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# DESCARTES ON THE OBJECTIVE REALITY OF MATERIALLY FALSE IDEAS

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**Abstract:** “The Standard Interpretation” of Descartes on material falsity states that Descartes believed that materially false ideas (MFIs) lack “objective reality” [*realitas objectiva*]. The argument for the Standard Interpretation depends on a statement from the “Third Meditation” that MFIs are caused by nothing. This statement, in conjunction with a causal principle introduced by Descartes, seems to entail that MFIs lack objective reality. However, the Standard Interpretation is incorrect. First, I argue that, despite initial appearances, the manner in which Descartes understands the proposition that *MFIs are caused by nothing* does not entail that they lack objective reality. Secondly, I argue that Descartes is committed to the objective reality of MFIs because of his quasi-scholastic explanation of MFIs.

In her seminal book, *Descartes*, Margaret Wilson presented an argument designed to show that Descartes held that materially false ideas (MFIs) lack objective reality [*realitas objectiva*].<sup>1</sup> The argument can be stated briefly as follows: In the “Third Meditation,” Descartes introduces the concept of MFIs, and he states that they “arise from nothing.” (AT VII 44; CSM II 30)<sup>2</sup> The statement that MFIs are caused by nothing, when combined with a causal principle also introduced in the “Third Meditation,” seems to yield the conclusion that MFIs lack objective reality.<sup>3</sup> Many authors have followed Wilson’s lead and similarly denied the objective reality of MFIs.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Wilson’s conclusion has become so widely accepted that we may call it “The Standard Interpretation.” I, however, think that the Standard Interpretation is mistaken; that is, I do not think that Descartes held that MFIs lack objective reality, and this is what I will argue.

In the first section of this paper, I will give a brief sketch of what ideas are for Descartes, and I will also present the argument for the Standard Interpretation in more detail. In the second section, I will give analyses of the concepts of material falsity and objective reality in Descartes. Much of the second section will be devoted to arguments for a series of claims necessary to show that the argument for the Standard Interpretation is invalid. In the third section, I will present Descartes' quasi-scholastic explanation of how MFIs do have objective reality despite being "caused by nothing."<sup>5</sup> I will show that the statement "MFIs are caused by nothing" is ambiguous, and the sense in which it must be understood by defenders of the Standard Interpretation is not the sense, which Descartes intended.

### 1. *Cartesian ideas and "The Standard Interpretation"*

Early in the "Third Meditation," Descartes distinguishes ideas from thoughts in general. Thoughts are modifications of an immaterial mind, and ideas are a type of thought. However, Descartes uses the term "idea" ambiguously. "Idea" can be taken in two senses: materially or objectively. As Descartes states: "'Idea' can be taken materially, as an operation of the intellect . . . Alternatively, it can be taken objectively, as the thing represented by that operation." (AT VII 8; CSM II 7) Here I am in agreement with Vere Chappell who holds that the distinction between ideas in the material sense and ideas in the objective sense is the distinction between mental acts and mental objects respectively; and Descartes holds that ideas in the material sense have ideas in the objective sense as their content.<sup>6</sup> For example, when I think of the sun, I have both an idea in the material sense (the modification that my mind undergoes) and an idea in the objective sense (the sun as the object of my thought).<sup>7</sup> The idea in the objective sense is what is presented to the mind when one has an idea in the material sense.

Ideas in the objective sense have a property called "objective reality." In the second section, I will explain more fully what this is, but for now we must be content with a very brief sketch. Wilson states, that "an idea has more or less 'objective reality' . . . depending on the metaphysical category of its object – that is, what it 'exhibits to us.'"<sup>8</sup> And Anthony Kenny states, "insofar as [ideas] represent different things, ideas are said to differ in their objective reality."<sup>9</sup> So, we can at least see that objective reality has *something* to do with ideas in the objective sense.

Descartes also introduces, in the "Third Meditation," as something known by the natural light, a causal principle governing the objective reality of ideas – the "Objective Reality Principle" (ORP).<sup>10</sup> He states: "But in order for a given idea to contain such and such objective reality,

it must surely derive it from some cause which contains at least as much formal reality as there is objective reality in the idea.” (AT VII 41; CSM II 28–9) What this all amounts to, and what “formal reality” is will be explained shortly. For now it suffices to say that ORP places a necessary condition on the causation of ideas, i.e. the cause must have at least as much formal reality as there is objective reality in the idea.

In Descartes’ “Third Meditation” discussion of ideas, he states that there are two types of falsity, one of which is not applicable to ideas considered in themselves: “Now as far as ideas are concerned, provided that they are considered solely in themselves and I do not refer them to anything else, they cannot strictly speaking be false.” (AT VII 37; CSM II 26) For example, my idea of a chimera, considered as an idea, is just as true as my idea of a goat, according to Descartes, because it is equally true that I have an idea of a chimera and that I have an idea of a goat. But there are some non-idea thoughts that can be false; these are called “judgments.”<sup>11</sup> Descartes calls the falsity that can occur in judgments “formal falsity,” and it “consists in my judging that the ideas which are in me resemble, or conform to, things located outside me.” (AT VII 37; CSM II 26) For example, if Descartes were to judge that his idea of a chimera corresponded to some external existent object, then his judgment would be formally false but his idea would not be.

But, Descartes tells us, there is another type of falsity that ideas can have even when no judgment is involved; this is called “material falsity.” The concept of material falsity arises in Descartes’ discussion of the qualities of bodies that he perceived clearly and distinctly – extension, shape, position, motion, substance, duration, and number. Descartes then considers the qualities that are not clearly and distinctly perceived.

But as for all the rest, including light and colours, sounds, smells, tastes, heat and cold and the other tactile qualities, I think of these only in a very confused and obscure way, to the extent that I do not even know whether they are true or false, that is, whether the ideas I have of them are ideas of real things or of non-things. For although, as I have noted before, falsity in the strict sense, or formal falsity, can occur only in judgments, there is another kind of falsity, material falsity, which occurs in ideas, when they represent non-things as things. For example, the ideas which I have of heat and cold contain so little clarity and distinctness that they do not enable me to tell whether cold is merely the absence of heat or vice versa, or whether both of them are real qualities, or neither is. (AT VII 43–4; CSM II 30)

And he states in the “Fourth Replies”: “certain ideas are materially false. As I interpret this claim, it means that the ideas are such as to provide subject-matter for error.” (AT VII 231; CSM II 162) That is to say, if one were to make judgments concerning MFIs, one would be led to error or formal falsity.

