

Two of Descartes' publications--the French translation of the *Meditations* and *The Passions of the Soul*--contain prefaces whose authorship has hitherto been unidentified. Using internal and historical evidence, it is argued that the author in both cases is Descartes himself. The *Meditations* preface distances the intended sense of the work from its scholastic façade, while the *Passions* preface exalts the humanitarian benefits of Descartes' practical philosophy ('the mastery of nature') while berating him for neglect in pressing for its acceptance.

DESCARTES' ANONYMOUS WRITINGS: A RECAPITULATION*

Hiram Caton
Griffith University

Anonymous publication was common in the seventeenth century. We note, for example, that only one author of the six sets of *Objections* initially published with the *Meditations* was named; and one of those anonymous authors, Thomas Hobbes, had at about that time circulated anonymously his *Elements of Law*. Examples of this practice among writers, scholars, theologians, philosophers, scientists, and politicians could easily be multiplied.

Although motives for anonymous authorship presumably varied, a complex sense of propriety seems to have suggested it in many cases. The *Elements of Law* was intended primarily for patricians and gentry at a moment of political crisis. The commoner Hobbes probably omitted his name from the title page to prevent embarrassment to his patron, William Cavendish, the Earl of Devonshire. Spinoza published the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* as a broadside in the struggle between the Orangists and Regents in Holland. He sent this inflammatory tract out anonymously, as was usual among Regents publicists, to present a lower profile to the religious fanatics that the work infuriated. Locke published a number of less provocative tracts anonymously for reasons not easy to discern. As the brain-truster to the Earl of Shaftesbury, he was for years deeply enmeshed in Shaftesbury's intrigues to assure Protestant succession. This, and subsequent collaboration with the exiled Whigs in Holland, undoubtedly taught him habits of secrecy.¹ But why, with James II chased from England and the Revolutionary Settlement sealed and delivered, did Locke anonymously publish those two defenses of the Glorious Revolution, the *Two Treatises of Government* and the *Letter on Toleration*? And why did he steadfastly refuse to acknowledge his authorship - which so many guessed - until he revealed it in his will? Possibly he believed that anonymous publication was better calculated to preserve his reputation as a philosopher from the tarnish of political ephemera.

Isaac Newton represents another example of curious anonymity. Newton personally avoided polemical contests about his world system. But he did deliberately assemble and closely supervise a team of young clergymen-gliadiators, whose prescribed task was to magnify the

Hiram Caton is the author of The Origin of Subjectivity: An Essay on Descartes and numerous articles in the history of modern philosophy and biosocial science. He is presently a Fellow at the National Humanities Center, where he is completing The Politics of Progress: The Origins and Development of the Commercial Republic, 1600-1900.

mechanical God and smite his High Church enemies.² Prudential caution cannot have suggested this indirect approach. By 1696 Newton was a powerful courtier as Master of the Mint, and his reputation as a philosopher exceeded that of any other man, living or dead. Perhaps Sir Isaac's habit of moving about London in a sedan chair is a clue: his Olympian aloofness was enhanced by sending in troops to fight his battles.

Descartes' only recognized anonymous publication was his first, *The Discourse on Method*. His authority was never a deep secret, since Mersenne quietly spread the word in his circle. When the Latin version appeared seven years later, Descartes' name was on the title page. Thin though it was, this disguise indicated Descartes' life-long ambivalence toward publishing. He was prompted by a "desire to serve the public", as he put it in the Preface to the *Principles*, to publish and make himself known. Yet he was deterred by the apprehension that his physics would stir the animosity of scholastics, with unhappy consequences for himself. He alluded to this ambivalence early in the *Discourse* by saying that he hoped to avoid the presumption of teaching others by presenting his method as his private notions, which might instruct some and encourage others. Later in Parts V and VI of the *Discourse*, Descartes went into the matter at length. Up to that point, he had kept his method in balanced tension with received opinion. Although his method rendered received opinion doubtful, it was, after all, only his personal opinion. But the development of his physics threatened to destroy the precarious balance. The censure of Galileo, he remarked, caused him to suppress his physical treatise, *Le Monde*, lest he offend ecclesiastics who believed in Aristotle. Unfortunately, physics was the very subject from which the fruits of philosophy sprang; its suppression was therefore not compatible with "serving the public" by making man "master and possessor of nature". Descartes tells us that he accordingly worked out a new compromise, which is to publish his physics only "in outline", withholding those aspects of it most likely to offend. And to conciliate further, he emphasized his submissiveness to ecclesiastical judgment even though it might censure his most clear and distinct private opinions.³

