

Descartes' Rational Masks Removed

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The problematic issue of the research

René Descartes (1596-1650) claims that his philosophy is clear and distinct, which means it is a philosophy with clear significance and does not permit more than one interpretation. Is this claim valid? Does the Cartesian philosophy have definite meaning? Or does it, on the contrary, stir equivocation, i.e., it is vague and ambiguous in its philosophical positions? Is there a Cartesian duality which reveals contradictions in his positions? Is it a rational or a theological philosophy? Is rationalism a final issue with him or is it just a mask to hide his theological tendencies?

Before an answer to the problematic question is attempted, the concept of “equivocation” must be investigated, especially when some question its status as a philosophical concept. Equivocation is, in fact, a genuine philosophical concept which André Lalande entered in his *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*⁽¹⁾ while other commentators specialized in the field ignored it although they displayed some reservations on some of the words and concepts contained in Lalande’s renowned dictionary. That shows that the concept is accepted by them.

Lalande defines the concept saying that “*Équivoque*” as a noun

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is (a) a word or an expression that allows numerous interpretations; (b) the property of being equivocal, that is, equivocity. The adjective is defined as (a) in speaking of words or expressions: that which has many meanings; (b) that which may be explained in many different ways; and as a result of being uncertain, it cannot be categorized as a definite type⁽²⁾.

In the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, Simon Blackburn defines the verb “equivocate” as “To make a statement that is capable of being taken in more than one way, with the aim of exploiting the ambiguity”⁽³⁾.

Arabic scholars translate the term “equivocation” using different Arabic equivalents. For instance, it is translated into Arabic as “اشتباه”⁽⁴⁾; it is also “إبهام”⁽⁵⁾, which refers to absence of a recognizable face. Thus,

this equivalent of “equivocal” denotes a concept without identity. Professor Murad Wahba translates the term as “لفظ مشكك” which means for him: (a) a term used for several meanings, (b) it allows several interpretation; thus it is indefinite⁽⁶⁾. Professor Muhammad Mahran translates it as ازدواج المعنى the equivalent of “ambiguity” “as in many cases the same word carries two or more distinct meanings, but generally this causes no problems since the context defines the intended meaning. When the two meanings appear in the same contest, ambiguity arises”⁽⁷⁾. This ambiguous use “often occurs in particular contexts or in some argument which the speaker manipulates to create a logical fallacy”⁽⁸⁾.

Generally speaking, these translations, despite their varieties, agree that the Arabic term and

concept denote polysemy, or lexical ambiguity. The meaning is indefinite and allows confusion in understanding the intended meaning. The current researcher prefers the Arabic term الاشتباه to denote the contention of several meanings giving rise to more than one interpretation, especially when the adjective متشابه is used in the Quranic textual studies.

It seems that the philosophical meaning of both “equivocal” and متشابه is the almost the same in the study of the principles of Islamic jurisprudence. The Quranic textual term is the expression that has no definite denotation. Al-Shirazi describes the “equivocal/المتشابه” as that which has ambiguous meaning⁽⁹⁾.

Moreover, Al-Ghazali describes the “equivocal/المتشابه” as that which has contradictory possible meanings⁽¹⁰⁾.

Thus, it stands in contrast to the definite. “The definite could have two meanings, the overt one of which does not allow problematicness or probabilities”⁽¹¹⁾.

Thus, some Islamic jurists see the equivocal as implying more than one sense, which creates ambiguity. This is problematic since it makes it not possible to say that this or that particular text is clear and distinct. This is the opposite of what is definite.

Therefore, there is no difference between the philosophical meaning of equivocation and the Islamic jurist one. The Jurists use the term in their discussions of Sharia and creed; philosophers and philosophy historians, on the other hand, use it in hermeneutics and other philosophical fields of study.

It is noteworthy that equivocation is not only present in single words. It may occur in phrases and whole texts.

It might also exist in a whole philosophical system. Equivocation is a characteristic of all that gives the possibility of numerous interpretations. A whole philosophical system can be equivocal.

Professor Hassan Hanfi has already used the term and concept in several of his philosophical studies. He used it, for instance in his study of Hegel. In the context of explaining equivocation in religious thought, he said that equivocation “means the presence of the two opposites at the same time, and the possibility to assess the whole situation based on one of them. Hence, this creates two contradictory judgments concerning one thing”⁽¹²⁾. In this sense of equivocation, Professor Hanafi interpreted the Cartesian philosophy. It implies contradictory positions⁽¹³⁾. He thus wonders, “Is Descartes’

stance on religion that of a liberal thinker or that of the traditional justifier in an intelligent and clear way?”⁽¹⁴⁾.

This problematic exposition of Descartes’ position on religion inspired the questions of this paper on the philosophy of Descartes: Is his philosophy equivocal, i.e., it implies more than one meaning, or is it a philosophy with a definite meaning? Does his philosophy include unclear and indistinct positions, or does it give a model of clear and distinct thought? Is it a rational or a theological philosophy? Is rationalism a decisive position in it, or is it a mere mask to conceal his theological tendencies? Does his philosophy take as a springing point man or God (true thought or divine security)? And at last does his philosophy adopt a clear and distinct criterion to determine right and wrong, or does it adopt divine truth?

The paper attempts to answer these questions. The motive to undertake such a task is stirred by the inclusion of equivocal texts in Descartes' philosophy in the sense explained above. His philosophical system creates equivocation where it is related to religion. That is because Descartes is considered among the philosophers who created controversies in the history of philosophy despite the famous saying that Descartes is the philosopher of pure rationality and clear and distinct thought! If this saying were true Descartes would not arouse controversy over his philosophical position on religion. The several diverse interpretations of this issue are proof enough that the Cartesian system is not clear; his doctrine is sometimes vague and sometimes lacking in logical rigor. There is even duality in Descartes' philosophy which reveals

contradictions in his positions. This might be the reason why he became the starting point of two different schools of philosophy. Bertrand Russell says,

There is in Descartes an unresolved dualism between what he learnt from contemporary science and the scholasticism that he had been taught at La Flèche. This led him into inconsistencies, but it also made him more rich in fruitful ideas than any completely logical philosopher could have been. Consistency might have made him merely the founder of a new scholasticism, whereas inconsistency made him the source of two important but divergent schools of philosophy.

It is the Cartesian dualism that created a schism in the European consciousness, turning it "at the beginning to look like the opened

jaws of a crocodile: the upper jaw is rationalism, the lower empiricism”⁽¹⁵⁾.

If most historian, for the past four centuries, considered Descartes “universally acknowledged as the father of modern philosophy”⁽¹⁶⁾ which is also admitted by John Cottingham⁽¹⁷⁾ who argues that Descartes established a philosophical system based on pure thought which is “clear and distinct”, it is high time for this claim to be put under scrutiny and research. The rationalism of Descartes is not definitely proven by the Cartesian texts, if the Cartesian philosophy is taken as a whole not only considering certain texts. Some texts indicate rational tendency, but others reveal theological tendency. Some even indicate pure theological choices ⁽¹⁸⁾. This requires a review of his philosophy in general and his religious thought in particular,

springing from the concept of equivocation. This also poses the question: Is rationalism a mere mask to conceal his theological tendencies which are but Christian beliefs in the attire of pure thought and under the banner of modern rationalism?

This question may acquire legitimacy if we consider that the famous Cartesian cogito was not so robust and well-established enough to serve as adequate basis for a philosophical system with a series of truths. It is-as set forth by Descartes-no more than a fragile basis in need of support. That is why Descartes supplemented it by the principle of the true perfect God to remedy the deficiencies of the cogito. Descartes could not, as will be explained later-free his philosophy from the captivity of the Christian religious outlook, whether on the level of philosophical escape

in his doubt methodology or on the level of the elements of his methodology—from his ontological view to physical and natural sciences, passing by presenting “himself as the ally of the Church”⁽¹⁹⁾, in addition to his repeated assertion that his philosophy is aligned with the general struggle against heresy and the infidels! Descartes says,

For although it is sufficient for us Christians to believe by faith that the human soul does not perish with the body and that God exists, yet it seems certain that unbelievers cannot be convinced of the truth of religion, and scarcely even of any moral values, unless these first two truths are proved to them by natural reason⁽²⁰⁾.

He further says,

.. because the Council of the

Lateran held in the reign of Leo X condemns these people (session 8), and explicitly enjoins Christian philosophers to refute their arguments, and to make every effort to prove the truth, I did not hesitate to tackle this issue as well.⁽²¹⁾

Descartes, indeed, attempted to give his philosophy a prophetic atmosphere when he mentioned the prophetic experience that took hold of him one night in his stove-heated room⁽²²⁾ in November 1619. He then saw three visions that enlightened him with a great revelation which served the principles of “*une science admirable*”. A divine spirit revealed to him a new philosophy and a promise to open all treasures of all sciences. In the following days he gave two prayers to God and Virgin Mary and promised himself to do pilgrimage to the Catholic most beloved shrine Notre-Dame de Lorette⁽²³⁾.

Apart from the debate among the scholars on the meaning of these visions and revelation-whether it is the cogito, the principles of his methodology, analytic philosophy, the unity of knowledge, etc, it is noteworthy that there is a prophetic religious characteristic that initiates Descartes' philosophical experience. His visions "seemed to put a divine approval on his project"⁽²⁴⁾.

The question is raised again: is the Cartesian rationalism more of appearance than essence? That is especially true when Descartes retrieves the propositions of Catholicism and its traditional mechanisms, such as the means of facing the devil with the support of the true God. Since the hypothesis of the true God is present in his thought, the outcome is known in advance: the true God will provide man with salvation, or at least will

support this mechanism as a divine guarantee to supplement thought which cannot stand by itself. This divine guarantee is an initial postulate in one of the most important moments of building the Cartesian doctrine.