From these characterizations of material falsity, we can give a first shot account of MFIs:

M1:  $x$ 's idea  $\phi$  is materially false if and only if (i)  $\phi$  represents a non-thing as a thing,<sup>12</sup> (ii)  $\phi$  is confused and obscure, (iii) because of  $\phi$ 's confusion and obscurity,  $x$  is unable to tell whether  $\phi$  represents a non-thing as a thing,<sup>13</sup> and (iv)  $\phi$  provides subject matter for error in judgment.<sup>14</sup>

I do not think that M1 is correct, as I will argue in Section 2b. But for now it is only important to notice that Descartes seems to think that all so-called "sensory ideas" meet these conditions, and hence are materially false.<sup>15</sup> For instance, take Descartes' example of the idea of cold as representative of MFIs. Assuming, as some Descartes scholars do,<sup>16</sup> that cold is simply a privation of heat, the idea of cold would be an idea that represents a non-thing as a thing. The idea of cold is confused and obscure, and it is confused and obscure to such a degree that the person with the idea of cold cannot tell whether cold is a non-thing or not. Moreover, if one were to judge that the idea of cold corresponds to a quality of extramental objects, then the judgment would be formally false.

The major problem that arises from Descartes' discussion of material falsity, and the one that concerns us in this paper, arises in the following passage:

Such ideas [i.e., MFIs] obviously do not require me to posit a source distinct from myself. For on the one hand, if they are false, that is, represent non-things, I know by the natural light that they arise from nothing – that is, they are in me only because of a deficiency and lack of perfection in my nature. (AT VII 44; CSM II 30)

From this quotation and other relevant passages we have already seen, Wilson gives a simple argument that MFIs lack objective reality.<sup>17</sup> Her argument can be reconstructed as follows:

*Argument 1*

- P1. MFIs are caused by nothing.
- P2. The cause of an idea must have at least as much formal reality as there is objective reality in the idea.
3. Therefore, MFIs have no objective reality.

As I have mentioned, the conclusion of this argument is the Standard Interpretation. Wilson thinks that this conclusion is "an embarrassment" because Descartes' *a posteriori* argument for the existence of God in the "Third Meditation" seems to require that the objective reality of an idea is something transparent or accessible.<sup>18</sup> And Descartes certainly does

seem to hold that transparency is a feature of objective reality: "There cannot be in me an idea of heat, or of stone, unless it is placed in me by some cause, in which there is at least as much reality as I conceive to be in heat or stone." (AT VII 41; CSM II 28) But if we can have ideas which *seem* to present something to us, but which lack objective reality, then there is reason, however slight, to doubt that the idea of God has objective reality at all, let alone infinite objective reality. This is problematic, to say the least.

## 2. *The analyses of objective reality and material falsity*

In the previous section, I presented a vague sketch of objective reality in Descartes. In this section, I will spell out more clearly and in much more detail how Descartes' notion of objective reality is to be understood. Later in this section, I will also examine MFIs more closely.

### 2A. OBJECTIVE BEING AND OBJECTIVE REALITY

Descartes takes the objective being [*esse obiectivum*] of an idea to be the *existence* of some object in the mind.<sup>19</sup> The clearest explanation of this is found in Descartes' replies to Caterus. There he states: "an idea is the thing which is thought of in so far as it has objective being in the intellect," and "'objective being' simply means being in the intellect in the way in which objects are normally there." (AT VII 102; CSM II 74) Clearly, Descartes is speaking of ideas in the objective sense here.

Caterus misunderstands Descartes' claim that something with objective being requires a real cause because Caterus is an heir to a scholastic tradition passed down through Suarez that holds that objective being is merely an "extraneous label which adds nothing to the thing itself." (AT VII 92; CSM II 67)<sup>20</sup> Descartes explains to Caterus that there is a difference between an object as it exists outside the intellect and an object as it exists in the intellect; and Descartes grants that to say of the former that it has objective being in the intellect is surely an extraneous label. As Descartes states,

[I]f anyone asks what happens to the sun through its being objectively in my intellect, the best answer is that nothing happens to it beyond the application of an extraneous label . . . But if the question is about what the idea of the sun is, and we answer that it is the thing which is thought of, in so far as it has objective being in the intellect, no one will take this to be the sun itself with this extraneous label applied to it. (AT VII 102; CSM II 74–5)

Descartes holds that the idea of the sun is the sun having objective being in the intellect. In other words, the objectively existing sun just is the idea in the objective sense.

In the passage above, Descartes contrasts the objective being of the sun with the formal being of the sun. The two notions can be defined as follows:

Definition 1:  $x$  has formal being  $=_{df}$   $x$  actually exists in the world as a substance or a property of a substance.<sup>21</sup>

Definition 2:  $x$  has objective being  $=_{df}$   $x$  exists in the intellect as an object of thought.

For instance, the sun up in the heavens has formal being, whereas the idea of the sun has objective being.<sup>22</sup> Descartes thinks that this distinction also applies to ideas taken in their two senses. An idea in the material sense, “as an operation of the intellect,” has formal being, but the idea in the objective sense, “as the thing represented by that operations,” has objective being.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Descartes thinks that *all* ideas, in the objective sense, have objective being in the intellect; as he states, “the objective mode of being [*modus essendi objectivus*] belongs to ideas by their very nature.” (AT VII 42; CSM II 29) So, Descartes holds O1.

O1: All ideas, in the objective sense, have objective being.

An important issue to be resolved concerns the relation between the objective sun and the formal sun. Several scholars have thought that the relation is one of identity.<sup>24</sup> As Lilli Alanen states, “the similarity or likeness between the idea and the thing it represents can be taken straightforwardly in the sense of identity of the *res* or thing represented and the idea, qualified only by a difference in their ontological status.”<sup>25</sup> Call this the “objective-formal identity thesis.” I take it to hold that when I have an idea of the sun, the very sun in the sky has objective existence in my intellect. This may not be as bizarre as it initially sounds, and it may have some intuitive appeal. After all, we do think that when we have an idea of something, that very something is what we have an idea of; that is, *it* has objective being in our intellect. But there are two reasons for rejecting the identity thesis: the first is that it doesn’t make much philosophical sense, and the second is that Descartes’ texts do not obviously support it.

The first reason is that we clearly have ideas of non-actual but possible things. It follows from Definition 1 that anything non-actual will lack formal being. So, the idea of a non-actual possible cannot be identical to the formal non-actual possible, “for there is no such thing.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, as least in this case, there is no formal-objective identity. And it would seem *ad hoc* to alter the identity thesis to state that there is an identity only when there is both an objective  $x$  and a formal  $x$ .

This point, however, does not show that Descartes did not identify the objective sun with the formal sun; it merely shows that he *should not*

*have*. Unfortunately, his text does not clarify matters much. Let us look at a passage from the First Replies.

