape:

\begin{quote}
I am like a prisoner who is enjoying an imaginary freedom while asleep; as he begins to suspect that he is asleep, he dreads being woken up, and connives [\textit{connivet}] with the pleasant illusion as long as he can. (23)
\end{quote}

Once deprived of his delusory avenue to freedom, the already disillusioned prisoner may continue briefly to devote some anxious wishful effort to persuade himself that his dream continues. Perhaps he “connives with the pleasant illusion” in a futile attempt to disregard some bell that already thwarts his effort to accommodate its tolling as a summons that fits within his dream. This prisoner personifies the meditator’s condition of disillusion at the First Meditation’s close. The prisoner’s unwelcome dawning deprives him of the only avenue by which he can try to escape now that waking dispels his delusory freedom. So too, an outcome of the meditator’s conduct of her inquisitive project

\footnote{Notably, it does not follow that she succeeds in believing that the supposed Evil Genius makes it the case that 2+3 has a sum other than 5.}
in first philosophy has deprived her of some resource indispensable for her to try to continue her inquisitive efforts. The meditator’s current disability also excludes her from anticipating any future Meditation when she will once again be able to try to pursue her inquisitive goal. Subsequently, however, after the perilous interval that follows the First Meditation’s close, she will emerge once again able to try to pursue her inquisitive goal of firm and enduring results of inquiry. In the Second Meditation she subsequently resolves explicitly: “…I will make an effort and once more attempt [Enitar] the same path which I started on yesterday.” (24) At the First Meditation’s close however the meditator pictures herself as far from a resumption of her inquisitive pursuit of results that are firm and enduring as the prisoner is distant from the delusory path of freedom in his vanished dream. The meditator has no way to attempt to continue inquiring at the First Meditation’s aporetic close. 20

The First Meditation’s dramatic close raises for the reader the question of just which resource did the meditator’s inquisitive efforts in first philosophy deprive her? For the meditator, questions the First Meditation’s close leaves unanswered ask whether her current disability has interrupted her inquisitive pursuits permanently. The meditator’s suspense during the interval that follows the First Meditation’s close portrays her wait for an answer as breathless.

**Meditation Resumed**

**Archimedean Goal**

The meditator emerges from the suspension of her inquiry that followed the First Meditation’s close revived. She reports her perilous position during the interval in this watery figure: “...as if I have fallen into a deep whirlpool ...[where] I can neither stand on the bottom nor swim to the top.” (24) In contrast with her disability that the close of the First Meditation portrayed, the

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20 If I understand him, a current commentator takes the closing passage of the First Meditation to imply that the prisoner can return to his interrupted dream of freedom. (Carriero 2009: 63) The meditator may share the prisoner’s wish to resume a prior condition, but she is portrayed here as reduced to an impotence that is personified by the prisoner who is disabled from even trying to return to his prior illusory freedom.
The meditator exhibits renewed inquisitive power with this announcement of her resolve: to “attempt [Enitar] the same path I started on yesterday.” This resolution recommits her to the inquisitive method that she adopted when she began her inquiry in first philosophy. Once again, her inquisitive goal will be foundations for prospective sciences that are not certainly false, and results in the sciences that have firm and enduring certainty. Her renewed inquiry will pursue her goal by following “the same path” that submits to the non-permissive acceptance rule she adopted to implement the First Meditation’s purgative tactical aim. Now, however, her Second Meditation’s start must acknowledge her current lack of any certain results. So her pursuit of firm and enduring results of inquiry must follow a plan of inquiry that is acquisitive. The meditator duly announces an “Archimedean” goal:

Archimedes used to demand just one firm and immovable point in order to shift the entire earth; so I too can hope for great things if I manage to find just one thing, however slight that is certain and unshakeable [certum ... & inconcussum]. (24)  

The meditator emulates Archimedes by introducing a single candidate on which her Second Meditation’s opening argument imposes a series of three Tests that assess whether it fulfills her stated “Archimedean” goal of “just one thing, however slight that is certain and unshakeable.” Presently, the argument’s Third Test supplies the interpretation of its epistemic term “unshakeable certainty” that specifies a special case of firm and enduring certainty. As in the First Meditation (18), the Second Meditation’s use of “certain” abbreviates the Meditations’ non-factive, undefined epistemic term “not at all doubtful [non liceat dubitare].” (21) The Second Meditation’s opening argument twice confirms that its epistemic terms “certain [certa]” and “unshakably certain” are non-factive.

