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*Descartes Defended*

Christopher Peacocke

I will argue for the soundness and the epistemic interest of the several varieties of the *Cogito* that are found in Descartes. I will not undertake the quixotic enterprise of defending the full range of Cartesian doctrines on these matters, such as the utter independence of the mental from the physical, or the primary foundational role of the *Cogito* in some proposed reconstruction of human knowledge. But I do believe that the soundness and epistemic interest of the *Cogito* follows from plausible conceptions of consciousness, the subject of consciousness, and the nature of first person content.

The conceptions on which I will be drawing are those outlined in my paper 'Subjects and Consciousness'.<sup>1</sup> Since space is so tight, I state the two main theses of that position baldly. First, the nature of conscious mental states and events, and the nature of subjects of consciousness, are interdependent. The explication of the nature of each involves essential reference to the other. Second, the first person concept is individuated by this condition: that in any event of thinking in which it features, it refers to the subject who produces that thinking, that is, to its agent.

We need a little stage setting, and some reactivation of our memories of what Descartes actually said. Here are some of the passages in which Descartes formulates the *Cogito*. In the *Discourse on the Method*, he writes

But immediately I noticed that while I was trying to thus to think everything false, it was necessary that I, who was thinking this, was something. And observing that this truth '*I am thinking, therefore I exist*' was so firm and sure that all the most extravagant suppositions of the skeptics were incapable of shaking it, I decided that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of philosophy I was seeking.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In *Self and Self-Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Volume 1* ed. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothof, D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.127.

And a little later in the *Discourse*,

I saw on the contrary that from the mere fact that I thought of doubting the truth of other things, it followed quite evidently and certainly that I existed...<sup>3</sup>

In the Second Meditation, he writes

and let him [a deceiver of supreme power and cunning] deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something. So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist* is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind.<sup>4</sup>

I am going to be taking the canonical form of the *Cogito* to involve three stages. First, Descartes engages in

(1) a particular conscious thinking;

second, he moves from this conscious event to the judgement

(2) I am thinking;

third, from (2) he infers

(3) I exist.

In the transition from (1) to (2), we have a transition from a conscious thinking to a self-ascription of thinking, made for the reason that he is thinking. This first step in the transition (1) - (3) should not be identified with any kind of inference.<sup>5</sup> In taking

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<sup>3</sup> *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Volume 1*, p.127.

<sup>4</sup> *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Volume 2* ed. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothof, D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.17.

<sup>5</sup> Descartes famously denied that in the *Cogito*, the transition from (2) to (3) should be construed as a syllogistic inference (see his Reply to the Second Set of Objections, CSM II, p.100). In the footnote marked with an asterisk to B422 in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant makes a bizarre modal fallacy when he writes "But I cannot say "Everything that thinks, exists"; for then the property of thinking would make all beings possessing it into necessary beings." Kant fails to distinguish the proposition that necessarily, anything that thinks, exists ("Necessarily, for all x (Tx, Ex)"), from the proposition that anything that thinks also necessarily exists ("For all x (Tx, necessarily (Ex))"). The latter proposition is not in any way a commitment of the use of the syllogism here, not even if the universal quantification is taken as holding necessarily. No doubt Kant's view that existence is not a predicate contributed to the error. Williams suggests that Descartes denied the transition was syllogistic because, in Aristotelian logic, the proposition that all S is P is treated as true only if some S is P (p.91). What Descartes actually says in the Reply to the Second Set of Objections is that the thinker "learns by experiencing in his own case that it isn't possible to think without existing" (*The Philosophical Writings of*

(1) - (3) as the canonical form, I am rejecting any view under which the content of the consciousness that forms the basis for the *Cogito* must itself have a first-personal content. As far as the form (1) - (3) is concerned, the initial thinking of which the thinker is aware could have any content at all. It need not be a first person content.

The form (1) – (3) respects the idea of Descartes and his commentators that he could equally have formulated his argument in terms of other conscious properties such as doubting, willing, imagining, experiencing and the like, including having a sensation with no representational content at all.<sup>6</sup> He could equally have started from an event of

(4) his conscious imagining (his conscious doubting, willing, experiencing, sensing...)

