



Having a Cake and Eating It Too? Direct Realism and Objective Identity in Descartes

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Abstract

Descartes holds that ideas have or contain *objective reality* of their objects, so that the idea of the sun is the sun itself existing in the intellect. In this paper, I examine this obscure thesis which grounds the disagreement about Descartes' commitment to direct or indirect realism. I suggest that, importantly, both readings are correct to a certain extent. I argue that the view of objective reality Descartes develops bears the earmarks of both direct and indirect realist views but must be classified as a third alternative combining some central features of both. I elaborate first on the direct realist interpretations of Descartes' objective reality and explain their most significant shortcomings. My interpretation of objective identity comes in the form of attributing to Descartes a view about identity and persistence of objects known as *sortalism*. I argue that Descartes' objective identity turns out to be much like the Aristotelian view of *formal identity*, yet without the forms. By way of discussing the case of Theseus' ship, I point out how Cartesian sortalism, contrary to other versions of sortalism, allows us to analyze the puzzle as a tension between two distinct yet independently legitimate criteria of identity. It is this sortalist insight that helps to render Descartes' account of objective identity consistent. This point also grounds my argument that we need not consider direct and indirect realism as logical complements, contrary to the received wisdom.

Keywords Descartes René · Philosophy of mind · Direct Realism · (Numerical) Identity · Causation · Sortalism

1 Introduction

For a long time, Descartes was considered a paradigmatic *indirect realist*. Until recently, his commitment to this view, according to which our cognitive reach, strictly speaking, terminates in our ideas, went virtually unchallenged. However, an increasing number of scholars now argue that the opposite is true of Descartes—we should consider him as elaborating a *direct realist* position and holding that our cognition is *of* or *about* external things themselves, directly. Interestingly, the common wisdom is that these views are logical contradictories: A theory of perception is indirect when it holds that awareness of ordinary objects (like the sun) is mediated by awareness of some mental object (say, an idea or a sense datum representing the sun). Conversely, a theory of perception is direct if (and only if) it denies that

perception is indirect in the aforementioned way, so that our awareness involves the extramental object itself.¹

¹ The distinction between indirect realism (or representative theory of perception) and direct (or naïve) realism is difficult to draw, especially in terms on which both sides could agree on simultaneously. An example of this difficulty is useful. Indirect realist Jackson (1977) states his view in terms of mediate and immediate objects of perception. The external object, O, is the mediate object, a mental object or sense datum, M, the immediate object. By immediately perceiving M, the perceiver, S, perceives (mediately) O. In contrast, direct realist Huemer (2001, 79–92) claims that such views as Jackson's are confused. They confuse "a vehicle of perception" with "an object of perception". For Huemer, M is a vehicle, but not perceived on its own. As O is the only proper object of perception, perception is direct according to Huemer. Interestingly, the difference between these views, arguably defined as logical contradictories, is hard to pin down properly. Jackson defines the perceptual relation between S and O as taking place 'in virtue of' S's perceiving M (1977, 15–20). But this seems to be close how Huemer sees his view. While he denies that M (consisting of, e.g., qualia) is an object of perception, he still agrees that perception takes place by M being what proximally modifies S's mind, that is, *in virtue of* M modifying S's mind. I will return to this issue in a later footnote in connection to Paul Hoffman's reading of Descartes. I have discussed the precise relation between direct and indirect realism further in my (2016).

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While evolution in the ways new generations of interpreters read historical texts is a commonplace phenomenon in philosophy, there is something more to this specific scholarly dispute. It is especially interesting, because at its heart lies an important piece of evidence providing simultaneous support for both opposing readings: Descartes' idiosyncratic version of the scholastic doctrine about *objective reality*.² Those inclined to read Descartes as an indirect realist point out that he clearly states that the objective reality contained by an idea is a *mental object* of awareness—a modification of the mind-substance that represents the external object.³ For the direct realist interpreters, Descartes' point is something else entirely: The objective reality is not a mental object, but the reality of the external thing, so that in being aware of the objective reality one is aware of the external object itself, not a mental object.⁴

In this paper I suggest that, importantly, both camps have gotten it right: The view of objective reality Descartes develops bears the earmarks of both direct and indirect realist views at the same time. This leads me to propose a reading that places Descartes' view somewhere in between these two views traditionally viewed as contradictory to each other: as having it both ways. I argue that Descartes' theory of ideas can be viewed as an original attempt to consider the distinct and incompatible motivations behind the indirect and direct realist views in a thoroughly causal framework. To see how this is possible, we must understand Descartes' thesis about objective reality, according to which “the idea of the sun is the sun itself existing in the intellect” (CSM2 75, AT7 102–103).⁵ I label this thesis, admittedly articulated in less than clear terms by Descartes, as *objective identity*.

