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Imitation and ‘Infinite’ Will: Descartes on the *Imago Dei*

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Introduction

Descartes’s conception of the *imago Dei* has proven perplexing to commentators, both in his own time and in ours. After presenting his Third Meditation arguments for the existence of God, Descartes affirms the doctrine: ‘the mere fact that God created me is a very strong basis for believing that I am somehow made in his image and likeness’ (AT VII 51; CSM II 35).¹

Gassendi presses Descartes on this claim:

You say that it is reasonable to believe that you are made in the image and likeness of God. This is certainly believable given religious faith, but how may it be understood by natural reason, unless you are putting forward an

¹I use the following abbreviations in this paper. For Descartes’s works: AT: Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (eds.), *Oeuvres de Descartes*, 11 vols. (Paris: CNRS/J. Vrin 1964–78); B: Giulia Belgioioso (a cura di), *René Descartes. Tutte le lettere. 1619–1650*, con la collaborazione di Igor Agostini, Francesco Marrone, Franco A. Meschini, Massimiliano Savini e di Jean-Robert Armogathe (Milano: Bompiani, 2005), which I cite by letter number and page number; CSM: John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (eds. and trans.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1984–85); CSMK: John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (eds. and trans.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Volume III, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Translations of Descartes are largely from CSM and CSMK, but with some modifications, which I indicate. Translations of Descartes for which I give no citation to a translation are my own. For Cardinal Cajetan’s work: *DNA*: N. Zammit (ed.) *De Nominum Analogia* (Rome: Angelicum, 1934), which I cite by section. For Francisco Suárez’s works: *DM*: *Disputationes metaphysicae*, which I cite by disputation, section, and paragraph; *OO*: M. André and C. Berton (eds.) *Opera omnia*, 26 vols. (Paris: Ludovicus Vivès, 1856–78). Translations of *DM* are from John P. Doyle (ed. and trans.), *The Metaphysical Demonstration of the Existence of God: Metaphysical Disputations 28–29* (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 2004). I provide citations to the relevant volume and pages of *OO* and to Doyle’s translation where necessary. Lastly, for Thomas Aquinas: *ST*: *Summa Theologiae*, which I cite by part, question, article, and subsection; and *Super II Sent.*: P. Mandonnet (ed.), *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi episcopi Parisiensis* (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1929), which I cite by distinction, question, article, and subsection. Translations of *ST* are of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, originally published by Benzinger Brothers.

anthropomorphic picture of God? Moreover, what can that likeness consist in? (AT VII 306; CSM II 213);

and Burman objects, ‘But why do you say that? Surely God could have created you without creating you in his image?’ (AT V 156; CSMK 338).

Descartes’s remarks in the Fourth Meditation might seem to provide some clarification:

It is only the will, or freedom of choice [*voluntas, sive arbitrii libertas*], which I experience within me to be so great that the idea of any greater faculty is beyond my grasp; so much so that it is above all in virtue of the will that I understand myself to bear in some way the image and likeness of God. For...[God’s will] does not seem any greater than mine considered in itself formally and precisely [*in se formaliter et praeise spectata*]. This is because the will simply consists in our ability to do or not do something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid); or rather, it consists simply in the fact that when the intellect puts something forward for affirmation or denial or for pursuit or avoidance, our inclinations are such that we feel we are determined to it by no external force [*ut a nulla vi externa nos ad id determinari sentiamus*]. (AT VII 57; CSM II 40, modified)

Descartes here singles out the will as central to his conception of the *imago Dei*. However, it is not at all clear what the resemblance between the divine will and the human will is supposed to be.² Present-day commentators are likewise dubious about Descartes’s affirmation of a resemblance, and the literature has largely concluded that Descartes’s view is problematic, at best. Bernard Williams, understanding the resemblance as connected to Descartes’s conception of the will as limitless, concludes, ‘Descartes’ view of the will as limitless is not fully intelligible...the view is fundamentally vacuous’.³ More recently, Tad Schmaltz says, ‘Descartes’ assertion of a resemblance in the specific case of the will is deeply problematic’,⁴ and he argues that significant differences between the divine will and the human will provide

² The obscurities and ambiguities in this passage have been much discussed in the secondary literature. See my ‘Descartes on Human Freedom,’ [‘Human Freedom’] *Philosophy Compass* 9 (2014): 527–39, for discussion of the difficulties that this passage poses for understanding Descartes’s conception of freedom.

³ Bernard Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 159.

⁴ Tad Schmaltz, ‘The Disappearance of Analogy in Descartes, Spinoza, and Regis,’ [‘Disappearance of Analogy’] *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 30 (2000): 85–113, at 86.

support for Jean-Luc Marion's view that there is a 'disappearance of the scholastic view that there is an analogical resemblance between God's mind and our own'.⁵

I think there is more to be said on Descartes's behalf. To show this, I begin by addressing an issue that, though fundamental to this topic, has been largely neglected: Descartes's understanding of the *doctrine* of the *imago Dei* and, in particular, how he conceives of the relation between God and human beings. I argue that although Descartes was familiar with and made use of medieval and Scholastic conceptions of analogy, when he says that human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, he is not alluding to those conceptions (Section 1). Instead, Descartes's language in his discussions of the *imago Dei* evokes the Augustinian-Thomistic tradition of discourse on the nature of image, likeness, equality, and imitation (Section 2). I also highlight a little-discussed feature of Descartes's formulation of the doctrine, its *comparative* form: Descartes thinks that it is 'especially' or 'principally' because of the will that we bear the image and likeness of God (Section 2).

Having clarified Descartes's conception of the doctrine, I turn to the issue of how the will figures in Descartes's conception of the *imago Dei*. I argue that his conception of the infiniteness of the human will is the key to how human beings bear the image and likeness of God. I begin by comparing the human will with the human intellect, which reveals that Descartes thinks that the human will is infinite in relation to its extent and that the extent of the will is tied to the nature of the will as a faculty, or a power (Section 3). I then explore the issue of why Descartes uses the term 'infinite' to characterize the human will when he says elsewhere that he reserves the term for God alone. I show that there are similarities between the human will and God that ground Descartes's use of the term. Finally, I explain why significant differences between the relevant

⁵ Schmaltz, 'Disappearance of Analogy,' 86. Schmaltz's reference is to Jean-Luc Marion, *Sur la théologie blanche de Descartes*, 2nd ed. [*La théologie blanche*] (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991). I discuss aspects of Marion's views in Sections 1.1 and 1.3, below.

powers in God and human beings, which I have claimed explains the *imago Dei*, do not undermine Descartes's affirmation that 'it is above all in virtue of the will that [we] bear the image and likeness of God' (AT VII 57; CSM II 40) (Section 4).

1. Descartes on Analogy

Discussion of Descartes's use of analogy in the scholarly secondary literature has centered around two issues, his use of analogical reasoning in his physics⁶ and his views on substance.⁷ But Descartes uses analogy in more than just these two contexts. As background to the question of how Descartes conceives of the resemblance between God and human beings, I will discuss four cases in which there is evidence that Descartes is drawing on theories of analogy: 1) the Replies discussions of efficient causation and God's derivation of his own existence, 2) his mention of the classical example of health in a letter to More, 3) the discussion of substance, and finally, 4) the case of the *imago Dei*. The discussion will show that although Descartes is familiar with and makes use of different kinds of analogy, there is good reason to think that he is not drawing on them in his discussion of the *imago Dei*.

A very brief introduction to the medieval and Scholastic background will help set the stage. Among Descartes's predecessors, theories of analogy were widely used and debated in logic, metaphysics, and theology.⁸ Theories of analogy explain how the same word can be used

⁶ See, for example, Peter Galison, 'Descartes's Comparisons: From the Invisible to the Visible,' *Isis* 75 (1984): 311–26; Glenn Statile, 'The Necessity of Analogy in Cartesian Science,' *The Philosophical Forum* XXX (1999): 217–31; Gideon Manning, 'Analogy and Falsification in Descartes' Physics,' *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 43 (2012): 402–11; and Gideon Manning, 'Analogy,' in Lawrence Nolan (ed.), *The Cambridge Descartes Lexicon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 3–6.

⁷ I present references to the literature on Descartes's use of analogy in his discussions of substance in Section 1.3, below.

⁸ The development of theories of analogy in medieval philosophy is intricate, because the proper conception and use of different types of analogy were greatly contested in the period. For an authoritative,

in more than one sense. In general, uses of words are divided into three types: a) used in the same sense (univocal), b) used with very different senses (purely equivocal), and c) used with related senses (analogical).⁹ The two predominant types of analogy discussed in philosophical contexts¹⁰ were ‘analogy of proportionality’ and ‘analogy of attribution.’¹¹ Analogy of proportionality compares two proportions or relations; analogy of attribution uses the same word to characterize two things, one in a primary sense and the other in a secondary sense (or ‘in a prior and a posterior sense’).¹²

accessible overview, see E. Jennifer Ashworth, ‘Medieval Theories of Analogy,’ [‘Medieval Theories’] in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2013 Edition), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/analogy-medieval/>>.

⁹ More precisely, analogy was normally regarded as a subdivision of equivocation in the medieval tradition. See Ashworth, ‘Medieval Theories,’ and E. J. Ashworth, ‘Suárez on the Analogy of Being: Some Historical Background,’ [‘Suárez on Being’] *Vivarium* 33 (1995): 50–75, at 51–2. The way of conceptualizing the categories I present seems to be the one Descartes was working with.

¹⁰ A third type of analogy, analogy of imitation or participation, was sometimes used by theologians to explain how the same terms (e.g. ‘good’ or ‘just’) could be used to describe both God and creatures. See Ashworth, ‘Medieval Theories’ and ‘Suárez on Being’.

¹¹ Confusingly, these two types of analogy sometimes went by different, but very similar names. Francisco Suárez, a Scholastic philosopher whom Descartes explicitly acknowledges reading (AT VII 235), explains: ‘analogy is commonly distinguished in two ways: one is called by many “analogy of proportionality” [*analogia proportionalitatis*] and the other “[analogy] of proportion” [*proportionis*]. Others, however, call the first, “analogy of proportion” [*analogiam proportionis*] and the second, “analogy of attribution” [*attributionis*]’ (DM XXVIII.3.4/OO 26, 13/ Doyle, 30). The terminological usage I favor, ‘analogy of proportionality’ for the first type of analogy and ‘analogy of attribution’ for the second, traces back at least to Cardinal Cajetan’s *De nominum analogia* (written in 1498, published in 1506), although Cajetan’s conceptions of the two types of analogy differ importantly from Suárez’s. For example, Cajetan conceives of analogy of attribution as involving only extrinsic denomination (*DNA* §10)—that is, that something is designated with a term either in relation to something else extrinsic to it (‘as urine is called “healthy” only by its relation as a sign of health’) or because the foundation of the relation of similarity to something else is extrinsic (‘air is said to be “bright” from the brightness of the sun’). (These two examples are from Cajetan’s Commentary on *Summa Theologiae*, as discussed in Joshua P. Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy: Rereading Cajetan’s De Nominum Analogia* [*Semantics*] (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 94–5 and 212, note 35). In contrast, Suárez holds that analogy of attribution can be of two kinds, not only extrinsic but also intrinsic. See notes 16, 17, and 21, below for further discussion of Suárez’s conceptions of intrinsic and extrinsic analogy of attribution.

