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Skepticism and the *Cogito*

By the end of the first *Meditation*, Descartes has persuaded himself that all of his former opinions have been called into question, including his belief in an external world. In the second *Meditation*, Descartes rouses himself to see if he can salvage anything from the world-wreck his methodological doubt has precipitated. It is not long, however, before he is able to report that he has arrived at a belief that is beyond question and a likely candidate for the foundational bit of knowledge which will serve as the Archimedean point for a refutation of skepticism. People who know nothing else about philosophy know that Descartes said *Cogito ergo sum* and most of them would erroneously attribute this claim to the body of his *Meditations*. As has been pointed out, however, the *Cogito* is hardly Descartes' unique discovery or even something not widely accepted. It is, in fact, a commonplace admitted even by philosophers whose methods and teachings are quite foreign to those of Descartes.[1] This ought not to surprise us; Descartes is not attempting to foist some odd or unconventional foundation for knowledge upon us; instead, he wants to appeal to something which will be admitted by all. The significance of the *Cogito* in Descartes and its impact on philosophy is a consequence of how he uses this shopworn insight as the foundation for a new way of doing philosophy, one which he pioneered without bringing it to fruition. In this chapter, I propose to explain what I mean by this.

First of all, I will explore the role of the *Cogito* in the refutation of skepticism. Here I will focus not on Descartes, but on the discussion of self-knowledge in Augustine of Hippo, one of the primary philosophical influences on Descartes.[2] Reversing the order of the last chapter, here I

1. See, e.g., the selections by Jean de Silhon in Ariew, Cottingham and Sorrell, eds., *Descartes' Meditations: Background Source Materials*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, 177–200; see especially 199–200.

2. On the influence of Augustine during Descartes' time and on Descartes himself, see Stephen Menn, *Descartes and Augustine*, 3–70. For a comparative study that emphasizes both similarities and differences between the views of Augustine and Descartes, see Gareth

will argue that Augustine's *Si Fallor, Sum* argument provides all that is required in order to refute the global skeptic and indicate the introspective foundation for human knowledge. When I turn to Descartes' *Cogito*, I will treat it positively as the entrée into a realm of knowledge revealed to us by introspection, a new realm of knowledge not heretofore explored by philosophers, and, in particular, ignored by Descartes' Scholastic predecessors. I shall suggest that Descartes' discovery of interiority as an object of theoretical inquiry is his most signal achievement in philosophy and that far from being the beginning of the end where philosophy is concerned deserves greater attention and holds greater promise than Descartes' critics are willing to credit. Although Descartes certainly miscarried in his attempts to arrive at the principles of a new philosophy, this does not show that there is anything necessarily wrong with his starting point. To the contrary, I suggest that we need to return to Descartes' discovery and try to do a better job of it than he did. How this may be done will the subject of the remaining chapters of this book.

Augustine's Refutation of Skepticism

It has often been noted that Augustine's *Confessions* is the first true autobiography in the modern sense, because unlike other classical "histories" and "lives" of notable individuals it is the first such document which takes us inside the mind and heart of its author. It is not surprising in one sense that this should be so, since Augustine's *Confessions* is intended above all to be the record of Augustine's conversion and cannot be told without taking us deep into the mental and emotional development of Augustine from his early childhood until the time he finally and irrevocably embraces the Christian religion at the age of 32. Since the *Confessions* is the story of Augustine's—or rather of his soul's—journey to God, it is a classic early exercise in the *itineram mentis* tradition. At the same time, however, it is also Socratic and Platonic as well, since it is both the search for adequate self-knowledge in accordance with the Delphic admonition and involves a turning away from the senses and the quotidian realm in order to seek for that truth within. Indeed, Augustine credits reading the works of the neo-Platonists as a crucial first step in turning away from a life of sybaritic luxury and the pursuit of worldly success and toward genuine fulfillment in the religious life.

For Augustine, Christianity is the true philosophy, which makes sense given that he understands philosophy in the way that post-Aristotelian

Matthews, *Thought's Ego*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1992.

Hellenistic philosophers do, as the search, not for theoretical knowledge for its own sake, but instead in the essentially religious sense in which philosophy is the search for happiness through the possession of a wisdom capable of securing our happiness—or at least our equilibrium—in an uncertain and threatening world.[3] On this view, the study of philosophy is a practical, goal-oriented activity and the test of a philosophy resides in its ability to deliver true and lasting happiness to its devotees. As such, we do not find Augustine doing philosophy for its own sake; nevertheless, in developing his version of the *itineram mentis* tradition, of which Descartes is a variant, we find him considering a number of philosophical problems and doing a good deal of creditable philosophical work. One issue that exercised the early Augustine was skepticism and the nature of knowledge. In fact, he devoted his only purely philosophical work, the *Contra Academicos* of 387 CE, to the discussion of this topic. To begin with, then, let us review Augustine's understanding of what skepticism is and how it best ought to be refuted.