“Objective being in the intellect” . . . will signify the object’s being in the intellect in the way in which its objects are normally there. By this I mean that the idea of the sun is the sun itself existing in the intellect – not of course formally existing, as it does in the heavens, but objectively existing, i.e., in the way in which objects are normally in the intellect. Now this mode of being is of course much less perfect than that possessed by things which exist outside the intellect . . . (AT VII 102–3; CSM II 75)

Descartes does state that the “idea of the sun is the sun itself existing in the intellect,” but his language indicates that there are really two distinct things, i.e., the formal sun and the objective sun. He states that the objective sun exists in the intellect “in the way in which its objects are normally there” and that the objective sun exists “not of course formally . . . as it does in the heavens” and the mode of being of the objective sun is “much less perfect” than the formal sun. But perhaps the most forceful statement of the difference between the formal sun and the objective sun occurs when Descartes states, “. . . but I was speaking of the idea, which is never outside the intellect.” (AT VII 102; CSM II 74) Thus, even if Descartes does think that the sun has both formal being and objective being, it should be clear that *the sun as it exists objectively* (“which is never outside the intellect”) is something distinct from *the sun as it exists formally*. However, we must recognize that there is a strong similarity relation between the objectively-existing sun and the formally-existing sun. For this reason, I think that we may attribute to Descartes the less strict thesis that some objectively existing things have formally existing counterparts and vice versa. I define these as follows:

Definition 3:  $\phi^o$  is the objective counterpart of  $\phi^f$  =<sub>df</sub>  $\phi^o$  is the idea of  $\phi^f$ .

Definition 4:  $\phi^f$  is the formal counterpart of  $\phi^o$  =<sub>df</sub>  $\phi^f$  is the formally existing thing of which  $\phi^o$  is the idea.<sup>27</sup>

(Henceforth, I will use “ $\phi^o$ ” and “ $\phi^f$ ” to stand for an idea and its formal counterpart, respectively.) The “counterpart theory” (not to be confused with that of David Lewis<sup>28</sup>) has several advantages over the identity theory: (a) it allows Descartes to hold (which he, in fact, does) that there are ideas with no formal counterpart (e.g., ideas of chimeras); (b) it allows Descartes to say that there are formally existing things with no objective counterpart (e.g., things that have yet to be discovered or thought of); and (c) it allows Descartes to say that  $\phi^f$  only has formal being, and  $\phi^o$  only has objective being. On the basis of (c) and Descartes’ insistence in the “First Replies” that ideas are never outside the intellect, we may attribute O2 to Descartes.

O2: The only kind of being that ideas, in the objective sense, have is objective being.

If ideas can only exist in the intellect, then they can only have the type of being appropriate to objects in the intellect, i.e., objective being.

I have now given a characterization of objective and formal being in Descartes. We must now examine the closely related notion of objective reality [*realitas objectiva*] more closely.<sup>29</sup> In the “Third Meditation,” Descartes states: “In so far as the ideas are simply modes of thought, there is no recognizable inequality among them: they all appear to come from within me in the same fashion.” (AT VII 40; CSM II 27–8) Here Descartes is considering ideas in the material sense as mere operations of the intellect, and ideas in this sense are equal; that is they are all modifications of the mind. Descartes continues:

But in so far as different ideas represent different things, it is clear that they differ widely. Undoubtedly, the ideas which represent substances to me amount to something more and, so to speak, contain within themselves more objective reality than ideas which merely represent modes or accidents. Again, the idea that gives me my understanding of a supreme God, eternal, infinite, [immutable], omniscient, omnipotent, and the creator of all things that exist apart from him, certainly has in it more objective reality than the ideas that represent finite substances. (AT VII 40; CSM II 28)

This is the first mention of objective reality in the body of the *Meditations*, and it is not exactly clear what it is supposed to be. As I mentioned earlier, it appears that it is something very closely tied to representational content. What we can flesh out from the above passage is that an idea may differ from another with respect to their objective reality.<sup>30</sup> But as the passage makes clear, objective reality comes in degrees.<sup>31</sup> So, it would be more appropriate to say that an idea may differ from another with respect to their *degree* of objective reality. However, it should be clear that Descartes is not interested in *individuating* ideas by introducing the notion of objective reality. Rather, he is concerned with showing that some ideas have a greater degree of objective reality than others: The idea of God has a greater degree of objective reality than the idea of finite substances, and both the ideas of God and of finite substances have greater degrees of objective reality than ideas of modes and accidents. But we still do not have much indication what this means.

Thankfully, Descartes begins to clarify what this means in his replies to Hobbes. Hobbes questions Descartes: “M. Descartes should consider afresh what ‘more reality’ means. Does reality admit of more and less?” (AT VII 185; CSM II 130) Descartes replies:

I have also made it quite clear how reality admits of more and less. A substance is more of a thing than a mode; if there are real qualities or incomplete substances, they are things to

a greater extent than modes but to a lesser extent than complete substances [i.e., finite substances]; and, finally if there is an infinite and independent substance, it is more of a thing than a finite and dependent substance. All this is completely self-evident. (AT VII 185; CSM II 130)

In this passage, Descartes is speaking of *formal* reality. But the “ontological hierarchy” that Descartes is introducing applies equally to degrees of objective reality:

There are various degrees of reality or being [*entitatis*]: a substance has more reality than an accident or a mode; an infinite substance has more reality than a finite substance. Hence there is more objective reality in the idea of a substance than in the idea of an accident; and there is more objective reality in the idea of an infinite substance than in the idea of a finite substance. (AT VII 165–6; CSM II 117)

This passage indicates that Descartes holds that degrees of formal and objective reality are *symmetrical*; but it is *in virtue of* an idea’s formal counterpart that an idea has the degree of objective reality it does. That is,  $\phi^o$  has a certain degree of objective reality *because* its formal counterpart  $\phi^f$  has a certain degree of formal reality,<sup>32</sup> but  $\phi^f$  does not have its degree of formal reality because of  $\phi^o$ ’s degree of objective reality. So, we might be tempted to attribute O3 to Descartes:

O3:  $\phi^o$  has  $n$  degrees of objective reality if and only if its counterpart  $\phi^f$  has exactly  $n$  degrees of formal reality.

For example, the idea of the sun has a certain degree of objective reality if and only if the formally-existing sun has exactly the same degree of formal reality. While it is true that the idea of the sun will have the same degree of objective reality that the formally-existing sun has of formal reality, to attribute O3 to Descartes would be a mistake. First of all, some objectively existing things are not going to have formal counterparts (and vice versa). Secondly, if O3 is true, then an idea of a non-actual possible would not have any objective reality because there is no formal counterpart of it. Descartes thinks that only things with formal being have some degree of formal reality.<sup>33</sup> Thus, a non-actual possible would lack formal reality. But certainly Descartes thinks that we may have an idea of a non-actual possible with some degree of objective reality, despite the non-existence of a formal counterpart.<sup>34</sup> So, we should not attribute O3 to Descartes. However, we need to account for the symmetry between degrees of formal and objective reality and the fact that objective reality depends in some way on formal reality. We can attribute to Descartes the more plausible O4:

O4:  $\phi^o$  has  $n$  degrees of objective reality if and only if, if there were a counterpart (of  $\phi^o$ )  $\phi^f$ , then  $\phi^f$  would have exactly  $n$  degrees of formal reality.

