GENEROSITY, THE *COGITO*, AND THE FOURTH MEDITATION

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Abstract: Standard interpretations of Descartes's ethics maintain that virtue presupposes knowledge of metaphysics and the sciences. Lisa Shapiro, however, has argued that the meditator acquires the virtue of generosity in the Fourth Meditation, and that generosity contributes to her metaphysical achievements. Descartes's ethics and metaphysics, then, must be intertwined. This view has been gaining traction in the recent literature; Omri Boehm, for example, has argued that generosity is foundational to the *cogito*. In this paper, I offer a close reading of Cartesian generosity, arguing that the Fourth Meditation cannot exemplify the method for acquiring generosity offered in *Passions* III.161, and more importantly, that the meditator cannot satisfy the two components of generosity listed in *Passions* III.153.

1 Ethics, the Tree of Philosophy, and the Question of Systematicity

Recent scholarship on Descartes's ethics has been particularly concerned with understanding the systematic relationship he envisions between ethics and the rest of philosophy. The guiding text is the famous tree of philosophy passage in the French Preface to the *Principles of Philosophy*,[1] as it is one of the few places where Descartes explicitly situates ethics within his philosophical system:[2]

> The whole of philosophy is like a tree. The roots are metaphysics, the trunk is physics, and the branches emerging from the trunk are all the other sciences, which may be reduced to three principal ones, namely, medicine, mechanics, and morals. By 'morals' [*la morale*] I understand the highest and most perfect moral system, which presupposes a

[1] I employ the following abbreviations for editions of Descartes's work: 'AT': *Oeuvres de Descartes* (cited by volume and page); 'CSM': *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vols I and II (cited by volume and page); 'CSMK': *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol III (cited by page).

[2] Many commentators read the tree of philosophy as a genuine representation of Descartes's philosophical system. However, not everyone has read it in this way. Roger Ariew (1992), for example, claims that Descartes leaves out significant parts of his so-called system, such as mathematics, logic, and theology. Although I am in agreement with the standard view, my thesis is consistent with a non-systematic reading. One can agree that the practice of ethics is distinct from metaphysical inquiry, yet deny that ethics and metaphysics figure into a broader system.

> complete knowledge [*présupposant une entière conaissance*] of the other sciences and is the ultimate level of wisdom [*la sagesse*].
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> Now just as it is not the roots or the trunk of a tree from which one gathers the fruit, but only the ends of the branches, so the principal benefit of philosophy depends on those parts of it which can only be learnt [*apprendre*] last of all. (AT IXB: 14/CSM I: 186)[3]

Before proceeding, we must distinguish two senses of 'ethics' (here, '*la morale*') at play in this passage and Descartes's broader ethical writings. There is a theoretical sense of '*la morale*,' that is, moral philosophy. This involves a theory of virtue, happiness, goodness, etc. Descartes clearly has moral philosophy in mind when he refers to the most perfect moral system. But there is also a practical sense of '*la morale*,' that is, the practice of morals. This involves the practice of virtue, the attainment of happiness, the pursuit of the good, etc. In the tree of philosophy, Descartes does not explicitly use '*la morale*' in this sense, but he has (in part) the practice of morals in mind when he refers to the fruit and principal benefit of learning philosophy. For earlier in the French Preface he claims, "the study of philosophy is more necessary for the regulation of our morals [*moeurs*] and our conduct in this life than is the use of our eyes to guide our steps" (AT IXB: 3-4/CSM I: 180). The commentators I engage are primarily concerned with ethics understood under the practical sense. In particular, they want to know at what point virtue is acquired in the tree of philosophy.[4] Unless otherwise noted, then, I use 'ethics' and related terms in this practical sense.

The standard interpretation is that the tree of philosophy represents an epistemological order to the attainment of virtue (Marshall 1998, 2-4, 72-4, 59-60; Morgan 1994, 204-11; Rutherford

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[3] See also Early Writings AT X: 215/CSM I: 3; *Rules* I, AT X: 359-61/CSM I: 9-10; Letter to Chanut 15 June 1646, AT IV: 441/CSMK: 289.

[4] Of course, this has implications for one's interpretation of Descartes's moral philosophy.

2004, 190).[5] For example, Donald Rutherford writes that happiness and virtue "can be guaranteed only if reason itself has been perfected through the acquisition and proper ordering of intellectual knowledge" (2004, 190). Thus, on this approach, ethics is a part of Descartes's philosophical system because knowledge of metaphysics and the sciences is supposed to lead the moral agent to virtue.[6] Call this the *epistemological reading*.[7]

In a series of recent papers, Lisa Shapiro (2005; 2008a) has challenged the epistemological reading. Shapiro (2008a, 456-7) does not deny that knowledge of metaphysics and the sciences is useful for virtue. But on her view, the epistemological reading cannot adequately ground Descartes's ethics within his philosophical system. For if ethics does not come into play until after metaphysics and the sciences have been completed, then it seems that ethics is merely "grafted on to a fully developed tree" (Ibid., 447). Instead, Shapiro claims that ethics is actually

[5] These readings draw from the following sorts of texts: *Rules* I, AT X: 361/CSM I: 10; French Preface, AT IXB: 2/CSM I: 179 and AT IXB: 20/CSM I: 190; Letter to Elizabeth 4 August 1645, AT IV: 267/CSMK: 258; Letter to Elizabeth 15 September 1645, AT IV: 291-6/CSMK: 265-7; Letter to Chanut 26 February 1649, AT V: 290-1/CSMK: 368.

[6] The standard reading does not claim that the virtuous person must be an expert in metaphysics and natural philosophy. Rather, the view is that there are certain general truths of metaphysics and natural philosophy one must know (see section 3.2).

[7] The epistemological reading seems to have the unattractive implication that prior to Descartes's metaphysical discoveries, no moral agent could have acquired virtue because nobody had access to the true metaphysics and natural philosophy. But surely there have been courageous people prior to Descartes. There is a sense in which proponents of the epistemological reading have to accept this consequence: Descartes does think his predecessors had the wrong metaphysics, thus they could not have been virtuous. However, Descartes does have the resources to allow for those ignorant of the true metaphysics to possess a degree of virtue. According to Descartes, virtue ultimately consists in the right use of the will. Ideally, we will use our will according to "knowledge of what is right", but "whereas what depends on the will is within the capacity of everyone, there are some people who possess far sharper intellectual vision than others" (Dedicatory Letter to Elizabeth, AT VIIIA: 2/CSM I: 191). Those who lack a sharper intellect can still be virtuous "according to their lights" so long as they "do their utmost to acquire knowledge of what is right, and always to pursue what they judge to be right" (Ibid.).

foundational to the tree of philosophy: virtue is not acquired *after* one completes metaphysics; rather, virtue *contributes* to metaphysics (Ibid., 459).