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21 This study treats the Second Meditation’s opening argument in part, just as it bears on the problem of the First Meditation. See also [reference omitted].
Starting when she is lacks certainty of any result and when she is prohibited from assuming that any previously certain result is true, the meditator’s announced Archimedean project aims for an initial single that is certainly and firm and lasting. So her Archimedean goal is a result with non-factive certainty that cannot be dependent on any other results that are certainly true and cannot be dependent on any results that could ever prove to be certainly false. It is nothing less than this tall order the meditator sets out to deliver in the opening argument of the Second Meditation.

The meditator launches her opening argument without pause to anticipate an objection that would invoke the unexceptionable epistemic principle that requires any argument that supplies a conclusion that is known or certain to have premises that are known or certain. Evidently, she relies on the fact that her argument to achieve her Archimedean goal of a single initial unshakably certain result can have premises sufficient to imply a conclusion both that attributes first-order certainty to a result and that is not itself an additional certain result. It follows that the Second Meditation’s opening argument can avoid violating the unexceptionable epistemic principle that requires any argument with a known or certain conclusion to have premises that are known or certain.

Contrast so-called “cogito reasoning,” and its abbreviation “the Cogito,” which standard interpretations interpolate in place of the Second Meditation’s opening argument. Interpolations of “cogito reasoning” suppose the meditator arrives at knowledge or certainty that she exists on the indelible Cartesian slogan, “Cogito ergo Sum” imported from Descartes’s popular works. For such “cogito reasoning” to provide knowledge or certainty that the meditator exists without violating indisputable epistemic principle, it must also be known or certain that “I think.” However, not only

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22 In Descartes’s earlier Discourse on the Method the autobiographer recalls that “this truth, ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’ was so firm and sure that all the most extravagant suppositions of the skeptics were incapable of shaking it, I decided that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking” (AT vi, 32/CSM I: 127). Descartes’s additional exoteric presentation in his Principles of Philosophy explicitly claims certainty of the same formula, just because “[it]... is a contradiction to suppose that what thinks does not at the very time when it is thinking, exist. Accordingly it [Cogito ergo Sum] is the first and most certain of all...” (AT viiiia, 7/CSM i: 195).
does the Second Meditation omit the slogan as well as any claim that the slogan is certain. 23 Also, “I think” is not known or certain for the meditator. She has no certain results following her First Mediation’s announced conclusion (4). So champions of “cogito reasoning” are barred from claiming that the meditator retains certainty of the Cartesian slogan’s antecedent. Margaret Wilson’s interpretation duly proposes “epistemic transparency” as an indispensable supplement to any attribution of cogito reasoning: “No matter how one interprets the cogito [Margaret Wilson says], one is going to have to recognize eventually that Descartes does ascribe indubitability to cognitatio judgments, epistemological ... transparency to his thought-states.” 24 Such a doctrine of epistemic transparency may salvage cogito reasoning’s compliance with the unexceptionable epistemic principle, but it forfeits not only the meditator’s announced Archimedean goal of a single initial certain result. In addition, if the meditator can be credited in the Second Meditation with “transparency” that provides “indubitability [of her] ... cognitatio judgments,” she can be similarly credited anytime and, notably, in the First Meditation where the meditator’s certainty of the antecedent “I think” would contradict her First Meditation’s announced conclusion, (4). 25 A current commentator would exempt the Second Meditation from providing any reasoning for its meditator’s initial certain result: “What is important to Descartes is to get the meditator to the point where she has

23 “One big surprise is that nowhere does Descartes have the meditator say, ‘I think, therefore I am’” (Broughton 2008: 182).

24 Margaret Wilson 1978: 53, 58. Ernest Sosa attributes “Cogito reasoning” to the Second Meditation’s start and observes that the Cartesian formula it requires as premise “seems also subject to skeptical doubt” (2014: 20).

