

FRANKFURT ON DESCARTES: CONSISTENCY OR VALIDATION OF REASON?

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Descartes is frequently charged with circular argumentation as he argues, in his *Meditations*, from clear and distinct ideas or perceptions to his own existence and, then, to God's existence and veracity, and, finally, to the validity or truth of his clear and distinct ideas. In two works, *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen*¹ and "Descartes on the Consistency of Reason,"² Harry G. Frankfurt would rescue Descartes from this charge. As Frankfurt reads him, Descartes shows by the above argument that skepticism in regard to reason is unreasonable. The skeptic's argument against reason is seen as a *reductio*, one which shows that if we rely upon reason we are led to the conclusion that reason may be unworthy of such a reliance. In his argument, according to Frankfurt, Descartes shows that clear and distinct ideas are consistent—that they can never conflict. Thus reason can never provide us with considerations that lead us to question reason. The skeptic's *reductio* is, then, undermined and we may be certain of our clear and distinct ideas.

On this reading, there is no vicious circularity in Descartes' argument. Rather than having him rely upon the very notions he would use the argument to validate, he is said to show that no skeptical questions arise from the proper exercise of reason as our clear and distinct ideas are consistent. Our certainty, then, is established *via* consistency considerations. This reading of Descartes, however, does not do justice to his concern with the representational character of his ideas. While consistency of reason is an important consideration for Descartes, his concern is to establish that his ideas are true of (correspond to) reality. Reason is not validated nor is our certainty warranted until the representational claim of the ideas is justified. Thus Frankfurt's rescue attempt fails in that he would ignore the very problem (representationalism) which Descartes would confront in his argument.

In *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen*, Frankfurt provides the following reason for downplaying correspondence considerations:

Although I agree that he sometimes conceives truth and falsity in terms of correspondence, I do not believe that this conception plays a very important role in his treatment of the epistemological problems that concern him most. Descartes seems willing to recognize and to make limited use of a notion of absolute truth, which may be explicated in terms of correspondence. But this absolute truth is not what interests him. I am inclined to take more seriously than do most commentators the following passage, in which he denies that the truth he seeks consists in the correspondence of a belief to reality:

What is it to us if someone should perhaps imagine that the very thing of whose truth we

have been so firmly persuaded appears false to God or to an angel, and that as a consequence it is false, speaking absolutely? What do we care about this absolute falsity, since we by no means believe in it or even have the least suspicion of it? For we are supposing a persuasion so firm that it can in no way be removed—a persuasion, therefore, that is exactly the same as the most perfect certainty.

Descartes's most basic and insistent preoccupation is with certainty itself, and he tends to be rather indifferent to the question of whether the certain corresponds or fails to correspond with the real (DDM, p. 25).³

Of course, downplaying correspondence considerations is not tantamount to establishing that consistency is the issue. However, according to Frankfurt, the certainty which is requisite if the skeptic is to be denied is to be established *via* consistency considerations:

Certainty is his fundamental epistemological concept, and he defines truth in terms of it. Now certainty is for him essentially a matter of the coherence of evidence. It is a coherence theory of truth, accordingly, which most authentically expresses the standards and goals of his inquiry (DDM, p. 26).

Such consistency would guarantee that we have no grounds to doubt our reason when it is properly employed. Thus the skeptic's *reductio* would be undermined and we would be justified in our certainty in regard to our clear and distinct ideas.

In "Descartes on the Consistency of Reason" Frankfurt modifies his view somewhat. He concedes that there is *no* textual evidence to support the view that Descartes advances a coherence theory of truth. Indeed, he admits that Descartes holds to a correspondence theory of truth throughout.⁴ Given this, he maintains, Descartes is interested in establishing only the consistency of our clear and distinct ideas and not their truth (in either the correspondence or coherence sense):

Descartes was deeply preoccupied with certainty—with finding beliefs he could trust without qualification or reserve. He was above all concerned to determine what it was reasonable for him to regard as altogether unshakable and permanent—that is, immune to any legitimate fear that he would someday discover it necessary to recant his adherence to it. It is unclear in what way, if at all, he worked through the relation between this ambition and the desire for truth. My present view of the matter is that he may never have thought through the implications of his defense of reason sufficiently to have become fully aware of the question to which it leads, and that he actually provides no clear or readily visible answer to that question (DCR, p. 37).