Shapiro develops this reading by arguing that the meditator acquires generosity [*générosité*] in the Fourth Meditation.[8] In *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes claims that generosity is our chief passion and virtue, describing it as "the key to all the virtues and a general remedy for every disorder of the passions" (*Passions* III.161, AT XI: 454/CSM I: 388). Generosity,

> [W]hich causes a person's self-esteem to be as great as it may legitimately be, has only two components. The first consists in his knowing that nothing truly belongs to him but this freedom to dispose his volitions, and that he ought to be praised or blamed for no other reason than his using this freedom well or badly. The second consists in his feeling within himself a firm and constant resolution to use it well—that is, never to lack the will to undertake and carry out whatever he judges to be best. To do that is to pursue virtue in a perfect manner.
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> (*Passions* III.153, AT XI: 445-6/CSM I: 384)

Shapiro (2008a, 458-9) acknowledges that the two components of generosity are supposed to lead one to act in traditionally generous ways (e.g. to be kind, charitable, and unselfish) in the "conduct of life." But she contends that they are also central to the "contemplation of truth."[9] On Shapiro's reading, the two components amount to "the recognition on each of our parts that we have a free will, paired with the resolution to use our will well" (2005, 28; see also 2008a, 459; 2008b, 35; 2011, 17-18). In the Fourth Meditation, the meditator satisfies these two components because she understands that she has a free will, and resolves to use it well by adhering to the method for avoiding error (Shapiro 2005, 28; 2008a, 459).

Generosity is supposed to contribute to metaphysics in two key ways. First, it regulates the

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[8] Shapiro (2008a) sees herself as developing Geneviève Rodis-Lewis's (1987) interpretation of generosity. As Shapiro puts it, Rodis-Lewis's view is that "generosity is a seed-bearing fruit, and that seed, if properly cultivated, will grow into the tree of philosophy" (2008a, 459).

[9] Descartes's distinction between the contemplation of truth and the conduct of life will be developed in section 3.2. For now, see *Replies* II, AT VII: 149/CSM II: 106.

meditator's disordered passions, especially her excessive desire for knowledge (Shapiro 2005, 25-30).[10] The desire for knowledge that initiates the First Meditation is excessive because the meditator hopes to never make a mistake again. By the end of the Fourth Meditation, however, the meditator desires to know that which she *can* know. Generosity tempers the meditator's desire for knowledge by leading her to acknowledge her cognitive limitations. This change in passion is significant because it helps the meditator reconsider her metaphysical goals and ultimately defeat skepticism. By the end of the Sixth Meditation, the meditator no longer desires to have absolute certainty in all of her beliefs, thus "the exaggerated doubts of the last few days should be dismissed as laughable" (AT VII: 89/CSM II: 61). Second, and more significantly, the practice of generosity is the "key to Cartesian metaphysics and epistemology" (Shapiro 2008a, 459). For it is by adhering to the method for avoiding error—only affirming her clear and distinct perceptions—that the meditator can draw the real distinction between mind and body, and prove the existence of an external world. On Shapiro's reading, then, ethics is a part of Descartes's philosophical system because generosity is involved in the construction of its metaphysical foundations. Call this the *organic reading*.[11] [12]

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[10] It is important to note that other commentators have also attended to the meditator's passions, but without involving generosity. See Schmitter (2002); Beardsley (2005).

[11] It is important to distinguish the organic reading from the claim that Descartes's metaphysics is *motivated* by ethical concerns. On this view, one might say that Descartes (in part) draws the real distinction between mind and body because it will help establish (say) the priority of intellectual pleasures over bodily pleasures. Though the organic reading is consistent with this view, Shapiro is making a stronger claim, namely, that ethics itself is involved in the construction of metaphysics.

[12] Morgan's interpretation, which I have classified as standard, describes the tree of philosophy as organic as well: "in a living organism such as a tree, all the connected parts grow *simultaneously*, dependent upon one another….hence the basic structure of the tree, branches and all, is apparent at the very early stage in its development" (1994, 25). This seems to place Morgan in Shapiro's camp. However, a closer reading shows that Morgan is not claiming that the tree is organic in virtue of (say) metaphysics involving ethics; rather, the claims is that "the most basic conclusions in metaphysics and physics will shape the structure of morals" (Ibid.).

Shapiro (2005, 14-5) stresses that her interpretation, as it currently stands, is merely a suggestion and that she is not calling for a wholesale rejection of standard interpretations of Descartes's metaphysics. Nonetheless, her reading is gaining traction in the recent literature. Noa Naaman-Zauderer confirms that generosity can be extended to "the realm of intellectual inquiry" (2010, 202). Omri Boehm (2014) extends this approach, arguing that generosity is actually foundational to the *cogito* in the Second Meditation. Boehm claims that generosity is not an "ethical counterpart [of the *cogito*] but the ground of theoretical certainty itself." (Ibid., 707, fn. 9). In short, if Shapiro et al. are right, we do have to reinterpret key features of Descartes's metaphysics and the *Meditations* more generally.[13]

I am sympathetic with the recent trend of situating Descartes's metaphysics within his moral project. However, I will argue that generosity does not contribute to the metaphysical foundations of Descartes's system, and consequently, that we should resist the organic reading.[14] Though I will focus on Shapiro's interpretation, my arguments are general, and thus apply to similar iterations in the literature (I will, however, substantially engage Boehm's interpretation of the first component of generosity). There are two objections that I develop. First, I argue that the meditator is neither in a position to acquire generosity, nor to satisfy particular features of generosity, precisely because she does not know the requisite metaphysics. The claim that

[13] As Shapiro points out, "if the meditator feels passions, and passions have a bodily cause, then it seems that either he is not to be thought of as a purely thinking thing or we need to reconsider Descartes's notion of pure thought" (2005, 23). Boehm is also clear about the revisionary implications of his reading: "Freedom, not only in the moral but also in the theoretical domain, is the first indubitable discovery, grounding the philosopher's assertion of his existence" (2014, 720).

[14] I will only address Shapiro's claim about the passions in the *Meditations* insofar as I am denying that generosity has any role in their (alleged) regulation. As I see it, there is nothing inconsistent about granting a role to the meditator's passions, while denying the organic reading.

generosity contributes to our achievement of this metaphysics, then, is problematic. Second, I argue that in order to construe generosity as the key to metaphysics, one must strip generosity of everything that makes it ethical in the first place. This is an impoverished conception of generosity, which cannot support the claim that ethics is involved in metaphysics.[15]

The paper is divided up as follows. In section 2, I examine the oft-neglected method for acquiring generosity Descartes offers in *Passions* III.161, arguing that Descartes would not think that the Fourth Meditation could induce generosity. In section 3, I offer a new reading of the two components of generosity listed in *Passions* III.153, arguing that the meditator cannot satisfy either component, and by extension, that generosity cannot be practiced in the *Meditations*. I conclude in section 4 by discussing the importance of distinguishing ethics from metaphysics.