¹² See Ashworth, ‘Medieval Theories’, on the history of this phrase (*per prius et posterius*).

1.1 Efficient Causation and God's Derivation of His Own Existence: Analogy of Proportionality

Descartes's most sustained use of *analogia* occurs in his First and Fourth Replies discussions of his view that God is *causa sui*, i.e. that God derives his existence from himself. Descartes says that to make sense of how God derives his existence from himself, we need to understand that it is analogous to efficient causation. As Descartes's discussions will show, the type of analogy in this context is analogy of proportionality: Descartes compares God's relation to himself with the relation between an efficient cause and its effect.¹³

Descartes's remarks on the topic are prompted by Caterus's questions in the First Objections about the second causal argument for the existence of God of the Third Meditation. Caterus asks Descartes to explain his claim from the Third Meditation, 'if I derived my existence from myself...I should myself be God' (AT VII 48; CSM II 33), and its implication that God derives his existence from himself. Clarification is needed, Caterus explains, because the phrase

¹³ Although the primary texts seem to me to be decisive (which I will attempt to show in what follows), there is debate in the secondary literature about which type of analogy Descartes is using in his Replies discussions of God as *causa sui*. For instance, in his *Questions cartésiennes II [Questions]* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), Jean-Luc Marion understands the analogy to be analogy of attribution (or, as he puts it, 'analogy of proportion': see note 11, above, for discussion of terminology): 'en bonne rigueur théologique (et thomiste), l'analogie de *proportio* ou de référence se construit entre des analogues et un terme privilégié, le premier analogue' (Marion, *Questions*, 177, emphasis in the original). But understanding the analogy in this context as analogy of attribution requires an inversion (Marion calls it a 'counter-analogy' (*contre-analogie*)): it makes the finite sense of efficient causation primary and the sense of efficient causation applicable to God or the infinite secondary: 'Reste l'hypothèse ici envisagée par Descartes: la causalité efficiente se dit au sens strict des étants finis et se dit analogiquement de Dieu; mais il en résulte un renversement prodigieux: Dieu ne se dit selon et comme cause efficiente que par analogie, donc par référence à la causalité finie, seule strictement efficiente' (Marion, *Questions*, 178). It is not clear why Marion understands the analogy in this way, but it might be that he sees Descartes's reasoning here to be similar to his reasoning regarding substance (Marion, *Questions*, 177–8), and he takes the relevant analogy there to be analogy of attribution. For more on Marion on Descartes on substance, see note 21 below. Vincent Carraud, *pace* Marion, interprets Descartes as using an analogy of proportionality in this context. See Vincent Carraud, *Causa sive ratio. La raison de la cause, de Suarez à Leibniz [Cause sive ratio]* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), 276–9. Carraud seems to take the primary texts to clearly show that Descartes is employing an analogy of proportionality (as I do): after presenting the relevant excerpts, Carraud states, 'Cette analogie s'entend comme un strict rapport (c'est du reste le mot que Clerselier choisit à plusieurs reprises), plus exactement une comparaison de rapports (égalité géométrique), ce que les scolastiques eussent appelé une analogie de proportionnalité. Rien n'autorise donc à l'interpréter comme une analogie de proportion, ou d'attribution, qui intègre le premier analogue à la série des analogues' (Carraud, *Causa sive ratio*, 279, emphasis in the original).

‘from itself’ has two senses: when it is said that something derives its existence ‘from itself’ (*a se*) the phrase can be taken in a positive sense, to mean ‘from itself as a cause,’ or in a negative sense, to mean simply ‘not from another’ (*non ab alio*) (AT VII 95; CSM II 68). And Caterus thinks that only the negative sense applies in this case.¹⁴

Descartes responds with a detailed elaboration in the First Replies (AT VII 106–112).

What is relevant for my purposes is Descartes’s use of analogy of proportionality in his explanation:

There are some who attend only to the literal and strict meaning of the phrase ‘efficient cause’ and thus think it is impossible for anything to be the cause of itself. They do not see that there is any place for another kind of cause analogous to an efficient cause [*aliud causae genus efficienti analogum*], and hence when they say that something derives its existence ‘from itself’ [*a se*] they normally mean simply that it has no cause. But if they would look at the facts rather than the words, they would readily observe that the negative sense of the phrase ‘from itself’ comes merely from the imperfection of the human intellect and has no basis in reality. But there is a positive sense of the phrase which is derived from the true nature of things, and it is this sense alone which is employed in my argument...the fact that God derives his existence from himself, or has no cause apart from himself, depends not on nothing but on the real immensity of his power; hence, when we perceive this, we are quite entitled to think *that in a sense he stands in the same relation to himself as an efficient cause does to its effect* [*illum quodammodo idem praestare respectu sui ipsius quod causa efficiens respectu sui effectus*], and hence that he derives his existence from himself in the positive sense. (AT VII 109–11; CSM II 79–80, my emphasis)

In this passage, Descartes explains how we are to understand God’s derivation of himself. He rejects Caterus’s suggestion that when we say something is the cause of itself we are using ‘from itself’ only in the negative sense to mean ‘not from another’—that is, that it has no other cause (AT VII 95). Instead, Descartes says, we can understand ‘from itself’ in a positive sense, i.e. in

¹⁴ Caterus follows the tradition, extending back to Aristotle, which denies that something can be the cause of itself in any ‘positive’ sense. For recent discussion of the Scholastic background relevant to the debate between Caterus and Arnauld and Descartes, see Richard A. Lee, Jr., ‘The Scholastic Resources for Descartes’s Concept of God as *Causa Sui*’ in Daniel Garber and Steven Nadler (eds.), *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy, Volume 3*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 91–118.

the sense of analogy of proportionality: God stands in the same relation to himself as an efficient cause stands to its effect.

In the Fourth Objections, Arnauld presses Descartes on this conclusion: he says it ‘seems to me to be a hard saying, and indeed to be false’ (AT VII 208; CSM II 146). The main problem is that an efficient cause is distinct from its effect but God is not distinct from himself (AT VII 209–10). Arnauld concludes, ‘I am sure that it will scarcely be possible to find a single theologian who will not object to the proposition that God derives his existence from himself in the positive sense, and as it were causally’ (AT VII 214; CSM II 150). Descartes, in response, reiterates his position from the First Replies. He admits that the notion of efficient cause ‘in a strict sense’ cannot be used to characterize God’s derivation of his existence of himself because the notion, strictly speaking, requires the cause to be distinct from itself. But, he maintains:

It does not, however, follow that such a cause is in no sense a positive cause that can be regarded as analogous to an efficient cause [*causam positivam, quæ per analogiam ad efficientem referri possit*]; and this is all that my argument requires. (AT VII 240; CSM II 167)

Descartes explains that just because some aspects of the notion of an efficient cause in the strict sense do not apply to the case of God does not entail that the notion cannot apply to God by analogy. And he further underscores the importance of acknowledging the analogy:

In refusing to allow us to say that God stands toward himself in a relation analogous to that of an efficient cause [*analogiam causæ efficientis*], M. Arnauld not only fails to clarify the proof of God’s existence but actually prevents the reader from understanding it (AT VII 244; CSM II 170).

Here, again, Descartes shows the analogy in this context to be analogy of proportionality: two relations are being compared, God’s relation to himself and the relation between a cause and its effect. To Descartes’s mind, recognizing the analogy of proportionality between efficient causation and God’s derivation of himself is central to understanding the Third Meditation proofs of God’s existence.

1.2. The Reference to Health: Analogy of Attribution

In his letter to Henry More of 5 February 1649, Descartes shows that he is aware of the second type of analogy I have discussed, analogy of attribution, which uses the same word to characterize two things, one in a primary sense and the other in a secondary sense. Descartes's use of the analogy of attribution arises in the context of his explanation of his definition of body as extended substance.

More objects to Descartes's definition: 'God, or an angel, or any other self-subsistent thing is extended, and so your definition is too broad' (AT V 269; B 677, p. 2616; CSMK 361). Descartes argues in response that 'no incorporeal substances are properly [*proprie*] extended' (AT V 270; B 677, p. 2616; CSMK 361, modified). He then identifies a common misunderstanding—'some people indeed do confuse the notion of substance with that of extended thing'—and presents an analysis of the confusion:

This is because of the false preconceived opinion which makes them believe that nothing can exist or be intelligible without being also imaginable, and because it is indeed true that nothing falls under the imagination [*sub imaginationem cadit*], without being in some way extended. Now just as we can say that health belongs only to human beings, though by analogy [*per analogiam*] medicine and a temperate climate and many other things also are called healthy so too I call extended only what is imaginable as having parts within parts, each of determinate size and shape – although other things may also be called extended by analogy [*per analogiam*]. (AT V 270; B 677, p. 2616; CSMK 362, modified)

Descartes raises the example of health to illustrate how the term 'extended' might be used not in its proper sense (his sense), but in an analogous sense. The example of health Descartes mentions originated with Aristotle¹⁵ and was commonly reproduced in Scholastic discussions.¹⁶ 'Healthy'

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Γ 2, 1003a34–b1.

¹⁶ Francisco Suárez, for instance, presents it as an example of *extrinsic* analogy of attribution, one of his two kinds of analogy of attribution (*DM XXVIII.3.14/OO 26, 17*). In extrinsic analogy of attribution, the referent of the term in question is in one thing intrinsically, and in the other extrinsically. So, regarding the classical example of health, Suárez says: "'healthy' is said absolutely of an animal and of medicine by reference to an animal' (*DM XXVIII.3.14/ OO 26, 17/ Doyle, 40*). In contrast, in his second kind of

is an analogical term as applied to human beings and medicine (and temperate climate etc.) because while a human being is healthy in a primary sense, medicine is healthy in a secondary sense: it contributes to or causes the health of the human being. Descartes says that only what is imaginable as having parts within parts is extended in a primary sense, and the term, therefore, is true, strictly speaking, only of corporeal substance. But just as medicine is healthy by analogy, so other things may be called extended by analogy.¹⁷

1.3. Substance and the Denial of Univocity

There is another context in which Descartes might be seen as using analogy of attribution, his discussions of substance. In the *Principles*, Descartes defines the term ‘substance’ as ‘a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence’ (AT VIII A 24; CSM I 210). Because created substances need God’s concurrence to exist (AT VIII A 24, 25), only God depends on no other thing. Thus, it follows, Descartes says:

The term ‘substance’ does not apply univocally [*univoce*], as they say in the Schools, to God and to other things; that is, there is no signification in the name that can be distinctly understood to be common to God and his creatures [*nulla*

analogy of attribution, intrinsic analogy of attribution, the referent of the term in question is in both things intrinsically, albeit in one thing absolutely and the other by relationship to the first. Suárez thinks, as a result, that with intrinsic analogy of attribution ‘there exists one common formal and objective concept, because the analogates properly and intrinsically are such and they truly agree in a certain character which the mind can conceive abstractly and precisely in one concept common to all’ (*DM XXVIII.3.14/ OO 26, 18/ Doyle 40*).