In support of this claim Frankfurt cites the same passage cited in his earlier work (HR II, p. 41). In addition to this citation to the effect that Descartes is not interested in what is true and false "absolutely speaking," Frankfurt maintains that consistency considerations are Descartes' primary concern:

The question he is committed to asking about reason is . . . whether it is possible that one clear and distinct perception should contradict another in the way that one sensory perception may contradict another. The best evidence reason provides cannot be good enough if beliefs based upon it may be contradicted by evidence which is equally good, anymore than beliefs based solely upon sensory considerations are acceptable once it is

recognized that they may be contradicted by beliefs with equally strong sensory support. Descartes has concluded that having the best evidence the senses alone can provide—that is, evidence acquired under conditions that seem to the senses to be ideal for accurate perception—is not good enough. When he considers the value of reason, he needs to know whether *its* best evidence leaves open the possibility of encountering the same sort of dilemma to which he has found that a reliance on sensory evidence may lead (DCR, p. 34).

Descartes' task, then, is to show that such contradiction is impossible. The consistency of reason will, thus, justify the confidence or certainty we have in regard to these perceptions or ideas.

In these two studies, Frankfurt moves from maintaining that Descartes ". . . is not interested in correspondence" (DDM, p. 170) and that he is interested in consistency, certainty, and a coherence theory of truth, to maintaining that he is not interested in (or, better, not fully aware of) the problem of truth, and instead, concentrates on the consistency of reason and certainty. In both works certainty is tied to consistency considerations and wholly divorced from the question of correspondence. I do not think this interpretation is correct and I will argue (*pace* Frankfurt) that Descartes is concerned with the representational claim of our clear and distinct ideas. This claim must be justified and, thus, truth (construed as correspondence of idea and object) must be guaranteed. While the consistency of reason is important for him, certainty without such truth would be hollow indeed. It is this concern with truth, of course, which leads him to validate his certainty in God's veracity.

As Donald Sievert, in his "Frankfurt on Descartes' View of Truth,"⁵ points out, the passage cited by Frankfurt may be read so that it is consistent with a concern for absolute truth. In the paragraphs which precede this citation we find Descartes discussing God's existence and veracity. This may well explain why he is not troubled by the prospect of "absolute falsity" at the point Frankfurt cites him—because he has, earlier, demonstrated its impossibility.

These passages also suggest that Descartes is not concerned with certainty at the expense of truth (correspondence), but rather that these concerns go hand-in-hand. Consider the passage three paragraphs before the one cited by Frankfurt. Descartes has just noted that our natural instinct of thirst is valuable except in cases of dropsy where it is fatal. Such a fact inspires no trust in such instincts and he is led to wonder, then, whether he should trust his clear and distinct ideas:

. . . in the case of our clearest and most accurate judgements which, if false, could not be corrected by any that are clearer, or by any other natural faculty, I clearly affirm that we cannot be deceived. For, since God is the highest being He cannot be otherwise than the highest good and highest truth, and hence it is contradictory that anything should proceed from Him that positively tends toward falsity (HR II, pp. 40-41).

If 'true' and 'false' function here as they do in a correspondence theory, the passage clearly maintains that one may be certain of, or trust, these ideas because His direct gifts cannot tend toward falsity. Frankfurt, in his "Descartes on the Consistency of Reason," so construes 'truth.' He maintains that

“ . . . whenever Descartes gives an explicit account of truth he explains it unequivocally as correspondence with reality” (DCR, p. 37). Certainty and truth are, in this passage, closely tied together and this provides a reason for interpreting the passage Frankfurt cites in a different light. It may be that Descartes is, there, unconcerned with absolute falsity as he has, earlier (e.g., in this passage), demonstrated the impossibility of such absolute falsity.⁶

At the end of the extended passage within which Frankfurt finds his evidence Descartes explains that our faculty of understanding, when properly employed, tends toward truth just because it is given to us by an existent and veridical God: “My answer is that those possess it [certainty] who, in virtue of their knowledge of God, are aware that the faculty of understanding given by Him must tend towards truth; but this certainty is not shared by others” (HR II, p. 43).⁷ That is, such clear and distinct ideas are certain only for those who have achieved knowledge of God (and His veracity)—given God’s veracity the worry about absolute falsity evaporates. Rather than divorcing certainty from truth here, Descartes is maintaining that a necessary condition for certainty is the recognition of the role of God as the guarantor of the truth-tendency of our faculty of understanding when properly employed.