Is the Cartesian doubt artificial or virtual not real? Descartes knows beforehand what the outcome of his doubt is going to be; he also knows in advance how to get out of it, which is apparent in the context of his method of doubt that is infiltrated with a spirit "poised" to gain certainty. It is infiltrated with a spirit of faith in God the Savior whose presence is postulated from the first moment of putting forth the thesis of the possibility of a deceiving god as a probability of doubt-a probability that is soon precluded; God is perfect and true and can never deceive. This is the

idea on which Descartes will construct all his doctrine after the stage of doubt comes to an end. The Cartesian doubt is perhaps similar to the plot on which the novelist structures his novel, selecting and excluding facts at will (facts of Christianity, morality, political system) while he knows in advance how he is going to resolve the complication of his plot with his choice of facts. The real plot which is the object of reason, on the other hand, is not dealt with, not put forth, simply because its resolution is difficult for rational deduction. If the circumstances necessitate facing the real plot, he immediately goes into contradiction with all the principles he previously approved for the solution of the selected plot, i.e., he contradicts the principles and rules of his method.

Had Descartes followed his own method, the result would have

been different. His is, no doubt, a rational method, but the problem is how he constructed his metaphysical system and how he determined the features of his religious position.

Therefore, this paper does not attempt a traditional exposition and explanation of the philosophy of Descartes; it rather seeks to go beyond explication of text to attempt a philosophical interpretation. This can be done through a reading which goes beyond details and particulars as it attempts to read the system through its internal structure. It is a revealing reading that diagnoses symptoms and ponders to determine the rationality of the method. Examining the interstices of the system, this reading seeks the covert rather than the overt meanings. Unsatisfied with the outspoken alone, it infers what is not disclosed or held back because of ideological evasion that masks itself

behind the façade of rationalism.

This is not, thus, a reading of the Cartesian philosophy in its relation to religion as he himself saw and detailed its aspects and characteristics. It is a reading that tries as best it can to scrutinize a different context and use a different perspective that aims at making reason call the theological ideology to face itself after shedding all remnants of evasive techniques. This is the purpose of the research. The researcher may have missed his aim or hit it, but the reward is stirring thought even for a while.

From the logic of a rational method

to the logic of faith acceptance

It may be apparent that the Cartesian philosophy is based on rational logic. This seems obvious in the rules he put forth in his essay "Rules for the Direction of the

Mind" or the four rules of his method as explained in his book *Discourse on Method* (1637) as they are rational rules. However, when seen from outside the adoption of belief in Christian revelation and the beliefs and authority of the Church, the Cartesian controlling logic seems not rational as his doctrine harbors theological concepts inside its structure and configuration so much that it can be said that his logic is more controlled by the theological than the rational. If the Cartesian logic is applied on his doctrine, the result will show that his doctrine teems with theological recognitions.

The deductive method of Descartes, as Bernard Le Bouyer de Fontenelle (1657-1757) says is, « beaucoup plus estimable que sa philosophie même, dont une bonne partie se trouve fausse, ou fort incertaine, selon les propres règles

qu'il nous a apprises »⁽²⁵⁾ (much more estimable than his philosophy itself, a large part of which is false or uncertain to a great degree, if we apply the right rules that he taught us.)

First, as regards the method, Descartes initially put forth his method in his essay "Regulae ad directionem ingenii" (Rules for the Direction of the Mind). This was written in Latin in Descartes' early period, probably between 1626 and 1628. It was incomplete and published posthumously in 1701 although a Dutch translation was published earlier in 1684. His original plan was to divide the book into three sections with twelve rules each, but the last part was lost and the second part was incomplete. A total of 18 rules were elaborated while rules number 19, 20 and 21 are mentioned only as titles. The first twelve rules deal with our apprehension of simple

propositions which can be apprehended in a way that is certain. They also cover intuition and deduction which are the two basic epistemological processes that create clear distinct knowledge for Descartes. The following twelve rules cover the problems that are perfectly understood, such as these problems that can be solved with accuracy in arithmetic and geometry⁽²⁶⁾. The last twelve rules which were set to solve the "imperfectly understood problems"- meant to show that the more complex problems of natural science can be solved according to a mathematical model. "The *Regulae*, despite its early date, and its unfinished state, is an extremely valuable source for Descartes' views on knowledge and method"⁽²⁷⁾.

In his second book, *Discourse on Method*, he mentions four rules that must be followed in every method that seeks the truth. These rules are sufficient, if followed

accurately, to arrive at certain truth. The rules are intuition, analysis, synthesis, and enumeration and review.

Descartes defines the content of these four rules as follows.

“The first was never to accept anything for true which I did not clearly know to be such; that is to say, carefully to avoid precipitancy and prejudice, and to comprise nothing more in my judgment than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly as to exclude all ground of doubt.

The second, to divide each of the difficulties under examination into as many parts as possible, and as might be necessary for its adequate solution.

The third, to conduct my thoughts in such order that, by commencing with objects the simplest and easiest to know, I

might ascend by little and little, and, as it were, step by step, to the knowledge of the more complex; assigning in thought a certain order even to those objects which in their own nature do not stand in a relation of antecedence and sequence.

And the last, in every case to make enumerations so complete, and reviews so general, that it might be assured that nothing was omitted.”⁽²⁸⁾

The reader of these four rules, and the previously mentioned twenty-one, will judge them as definitely rational. Hence, he would expect Descartes' religious thought to be saturated with the spirit of rationalism. Descartes, nevertheless, proceeds to set a rule that contradicts his first rule as he recalls the view of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) concerning

Christian revelation or theological truths which “surpass the ingenuity of the human reason”⁽²⁹⁾. Saint Thomas makes his starting point the principle that

Truth cannot contradict itself. This entails that no truth of faith can negate a truth of reason, and vice versa. However, since human reason is feeble as when comparing the intelligence of the greatest philosopher to that of an angel, it appears quite inferior exactly as when comparing the mind of the simplest of peasants to the mind of the this philosopher himself. Accordingly, when a truth of reason seems to us in contradiction with a truth of faith, we can be sure that the claimed truth of reason is nothing but an error and that with more intensive discussion we will discover the falsity of that truth⁽³⁰⁾.

As for Descartes, he declared that the truth of the Christian faith should be the first that we accept without examining whether it is intuitive, clear and distinct or not. He even gives this rule a status higher than that of all his famous methodical rules; he considers it infallible as it is revealed by God who is to be trusted more than any other⁽³¹⁾.

This is what made Étienne Gilson say that “although Descartes gives great value to the voice of reason in the first rule of his method, he stated in *The Principles of philosophy* (1644) that we must believe everything which God has revealed, as it is more certain than any other thing. Thus, he is similar to St. Thomas Aquinas and other religious philosophers who also made reason surrender to the authority of revelation”⁽³²⁾.

Thus, Descartes has, in explicit terms, raised revelation above reason considering his beliefs and faith as “acts of will and not reason. He, thus, reverted to the middle ages theology, relinquishing rational philosophy. The domain of reason, in this way, did not extend beyond philosophical facts. The religious facts, which lead to heaven, as he says in the first part of his discourse, are above the grasp of reason. It is not wise to leave them to our feeble rational deductions since they were revealed in an extraordinary way by heaven, i.e., revealed by God to whoever He selects of His worshippers.”⁽³³⁾

What is the nature of the evidence which proves that this revelation is divine? Descartes does not ask himself. Neither does he resort to any criteria of historical

criticism which examine what is passed down by ancestors to posterity to verify its historical credibility and originality.

Descartes sets the base of rational practice in the first rule of his method, but then he overrides this rule and others with the rule of infallible Christian revelation. This has led to negating his rational method in which he called for discarding all thoughts based on whatever authority, using the intuitive measure to determine right and truth.

Nevertheless, he accepts the authority of Christian faith, taking the beliefs of Christianity as truth not to be doubted since it is beyond the grasp of reason. Descartes says, “We must believe everything which God has revealed, even though it may be beyond our grasp.”⁽³⁴⁾ This is

interpreted by him as follows:

Hence, if God happens to reveal to us something about himself or others which is beyond the natural reach of our mind - such as the mystery of the Incarnation or of the Trinity - we will not refuse to believe it, despite the fact that we do not clearly understand it. And we will not be at all surprised that there is much, both in the immeasurable nature of God and in the things created by him, which is beyond our mental capacity⁽³⁵⁾.

Thus, Descartes, who claimed in his method that he would not accept anything as true unless it was clear and distinct, called for establishing non-rational and vague thought on the pretext that it is not strange to see in God's nature and acts many things that are beyond our comprehension.

Descartes did not ask himself here, as a philosopher who upholds rationalism, what is the nature of the proof that these beliefs actual express the nature of God? And what is the proof of the truth of revelation as divine?

Ironically, Descartes does not make clear and distinct thinking a measure of the truth of Christian revelation, but he makes these beliefs the measure of the truth or falsity of thought in all the points that revelation dealt with. Things regarding which there is no revelation are given to mature reason rejecting the inconsiderate judgments of childhood and the testimony of the senses. We should avoid the prejudices of the senses, and possess so great evidence that we cannot doubt of their truth⁽³⁶⁾. Descartes says,

Divine authority must be put

before our own perception; but, that aside, the philosopher should give his assent only to what he has perceived⁽³⁷⁾.

The dominance of revelation is further confirmed as he says,

But above all else we must impress on our memory the overriding rule that whatever God has revealed to us must be accepted as more certain than anything else. And although the light of reason may, with the utmost clarity and evidence, appear to suggest something different, we must still put our entire faith in divine authority rather than in our own judgment⁽³⁸⁾.

Accordingly, for Descartes, religious truth is above rational truth which is of no value unless in the domain of the facts regarding which there is no revelation. The rational truth for him will even

lose its validity if it contradicts religious truth. Descartes here does not show as a modern philosopher; he rather takes us back to the theological tendency of the middle ages.

It may be said that a philosopher such as Ibn Rushd (Averroës, 1126 - 1198) was more expressive of the spirit of the modern times as he gave priority to reason: if a contradiction arises between reason and revelation, revelation is to be interpreted in a manner that agrees with reason. In so doing, he resorts to “transferring the literal meaning of the text into a metaphorical one following the convention of the Arabs where they gave a thing the name of another which is similar to it, causative of it, dependent on it, comparable to it, and so on.”⁽³⁹⁾

Among the aspects of sidestepping his rational method

which, he chose to arrive at certainty, is evasion of applying the second step of analysis, the third of synthesis and moving from the simple to the complex. He evades application of these on what he considers divine judgments as expressed in the Bible. **He did not ask himself: why did God ask us to believe in things that contradict the mind that He gave to us? Is the mind not a creation of God just as revelation? The question is: Does one act of God contradict another?!**

In this way, Descartes raises some vague, incomprehensible beliefs to a status above that of rational analysis and deduction, adopting traditional justifications and proofs to rationalize taking them for granted. His methodical doubt is not applied here neither is any of the principles of his

methodology.