2 Acquiring Generosity

In *Passions* III.161, Descartes offers his method for acquiring generosity:

> [A] If we occupy ourselves frequently in considering the nature of free will and [B] the many advantages which proceed from a firm resolution to make good use of it—[C] while also considering, on the other hand, the many vain and useless cares which trouble ambitious people—[D] we may arouse the passion of generosity in ourselves and then acquire the virtue. (AT XI: 453-4/CSM I: 388; sections added)[16]

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[15] It is important to keep in mind that Shapiro is using 'ethics' in the practical sense described above. Accordingly, I am only resisting the claim that ethics, *in this narrower sense*, is involved in the *Meditations*. Strictly speaking, my reading is consistent with allowing for certain aspects of *moral philosophy* to be intertwined with metaphysics. Indeed, the meditator considers various moral propositions that are central to Descartes's final moral system. For example, that the contemplation of God "enables us to know the greatest joy of which we are capable in this life" (Third Meditation, AT VII: 52/CSM II: 36), and that free will is "man's greatest and most important perfection" (Fourth Meditation, AT VII: 62/CSM II: 43). (I say "considers" because it is unclear whether the meditator has *knowledge* of these moral propositions).

[16] In the beginning of *Passions* III.161, Descartes claims that generosity is "dependent on good birth" (AT XI: 453-4/CSM I: 388). This seems to suggest that, in addition to the method offered above, Descartes is proposing a separate "natural path" to generosity. However, as clarified in *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet*, Descartes is merely acknowledging that some people are

We can disambiguate two *meditations on the will* in the method for acquiring generosity. Broadly construed, the first consists of frequent consideration of the nature of free will [A]. Call this the *metaphysical meditation on the will*. The second consists of frequent consideration of the many advantages that proceed from a good use of the will [B], and frequent consideration of the disadvantages that proceed from a bad use of the will [C]. Call this the *consequential meditation on the will*.

Commentators arguing that generosity is present in the *Meditations* have a difficult relationship with *Passions* III.161. On the one hand, some commentators disregard this passage (e.g. Boehm). Perhaps they are motivated by Descartes's suggestion that the method is merely a *sufficient condition* for acquiring generosity: "If [*si*] we occupy ourselves frequently in considering…we may arouse the passion of generosity in ourselves and then acquire the virtue" (AT XI: 453-4/CSM I: 388).[17] The thought here is that whether the relevant part of the *Meditations* (i.e. the Second or Fourth Meditation) resembles Descartes's method is irrelevant to the question of whether the meditator in fact acquires generosity, because the method is not necessary for acquiring generosity. However, disregarding the method is still problematic. Descartes published the *Passions* (1649) about eight years after the *Meditations* (1641). Thus, if he thought that the Second or Fourth Meditation were a path to generosity, presumably he would have indicated as much. But he does not. Thus, I think commentators owe us some explanation;

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born with a "tendency" to acquire generosity (AT VIIIB: 357-8/CSM I: 303-4). In short, the portion of *Passions* III.161 I have presented is Descartes's method for acquiring generosity. For similar presentations of the method, see Rodis-Lewis (1987, 54); Des Chene (2012, 188); Naaman-Zauderer (2010, 201).

[17] Strictly speaking, it is unclear whether the method even amounts to a sufficient condition for acquiring generosity. Descartes says the method "may" (*peut*) induce generosity. Perhaps he is being careless. Nonetheless, this passage represents his views about how generosity is acquired, and thus it must be taken seriously.

they cannot simply ignore this central passage in Descartes's theory of generosity.

On the other hand, commentators who do try to account for *Passions* III.161 have problematic interpretations of the method for acquiring generosity. Consider Shapiro's interpretation:

> According to Descartes, one 'may excite in oneself the passion and then acquire the virtue of generosity' just by frequently considering 'what free will is and how great the advantages are that come from a firm resolution to use it well.' (1999, 252)

On this reading of the method, the Fourth Meditation seems to resemble the method for acquiring generosity. In the Fourth Meditation, the meditator investigates truth, falsity, and the source of her errors. A significant part of this meditation turns on understanding the nature of free will: the meditator learns that her false judgments arise from a misuse of her freedom, as opposed to deception on the part of God. In this respect, the Fourth Meditation involves something like the metaphysical meditation on the will. Furthermore, the meditator considers a key advantage that comes from using her will well: if she suspends judgment about her obscure and confused perceptions, and only affirms her clear and distinct ones, she can attain knowledge. In this respect, the Fourth Meditation involves something like the consequential meditation on the will as well. Thus, Shapiro's reading seems to be in good standing.

Here, I will not question whether the Fourth Meditation involves something like the metaphysical meditation on the will.[18] Instead, I want to focus on the consequential meditation on the will. Recall that the consequential meditation on the will involves frequent consideration

[18] Nonetheless, I would resist the claim that the metaphysical meditation on the will does occur in the Fourth Meditation. As I see it, the metaphysical meditation on the will involves reflection on our *knowledge* of the nature of free will. However, I do not think that in the Fourth Meditation the meditator can have knowledge of her free will, because she has yet to draw the real distinction between mind and body. As we will see below, the meditator is still unclear about whether she is a corporeal thing, and consequently, she cannot understand the nature of her (non-corporeal) will.

of two things: "[B] the many advantages which proceed from a firm resolution to make good use of it [free will]" and "[C]…the many vain and useless cares which trouble ambitious people." However, notice that Shapiro omits [C] in her rendition of the method. For Shapiro, we need only reflect on the many advantages that come from using our will well. No explanation is offered for this omission. Perhaps it is accidental, but it certainly helps Shapiro's case. On its own, [B] is unclear about the sorts of advantages Descartes wants us to consider, and thus admits of a theoretical gloss. That is, Shapiro can read [B] as claiming that we should reflect on theoretical advantages that come from using our will well (e.g. metaphysical knowledge). Thus it seems that the consequential meditation on the will does occur in the Fourth Meditation, because the meditator clearly considers this advantage: "I shall unquestionably reach the truth, if only I give sufficient attention to all the things which I perfectly understand…" (AT VII: 62/CSM II: 43). However, when we include [C], a different reading of the consequential meditation on the will starts to emerge. As I will argue, far from being a meditation about theoretical advantages and disadvantages, the consequential meditation on the will concerns practical advantages and disadvantages.

Let us reconsider the consequential meditation on the will, then, by first examining the disadvantages mentioned in [C]. Descartes says we must frequently consider the many vain and useless cares that trouble ambitious people. It may seem odd that Descartes regards ambitious people as using their will in the wrong way; usually, ambition is a positive trait. Ambition involves determination and hard work, and drives us to achieve difficult goals. But Descartes is not objecting to this type of ambition; rather, he has in mind ambitious people who are *excessive* in their desires. Descartes explains that our desires become excessive when we fail "to distinguish adequately the things which depend wholly on us from those which do not depend on

us at all" (*Passions* II.144, AT XI: 436-7/CSM I: 379). The things that depend on us fall within the control of our free will, and the things that do not depend on "other causes" outside of our control (*Passions* II.145, AT XI: 437/CSM I: 379-80). Ambitious people—in Descartes's sense—fail to make this distinction, and thus value things that do not depend on their free will, such as intelligence, beauty, and wealth (*Passions* III.158, AT XI: 449/CSM I: 386). In this way, they have unjustified self-esteem, and are vain (*Passions* III.157, AT XI: 448-9/CSM I: 385). These vain and useless cares make ambitious people "slaves to their desires," and because they cannot fulfill their desires, "they have souls which are constantly agitated by hatred, envy, jealousy, or anger" (*Passions* III.158, AT XI: 449/CSM I: 386).[19] In short, the ultimate disadvantage of having excessive ambition is unhappiness.