The function of the anonymity of the *Discourse* is to be understood within the context of this somewhat tortured compromise of "true philosophy" by the menace of ecclesiastical disapproval. As he wrote to Mersenne, anonymity enables him to "listen behind the screen" to opinions about his book before publicly avowing authorship.⁴ This no doubt accounts for the surprising under-description of the *persona* Descartes adopted in the work. The "I" who speaks there never explicitly identifies his religion, social class, nationality or marital status. This literary disembodiment of the *persona* of the *Discourse* enhances the anonymity of the author.

These explanations of the anonymity of the *Discourse* may be used with advantage to identify the author of two further anonymous

writings in the Descartes corpus. The first is the Preface to the French translation of the *Meditations* (1647), entitled “Le Libraire au lecteur”. The second is the Letters Prefactory of *Les Passions de l’âme* (1649). Since both these works were published with Descartes’ approval, they enjoy the status of quasi-Cartesian writings. Yet their neglect in the secondary literature is complete. They have not been included in any English translation of Descartes’ writings. (The new translation being prepared by Professor R. H. Stoothoff will remedy this disconcerting oversight.⁵) Even editors treat these writings as alien objects. Since 1667, Adam and Tannery alone have included both works in their editions.

In 1960 and again in 1962, Pierre Ehrmann made an unsuccessful attempt to drag “Le Libraire au lecteur” from obscurity. The gist of his bibliographic study may be summarized as follows:

1. Of 29 editions examined, only five publish the Preface and publish it in the correct position (i.e., between the Dedication to the Sorbonne Faculty and the Synopsis). The entire third edition was mysteriously suppressed by its publisher, Théodore Girard.
2. The first two editions, with the Preface in the correct position, sold well, whereas subsequent editions, without the Preface, sold badly. Ehrmann attributes this difference to the circumstance that the Preface claims to state “the key to the book without which no one will comprehend it”.
3. Ehrmann maintained that the Preface was omitted, and that editions after 1661 were otherwise mutilated, by Descartes’ “enemies”, whom he does not identify. The Preface, which states the key to the *Meditations*, modestly conveyed by the “publisher”, was the “artifice Descartes used to outflank his enemies”.⁶

Ehrmann seems to imply or insinuate that Descartes used “Le Libraire” as a *non de guerre* to bamboozle an opposition of uncertain identity. In fact, one knows that during the period 1660-1670, an intense struggle over Cartesian philosophy occurred in France. The band of Cartesians led by Clerselier and Sorbière were engaged with the Jesuits.⁷ As a fraternity practiced in intrigue, it would have been easy for the Jesuits to suppress the Girard edition. They did something more spectacular by arranging for the king’s officers to interrupt the ceremony of interment in Paris and preventing Father Lallement pronouncing the funeral oration.⁸ However, recent studies by J. R. Armogathe show conclusively that the Jesuits had nothing to do with the curious history of the early editions of Descartes’ works. All anomalies are due to the complex transfers of copyright between three publishers, of whom Girard was one.⁹

As mentioned, Ehrmann implies that Descartes used “Le Libraire” as a *nom de guerre*. Yet he accepted Charles Adams’ judgment that Pierre Le Petit, the co-publisher of the first French edition, was “without doubt” the author of the Preface.¹⁰ Adams’ investigations turned up no

direct evidence to this effect. There is nothing in the surviving correspondence about the authorship of the Preface; Adrian Baillet's biography does not fill this gap, despite extensive discussion of the preparations for the French edition.¹¹ Adam based his categorical assertion of Le Petit's authorship solely on (a) the claim of the title; and (b) Le Petit's ardent partisanship on Descartes' behalf.¹² (In his edition of Descartes' writings, which omits the Preface, Ferdinand Alquié asserted, on the basis of unspecified stylistic considerations, that Descartes was not its author.¹³) This very slender evidence would be stronger if Descartes had not been involved in the preparation of the French edition; but he went over the translation carefully and made a number of additions, as the Preface itself prominently advertises.¹⁴ Descartes' hand in the edition is evident in other ways as well. The Latin original claimed on its title page to be published "cum Privilegio et Approbatione Doctorum". This was a fabrication, and an insolent one given the intense behind-the-scene opposition to the *Meditations* emanating from Father Bourdin at the Sorbonne. The French translation suppressed this false claim. Furthermore, the original claim of the Latin subtitle to have proved the immortality of the soul was replaced by the more modest claim to have proved the "real distinction" between body and soul. These alterations presumably had Descartes' approval. We also note that not only was a Preface added, it replaced the Preface to the Reader composed for the Latin editions. Since in this correspondence, Descartes did not protest these substantial alterations, we must assume that they had his approval. One fact in particular is, I believe, decisive evidence of Descartes' close supervision of the final copy. If a publisher were to add a preface on his own initiative, he would almost certainly place it before any part of the text. But this was *not* its position, for it was interpolated *between* the Dedication to the Sorbonne and the Synopsis. The placement is so strange that it drove Charles Adam to suspend the canons of scientific editing in order to move the Preface forward to unparadoxical front position, where it would be expected. He remarked this alteration in a footnote, but provided no justification. This anomaly, which may be bibliographically unique, is a potent argument that it stems from the author.

