Chapter 2

Reading the *Meditations*

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The *Meditations* is a piece of writing. We are interested in it as philosophical writing, which means that we want to understand its conclusions, grasp its vision, and locate the source of its philosophical force. How does a work gain philosophical force? Surely this must vary depending on the aims and methods of the work, which in turn will vary from thinker to thinker and age to age. The modern standard for producing philosophical conviction is the argument. In its bare-bones structure, an argument is set out in numbered steps, called premises, which lead logically to the conclusion. A logical argument is such that if its premises are true and the conclusion follows logically from them, then the conclusion must be true. (On logical argument and Descartes' relation to it, see the Appendix.)

Descartes certainly used arguments, and we will examine many of them. Partly we will be interested in the logical structure of his arguments (even if, as we saw in Chapter 1, he did not consider it important to present arguments explicitly in a formally valid

structure). However, no matter how flawless the logic, to establish the truth of its conclusion an argument's premises must be true. How is the truth of a premise established? Some premises might be established by previous argument, but not all, on pain of circularity or infinite regress. Some might be accepted on the basis of sensory experience. Others might be taken as rationally self-evident.

Discovering a firm basis for his premises, or first principles, was especially important to our author. He believed that true principles, once discovered, would serve to guide further reasoning by the clarity of their own content. As modern readers looking back at Descartes' work, we will want to understand how he endeavored to reveal such clarity to his audience. And we will sometimes reconstruct his reasoning in formally valid arguments as a way of understanding for ourselves how his principles were supposed to lead to further conclusions.

In the *Meditations*, Descartes was especially concerned to establish first principles in metaphysics. Many of the principles he favored were not accepted by his philosophical contemporaries. Moreover, most of his contemporaries, as empiricists of one sort or another, held that all knowledge arises from the senses. But Descartes believed that the special premises he wished to establish, concerning the nature of reality, could not be based in sensory experience. He was faced with the difficult problem of getting a hostile audience, committed to an opposing epistemology, to see the force of his first principles. The *Meditations* was constructed to meet this challenge.

Method in the *Meditations*

In Chapter 1, we saw that Descartes listed four rules of method in his *Discourse* (6:18–19). Boiled down, these amount to (1) accepting as true only what is known so clearly and distinctly as to be beyond doubt; (2) resolving problems into the simplest parts possible; (3) moving from the simple to the complex; and (4) thoroughly reviewing and checking one's work. This is a method appropriate to a great mathematician. Indeed, we have seen that, from 1619 on, Descartes sought to extend the certainty characteristic of mathematics into philosophy.

The *Meditations* uses a method of doubt to find what is indubitably known, as in rule (1). It seeks to resolve problems into basic or simple parts (2), first searching for a single indubitably known thing, then for the basic constituents of all things, and subsequently moving on to more complex knowledge (3). Finally, it includes reviews and checks throughout (4).

Seventeenth-century thinkers were fascinated with the notion of method. They wanted to know how new knowledge can be discovered and how existing knowledge can be presented and justified to someone who doesn't already accept it. By the 1620s, Descartes was renowned for possessing a new method of the first sort, before publishing even a single word of his philosophy. We can infer that he was also interested in methods of exposition, for he used several, including autobiographical narrative in the *Discourse*, fable in *The World*, dialogue form in the *Search for Truth*, and textbook format in the *Principles*.

In crafting the *Meditations*, Descartes drew on still other methodological devices. He took the "analytic method" from mathematics, adapted the literary form of the meditation from religious writings, and used the Objections and Replies to stage his own version of a scholastic disputation.

Analytic method

Descartes described the analytic and synthetic methods near the end of his second Replies to Objections (7:155–6). The synthetic method starts from definitions, axioms, and postulates and moves on, in an unbroken chain of demonstrations, to prove theorems. Euclid's geometry is the classic example. The reader can be compelled to assent by showing how the current step follows from what has been given. The analytic method, by contrast, takes nothing as previously given. It starts from a particular problem and works backward, as it were, until some simple and evident truths by which the problem could be proved or solved are reached. Those following the method are supposed to see the simple and evident truths for themselves along the way. In both methods, Descartes insisted, the arguments or demonstrations depend solely "on what has gone before" (7:155) – meaning that

nothing is assumed that has not been explicitly introduced or shown to follow from what has been introduced. But with the synthetic method, the chain of explicit demonstrations can begin with axioms and postulates that are simply assumed or accepted on authority. With the analytic method, the reader will become convinced only if he or she achieves appropriate insights into crucial premises, or first principles, along the way. (Descartes believed that in the analytic method he had reconstituted the secret method of discovery of the ancient Greek mathematicians [10:373].)

Descartes thought that the synthetic method, with its requirement that the definitions, axioms, and postulates receive prior acceptance, would not be an effective way to argue for his new metaphysics. It was fine for elementary mathematics; the opening statements in Euclid might be sufficiently evident that they would be granted by all – or at least they were so widely accepted that students could feel secure in adopting them. But in metaphysics he saw a different situation. There, various writers were in disagreement, even on the basics (e.g., whether the natural world could exist on its own or must be created, whether matter is continuous or made of discrete parts, and so on). The dominant Aristotelian metaphysics was, in his view, deeply flawed. To the extent that his readers were inculcated with an opposing but flawed metaphysics, they would resist his new principles.

For these reasons, he believed the method of analysis was needed, to lead readers to consider metaphysical first principles for themselves. But he did not claim that the method would be universally effective. For an inattentive or lazy reader, it would not compel assent, for it did not offer an unbroken chain of demonstration from previously given premises. Rather, its aim was to help the reader to retrace the path of discovery, intuitively grasping the needed principles at each step. When using the method of analysis, "if the reader is willing to follow it and give sufficient attention to all points, he will make the thing his own and understand it just as perfectly as if he had discovered it for himself" (7:155).

The six Meditations were constructed to focus the reader on the required points. They use the method of doubt to clear his or her mind of previous opinions, leading to a first truth in the *cogito* argument. The basis for this first truth is then sought "analytically" (in

Meditation 3), by asking what could explain the given indubitable knowledge. The reader can then use the discovered basis to find additional first truths. Further reflections on this basis, as dependent on innate ideas, follow (7:51, 68).

The Meditations *as meditations*

Descartes did not think that his metaphysical principles would meet resistance simply because his readers already held other beliefs. Rather, he considered certain core beliefs, opposed to his metaphysics, to be the ordinary and natural result of human cognitive development. Human infants are immersed in the body (see 8A:35). They rely on their senses for preservation, and for the most part the senses serve them well in this regard. From such successes, children mistakenly come to believe that the senses immediately inform them not only of what is useful in external objects but also of their ultimate nature (7:83). Later on, adults have forgotten how these early opinions were formed, so they unreflectively hold that bodies are simply composed out of the properties manifest to the senses, including colors, sounds, tastes, odors, and tactile qualities such as hot and cold (the Aristotelian "real qualities"), as well as others such as size, shape, and motion.

