Seventeenth-century
Responses to
the Meditations

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Introductory philosophy courses tend to include a section on the Descartes of
the first two Meditations; that is, Descartes the pure epistemologist. This sort
of focus reflects the prevalence in past Anglo-American Cartesian scholarship
of treatments of epistemological issues from the Meditations such as skepticism
concerning the senses (see chapter 2), the cogito (see chapter 3), and the problem
of the circle (see chapter 8). The subtitle of the Meditations (in the second edition
published in 1642) also highlights demonstrations of “the existence of God and
the distinction of the soul from the body,” and the particular metaphysical argu-
ments there for the existence of God (see chapter 7) and for mind–body dualism
(see chapters 4 and 11) are familiar fare for philosophy scholars and students
alike.

More recently, however, commentators have criticized the preoccupation with
abstract features of Descartes’ epistemology and metaphysics, and have drawn
attention to his own concern to provide a method for scientific inquiry and to
establish metaphysical foundations for his own form of mechanistic science. Here
the proposal is to read the Meditations in light of both Descartes’ account of the
method for scientific investigation in his Discourse on Method and his discussion of
the details of his mechanistic science in the Essays accompanying the Discourse and
in his Principles of Philosophy.

I have nothing against this proposal. Indeed, I concur in Margaret Wilson’s
judgment that “the increased interest in the whole range of Descartes’ writings –
including, particularly, the “scientific” ones – is one of the greatest improvements
in Cartesian scholarship in recent decades” (Wilson 1999b: 17). I would also note
that recent Anglo-American scholarship is in this respect just beginning to catch
up with the early modern reaction to Descartes, which emphasized the Discourse
and Principles at least as much as, and sometimes more than, the Meditations. For
instance, the Discourse is most important for the discussion among later Cartesians
and anti-Cartesians of the doctrine of the bête machine, according to which
non-human animals are mere mechanisms devoid of any sensory thought or feeling
Descartes argued for this doctrine most explicitly in that text, where he claimed in Part Five that the fact that animals lack language provides sufficient reason to think that their operations do not differ in kind from the operations of a watch (Discourse on Method, AT iv, 55–60; cf. AT vii, 229). Moreover, the point of departure for most early modern discussions of Cartesianism in academic circles was the Principles rather than the Meditations (see the articles on the influence of the Principles in Armogathe and Belgioioso 1996). Here it is telling that Spinoza introduced one of his pupils to Descartes’ system by providing a summary more geometrico of portions of the Principles (a summary which became Spinoza’s first published text in 1663).

But though the Meditations was not as dominant in the early modern period as past scholarship and current teaching may seem to indicate, the treatment there of various epistemological and metaphysical issues did have a distinctive impact on the seventeenth-century reception of Descartes. My intent here is to highlight the particular issues from the Meditations that both defenders and critics stressed in the half-century or so following Descartes’ death. An appreciation of the historical importance of these issues will hopefully contribute to a balanced assessment of the significance of the Meditations (cf. the discussion of Descartes’ early modern reception in Lennon 1993).

First, however, we need to have a better sense of what distinguishes this work from the Discourse and Principles. It must be admitted initially that several familiar elements of the Meditations (1641) are both anticipated in the Discourse (1637) and repeated in the Principles (1644). Thus, Part IV of the Discourse and Part I of the Principles both mention the so-called “method of doubt” (to be distinguished from the four-part method sketched in Part III of the Discourse), the certainty of the cogito, and the so-called truth rule, according to which all clear and distinct perceptions are true. Even so, Descartes wrote in 1638, in a somewhat misogynist vein, that he merely mentioned without explaining in detail “the arguments [raisons] of the skeptics” in the Discourse since the details “did not seem proper for inclusion in a book where I wished even women could understand something while the most intelligent would also find enough material to occupy their attention” (AT i, 560). Though Descartes did say more about the “arguments of the skeptics” in the Principles, his comments there leave out the more detailed consideration of the problems of the “evil genius,” the possible deceptiveness of God, and the possible circularity of the justification of the truth rule that is found in the Meditations and the accompanying Objections and Replies (on the relation of the latter to the former, see chapter 1).