¹⁷ Although, as far as I can tell, he nowhere refers to Suárez’s distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic analogy of attribution (see previous note), if Descartes has this distinction in mind, he surely takes the relevant analogy in his response to More to be *extrinsic* analogy of attribution, for at least two reasons. First, the example of health is historically a paradigm case of extrinsic analogy of attribution (in addition to Suárez, Cajetan takes it as an example of analogy of attribution (*DNA* §8), which he conceives of as exclusively extrinsic—see note 11, above), and the comparison between the two cases in this context only works if Descartes is using the same kind of analogy in both. Second, Descartes would certainly reject the claim that extension belongs to incorporeal substances such as God intrinsically, which would have to be the case if he was using intrinsic analogy of attribution. Thus, his response to More depends on understanding extension as belonging to incorporeal things extrinsically, only by reference to things that are ‘imaginable as having parts within parts’, as he puts it.

ejus nominis significatio potest distincte intelligi, quæ Deo et creaturis sit communis] (*Principles* I.51: AT VIII A 24).¹⁸

Descartes's denial that the term 'substance' is univocal as applied to God and created beings allows for two possibilities, either that the term is purely equivocal or that there is an analogous sense in which God and created beings are both substances.¹⁹ Because Descartes never says that the term 'substance' is applied analogically to God and created beings in the *Principles* discussion of substance or elsewhere, some commentators have suspected that 'substance' is purely equivocal for Descartes.²⁰

But later remarks in a letter to Clerselier of 23 April 1649 seem to support the view that Descartes thinks that 'substance' is analogical. Descartes says that the notion of substance itself entails infinity and that any defects are accidents:

By 'infinite substance' I mean a substance which has actually infinite and immense, true and real perfections. This is not an accident added to the notion of substance, but the very essence of substance taken absolutely and bounded by no defects; these defects, in respect of substance, are accidents; but infinity or infinitude is not. (AT V 355; B 697, p. 2694; CSMK 377)

¹⁸ I reproduce Tad Schmaltz's more literal translation here (Schmaltz, 'Disappearance of Analogy,' 90).

¹⁹ Whether 'substance' is purely equivocal or analogical for Descartes is a difficult and much debated issue, and I cannot do it justice to here. It is complicated by the fact that which particular background conceptions of analogy Descartes might be employing or responding to is itself a contentious issue. For example, Jean-Marie Beyssade, Jean-Luc Marion, Tad Schmaltz, and Jorge Secada take Francisco Suárez's conception of the analogy of being to be relevant background, but they come to varying conclusions on whether Descartes agrees with Suárez or not. See Jean-Marie Beyssade, 'La théorie cartésienne de la substance: équivocité ou analogie?' *Revue internationale de philosophie* 50 (1996): 51–72; Jean-Luc Marion, 'A propos de Suarez et Descartes,' *Revue internationale de philosophie* 50 (1996): 109–31; Schmaltz, 'Disappearance of Analogy'; and Jorge Secada, 'The Doctrine of Substance,' ['Substance'] in Stephen Gaukroger (ed.) *The Blackwell Guide to Descartes's Meditations* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 67–85. This is not surprising because Suárez's position (and his relevant tradition) is itself a matter of significant debate. See John P. Doyle 'Suárez on the Analogy of Being,' *The Modern Schoolman* 46 (1969): 219–49 and 323–41, on Suárez's conception of the analogy, and Ashworth, 'Suárez on Being,' regarding the debate over the relevant background to Suárez. Even if Descartes agrees with Suárez that 'substance' is to be applied analogically to God and creatures, it seems that he disagrees with Suárez on the nature of the analogy involved. See note 21, below, for further discussion of this point.

²⁰ See, for example, Secada, 'Substance,' 77–8.

This suggests that for Descartes, because ‘substance’ includes infinity, the term in its strict sense applies alone to God but then may be applied secondarily to finite creatures, since finitude would presumably be a defect. Descartes continues:

I say that the notion I have of the infinite is in me before that of the finite because, by the mere fact that I conceive being, or that which is, without thinking whether it is finite or infinite, what I conceive is infinite being; but in order to conceive a finite being, I have to take away something from this general notion of being, *which must accordingly be there first [il faut que je retranche quelque chose de cette notion générale de l'être, laquelle par conséquent doit précéder]*. (AT V 356; B 697, p. 2694; CSMK 377, my emphasis)

Here the interpretation that Descartes holds that ‘substance’ is analogical is better supported, because Descartes says in order to conceive a finite being, we must first have a general notion of being from which we then take something away. In other words, Descartes seems to be expressing the view that analogy of attribution holds for ‘being’ or ‘substance’: ‘being’ applies primarily to God, and then in a secondary or derivative sense to finite beings.²¹

1.4. Analogy and the *Imago Dei*

Lastly, Descartes might be seen as drawing on theories of analogy in his conception of the *imago Dei*, because analogy appeared in medieval discussions of the *imago Dei*²² as well as in discussions of a related issue, how we can sensibly use the same terms to characterize both God

²¹ If in his discussions of substance Descartes has in mind Suárez’s views on analogy and substance, and if Descartes is affirming that ‘substance’ can be applied analogically to God and creatures, he surely disagrees with Suárez on the kind of analogy involved. (See note 16, above, for Suárez’s distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic analogy of attribution.) Jean-Luc Marion thinks it is the (Scotist) aspect of Suárez’s conception of intrinsic analogy of attribution that Descartes is denying in his rejection of univocity in the *Principles* (Marion, *La théologie blanche*, 116) and that Jorge Secada thinks amounts to univocity (Secada, ‘Substance,’ 73). As we saw, in *Principles* 1.51 (AT VIII A 24) Descartes explicitly denies, regarding substance, that there is a common signification common to God and creatures. If Descartes holds there is an analogy here, the kind of analogy would be extrinsic analogy of attribution, not intrinsic analogy of attribution, as Suárez holds.

²² For example, Thomas Aquinas makes a passing reference to analogy in his discussion of the *imago Dei*. See note 32, below.

and created beings (e.g. ‘good’ and ‘wise’).²³ But if Descartes uses analogy to illuminate the *imago Dei*, as some commentators suggest,²⁴ his claim that the will figures in some way in our resemblance to God seems to be in tension with significant commitments he holds about the nature of God.

Descartes’s commitment to divine indifference seems to pose a particular difficulty.²⁵ Descartes holds that God’s will is indifferent, that is, that God’s choices are never impelled by any prior perception of the good (AT VII 431–32; CSM II 291–92). He explains in the Sixth Replies that this indifference is essential to the divine will and divine freedom²⁶ and an indication of God’s perfection (AT VII 431–2; CSM II 291–2).²⁷ Indifference in human beings, however, is neither essential to human freedom (AT VII 433; CSM II 292) nor a perfection but, instead, evidence ‘of a defect in knowledge or a kind of negation’ (AT VII 58; CSM II 40). But Descartes also maintains that the human will is ‘perfect of its kind’ (AT VII 55; CSM II 38). Tad Schmaltz argues that these commitments undermine a purported analogy between God and human beings because given that Descartes holds that the divine will/freedom and human

²³ See Ashworth, ‘Medieval Theories,’ §6 and John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 510–75, on this issue, the analogical predication of divine names.

²⁴ References to Descartes’s use of analogy in the context of the *imago Dei* include: Schmaltz, ‘Disappearance of Analogy’; C. P. Ragland, ‘Alternative Possibilities in Descartes’s Fourth Meditation,’ *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 14 (2006): 379–400, at 387; C. P. Ragland, ‘Descartes on the Principle of Alternative Possibilities,’ *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 44 (2006): 377–94, at 381; and Noa Naaman-Zauderer, *Descartes’ Deontological Turn: Reason, Will, and Virtue in the Later Writings [Descartes’ Deontological Turn]* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), e.g. at 148. Naaman-Zauderer, however, makes the reference in passing and may not be committed to anything stronger than the view that Descartes holds that there is a likeness between God and human beings.

²⁵ Tad Schmaltz mentions a second point of disanalogy: God’s will and understanding are identical, whereas the human will and understanding are not (Schmaltz, ‘Disappearance of Analogy,’ 94). I address this difference in Section 4, below.

²⁶ Descartes identifies the faculty of the will with *arbitrii libertas* (translated ‘freedom of judgment’, ‘freedom of choice’, or ‘freedom of decision’) both for human beings (AT VII 56, 57: ‘*voluntas, sive arbitrii libertas*’) and for God (AT VII 432).

²⁷ ‘The supreme indifference to be found in God is the supreme indication of his omnipotence’ (AT VII 432; CSM II 292). I will return to this point in Section 4.

will/freedom are each perfect, they then must be different in kind. If they are different in kind, there is no essence of freedom in general that God possesses that we possess only derivatively, as can be argued in the case of substance (as we have seen). It follows, according to Schmaltz, that there must be a purely equivocal relationship between God and human beings in regard to the will and freedom.²⁸

This argument assumes that for Descartes's claim about the will's role in the *imago Dei* to stand, it must meet the requirements of analogy of attribution. But there is reason to reconsider this assumption: in contrast to the other contexts we have seen in which Descartes clearly has in mind the framework of medieval theories of analogy, Descartes does not use the relevant terminology (*analogia*, *equivoce*, *univoce*, and all their variants) to clarify his conception of the *imago Dei*.²⁹ Furthermore, an alternative framework can better make sense of the *imago Dei*: a tradition of discourse in which the notions of image, likeness, and imitation clarify how human beings bear God's image and likeness.³⁰

²⁸ I take the basics of this argument from Schmaltz, 'Disappearance of Analogy,' 93–5.

²⁹ So far as I know, there are only two passages in which Descartes's language might suggest that he is alluding to theories of analogy in the context of the *imago Dei*. First, in the Second Replies, Descartes says 'of all the individual attributes which, by a defect of our intellect, we assign to God in a piecemeal fashion, corresponding to the way in which we perceive them in ourselves, none belong to God and ourselves univocally [*univoce*]' (AT VII 137; CSM II 98). But Descartes here is not clarifying his conception of the way in which human beings bear the image and likeness of God, but instead, clarifying his conception of God in response to objections from Mersenne on this issue. Second, in the Sixth Replies, in his discussion of the difference between indifference in human beings and God, Descartes says 'no essence can belong univocally [*univoce*] to both God and his creatures' (AT VII 433; CSM II 292) but this reference to non-univocity is an artifact of his objector's claim that 'the essences of things are... indivisible and immutable' (AT VII 417; CSM II 281), which Descartes dismisses as irrelevant to the discussion (AT VII 433; CSM II 292).

³⁰ The distinction I am positing here between likeness and analogy is present earlier in the history of discussions of *analogia*. Joshua P. Hochschild briefly traces the distinction from Aristotle to Aquinas (he calls it the distinction between 'associated meaning and nongeneric likeness') in *Semantics*, 9, and references work on Bonaventure as especially helpful for illustrating it. See Hochschild, *Semantics*, 179, note 16, for the references to Bonaventure.

2. Descartes on Bearing God's Image and Likeness

In this section, I show that Descartes's discussions of the *imago Dei* evoke the Augustinian-Thomistic³¹ tradition of discourse on the nature of image and, therefore, that this tradition should be used to make sense of Descartes's conception of the doctrine.³² I then turn to the comparative nature of Descartes's formulation of the *imago Dei* claim.