This description shows how childhood prejudices could lead one to become an Aristotelian philosopher. With their sense-based theory of cognition, orthodox Aristotelians held that immaterial beings such as God, since they do not fall under the senses, can be cognized only obscurely in this life. In their view, such cognition must proceed through analogy with created things; for example, we observe that any change in sensible things requires a cause, so, by analogy, we posit a supreme cause as creator of the whole world. By contrast, Descartes (like the Platonists) held that a clear and distinct idea of God could be gained only by turning away from the senses and the created material world and relying on purely intellectual contemplation.

To reach his Aristotelian audience (as also the new empiricists), Descartes needed to overcome the belief that all knowledge and thought are based in the senses. In essence, he had to retrain his readers to turn from the senses toward purely intellectual ideas.

Otherwise, the analytic method of the *Meditations* would not work. To effect this retraining, he adopted a second methodical device: he composed his work using the literary form of the meditation.

In Descartes' day, the meditative method was well developed in religious writings known as spiritual exercises. Ignatius, founder of the Jesuits, had composed a set of exercises, and Descartes participated in meditations or spiritual exercises at La Flèche. Such exercises were intended to train the meditator's mental faculties. Works in this genre followed a standard order. First, one retreats from the world of the senses in order to meditate upon religious images (with Ignatius), or to clear the mind of images in order to experience union with God (as in Augustine). Then one trains the will to avoid the error of sin. In this process, the exercitant sequentially focuses on the relevant cognitive faculties: first the senses, then the imagination and intellect, and finally the will.

Descartes' *Meditations* is not spiritual, but cognitive and epistemic. ("Epistemic" means having to do with knowledge and its grounds.) It aims to produce metaphysical knowledge, not to induce a religious experience. In it, one turns away from the world by denying the reliability of the senses (First Meditation), clears the mind of sensory images in order to experience the mind itself and to find there the idea of God (Second and Third Meditations), and then seeks to regulate the will so as to avoid error in judgment (Fourth Meditation). Once the meditator's mind has been properly trained, Descartes presents the ideas and arguments that provide the basic premises for further points in his metaphysics, including his theory of material substance, his mind–body dualism, and his new theory of the senses (Fifth and Sixth Meditations). The concluding remarks of the first four Meditations especially reveal Descartes' use of the meditative genre, when he speaks of training his will to pretend that the material world does not exist (7:22), of fixing a result in memory (7:34), of contemplating God (7:52), and of controlling the will (7:62).

Objections and replies as disputation

To convince the widest variety of readers of his new metaphysics, Descartes creatively adapted another form of literature. Medieval

scholastic works sometimes took the form of disputations, in which the opinions of various sides, pro and con, were reported on a given topic. Disputations took place in universities at public meetings, and they might subsequently be published. Descartes engaged in such disputations at La Flèche. As an extension of this practice, in the *Discourse* he promised to reply by letter to any objections that were sent to him. With the *Meditations*, he arranged for both objections and replies to be published with the original work. Together with Mersenne (who chose several of the objectors, and composed his own objections), he distributed copies of the *Meditations* to some leading philosophers and theologians, whose objections were appended to the six Meditations with Descartes' replies.

Descartes used his Replies to Objections for various purposes. Partly, he wanted to test himself against strong objections and show that he could meet them. In a philosophical culture accustomed to disputation, that would provide powerful support. He also wanted to show that he could avoid theological difficulties, so he made sure to have theologians represented among the objectors. (He originally proposed that objections be solicited only from theologians [3:127, 183], although he had himself already shown the manuscript to a philosopher, his follower Regius at Utrecht [3:63].) Perhaps most importantly, the Replies allowed him to elaborate his positions using standard philosophical terminology and modes of argument, and to introduce matters not discussed in the body of the work (such as his doctrine on eternal truths).

Overview and front matter (7:1–16)

The *Meditations* consists of the opening Letter to the Faculty of Theology at the Sorbonne, a Preface to the reader, a Synopsis, the six Meditations, Objections and Replies, and (added after the first edition) letters to Dinet and Clerselier. The six Meditations were written first as a self-contained treatise, which was completed by March 1640. Shortly thereafter, and continuing into 1641, this treatise was circulated to elicit objections (first by Descartes in the Netherlands, and subsequently by Mersenne). In the latter part of 1640, Descartes composed the "front matter," consisting of the Letter, Preface, and Synopsis.

Letter to the Sorbonne (7:1–6)

Descartes wrote to Mersenne that prior to publication he wanted his work to be "seen and approved by various Doctors [of Theology]," including "the Sorbonne as a body" (3:126–7*). In September, he wrote (3:184–5) that he would dedicate the book to the Faculty of Theology at the Sorbonne, the most respected theologians in France. He was hoping for their support in an anticipated battle with the Jesuits (3:126, 184, 752). He wanted them to examine the work and either give their approval or provide him with objections, to which he would reply (3:239–40). Four members of the faculty considered the work; their approval, given in August 1641, was noted on the title page of the first edition.

In the Letter, Descartes suggests that the Sorbonne should take the work under its sponsorship or "protection" because of what (ostensibly) are its two principal theses: the existence of God and the distinction of soul from body (and hence the soul's natural immortality). These are, he explained, the two things of greatest religious significance that could be proved by "natural reason" – that is, by the human mind working on its own. They are "prime examples of subjects where demonstrative proofs ought to be given with the aid of philosophy rather than theology" (7:1).

This Letter is notable for claiming that the arguments of the *Meditations* are needed to convince "unbelievers" of the existence of God and the soul. Those who believe in God, it says, are happy to do so on the authority of the Bible, and also to accept the authority of the Bible because it comes from God. But "this argument cannot be put to unbelievers because they would judge it to be circular" (7:2). Descartes has therefore examined all rational proofs for the existence of God and the separability of soul from body in order to present the best available (7:3–4). That is what he, as a philosopher, can do for religion.

But if he was providing rational proofs, why should he have sought "protection" under the "authority" of the theologians of the Sorbonne? Descartes addresses that question by comparing attitudes toward mathematics and metaphysics. Everyone is taught to accept mathematical proofs as uncontroversial, even though only a few

people actually understand them. But in philosophy, everyone believes that the questions can be argued in various ways. In mathematics, the basic ideas are easily understood, whereas in metaphysics they are not. To follow Descartes' metaphysical arguments, the reader must possess "a mind completely free from preconceived opinions and one that can easily withdraw itself from involvement with the senses" (7:4*). In case his readers did not succeed in this difficult task, Descartes was willing to enlist institutional authority – especially against other organized groups, such as the Jesuits.