Descartes considers himself among the believers in God and the immortality of the soul, setting for himself the job of convincing the infidels of the great facts of faith through natural reason as reason is made to save Christian faith. Thus, philosophy reverts to its role of the middle ages as a servant of the Christian religion.

The reason why he resorted to philosophical evidence is that “it seems certain that unbelievers cannot be convinced of the truth of religion, and scarcely even of any moral values, unless these first two truths are proved to them by natural reason.”⁽⁴⁰⁾

Descartes asserts than resorting to reason and philosophizing is but a means to prove the beliefs of faith in order to convince the unbelievers. As for him, he “should believe in

the existence of God because it is taught in the Holy Scriptures, and by the same token that we should believe the Holy Scriptures because we have them from God—since, faith being a gift of God.”⁽⁴¹⁾

The existence of God, Descartes argues, can be proven by proofs that need not be deduced from nothing other than ourselves and our thinking and that “the holy scriptures imply that the knowledge of him is much easier to attain than that of many created things: so easy, in fact, that those who lack it do so by their own fault. This is clear from this passage of Wisdom 13: ‘They have no excuse. For if they are capable of acquiring enough knowledge to be able to investigate the world, how have they been so slow to find its Master?’”⁽⁴²⁾

A scholastic proof, the ontological argument, was used by Descartes to prove the existence of God. This argument was first formulated by Anselm (1033-1109) in his book *Proslogion* (Discourse on the Existence of God, Chapters II & III)—a proof that was criticized by Thomas Aquinas. However, it took another form with Descartes⁽⁴³⁾ who resurrected it after the rejection of Aquinas. This proof keeps alive the scholastic spirit which Descartes claimed he had left behind.

Antoine Arnauld (Le Grand Arnauld) (1612-1694) considered the manner Descartes used to prove the existence of the soul through his *cogito* similar to that of St. Augustine. Explaining this point, Émile Bréhier says, “When the theologians knew of the *cogito* of Descartes, Arnauld did not miss

the chance to remark that Saint Augustine had said the same thing. He made use of the idea of *Si fallor, sum* (I err, therefore I am) to escape from scepticism. More than that, in his book *On the Trinity*, Augustine used it to show that the soul is spiritual and distinct from the body.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Hence, St. Augustine had used the idea before Descartes, according to Arnauld, to prove the existence of the soul, but historians differ on how original Descartes was in this issue and on the degree of similarity between the two⁽⁴⁵⁾.

However, When Arnauld revealed the points of similarity and the link between Descartes and Saint Augustine, he paved the way for Christian Cartesianism as would be adopted later by *la Société de l'Oratoire*. This society meant to face the Protestant Reformation with a counter reformation that aimed at

renovating Catholicism from within and rejecting the mundane conducts which Protestantism wished to introduce into the clergy. In 1611 in Paris, Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (1575 –1629) founded of this society which was previously established in Rome in 1564 as *la Congrégation de l'Oratoire* by Saint Philippe Néri⁽⁴⁶⁾.

In this context, the idea of the duality of soul and body and how they are distinct in Descartes' thought can also be traced back to scholasticism. He inherited the idea and gave it classic expression in Latin scholastic terms⁽⁴⁷⁾. Moreover, he considered the interaction between mind and body a mystery. In a letter to Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia, who found refuge in Holland after her father the king of Bohemia was dethroned, Descartes postulated that this interaction is a mystery⁽⁴⁸⁾.

Later philosophers severely criticized his position on the relation between soul and body—the mind-body problem. A. F. Whitehead argued that the Cartesian separation between them is arbitrary with no philosophical justification as he presented no reason for his rejection of the concept of one universal substance, whether material or spiritual⁽⁴⁹⁾. Descartes failed to find a link between body and soul, or matter and mind; “the distinction between the two substances may have made Descartes fail dismally in solving the problem of the unity of soul and body”⁽⁵⁰⁾. Whitehead argues, “The chief error of René Descartes was the conception of matter as “vacuous actuality,” as wholly devoid of experience, which makes the body’s ability to interact with the mind utterly mysterious”⁽⁵¹⁾.

Is the Descartes who spoke of the duality of mind and body, or soul and matter, and failed to find a link between them the same Descartes who does not accept what is not clear and distinct?! Even when he said that the pineal gland is the place of interaction, he did not mention how this interaction occurs. Thus the essence of this interaction remains mysterious and accepted, nevertheless, by Descartes! The question poses itself again: Does rationalism, the philosophy of what is clear and distinct, accept mysteries?

Accepting an enigmatic theory, such as the dichotomy of soul and body while being ignorant of how they interact, seems consistent with accepting, on another level, the authority of Church clergy over philosophical judgments.

Descartes asked the Christians theologians to correct his errors, considering them the source of higher knowledge. It evidently strikes the attention that at the end of his *Principles of Philosophy* (which was designed partly for use as a theological textbook.)⁽⁵²⁾, he says,

Nevertheless, mindful of my own weakness, I make no firm pronouncements, but submit all these opinions to the authority of the Catholic Church and the judgement of those wiser than myself⁽⁵³⁾.

Descartes showed his *Meditations* first to a young Dutch theologian, Johan de Kater. Then, in late 1640, he sent this work to Father Mersenne (1588-1648) with Kater's objections and Descartes' replies (first objections). His purpose was to make Mersenne show the *Meditations* to the

theologians in order that he may consult them on the book and to discover what can be altered, corrected or supplemented before the book is made available to the public⁽⁵⁴⁾. Father Mersenne used to defend Descartes so vehemently that he was called "the ambassador in Paris of M. Descartes". He was also the advocate of Galileo against the traditional Aristotelian theologians⁽⁵⁵⁾.

When Descartes published *Principles of Philosophy*, he was keen on securing the approval of his old Jesuit teachers since their position made them more than others capable of spreading a philosophy different from that of Aristotle. Descartes' successive statements in his books or letters show that his metaphysics embody the Christian commitment to use reason to combat the denials of the heretics and atheists. This discloses the fact that Descartes had joined

the camp of fighting the heretics and atheists as he meant to continue, in the domain of thought, the efforts exerted by his grandfather, Pierre Descartes, in the military field in the religious wars⁽⁵⁶⁾.

This is confirmed by the fact that Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle asked Descartes to support the Christian creed with philosophical proofs within the campaign of confronting the heretics and the atheists. He also encouraged him to continue his writings as he saw them supporting the religious position of *la Société de l'Oratoire*. Indeed, Donald A. Cress mentions that Descartes' style of life before 1628 was abandoned as Descartes started to lead a different way of life through the encouragement of Cardinal de Bérulle, and decided to see his

program through completion. "He left France to avoid the glamour and the social life; he renounced the distractions in which he could easily lose himself and forget what he knew to be his true calling"⁽⁵⁷⁾. The aim of these writings was to accomplish the task entrusted to him by Cardinal de Bérulle before his seclusion in Holland-the task being the support of the Christian creed with philosophical proofs within the campaign of confronting the heretics and the atheists.

For this purpose, the treatise *Meditations on First Philosophy: In which the existence of God and the immortality of the soul are demonstrated* (completed in 1640 and published in 1641) occupied a high place in the intellectual defense of the principles of the Christian creed⁽⁵⁸⁾. This was the will of Descartes and what he frequently reiterated saying that he

advocated the “cause of God” «*cause de Dieu* », which is not out of place since he was the disciple of the movement of the Jesuits who exerted great efforts in resisting the Protestant Reformation and aimed at effecting a renovation within the Catholic Church.

Reading the life of Descartes, it can be deduced that he was filled with fear of the Church clergy. Henry More said his nature was corrupted by the fear of the Church. He was afraid he would be subjected to what Galileo endured; his trial in Rome dismayed and horrified him⁽⁵⁹⁾. Therefore, out of fear of the power of the clergy, Descartes presented himself as an ally of the Church; he dedicated his *Meditations on First Philosophy* “To these wisest and most distinguished men, the Dean and Doctors of the holy Faculty of Theology at the

University of Paris”⁽⁶⁰⁾.

This does not mean that fear alone is the explanation of Descartes' attitude towards the Church clergy. He was a believer in Christianity since his childhood and “his keenness to ingratiate himself with the clergy was criticized by some of his biographers. One of the aspects of his adherence to the religious tradition is the prayers he offered to God an Virgin Mary and the pledge he took to do pilgrimage to the Catholic most beloved shrine Notre-Dame de Lorette in Italy when, on 10 November 1619, he discovered the rules of a new admirable science (*une science admirable*)”⁽⁶¹⁾.

In the opening Letter of Dedication in the introduction to *Meditations on First Philosophy*, he considers himself a follower of

Pope Leo X who “explicitly enjoins Christian philosophers to refute their [the unbelievers’] arguments and to make every effort to prove the truth.”⁽⁶²⁾

However, Descartes suffered some persecution at the hands of Dutch theologians, but that was because they considered the literal meanings of scholasticism and the beliefs of the Bible as one, confusing Aristotle with the Bible. He was aware that the opposition of these theologians arose from this mix-up of Aristotelian thought and scholasticism on the one hand and the Bible on the other⁽⁶³⁾.

In his letter to Father Mersenne in March 1641, Descartes states,

So I have decided not to keep silent on this matter, and to fight with their own weapons the people who confound Aristotle with the Bible and abuse the authority of

the Church in order to vent their passions - I mean the people who had Galileo condemned. ... I am confident I can show that none of the tenets of their philosophy accords with the Faith so well as my doctrines⁽⁶⁴⁾.

To be noticed also is the more formal statement in his letter to Father Dinet published in the second edition of the *Meditations*:

As far as theology is concerned, since one truth can never be in conflict with another, it could be impious to fear that any truths discovered in philosophy could be in conflict with the truths of faith. Indeed, I insist that there is nothing relating to religion which cannot be equally well or even better explained by means of my principles than can be done by those which are commonly accepted⁽⁶⁵⁾.

