How to Read Descartes' Fourth Meditation: Augustinian Sources of Cartesian Metaphysics[1]

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Despite the universal recognition of Descartes' philosophical genius, the commentators of his works have been highly critical of his metaphysics. To Etienne Gilson "the metaphysics of Descartes had largely been a clumsy overhauling of scholastic metaphysics."[2] In *Being and Some Philosophers*, one of the most important books on metaphysics produced in this century, Gilson devoted hardly more than a few pages to Descartes' metaphysics, finding in it "something amateurish."[3] The judgment of Martin Heidegger is no more favorable. In discussing the question of Being, Heidegger writes, "Descartes is always far behind the Schoolmen."[4] The question of whether Descartes' metaphysical sophistication matches that of the Scholastics'—whose metaphysics was a yardstick of philosophical refinement both to Gilson and Heidegger—is, however, additionally obstructed by the fact that Descartes never laid out his metaphysics in a systematic fashion. What we find in the *Meditations*, is a jumble of metaphysical terms. As one of Descartes' recent commentators remarked:

> Descartes in the *Meditations* never asks nor discusses the question, what is being, or substance, or essence. Nothing approaching a definition is found of these terms .... Does he utilize the metaphysical terminology of the tradition unaware of, or unconcerned with, the precision with which its issues and implications had been treated in the tradition? Or does he employ it as an *ad hominem* concession to the regnant scholasticism of the day? In *Discourse* I (para. 2) he introduces the reader to his use of scholastic

[1] An earlier version of this text has been read by Jean-Luc Marion and Leszek Kolakowski. I am grateful for their suggestions.

[2] *God and Philosophy*, Powell Lectures on Philosophy at Indiana University (New Haven, 1941) xiv.

[3] *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto, 1952) 113.

[4] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco, 1962) 120.

> language by employing the terms "forms or natures," "accidents," "individuals," and "species" .... We find that in the *Meditations* he uses little or no traditional terminology until in *Meditations* III he addresses himself to the first part of his apologetic intention, the proof that God exists. Abruptly a group of scholastic terms is introduced, scarcely defined and devoid of supporting explanation—"objective reality," "formal or actual reality," "eminent reality" .... "Essence" is never defined in any Cartesian publication: *what meaning employed by what philosopher of the tradition should we fall back on?*[5]

Particularly irritating is the reading of the Fourth Meditation, in which Descartes is working out the theory of nature and origin of falsity. He uses a number of traditional metaphysical notions without taking the trouble, however, to state precisely the meaning of any of them. Etienne Gilson, who devoted several hundred pages of his *La liberté chez Descartes et la théologie* (1913) to investigating the sources of Descartes' philosophy, unable to precisely pinpoint them, came to the conclusion that "the whole Fourth Meditation is a web of borrowings from the theology of St. Thomas and that of the Oratory. It will not be an exaggeration to say that it contains *nothing* original ...."[6] Cartesian scholars by and large have accepted Gilson's conclusion, and no attempt to reconsider it ever since has been undertaken.[7] The goal of this article is to reopen the question concerning the sources of Descartes' metaphysics in the Fourth Meditation.

I

Unlike God, who on account of His absolute omnipotence enjoys the "freedom of indifference," man, according to Descartes, finds all the norms of the true and the good already established by God. Hence Descartes infers that man's freedom lies in directing his judgments in accordance with these norms and pursuing a clearly known good (AT VII, 432-33; CSM II, 291–92).[8] In the Fourth Meditation—in which Descartes' considerations about the nature of truth and falsity are intricately linked with those on the nature of human freedom—Descartes remarks that the freedom of indifference (*libertas indifferentia*), which is the *essence* of Divine freedom, in man is "the

[5] Richard Kennington, "The 'Teaching of Nature' in Descartes' Soul Doctrine," *The Review of Metaphysics* 26 (1972): 91–93; emphasis mine.

[6] Etienne Gilson, *La liberté chez Descartes et la théologie* (Paris, 1913) 441; emphasis mine.

[7] The only worthy attempt to link Descartes' consideration in the Fourth Meditation to Augustine's writings is Stephen Menn's "Descartes, Augustine, and the Status of Faith," in *Studies in Seventeenth-Century European Philosophy*, ed. M.A. Stuart (Oxford, 1997) esp. 6–18.

[8] References to Descartes' works are to: Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (eds.), *Oeuvres de Descartes*, 2nd edition, 11 vols. (Paris, 1974–86). This is abbreviated to AT. References to the English edition are to John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (eds.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1984–95). This is abbreviated to CSM, with the exception of volume III, which is abbreviated to CSMK.

lowest degree of freedom" (*infimus gradus libertatis*),[9] and testifies only to "a *defect* in cognition, or to some *negation*" (*tantummodo in cognitatione defectum, sive negationem quandam, testatur*). When the will has no more reason to incline itself in one direction rather than another, it becomes *indifferent* and "it easily turns aside from what is true and good, and this is the source of my error and sin" (AT VII, 58; CSM II, 40–41).

Whence error?

> In this *incorrect* use of the *liberum arbitrium* is to be found that *privation* which constitutes the essence of error. The privation, I say, lies in the operation of [the will] itself *in so far as it proceeds from me*, but not in the faculty of will [*the liberum arbitrium*] which I received from God, nor even in its operation, in so far as it depends on Him. (AT VII, 60; CSM II, 41)

The crucial term in the above passage is the personal pronoun *me—privatio ... quatenus a me procedit*; *privation ... in so far as it proceeds from me*—the meaning of which Descartes explains in the following way:

> I find that I possess not only a real and positive idea of God, or of a being that is supremely perfect (*entis summe perfecti*), but also what may be described as a negative idea of nothingness (*nihili ... negativam quandam ideam mihi obvervari*), or of that which is farthest removed from all perfection. I realize that I am, as it were, a middle something between God and nothingness, or between the highest being and nonbeing (*tanquam medium quid inter Deum & nihil, sive inter summum ens & non ens ita esse constitutum*): my nature is such that in so far as I was created by the highest being, there is surely nothing in me to enable me to go wrong or lead me astray; but in so far as I also participate in nothingness or non-being, that is, in so far as I am not myself the highest being himself (*sed quatenus etiam quodammodo de nihilo, sive de non ente, participio, hoc est quatenus non sum ipse summum ens*) and am lacking in countless respects, it is no wonder that I would be deceived. (AT VII, 54; CSM II, 38)

Let us briefly reiterate the main points of Descartes' account. 1) In creating man, God endowed him with *liberum arbitrium*. 2) Error is not something positive or real (*non esse quid reale*), that is, it does not require a positive force on the part of God, but rather it is only a lack, a privation (*privatio*) or a defect (*tantummodo esse defectum*). 3) It arises from the incorrect use of the *liberum arbitrium*. To explain how this incorrect use of the *liberum arbitrium* comes about—and this is the real crux of Descartes' argument in the Fourth Meditation[10]—Descartes draws on the *difference* between the respective natures of God and man. While God is "the most perfect being" (*ens summe perfectum*) or "the highest being" (*summum ens*), man is "a middle

[9] AT VII, 58; CSM II, 40. Cf. Leibniz, *Theodicée* 33–53.