An additional point is extremely relevant here. Earlier in the same set of Replies Descartes maintains:

That an atheist can know clearly that three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, I do not deny, I merely affirm that, on the other hand, such knowledge on his part cannot constitute true science, because no knowledge that can be rendered doubtful should be called science. Since he is, as supposed, an Atheist, he cannot be sure that he is not deceived in the things that seem most evident to him . . . and though perchance the doubt does not occur to him, nevertheless it may come up . . . he can never be safe from it unless the first recognizes the existence of a God (HR II, p. 39).

In this passage, as in the preceding one, Descartes maintains that full certainty is possessed only by those who are aware of the *existence* of God.⁸ What is the special point of this additional knowledge, how does it assuage doubt? According to Frankfurt, Descartes’ “proof of God’s existence” is the final step in the proof of the consistency of reason:

The crux of Descartes’s validation of reason is not so much the discovery that a benign deity exists, but that reason leads to the conclusion that such a deity exists. Since the proof of God’s existence eliminates not only the demon hypothesis but every hypothesis that might serve as a basis for mistrusting reason, its value is in effect a proof of the consistency of reason, i.e., a proof that no set of clear and distinct perceptions can be self-contradictory. For it shows that no proposition entailing the unreliability of reason can be clearly and distinctly perceived (DDM, p. 176).

According to Frankfurt, this proof does not show that a non-deceptive God *exists* but, rather, that reason (when properly employed) is not led to conclude that a deceptive demon is possible—such a conclusion establishes that the skeptic’s worry can not arise when reason is properly employed.⁹ The proof need not establish the existence of such a deity as reliability is to be questioned only

if reason is not consistent. Here certainty is justified independently of any consideration of truth.

In his "Descartes On the Creation of Eternal Truths"¹⁰ Frankfurt notes that if one maintained God was constrained to make or observe the eternal truths about essences an external constraint would be placed upon that deity. This, he maintains, Descartes adamantly refused to consider. The moral Frankfurt draws from this is that God is not constrained by the rules of logic or any of the eternal truths. Human reason, however, is ". . . strictly limited within the boundaries defined by the set of logically necessary propositions. The negations of these . . . are unintelligible to us" (DCE, p. 44). Thus, Frankfurt concludes, Descartes holds we must recognize the limitations of human reason: there is ". . . a decisive and ineradicable uncertainty concerning the relation between the class of judgements required by rational considerations and the class of judgements that correctly describe the inherent nature of reality" and Descartes must ". . . forswear the hope of penetrating, *through* the limits of rationality set by the character of the human mind, to an unconditioned apprehension of how things are" (DCE, p. 50). Here the proof of the deity's existence,

like any rational demonstration, can establish for Descartes nothing more than that its conclusion is required by the principles of human reason. The proof is designed to show that the notion of a deceiving God is logically incoherent and hence unintelligible. . . . But the proposition that God is a deceiver . . . cannot be regarded by Descartes as . . . an absolute impossibility . . . (DCE, p. 52).

Frankfurt recognizes that the "standard interpretation" here consists of arguing that Descartes believes there is a *contingent* connection between the character of our minds and the nature of reality. This connection, of course, is said to be just what he would establish with his "proof of God's existence"—an existent and nondeceptive deity could not provide a faculty which was, essentially, misleading. Someone who advances this view might well grant much of what Frankfurt says in regard to the eternal truths but go on to emphasize this contingent connection between the logically necessary statements and the nature of reality. Such a person could maintain that while the eternal truths might well be created by the Deity, Descartes does not content himself with mere consistency of reason but argues for the *truth* of his conceptions.

A detailed examination of Frankfurt's view of Descartes' eternal truths would require a complete paper in and of itself.¹¹ In arguing for his view of the eternal truths Frankfurt does make a strong case for the separability, for Descartes, of logical consistency and truth. He argues, however, that Descartes is interested *only* in the former (indeed, he says Descartes had not "thought through" the relation between his concern with consistency and the desire for truth—cf., DCR, p. 37). In considering possible objections to his view Frankfurt notes that saying God *could* have created different eternal truths and logical laws is not to say he did so. Here the opening for the "standard inter-

pretation" arises and Frankfurt would close this opening by appealing to his general interpretation as advanced in *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen* (cf., DCE, pp. 51-52). While his treatment of eternal truths, then, may suggest that Descartes separates the issues of consistency and truth, the argument that he is uninterested in the latter is not supported by anything in Frankfurt's discussion of eternal truth. The reverse is rather the case. The plausibility of his view that Descartes postulates a "decisive and ineradicable uncertainty" in regard to the relation between those judgments which are logically necessary and those which are true depends upon the plausibility of Frankfurt's general argument that Descartes is unconcerned with truth (in either of sense).