Neither Adam nor Alquié examined the internal evidence of the Preface to justify their attribution of authorship. Yet a causal examination shows that Le Petit could not possibly have composed it. The Preface indeed identifies its author by three characterizations that point directly at Descartes' authorship.

The author of the Preface draws attention to the anomalous placement of the Preface with an apology: he notes that in view of the satisfaction that Descartes and his translators will provide "all intelligent persons", he must take care to satisfy the reader also, lest the "disgrace" fall on himself alone!¹⁵ One might imagine that a publisher anxious to save himself from disgrace would not risk it by venturing to interrupt the author. Instead, the "publisher" penned a saucy, even inflammatory

account of Descartes' intentions in first publishing the *Meditations* in Latin and then in French translation. The account resumes and expands upon Descartes' own account of this ambivalence toward publishing, previously reviewed. We are told that Descartes resolved to publish his meditations for fear that otherwise "the voice of truth" would be "choked". How and by whom is not said. But the metaphor "choked" was used by Descartes in his correspondence in such a way as to enable us to identify the allusion precisely. In a letter to the Jesuit Father Dinet (October, 1644) Descartes wrote: "Here finally are the principles of this unhappy philosophy [i.e. *The Principles of Philosophy*] which some have attempted to choke before their birth".¹⁶ Descartes refers to the protracted hostilities that broke out between himself and the Jesuits after Father Bourdin criticized the *Dioptrics* and then the *Meditations*. Inserting this gloss into the publisher's declaration, we read its meaning as: Descartes resolved to publish his meditations fearing that the Jesuits might do him or his philosophy some injury. Only if we realize that the Jesuits, to whom the *Meditations* is dedicated, are also the chief opponents of Cartesian philosophy, can we understand the amazing oblique strategy that Descartes pursued, according to the publisher. The proper and intended audience of the *Meditations*, we are given to understand, is the one which will be reached by the French translation — the *honnête homme* who has never studied philosophy and who has no Latin.¹⁷ He is free from prejudice and ill-humor and delights in "new thoughts" or the "very free thoughts" offered in the *Meditations*. He is contrasted sharply with the learned, who read only in order to dispute, and who fear finding the truth for which they profess to search; and they altogether lack that willingness to learn which is the "key" to understanding the *Meditations*.¹⁸

This saucy put-down of scholastic philosophers is identical with the line Descartes took in the Dedication and Preface to the French translation of the *Principles of Philosophy*, which was written about the same time as the work here in question. In the Dedication to Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia (whose parents, be it noted, were heroes in the Protestant cause against Popery, even as Christina of Sweden was a heroine in the Protestant cause), Descartes extravagantly praised her abilities and contrasted her young, free spirit with the feeble, blundering envy of the old men who dominated professional philosophy.¹⁹ Similarly, in the Preface of the *Principles*, Descartes appealed to the *honnête homme* against school philosophy, and boldly offered his own philosophy as the successful termination of the two millenium search for "truth" or "wisdom".²⁰ Thus, while the breezy impudent style of "Le Libraire au lecteur" is not vintage of Descartes, the substance of assertions are identical with the message of the Dedication and Preface to the *Principles*, written about the same time. This fact is strong circumstantial evidence that the author of "Le Libraire au lecteur" wrote as Descartes' amanuensis.

