

Memory in the *Meditations*

1. At least one problem of memory in Descartes's *Meditations* has been widely acknowledged since the work was first published. In the Fifth Meditation, Descartes draws a distinction between the certainty of clear and distinct perceptions to which we attend and that of those we remember having had. While I cannot but be certain of clear and distinct perceptions in the moment, "I can convince myself that I have a natural disposition to go wrong from time to time in matters which I think I perceive as evidently as can be" (7:70; 2:48),¹ if I am, like an atheist geometer, "unaware of God" and, so, unaware that God is no deceiver. Some of Descartes's objectors picked up on this remark and were understandably puzzled. They worried that without having proven that God is not a deceiver, the meditator cannot rely on his memory of his demonstration of the existence of God, let alone that God is not a deceiver. Antoine Arnauld (author of the Fourth Objections) is perhaps the first to suggest that there is a worry of circularity (7:214; 2:150). Descartes somewhat curiously responds by restating the "distinction between what we in fact perceive clearly and what we remember having perceived clearly on a previous occasion" (7:246; 2:171). And he goes on: "To begin with, we are sure that God exists because we attend to the arguments that 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. This would not be sufficient if we did not know that God exists and is not a deceiver" (ibid.). This line of defense resurfaced in the 20th century, and was quickly dispatched, for it certainly seems that in proving the existence of God the meditator aims to validate his faculty of reasoning and not simply his memory.² Following this move, more recent interest in the Cartesian Circle has focused on this problem of circularity rather than memory: How can Descartes establish that God exists and is not a deceiver, thereby validating his faculty of reason, without relying of the very faculty of reasoning that

¹ Passages from Descartes's writings will be cited internally as follows (Descartes (1996) Volume: page; Descartes (1984-

² See Doney (1955). Frankfurt (1962) takes issue with Doney's efforts on Descartes's behalf.

he aims to validate?³ My aim in this paper is *not* to reintroduce memory into the problem of understanding the Third Meditation argument for the existence of God. Nor will I focus on the distinction suggested by Descartes's remarks, between occurrent intuitions within a piece of reasoning and memory of having reasoned. Instead I want to attend to some puzzling instances of the meditator's memory, and the way those memories drive the argument of the work. That is, I want to consider just how memory *works* throughout the *Meditations* to adduce just how Descartes's conceives of memory. I begin by laying out instances of the meditator's memory at work, and raising some questions about the nature of Cartesian memory and its epistemic role. What is the distinction between remembering and repeating a thought? If remembering is not simply repeating a thought, then what is involved in properly remembering? In particular can we remember properly while adding or shifting content, say, in virtue of articulating relations between ideas? If so, what is the relation between remembering and reasoning, since both would then involve relations of ideas? These questions become most salient in consider what we might call the meditator's creative recollections in the Third and especially the Sixth Meditation. After briefly considering what little Descartes does say about memory, and showing it is of little help, I consider two other strategies for addressing those questions: an analogy with innate ideas, and attending to role that other thinkers play in one's own recollections. I argue that while the analogy of innate ideas provides some insight into Descartes's account it does not resolve epistemic issues with the recollection of one's own experiences that are intrinsically personal. To resolve these issues, I suggest we consider how others hold us to account for what we remember, for instance, by maintaining public records. In so far as we are reading the *Meditations* along with the meditator, we can keep him honest as he recollects his past thoughts. There is thus a public aspect to the conception of recollection and, so perhaps of reasoning, in the *Meditations*.

³ For more recent discussions of the Cartesian Circle, see Della Rocca (2005), Loeb (1992), Newman and Nelson (1999) and van Cleve (1979).

2. Let me begin by noting some seemingly unremarkable rememberings of the meditator. The *Meditations* begin with the meditator's recalling what he took to be true and juxtaposing those beliefs with his current doubts, and this same juxtaposition gets inverted as the First Meditation concludes with the meditator asserting that he "must make an effort to remember" that all his beliefs can be called into doubt (7:22 ; 2:15). The Second Meditation begins from the meditator's memory of the findings of the First, alluding to the "serious...doubts into which I have been thrown as a result of yesterday's meditation" (7, 23-4; 2, 16), and then going on to reassert its conclusion: "I will suppose then, that everything I see is spurious. I will believe that my memory tells me lies, and that none of the things that it reports ever happened. I have no senses. Body, shape extension, movement and place are chimeras. So what remains true?" (7:24; 2:16). (Of course, already things are starting to get remarkable: the meditator's memory tells him lies?!?) The Third Meditation in turn seems to begin with the recollection of the insights of the Second — the meditator asserts he is "a thing that thinks: that is, a thing that doubts, affirms, denies, understands a few things, is ignorant of many things, is willing, is unwilling, and also which imagines and has sensory perceptions" (7:34; 2:24). And he remarks that the certainty of this truth might well signal a general rule for arriving at certainty: if he perceives an idea clearly and distinctly, then it must be true.

As I just suggested, while these memories seem unremarkable, there is something odd going on. They seem unremarkable because we readers have no cause to suspect them: they appear accurate; they repeat instances of the meditator's train of thought that we have read before. But if we are paying attention, something is not quite right. What is this about believing his memory tells him lies? How can he go forward while relying on the conclusions of his skeptical arguments if that is the case? Why does he trust his 'discovery' that he knows he is a thinking thing?

