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doesn't follow from (3)? No, (3) is unaffected.[25] It's helpful to compare the situation once again with that of (S)–(V) (or (S')–(V')). (3) is a logically compound proposition and an intensional one, just as (U) is. And just as (U) might well be true even though (S) is true and even though (V) doesn't follow from (U), so (3) might well be true even though (1) is true and even though (4) doesn't follow from (3). For both propositions, the protective barrier, so to speak, holding back the influx of falsity, is their intensionality.

The place, then, that we can definitely say that Descartes' argument goes wrong is at the jump between (3) and (4), an unassuming and perhaps unlikely spot. But one mistaken inference, no matter how unassuming or unlikely, is still one too many.[26]

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[25] If the 'can' that figures in (3) concerns logical possibility, it might well be false, but its falsity would still be independent of (1), (2), and (4). It would be false for the simple reason that the proposition that I doubt that I exist isn't contradictory, is possibly true.

[26] Although Walter L. Weber doubted that I'd write up this paper, I'd still like to thank him for hounding me to do so.

Contemporary Epistemology and the Cartesian Circle

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Descartes möchte zeigen, dass klare und deutliche Ideen zuverlässig sind. Sein Argument erscheint jedoch zirkulär. Denn seine Prämisse, dass Gott wahrhaftig ist, hängt selbst von klarer und deutlicher Einsicht ab. Descartes' Reaktion auf den Zirkelvorwurf kann auf zwei Weisen interpretiert werden. Die erste Interpretation ist eine psychologische. Klare und deutliche Ideen sind zwingend. Daher können sie nicht bezweifelt werden, solange man auf sie achtet. Diese Interpretation erweist sich jedoch als unzureichend. Denn sie passt nicht zu Descartes' Ziel, zu verlässlicheren Überzeugungen zu gelangen. Die zweite Interpretation integriert das Ziel der Verlässlichkeit in die klaren und deutlichen Einsichten selbst. Diese Einsichten sollen die Kluft zwischen innerer Zugänglichkeit und äußerer Verlässlichkeit überbrücken. Aber gemäß dieser Interpretation erscheint die Berufung auf die Zuverlässigkeit Gottes überflüssig. Im Ausgang von gegenwärtigen Erkenntnistheorien werden zwei Möglichkeiten diskutiert, ihr trotzdem einen Sinn zu geben. Gemäß der ersten Lesart bietet das Argument aus der Zuverlässigkeit Gottes einen Gewinn an reflexiver Kohärenz für unser Überzeugungssystems. Diese Überlegung konfligiert jedoch mit der Situation des methodischen Zweifels, die eine Suspendierung unseres gesamten Überzeugungssystems beinhaltet. Die zweite, aussichtsreichere Lesart ist, dass es ein respektables epistemisches Ziel ist, Rechenschaft über Ursprung und Zweck unserer Erkenntnisfähigkeiten abzulegen.

In the fourth set of objections to the *Meditations* Arnauld charges Descartes with circularity:

> I have one further worry, namely how the author avoids reasoning in a circle when he says that we are sure that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true only because God exists. But we can be sure that God exists only because we clearly and distinctly perceive this. Hence, before we can be sure that God exists, we ought to be able to be sure that whatever we perceive clearly and evidently is true. (CSM II, 150, AT VII, 214)

This objection threatens Descartes' argument that a privileged class of insights deserves to be trusted. For Descartes, these insights are attained by attending to clear and distinct ideas. Perhaps Arnauld's point can be stated more completely by the following argument which takes Descartes' own version into account (AT VII, 40–61):

1. Convictions formed in due course on the basis of clear and distinct ideas are true.
2. The following convictions are formed in due course on the basis of clear and distinct ideas:
   2.1 God exists.
   2.2 God is trustworthy.

2.3 If God is trustworthy, he ensures that convictions formed in due course, which cannot be corrected by available counterevidence, are true.
2.4 Convictions formed in due course on the basis of clear and distinct ideas cannot be corrected by available counterevidence.
3. Convictions formed in due course on the basis of clear and distinct ideas are true.

1. Circularity in the program or circularity in its realization?

Before going into the details of Descartes' reaction to the circularity reproach, we briefly must address the background of the argument in order to see where to place the apparent circularity. As the argument has just been stated, it seems intended to prove claims which hitherto have no foundation and therefore need to be accounted for. However, beliefs formed on the basis of clear and distinct insight do not necessarily need to be accounted for. Even if we do not always conform to the requirements of their proper use (and perhaps never did before educated by Cartesian training), clear and distinct ideas form an essential part of our everyday epistemic practice. It is not a matter of course that their usage has to be accounted for at all. Normally we can take for granted clear and distinct insights. The need to account for beliefs formed on the basis of clear and distinct ideas arises in a certain context and within certain limits. This context is given by Descartes' aim of raising his established methods of belief formation to an incomparably higher degree of safety than before (AT IX/2, 5). To achieve this he uses his method of hyperbolical doubt. He suggests once in a lifetime to try to doubt as radically as possible everything that can be doubted. The criterion of the possibility of doubt is that the slightest reason of doubt can be forwarded (AT VII, 18). Now Descartes claims that there is at least one reason to doubt even clear and distinct insights. There could be a very mighty deceiving demon who made us falsely believe even what is most evident to us (AT VII, 21f.). Thus clear and distinct insights must be accounted for. To understand the strange aim of absolute certainty and the enterprise of hyperbolic doubt Descartes' motives for epistemological scrutiny briefly must be summarized. Such a summary will provide further understanding what is meant by discarding every reason to doubt. These motives spring from Descartes' practical ideal of living securely (AT VI, 9f.). This ideal can only be achieved by acting on reliable convictions. Descartes doubts the epistemic practice his fellow citizens accept as sound to provide sufficiently reliable convictions as it leads to contradictions (AT VI, 4f.). His method of doubt is meant to help building his belief system anew upon secure foundations (AT IX/2, 5). He wants his beliefs generally to be better founded, safer and more stable than before. He promises that methods providing beliefs which are robust to doubts will serve this task. It can be discussed if Descartes also strives for a maximum of reliability, infallibility, and if his method of doubt is a method to distinguish true from false beliefs. Arguably Descartes pursues even more ambitious aims, as developing an integrated system of universal science which is infallible. However, for our present purposes we will restrict Descartes' aims to those mentioned before: safety, well-

foundedness, stability of beliefs, as it seems easier to avoid the circle if the aims pursued are more modest.

This summary of Descartes' motives and method allows to place the circularity reproach within his philosophy. It has been argued that even Descartes' program is circular:

> Now Descartes thought that in fact the other sources of belief could be legitimated by reason and consciousness. He thought first to establish the reliability of reason by giving a reasoned (rational) proof that we have been created by a benevolent God who is nondeceptive (and here we fall into that distressing Cartesian circle), but God would be a deceiver if the world weren't very much like our perceptual faculties reveal it to be. (Plantinga 2000, 220f.)

Contrary to Plantinga's distressed statement, we now can see that there is no programmatic circularity. It is Plantinga's description that makes Descartes' program seem circular. But the description is too general to bear such a grievous reproach. There is nothing circular in checking the trustworthiness of reason by raising and refuting any possible reason of doubt. The circularity is located in the way Descartes tries to refute certain instances of doubt. The circularity reproach merely has a limited scope.[1]

2. Reflective versus animal knowledge?

Instead of directly turning to Descartes' own attempt to refute the circularity reproach, we will start with a suggestion by Ernest Sosa who discusses what he calls "a Cartesian circle"(Sosa 1997, 239). Sosa suggests that his distinction of animal and reflective knowledge might be suited to explain what Descartes aims at. According to Sosa, Descartes' argument is meant to turn animal into reflective knowledge. The latter involves the capacity to give an account of what one just does when acquiring merely animal knowledge. The epistemic ascent from animal to reflective knowledge is motivated by a consideration starting from Sextus Empiricus' question if knowledge which is due to mere epistemic luck can be proper knowledge at all. The answer Sosa provides is that knowledge should be "enlightened". Knowledge claims should be accompanied by an account of the suitability of the way they were acquired for acquiring knowledge:

> It is better to believe and act in ways that are reflectively right than in ways that happen to be right but unreflectively so. (Sosa 1997, 232)

Sosa claims that this idea serves to avoid a Cartesian circle which he states as follows:

[1] Before turning to Descartes' own attempt to refute Arnauld's criticism, we must notice that Arnauld and Descartes focus on the question if clear and distinct ideas are trustworthy. It is not discussed which ideas can be clear and distinct, and if there are ideas which are not clear and distinct but shown to be trustworthy by the very same argument Arnauld refers to. So we will not discuss these questions either.