There are several advantages to O4. First, because of the counterfactual nature of O4, it yields the result that an idea of a non-actual possible can have some degree of objective reality. Secondly, it is explicit about the relation of dependence between objective and formal reality; the degree of objective reality depends (counterfactually) on the degree of the latter. Finally, it maintains symmetry and commensurability between degrees of formal and objective reality. It is symmetry that is important for Descartes' ORP. Earlier, we saw a rough formulation of ORP, but now, with Definitions 1–4 and O4 in hand, we can give a more detailed and accurate formulation of ORP:

ORP: The cause of an idea  $\phi^o$  must have at least as much formal reality as  $\phi^o$ 's formal counterpart  $\phi^f$  would have if  $\phi^f$  were to exist.<sup>35</sup>

We now have some idea of which things have more objective (or formal, as the case may be) reality than other things, but we are still left not knowing exactly what constitutes one thing's having more reality than another thing. But Descartes has already given us the answer in the passages from the "Replies" to Hobbes, quoted above. He states that an infinite and *independent* substance has more reality than "a finite and *dependent* substance." Moreover, Descartes, who is a finite substance, states, "I *depend* on some being distinct from myself," and "I understand that I am a thing which is . . . *dependent* on another." (AT VII 49, 51; CSM II 34, 35, my emphasis)<sup>36</sup> Thus Descartes is cashing out degrees of reality in terms of degrees of *relative independence*.<sup>37</sup> Both finite substances and modes/accidents depend on God; and modes/accidents depend on finite substances, although the type of dependence is different in the two cases.<sup>38</sup> And this corresponds directly with Descartes' previous explanation of which things have more reality than others.<sup>39</sup> Just as there are three degrees of relative independence (infinite, finite, and modal), so too, there are three degrees of formal reality.<sup>40</sup> And because degrees of objective reality are "inherited" from the degree of formal reality of their formal counterpart, there are only three degrees of objective reality.

We can deduce from our discussion of objective reality and ORP (as Descartes did) that only God can cause the idea of God; only God and finite substances can cause ideas of finite substances; and God, finite substances, and modes/accidents can cause ideas of modes/accidents. This account of the causes of ideas, it should be noted, is quite weak. For instance, it leaves open the possibility of an idea being caused by something other than its formal counterpart; as long as the cause has at least as much formal reality as the idea has objective reality, Descartes' ORP is satisfied. I think that this is an attractive feature of Descartes' theory because it is true that sometimes ideas are caused by something other than their formal counterparts.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, we can have ideas of

non-actual things, and these require a cause no less than an idea of an actual thing. But something non-actual (hence, non-formal) cannot cause something with objective reality according to Descartes.<sup>42</sup> Even though Descartes holds that objective being is “much less perfect than that possessed by things which exist outside the intellect . . . it is not therefore simply nothing,” (AT VII 103; CSM II 75) it is still something that requires a cause, and “the formal mode of being belongs to the causes of ideas . . . by their very nature.” (AT VII 42; CSM II 29) So, the idea of a unicorn requires a cause, but obviously it cannot be caused by its formal counterpart because there is none. Moreover, an idea may be caused *eminently*, by something having a greater degree of formal reality than the idea’s formal counterpart would have.<sup>43</sup>

Another feature of objective reality, and the one that causes problems with respect to MFIs is that the objective reality of an idea is something accessible from inspection of the idea.<sup>44</sup> As Descartes states, “whatever we perceive as being in the objects of our ideas exists objectively in the ideas themselves.” (AT VII 161; CSM II 114) And, “the ideas of heat, or of a stone, cannot exist in me unless it is put there by some cause which contains at least as much reality as I conceive to be in the heat or in the stone.” (AT VII 41; CSM II 28) So, the objective reality of an idea is something that can be “read off” from the idea.<sup>45</sup>

From the features of the objective reality of ideas I have been discussing, we may finally see the proper analysis of objective reality for Descartes.

O5: P’s idea  $\phi^o$  has  $n$  degrees of objective reality if and only if (i)  $\phi^o$  is presented to P, (ii)  $\phi^o$  is such that were it to have a formal counterpart,  $\phi^f$ ,  $\phi^f$  would have exactly  $n$  degrees of formal reality, and (iii)  $\phi^o$  is caused by something having  $m$  degrees of formal reality (where  $m$  is greater than or equal to  $n$ ).

(i) is what I call the “Presentation Condition”; that is, there must be *something* which has objective being and which is such that it is presented or exhibited to the person having the idea.<sup>46</sup> (ii) is the “Correspondence Condition,” which has been stated previously as O4. (iii) is the “ORP Condition.”<sup>47</sup>

I have stated earlier that Descartes thinks that all ideas have objective being/existence. But Descartes is also committed to the fact that all ideas have some degree of objective reality. That is, he is committed to O6:

O6: All things with objective being have some degree of objective reality.

Although there is little *direct* textual evidence that Descartes held O6, he is certainly committed to it if my interpretation of his discussion of formal and objective being, O4, and the ontological hierarchy is correct. We can see this through the following argument: Take any idea in the objective sense,  $\phi^o$

*Argument 2*

1.  $\phi^o$  exists objectively.
2. If 1, then  $\phi^o$  is either an objectively existing substance or mode/accident.
3.  $\phi^o$  is either an objectively existing substance or mode/accident.
4. If 3, then  $\phi^o$  is such that were it to have a formally existing counterpart  $\phi^f$ ,  $\phi^f$  would either be a formally existing substance or mode/accident.
5.  $\phi^o$  is such that were it to have a formally existing counterpart  $\phi^f$ ,  $\phi^f$  would either be a formally existing substance or mode/accident.
6. If 5, then  $\phi^o$  is such that were it to have a formal counterpart  $\phi^f$ ,  $\phi^f$  would have a certain degree of formal reality.
7.  $\phi^o$  is such that were it to have a formal counterpart  $\phi^f$ ,  $\phi^f$  would have a certain degree of formal reality.
8. If 7, then (by O4)  $\phi^o$  has a certain degree of objective reality.
9.  $\phi^o$  has a certain degree of objective reality.

And because  $\phi^o$  could be *any* idea in the objective sense, we get O6: All things with objective being have some degree of objective reality.

Thus far, I have established that Descartes was committed to O1, O2, O4, O5, and O6. I have spent this much time establishing these claims because each one is needed to show that Descartes does not hold that MFIs lack objective reality. In order to show this, however, we still require a clear understanding of what Descartes took material falsity to be. I now turn to this.

## 2B. MATERIAL FALSITY

There are basically two general approaches to interpreting material falsity. The first and more popular approach is, what I call, the “metaphysical approach.”<sup>48</sup> The other is, what I call, the “epistemological approach.”<sup>49</sup> I will first look at the metaphysical approach.