Recall that [B] was unclear about the advantages we should consider. It merely states that we must consider "the many advantages which proceed from a firm resolution to make good use of it [free will]." But now that we have a better sense of the sorts of disadvantages Descartes wants us to consider, we are in a position to clarify the advantages he has in mind. I think it is plausible that Descartes wants us to reflect on the advantages enjoyed by people who *do* value things that depend on their free will. That is, we should reflect on the behavior of people with justified self-esteem. As one might expect, these virtuous people are not vulnerable to the emotional disorders that afflict ambitious people, enjoying a range of advantages, the most notable of which is happiness. Because their desires are in conformity with their finite power, they can fulfill their well-formed desires and achieve happiness (*Passions* II.144, AT XI: 436-7/CSM I: 379).

[19] See also *Passions* III.164, AT XI: 456/CSM I: 389, in which Descartes describes the problems that plague "weak and abject spirits."

A practical reading of the consequential meditation on the will can also explain how this part of the method helps induce generosity. In section 3, we will fully consider the complexities of generosity by examining its "two components." In the present context, however, I suggest that we think about generosity, as Descartes often does, in terms of self-esteem, or more specifically, *maximal* and *justified* self-esteem. Recall that generosity makes a person's self-esteem "as great as it may legitimately be" (*Passions* III.153, AT XI: 445-6/CSM I: 384). The legitimacy of the generous person's self-esteem is significant, because it distinguishes her generosity from vanity: "vanity and generosity consist simply in the good opinion we have of ourselves—the only difference being that this opinion is unjustified in the one case and justified in the other" (*Passions* III.160, AT XI: 451/CSM I: 386-7). According to Descartes, vanity and generosity are similar because they are produced by the same movement of spirits involved in the passions of wonder, joy, and self-love. But what makes the self-esteem of the generous person justified, while the self-esteem of the vain person unjustified, are the different *causes* of these movements. Vain people lack proper self-knowledge, and are thus "the most liable to become prouder or humbler than they ought…they are surprised by anything new that comes their way, and so attribute it to themselves and wonder at themselves, and have either esteem or contempt for themselves depending on whether they judge the novelty to be to their advantage or not" (Ibid.). Generous people, on the other hand, "are well acquainted [*connaissent*] with the causes of their self-esteem," namely, "the power to make use of our free will, which causes us to value ourselves, and the infirmities of the subject who has this power, which causes us not to esteem ourselves too highly" (Ibid.). On the proposed reading, we can see how the consequential meditation on the will puts us in contact with these causes or *reasons* for maximal and justified self-esteem. By observing the advantages enjoyed by people with proper self-esteem, we come to

appreciate the great power our free will affords us, and by observing the disadvantages that plague people with improper self-esteem, we come to terms with our own weaknesses and potential for vice.[20]

We are now in a position to see why the Fourth Meditation cannot involve the consequential meditation on the will. Many (if not all) of the advantages and disadvantages considered in the consequential meditation on the will pertain to the consequences of practical conduct. However, such considerations simply do not figure into the Fourth Meditation. Indeed, Descartes stresses that the Fourth Meditation dealt only "with the mistakes we commit in distinguishing between the true and the false and not those that occur in our pursuit of good and evil" (*Replies* IV, AT VII: 248/CSM II: 172), and that "there is no discussion of matters pertaining to faith or the conduct of life [*vitam agendam*], but simply of speculative truths which are known solely by means of the natural light" (Synopsis, AT VII: 15/CSM II: 11).[21]

That these considerations do not occur in the Fourth Meditation is sufficient for showing that the Fourth Meditation *does not* exemplify the consequential meditation on the will. But it is important to see that the Fourth Meditation *cannot* exemplify the consequential meditation on the

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[20] Reflection on the behavior of other people is crucial to the process of acquiring generosity, and it is emphasized again in Descartes's account of why humility accompanies generosity: "We have humility as a virtue when, as a result of reflecting on the infirmity of our nature and on the wrongs we may previously have done, or are capable of doing (wrongs which are no less serious than those which others may do), we do not prefer ourselves to anyone else and we think that since others have free will just as much as we do, they may use it just as well as we use ours" (*Passions* III.155, AT XI: 447/CSM I: 385).

[21] Earlier (footnote 15), I conceded that the meditator considers various moral propositions in the Fourth Meditation. This seems to conflict with Descartes's claim that the Fourth Meditation does not discuss the conduct of life. Two responses are available here. First, even if Descartes is overstating his case in the Synopsis, it still holds that the consequential meditation on the will does not occur in the Fourth Meditation. Second, the moral propositions considered seem mostly meta-ethical in nature, as they concern the *nature* of the good, evil, and so on. In that sense, they are relevantly speculative, and thus do not immediately pertain to practical action in the conduct of life (arguably, a matter of first-order ethics).

will. The consequential meditation on the will demands reflection on the actions of others, and how the consequences of their actions affect their lives. This is not a matter of speculative truth: we do not have innate ideas about practical conduct. We must observe other people to learn about them. The problem that this detail poses for Shapiro's reading is that by the Fourth Meditation, the meditator cannot know that other (finite) minds, let alone mind-body composites, exist. The *cogito* argument of the Second Meditation only entails that one *res cogitans* exists. And although the meditator learns about the existence of God in the Third Meditation, she understands that she has enough formal reality such that she could be causally responsible for her ideas of other things: "As far as concerns the ideas which represent other men, or animals, or angels, I have no difficulty in understanding that they could be put together from the ideas I have of myself, of corporeal things and of God, even if the world contained no men besides me, no animals and no angels" (AT VII: 43/CSM II: 29). From the perspective of the Fourth Meditation, then, the universe consists of only two substances: the meditator (*qua* mind) and God. It is not until the Sixth Meditation that the meditator is in a position to prove the existence of extension, and that her sensory perceptions of external things are reliable. In short, by the Fourth Meditation, the meditator cannot reflect on the actions of mind-body composites; consequently, the Fourth Meditation cannot exemplify the method for acquiring generosity.

3 Generosity in the *Meditations*?

That the Fourth Meditation does not exemplify Descartes's method for acquiring generosity tells against Shapiro's reading. But given that the method is merely a sufficient condition for acquiring generosity, strictly speaking, the Fourth Meditation could still induce generosity. The tenability of Shapiro's reading, then, rests on whether the meditator does acquire generosity.

Shapiro claims that the meditator is generous in two respects. First, the meditator satisfies the two components of generosity listed in *Passions* III.153. It is important to note that these two components initially constitute the *passion* of generosity, but upon becoming a habit in the soul they constitute the disposition or *virtue* of generosity (*Passions* II.54, AT XI: 373-4/CSM I: 350; *Passions* III.160-1, AT XI: 451-54/CSM I: 386-8). Shapiro's original reading (2005) only claimed that the meditator acquires the passion of generosity. However, her more recent account (2008a) claims that the meditator acquires the virtue of generosity as well. This is because Shapiro now wants to say that virtue—not just the passions—contributes to metaphysics.