Descartes seems enmeshed in a Cartesian Circle because he appears committed to each of the following propositions:

(1) I can know with certainty that (p) whatever I perceive clearly and distinctly is true only if I first know with certainty that (q) there is a veracious God.
(2) I can know with certainty that (q) there is a veracious God only if I first know with certainty that (p) whatever I perceive clearly and distinctly is true. (Sosa 1997, 239)

This looks very similar to the circle Arnauld points to. Sosa claims that he can solve this problem by recurring to the distinction of animal and reflective knowledge. According to him this distinction is foreshadowed by Descartes' distinction between *cognitio* and *scientia* in the second set of replies (Sosa 1997, 236, AT VII, 141).[2] Whereas cognitio is attained by every clear and distinct perception alone, scientia is reflective. In the case of clear and distinct insight it demands a cognitio concerning clear and distinct perception itself. Basic intuitions do not always have to provide scientia but cognitio. This cognitio serves as a starting point to render all cognitio scientia, all animal knowledge immediately acquired by clear and distinct perception reflective knowledge. By appealing to a peculiar case of cognitio, the clear and distinct idea of God, we gain a reflective knowledge of ways of acquiring knowledge to be reliable.

However, several problems arise when transferring this approach to the circle Arnauld hints at. The first is that Sosa does not attend to Descartes' aims and standards. Descartes does not merely aim at reflective knowledge in general, but at a special kind of reflective knowledge which fulfils the task to make his beliefs generally better founded, safer and more stable than before. Presumably he even wants to avoid to entertain any false beliefs. Now neither the modest nor the more ambitious aims of Descartes are addressed by Sosa. But it is not with regard to reflective knowledge but with regard to these aims the circularity reproach must be refuted. In order to attain his aims, Descartes suggests the criterion of metaphysical doubt. Everything which can be doubted must not be used as a premise of an argument which is to refute the doubt. Thus Sosa cannot simply make use of a certain animal knowledge. At least he would have to explain how his reliance on a piece of animal knowledge is to be reconciled with the situation of hyperbolic doubt. However, a strategical hint can be preserved from Sosa's approach. In order to refute the circularity approach, we must understand why we can rely on a particular clear and distinct insight as premise of an argument while preserving the force of the conclusion concerning clear and distinct insight in general.

[2] This thesis is not a matter of course. According to the translators of CSM, "Descartes seems to distinguish between an isolated cognition or act of awareness (cognitio) and systematic, properly grounded knowledge (scientia)."(CSM 101, ann. 2) Such a systematic, properly grounded knowledge is not necessarily reflective.

3. Descartes' refutation of the circularity reproach

We now want to ask if Descartes himself successfully refutes Arnauld's criticism. Descartes reacts to this reproach by pointing to his replies to the second set of objections forwarded by Thomas Hobbes:

> Lastly, as to the fact that I was not guilty of circularity when I said that the only reason for being sure that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true is the fact that God exists, but that we are sure that God exists only because we perceive this clearly: I have already given an adequate explanation of this point in my reply to the Second Objections [...] where I made a distinction between what we in fact perceive clearly and what we remember having perceived clearly on a previous occasion. To begin with, we are sure that God exists because we attend to the arguments which prove this; but subsequently it is enough for us to remember that we perceived something clearly in order for us to be certain that it is true. (CSM II, 171, AT VII, 245f.)

In order to understand Descartes' argument, we must recur to his reply to Hobbes which has to be quoted extensively:

> First of all, as soon as we think that we correctly perceive something, we are spontaneously convinced that it is true. Now if this conviction is so firm that it is impossible for us ever to have any reason for doubting what we are convinced of, then there are no further questions for us to ask: We have everything that we could reasonably want. What is it to us that someone may make out that the perception whose truth we are so firmly convinced of may appear false to God or an angel, so that it is absolutely speaking, false? Why should this alleged 'absolute falsity' bother us, since we neither believe in it nor have even the smallest suspicion? For the supposition which we are making here is a conviction so firm that it is quite incapable of being destroyed; and such a conviction is clearly the same as the most perfect certainty.
>
> But it may be doubted whether any such certainty, or firm and immutable conviction, is in fact to be had.
>
> [...] Accordingly, if there is any certainty to be had, the only remaining alternative is that it occurs in the clear perceptions of the intellect and nowhere else. Now some of these perceptions are so transparently clear and at the same time so simple that we cannot ever think of them without believing them to be true. The fact, that I exist so long as I am thinking, or that what is done cannot be undone, are examples of truths in respect of which we manifestly possess this kind of certainty.
>
> For we cannot doubt them unless we think of them; but we cannot think of them without at the same time believing they are true, as was supposed. Hence we cannot doubt them without at the same time believing they are true; that is, we can never doubt them.
>
> [...] It is also no objection for someone to make out that such truths might appear false to God or an angel. For the evident clarity of our perceptions does not allow us to listen to anyone who makes up this kind of story.
>
> There are other truths which are perceived very clearly by our intellect as long as we attend to the arguments on which our knowledge of them depends. But we may forget the arguments in question and later remember simply the conclusions which were deduced from them. The question will now arise as to whether we possess the same firm and immutable conviction concerning these conclusions when we simply recollect that they were previously deduced from quite evident principles (our ability to call them 'conclusions' presupposes such a recollection). My reply is that the

> required certainty is indeed possessed by those whose knowledge of God enables them to understand that the intellectual faculty he gave them cannot but tend towards the truth [...] (CSM II, 103f., AT VII, 144ff.)

Descartes implicitly recurs to the fact that clear and distinct ideas do not as such require to be justified by an argument as the one Arnauld alluded to. Beliefs formed with the help of such ideas are taken as a matter of course in normal epistemic practice. The need for defending their trustworthiness arises if one accepts the Cartesian project of rebuilding one's own belief system once in life by defending one's beliefs against even the slightest reason for doubt. If it can be shown that these prerequisites of an argument for the trustworthiness of clear and distinct ideas limit the aim of Descartes' argument in a way that a certain circularity does no harm, Descartes can avoid a *vicious* circle.

The main idea of Descartes' defence is to accept that he has to rely on clear and distinct insight, but to deny that this acceptance threatens the success he intends. Descartes evokes the obviousness of beliefs perceived clearly and distinctly in order to show that these ideas can only be doubted and consequently must be accounted for in special contexts. Clear and distinct ideas are overwhelming while we are attending to them. We are so convinced of beliefs originating in these ideas that we simply cannot doubt. We cannot doubt as we may well be able to think of reasons for doubt, but we just cannot take them as serious objections. They cannot achieve their effect to suspend our believing the propositions to be doubted. If the capacity to doubt is a prerequisite of the claim that the trustworthiness of clear and distinct ideas must be accounted for, there is no necessity to account for them while contemplating them.

Now there are certain situations forming part of every good epistemic practice, which might give rise to doubts concerning the reliability of clear and distinct ideas. Descartes distinguishes beliefs the content of which only needs to be considered to be indubitable. Whenever we want to ask if such beliefs are true, we cannot doubt that they are. Yet there are beliefs which are attained by a chain of reasoning starting from beliefs of the former kind. We cannot doubt these conclusions while attending to their connection with basic evidences. However, when we merely remember these conclusions to hold and do not any longer concentrate on their connection with basic evidences, they are no longer invulnerable to doubt. E.g. we can ask if they could have been infused into our minds by a mighty malevolent demon. It seems that the target of Descartes' argument is restricted to such situations.