Augustine Against the Skeptics

Augustine's primary source for the teachings of the Skeptics is Cicero's *Academica*, a dialogue in which Cicero and his interlocutors discuss the pros and cons of skepticism. In turn, Cicero embraces the non-dogmatic skepticism of Philo of Larissa, founder of the so-called Fourth Academy.[4] The distinctive teachings of this school, as opposed to the older version of Skepticism developed by the Academy under Arcesilaus and Carneades, were the rejection of dogmatic skepticism and the adoption of a probabilistic theory of rational belief. According to Philo, the earlier skeptics embraced the self-refuting position that nothing can be known, which must be false if proposed to be true, thus making the skeptical position incoherent. It is better that the skeptic should make the more moderate claim that so far as we are aware there is nothing beyond doubt, dispute and the possibility of error and so believe accordingly. However, according to Philo, this admission is consistent with the idea that some beliefs are

3. Menn, *Descartes and Augustine*, 73–4 and 130–33 emphasizes the point that Augustine sees his conversion to Christianity as the culmination of his search for wisdom. On the attitude of post-Aristotelian Hellenistic philosophers to the search for wisdom, see Giovanni Reale, *The Systems of the Hellenistic Age*, 5–15. Concerning the attitude and contributions of Augustine and other Christian thinkers to philosophy, see Christopher Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity,* 80–93.

4. My main sources for the teachings of Philo and Antiochus are Giovanni Reale, *The Systems of the Hellenistic Age*, 347–65 and John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 52–69.

more probable or have a greater degree of verisimilitude than others. Unlike Carneades, who treated probability or verisimilitude as simply a matter of the force and vivacity of presentations, Philo treats verisimilitude as an objective property of presentations, an innovation required in response to his student Antiochus's major criticism of Carneades' position. Carneades had denied, as part of his critique of Stoicism, that we could distinguish *cataleptic* (veridical) from *acataleptic* (non-veridical) presentations due to the lack of a certain criterion for distinguishing these two classes of presentations. Antiochus had countered that Carneades' argument, depending as it does on the claim that there are false presentations, collapses as soon as we recognize this fact. After all, if there is no certain criterion for distinguishing true from false presentations, then we cannot know that there are any false presentations and skepticism cannot even get off the ground. In other words, in order for me to be able to judge that there is no certain mark differentiating true from false presentations, I need to be able to compare examples of each kind in order to establish this. Philo's position represents a retreat from ontological to merely epistemological skepticism in that he no longer challenges the claim that there is such a distinction but only the claim that we are in possession of it. Nevertheless, some propositions have more probable truth or verisimilitude than others and thus are more reasonable to believe than others.

Cicero, a student of Philo's and a fellow-student of Antiochus', feels called upon in the *Academica* to embrace and defend his master's position; Augustine, however, though a Ciceronian in rhetoric and writing style sides with Antiochus against the mitigated skepticism of Philo. Having retreated from the dogmatic skepticism of Carneades, which denies that there is any such thing as truth and treats probability as merely a phenomenological feature of presentations, Philo has been forced to give an objective reference to the notion of truth, hence to the notions of probable truth and verisimilitude ("truth-likeness"). Augustine's point in *Contra Academicos* (using perhaps an argument of Antiochus himself) is that this admission is fatal, since we can now no longer "read off" the probability of propositions simply from how they appear to us—their apparent or intrinsic plausibility. Since Philo has made truth an objective standard, the possibility of applying the terms "probable truth" or "verisimilitude" to propositions requires that we actually possess knowledge of the truth in order to make sense of these attributions. Philo's epistemological skepticism, then, turns out to be as untenable as the dogmatic skepticism of Carneades, though for different reasons. Either Philo admits that we have knowledge of the objective truth, in which case he must abandon skepti-

cism, or he no longer has any non-arbitrary basis for making assignments of probability, verisimilitude or likeliness to be true, which seems to be required if skepticism is to be a viable philosophy of life capable of leading us to happiness.[5]