Second, the generosity of the meditator is not a dormant or idle disposition. If that were the case, then generosity would be an irrelevant feature of the *Meditations*, and could not ground the organic reading. Instead, Shapiro (2008a, 459-61) claims that generosity has an active role in the meditator's progress in metaphysics. The meditator exemplifies generosity because she practices generosity within the context of metaphysics. In what follows, I argue against both of these claims: the meditator cannot acquire either component of generosity (sections 3.1-3.2) and, by extension, generosity cannot be practiced in the *Meditations* (section 3.3).

3.1 The first component

Descartes describes the first component of generosity as follows: "the first consists in his knowing [*connaît*] that nothing truly belongs to him [*qu'il n'y a rien qui véritablement lui appartienne*] but this freedom to dispose his volitions, and that he ought to be praised or blamed for no other reason than his using this freedom well or badly" (*Passions* III.153, AT XI: 445-6/CSM I: 384). According to Shapiro, the first component amounts to "the recognition on each of our parts that we have a free will" (2005, 28). In an earlier paper, Shapiro characterizes this recognition as follows:

> The first step in acquiring generosity is to recognize that we are freely willing, and I have been suggesting that this recognition comes principally with a critical reflection on what we find ourselves taking for granted. For it is precisely with this reflection, which essentially involves turning our thoughts away from those to which we are predisposed, that we exercise our freedom. The primordial exercise of our free will occurs when we do something other than what our senses dispose us to do. Doing this involves taking a risk, but this risk is also accompanied by a feeling toward one's own power in that undertaking. It is this *feeling* that constitutes our *experience* of our free will, and so it is this feeling that completes our understanding that we have a free will. (1999, 257-8)

On this reading, the meditator surely acquires the first component in the Fourth Meditation (AT VII: 57-8/CSM II: 40). But it is not clear that merely knowing that "we have a free will" amounts to the first component of generosity. Descartes tells us that the first component involves two items of knowledge: first, the knowledge that *nothing truly belongs* to us but our free will; and second, the knowledge that we should only be *praised or blamed* for how we use our free will. For simplicity, I will treat the first component of generosity as consisting solely in the knowledge that nothing truly belongs to us but our free will (or that the *only thing* that truly belongs to us is our free will).[22]

In knowing that nothing truly belongs to her but her free will, I take it that the generous person is doing something quite stronger than *acknowledging* that she has a free will (see also Brown, 2006, 25; Boehm 2014, 718-9). Instead, the generous person is *identifying* with her free will. She understands her-*self*, in some sense, as a *willing thing:* a *res volans* as opposed to a *res cogitans*. But in what sense? On a literal reading of the key phrase here, "nothing truly belongs," Descartes is making a strict metaphysical claim about our essence. Boehm reads Descartes in this way: "by Cartesian standards, knowing the only property truly belonging to us amounts to knowing our essence," thus,

[22] I use 'will,' 'free will,' 'freedom of will', and 'freedom' interchangeably.

> If I come to experience *générosité*—know that nothing truly belongs to me but my freedom—I come to know what essentially I am. Using strong terms such as 'know' (*connaît*) and 'truly' (*véritablement*), the definition of *générosité* defines not merely what *générosité* is but what we are. (2014, 718-19)[23]

Call this the *essentialist reading* of "nothing truly belongs." More specifically:

> [**essentialist reading**]: property φ is the only property truly belonging to subject *S* if and only if φ alone constitutes the essence of *S*.[24]

On this approach, then, the first component of generosity consists in the knowledge that free will alone constitutes our metaphysical essence. According to Boehm, the meditator acquires this knowledge in undergoing the *cogito*: "the knowledge that we are free achieved through radical doubt—knowledge that is 'transparent and clear as anything can be'—just is knowledge of ourselves. By making us aware as generous subjects, radical doubt demonstrates that we exist" (Ibid.).

I do not think that a literal reading of "nothing truly belongs" is the right reading. I will argue that the broader context of *Passions* III suggests something wholly different: Descartes is using "nothing truly belongs" in an evaluative sense. But before offering my alternative reading, I will argue that that even if the essentialist reading is correct, the meditator cannot acquire the first component of generosity in the Second Meditation, as Boehm claims.

By Cartesian standards, to have knowledge of an essence, we must have a *clear* and *distinct* perception or idea of it. Here, I will not discuss how we can achieve a *clear* perception of an essence. Instead, I want to focus on how we can achieve a *distinct* perception of an essence, a perception "so sharply separated from all other perceptions that it contains within itself only what is clear" (*Principles* I.45, AT VIIIA: 22/CSM I: 207-8). Descartes proposes the *method of*

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[23] Boehm is in part inspired by Ernst Cassirer's reading of the centrality of freedom for Descartes (1995, 93). See Boehm (2014, 720) for a translation of the relevant Cassirer.

[24] As Boehm puts it, "If property φ is the only property truly belonging to S, it is also the only property belonging to its nature or essence" (2014, 718).

exclusion for making the idea of an essence distinct (*Principles* I.60, AT VIIIA: 28-9 CSM I: 213; *Fourth Replies*, AT VII: 223/CSM II: 157). Roughly put, the method of exclusion has us consider two ideas together, and try to exclude, separate, or deny the one from the other. For example, we must conceive of something having property *T* (say, thought) without some other property *E* (say, extension). If one can perform a mutual exclusion, that is, show that the judgments '*Ta & ~Ea*' and '*Ea & ~Ta*' are both true, it follows that thought and extension are *really distinct* (Murdoch 1993, 39-42).[25] If one of these judgments is false, then thought and extension are either *modally distinct* or *conceptually distinct* (*Principles* I.61-2, AT VIIIA: 29-30/CSM I: 213-5).[26]

Suppose, then, that free will alone constitutes our metaphysical essence, and that in undergoing the *cogito*, the meditator becomes aware of that essence. The problem for Boehm is that while this awareness may be clear, it cannot be distinct; thus it cannot amount to knowledge (a necessary feature of the first component). This is because in the Second Meditation, the meditator is unclear about the metaphysical status of bodies: "may it not perhaps be the case that these very things which I am supposing to be nothing [i.e. bodies], because they are unknown to me, are in reality identical with the 'I' of which I am aware? I do not know, and for the moment I shall not argue the point…" (AT VII: 27/CSM II: 18). The meditator expresses this concern again in the Fourth Meditation: "I happen to be in doubt as to whether the thinking nature which is in me, or rather which I am, is distinct from this corporeal nature or identical with it" (AT VII: 59/CSM II: 41). Given her current epistemic position, the meditator cannot exclude extension

[25] For a more detailed discussion of the method of exclusion and Descartes's broader theory of distinction see Wells (1966); Murdoch (1993); Nolan (1997); Hoffman (2002).
[26] Of course, thought and extension are really distinct for Descartes. But if one were considering (say) the property of extension, *E*, and the property of motion, *M*, then the judgment '*Ma & ~Ea*' would turn out false. Consequently, they are either modally or conceptually distinct.

from her nature. Even if free will, *W*, constitutes her essence, the meditator, *m*, does not yet know what to make of the judgment '*Wm & ~Em*'. For all she knows, the judgment '*Wm & Em*' may be true. It is not until the Sixth Meditation that she is in a position to disprove her long-standing sensory impression that her body is her "whole self" (AT VII: 74/CSM II: 52).