25 Descartes’s defense of the familiar Cartesian formula in Replies to Gassendi does not address the Second Meditation. This may tend to confirm that Gassendi’s Objection does not apply to the Archimedean argument. (140f.) Contrast Wilson: “What Descartes’s reply to Gassendi seems to tell us is just that ...[the Meditations] is not meant to supplant in any substantial way the more straightforward deployment of ‘I think therefore I am’ in other works” (Wilson 1978: 54).
indisputably seen some truth (namely the truth that she exists). How exactly she gets there is not important” (Carriero 2009:77).

Unfortunately, standard English and French translations of the Second Meditation prompt current commentaries to interpolate such “cogito reasoning” by obscuring the Archimedean argument. These translations reproduce the Second Meditation’s opening passage’s interchanges of its Latin cognates of epistemic “certain” and alethic “necessary.” As I note below, one of the Archimedean argument’s premises uses a cognate of “certain” as an alethic modal; the conclusion of the Archimedean argument uses a cognate of “necessary” as an epistemic term to credit the meditator with a result that has “unshakeable certainty.”

**Archimedean candidate**

Any candidate to achieve the meditator’s announced Archimedean goal must be, as she says, “something else”; that is, a result that could not have been included among those made doubtful by her First Meditation’s argument when she surveyed all her then current and currently prospective certain results. The meditator lists some of the casualties: “I will suppose then, that everything I see is spurious. I will believe that nothing my mendacious memory represents ever existed...I have no senses. Body, shape, extension, movement and place are chimeras.” (24) She denies nevertheless that these can exhaust her options:

How do I know there is not something else which does not allow even the slightest doubt?

(24)

God is a notable absentee from her list of casualties. The reason is that only results that previously were certain, such as that she is seated, that 2+3=5, that there are bodies, and that she has senses, does the conclusion of the First Meditation’s argument demote. (21) Her lately renewed non-permissive method of inquiry requires that she treat just such opinions as certainly false. (22)

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26 Carriero cites Aquinas: “In thinking something he sees that he exists” DV Q 10, A 12, as. 7.8. (Carriero 2009:75).
Consequently, results exempt from the First Meditation’s reassessment include the religious creed that the meditator explicitly specified as her previously reported “old opinion [vetus opinio].” (21) Consequently, in the Second Meditation the meditator can nominate as “something else that does not allow even the slightest doubt” that God exists.

Further, the meditator introduces her divine nominee as source of the thoughts that constitute her current inquisitive meditation, who “puts into me the thoughts I am now having”:

Is there not a God, or whatever I may call him, who puts into me the thoughts I am now having [qui mihi has ipsas cogitations immittit]? But why should I think this, since I myself could perhaps be the author of these thoughts? Therefore, am not I at least something? (24)

Immediately, the meditator introduces “I myself” as source of her current thoughts. This nomination raises delicate questions for subsequent Meditations. The balance of the Second Meditation however offers neither any rationale for concluding, nor any suggestion that the meditator is diverse from the God of her avowed religious opinion. The Meditations also postpones its argument for denying that the origin of her current thoughts is divine.27 Rather, just because the Second Meditation does not distinguish “I myself” from the God of her avowed opinion, the meditator can introduce “I myself” as “something else” that is not a previously certain result that the First Meditation reassessed. The exemption that allows the God of her avowed religious opinion to qualify as “something else” and to serve the Second Meditation’s opening argument as Archimedean nominee applies equally to “I myself.” The merely nominal distinction of the meditator from God thus preempts objections that would protest that the First Meditation’s argument together with her newly renewed commitment to her current method of inquiry require the meditator to withhold her belief that she exists, just as she currently withholds belief that she has a body and senses, that she is seated, that 2+3=5, and that she

27 On the contrary, the Second Meditation’s conclusion that categorizes the meditator as a substance [res vera] depends in part on the Second Meditation’s lack of distinction between the meditator and God. Cf. [reference omitted]
thinks. Consequently, the Second Meditation’s opening argument can nominate, as "just one thing, however slight":

(J) I myself exist.