Having refuted skepticism on its own terms, Augustine turns to the task of positive epistemology, maintaining that there are, in fact, truths that we know for certain and of which no trickery of the Greeks can dispossess us. Again, Augustine challenges the skeptical strategy as it was known to him, which is to call into question any knowledge-claim by suggesting that one might be mistaken about that claim and demanding some sort of proof or evidence for it, which in turn leads to the classic dilemma concerning epistemic justification. Augustine proposes to short-circuit this strategy by exhibiting a series of examples of types of beliefs that are grasped by me indubitably and incorrigibly and thus immune from the demand for further justification. In the case of three such examples, namely, his knowledge of his own existence, life and love/desire, Augustine claims to have found propositions that withstand the very possibility of doubt on the ground that such a possibility presupposes the falsity of what is being entertained. Let us now turn to Augustine's discussion of his positive epistemology.

Augustine: Things We Know

In Book Three of the *Contra Academicos*, Augustine presents examples of things we know with certainty as a direct disproof of the claims of the skeptics to the effect that there is no knowledge.[6] He distinguishes three classes of such objects. First, there are *formal truths*, such a mathematical or logical truths, which are knowable *a priori* due to their intrinsic self-evidence; these include propositions such as 2+2=4 and "Either the external world exists or it fails to exist." Augustine's examples, especially of the latter sort, strongly suggest that the self-evidence of these truths is due to their logical form rather than some sort of necessity *a posteriori*, though he does not hesitate to classify the proposition "Either the external world exists or it fails to exist" as a principle of physics. Since these sharp distinctions did not exist in Augustine's time, he can be excused for not having clarified this point. The second class of things we know are the immediate contents of our conscious states, i.e., how things appear to us in, e.g., visual perception. Even if there is no external world, it nevertheless remains that it certainly appears to be the case that there is such a world and this

5. Augustine, *Contra Academicos*, translated by Peter King, 5–25.

6. Ibid., 72–78.

is something that I can be certain about. Augustine appears to adopt the "adverbial" theory of such contents, such that my current visual experience of a red patch is best characterized in Chisholmian terms as the state of my *being appeared-to redly*. Since my apprehension of these contents is incorrigible for me, the judgments expressing them are likewise infallible.

The third class of objects of knowledge distinguished by Augustine is the most interesting for our purposes here.[7] Against the skeptic's assertion that I might be mistaken with regard to any and all substantive contingent propositions, Augustine identifies a class of substantive, contingent facts which I immediately and incorrigibly apprehend which includes the facts that *I exist*, that *I am alive* and that *I love/desire*, such that the judgments expressing these facts are themselves indubitable and infallible for me hence known with certainty when affirmed/believed by me. The supposition that I might be mistaken about these propositions and hence that they are doubtful for me is dismissed by Augustine with the phrase *Si fallor, sum*: "If I am mistaken, I exist." According to Augustine, none of the traditional grounds for skepticism can motivate rational doubt in the case of my apprehension of facts of this kind. If I am mistaken, I exist. If I am insane, I exist. If I am dreaming, I exist. If I am being deceived by a god, I exist. So, too, for the claims that I am alive and that I love/desire; I cannot even entertain the possibility that I might be wrong about these facts without having sufficient reason to reject it. As such, concludes Augustine, I do possess some substantive knowledge of which no Greek trickery can dispossess me.

It would appear that Augustine's *Si Fallor, Sum* argument is sufficient to refute the form of skepticism against which it is directed and bears an obvious resemblance to and relevance for the Cartesian *Cogito*. Although Descartes cannot accept Augustine's claim to the effect that we are in possession of formal mathematical and logical truths of the sort proposed as indubitable by Augustine, since these experiential contents are only intrinsically certain for me, hence not demon-proof, it appears that the second and third classes distinguished by Augustine remain as potentially available to Descartes. After all, both classes of examples share in common that they are initially constituted by the immediate apprehension of a non-propositional state of affairs constituting a fact, i.e., something capable of serving

7. Augustine actually presents this argument, not in the *Contra Academicos* itself, but in several places, such as *De Libero Arbitrio* 2.3, *De Trinitate* 15.12.21 and *City of God* 11.26; on this see King's edition of the *Contra Academicos*, Appendix Six (158–61) and Appendix Eight (162–3) and Thomas Williams, ed., *On the Free Choice of the Will*, 33. This latter is the passage referred to by Arnauld in the fourth *Objections*. For more on this, see Matthews, *Thought's Ego*, 29–38.