Let me clarify the scope of my objection. First, my objection does not show that an experience of freedom is not foundational to the *cogito*. Rather, it proves that even if the meditator were to have the experience Boehm describes, she still would not satisfy the first component of generosity. Second, my objection does not show that the essentialist reading as such is problematic. Even if Boehm's ascription of the first component to the meditator is mistaken, his essentialist reading may still be correct.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to further discuss Boehm's reading of the *cogito*. However, I do want to resist the essentialist reading. The essentialist reading generates a significant conflict within Descartes's metaphysics of the self (and mental substance). In the Sixth Meditation, Descartes is explicit about the metaphysical nature of the self: "my essence consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing [*res cogitans*]" (AT VII: 78/CSM II: 54).[27] The "I" qua *res cogitans* has various faculties, including the will, intellect, sensation, and imagination. Now Descartes does claim that some of these faculties are not essential to the mind. The mind has sensation and imagination in virtue of being united with a body. Thus they are accidental mental faculties: "I can clearly and distinctly understand myself as a whole without these faculties" (Ibid.). However, Descartes repeatedly stresses that both the intellect and the will

[27] Some commentators have argued that insofar as we are mind-body composites, there is a sense in which our self has a corporeal dimension (Brown, 2014). Though I am assuming a strict immaterial reading of the self, the objection raised below does not hinge on this difference.

are essential to the mind (Sixth Meditation, AT VII: 72-3/CSM II: 50-1; *Principles* I.32, AT VIIIA: 17/CSM I: 204).[28]

Boehm acknowledges this tension between the *Meditations* and the *Passions*: "one is not essentially free in virtue of being essentially (intellectually interpreted) thinking" (2014, 719). He says he "will not speculate here about whether, or how, Descartes' position changed in his later writings," but he attempts to ease the tension as follows:

> While all ideas, including those implemented by an omnipotent God or a supremely powerful evil deceiver, are our thoughts (metaphysically depending on our mind), they are separable from us in the sense that they do not depend on us exclusively; they are conditioned by a cause outside us. There is, however, one type of thoughts that are inseparable from us in any sense of that term, namely judgement…Because Descartes is in search of the one thing absolutely inseparable from us (the sixth Meditation uses *nihil plane*), it would not be inappropriate for him ultimately to conclude, as he does when defining *générosité*, that this is freedom and hence judgement alone. (Ibid.)

This sort of response is problematic, however, as it appeals to an ambiguity in the term 'inseperable' (and its corollary 'seperable'). Boehm is using 'inseperable' in a causal sense. For Boehm, (free) judgment or volition is inseparable from the mind because it is not conditioned by external causes.[29] However, in determining the essence of the mind, Descartes first and foremost uses 'inseperable' in a conceptual sense. This figures into one application of the *method of exclusion*: If I cannot clearly and distinctly perceive *P* while denying *Q*, then *Q* is inseparable from *P*. Though *particular* thoughts (e.g. a thought about an angel) may be separable from the mind in Boehm's sense, Descartes would not say that the *faculty* of the intellect is separable from the mind in the conceptual sense. Rather, they are mutually inclusive: we cannot conceive of

[28] That the will is metaphysically essential to the mind is perhaps less well-known. See Mihali (2011) for a developed account of this view.

[29] Still, there remains a sense in which even judgment is necessarily dependent on things external to the will, because there must be some content (intellectual, sensory, etc.) about which we are judging.

mental substance without intellection, and conversely, we cannot conceive of intellection without mental substance. They are conceptually distinct, then, and consequently inseparable in reality (*Principles* I.63, AT VIIIA: 30-1/CSM I: 215; Sixth Meditation, AT VII: 78/CSM II: 54).[30] In short, the essentialist reading does take on a significant explanatory burden.

But we need not pin Descartes with the essentialist reading. The articles surrounding *Passions* III.153 offer us a different way of thinking about, and distinguishing the self. Consider *Passions* III.152, the article immediately preceding Descartes's definition of generosity,

> I see only one thing in us which could give us good reason for esteeming ourselves, namely, the exercise of our free will and the control we have over our volitions. For we can reasonably be praised or blamed only for actions that depend upon this free will. (AT XI: 445/CSM I: 384)

The starting point for this alternative reading is the nature of legitimate praise and blame. If I am to be legitimately praised or blamed for something, whether it be one of my actions or features, then I must be responsible for its existence. I am responsible, in the right way, for an action or feature if my free volitions produced it. If an action or feature does not (or could not) be causally traced back to my will, then I cannot be legitimately praised or blamed for it. For example, I can be praised or blamed for pursuing philosophy, because this action depends on my will; but I cannot be praised or blamed for naturally having brown hair, because this feature does not depend on my will. Legitimate self-esteem, then, is parasitic on legitimate praise and blame. I should have legitimate self-esteem for those actions and features for which I can be legitimately praised. Likewise, my self-esteem should not be affected by actions and features for which I cannot be legitimately blamed. But we must be clear about the object of self-esteem. Suppose

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[30] There is a debate in the literature about whether a conceptual distinction between *P* and *Q* implies that *P* and *Q* are identical or co-instantiated (Nolan 1997; Nelson, 1997; Hoffman 2002). I am not taking a stance on this issue here, but my overall reading of generosity suggests a robust distinction between the intellect and the will.

that my pursuing philosophy is praiseworthy. Though this pursuit is praiseworthy and can induce legitimate self-esteem, it is so merely in a derivative sense. Strictly speaking, I should not have self-esteem for pursuing philosophy per se; rather, I should have self-esteem because I am exercising my will in a virtuous manner in pursuing philosophy. In short, it is the "virtuous will" alone that is non-derivatively or intrinsically worthy of self-esteem (*Passions* III. 154, AT XI: 447/CSM I: 384).

With this broader context in place, I think Descartes's claim that nothing truly belongs to us but our freedom is best read as an evaluative, not metaphysical, claim. Call this the *evaluative reading* of "nothing truly belongs." More specifically:

[**evaluative reading**]: property φ is the only property truly belonging to subject *S* if and only if φ alone is worthy of esteem by *S*.

On this approach, the first component of generosity consists in the knowledge that the only thing for which we should have self-esteem for is our freedom of will. My freedom of will is the only thing that truly belongs to me because it is the only thing for which I can have (legitimate) self-esteem. The other aspects of my nature do not truly belong to me, because *I* (i.e. my free will) cannot legitimately be held accountable for them.

A significant upshot of this reading, then, is that it does not generate a conflict between the *Meditations* and the *Passions*. While the evaluative reading presupposes certain metaphysical claims (e.g. that free will is essential to our nature), it does not require the stronger claim that the will is the *only* property that is essential to our nature. The intellect, will, and even the body can remain essential to the self. Metaphysically speaking, we are *res cogitantes*. Morally speaking, we are *res volantes*.[31]

[31] Brown arrives at a similar conclusion: "The meditator comes face to face with herself as a *res cogitans*, an essentially thinking thing, the sage, the *res volans*" (2006, 25).

