unusually faithful to Augustine's argument." There certainly are important comparisons to be made between what these two great thinkers have to say about God and evil, but the differences are at least as important as the similarities.

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"Turn My Will in Completely the Opposite Direction":

Radical Doubt and Descartes's Account of Free Will

2

LISA SHAPIRO
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Descartes's gestures at addressing the problem of free will are less than satisfying from a contemporary point of view. He does not directly consider how we can reconcile human freedom with the physical determinism characteristic of a mechanistic natural world. If there is a problem for him with voluntary action, it is in understanding the nature of the causation involved in mind-body interaction, but not in the fact that we can will our bodies to move. They are more satisfying from the point of view of Scholasticism. Descartes at least recognizes that there is a problem reconciling human free will and divine preordination, but his effort to resolve this problem almost suggests that he just does not want to be bothered with the metaphysical conundrums of the problem. Both in the *Principles* I.41 and in correspondence with Elisabeth, he maintains that though our finite minds leave us unable to reconcile our own freedom and the determinism implied by God's preordination, we should give up neither commitment because of our limited understanding.[1] In this paper my aim is not to run that metaphysical gauntlet on Descartes's behalf. Rather I want to take a step back from the problem of free will to consider just how Descartes conceives of the free will that he repeatedly insists we "experience and feel in ourselves."[2] While the account I offer here will no doubt have implications for understanding his approach to the problem of free will, I will not be able to pursue these here.

Quite famously, Descartes sends a mixed message about what free will consists in. On the one hand, in the Fourth Meditation and elsewhere, Descartes main-

1 See AT 8A:20; CSM 1:206, and the letter to Elisabeth of 3 November 1645 (AT 4:332-3; CSM 3:277). Throughout this paper I will use a standard format to refer to passages in Descartes's writings. I provide first the Adam and Tannery edition (Descartes 1996) (AT) volume number, followed by page numbers (after a colon), and then the Cottingham, et al, translation (Descartes 1984-1991) (CSM) volume number, followed by page numbers (after a colon).

2 He puts it this way in the 3 November 1645 letter to Elisabeth (AT 4:333; CSM 3:277), but consistently refers to our experience of our free will. I discuss this in more detail below.

tains that the will is determined, by its very nature, to affirm the true and pursue the good. Cartesian epistemology would seem to rely on this freedom of spontaneity. On the other hand, in the *Principles* and in correspondence, he suggests that our free will consists essentially in a power to do otherwise, or a freedom of indifference.[3] Nowhere is this clearer than in his letter to Mesland of 9 February 1645. There, famously, Descartes maintains that when a very evident reason moves us in one direction, although morally speaking we can hardly move in the contrary direction, absolutely speaking we can. For it is always open to us to hold back from pursuing a clearly known good, or from admitting a clearly perceived truth, provided we consider it a good thing to demonstrate the freedom of our will by so doing. (AT 4:173; CSM 3:245) He thus would seem to admit that clear and distinct perceptions do not necessitate our spontaneous affirmation, and so to contravene the account of will relied upon in arriving at the method for avoiding error in the Fourth Meditation.

Because of the impact on Descartes's epistemology, it is easy to conclude that these two sets of remarks are inconsistent with one another, and commentators have typically argued that Descartes holds one account or another, offering explanations for those passages which do not seem to conform to their preferred account. Despite their efforts, the fact remains that Descartes consistently avows both sorts of accounts in the same texts. That he does so in the *Principles*, is widely acknowledged, (and is usually explained away), but that he also does so in the *Meditations* is not usually recognized.[4] At the end of the First Meditation, in an appeal to the will in the *Meditations* that commentators often overlook, the meditator 'turns his will' to consider his former beliefs as not merely doubtful but false (AT 7:22; CSM 2:15). This move seems a clear instance of the will as a power to do otherwise. This consistent appeal to both sorts of will in the same texts suggests that, for Descartes, they are not distinct alternatives but form a consistent whole. My aim is to show how they do so by examining how the First Meditation exercise of will as a power to do otherwise relates to the Fourth Meditation account of the will as determined to affirm spontaneously those ideas perceived clearly and distinctly. In the end, I will claim that for Descartes the will by its nature compels us to affirm the true and to pursue the good insofar as we properly understand, that is, the will. We come to understand our nature as willing things, however, by acting contrary to our inclinations, that is, by exercising a power to do otherwise. Proper understanding of the will determines us to act in accord with its nature in virtue of illuminating for us the measure of truth and falsity; we gain a rule, if you will, for rightly conducting our reason. On this view, then, freedom and self-understanding are intimately intertwined for Descartes. Not only does this reading reflect the view of the *Meditations*, it can also help us to make sense of some of the more inscrutable of Descartes's remarks. I begin, however, by laying out the seemingly inconsistent set of remarks Descartes makes concerning the will.

3 I use 'freedom of indifference' here to refer to the freedom to choose between two contrary alternatives, or the freedom of deliberation. I want to avoid pre-judging whether the indifference referred to in the Fourth Meditation corresponds to this freedom of indifference. I will address this issue directly below.