Yet we have not taken the full measure of the insolence of this Preface. It unfolds as the author explains the indirect path Descartes took in publishing the *Meditations*. Instead of writing straight away for his intended audience, the *honnête homme*, while leaving the professional philosophers turning in the winds of their theorizing, Descartes took the opposite course. He decided first to submit his thoughts to the judgment of the very philosophers he is said to despise. According to one statement, he did this to win their approval; according to a second, more realistic statement, he did it to search out “les contradisants”.²¹ In any case, the detour to the Sorbonne led him to recast his private “very free” thoughts in a manner suitable to that audience; consequently he wrote “in their language, and according to their manner, and concealed all his thoughts in Latin scholastic verbiage”.²² Elaborate pedagogical strategies are one thing, but oblique strategies of this magnitude have, I believe, no parallel in the history of philosophy: by presenting his philosophy in scholastic jargon, Descartes chose an expressive mode so misleading that it effectively “concealed all his thoughts”! If so, the reader of the *Meditations* is burdened with a cognitive dissonance serious enough to threaten the intelligibility of the work.

It is scarcely credible that a publisher — any publisher — would advertise a book he offers to the public as a closed book. The question then arises whether this view of the expressive character of the *Meditations* can be established from any known Cartesian texts. And the answer is that partial confirmation can be found elsewhere. In the *Discourse*, Descartes represents himself as abandoning the philosophy of the schools on completing his studies at La Flèche. Left to himself, he would not have returned to it. But after the celebrated demonstration of his methods at the residence of the Papal Nuncio in 1627, rumor spread that he had a “new philosophy”; and to render himself worthy of his reputation, he decided to write a treatise on God and the soul in which he “freely used the language of the schools”.²³ That this linguistic concession to scholasticism involved no conceptual compromise we know from the correspondence. In numerous letters, Descartes outlined his strategy of reducing the appearance of cognitive clash between his own philosophy and scholasticism by a linguistic simulation of the latter. Thus, to Huygens Descartes wrote that he wanted to make his *Le Monde* “speak Latin” before publishing it; and to Mersenne he revealed that the *Principles* was to be composed as a series of theses, in imitation of the widely-used textbook by Eustachius, in order to make the *Principles* more suitable for use in the schools.²⁴ While these remarks do not go so far as to say that Descartes “conceals” all his thoughts in scholastic verbiage, they assuredly indicate that the scholastic terminology of Cartesian metaphysics was regarded by its author as packaging only. It is therefore entirely credible that Descartes, in the *persona* of “publisher”, might have written the startling opinion that the scholastic terminology actually *conceals* the thought of that work. On the other hand, it is wholly incredible that Pierre Le Petit might have said such a

thing on his own initiative.

We mentioned previously that the position of the publisher's Preface between the Dedication to the Sorbonne and forward to the reader is significant. The effect of this placement is to heighten the paradoxes that tumble abundantly from the pen of the "publisher". The dedication swims in obsequious praise of Sorbonne theologians and emphasizes the pious work undertaken in the *Meditations*. Then comes the "publisher's" saucy put-down of those venerable gentlemen. No wonder editors omit the Preface while commentators prefer to let this sleeping dog lie: the cognitive dissonance is too jarring. Yet we know that even if Descartes did not create this cacophony, he nevertheless endorsed it. The logic of interpretation therefore demands that it be integrated into our picture of Descartes.

The Author of the publisher's Preface throws out numerous hints about his identity and his relation to Descartes. He claims to know by "personal knowledge" (*connaissance particuliere*) Descartes' intimate motives. In a passage that manages to cast doubt on the author's identity as publisher while yet asserting it, he wrote: "But I fear that I will be reproached for exceeding the bounds of my *métier*, or rather for not knowing it at all, [seeing that] I put so great an obstacle before my book by this large exception of so many persons for whom I do not think it is intended".²⁵ Publishers are businessmen. It is unprofessional, to put it mildly, to suggest that a philosophical tract is not intended for professional philosophers that comprise by far the largest ready market. Precisely in this sentence, where the professionalism of the publisher-*persona* is doubted, the author of this piece boldly claims the *Meditations* to be "my book". The next sentence reads: "But I shall hold my peace, and not shock the world further". There is exactly one individual, and no more, who could personally know Descartes' motives; again, there is exactly one individual, and no more, who could truly claim the *Meditations* as "my book". That individual, we need not further emphasize, is not Pierre Le Petit.