The question now is whether the meditator can acquire the first component on the evaluative reading. Alas, I think that such an approach will suffer from difficulties similar to those faced by the essentialist reading. In order to know that we should exclusively have self-esteem for some aspect of our nature (in this case, free will), we must have a complete understanding of our metaphysical nature. It would be premature to have self-esteem *exclusively* for one aspect of our nature prior to having understood the rest of our nature, because there may be some other aspect of who we are—of which we are currently ignorant—that we should have self-esteem for as well. The problem is that in the Second and Fourth Meditation, the meditator cannot know that free will alone should be the source of her self-esteem, because she has yet to understand her complete nature. In particular, the meditator still does not know whether she is identical with her body. If it turns out that she is identical with her body, then whatever she esteems about herself, it will be something corporeal. But the status of bodies is not an open question for the generous person. In identifying with her free will alone, the generous person knows she is not including anything corporeal. Indeed, she is doing the opposite, for she is aligning herself with God: "it [free will] renders us in a certain way like God by making us masters of ourselves, provided we do not lose the rights it gives us through timidity" (*Passions* III.152, AT XI: 445/CSM I: 384). Even on the evaluative reading, then, the meditator cannot satisfy the first component of generosity.

3.2 The second component

The second component of generosity "consists in his feeling within himself a firm and constant resolution to use it well—that is, never to lack the will to undertake and carry out whatever he judges to be best" (*Passions* III.153, AT XI: 445-6/CSM I: 384). To determine whether the meditator acquires the second component, we must turn to Descartes's distinction between the

contemplation of truth and the conduct of life. I will argue that the kind of resolution Descartes describes is restricted to the conduct of life, and cannot be identified with the meditator's resolution to adhere to the method for avoiding error, as Shapiro claims.

Roughly, the contemplation of truth [*contemplationem veritatis*] concerns fundamental metaphysics whereas the conduct of life [*usum vitae*] concerns practical action. The distinction is made frequently in the *Objections and Replies*. For example:

> I should like you to remember here that, in matters which may be embraced by the will, I made a very careful distinction between the conduct of life and the contemplation of the truth. As far as the conduct of life is concerned, I am very far from thinking that we should assent only to what is clearly perceived. On the contrary, I do not think that we should always wait even for probable truths; from time to time we will have to choose one of many alternatives about which we have no knowledge, and once we have made our choice, so long as no reasons against it can be produced, we must stick to it as firmly as if it had been chosen for transparently clear reasons…But when we are dealing solely with the contemplation of the truth, surely no one has ever denied that we should refrain from giving assent to matters which we do not perceive with sufficient distinctness. Now in my *Meditations* I was dealing solely with the contemplation of the truth; the whole enterprise shows this to be the case, as well as my express declaration at the end of the First Meditation where I said that I could not possibly go too far in my distrustful attitude, since the task in hand involved not action but merely the acquisition of knowledge. (*Replies* II, AT VII: 149/CSM II: 106)[32]

Descartes is claiming that the epistemic norms that govern theoretical judgments in the contemplation of truth should not be extended to practical judgments in the conduct of life. In the contemplation of truth, the goal is to acquire knowledge of the true nature of things. To do so, we must ensure that our theoretical judgments are always grounded in clear and distinct perception. But acquiring clear and distinct perceptions takes a lot of time; indeed, it can take weeks to complete a meditation (*Replies* II, AT VII: 130/CSM II: 94). Thus, in the conduct of life, where we have a limited window of opportunity to judge and act, we should not try to ground our

[32] See also *Replies* IV, AT VII: 248/CSM II: 172; *Replies* V, AT VII: 351/CSM II: 243.

practical judgments in clear and distinct perceptions.[33] Instead, we should make the *best practical judgments* we can, so that the opportunity to act does not pass us by.[34] Though they do not have absolute certainty, our best practical judgments have "moral certainty," that is,

> [C]ertainty which is sufficient to regulate our behaviour, or which measures up to certainty we have on matters relating to the conduct of life which we never doubt, though we know that it is possible, absolutely speaking, that they may be false. (*Principles* IV.205, AT VIIIA: 327/CSM I: 289, fn. 2)

In order to "judge well" (i.e. make morally certain practical judgments) we must have "knowledge of the truth" and "practice in remembering and assenting to this knowledge whenever the occasion demands" (Letter to Elizabeth 15 September 1645, AT IV: 291/CSMK: 265). Here, "knowledge of the truth" refers to four primary truths of metaphysics and natural philosophy (AT IV: 291-3/CSMK: 265-6).[35] Roughly, we must know,

(1) *The goodness of God*, which teaches us to accept both the good and the bad things that happen to us.

(2) *The immortality of the soul*, which teaches us that the mind is more noble than the body, that we should not fear death, and that we should detach our affections from this world.

(3) *The immensity of the universe*, which teaches us to not think that the earth is only made for man, and thus that we belong to God's council.

(4) *The interconnectedness of the universe*, which teaches us that the interests of our greater communities should be preferred over our own particular interests.

According to Descartes, if we know these truths, and habituate ourselves to assent to them, we will acquire the disposition to judge well, and consequently to act virtuously (AT IV: 295-

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[33] See *Principles* I.3, AT VIIIA: 5/CSM I: 193; Letter to Hyperaspistes August 1641, AT III: 422-3/CSMK: 188-9; Letter to Elizabeth May 1646, AT IV: 414-5/CSMK: 288.
[34] See Letter to Reneri for Pollot April or May 1638, AT III: 34-5/CSMK: 96-7; Letter to Elizabeth 6 October 1645, AT IV: 307/CSMK: 269; *Discourse* III, AT VI: 25/CSM I: 123.
[35] These four truths are *primary* because they "concern all our actions in general" (AT IV: 294-5/CSMK: 267). However, "many others must be known which concern more particularly each individual action" (Ibid.).

6/CSMK: 267). Descartes stresses, however, that having this disposition to judge well does not guarantee that we will make our best practical judgments, or act in accordance with them (in other words, this disposition is not sufficient for virtue). We still face a key psychological barrier to exercising virtue, namely, irresolution. Fundamentally, irresolution is a state of indecisiveness with respect to some course of action (*Passions* III.170, AT XI: 459-460/CSM I: 390-1). Irresolution per se, however, is not problematic; moderate irresolution can sometimes help us in our practical deliberations. Excessive irresolution, rather, is Descartes's target. This form of irresolution is the real barrier to virtue, and the source of vice and regret (Letter to Elizabeth 15 September 1645, AT IV: 295/CSMK: 267; Letter to Queen Christina, 20 November 1647, AT V: 83-4/CSMK: 325).

Descartes distinguishes between two stages of irresolution in the conduct of life. First, we can be irresolute at the stage of deliberation. This happens when we spend too much time trying to determine the right course of action. We imagine that if we had more time at our disposal, we could gather more information that would allow us to arrive at a better judgment. Second, we can be irresolute at the stage of action (Letter to Elizabeth May 1646, AT IV: 414-5/CSMK: 288). This happens when we fail to act in accordance with our best judgment, because we fear that we may have nonetheless made the wrong judgment. Given the ways in which irresolution can prevent virtuous judgment and action, the virtuous person not only needs the disposition to judge well, but also the disposition to not be irresolute. As Shoshana Brassfield puts it, the virtuous person must have *resolution*: "a *character trait* constituted by a *disposition* of the will to determine itself in accordance with a judgment in the face of uncertainty" (2013, 167).