4 Schouls 1994 is a rare instance of attention to this passage.

THE TEXTS

In the Fourth Meditation, in the course of establishing the method for avoiding error, Descartes maintains that the highest grade of freedom is that whereby the will spontaneously affirms what is perceived clearly to be true, and he contrasts this freedom of spontaneity with a lesser freedom,[5] whereby we are not determined one way or another and must deliberate:

> In order to be free, there is no need for me to be inclined both ways; on the contrary, the more I incline in one direction—either because I clearly understand that reasons of truth and goodness point that way, or because of a divinely produced disposition of my inmost thoughts, the freer is my choice ... But the indifference I feel when there is no reason pushing me one way or another is the lowest grade of freedom; it is evidence not of any perfection of freedom, but rather of a defect in knowledge or a kind of negation. For if I always saw clearly what was true and good, I should never have to deliberate about the right judgement or choice. (AT 7:58; CSM 2:40)

Here Descartes certainly seems to be espousing an account of freedom wherein the will is determined by its nature to affirm the true and pursue the good.[6] This position is echoed most particularly in *Principles* 1.43 where Descartes claims that "the minds of all of us have been so moulded by nature that whenever we perceive something clearly, we spontaneously give our assent to it and are quite unable to doubt its truth" (AT 8A:21; CSM 1:207), as well as in a letter to Mesland of 2 May 1644, predating the problematic letter of 1645. There he again claims that "it seems clear to me that a great light in the intellect is followed by a great inclination of the will, so that if we see very clearly that a thing is good for us, it is very difficult—and on my view impossible, as long as one continues in the same thought—to stop the course of our desire" (AT 4:115; CSM 3:233).[7]

5 Though this freedom is often called a freedom of indifference, as I noted above (n.3), I hesitate here to follow this standard shorthand, for freedom of indifference is usually aligned with a positive power to do otherwise. I do not want to prejudge what Descartes intends here.

6 Here Descartes would seem to be adopting an account of freedom consonant with that of the Oratorians, who adopted an Augustinian conception of human will. For some discussion of this point see Chappell 1994 and Schmaltz 1994.

7 This view is also suggested by the account of virtue articulated in the correspondence with Elisabeth and with Christina, as well as in the *Passions of the Soul*. See for instance, the letters to Elisabeth of 4 August 1645 (CSM 3:258), and to Christina of 20 November 1647 (AT 5:84f; CSM

By contrast, particularly outside the *Meditations*, Descartes seems to understand our will as a power to do otherwise rather than a capacity to act as determined 'by reasons of truth and goodness.'[8] The most unequivocal statement of this view comes in the later letter to Mesland (of 9 February 1645). It is clearly presupposed in the passage I cited earlier, but just before that passage Descartes explicitly avows this position: "But perhaps others mean by 'indifference' a positive faculty of determining oneself to one or another of two contraries, that is to say, to pursue or avoid, to affirm or deny. I do not deny that the will has this positive faculty" (AT 4:173; CSM 3:245). Though it might well seem that Descartes has done an about face in the nine months between these two letters to Mesland, the concept of will expressed here is not something wholly new for him. He privileges the power of the will to do otherwise in the *Principles* as well. In *Principles* I.39, Descartes avers that the fact "that there is freedom in our will, and that we have power in many cases to give or withhold assent at will is so evident that it must be counted among the first and most common notions that are innate in us" (AT 8A:19; CSM 1: 205-6). Descartes here takes it as a fundamental truth that we have the ability to choose between the two contrary alternatives of giving or withholding our assent. And this conception of the will underpins what Descartes has to say about our moral responsibility two articles earlier in *Pr.*I.37:

> And it is a supreme perfection in man that he acts voluntarily, that is, freely; this makes him in a special way the author of his actions and deserving of praise for what he does. We do not praise automatons for accurately producing all the movements they were designed to perform, because the production of these movements occurs necessarily. It is the designer who is praised ... for in constructing [these devices] he acted not out of necessity but freely. By the same principle, when we embrace the truth, our doing so voluntarily is much more to our credit than would be the case if we could not do otherwise. (AT 8A:18-19; CSM 1:205)[9]

For Descartes, we would not be worthy of praise if we were determined to act in a certain way, as are automatons. We are assigned moral responsibility, and presumably responsibility for our beliefs as well, it seems, because we do the right thing when we could have done otherwise.[10]

These texts stand in tension with one another most particularly because of the role freedom of spontaneity plays in Descartes's epistemology. In the Fourth

3:325f), and *Passions* a.48 (AT 11:367). See also the letter to Mersenne of the end of May 1637 (AT 1:366; CSM 3:55).

8 In these passages Descartes seems to be aligning himself with the Molinist position, adopted by the Jesuits. Again, see Chappell 1994 and Schmaltz 1994 for some discussion of this point.

9 Schmaltz 1994 has an excellent discussion of this passage.

10 For other texts in support of this view see *Discourse* Part 3, and a letter to Reneri for Pollot, April or May 1638 (AT 2:36f, CSM 3:97f). In addition, in the *Notae Programmae* Descartes does not take issue with Regius' assertions (theses 20 and 21) that the will is free and self-determining.

Meditation, it seems that we arrive at the method for avoiding error just by recognizing that our will is determined to affirm what the intellect perceives clearly and distinctly. Yet, as the 1645 letter to Mesland illustrates, understanding the will as a positive power to do otherwise would seem to undermine the basis of that method. For if our clear and distinct ideas do not determine our assent, how do we know that we judge correctly by affirming them?

Commentators have tried to press Descartes into holding one account of will or another.[11] And, in a variation on this sort of strategy, some have argued that Descartes's position undergoes a shift from the *Meditations* to the *Principles*.[12] All these interpretations share the assumption that the freedom of spontaneity of the Fourth Meditation and the freedom of indifference in other passages are antithetical to one another. There is a problem with this sort of strategy, however. Descartes actually consistently asserts both views in a single text. In the quick review of passages just undertaken, we can see Descartes espousing both views in the *Principles*—in *Pr.*I.43 he would seem to avow that it is our nature to affirm clear and distinct ideas and in *Pr.*I.37 and 39, he affirms that we have a power of doing otherwise. One might explain Descartes's seemingly contradictory remarks here by remarking that our spontaneous assent is demanded by clear and distinct perceptions whereas our will as indifferent applies when we do not. This response goes some way towards alleviating tensions within one text, but it raises the question of how these two different accounts of will work together. The default assumption seems to be that the human will has a kind of built in switch: when confronted with a clear and distinct perception this switch flips to a liberty of spontaneity; when the perception is not clear and distinct, it flips to the liberty of indifference. This picture of a bivalent will strikes me as awkward in the way that arbitrary solutions are.[13] It would be better for Descartes if we could see our voluntary responses to our various ideas as of a piece.