From this conscious event, he moves to the judgement

(5) I imagine (doubt, will, experience, sense...);

and then on to the same original conclusion

(6) I exist.

The fact that Descartes said his conclusion could equally have been reached along the lines of (4) - (6) tells against any view that attempts to give as the canonical formulation of his thought a judgement of something self-referential such as “I am in this very thought thinking that I exist”. While a thinking that is a judgement can refer to itself and still be a judgement, an imagining or a willing or a doubting cannot be a judgement that something is the case (in particular, that I exist). So such self-referential readings cannot accommodate the very natural extension of Descartes’ reasoning to these other conscious mental states.

The *Cogito* as conceived in (1) - (3) is apparently sound even when the thinking an awareness of which is described in (1) is something a schizophrenic subject reports as an “inserted thought”, something experienced as inserted by the agency of another. Line (2) does not imply that the thinker engaged in the *Cogito* reasoning is experienced as the agent of the thinking which forms its starting point, nor even that the thinker actually is that agent.

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*Descartes Volume 2*, p.100). Nothing here supports a transition from the first to the second of the propositions that Kant seems not to have distinguished.

<sup>6</sup> See Williams, pp.79-81, and the references to passages in Descartes cited there.

So much by way of stage setting. Of the transitions made in (1) - (3), we can ask the question of their soundness. This is a question about the world, the question of whether the transitions lead to true judgements. We can ask too the question of whether the thinker is entitled to make the judgements, and in such a way that these transitions result in knowledge, as Descartes thought. We can also ask not merely whether the transitions are ones the thinker is entitled to make, but whether they also possess Cartesian certainty. I take the issue of soundness first.

Lichtenberg famously wrote “We are acquainted only with the existence of our sensations, imaginations and thoughts. ‘Thinking is going on’ is what one should say, just as one says ‘Lightning is occurring’. Saying ‘Cogito’ is too much, as soon as one translates it as ‘I am thinking’.”<sup>7</sup>

Lichtenberg’s objection is unsound if the position I developed in ‘Subjects and Consciousness’ is correct. The metaphysical interdependence of conscious events with the subjects of those events implies that there cannot be conscious thinking without a thinker. What makes the event conscious requires it to have a subject, as I argued earlier.

Still, it may be objected, even if every conscious mental event must have a subject, what ensures, when anyone tries to apply the *Cogito* to himself, that that subject doing the thinking is the same as the subject referred to in its last line, the subject to whose existence he concludes? To this the answer is that only the subject whose thinking it is can be aware of the thinking in the distinctive way that stage (1) of the *Cogito* involves. Another person might be aware of your thinking by examining a real-time scan of your brain. That person is not thereby aware of your thinking in the special way in which only the subject whose thinking it is can be aware of it. Now suppose someone aware of the thinking in that special way judges “I am thinking”, and does so rationally because of that awareness. By the nature of the first person concept, he refers to the agent of his judgement “I am thinking”, viz., himself. So in the circumstances he certainly judges truly. In these circumstances, the agent of the judgement “I’m thinking” is the subject of the conscious thinking that is his reason for making the judgement. “I exist” then in turn follows from “I’m thinking”. That is so,

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<sup>7</sup> G. Lichtenberg, *Schriften und Briefe*, Vol. II (Carl Hanser Verlag, 1971), 412, §76.

because for any content of the form *a is F*, where *F* is a concept of a conscious state, the truth of the content requires that *a* refers.

That concludes the argument, drawing on the metaphysics of consciousness and subjects, and the nature of the first person concept, that the *Cogito* as conceived in (1) - (3) is sound, that is, yields true judgements given its starting point. But there are still some major issues about the metaphysics involved in this validation that I will pursue further. Some of the issues can be introduced by considering the points in Bernard Williams' justly famous discussion of the *Cogito* in his book on Descartes.<sup>8</sup> Williams argues that the Lichtenberg's subjectless, impersonal formulations cannot account for the distinction between the case in which

It's thought that *p* and it's thought that *q*  
imply that

It's thought that *p and q*  
and the case in which they do not (p.96ff.). He introduces a 'here' to indicate the case in which the implication does hold, and in those cases Williams writes

It's thought here that *p* and it's thought here that *q*.