The meditator can attribute certainty to her nominee (J):

C(J) I am certain that (J).

To assess whether the meditator has unshakeable certainty of a single result (J), the Second Meditation’s opening argument imposes a series of tests on its Archimedean candidate, C(J).

First Test

The First Test distinguishes the certainty that the candidate C(J) attributes to the single Archimedean nominee from the certainty the meditator applied previously in the First Meditation’s argument and previously in her inquiries in the sciences. That the meditator has senses and that there are bodies are among the previously certain results that the First Meditation’s argument reassessed and her renewed commitment to inquiry in first philosophy requires her to treat as if certainly false. She announces the outcome for the First Test rhetorically, and not fully explicitly:

But I have just said that I have no senses and no body. Wait, what follows from this? Am I so bound up with a body and with senses that I cannot exist without them? (25)

This verdict specifies that it is possible for the meditator both to have the non-factive certainty the Archimedean candidate C(J) attributes to (J) and to lack senses or a body. Her rhetorical question asks, “What follows from this [for the certainty that C(J) attributes]?” The stated answer is that nothing at all follows for the certainty the candidate attributes to (J). The certainty she has of (J) does not imply that she has senses or a body. Here, the Second Meditation’s opening argument’s First Test distinguishes the certainty C(J) attributes to (J) from the necessarily sensory certainty “from the
senses or through the senses” which the meditator acknowledged in the First Meditation’s argument as specifying the certainty of “whatever I have up till now accepted” (18). The certainty $C(J)$ attributes is thus newly accessible for her in the Second Meditation. It follows that the Second Meditation’s opening argument will solve the problem the First Meditation’s argument imposes by depriving the meditator of all non-acquired certain results and all acquired certain results with certainty from the senses or through the senses, provided the meditator’s Archimedean candidate $C(J)$ fulfills its the remaining tests that Meditation’s opening argument imposes.

Presently, the Second Meditation emphasizes that the meditator cannot be understood to claim, in place of the elliptically formulated verdict of the First Test of $C(J)$, that it is the truth of $J$ that is consistent with her lacking senses or a body. The meditator confirms it is rather the non-factive certainty that $C(J)$ attributes that is consistent with her lacking senses or a body, following both the Second Meditation’s opening argument and its subsequent central argument. There, the meditator explicitly raises and postpones a separate question, to which the meditator will return in the Sixth Meditation, that asks whether or not it is possible for the meditator to lack senses or a body:

But perhaps these very things that I suppose to be nothing because they are unknown to me do not differ from that me that I know? I do not know. I am not now disputing about this matter. (27)

The Sixth Meditation’s argument for “the real distinction between mind and body” returns to the questions of whether $J$ can be true in case no currently unknown body exists and, particularly, to the questions of whether, and how, “I myself” is distinct from a body.

As the certainty $C(J)$ attributes does not imply that the meditator has senses or a body and leaves open whether or not $J$ has similar implications, the Second Meditation confirms here that the certainty $C(J)$ attributes is non-factive.

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28 See [reference omitted].
The First Test’s verdict that credits the meditator with an epistemic concept of certainty newly available to her in the Second Meditation renews attention to the question of what accounts for the meditator’s ability at the Second Meditation’s start to resume the inquiry that she was unable even to attempt to continue when her First Meditation closed. The precipitously falling dramatic action of the First Meditation’s monologue suggests one answer. The meditator’s First Meditation’s purgative inquisitive efforts in first philosophy that deprived her of all results that were currently or prospectively certain also effectively deprived her of her confidence in the epistemic norm provided by her acknowledged concepts of certainty from the senses or through the senses. As the prisoner’s waking deprived him of the illusory freedom of his dream, an outcome of the meditator’s inquisitive efforts to relieve her initial lack of firm and lasting results in the sciences may have left her not only deprived of any current or prospective certain results, but also disillusioned with her acknowledged epistemic concepts “from the senses or through the senses.” The interval when her inquiry was suspended following the First Meditation’s dramatic close may then represent her perilous transitional condition when she did not yet command her newly accessible epistemic concept the Second Meditation introduces. At the start of her Second Meditation’s inquiry, she emerges to exhibit her ability to resume her interrupted inquiry in first philosophy. Evidently, she is newly relieved of impediments that previously prevented her from employing her previously inaccessible epistemic concept that the opening argument’s First Test specifies. The meditator owes this reversal of her inquisitive fortunes to her conceptual renovation that the drama of the *Meditations* portrays.