We might be able to skirt around these questions by simply denying that the meditator is remembering his prior conclusions. He doesn't exactly state that he is remembering. We readers

simply assume he is, since *we* are remembering his previous claims; and we are certainly encouraged to do that, as the meditator on occasion repeats almost *verbatim* what has come before. But this very repetition makes it hard to tell whether the meditator himself *is* remembering. That is, is the meditator calling his previous conclusions to mind? Or is he having the same thought once again, repeating his thoughts, as it were? And this ambiguity brings me to the first puzzle: What is the difference between remembering what one thought and repeating one's thoughts?

But let us continue on through the *Meditations*. The first clear cut instance of a memory comes just after the provisional assertion of "a general rule that whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true" (7:35; 2:24) in the Third Meditation. The validity of this rule is undermined by the memory of the First Meditation's skeptical arguments. The meditator notes: "Yet I previously accepted as wholly certain and evident many things which I afterwards realized were doubtful" (7:35; 2:24), and in particular his recalling the worry that God might be a deceiver threatens the stability of the rule. The meditator here is clearly not simply repeating the argument but rather calling it to mind again, and what distinguishes his act of remembering is the fact that he relates the argument, and its conclusion, to other thoughts, and in particular his thought of himself. Indeed, it is this relation that impacts the stability of his occurrent certainty that he is a thinking thing. So quite quickly we see a second puzzle about memory: for Descartes, reasoning is just the intuition of the connections between ideas — rather than the syllogisms of the Aristotelians⁴ — and at least sometimes the ideas we relate to one another include ideas of memory. What is the difference between the relations of ideas constituting reasoning and the relation of ideas involved in the way we relate memories to occurrent thoughts? Here's one way to think about a difference. In reasoning, we simply assume the content of the ideas being related to one another, and we ask what the relation between them is. With memory we aim to bring previous ideas to mind once again. But what is it to bring an idea to mind once again? If we

⁴ The *Regulae* offers a defense of this alternative conception of logic, which is then followed through in the *Discourse* and *Meditations*. See Gaukroger (1989) for a full discussion.

think that it is to bring an idea to mind just as it was originally, we are brought back to the first puzzle, and we might well think of reasoning as essentially involving memory. If there is some difference between memory and having an idea again, how does the accuracy of the remembered idea figure in way that idea relates to other ideas?

The issue of accuracy becomes salient quickly. Though the reconstruction of his skeptical arguments in the Third Meditation certainly tracks those in the First Meditation, some points do get highlighted here that were not in the First. For instance, the meditator couches the final skeptical argument of the First Meditation, that which undermines the validity of those truths we take to be self-evident, as a concern about his *nature*, a term not invoked in the First Meditation.⁵ And then, the meditator introduces a whole taxonomy of ideas and asserts that he has been taught by nature that his ideas resemble those things outside him from which they are derived, as if these were assumed from the outset, and the example used to illustrate this point -- his idea of himself sitting by the fire -- is the same one as in the First Meditation. Yet neither a resemblance thesis nor a taxonomy of ideas was ever there articulated. How ought we to understand what is going on here? Is the meditator adding new content to his former ideas? Or is he simply attending to other, previously unremarked, previously held ideas? Maybe one ought not to make too much of this. It is easy enough to explain the introduction of the resemblance thesis and the theory of ideas as somewhat stylistically awkward intrusions into the method of analysis Descartes has chosen for the *Meditations*, intrusions which nonetheless make explicit assumption in play in the First Meditation.

Nonetheless, these questions become pressing once again in the Sixth Meditation. There, after the false start of looking to the imagination for proof of the existence of bodies, the meditator once again turns to his memory: "I will go back over all the things which I previously took to be perceived by the senses and reckoned to be true; and I will go over my reasons for thinking this. Next I will set out by

⁵ Lex Newman leverages this passage to great effect in Newman (1994)

reasons for subsequently calling these things into doubt. And finally I will consider what I should now believe about them” (7:74; 2:51). What we might expect is a review of the First Meditation, and we do get that in a sense. However, the differences between this Sixth Meditation synopsis and the First Meditation are striking, much more than are the subtle differences in the Third just noted. Nor do they seem quite so easy to explain away. The paradigm examples of sensory perception here are those of our own body and of how external bodies affect our body "in favorable and unfavorable ways". While the former figures in a small way in the First Meditation — the meditator does remark that he is sitting by the fire in his dressing gown, “stretch[ing] out and feel[ing] his hand, and he does conclude by “consider himself as not having hands or eyes or flesh or blood or senses” — it is not front and center the way it is here. The latter, sensations of pain and pleasure, along with the sensations of "hunger, thirst, and other such appetites, and also of physical propensities towards cheerfulness, sadness, anger and similar emotions"(7:74; 2:52) the meditator goes on to mention, do not figure there. The emotions are mentioned in passing in the theory of ideas of the Third Meditation, but it is not clear he is talking about the same thing there. Nor does it seem that there is any earlier mention of the special way in which his body is his own, something highlighted in this part of the Sixth Meditation. Indeed in light of this reconstruction of his previous beliefs about the senses, the meditator raises a new skeptical argument about our sensory knowledge -- the argument from cases of phantom limbs. This way of characterizing his initial sensations seems to come out of nowhere. What are we to think? Again: Is the meditator introducing new content into his reasoning? Or is he simply attending to other, previously unremarked, previously held ideas or aspects of them?