Descartes and the Augustinian-Thomistic Tradition

In question 74 of *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*,³³ Augustine maps the relationships between the concepts *imago* (image), *similitudino* (likeness), and *aequalitas* (equality, also translated 'identity'). He focuses on those particular concepts because his larger context is the Christological-Trinitarian discussion of the relationships between God, Christ, and man, and whether man is in the image of God as Christ is, or whether man is made only in Christ's image.³⁴

According to Augustine, although the concepts of image, likeness, and equality are distinct from each another, they are related. The concept of image includes likeness but not

³¹ I use this term to characterize the tradition because Augustine seems to initiate a new way of conceptualizing the *imago Dei*, and as I will show, Thomas Aquinas follows Augustine to a great extent. See R. A. Markus, "Imago" and "Similitudo" in Augustine, ["Imago" and "Similitudo"] *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 10 (1964): 125–43, for a discussion of how Augustine breaks from the earlier patristic tradition in his analysis of the relationships between *imago* and *similitudo*.

³² At one point in his discussion of the *imago Dei* in the *Summa*, Thomas Aquinas mentions analogy: 'Now a thing is said to be one not only numerically, in species, or in genus, but also according to a certain analogy or proportion. In this sense a creature is one with God, or like to Him' (*ST Ia q.93 a.1 ad 3*). But the discussion of image, likeness, and imitation I will focus on is distinct: Aquinas does not integrate it with any of the theories of analogy that he makes use of in other contexts.

³³ Translations are from Saint Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, [Eighty-Three] David L. Mosher (trans.) (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982).

³⁴ The title of Question 74 is 'On the text in Paul's letter to the Colossians: "In whom we have redemption and remission of sins, who is the image of the invisible God".' (Augustine, *Eighty-Three*, 189). But Markus argues on the basis of earlier texts that 'Augustine's ideas of image and likeness and their mutual relations had been formulated... without reference to their use in Trinitarian contexts, and that they were only introduced into such contexts already fully-fledged' (Markus, "Imago" and "Similitudo", 133).

necessarily equality (the image of a man in a mirror is like the man but not equal to him ‘because there is absent from the image much that is present in that thing of which it is the copy’).³⁵ The concept of equality entails likeness (between two identical eggs there is an equality ‘for whatever belongs to the one belongs to the other’³⁶) but not image (the concept of image requires that the image be dependent on the original, which it expresses).³⁷ Lastly, the concept of likeness entails neither image nor equality, because something can be like something else while being neither its image nor its equal (a partridge egg is like a chicken egg insofar as it is an egg, but is neither its image nor its equal). Augustine concludes his discussion in question 74 by using this conceptual map to argue that Christ is not only the image and likeness of God, but that there is equality between them.

Thomas Aquinas reproduces Augustine’s discussion of the relations between the concepts to a large extent in his discussion of the *imago Dei* in question 93 of Part 1 of the *Summa Theologiae*:

As Augustine says: ‘Where an image exists, there forthwith is a likeness; but where there is likeness, there is not necessarily an image’. Hence it is clear that likeness is essential to an image; and that an image adds something to likeness—namely, that it is copied from something else [*sit ex alio expressum*]. For an ‘image’ is so called because it is produced as an imitation of something else [*agitur ad imitationem alterius*]; wherefore, for instance, an egg, however much like and equal to another egg, is not called an image of the other egg, because it is not copied from it. But equality does not belong to the essence of an image, for as Augustine says: ‘Where there is an image there is not necessarily equality’...now it is manifest that in man there is some likeness to God, copied from God as from an exemplar; yet this likeness is not one of equality, for such an exemplar infinitely excels its copy. Therefore there is in man a likeness to God; not indeed, a perfect likeness, but imperfect. (*ST Ia q.93 a.1 resp*)

³⁵ Augustine, *Eighty-Three*, 190.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ The Latin is ‘*quia de illo expressa est*’. This phrase is also rendered by translators of Augustine and Aquinas in the language of ‘copying’: see the passage from *ST* in the next paragraph.

Aquinas presents the same key notions of image, likeness, and equality and traces the same relationships between them. But Aquinas adds a further notion that will figure in Descartes's discussion, imitation: 'an "image" is so called because it is produced as an imitation of something else'. This isn't the only instance of Aquinas using 'imitation'. In an earlier work, Aquinas presents the same basic conception of image as the one he presents in the *Summa Theologiae* but frames the discussion using 'imitation': 'We call image what refers to the imitation of another [*imago proprie dicitur quod ad alterius imitationem est*]',³⁸

Descartes echoes the language and conceptual connections of Aquinas's (and hence Augustine's) view. In response to Gassendi's objections to his Third Meditation affirmation of the *imago Dei*, Descartes clarifies how he conceives of the doctrine:

You deny that we are made in the image of God, and say that this would make God like a man; and you go on to list the ways in which human nature differs [*differt*] from the divine nature. Is this any cleverer than trying to deny that one of Apelles' pictures was made in the likeness [*similitudinem*] of Alexander on the grounds that this would mean that Alexander was like a picture, and yet pictures are made of wood and paint, and not of flesh and bones like Alexander? It is not in the nature of an image to be the same in all respects [*in omnibus eadem sit*] with the thing of which it is an image, but merely to imitate it in some respects [*sed tantum ut illam in aliquibus imitetur*]. And it is quite clear that the wholly perfect power of thought which we understand to be in God is represented by means of that less perfect faculty of thought which we possess. (AT VII 372–73; CSM II 256–57, modified)

The conception of the *imago Dei* doctrine Descartes presents here is remarkably similar to Aquinas's: image entails likeness; image does not require equality with its exemplar (that it is

³⁸ *Super II Sent.* 16.1.1, sol. The *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard (Scriptum super libros Sententiarum)* was written 1252–56, whereas the *Summa Theologiae* was written 1265–73. I discovered the reference to *Super II Sent.* in Dominic Olariu, 'Thomas Aquinas' definition of the *imago Dei* and the development of lifelike portraiture', in *Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre* No.17.2 (2013): url: <http://cem.revues.org/13251>.

‘the same in all respects with the thing of which it is an image’); and what makes something an image is that it imitates its exemplar.³⁹

Although Descartes seems to situate his conception of the *imago Dei* in the general Augustinian-Thomistic framework of image and likeness, he diverges in content from the view. Several differences are worth noting: Aquinas says that not just any likeness is enough to make something an image of something else and that likeness in species is necessary (*ST Ia q.93 a.2* resp), but Descartes does not restrict the kind of likeness by which humans imitate God to a likeness in species. Furthermore, for Aquinas only rational creatures are made to God’s image, whereas although Descartes does point to our faculty of thought as a way in which we resemble God, he does not agree that only rational creatures bear God’s image and likeness. For Descartes, the causal relationship between God and all created things is enough to ground the likeness of image between them:

Since the cause is itself being and substance, and it brings something into being, i.e. out of nothing (a method of production which is the prerogative of God), what is produced must at the very least be being and substance. To this extent at least, it will be like God and bear his image. (AT V 156; CSMK 340)⁴⁰

Thus, Descartes does not adopt Aquinas’s distinction between likeness of image and likeness ‘by way of a trace [*per modum vestigii*],’ which ‘represents something by way of an effect, which represents the cause in such a way as not to attain to the likeness of species’, like ashes are a

³⁹ The *Conversation with Burman* (for a discussion of its reliability, see Roger Ariew, ‘The Infinite in Descartes’ Conversation with Burman,’ [‘The Infinite’] *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 69 (1987): 140–63) reveals another point of similarity to Aquinas’s view. At the end of his question 93 discussion of the *imago Dei*, in clarifying the relationship between ‘likeness and image’, Aquinas says that there is a general notion of likeness which is not distinct from the notion of image: ‘Likeness is not distinct from image in the general notion of likeness [*communem rationem similitudinis*] (for thus it is included in image)’ (*ST Ia q.93 a.9 ad 1*). Likewise, Descartes clarifies in his remarks to Burman, ‘I am not...taking “image” here in the ordinary sense of an effigy or picture of something, but in the broader sense of something having some likeness [*similitudinem*] to something else’ (AT V 156; CSMK 340, modified). This statement evokes Aquinas’s claim that there is sense of ‘image’ as likeness in a general sense.

⁴⁰ Although this passage is from the *Conversation with Burman*, it is consistent with Descartes’s statements about causation in the Third Meditation. See Schmaltz, ‘Disappearance of Analogy,’ 88–90 on this issue.

trace of fire (*ST* Ia q.93 q.6 resp). Instead, for Descartes, even things such as stones ‘do have the image and likeness of God, but it is very remote, minute and indistinct’ (AT V 156; CSMK 340).

Descartes’s Comparative Formulations of the Imago Dei Doctrine

Descartes adapts the Augustinian-Thomistic conceptual apparatus in a way that is important to notice: his formulations of the *imago Dei* doctrine regarding the will’s role are *comparative* statements.⁴¹ In the Fourth Meditation, it is ‘especially’ or ‘chiefly’ or ‘above all’ (*praecipue*, AT VII 57) in virtue of the will that human beings bear the image and likeness of God; and in a letter to Mersenne dated during the time he was writing the *Meditations*,⁴² Descartes says, ‘it is principally [*principalement*] because of this infinite will [*volonté infinie*] within us that we can say we are created in his image’ (AT II 628; B 235, p. 1104; CSMK 141–142).⁴³ As we have seen, in his replies to Gassendi Descartes says that we imitate God in our faculty of thought (*vim cogitandi*): ‘the wholly perfect power of thought which we understand to be in God is represented by means of that less perfect faculty of thought which we possess’ (AT VII 373; CSM 257).⁴⁴ Descartes classifies all of human thought into two categories: operations of the intellect and operations of the will (AT VIII A 17). Why Descartes ultimately takes the will, rather than the intellect, to be the way in which we especially bear the image and likeness of God

⁴¹ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer of an earlier version of this paper for underscoring this point.

⁴² The letter is dated December 25, 1639. Descartes was writing the *Meditations* from 1638 to 1640; the *Meditations* were published in 1641.

⁴³ This language is echoed in the French translation of the *Meditations*, which Descartes did not carry out himself but approved: ‘it is principally [*principalement*] the will that makes me know that I bear the image and likeness of God’ (AT IX 45).

⁴⁴ In Descartes’s Third Meditation statement of the *imago Dei* (AT VII 51; CSM II 35) he specifies that our likeness includes the idea of God. For further discussion of Descartes’s Third Meditation claim and how Descartes’s theory of ideas generally reflects the image of God doctrine, see Nicholas Jolley’s *The Light of the Soul: Theories of Ideas in Leibniz, Malebranche, and Descartes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 8–9, and Chapters 2 and 3.

therefore needs explanation, especially since he holds that each faculty is ‘perfect of its kind’ (AT VII 55; CSM II 38).