Although the theological base is obvious in Descartes' thought, his philosophical system does not include the Seven Sacraments⁽⁶⁶⁾; nor does it include mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Crucifixion. However, his philosophy proved the major beliefs of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. He may have found it hard to rationally justify inclusion of specific Christian and Catholic beliefs in the structure of a philosophical system that claims to uphold rationalism as a methodology.

Nevertheless, Descartes never admitted that his specific Christian beliefs contradict reason; he rather accepted them as divine blessings that are beyond the grasp of our minds on their ordinary level. He says,

Hence, if God happens to reveal to us something about himself or others which is beyond the natural reach of our mind - such as the mystery of the Incarnation or of the Trinity - we will not refuse to believe it, despite the fact that we do not clearly understand it. And we will not be at all surprised that there is much, both in the immeasurable nature of God and in the things created by him, which is beyond our mental capacity⁽⁶⁷⁾.

Furthermore, he persistently asserted that no philosophical truth in his doctrine can negate a revealed Christian belief (which is the common relation between faith and reason in Thomism). Therefore when a theologian criticizes his theory⁽⁶⁸⁾ about matter as contradicting the specific Christian creed concerning transubstantiation (the whole substance of the bread and the wine

changes into the substance of the body and blood of Christ when consecrated in the Eucharist) as a real transmutation, he hurries to exert his utmost efforts to prove that his theory is compatible with the creed.

**** God and the Devil:**

two religious mechanisms in Descartes' thought

It can be said that the two terms "God the Savior" and "Satan the deceiver" are essential components of the structure of the Christian dogma as is the case in most religions.

As regards the concept of Satan, the Christian faith cannot be consistent with its own system of beliefs without developing the hypothesis of the existence of a cunning devil that has been playing a major role since the beginning of human history-trying

to set man astray from the right path. Jesuit Father Xavier Léon-Dufour says, "Under the names 'Satan' (Hebrew meaning *adversary*) and 'Diabolos' (Greek meaning *slanderer*), the Bible refers to an invisible personal entity which is apparent only through its acts and influence: this happens either through other creatures' activities (demons of impure spirits) or through temptation. Anyway, the Bible, different in this case from late Judaic period conception and most old Oriental writings, is very succinct on this, limiting its mention to guiding us to the existence of such entity and its deceit in order to show us how to protect ourselves"⁽⁶⁹⁾.

As for Descartes, he presumes the existence of a devil as a personal entity, not visible in itself, but appears in act and

influence with an ability to deceive our senses and deceive our perception. John H. Hick quotes Descartes as saying, "Perhaps to go to the ultimate of doubt, there is an all-powerful malicious demon who not only deludes our senses but also tampers with our minds"⁽⁷⁰⁾. The possibility of the existence of a malicious demon that has power over our minds "undermines all proofs since that demon can (by tampering with our memories) make us believe an argument to be valid that is in fact not valid"⁽⁷¹⁾.

At the beginnings of the modern times, Descartes raised the flag of rationalism, as he is seen by many, but he could not free himself and his thoughts from the captivity of the religious view. He set forth a philosophical view that cannot be consistent in its internal methodical structure as it had to

incorporate the assumption of the existence of this malicious demon, Descartes says,

I will therefore suppose that, not God, who is perfectly good and the source of truth, but some evil spirit, supremely powerful and cunning, has devoted all his efforts to deceiving me. I will think that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds, and all external things are no different from the illusions of our dreams, and that they are traps he has laid for my credulity; I will consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, and no senses, but yet as falsely believing that I have all these; I will obstinately cling to these thoughts, and in this way, if indeed it is not in my power to discover any truth, yet certainly to the best of my ability and determination I will take care not to give my assent to anything

false, or to allow this deceiver, however powerful and cunning he may be, to impose upon me in any way⁽⁷²⁾.

This text illustrates the presence of the concept of the devil in the structure of the Cartesian thought; he presumes the existence of a malicious demon (an evil spirit or *un mauvais génie*) that has all-powerful authority over our minds and can tamper with our memories so that we can believe an argument valid while it is not valid. Descartes, with this position, reflects a component of the Christian creed that believes in the existence of a malicious demon that plays a major role in deluding man.

How can man overcome the devil in Christianity or in Cartesian philosophy?

Although the Christian faith

sees the devil as a horrid spirit armed with cunning, deception and persuasions, it can be defeated by union with Christ through faith and prayers. Thus, religious salvation can be achieved by defeating the devil through resort to God. This is the Christian method of overcoming the devil's schemes, but what is the Cartesian position?

Descartes' stance on the manner of defeating the devil is suspicious; some of his texts express a genuine philosophical position, but others simply express a Christian position. How? It appears that the mechanism of philosophical escape is based in "thinking" as Descartes says,

But I convinced myself that there was nothing at all in the world, no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies. Did I therefore not also

convince myself that I did not exist either? No: certainly I did exist, if I convinced myself of something.-But there is some deceiver or other, supremely powerful and cunning, who is deliberately deceiving me all the time.- Beyond doubt then, I also exist, if he is deceiving me; and he can deceive me all he likes, but he will never bring it about that I should be nothing as long as I think I am something. So that, having weighed all these considerations sufficiently and more than sufficiently, I can finally decide that this proposition, 'I am, I exist', whenever it is uttered by me, or conceived in the mind, is necessarily true⁽⁷³⁾.

This represents the first principle of philosophy that Descartes seeks. It is thus what he argues is the essence of his epistemology. However, is "thinking" alone the means of escape,

or does it need a divine guarantee? Hence, the philosophical solution in itself is not possible unless religious salvation is accomplished first.

Initially, Descartes uses clear thinking as a mechanism that cannot be deceived to deduce the existence of God, but, on the other hand, he depends on the true God who will not allow the devil to manipulate the manner of clear thinking-God prevents the malicious demon from playing tricks on the thinking subject. Descartes states that thinking discovers its own existence in the moment the devil does its act of deceiving the thinker about everything but the act of imagining this-the act of thinking. This piece of knowledge *-I am thinking, therefore, I exist [cogito ergo sum]-* is the first and most certain of all to occur to anyone who philosophizes in an orderly way. The devil can deceive man about everything

except his own existence⁽⁷⁴⁾. This is how Descartes starts, but in other texts of a general absolute nature, many of them in fact, he asserts an intuitive truth that precedes the truth of logical thinking since it guarantees the validity of thinking, with its clarity and distinction, by protecting it against the various factors of deception including the manipulations of the devil. That is to say that thinking primarily requires a guarantor who is the true God who does not deceive. God does not allow the devil to play its tricks on man's thoughts since God is the source of truth and its guarantor. God is the real savior who salvages man from the claws of doubt and has a logical and ontological precedence in the process of moving from doubt to certainty. He is like a bridge on which thought crosses the gap between the two sides. Therefore, the philosophical manner of

survival remains always in need of the religious salvation, which will be clear in perusing some Cartesian texts where Descartes speaks of God as the Supreme Guarantor of truth.

It is noticeable that Descartes, who does not mention the malicious demon in his two dominant books, *Discourse on Method* and *Principles of Philosophy*, reiterates mention of it as one of the factors affecting methodic doubt in his book *Meditations on First Philosophy*. The malicious demon is not only mentioned in the context of the causes of doubt, but it is also brought up in the context of seeking certainty as if no philosophical survival is possible without overcoming this demon. This indicates that the concept of the devil as a symbol of evil—evil

here being doubt-is present in the structure of Cartesian thinking.

But for the divine guarantee, Descartes could not have faced the cunning demon and crossed the bridge of doubt. But for the non-deception of God, the Cartesian doubt, fed by the devil, would not have ended. "Descartes' doubt was about to consume itself but for the guarantee of Divine truth"⁽⁷⁵⁾. This is the topic of the following requirement.

****God as the Supreme Guarantor of truth**

The famous Cartesian cogito suggests, in some Cartesian texts, that thought has logical precedence in emergence from the darkness of doubt to the light of certainty⁽⁷⁶⁾. This is evidenced in, for instance, these words, "But we cannot for all that suppose that we, who are having such thoughts, are nothing.

For it is a contradiction to suppose that what thinks does not, at the very time when it is thinking, exist. Accordingly, this piece of knowledge - I am thinking, therefore I exist - is the first and most certain of all to occur to anyone who philosophizes in an orderly way"⁽⁷⁷⁾.

The precedence of thought for Descartes is the most common view of historians of philosophy. However, some argue that there is a circular logic in his discussions about the existence of God and thought. His own contemporaries argued this way; "they have discovered a vicious circle in his logic because we cannot demonstrate the existence of God without trusting ideas that are clear and distinct, and at the same time we cannot trust this evidence unless the existence of God has been demonstrated"⁽⁷⁸⁾. Dave Robinson and Chris Garratt explain this circular reasoning of Descartes in simple

terms, saying,

But what is worse, Descartes' argument is now infamous for being the "Cartesian circle". Descartes uses that which he wishes to prove as one of his premises. You can't guarantee the clear and distinct rule with a truth-telling Deity if you've already claimed that you know he exists because you have a clear and distinct idea of him in your mind. Descartes needs God to guarantee his rule and the rule to guarantee that God exists⁽⁷⁹⁾.

Thus, some scholars use the concept of "circular logic" to attempt an explanation of Descartes' position on thought and God, a position which raises questions of equivocation.

This equivocation remains present in most of the Cartesian texts. If we go back to the

Meditations on First Philosophy, we discover texts with general and absolute nature which necessarily require that the certainty of thought should come as a logical outcome of a certainty concerning the true God; God is the guarantee of the veracity of thought itself. In the first meditation, Descartes says,

But perhaps God has not willed that I should be so cheated, for he is said to be supremely good.-But if it were incompatible with his goodness to have created me such that I am perpetually deceived, it would seem equally inconsistent with that quality to permit me to be sometimes deceived⁽⁸⁰⁾.

In a clear unambiguous manner, Descartes states, "God .. is perfectly good and the source of truth"⁽⁸¹⁾.

Descartes' philosophical dependence

on the Divine guarantee reaches its highest point when he argues that it is impossible to arrive at certainty without knowledge of God's existence and divine truthfulness. He says,

But once I have perceived that God exists, then because I grasped at the same time that everything else depends on him, and that he is no deceiver, and from this deduced that everything I clearly and distinctly perceive is necessarily true...⁽⁸²⁾

This is even further confirmed in *Principles of Philosophy* when he ascertains that "the possession of certain knowledge will not be possible until it has come to know the author of its being"⁽⁸³⁾, and that there is "the sense in which knowledge of all other things depends on the knowledge of God"⁽⁸⁴⁾.