The question of how to reconcile the two apparently different aspects of will becomes even more poignant in the face of the 1645 letter to Mesland, for there it certainly seems as if Descartes thinks our freedom of indifference can override our freedom of spontaneity: we can move "in a contrary direction" to what we perceive most evidently.[14] There is another place, however, where Descartes also espouses both accounts of will: the *Meditations*. Examining how the two forms of will figure in the *Meditations* can help in answering this question of how

11 For accounts that emphasize the role of the determination of the will by the true and the good in Descartes's account of free will, see Hoffman 2003, Chappell 1994, and Kenny 1972. For accounts that take Cartesian freedom to consist in a power to do otherwise see Alanen 2003, Moyal 1997, and less expressly Hoffman 1995 (Hoffman explicitly alters his view in Hoffman 2003).

12 See, for instance, Schmaltz 1994, Beyssade 1994, Aliquié 1950.

13 In addition, this picture seems to uncritically assume that the indifference referred to in the Fourth Meditation is just a liberty of indifference, understood as a power to do otherwise.

14 Kenny 1972, for instance, has argued that we can avoid this reading of the letter to Mesland by distinguishing the case of failing to affirm a clear and distinct perception while we are having it from that in which we do so when we direct our attention elsewhere.

Descartes's account of will fits together, and, I think, can also shed light on the puzzling statement to Mesland.

The First Meditation

At the end of the First Meditation, after the meditator has gone through the series of skeptical arguments to reach the "neither flippant nor ill-considered conclusion" that "there is not one of my former beliefs about which a doubt may not properly be raised" (AT 7:21; CSM 2:14-15), he finds himself nonetheless drawn back to his former beliefs: they "capture my belief, which is as it were bound over to them as a result of long occupation and the law of custom" (AT 7:22; CSM 2:15). In order to counter this strong inclination, the meditator decides to "turn my will in completely the opposite direction and deceive myself, by pretending for a time that these former opinions are utterly false and imaginary" (ibid.).[15] It is at this point, more famously, that he supposes that "some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive" him (ibid.), and comes to consider his experience of the world as "the delusions of dreams."

Now it might well be that the meditator here is just describing the effort it takes to adhere to the conclusions of his skeptical arguments. Doing so may well involve an act of will, but that act might be just the sort compatible with the will's being determined. Nonetheless, the conception of will in play here does seem to be that of a freedom of indifference. That is, the meditator's acts of will seem to involve his determining himself to one of two contraries. First, the meditator's considering his former opinions as false clearly presupposes that he could do one of two contrary things: either fall back into old habit and affirm his former opinions or deny them and thereby break those habits. Moreover, the meditator not only turns his will, he also resolves to do so. That is, he wills to keep on willing in the same way, rather than be left vacillating or changing his mind. That is, he determines the course of his belief. The account that follows brings home that his is an act of self-determination. The language with which the meditator invokes the malicious demon is fraught with willfulness. He vows to "stubbornly and firmly persist" in his meditation, asserts that it is in his power to "resolutely guard" against the deceptions of the demon, and concludes with the despairing claim that he is "like a prisoner who is enjoying an imaginary freedom while asleep; as he begins to suspect that he is asleep, he dreads being woken up, and goes along with the pleasant illusion as long as he can" (AT 7:23, CSM 2:15). It is hard to know how to read this last passage, but I take it that the meditator is bemoaning

15 The Descartes 1984-1991, vol. 2, translation (CSM) puts this claim perhaps more actively than the Latin demands. The Latin reads: *"Ut opinior, non male agam, si, voluntate plane in contrarium versa me ipsum fallam illos que aliquando omnino falsas imaginariasque esse fingam...."* A more literal translation would be: "I believe I would not act badly if, turning my will in completely the opposite direction, I deceive myself that these former opinions are utterly false and imaginary." I do not think this issue of translation affects my reading of this passage.

the difficulty of his newfound freedom, the difficulty of his considering as false all he once took to be true, and of his standing resolutely on guard against the demon's deceptions, the difficulty of taking responsibility for his beliefs. And, as we have seen, according to the *Principles*, attributions of responsibility would seem to depend on our having a power to do otherwise. The meditator's persistence in his project of finding something stable and lasting in the sciences demands that he actively do otherwise than he is inclined, and be determined to continue on this course. Through this self-determination, his actions, and indeed his beliefs, become his own, and he can be held responsible for them.

It is worth pointing out how peculiar and puzzling this act of will is from the point of view of the Fourth Meditation. The meditator turns his will to consider as false those beliefs that are most evident to him. The opinions at issue are those which "capture his belief," much as do clear and distinct perceptions. While the meditator claims they do so because they are "highly probably opinions... which, despite the fact that they are in a sense doubtful, ... it is still much more reasonable to believe than to deny" (AT 7:22; CSM 2:15), this explanation is somewhat misleading. While his opinions are not officially clear and distinct perceptions, they do include objects of thoughts that will be. For they include "arithmetic, geometry and other subjects of this kind, which deal only with the simplest and most general things," and other "transparent truths" that seem to constitute "the most perfect knowledge" (AT 7:20; CSM 2:14). The meditator here is certainly doubting those beliefs he has taken to be transparently—one wants to say self-evidently—true, but it also seems that he is also willing to consider them as false.[16] In either case, he is acting contrary to a very strong inclination of his will, something that from the point of view of the Fourth Meditation should not be possible.