Descartes' reply to Hobbes cited above is somewhat misleading. He suggests that we do not doubt beliefs immediately based on clear and distinct ideas but the conclusions drawn from these beliefs. In the main text of the *Meditations* Descartes makes it clear that the reliability of *any* belief formed on the basis of clear and distinct insight may indirectly be doubted and must be accounted for if one is not immediately attending to it (AT VII, 70). Such a mediate doubt can arise when we do not ask if a particular basic clear and distinct insight is trustworthy, but if clear and distinct insights generally are trustworthy. Descartes' aim is to exclude any doubt even in situations in which a doubt principally could arise. In Descartes' opinion this is achieved by the argument which Arnauld criticizes, as the only imaginable reason for doubt, the hypothesis of a deceiving demon, now is rendered impossible to conceive. We can think of the possibility of a deceiving demon. But while we are considering this possibility we realize clearly and distinctly that this demon does not exist, as it is incompatible with the trustworthiness of God to allow such a deception (AT VII, 70). Thus Descartes exactly fulfils his task to exclude every imaginable reason of doubt.[3]

Before turning to further interpretations of Descartes' argument we have to note that there seems to be an insurmountable difficulty which precludes every attempt to save this argument. This difficulty is the following: Descartes distinguishes between clear and distinct insights and related beliefs which are immediate or basic and clear and distinct insights and related beliefs which are the result of a chain of reasoning starting from immediate or basic clear and distinct insights. Descartes denies that any instance of the former can be doubted as we cannot suspend them. We cannot suspend these beliefs as we cannot consider if they are true without irresistibly believing them. The same holds for clear and distinct insights that certain beliefs involve a contradiction. When considering these beliefs we either immediately believe that they involve a contradiction or we conclude from other insights that they involve a contradiction. Now there are two possibilities to doubt clear and distinct insights. The first is that we can doubt an insight which is not immediate if we do not attend to its basic sources and the chain of reasoning unifying premises and conclusions. The second is that we can generally doubt clear and distinct insights to be trustworthy although we cannot doubt any particular basic insight. Descartes nowhere denies Arnauld's premise that he must base his refutation of doubt on clear and distinct insight. He rather seems to claim that he is entitled to do so. Now Descartes' aim is to refute any reason of doubt forwarded. A reason of doubt involves a skeptical hypothesis: A situation is imagined which is indistinguishable from our present situation but in which the belief which is to be doubted is false. A reason of doubt is shown to be false if it is shown that it does not fulfil this description as e.g. it is inconsistent or the hypothetical situation which is imagined is different from our real situation. Apparently Descartes has two possibilities to refute a reason to doubt clear and distinct insights: Either (1) this refutation is part of an immediate and basic clear and distinct insight or it is (2) the result of a chain of reasoning which starts from immediate and basic insights. Let us first consider the second case (2). In this case, doubts can arise anew when we do not attend to the premises. Thus the situation after the refutation of doubt is the same as before. Of course, we now have a strategy to counter this doubt as we can reconsider the insight refuting

[3] We will not treat the topic of Descartes eventually discussing the trustworthiness of our memory. But if Descartes' argument is successful, it allows to exclude that our memory is systematically deceptive. However, due to our finite nature we may err in particular cases even if we do our best to avoid memory errors (this does not conflict with God being trustworthy, as we could check every belief stored in our memory by attending to the clear and distinct idea underlying it, if the necessity of life were not pressing).

the doubt. But we already had an alternative strategy at the very beginning to cope with any doubt: We only had to reconsider the chain of reasoning linking basic insights and the belief which is now doubted. Of course, this chain may be very complex and it may be easier to recur to the insight refuting the doubt. Yet such a relative gain is not what Descartes aimed at: He promised to remove once and for all any reason of doubt concerning clear and distinct insight. According to his distinction of basic indubitable insights and derived dubitable insights this aim was focused on states of doubt occuring when we consider derived insights without thinking of their premises. Such states of doubt were to be completely excluded. In this respect Descartes project now seems doomed to failure. He cannot exclude that states of doubt occur in all those situations in which they have occurred before.

Let us now consider the first case (1). There are two possiblities: Either we have (1.1) an immediate and basic insight that the reason for doubt is false when considering it. In this case, we can never base any doubt on it. The argument Arnauld cites would be superfluous. Or we have (1.2) an immediate and basic insight which is not the reason of doubt to be refuted but which immediately involves the reason of doubt to be false. This last alternative is the only variant of the first case (1) which is compatible with Descartes' view of immediate and mediate insights and the possibility to doubt even clear and distinct insights. Unfortunately, it is not a viable alternative. It presupposes that there is an insight which has at least two contents, A and B. The content A is that the reason of doubt to be refuted is false. The content B is necessary as we must avoid that a reason of doubt is refuted when merely considering it. These requirements lead to two difficulties. The first difficulty is the following: Just like in the case of a chain of reasoning refuting the doubt (2), we are driven back to the situation in which a doubt can arise. A doubt already refuted may rise again when I do not any longer attend to the basic clear and distinct insight involving A and B. When I do not attend to the idea containing A and B, the reason of doubt can be forwarded again without it being evident that this reason is false. The second difficulty is the following: Descartes would have to fit his whole argument into a singular basic insight. There seems to be no possibility to integrate all the premises Descartes uses and their conclusion into a whole basic insight.

This problem threatens any interpretation of Descartes which a) starts from the foundationalist distinction of immediate or direct indubitable insights and mediate or indirect insights based on the former, b) restricts indubitability to moments of immediate or direct insights or the actual realization of a chain of reasoning based on them. Any refutation of doubt is either direct/immediate or indirect/mediate. In the former case doubts cannot arise and thus need not to be refuted. In the latter case, they can arise again after they have been refuted in the very moment in which the refutation loses its force of indubitability. Doubts and their refutation may be repeated ad infinitum. The key problem of these accounts is that they restrict indubitability to certain states of mind while retaining the more ambitious aim of extending indubitability to the whole range of such states. It can be avoided if indubitability does not depend on conditions pertaining to states of mind but on reasons.

Although Descartes' argument seems thus doomed to failure, this failure is independent of the question if Descartes has a promising strategy to refute the circularity reproach. So in what follows we will address this question without reference to the further difficulty hitherto developed. We now will discuss how to understand the overwhelming evidence Descartes invokes. The result of this discussion will allow to understand how Descartes can claim to avoid the circle and to evaluate how successful his strategy finally is.[4]

The kind of insight Descartes relies on demands an explanation. Unfortunately, his criterion of clarity and distinctness does not provide such an explanation. Thus in the crucial passages cited above Descartes does not refer to the distinctive features of clarity or distinctness. A more promising approach is to analyze states of mind in which something becomes *evident*. The kind of perception Descartes invokes is discussed in modern epistemology, too. One contemporary concept Descartes' notion of clear and distinct insight can be compared to is what Plantinga calls *a priori knowledge*. Such knowledge can be described as follows:

> So what is it, then, to *see* that a proposition is true. All I can say is this: it is (1) to form the belief that p is true and indeed necessarily true (when it *is* necessarily true, of course), (2) to form this belief immediately, rather than as a conclusion from other beliefs, (3) to form it not merely on the basis of memory or testimony (although what someone tells you can certainly get you see the truth of the belief in question), and (4) to form this belief with that peculiar sort of phenomenology with which we are well acquainted, but which I can't describe in any way other than as the phenomenology that goes with seeing that such a proposition is true. (Plantinga 1993, 105f.)

Clear and distinct insight as well as a priori knowledge belong to a special kind of experience which Plantinga calls "[...] doxastic experience because it always goes with the formation of belief."(Plantinga 2000, 111) What is special about this experience is that considering a certain topic immediately leads one to entertain certain beliefs. This effect is due to "impulsional evidence." Plantinga mentions examples as "All human beings are mortal"(cf. Plantinga 2000, S. 106) or "[...] the knowledge that it is you as opposed to someone else who is now perceiving the book in front of you."(Plantinga 2000, 111) Now the main effect of a Cartesian idea is to provide impulsional evidence. When we consider a certain idea, it leads us immediately to a certain judgment if we do not suspend this judgment by an act of will. According to Descartes, the realm of impulsional evidence is larger than in Plantinga's account. It comprises the examples Plantinga mentions but also sense perception which in Descartes' analysis consists of ideas inevitably linked by nature with a propensity towards a certain judgement.