In other texts, however, Descartes asserts the precedence of thought as in saying, "I am thinking, therefore I exist". His cogito is considered a primary truth that is clear and distinct as the devil can stir his doubt in everything except the fact that he exists. Clear and distinct ideas are the two criteria that make no mistake in knowing the right judgments as different from the wrong ones. Descartes considers clarity and distinction two signs that are free of doubt and lead to certainty. John H. Hick says,

Descartes held that we can properly be said to know only truths that are self-evident or that can be reached by logical inferences from self-evident premises⁽⁸⁵⁾.

But what is the source of clarity and distinction?

Descartes does not consider pure thought a source for them; he considers them as springing from a Divine source. The evidence is that in the “Fourth Meditation” (On truth and Falsity), Descartes reaches the conclusion that “every clear and distinct perception is something, and therefore cannot come from nothing, but necessarily derives from God-God, the supremely perfect being, whose nature is incompatible with deception”⁽⁸⁶⁾. Hence, Descartes’ conclusion is that clarity and distinction, as properties of truth, come from God and carry his guarantee.

It is obvious then that the Divine guarantee is present from the first moment in the construction of the Cartesian method, the moment of determining the criterion of certainty. This entails the necessity

of reviewing the validity of Descartes’ statement that the cogito is an established epistemological primary truth that is valid by itself. It is a truth that presumes a previous truth which Descartes mentioned in his “First Meditation” in the context of guarding against doubt. He says it would be “.. incompatible with his goodness to have created me such that I am perpetually deceived”⁽⁸⁷⁾. Therefore, the “Divine guarantee” is not only the pivot of his doctrine, but it is also the pivot of his methodic doubt since overcoming doubt does not occur through thinking alone-thought being insufficient in itself-but it always needs a Divine guarantee of its veracity.

For Descartes, God is not only the guarantor of the validity of thought comprehending itself, but he is also a guarantor of the validity

of thought comprehending the world and things. Thought alone cannot cross the gap between mind and things dug by doubt. Only through the true God can thought cross the gap; man's natural tendency to believe in the existence of things stems from God who does not deceive and not from the senses. Sensations are vague confused ideas while certain knowledge must be clear and distinct. As for the material world as a 'corporeal substance', for Descartes, it is, as a clear and distinct idea, an extension "and in principle all the various properties of matter can be exhibited as 'modes' of extension, i.e. various ways in which something can be extended"⁽⁸⁹⁾. This is an idea that is not known directly through the senses; it is a mental image and as such it is identical to real not imaginary beings, which it cannot be ascertained but through

Divine truth. Descartes says,

But because God is no deceiver, it is altogether plain that he does not transmit these ideas to me immediately, or by the intermediary of some creature, in whom their objective reality is contained not formally but only eminently. For since he has certainly given me no faculty by which I might realize this to be true, but has, on the contrary, endowed me with a strong propensity to believe that these ideas are conveyed by bodily things, I cannot see how, if they were in fact from some other source, it would be possible to think of him except as a deceiver. And therefore bodily things exist⁽⁹⁰⁾.

Descartes cannot give up the Divine guarantee when he distinguishes between the dreams

man sees in his sleep which do not come from an external source and the representations that come from the outside world when man is awake. Man can ascertain that the second are identical with the external objects not only by resort to the senses, memory, perception and consistency-necessary criteria but no sufficient in themselves, but there is a dire need to have guarantee from the non-deceiving true God. Descartes states,

Nor should I doubt even in the slightest degree of their truth, if after I have summoned all the senses, the memory, and the understanding to join in their examination, none of these reports anything that clashes with the report of the rest. For, from the fact that God is not a deceiver, it follows inescapably that in such cases I am not deceived⁽⁹¹⁾.

For Descartes, God does not only guarantee that man will not go astray in seeing the identical correspondence between representations and objects of the external world, but he also guarantees the truth of eternal truths on which the world is based. Writing to Father Mersenne on 6 May 1630, Descartes states,

As for the eternal truths, I say once more that "they are true or possible only because God knows them as true or possible. They are not known as true by God in any way which would imply that they are true independently of him. ... So we must not say that if God did not exist nevertheless these truths would be true; for the existence of God is the first and the most eternal of all possible truths and the one from which alone all others proceed⁽⁹²⁾.

Therefore, perhaps it can be said

that the certainty of the cogito is not such a robust and well-established principle that is sufficient to develop a complete philosophical system which can traverse a series of truths. In the manner it is presented by Descartes, it is a wobbly base that needs support; that is why Descartes introduced the principle of the true perfect God to fill in the gaps of the cogito. He ended up saying that God is the intellectual principle of the deductive method. In this “deductive enterprise of Descartes, God has had work to do, and was thus included among the principles and subject matter of metaphysics precisely because of his functional contribution to the whole system”⁽⁹³⁾. Without God, certainty, perfect comprehension, deductive richness which is characteristic of the Cartesian metaphysics, have no existence.

It is likely that the cogito is a

sterile principle since it cannot present proof of the existence of the world depending on pure thought. The thinking “I” only functions intermittently; i.e., it does not function in continuous time. Thus it does not have internal duration, which means that memory needs a guarantee. The thinking “I” acquires its certainty when it perceives something in a direct intuitive way at the same moment of perception, but when it moves to something else, the direct perception of the first thing is disrupted, hence the lack of perfect certainty of it. “That I once counted many things as true and certain that I later realized to be false”⁽⁹⁴⁾. Giving an example, Descartes explains,

Thus, for example, when I am considering the nature of a triangle, it certainly appears utterly evident to me (being, as I am, well

versed in the principles of geometry) that its three angles are equal to two right angles; and I cannot not believe this is true, as long as I am concentrating on the proof; but, as soon as I have turned the eye of the mind in a different direction, then however well I remember that I grasped the proof very clearly, I can still easily find myself doubting its truth, if I am ignorant of God. For I can persuade myself that I was so made by nature that I am sometimes deceived in matters which I think I perceive entirely clearly, especially since I remember counting many things as true and certain that later, when guided by other reasons, I judged to be false⁽⁹⁵⁾.

Accordingly, the thinking subject needs sufficient guarantee so that it can proceed to construct the components of the system-the

sufficient guarantee is the no deceiver God as Descartes say,

But once I have perceived that God exists, then because I grasped at the same time that everything else depends on him, and that he is no deceiver, and from this deduced that everything I clearly and distinctly perceive is necessarily true⁽⁹⁶⁾.

Then, in clear non-ambiguous terms, Descartes states that the base of certainty in knowledge is the no deceiver God and not pure thought,

And so I plainly see that the certitude and truth of all knowledge [scientiae] depends on the knowledge [cognitione] of the true God alone: so much so, that before I had discovered this knowledge, I could have no perfect knowledge [scire] of anything else at all. But now innumerable truths, concerning both, on the one hand, God himself and other intellectual things

and, on the other, the whole of this bodily nature which is the object of pure mathematics, can be plainly known to me with certainty⁽⁹⁷⁾.

Therefore, the metaphysical divine dimension precedes the cogito. Prof. Yehya Hweidi comments, "Descartes has reached the truth of existence and the truth of God through the discovery of two important theories: eternal truths and continuous creation-both led Descartes to believe in God. All that occurred before he discovered the cogito. The two theories showed the world as not self-sufficient. Hence, the existence of a Creator has become a necessary precondition-all that preceded the discovery of the cogito"⁽⁹⁸⁾.

Divine presence in physics and mathematics

The term "theological" may refer to "theology" (the study of the

nature of God and religious truth as in Christian theology), or it may refer to an approach that interprets natural phenomena as caused by supernatural or divine power or powers as in the theological stage in the theory of Auguste Comte. The theological stage is the first in the development of human understanding of events in the world. The second stage is the metaphysical; the third is the scientific⁽⁹⁹⁾. In the theological or religious stage, the human mind "sees phenomena as products of the direct and continuous action of supernatural agents, a few or many, whose arbitrary intervention explains all the apparent anomalies of the universe"⁽¹⁰⁰⁾. Comte studied "the three essential forms of the 'theological stage' and of the theological and military system which correspond to fetishism, polytheism and monotheism"⁽¹⁰¹⁾.

In this context, the term “theological” is used to denote the interpretation of phenomena by supernatural causes not through scientific natural laws. This does not consider the theological stage as a past stage that has been superseded by the following stage as in Comte’s presentation; the theological interpretation can be present in the thinking of any philosopher even in the modern time when such a thinker introduces the supernatural divine dimension in his physical and mathematical theories. It may be obvious that this use of the term does not mean agreement with Comte’s views. It is a mere use of the term with some and not all of its denotations. If Comte differentiates between the theological, the metaphysical and the scientific, the researcher does not adopt this radical division

since the theological dimension can be present in the metaphysical thought or even in scientific thought as in the case of Descartes. Therefore, this research does not project all that Comte includes in the theological stage on the physics and mathematics of Descartes. There is only use of some of these denotations in explaining Descartes’ scientific position.

If it is known that divinity rests at the heart of the Cartesian metaphysics and represents its pivot, can it be said that since Descartes sees metaphysics as preceding natural science he is thus considered more theological than the philosophers of the middle ages who made natural science precede metaphysics?

Conventions in the history of philosophy used to put the

physical sciences before metaphysics following the ordering of Aristotle's books arranged by Andronicus of Rhodes in around 60 BC. However, when Descartes meant to establish a universal science that depends on the unity of knowledge, he reversed the order as he made metaphysics the origin and starting point of all sciences; hence metaphysics took its place before physics. For him it represents the introduction that makes the development of the sciences, including physics, possible⁽¹⁰²⁾. One of the meanings of this set-up is that Descartes refused to recognize complete independence of natural science and saw metaphysics as playing a basic role in physics.