Frankfurt's central piece of evidence (in each of his works) for this general interpretation is the passage from the replies to the second Objections. We have seen that the passages which precede and follow this passage as well as the passage about the atheist seem to belie his interpretation. His reading also runs afoul of several passages within the third Meditation. There Descartes maintains that:

. . . as to what concerns ideas, if we consider them only in themselves and do not relate them to anything else beyond themselves, they cannot properly speaking be false . . . (HR, I, p. 159).

It is only when we consider our ideas as like "images" or "representations" and judge them to be such that the danger of error and falsity arises.¹² He goes on to maintain that:

. . . my principle task in this place is to consider, in respect to those ideas which appear to me to proceed from certain objects that are outside me, what are the reasons which cause me to think them similar to these objects (HR, I, p. 160).

After discussing two spurious reasons, he offers his proof of God's existence and veracity. In these passages, Descartes is declaring that the truth (construed in terms of correspondence of idea and object) of his judgments (the judgments that his ideas are like "images") is something which he must establish and it is the proof of God's existence and veracity which is to guarantee the truth of these judgments.

The concern here is not simply with the consistency of reason but with truth and, as Descartes notes, it is the representational character of these ideas which makes truth problematic here. I do not wish to maintain that certainty is not an issue here. I agree with Frankfurt that certainty is a most important issue for Descartes. However, I do not agree with Frankfurt's assertion that truth and certainty may be separated. Considered in themselves, our ideas are not, properly speaking, false. It is, however, an open question (until God's existence and veracity are established) whether our ideas represent as we suppose them to. Thus his principal task is to justify the representational claim. Full certainty awaits the guarantee to this effect which is provided by the deity.

In the second Meditation, Descartes shows that the skeptic's worries about

self-knowledge and self-identity cannot arise. Here the question is one of consistency. Descartes is not content, however, with this claim to knowledge. He claims that many of his ideas are more than modes of thought—they are (like images) representations of, and, thus, are supposed to provide knowledge of the external world. Unless, however, some guarantee is found which distinguishes various ideas which truly represent from others which either do or may not, skepticism is appropriate in regard to the representational claims for these ideas. This skepticism is founded on questions of truth rather than upon questions of consistency, for the principal error in regard to the representational ideas consists in “. . . my judging that ideas which are in me are similar or conformable to things which are outside me . . . (HR I, p. 160). The avoidance of such error requires certainty, consistency, and truth. This problem of truth is the principal task he sets for himself in the third Meditation. His proof of God's existence and veracity is intended to meet the skeptical issue and to show that such error is avoidable. Thus we would be able to be certain in regard to such ideas.¹³

Descartes' purpose in offering this proof, then, does not accord with Frankfurt's reading. Nor does the conclusion of this proof bear out Frankfurt's interpretation. Descartes maintains that “. . . we must conclude that God necessarily exists” (HR I, p. 165). Here the 'necessary' modifies God's existence and not the conclusion. Frankfurt would have the proof of God's existence establish the consistency of reason rather than the existence of the deity and, thus, the conclusion should read something like “necessarily we must conclude that God exists”—that is, the skeptic's *reductio* may not arise. While one might maintain that Descartes has misspoken here, and that this is what Descartes should have said, I take the final summary of his point which states that “. . . the whole strength of the argument which I have here made use of to prove the existence of God consists in this . . . ” (HR I, pp. 170-171) to indicate that this is not what Descartes thought himself to be doing in the proof in question. Descartes says he has proven God's existence. He is worried about the representational claim and he recognizes the need for a guarantor in this regard. Knowledge of God's existence and veracity assures us that our faculty of understanding, when properly employed, tends toward truth and justifies our certainty in regard to the representational claims in regard to our clear and distinct ideas.

Frankfurt is loath to place such emphasis upon Descartes' theological beliefs (CDR, pp. 27-28). However, I see no alternative to maintaining that the proof of God's existence and veracity in the third Meditation is to guarantee the truth of (the representational claim for) our clear and distinct ideas. While Descartes is, certainly, establishing the consistency of reason and the certainty of our clear and distinct ideas, he is not willing to stop short of “absolute truth” here. Happily or not, it is this guarantee which he attempts to provide by his appeal to God's existence and veracity.