The Discourse anticipated and the Principles repeated the famous cogito argument in Meditation II. Indeed, the label is drawn from these other works, which use, as the Meditations does not, the Latin cogito ergo sum (in the Principles) or the French je pense donc je suis (in the Discourse). What the Meditations contributes, however, is an especially subtle version of the cogito argument that is more clearly
linked than the versions in the *Discourse* and the *Principles* to the truth rule. In particular, the claim in Meditation II that “this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind” indicates more clearly than *cogito ergo sum* that the argument is tied to the (clear and distinct) perception of the truth of a proposition and that the certainty of the perception is indexed to the time at which that proposition is perceived. The point about the temporally indexed nature of the certainty is important in light of Descartes’ claim in the *Second Replies* that his doubt covers only “knowledge of those conclusions which can be recalled when we are no longer attending to the arguments by means of which we deduced them” (AT vii, 140; cf. 245–6).

Finally, there is the theistic and dualistic metaphysics of the *Meditations*. Once again, the basic features of this metaphysics are present in the *Discourse* and *Principles*. But whereas such features play only a supporting role in these texts, they are front and center in the *Meditations*. This helps to explain the fact that when early modern supporters and critics considered Descartes’ arguments for the existence of God and mind–body distinctness, they tended to focus on the versions of these arguments in the *Meditations*. As I indicate below, moreover, the account of the nature of ideas that is crucial for these arguments (cf. chapter 6) was a prominent issue among the later Cartesians.

In contrast to the *Discourse*, which was first published in French and includes disparaging remarks concerning traditional education, the *Meditations* and *Principles* were both Latin texts clearly intended for an academic audience. This is especially evident in the case of the *Principles*, which was written in textbook style. But even in the case of the *Meditations*, Descartes attempted (without success) to enlist the help of the Paris Theology Faculty in promoting his work in the schools. Moreover, he reported to a correspondent that he was heartened by the fact that his Jesuit friend, Denis Mesland, saw fit to adapt the *Meditations* “to the style that is commonly used for teaching” (AT iv, 122).

The project of making the *Meditations* suitable for the schools continued after the death of Descartes in the work of the German-born and Dutch-educated Cartesian Johannes Clauberg (1622–65) (on Clauberg, see Verbeek 1999a). In 1648, Clauberg had helped Frans Burman (1628–79) compose the notes of Burman’s interview of Descartes at his home in Egmond; these notes have come down to us as the *Conversation with Burman*. Clauberg later facilitated the importation of Dutch Cartesianism into the German universities, having been appointed to teaching posts in Herborn and Duisburg. It was while in Duisburg, in 1658, that Clauberg published his *Paraphrasis*, a commentary on Descartes’ *Meditations*. In following the order of the *Meditations*, Clauberg included a discussion of the issue of methodological doubt so prevalent at the beginning of this text. This issue was particularly sensitive for Dutch critics of Cartesianism (for this point, see Verbeek 1992). Already during his lifetime, Descartes had been condemned in both Utrecht and Leiden for proposing in the *Meditations* a sort of doubt that undermines both a traditional Aristotelian scholasticism that starts with trust in
the senses and an orthodox Calvinism that starts with faith in the authority of scripture and the testimony of the Holy Spirit. In his *Defensio cartesiana* (1652) and *Dubitatio cartesiana* (1655), Clauberg sought to defend Descartes against these charges by emphasizing the limited therapeutic role of doubt in removing unfounded philosophical prejudices. These texts stress that doubt is not to be extended to religious or practical matters. Even so, the suggestion there that philosophy can be cleanly separated from theology and practical life was widely criticized by opponents of Cartesianism, and even was at some odds with Clauberg’s own attempt to portray doubt as something that helps to renew the health of a diseased soul (see Verbeek 1999b: 118f).