Yet considering these two cases side by side, the questions become even more compelling, because it is far from clear that the two, let me call them, creative recollections are compatible with one another. In particular, the sensations Descartes introduces in the Sixth Meditation — sensations of a body as our own, pain, pleasure, hunger, thirst, emotions — do not satisfy the resemblance

account of representation. Indeed, the point of introducing them is to set up the alternative account of sensory representation that Descartes will develop later in the meditation. Maybe this isn't so much of a problem, since already in the Third Meditation there are doubts about the validity of the resemblance account: "...even if these ideas did come from things other than myself, it would not follow that they must resemble those things" (7:39; 2:27). But it also seems that these new ideas threaten the taxonomy of ideas: Are pleasure and pain, hunger and thirst, ideas properly speaking, that is, "as it were images of things"? Would it not be a problem if the meditator's creative recollection of what he used to think ran counter to a basic element of his self-understanding, what it is to be a thinking thing, to have thoughts, of varying kinds, which when themselves analyzed allow for a method of avoiding error? It is critical to the success of the project of the *Meditations* that our recollections reflect our past thoughts properly. But what is a proper reflection of our past thoughts? An answer that requires a perfect accuracy will not do here. While at the outset of the *Meditations*, it is not clear how to distinguish remembering from simply repeating the same thought again, by the end of the work, it seems clear that Descartes does take there to be a difference, if what the meditator does is any reflection of Descartes's views. The meditator's recollection of his past thoughts is both clearly taken to involve bringing those thoughts to mind again and, at the same time, altering them in some way. Part of the puzzle of understanding Cartesian memory involves making sense of this.

Let me add another piece of the puzzle about memory to the mix. At the beginning of the Fourth Meditation, memory is fully in play — the meditator uses the past tense in reviewing what he has done "during the past few days" (7:52-53; 2:37), and this seems a shift from the ambiguity of simply restating his earlier conclusions. And memory becomes particularly salient at the end of that meditation. There, in articulating the method for avoiding error, the meditator notes:

What is more, even if I have no power to avoid error in the first way just mentioned, which requires a clear perception of everything I have to deliberate on, I can avoid error in the second

way, which depends merely on my remembering to withhold judgement on any occasion when the truth of the matter is not clear. Admittedly, I am aware of a certain weakness in me, in that I am unable to keep my attention fixed on one and the same item of knowledge at all times; but by attentive and repeated meditation I am nevertheless able to make myself remember it as often as the need arises, and thus get into the habit of avoiding error. (7:61-62; 2:43)

While at first it can seem as if memory is meant to be a storehouse of items of knowledge, that can't be quite right. For what he remembers here is a principle for guiding his action, and that memory, through repeated use, is transformed into habit, a guide to action that does not require attention any longer. The conclusion of the Fourth Meditation thus suggests that memory is somewhat double sided. On the one side, remembering involves our attending to thoughts we have already had, bringing them to mind once again, even if that involves some revisions; on the other side, memory also includes habits of thought, and so functions as the background against which we attend to our occurrent ideas.

This same dual conception of memory, as functioning as the background against which we have ideas and attending to past ideas, figures in the meditator's ultimate answer to the First Meditation Dreaming Argument at the very end of the Sixth Meditation. There, he notes "there is a vast difference" between dreaming and waking "in that dreams are never linked by memory with all the other actions of life as waking experiences are" (7:89; 2:61). If we find ourselves in a position where we worried about whether we are asleep or awake, we need only "call upon all the senses as well as my memory and my intellect in order to check them" (7:90; 2:62). In the ordinary course of experience, our memory works to ensure the continuity of our experience — we do not perceive things to go in and out of existence — and this background serves, if not to guarantee, then to ensure reliability of our current sensory experiences. If we find ourselves doubting what we perceive to be the case,

however, we can actively attend to our past experiences (as well as our other senses, and reason), to settle how we should epistemically regard our sensations.

So then, to put the pieces of the puzzle all on the table at once: What is the difference between remembering what one thought and repeating one's thoughts? If we take remembering to involve bringing an idea to mind once again, rather than repeating it, it can well be the case that the memory is differs from the idea just as it was originally. What then about accuracy? When we remember things somewhat differently than we originally presented, adding detail, rearticulating ideas, is that a matter of adding new content to the original ideas? Or is it simply attending to other, previously unremarked, ideas? What, if any, are the limits on those additions of detail and rearticulations? What is it to remember properly? Equally, if remembering does admit of some modifications to the idea as it was originally held, what is the relation between the relations of ideas involved in reasoning and those involved in memory? How do the answers to these questions relate to the seeming dual function of memory, of providing the background against which we form occurrent beliefs and of bringing past ideas to attention again?

It is perhaps clear that I think taking memory in a somewhat standard way does not do justice to the way in which memory figures in the *Meditations*. Though I am not clear on just what the standard view of memory is, I suspect that it is a combination of something like Hume's view, an order-preserving collection of mental states or experiences, of a vivacity that has diminished over time, and Locke's, a kind of retrieval of conscious experience had at one time and place, at a different time and place. If memory were a kind of faculty that each individual mind possessed, which served as a storehouse of prior experiences which could be called up at will, the questions that I have marked as arising in the *Meditations* would be *problems* for Descartes. The inaccuracies of the meditator's recollection would at best introduce unjustified premises into the line of argument of the work, and at worst they would introduce a contradiction with an earlier claim, thereby undermining the validity of

the argument. It might well be that there are problems, but it seems to me that we give up too soon in trying to understand how memory works in the *Meditations* and so in Descartes's account of mind, if we simply dismiss them as problems outright.