After some discussion, Williams concludes that this 'here' effectively reintroduces reference to a subject. Williams also mentions an objection that he says he will not pursue, the objection (pp. 99-100) that there may be some way of construing 'It's thought here that *p*' that is weaker than something of the form 'A thinks that *p* and A thinks that *q*' (p.100). On the metaphysical response to Lichtenberg's objection, and on the metaphysics of conscious events I have been offering here, there is nothing weaker. There is nothing weaker because by the very nature of conscious mental events, they have subjects.

But, as Frege once put it, I think I hear an objection. This most recent dismissal of Lichtenberg's position may be correct, but there is certainly a further issue to be addressed. There are some other cases in which there is an operator **O** for which the transition from

**O***p* and **O***q*

to

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<sup>8</sup> Descartes: *The Project of Pure Enquiry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), ch. 3, 'Cogito' and 'Sum'.

### **O** ( $p$ and $q$ )

also fails, and yet in which we have a strong impulse to reject the view that there is some more fundamental entity or object at which  $p$  holds and at which  $q$  holds. Perhaps the best example is that of modality, where the operator **O** can be taken to be “it is possible that...”, and a simple counterexample to the most recently displayed transition will be some instance in which we substitute  $\sim p$  for  $q$ . From the fact that it is possible that  $p$  and it is possible that  $\sim p$  it does not follow that it is possible that  $p$  and  $\sim p$ . So we face an important question: does the failure of the transition in modal cases mean that we have some model for explaining the failure of the transition Williams discusses, but without postulating subjects of consciousness? Many would be reluctant to see in the modal case any vindication of modal realism about possible worlds. So why, it may be asked, should the failure of the transition in Lichtenberg’s case be any vindication of an ontology of subjects of consciousness? This is a new Lichtenbergian challenge, Lichtenberg’s revenge.

I respond to Lichtenberg’s revenge by appealing to the fundamental differences between the ontology of possible worlds that one invokes to explain why the modal inference fails and the ontology of subjects one invokes to explain why the Williams transition fails. Possible worlds are entirely constituted by what is the case at them. Intuitively, they are constructed entities, constructed from sets of compossible propositions. This broad statement involves many oversimplifications, but in one way or another it is, in my view, underwritten by plausible substantive accounts of modality. In the ‘principle-based’ account of modality I advocate, a possible world considered as a set of propositions is generated by an assignment of extensions to concepts, where the assignment must be admissible - it must respect constraints on what makes concepts the concepts they are, and what makes objects and properties the objects and properties they are.<sup>9</sup> Other approaches to modality also take possible worlds as sets of propositions while not operating with that framework.<sup>10</sup> But in all

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<sup>9</sup> See the treatment in *Being Known* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), chapter 4.

<sup>10</sup> Prominent examples: R. Adams, ‘Theories of Actuality’, *Noûs* 8 (1974) 211-231; R. Stalnaker, ‘Possible Worlds’ revised and repr. in his collection *Ways a World Might Be* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); N. Salmon, ‘Impossible Worlds’, repr. in his collection *Metaphysics, Mathematics, and Meaning: Philosophical Papers Volume 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

these cases, there is no more to a world than the set of propositions that hold at it. The various theories may differ on what determines a set as genuinely compossible, but they agree that there is no more to the world than the relevant set of propositions that hold at it. All such views differ from David Lewis's modal realism, according to which a possible world is a huge material thing of the same kind as the actual physical universe (which is not a set of propositions).

By contrast, subjects of consciousness are not, on the view I have been developing, constituted by what properties they possess, or what "holds at them". We should be fundamentally realists about subjects of consciousness, but not about possible worlds.