If what I have maintained is correct, then in the third Meditation questions of consistency, truth (correspondence), and certainty are intimately related and Frankfurt's interpretation must be denied. I do not believe, however, that Descartes consistently associates the issues of certainty and truth. Especially relevant here is the fact that he uses the term 'indubitable' in three distinct senses—without always clearly differentiating or keeping track of these distinct meanings. At times Descartes uses 'indubitable' to mean "psychologically indubitable." At other times he employs the term to mean "inconceivability." Here he has in mind compatibility considerations.¹⁴ Finally, Descartes uses the term to mean "metaphysical indubitability"—that is, to indicate something which is not subject to the metaphysical doubt or demon hypothesis of the first Meditation. Clearly, these three senses are quite different. It is possible for something to be psychologically indubitable and for its contrary to be inconceivable and yet for it to be metaphysically dubitable.

I grant that Descartes does not always keep these distinctions clearly in mind. However, I do believe that they play a fundamental role in the third Meditation. In the beginning of this Meditation he first recounts what he has established and proposes (HR I, p. 158) that, as a general rule, all clearly and distinctly perceived ideas are true. He immediately notes, however, that in the past things he thought to be "certain and manifest" were not. This, he notes, is especially true of the representational claim for various of his ideas: for knowledge and error in regard to such representational claims are ". . . not due to any knowledge arising from my perception" (HR I, p. 158). Any justification, then, of such claims must come from some other source than clear and distinct perception—for perception can not guarantee (nor can consistency of perceptions) the correspondence of idea and object. While perception may guarantee some claims to knowledge, then, it can not ground the representational claim for our ideas. Thus doubt must be expressed in regard to these claims until some other ground is uncovered. Descartes further notes that truths of mathematics seem to escape the sort of representational doubt just noted. However, the demon waits in the wings and thus Descartes says:

But every time that this preconceived opinion of the sovereign power of a God presents itself to my thought, I am constrained to confess that it is easy to Him, if He wishes it, to cause me to err, even in matters which I believe myself to have the best evidence. And, on the other hand, always when I direct my attention to things which I believe myself to perceive very clearly, I am so persuaded of their truth that I let myself break out into words such as these: Let who will deceive me, He can never cause me to be nothing while I think that I am, or some day cause it to be true to say that I have never been, it being true now to say that I am, or that two and three make more or less than five, or any such thing in which I see a manifest contradiction. And, certainly, since I have no reason to believe that there is a God who is a deceiver, and as I have not yet satisfied myself that there is a God at all, the reason for doubt which depends on this opinion alone is very slight, and so to speak metaphysical. But in order to be able altogether to remove it, I must inquire whether there is a God as soon as the occasion presents itself; and if I find that there is a God, I must also inquire whether He may be a deceiver; for without a knowledge of these two truths I do not see that I can ever be certain of anything (HR I, pp. 158-159).

In this passage Descartes goes from psychological certainty ("I believe myself to perceive") to inconceivability ("manifest contradiction") to, finally, metaphysical doubt. Until the demon is disposed of and it is proved that a veracious God exists, he says, he can not be certain of anything—because it is possible that he is deceived even about things which seem most evident to him. Two of the things, specifically, called into doubt are mathematical truths and the *cogito*. Neither psychological certainty nor logical consistency is adequate for certainty here in the face of the metaphysical doubt.¹⁵ Here Descartes is in the position of the atheist discussed earlier. And, as was noted above, the role of the deity in such a situation is to guarantee that our faculty of understanding, when properly employed, tends toward truth (HR II, p. 43).

Two problems, then, emerge in the early passages of the third Meditation. First there is the problem with his representational claim for his ideas—a claim which cannot be justified by perception alone (HR I, p. 158). Secondly there is the hypothesis of the evil demon and the uncertainty it engenders. The statement of these problems in the third Meditation is followed immediately by his discussion of ideas considered as "images," by his statement that the principal error relevant to such "images" is in regard to the claim they are representations, by his claim that his principal task at this point is to address this issue of representationalism, and by his proof of God's existence and veracity.