[10] Cf. Gilson, *La liberté chez Descartes* 211–35.

something" (*tanquam medium*) between God and nothing, or, as Descartes puts it in yet another way, between the *highest being* and *non-being* (*medium quid inter Deum et nihil, sive inter summum ens & non ens ita esse constitutum*). Furthermore, insofar as man *participates* in nothingness (*nihil*) or in non-being (*non ens*) he is subject to error.

Although Descartes' only goal in this passage is to explain the meaning of the single personal pronoun *me*, he resorts to a battery of metaphysical terms: "being" and "non-being," "privation" and "negation," "participation," "highest being." None of these terms, strangely enough, he explains. Descartes says neither what *privation* or *negation* are[11] (we are told that error is *privation* but we are not told a privation of *what*); nor in what way man "participates" in non-being; nor what it means that God is the "highest being;" and, last but not least, how the fact that man is not the "highest being" (*summum ens*) or the "most perfect Being" (*Ens summe perfectum*) accounts for man's being subject to deception.

The statement, "in so far as I am not God, it is not very surprising that I would be deceived," is far from clear. If we take it at face value, it explains literally nothing, or it yields a tautology: if to be infallible means to be perfect, and only the highest being is perfect, and man is not the highest being, therefore *non mirum est* that man is subject to deception. Only with the greatest of difficulty can we ascribe to Descartes' statement any explanatory power. Needless to say, if that is what Descartes is really saying, the argument instead of vindicating God's goodness and omnipotence leads Descartes back to the very problem he was attempting to overcome, namely, that God might be responsible for error: either God has not conferred on man something which could keep him from deception,[12] in which case His benevolence is at stake; or God could not create human nature in such a way that man could avoid error, in which case His omnipotence is at stake.

We should not, however, suspect Descartes of committing such an apparent logical blunder. If his account raises problems, these concern, first and foremost, his understanding of God. We are told that God is the *most perfect Being* (*Ens summe perfectum*), but what exactly is this *Ens summe perfectum*? Is the *Ens summe perfectum* (the most perfect being) the same as *summum ens* (the highest being; another expression used in the same pas-

[11] Cf. *Principles of Philosophy* I. 31, and Descartes' letter to Regius, 24 May, 164 (AT III, 65). According to L. J. Beck (*The Metaphysics of Descartes: A Study of the Meditations* [Westport, 1979] 205, footnote 1), Descartes is using here "privation" in Aristotle's sense of steresis = loss, deprivation. Cf. the quotation from Suarez cited by Gilson in his *Index Scholastico-Cartesien* (245): "nam privatio dicit carentiam in subjecto apto nato."

[12] In a short passage in the Fourth Meditation Descartes considers such a possibility: AT VII 61; CSM II, 42.

sage), or, perhaps, *Ens summe perfectum* means just *Ens* (being)? But if so, why is Descartes using the expression *Ens summe perfectum* (the most perfect being) or *summum ens* (the highest being) rather than simply *Ens* (being)? Possibly, to suggest another line of interpretation, the two terms—the highest being and the most perfect being—should be taken to mean a being (*Ens*) which possesses certain attributes which man does not possess. The two definitions of God which Descartes offers in the Third Meditation might support such an interpretation.

The first reads: "a God sovereign, eternal, infinite, immutable, all knowing, all powerful, and universal creator of all things" (*illa [idea] per quam summum aliquem Deum, aeternum, infinitum, omniscium, omnipotentem, rerumque omnium, quae praeter ipsum sunt creatorem intelligo* AT VII, 40; CSM II, 28).

The second reads: "By the name God I understand a substance infinite, eternal, immutable, all knowing, all powerful, and by which I myself and all other things (if it is true that any such exist) have been created and produced" (*Dei nomine intelligo substantiam quandam infinitam, independentem, summe intelligentem, summe potentem, et a qua tum ego ipse, tum aliud omne si quid aliud extat, quodcumque extat, est creatum* AT VII, 45; CSM II, 31).

We could interpret the expression *Ens summe perfectum* to imply the existence of a hierarchy of "beings" or "substances" of which God is the most perfect. The difference between the highest Being (God) and lesser beings (like man) would lie in that the highest Being possesses certain attributes (infinity, eternity, etc.) which the latter do not possess. By placing God on the top of the ladder of beings, the equation between God as *Ens* in the Fourth Meditation and God as *Substantia* in the Third Meditation is rather unproblematic: God as *Substantia* would be the highest Being in the sense of being a unique bearer of certain attributes. Thus, the problem of the mutual translatability of these two definitions of God as "Being" and "Substance" disappears.[13]

This reading is not free of difficulties, however. Even if God—as the only bearer of some attributes—were, so to speak, the only genus of His species, He would still be the *highest* being amongst other *beings*. Accordingly, God is a being which possesses certain attributes which man does not—but both God and man are essentially *beings*. The problem with this interpretation is that it makes the difference between God and other beings "quantitative"

[13] For a very instructive and erudite discussion of different problems with Descartes' definition of God see Jean-Luc Marion, "The Essential Incoherence of Descartes' Definition of Divinity," in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Descartes' Meditations* (Berkeley, 1986) 297–338.

rather than "qualitative." Descartes could defend himself against this accusation by saying that God is a unique being not only because He possesses certain attributes which other beings do not possess, but because *no* other beings can possess them. Be that as it may, this argument is exposed to a simple objection: as it is in the nature of man not to be, say, eternal or omnipotent, etc., it is not in the nature of God to possess the attributes which are proper for "lower" beings; the fact that God is the only such a being who is eternal, immutable, etc., whereas there are many beings such as man, does not matter since both man and God are essentially *beings*. Thus God's "uniqueness" in the sense that only He is, e.g., immutable, eternal, etc. is insufficient to account for God's being the *highest* Being.