We saw in Chapter 1 that Descartes was not completely forthright in saying that the book was intended primarily to offer proofs to unbelievers; he wanted it to convince his readers (surreptitiously) of the foundations of his new physics. Indeed, from as early as 1629 (1:85), Descartes had expected the main objections to his philosophy (from Jesuits and others) to arise over his physics or natural philosophy (1:271, 285, 324, 455–6, 564) – including his account of sensory qualities and his affirmation of the Earth's motion – not his views on God or the soul (although they were later criticized too). Did he, then, simply include the material on God and the soul as a shield from criticism, or to attract help from the Sorbonne? Was he simply appeasing a religious age?

Some interpreters think that Descartes cared only about his physics and was simply seeking to appease religious authority on prudential grounds (after what had happened to Galileo). Indeed, Hiram Caton argues that Descartes was actually a materialist and an atheist, who camouflaged his true intentions with talk of God and immortality. According to Caton, Descartes sought to undermine his own demonstration of God's existence by hinting at its weakness in the Letter, where he mentions the circularity involving God and Scripture. This hint was supposed to prefigure the circularity of Descartes' use of clear and distinct perception to prove God's existence, and his appeal to God to establish that clear and distinct perception yields truth. (This charge of circularity is discussed below.)

Despite Descartes' confession to Mersenne (3:233, 298) that he was not fully honest in presenting the *Meditations*, there is nothing to indicate he was insincere in proving God's existence and mind–body distinctness. Such topics were part of the theoretical

work of philosophy at this time. They were not simply matters for religious belief (or disbelief) but were part of philosophy and subject to rational scrutiny. If we assume that Descartes was a religious believer, we should also realize that his primary philosophical aim was not to promote religious belief but to establish foundations for his physics. We should expect the discussions of God and the soul to contribute to this metaphysical goal.

In thinking about these questions, it is important to distinguish religious matters from philosophical discussions of God and the soul. Descartes avoided what he considered to be purely theological questions (1:153, 4:119, 5:176, 7:428), such as whether the world was created in six days (5:168–9), "mysteries" of religion such as the Trinity (3:274), the existence of miracles (*2:557–8*, 3:214, 11:48), the role of the will in relation to sin (7:15), and so on. In purely religious matters, he favored divine illumination through the "light of grace" over natural reason, which meant that he left such matters to revelation as interpreted by the Church or accepted by individuals (3:426, 7:147–8, 8B:353–4, 9A:208). He criticized others for mixing religion and philosophy (2:570) or trying to derive philosophical truths from the Bible (2:347–8, 8B:353). As regards God and the soul, he addressed aspects that he considered knowable by reason alone. The concept of a supreme god and the question of whether the soul is immaterial had been part of Greek philosophy, prior to the medieval synthesis of Greek thought with the Judeo-Christian–Islamic tradition. Descartes considered the notion of a supreme being to be a proper topic for "natural" reason, that is, reason independent of divine revelation. One might with hindsight suspect that his theory of God was influenced by the surrounding religious culture, but that does not alter the fact that his intent was to address only those aspects of God known by reason alone. Similarly, he thought that the soul might be studied as a part of the natural world by means of reason. Indeed, for philosophical purposes, he equated soul (Latin *anima*) with mind (*mens*) and preferred the latter term (7:161, 356). He did, as needed, try to show that his philosophy was *consistent* with Catholic (and, in the Netherlands, Calvinist) doctrine (3:349, 5:544). This was prudent, for his personal safety and the acceptance of his works by educational and political authorities depended on it. In some cases,

these doctrinally consistent explanations were tortured (e.g., on bodily surfaces [7:250–1, 433–4]), but he was not prepared to change his core philosophical positions to gain acceptability (3:259). If he feared punishment, he was willing not to publish (1:271–2).

A good case can be made that Descartes needed the arguments about God and the soul to secure the foundations of his physics. Famously, he raised the possibility of a deceiving God in the First Meditation as his strongest reason for doubt, which, if answered, would yield the most certain knowledge. He used this hypothesis in conjunction with his analytic method to search for first principles. In physics proper, he appealed to God as the operator behind his laws of motion, acting to conserve the quantity of motion in the universe. This role was foreshadowed near the end of the Third Meditation. As for the soul or mind, in the seventeenth century nearly every philosopher considered the mind to be part of nature and so to fall within the discipline of physics (which treated all of nature). Consequently, in examining human beings in his physics, Descartes needed to account for the mind, its relation to the body, and its role in various bodily functions, including sensation.

Preface to the reader (7:7–10)

The Preface offers a hint as to the intended breadth of Descartes' work and attempts to forestall quick objections. It affirms that the *Meditations* will cover not only God and the soul but also "the foundations of First Philosophy in its entirety" (7:9). The work will provide a complete version of the metaphysical arguments only sketched in the *Discourse*. But, furthermore, it will cover *all* the "foundations" (Latin *initia*, literally, elements or first things, hence first principles or foundations) of metaphysics, beyond God and the soul. As he wrote to Mersenne, it would examine "all the first things to be discovered by philosophizing" (3:235; also 3:239).

Descartes used the Preface to address the objections he received to the summary arguments of the *Discourse*. The argument for mind–body distinction in that work has every appearance of being fallacious. When this was pointed out, Descartes claimed that the earlier work provided only a truncated version of an argument that

would now be presented in full. A second objection, concerning the argument for God's existence, allows Descartes to introduce his distinction between an idea of God considered simply as a state of a human mind and the content of that idea – a distinction crucial to the argument as presented in the Third Meditation. He dismisses other objections as "lifted from the standard sources of the atheists" (7:8–9).

Perhaps in an attempt to forestall new objections, he repeats a point from the Letter. Modestly predicting that the new, deeper, more complete arguments of the *Meditations* would not gain a wide audience (although in fact he was already recasting them in textbook form), he offers a warning to the casual reader: "I am not an author for anyone who might read this book except those who are willing and able to meditate seriously with me and to draw their minds away from the senses and, at the same time, all preconceived opinions" (7:9*). He encourages readers to attend to the order and connection of his arguments without dwelling on individual sentences. The *Meditations* is intended to present the "very thoughts" that allowed him to arrive at the truth, to find out whether others would find such thoughts convincing (7:10). Those not convinced might examine the Objections and Replies, where, he suggests, he has responded to virtually every serious objection that might be raised. (Although not in fact foretelling every serious objection, they do record many of the most important problems with Descartes' arguments.)