The radical doubt at the end of the First Meditation—whether we understand this to involve the meditator's wholesale suspension of judgement or his considering all his previous beliefs as false—involves an exercise of will as the power to do otherwise. Moreover, it provides the context in which the meditator arrives at the certainty he seeks. And in the Fourth Meditation, Descartes affirms that the will is determined by reasons of truth and goodness. We thus find the two competing accounts of will Descartes has been taken to offer in another text. And here, even more than in the *Principles*, it is important to understand how these two accounts fit together.

16 If he is in fact doing the latter, I am of mixed minds about whether this move at the end of the First Meditation exemplifies the sort of case described in the 1645 letter to Mesland. Given that the meditator is simply impelled to affirm the *cogito*, shouldn't he too affirm spontaneously what the Fifth Meditation will mark as eternal truths? On the other hand, perhaps, the meditator doesn't have the perception before his mind as he denies them, and so he is not impelled to affirm them. Kenny 1972 recommends this strategy for accommodating the letter to Mesland. However, I find it hard to see how one could consider as false a thought one is not attending to. Perhaps the perceptions here are not yet perceived clearly and distinctly. Settling this issue would require a much deeper discussion of the nature of clear and distinct perception than I can undertake here.

The distinctive style of the *Meditations* suggests a strategy for understanding Descartes's account of will. As he describes it in the Second Replies, the work follows the method of analysis.[17] The intellectual moves the meditator makes follow the logic of discovery. In following these moves, the attentive reader is to see how one idea necessitates the next, so that "he will make the thing his own and understand it just as perfectly as if he had discovered it for himself" (AT 7:155, CSM 2:110). I propose to follow these moves with regard to the will. That is, I propose to understand what is involved in the move from the meditator's exercise of his power to do otherwise to the determination to affirm spontaneously what he perceives clearly and distinctly in order to understand how Descartes's account of will is meant to hang together as a whole.

From the First to the Fourth

So what happens between the First and the Fourth Meditations with regard to the will? The meditator establishes the *cogito*: that it is necessarily true that he exists in so far as he is thinking, and that he is a thinking thing. He goes on to establish that God, an infinite and perfect being, exists as the cause, or creator and sustainer, of him, a thinking thing with an idea of such a perfect being. And he establishes that God, as a perfect being, is not a deceiver. How do these truths bear on the apparent shift in how the First and Fourth Meditations present the nature of the will?

To answer this question it will help to consider the way the will figures in the epistemological conclusion of the Fourth Meditation. For in the Fourth Meditation—its title is "Of truth and falsity"—we are meant to regain the cognitive footing lost through the First Meditation's skeptical arguments, and to be able at last to distinguish rightfully between the true and the false. Without doubt, the Fourth Meditation establishes the general rule set out provisionally at the beginning of the Third Meditation: "that whatever I perceive clearly and distinctly is true" (AT 7:34; CSM 2:24). At its end the meditator does conclude that what he perceives clearly and distinctly is "undoubtedly something, and hence cannot come from nothing, but must have God for its author" and so, since God "cannot be a deceiver on pain of contradiction, ... is undoubtedly true" (AT 7:62; CSM 2:43). That is, the veridicality of clear and distinct perceptions is a result of the Fourth Meditation. Important for the discussion here is *how* the meditator establishes this conclusion, and how the will figures in it.

It is striking that the meditator does not arrive at this conclusion by identifying the criteria that serve to define clearly and distinctly perceived ideas as such. When pressed on this point by his objectors, Descartes evades the issue.[18] Indeed, it does not seem he ever bothers to get clear about clarity and distinctness, judging from the vagueness of the definition he offers in the *Principles* I.45. There he stipulates

17 See AT 7:155-159; CSM 2:110-113.

18 See Second Objections, AT 7:126; CSM 2:90, and Descartes's reply, AT 7:144-45; CSM 2:103f; and Fifth Objections, AT 7:318; CSM 2:221, and Descartes's reply, AT 7:379; CSM 2:260.

that a perception is "'clear' when it is present or accessible to the mind ... [and] 'distinct' if, as well as being clear it is so sharply separated from all other perceptions that it contains within itself only what is clear" (At 8A: 22; CSM 1:207-8).

Rather the meditator comes to see that his clear and distinct perceptions are true by reflecting more carefully on his own nature as a thinking thing and in particular on his faculty of judgement to determine how to use that faculty correctly.[19] His strategy is to "look more closely at myself and inquire into the nature of my errors" (AT 7:56; CSM 2:39),[20] and through this self-examination he quickly perceives that his judgements are concurrently caused by intellect and will. Through this analysis of what it is to judge and the role of the will in judging, he comes to understand that it is the nature of his will to spontaneously affirm those beliefs clearly seen as true. He asserts, "in order to be free, there is no need for me to be inclined both ways; on the contrary, the more I incline in one direction—either because I clearly understand that reasons of truth and goodness point that way, or because of a divinely produced disposition of my inmost thought—the freer is my choice" (AT 7:57-8; CSM 2: 40). This new understanding of the nature of his will in turn yields insight into how to act, or in this case, judge correctly: "If, however, I simply refrain from making a judgement in cases where I do not perceive the truth with sufficient clarity and distinctness, then it is clear that I am behaving correctly and avoiding error. But if in such cases I either affirm or deny, then I am not using my free will correctly" (AT 7:59; CSM 2:41). What follows in the meditation, a litany of causes not to complain, is a further affirmation of his nature as a human being, a freely willing being of a finite intellect.