I call any approach to material falsity “metaphysical” which holds, as M1 does, that a necessary condition for an MFI is that it represents a non-thing as a thing. So, in Descartes’ example of the MFI of cold, cold is assumed to be an absence of heat, and as such it is thought to be a non-thing. But the idea of cold presents something “positive” to me, and hence it represents a non-thing as a thing. It is therefore materially false.

Two issues force us to think twice about a metaphysical analysis (e.g. M1) of material falsity. The first concerns the difficulty in spelling out exactly what Descartes took a non-thing to be. The second concerns the fact that there is a scarcity of textual evidence in favor of the metaphysical analysis and an abundance of textual evidence against it.

What is a non-thing for Descartes? There is substantial disagreement even among those who hold a metaphysical analysis. Is it reasonable to suppose that Descartes thinks that a non-thing is something *nonexistent*? I do not think this candidate is plausible because Descartes certainly

holds that a chimera does not exist, but the idea of a chimera is not materially false.<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps a non-thing is an *absence of something positive*.<sup>51</sup> Descartes does seem to use this type of language: “if it is true that cold is nothing but the absence of heat . . .” (AT VII 44; CSM II 30), and “whether cold is a positive thing or an absence . . .” (AT VII 233; CSM II 163) The idea of cold is an MFI according to Descartes, and apparently if we want to take a metaphysical approach to material falsity, we should take a non-thing to be an absence of something positive. But is this what Descartes thinks? Descartes certainly wants to say that the idea of cold is an MFI, but he also wants to say that *all of the sensory ideas are materially false*.<sup>52</sup> The idea of heat is also an MFI for Descartes. But if cold is merely the absence of heat, then heat is a thing, not a non-thing. Thus, the idea of heat would not be an MFI; but, in fact, it is an MFI.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps the example of heat and cold is simply a bad example. However, Descartes also holds that rest is the absence of motion, but rest is not a non-thing.<sup>54</sup> We can see that spelling out just what a non-thing is for Descartes is quite difficult. But, more importantly, it is also unnecessary because Descartes, as we will now see, does not hold that representing a non-thing as a thing is a necessary condition for material falsity.

I propose that Descartes had an “epistemological approach” to material falsity; that is, one which does not make claims about non-things but only about what people can tell about their ideas from a first-person perspective. Descartes, I will argue, held that the following is the correct approach to material falsity:

M2: P’s idea  $\phi$  is materially false if and only if (i)  $\phi$  is confused and obscure, (ii) because of  $\phi$ ’s confusion and obscurity, P cannot tell what  $\phi$  is the idea of from introspection, (iii)  $\phi$  provides P with material for error in judgment.<sup>55</sup>

M2 more accurately expresses Descartes’ notion of material falsity. Even in the passage where Descartes mentions non-things in connection with material falsity, he states: “But as for all the rest, including light, and colours, sounds, tastes, heat and cold and the other tactile qualities, I think of these only in a very confused and obscure way, to the extent that *I do not even know whether they are true or false*, that is whether the ideas I have of them are ideas of real things or of non-things.” (AT VII 43; CSM II 30, my emphasis) It is clear from this text that Descartes does not hold that MFIs are those that represent non-things as things; rather they are ideas such that the person cannot tell, due to the idea’s confusion and obscurity, what kind of thing the idea represents. This is further stated a few lines down: “the ideas which I have of heat and cold contain so little clarity and distinctness that they do not enable me to tell whether cold is merely the absence of heat or vice versa . . .” (AT VII 43–4;

CSM II 30) Furthermore, under intense questioning and criticism from Arnauld in the “Fourth Objections,” Descartes does not back away from the epistemological analysis of material falsity. He states, “for if I consider the ideas of cold and heat just as I received them from my senses, *I am unable to tell* that one idea represents more reality to me than the other.” (AT VII 232–3; CSM II 163) And

[M]y only reason for calling the idea “materially false” is that, owing to the fact that it is obscure and confused, *I am unable to judge* whether or not what it represents to me is something positive which exists outside my sensation . . . For I do not claim that an idea’s material falsity results from some positive entity; it arises solely from the obscurity of the idea. (AT VII 234; CSM II 164, my emphasis)

M2 has these texts to support it, and methodologically, M2 does the same work in the *Meditations* as the less textually justified M1. That is, M1 and M2 both accomplish what Descartes in fact wished to accomplish by introducing the notion of material falsity. Material falsity is introduced in the “Third Meditation” to show that we cannot infer the existence of external objects on the basis of our sensory ideas. M2 is up to this task. M2 holds that an MFI is so confused and obscure that one cannot tell what the idea is of. And if one cannot tell what the idea is of, one cannot infer from ORP what the cause of the idea had to be, that is, how much reality the cause would have to have. As Descartes states, “the reality which they [i.e., MFIs] exhibit [*exhibent*] is so extremely slight . . . I do not see why they cannot originate from myself.” (AT VII 44; CSM II 30) So, M2 is very well supported by Descartes’ text and it does all the work that M1 does.

### 3. *Descartes’ quasi-scholastic explanation of MFIs*

Now that we have some detailed accounts of the important notions of objective reality and material falsity, we are in position to see why the “Standard Interpretation” is not correct. First, we will see that the argument for the Standard Interpretation (Argument 1), when the premises are more clearly understood, is invalid. Secondly, we will see why Descartes’ account of MFIs commits him to the objective reality of MFIs.

Recall that defenders of the Standard Interpretation focus on the following passage from the “Third Meditation” when formulating their argument:

Such [materially false] ideas do not require me to posit a source distinct from myself. For on the one hand, if they are false, that is, represent non-things, I know by the natural light that they arise from nothing – that is, they are in me only because of a deficiency and lack of perfection in my nature. (AT VII 44; CSM II 30)

When Arnauld questions Descartes about this passage, Descartes' answer reveals much information concerning the nature of MFIs and their causes. Arnauld states:

Again, what is the cause of the positive objective being which according to you is responsible for the idea's being materially false? "The cause is myself," you may answer, "in so far as I come from nothing."<sup>56</sup> But in that case, the positive objective being of an idea can come from nothing, which violates the author's most important principles. (AT VII 207; CSM II 146)

Arnauld rightly assumes that the positive objective being, even in an MFI, requires a real cause because "nothing comes from nothing." If it does not require a real cause, then Descartes' ORP is violated. We have already seen Descartes' response to this, but it is worth looking at again.