[4] William Alston (1976) criticizes that Descartes wants to justify the epistemic belief that other beliefs are justified on the basis of immediate evidence, not on the basis of other beliefs. He argues that normative concepts like "justification" must be based on the ascription of non-normative properties. Thus the justification of epistemic beliefs must be based on beliefs concerning these non-normative properties. Yet Descartes wants to be *certain* that his beliefs are reliable. He does not use "justification" or comparable normative terms in his main argument.

Some remarks must be made before transferring Plantinga's account to Descartes'. Clear and distinct insights can be called a priori in the sense of not being due to sensual experience. We also feel a certain necessity of the beliefs formed this way. But this does not mean that the propositions believed on the basis of clear and distinct insights are necessarily true. The thought "I exist" states a contingent fact whereas the thought "Whenever I consider the thought 'I think' I exist" indeed states something which holds necessarily. The necessity which is *common* to both these thoughts merely concerns my conviction that what I apprehended in this way is true: Upon reflection, I believe that there is a necessary connection between anyone believing in this way and her belief being true. This is what Descartes and Plantinga (who denies its existence) call (metaphysical) "certainty" (AT VI, 28).

Plantinga criticizes Descartes and Locke for their describing the peculiar phenomenology of a priori perception in terms of sight:

> When I introspect, however, trying to focus on the phenomenology involved in such cases, I do not find anything like a luminous glow, or brightness, or luster.(Plantinga 1993, 105)

However, he accepts that there is a kind of special phenomenal quality which unifies all such experiences.

Another difference to note is that for Descartes clear and distinct insight comprises basic and non-basic insights. The very same kind of doxastic impulse which causes a belief based on clear and distinct insight relates premises and conclusions in a chain of reasoning consisting of clear and distinct insights.

The claim of reliability forms the main difference between Descartes' idea of clear and distinct insight and the notion of a priori beliefs forwarded e.g. by Plantinga. These latter beliefs can be false despite being a priori. This difference must concern the Cartesian scholar as it involves rejecting Descartes' claim that there is a privileged form of a priori reasoning which is absolutely reliable. Plantinga points to examples of error even when practising mathematics in due course like the flaw detected by Russell in Frege's foundation of arithmetics (Plantinga 1993, 106). Yet this problem shows what Descartes expected his criterion of clarity and distinctness to achieve. Whereas clarity has to do with the special kind of phenomenology that always goes with a priori knowledge, distinctness which is recursively determined as clarity of natural parts has to do with *completeness*: If we apprehend something clearly and distinctly, we grasp it in a way that excludes eventually omitting some important issue as Frege did when he did not consider the set of nonselfmembered sets. Of course, it is by no means clear how Descartes' description of his criterion conforms to these claims.

Clear and distinct insight and a priori knowledge have in common that there is no criterion which can be learned. One simply sees that something is the case. When I make a mistake in what I took for an insight, say I thought $9 \times 9 = 79$, I can be corrected what concerns its content. I can learn that $9 \times 9 = 81$. But I cannot be taught a further difference between a real insight and this pseudo-insight, a difference which I missed to note. Descartes must add a strong claim: Clarity and distinctness must be transparent to me. If I behave in a transparently

responsible way, it cannot happen that I am wrong in thinking that some state is clear and distinct or that some state is not clear and distinct.

Beliefs formed on the basis of a priori perception are compelling. For Descartes this is due to the coercive nature of clear and distinct insight. There are two main interpretations of this overwhelming power.

4. The psychological interpretation

The first interpretation is a psychological one. It draws a distinction between the role clear and distinct ideas play in our normal epistemic practice and the role they could retain even if one of the skeptical hypotheses were true. The last, artificially restrained role can be termed "psychological". It is neutral concerning the question how reliable clear and distinct ideas are in terms of truth-conveyance. It merely involves that clear and distinct ideas *coerce* those concentrating on them to consent to certain convictions. This is their main property Descartes relies on. His argument serves the only purpose to extend the psychological coercion we feel when concentrating on clear and distinct ideas to all mental states in which beliefs formed on the basis of these ideas play their role. The proposition (2.4) of the argument alluded to by Arnauld must be interpreted as follows:[5] Beliefs formed in due course on the basis of clear and distinct ideas cannot be corrected as the epistemic agent is coerced to believe them without remedy. If Descartes is right about the psychological effects of clear and distinct ideas, his argument of the trustworthiness of God prohibits us to take seriously any reason to doubt clear and distinct insights, which was the aim Descartes had at the beginning (leaving aside the problem of the doubt arising again if we do not attend to the argument of God being trustworthy). He avoids the circle Arnauld points to as his argument is not designed to *show* that clear and distinct ideas are trustworthy but to inevitably *cause* the incapability to doubt them. When asking ourselves if clear and distinct ideas are reliable, we are forced to believe that God is trustworthy and ensures their reliability. In this reading Descartes may refute the circularity reproach. If he fulfils his task, he also achieves the aim of indubitability. But is this strategy in tune with the spirit of Descartes' epistemology?

Even in the light of the aims already mentioned the strategy of psychological coercion seems odd. In order to see this we return to the general motives Descartes stresses in order to persuade his readers to join the enterprise of the *Meditations*. Let us try to imagine the reaction of the adept of Cartesian philosophy who has just embarked in the enterprise of doubt as she shares Descartes' concern for safe, well-founded, stable beliefs. What would she say if she was told that in the end she would not be convinced by a sound argument showing that the method of Descartes suits her aims, but that she just will be forced to believe it by some strange psychological mechanism. What would she say, if Descartes achieved this forced belief by using some hallucinogene? In the interpretation presented above

[5] 2.4 Convictions formed in due course on the basis of clear and distinct ideas cannot be corrected by available counterevidence.

Descartes' argument looks like a psychological trick. Descartes' strategy does not seem a rationally acceptable procedure.

There are other reasons for skepticism concerning Descartes' achievement. Even if Descartes succeeds in making us believe that clear and distinct ideas are trustworthy, it does not follow that these ideas actually are reliable. He has given no reason to think that our belief system has become safer and more stable than it was before. This result does not only conflict with his epistemological aims but also with the statements he uses to refute the circularity reproach. Descartes claims referring to Hobbes' objection that clear and distinct ideas are not only coercive but that they cannot deceive us:

> It is no objection to this to say that we have often seen people 'turn out to have been deceived in matters where they thought their knowledge was as clear as the sunlight'. For we have never seen, indeed no one could possibly see, this happpening to those who have relied solely on the intellect in their quest for clarity in their perceptions; we have seen it happen only to those who tried to derive such clarity from the senses or from some false preconceived opinion. (CSM II, 104 AT VII, 146).

On the one hand, Descartes seems to make an observational statement. On the other hand he cannot merely claim to make an empirical statement that we never observed someone to be deceived by clear and distinct insight. For he claims that no one *could* find someone to be deceived by clear and distinct insight. He states as a matter of fact that clear and distinct ideas did never and cannot deceive as they are reliable. It could be argued that Descartes himself might be coerced by his own clear and distinct ideas to believe that such ideas are always reliable, whoever has them. But this does not fit the observational part of the statement, according to which we have never seen someone being deceived by clear and distinct ideas. For it would be meaningless to make empirical observations while their result was already predetermined independently by clear and distinct ideas exercising their overwhelming power.