Synopsis (7:12–16)

Late in December 1640, Descartes sent to Mersenne an "abstract" or "synopsis" of the *Meditations* (3:271). This Synopsis summarizes the six Meditations while also addressing specific queries from Mersenne.

Several weeks earlier, Mersenne had asked Descartes why the proof for mind–body distinctness had to wait until the Sixth Meditation, and why there was no proof of the soul's immortality (3:266). (The *Discourse* had hinted at such a proof [6:59–60].) The Synopsis explains (7:13) that the proof of mind–body distinctness depends on knowing that clear and distinct perceptions are true (Meditation 4) and discovering the nature of corporeal things (Meditations 2, 5, 6).

As for immortality, Descartes explains that by proving the soul is distinct from the body and need not perish with it, he allows for it without proving it. A proper proof would have to explain how a human body can perish by losing its configuration, even though matter (or body in general) cannot perish (subject to God's preservation, as described in Meditation 3); and how a human mind, because it is a "pure substance," preserves its identity across all changes of its "accidents" (properties that may change from moment to moment) and so does not perish (7:14).

These clarifications take up nearly half of the Synopsis (7:12–14), which otherwise provides a convenient summary of the points in the work "concerning God and the soul" (to Mersenne, 3:268), including the use of the skeptical doubt as a means to understand intellectual (immaterial) beings such as God and the soul (7:12, 14). Descartes apparently hoped that the Synopsis would be helpful to those concerned to certify his religious orthodoxy.

The *Meditations* proper (7:17–90)

Although Descartes described the six Meditations to Mersenne as a "treatise" (3:183), we have seen that it was not structured as an ordinary philosophical treatise, in which an author directly presents arguments and discoveries. It was written as meditations. He explains in the Second Replies that he wrote "Meditations" – rather than "Disputations," or "Theorems and Problems" as in mathematics – because of his desire to follow the analytic method (7:157). This choice of genre carries implications for our interpretation of the first-person pronoun (in English, "I") in the six Meditations themselves.

First person in the Meditations

In the front matter and the Replies, the first-person pronoun clearly refers to René Descartes, author of the work. The referent for this pronoun is not so obvious in the body of the work. The work is presented as describing a sequence of thoughts that Descartes has had, characterized in the Preface as "the very thoughts" that brought him to see the metaphysical truths he now presents (7:10). At the same

time, the six Meditations most certainly do not record the thoughts that Descartes had in the course of a few days in his stove-heated room (in 1619), since his metaphysics was initially developed only nine years later. It is certain that his thoughts continued to develop after he had composed his unfinished metaphysical treatise of 1629, and after he had presented a sketch of his arguments in the *Discourse* in 1637. And when he wrote the *Meditations*, he did not actually believe some of the things he said in the First Meditation, such as that up to that instant he had believed the senses to be the primary basis of knowledge (7:18); surely, when writing the first part he had already formulated the quite different attitude toward the role of the senses found later in the work.

The *Meditations*, then, unlike the *Discourse*, is not properly autobiographical. So how shall we understand the "I"? We might view the six Meditations as a story that Descartes has constructed in the first person to represent in the fictional setting of six "days" of meditating the very sequence of thoughts by which he had discovered his metaphysics – or at least a sequence of thoughts that, in accordance with the analytic method, would show how the discovery can be made. The "I" of the six Meditations would function as narrator and protagonist in a metaphysical morality play (with one or two other characters: God or the malign demon). The reader could then "take the moral" of the story through empathy with the narrator.

This construal properly distinguishes the "I" of the six Meditations from Descartes, their author. It also permits the "I" to serve as a placeholder for every reader (or any human being), an intention signaled by occasional use of the first-person plural ("we say," "let us," etc. [7:21, 30, 32]). But it does not fully capture the active role that the reader is to take in becoming the "I." When Descartes says that he wants only readers who will "meditate seriously" with him (Preface, 7:9), we may read this as an instruction to approach his metaphysical meditations like religious exercises – as guiding the reader to experiences each must have for him or herself. This means that we, as readers, are to engage his arguments and exercises fully and directly, thereby undergoing, as much as possible, a cognitive progression that permits us to grasp the things that Descartes has already discovered. The reader must not simply follow a narrative in his or her

imagination, but must employ all her cognitive resources to relive the process of doubt and discovery described in the work.

When naming the "I" in the main body of the work, we will often speak of "the meditator" rather than of Descartes as author. (For distinctness of reference, we can imagine the meditator as female.) At the same time, as author, Descartes did in fact construct the work's exercises and arguments with certain didactic aims in mind. Hence, in describing the philosophical strategy behind various arguments or devices, Descartes, and not the meditator, should be invoked. Moreover, as the work progresses the meditator's conclusions come to express Descartes' own metaphysical positions. By the end of the work, the distance between Descartes as author and meditator as convert should diminish to nothing.

Overview of the metaphysical treatise

The individual Meditations are of various lengths, the first being the shortest, the sixth the longest. A rough idea of their contents, and hence of the order of Descartes' argument, can be gleaned from their titles (Table 1). The general order is clear. Descartes begins by having the meditator engage in a process of doubt (Meditation 1). She finds that the existence and nature of her own mind are better known to her than are material things (2). The meditator then considers two proofs for the existence of God (3), learns to guide her judgment so as to find truth and avoid falsity (4), considers the essence of material things and examines another proof of the existence of God (5), and discovers a real distinction between mind and body and proves the existence of material things (6).

However, the sequence of topics expressed in the Meditations' titles does not fully describe the main arguments and conclusions of the work. The titles of Meditation 2, and perhaps 3, 5, and 6, reached their final form late in the process of composition, after the first three sets of objections were in hand (3:297). They conform with Descartes' goal of publicizing his efforts concerning God and the soul. But they do not draw attention to the contents of the work as a treatise on general metaphysics, undertaken to establish something "stable and likely to last" in the sciences (7:17). Nor do they draw attention to the

Table 1 Topical analysis of the *Meditations*

Med.	*Title*	*Epistemological topics*	*Metaphysical topics*
1	What can be called into doubt	Sensory fallibility Mathematics dubitable	
2	The nature of the human mind, and how it is better known than body	Indubitable "I" (*cogito*) Mind cannot be imaged Knowledge of body via intellect	Nature of thinking thing Body as extension
3	The existence of God	Truth rule, clear and distinct perceptions are true Natural light vs. teachings of nature Idea of God innate God is no deceiver	Causal principle Metaphysics of ideas God's existence and attributes Preliminary distinction between geometrical and other sensory qualities
4	Truth and falsity	Analysis of judgment: intellect and will Analysis of cognitive error Reaffirmation of truth rule (God is no deceiver)	Cognitive error and the problem of evil Freedom of the will
5	The essence of material things, and the existence of God considered a second time	Innate ideas of essences Knowledge of God needed to banish doubt	Essence of matter is extension Ontological argument for God's existence
6	The existence of material things, and the real distinction between mind and body	Intellect vs. imagination Role of senses and intellect in knowing bodies Analysis of sensory error	Mind as distinct substance; with intellectual essence External objects exist Mind–body union Status of sensory qualities Psychophysiological correlations

main methodological and epistemological moments, as the meditator battles back from the general doubt of Meditation 1. These further topics are summarized in Table 1 under two separate headings.