A solution to the problem the First Meditation imposes depends on the meditator’s single Archimedean candidate’s passing the additional Tests in the Second Meditation’s opening argument. **Persuasion Test**

The meditator could be persuaded that there is “no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies.” It would suffice that she somehow became persuaded of something that implies there are no heavens, planets, minds, or bodies at all. Then, she could conclude that she lacks a mind and she has no body, entertain her conclusions, and, finally, became persuaded of her conclusions. If somehow or other she became persuaded that nothing at all exists she could conclude that she does not exist, and she could entertain the thought that she does not exist. This Persuasion Test questions whether, by being
thus persuaded of something from which she infers that she does not exist, she could be persuaded that she does not exist. The meditator answers rhetorically:

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)

No, she cannot be persuaded that not-(J) no matter of what else she is persuaded. As already noted, the reason is not that she is unequipped to have the thought that she does not exist. Her reason could be understood as if she responded that she has a capacity to represent herself as subject in a propositional thought or judgment, and the Second Meditation allows her to represent not-(J) as her thought <that I do not exist>. From her thought <that I do not exist> the meditator can infer necessary <that I do exist>. So she cannot be persuaded that not-(J) even if what she is persuaded of is that she does not exist:

If I persuaded myself of something [ ] then necessarily [certe] I existed. (25)

The Archimedean candidate passes its Persuasion Test, because the meditator is able to represent “I myself” as subject in judgments or propositional thoughts. The Second Meditation allows <that I do not exist> to be regimented as a judgment from which the meditator could infer necessarily <that I exist>.

Notably, the meditator does not say she can infer necessarily <that I exist> if she is persuaded of anything. To be sure, in case she also had a thought <that I am persuaded that I do not exist> she could infer necessarily <that I exist>. In that case she could also infer necessarily <that I am persuaded> and <that I think>. However, the Persuasion Test does not require the meditator to add a reflective thought <that I am persuaded that I do not exist>. Also, the Persuasion Test can confirm that (J) is the single nominee available for the opening argument to nominate as her one current initial result. From a thought <that I do not exist> the meditator can infer necessarily <that I
exist>. Contrast: from thoughts such as <that I am not persuaded> she could not infer necessarily <that I am persuaded>, from <that I do not think> she could not infer necessarily <that I do think>.

Unfortunately, English and French translations effectively obscure the Persuasion Test. A standard English translation offers a cognate of “certe”: “…If I convinced myself of something then I certainly existed” (tr. Cottingham); A widely used translation offers an equivalent epistemic term: “…But doubtless I did exist, if I persuaded myself of something” (tr. Cress); and, in French translation: “… ne me suis-je donc pas aussi persuadé que je n’étais point? Non certes, j’étais sans doute, si je me suis persuadé, ou seulement si j’ai pensé quelque chose” (AT xi-1: 19). These translations would commit the meditator to contend that her being convinced of something, or her being persuaded of something, suffices for her to be certain that (J). However, for her to earn certainty of (J), it would be insufficient even if it were (J) of which he was convinced. Further, the certainty these translations would prompt the meditator to attribute to (J) not only would not be the unshakeable certainty that is the Second Meditation’s opening argument’s announced goal, but the meditator would not be assured that the certainty these translations can attribute to (J) do not return her to her pre-meditative predicament of having certain results that are not “firm and lasting.” Contrary to these translations, the Persuasion Test uses “certe” to endorse the meditator’s inference that yields a consequence that follows necessarily. The Persuasion Test provides explanation why, from her being persuaded of something from which she can conclude that (J) is false, nevertheless she cannot be persuaded that (J) is false. 29

A further result of the second requirement is epistemic. The certainty her nominee attributes to (J) contrasts with non-acquired certainty such as her First Meditation illustrated. There, just because her sensory cognitive capacities prevent the meditator from even dreaming a sum of 2+3 other than 5, her sensory faculties earn credit for sufficing to provide non-acquired certainty from the senses or through the senses that 2+3=5. (20) As the outcome of the Second Test makes clear, the meditator’s faculty for thinking does not similarly prevent her from thinking that she does not exist.