It can be helpful in reflecting on the space of conceivable philosophical positions in this territory by considering what parallels do, and what parallels do not, holds between the cases of times, worlds and subjects of consciousness. Some of the relevantly different significant conceivable positions are actually occupied by Arthur Prior, by me, and by a theorist envisaged by Kit Fine. Prior introduced a language he called 'Egocentric'. In this language, we say that such expressions as 'standing', 'drinking', 'sitting' are the case with respect to individuals. As Prior writes,

"Standing" is the case with a  
is equivalent to

"I am standing" is true when said by a.<sup>11</sup>

Prior's own stated motivation for inventing Egocentric was to "bring out both the similarities and the differences" between "the machinery of tenses" and "that of personal pronouns" (p.225). He described Egocentric as a language "in which properties *are* located in individuals in the same way as events are located in times by means of tenses" (p.225). However, while Prior thought tense logic to be of fundamental metaphysical significance, he did not believe the same to hold of Egocentric. He wrote,

"Tense logic is for me, if I may use the phrase, *metaphysically fundamental*, and not just an artificially torn-off fragment of the first-order theory of the

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<sup>11</sup> A. Prior, 'Egocentric Logic', Chapter XVII in his *Papers on Time and Tense: New Edition* ed. P. Hasle, P. Øhrstrøm, T. Braüner, J. Copeland), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.225.

earlier-later relation. Egocentric logic is a different matter; I find it hard to believe that individuals really are just propositions of a certain sort, or just 'points of view', or that the real world of individuals is just a logical construction out of such points of view." (p.232; see also pp.219-20)

So Prior groups modality and tense together in respect of their metaphysics. Prior is neither a realist about times nor about possible worlds. Against that, I would group selves and times together in respect of their metaphysics, and contrast both of them with the right metaphysics of modality.

Fine formulates - though he explicitly refrains from endorsing - the view that Prior's language Egocentric *is* of metaphysical significance. Fine is interested in "first-personal realism", which for him is a form of aspectual realism, and he suggests that such a realist "should not accept the reality of selves".<sup>12</sup> Fine is of course very well aware that the properties that hold of a time are not essential to it. It may in fact be sunny now, but this present time could exist without being a time at which it's sunny. In this respect, times are unlike possible worlds. Selves also do not have their properties essentially: you and I could have had different properties from birth, and even earlier.

Fine's first-personal realist has to make some sense of identities such as "I am Kit Fine", as thought or uttered by Kit Fine, in a way consistent with not accepting the reality of selves. Fine suggests that, for the first-personal realist, this apparent identity should be regarded as "restricting egocentric reality to the experience of experiences that only KF can have" (318). The background supposition here is that for each subject, there are token experiences that only that subject can have. The realist about subjects, whose position I endorse, could of course agree that there are such experiences, but would suggest that token conscious events, and even consciousness itself, cannot be elucidated without already incurring a commitment to subjects or selves who enjoy the experiences. Whatever genuine phenomena underlie the motivation for the first-personal realism Fine formulates, they should be accommodated at the level of modes of presentation of events, properties and objects, and not by distinctions in reality itself. Nonetheless, Fine's characterization of what he

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<sup>12</sup> *Modality and Tense: Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), in particular the essay 'Tense and Reality', at p.312.



at one point calls “First-Personalism” is certainly of interest when we come to consider the taxonomy of possible positions in this area, part of which can then be diagrammed thus:

Non-constructionist, realist view of:	Prior	Fine’s ‘first-personalist’	Peacocke
Possible Worlds	No	n/a	No
Times	No	n/a	Yes
Selves	Yes	No	Yes

To summarize the point we have now reached in this discussion: there are indeed operators for which the Williams-like inference fails, but that fact cannot support Lichtenberg. Subjects of consciousness are not entities constructible from materials that do not already involve subjects of consciousness. When the Williams-like inferences fail and without commitment to non-constructed entities (as in the modal case, on my view), they cannot give a model for the case of subjects of consciousness. So Lichtenberg’s revenge fails. Descartes remains vindicated against Lichtenberg’s objection.

Williams makes a further comment on Descartes’ *Cogito* in this passage:

“The objection I have been discussing (viz. Lichtenberg's - CP) tries to find a fact which is less substantial; but that, too will have to be capable of being regarded from the third-personal perspective if it is to be an objective fact, and the mere perspective of consciousness no more gives us a way of getting to that kind of objective fact, than it gives us a way of getting to Descartes’s more substantial fact. This is not a verificationist point... it is a question about the coherence of the conception, of what it is one is invited to conceive” (100).