This meaning is emphasized in the Cartesian text as in the introduction to *Principles of*

Philosophy where he explains the relation among the sciences in the context of speaking about the human who seeks guidance and truth. He says that such a man

should begin to tackle true philosophy in earnest. The first part of philosophy is metaphysics, which contains the principles of knowledge, including the explanation of the principal attributes of God, the non-material nature of our souls and all the clear and distinct notions which are in us. The second part is physics, where, after discovering the true principles of material things, we examine the general composition of the entire universe and then, in particular, the nature of this earth and all the bodies which are most commonly found upon it, such as air, water, fire, magnetic ore and other minerals. Next we need to examine individually the nature of plants, of animals and, above all, of

man, so that we may be capable later on of discovering the other sciences which are beneficial to man. Thus the whole of philosophy is like a tree. The roots are metaphysics, the trunk is physics, and the branches emerging from the trunk are all the other sciences, which may be reduced to three principal ones, namely medicine, mechanics and morals⁽¹⁰³⁾.

Reviewing Descartes' physics, we see how he deduced the laws of matter from his metaphysics and not from the objective external world. He meant to reach *a priori* knowledge of all the earth bodies of all forms and essences. Therefore, his natural laws are extracted from a conception of matter through pure mental deduction and not extracted from matter itself depending on experience.

It is even more evident that the

theological aspect is present in the Cartesian science in his belief that the laws of nature are subject to the will of God, this will which is absolutely constant suffering no change. As Descartes argues that "God always acts in the same way and consequently always produces substantially the same effect... God is immutable,"⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ and since "God has created extension and movement with a constant quantity"⁽¹⁰⁵⁾, nature moves according to rules set by God. Descartes says, "I will set out here two or three of the principal rules by which we must believe God to cause the nature of this new world to act"⁽¹⁰⁶⁾. These rules are:

First rule: Everything stays the way it is as long as nothing changes it⁽¹⁰⁷⁾. In Descartes' words: "if the part has some size, it will never become smaller unless others divide

it; if it is round or square, it will never change that shape unless others force it to; if it is brought to rest in some place it will never depart from that place unless others drive it out; and if it has once begun to move it will always continue with an equal force until others stop or retard it”⁽¹⁰⁸⁾.

Second rule: this is the conservation of momentum as follows: “that when one of these bodies pushes another it cannot give the other any motion except by losing as much of its own motion at the same time; nor can it take away any of the other’s motion unless its own is increased by the same amount”⁽¹⁰⁹⁾.

Third rule: this is straight motion as follows: “when a body is moving, even if its motion most often takes place along a curved line and, as we said above, it can

never make any movement that is not in some way circular; nevertheless each of its parts individually tends always to continue moving along a straight line. And so the action of these parts, that is the inclination they have to move, is different from their motion”⁽¹¹⁰⁾.

Descartes argues that the personal God is the first cause of motion⁽¹¹¹⁾. That is to say he interprets motion not by attributing it to natural laws but to a theological metaphysical conception, which contradicts the principles on which modern science has been established, i.e., setting the theological conceptions aside. In the same context, Descartes deduced from the concept of God’s immutability that he is the first cause of motion-God conserves momentum in the universe and he sets three constant

laws for motion based on the fact that God, its Creator, is immutable.

James Collins explains this Cartesian concept saying that divine immutability means that God's existence is not subject to change and he always acts in the same manner towards the created world. There is a primary certainty that momentum is conserved. Since the conservation of momentum is rooted in the idea of the immutability of God himself, it is deduced that the law of inertia is proved as a general law of nature or a secondary cause for all partial motion of actual bodies⁽¹¹²⁾.

Thus, Descartes believes that it is necessarily imperative to deduce the constancy of the laws of motion from the immutability of God. However, this is not true since there is no imperative necessary relation between the

two. "Does the immutability of God prevent change from taking place in nature? Who knows: God may will things to follow a set of laws at a certain time then wills them to follow another set at another time"⁽¹¹³⁾.

Not only does God, according to Descartes, have a role in the first act of creation, and a role in the first creation of motion, but he also maintains creation and motion and gives them permanence "whereby he preserves things in existence, once created, and without which they would simply collapse into nothingness"⁽¹¹⁴⁾. Descartes also says that the third rule, mentioned above, depends on "God's conserving everything by a continuous action, and consequently on His conserving it not as it may have been some time earlier but precisely as it is at the very instant

He conserves it⁽¹¹⁵⁾.

The dominance of the theological metaphysical conceptions of physics led Descartes to errors, one of which is Descartes' claim that Galileo's theory of falling objects was wrong since he did not know the real first principles of nature, meaning theological metaphysical principles, one of which is the absolute immutability of God⁽¹¹⁶⁾. In fact the mistake is not Galileo's; the mistake lies with Descartes who imposed an *a priori* metaphysical principle on a purely natural issue.

What is confusing in Descartes' philosophy is his assertion that God has absolute power to reverse facts, which stands in contradiction with theses of constancy and necessity on which every scientific law is based. However, Descartes reverts

to imposing, on mathematical and physical laws, a sort of necessity guaranteed by God with his stable and immutable will. If God's power is infinite and absolutely free, he commits himself, on creating the world according to the laws of necessity, to his own truths and laws and does not start to change them later. Descartes consecrates belief in God's absolute omnipotence and complete freedom, and at the same time consecrates scientific certainty based on the constancy of laws and facts.

Related to Descartes' theory of God's creation of eternal truths is another which is continuous creation which argues that creation did not occur just once at the beginning of existence; it is rather a continuous act, present in every moment through God's conservation of beings. Descartes

says, “if there were any bodies in the world, or even any intelligences, or other natures that were not wholly perfect, their existence depended on his power in such a way that they could not subsist without him for a single moment”⁽¹¹⁷⁾. The act of creation is itself the act of conservation and in Descartes’ words, “But this is certain, and an opinion commonly received among theologians, that the action by which he now sustains it is the same with that by which he originally created it”⁽¹¹⁸⁾.

Descartes proves creation or continuous conservation through looking into the nature of time which is not united with separate independent moments. The existence of a being now does not necessarily guarantee its existence later, which necessitates divine interference to conserve the

existence of this being. This temporal proof is mentioned by Descartes in more than one of his books. In the *Meditation* for instance, he says,

For since all the time of a life can be divided into innumerable parts, of which each particular one in no way depends on the rest, it does not follow from the fact that I existed not long ago that I have to exist now, unless some cause, so to speak, creates me again at this moment, or in other words, conserves me in being. For it is clear, if one considers the nature of time, that the same power and action is required to conserve anything, whatever it may be, in being during the individual moments in which it continues to exist, as would be needed to create the same thing from the start if it did not yet exist⁽¹¹⁹⁾.

The same proof is also mentioned in the *Principle of Philosophy* where he says,

For the nature of time is such that its parts are not mutually dependent, and never coexist. Thus, from the fact that we now exist, it does not follow that we shall exist a moment from now, unless there is some cause - the same cause which originally produced us - which continually reproduces us, as it were, that is to say, which keeps us in existence. For we easily understand that there is no power in us enabling us to keep ourselves in existence. We also understand that he who has so great a power that he can keep us in existence, although we are distinct from him, must be all the more able to keep himself in existence; or rather, he requires no other being to keep him in existence, and hence, in short, is God⁽¹²⁰⁾.

Descartes considers this look into the nature of time is a proof of the existence of God since “The fact that our existence has duration is sufficient to demonstrate the existence of God.”⁽¹²¹⁾ He further asserts, “It will be impossible for anything to obscure the clarity of this proof, if we attend to the nature of time or of the duration of things”⁽¹²²⁾.

The theory of continuous creation in the field of physics was introduced by Descartes to differentiate between notion which is determined geometrically and the moving power which is attributed to God by Descartes. He used the theory to assert his view that “nature is not gods” which means that the world has no self-independence and no real truth. Nature is mere spatial extension with no self-power or initiative; neither does it have ontological depth.

In this manner, the presence of a major biblical belief in the Cartesian philosophy is obvious. Descartes' theory of continuous creation is the belief expounded in Genesis about God's continuous act of creation and conservation—the core of the Christian dogma. “The story of creation as told in Genesis is that God created the universe and did not leave it alone to itself as claimed by some philosophers. His power is still active in the universe: creative, running and sustaining”⁽¹²³⁾.

Complete agreement is apparent here between the Cartesian theory and the biblical belief. However, this shows radical difference between the Cartesian theory and the Aristotelian theory. Aristotle spoke of the first cause as if there were no connection between God and creation outside the series of

causes and effects. For the universe, God is the First Mover who is unmoved; he first created the universe then stood apart above creation. For Aristotle, God is in a perpetual state of thinking and he is thinking eternally of himself, the Supreme Being. Hence, his life is described as a ‘thinking of thinking’⁽¹²⁴⁾.

Both Descartes and the Bible, on the other hand, also reject the theory of the unity of existence, pantheism, whether cosmic (that the universe or nature is identical with divinity) or acosmic (which denies the existence of the world asserting the real existent, God)⁽¹²⁵⁾. God, for Descartes and the Bible, is not the universe with its creatures, and the created world is not God. The Cartesian and the biblical views see God as creating the world out of his own free will;

creation is not, as Plotinus says, emanation from God, which is like self-generation, coming out of him as inevitable necessity, “unconscious production, involuntary, due to a sort of abundance, like this of a spring that flows. The living being, the spring, and light do not lose anything when they flow, but they keep in themselves all reality; this is what has been called, in a used metaphor which is not quite just, the theory of emanation. It should have been called, following Plotinus, the procession, the production, or the proceeding ahead coming out of the principle”⁽¹²⁶⁾.

The theological dimension in the Cartesian thought is flagrantly obvious in his position on mathematical facts and natural laws. In his letter to Father Mersenne on 15 April 1630, Descartes wrote,

“The mathematical truths which you call eternal have been laid down by God”⁽¹²⁷⁾.

Natural laws, like all creatures, depend entirely on God as Descartes argues, in the same letter to Mersenne, “Indeed to say that these truths are independent of God is to talk of him as if he were Jupiter or Saturn and to subject him to the Styx and the Fates”⁽¹²⁸⁾. That is if these laws did not depend on God, our conception of God will be like the ancient Greek conception of Zeus (Jupiter⁽¹²⁹⁾) where God is subject to fate⁽¹³⁰⁾. Hence, Descartes asserts emphatically that it was God who created these laws in nature just like a monarch passing laws in his monarchy. Descartes says,

It will be said that if God had established these truths he could change them as a king changes his

laws. To this the answer is: Yes he can, if his will can change. 'But I understand them to be eternal and unchangeable.'-I make the same judgement about God. 'But his will is free.' - Yes, but his power is beyond our grasp. In general we can assert that God can do everything that is within our grasp but not that he cannot do what is beyond our grasp. It would be rash to think that our imagination reaches as far as his power⁽¹³¹⁾.