II

It needs to be noted, however, that the problem which we just addressed is not peculiar to Descartes' account, but has always been one of the most essential questions of Christian metaphysics and Descartes' is only one more expression of the perennial problem of finding an adequate definition of Being. The term *Ens* or *Essentia* has a long history and was coined because the term *substantia*—which implies that it "underlies" attributes, while God's attributes are not accidents properly speaking—was always thought to be insufficient for defining God's essence. To St. Augustine, who to a large extent is the true author of the definition of God as *Essentia*, "God is *improperly* called substance and better usage requires that He be understood as *essence*, which He is truly and properly called." To this St. Augustine adds: "perhaps God alone should be called essence. For He alone truly is immutable."[14] In other words, only that which is immutable really *is*, and only that

[14] *De Trinitate* VII, 4–5; 9–10: "For just as essence receives its name from being [esse], so substance is derived from subsisting. But it is absurd to give a relative meaning to the word substance, for everything subsists in respect to itself; how much more God? If, indeed, it is fitting to speak of God as subsisting! For to subsist is rightly applied to those things to which the qualities, which need another being in order to be able to be, cling for support, as the color or form of the body .... Therefore, things that are changeable and not simple are properly called substances. But if God subsists, so that He may be properly called a substance, then there is something in Him as it were in a subject, and He is no longer simple: His being, accordingly, would not be one and the same with the other qualities that are predicated of Him in respect to Himself, as for example, to be great, omnipotent, good, and any other attributes of this kind that are not unfittingly said of God. But it is wrong to assert that God subsists and is the subject of His own goodness, and that goodness is not a substance, or rather not an essence, that God Himself is not His own goodness, and that it inheres in Him as in its subject. It is, therefore, obvious that God is improperly called a substance. The more usual name is essence, which He is truly and properly called, so that perhaps God alone should be called essence. For He is truly alone, because He is unchangeable." Cited after Vernon Bourke, *Augustine's View of Reality* (Villanova University, 1963) 91–92. Cf. *De Trinitate* VII, 5, 10; Cf. *Enar. in Ps.* CXXI, 3, 6; *De Trinitate* VII, 4, 7–8. Bourke's book contains an excellent essay on St. Augustine's metaphysics.

which *is* can be properly called *Essentia*. Thus God as *Essentia* or *Ens* (the latter term, used by Descartes, was a Scholastic invention unknown to St. Augustine[15]) signifies, first and foremost, that which *is* or *exists*. Thus, God's essence is the act of existence.

Since only in God are essence and existence one and the same thing, Descartes' expression *Ens summe perfectum* might suggest that the *summe perfectum* (the most perfect) adds something to *Ens* (Being), implying, therefore, that there are either grades of existence or that existence in equal degree belongs to the essence of creatures as it does to God, but then, the creatures would exist necessarily as God does. Another complication with the definition of God as *ens summe perfectum* is that the very notion of the "higher" and the "lower," "more perfect" and "less perfect," presupposes a scale, a measurement by means of which one could estimate the position of a given being on the ladder of beings. But such a measurement would need to be independent of God. Descartes' doctrine of the eternal truths, according to which God is the creator of all possible norms, and subject to none (otherwise, as Descartes says, God would be like a Jupiter subject to the Fates or the Styx), precludes the possibility of the existence of such a scale. Thus the "quantitative" interpretation runs counter both to the traditional understanding of *Ens* as *existence*, which Descartes accepted,[16] and to his own doctrine of divine omnipotence which he formulated as the doctrine of the eternal truths. Accordingly, the *summe perfectum* is, it seems, merely a superfluous addition to *Ens* and we should therefore take Descartes' *Ens summe perfectum* to mean a unique being not only in the sense that God possesses certain attributes which only the *highest being* can possess, but in the sense that only God is *Ens*, properly speaking. However, to say this implies that man can be called *ens* only "improperly" or conditionally.

Before we discuss this problem, let us first ask what it is about the idea of God as *Being* (*Ens*) that made Descartes use it in the Fourth Meditation rather than *Substance* (*Substantia*). Descartes' goal in the Fourth Meditation is to explain *how* error comes about. In contradistinction to *Substantia*, which defines God through His attributes, the notion of *Ens* (Being) allows Descartes to construct the notion of non-being which Descartes needs for the interpretation of error as *privation*, and which in turn he needs to explain in what

[15] On the development of this notion see Etienne Gilson, "Notes sur le vocabulaire de l'être," *Mediaeval Studies* VII (1946): 150–158. Cf. J. Owens, *Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics* (Toronto, 1951) 65–74.

[16] In the Fifth Meditation (AT VII, 68; CSM II, 47) Descartes states: "First of all, there is the fact that, apart from God, there is nothing else of which I am capable of thinking such that existence [necessarily—reads the French version] belongs to its essence."

sense error proceeds from *me*. While error as *privation* is unintelligible without knowing what it is privation *of*, the definition of man as a "middle something" between Being and non-being is equally unintelligible without constructing the idea of *non-being*. Descartes' theory of error as privation of being is of course nothing but a projection into the field of epistemology of the well-known Augustinian idea of evil as privation of being.

Let us make a short digression here. In "epistemologizing" the Augustinian theory of evil, Descartes, like St. Augustine, can easily exonerate God from the responsibility for man's going wrong. However, in so doing he will inherit all the problems of Augustinian theology. Insofar as Cartesian metaphysics is in fact a "secularized" version of Christian theology, Descartes must find room in his purely "rational" philosophy for the Christian notion of Original Sin.[17]

Up to this point Descartes' theological-epistemology is a description of the formal conditions, or nature, of error. What needs to be further explained is the cause of error: that is, *why* man goes wrong. Descartes' discussion is very scanty and in fact does not go much beyond the two passages we quoted earlier: the absence of clear and distinct ideas causes the will's "indifference" and then it "turns itself aside from truth and goodness." This is essentially all Descartes has to say. The lack of an extensive discussion makes the Fourth Meditation almost unintelligible, to the point that Descartes' most fundamental question—whence error and how does it come about?—seems to be hanging in the air. Gilson's conclusion about the "kaleidoscopic character" of Descartes' theory of error coupled with the almost complete absence of studies of the Fourth Meditation[18] indeed implies that Descartes had no coherent explanation of the origin of error. Tempting as this explanation seems to be, it is rather incredible.

[17] On the place of the conception of Original Sin in Cartesian epistemology, see my *Cartesian Theodicy. Descartes' Quest for Certitude*, International Archives of the History of Ideas 168 (Dordrecht, 2000) 137–40.

[18] In the most recent study of the *Meditations*, *Descartes: An Analytical and Historical Introduction* (Oxford, 1993) by Georges Dicker, which aspires to be a systematic exposition of the *Meditations*, the Fourth Meditation is completely left out. However, when the metaphysics of the Fourth Meditation is discussed, especially among English speaking commentators, it is often full of errors. L.J. Beck in his study of the *Meditations* (*The Metaphysics of Descartes: A Study of the Meditations* [Greenwood Press, 1979 ed.] 208), when discussing the metaphysics of the Fourth Meditation states "The natural tendency of the will is towards the 'good' and the 'true.'" This claim is consistent neither with theological doctrines in the seventeenth century nor with Descartes' own statements. See note 26 (below).