Further topics: methodological and epistemological

In a work ostensibly intended to demonstrate some truths about God and the soul, the author might not choose to highlight the methods used for those purposes. It might then seem natural that, other than asking his readers to concentrate on the arguments (in the Preface), Descartes did little by way of discussing his method up front. (The most extensive discussions occur in the Replies to Objections.)

Nonetheless, as we have seen, he thought carefully about the methodological structure of his work. Furthermore, at the beginning of the First Meditation he characterizes the work as having an epistemological aim. It will seek to evaluate and undermine the foundations of the meditator's previous claims to knowledge and find new foundations (7:17). From these comments and the Synopsis, the meditator can know that, even if epistemological topics such as "doubt" and what is "known" are mentioned only in the titles of Meditations 1 and 2, the whole work is aimed at achieving certain knowledge. Furthermore, she has been apprised in the Synopsis that a specific rule for gaining such knowledge, involving the truth of "clear and distinct perception," will be introduced in the later Meditations.

The First Meditation employs the celebrated method of doubt. The meditator is instructed to doubt all her previous beliefs. To achieve this aim, she is offered various arguments to undermine what she considered to be the sources of her previous knowledge. She casts doubt on the senses and comes to doubt the existence of the material world by means of the deceiving-God hypothesis. She uses the latter hypothesis to call into doubt even the "transparent" truths of mathematics (7:20–1).

Descartes did not employ his method of doubt as part of a general skeptical outlook. He was using it as a tool in his search for knowledge. Famously, its first result concerns the meditator's own existence as a thinking thing, achieved through the *cogito* reasoning. This important item of knowledge serves as a basis for subsequent knowledge. Exactly

how it does so requires some philosophical interpretation, and we will consider several possibilities in Chapter 4. But one way in which the *cogito* result helps – as Descartes has the meditator observe at the beginning of Meditation 3 (7:35) – is by providing an example of what it takes to know anything. The meditator can then work backward, in accordance with the method of the analysis, to find its underlying basis.

In this way, Descartes leads the meditator to extract his famous rule for finding the truth: that clear and distinct perceptions are true. Although this rule is first asserted early in the Third Meditation, the Synopsis says that it is established in the Fourth (7:12, 14). And, indeed, much of the Third Meditation concerns whether the hypothesis of a deceiving God, which at least seems to call the rule into question, can be removed. The use of the rule in evaluating and rejecting the deceiving-God hypothesis has led some readers to charge Descartes with circular reasoning. In our examination of Descartes' epistemology, we will want to pay close attention to the question of whether he needed to provide – and if so, how he might have provided – further support for his truth rule beyond the argument at the beginning of Meditation 3. One candidate for validating the rule would be to have it guaranteed by a non-deceiving God. But appeal to such a guarantee is what led to the charge of circularity (discussed later in this chapter).

Descartes frames the epistemology and methodology of the six Meditations in the vocabulary of cognitive faculties. From the outset, he speaks freely of such faculties, including the senses, imagination, memory, and intellect or reason. In analyzing acts of judgment in Meditations 3 and 4, he adds the will as a separate mental faculty. All six Meditations contain points about the operation, reliability, and comparative roles of various mental faculties. Discussion of such faculties had been found in philosophical analyses of knowledge since antiquity. Descartes could expect his readers to understand his terminology. Readers today may be less familiar with this sort of talk.

Part of Descartes' epistemological project was to convince the Aristotelians and the new empiricists that their theory of how the cognitive faculties function to yield knowledge was erroneous. As previously mentioned, Aristotelians and empiricists held that sensory

materials of one sort or another are required in every cognitive act. But Descartes maintained that some acts of cognition – indeed, those that hold the key to metaphysical knowledge – occur through the intellect alone.

His disagreement with the Aristotelians and new empiricists hinged on his claim that the "pure intellect" can operate independently of the senses and imagination. In the terminology of mental faculties, "imagination" has a technical meaning. To imagine something is to form an image of it, as when, with eyes closed, we might think of our pet cat by picturing to ourselves what he looks like. Such images are concrete. They show the cat in some particular position, usually in relation to a surface (on a favorite perch, or on the floor crying to be fed), perhaps with eyes open or closed, tail in the air or tucked next to the body, and so on. Although many thoughts involve such images, Descartes contended that other thoughts, even about the same objects, contain no images at all. These are the perceptions of the pure intellect, which extend to God, the mind as a substance, and geometrical essences. The distinction between imagination and pure intellect, discussed at length early in the Sixth Meditation (7:71–3), was fundamental to Descartes' epistemology, as the interchanges with Hobbes and Gassendi in the Objections and Replies make clear (7:178, 181, 183, 358, 365, 385). According to Descartes' rationalist epistemology, the essences of even material things are known not through sensory experience but by contemplating ideas that are available to the intellect innately, independently of sensory experience.

A final aim of Descartes' epistemological program was to reevaluate the role of the senses in knowledge. In the Sixth Meditation the senses are rehabilitated, although with a different role in philosophical knowledge than the meditator had accepted in the First. Descartes argues that the primary function of the senses is to allow detection of potential bodily benefits and harms in the surrounding environment. They do not provide materials used for discovering the essences of natural things; that function is left to the intellect alone. But the senses can provide knowledge beyond the locally pragmatic. They can be used in natural philosophy to help to ascertain facts about the material world, such as the true size of the Sun (7:80).

Further topics: metaphysical results

Although Descartes had been famous for his interest in method, from 1629 on his main interest in pure philosophy lay in metaphysics. The metaphysical results of the *Meditations* constitute the desired fruits of his new method. As he advertised to the Sorbonne, some main results concern God, the soul or mind, and its distinction from body. These depend on further metaphysical concepts and principles, which are introduced as needed. And they hold further implications for the notion of the whole human being (composed of mind and body) and for the ontology of sensory qualities as part of the foundation for Descartes' physics. ("Ontology" is the study of the nature of "being," that is, what exists or has reality; the ontology of sensory qualities involves an analysis of those qualities in objects and in relation to our perception of them.)