The work of the Fourth Meditation is thus that of furthering the self-understanding begun in the Second Meditation. Its conclusion—that clear and distinct ideas are necessarily true—is derived from insight into the nature of a thinking thing as willing and in particular as affirming and denying. It is our nature to affirm spontaneously clear and distinct ideas, and, because God is not a deceiver, that natural inclination cannot be misguided. That is, the clear and distinct ideas that we naturally affirm must be true. We can avoid error by recognizing and affirming our nature.

The relevance of what happens from the Second to the Fourth Meditation to Descartes's account of the will is now clear. In the Second Meditation, the meditator discovers his nature as a thinking thing, a nature that includes faculties of willing and judging (or at least affirming and denying). The Third Meditation

19 Early in the Third Meditation, the meditator had noted that the loci of truth and falsity, and thus the loci of error, are judgements, and not ideas considered in and of themselves. See AT 7:37; CSM 2:26. It thus makes sense, given the aim of the Fourth Meditation, that he begins there to examine his judgements more assiduously.

20 He writes a bit earlier in the Fourth Meditation: "I know by experience that there is in me a faculty of judgement, which, like everything else which is in me, I certainly received from God. And since God does not wish to deceive me, he surely did not give me the kind of faculty which would ever enable me to go wrong while using it correctly" (AT 7:53-54; CSM 2:37-38).

affords further insight into this nature, and in particular its capacity for knowledge. We arrive at knowledge by making true judgements, not simply by containing within us ideas of a certain kind. Furthermore, it is, in principle, possible for us to make true judgements because we have been created and are sustained by a non-deceiving God. God has created us with a will naturally inclined to affirm what is evident to us, and, because God is not a deceiver, those natural inclinations cannot be misguided. It is just in our will's nature to incline towards the true and pursue the good. We judge correctly, then, in spontaneously affirming our clear and distinct perceptions. And we go astray when we act in a way we are not spontaneously inclined to.

What still remains to be explained is how the act of will at the end of the First Meditation figures in his new understanding of the will's nature. Not only does that act of will appear antithetical to the nature of the will, but also Descartes surely could have had his meditator examine his nature as a thinking thing without denying, or even doubting, what appears to be evidently true. The question is this: How does acting contrary to our natural inclinations contribute to our understanding of our will? In what sense is it even possible to act contrary to our nature in this way?

Let me introduce another piece of the puzzle. The meditator does not come to understand the nature of the human will by considering it in the abstract. He does not, in the Fourth Meditation, expound metaphysical principles to be taken on authority, or otherwise dogmatically assert the nature of the will. Rather, he appeals to his own *experience* of the will. He claims: "I know by *experience* that it is not restricted in any way" (AT 7:56; CSM 2:39) and "[i]t is only the will, or freedom of choice, which I *experience* within me to be so great that the idea of any greater faculty is beyond my grasp" (AT 7:57; CSM 2:40). Most centrally, he illustrates the distinction he draws between the freedom of spontaneity and the lesser degree of freedom by appeal to his own experience of judging that he exists and is a thinking thing. Shortly after he has laid out this difference in the grades of freedom, he writes:

> For example, during these past few days I have been asking whether anything in the world exists, and I have realized that from the very fact of my raising this question it follows quite evidently that I exist. I could not but judge that something which I understood so clearly was true; but this was not because I was compelled so to judge by any external force, but because a great light in the intellect was followed by a great inclination of the will, and thus the spontaneity and freedom of my belief was all the greater in proportion to my lack of indifference. But now, besides the knowledge that I exist, in so far as I am a thinking thing, an idea of corporeal nature comes into my mind; and I happen to be in doubt as to whether the thinking nature which is in me, or rather which I am, is distinct from this corporeal nature or identical with it. I am making the further supposition that my intellect has not yet come upon any persuasive reason in favour of one alternative rather than the other. This obviously implies that I am indifferent as to whether I should assert or deny either alternative, or indeed refrain from making any judgement on the matter. (AT 7: 58-59; CSM 2:41)

This discussion in the *Meditations* is the meat of what Descartes intends in his appeals to our "experience" of our own free will elsewhere. In *Principles* I.6 he takes our experience to demonstrate our having a free will. There, he notes that "we nonetheless experience within us the kind of freedom which enables us always to refrain from believing things which are not completely certain or thoroughly examined" (AT 8A:6, CSM 1:94). Later in the *Principles* in the title to 1.39, he claims that the "freedom of the will is self-evident," and this self-evidence consists simply in that we "experienced [it] within us" (AT 8A:19-20; CSM 1:205-6).[21] The *Meditations* thus spells out what our experience of the will demonstrates. And it suggests that the account of the nature of the will Descartes does set out is not *on its own* sufficient to constitute understanding of that nature. In order to genuinely understand the will's nature, the meditator must find that account realized in his own experience. He can legitimately claim that the will is impelled to affirm clearly and distinctly perceived ideas only once he has recognized himself as having experienced this pull in finding himself spontaneously drawn to affirm those ideas taken to be evidently true. For Descartes, then, our understanding the nature of the will derives from our experience of it.

With this point in mind let us return to the act of will in the First Meditation. One might ask how our attention is drawn to our experience of the will? When the meditator asks "What am I?" in the Second Meditation, he answers that he is a thinking thing, and he includes willing as a faculty of thought. But what justifies that inclusion? The only express act of will at that point in the *Meditations* is that at the end of the First Meditation. With that act the meditator experiences his own will. Moreover, in turning his will in the opposite direction, to consider opinions that "capture his belief" as false, the meditator puts himself in a position to recognize the nature of the will. In exerting his will in such a radical way, he attends to

21 See also, *Pr.*I.41 "we have such close awareness of the freedom and indifference within us", *Pr.* II, 26 "...our bodies move by our will, of which we have inner awareness", *Description of the Human Body*, "we have all found by experience that many bodily movements occur in obedience to the will" (AT 11:224, CSM 1:314), and a letter to Elisabeth of 3 November 1645, "we nonetheless experience within us the kind of freedom..." (AT 4:332; CSM 3:277); and remarks recorded in the *Conversation with Burman* (AT 5:159; CSM 3:342).