The Jesuit influence on Descartes appears here clearly. He imbibed this influence from the religious basis of the founder of the Jesuit Order St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) which is that "Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God"; man is thus unable to grasp the secrets of God and his omnipotence; he is, nevertheless, a free being that can

serve and glorify God⁽¹³²⁾.

For Descartes then, God is the creator of eternal truths, and, at the same time, he guarantees that we perceive them correctly. Moreover, he is free and able to create them in a different way and not obliged to create them the way they are or any other way. Descartes says,

You ask also what necessitated God to create these truths; and I reply that he was free to make it not true that all the radii of the circle are equal - just as free as he was not to create the world⁽¹³³⁾.

It seems that Descartes understands the relation between God and things in the manner of the Islamic Ash'ariyyah⁽¹³⁴⁾ theology if the comparison is plausible.

Therefore, if Descartes saw "Mathematics as the key to knowledge"⁽¹³⁵⁾ he did not see it at

all as a purely rational key since this key is not in man's possession and it is not based on the guarantees of thought alone. The key is with God who created it and guarantees its veracity and usefulness.

Descartes does not only base the mathematical and natural sciences on the concept of divinity, but he also endows this base with divine authority that may destabilize Cartesian rationalism. He describes whoever objects to his interpretations as an objector to the acts and order of God. It is as if Descartes subscribes to the mechanism of accusing the opponents of being infidels—a fundamental intellectual device of theological thought. In a definitive way, Descartes opines “those who think the causal principle of nature, as we see it, is invalid object to God's acts and

management since this means they hold God accountable for creating us defective and liable to fall in error even if we use well God's gift of mind and perception”⁽¹³⁶⁾.

Conclusion

Thus, equivocation and entanglement with religious thought has led the researcher to review Descartes' philosophical position in general. This reveals that Descartes' method appears to be rational and logical, considering the rules he sets for his method, which are rational rules. However, a study of his doctrine discloses that Descartes has contradicted the rules of his own method. The logic that controls the Cartesian method seems to be a rational one in most cases, but theological conceptions exist in the very structure of the method. It can be said that this

method is more controlled by theological thought than by rational logic.

Thus, the rational masks Descartes used to conceal his doctrine and metaphysical system have fallen.

In his method and system, there is an overwhelming presence of theological conceptions, such as divine guarantee, deceiving devil, continuous creation theory, the eminent divine presence in physics and mathematics, duality of body and soul, total acceptance of revelation, non-critical espousal of beliefs, submission to Church clergy and his continual assertion that no philosophical truth in his doctrine could be in contradiction with revealed Christian beliefs—the well-known relation between revelation and reason in Thomism—and all other ideas which this piece of

research attempted to review because of the equivocation in the meaning of the Cartesian texts. Has this piece of research been able to understand these Cartesian texts?

Jacques Derrida may have the answer. He says, “A text is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game. A text remains, moreover, forever, imperceptible. Its law and its rules are not, however, harbored in the inaccessibility of a secret; it is simply that they can never be booked, in the *present*, in anything that could rigorously be called perception. And hence, perpetually and essentially, they run the risk of being definitively lost. Who will ever know of such disappearance? The dissimulation of the woven texture can in any case take

centuries to undo the web: a web that envelops a web, undoing the web for centuries¹³⁷.

Therefore, each reading is not absolute, each interpretation is relative, and each attempt to perceive the text is not final. Nevertheless, attempts at reading and rereading should continue.

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Notas

- 1- André Lalande, *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*, Paris, Presse Universitaire de France, 1926
- 2- Équivoque, 1. adj. A. En parlant d'un mot ou d'une expressions : qui a plusieurs sens. B. Qui peut être expliquée de plusieurs manières différentes; par suite de nature incertaine, qui ne peut être rangé

dans une espèce bien définie. 2. Subst. A. Mot, expression ou phrase prêtant à plusieurs interprétations. B. Caractère d'être équivoque, équivocité.

3- Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 124.

4- As used by Dr. Khaleel Ahmed Khaleel in his translation of Lalande, *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*: أندريه لالاند، معجم مصطلحات الفلسفة التقنية والنقدية، مترجم إلى العربية تحت عنوان "موسوعة لالاند الفلسفية"، ترجمة د. خليل أحمد خليل، بيروت - باريس، دار عويدات، ١٩٩٦، ص ٣٦٠.

As translated by Dr. Muhammad - ٥

Aziz Al-Habbabi: د. محمد عزيز الحبابي، مفاهيم مبهمّة في الفكر العربي المعاصر، القاهرة، دار المعارف، ١٩٩٠، ص ٨.

٦- د. مراد وهبة، المعجم الفلسفي، مصر، دار قباء، ١٩٩٨، ص ٥٨١.

٧- د. محمد مهران، المدخل إلى المنطق

- الصورى، القاهرة، دار قباء، ١٩٩٨. ص١٠١-١٠٢.
- 8- Ibid., p. 102.
- ٩- الشىرازى: أبو إسحاق إبراهيم بن على، اللمع فى أصول الفقه، بىروت، دار الكتب العلمىة، ١٤٠٥هـ، ص ٥٢.
- ١٠- الغزالى: أبو حامد، المستصفى فى علم الأصول، تحقىق محمد عبد السلام عبد الشافى، بىروت دار الكتب العلمىة، ١٤١٣، ط ١، ج ١ / ص ٨٥.
- 11-Ibid.
- ١٢- د. حسن حنفى، قضاىا معاصرة: فى الفكر الغربى المعاصر، الجزء الثانى، بىروت، دار التنوىر، ط ١، ١٩٨٢. ص ١٥٦.
- See: د. حسن حنفى، مقدمة فى علم الاستغراب، القاهرة، الدار الفنیه، ١٩٩١، ص ٢٥٠ وما بعدها.
- ١٣- د. حسن حنفى، قضاىا معاصرة، ج ٢ / ص ١٥٧.
- 14- Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1945, p. 568.
- ١٥- د. حسن حنفى، مقدمة فى علم الاستغراب، ص ٢٥٥.
- 16- D. E. Cooper, *World Philosophies: An Historical Introduction*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, p. 242. And Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary Of Philosophy*, p. 100.
- 17- J. Cottingham, "Introduction" to *Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. vii.
- 18- Several scholars and historians previously confirmed Descartes' support of Christianity, such as Alfred Espinas in his paper "L'idée initiale de la philosophie de Descartes" in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 24 (3): 253 - 278 (1917); Léon Blanchet in his book *Les Antécédents historiques du je pense, donc je suis*, Paris, 1910; and Henri Gouhier's *La pensée*

- religieuse de Descartes, Paris, J. Vrin, 1924.*
- 19- J. Cottingham, *A Descartes Dictionary*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1994, p.62.
- 20- René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, tr. Michael Moriarty, Oxford, OUP, 2008, p.3.
- 21- Ibid., p. 4.
- 22- D. E. Cooper, *World Philosophies*, p.243.
- ٢٣ - ديكارت، التأملات في الفلسفة الأولى، ترجمة د. عثمان أمين، القاهرة، مكتبة الأنجلو المصرية، ١٩٨٠. ص ٣٩.
- 24- Donald A. Cress, "Editor's Preface" To Descartes: *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, Indianapolis/Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company, 3rd Edition, 1993, p. vii.
- 25- Bernard Le Bouyer de Fontenelle, *Œuvres de Fontenelle ; Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes*, Paris, Salmon, Libraire-éditeur 1825 (1^{re} éd. 1688), p. 243.
- 26- J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff and D. Murdoch (Eds.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, Vol. I, p. 51.
- 27- *A Descartes Dictionary*, p. 152.
- 28- René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, Trans. John Veitch, London: J. M. Dent & Sons (Everyman), 1912, pp. 15-16.
- 29- D. E. Cooper, *World Philosophies*, p. 174.
- 30- Émile Bréhier, *Histoire de la philosophie*, Tome I., Paris, Librairie Félix Alcan, 1932. p. 445.
- 31- Descartes expressed this meaning in a definitive way more than once in his *Principles of*

- Philosophy* (J. Cottingham, et alia (Eds.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. I.), as in “We must believe everything which God has revealed, even though it may be beyond our grasp.” (paragraph 25, p. 201) and “Divine authority must be put before our own perception; but, that aside, the philosopher should give his assent only to what he has perceived.” (paragraph 76, p. 221)
- 36-E. A. Burt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980, p. 116.
- 37-Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, p. 221.
- 38-Ibid.
- ٣٩- ابن رشد، فصل المقال فيما ما بين الشريعة والحكمة من الاتصال، تحقيق د. محمد عمارة، بيروت، المؤسسة العربية، ١٩٨١، ط ٢، ص ٣٢.
- ٣٢- توفيق الطويل، قصة الصراع بين الدين والفلسفة، دار النهضة العربية، ط ٣، ١٩٧٩، ص ١٩٢. Also Cf. د. عثمان أمين، ديكارت، القاهرة، مكتبة القاهرة الحديثة، ١٩٦٥، ص ٢٩٢-٢٩٣.
- ٣٣- قصة الصراع بين الدين والفلسفة، ص ١٩٢.
- 34- Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, in J. Cottingham, et alia (Eds.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. I. p. 201.
- 35-Ibid.
- 40-Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 3.
- 41-Ibid.
- 42-Ibid.
- 43-Penelhum, T., *Religion and Rationality*, New York, Random House, 1971, p. 11-12. And Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, p.715.
- 44-Émile Bréhier, p. 61.
- 45- On the extent of the differences or

- similarities between Descartes and Augustine, see: E. L. Allen, *Guide Book to Western Thought*, London, The English Universities Press, 1966, pp. 60-1; Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1945, p. 564; and Émile Bréhier, *Histoire de la philosophie*, Tome II., p. 61.
- 46- See: H. E. Smithers, *A History of The Oratorio*, 3 Vols., London, 1977- 79.
- 47- H. D. Lewis, *Philosophy of Religion*, London, Warwick Lane, 1975, p. 276.
- 48- Anthony Kenny, *Descartes: A Study of His Philosophy*, New York, Random House, 1968, p. 223-4.
- ٤٩ - د.علي عبد المعطي محمد، ألفرد نورث هوإتهد: فلسفته وميتافيزيقاه، الإسكندرية، دار المعرفة الجامعية، ١٩٨٠. ص١٧٣.
- 50- Ibid., p. 174.
- 51- Quinn, Taliaferro et alia, *A Companion To Philosophy of Religion*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2nd ed., 2010, p. 159.
- 52- Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 101.
- 53- J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff and D. Murdoch (Eds.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, Vol. I, p. 291.
- 54- Quoted in Émile Bréhier, op.cit, p. 46.
- 55- Catharine Wilson, "Mersenne", in: *Academic American Encyclopedia*, New Jersey, Arete, 1980, vol. 13, p. 312.
- 56- Cf. Émile Bréhier, op.cit, Tome II., p. 47.
- 57- Cress, D. A., "Editor's Preface" to *Descartes: Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. vii-viii.