III

On 21 April 1641, Descartes wrote to his friend Mersenne:

> I wrote [in the Fourth Meditation] that indifference in our case is rather a defect than a perfection of freedom; but it does not follow that the same is the case with God. Nevertheless, I do not know that it is 'an article of faith' to believe that he is indifferent, and I feel confident that Father Gibieuf will defend my position well on this matter: for *I wrote nothing, which is not in accord with what he said in his book* De libertate.[19]

In another letter to Mersenne, written two months later (23 June 1641), Descartes states, "as for what I wrote about liberty [in the Fourth Meditation], it conforms to that which Reverend Farher Gibieuf wrote before me, and I do not think that there is anything to which he could object."[20]

An extensive discussion about the contents of Gibieuf's *De Libertate Dei et Creaturae* (1630) would require a long and detailed treatment which would take us too far away from our present topic, but a few remarks need to be made. Much of the contents of Gibieuf's book, and his conception of freedom in particular, is a philosophical elaboration of the theology of St. Augustine. During the theological debates in the first half of the seventeenth century, especially before the publication of Jansenius' *Augustinus* in 1640, Gibieuf became a primary object of attacks by the Jesuit theologians (Annat, Raynauld, Habert, Dola, Colonia, et al.), some of whom (Annat and Habert) played an essential role in furthering the condemnation of Jansenius' Augustinian theology of grace in 1653. To the extent that Gibieuf's theory of human liberty is an exposition of St. Augustine's views, it amounts to criticism of the Molinist-Jesuit understanding of freedom as the possibility of freely acting in one direction or another. In religious terms the semi-pelagian Molinist doctrine meant that even after Original Sin man does not need God's grace to choose the good and thus is capable of gaining eternal salvation by means of his own natural resources.

Although the battle between the Augustinians and the Molinists was fought primarily on a theological front and concerned almost exclusively religious issues, it could very easily be translated into purely philosophical categories. The philosophical issue which divided the two camps was freedom of the will. According to Molina, freedom is the power to act or not act, or do something or its opposite; this faculty of acting or of doing something or its

[19] To Mersenne, 21 April 1641 (AT III, 360; CSMK III, 179; emphasis mine).

[20] Letter to Mersenne, 23 June 1641 (AT III, 385–86). Adrien Baillet writes that "La publication du livre de P. Gibieuf, touchent la liberté de Dieu et de la créature, où il eut le plaisir de trouver de quoi autoriser ce qu'il pensait de l'indifférence et du libre arbitre" (*La vie de Monsieur Descartes* [Paris, 1946] 87).

opposite when all that is required for acting is given is called liberty (*quo modo id liberum dicimus, quod positis requisitis ad agendum in potestate ipsius habet agere aut non agere, aut agere hoc aut oppositum; facultasque illa agendi et non agendi aut agendi hoc aut oppositum positis omnibus requisitis ad agendum appellatur libertas*).[21] The Jesuit-Molinist conception of freedom does not presuppose a special metaphysics of good and evil, right or wrong, truth or falsity; there is nothing in it which would not allow us to conceive of freedom as the pursuit of error rather than truth, or evil rather than good. The position of the Molinists entailed, even if they never spelled it out, that in making a wrong choice man also asserts his freedom. From this it followed that if we are capable of doing good out of our own resources (and we are, since, as the Molinists maintained, God's grace, even if necessary, is distributed equally), we can also be *indifferent* with respect to the choice between good and evil, right and wrong, or truth and falsity.

Gibieuf's position is on the opposite pole. The question which he raises in *De Libertate Dei* concerns whether the liberty of indifference in man is absolute, or, in other words, whether it belongs to the essence of human freedom (*Hic duae quaestiones emergunt: una, utrum indifferentia libertatis sit indifferentia absoluta ad agendum & non agendum*[22]). In addressing this question, Gibieuf states that the liberty of indifference of the will is only "conditional and tempered" by its end (*Dico 1. Indifferentia quae spectat ad liberum arbitrium creaturae, non est indifferentia absoluta ad agendum & non agendum, sed indifferentia conditionata & temperata per respectum ad finem ...*[23]). (This is the exact same argument Descartes will use in the Fourth Meditation eleven years later.) Gibieuf concludes his argument—and here he is repeating St. Augustine verbatim—that the more man becomes subject to God's will the more free he is.

Jansenius, who served as an examiner of Gibieuf's work, despite some reservations, found the Oratorian's criticism of the freedom of indifference to be the most valuable part of *De Libertate Dei*. "The true liberty of the *liberum arbitrium* known by the ancient authors," reads Jansenius' approbation, "does not consist in this philosophical indifference to act as it is commonly proclaimed (*quae vulgo praedicatur*). This book demonstrates this with numerous and solid reasons, and it refutes the defenders of contrary opinions."[24] Jansenius' *Augustinus* contains much more severe and elaborate criti-

[21] Molina, *De Scientia Dei*, published in *Beiträge Zur Geschichte Der Philosophie Und Theologie Des Mittelalters*, Band XXXII (Münster, 1935) 207.

[22] *De Libertate* 68.

[23] *De Libertate* 68–69.

[24] The full text of the approbation reads: "Veram arbitrii Libertatem antiquis Scriptoribus notam, non esse sitam in illa Philosophica indifferentia agendi, quae vulgo praedicatur, multis praeclaris et solidis rationibus hic liber astruit et adversae opinionis defensores confutat. Et quia

cism of the freedom of indifference than Gibieuf's work, and there seems to be very little in *De Libertate Dei* as far as the freedom of indifference is concerned which cannot be found in *Augustinus*. However, before the publication of *Augustinus*, which is a strictly theological work, *De Libertate Dei* was the first, and the most important, book to take an open stance against the increasingly powerful partisans of the freedom of indifference.

Descartes' statements on freedom are in perfect conformity with the Augustinian doctrine of freedom understood as the opposite not of necessity but of compulsion:[25] "in order to be free, there is no need for me to be inclined both ways; on the contrary, the more I incline in one direction—either because I clearly understand that reasons of truth and goodness point that way, or because of a divinely produced disposition [i.e., grace] of my inmost thoughts—the freer is my choice ... divine grace ... [does not] diminish freedom, [but] increas[es] and strenghten[s] it." What explains the incompleteness of Descartes' account of the will and the theory of being in the Fourth Meditation is, in my opinion, the fact that he was all too well aware that his account was to a large degree an exposition of Augustinian theology.[26] An open adherence to the Augustinian theory of freedom could

non modo eruditionem, sed etiam pietatem Auctoris sui testamentum fecit, et Lectoris provocat, dum animum creaturarum visco et nexibus expediendum docet, ut asseratur in libertatem gloriae filiorum Dei: merito omne tulisse punctum dici potest: quia Dei simul et hominis consuluit dignitati" Cornelius Iansenius, S. Theologiae Doctor ac Professor Ordinarius, In Universitate Louvanevsi (13 December 1629). Quoted after Jean Orcibal in *Les origines du Jansénisme*. Vol. I. *Correspondance de Jansénius* 456.