There was a very different treatment of Descartes’ methodological doubt in the work of one of the most famous and controversial figures of the period, Baruch Spinoza (1632–77). In the introduction to his summary of Descartes’ *Principles*, Spinoza noted the famous objection that given the claim in the *Meditations* that we cannot be certain of anything prior to knowledge of God, Descartes is caught in a circle. For he cannot be certain of a proof of the existence of God without being certain of the premises of that proof, but also cannot be certain of the premises prior to demonstrating God’s existence (cf. chapter 8). Spinoza mentioned Descartes’ response that doubt does not extend to those clear and distinct perceptions to which we attend, but noted that “this answer does not satisfy some people.” The alternative answer he proposed on Descartes’ behalf was that doubt depends on an inadequate conception of God, and that this doubt can be removed once we form a clear and distinct conception of him (Spinoza 1985: 236). But since the hyperbolic doubt in the *Meditations* seems to call into question even our clear and distinct conceptions, it is not clear that we can trust such conceptions. In his mature writings, however, Spinoza attempted to sidestep the problem of circularity by rejecting the gap between the clarity and distinctness (or what he also called the adequacy) of conceptions and their truth. In the *Ethics*, this result is said to follow from the fact that our adequate ideas are just God’s ideas insofar as he constitutes the essence of our mind. Since God’s ideas must be true in the sense of agreeing with their objects, our adequate ideas must also be true in this sense (Spinoza 1985: 472). Thus, Spinoza emphasized that anyone who has an adequate idea of a thing cannot doubt the truth of that thing (Spinoza 1985: 479).

This line of reasoning indicates a fundamental metaphysical disagreement between Spinoza and Descartes. Whereas more orthodox Cartesians such as Clauberg emphasized the theological orthodoxy of the move in the *Meditations* from the existence of the self as a finite *res cogitans* to the existence of an infinite and transcendent God, Spinoza took the decidedly different path of arguing that God is the only substance, and that all finite objects, including our own minds, are modes of that substance. Given this argument, there is no room for Descartes’ starting-point of a skeptical self disengaged from external reality. Instead, we have in Spinoza a finite mind that thinks God’s thoughts insofar as that mind is simply
a particular expression of God as thinking substance. Spinoza did allow that we have ideas that are false in the sense that our mind lacks other ideas in God that are required for complete understanding (Spinoza 1985: 472f). However, what he took to be impossible was the skeptical suggestion in Meditation III that God could make us go wrong even with respect to ideas that we understand completely (AT vii, 36). For Spinoza, this is just the unintelligible possibility that God makes his own adequate ideas to be false.

Whereas Spinoza objected to Descartes’ use of hyperbolic doubt, other critics objected that Descartes and his followers did not take such doubt seriously enough. A case in point is provided by the French skeptic, Simon Foucher (1644–96). Foucher’s main response to Cartesianism is in a 1675 Critique of the first volume (of two total volumes) of the Search after Truth of the French Oratorian, Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715). In this text, Foucher took issue with various “suppositions” and “assertions” from the Search that purportedly are contrary to Malebranche’s own method for finding the truth. Foucher raised his objections from the perspective of a moderate Academic (as opposed to a more extreme Pyrrhonian) skeptic; indeed, his Critique is written in the form of a “Letter by an Academician.” One skeptical argument that is particularly prominent in this text is directed against the Cartesian view in Malebranche that we perceive bodies by means of ideas. Foucher urged that since Malebranche followed Descartes in thinking that these ideas are modes of mind, and since both adhered to the view that mind is a substance distinct in nature from body, no ideas can resemble bodies, and thus no ideas can represent their true nature (Foucher 1969: 44–50; for discussion of this argument, see Watson 1966). Foucher also took skeptical consequences to follow from Malebranche’s purported endorsement of Descartes’ doctrine that necessary and eternal truths derive from God’s free will. For Foucher, this doctrine leaves open the possibility that God could change these truths at any moment (Foucher 1969: 30).