It is not difficult to conceive why Descartes adopted a fictive *persona* to convey the ideas of the publisher's preface. The dedication to the Sorbonne conciliates the Jesuit theology faculty in Descartes' name; the Preface insults them in the publisher's name. That ambivalence appeared in Descartes' earliest correspondence and continued through publications and correspondence right to the end of his life. In particular, between 1642 and 1647, he considered himself "at war" with the Jesuits. In January of 1642 he wrote to Constantine Huygens a fascinating tableau of his mental workshop:

"Four or five days ago I received the paper of the Jesuits [i.e., the *Objections* of Father Bourdin]. It is now a prisoner in my hands, and I want to treat it as courteously as I can; but I find it so guilty that I see no way of saving it. Every day I call my council of war about it, and I hope that in a short time you will be able to see the account of the trial. Perhaps these scholastic wars will result in my *World* being brought into the world. It would be out already, I think, were it not that I want to teach it to speak Latin first. I shall call it *Summa*

Philosophiae to make it more welcome to the scholastics, who are now persecuting it and trying to smother it before its birth. The [Calvinist] ministers [of Holland] are as hostile as the Jesuits".²⁶

This ambivalence is clearly more practical than intellectual. Descartes despised scholasticism and hoped to replace it with his own philosophy. But unfortunately the scholastics were in control of tertiary education; and in Catholic lands those scholastics were also Jesuits. He therefore tried to conciliate them, and entertained the hope that the *Principles of Philosophy* might be adopted as a textbook. In attempting to have it both ways, he failed both ways. The Jesuits were never remotely in danger of adopting Cartesianism. It did make some progress in Dutch universities but in 1672 Cartesians were placed on the defense by the extreme impiety of Spinoza's *Tractatus*, clerical critics maintaining that it was the logical outcome of the Cartesian system.²⁷ The laity, on the other hand, did not find the *Meditations* to their taste and sales of the book were poor.²⁸ Once the public were able to choose between Spinoza's hard Cartesianism and Locke's soft variety, the *Meditations* disappeared from the book stalls. It owes its modern revival entirely to academics. However, in reaching back three and a half centuries, we find it hard to conceive an intellectual milieu that might cast up a philosophical treatise whose sense is profoundly enmeshed in the academic wars of that milieu. But let us formulate this difficulty more precisely. Descartes is today commonly viewed as a modern innovator, insofar as he championed the mechanistic system, yet an innovator still concerned with many of the traditional metaphysical questions. One therefore discounts as exaggeration those places where he sharply juxtaposed the old and new philosophy as exclusive alternatives. We are altogether unprepared for the possibility that everything traditional and "uncartesian" in Descartes' philosophy is merely a flanking movement in an elaborate academic war. Yet that is exactly what the Preface and the supporting documentation here examined suggest. The second anonymous writing we wish to examine does not merely suggest this; it screams it from the house tops.

The Preface to the *Passions* consists of two exchanges of letters between Descartes and an unidentified correspondent in Paris. In the *Advertissement d'un des amis de l'auteur*, the correspondent explains that Descartes sent the *Passions* to him from Holland, with instructions to print it and to add "such a preface as I should wish". Who is this friend and correspondent to whom Descartes gave *carte blanche* to write whatever he wished by way of preface? Adrian Baillet identified him as Clerselier, but Charles Adam showed that identification to be inconsistent with Descartes' correspondence with Clerselier at that time. Whereas in July, 1649 the Paris correspondent still had not seen the *Passions* and despaired of its being printed, Descartes wrote Clerselier in April 1649 that the *Passions* were about to be published. Adam identified the correspondent as Abbé Picot.²⁹ He drew attention,

however, to an inconsistency in this identification; it is that while the correspondent claims to have been charged by Descartes with *printing* the *Passions*, Abbe Picot only supervised its *distribution* in Paris, the printing itself being done by Elzevier in Amsterdam. But this inconsistency is fatal to the identification of Picot as author of the Preface. For if Descartes dispatched the *printed* text to Paris, as he did, then neither Picot nor anyone else in Paris could have added the Preface. Or to put it another way, since Picot was involved only in distribution and not in printing, he did not carry out the task that the correspondent claims to have done. Since there is no evidence that anyone other than Picot was involved at the Paris end, we are forced to conclude that the Preface, contrary to its express declaration, was printed in Amsterdam under Descartes' supervision. If so, the Paris correspondent exists only as a literary fiction conjured by someone in Amsterdam or its environs. The internal evidence of the Preface readily identifies the correspondent as yet another of Descartes' *personae*. Here is the evidence.