[25] AT VII, 58; CSM II, 40. A. Boyce Gibson rightly remarks that "by his deliberate and almost unnecessary allusion to 'divine grace', and by his use of the technical term, 'liberty of indifference', which he could easily have avoided, Descartes here ranges himself with one of the parties to the bitterest of the contemporary theological controversies." *The Philosophy of Descartes* (London, 1932) 333. Gibson is right but for the wrong reasons. He is referring to the Jansenist movement which did not exist in 1641. Before 1640 it was primarily the Oratorian Fathers who constituted the most influential Augustinian group in France.

[26] Let us use several questions from Descartes' writings to support our claim: "The will of a thinking thing is drawn voluntarily and freely (for this is the essence of will), but nevertheless *inevitably*, towards a clearly known good" (AT VII, 58–59; CSM II, 41, emphasis mine). "I can see, however, that God could easily have brought it about that without losing [freedom], and despite the limitations in my knowledge, I should nonetheless never make a mistake. He could, for example, have endowed my intellect with a clear and distinct perception of everything about which I was ever going to deliberate" (AT VII, 61; CSM II, 42). To be sure, there are other places in Descartes' writings, especially those written in 1644, in which Descartes seems to endow will with a certain degree of autonomy with respect to the choice between good and evil. These, I believe, are nothing more than a concession for the benefit of the Molinists, who by 1644, that is, by the time of the publication of the *Principles of the Philosophy* and the letters to Mesland, were starting to take the upper hand; by 1653 they had carried out the condemnation of the Augustine's teaching precisely on this point (the so-called "Five Propositions"; see, e.g., Leszek Kolakowski, *God Owes Us Nothing* [Chicago, 1995] Part I). However, the core of

bring on him the wrath of the Molinists, as it had in the case of Gibieuf in the 1630s, and consequently could jeopardize his chances of receiving the approbation for his *Meditations*.[27]

IV

Let us now have a closer look at the major premises of St. Augustine's theology and, next, contrast them with the contents of the Fourth Meditation. St. Augustine begins with the observation that the bodies which constitute the material world change: nothing remains unchanged even for a short time (*in eo nihil manet, nihil vel parvo spatio temporis habet eodem modo*).[28] Physical objects change not only in space but also in time (*Omne autem quod movetur per locum, non potest nisi et per tempus simul moveri*).[29] What causes this change? It would seem that it is matter (*mutabilitas enim rerum mutabilium ipsa capax est formarum omnium, in quas mutantur res mutabiles*).[30] But change also affects souls which are immaterial (*clarum est eam esse mutabilem*).[31] Thus one cannot account for change by mere reference to matter or mere time, though time and matter or only time are necessary conditions for change. The mutability, however, is a result of something much more fundamental: there was a "time" when what is mutable was *not*,

the Cartesian doctrine of freedom of the will remains essentially Augustinian. AT VII, 57; CSM II, 40. On the condemned propositions, see Antoine Arnauld, "Quinque Propositiones ab Innocentio X Damnatae, et Propositiones Jansenii Yprensis Episcopi, Damnatis Contrariae," in *Œuvres de Messire Antoine Arnauld*, vol. XIX (Paris, 1967). Cf. also "Argument du P. Annat," *ibid.*, and "Relation Abrégé sur le sujet des cinq Propositions condamnées par la Constitution du Pape Innocent X," *ibid.* The theological background of Descartes' doctrine of the Divine and human freedoms, especially their relations vis-à-vis Molinism, is discussed by Romano Amerio, "Arbitrarismo Divino, Libertà Umana e Implicanze Teologiche Nella Dottrina Di Cartesio," *CARTESIO: Nel Terzo Centenario Del <Discorso Del Metodo>*(Milano, 1937).

[27] It was assumed until recently that the approbation of the Sorbonne for the *Meditations* was never granted. Recently, J.-R. Armogathe convincingly argued on the basis of existing documents that the *Meditations* did receive the approbation. (See his "L'Approbation des *Meditationes* par la Faculté de Theologie de Paris (1641)," *Archives de Philosophie*, Bulletin Cartésien, XXI, 57 (1994:1): 1–3. See also Francis Ferrier's remarks on the same question. *La pensée philosophique du Père Guillaume Gibieuf* [Lille, 1976], vol. I, 125). Four men served as the examiners of the *Meditations*: Chastelain, Potier, Hallier, and Cornet. The hostile attitude of the latter two towards Jansenism is well known.

[28] *De Ordine* II, xix, 50 (PL XXXII, 1018).

[29] *De Genesi ad litteram* VIII, xx, 39 (PL XXXIV, 388).

[30] *Confessiones* XII, vi, 6 (PL XXXII, 828). Cf. *Confessiones* XII, viii, 8; (PL XXXII, 829); *De vera religione* c. xviii, 35–36 (PL XXXIV, 137); *De Genesi liber imperfectus* c. xii 36 (PL XXXIV, 235); *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* II, xiv, 28 (PL XXXIV, 274–75).

[31] *De vera religione* c. xxx, 54 (PL, XXXIV, 140). Cf. also *De immortalitate animae* c. v, 7 (PL XXXII, 1025).

before God created the world. Because God created the world not out of His being (which is impossible since then the world would always have been) but *ex nihilo*,[32] therefore everything must be changeable. Whatever was *created* is by definition mutable (*solus ipse incommutabilis, omnia quae fecit, quia ex nihilo fecit, mutabila sunt*).[33]

In contrast to creation, God is not subject to change, and, therefore, only He can properly be said ***To Be*** (*Id enim vere est, quod incommutabiliter manet*).[34] "It is obvious that God is improperly called substance, and better usage requires that He be understood as essence, which He is truly and properly called: and thus, perhaps *God alone should be called essence. For He alone truly is, since He is immutable.*"[35] This is probably the strongest statement in St. Augustine to the effect that in God *essence*—which, as he says elsewhere, is derived from "what it is to be" (*ab eo quod est esse*)[36]—is *existence.*

If God is the pure act of existence, in what sense can the creatures be said *to be*? It would seem that St. Augustine's definition of God as that which *Is* (*Vere enim ipse est, quia incommutabilis est; omnis enim mutatio facit non esse quod erat*)[37] does not leave room for anything other than God Himself to be called *essentia.* And yet, despite St. Augustine's unequivocal statement to the effect that only God is *ousia* or *essentia*[38] (*fortasse solum Deum dici oporteat*

[32] *De Civitate Dei* XII, 1.

[33] *De natura boni* I, i (PL XXXII, 811).

[34] *Confessiones* VII, 11. 17 (PL XXXII, 742). Cf. *De vera religione* 18. 35 (PL XXXIV, 137).

[35] *De Trinitate* VII, 5, 10. Cf. *Enar. in Ps.* PL CXXI, 3, 6, also *De Trinitate* VII, 4, 7–8.

[36] *De Trinitate* V, 2, 3.

[37] *De natura boni* 19 (PL XLII, 557).