3. Descartes himself does not say much about memory. Much of what he does say treats memory as a bodily faculty, a matter of traces left in the brain.⁶ We recall previous thoughts when the animal spirits are directed into the brain traces, thereby triggering the same thoughts in the soul. This sort of picture of memory seems of a piece with the storehouse model I just argued is inadequate to our needs. But the meditator is meant to be a pure intellect, not dependent on any body at all. Although remembering is not on the Second Meditation's list of things a thinking thing does, in correspondence Descartes does allude to an intellectual memory distinct from bodily memory.⁷ However, he says very little about in what intellectual memory consists; indeed, he suggests that there is little he *can* say about it "without a great deal of qualification" (2 May 1644, 4:114; 3:233). In the 1648 *Conversation with Burman*, he indicates that intellectual memory is that through which we recognize a sequence of letters (that is, a word) as meaningful (5:150; 3:336f). The most Descartes has to say is what he writes in the *Regulae*. There, in Rules 3, 7 and 11, Descartes is concerned to explain the difference between a simple intuition of the relation between two ideas and a deduction, which involves a continuous sequence of such intuitions. Provided that there is "a continuous movement of thought" (10:387; 1:25) from one intuition to the next through the whole of the deduction, memory can hold the previous intuitions in mind as we work through the sequence of intuitions, and so help to secure the certainty of the whole.⁸ Nonetheless, it does not seem what Descartes offers us here can help us much. His focus is on cases where intuitions are in a continuous sequence, but in the *Meditations*, the meditator's memory works to

⁶ See for instance: *Treatise of Man*, 11:177-179; *Passions of the Soul* aa. 21, 42, (11: 340, 360), and numerous letters including to Mersenne 18 March 1630 (1:134; 3:320); to Meyssonier 29 January 1640 (3:20; 3:143f); to Mersenne 1 April 1640 (3:40; 3:146); and to Hyperaspistes August 1641 (3:433; 3:196).

⁷ See: to Mersenne 1 April 1640 (3:48; 3:146); to Mersenne 11 June 1640 (3:84; 3:148) which is followed up in the next letter to Mersenne 6 August 1640 (3:143; 3:151); to Huygens, 26 April 1643 (3:598; 3:216); to [Mesland] 2 May 1644 (4:114; 3:233); for [Arnauld] 4 June 1648 (5: 192; 3:354); for [Arnauld] 29 July 1648 (5:220; 3:356).

⁸ See (10:387-88; 1:25); (10:370; 1:15); (10:408; 1:37-38).

bridge discontinuities in the line of reasoning. Equally, in the *Regulae*, Descartes acknowledges weakness of memory, and its dependence on both the continuity in thinking and a repetition of the movements of thought through the demonstration, "until I seem to intuit the whole thing at once" (10:388; 1:25). While the way in which repetition effects a habit of thinking can help in understanding the way in which memory can serve as a background against which our current thinking occurs, this point only exacerbates the puzzle of the meditator's creative recollection of his past thoughts. It seems that in virtue of the discontinuity of thinking and the singularity of the thoughts introduced, by Descartes's own lights we ought to be concerned about the accuracy of these recollections.

So, while Descartes does allow for an intellectual as well as a corporeal memory, neither account of memory is particularly well-developed, and the account of intellectual memory is particularly thin.⁹ What he does say suggests that he takes memory to involve bringing to mind once again an idea we previously had. The more recently we originally had the idea, the more likely it is that memory perfectly preserves the original idea, but as the gap between the original having of the idea and our recalling it widens, the less we can rely on our memory. But Descartes has little more to say about the shifts between the ideas as we first have them and our later recollections of them. It seems that by the time he writes the *Meditations*, Descartes has complicated his account of memory a bit, allowing that memory is different from simply repeating an idea and so that some deviation from the idea as originally had is still consistent with proper recollection.

Neither the discussion of the *Regulae* nor that of memory in other works offers any resolution to the issues raised by the way the meditator's memory works in the *Meditations*. In the rest of this paper I want to offer two very different sorts of suggestions for addressing these issues concerning the accuracy of memory. The first suggestion involves considering the meditator's grasp of three innate ideas in the *Meditations*; the second involves considering how other thinkers figure in our checking our

⁹ For a good discussion of the importance of intellectual memory to Descartes's project see Joyce (1997).

memories. Each suggestion has its shortcomings, but perhaps together they can afford a better picture of the workings of Cartesian memory.

4. The first suggestion involves drawing a parallel between the meditator's memory and his articulation of innate ideas.¹⁰ While Descartes does occasionally talk of having innate ideas as a kind of remembering, no doubt alluding to a Platonic account of knowledge as recollection, we have no reason to think that such talk is anything more than an analogy.¹¹ It does not seem as if becoming aware of innate ideas explicitly involves memory. Nonetheless, the meditator's grasp of ideas that are unequivocally innate is of interest for addressing the set of questions regarding the accuracy of the meditator's memory: When we recall things creatively, adding detail, rearticulating ideas, is that a matter of adding new content to the original ideas? Or is it simply attending to other, previously unremarked, ideas? What, if any, are the limits on those additions of detail and rearticulations? What is it to properly remember if there can be variations between our memories and our original thoughts?

The meditator's awareness of the content of his innate ideas does not come all at once. Rather as he progresses through the *Meditations*, the meditator further articulates their content, honing the clarity and distinctness with which they are perceived. In the course of so doing, he compares his current understanding -- his current thought of that innate idea -- with his prior awareness of what must be the same idea. Three cases can illustrate this point.

First, consider the first perception identified by the meditator as clear and distinct, that of the nature of the piece of wax:

But what is this wax which is perceived by the mind alone? It is, of course, the same wax which I see, which I touch, which I picture in my imagination, in short the same wax I thought it to be from the start. And yet, and here is the point, the perception I have of it is a case not of vision or touch or imagination -- nor has it ever been despite previous

¹⁰ I am indebted to Anat Schechtman for suggesting this very helpful point of comparison.