Descartes seems to provide an answer in his discussion of the two faculties in the Fourth Meditation. The human intellect is ‘extremely slight and very finite’ (AT VII 57; CSM II 40), whereas the divine intellect is ‘much greater—indeed supremely great and infinite’ (AT VII 57; CSM II 40). But the human will and the divine will are not so vastly different: ‘it is only the will...which I experience within me to be so great that the idea of any greater faculty is beyond my grasp; so much that it is above all in virtue of the will that I understand myself to bear in some way the image and likeness of God’ (AT VII 57; CSM II 40). To understand Descartes’s conception of the *imago Dei*, then, it is necessary to explore why Descartes conceives of the human will as so much greater than the human intellect.⁴⁵

3. Finite and Infinite: the Contrast between the Human Intellect and Will

Descartes is working within the Scholastic tradition of faculty psychology,⁴⁶ in which a faculty is a power. I will argue in this section that Descartes conceives of what I call the ‘extent’ of a faculty as set by the nature of the power, and that the difference in magnitude between the intellect and the will is related to their respective extents. A passage from the *Principles* suggests the latter. Under the heading, ‘[The will] extends more widely than [the intellect] does, and this is the cause of error [*Hanc illo latius patere, errorumque causam inde esse*]’, Descartes says:

⁴⁵ See Thomas Lennon, ‘Descartes and Pelagianism,’ [‘Pelagianism’] *Essays in Philosophy* 14 (2013): 194–217, at 199–203, for the significance of this comparison and, in particular, the problems for Descartes that resulted from his interlocutors taking the proper comparison class as encompassing all things, including God.

⁴⁶ See Gary Hatfield ‘The Cognitive Faculties’ in Dan Garber and Michael Ayers (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy Vol. 2*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 953–1002, for an overview of the late Scholastic background on the cognitive faculties.

Moreover, the perception of the intellect [*intellectus perceptio*] extends itself [*se extendit*] only to the few objects presented to it, and is always very finite [*valde finita*]. But the will can be called infinite in a certain sense [*infinita quodammodo*] because we notice nothing ever which cannot be the object of some other will, or of that immeasurable will which is in God, to which our will cannot also extend itself [*quia nihil unquam advertimus, quod alicujus alterius voluntatis, vel immensæ illius quæ in Deo est, objectum esse possit, ad quod etiam nostra non se extendat*]. And this to such a degree that we easily extend our will [*illam...extendamus*] beyond those things which we clearly perceive. (*Principles* I. 35: AT VIII A 18)⁴⁷

In this passage, Descartes explicitly connects the intellect's finitude and the will's greatness (here, 'infinite in a certain sense' (*infinita quodammodo*))⁴⁸ with their extents—that is, their extending (*patere*) or their extending themselves (*se extendere*). But what Descartes means by this needs further discussion.

The Intellect's Finitude

Descartes uses the term 'intellect' (*intellectus*) and its grammatical variants to characterize two different powers.⁴⁹ The intellect is, at times, the power to perceive broadly speaking: 'by the intellect alone I perceive the ideas about which I can make judgments [*per solem intellectum percipio tantum ideas de quibus iudicium ferre possum*]' (AT VII 56). At other times the intellect is the power to 'understand [*intelligere*]', that is, to perceive clearly and distinctly (AT VII 60; AT VII 376–7).⁵⁰ The extent of the intellect, I will show, is therefore finite in two corresponding

⁴⁷ See note 55 for discussion of my translation of this passage.

⁴⁸ I will discuss the importance and meaning of Descartes's characterization of the will as infinite in the next section.

⁴⁹ Anthony Kenny also makes the point that Descartes uses the term 'intellect' in at least two senses, although I characterize the first sense slightly differently than he does. He says 'in one sense the intellect is the possession of the power to recall and combine ideas...in another sense the intellect is the faculty which produces clear and distinct ideas and intuits their truth'. See Anthony Kenny, 'Descartes on the Will,' ['Descartes on the Will'] in R. J. Butler (ed.), *Cartesian Studies*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972) 1–31, at 12–13.

⁵⁰ I will further discuss the relevant Fourth Meditation passages in what follows. Here I also cite the Fifth Replies passage that Anthony Kenny references in which Descartes's explanation of error relies on conceiving of the intellect as responsible for clear and distinct perception. In response to Gassendi's

ways: first, it is limited in the sense that we cannot perceive everything that exists, and second, it is limited in the sense that we cannot clearly and distinctly perceive everything we perceive.

In the *Principles* passage quoted above, Descartes presents the first sense in which the extent of the intellect is finite: the intellect is limited in the sense that our power to perceive is limited—we cannot perceive everything there is to perceive. Another way that Descartes puts this idea is that the intellect lacks some ideas:

For by the intellect alone I perceive the ideas about which I can make judgments ...although countless things may exist without there being any corresponding ideas in me, it should not, strictly speaking, be said that I am deprived [*privatus*] of these ideas, but merely that I lack them, in a negative sense [*sed negative tantum destitutus*]' (AT VII 56; CSM II 39, modified).

This sense of the intellect's finitude is closely tied to the fact that human beings are finite creatures—unlike God, we bounded in time and space.⁵¹

But Descartes also presents a second sense in which intellect has a finite extent: the intellect's extent is limited in the sense that we do not have knowledge about (i.e. perceive through the 'natural light', or perceive clearly and distinctly) everything that we perceive. In other words, the intellect's extent is limited in that there are a limited number of things we perceive clearly and distinctly, and we perceive everything else only confusedly and obscurely. In explaining how to avoid error, Descartes says we need 'simply refrain from making a

request to explain whether the will can extend to anything that escapes the intellect, Descartes says: 'when you judge that the mind is a rarified body, you can understand [*intelligere*] that it is a mind, that is, a thinking thing, and you can understand that a rarefied body is an extended thing; but you do not understand [*non intelligis*] that the one and the same thing is both thinking and extended; this is something you merely will to believe because you believed it before and you do not like changing your mind...and so I agree that we do not will anything about which we understand [*intelligamus*] nothing at all; but I deny that we understand [*intelligere*] as much as we will [*velle*]; because we can, about one and the same thing, will much and know very little [*possumus enim de eadem re velle permulta, et perpauca tantum cognoscere*]' (Kenny, 'Descartes on the Will,' 13, excerpted; AT VII 376–7).

⁵¹ Strictly speaking, by the Fourth Meditation, all that Descartes can claim is that we are creatures that are bounded in time, but by the end of the *Meditations*, since Descartes will have 'proved' that bodies exist and we have them, we are finite creatures in the sense that we are bounded in both time and space.

judgement in cases where [we] do not perceive the truth with sufficient clarity and distinctness’ (AT VII 59; CSM II 41). He then continues:

And I have no cause for complaint on the grounds that the power of understanding or the natural light [*vim intelligendi, sive... lumen naturale*] which God gave me is no greater than it is; for it is of the nature of a finite intellect to not understand many things, and it is of the nature of a created intellect to be finite [*quia est de ratione intellectus finiti ut multa non intelligat, et de ratione intellectus creati ut sit finitus*]. (AT VII 60; CSM II 42, modified)

Here he ties the finitude of the intellect with our lacking understanding, or ‘the natural light’ being ‘no greater than it is’. This is the sense of the finitude of the intellect Descartes invokes in his explanation of why we, not God, are responsible for our errors in judgment: ‘So what then is the source of my mistakes? It must be simply this: that the will extends more widely than the intellect [*latius pateat voluntas quam intellectus*]; but instead of restricting it within the same limits, I extend it [*extendo*] to matters which I do not understand’ (AT VII 58; CSM II 40, modified). Descartes cannot mean here that the intellect’s extent is finite in the first sense, that it lacks some ideas, because in order to make a judgment, the will must have an idea supplied by the intellect to affirm or deny. Instead, it is the second sense of the finitude of the intellect that explains our errors in judgment: we don’t confine our judgments to only what we clearly and distinctly perceive.

Descartes explicitly derives this second sense of the intellect’s finite extent from our being created (‘it is of the nature of a created intellect to be finite’, above), but this cannot be his ultimate explanation. It follows from the fact that an intellect is created and thus bounded in time and space that it has a finite extent in the first sense I discussed, i.e. that it lacks some ideas. But that a created intellect lacks some ideas does not entail that it lacks ‘understanding of many

things’, or that we cannot clearly and distinctly perceive everything we perceive.⁵² After all, human beings could have been created with the power to clearly and distinctly perceive everything that we actually perceive, while not perceiving everything there is to perceive. Descartes himself raises this very possibility later in the Fourth Meditation: God, he says, ‘could have endowed my intellect [*intellectui*] with a clear and distinct perception of everything about which I was ever likely to deliberate’ (AT VII 61; CSM II 42). This hypothetical situation is one in which a created intellect is finite in the first sense, but not in the second sense.

Descartes’s response to why we are not like these hypothetical beings is, unfortunately, unsatisfying.⁵³ He appeals to the consideration that by being prone to error, and thus being less perfect than we could have been, the universe as a whole is more diverse, and thus possibly more perfect than if we were not prone to error (AT VII 61).⁵⁴ In any case, recognizing that Descartes conceives of the extent of the intellect as finite in these two ways is necessary background to clarifying why he conceives of the human will as so much greater than the intellect.

⁵² Descartes’s *Principles* presentation of his position likewise runs together the two senses of the finite extent of the intellect: ‘It must not in any way be imagined that, because God did not give us an omniscient intellect, this makes him the author of our errors. For it is of the nature of a created intellect to be finite; and it is of the nature of a finite intellect that it does not extend itself to everything [*ac de ratione intellectus finiti, ut non ad omnia se extendat*]’ (AT VIII A 18; CSM I 205). It follows from the fact that an intellect is created that it is finite in the first sense—that there are some things that such an intellect simply does not perceive. But the finite extent of the intellect is supposed to explain why we make errors, and that explanation needs his second sense, that we do not clearly and distinctly perceive everything.

⁵³ See C.P. Ragland, ‘Descartes’ Theodicy’, *Religious Studies* 43 (2007) 125–44, for a more detailed discussion of the role of this consideration in Descartes’s Fourth Meditation strategy of defending God.

⁵⁴ The appeal to diversity as leading to greater perfection does not originate with Descartes. Michael J. Latzer calls it the ‘principle of plenitude’ and cites Augustine’s and Aquinas’s versions of the idea in his ‘Descartes’s Theodicy of Error’ in Elmar J. Kremer and Michael J. Latzer (eds.), *The Problem of Evil in Early Modern Philosophy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001) 35–48, at 39–40.

The Infinite Will

The rationale Descartes provides for why it is in virtue of the will that we bear the image and likeness of God is that the will seems to be ‘so great that the idea of any greater faculty is beyond my grasp’ (AT VII 57; CSM II 40). Descartes here makes merely the negative point that there does not seem to be any greater faculty than the will.⁵⁵

But there are two passages in which Descartes characterizes the will, positively, as infinite. In the letter to Mersenne written while Descartes was working on the *Meditations*, he says:

The desire that everyone has to possess every perfection he can conceive of, and consequently all the perfections which we believe to be in God, is due to the fact that God has given us a will which has no limits [*Dieu nous a donné une volonté qui n'a point de bornes*]. It is principally because of this infinite will [*volonté infinie*] within us that we can say we are created in his image [*nous a créés à son image*]. (25 December 1639: AT II 628; B 235, p. 1104; CSMK 141–42)

Descartes here characterizes the will as having no limits and as infinite, and says this is why we bear the *imago Dei*. It is important to see that what Descartes means by this is that the will is infinite *in relation to its extent*. In the *Principles* passage quoted at the start of this section, titled

⁵⁵ Several commentators have noted this point: see Nicolas Grimaldi, for instance, *Six études sur la volonté et liberté chez Descartes* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1988), 25 and Schmaltz, ‘Disappearance of Analogy,’ 94. Some take Descartes’s negative claim to have significant consequences: Schmaltz thinks that it ‘allows for the possibility that there is in fact a greater will that differs in kind from his own.’ Noa Naaman-Zauderer takes the ‘more qualified formulation’ (102) of the Fourth Meditation as evidence that an infinite extent cannot be the point of similarity between the divine will and the human will and suggests the epistemic aspects of Descartes’s Fourth Meditation formulations are the key to the similarity (Naaman-Zauderer, *Descartes’ Deontological Turn*, 102 and 137–38). In *La pensée métaphysique de Descartes* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1962), 201, Henri Gouhier suggests that, in trying to make sense of Descartes’s claim of a resemblance between the human will and the divine will, we should take Descartes as holding that the human will is indefinite (*indéfini*). I disagree with these commentators and take Descartes’s negative formulation here combined with his other characterizations of the will in the Fourth Meditation to be equivalent to the claim that the will is infinite (at least, in a certain sense). I discuss these issues in what follows, and in Section 4, I specifically address the issue of how we should understand Descartes’s claim that the will is infinite.