[38] *De Trinitate* VII, 5. 10 (PL XLII, 942); "Est tamen sine dubitatione substantia, vel, si melius hoc appellatur, essentia quam Graeci ousiam vocant .... Aliae quae dicuntur essentiae sive substantiae, capiunt accidentia, quibus in eis fiat vel magna vel quantacumque mutatio: Deo autem aliquid ejusmodi accidere non potest; et ideo sola est incommutabilis substantia vel essentia, qui Deus est" (*Ibid.*, V, 2. 3). In *De Civitate Dei*, XII 2 St. Augustine states: "The quickest and easiest way for anyone to divest himself of that erroneous and blasphemous notion is to understand clearly what God said by the mouth of his angel when sending Moses to the children of Israel: God said, "I am HE WHO IS" [Exodus 3, 14]. For God is existence in a supreme degree—he supremely is—and he is therefore immutable. Hence he gave existence to the creatures he made out of nothing; but it was not his own supreme existence. To some he gave existence in a higher degree, to some in a lower, and thus he arranged a scale of existences of various natures. Now 'existence' (*essentia*) is derived from the verb "to be" or "to exist" (*esse*), in the same way as "wisdom" (*sapientia*) from the verb "to be wise" (*sapere*). It is a new word, not employed by ancient writers, but it has come into general use in modern times to supply the need for a Latin word to express what the Greeks call *ousia*, of which *essentia* is a literal translation. Thus the highest existence, from which all things that are derive their existence, the only contrary nature is the non-existent. Non-existence is obviously contrary to the existent. It follows that no existence is contrary to God, that is to the supreme existence and the author of all existence whatsoever."

essentiam), he does not restrict the term *essentia* to God alone. Although in contrast to God creation contains an element of change, it contains, however, a principle of permanence[39] without which it would inevitably perish (*nisi permaneret, incommutabilis, nulla mutabilis natura remaneret*).[40] In creating the world, God imposed on creation three principles: *measure*, *form* and *order* (*modus*, *species*, *ordo*): "Since measure determines the proportions of each thing, number furnishes each thing with its species, and weight draws each thing to rest and stability, He is these things firstly, truly, and uniquely, who sets bounds to all, forms all, and orders all."[41] Insofar as every created thing contains these three principles (and it must contain them because otherwise it would cease to be), it *is*. Whatever *is* is at the same time good.

Thus we come to what is probably the most often recurring question in Christian thought. If everything that *is* is *good*, what is evil and from where does it come? "Evil is that which defects from essence and tends toward nonexistence" (*Idipsum ergo malum est, si praeter pertinaciam velitis attendere, deficere ab essentia et ad id tendere ut non sit*);[42] "I did not find it [*iniquitas*, wickedness] a substance, but perversion of the will which is twisted away from the highest substance, from Thee . . ." (*non inveni substantiam, sed summa substantia, te Deo, detoratae in infima voluntatis perversitatem proicientis intima sua, et tumescentis foras*).[43]

From the fact that only God is *Essentia*, it follows that what was created *is not* and cannot be called *essentia*. On the other hand creation cannot be said *not to be*. What, then, is man, if he is neither being (God) nor pure nothing? In the *Confessiones*, St. Augustine calls man a *certain nothing* (*nihil aliquid*), *An is Is-not* (*est non est*).[44] Man is neither Being nor a non-being (nothing): man is stranded between *nothingness* (whence it came) and *Being* (which called him into existence/being). The famous sentence from the *Civitate Dei* reads: "Man is a greater miracle than any miracle effected by man's agency" (*Nam et omni miraculo, quod fit per hominem, majus miraculum est homo*).[45] Despite his numerous and valiant attempts, the great Saint never really answered the question of what man is, and the reason for his failure is that he

[39] "Deus cujus legibus in aevo stantibus, motus instbilis rerum mutabilium perturbatus esse non sinitur, frenisque circumeuntium saeculorum semper ad similitudinem stabilitatis revocatur." *Soliloquia* I, i, 4 (PL XXXII, 871).

[40] *De vera religione* c. x, 18 (PL XXXIV, 130).

[41] *De Genesi ad litteram* IV, iii, 7 (PL XXXIV, 299).

[42] *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae et Manichaeorum* II, 2. For a detailed discussion of evil in St. Augustine, see R. Jolivet, "Le Problème du mal chez saint Augustin," *Archives de Philosophie* VII:2 (1929): 1–101.

[43] *Confessiones* VII, xvi.

[44] *Confessiones* XII, viii, 8 (PL XXXII, 829).

[45] *De Civitate Dei* X, 12 (PL XLI, 291).

never found the answer to the question of how the human soul and body are connected.[46]

Because of his incorporeal soul, which belongs to another world, man is never properly at home as long as he is in the body. The soul's journey to his Creator is, as Etienne Gilson aptly remarked, at once a metaphysics, an epistemology, a psychology, a moral philosophy, and a mysticism. This journey begins for St. Augustine with the evaluation of human cognitive faculties. There are the external senses (which are lowest on the ladder), internal senses, and reason which is higher on this cognitive hierarchy. Parallel to them are the objects of man's cognition. Now, since what is changing cannot be said *to be*, the proper object of knowledge must be that which is immutable. Because only God is immutable, He is the Truth, since only that which is always the same can be true (*Ecce tibi est ipsa veritas: amplectere illam si potes, et fruere illa, et delectare in Domino, et dabit tibi petitiones cordis tui*).[47] Man who wants to know the truth should, therefore, focus on what is immutable. With the knowledge of what is immutable (a knowledge gained by reason), the soul begins her ascent to God. One can already in this life have a foretaste of what it truly means *to be*, provided that one fixes one's gaze on the *Supreme Essence*.

As has been pointed out many times, the famous *cogito* already appears in St. Augustine. Like Descartes, St. Augustine needs the *cogito* to demonstrate the groundlessness of the Sceptics' claim that we cannot have any certainty. However, the context in which it appears in St. Augustine is different from that in Descartes. Both in *De Trinitate* and in *De Civitate Dei* St. Augustine discusses it as part of his considerations concerning the Holy Trinity and happiness. For a modern reader, who knows the *cogito* from Descartes' *Meditations* and is used to dry Cartesian epistemological language, the Augustinian *cogito* must seem somewhat strange. One would like to ask: what do the Holy Trinity and happiness have to do with the *cogito* or *being*? Because everything created is changing, it never really *is*. To be happy for St. Augustine is *to be*, and *to be* is to enjoy the presence of He who *Is*—that is, God in the Holy Trinity.

A man who directs his judgments in accordance with what is Eternally True can already in this life have a foretaste of what it is *to be* (happy).[48] And inversely, when man turns away from the eternal and immutable

[46] *De Civitate Dei* XXI, 10 (PL XLI, 752).

[47] *De libero arbitrio* II, xiii, 35 (PL XXXII, 1260).

[48] "Constituamus ergo animo talem sapientem, cujus anima rationalis jam sit particeps incommutabilis aeternaeque veritatis, quam de omnibus suis actionibus consulat, nec aliquid omnino faciat, quod non in ea cognoverit esse faciendum, ut ei subditus eique obtemperans recte faciat." *De Trinitate* III, iii, 8 (PL XLII, 872).