What is the argument here? Suppose for the sake of argument we grant Williams's thesis that any objective fact must be capable of being regarded from a third personal perspective. That is a thesis about the metaphysics of the mental, a claim about the

relations between being an objective fact and the third-personal perspective. We should distinguish between

- (1) Metaphysical principles that hold of some domain of entities; and
- (2) The conditions for a subject to think about, or to otherwise mentally represent, elements of that domain.

The conditions for thought in (2) do not in general require knowledge or beliefs about the metaphysical principles of kind (1). Williams seems to write as if they do. There are however many examples in which thought about some domain exists without the subject knowing or even so much as thinking about or representing the metaphysical principles that hold of that domain.

One straightforward example is perception of physical objects and events, and of their properties and relations. Animals and very young children enjoy perceptual states and events whose correctness conditions concern objects and events in the physical world, and concern their properties and relations. It is a metaphysical truth that these physical items and properties are in general mind-independent, and in particular exist independently of perception of the objects and their properties; but this fact is not something that needs to be known by or represented by the perceiver. Reflection on the correct metaphysics of what one is perceiving or thinking about is something much more sophisticated than such primitive spatial perception. It does not need to be present for perception with objective content to occur. This point has been made in several recent writings on perception.<sup>13</sup>

Perception is only one of many such cases. The general phenomenon here is that of relation-based thought or mental representation. Sometimes a subject can think about something in virtue of standing in a certain relation to it, and that relation does not at all require that the subject have a correct conception of what is involved in being that thing's being what it is. If the thinker has any conception of such matters at all, she may even be radically mistaken, entirely consistently with still thinking about that object or state. We have long accepted this point as applied to physical particulars, properties and relations. It applies equally to the mental too – even more

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<sup>13</sup> See my paper “Does Perception Have a Nonconceptual Content?”, *The Journal of Philosophy* **98** (2001) 239-64, especially the last paragraph; and the extended discussion in T. Burge, *Origins of Objectivity* (Oxford: OUP, 2010).

saliently, because it is clear that a thinker stands in special relations to her own mental states and events, relations that allow her to think of them in distinctive ways.<sup>14</sup>

We must indeed have an account of thought that makes it possible to conceive of mental events and of subjects as accessible from the third person perspective. If Descartes had a general conception of thought and of the mental that would make it impossible, his account is objectionable. But there is no such commitment simply in holding that a subject can make a possibly knowledge-generating transition from thinking (in Descartes' broad sense) to the conclusion that he exists.

There is much more to be said about Williams's discussion, but there is no room here, so let us return to the *Cogito*. The account I have offered of the soundness of the *Cogito* differs from those neo-Humean accounts that say they find something sound in it. On Parfit's moderate reductionist view of subjects of consciousness, as he explicitly notes, the *Cogito* is sound, but only because of the way we talk. In *Reasons and Persons*, Parfit writes, "We do in fact ascribe thoughts to thinkers. Because we talk in this way, Descartes could truly claim, 'I think, therefore I am'." (p. 226). Earlier in the same book, Parfit writes, "A Reductionist can admit that, in this sense, a person is what has experiences, or the subject of experiences. This is true because of the way in which we talk." (p. 223). Parfit diverges from Lichtenberg only in adding that observation about the way we talk to a fundamentally subject-free view.

On the view I am advocating, Descartes' *Cogito* is sound not merely because of the way we talk. The conclusion of the *Cogito* concerns a subject whose existence is not reducible to something else. I argued that it is not, on my view, even correct to make the weaker claim that the licensed conclusion is only that some subject or other is thinking, and not necessarily me. The sound conclusion that can be reached by the *Cogito* goes beyond this because the *Cogito* employs distinctive ways of thinking of conscious states, including thinking itself, that can be employed in thinking about a mental state or event only by the subject of that state or event, and in virtue of being the subject of the state or event.