‘[The will] extends more widely than [the intellect] does, and this is the cause of error [*Hanc illo latius patere, errorumque causam inde esse*]’ (AT VIII A 18), Descartes states:

The will...[in contrast with the intellect] can be called infinite in a certain sense [*infinita quodammodo*], because we notice nothing ever which cannot be the object of some other will, or of that immeasurable will which is in God, to which our will cannot⁵⁶ also extend itself [*quia nihil unquam advertimus, quod alicujus alterius voluntatis, vel immensæ illius quæ in Deo est, objectum esse possit, ad quod etiam nostra non se extendat*]. And this to such a degree that we easily extend our will [*illam...extendamus*] beyond those things which we clearly perceive. (*Principles* I.35: AT VIII A 18)⁵⁷

Descartes explains that the human will is infinite in the sense that it can extend itself not only to things that can be the object of some other will, but to things that can be the object of God’s will. This is notable because Descartes famously thinks that absolutely anything can be the object of God’s will.

It is worth pausing over this idea because it might seem highly implausible: for example, one might object that surely there are some things to which the human will cannot extend itself. Winning the lottery, jumping over the moon, making contradictions true, and so on, one might think, are not things the human will can extend itself to and thus serve as counterexamples to Descartes’s view. In the course of elaborating on what Descartes means by this implausible seeming idea and dispelling some *prima facie* worries, I will show that they do not.

⁵⁶ Here I diverge from what would be a literal translation of ‘ad quod etiam nostra non se extendat’ (‘to which our will does not also extend itself’) because the sentence that immediately follows it only makes sense if Descartes here is talking about possibility rather than actuality. In doing so I am in good company: see CSM I 18, as well as Elizabeth Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (eds.), *The Philosophical Works of Descartes, Volume I* (New York: Dover, 1955), 233. The French edition of the *Principles*, which Descartes did not carry out himself but lauded (AT IXB 1; CSM I 179), formulates the corresponding passage in the language of possibility: ‘au lieu que la volonté en quelque sens peut sembler infinie, parce que nous n’apercevons rien qui puisse être l’objet de quelque autre volonté, même de cette immense qui est en Dieu, à quoi la nôtre ne puisse aussi s’étendre: ce qui est cause que nous la portons ordinairement au-delà de ce que nous connaissons clairement et distinctement’ (AT IXB 40, my emphasis).

⁵⁷ Lex Newman also notes that the reference here to the will’s infinity should be understood in terms of the will’s scope, similar to what I am calling its ‘extent’: see Lex Newman, ‘Descartes on the Will in Judgment’ in Janet Broughton and John Carriero (eds.), *Blackwell Companion to Descartes* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008) 334–51, at 339. I go on to develop this point in ways that Newman would likely not endorse, however.

Just as the intellect's extent is tied to the powers for which the intellect is responsible, so too is the will's extent tied to the particular power for which the will is responsible. Descartes's Fourth Meditation definition of the will or freedom of choice (*voluntas, sive arbitrii libertas*) explains what that power is:⁵⁸ '[the will or freedom of choice] simply consists in our ability to do or not do something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid) [*eo consistit, quod idem vel facere vel non facere (hoc est affirmare vel negare, prosequi vel fugere) possimus*]' (AT VII 57).⁵⁹ Descartes enumerates here and elsewhere that the operations, or 'modes' of the will, for human beings include affirming, denying, pursuing, avoiding (AT VII 57), desire, aversion, assertion, and doubt (AT VIIIA 17). 'Willing' for Descartes thus encompasses a variety of mental attitudes related to both belief and action.⁶⁰ But willing, for human beings, does not include accomplishing things because, at least for human beings,⁶¹ accomplishing things requires the cooperation of the world in different ways with our volition, and we don't have any control

⁵⁸ In identifying the will with freedom of choice, where freedom of choice is a particular power, Descartes, I think, is staking out a position on a long-standing question: what is the relationship between the will and this power (called 'liberum arbitrium' in medieval discussions)? I take Descartes not only to have an answer to this question, but a particular conception of what this power consists in. For a helpful discussion of terminology and how it bears on the background question (as well as the views of prominent thinkers of the period), see J. B. Korolec, 'Free will and Free Choice' in Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 629–41. For a similar approach, but a different interpretation of Descartes on *arbitrii libertas*, see John Carriero, *Between Two Worlds: A Reading of Descartes's Meditations* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), at 249–64. I am grateful to Sean Greenberg for many discussions on this point and for the reference to the Korolec article.

⁵⁹ As quoted at the start of this paper, there is a second clause to this definition: 'or rather, it consists simply in the fact that when the intellect puts something forward for affirmation or denial or for pursuit or avoidance, our inclinations are such that we feel we are determined to it by no external force [*ut a nulla vi externa nos ad id determinari sentiamus*]' (AT VII 57; CSM II 40, modified). The relation between the two clauses is a much-discussed issue that I cannot address here. See my 'Human Freedom' for discussion and references to the secondary literature.

⁶⁰ On this point, see David M. Rosenthal, 'Will and the Theory of Judgment' in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Descartes's Meditations*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 405–434.

⁶¹ I discuss in Section 4, below, the point that Descartes conceives of *divine* willing as including accomplishing.

over that.⁶² Descartes's view that the will can extend to absolutely anything, then, does not entail that we can accomplish absolutely anything. That I cannot win the lottery by willing it so, therefore, is not a problem for Descartes' view. Similarly, Descartes does not think that by possessing a will, we possess the power to make every state of affairs come into being, including states of affairs that require changing the laws of physics or the laws of logic.⁶³ So, that we cannot jump over the moon or make contradictions true are not counterexamples to Descartes's view.

Further, because of the nonsensical statements that result, it seems unreasonable to saddle Descartes with the view that his conception of the will's infinite extent entails that anything can be the object of *every* mode of the will. Certain things seem to be the wrong kind of thing for particular modes of will: '2+2=5' makes sense as the subject of doxastic attitudes, because some person could (wrongly) affirm it, deny it, doubt it, or withhold judgment about it. But the same proposition could not be the subject of practical attitudes: what would it mean to pursue or avoid it? The division of objects does not run solely along the distinction between doxastic and practical attitudes: although I may desire that the sky is clear (not cloudy), it makes no sense to avoid such a thing.

Third, Descartes is not advancing the view that the will *actually* extends to every possible thing. Such a view is obviously false: regarding doxastic matters alone, for any given human

⁶² I think this point underlies the third maxim of Descartes's *morale provisoire* in his *Discourse on the Method*: 'My third maxim was to try always to master myself rather than fortune, and change my desires rather than the order of the world. In general I would become accustomed to believing that nothing lies entirely within our power except our thoughts, so that after doing our best in dealing with matters external to us, whatever we fail to achieve is absolutely impossible so far as we are concerned. This alone, I thought, would be sufficient to prevent me from desiring in the future something I could not get, and so make me content' (AT VI 25; CSM I 123–24).

⁶³ This, too, is in the capacity of the divine will in some sense. How Descartes conceives of this feature of the divine will has been much discussed in the extensive literature on Descartes's doctrine of the creation of the eternal truths.

being, there are many possible statements that he or she has never affirmed, denied, asserted, doubted, or suspended judgment about. This interpretation should not be attributed to Descartes because it conflates a will's *object* and a will's *extent*. A will's object is the set of things a will in fact wills, and it is in relation to its object that Descartes explicitly denies that the human will is as great as the divine will: 'God's will is incomparably greater than mine...in virtue of its object, in that it extends itself to a greater number of items [*ratione objecti, quoniam ad plura se extendit*]' (AT VII 57; CSM II 40, modified). The object of the human will, like the extent of the human intellect, is finite (in the first sense) because we are creatures that are bounded by time and space: there are a limited number of things that we can actually will. A will's extent, in contrast, has to do with what a given will can will—that is, the *will as a power*. Thus, when Descartes immediately follows the point that God's will is incomparably greater than ours in virtue of its object with the claim that 'nevertheless [God's will] does not seem any greater than mine considered in itself formally and precisely: because [the will] simply consists in our ability to do or not do something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid)' (AT VII 57; CSM II 40, modified), he is not saying anything contradictory. God's will is incomparably greater than ours in its object but does not seem greater than ours in its extent, because the will's extent is set by the relevant power of the will: our power to do or not do something. In sum, with his view that the human will is infinite in extent, I have argued, Descartes means that in virtue of having a will, we possess the power to take some mental attitude towards absolutely anything.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Some readers will notice that my interpretation of the will's infinite extent and the corresponding power referred to by the first clause of the Fourth Meditation definition does not address the question of whether Descartes is a compatibilist or an incompatibilist about the relationship between freedom and determinism. See my 'Human Freedom' for discussion of the challenges in adjudicating this question. I follow Thomas Lennon's position that the first clause of the definition is meant to be neutral on this issue. See Thomas Lennon, 'Descartes's Supposed Libertarianism: Letter to Mesland or Memorandum concerning Petau?' *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 51 (2013): 223–248, at 231–6, and Thomas

Why the Will is not Limited in the Way the Intellect Is

The connection I have argued for—between the extent of a faculty and the power that sets that extent—explains why Descartes thinks the will is not limited in the way the intellect is. As I have argued, for Descartes the intellect is finite in the first sense (our power to perceive is limited) because we are located in a particular time and space. But, according to Descartes, the power to do or not do something, properly understood, is not restricted in the same way by our location in time and space. That is, our power to take some mental attitude towards something is not limited by our location in time and space because it does not depend on anything other than our minds (except, perhaps, God).⁶⁵ Descartes presents this view in *The Passions of the Soul*, in delineating the category of ‘actions’ of the soul from other mental states:

[The thoughts] I call [the soul’s] actions are all of our volitions, because we find by experience that they come directly from the soul and seem to depend only on it [*semblent ne dépendre que d’elle*] (AT XI 342; CSM I 342, modified);

and in a letter to Christina, dated 20 November 1647:

The goods of the body and fortune do not depend absolutely upon us [*ne dépendent point absolument de nous*]; and those of the soul can all be reduced to two heads, the one being to know, and the other to will, what is good. But knowledge is often beyond our powers; and so there remains only our will, which is absolutely within our disposal [*il ne reste que notre volonté, dont nous puissions absolument disposer*]. (AT V 83; B 631, p. 2484; CSMK 325)⁶⁶

Descartes conceives of the will and its operations as the only things that depend on our minds alone—all other things, including operations of the intellect, depend in some way on things external to the mind.⁶⁷

Lennon, ‘No, Descartes Is *Not* a Libertarian,’ in Daniel Garber and Donald Rutherford (eds.) *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy, Volume VII* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2015.