The same problem that the reliability of clear and distinct ideas remains doubtful can be stated with the help of the epistemic desiderata Hilary Kornblith attributes to Descartes:

> In particular, I want to suggest that knowledge requires:
> (1) Belief which is arrived at in an objectively correct, that is, reliable, manner; (2) belief which is arrived at in a subjectively correct manner; and (3) belief which is the product of epistemically responsible action, that is, action regulated by a desire for true beliefs."(Kornblith 1965, 273)

According to Kornblith, knowledge requires that beliefs are arrived at in a manner which is reliable independently of the epistemic agent's perspective on this manner of belief acquisition. It further requires that this manner of belief acquisition seems correct to the epistemic agent. The psychological interpretation meets the second, but not the first requirement. There is nothing in clear and distinct insight interpreted psychologically which allows to assess that clear and distinct insight is an objectively reliable way to gain knowledge. Of course we could ask if any epistemological argument can tell us something about the first condition to be fulfilled. Yet Descartes claims to have established the general rule that we

should trust clear and distinct insights and only those insights (AT VI, 33).[6] If Kornblith is right about Descartes' aims, Descartes should claim that in obeying this rule we conform to the requirements of knowledge. If he were to accept the psychological interpretation, he should consequently admit that his argument does not serve the first task of reliability (1) instead of claiming to have successfully established clear and distinct insight as an epistemically sound method to acquire beliefs. His argument leaves open whether there is no better method than trusting clear and distinct insight. Now one could argue that even if there were a better method we would have no way to find it. Yet there may be many ways of establishing such a method which seem at least as sound as the method of using mechanisms of psychological coercion, e.g. to seek coherence in our belief system. Nothing excludes that a system of clear and distinct insights could turn out to be incoherent.

In the first interpretation Descartes is successful in avoiding the Cartesian circle but his argument has not the epistemological significance he promises.

5. The transparency interpretation

Let us now turn to a different understanding of Descartes' strategy against the circularity reproach which escapes the problems just stated.

This understanding starts from the role of denoting a kind of "epistemic maximum" which modern epistemology often attributes to the notion of certainty, mainly in order to reject such a notion, of course (e.g. Chisholm 1982, Plantinga 2000). This notion is far from clear. However, to catch the intuitive idea of such an epistemic maximum the epistemic state of being certain of a belief p can be identified with the epistemic perspective we might attribute to God. As he is omniscient, God believes p iff p is true. But this seems not enough to describe God's epistemic state. What is additionally required becomes obvious when we ask whether God could ever doubt that his belief p is true and if an eventual incapability to doubt might be a flaw in his epistemic position, a sort of naïve incapability to reflectively assess this epistemic position. The answer to both questions seems to be no. God cannot doubt. Yet his incapability to doubt is no defect but due to his unique epistemic position. He is aware that he cannot err. The truth of his beliefs is so to say *transparent* to him.

What has all this to do with Descartes' argument? Descartes' ideal of certainty now could be interpreted as involving the claim that in having a clear and distinct insight we are comparable to God – the difference being that we are restricted to this particular insight and to the moment in which we have it. In this reading clear and distinct ideas are not only coercing but *trustworthy*. The epistemic agent who concentrates on clear and distinct ideas *sees* (in a stronger sense than Plantinga suggests) that something is the case. Some proposition is not only overwhelmingly credible to her, but it is *perspicuous* to her that it is true.

[6] In the *Discours* this transition is immediate. In the second meditation is can be derived from Descartes' concluding remarks (AT VII, 33f.).

This interpretation involves two claims:

1. External Truth: Descartes maintains that convictions gained on the basis of clear and distinct ideas are always true. This can be called the reliability thesis concerning clear and distinct insight.
2. Transparency: It is *perspicuous* to the epistemic agent that a clear and distinct insight is absolutely reliable. For Descartes clear and distinct insight is unique as it bridges the gap between purely internalist conditions the epistemic agent can ensure to obtain and truth. The latter is normally regarded to be an externalist requirement of epistemic success which the epistemic agent cannot ensure to be fulfilled.

Descartes' argument now runs as follows: Clear and distinct ideas make one see that certain propositions are true while contemplating them. But when one does not any longer attend to them, doubts arise. When reflecting on clear and distinct ideas in general, it becomes perspicuous that these ideas provide true beliefs. By invoking the clear and distinct idea of God Descartes sees that God is no deceiver. He also sees that God would be a deceiver if clear and distinct ideas would make one see what is not the case. Now whenever we think of the deceiving demon or another skeptical hypothesis, it becomes perspicuous that God does not accept someone deceiving us in clear and distinct insights. We cannot doubt any longer as we realize that the reasons of doubt are absurd (again leaving aside the problem of doubts rearising if we do not attend to the argument refuting them).

Let us now discuss the two requirements which are crucial to the second interpretation, truth and transparency. The first requirement seems exaggerated, but in ascribing it to Descartes we conform to Alston (1976) and Sosa (1991, 89) who see absolute reliability as crucial to Descartes' concept of foundationalism which they dismiss. If the transparency requirement is considered in itself, it seems to state quite a normal epistemic situation. Many things are transparent to us, e.g. that we are now discussing philosophical issues. What bothers us is that Descartes combines the two requirements. How can some fact which is independent from our states of mind be perspicuous to us? What Descartes has in mind can be understood when considering the epistemic level of certainty R. Chisholm discusses. Chisholm recurs to the notion of self-presenting properties. He states a sufficient condition of such properties:

> [...] every property it entails is necessarily such that, if a person has it and also considers whether he has it, then ipso facto he will attribute it to himself.(Chisholm 1982, 10)

Chisholm regards statements of the form "I am appeared to in a ... way" as paradigmatic cases of self-presenting properties. Departing from this condition, he states a sufficient condition of certainty:

> If the property of being F is self-presenting, then for every x, if x has the property of being F and if x considers his having that property, then it is certain for x that he is then F. (Chisholm 1982, 12)

Chisholm explicitly refers to the second Meditation in which Descartes discusses the indubitability of the thought "I exist" and of a broader class of self-presenting properties:

> For example, I am now seeing a light, hearing a noise, feeling heat. But I am asleep, so all this is false. Yet I certainly *seem* to see, to hear, and to be warmed. This cannot be false. (CSM II, 19, AT VII, 29)

Descartes and Chisholm advocate a sort of "bracketing"-operation which separates aspects of everyday perception to which we have a sort of privileged access from other aspects. Both Descartes and Chisholm do not provide a further explanation what feature of perception it is that allows this privileged access. They rely on our having this access. Descartes apparently claims a stronger privilege: Descartes states that honest statements formed in due course which report how one is appeared to are true. Now there is a striking difference between Chisholm's account and Descartes' proposals. This difference consists in Descartes' claim that if I form a belief ascribing to me a self-presenting property, this belief is true. This claim does not follow from Chisholms account, nor does the weaker claim that when forming a belief ascribing a self-presenting property to ourselves we cannot accept the possibility of this belief being false. For there is nothing in Chisholm's sufficient condition that prevents one from ascribing to oneself such a property while not having it. It is even possible that we are mostly wrong when ascribing these properties to us. Descartes excludes this possibility.

Yet it seems as if Chisholm would have to exclude this possibility, too. For the modesty of his claims regarding self-presenting properties is in tension with his claim that certainty is the highest attainable epistemic level. According to him, nothing would be more reasonable to accept than beliefs which are certain (Chisholm 1982, 12). This is at odds with the possibility that we are mostly wrong when ascribing these properties to us. To sustain this claim, beliefs which are certain must have a property which explains that they provide an epistemic maximum. The only possibility to achieve this seems to be to accept Descartes' proposal: If self-presenting properties provide certainty and if certain beliefs are the most reasonable to accept, beliefs concerning self-presenting properties must be true, and this truth must be part of what it is to be self-presenting.

Descartes now takes a further step. He asks himself what different examples of certainty have in common. He answers that they are perceived clearly and distinctly. He thinks that this answer allows him to state the general rule that everything which is perceived clearly and distinctly is true (AT VI, 33). Descartes claims that the realm of certainty is broader than that of statements concerning how I am appeared to. From the general rule which he states we can conclude that it must be the very same common feature of clarity and distinctness that is responsible for the certainty of this enlarged realm of convictions.