Hence in asking what is the cause of the positive objective being which, in my view, is responsible for the idea being materially false, my critic has raised an improper question. For I do not claim that an idea's material falsity results from some positive entity; it arises solely from the obscurity of the idea – although this does have something positive as its underlying subject, namely the actual sensation involved. (AT VII 234; CSM II 164)

This response reveals that, despite their obscurity (and confusion), MFIs have some underlying positive being, "namely the actual sensation involved." Furthermore, directly following the previous passage, Descartes states:

Now this positive entity exists in me, in so far as I am something real. But the obscurity of the idea is the only thing that leads me to judge that the idea of the sensation of cold represents some object called "cold" which is located outside me; and *this obscurity in the idea does not have a real cause but arises simply from the fact that my nature is not perfect in all respects*. This does not in any way violate my fundamental principles. (AT VII 234–5; CSM II 164, my emphasis)

From this passage we can see that Descartes does not hold that the MFI of cold is caused by nothing; rather he holds that the *confusion and obscurity* found in the idea of cold is caused by "a defect in my nature." It is the confusion and obscurity that is responsible for the idea's being materially false. But the positive underlying subject – the sensation – will have a real cause, i.e., the body.<sup>57</sup> This interpretation is further vindicated in several of Descartes' writings, but perhaps the most forceful statement of Descartes' position is found in the *Discourse on Method*:

Thus, if we frequently have ideas containing some falsity, this can happen only because there is something confused and obscure in them, for *in that respect* they participate in nothingness, that is, they are in us in this confused state only because we are not wholly perfect. (AT VI 38; CSM I 130, my emphasis)

Contra the Standard Interpretation, Descartes is not claiming that MFIs are caused by nothing; rather, he is claiming that the feature of them – their confusion and obscurity – that is (at least partially) responsible for their being materially false is caused by nothing, by a defect in his nature. So, when the problematic text from the “Third Meditation” is understood correctly, it is clear that P1 from Argument 1 should not read as

P1. MFIs are caused by nothing.

but rather as

P1\*. The confusion and obscurity in MFIs is caused by nothing.

But notice that Argument 1 is invalid if we substitute P1\* for P1. Thus, the argument for the Standard Interpretation does not establish its conclusion, i.e., that MFIs lack objective reality.

Thus far, we have only seen that *there is no reason to think that the Standard Interpretation is true*. We will now see that the Standard Interpretation is false. The way this will be shown is by noticing that, in his discussion of MFIs, Descartes is employing a quasi-scholastic distinction between primary efficient causes and secondary deficient causes.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps the most familiar discussion concerning this is found in Aquinas. The distinction between efficient real causes and privative or deficient causes and their effects is prominent in Aquinas’ discussion of God’s causal role with respect to sin. But Aquinas’ analysis can be used to discuss more than just sins; it can be used to discuss defects of a wide variety, including defects in ideas.<sup>59</sup>

It is convenient to have an example before us, and I can think of none better than Aquinas’ example of the act of limping. In the act of limping, Aquinas thinks, there are two components: one real – i.e., the walking – and one privative – i.e., limpiness. To limp is simply to walk with a limp. Limpiness is what Aquinas *inter alia* would call a “privation.” A privation, in scholastic terminology differs from a “negation.” A negation is simply a lack of something, but to say that x has a privation is to make a *normative* claim about x. That is,

Definition 5: p is a privation in some thing S =<sub>df</sub> p is a lack of some property F in S and S is such that it ought to have F.

As Aquinas states, “Every privation, if taken properly and strictly, is of that which one is born to have, and should have.”<sup>60</sup> If a car does not have feet, that is not a privation; but if a woman does not have feet, that is a privation, a defect or imperfection.<sup>61</sup> Because a privation is a lack of a property *a thing* ought to have, we may hold that someone who believes that there “are” privations is committed to A1:

A1: All privations are in something with positive being.

That is to say, a privation must have a subject. In the case of limping, the limpiness is a defect in the act of walking, and the act of walking is an action with real being.

In the case of limping, there are two distinct causes. In *De Malo*, Aquinas states that whatever motion or action there is in limping can be traced back to the power of locomotion or the motive powers. But whatever there is in the limpiness of the limping cannot be traced back to the motive powers. Rather, the defect or privation in the limping – its limpiness – must be traced back to a privative or deficient cause, in this case, a crooked leg.<sup>62</sup> Take the following statements:

- (a) The motive powers cause S to walk.
- (b) The motive powers cause S to limp.
- (c) The crooked leg causes S to walk.
- (d) The crooked leg causes S to limp.

According to Aquinas, (a) and (d) are true, but (b) and (c) are false. As Aquinas states: “What an effect does precisely as effect can be traced back to the cause, but whatever else effects do cannot.”<sup>63</sup> And because privations are, strictly speaking, nothing, Aquinas holds A2:

A2: Privations do not have a positive cause, but only a privative cause.

Descartes employs this very distinction between real effects (and their real causes) and privations (and their privative causes) in his discussion of MFIs. In the case of every MFI, there is a real, positive aspect which requires a real cause in accordance with ORP, and there is a privative aspect, which will have a privative cause. The positive aspect, as we have already seen, is the sensation presented to the mind. The privative aspect is the confusion and obscurity in the idea. And as we have seen, Descartes thinks that the confusion and obscurity of MFIs is “caused by nothing,” by a defect in his nature. Descartes’ reasoning concerning the cause of confusion and obscurity in MFIs is remarkably similar to Aquinas’ limping example. Take the following:

- (a\*) The body is the cause of the idea of cold.
- (b\*) The body is the cause of the confusion and obscurity in the idea of cold.
- (c\*) A defect in my nature is the cause of the idea of cold.
- (d\*) A defect in my nature is the cause of the confusion and obscurity in the idea of cold.

Just as in Aquinas' limping example, for Descartes, (a\*) and (d\*) and true, but (b\*) and (c\*) are false. The positive aspect of the idea – the sensation – has a real cause; but the privative aspect – the confusion and obscurity – has a privative cause, namely a defect in my nature.

But does Descartes think that confusion and obscurity are privations in an idea and not merely negations? If they are privations, then Descartes must hold that ideas *ought* to be clear and distinct; or perhaps Descartes is not using the term “privation” in the scholastic sense as found in Definition 5. But Descartes does use “privation” in the scholastic sense. For instance, in the “Fourth Meditation,” Descartes himself distinguishes negations from privations in the scholastic tradition: “For error is not a pure negation [i.e., not simply the defect or lack of some perfection to which I have no proper claim] but rather a privation or lack . . . which somehow should be in me.” (AT VII 55; CSM II 38)<sup>64</sup> So, if Descartes thinks that confusion and obscurity are privations, then he must say that ideas *ought* to be clear and distinct. Descartes does think that clarity and distinctness are something our ideas ought to have; and they will be clear and distinct, provided we do not abuse the faculties God has given us by making rash judgments.<sup>65</sup> Descartes even thinks that MFIs, despite their confusion and obscurity, *ought* to be perceived clearly: “These may be clearly perceived provided we take great care in our judgments concerning them to include no more than what is strictly contained in our perception.” (AT VIII 32; CSM I 217)<sup>66</sup> But because of bad habits acquired since childhood, we do not refrain from taking “great care in our judgments,” although we ought to. Thus, Descartes holds A3:

A3: Confusion and obscurity are privations in ideas.