In a 1675 response to Foucher, added to the second volume of the Search, Malebranche countered with the caustic observation that “when one Critiques a book, it seems to me that it is necessary at least to have read it” (Malebranche 1958–84: ii, 249). He emphasized in particular that Foucher had failed to notice that he had devoted a section of his first volume to a refutation of the view that the ideas that represent bodies are modes of our mind. This is the section where Malebranche defended his thesis of “the vision in God,” according to which we perceive bodies by means of ideas in God’s intellect that serve to represent them. Malebranche also protested to Foucher that he never had endorsed Descartes’ doctrine of the creation of the eternal truths. Indeed, he emphasized in later writings that this doctrine is in fact incompatible with the thesis of the vision in God insofar as the latter requires that necessary and eternal truths are grounded in uncreated ideas in God’s intellect rather than in the divine will (see Malebranche 1980: 617f). For Malebranche, the sort of voluntarism present in Descartes’ created truths doctrine is unacceptable insofar as it supports the
view of God as an arbitrary tyrant whose action is not guided by rational and moral norms.

Malebranche’s thesis of the vision in God also turned out to be incompatible with the more traditional Cartesian account of ideas in the work of his main Cartesian critic, Antoine Arnauld. Arnauld drew from the *Meditations* the view that the “objective reality” of our perception of an external object is simply the internal “form” of that perception that serves to relate it to that object (Arnauld 1990: 21, modeled on Descartes’ remarks in AT vii, 101ff). Malebranche offered a somewhat weak response to Arnauld’s claim that Descartes identified ideas with our perceptions. However, his main objection was that such an identification leads to skepticism insofar as it deprives us of any means of determining that our ideas correspond to the external world. Malebranche insisted that his own view that these ideas are archetypes for God’s creation of the objects they represent eliminates this sort of skepticism since, so conceived, the ideas must correspond to their objects (cf. Jolley 1990: 65f).

There is some analogue here of Spinoza’s response to skepticism. Though Malebranche insisted on the transcendence of God and thus rejected the Spinozistic conclusion that our minds are modes of God, he nonetheless shared with Spinoza the view that Descartes’ radical skepticism is unthinkable given that our knowledge is rooted in God’s own ideas. This turn away from Descartes is admittedly not evident in the *Search*, which includes a discussion of method that endorses the view of the *Meditations* that the search for truth must begin with a confrontation of the supposition that God is a deceiver (see Malebranche 1980: 480ff). In later writings, however, Malebranche started with the argument that the ideas involved in our perception of necessary and eternal truths must be necessary and eternal features of God’s own mind.

Another sort of response to skepticism emerged out of the Foucher–Malebranche exchange. One of Malebranche’s friends, the French Benedictine Robert Desgabets (1610–78), took it upon himself to defend Cartesianism against Foucher’s attack even before Malebranche had a chance to respond. In a 1675 *Critique of the Critique*, Desgabets attempted to support Malebranche by arguing that it follows from the fact that we have an idea of the external world that such a world exists, and that the immutability of necessary truths is consistent with the fact that they derive from God’s free will (Desgabets 1675: 115–22 and 72–4, respectively).

Malebranche was not pleased with the discussion in Desgabets’ *Critique* since it falsely implied that he identified ideas with our thoughts and that he accepted Descartes’ doctrine of the creation of eternal truths. Moreover, Desgabets’ remarks were too terse to render his own position fully intelligible. However, he provided a more complete sketch of his distinctive brand of Cartesianism in an unpublished “Supplement” to Descartes’ *Meditations* (included in Desgabets 1983–5). In this commentary, Desgabets took Descartes to task for two principal “faults” connected to the use of methodological doubt at the beginning of the *Meditations*. The first fault is in failing to see that our idea of extended substance must correspond to an
object that exists external to our mind. Since Desgabets identified this substance with the essence of extension, and since he held that we cannot think of an object that has no essence, he concluded that we can think of extended substance only if it exists. In Desgabets’ view, then, the doubt of the existence of extended substance in Meditation I is much too strong insofar as it allows for the unintelligibility of our thoughts about the material world (see Schmaltz 2002: ch. 3).