Beliefs like "I exist" or "I am appeared to in a ... way" enjoy an epistemic privilege. The former cannot be false when actually held by someone. According to many philosophers, beliefs of the second type cannot be false if formed in their normal way. These cases of knowledge are not only privileged, they also seem subject to a certain reflective knowledge which is privileged, too. Our epistemically

privileged position is in a special way perspicuous to us. Epistemologists must rely on this perspicacity. As Descartes introduces clear and distinct insight by referring to these cases of knowledge, he apparently claims other cases of clear and distinct insight to enjoy the same epistemic privilege. Descartes wants to offer an account of what is common to all these cases: They are due to clear and distinct insight. But is he right in treating equally statements about how I am appeared to and, say, mathematical statements or the statement that God is trustworthy? As we noted before, neither Descartes nor Chisholm provide a direct explanation of the privileged position they achieve by their bracketing operation. They rely on us *seeing* that we are privileged. Descartes suggests generally to describe such privileged positions as clear and distinct insight. He apparently has in mind just this intuition that there is a privileged perspective of someone *seeing* something to be the case. According to him, this perspective extends to so heterogeneous beliefs as "I exist", knowing God, and mathematical reasoning. His confidence may appear strange. However, as long as epistemology neither has succeeded in satisfactorily explaining what it is that makes beliefs how I am appeared to reflectively certain, nor in explaining the experience of cogency involved in mathematical reasoning, Descartes' proposal to identify both kinds of certainty is not to be dismissed.

Of course it seems extremely odd to make the externalist requirement of reliability an internalist requirement whose fulfilment can be transparent to us. But it is not obvious that the mere idea of an epistemic situation fulfilling these conditions is absurd. If Chisholm is right, some everyday beliefs are examples of such a situation, beliefs concerning how I am appeared to. If Descartes were right, the realm of the obvious would be still larger. Descartes is not right. But there is nothing absurd in thinking e.g. that mathematical truths are transparently obvious.

If clarity and distinctness is to be achieved consciously, it must be transparent to the epistemic agent. Of course the problem remains how the criterion of clarity and distinctness is to achieve this aim. If the criterion of clarity and distinctness is interpreted in this way, we can understand why Descartes is confident that we never have experienced and never will experience a case in which someone just thought to grasp something clearly and distinctly. It must be excluded that someone merely believes to have attained clarity and distinctness while not having actually attained it.

If Descartes succeeds in making us *see* that beliefs adequately formed on the basis of clear and distinct ideas are true, the aims he sets at the beginning of his epistemology are attained. But what about the circularity reproach? In a sense this reproach is not addressed by Descartes' argument in this reading. It has to be accepted that the clear and distinct idea of God produces true beliefs while we adequately attend to it. But this circularity does not threaten the argument. For this argument does not rest on a conclusion from the premise that clear and distinct ideas are truth-conveying. Descartes is rather reporting what he sees than giving an argument. He just sees that God is trustworthy. This evidence gives rise to the evidence that the hypothesis of a deceiving demon is absurd, and that clear and distinct ideas generally are truth-conveying if used rightly. The weight of the argument fully lies on the evidence clear and distinct ideas provide.

What seems odd in this second interpretation is not that Descartes' argument is circular. In a way, it is circular. But this circularity does not harm the result as a fallacious argument would. It rather makes the conclusion seem superfluous. It is not a prerequisite of using clear and distinct ideas as we already use them to attain it. Now one may recur to the particular aim of removing doubt in order to explain the meaning of Descartes' argument, even if it rests on accepting clear and distinct insight to be reliable. We may argue that there is a special epistemic standard situation in which the result of clear and distinct insight is only remembered but not actually perceived. In this situation the doubt triggered by the evil demon hypothesis may be dispersed by invoking the argument of the trustworthiness of God. But it is not necessary to invoke the trustworthiness of God. This can be shown by taking a closer look at step 2.4 of the argument Arnauld alludes to. This step alone is sufficient to establish the conclusion of the argument. It must be interpreted as saying: Clear and distinct insight provides an evidence which cannot be questioned by appealing to counterevidence as it makes us see what is the case. The reason for this understanding lies in the present interpretation. The peculiarity of this interpretation lies in the effect it ascribes to clear and distinct insight. This effect is not only that this insight is cogent but that it makes something *perspicuous*. It is due to its transparent reliability that clear and distinct insight cannot be corrected, not due to its psychological effect (which nevertheless may hold). But couldn't we artificially separate psychological coercion and reliable evidence by appealing to a reason of doubt? In order to draw this distinction we would have to assume that the cogency of these ideas is transparent to us while their reliability is not. Yet the presupposition of the second line of argument is that clear and distinct ideas immediately give us something more than merely coercing us to believe some proposition. They give us certainty, which involves even more than reliability. It also involves *being aware* of this reliability. Certainty must be transparent to us if it is to bridge the gap between internalist requirements of knowledge and independent truth. Thus we cannot separate coercion and certainty. This understanding apparently renders the appeal to God being trustworthy superfluous. We need only appeal to the general clear and distinct insight that clear and distinct ideas are trustworthy in order to discard any reason of doubt directed against clear and distinct insight. In step 2.4 of the argument this aspect of clear and distinct ideas becomes known *explicitly*.

This result is not merely a difficulty. It is also an opportunity. For if we can dismiss the appeal to the trustworthiness of God, there is a better outlook to solve the problem developed at the beginning: If Descartes' distinction between immediate indubitable insights and chains of reasoning whose results can be doubted is to be upheld, the whole argument rendering the use of clear and distinct insight indubitable must form a single basic insight. If we merely need a simple insight concerning clear and distinct ideas to be reliable, in contrast to the argument of the trustworthiness of God such an abbreviated argument might indeed form a single basic insight. Of course, the problem remains how such an argument is to repel every moment of doubt. Yet this argument could ground a reflective awareness accompanying every single reference to clear and distinct insight that such an insight is fully reliable and indubitable. Instead of just seeing

p to be the case, I have a conscious instance of seeing that p is the case, a piece of reflective instead of animal knowledge. Such an awareness could serve to suppress any moment of doubt. Whenever having a particular clear and distinct insight or referring to clear and distinct insight in general, we now are immediately aware that this insight is reliable. This awareness prohibits us to doubt.

6. What does Descartes' argument achieve?

We now seem to be caught in a dilemma. Either Descartes' argument does not serve his alleged aims, or it rests so heavily on clear and distinct evidence that the invoking of God seems superfluous. To save the second interpretation we must understand what purpose Descartes' argument of the trustworthiness of God may serve. Inspiration what to make of Descartes' argument can be found in the works of contemporary epistemologists treating problems very similar to those Descartes has to face. Yet it must always be discussed if this similarity does not remain on the surface compared to a deeper divide of the whole epistemological approach which limits the explanatory power of a comparison. We will refer to three different epistemological approaches.

Even if the very idea of accounting for our well-established epistemic practice by asking how reliable it is has lost much of the appeal it had to philosophers in former times, it has recently been revived by Keith Lehrer.

> [...] when we reflect on examples, however fantastical and unrealistic, of universal and invincible deception, we understand that intellectual virtue and trustworthiness would be powerless to expose such deception. So how we can determine that we are not so deceived? (Lehrer 2001, 206)

In order to answer this question, Lehrer suggests the following argument:

(1) I am trustworthy in what I accept.

(2) I accept that *p*.

(3) I am trustworthy in accepting that *p*.
[From (1) and (2)] (3) Let *p* = I am trustworthy in what I accept.

(4) I am trustworthy in accepting that I am trustworthy in what I accept.
[From (3) and (=)]. (Lehrer 2001, 206)

Now this scheme can be transferred to Descartes' reasoning in order to state the argument Arnauld criticizes:

1′) Clear and distinct ideas are trustworthy.

2′) Clear and distinct ideas show that *p*.

3′) Clear and distinct ideas are trustworthy in showing that *p*.
[From (1′) and (2′)] 3′) Let *p* = clear and distinct ideas are trustworthy in what they show.

4′) Clear and distinct ideas are trustworthy in showing that they are trustworthy in what they show. [From (3′) and (=)].