as the truth-conditions for a proposition and grasped in such a way that it can be compared with the judgment expressing or articulating that state-of-affairs by means of propositional content which is, in turn, linguistically accessible. For example, if I am currently appeared-to redly, my judgment to this effect, as expressed in the simple English sentence "I am appeared-to redly" expresses my apprehension of a non-linguistic state-of-affairs or fact. Likewise, if I am aware of my own existence, judge myself to exist and express these judgments in a simple English sentence like "I exist," something similar and just as certain is going on. I shall subsequently argue that this is the case, but in so doing I am not suggesting that Descartes' *Cogito* is a mere retread of Augustine's *Si Fallor, Sum* response to skepticism.[8] To the contrary, Descartes is engaged in something more, i.e., providing a positive account of how we acquire knowledge of our own existence through the introspective investigation of the structures of consciousness. After briefly considering the account given by Descartes and his clarifications of his view in response to objections, I shall attempt in the next chapter to outline the account of introspective knowledge presupposed by Descartes' account and fill in some of the details required to make this account adequate to the tasks of contemporary epistemology.

8. As Arnauld obliquely suggests in the fourth *Objections*—see *CSM*, 139. In reply, Descartes simply thanks Arnauld (in a backhanded way) for having invoked the authority of St. Augustine on his behalf. He gives no indication of being aware of or having consciously borrowed from Augustine on this point. Descartes was not a scholar and seems to have been rather proud of this fact; he bragged, for example to William Cavendish, Marquess of Newcastle, that the only algebra book that he had ever read was the textbook by Clavius used at La Fleche. In a 1640 letter to Colvius (no relation to Clavius), Descartes implies that he never read or heard of Augustine's *si fallor, sum* argument until Colvius mentioned the matter to him in an earlier letter; on the likelihood of this, see Gareth Matthews, *Thought's Ego*, 12–15. Descartes was notoriously jealous of his originality and vehemently denied that there were any external influences on his thought—not even Galileo has taught him anything! Further, Descartes rejects all reliance on the authority of experts, maintaining that we can only know we ourselves have independently discovered and verified—see, once again, Matthews, *Thought's Ego*, 125–40. Whatever we may think of this, it remains likely that Descartes' Augustinianism more likely reflects the intellectual milieu of his time rather than any close acquaintance with Augustine's own texts. In contrast to the Scholastics, Descartes is one of the first truly modern philosophers in the sense that he both rejects tradition and puts implicit trust in his own cognitive faculties to construct original theories from his own resources superior to any conceived of in the past. Our tendency to treat those who lived in the past as inferior in knowledge and reliability to ourselves is, I think, in large part a reflection of Descartes' attitude, a complete reversal of the pre-Modern view that attributes greater wisdom to the ancients than to our contemporaries.

The *Cogito* as Positive Knowledge of Fact

Having doubted everything that is dubitable, Descartes turns in the second *Meditation* to the task of reconstructing human knowledge beginning from what appears to be only thinnest possible foundation, i.e., his own existence. In fact, in investigating this claim by Descartes we will find an account of our cognitive powers which is remarkably complex and sophisticated implicitly contained in his seemingly simple reflections in the *Meditations*, one which, had he developed and articulated it, would have greatly enhanced the plausibility of many of the views which have only slight attraction for contemporary philosophers. Before doing this, however, let us briefly consider what Descartes does say.

Descartes begins the second *Meditation* by recording his amazement at the results of the first without weakening his resolve to doubt all, including the existence of his own body, the external world and even God insofar as He is conceived as the author of Descartes' own thoughts. Even so, he finds it difficult to persuade himself that he himself might not exist. Even if he is able to persuade himself that nothing is certain, it remains that he is convinced of something and knows this fact, something which is possible only on the supposition that he exists.[9] In a like manner, even for it to be possible for him to doubt his own existence requires that he exist in order to do the doubting, thus undermining any grounds for doubt he might possess through the contemplation of that fact.[10] Even the supposition that there is an Evil Genius who bends all his powers to deceiving Descartes will not undermine his conviction of this fact, since the possibility that he is deceived by the Demon presupposes that he exists, and hence that he is not deceived in any way in so thinking.[11] Indeed, says Descartes, whenever I so much as contemplate the notion of my own existence, or indeed am aware of anything at all, I am by the same token aware of the fact that I exist, or at least, can be aware of this whenever I chose to consider it. Therefore, says Descartes, "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."[12]

We immediately note a singular difference between Augustine and Descartes with regard to the status of the claim that I exist. For Augustine, my knowledge of my own existence is taken to be immediate, as though

9. See *CSM*, Vol. II., 16–17.

10. Descartes, *Principle of Philosophy*, Sec. 7 in *CSM*, Vol. I, 194–5. See also *The Search for Truth* in *CSM*, Vol. II, 409–10.