In addition, Regius, in the program of alleged Cartesian theses he expounds, reads Descartes as claiming that we know our freedom by an "inner awareness", and this is one of the few theses about which Descartes has nothing to say. The relevant thesis is the twentieth: "The will is free, and, in the case of natural things, is indifferent as between opposites—as we know from our own inner awareness" (AT 8B:346; CSM 1:296). The twenty-first thesis claims that the will is self-determining. Descartes in his *Notae Programmae* bends over backwards to distance himself from many of the theses Regius has attributed to him, and is quite clearly perturbed. However, he has very little to say about the theses concerning the freedom of the will, and our knowledge of that freedom.

and reflects on, the experience of willing.[22] In doing so, he comes to recognize the nature of the will as governed by considerations of the true and the good.

Pre-reflectively, we find ourselves inclined to affirm those ideas which seem to be evidently true, and others which seem highly probable, but until we understand our nature—the will's nature—properly, our inclinations are only that—dispositions which we can resist by speculating on how things might be otherwise. Indeed, we can go so far as to suppose things *are* otherwise. Post-reflectively, however, we understand that those dispositions are far from arbitrary. They derive from our nature, and our nature, since it is created by God, is perfect of its kind.

In properly understanding our nature, we, by our nature, spontaneously affirm that nature; it is in this way our will is determined. That is, once we recognize that our will is moved by the true and the good, we resolve to act in accordance with our nature, and so we cannot but affirm ideas we perceive as evidently true. The determination of the will is thus not to be understood as an internal compulsion we have independently of our experience and awareness of it. Rather, we are determined insofar as we realize our nature as human beings. The determination of the will is thus a peculiar one, because it involves a self-conscious act of will—a resolution. Our being determined to affirm only true ideas derives from a self-determination borne of our affirmation of our own nature.

In a certain respect, then, I am agreeing with Lilli Alanen's recent reading of Descartes on the will.[23] For Alanen too recognizes the importance of the meditator's resolution to affirm only clear and distinct ideas at the end of the Fourth Meditation, and takes Cartesian freedom to essentially involve a self-determination. For Alanen, however, this act of self-determination demonstrates that for Descartes human freedom is essentially a positive power to do otherwise, or a freedom of indifference. In her view, it is always open to us to determine ourselves to act in some other way; though such self-determination might well deviate from the true and the good, and so be perverse, it is nonetheless possible to consistently and stably resolve to act in this way.[24] While I agree that Descartes does want to maintain that human beings have a freedom of indifference, I locate it differently. In my view, for Descartes, in so far as we do properly understand our nature, we are not only inclined to affirm it, but are determined to do so. We can exercise a freedom of indifference with respect to our ends just when we have an insufficient knowledge of our nature. For Alanen, our resolve to pursue the truth is a choice. On my view, it is a determination to affirm our

22 Interestingly, in the Fourth Meditation, Descartes returns to his experience of turning of his will in the opposite direction. He writes: "My experience in the last few days confirms this: the mere fact that I found that all my previous beliefs were in some sense open to doubt was enough to turn my absolutely confident belief in their truth into the supposition that they were wholly false" (AT 7:59; CSM 2:41). He is now able to see that his ability to act in this way reflected his indifference about the matter at hand. His "absolutely confident belief" was not based on clear and distinct perceptions but on something else.

23 See Chapter 7 of Alanen 2003.

24 See Alanen 2003, pp. 245-6.

nature. In so far as, for Descartes, human beings by nature pursue the truth and properly understand that they do so, they cannot but make this affirmation.

Note too that on the reading I have put forward thus far, I have said little or nothing about the free will that is in play when we affirm clear and distinct ideas other than that about our nature, or suspend judgement about those which are confused and obscure. I will turn to those cases in a moment. So far I have looked only at what the particular case of my idea of my own nature can tell us about Descartes's views on freedom. I have been claiming, in effect, that human freedom, for Descartes, is tied in particular to our understanding of our own nature. Our nature includes a faculty of will. To understand our nature as freely willing beings, we have to act in a way wherein we recognize that what we are doing is using our will. Acting against our natural inclinations, as does the meditator at the end of the First Meditation, is just such an act. By reflecting on our experience of the will in these actions, we come to understand that the will is by its nature inclined to affirm the true and pursue the good. This understanding leads to a determination to act in accord with our nature.

Thus, there are two important features of this account. First, we cannot be fully free without understanding the nature of the will. Second, we learn the nature of the will through the experience of acting contrary to our nature. That is, it is not clear that we could achieve the highest degree of freedom if we did nothing but affirm what is evidently true. For even though in this case we would always be acting in accord with our nature, we might well never understand that was what we were doing. Without that understanding, we are not fully free. There is a clear parallel here with a standard issue in accounts of virtue. To be virtuous one must act in accordance with the good for the right reasons, that is, because it's good. The issue is whether one could act for the right reasons if one always acted in accordance with good, or whether awareness of the right reasons requires one first act incontinently. For Descartes, I am claiming, to be fully free, to affirm for the right reasons, one must first err, that is, take what is in fact evidently true as false. This error puts us in position to see the right reasons for affirming the evidently true. Thus, I see Descartes as more sympathetic with the latter account of virtue.

These features, I think, allow for us to reconcile the two different accounts of freedom Descartes appears to hold. The determination of the will is tied to our proper understanding of our nature as inclined to affirm spontaneously the true and the good. That proper understanding derives from our doing otherwise than we are inclined. There is no contradiction in acting contrary to our natural inclinations so long as those actions are taken from a position of ignorance of our nature.