There is a striking surface similarity between Descartes' and Lehrer's arguments. Thus it may be expected that Lehrer's explanation of his argument might apply to that of Descartes, too. But what is to be gained by appealing to this similarity? The invocation of God still seems superfluous. Yet the particular epistemological framework of Lehrer's argument can be used to show that the argument is enriched when it is enlarged by the trustworthiness of God. Of course Lehrer sees the circular structure of his argument. He calls it "rhetoric" as it is not a proof. Its performance can be stated in terms of coherence of our belief system:

> We cannot use the theory in a dispute with another to proof that we are justified in accepting what we do. That would be contrary to the rules of rhetoric. But we can and should use the theory to explain why we are justified in accepting it among other things. That is consonant with rules and purposes of explanation. (Lehrer 2001, 205)

The appeal of this argument lies in the fact that the epistemic faculties are operating within the limits of established epistemic practice. A method of forming beliefs already in use is just applied to a particular instance of its normal use. This instance has the peculiarity that the acquired belief refers to all other instances of the use of the method by which it was acquired. The argument depends on the coherence of our established ways of acquiring beliefs. This idea of coherence encloses that there is a gain in coherence if the faculties already in use within due course confirm that this use conforms to the aims associated with it. In Descartes' case this is achieved by reflecting on the general nature of clear and distinct ideas. This reflection involves the first circle which is given by reflecting on a practice within this very practice. Now it can be argued that there is just a further gain of coherence to be expected if we adjoin a second circle of reasoning to the first. This larger circle which is given by appeal to God's veracity integrates further beliefs gained in due course. It shows that these beliefs further confirm that our epistemic practice is in tune with its aims.

Thus the argument just stated as a variant of Lehrer's scheme can be extended harmoniously:

5′) Clear and distinct ideas show that God is trustworthy in providing clear and distinct ideas.

6′) If God is trustworthy in providing clear and distinct ideas, these ideas are trustworthy.

7′) Clear and distinct ideas are trustworthy.

Although it provides a general scheme every attempt to save the whole argument conforms to, Lehrer's explanation cannot be applied straightforwardly to Descartes. Firstly, it applies to the whole range of epistemically virtuous behaviour, not to a particular way of acquiring beliefs, clear and distinct insight. Our suggestive description of Lehrer's achievement as referring to a particular method proves misleading. The plausibility of Lehrer's account depends on its broad scope which connects the trustworthiness of our epistemic practice to the acceptability of our whole belief system. Secondly, neither this system of beliefs nor even that part of this system that is formed on the basis of clear and distinct insight can be taken for granted in Descartes' argument as his method of doubt explicitly

serves the purpose to suspend our whole belief system (with some very special exceptions). Thus he has got no background system to fit in the trustworthiness of clear and distinct insights as one case among others. Although Descartes' and Lehrer's accounts seem almost identical at first glance there are deep differences prohibiting to extract immediately an interpretation of Descartes' argument from Lehrer's ideas.

The very same problem threatens Sosa's interpretation of Descartes which has already been summarized in part. Although he refers to Pyrrhonic doubt, Sosa does not pay much attention to Descartes' method of doubt. This becomes obvious when he explains how Descartes fulfils his task to attain reflective knowledge. According to Sosa, "[...] Descartes was a foundationalist, *and* a coherentist, *and* a reliabilist."(Sosa 1997, 243) Here again we have the problem of coherentism which hindered our attempt to interpret Descartes departing from Lehrer's ideas. Why does Sosa appeal to coherentism? The reason lies in his description of how Descartes attains reflective knowledge: Descartes

> [...] meditates along attaining the kind of epistemic justification and even 'certainty' that might be found in an atheist mathematician's reasonings, one deprived of a world view within which the universe may be seen as epistemically propitious. [...] Absent an appropriate world view, however, no such reasoning can rise above the level of *cognitio*. If we persist in such reasoning, nevertheless, enough pieces may eventually come together into a view of ourselves and our place in the universe that is sufficiently comprehensive and coherent to raise us above the level of mere *cognitio* into the realm of higher, reflective, enlightened knowledge, or *scientia*. (Sosa 1997, 240)

From animal knowledge (cognitio) reflective knowledge (scientia) may gradually emerge. Now there are at least two points where this description does not fit Descartes' enterprise: Firstly, the ascent from cognitio to scientia is a matter of degrees. This does not seem to fit Descartes' ideal of a relatively brief, closed argument. Secondly, the role of methodic doubt is missing. Descartes' argument is fitted into the setting of a doubt concerning everything hitherto believed. As Sosa emphasizes, even the *Cogito* is not sufficiently certain until the argument from the veracity of God has been stated (Sosa 1997, 234). In the situation of methodic doubt, the argument which establishes the veracity of God is isolated. It follows that only an extremely restricted sense of coherentism can be at stake when Descartes uses clear and distinct insight in order to establish clear and distinct insight. The "world view" provided by this argument is very restricted, too. There is another difficulty with coherentism: If Descartes was to rely entirely on coherentism, his retortion to Arnauld would be entirely misleading. He should not appeal to the force of clear and distinct insight. Instead he should recur to the coherence of our current belief system and the subsystem of beliefs formed departing from clear and distinct insight.

Do we have to dismiss Sosa's and Lehrer's proposals as solutions of Descartes' problem? Not necessarily. The problems with these proposals emerge if we take them as a straightforward interpretation of Descartes' whole reasoning in favour of clear and distinct ideas to be trustworthy. Yet there is a way to avoid these problems by embedding the coherentist interpretations in the special situation

created by accepting clear and distinct ideas as reliable. Departing from the second interpretation of Descartes' argument, we asked what the argument of God's trustworthiness could achieve if the clear and distinct idea that clear and distinct ideas are absolutely reliable is sufficient to refute any possible doubt. When addressing this special question, we can take it for granted that our epistemic practice of judging on the basis of clear and distinct insight is reestablished to its full extent. Thus we can recur to the coherence of this epistemic practice if we drop Sosa's claim that this coherence provides an answer to the Pyrrhonic problematic and just claim that every gain in reflective coherence is an epistemic aim. Such a limited gain is provided by Lehrer's and Sosa's proposals and their application to Descartes.

Keeping in mind Sosa's idea of the propensity of the world surrounding us for epistemic activity, we may get a more concrete idea of the kind of reflective knowledge Descartes wants to achieve if we turn to a third position which is prominent in contemporary epistemology. Plantinga's criticism of the Cartesian approach has already been evaluated. Plantinga's concept of knowledge notwithstanding provides a very promising basis for further understanding what Descartes' reasoning might achieve. For there are very striking similarities not only in the striving for a general account of warranted knowledge, but also in the picture of the knowledge that is to be warranted. In his *Warranted Christian Belief* Plantinga accepts what he calls the "Aquinas/Calvin-Model" of warranted Christian belief. This model includes a faculty of directly perceiving God, which apart from its narrower content closely resembles Descartes' ideal of clear and distinct insight. Like Descartes, Plantinga must postulate that human beings have got such a non-sensual perceptual faculty. There is no possibility to argue further against those who question that there is such a faculty. Furthermore, Plantinga's analysis of this faculty is strikingly similar to Descartes' notion of an idea and its effect when considered. Although Plantinga presumably would not accept Descartes' notion of ideas as the central source of reliable beliefs, he accepts that the truths which he considers most important to us, the truths of warranted Christian belief, are basic beliefs due to doxastic a priori experience. So there is a striking similarity in Descartes' and in Plantinga's account of knowledge. Yet the special interest we take in Plantinga's reasoning springs from the general conditions knowledge must met. Plantinga distinguishes internal rationality on the one hand and external rationality and warrant on the other hand. Coherence with a net of beliefs of the epistemic agent and her epistemic community is a matter of internal rationality. Thus we can expect that external rationality and warrant might add some interesting epistemic achievement to the gain in coherence. Perhaps external rationality and warrant may serve further to explain Descartes' aims.