¹¹ See for instance 7:64; 2:44 and Letter to Voetius May 1643, (3:167; 3:222-23).

appearances -- but of purely mental scrutiny; and this can be imperfect or confused, *as it was before*, or clear and distinct *as it is now*, depending on how carefully I concentrate on what the wax consists in. (7:31; 2:21; emphasis added.)

Note that the meditator here implicitly relates his occurrent idea to one he had before, juxtaposing his current grasp of the piece of wax with his previous idea of it: the meditator's earlier idea of the piece of wax was confused, now it is clear and distinct. This juxtaposition presupposes that his idea then and his idea now are one and the same idea: through methodical examination the meditator has come to better articulate the content of that idea. The meditator thus takes it that the idea of the piece of wax has a fixed content independent of his own awareness of, or thinking, that idea. In this case, the meditator's newfound understanding of the piece of wax is not a matter of his adding new content to the idea, but rather of his articulating aspects of that idea to which he did not previously attend.

The second and third examples, from the Third and Fifth Meditations, also implicitly involve comparing the meditator's prior awareness of an innate idea with his current awareness. In the Third Meditation, the meditator revises his idea of himself as a thinking thing. Whereas in the Second Meditation, he took himself to be a thing that engaged in a range of intellectual activities, all of which are ways of thinking: doubting, understanding, affirming denying, willing, imagining and sensing, that was just what it was to be a *res cogitans*. However, in the Third Meditation, the meditator gains a new perspective on what thinking entails:

On the contrary, I clearly understand that there is more reality in an infinite substance than in a finite one, and hence that my perception of the infinite, that is God, is in some way prior to my perception of the finite, that is, myself. For how could I understand that I doubted or desired -- that is, lacked something -- and that I was not wholly perfect, unless there were in me some idea of a more perfect being which enabled me to recognize my own defects by comparison?" (7:45-46; 2:31)

Again, it is clear that he is having the same thought in each instance -- his nature as a thinking thing -- and that he has come to articulate the content of that thought more completely. By this point of the Third Meditation, he has come to understand his nature as finite, and that this very finitude was implicit in his prior self-understanding: doubting implies that he lacks something. From this newly articulated idea of himself, he can further note that he is a thinking thing with an idea of God -- an infinite being lacking nothing -- and more, go on to conclude that God exists as the cause of his own existence as the kind of thing he is. Not only does the newly articulated idea allow for new intuitions of relations between ideas, it also seems that the process of articulating the content of the idea of *res cogitans* involves recognizing just what relations hold between ideas. That is, creative recollection in these cases involves just what Descartes takes to be reasoning.

The third case, from the Fifth Meditation, just confirms these conclusions about how the meditator comes to articulate his innate ideas. There, the meditator further articulates his idea of God, remarking that "it is quite evident that existence can no more be separated from the essence of God than the fact that its three angles equal two right angles can be separated from the essence of a triangle"(7:66; 2:46). Again, his idea of God here is one and the same as the idea articulated in the Third Meditation; the meditator is simply further articulating its content. And again, that articulation is facilitated through the intuitions of relations of ideas -- in this case, of the similarities and differences between his idea of a triangle and his idea of God.

In the case of innate ideas, then, for Descartes, there is sense to be made of further articulating an idea one had before, of attending to aspects of the idea that were not previously remarked, adding detail. In these cases, we take the idea itself to be constant, even while our awareness of its content is not. Moreover, the articulation of an innate idea depends on intuiting the relations between it and other of our ideas.

The analogy Descartes himself offers between memory and innate ideas suggests that we can draw on these features of our awareness of innate ideas to help in understanding memory in the *Meditations*. The case of innate ideas further supports the view that memory for Descartes is not simply a matter of repeating previously thoughts, but rather can involve articulating previously unremarked elements of those thoughts. Moreover, we might think that the re-presentation of ideas in remembering is informed by an awareness of the relations they stand in to other ideas, just as the articulation of the content of innate ideas is facilitated by the intuitions of relations of ideas. However, it also seems that innate ideas are somewhat special cases in that their content is, like the idea of a triangle, true and immutable. That is, innate ideas, in virtue of being innate ideas, have a fixed, and true, content, which can be clearly and distinctly perceived. As such, they contain within themselves the standard for proper articulation. Some of the workings of the meditator's memory might be assimilated to this model. For instance, in the cases of the reworking of the third sceptical argument in the Third Meditation, it seems right to say that appealing to the cause of my nature is an explication of what was left largely implicit but was nonetheless contained in the First Meditation. But in this case, it is worth highlighting, the idea being explicated is one that *is* innate: the idea of my nature as a thinking thing.

Can the approach help us in cases where the ideas at issue are not innate, where it is not clear whether idea as re-presented in recollection was implicit in the original thought, as seems to be the case in the Sixth Meditation? There, the shift in paradigm sensations — from those likened to images in a painting to pains, pleasures, hungers and thirsts — is so dramatic that what is re-presented in recollection hardly resembles the original idea at all, let alone was implicit in it.¹² It does not seem that the cases of creative recollection, and in particular that of the Sixth Meditation, where the most

¹² I very much intend here to suggest that problem is analogous to the problem Descartes poses for sensations, rejecting the resemblance account with which he begins and intimating another account, founded on their role in building a system that serves to preserve a healthy human being, but I cannot say much more than that here.

serious issues of accuracy arose, can be adequately addressed by appealing to an analogy with innate ideas. In these cases, the meditator is recalling his own experiences, and it seems that these ideas the previous ideas are intrinsically confused and obscure.¹³ Without the prospect of clear and distinct perception, it still seems that there is a real question of how to assess the accuracy of one's recollections. Is there any way to put Cartesian memory on a stronger epistemic footing? To address this question, I turn to my second suggestion.