With this way of reconciling these two apparently divergent positions in mind, it is worth returning to Descartes's remarks to Mesland in the problematic 1645 letter. There, recall, he maintains that we can hold back, and indeed deny, very evident reasons, "provided we consider it a good thing to demonstrate our freedom of our will by so doing" (op. cit.). On first glance, it seems that Descartes thinks that we can act in this perverse way simply when we are feeling petulant or have some other need to exert ourselves. And so it seems that his remarks here fly in the face of his claims about the determination of the will in the Fourth

Meditation, and indeed threaten to undermine his epistemology. However, now, with the reading I have offered of the *Meditations* in mind, the concluding clause of the remark gains significance. We act in ways contrary to evident reasons not to show that we can, but rather in order to arrive at an understanding of the nature of the will. For in doing so we demonstrate to ourselves that we are by nature inclined to affirm the true and the good and so affirm that nature.

OTHER TEXTUAL SUPPORT

This reading of Descartes's account of human freedom also helps to unravel some other textual puzzles. For one, it helps to explain the prevalence of both conceptions of the will throughout Descartes's texts. I have here offered an explanation of how freedom as a power to do otherwise and freedom of spontaneity work together in the *Meditations*. But we can explain their co-existence in the *Principles* in the same way. And we can also avoid having to ascribe either self-serving motives or a real change of mind to Descartes in reconciling his 1644 and 1645 letters to Mesland.

In addition, this reading can account for Descartes's rather cryptic reply to one of Gassendi's objections to the *Meditations*. Gassendi in response to the Fourth Meditation insists that any action of the will in judgement depends on the conception of the intellect, so that if the intellect perceives something clearly, or seems to do so, the will in that case will make a judgement that is approved and settled, irrespective of whether it is in fact true, or merely thought to be true. But when the intellect's perception is obscure, the will in this case will make a judgement that is doubtful and tentative, but which will, nonetheless, be regarded for the time being as truer than its opposite (AT 7:317, CSM 2:220).

For Gassendi, our will is moved in proportion to the reasonableness of our ideas and arguments, and this point seems in harmony with Descartes's claims about the freedom of spontaneity. However, for Gassendi, it is simply impossible to engage in the radical denial of the First Meditation. For Gassendi, the will *cannot but* be moved to affirm its ideas in proportion to their reasonableness.

Descartes's reply to Gassendi is very peculiar. Rather than defending his conception of the will, and of our power to abstain or to doubt, he teases:

> You next deny certain propositions about the indifference of the will. But although these propositions are self-evident, I am not prepared to set about proving them here. These are the sorts of things that each of us ought to know by experience in his own case, rather than having to be convinced of them by rational argument; and you, O Flesh, do not seem to attend to the actions the mind performs within itself. You may be unfree, if you wish; but I am certainly very pleased with my freedom since I experience it within myself. What is more, you have produced no arguments to attack it but merely bald denials. I affirm what I have experienced and what anyone else can experience for himself, whereas your denial seems merely to be based on your own apparent failure to have the appropriate experience ... (AT 7:377; CSM 2:259-60)

What is Descartes's point here? Descartes takes Gassendi to have done exactly what the meditator purports to do at the end of the First Meditation: deny self-evident propositions. Through just this sort of denial we come to have the kind of experience of our own freedom that leads us to a proper understanding of our own nature. But Gassendi effectively denies that experience of freedom. It is for this reason that Descartes is willing to allow Gassendi to be "unfree." Either Gassendi has willfully turned a blind eye to his experience of his freedom or he has failed to "have the appropriate experience." In either case, on the conception of freedom that I have been arguing that Descartes subscribes to, Gassendi is not in a position to understand the nature of the will, and so he cannot be fully free. Descartes ribs Gassendi here, rather than offering an argument for his view, in order to get Gassendi to recognize what he has done, to attend to his experience, and so come to understand his nature as a willing being, that is, what free will is.

Moreover, this reading squares well with Descartes's notion of generosity, introduced in the *Passions of the Soul*. Cartesian generosity consists in two parts: the understanding that we have "free control of [our] volitions" and that we are praised or blamed insofar as we use this freedom well, and the "feeling within [ourselves] a firm and constant resolution to use it well" (PA a.153, AT 11:466). The first part of generosity corresponds to our own experience of a capacity to do otherwise, and the way that experience moves us to discover the nature of the will, that is, what the right course of action is. The second part of generosity consists in our determination, once we have come to understand the nature of the will, to pursue the true and the good.[25] Within this notion of generosity too, we see the conception of the will I have been arguing we attribute to Descartes.

INDIFFERENCE AND THE FOURTH MEDITATION

It remains to consider how this interpretation of Descartes's account of the will affects how we are to understand our determination to affirm clear and distinct ideas other than that of our nature, and the sense in which we are indifferent with regard to confused and obscure ideas. As is well known, Descartes maintains that when we perceive clearly and distinctly we cannot but judge what we so perceive to be true—we spontaneously affirm those ideas; and that when we do not so perceive we feel indifferent. As I noted above, to accommodate this position, it is tempting to read Descartes as proposing a bivalent account of will, but I also suggested that this sort of line has the ring of arbitrariness. We are now in a position to see how Descartes, fortunately, might well have something else in mind.