The main arguments concerning God occur in Meditations 3 and 5. Descartes offers three separate proofs for God's existence and fills out the metaphysics of God by ascribing such attributes to him as infinity, independence, omniscience, and omnipotence. He seeks to establish metaphysically that God is the creator and preserver of everything (7:45). We will examine these arguments, and the metaphysical concepts they rely on, in Chapters 5 and 7.

The Fourth Meditation asks how a perfect God could create anything evil or subject to fault. The answer relies on the Neoplatonic (Augustinian) metaphysics of good and evil. Descartes argues that evil literally does not have existence (it has no "being"). Rather, some things are simply less good than others. God is infinitely good, but everything else falls short in some way. Descartes uses this Augustinian analysis of evil to explain how a perfect God could create imperfect humans. As part of this explanation, he analyzes the notion of free will in humans. In making us free, God allowed us to make our own errors. Here we find Descartes using tenets from theological metaphysics to further his own project.

Metaphysical topics concerning God are prominent in Meditations 3–5, but in the end, they serve as support for the final metaphysical aims of the work, concerning the essences of mind and body, the relations of mind and body in the whole human being, and

the proper understanding of matter and its sensory qualities. These topics are taken up in the Second and Third Meditations, and they form the entire subject matter of the Sixth. One important result is the claim that the essence of matter is extension – a finding that had significant implications for Descartes' physics (examined in Chapter 9). Another is that the mind is an "intellectual substance" (7:78), the essence of which is thinking.

The title of the Sixth Meditation announces the "real distinction" between mind and body and promises a proof for the existence of bodies. In fact, the Meditation is largely devoted to mind–body union and interaction, and the theory of the senses. It thoroughly investigates the embodied mind, including the functions of sensation and appetite (7:75–7, 80–1, 83–9), and it allots nearly equal space to the metaphysics of the sensory qualities (7:74–7, 82–3). Some of this material belongs as much to natural philosophy as to metaphysics, such as the extensive discussion of the operation of the nerves to produce sensations. Several points in the argument appeal to sensory evidence (7:80, 86, 87). Although these discussions are framed by the metaphysical thesis that mind and body are different kinds of substance, the extended discussion of sensory and nervous function marks a transition from metaphysical foundations for physics to some first results in natural philosophy itself.

Objections and Replies (7:91–561)

When Descartes had completed the body of the *Meditations*, he showed it to some philosophical allies in the Dutch Netherlands, including his follower Regius, and to a Catholic theologian named Johannes Caterus. Regius corrected the punctuation and spelling and sent several objections, which Descartes answered brusquely by return letter (3:63–5). By contrast, he placed Caterus' objections at the end of his manuscript, with replies. In November 1640, he sent the six Meditations, Letter (and probably the Preface), and these first Objections and Replies to Mersenne, followed by the Synopsis (3:238–9, 271).

Mersenne collected the rest of the objections by circulating the material to philosophers and theologians in France. Completed

objections and replies were included in the manuscript sent to further objectors. (Explicit or tacit references among the Objections and Replies may be found at 7:127, 200, 208–11, 213, 348, 414, 417.) The first six Objections and Replies appeared in the first edition, published late in 1641 in Paris under Mersenne's supervision. The seventh set, by the Jesuit Bourdin, appeared in the second edition (Amsterdam, 1642) with a letter from Descartes to Father Dinet (7:563–603), head of the French Jesuits. Descartes himself oversaw publication of the second edition (3:448).

The objectors represented innovative as well as conservative viewpoints. The innovators included the English materialist Hobbes, who moved to France in 1640 (third set), the French priest and Epicurean philosopher Gassendi (fifth set), and Mersenne himself (who contributed to the second and sixth sets, along with some theologians, philosophers, and geometers). The theological objectors included, besides Caterus and Mersenne's helpers, the French Catholic theologian Antoine Arnauld (fourth set). The most conservative objector was Bourdin. In 1644, Gassendi published the Fifth Objections and Replies separately, along with additional *Counter-Objections*. Descartes responded with a Note and a Letter to Clerselier (9A:198–217), published with Clerselier's French translation of the Objections and Replies in 1647 (the body of the work was translated by the Duke of Luynes).

Despite their differing viewpoints and chosen emphases, there were some topics to which all objectors responded. All save Bourdin raised questions about the proofs for the existence of God, and all questioned the proof of mind–body distinctness. Hobbes and Gassendi contended that organized matter might think; the second, fourth, and sixth objectors, although not asserting that hypothesis, challenged Descartes' success in ruling it out (7:122, 198, 422). Caterus and Bourdin posed general objections to the argument for a real distinction (7:100, 503–9).

The Objections and Replies stand outside the meditational form of the six Meditations. They provide commentary and disputation that illuminates and extends the original text, and they introduce as a new point his doctrine that the eternal truths are God's free creations (7:380, 432, 435–6; discussed in Chapter 9). Their explications of tech-

nical vocabulary can be especially helpful. The concept of substance, mentioned directly only in the Synopsis and Third Meditation (7:12, 40), is explained more fully in the Second and Third Replies (7:161, 176); it is elaborated using the crucial notion of a "complete being," or something capable of existing on its own, in the First and Fourth Replies (7:120–1, 219–31). The second, third, fifth, and seventh sets explain the methodological use of skepticism and doubt (7:129–30, 144–6, 171–2, 257–8, 454–82). At the request of the second set of objectors, Descartes appended to the Second Replies the Geometrical Arguments (7:160–70), restating his main metaphysical proofs in geometrical fashion, with formal definitions, axioms, and postulates.

Following the argument

Part II of this guidebook is directed at the arguments and conclusions of the six Meditations, examined one by one. Descartes has warned that the arguments should not be considered in isolation, since their order and connection are crucial. Having reviewed the main conclusions, we can be mindful of where the arguments are headed.

Various readers continue to disagree about the overall point of Descartes' enterprise, and the significance and role played by each argument. What shall we think of a work that has already been studied for several hundred years with no final agreement on its structure and purpose? Interpretive uncertainty is usual with great texts. A good strategy for a first-time reader is to attend to the overall purpose and structure of the text while remaining open to a variety of interpretive hypotheses. As you consider or even form such hypotheses, you should also note objections against Descartes' arguments so construed. Then read his work again, looking for support for one or another interpretation, and checking to see if the objections hold up. Great philosophical texts repay such effort with increased insight and understanding, and Descartes' works are no exception.