1. The correspondent complains that he has not seen the manuscript of the *Passions*. He also notes that he did not discuss its contents with Descartes when he visited Paris in 1647. In this way he establishes his complete ignorance of the work. Yet the correspondent speaks at length about the passions, especially about Descartes' intimate feelings and attitudes. His classification and evaluation of passions is not only consistent with the teaching set forth in a work he has never seen, he even copies Cartesian terminology and produces accurate paraphrases of the unseen work.³⁰

2. Descartes raises doubt about the independent existence of the correspondent in his response to the first letter. He says that if the correspondent publishes his letter, as he threatens, then "I would fear that people will imagine that there is more collusion between us than there has been, and [they will think] that I have entreated you to write certain things that propriety would not allow me to make known to the public myself".³¹ Assuming that the correspondent is Descartes' *persona*, the function of this remark may be construed as follows. There are certain things that Descartes urgently desired to communicate to the public, but cannot because they intimately concerned himself. For modesty's sake he put these things into the mouth of another person. But then, by raising the scruple about collusion, he suggested that correspondent's sentiments, which he seems to oppose, were in fact his own.

3. The correspondent makes it abundantly clear why Descartes could not say what he says without shocking or even outraging propriety: the Preface is a paean to Descartes' greatness as a philosopher and benefactor of mankind. But the author, evidently skilled in panegyric, cleverly casts his praise as reproach. Descartes is reproached for his do-nothing attitude toward his own "practical" philosophy: although Cartesian philosophy promises immense practical benefit to all mankind, its originator does nothing toward promoting its practice. The

correspondent faults him for failing even to announce the importance of his work, having spoken of it “only in passing, in the preface of the book”.³²

Having attacked Descartes’ inaction, he launches into vehement reproaches of the modesty and diffidence that cause Descartes to neglect “the public good”. The explanation of this diffidence takes the correspondent through a rehearsal of Descartes’ ambivalence toward publishing, now familiar to us. Once again the scholastic wars and the irreconcilability of Cartesian philosophy with traditional philosophy are emphasized. Finally, in a fit of friendly fury, the correspondent threatens to print his letter so that Descartes can no longer hide behind the pretense that the public is not interested in his project to master nature.³³

4. Descartes’ replies illustrate the faults his friend blames. He is evasive, reluctant to act without the public support which he thinks will not be forthcoming, and finds reasons why his friend should not publish his panegyric. However, according to the fiction of the Preface, this diffident benefactor did act by allowing his friend to add “whatever preface he wished”.

5. The Preface presents an extensive summary of Cartesian philosophy comparable in scope to the summary given in the Preface to the *Principles*. While it is not impossible that one of Descartes’ friends might have composed the former on the basis of the latter, the high degree of correspondence between the two works is a strong argument for Descartes’ authorship. But the new twist given to the Preface to the *Passions* establishes, I believe, Descartes’ authorship beyond reasonable doubt. I refer to the emphasis the Preface places upon the practical bearing of Cartesian philosophy as a technological physics able to transform nature to human uses. The idea itself is not new: as we previously mentioned, both the *Discourse* and the Preface to the *Principles* unequivocally posit the mastery of nature as the goal of philosophy. The novelty lies only in the *way* this goal is displayed for the reader’s attention. The difference is accurately characterized by the author of the Preface to the *Passions* when he reproaches Descartes for understating a practical goal so important to mankind that it must be shouted from the house tops. What identifies this clear departure from Descartes’ previous reticence as genuinely Cartesian is the consistency of the author’s description of Descartes’ diffidence with Descartes’ descriptions in the *Discourse* and correspondence. When the accuracy of the description is paired with the fact that the author manages to describe Descartes’ “passions” in the terminology of the *Passions*, a book that he purportedly has not seen, the internal evidence for Descartes’ authorship is conclusive.