⁶⁵ Descartes’s remarks on the issue of how our volitions depend on God are ambiguous (e.g., AT VIII A 20; CSM I 206). I cannot fully address this issue here.

⁶⁶ Descartes also presents an early variant of this view in the *Discourse* (AT VI 25; CSM I 123).

⁶⁷ Immediately preceding *The Passions of the Soul* excerpt above, Descartes says of operations of the intellect: ‘the various perceptions or modes of knowledge present in us may be called its passions, in a

It should be noted that our power to take some mental attitude towards something does depend in a trivial sense on something external to the will, because there must be something to take an attitude towards, which can only be supplied by something external to the will. Thus, the will depends in this trivial sense on the intellect because the intellect provides the subject matter of the will's attitudes. Gassendi has this dependence of the will on the intellect in mind in the Fifth Objections when he objects to Descartes's Fourth Meditation statement that the will extends more broadly than the intellect. Gassendi claims that the will and the intellect 'extend equally broadly [*aeque late patere*], and that the intellect extends at least no more narrowly than the will [*non intellectus saltem minus quam voluntas*], since the will is never directed towards anything which the intellect has not already perceived' (AT VII 314).⁶⁸ But Descartes's *imago Dei* claim is about the will in itself, considered separately from the contribution of the intellect. It is about the will 'considered in itself formally and precisely [*in se formaliter et praecise spectata*]' (AT VII 57), Descartes says, or the will as aforementioned power.

Regarding the second sense in which the intellect is limited (in our power to perceive clearly and distinctly), I have argued that Descartes does not have a satisfying account of why it is limited. His suggestion, which appealed to the greater diversity and, hence, perfection of the universe that results from our being prone to error, does not explain why it is necessary that human beings, of all the created things in the universe, should be the ones to provide that

general sense, for it is often not our soul which makes them such as they are, and the soul always receives them from the things that are represented by them' (AT XI 342; CSM I 335)

⁶⁸ Descartes, in response, admits the dependence of the will on the intellect in this trivial sense but denies that the intellect and the will have the same extent (AT VII 377), and reiterates his explanation of how we make errors: we make judgments about things we do not clearly and distinctly perceive. See note 50, above, for the text. Gassendi and Descartes here seem to be talking past one another. I diagnose the dispute as stemming from the ambiguity in Descartes's use of 'intellect' that I discuss above: Gassendi's objection relies on understanding 'intellect' in the first sense I discussed (as the faculty that perceives, broadly speaking), whereas Descartes's response to Gassendi relies on understanding 'intellect' in the second sense (as the faculty of clear and distinct perception).

diversity. It seems to be a basic commitment for Descartes that our finite nature entails that our power to perceive *clearly and distinctly* (or, in Descartes's words, our power of 'understanding' (*intelligere*)) is limited. He says in the *Meditations*, simply, 'it is of the nature of a finite intellect that it not understand many things [*de ratione intellectus finiti ut multa non intelligat*]' (AT VII 60) and in the *Principles*, 'it is of the nature of a finite intellect that it not extend itself to everything [*de ratione intellectus finiti, ut non ad omnia se extendat*]' (AT VIII A 18), where (as I have argued in the previous section) he is referring to our power to perceive clearly and distinctly. His letter to Mesland of 2 May 1644 explicitly points out one way in which the finitude of the mind limits our power to understand:

Our mind is finite and so created as to be able to conceive [*qu'il peut concevoir*] as possible the things which God has willed [*voulu*] to be in fact possible, but not be able to conceive as possible things which God could have made possible, but which he has nevertheless willed [*voulu*] to make impossible. (AT IV 118; B 454, p. 1912 and 1914; CSMK 235, modified)

If the connection between our finite nature and the finitude of the intellect in this second sense is indeed a basic commitment, then the finitude of our nature need not also limit the will.

4. 'Infinite' and Imitation: the Human Will and the Divine Will

The account I have presented of Descartes's conception of the will as infinite illuminates his conception of the *imago Dei*, or so I have argued. But my strategy faces a problem: Descartes repeatedly claims that he reserves the term 'infinite' for God alone. By exploring the issue of why Descartes uses the term (albeit in a qualified sense) to characterize the human will, I will explain in what sense he thinks human beings imitate God. I will then discuss the differences between the power I have argued grounds Descartes's use of 'infinite' for the will and the corresponding power in God and show how these differences do not undermine Descartes's affirmation of the *imago Dei*.

'Infinite' vs. 'Indefinite': How the Human Will Imitates the Divine Will

As I have mentioned, Descartes says that the will 'can in a certain sense be called infinite [*voluntas vero infinita quodammodo dici potest*]' (AT VIII A 18; CSM I 204). This is notable because it seems to go against his own policy governing the use of the term 'infinite'. Descartes says repeatedly that he reserves the term for God alone and that he uses the term 'indefinite' instead to describe other things that lack limits in some respect (e.g. AT VII 113; CSM II 8, and AT VIII A 15; CSM I 202). I will argue that Descartes extends 'infinite' to the human will because the very power that he conceives as constituting the will—*arbitrii libertas*—meets his criteria for calling something 'infinite' (although this claim too will need to be qualified, as I will show).

Descartes provides two criteria for his use of the term 'infinite' rather than 'indefinite': an 'epistemological' criterion and a 'metaphysical' criterion.⁶⁹ Descartes presents versions of the two criteria in *Principles* I.27:

Our reason for using the term 'indefinite' rather than 'infinite' in these cases [i.e. in cases 'such as the extension of the world, the division of the parts of matter, the number of the stars' (AT VIII A 14)] is, in the first place, so as to reserve the term 'infinite' for God alone, because in him alone in every respect [*omni ex parte*], not only do we recognize no limits, but we understand positively [*positive...intelligimus*] that there are none. Secondly, in the case of other things, our understanding does not in the same way positively tell us that they lack limits in some respect [*aliqua ex parte*]; we merely acknowledge in a negative way [*negative... confitemur*] that any limits which they may have cannot be discovered by us. (AT VIII A 15; CSM I 202, modified)

First, according to the epistemological criterion, 'infinite' is reserved for things that we 'understand positively' as having no limits; 'indefinite' is for things in which we 'acknowledge

⁶⁹ Margaret Wilson has shown this in her 'Can I Be the Cause of My Idea of the World? (Descartes on the Infinite and the Indefinite),' ['Can I Be the Cause'] in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (ed.) *Essays on Descartes' Meditations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986) 339–58.

in a negative way' that we cannot discover any limits.⁷⁰ Descartes here says that God alone meets the epistemological criterion: for God alone do we have such positive knowledge.⁷¹

Second, according to the metaphysical criterion, 'infinite' is reserved for things that lack limits in *every* respect, whereas 'indefinite' is reserved for things that lack limits only in *some* respect.⁷²

Descartes explains that only God meets the metaphysical criterion: only God lacks limits in every respect.

It is my contention that, although he nowhere states this explicitly, Descartes holds that the human will in some way meets both criteria, and this is why he extends the term 'infinite' in a qualified sense to the human will.⁷³ First, the human will as *arbitrii libertas* clearly meets the epistemological criterion: just as we have positive knowledge that God has no limits, we have positive knowledge that our will, in some sense, is unlimited. Descartes states in the Fourth Meditation, 'I know by experience that [my will or freedom of choice (*voluntatem, sive arbitrii*

⁷⁰ Roger Ariew calls this 'Descartes' distinction between what we positively and negatively intellect'. See Roger Ariew, 'The Infinite,' 154, n. 61. Descartes reiterates the epistemological criterion in his letter to More of 5 February 1649 (AT V 274; B 677, p. 2620; CSMK 364).

⁷¹ Roger Ariew makes this point clearly: Ariew, 'The Infinite,' 155–56.

⁷² The metaphysical criterion is seen even more clearly in Descartes's First Replies formulation: 'I apply the term "infinite", in the strict sense, only to that in which no limits of any kind can be found [*in quo nulla ex parte limites inveniuntur*]; and in this sense God alone is infinite. But in cases like the extension of imaginary space, or the set of numbers, or the divisibility of the parts of a quantity, there is merely some respect in which I do not recognize a limit [*in quibus sub aliqua tantum ratione finem non agnosco*]; so here I use the term "indefinite" rather than "infinite", because these items are not limitless in every respect [*omni ex parte*] (AT VII 113; CSM II 81). Immediately following this passage, Descartes states his distinction between the *ratio formalis infiniti* and the *res infinita*: he distinguishes our 'negative understanding' of the *ratio formalis infiniti* from our 'positive understanding' (which is nonetheless inadequate) of the *res infinita* (AT VII 113). As an anonymous reviewer helpfully pointed out, the *Principles* formulation of the distinction between 'infinite' and 'indefinite' seems to combine the First Replies distinction between 'infinite' and 'indefinite' and this distinction between *ratio formalis infiniti* and *res infinita*.

⁷³ On my account, one small mystery remains, why Descartes describes his usage of the term 'infinite' in such absolute terms when he clearly uses the term to characterize the will. Perhaps he thinks his qualification of the term, 'the will can be called infinite *in a certain sense*' (AT VIII A 18; CSM I 204, my emphasis) is sufficient to make it true that he reserves 'infinite' for God alone. And as Margaret Wilson discusses in 'Can I Be the Cause,' 341–2, Descartes has good pragmatic reasons to unreservedly affirm his terminological policy.

libertatem)] is restricted by no limits [*nam sane nullis illam limitibus circumscribi experior*] (AT VII 56; CSM II 39). The epistemic mechanism, however, differs between the two cases: in the case of God, our knowledge is through intellection (*intelligimus*, AT VIIIA 15), whereas in the case of the will, our knowledge is through experience (*experior*, AT VII 56).⁷⁴

Second, Descartes holds that the human will, in a sense, is metaphysically similar to God in its infiniteness. First, as I mentioned in the previous section, Descartes says in the letter to Mersenne dated December 25, 1639: ‘God has given us a will which has no limits [*Dieu nous a donné une volonté qui n’a point de bornes*]’ (AT II 628; B 235, p. 1104; CSMK 141). Here Descartes states that the will *simpliciter* has no limits. But more commonly, Descartes seems to hold that the will, *in a specific sense*, is restricted by no limits: take, for example, the passage I discussed in the context of the epistemological criterion, ‘I know by experience that [my will or freedom of choice] is restricted by no limits’ (AT VII 56; CSM II 39).⁷⁵ This passage is not sufficient for showing that the will meets the metaphysical criterion, for just because the will in one respect—in its freedom of choice (*arbitrii libertas*)—is unlimited does not mean that the will isn’t limited in other respects.⁷⁶

But Descartes seems to accept a different formulation of the metaphysical criterion that the will as *arbitrii libertas* does meet. In a letter to Clerselier dated 23 April 1649, Descartes clarifies:

⁷⁴ Noa Naaman-Zauderer highlights the experiential aspect of some of Descartes’s characterizations of the will in her account of the *imago Dei*. See Naaman-Zauderer, *Descartes’ Deontological Turn*, 131–48.