While Descartes' proof clearly establishes that the skeptic's worries can not arise and that reason is, when properly employed, consistent, his proof is not offered merely to establish such consistency. Rather, he must also guarantee truth if he is to validate reason. He wishes to establish that he may be certain—certain that his clear and distinct representational ideas do represent (are true) and certain that his knowledge is true when he is confronted with the cases which are most evident to him. Mere consistency generates certainty, but certainty without any guaranteed connection with truth. Such certainty is, clearly, not his goal. He does wish to settle for the question of the consistency of his ideas considered as merely related to one another. Here no question of falsity arises—though he could not be certain until the demon is disposed of. Rather, he wishes to consider certainty and truth together—he would consider ideas as "images" and uncover a justification for the representational claim here thus disposing of skepticism in regard to such a claim as well as skepticism in regard to the consistency of reason.

In his latest work, then, Frankfurt would have Descartes separate the issues of certainty and truth and argue against the skeptic by establishing the consistency of human reason. This reading may allow us to avoid the circularity problem, but it runs counter to the stated purpose of the third Meditation. The skeptical worries that apply to the ideas considered as "images" in this Meditation raise questions of correspondence. To support his view that certainty is considered independently of truth here Frankfurt relies upon the cited passage from the Replies (HR II, p. 41). I have questioned whether this passage does, as

Frankfurt maintains, separate questions of truth and certainty. Even if Frankfurt is correct about the passage in question, however, he has not established that, in the third Meditation, Descartes separates these issues. As I have pointed out, the thrust of the passages I have cited from that Meditation belie the contention that it is consistency *rather than* truth which concerns Descartes as he offers this proof of the existence of God. The skeptical doubt to be denied here is one about the representational claim of our ideas. In separating the issues of certainty and truth here Frankfurt deprives Descartes of the fundamental problem he would solve. Thus, Frankfurt would rescue Descartes from his circularity problem at the price of ignoring the difficulty which led him there in the first place. To prove that this rescue attempt fails, of course, is not to prove that the argument is inherently circular. But that is another story.¹⁶

1 Frankfurt, H.G., *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen*, Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1970. (DDM).

2 Frankfurt, H.G., "Descartes on the Consistency of Reason," in *Descartes*, M. Hooker (ed.), John Hopkins, Baltimore, 1978, pp. 26-39. (DCR).

3 The citation from Descartes here is from Haldane, E.S., and Ross, G.R.T., *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Cambridge, 1970, Volume II, p. 41. (HR)

4 Cf., DCR, p. 37.

5 Sievert, D., "Frankfurt on Descartes' View of Truth," *The New Scholasticism*, v. 51 (1977), pp. 372-383.

6 The argument offered here (and below in regard to the next two passages) might well beg the question against Frankfurt's argument in his *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen* for he maintains there that 'true' is to be treated in a coherence fashion. I agree with Frankfurt's later claim, however, that for Descartes 'true' is to be treated in the correspondence fashion. In my discussion of the third Meditation below I provide reasons for so emphasizing the correspondence theory also. Against the argument in "Descartes on the Consistency of Reason" my points here do not beg the question. Truth and certainty are tied together and the discussion of the third Meditation below clarifies this fact. Given Frankfurt's admission that there is *no* textual evidence which supports the coherence view of truth, I believe we must conclude that continued reliance upon the passage Frankfurt centers his attention upon will support the view that Descartes is unconcerned with absolute falsity and truth only if one wrenches this passage out of its context.

7 The certainty at issue in this citation is that we have in regard to our present memory of past clear and distinct ideas and of past demonstrations. Nevertheless I believe the point is fully general. Truth of such ideas is guaranteed (and our certainty in this regard is validated) only when we are aware of the tendency toward truth which God guarantees applies to our faculty of understanding.

8 This passage is discussed at length in P. Markie's "Clear and Distinct Perception and Metaphysical Certainty," *Mind*, v. 88 (1979), pp. 97-104. A related passage occurs in the fifth Meditation (HR, I, pp. 183-184) where Descartes notes that while he is "naturally impelled" to

believe anything clearly and distinctly understood is true, as long as he is ignorant of God's existence he can not possess "true and certain" knowledge. Frankfurt, of course, maintains that the "proof of God's existence" is of central import—according to his interpretation it guarantees the consistency of reason. These two passages and those cited earlier, however, suggest that this proof is not merely one which is to guarantee the consistency of our understanding—a central issue seems to be that of the truth of our judgements. The atheists (and Descartes, before he has the proof) may not claim certain and true knowledge—not even in the realm of mathematics. Here the issues of certainty and truth are intimately connected rather than separable.