Now whatever Descartes' argument may achieve in terms of warrant and external rationality, it seems at odds with the interpretation of this argument we have just developed with the help of Lehrer and Sosa. In this interpretation the argument served to increase the coherence of our belief system. Yet nothing prevents the argument to serve two tasks: It may increase the internal coherence of our belief system. Yet if its premise and its conclusions are true, it may additionally

tell us some facts about our belief system and its acquisition which independently of any gain in coherence have an epistemological significance. Thus the two interpretations of the argument developed with the help of Sosa, Lehrer, and Plantinga can be combined.

Whereas Plantinga's prerequisites of internal and external rationality are rather weak, the concept of warrant comes closer to the demands which may lead to the Cartesian reasoning:

> After all, even the beliefs of a madman or the victim of a Cartesian evil demon can be both justified and internally rational. Well then, what about external rationality and warrant? A belief is externally rational if it is produced by cognitive faculties that are functioning properly and successfully aimed at truth (i.e. aimed at the production of true beliefs) – as opposed, for example, to being the product of wish fulfilment or cognitive malfunction. Now warrant, the property enough of which distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief, is a property had by a belief if and only if (so I say) that belief is produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly in a congenial epistemic environment according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth. (Plantinga 2000, 204)

For beliefs to be warranted, the epistemic faculties providing them must function properly in a suitable epistemic environment *according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth*. Plantinga points to a framework his notion of proper function has to be fitted in if a belief is to be warranted. A faculty must operate according to a design plan which specifies its purpose so that this faculty's aiming at truth becomes obvious. In order to be successful, this faculty must be adapted to the world surrounding it. An account of origin and purpose of this faculty which meets all these requirements must allow for a conjecture how probable it is that the faculties in question provide true beliefs.

Plantinga's description of knowledge is ambiguous what concerns the ability to account for knowledge. At first knowledge only seems to require certain conditions as functioning according to a design plan to be fulfilled. However, knowledge seems to imply some reflective awareness of one's own epistemic status. Plantinga claims:

> One who is agnostic about the existence of God may also be agnostic about his origin and his place in the universe. [...] one who displays a certain kind of agnosticism with respect to his origin and place in the universe, and also grasps a certain cogent argument, will not, in fact, know anything at all; nothing he believes will have warrant sufficient for knowledge. (Plantinga 2000, 218)

Plantinga argues that the agnosticist cannot entertain the belief that her cognitive faculties are reliable as considering the relevant facts given she cannot conjecture the probability of her epistemic faculties to be trustworthy: "[...] one wouldn't know what to think about this probability." (Plantinga 2000, 223)

Now agnosticism may imply the claim that one *cannot* know something. Plantinga might accept someone who is not agnostic but merely ignorant regarding the origin and purpose of her epistemic faculties to have knowledge. However, Plantinga's epistemology seems to imply the further idea that it is at least an epistemic aim to give a non-arbitrary account of the design plan according to which

our epistemic faculties are aimed at truth and the environment in which these faculties are to fulfil their task. No doubt Plantinga is right that such an account enriches our picture of knowledge and consequently is a legitimate end an argument as the one Descartes develops can aim at – even if a probability conjecture concerning epistemic faculties to be reliable has already been established. In his final statement from the longer passage which already has been quoted extensively Descartes seems to have in mind a concept which is quite similar to Plantinga's ideas:

> My reply is that the required certainty is indeed possessed by those whose knowledge of God enables them to understand that the intellectual faculty he gave them cannot but tend towards the truth [...] (CSM II, 104, AT VII, 146)

Here Descartes emphasizes the importance of understanding our epistemic faculties as springing from a plan designed by God. If we accept Plantinga's ideal of a knowledge which is enriched by an account of its origin and purpose, we can see why it is important to achieve what Sosa calls reflective knowledge. If Descartes can be assumed to aim for knowledge in Plantinga's sense, we can understand why he presents the argument Arnauld criticizes and why he can claim to be justified in presenting it. Even if we are assured by clear and distinct insight that clear and distinct insight provides true beliefs, we cannot give an account of the origin and purpose of the faculty of clear and distinct insight unless we recur to God as the conscious designer of this faculty. Although this account is based on the very faculty whose origin and purpose is to be scrutinized, we can trust it as we are assured independently that clear and distinct insight is reliable.

But does Descartes really differentiate between those parts of his argument which are necessary to establish that clear and distinct ideas are trustworthy and those parts which are necessary if one wants to account for origin and purpose of our epistemic faculties? Apparently he does not. But this could simply be due to the fact that he himself did not separate with sufficient clarity and distinctness the different parts of his arguments. The task of his interpreter is to distinguish what is necessary to establish the reliability of clarity and distinctness and what is necessary to give an account of epistemic powers conforming to a design plan.

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Freiheit durch Erkenntnis der Notwendigkeit bei Spinoza

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Spinoza holds that we can become free by recognizing that everything happens with necessity. His own reasons for this claim do not withstand scrutiny. More promising appears to be the idea that he who considers things to be necessary is not subject to affects that deprive him of his freedom. On this line, however, recognizing necessity also destroys joy, contrary to Spinoza's maxim 'Do good and be joyful'. More importantly, what is necessary may in fact be a reasonable object of affective reactions. Thus, Spinoza fails to support the enlightenment's hope that knowledge brings freedom.

Spinoza redet in der *Ethik* von Freiheit in verschiedenen Bedeutungen. Da ist einmal die Freiheit nach ihrer offiziellen Definition (1d7)[1]: frei ist, was existiert und wirkt allein auf Grund seiner eigenen Natur. Frei in diesem Sinne ist Gott und er allein (1p17c2). Da ist zum anderen die Freiheit des Willens. Sie ist das Vermögen eines Wesens, etwas nicht zu tun, was zu tun in seiner Macht steht (1p17s). Nach Spinoza gibt es nichts, was in diesem Sinne frei wäre, und er gebraucht den Ausdruck in diesem Sinne nur, um die Auffassungen seiner Gegner zu beschreiben. Da ist schließlich die menschliche Freiheit, von der erklärtermaßen im fünften Teil der *Ethik*, tatsächlich aber auch schon in ihrem vierten Teil die Rede ist. Der Ausdruck „menschliche Freiheit" ist jedoch nicht nach dem heute geläufigen Sprachgebrauch so zu verstehen, daß diese Freiheit jedem Menschen zukommt. Spinoza sagt von ihr vielmehr, sie sei selten (4p54s, 5p42s). Das heißt, sie ist nicht Teil der menschlichen Ausstattung, sie ist eine Vollkommenheit, zu der manche Menschen gelangen. Mit „frei" eine Vollkommenheit zu bezeichnen ist heute zwar nicht ein alltäglicher, aber durchaus ein korrekter und verständlicher Sprachgebrauch. In einem Nachruf könnte man schreiben: „er war ein freier Mensch"; und es würde verstanden, daß man damit eine bedeutungsvolle und seltene Eigenschaft des Betreffenden benennt. Wenn Spinoza also in den letzten Teilen der *Ethik* von „menschlicher Freiheit" spricht, ist das zu lesen als „für Menschen erreichbare Freiheit".[2] Um diese Freiheit geht es im Folgenden. Die Frage ist, was gilt von einem Menschen, der in diesem Sinne frei ist?

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[1] Baruch de Spinoza, *Ethica ordine geometrico demonstrata*, in: Spinoza, Opera, Band 2, Konrad Blumenstock (Hrsg.), Darmstadt (Wiss. Buchgesellschaft) 1967. Stellen aus der *Ethik* werden mit den üblichen Abkürzungen bezeichnet. Die Übersetzungen stammen von mir.

[2] Anders Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, o.O. (Hackett) 1984, § 72.3, der Spinozas Rede von menschlicher Freiheit als Bezugnahme auf einen tatsächlich nie erreichten, für die Theorie aber nützlichen Grenzfall versteht, vergleichbar der Rede von einem idealen Gas. Dabei scheint er jedoch Spinozas Aussagen übersehen zu haben, wonach menschliche Freiheit selten ist: es wäre äußerst irreführend, von idealen Gasen zu sagen, sie seien selten.