The principle of charity

Philosophers sometimes appeal to the "principle of charity" as an aid in reading philosophical texts. According to this principle, one avoids

attributing silly mistakes to authors such as Descartes and seeks to interpret their works so as to have them make "good philosophical sense." The latter phrase means that we should attempt to find a reading of the text that renders its various statements consistent with one another and that provides a coherent and forceful interpretation of the arguments therein. One standard for such interpretations is that they render the text as making points we would agree with now, or that seem the most interesting.

How far shall we take such advice? The principle may be followed a good way. For instance, although it is possible that Descartes made mistakes in reasoning or contradicted himself, overly hasty attributions of contradictions or weak arguments to him may simply reveal our own limitations and ineptitude. The principle of charity advises us not to take the easy way out by quickly deciding that a text is incoherent or contains deplorably weak arguments. When philosophers contradict themselves, such contradictions are often deep – they reveal fundamental tensions in a philosopher's systematic enterprise. We might miss these deeper points by abandoning our interpretive effort too soon. Furthermore, some metaphysical arguments may appear weak to us now because of advances in science since they were written, or because the prevailing attitude toward religious belief has changed. But if we dismiss such arguments out of hand simply because we disagree with their conclusions, we lose any chance of gaining a comprehensive view of the structure, variety, and history of philosophical positions and arguments.

Nonetheless, the principle of charity can be taken too far. By interpreting past arguments so as to maximize their agreement with current wisdom, we run the risk of repeatedly reading our own favorite positions into past texts. Moreover, while we should seek coherent and forceful readings because they are of greater philosophical interest, this does not require that past authors always come out "right." If we always see only "correct" positions in past texts, we will mask genuine differences between now and then, and we will fail to see how the problem space of philosophy has changed. A coherent argument for a position we now consider wrong can be of interest for what it teaches us about philosophical positions and arguments and their forcefulness. The strong principle of charity, which would have

us read past philosophers as saying things we would want to say now, is too restrictive and distorting.

Reading contextually

The strategy of reading past philosophers in their own historical and philosophical context affords a further standard for assessing their arguments. Philosophy typically addresses problems and topics of importance in its time, and it usually takes as its primary audience other philosophers, who bring with them the assumptions and convictions of that time. In order to understand why philosophers construct their arguments in a certain way, we will usually need to know which positions they intend to overturn, and the assumptions shared by author and opponent. Such knowledge may enable us to see how an argument that we would now reject could have seemed forceful in the past.

The interpretation of past philosophy can be interesting simply for the insight it gives us into unfamiliar ways of thinking. But that is not its primary philosophical benefit. Philosophy attempts to get at the fundamental issues in the intellectual pursuits of a given age. These issues change over time, but in some ways they remain the same. Questions about the possibility of knowledge, about the rational grounds for thinking that a supreme being exists, and about the place of the mind in nature have been asked in one form or another since the time of the ancient Greeks. The common assumptions and the range of plausible positions have changed from age to age, even while some things stayed (nearly) the same. We want to notice both what is similar and what is different between our ways of thinking and that of Descartes. In this way, we can appreciate more fully both our framework of thought and his.

The overall problem space of philosophy changes more slowly than the particular positions that are offered as solutions to (or dissolutions of) the problems themselves. Aspects of Descartes' thought still influence philosophical and scientific thought today. These include perspectives on perception as a source of knowledge, the place of mind in nature, the relation of mind to the body or brain, and the basic explanatory categories of physical science and psychology.

A historically sensitive reading of Descartes can detect the changes and continuities in philosophical responses to these topics. Often, understanding how a problem has come to be posed in its present form will help us to rethink both problem and answers.

Interpretive threads

As we saw in Chapter 1, since their publication Descartes' writings have been the subject of various interpretations. The *Meditations* has often been the focus. We can recognize three main approaches to the *Meditations* in recent years: epistemological, metaphysical, and cognitive.

Epistemological readings

Some read the *Meditations* as primarily a work in epistemology or theory of knowledge. According to this view, Descartes' foremost concern was to determine the possibility and limits of knowledge, considered generally. His epistemic goal was to see whether certainty can be achieved about anything. His primary result was to find that his immediate knowledge is limited to his own mental states. His problem was then to see whether he could move beyond those states to know anything else. As a pure epistemologist, he would be indifferent to the outcome and ready to abandon any claim to extramental knowledge if his investigation led to that conclusion.

Descartes' use of the method of doubt and his emphasis on certainty are consistent with an epistemological reading. For that reason, we will remain attuned to what he says about the basis of knowledge, and to the content and limits of what can be known. At the same time, we have strong evidence that Descartes did not write his book simply to discover whether knowledge is possible. From the start he conceived the *Meditations* as the first full presentation of his metaphysics. He was not trying to discover *whether* anything can be known but intended to show *how* knowledge is possible and to offer *proofs* for metaphysical first principles.

Metaphysical readings

Metaphysical readings acknowledge these goals and therefore focus on the metaphysical results of Descartes' work. These results include the *cogito* conclusion and the arguments concerning the existence and essence of God, the essences of matter and mind, the mind–body relation, and the nature of sensory perception. On this view, Descartes examined the scope and limits of knowledge so that he could show that his metaphysical findings were certain and unshakeable; but his use of the method of doubt played no substantive role. The doubt was simply a filter for certainty.

A cognitive and metaphysical reading

A third type of reading, which will be favored here, joins Descartes' theory of knowledge – or, better, his theory of the cognitive faculties – with his quest for a new metaphysics. According to this sort of reading, Descartes sought to bring his readers to an awareness of cognitive resources latent in their own minds, which they could then use to see the first principles of metaphysics for themselves.

As we have seen, the *Meditations* contains frequent mention of various cognitive faculties or powers of mind, including the senses, imagination, memory, intellect, and will. For much of the twentieth century, talk of such faculties was considered illegitimate and therefore as unsuited to a "charitable" interpretation of an author such as Descartes. This supposed illegitimacy was frequently expressed by repeating a joke from the seventeenth-century playwright Molière about the Doctor who explained that opium puts people to sleep because of its "dormitive" or sleep-inducing virtue. The joke depends on the idea that it is empty and pointless to *explain* the ability to induce sleep by positing a sleep-inducing ability. However, Descartes (and others) did not fall into the trap of seeking to explain human intellectual ability by saying that the intellect has the faculty of intellection. Faculty terms were classificatory. Intellect, will, memory, etc. are identifiable kinds of mental activity, each with its own characteristics, which are subject to further description and classification. Talk of faculties offers a classification of the powers of the mind (1:366).