Descartes’ second fault was in claiming in Meditation II that it follows from the *cogito* that our knowledge of mind does not depend on body. Desgabets’ argument begins with the Aristotelian premise that time is the measure of motion. Since the thoughts involved in the *cogito* are temporal, they must be measured in some way by motion. But they could be measured in this way only if they are united to motion. Thus, the *cogito* itself requires the union of our thoughts with motion, a union which itself requires the existence of bodies in motion. Here there is a concern to refute what Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) later called Descartes’ “problematic idealism,” that is, the view that we can have knowledge of inner experience that does not require the existence of outer objects. Kant’s famous “Refutation of Idealism” involved the claim that our knowledge of determinate temporal relations among our inner states presupposes the existence of spatial objects. In contrast, Desgabets’ less familiar refutation depends on the claim that by its very nature the temporality of our thought requires a connection to motion (see Schmaltz 2002: ch. 4).

It must be said, however, that these issues concerning methodical doubt and the implications of the *cogito* were not always the most prominent in discussions of Cartesianism in the decades following Descartes’ death in 1650. Indeed, the focus in Catholic countries was more on the implications of Cartesian physics for theological doctrines, and in particular the doctrine of the Eucharist. In his *Fourth Objections* to the *Meditations*, Arnauld had anticipated these later disputes by questioning Descartes about the consistency of his denial of sensible qualities in bodies distinct from modes of extension with the Catholic teaching that the “species” of the Eucharistic elements remain after the conversion of the substance of the elements into Christ’s body and blood (AT vii, 216–18). In later correspondence, Arnauld also asked Descartes for an explanation of how the Cartesian identification of a body with its extension is consistent with the Catholic doctrine that Christ’s body is present in the Eucharist without its local extension. These somewhat abstruse issues played a role in the placement of an edition of Descartes’ writings on the *Index* in 1663 (see Armogathe and Carraud 2001). They also were prominent in a 1671 decree against the teaching of anti-Aristotelian philosophy in France that was subsequently used to harass Cartesians in French universities (see Schmaltz 2002: ch. 1).

However, attention shifted to more familiar issues from the *Meditations* with the publication in 1689 of a *Censure of Cartesian Philosophy* by the French cleric and scholar, Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630–1721). Like Foucher, Huet was a skeptic, and like Foucher again, he was brought to a critical view of Cartesianism through a reading of Malebranche. In Huet’s case, it was Malebranche’s disdain for
humanistic learning that prompted a negative reaction to Cartesianism (as shown in Lennon 2003). In the Censure, however, Huet attacked Descartes directly. He included a critical discussion of issues in Descartes’ natural philosophy such as the identification of matter with extension, the void, the origin of the world, and the cause of gravity. However, the first two of the eight chapters of the Censure, which constitute nearly a third of the total text, concern Descartes’ views on methodical doubt, the cogito argument, and the criterion of truth. Huet offered a barrage of skeptical points to counter these views, including the claim that neither the natural light nor clear and distinct perception provides a reliable criterion of truth, that the transition in the cogito argument from I think to I exist is subject to doubt, and that Descartes’ suggestion that God can do the impossible makes any complete escape from doubt impossible.

Huet’s Censure drew an international response from the Cartesians. However, Huet singled out one in this group as “the Prince of the Cartesians” (for Huet, a term of abuse), namely, the French Cartesian Pierre-Sylvain Regis (or Régis) (1632–1707). As in the case of Huet’s Censure, a good portion of Regis’s Response to that text focused on epistemological issues. Regis countered Huet’s objection to the cogito argument by holding that the connection between thought and existence is known not through discursive argument but rather “by a simple introspection of the mind” (Regis 1691: 50). Moreover, Regis insisted that Descartes simply identified the light of nature with clear and distinct perception, and that he correctly claimed that neither can deceive when properly used. On his reading, Descartes’ “merely hyperbolic” doubt never brings reason itself into question. Regis claimed that not even Descartes’ suggestion that God is the cause of eternal truths can render dubitable our intellectual apprehension of those truths.