Truth, directing his gaze toward what is changeable and perishable,[49] he abandons higher goods for lesser ones, and thus loses himself in what only *appears* to be. In ontological terms, the consequence of this turning away from *Being* is *privation* of being, resulting in one's tending toward nothingness. In the moral realm, this turning away from God inevitably leads man astray from the path of righteousness.

V

The above is merely a very brief survey of St. Augustine's theology or metaphysics, but it suffices for our present purposes. How much of it do we find in Descartes?

1) Error in Descartes, like evil in St. Augustine, is *privation* of being or defect (*tantummodo esse defectum*;[50] *defectus substantiae ... contra naturam*;[51] and *malum ex defectu non ex profectu*[52]).

2) To account for error (evil), Descartes, like St. Augustine, juxtaposes uncreated *Essence* (*ens summe perfectum*) with created *essence.* Descartes remarks that insofar as man is not the highest Being, he *participates* in non-being. St. Augustine in turn claims that because creatures were created *ex nihilo* they by their very nature tend toward nothingness (*Tanto utique deterior, quanto ab eo quod summe est, ad id quod minus est vergit, ut ipsa etiam minus sit. Quanto autem minus est, tanto utique fit propinquior nihilo*).[53]

3) What or who is man? In contradistinction to God, whom St. Augustine calls that "who himself is not in degree, but He is, He is" (*qui non aliquo modo est, sed est, est*),[54] man is *nihil aliquid* (a certain nothing), *Est non est* (An is is-not). "I cast mine eyes upon those other creatures beneath thee, and I perceived, that they neither have any absolute being, nor yet could they be said to have no being" (*Et inspexi cetera infra te, et vidi nec omnino esse nec omnino non esse: esse quidem, quoniam abs te sunt, non esse autem, quoniam id quod es non sunt*).[55] Descartes in turn calls man a middle something between God or nothing or Being and non-being (*medium quid inter Deum et nihil* AT VII, 55; CSM II, 38).

[49] "Loca offerunt quod amemus, tempora surripiunt quod amamus et relinquunt in anima turbas phantasmatum, quibus in aliud atque aliud cupiditas incitetur." *De vera religione* c. xxxv, 65 (PL XXXIV, 151).

[50] AT VII, 54; CSM II, 38.

[51] *Contra Epist. Manichaei* c. 33 (PL XLII, 199).

[52] *Contra Secund. Manichei* c. 15 (PL XLII, 590).

[53] *ContraSecund. Manichei* c. 15 (PL XLII, 590). "Quapropter quamvissit malum corruptio, et quamvis non sit a Conditore naturarum, sed ex eo sit, quod de nihilo factae sunt." *Contra Epist. Manichaei* xxxviii, 44 (PL XLII, 203).

[54] *Confessiones* XIII, 31.

[55] *Confessiones* VII, xi.

Furthermore, man, St. Augustine claims, is a dweller of two worlds: his soul belongs to the world changeable only in time, while his body inhabits the world which is subject to change in both space and time: "There is a ... manner of contact of spirit with body which produces a living being; and that conjunction is utterly amazing and beyond our powers of comprehension. I am speaking of man himself" (*iste alius modus, quo corporibus adhaerent spiritus* ...).[56] Because of his inexplicable nature, man "is a greater miracle than any miracle effected by man's agency."[57] Descartes was in equal measure unsuccessful in defining the connection between mind and body. In his private note, among the three miracles, Descartes lists free will which does not fit the structure of his deterministic universe.

4) To explain *how* the will comes to make incorrect choices (this question should not be confused with *why* the will makes incorrect choices), St. Augustine observes that it is because "I lack the strength to fix my eye long upon them [the invisible things of Thee]: but my infirmity (*infirmitate*) being beaten back again, I returned to my wonted fancies ...."[58] Likewise Descartes, who could also find this idea in Gibieuf,[59] ascribes it to a weakness (*infirmitas*) in man which does not always allow him to "inhere fixed in one and the same cognition" (*ut non possim semper uni & eidem cognitioni defixus inhærare* AT VII, 62; CSM II, 43).

5) According to St. Augustine, "all sins are contained in ... turning away from things divine and truly everlasting, [and then man] is turned to things changeful and uncertain" (*omnia peccata hoc uno genere contineri, cum quisque avertitur a divinis, vereque manentibus; et ad mutabilia atque incerta convertitur*). "When the will turns away from the unchangeable and com-

[56] *De Civitate Dei* XXI, 10 (PL XLI, 752).

[57] *De Civitate Dei* Bk. X, 12.

[58] *Confessiones* VII, 17.

[59] "Des deux recommandations du Philosophe [Descartes], la second seulement ressemble au conseil indirect de Gibieuf. Là où l'oratorien, trop pris par sa controverse, constatait une carence et recommandait d'y remédier par l'effort, le philosophe préoccupé de donner des règles d'action où la considération des fins n'est pas envisagée demand à l'intelligence de ne pas se relâcher et de tenir ferme sur une vérité une fois entrevue. Pour être différente dans leur aboutissement, le cheminement des deux pensées mérite d'être signalé: il montre à l'évidence que Descartes en partant des positions du théologien mais en les querelles stériles et les considérations théoretiques, fait faire un pas considérable 'pour parvenir à la connaissance de la vérité' et donc pour que le choix moral soit plus assuré. Car, il faut bien le reconnaître, le constant rappel 'd'adhérer à Dieu' qui est le leitmotiv très bérullien du système Gibieuf manque trop souvent de contenue pratique et de règles précises. Il se trouve au contraire que Descartes qui se défend de le faire y parvient plus efficacement, car sans exacte appréhension du bien on ne peut le poursuivre. Pour faire le bien il faut sans cesse rectifier son jugement." F. Ferrier, *La pensée philosophique du Père Guillaume Gibieuf 1583–1650* (Lille, 1976) vol. II, 15–16.

mon good ... it sins" (*voluntas autem aversa ab incommutabili et communi bono ... peccat*).[60] Descartes provides a similar explanation for error: when I am unable to fix my gaze on truth, the will becomes indifferent and it "easily turns away from the true and the good, and thus both am I deceived and do I sin" (*ad quae cum sit indifferens, facile a vero & bono defectit, atque ita & fallor & pecco*).[61]

6) Descartes' theory of the unlimited scope of human will, probably the most unusual and original item in Descartes' philosophical armory, can be found in Gibieuf, who in turn borrowed it from the sixteenth-century Cardinal Contarini.