With this discussion of the contemplation of truth and the conduct of life in place, let us now turn to the second component of generosity. On Shapiro's reading, the second component

amounts to "the resolution to use our will well" (2005, 28).[36] Shapiro seems to read the second component as a general, all-purpose resolution. Regardless of the type of activity we are engaged in, we exemplify the second component of generosity if we are resolving to use our will well.[37] Thus the meditator surely exemplifies the second component, for she resolves to use her will well in adhering to the method for avoiding error. However, Shapiro seems to ignore Descartes's clarification about the second component: "the second consists in his feeling within himself a firm and constant resolution to use it well—that is [*c'est-à-dire*], never to lack the will to undertake and carry out whatever he judges to be best" (*Passions* III.153, AT XI: 445-6/CSM I: 384). I contend that Descartes's complete description of the second component implies that the generous person's resolution to use her will well pertains only to the conduct of life, and thus cannot be identified with that of the meditator's.

Two points are noteworthy here. First, unlike the meditator, notice that the generous person is in the business of making practical judgments: she resolves *to undertake and carry out* whatever she *judges to be best*. One might object that when the meditator affirms her clear and distinct perceptions, she too is making her best (theoretical) judgments. This is true on a broad reading of "best." However, Descartes only uses phrases such as "best judgment" and "whatever he judges to be best" in discussing the conduct of life; these phrases never appear in the *Meditations* or the *Objections and Replies*. Furthermore, the *content* of these judgments must be about some course of action. However, in adhering to the method for avoiding error, the

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[36] Given that Boehm attributes generosity to the meditator prior to the Fourth Meditation, he has to locate the resolution to use the will elsewhere. According to Boehm, "the undertaking of a programme of doubt in the first place, the use of good reasons in generating doubt and the stubborn insistence to persist in doubt are expressions of this resolve" (2014, fn. 33). The objections raised below against Shapiro's reading will show that this is not the kind of resolution Descartes has in mind.

[37] This seems to be a divergence from Shapiro's earlier view (1999, 263-9).

meditator is not at all concerned with action. Recall, the whole project of the *Meditations* is in part premised on the condition that "the task in hand does not involve action [*agendis*] but merely the acquisition of knowledge" (First Meditation, AT VII: 22/CSM II: 15). When the meditator affirms the real distinction between mind and body, for example, she is not making a judgment about a course of action, which she must then undertake and carry out. Rather, the meditator is affirming a metaphysical truth, the content of which involves no plan of action. Of course, she must always reaffirm this truth in the future, but doing so would not amount to carrying out her original judgment in the relevant sense.

Second, notice that the generous person's resolution is defined with respect to irresolution: in having a firm and constant resolution never to lack the will to undertake and carry out her best judgments, the generous person has *the disposition to not be irresolute*. Irresolution is generated by two key features of practical contexts: (i) a limited amount of time to make a judgment, and (ii) the inability to ground one's judgment in a clear and distinct perception. However, these features are non-starters in the *Meditations*: the meditator is in no way pressed for time (*Replies* II, AT VII: 130/CSM II: 94), and the method for avoiding error requires her to refrain from affirming obscure and confused perceptions (Fourth Meditation, AT VII: 59-60/CSM II: 41). Moreover, there is no worry about the meditator being indecisive when she has a clear and distinct perception, because her will is compelled to affirm it (Fourth Meditation, AT VII: 58-9/CSM II: 41; *Replies* II, AT VII: 156/CSM II: 111). There is no relevant sense, then, in which the meditator is disposing herself to not be irresolute in adhering to the method for avoiding error. Indeed, if the meditator resolved (say) to make her best metaphysical judgments in the face of obscure and confused perceptions, she would not be in good standing with respect to the method for avoiding error. This is not to say that the meditator is not resolute. Rather, the

resolution exemplified in the meditator's adherence to the method for avoiding error must be a different kind of disposition of the will.

3.3 Practicing Generosity

Given that the meditator cannot satisfy the two components of generosity, it follows that she cannot practice generosity. Indeed, Descartes does not describe generous actions in the way that Shapiro's reading requires, as he does not suggest that metaphysical inquiry counts as an instance of generosity. Descartes always describes the exercise of generosity as a practical, other-regarding activity. As Deborah Brown puts it, "the good will [of the generous person] is the same thing as good will towards others" (2006, 203; see also Frierson 2002). Roughly put, this is because the grounds the generous person has for her self-esteem leads her to have esteem for others. It is not *her* freedom that is worthy of esteem; rather, *freedom* is worthy of esteem. Other people, then, are worthy of esteem because they also have free wills and are capable of "achieving the same knowledge and feeling" about themselves (*Passions* III.154, AT XI: 446/CSM I: 384). Thus generous people "are naturally led to do great deeds" and "esteem nothing more highly than doing good to others and disregarding their own self-interest" (*Passions* II.156, AT XI: 447-8/CSM I: 385).[38]

However, there may be a different sense in which theoretical activities can exemplify generosity. It is plausible, for example, that a philosopher can perform a great deed in writing theoretical texts for the benefit of others (Fennen 2012, 33-6). But this does not imply that metaphysical inquiry per se exemplifies generosity. Though Descartes, for example, may be

[38] See also *Passions* III.154 AT XI: 446/CSM I: 384; *Passions* III.155, AT XI: 447/CSM I: 385; *Passions* III.187, AT XI: 470/CSM I: 395; *Passions* III.164, AT XI: 455-6/CSM I: 388-9.

generous in writing and sharing his metaphysical discoveries, those who meditate along with him are not.

4 Distinguishing Ethics from Metaphysics

We have encountered a variety of problems with reading Descartes's ethics back into his metaphysics. In closing, however, I would like to emphasize a further problem, namely, that by making ethics central to the foundations of Descartes's system commentators run the risk of obscuring, if not losing, his ethics. Indeed, Descartes's ethics starts to seem like a recapitulation of his metaphysics and epistemology.[39] But it is not. Generosity is antithetical to the isolated cognitive exercises of the meditator: in acquiring generosity, we are supposed to observe others to learn about our own freedom, and in exercising generosity we must regard other people as worthy of esteem. As I see it, then, the interesting issues concerning the systematic relationship Descartes envisions between his metaphysics and ethics lie not in bridging a supposed gap between metaphysical inquiry and ethical practice. Rather, they concern how the meditator can emerge from her isolated meditations to become a generous agent committed to the well-being of others.[40]

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[39] For example, Shapiro's stripped-down version of generosity seems to make it an intellectual or epistemic virtue. Epistemic virtue may be central to the *Meditations* (Davies 2001; Sosa 2012; Shapiro 2013). But Shapiro requires moral—not epistemic—virtue for the organic reading.

[40] I would like to thank Alice Sowaal, John Whipple, David Landy, Mohammad Azadpur, Andrew Youpa, Frans Svensson, Shoshana Brassfield, Kristen Irwin, Joseph N. Gottlieb, Kristin Parvizian, and two anonymous referees of this journal for their generous feedback.

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