The historical significance of Huet’s Censure is revealed not only by the reaction it received from Regis and other Cartesians, but also by a 1691 Formulary imposed on the philosophy faculty at the University of Paris that condemned various propositions, including several drawn from Descartes. In contrast to the earlier focus on the implications of Cartesian physics for Eucharistic theology, the initial propositions of this Formulary emphasize the need for radical doubt in the search for truth, the dependence of our knowledge of God on clear and distinct perception, and the possibility that God is a deceiver. The fact that Huet had highlighted all of these issues supports the hypothesis that his work is responsible for the shift to the emphasis in the 1691 Formulary on Cartesian epistemology.

The Formulary also includes propositions drawn from Jansenist theology. This theology derives from the posthumously published Augustinus (1640) of Cornelius Jansenius (1585–1638). In this text, Jansenius called for a return to the emphasis in Augustine on the importance of the workings of grace in the salvation of the elect, and a turn away from the tenet of the Catholic theology of the Jesuits that our will is free to accept or reject the divine offer of grace. The Jesuits were influential in the French court, however, and it was due to pressure from the French government that Jansenius’ work was condemned in a series of papal bulls during
the 1650s. This official rejection of Jansenism is reflected in the condemnation in the 1691 Formulary of a proposition that takes freedom to consist merely in freedom from constraint, and not freedom from necessity. Though Cartesianism is not directly implicated here, French critics commonly charged that Cartesian philosophy is allied with Jansenist theology against the interests of both church and state (for more on the context of the 1691 Formulary, see Schmaltz 2004).

This theologico-political line of attack against Cartesianism in Catholic France contrasts in an interesting way with an earlier attack against this movement in the Calvinist United Provinces, which resulted in a 1676 condemnation of Dutch Cartesians in Leiden. I have mentioned the objections that Dutch critics offered to the method of doubt during Descartes’ own lifetime. This context serves to explain the fact that the 1676 Leiden Condemnation mentioned the same sort of Cartesian appeal to hyperbolic doubt found in the 1691 Paris Formulary. But whereas the latter linked Cartesianism to the Jansenist denial of undetermined human freedom, the former took Cartesians to task for holding that the human will is “absolutely free and undetermined.” What was behind the charge in the Leiden Condemnation was the suspicion that Descartes’ insistence in Meditation IV that the will is wholly unbounded leads to the theological view, heretical among Dutch orthodox Calvinists, that we can obtain salvation through our own efforts. It is interesting that some Dutch Cartesians responded to this line of objection by claiming that Meditation IV requires only freedom from constraint and not freedom from determination: the very position condemned in the Paris Formulary!

There were further criticisms of Cartesianism in the work of the German philosopher, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716). Leibniz had previously had a friendly correspondence with Malebranche’s critic, Foucher, and, after learning of the Censure, he proposed to Huet that he add Leibniz’s own objections to Cartesianism in a future edition of this text. Whereas Huet tended to emphasize the inadequacies of the epistemology of the Meditations, however, Leibniz’s most famous objections concern the natural philosophy of the Principles, and in particular Descartes’ account there of the laws of motion. Yet he also took issue, in a 1679 letter, with Descartes’ treatment of two issues mentioned in the subtitle of the Meditations, namely, the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. With respect to the first issue, Leibniz charged in this letter that Descartes’ God “is something approaching the God of Spinoza” insofar as God has neither will nor understanding (Leibniz 1989: 242). We have seen that Spinoza spoke of God’s adequate ideas, but Leibniz had in mind Spinoza’s claim in the Ethics that no ideas pertain to God as substance, since all ideas are modes that follow necessarily from God’s nature as a thinking thing (Spinoza 1985: 434f). This Spinozistic conclusion may seem to be far from anything in Descartes. In comments in his Replies to Objections to the Meditations, however, Descartes did emphasize that since God is the indifferent cause of truth and goodness, divine action is not directed toward any pre-determined ends (see AT vii, 431–2, 435ff). For Leibniz, this consequence
of the doctrine of the creation of the eternal truths detracted as much from God’s moral goodness as the purported implication in Spinoza that effects follow with “blind necessity” from God. As Malebranche had insisted earlier, so Leibniz claimed that in order to be praiseworthy, God’s action must be directed by considerations of moral goodness determined by his intellect.