We are finally in a position to see why Descartes is committed to the objective reality of MFIs. The argument, which consists almost exclusively of propositions established in the course of this paper, runs as follows:

*Argument 3*

1. MFIs are confused and obscure. (From M2)
2. Confusion and obscurity are privations in ideas. (A3)
3. So, the confusion and obscurity in MFIs is caused by nothing, i.e., a defect. (From premises 1 and 2, by A2)<sup>67</sup>
4. All privations are in something with positive being. (A1)
5. So, there is something with real positive being in MFIs. (From premises 1, 2, and 4)
6. The only kind of being ideas (in the objective sense) have is objective being. (O2)
7. So, MFIs have objective being. (From premises 5 and 6)
8. All things with objective being have some degree of objective reality. (O5)
9. Therefore, MFIs have some degree of objective reality. (From premises 7 and 8)

This argument establishes the objective reality of MFIs, contrary to the Standard Interpretation. However, the inference from 5 and 6 to 7 requires some comment. Someone may object that MFIs are not ideas in the objective sense at all, and this is precisely the problem they pose (i.e., they merely *seem* to present something to mind). As far as I can imagine, there are two reasons for this line of thought. First, there may be an anachronistic tendency to attribute to Descartes a distinction between ideas with propositional content and contentless sensations. However, it is not clear that Descartes makes this distinction. In fact, Descartes never writes of ideas as having propositional content, but rather as having *objects*, regardless of whether the object has a formal counterpart.<sup>68</sup> Just because an MFI does not have a formal counterpart does not entail that it does not represent something. Descartes sometimes speaks of ideas in the objective sense as *presenting* or *exhibiting* something to mind;<sup>69</sup> and MFIs present something to mind, albeit confusedly and obscurely and without having a formal counterpart. Furthermore, Descartes seems to think that the distinction between ideas in the objective sense and ideas in the material sense is exhaustive and exclusive. That is, all ideas are either material or objective and if they are one, then they are not the other. But, Descartes states in the “Preface” to the *Meditations*, that ideas in the objective sense are those things presented or represented in the mind; (AT VII 8; CSM II 7) and certainly MFIs present something to the mind. (AT VII 44; CSM II 30)

Secondly, they could be *presupposing* the Standard Interpretation and trying to account for the difference between MFIs and other ideas in terms of the former not being an idea in the objective sense; in which case, they are obviously begging the question. As I have shown, Argument 1 (for the Standard Interpretation) is invalid when the premises are properly understood. So, we cannot suppose that the Standard Interpretation is true, let alone *presuppose* that it is true.

### *Conclusion*

The Standard Interpretation has enjoyed a long reign, and it has largely gone unquestioned. However, I have shown that the Standard Interpretation is incorrect. I realize that there is much more required to give a *positive* account of the nature of the objective reality of MFIs. However, this is a project I do not have space to pursue here.<sup>70</sup>

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Wilson (1978).

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this paper I will cite Descartes' works according to their location in the Adam and Tannery *Oeuvres de Descartes* and in Cottingham *et al. Philosophical Writings of Descartes* as follows: "AT," followed by volume and page number, and "CSM," followed by volume and page number.

<sup>3</sup> Descartes uses the term "objective reality" in a way wholly unlike our contemporary use. I will explain what it means in the seventeenth-century context below.

<sup>4</sup> Normore (1986), Field (1993), Aquila (1995), MacKenzie (1994).

<sup>5</sup> Wilson herself (1978) suggests, but immediately dismisses, the type of reasoning that I will be attributing to Descartes. She does this primarily because she does not think that the texts, especially the "Fourth Replies," support such reasoning. However, we will see that they do support such reasoning.

<sup>6</sup> Chappell (1986), 178.

<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that whenever I speak of the "objective being" or "objective reality" of an idea, I am speaking of an idea in the objective sense. Throughout the course of this paper, I will be using the term "idea" for ideas in the objective sense only, unless otherwise specified.

<sup>8</sup> Wilson (1978), 105.

<sup>9</sup> Kenny (1968), 131, my gloss.

<sup>10</sup> The name "Objective Reality Principle" is taken from O'Neill (1987) and MacKenzie (1994).

<sup>11</sup> According to Descartes, judgments concern ideas, but are strictly the function of the will, not the intellect; and it consists in affirming or denying something of an idea.

<sup>12</sup> Condition (i) is stated as Descartes states it, but it must be understood to mean the following:  $\phi$ , as it exists outside the intellect, is a non-thing, but the idea of  $\phi$  presents  $\phi$  as if it were a thing. This will become clearer in the second section of this paper.

<sup>13</sup> That is,  $x$  is unable to tell whether condition (i) is satisfied.

<sup>14</sup> M1 is similar to an analysis given by Richard Field (1993), 316.

<sup>15</sup> "But as for all the rest, including light and colours, sounds, smells, tastes, heat and cold, and other tactile qualities . . ." (AT VII 43; CSM II 30).

<sup>16</sup> For example, Hoffman (1996), 358. Wilson is a notable exception (1978), 109.

<sup>17</sup> Wilson (1978), 111.

<sup>18</sup> Wilson (1978), 111–112.

<sup>19</sup> We would be right to say that Descartes holds that a thing with objective being in the mind just *is* an idea in the objective sense.

<sup>20</sup> Caterus even refers to a thing with objective being as an *ens rationis*, a term used by Suarez and others to denote things which only have objective being in the intellect. Suarez (1995) holds that only privations, negations, and relations are *entia rationis*. See Wells (1990).

<sup>21</sup> The reason for "actually" is that it is fairly clear that Descartes thinks that mere *possibilia* do not have formal being. "Property" is meant to encompass attributes, modes and accidents.

<sup>22</sup> We can now see that the passage above should read: "if anyone asks what happens to the *formally-existing* sun . . . no one will take this to be the *formally-existing* sun itself with this extraneous label applied to it."

<sup>23</sup> The distinction between the formal being and the objective being of an idea is very similar to Suarez's distinction between the "formal conception" and the "objective conception": "The formal concept is said to be the act itself, or (what is the same) the word by

which the intellect conceives something or a common *ratio* . . . The objective concept is said to be that thing or *ratio* which is properly and immediately known or represented through the formal concept; for instance, when we conceive of a man, that act by which we bring about the conceived man in our understanding, we call “the formal concept”; on the other hand, the man presented and represented by that act is called “the objective concept.” Suarez (1861), vol. XXV, 2.1.i.

<sup>24</sup> Normore (1986); Alanen (1994); Hoffman (1996).

<sup>25</sup> Alanen (1994), 233.

<sup>26</sup> Chappell (1986), 185.