11. See *CSM*, Vol. II, 17.

12. See *CSM*, Vol. II, loc. cit.

the fact of my existence were apprehended as such, in complete isolation from all other facts. For Descartes, however, my apprehension of my own existence is not immediate, but mediated by my prior apprehension of myself as thinking.[13] Indeed, it appears that for Descartes the closest I can come to apprehending my own existence directly is by contemplating that fact in thought; even in that case, my awareness of my own existence is precisely such as to be a thought in Descartes' sense, i.e., a content of consciousness.[14] My awareness of my own existence, then, is never direct or immediate for Descartes; instead, it is always mediated by thought, or conscious awareness, even when it is the fact of my own existence of which I am aware. Further, as Descartes himself points out, the fact that I exist is implicated in any and every thought I have no less than the specific thought that I exist—in the French translation of the Meditations Descartes adds the phrase "or thought of anything at all" to the sentence "No, if I convinced myself as something then I certainly existed."[15] It is not some particular thought or thought-content by means of which I become aware of or apprehend my own existence; rather, *it is my apprehension of the fact of my thinking itself which serves as the ground for my apprehension of my own existence*.

None of Descartes' critics are willing to challenge the soundness of the *Cogito* or the truth of the insight it reveals. Presumably none of us are willing to do so either. Nevertheless, the *Cogito* is not entirely unproblematic as Descartes depicts it. After all, what exactly is the relation between

13. Broughton, op cit. 109–17 argues that Descartes does not derive his existence from the fact that he thinks but instead from the impossibility of his doubting that fact. I maintain, to the contrary, that it follows from this "dependence argument" that I exist only if I know that I doubt and thus can affirm a proposition to that effect. Given that doubting is a mental act and thus a mode of thought, I know that I exist only by first knowing that I think this particular thought: "I doubt that I exist." Thus, my knowledge of my own existence is not immediate, but mediated by self-conscious awareness of myself *qua* thinker: *cogito, ergo sum*.

14. As is well known, Descartes does not restrict the term "thought" merely to acts of the intellectual contemplation of propositional contents, but extends it include every aspect of conscious awareness and every mental content, including passion, feeling and sense-perception. See, for example, the definition of "thought" given in *Principles of Philosophy*, Sec. 9 in *CSM*, Vol. 1, 195. It is to be noted here that all of the terms used to describe various kinds of thought are *verbs* naming *activities* that represent modes of awareness of or operations over mental contents—I am a *thinking* thing, not merely something that *has* (or merely *suffers*) thoughts. Unfortunately, even Descartes himself often slips into characterizing the mind as a kind of substratum in which thoughts "inhere" much as real accidents are taken to do in Aristotelian substances according to the Scholastics. This contributes to the confusion surrounding Descartes' position here.

15. See *CSM*, Vol. II., 16–17 and footnote.

the fact of my thinking and the fact of my existence? The most natural suggestion is that the relation is somehow *inferential*; the fact of my thinking somehow provides proof, evidence or justification for the *proposition* which I express by the English sentence "I exist," or, given that it is difficult to imagine how a proposition could be directly justified by anything non-propositional,[16] for some proposition from which the proposition "I exist" can be inferred by a valid deductive argument. Descartes encourages us to think in this way by using inferentialist language (such as "conclude," "proposition" and "necessarily true" in the *Cogito* passage) and the formula *Cogito ergo Sum* in the *Principles of Philosophy*, Sec. 7 where he even calls it an inference in the French edition of that work.[17] Descartes reinforces this idea in his response to the fifth *Objections* in answer to Gassendi's query as to why Descartes does not infer his existence from the fact that he is walking just as easily as from the fact that he thinks. Descartes responds, not by denying that there the *Cogito* is an inference, but by denying that the premise "I walk" is known with certainty, since I could simply be dreaming that I walk.[18] Descartes does appear to think that one can infer one's own existence from the fact that one is thinking.[19]

The difficulty, of course, is that the inference from "I think" to "I exist" is not formally valid, since its logical form is P /.: Q. This is not a valid pattern of inference, as a simple truth-table will show. Despite appearances, Descartes denies that I infer "I think" from "I exist," if what we mean by this is by means of formal logic (which, for Descartes, is essentially syllogistic inference):

16. For one version of this concern, see Laurence BonJour's contribution to Laurence BonJour and Ernest Sosa, *Epistemic Justification*, London, Blackwell Publishing, 2003, 17–20. See especially the references in fn. 16 on page 19.