By taking seriously the faculty talk in the *Meditations*, we can see that the apparently "epistemological" parts of the work functioned to reveal significant facts about the mind's cognitive faculties. Descartes was particularly interested in analyzing the roles of the senses and the pure intellect. The Aristotelians had assigned the intellect an important role in knowledge, of discerning the "universal," or common nature, shared by all the instances of a natural kind (e.g., the common nature that makes each horse a horse). But in doing so, the Aristotelian intellect always had to operate on an image (also known as a phantasm) originating from the senses. As has been mentioned, Descartes held that the intellect can operate independently of the senses. Because this would have been news to the Aristotelians, he had to work hard to convince them of it. Meditations 2–6 all emphasize the discovery and proper use of the pure intellect, with the method of doubt preparing for and aiding this discovery (see 7:130–1). Once the meditator becomes accustomed to the clear and distinct perceptions of the intellect, metaphysical conclusions fall thick and fast in Meditations 3–6. On this reading, Descartes seeks to reform the theory of cognition in preparation for discovering and defending a new metaphysics.

Specific questions, alternative paths

Beyond these large questions about the overall aim of the *Meditations*, others arise about specific arguments and conclusions. We will sometimes consider competing construals of an argument as we proceed through the text, and each reader should try to decide which version is most philosophically compelling, while also fitting Descartes' text.

One important question concerns the role of consciousness in Descartes' philosophy. The *cogito* argument in the Second Meditation focuses attention on the conscious thoughts of the meditator. Elsewhere, Descartes affirms that every act of thinking possesses consciousness (7:246). But in the Third Meditation he emphasizes the representational character of thought, and in several places he characterizes the mind as an intellectual (or perceiving) substance (e.g., 7:12, 78). This raises the question (addressed in Chapters 4 and 8) of

which, if either, is more fundamental in Descartes' conception of thought: consciousness, or intellection and representation.

Another decisive interpretive question concerns the problem of the "Cartesian circle," first raised by Arnauld (7:214). The problem is that Descartes apparently appeals to God's existence and perfection to legitimize the criterion of clear and distinct perception, and he also uses that very criterion to prove the existence and perfection (hence goodness) of God. This procedure seems circular, in that a specific criterion of truth is used to establish the argument that legitimizes that very criterion. Given the centrality of the criterion of clear and distinct perception in establishing Descartes' metaphysical results, this charge of circularity is potentially devastating.

We will consider several approaches to the circle in Chapters 5–7. For now, I will illustrate the sorts of interpretive choice open to readers by mentioning two approaches yielding different conclusions about circularity. On one reading, Descartes does not use an appeal to God to legitimize clear and distinct perception itself. Rather, he achieves his initial confidence in clear and distinct perception by reflecting on the *cogito* reasoning at the beginning of the Third Meditation. He then uses such perception to investigate and remove the hypothesis of the deceiving God, left over from the First Meditation, by establishing that God is no deceiver. Hopefully, because God is not used to vindicate the criterion itself, the circle can be avoided.

On another reading, Descartes wants or needs to prove that the mind is properly attuned to a mind-independent reality. He calls upon God, as creator of the human intellect as well as the very natures of things, to guarantee that the intellect is attuned to those natures. This divine guarantee underwrites the claims of transcendent metaphysics to know the natures of things as they are in themselves. It seems difficult to avoid the circle on this reading. If we followed a strong principle of charity, we might rule out this reading on the face of it. But we will not do that. Our approach will be to consider both Descartes' successes and failures. If the conclusion that he fell prey to the circle is to be rejected, it will not be on the basis of simple charity. It will require a reading that makes good philosophical sense contextually and fits the text well.

Be active when reading

One of the most satisfying aspects of reading good philosophy is the joy of working out your own view of what is good and what is important in a particular work. I suggest that you use this guidebook and the hints it contains to come to your own reading of the text. As you formulate this reading, try also to consider how you would convince someone with a different reading that yours is a good one. In the end, whether you agree with Descartes or not, in reading his text you will raise new questions for yourself, and consider new answers, on such topics as the nature of mind and body, and the possibility of metaphysical knowledge.

References and further reading

Introductory works aimed primarily at Descartes' *Meditations* include G. Dicker, *Descartes: An Analytical and Historical Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), A. Kenny, *Descartes: A Study of His Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1968), and J. Cottingham, *Descartes* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986). Dicker offers a primarily epistemological reading, Kenny a metaphysical one, and Cottingham a cognitive and metaphysical one. The more advanced works of M. Guèroult, *Descartes' Philosophy Interpreted According to the Order of Reasons* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984–85), and M.D. Wilson, *Descartes* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), provide metaphysical readings. E. Curley, *Descartes Against the Skeptics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), offers a cognitive and metaphysical reading. References to further epistemological readings are given in Chapter 4.

A. Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Descartes' Meditations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), contains many helpful essays; the first three, by Rorty, Kosman, and Hatfield, examine the meditational structure of Descartes' work (which Hatfield places in an Augustinian context). D. Sepper reviews work on that topic in "The Texture of Thought: Why Descartes' *Meditations* Are Meditational, and Why It Matters," in S. Gaukroger, J. Schuster, and J. Sutton (eds.),

Descartes' Natural Philosophy, (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 736–50. R. Ariew and M. Grene (eds.), *Descartes and His Contemporaries: Meditations, Objections, and Replies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), focuses on the objections and replies. For the view that Descartes was an atheist, see H. Caton, *The Origin of Subjectivity: An Essay on Descartes* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973).

For the mainstream scholastic Aristotelian doctrine that all thought requires an image, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica* (London: Blackfriars, 1964–81), Part 1, question 84, articles 7–8; on the doctrines that in this life God's essence cannot be known by natural human cognition because all thought is based in the senses, and that his existence and role as creator can be thought of and known only through analogy, see Part 1, question 12, articles 11–12, and question 13. These passages are available in A.C. Pegis (ed.), *Introduction to Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Modern Library, 1948).

Works examining method in Descartes include L.J. Beck, *Metaphysics of Descartes: A Study of the Meditations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) and *Method of Descartes: A Study of the Regulae* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), and D.E. Flage and C.A. Bonnen, *Descartes and Method: A Search for a Method in Meditations* (London: Routledge, 1999). M. Miles, *Insight and Inference: Descartes's Founding Principle and Modern Philosophy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), examines Descartes' method from the perspective that his philosophy actually was focused on the soul and God and only secondarily directed toward the new science.

On the methods and uses of the history of philosophy, see J. Ree, M. Ayers, and A. Westoby, *Philosophy and Its Past* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978), R. Rorty, J.B. Schneewind, and Q. Skinner (eds.), *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), and A.J. Holland (ed.), *Philosophy, Its History and Historiography* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1985).