<sup>27</sup> As an anonymous referee pointed out to me, this “counterpart relation” is not a commonplace notion, and explicating it in any great detail is sticky business. I confess that I do not have a well-developed theory about the relation between objective and formal counterparts. (I was tempted to define the relation in terms of *similarity* between formal and objective counterparts. However, explicating the similarity relation is notoriously difficult and is fraught with puzzles and problems. I was then tempted to define the relation in terms of “counterfactual identity”; that is, if  $\phi^o$  is the objective counterpart of  $\phi^f$ , then, if  $\phi^o$  were to exist formally,  $\phi^o$  would be  $\phi^f$  (and vice versa). I think that something like this is *probably* correct.) However, I think that we have an intuitive sense of what counterparts are – e.g., a formally existing dog is the formal counterpart of my idea of that dog, and my idea of that dog is an objective counterpart of the formally existing dog. This intuitive sense of what counterparts are, while not particularly deep, is sufficient for the purposes of this paper.

<sup>28</sup> Lewis (1968).

<sup>29</sup> Several scholars *identify* objective reality and objective being. Hoffman (1996), Alanen (1994), Nadler (1989). Nadler does not explicitly identify the two, but he identifies objective reality with representational content; and I take it that the objective existence of an object *is* the representational content of that idea. Nadler (1989), 159.

<sup>30</sup> See Kenny (1968), 131–2.

<sup>31</sup> As Frederick O’Toole states, it is a “scalar property (i.e., a property which admits of degrees or levels).” O’Toole (1993), 108.

<sup>32</sup> This is true only in cases in which there is a formal counterpart. We will see shortly that there is a way to maintain the dependence of objective reality on formal reality even in cases in which there is no formal counterpart of an idea.

<sup>33</sup> If Descartes allowed non-existent things to have formal reality, then according to ORP, a non-actual thing can serve as the cause of an idea’s objective reality. This is one reason I reject Wilson’s (1978) thesis that formal reality should be understood as “reality simpliciter.” She further supposes that reality simpliciter should be understood as possible existence. But if this were true then possible things could serve as causes of an idea’s objective reality, in accordance with ORP. But they cannot, according to Descartes: “I perceive that the objective being of an idea cannot be produced by potential being, which strictly speaking is nothing, but only by actual and formal being.” (AT VII 47; CSM II 32)

<sup>34</sup> See AT VII 37; CSM II 25–26.

<sup>35</sup> This formulation of ORP was inspired by G. E. M. Anscombe’s (1981) account of ORP. She, however, does not employ the counterpart terminology.

<sup>36</sup> See AT VI 34–5; CSM I 128.

<sup>37</sup> O’Neill (1987) and Nelson (1996) also think that this is the way Descartes explained degrees of reality.

<sup>38</sup> Finite substances and modes/accidents are *causally* dependent on God for their creation and conservation. Modes/accidents are *substantially* dependent on finite substances in the sense that they require substances in which to inhere.

<sup>39</sup> AT VII 40, 165–6, 185; CSM II 28, 117, 130.

<sup>40</sup> O'Neill (1987) thinks that there are more than three levels of objective/formal reality. However, the textual evidence for such a view is quite scarce.

<sup>41</sup> This feature of ideas is discussed at length in "causal theories of content" in contemporary philosophy of mind. For three seminal discussions, see Jerry Fodor (1987) and (1990), Fred Dretske (1986), and Ruth Millikan (1989).

<sup>42</sup> Descartes holds that "nothing comes from nothing" and "potential being is really nothing," hence he holds that nothing comes from potential being. See AT VII 40, 47; CSM II 28, 32.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, AT VII 41, 161; CSM II 28, 114 and AT VIII 11; CSM I 198–9. For two excellent discussions of eminent causation in Descartes, see O'Neill (1987) and Clatterbaugh (1980).

<sup>44</sup> This will be true only in the case of clear and distinct ideas. See AT VII 46; CSM II 31–32.

<sup>45</sup> I borrow the phrase "read off" from Alanen (1994).

<sup>46</sup> See AT VII 40–1, 161; CSM II 28, 114.

<sup>47</sup> If Definition 2 and O5 are correct interpretations of Descartes, it is clear that objective reality is not identical to objective *being* for Descartes.

<sup>48</sup> This position is held by Wilson (1978), Field (1993), Hoffman (1996).

<sup>49</sup> The only other author with which I am familiar who holds this position is Jean Marie Beysade (1992).

<sup>50</sup> See AT VII 37; CSM II 25–6. Descartes never lists anything but so-called "sensory ideas" as MFIs.

<sup>51</sup> This is how Beysade understands Descartes. Beysade (1992), 8.

<sup>52</sup> See AT VII 43; CSM II 30 and AT VIII 32–3; CSM I 216–7.

<sup>53</sup> See AT VII 43; CSM II 30.

<sup>54</sup> See AT XI 40; CSM I 94.

<sup>55</sup> M2 is consistent with materially false ideas representing non-things as things; it merely holds that it is not a necessary condition for material falsity.

<sup>56</sup> This is a misquotation of Descartes.

<sup>57</sup> That Descartes believed that the body is the (most proximate) cause of sensations is shown at AT XI 345–6; CSM I 336–7. Interpretation of Descartes' account of the proximate and distal causes of sensations is sticky business and something I do not have space to address here. For a very helpful discussion, see Wilson (1991).

<sup>58</sup> That Descartes was familiar with this distinction cannot be doubted. As Calvin Normore points out: "Descartes was educated in a Jesuit College (La Flèche) and the Jesuits were heavily influenced by the intellectual climate of the Spanish universities. In Spain, Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* had largely replaced the 'Sentences' of Peter Lombard as the keystone of theological training: Aquinas' thought had indeed moved to the center of Scholasticism." Normore (1986), 231. Cf. Ariew (1992).

<sup>59</sup> Aquinas points out that the Latin word for "sin," "*peccatum*," has a wider use than simply to denote sin: "*peccatum*" is broadly used to mean any failure of activity, natural, or designed, to reach its goal." Aquinas (1995), 3.1.

<sup>60</sup> Aquinas (1975), 3.6.1. Suarez also characterizes privations this way: "A genuine privation is said to be a lack of form in a subject apt to have it." Suarez (1995), 3.3.

<sup>61</sup> See Aquinas (1975), 3.6.1.

<sup>62</sup> Aquinas (1995), 3.1–2. By "privative" or "deficient cause" I simply mean a cause that has a privation itself.

<sup>63</sup> Aquinas (1995), 3.1.r 4.

<sup>64</sup> See AT VII 61; CSM II 42.

<sup>65</sup> See "Fourth Meditation," AT VII 59; CSM II 41.

<sup>66</sup> See AT VIII 33; CSM I 216.

<sup>67</sup> Proposition 3 does not do any work in Argument 3. Proposition 3 is merely a reiteration of an earlier conclusion reached in the paper, namely that the argument for the Standard Interpretation, when its premises are clearly understood, is invalid. That is, MFIs are not caused by nothing; rather their confusion and obscurity is caused by nothing.

<sup>68</sup> See AT VII 37–8; CSM II 25–6.

<sup>69</sup> See AT VII 40; CSM II 28, for example.

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