5. The second suggestion involves thinking a bit more about memory, and in particular, about the role of others in validating our own recollections. It may seem somewhat surprising to consider the role of other thinkers with regard to the meditator -- an apparent paradigm of a solitary thinker. However, in a passage cited above -- in which the meditator further articulates his nature as a thinking thing as including an idea of God -- it becomes clear that the meditator depends on at least one other being: God. Indeed that moment in the Third Meditation serves as inspiration for Annette Baier's view that "persons essentially are second persons" (Baier 1985a, 77), where second persons exhibit a "dependency on another for standards of correctness, and the capacity for meaningful acts as distinct from passive undergoings" (Baier 1985a, 79). Baier argues "Cartesian thinking is intrinsically subject to correction and improvement, but for this purpose the only communication Descartes finds necessary is communication between a thinker and a perfect thinker, and communication between one time and another within the history of one finite imperfect thinker's progress of thought" (Baier 1985a, 78). Our bearing the mark of the craftsman, an idea of a perfect being, is, for Descartes, "in some way prior to my perception of the finite, that is, myself" (7:45-46; 2:31). For this idea is that through which we doubt and desire, that is, through which we recognize our own imperfections, that there is something we lack. God, or a perfect being, provides the standard of correctness against

¹³ In the case of sensory experience and the special relation in which I stand to my body, for instance, Descartes is clear that though there is no doubt that we experience sensations and that we are united with a body, we can in fact say very little about what those experiences tell us about the natures of things. See the exchange with Elisabeth of 1643 (3:660-668; 3:683-85; 3:690-95. ED Correspondence 61-71.)

which we measure ourselves.¹⁴ However, the appeal to God for providing the standard of correct thought is inadequate for addressing the problems of the real workings of memory in the *Meditations*, just as was the analogy with innate ideas. The problem that keeps arising again and again is that of how to make sense of the Sixth Meditation re-presentation of sensory experience. In this case, it is hard to see by what standard is the meditator articulating his earlier ideas, and it is far from clear that an appeal to God as a perfect being can provide that standard.

There is, however, another feature of personhood that Baier finds in Cartesian persons, and that is “the capacity for meaningful acts as distinct from passive undergoings” (Baier 1985a, 79).

According to Baier, this capacity is realized in memory, but importantly, it is realized in a particular kind of memory: recollection, as distinguished from retention. Whereas retention involves retrieving and repeating previous thoughts, recollection involves giving “a historical account of one's past.”¹⁵ Recollection involves something more than simple retrieval and repetition; it involves situating one's thoughts within a narrative that unfolds so that a range of events are situated with respect to each other in space and time, and equally, inferentially. It does not passively take the narrative to be

¹⁴ In another strand of the argument, she notes that, what she terms, the self-consciousness (as opposed to simple consciousness) distinctive of persons is second personal in this way: “Persons are self-conscious, know themselves to be persons among persons” (Baier 1985a, 89). This view too is found in Descartes. She argue that the Second Meditation thinker is not Descartes's last word about human beings —the Sixth Meditation, the *Passions*, the narrative of the *Discourse*, as well as the marking of the passage of time, days and nights, in the *Meditations* themselves, all recognize the very embodied nature of Cartesian human beings, and along with it the ways in which we engage with one another linguistically and otherwise to create our form of life, complete with norms.

¹⁵ Note that Baier seems to take it that retention is what is at issue in the worries about circularity of the proof of God's existence. And this seems correct: the atheist geometer cannot be certain that he is retaining his past proofs properly:

The ability to give a historical account of one's past, to recall when one learned something, whether it was before or after some other past event, is a different ability from that mere availability in the present of a truth one is certain one learned at some unspecified time in the past. Descartes believes that God's veracity guarantees that, if he believes that he has already proved, it matters not when, a difficult theorem, then he will not err if he takes its truth as established and moves on to new theorems. He need not keep repeating the proofs he has already on some previous “day” seen to be sound. But memory as recollection is precisely the repeating and ordering of old things. The intellectual memory Descartes wants validated is not repetition or recollection, but that retention which obviates the need for repeat performances. Human thinking things, however, have both sorts of memory, and the whole of Descartes' “analytic” style of philosophizing exercises the ability to provide a narrative account which recounts in order, what has already been. (Baier 1985a, 81-82)

foretold, but rather through recalling engenders the relations between events. It is in this way that the historicizing of one's thoughts is very much an act that gives them meaning.