Supposing, then, that these two prefaces were written by Descartes, what bearing do they have on the study of his writings? They provide a much fuller description of Descartes’ ambivalence about publishing than is available otherwise, and confirm the hints thrown out in the

Discourse that the ambivalence signals less a state of indecision than a set of tactics to be followed in publishing his philosophy in a hostile climate of opinion. Put in a nutshell, the prefaces confirm the whispered remarks of the *Discourse* that metaphysics is only a detour, a pause made "once in a lifetime" on the way to the real goal of philosophy — a mathematical, technological physics. This way of viewing Cartesian philosophy corresponds well with what every textbook tells us about the innovating core of Cartesian philosophy, which is said to lie in its repudiation of Aristotelian physics and championing of the mechanistic universe. This hard core Cartesianism, with its clean geometrical lines, is difficult to square with the dog-eared scholastic metaphysics prominently displayed in the *Meditations*. The two prefaces help reconcile this massive inconsistency by explaining it as a concession to professional philosophers, extracted from Descartes by hope that the scholastics might be induced to act as the conveyor belt for a philosophy that they did not approve. If we are to comprehend the *Meditations* as the historical writing that it unquestionably is, its interpretation must be framed in terms of this compromise of "true philosophy" by the exigencies of the intellectual climate prevailing at the time. This is not the place to explore such an interpretation. But a few preliminary remarks might be appropriate.

It is a philosophical commonplace that the logic of mechanism is incompatible with the scholastic philosophy of the seventeenth century Catholic and Protestant clergymen. Even the streamlined theology of the Protestants committed them to defense of miracles, to belief in spirits, witches, and the like; to belief that natural effects such as comets or plagues were the work of God meant as retribution or as sign to man; and so on. Mechanism, by contrast, excludes final causes and teleological natural order, miracles are impossible, witches and spirits generally are figments of imagination, and every natural effect, without exception, has a natural cause. From the point of view of systematic logic, it is impossible for a lucid mind to hesitate for a moment about the complete incompatibility of these two outlooks. We may therefore be tempted to infer that if Descartes believed his tactic of throwing a scholastic mantel over his mechanistic philosophy had a chance of succeeding, then he must have lacked clarity about his own system.

This inference must be resisted. If Descartes' tactic failed to secure a place for his philosophy in the curriculum of the schools, it remains true that the prevailing form of philosophy after about 1650 was an illogical compromise between mechanistic philosophy and religious dogmas of ancient provenance — the theology of Malebranche, Bishop Berkeley, the Low Church Latitudinarians are examples. The career of mechanistic philosophy then confirms Descartes' judgment that some diluted, compromised version of mechanism was necessary in order to give it currency. Events also confirmed that the main lines of his compromise, a metaphysical dualism that rescued the soul from the fatality of natural processes, was needful. Dualism represented the *minimum* feasible

concession to the dominant religious climate of the day. Again, the success of Locke's soft Cartesianism reflects favorably on the main line of Descartes' judgments concerning the accommodation of philosophy to religious beliefs. In the *Essay*, Locke presupposed that "the external world" was the mechanistic system that Newton's natural philosophy declared it to be. What remained to be done was to clear our "mental powers" of the phantasms and chimeras that had been expunged from nature; and this attending to the mind's powers to clear it of "idols" or "prejudice" was a tactic taken over from Bacon and Descartes.³⁴

These particulars go to show that Descartes' tactical failure concerns not the broad lines, which succeeded in the hands of other authors, but in the attempt to simulate traditional metaphysics, and get this simulation accepted by the Jesuits, with whom he was at "war". To approach the work historically, then, must mean approaching it as a Jesuitical work, whose main feature, we know from the Preface to the French translation of the *Meditations*, as well as from a private letter to Mersenne, is to use scholastic verbiage for a doctrine that completely overthrows scholasticism.³⁵ The deployment of that tactic must logically entail a tremendous tension between Descartes' "very free new thoughts" and the old prejudices simulated by the *Meditations*. The *Meditations*, in other words, should exhibit a tendency to dissolve into incoherence under the burden of inconsistent philosophies. Aspects of this incoherence are salient points of contemporary Cartesian studies — the dreaming doubt, the deceiving demon, the proofs of God's existence, the creating God. In a recent publication the present author has used a review of the secondary literature to present a systematic exposition of the functional incoherence of the *Meditations* as a work meant to erect mechanism on the ruins of the systems of Aristotle and St. Thomas.³⁶ Readers who consult that article will find that the seemingly paradoxical findings of the research presented here may be integrated into a systematic interpretation of Descartes' metaphysics.

NOTES

*The main ideas of this essay were originally published as "Les écrits anonymes de Descartes", in a special Descartes issue of *Les Etudes Philosophiques*, 1976. Numerous calls for an English translation led me to revise and extend the article in light of research published in the intervening years.

¹ Maurice Cranston, *John Locke, A Biography* (London: Longmans, 1957), 227, 249f., 253, 262, 285, 392.

² Frank Manuel, *Freedom from History and Other Untimely Essays* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), 156, 160, 164.