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<sup>14</sup> There is further discussion of these points and their significance in my paper "Relation-Based Thought, Objectivity and Disagreement", in a Special Issue on Concepts, ed. E. Lalumera, *Dialectica* 64 (2010) 35-56.

In *Reasons and Persons*, Derek Parfit does address Williams' response to the Lichtenberg objection, and writes after his own discussion that "Lichtenberg's objection to Descartes thus survives" (226). Parfit's strategy is to agree that some kind of relativization is needed in response to Williams's argument, but that the relativization required does not attribute mental states and events to irreducible subjects of experience. Parfit offers, instead of relativization to a subject, these formulations:

"In the particular life that contains the thinking of the thought that is expressed by the utterance of this sentence, it is thought: . . .

or

In the particular life that is now directly causally dependent on body A, it is thought: . . ." (226)

As Parfit notes, this will require a subject-free elucidation of the notion of a life.

In 'Subjects and Consciousness', I argued that subjects are already involved in what makes an event conscious. Identity of subject over time cannot be reduced to subject-free relations and entities. If that is correct, then the kind of intermediate relativization Parfit suggests will not solve the problem.

I would make the same point if a reductionist about subjects aims to use relativization to brains or other causal bases of a subject. Two subjects may in exceptional cases be associated with the same brain. Some conceivable split-brain cases could be like that (even if actual split-brain cases are not). In such conceivable cases, we would need to use the notion of a subject in characterizing the relativization, on pain of insufficiency in solving Williams' problem, since in these cases, a relativization to brains would not meet the purpose. I conjecture that any form of relativization that actually suffices involves subjects directly or indirectly in a way that the reductionist cannot accommodate.

I turn now to the issues of entitlement and certainty. Are the transitions in (1) – (3) ones to which Descartes was entitled, and can they yield any kind of certainty? Not everything ensured by the metaphysics of a subject matter and by the nature of the concept employed in a thought is thereby known to those who think about the subject matter. So these are certainly questions that go beyond those already addressed.

Two further premisses would suffice to explain why the transitions in the *Cogito* do not merely lead to true judgements, but also lead to knowledge. We have several times noted that the concept *thinks* has an individuating tie to the first person in the present tense. Any plausible account of the nature of that concept entails that to possess it involves taking one's own conscious thinking as conclusive reason for self-applying the concept of thinking in the present tense. This first person character of the concept can be accommodated on several different theories of concepts in general. On conceptual role theories, it can be written in as part of the specification of the role of the concept, the role which, if those theories are true, individuates the concept. On theories that say that concepts are individuated by their fundamental reference rules, the fundamental reference rule can be formulated so as to imply that someone's consciously thinking at a given time suffices by itself for that person to fall under the concept at that time. (Whichever of these approaches to concepts, or some other, is adopted, there will also be the task of elucidating predications of other objects, at other times, too.)

The other premiss that contributes to the status of the *Cogito* as knowledge-yielding is the principle that if someone judges a content on grounds that are, as a matter of the nature of one or more concepts in the content, conclusive grounds for judging the content, then the content so judged is knowledge. This is a principle we accept in other cases, for concepts at some distance from the psychological and the first person. I refer the reader to earlier discussions.<sup>15</sup>

I will not discuss here the very strong indubitability that Descartes claimed for the *Cogito*, for it would take us too far off track. I just note that there are more modest notions of rational first level certainty on which one can be rationally certain of some transition if a thinker's willingness to make the transition is built into the very identity of the concepts involved. This is plausible both for the step from (1) to (2) and for the step from (2) to (3) in the *Cogito* as I have formulated it. For such rational first level certainty, these claims about the connection between concept identity and certainty do

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<sup>15</sup> See especially the epistemological principle linking knowledge of a content with those sufficient conditions for judgement of a content which are specified in possession conditions for concepts contained in the content: *A Study of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), at p. 157ff.. A version of this principle, and also its rationale, survives the change from possession-condition theories of concepts to concepts as individuated by fundamental reference rules.

not themselves need to be known by the thinker in question, let alone indubitable. They need only to be true.