With regard to the issue of immortality of the soul, Leibniz held in his 1679 letter that what Descartes had to say about this “is useless and could not console us in any way” (Leibniz 1989: 243). Descartes himself admitted that he had shown in the *Meditations* only that the destruction of the body does not entail the annihilation of the soul, and not that God cannot destroy the soul by his “absolute power” (AT vii, 154). This explains why the promise in the subtitle of the first (1641) edition of the *Meditations* of a demonstration “of the immortality of the soul” was changed in the second (1642) edition to a promise of a demonstration of “the distinction of the human soul from the body.” However, Leibniz objected that even if Descartes had established that the substance of the soul cannot perish, he would not have provided all that is required for the sort of immortality that is of moral concern to us. This is so since “immortality without memory is completely useless to morality, for it upsets all reward and punishment” (Leibniz 1989: 243). The emphasis here on the need for memory explains Leibniz’s later reaction to the theory of personal identity in the work of John Locke (1632–1704). Locke had added a section on personal identity to the second (1694) edition of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in which he argued that personal identity consists in sameness of consciousness. In his *New Essays* on Locke’s text (largely completed by 1704, but not published until 1765), Leibniz responded that though the appearance of identity through consciousness is necessary for personal identity, it is not sufficient. What is further required is a “real, physical identity” that involves the continued existence of the substance of the soul that has consciousness (Leibniz 1981: 236). In this way, Leibniz attempted to combine the stress in Descartes on the persistence of substance with the emphasis in Locke on the continuation of consciousness for a more adequate account of our immortality (for more on the development of Leibniz’s views on this issue, see Wilson 1999c).

The fact that metaphysical issues raised in the *Meditations* were important for Descartes’ reception elsewhere on the Continent is indicated by the report of Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) that in 1696 in Naples “one had begun to cultivate the *Médiations métaphysiques,*” and that in order to claim that someone was a great philosopher, one had to say that that person “understands René’s *Médiations.*” The metaphysics of the *Meditations* did indeed play an important role in discussions of Cartesianism in Italy during the first few decades of the 1700s. In particular, it provided material for the dispute between two Neapolitan figures, Paolo Mattia Doria (1661–1746) and Francesco Maria Spinelli (1658–1752). Doria started as a Cartesian, but came to hold that the Cartesian system leads ultimately to the Spinozistic conclusion that God and creatures constitute
one unified being. Doria’s conclusion – interestingly similar to a line that F. H. Jacobi (1743–1819) later took against Kant (see Beiser 1987: ch. 2) – was that the only way to defeat Spinozism is to reject reason and to embrace religious faith. Spinelli responded on behalf of the Cartesians by emphasizing that the Meditations starts not with Spinoza’s all-encompassing infinite substance, but rather with a finite substantial thinking thing that realizes its limitations by way of doubt. Thus Descartes was led to the distinction of the self from a perfect God, just as he was led toward the end of the Meditations to distinguish our finite mind from body (on the Doria–Spinelli debate, see Belgioioso 1999: chs 3–4).

The importance of the metaphysics of the Meditations for the reception of Descartes is illustrated by one last event in Paris. In a stunning reversal of the antipathy for Cartesianism reflected in its 1691 Formulary, the University of Paris adopted a set of statutes in 1720 that incorporated Descartes’ writings into the curriculum (see Jourdain 1862–6: ii, 173). The primary author of the statutes was Edmond Pourchot (1651–1734), a member of the Paris philosophy faculty who was a target of the earlier campaign against Cartesianism (see Schmaltz 2004). Pourchot had been one of the first to introduce the physics of Descartes’ Principles to university students at Paris. However, his statutes emphasized the value not of Descartes’ physics but rather of a metaphysics in the Meditations that has served “to illustrate the wondrous doctrine of Plato” and “to move it closer to Christian doctrines.” We see here the culmination of an earlier campaign by various French Cartesians to defend Descartes by associating him with the Christianized form of Platonism in Augustine. But the metaphysics of the Meditations won the day in eighteenth-century France at just the time that Cartesian physics was beginning to be replaced on the Continent by the physics of Newton’s Principia mathematica.