The first thing to note is that there is little textual basis for taking the feeling of indifference Descartes adverts to here as a liberty of indifference taken as a positive power to do otherwise. The way Descartes describes this feeling of indifference is telling: "For although probable conjectures may pull me in one

25 For a more comprehensive treatment of generosity see Shapiro 1999.

direction, the mere knowledge that they are simply conjectures, and not certain and indubitable reasons, is itself quite enough to push my assent the other way (AT 7:59; CSM 2:41). Note that indifference here is *not* characterized by a lack of determination in one direction or another; nor is it a matter of being free to deliberate about and choose what our ends are; nor is it a positive power to do otherwise. Rather when we are indifferent we find ourselves determined in sequence in opposing directions, by our understanding. Reasons move us first in one way, then in the other.[26] The difference between a clear and distinct perception and a confused and obscure one is not that we are determined to a particular judgement in the one case, and free to either affirm or deny in the latter. In both cases our will is naturally inclined by reasons of truth and goodness. In the former, those reasons are conclusive; in the latter case, they are not. Our error in affirming confused and obscure ideas lies not taking something false to be true, or vice versa, but lies rather in our concluding our reasoning prematurely.

How do we do that? Here is the crux of the matter. Those who read Descartes as holding that our will consists of a positive power to do otherwise claim that each time we make a judgment we exercise that power: after all, we can affirm or deny the ideas before us. On this view, in making a judgement, any judgement, we would be, absolutely speaking, able to fly in the face of reason, and judge what is false to be true and vice versa. However, we find ourselves naturally inclined to follow the truth, and choose to follow those inclinations, though we could have done otherwise. While it is a tempting to make sense of the Fourth Meditation discussion of indifference in this way, I do not think, in the end, that it does sufficient justice to those texts. For there Descartes does not paint us as *choosing* between two alternatives, neither of which determine us conclusively. Rather, he paints us as being pushed and pulled in contrary directions, and stopping our consideration precipitately. We affirm or deny in error because we are not properly attuned to the reasons that move us.

The view of the will I have been putting forward understands our judgements differently. In properly understanding our nature, our inclinations are such that we cannot but affirm it. But in so doing, we effectively explicate what guides our inclinations and endorse it. That is, we recognize ourselves as bearing a standard of truth and commit to that standard. Doing so provides us with a rule to guide all our other judgements. In making a judgement then I am not simply buffeted about by inclinations, having to use my powers to choose between them. Rather, I recognize that I am naturally inclined towards truth and goodness. In order to judge well, that is, in accord with the truth, I must let my reasoning—my inclinations—run its course until I reach a stable resting point. Then, and only then (at

26 It is precisely this characterization of indifference that motivates Gassendi's objections regarding the indifference of the will. While Gassendi agrees with this model, he takes Descartes to have slipped in the notion that the will is a positive power to do otherwise. See AT 7: 314-317; CSM 2:218-20.

least in the theoretical context, is my reasoning properly concluded.[27] With clear and distinct perceptions, this point comes quickly. With confused and obscure ideas it does not come. Proper understanding of our own nature thus circumscribes for us the contexts in which it is appropriate for us to pass judgement. With an awareness of our natural limits, we are determined to stay within them.

Not only does this understanding of our judgements square with what Descartes writes about indifference, it has two other distinct advantages. First, it situates our judgements regarding clear and distinct ideas and confused and obscure ones on a continuum. We are not forced into understanding the will as bivalent in a somewhat arbitrary way. Second, it resonates with Descartes's concern to establish just what the limits of human judgement are at the end of the Fourth Meditation. On this reading, the upshot of understanding our nature properly is a recognition of those limits that binds us.

I do not think that this reading requires that we return to the First Meditation act of "turning my will in the opposite direction" and re-evaluate it in light of this new understanding of indifference. Certainly, there the meditator is pushed and pulled in contrary directions—by his habitual opinions on the one hand, and reasons for doubt on the other. However, the meditator does not settle on either of these two alternatives. Rather, he moves to consider all his former beliefs as false. He has no apparent reason for thinking they *are* false; his only reasons are for thinking they *might* be so. In so judging without being inclined by reasons, he seems to be truly exercising a positive power to do otherwise.

While I can say hardly anything on this point here, this reading of Descartes on free will might well require us to modify our reading of the passages in which Descartes aligns free will with responsibility. As I noted above, it is common to take passages like *Principles* 1.37 to indicate that Descartes is committed to a notion of will as a power to do otherwise. I am not sure that this is quite right. On my reading, exercising this power entails we do not have reasons moving us to one end or another. Nonetheless, I would suggest that for Descartes responsibility is tied to free will. For him, we can be held responsible in so far as we have a capacity to understand our own nature as inclined toward the good. We are responsible for realizing this capacity, and for failing to, and so for acting well, and failing to do so.

27 Descartes does recognize that in the practical context the demand for action is somewhat different. In that arena, we have to act prior to the final conclusion of our reasoning. Still, even then we are to go with which inclinations move us the most when the time for action comes. See the *Passions* a.146 and 170 for a discussion of irresolution and its relation to virtue. See also Shapiro 1999 for further discussion of the parallels between reasoning in the practical and the theoretical context.

CONCLUSION

Descartes's account of will is, on its face, quite puzzling. On the one hand, he maintains, and his epistemology seems to demand, that the human will be by its nature determined by reasons of truth and goodness. On the other hand, Descartes also insists that our freedom of will consists in a power to do otherwise. It is easy to conclude that Descartes is simply inconsistent. The radical act of will by the meditator at the end of the First Meditation, whereby he turns his will to deny what appears to him to be evident can help shed light on how Descartes's account of freedom hangs together. By considering how the meditator moves from this act of doing otherwise to the determination of the will necessary to the conclusion of the Fourth Meditation, I have argued that these two accounts of will are actually consistent with one another. For Descartes, our experience of our freedom to do otherwise sets us on a course to understanding the nature of the will, and so, in affirming our nature, to being determined by the reasons of truth and goodness that incline it. This account helps us to make sense of many of Descartes's puzzling remarks about the will, as well as to unify the Fourth Meditation account of judgement.[28]

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