> As intelligence is very ample because it understands everything, the will itself is also very ample and extends itself towards all the kinds of good and the universal Good itself ... a spontaneous human will ... unconfined by anything, but free and with no limits, stretches itself no less to any good as it does to the universal good. (*cumque intellectus amplissimus sit quoniam intelligit omnia, voluntas etiam ipsa amplissima est, seseque ad omnia bonorum genera, atque ad Bonum ipsum universum extendit intellectus .... Spontanea ergo voluntate homo ... neque ullo termino circumscripto, sed amplo, ac libero movetur arbitrio, quod tum ad singulat um ad universum bonum extenditur.*[62]

If we did not know that the author of this passage is Contarini, we would not hesitate to ascribe it to Descartes, who in a famous passage from the Fourth Meditation talks about the ample and perfect will which is not limited by anyrhing (*sola est voluntas sive arbitrii libertas ... ut nullius majoris ideam apprehendam* AT VII, 57; CSM II, 40).

7) Furthermore, there are several points, which are essential both for Gibieuf and Descartes, where Gibieuf's thought and Descartes' philosophy seem to converge. Why does man arrive at indifference, that is, hesitation before making a decision? Gibieuf invokes man's habit, moral weakness, at-

[60] *De libero arbitrio* I, xvi, 35 (PL XXXII, 1240); *ibid*., II, xix, 53 (PL XXXII, 1269).

[61] AT VII, 58; CSM II, 41. See also *Principles of Philosophy* I, 23.

[62] The whole fragment quoted by Gibieuf (*De Libertate* 44) reads: "*Cum*, inquit [Contarini in tractatu *De libero arbitrio*], *hominis voluntas facultas quedam sit & appetendi vis quae intellectum sequitur & ad omnia se extendit ad que ipse se extendit intellectus, cumque intellectus amplissimus sit quoniam intelligit omnia, voluntas etiam ipsa amplissima est, seseque ad omnia bonorum genera, atque ad Bonum ipsum universum extendit, quare praecedente cognitione in finem ut finis est fertur, & media quae sibi accommodata fini videntur, eligit. Spontanea ergo voluntate homo, proprio, neque ullo termino circumscripto, sed amplo, ac libero movetur arbitrio, quod tum ad singulat um ad universum bonum extenditur.*" Gasparis Contareni Cardinalis, *De Libero Arbitrio* [597–60.3], ●*pera* (Paris, 157 l) 599. I have retained the original punctuation from Contarini's work, which was slightly changed by Gibieuf.

traction to what is easy.[63] To understand that the freedom of indifference is not an ideal of liberty, Gibieuf goes on to remark, one needs to change one's habits and make an effort. In the Fourth Meditation Descartes says something very similar:

> What is more, even if I have no power to avoid error in the first way just mentioned, which requires a clear perception of everything I have to deliberate on, I can avoid error in the second way, which depends merely on my remembering to withhold judgment on any occasion when the truth of the matter is not clear. Admittedly, I am aware of a certain weakness in me, in that I am unable to keep my attention fixed on one and the same item of knowledge at all times; *but by attentive and repeated meditation I am nevertheless able to make myself remember it as often as the need arises, and thus to get into the habit of avoiding error.*[64]

In other words, there where the Oratorian recommended "effort," the philosopher suggested a rule of firmly holding to the truth once we catch sight of it. Gibieuf's constant reminder to "adhere to God" (a Bérullian leitmotiv) is reminiscent of Descartes' idea of rectifying a judgment.

As we can see, despite Descartes' strenuous effort to avoid religious terminology, the core of Cartesian metaphysics clearly betrays religious, and more precisely, Augustinian provenance. All the elements which we listed above can be found in St. Augustine's well-known and widely read works: *De libero arbitrio*, the *Confessiones*, and *De Civitate Dei*. Did Descartes read them? We know from Descartes' correspondence that he read the *Confessiones*, *De Genesi ad Litteram libri duodecim*, and *De Civitate Dei*.[65] As for *De libero*

[63] *De Libertate* 272–73 (cf. Ferrier, *ibid.*, vol. II, 13). There are several other points which Descartes could have borrowed from St. Augustine via Gibieuf. First, the idea of evil as privation, which Gibieuf describes as the return to nothingness: "Ex parte principii, quia non qua capax Dei operatur, sed qua ad inferiorem gradum declinans propria defectibilitate & nihilo, unde nondum omnino emersit" (*De Liberate* 271); also, the idea that the perfection of creation should be looked at not from a perspective of a perfection of an individual part but from the perspective of creation as the whole: "Videlicet, etsi multa mala sint, relata ad creturas et naturas earum, ad providentiam tamen comparata, omnia bona sunt, satem per modum medii, quia omnia ad bonum aliquod conferunt" (*De Libertate* 441). Cf. St. Augustine, *Enchiridion* c. 11, 95, 96, 99, 100.

[64] "Ac praeterea, etiam ut non possim ab evidenti eorum omnium perceptione de quibus est deliberandum, possum tamen illo altero qui pendet ab eo tantum, quod recorder quoties de rei veritate non liquet a judicio ferendo esse abstinendum; nam, quamvis eam in me infirmitatem esse experiar, ut non possim semper mei et eidem cognitioni defixus inherare, possum tamen attentia et saepius iterator meditatione efficare ut ejusdem, quoties usus exiget, recorder, atque ita habitum quemdam non errandi acquiram." AT VII, 61–62; CSM II, 43; emphasis mine.

[65] See letters to Mesland, 2 May 1644 (AT IV, 119; CSMK III, 235), Conversation with Burman, 16 April 1648 (AT V, 169; CSMK III, 349), and to Mersenne, December 1640 (AT III, 260; CSMK III, 161). For the complete dossier of Descartes' borrowings from St. Augustine's writings, see my *Index Augustino-Cartésien* (Paris, 2000).

arbitrio, there is no explicit reference in Descartes' writings to confirm this; yet almost verbatim reiterations in the Fourth Meditation[66] leave no doubt that Descartes read it carefully.

In view of our findings, the answer to the question as to which metaphysical tradition Descartes draws on in the Fourth Meditation is: the Augustinian tradition, or more precisely, the "metaphysics" of St. Augustine himself.

[66] St. Augustine: "omnia peccata hoc uno genere contineri, cum quisque avertitur a divinis, vereque manentibus; et ad mutabilia atque incerta convertitur" (*De libero arbitrio*, I, xvi); "sed malum sit aversio ejus [voluntas libera] ab incommutabili bono, et conversio ad mutabilia bona" (*ibid.*, II, xix). Descartes: "ad quae cum [voluntas] sit indifferens, facile a veto & bono deflectit, atque ita & fallor & pecco" (ATVII, 58; CSM II, 40–41); St. Augustine: "Et quaesivi, quid esset iniquitas, et non inveni substantiam, sed a summa substantia, te Deo, detortae in infima voluntatis perversitatem proicientis intima sua, et tumescentis foras" (*Confessiones* VII, xvi, 22); Descartes: "nam, quamvis eam in me infirmitate, esse experiar, ut non possim semper uni & eidem cognitioni defixus inhaerare" (AT VII, 62; CSM II, 43).