9 Thus, "all that is relevant to the removal of metaphysical doubt is that the skeptic's *reductio* be discovered not to materialize and this discovery can be made and recalled without anything clearly and distinctly perceived being shown to be true" (DDM, p. 177).

10 Frankfurt, "Descartes On the Creation of Eternal Truths," *The Philosophical Review*, v. 86 (1977), pp. 36-57. (DCE).

11 Cf., E.M. Curley's "Descartes On the Creation of Eternal Truths." Since Descartes Maintains God freely created the eternal truths and logical laws, Frankfurt says, he must recognize that He could have created different truths and laws—in short, God could have made contradictions true (cf., DCE, pp. 42-43). But this seems to suggest the logical possibility of the logically impossible. Rather than attribute this suggestion to Descartes, Frankfurt maintains that he distinguishes the limitations of human reason and the nature of reality and holds we can never presume that what we recognize to be logically necessary coincides with what is, in fact, true. The most we may hope for, then, is a demonstration of the consistency of reason. Curley suggests a different resolution of this difficulty. He maintains Descartes' doctrine of the creation of eternal truths does not deny that the necessary truths we recognize are true but, rather, denies these necessary truths are necessarily necessary. So interpreted Descartes need not envision an ineradicable uncertainty as to the relation of the eternal truths and the nature of reality—the question of their relation, rather, becomes the question he would address.

12 Here we should recognize Descartes does not maintain ideas *are* images but, rather, that they are *like* them. They are similar in that they may each be taken as representations of other objects. This point was called to my attention by E.M. Curley—see his *Descartes Against The Skeptics* (Cambridge, Harvard, 1978), pp. 128-129. When this paper was written I was unacquainted with this excellent study. Curley offers a lengthy discussion of Frankfurt (pp. 104-118). On p. 110 he offers an argument similar to mine stating that the theory of ideas and the analysis of error in the third Meditation strongly suggests (*pace* Frankfurt) a correspondence theory of truth. I believe the argument I provide against Frankfurt is more detailed on this point and hope it and Curley's will go a long way toward showing what Frankfurt must account for and "explain away" if his emphasis upon certainty to the exclusion of truth is to be made believable.

13 Thus the proof of God's existence in the third Meditation begins with the line "but there is yet another method of inquiring whether any of the objects of which I have ideas within me exist outside of me" (HR, I, p. 161). This method consists of comparing the objective reality of our ideas with their causes and seeking an idea which must be caused by something other than himself. The candidate for this role is the idea of God. And, thus, the guarantor of our representational ideas is sought and discovered and their truth is assured. The proof, in its very construction evidences its concern with representationalism and truth (as well as with consistency).

14 Frankfurt's discussion of eternal truths provides a way of seeing the second sense here and the eternal truths and laws of logic (until the proof of God's existence and veracity is concluded) might seem to be examples of things of which one could have the first two sorts of certainty

while lacking the third. What is logically necessary is not (necessarily) true and there is, thus, a sense of certainty which may be stronger than the psychological yet weaker than that sort of certainty he ultimately desires. If one reads Descartes as offering a coherence theory of truth, of course, the third sense below would collapse into this second one. Ultimately, I believe, it may only be if Frankfurt returns to his original reading (for which, unfortunately, he has no evidence) that it remains plausible for him to read Descartes like an early Kant—proposing an ineradicable ignorance of the nature of reality as it is outside the limits of human reason.

15 Nonetheless, logical consistency may, given the discussion of eternal truths, provide a type of certainty greater than psychological certainty here. Convinced that God exists and that there are no constraints upon his creative powers Descartes is convinced He could have created true logical contradictions. This possibility, however, is inconceivable to us and when we uncover (as he does in the *cogito*) a necessary truth, we find something of which we are more than psychologically certain (" . . . let him deceive me as much as he will, he can never cause me to be nothing so long as I think I am something" (HR, I, p. 150)—the inconceivability of one's non-existence here is logical rather than merely psychological though, as the citation from the third Meditation makes clear, doubt is still appropriate where one has such certainty.

16 An earlier version of this paper was read at the Florida Philosophical Association Meeting in Gainesville on November 5, 1979. Donald Sievert read an earlier version of that paper and his comments forced substantial revisions which made it a presentable piece. E.M. Curley and an anonymous reviewer for this journal provided still further comments which led to a variety of modifications. I suspect none of these individuals will be in full agreement with this final version yet I wish to thank each for his comments.