Baier's distinction between retention and recollection helps in distinguishing the different ways in which the memory does seem to figure in the *Meditations*. In the early stages of the work, it isn't clear which the meditator is engaged in: initially, he doesn't mark his thoughts as coming to him from the past so much as he repeats the same steps; that changes with his consideration of the piece of wax, when he comes to recognize that he plays an active role in his representations of things. That self-consciousness of the activity of thought carries forward and he begins to re-present and further articulate his prior arguments and conclusions. The Fourth Meditation ends, recall, with his "making himself remember" his method for avoiding error and as he begins to situate himself with respect to his past, and we can see this moment as marking that remembering too is an act of thinking, and not something that simply involves an attention to what one has passively undergone and retained, but rather treats the retaining itself as active. Unlike with innate ideas, none of this can require appeal to an idea with content independent of the meditator, for what the meditator recalls is his *own* experience, ideas which are by definition dependent on the thinking thing he is. For the same reason, it cannot be that the veracity of his recollections of his experiences depends on his being related to an infinite and perfect being. So while we are still left with questions regarding the accuracy of the meditator's memory, they can be reframed: What guides the meditator's historicization of his thoughts, his actively remembering? What serves as the basis for his "making [him]self remember" one thought rather than another? What serves as the standard whereby his re-presentations of his earlier thoughts can be judged as appropriate or not? Are we pushed (or pulled?) inexorably to think that Descartes's meditator is simply the most unreliable of narrators, given that it is not clear that he

has justification for relying on his memory of his prior thoughts? Or is there a way to retrieve a measure of accuracy of the meditator's memory?¹⁶

To this end, let me consider memory in a bit more detail.¹⁷ As I just noted, the meditator's memories cannot be grounded in the same way innate that ideas are because they are intrinsically his own; they are of his experiences. Insofar as memories are personal in this sense, we quite reasonably think of memory as something intrinsically essentially individual. Not only are they proper to us and not to anyone else, in being proprietary in this way, they can serve to constitute us. Locke, famously, defines sameness of person as "sameness of a rational being," by which he means that "as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past Action or Thought, so far reaches the Identity of that Person" (ECHU 2.27.9). One way of thinking about memory simply presupposes that our memories by definition are our own just by being our thoughts. Who else's thoughts would they be, after all? On this line, Locke's principle of individuation for persons is almost trivial. Our thoughts, over time, constitute us as the persons we are just because each of those thoughts are *our* own thoughts. There is, however, another way of thinking about Locke's account. After all, it is neither the case that *each* thought we have had constitutes us as the persons we are, nor that we are required to call *all* the thoughts we have had to mind to be the same person over time. So, first, we might think that thoughts that are bytes of information do not in of themselves make us the persons we are, and so the retrieval of those bytes (what we ate for dinner on June 30, 1997, for instance) is not central to our being the same person over time. And second, being able to extend our current consciousness backward does not entail recapture every thought, every episode of that consciousness that has

¹⁶ There is another direction one might go here. We might recognize that the meditator's memory, whether it is invented or not, to be central to a kind of argument that his experience, the experience of a thinking thing, is in time. Insofar as our memory shapes our experience in this way, it will play an important epistemic role, though one not necessarily related to its accuracy. While I do think that memory in the *Meditations* is meant to reveal the temporality of experience, I will not be developing that line of thought here. For an interesting discussion of this line see Beyssade (1979), especially pp. 159-167 and 320-328.

¹⁷ Much of this discussion is influenced by Baier (1985b).

passed. Rather, recalling our past thoughts involves a certain selectivity, one that is, in some sense, directed, or willful.

This willful selectivity of recollection comes out in considering a variety of failures of calling to mind. I can fail to call to mind something I just do not know. This failure is evidence of a gap in my knowledge, of my ignorance of a particular matter of fact. I can also fail to recall something of which I was once aware. Such a failure constitutes a gap in my memory, but that in itself need not be a problem. I have just suggested that we do not need to be able recall every past episode of consciousness to remain the same person, but even more, it would be somewhat pathological to have a memory with nothing left out. There is a third kind of failure of recollection, however, one that involves a failure to call to mind something that we had meant to keep in mind. We might call this kind of failure a memory *lapse*. These lapses can involve either simply forgetting something or recalling varying details. These failures of memory are lapses because, in remembering, we not only attend to some events rather than others, to some details rather than others, but we also connect those attended-to items with one another. In this way we connect the episodes of consciousness that make up the pieces of our life, and so constitute ourselves as the same person over time. When we forget or misremember something what we lose is not simply the thought but the way in which that thought is connected with other thoughts. It is this last failure of memory that brings out just what willful selectivity of recollection consists in. It involves our attending to some thoughts rather than others, and connecting those thoughts together such that they are made our own.

This way of thinking about memory squares with what I have earlier noted about the way the meditator's memory works. The meditator attends to some thoughts (and aspects of those thoughts) rather than others, and connects them together to weave a kind of narrative of intellectual development. But this account does not yet add much new to our efforts to understand memory in the *Meditations*. For it does not help us to understand how the meditator's memory lapses need not

undermine his epistemic efforts. To address this question I want to consider another feature of memory: the dependence of our private memory on something public.

While we like to think of memory as an essentially private matter -- my memories are my own after all -- this cannot be quite right. For one, we reflexively verify our memories against what is a matter of public record. Our families mark our birthdays and major life events, our passports indicate dates of travel, tax records and contracts verify our employment history, simple receipts confirm our expenses. We can connect up our thoughts any way we want to tell a story about where we have been, what we have done and thought about, but if that story does not square with what our community, with what history, has to say about us, that story will not have epistemic validity. In so far as our recollections demand this public verifiability, they are not entirely private but rather dependent on the public.

This public dependency of memory might seem very hard to square with the *Meditations*, a work with a first personal narrator, whose core philosophical project centrally involves the ownership of one's own thoughts, and the search for a way in which one can establish *for oneself* that at least some of one's own thoughts are true. There does not seem a space within the first philosophy of the *Meditations* through which to appeal to others to provide the standard through which the meditator's own memories of his experiences can be checked and guaranteed. We ought not, however, give up too soon. For the *Meditations* are not a testament of a lone meditator; they are a highly stylized piece of philosophical writing. In the context of the *Meditations*, the work itself, the written record of the *Meditations*, certainly serves as part of history through which to verify the meditator's memories. But it is remarkable that the meditator himself is not the one doing that. Rather, we readers of the work flip back through to the earlier pages, and check the meditator's recollections. We hold him accountable; we ask questions about the basis for his re-presentation of his earlier claims. In this way, the meditator's memories are publicly dependent and held to a standard that we readers supply.