29 A current interpretation attributes a true announcement without disputing the standard translation, by omitting translation of the Latin “certes”: “if I persuaded myself of anything – if I am the author of my thoughts – then I exist” (Carriero 2009: 74).
Though she cannot be persuaded that \((J)\) is false, she can entertain a thought that \((J)\) is false. Consequently, the certainty the meditator’s Archimedean candidate attributes is not non-acquired certainty that would be susceptible to demotion by the meditator’s religious opinion that there is a maximally powerful and benevolently purposive God. An outcome of the Persuasion Test adds that certainty that \(C(J)\) attributes is acquired certainty.

**Third Test**

The opening argument next questions whether the Archimedean candidate \(C(J)\) is consistent with the Deceiver hypothesis. This Deceiver Test asks if the Archimedean candidate that has passed its two previous Tests could survive in an environment that is maximally hostile:

[There] is a deceiver \([deceptor]\) -- otherwise unknown -- of supreme power \([summe potens]\)
and supreme cunning who sedulously always deceives me \([qui de industria me semper fallit]\).

(25)

To deceive the meditator about \(C(J)\), the hypothesized deceiver can exert its supreme power in order to deprive her of the certainty her Archimedean candidate attributes to \((J)\). That this exertion fails implies that the certainty \(C(J)\) attributes implies neither that any other certain result contributes as supporting evidence for \(C(J)\); nor that the Meditations’ subsequently introduced general Clarity Principle is true that credits clear and distinct perception with generating the certainty of results that include \((J)\). Also, the certainty \(C(J)\) attributes cannot imply that there exists a benevolently purposive deity or that there does not exist a malicious demon. Most generally, the certainty \(C(J)\) attributes does not imply that the Deceiver hypothesis is false.

Even in case the Deceiver hypothesis were true, therefore, \((J)\) would remain undoubtedly true or, that is, certainly true:

In that case I undoubtedly exist, if he is deceiving \([fallit]\) me. (25)
The Archimedean argument’s conclusion presently dubs this certainty that is thus independent of the Deceiver Hypothesis “unshakeable.” Since the hypothesized Deceiver could devote a fraction of its supreme power to make it the case that there is no meditator and no candidate certain result, this unshakeable certainty that enables C(J) to clear its Third Test may be understood to be non-factive certainty that lacks any non-trivial implications such as that there is a candidate certain result. The opening argument’s conclusion presently labels “unshakeable” this certainty that lacks any non-trivial implications.

A notable consequence: the Archimedean candidate C(J) that clears its Third Test attributes to (J) unshakeable certainty also achieves the goal the meditator announced at the First Meditation’s start of firm and lasting certainty. Non-factive certainty that lacks any non-trivial implications also lacks any implications that are certainly false.

It should be acknowledged that a candidate with certainty that passes the Deceiver Test has certainty consistent with the meditator’s lacking senses and a body. The Second Meditation’s opening argument nevertheless devotes separate attention in its First Test to crediting the meditator’s capacity to apply a concept of certainty that was unavailable to her in the First Meditation.

The Archimedean candidate must have an additional immunity from the hypothesized Deceiver:

And let him [the hypothesized deceiver] 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)

The deceiver has power ample to bring it about that (J) is false, “that I am nothing.” Could this power of the hypothesized deceiver also bring it about that the meditator has a thought (J) that both clears the argument’s prior Tests and is false? Or, as she asks, is it possible that “I think that I am something... [but] ...I am nothing”? The answer, that necessarily if she thinks that (J) then (J) is true, applies just to a candidate that passes the prior Tests. Consequently, the Third Test cannot also endorse, or assess any certainty that I think, that I doubt, that I sense or any other result the Archimedean argument could previously have excluded.
Archimedean conclusion