³ *Discours de la méthode*, edited by E. Gilson, 3rd. ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1962), 40, 41, 42, 60, 68, 71.

⁴ *Oeuvres de Descartes*, edited by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: Vrin, 1957-1968), I, 23f.

⁵ Personal communication from Professor Stoothoff, of the University of Canterbury, New Zealand.

⁶ P. Ehrmann, "Descartes: Complément à l'histoire d'une préface inconnue," *Le Bourquiniste Français* 42 (1962), 103-106.

⁷ T. McClaughlin, "Censorship and Defenders of the Cartesian Faith in Mid-Seventeenth Century France", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40 (1979), 569-81.

⁸ Adrian Baillet, *Vie de Monsieur Descartes* (Paris, 1691), II, 440.

⁹ J. R. Armogathe, "Editions et émissions des oeuvres de Descartes de 1657 à 1673", *Archives de Philosophie* 39 (1976), 453.

¹⁰ Ehrmann, *op. cit.*, 104, 133.

¹¹ Baillet, *op. cit.*, II, 171ff., 220, 241, 279f., 324.

¹² Adam and Tannery, *op. cit.*, IX-1, 1, n.

¹³ Alquié, *Oeuvres Philosophiques de Descartes* (Paris: Garnier, 1973), II, 394, n.1.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 379.

¹⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, IV, 142.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 3.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, IX-2, 21f.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 1f., 14, 18.

²¹ *Op. cit.*, IX-1, 2.

²² The full text reads as follows: "Lors que l'auteur, après avoir conçu ces Méditations dans son esprit, résolu d'en faire part au public, ce fut autant par la crainte d'étouffer la voix de la vérité, qu'à dessein de la soumettre à l'épreuve de tous les doctes. A cet effet il leur voulut parler en leur langue, & à leur mode, & renferma toutes des pensées dans le Latin, & les termes de l'école. Son intention n'a point été frustrée . . ." (*ibid*, I).

²³ *Discours de la méthode*, 34.

²⁴ *Oeuvres de Descartes*, III, 523, 233, 259f., 270, 276. For further examples of his deliberate simulation of scholastic doctrine by means of linguistic imitation, see *ibid*, III, 297f., 491f., 528f.

²⁵ *Ibid*, IX-1, 3.

²⁶ *Ibid*, III, 523.

²⁷ J. Freudenthal, *Spinoza: Leben und Lehre*, 2nd. ed. (Heidelberg: Winter, 1927), 236-42.

²⁸ Armogathe, *op. cit.*, 453, n. 8, where he corrects Ehrmann's statement that sales varied as the *Meditations* did or did not include the Preface. According to Armogathe, the sales of *all* Descartes' works were poor.

²⁹ *Oeuvres de Descartes*, XI, 294f.

³⁰ A comparison of *Oeuvres de Descartes* XI, 304-306 with articles 150-160 of the *Passions* shows that "satisfaction de soi-même" or its opposite is basic to the view of virtue and vice expressed by both authors. Both characterize the virtuous/vicious self-relation in the same terms (*faiblesse, bassesse, l'humilité vertueuse, l'humilité vicieuse, l'orgueil*). The correspondent asserts that Descartes despises reputation without merit (p. 304). Descartes equates reputation without merit, and love of reputation regardless of merit, with pride, which he sharply distinguishes from the self-sufficiency of generosity (art. 157). The correspondent's characterization of asking much for oneself as baseness, and speaking much of oneself as pride, harmonizes with Descartes's conception of generosity as the self-satisfaction that stems from having acted well on one's knowledge of good and evil. Finally, both authors make the distinction between virtue and vice turn on the justness of a man's self-evaluation: they accept the same version of the virtur-is-knowledge doctrine.

³¹ *Oeuvres de Descartes* XI, 325.

³² *Ibid*, 305.

³³ *Ibid*, 304.

³⁴ Locke dedicated the *Essay* to the Earl of Pembroke, a whig magnate and patron of Locke who was at that time President of the Royal Society. The *Essay's* attack on innate ideas was aimed at Henry More and Ralph Cudworth, whose patronizing of the mechanistic system led them into explicit defenses of the worst popular superstitions, e.g., belief in witches.

³⁵ *Oeuvres de Descartes*, III, 297f.

³⁶ "Analytic History of Philosophy: The Case of Descartes", *Philosophical Forum* 12 (1981), 273-94.