Note, however, that it is not a foregone conclusion what the answers to those questions are. As I noted earlier, one possibility is that the meditator reveals himself to be a wholly unreliable narrator in the Sixth Meditation, that his creative recollection of his earlier beliefs is a bit too creative and loads the dice to set up Descartes's preferred account of sensory representation. But I have also been suggesting another route, taking Descartes's authorial moves to be a matter of design, and so the meditator's creativity to be meaningful in a certain way (to be adduced). That is, we do not simply dismiss the meditator's representations of his past thoughts as mistaken; we take them to merit an interpretation, and in doing so, we also assume that the meditator's own recollections involve an interpretation of a sort.

This point brings me to a second way in which memories cannot be wholly private: they presume a common good, that is, good held in common. History can only serve to verify memories if it is assumed that those who record history are inclined to attend to the same events, the same sort of details as we do. If we privilege different occasions, different properties, we are not going to find ourselves in agreement about what happened. If we are going to try to make sense of the meditator's shifting recollections of his past thoughts, we will try to understand the *reason* for these shifts; we assume that they serve a purpose in the project of the work. What is that end? That Descartes presumes a good held in common between himself and his readers is clear. His demand that his readers meditate along with him is a way of insisting on this common good. But what about the meditator, thinking alone, and, it appears, only for himself. Even the meditator's project presumes a common good. Of course, the meditator is striving for knowledge, but there is no reason to think that knowledge needs to be a common good (especially when the only things we can have knowledge of are a small set of clear and distinct perceptions that are impersonal). But his self-professed aim to "establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last" (7:17; 2:12), and that is most definitely a common good — meant to last not simply through the meditator's own life, but through

generations — and as the *Discourse* makes clear, Descartes sees science as a very public enterprise indeed. We can understand this commitment to a public common good as guiding the meditator's recollection, his re-presentation of his earlier thoughts. That commitment directs his attention to particular thoughts, and ultimately to certain details. As his thinking progresses, so does his project, he can re-attend to what has come before, draw things out that before escaped his attention. And equally, he can be held accountable for those creative recollections by we readers of his work, who share this commitment.

6. The meditator's memory, the way it works throughout the *Meditations* and not just regarding the Third Meditation's proof of God's existence, presents a series of puzzles. For one, it is not clear at the outset just what memory consists in for Descartes, whether it consists in repeating prior ideas or in some way re-presenting and articulating those ideas. I have argued that over the course of the work, it becomes clear that Descartes takes memory to involve articulating the content of one's prior thoughts, attending to details that were not previously remarked and explicating the relations between ideas. This view of memory, however, raises a further puzzle, for it is not clear just what determines whether a memory is an accurate articulation or re-presentation of a prior idea. The meditator's creative recollection of his previous ideas of sensory experience in the Sixth Meditation presented a particular challenge, as his recollection seems to be quite different from his original idea.

An analogy with innate ideas, which Descartes occasionally describes as recollected, afforded a way to begin to address this issue. For the meditator progressively articulates more and more of the content of his innate ideas, just as he articulates and re-presents his recollections. This comparison does provide a helpful model for thinking about memory. In remembering, we do strive to get what we are remembering right, but correctness need not be understood as simply replicating the thought as it was originally held. Just as we are able to further articulate innate ideas by better grasping their relations to other ideas, our recollections benefit from our increased understanding with the passage

of time, both of other ideas and of the relations between those ideas and what we previously thought. Grasping these relations can and does inform our articulations of our prior thoughts, drawing our attention to aspects we had not remarked originally. Equally, the meditator's work in articulating innate ideas demonstrates his commitment to pursue certainty and, in particular, leads him to recognize that he is caused by an infinite and perfect God, of whom he has an idea, whose completeness provides the standard which grounds his own reasoning.

Nonetheless, in there is an important disanalogy between innate ideas and ideas of memory. Innate ideas have content independent of the meditator and admit of clear and distinct perception. That is, they contain their own standard of correctness. Memories, that is, recollections of experiences, on the other hand, are intrinsically personal, and, it would seem, that in at least some cases are inevitably confused and obscure. The meditator, thus, cannot appeal either to his original ideas or to his faculty of reasoning all on its own for the standard of correctness as he further articulates his experiences.

Where then is to be found the measure of accuracy for creative recollections, like those in the Sixth Meditation? I have suggested that the fact that each of us are undertaking the *Meditations* along with the meditator, and so that we share the meditator's commitment to pursue certainty and truth, can serve to put the meditator's memory on a solid epistemic footing. We can make the meditator's shifting recollections make sense in light of this shared commitment. We hold him to account for his articulations, and with our interpretations we provide articulations of the relations of ideas that allow his recollections to relate properly to what has come before. The public aspect of the meditator's memories, along with a shared commitment to standards of reasoning, lends credence to the more creative of the meditator's recollections.¹⁸

¹⁸ I have benefited greatly from the comments of Anat Schechtman at the 2014 Henle Conference at Saint Louis University, as well as from the discussion there. The discussion at the Tahoe Workshop in Early Modern Philosophy was also very helpful, and raised lines of inquiry, including the scholastic views on intellectual memory, that I have not been

Lisa Shapiro
Simon Fraser University

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