17. See *CSM*, Vol. I, 195 and footnote 1.

18. See *CSM*, 229.

19. Commentators have been in general agreement, contrary to what will be argued here, that the *cogito* is intended to express an inference and is thus somehow to be represented by a valid deductive argument. The difficulties with this sort of view were perhaps first driven home by Jaako Hintikka in his classic paper "Cogito ergo sum: Inference or Performance?" reprinted in Doney, *Descartes: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 108–39. While Anthony Kenny, Bernard Williams and Margaret Wilson all express dissatisfaction with Hintikka's performative interpretation of the *cogito*, none of them resist the idea that the *Cogito* is an inference expressible as an argument. For a more recent reconstruction along the same lines, see Husain Sarkar, *Descartes' Cogito*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002. No one, of course, denies that the cogito can be expressed as an argument; the question is whether this argument expresses an act of inference. It is this latter that I intend to deny (or at any rate show to be dispensable) in what follows.

> Whenever someone says "I am thinking, therefore I am or I exist," he does not deduce existence from thought by means of a syllogism, but recognizes it as something self-evident by a simple intuition of the mind. This is clear from the fact that if he were deducing it by means of a syllogism, he would have to have had previous knowledge of the major premises "Everything that thinks is, or exists"; yet in fact he learns it from experiencing in his own case that it is impossible that he should think without existing.[20]

He then immediately adds that "It is the nature of our mind to construct general propositions on the basis of our knowledge of particular ones."[21] Whatever Descartes means when he calls the movement in thought from "I think" to "I exist" an inference, he is not talking about a formal deductive inference. Nevertheless, he wants to insist that this movement of thought is both somehow "self-evident" and confers some sort of "necessity" on its "conclusion," using all these terms in ways that cannot be cashed out in formal logical terms.

In a sense, this is all to the good, since at this point in the discussion the principles of formal logic lay just as much under a cloud as any of the other products of rational intuition. In *Principles of Philosophy*, Sec. 5,(20) Descartes gives arguments for doubting even mathematical demonstrations parallel to those he gave against the senses, presenting both a version of the argument from error and the Evil Genius argument. Descartes can hardly have exempted the principles of formal logic from this general ban, given that these are the very principles used in the sort of mathematical demonstrations most well-known to Descartes, i.e., geometrical demonstrations of the sort to be met with in Euclid. Even had he wanted to exempt these principles from the skeptical net he would not have had any non-arbitrary means of doing so, since the same arguments which call mathematical demonstration into question would surely call formal logical demonstrations into question as well. Descartes would be in a very tough spot indeed if the *Cogito* were intelligible to us only if the principles of formal logic could be trusted.

20. *CSM*, Vol. II, 100. This is from Descartes' *Replies* to the second set of *Objections* collected by Mersenne.

21. See *CSM*, loc. cit. Descartes' argument here recalls a sophism of Sextus Empiricus against the validity of *modus ponens*. If P /.: Q is invalid, then Q does not in fact follow from P. On the other hand, if we make the argument formally valid by adding "If P, then Q," the resulting argument is unsound, since "If P, then Q" cannot be true unless P follows from Q by itself; thus, no one is ever justified in accepting the conclusion of an argument with that form.

At the same time, it might be thought that Descartes is still in a very tough spot as things stand, since he is forced to claim that he can know, from the fact that he is thinking, that he exists in such a way as to grasp that fact with self-evidence sufficient to confer extrinsic certainty upon the proposition "I exist" whenever he considers or entertains it and, more than this, to make that necessity available to me in reflection at every waking moment. Once again, the claim seems plausible on the face of it and readily commends itself to us on the basis of the considerations Descartes has offered on its behalf. The difficulty, however, arises when we begin to raise technical, philosophical questions about exactly what is going on here. What sort of "simple intuition of the mind" is Descartes talking about here? How does it work, and, in particular, how does it confer justification amounting to knowledge, let alone self-evident truth, on the claim that I exist? What is the relation between what I apprehend by means of this simple intuition and the propositional content of my justified true belief that I exist, and so on? These are not easy questions to answer, and to take them up will require that we leave Descartes and take up questions and issues which were not current in his time and about which he could not have had any carefully formulated views. At the same time, however, I believe the results will be compatible with the views that Descartes was formulating and thus would have been useful to him had he known about them by way of clarifying and defending the views he explicitly held. To these topics I now turn.