- 58- Bréhier traces the beginnings of the intellectual defense of Christianity in the 16th century, i.e., immediately before Descartes. See his book: *Histoire de la philosophie*, Tome II. Bréhier includes the Cartesian metaphysics in the context of this religious apologist movement. However, he then considers this position “mere external aspect of the Cartesian thought” in contrast with the thesis of this research which considers the Cartesian rationalism a mask which Descartes donned to conceal his theological thought behind it. Cf. Émile Bréhier, *Histoire de la philosophie*, Tome II., p. 56.
- 59 - د. توفيق الطويل، قصة الصراع بين الدين والفلسفة، ص ١٩٤.
- 60- Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 3.
- 61 - د. توفيق الطويل، قصة الصراع بين الدين والفلسفة، ص ١٩٣.
- 62- Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 4.
- 63- J. Cottingham, *A Descartes Dictionary*, p. 63.
- 64- J. Cottingham et alia (Eds.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. III, p. 177.
- 65- J. Cottingham et alia (Eds.), *Ibid*, Vol. II, p. 392.
- 66- The Seven Sacraments, in both Catholic and Orthodox creeds are seven particular sacraments which have become traditional and are enumerated: baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, orders, and marriage. The traditional Catholic theology of the sacraments holds that they are channels of God's grace to the recipient. The right ‘matter’ (bread and wine for the Eucharist, etc.), the right ‘form’, and the right intention are essential for the sacrament to be ‘valid’. In addition, the recipient must

- be in a proper state of faith and repentance for it to be 'efficacious'. In Anglican tradition (Art. 25 of the Thirty-Nine Articles) baptism and the eucharist are distinguished as having been ordained by Christ (i.e. Dominical sacraments), from the other five so-called sacraments. Protestant theology generally speaks of these two sacraments only. See: John Bowker (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, Oxford, OUP, 1997, p. 831.
- 67- Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, p. 201.
- 68- Such as Arnauld's criticisms of Descartes in the "Fourth objections"; Arnauld presented some partial objections (bearing on the Eucharist) as regards the *Meditations of First Philosophy*. However, this does not prevent Arnauld from supporting Descartes in the rest of his theories. See: J. Cottingham, et alia (Eds.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. II, p. 153. And J. Cottingham, *A Descartes Dictionary*, p. 62.
- 69- Père Jésuite Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique*, Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 1962.
- 70- J. H. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, London, Prentice-Hall International, 1988, p. 58.
- 71- Ibid.
- 72- Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, pp. 16-17.
- 73- Ibid, p.18.
- 74- D. E. Cooper, *World Philosophies*, p. 244.
- ٧٥- د. صلاح قنصوه، الموضوعية في العلوم الإنسانية، بيروت، دار التنوير، ط٢، ١٩٨٤. ص ٢١٨.
- 76- E. L. Allen, *Guide Book to Western Thought*, p. 140.

- 77-Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, p. 195.
- 78-Émile Bréhier, op. cit, Tome II., p. 66.
- 79-Dave Robinson and Chris Garratt, *Introducing Descartes: A Graphic Guide*, Cambridge, Icon Books, 1998, p. 66.
- 80-Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 15.
- 81-Ibid, p. 16.
- 82-Ibid, p. 50.
- 83-Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, p. 197.
- 84-Ibid.
- 85-J. H. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 58.
- 86-Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 45.
- 87-Ibid, p. 15.
- 88-J. Cottingham, *A Descartes Dictionary*, p. 60.
- 89-Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 56.
- 90-Ibid, p. 64.
- 91-J. Cottingham et alia (Eds.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. III, p. 24.
- 92-James Collins, *God in Modern Philosophy*, Chicago, Henry Regnery Co., 1959, p. 59.
- 93-Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 50.
- 94-Ibid.
- 95-Ibid.
- 96-Ibid, pp. 50-51.
- ٩٧- د. يحيى هويدي، دراسات في الفلسفة الحديثة والمعاصرة، القاهرة، دار الثقافة للطباعة والنشر، ١٩٨١، ص ٢٧.
- 98-Jacques Waardenburg (Ed.), *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion: Introduction and*

Anthology, Paris, Mouton & Co., 1973, p.29.

99- André Lalande, *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*, p. 886.

100- Ibid.

101- Compare: د. فؤاد زكريا، آفاق الفلسفة، القاهرة، مكتبة مصر، ١٩٩١، ص١٢٩. It is noteworthy that Prof. Fuad Zakariya gives a reading that is keen on presenting the point of view which asserts the importance of the scientific aspect of the Cartesian philosophy. This includes two interpretations. The first makes science a basic positive aim beside which metaphysics fades away and simply paves the way initially. The other gives metaphysics a positive role which accompanies science all the way, fully and to the end. Prof. Zakariya here faces a problematic issue that has to do with the

essential task of the Cartesian meditative philosophy. He says, "It seems that Descartes' time itself, his historical position, his role as a philosopher who was enthusiastic towards scientific knowledge-all these factors led to keeping the paradoxical problem alive, preventing us from taking a final position concerning the two contradictory sides." pp. 164-165.

102- Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, p. 186.

103- Descartes, *The World and Other Writings*, Tr. Stephen Gaukroger, Cambridge, CUP, 1998, p. 25.

١٠٤- د. عثمان أمين، ديكارت، ص٢٢٧.

105- Descartes, *The World*, p. 25.

106- د. عثمان أمين، ديكارت، ص٢٢٧.

107- Descartes, *The World*, p. 25-26.

- 108- Ibid, p. 27.
- 109- Ibid, p. 29.
- 110- E. A. Burt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*, p. 113.
- 111- James Collins, *God in Modern Philosophy*, p. 98.
- 112- يوسف كرم، تاريخ الفلسفة الحديثة، بيروت، دار القلم، بدون تاريخ، ص ٨٠.
- 113- J. Cottingham, *A Descartes Dictionary*, p. 40.
- 114- Descartes, *The World*, p. 29-30.
- 115- For more details, see the detailed comparison made by E. A. Burt between Descartes and Galileo from a metaphysical perspective in his book: E. A. Burt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*, pp. 111 ff.
- 116- Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, p. 29.
- 117- Ibid, p. 39.
- 118- Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p.
- 119- Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, p. 200.
- 120- Ibid.
- 121- Ibid.
- ١٢٢ - حبيب سعيد، مادة "خلق" في: قاموس الكتاب المقدس، القاهرة، دار الثقافة، ١٩٩١، ص ٣٤٥ - ٣٤٦.
- 123- Ross, *Aristotle Selections*, London, 1927, p. 116.
- 124- Hinnells (Ed.), *The Facts on File Dictionary of Religions*, United Kingdom, Penguin Books, 1984, p.245.
- 125- Émile Bréhier, op. cit, Tome I., p. 309.
- 126- J. Cottingham et alia (Eds.), *The Philosophical Writings of*

- Descartes*, Vol. III, p. 23.
- 127- Ibid.
- 128- Jupiter is the supreme god of Romans; counterpart of Greek Zeus. Saturn is god of agriculture and vegetation; counterpart of Greek Cronus.
- 129- In reply to the author of Fifth Objections, Pierre Gassendi, Descartes says, "But just as the poets suppose that the Fates were originally established by Jupiter, but that after they were established he bound himself to abide by them, so I do not think that the essences of things, and the mathematical truths which we can know concerning them, are independent of God. Nevertheless I do think that they are immutable and eternal, since the will and decree of God willed and decreed that they should be so. Whether you think this is hard or easy to accept, it is enough for me that it is true".
- 130- J. Cottingham et alia (Eds.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. III, p. 23.
- 131- For more details see: James Brodrick, *St. Ignatius Loyola: The Pilgrim Years, 1491–1538*, London, Ignatius Press, 1956.
- 132- In a letter to Father Mersenne on 27 May 1630, J. Cottingham et alia (Eds.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. III, p. 25.
- 133- In Islam, this is a school of theology supporting the use of reason and speculative theology (kalam) to defend the faith. Followers of the school, which was founded by Abu- al-Hasan al-Ash'ari in the 10th century, attempted to demonstrate the existence and nature of God (Allah) through rational argument

while affirming the eternal, uncreated nature of the Qur'an, the sacred scripture of Islam that Muslims believe to be the divine word. They were accused by the Mu'tazilah-theologians from a school promoting a much more extreme rationalism-of believing in predestination because of their claim that the human capacity for action was acquired only at the very moment of action. "Ash'ariyyah," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 2011.

134- E. A. Burtt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*, p. 106.

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About the book:

This book does not attempt a traditional exposition and explanation of the philosophy of Descartes; it rather seeks to go beyond explication of text to attempt a philosophical interpretation. This can be done through a reading which goes beyond details and particulars as it attempts to read the system through its internal structure. It is a revealing reading that diagnoses symptoms and ponders to determine the rationality of the method. Examining the interstices

of the system, this reading seeks the covert rather than the overt meanings. Unsatisfied with the outspoken alone, it infers what is not disclosed or held back because of ideological evasion that masks itself behind the façade of rationalism.

This is not, thus, a reading of the Cartesian philosophy in its relation to religion as he himself saw and detailed its aspects and characteristics. It is a reading that tries as best it can to scrutinize a different context and use a different perspective that aims at making reason call the theological ideology to face itself after shedding all remnants of evasive techniques.

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