I call this kind of certainty rational first level certainty because it may well fall short of absolute indubitability. A philosophical thinker might come to doubt that a concept really has the status of having the willingness to make a certain transition built into its identity. A thinker may also doubt the connection of this property with rational certainty. So I am not sure absolute indubitability can be secured from the resources I am deploying; nor is it obviously desirable that it should be. So I am not supplying everything Descartes wanted on the epistemic side.

All the same, if we accept the positive accounts I have been offering, we can move from the consciousness of thinking to rational, knowledgeable self-ascription of thinking, one that has what I called first level certainty. This still constitutes a limited defence of Descartes against Lichtenberg. The defence rests on an array of principles from different parts of philosophy. It relies on principles of metaphysics, in its treatment of conscious mental events and their relations to subjects. It relies on principles about the nature of concepts. It relies on principles linking the individuation of concepts to entitlement and to knowledge. All these contribute to the explanation. I doubt that we could defend the *Cogito* without them. But they are also principles we need elsewhere. They have not been constructed *as hoc* simply to validate the *Cogito*.

This defence is limited in other respects too. The defence does not show that the thinker is an immaterial, immortal object. In fact I argued earlier that subjects, as conceived in this very defence of the *Cogito* as conceived in (1) - (3) must be something material. Nor of course does the argument establish that the subject who is known to be thinking must be a Strawsonian person.

Descartes defended as 'evident' another claim that goes beyond 'Cogito ergo sum'. In the *Meditations*, Descartes follows his statement of the *Cogito* with something I have sometimes heard called 'the second *Cogito*'. He writes,

Is it not one and the same 'I' who is now doubting almost everything, who nonetheless understands some things, who affirms that this one thing is true, denies everything else, desires to know more, is unwilling to be deceived, imagines many things even involuntarily, and is aware of many things which apparently come from the senses? Are not all these things just as true as the fact that I exist, even if I am asleep all the time, and even if he who created me

is doing all he can to deceive me? Which of all these activities is distinct from my thinking? Which of them can be said to be separate from myself? The fact that it is I who am doubting and understanding and willing is so evident that I see no way of making it any clearer. But it is also the case that the 'I' who imagines is the same 'I'. For even if, as I have supposed, none of the objects of my imagination are real, the power of imagination is something which really exists and is part of my thinking. Lastly, it is also the same 'I' who has sensory perceptions, or is aware of bodily things as it were through the senses. For example, I am now seeing 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; what is called 'having a sensory perception' is strictly just this, and in this restricted sense of the term it is simply thinking.<sup>16</sup>

Here Descartes seems to be saying that his knowledge that it is he, one and the same subject, who affirms, and also denies, and also desires, and also seems to see, is as secure as the knowledge that he exists. He says it is 'evident', and even if he who created him is doing all he can to deceive Descartes, he will not succeed in deceiving Descartes about this. Can this second *Cogito* also be validated by the metaphysics and epistemology of conscious subjects that I have presented?

Suppose we have a subject *s* who is:  
imagining something at *t*  
willing something at *t*  
seeming to experience something at *t*.

We can make use of a plausible principle about subjects also proposed in 'Subjects and Consciousness', a principle stating what co-consciousness of states and events consists in:

(CC) Co-consciousness of mental events *a* and *b* occurring at the same time *t* consists in *a* and *b* being events in the awareness of the same subject, as elements of that subject's single total state of consciousness.

If (CC) is correct, then the imagining, the willing and the seeming-experiencing of our subject *s* at *t* are all co-conscious. By parallel reasoning to that which we used in the

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<sup>16</sup> *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Vol. 2*, p.19.

discussion of the original *Cogito*, our subject can now rationally and knowledgeably judge “I’m imagining and I’m willing and I’m seeming to experience”. So our subject is indeed in a position to know that it is one and the same thing, himself, that imagines and wills and seems to experience.

I offer this as a defence of Descartes’ second *Cogito*. Again, the defence relies extensively on theses in the metaphysics of the subject, including (CC), and the nature of concepts together with their link with epistemology.

The treatment in this paper is just a first step into this territory. The next step should be a consideration of whether the principles appealed to above can themselves be explained by deeper considerations.