⁷⁵ I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out that many of Descartes’s statements regarding the lack of limits on the human will are not about the will *simpliciter* but only about its freedom of choice (*arbitrii libertas*).

⁷⁶ For example, Descartes explains in the Fourth Meditation that the human will’s object is limited (AT VII 57; CSM II 40). Descartes might say, in response however, that the will’s object is not intrinsic to the will, and thus that the will itself, or will ‘*in se formaliter et praecise spectata*’ (AT VII 57) remains unrestricted.

It should be observed that I never use the word ‘infinite’ to signify the mere lack of limits (which is something negative, for which I have used the term ‘indefinite’) but to signify a real thing [*une chose réelle*], which is incomparably greater [*incomparablement plus grande*] than all those which have some limit [*qui ont quelque fin*]. (AT V 356; B 697, p. 2694; CSMK 377, modified)

‘Infinite’, he explains, is used to signify a real thing, incomparably greater than things that have some limit. Similarly, in a letter to Henry More from about the same time, Descartes says:

The reason why I say that the world is indeterminate, or indefinite, is that I recognize no boundaries in it; but I would dare not call it infinite, because I perceive that God is greater [*esse majorem*] than the world, not in extension [*ratione extensionis*], which, as I have often said, I do not understand as a property in God, but in perfection [*ratione perfectionis*]. (15 April 1649: AT V 344; B 694, p. 2684; CSMK 374, modified)

Descartes adds here that using the term ‘infinite’ makes sense for God, because God is greater than other (indefinite) things—here, the world—in virtue of his perfection.

Descartes makes similar claims about the nature of the human will. He says that the will is greater and more perfect than other things that are clearly limited:

There is nothing else in me which is so perfect and great that the possibility of a further increase in its perfection or greatness [*perfectiora sive majora*] is beyond my understanding (AT VII 57; CSM II 39);

It is only the will, or freedom of choice [*voluntas, sive arbitrii libertas*] which I experience within me to be so great that the idea of any greater faculty is beyond my grasp [*nullius majoris ideam apprehendam*]. (AT VII 57; CSM II 40)

Compared with our other mental faculties, including the intellect, memory, and imagination, which Descartes has explained are ‘finite’ (*finitus*) and ‘limited’ (*circumscriptus*) (AT VII 57), the will as *arbitrii libertas* is incomparably greater and more perfect.

Although the language Descartes uses to describe the will as *arbitrii libertas*—‘restricted by no limits’, ‘greater’, ‘more perfect’, etc.—echoes his discussion of why he uses ‘infinite’ to describe God alone, the comparison class of Descartes’s claims about the will is, of course, much smaller. Descartes compares the will to all things ‘in us’, not to all things that exist, as he does

with God.⁷⁷ But the comparison between the two cases does not need to be perfect, because the infiniteness of the human will is a mere imitation of the infiniteness of God.

Recall the Augustinian-Thomistic conception of the *imago Dei* that Descartes puts forward in the Fifth Replies: ‘It is not in the nature of an image to be the same in all respects [*in omnibus eadem sit*] with the thing of which it is an image, but merely to imitate it in some respects [*sed tantum ut illam in aliquibus imitetur*]’ (AT VII 373; CSM II 256–57, modified). I have argued that Descartes holds that the infiniteness of the human will imitates the infiniteness of God in that the aspect of the human will that is responsible for the will’s ‘infinite’ extent, *arbitrii libertas*, meets Descartes’s two criteria for infiniteness. But because human beings are images of God—and thus merely imitate God rather than being equal to God—what grounds the attribution of ‘infinite’ to the human will is not a comparison of the will to all things *simpliciter* but a comparison of the will to all things in us.

Differences between Divine Will and Human Will

There are significant differences that might give one pause between the power in human beings I have focused on and the respective power in God. First, there is a significant difference in the nature of ‘willing’ or ‘doing’. For God, there is only one act that constitutes his doing. Descartes tells Mersenne, in his letter of 6 May 1630, ‘In God willing and knowing are a single thing in such a way that by the very fact of willing something he knows it and it is only for this reason that such a thing is true’ (AT I 149; B 31, p. 150; CSMK 24), and in the *Principles* he says, ‘there is always a single identical and perfectly simple act by means of which he simultaneously

⁷⁷ See Lennon, ‘Pelagianism,’ 199–203, for the role that missing this point played in the accusations of Pelagianism against Descartes.

understands, wills and accomplishes everything' (AT VIII A 14; CSM I 201). Furthermore, in a 1644 letter, possibly to Mesland, Descartes says:

The idea which we have of God teaches us that there is in him only a single activity [*une seule action*], entirely simple and entirely pure. This is well expressed by the words of St. Augustine: 'They are so because thou see'st them to be so'; because in God *seeing* and *willing* [*videre et velle*] are one and the same thing. (AT IV 119; B 454, p. 1914; CSMK 235)

For God, willing, understanding (or seeing), and accomplishing are three ways of characterizing one and the same act of doing. Not so for human beings: understanding, willing, and accomplishing are distinct, and only willing is a kind of doing. Understanding, as we have seen, is an operation of the intellect for Descartes, and accomplishing is not an act at all for human beings, properly speaking—it is a matter of the cooperation of the world with our volition. One significant difference between God and human beings related to the power to do something, therefore, has to do with what qualifies as doing. For God, there is no difference between understanding, willing, and accomplishing: they are identical. But for human beings, understanding and accomplishing are not doings at all, because they are not the operations of the human will.

A second significant difference between the divine will and the human will has to do with indifference. As I discussed early in this paper, Descartes holds that God's will is essentially indifferent but the human will is not. The indifference of the divine will is connected to the identity between God's intellect and will, which entails that there is no priority between the two faculties: 'In God, willing, understanding and creating are all the same thing without one being prior to [*précède*] the other even in reason [*ne quidem ratione*]' (AT I 153; B 32, p. 152; CSMK 25–6, modified).⁷⁸ And if there is no priority between God's intellect and will, it follows that

⁷⁸ See Dan Kaufman's argument that the doctrine of divine simplicity does not preclude there being a certain kind of conceptual distinction in God, that which holds between identical things, in his 'Divine

God's will is never guided by any antecedent knowledge of the good because there is no fact of the matter about the good or true independent of God's will. The lack of priority between God's intellect and will thus entails that God's will is essentially indifferent, where by 'indifference' Descartes means 'that state of the will when it is not impelled one way rather than another by any perception of truth or goodness' (AT IV 173; B 483, p. 1968; CSMK 244–45). Descartes explicitly acknowledges that the essential indifference of God's will follows from the lack of priority between God's intellect and will:

It is self-contradictory to suppose that the will of God was not indifferent from eternity with respect to everything which has happened or will ever happen; for it is impossible to imagine that anything is thought of in the divine intellect as good or true, or worthy of belief or action or omission, prior to the decision of the divine will to make it so. I am not speaking here of temporal priority: I mean that there is not even any priority of order, or nature, or of 'rationally determined reason' as they call it, such that God's idea of the good impelled him to choose one thing rather than another. (AT VII 432; CSM II 292)

But Descartes also holds that the human will is *not* essentially indifferent. Indifference in human beings is evidence 'of a defect in knowledge or a kind of negation' (AT VII 58; CSM II 40): human beings are 'never indifferent except when [they do] not know which of the two alternatives is the better or truer, or at least when [they do] not see this clearly enough to rule out any possibility of doubt' (AT VII 432–33; CSM II 292).

These differences in what constitutes doing and the nature of indifference are important for understanding how Descartes conceives of human beings as differing from God. However, they do not pose a problem for the account I have developed because they do not indicate any kind of limitation intrinsic to the will. They both stem from the fact that, unlike God, we are not omnipotent beings. The particular power of accomplishing all things or making any state of affairs of come into being is tied to God's omnipotence: it is because God is *all*-powerful that he

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has this power. Likewise, divine indifference is connected to divine omnipotence: Descartes says, ‘the supreme indifference to be found in God is the supreme indication of his omnipotence’ (AT VII 432; CSM II 292). But the fact that we are not omnipotent is not a limitation of the human will. Indeed, in a statement emphasizing the similarity between the divine will and the human will, Descartes characterizes God’s omnipotence as accompanying, or extrinsic, to the will:

Although God’s will is incomparably greater than mine...in virtue of the knowledge and power [*potentiæ*] that accompany it and make it more firm and efficacious, and also in virtue of its object, in that it ranges over a greater number of items, nevertheless it does not seem any greater than mine considered in itself formally and precisely. (AT VII 57; CSM II 40, modified).

Therefore, although we are unable to accomplish all things or act with perfect indifference, these are not limitations of the human will. These differences between the human will and the divine will stem from a feature of the divine nature that we lack, omnipotence.

Conclusion

One of the main claims I have argued for in this paper is that in his doctrine of the *imago Dei*, Descartes does not allude to the main medieval and Scholastic conceptions of analogy available to him at the time but instead draws on the notion of imitation, thus following Augustine and Aquinas. Recognizing that a different tradition underlies Descartes’s understanding of the doctrine is important because those conceptions of analogy place particular constraints on the legitimacy of the comparison between God and human beings. As I have discussed, if an analogy of attribution is invoked in the *imago Dei* doctrine, there must be a sense in which the term in question applies to God in a primary sense and human beings in a secondary sense. But on Descartes’s own conceptions of the divine and human will, there does not seem to be any such sense of ‘will’, because there is no essence of will or freedom that God possesses that human

beings possess only derivatively. And his claim that the will figures predominantly in the *imago Dei* then looks problematic, if not outright false.

But when we understand that Descartes uses the notion of imitation in his doctrine of the *imago Dei*, we see that those constraints no longer apply. According to the Augustinian-Thomistic tradition he draws on, imitation (*imitatio*) differentiates an image (*imago*) from likeness (*similitudo*), and what makes something an imitation is that there is an original that it ‘expresses,’ or copies. Furthermore, according to Aquinas, human beings are *mere* imitations of God in that human beings are imperfect copies of God: ‘this likeness is not one of equality, for such an exemplar infinitely excels its copy. Therefore there is in man a likeness to God; not indeed, a perfect likeness, but imperfect’.⁷⁹ In effect, then, by using the notion of imitation, Descartes’s conception of the doctrine eases the requirements that a true comparison between God and human beings must meet: as long as human beings are a copy of God, and there is a likeness between them, even if imperfect, human beings can properly be said to be made in the image and likeness of God.

Like Aquinas, Descartes takes the notion of imitation in the context of the *imago Dei* to imply that the imitation (human beings) is in some sense less perfect than what it copies (God), and therefore that the imitation bears an imperfect likeness to what it copies. As an illustration of a way in which human beings merely imitate God, Descartes cites in his response to Gassendi ‘that the wholly perfect power of thought which we understand to be in God is represented by means of that less perfect faculty of thought which we possess’ (AT VII 373; CSM II 257). Even though the human will is in a certain sense infinite and even ‘perfect of its kind’ (AT VII 55), so too is the likeness to the divine will imperfect. But, as I have argued, the imperfection in likeness

⁷⁹ ST Ia q.93 a.1 resp. I quote the passage in Section 2, above.

between the human will and the divine will ultimately stems from the fact that we are not omnipotent—a situation about which, as Descartes would say, we have no cause for complaint.⁸⁰

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