The meditator uses a cognate of “necessary” as an epistemic term to announce her Archimedean conclusion:

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 conclusion of the Archimedean argument thus announces the meditator’s achievement of her Archimedean goal: the Second Meditation’s opening argument certifies a single result (J) as having acquired unshakeable certainty. Provided she has a thought (J), (J) is true and the meditator’s certainty of (J) has achieved her Archimedean goal of “a single result that has unshakeable certainty.” Subsequently, the meditator credits her conclusion with providing that (J) is known. Evidently, here the meditator allows that her having a certain and true thought that (J) suffices for having knowledge that (J). Presently, the Second Meditation expressly credits the opening argument’s conclusion with providing her knowledge of (J); that is, credits the meditator’s non-factive certainty and her true thought of (J) as sufficient for her having knowledge of (J): “I know that I exist [Novi me existere]” (27); and ”knowledge [notitiam] of it [(J)] does not depend on things of whose existence I am as yet unaware…” (27). These summary citations exhibit the Meditations’ allegiance to a traditional account of knowledge, with three independent ingredients, justly famous under its current label “justified true belief.”

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30 See also: “that which is true and known [cognitum] – my own self” (29); “I now know [cognosci] myself”(33.)

31 With these summary labels for the result that concludes the Second Meditation’s opening argument the Meditations grants, provided she judges that (J), that her certain and true judgment suffices for knowledge. This conditional formulation of her conclusion provides for her presently emphasized lack of knowledge of whether or not the truth of (J) implies there are bodies. Contrast the attribution of
Here, the standard English and French translations offer a cognate alethic modal term to translate “necessario”: “I must finally conclude that this proposition, I am, I exist, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind,” (tr.) Cottingham. “Je suis, j’existe, est nécessairement vraie...” (Fr.) “…this pronouncement “I am, I exist” is necessarily true every time I utter it or conceive it in my mind,” (tr.) Cress. These translations would have the conclusion of the Second Meditation’s opening argument issue a superfluous repetition of one result the Third Test already explicitly established, that necessarily if she thinks that (J) then (J) is true. Or, it would saddle the argument with the inconsequent conclusion that the meditator exists necessarily. The meditator adds confirmation that her conclusion’s use of “necessario” is epistemic where next she introduces the task for the Second Meditation’s central argument: “I do not yet have a sufficient understanding of what this ‘I’ is that now certainly [necessario] exists” (25). Notably, unlike the standard and widely used English translations that again offer a cognate of “necessario,” the French translation provides: “moi qui suis certain que je suis.” The meditator’s Archimedean conclusion completes the solution to the problem of Descartes’s First Meditation.

It will be recalled that the Archimedean conclusion remains independent on whether or not (J) implies that there are bodies, because the conclusion is C(J) and the certainty C(J) attributes to (J) is non-factive unshakeable certainty that does not imply that there are bodies. Neither does the conclusion depend on whether or not (J) implies that theism is true, because as the meditator expressly introduces her Archimedean nominee (J), the Second Meditation’s opening argument does not imply that the meditator is diverse from the God of her avowed religious creed.

The First Meditation’s sound central argument deprives the meditator of any current or currently prospective results of inquiry that instance the epistemic concepts available to the meditator before she arrives at her Second Meditation. As the Meditation’s dramatic monologue portrays, and as the Second Meditation’s opening argument’s First Test confirms, the meditator arrives at the Second Meditation newly enabled to apply an epistemic concept unavailable to her

factive certainty to Descartes’s account of the nature of knowledge in “The Myth of the Justified True Belief Analysis.” (Dutant 2015)
previously. The conclusion of the Second Meditation's seminal opening argument credits the meditator with an initial certain result with certainty that is independent of both the Second Meditation's subsequent title metaphysical conclusions “On the Nature of the Human Mind,” the balance of the answer to its title epistemological question of “How the Mind is More Easily Known than the Body,” as well as to subsequent Meditations' delicate task of replacing the meditator's current avowed version of theism that bars her from any non-acquired certainty in prospective mathematical sciences.
References