² For historical overviews of the doctrine of objective reality (also objective *being*), see Read (1977), Nuchelmans (1983, Chaps. 1–2), Normore (1986), Tachau (1988), and Ayers (1998). For a helpful comparison of objective reality in certain scholastics, as well as in Descartes, see Brown (2007, 139–43). In the same volume, see also Clemenson (2007), King (2007), and Tweedale (2007).

³ While the representationalist reading has long been the default interpretation of Descartes' ideas, there has nevertheless been significant disagreement over whether his alleged representationalism is a strength or liability. For a historical critical view, see Reid (Reid 1896). For a more recent critical representationalist reading, see Kenny (1968). In contrast, Hoffman (2002b) defends a representationalist reading in an approving tone. I have elaborated further the functions of representation and reference of ideas in Descartes' theory of ideas in my (2023).

⁴ See, for example, (O'Neil 1974; Lennon 1974; Yolton 1975, 1984; Costa 1983; Normore 1986; Cook 1987; Nadler 1989; Alanen 1990; Brown 2007; Carriero 2013). I will discuss differences among the direct realist interpreters later in the text.

⁵ The abbreviation “CSM” refers to the English translation of Descartes' works by Cottingham, Stootoff, and Murdoch (Descartes 1984, 1985) and is followed by the volume and page numbers, respectively. The third volume (Descartes 1991) includes Kenny as translator, and is abbreviated ‘CSMK’ followed by page numbers. The abbreviation “AT” refers to Adam and Tannery's edition of Descartes' works

Making philosophical sense of this thesis is the task of this paper.

I argue for my own reading by elaborating first on the direct realist interpretations of Descartes' objective reality and explaining their most significant shortcomings. My proposed solution to these issues and my interpretation of objective identity comes in the form of attributing to Descartes a view about identity and persistence of objects known as *sortalism*. While attributing this sortalist reading to Descartes must remain somewhat tentative, I indicate that there is evidence in support for doing so that is independent of my considerations pertaining directly to the thesis of objective identity. In addition, the Cartesian variety of sortalism as I develop it, connected to the causal notion of *reality* (lat. *realitas*), is a metaphysically interesting view of identity, and it can help us understand various problems related to identity, or so I argue. To illustrate this, I discuss also the case of Theseus' ship, and indicate how Cartesian sortalism (contrary to many other views about identity, including more traditional versions of sortalism) allows us to analyze the original puzzle as a tension between two distinct yet independently legitimate criteria of identity. Finally, I will discuss how the sortalist reading of Descartes' objective identity offers us an interesting midway position between direct and indirect realism, one that appreciates the intricacies of both direct and indirect realisms and has gone unnoticed by philosophers thus far.⁶

2 The Problem of Objective Identity

It is well known that, according to Descartes, ideas are “as it were the images of things” (CSM2 25, AT7 37). For our purposes, we can take this to mean that ideas are *intentional* mental states—mental states that *have*, are *directed at*, or *are about*, objects.⁷ What this statement precisely implies about the nature of ideas need not yet concern us. The intentionality or aboutness of ideas is due to the ideas having or

(Descartes 1904) and is followed by the volume and page numbers, respectively.

⁶ In what follows, I will restrict my attention solely to issues related to the problem of objective identity, explained below, and ignore many other issues related to his alleged direct or indirect realism. For instance, Descartes' notion of *perception* (i.e., the activity of the intellect) and his views related to it do not directly concern me, nor does his 6th Meditation account of sensation. To further simplify my discussion, I will restrict my attention specifically to singular adventitious ideas – ideas of particular objects, like the sun – though I will occasionally say something of innate universal ideas as well.

⁷ According to Husserl, intentionality is a ‘universal fundamental property of consciousness’ (Husserl 1960, Sect. 14). It is the classic exposition of this Husserlian notion by Smith and McIntyre (1982) that is in an important way responsible for the term entering into discussions of mind in the analytical philosophical tradition as well.

containing *objective reality* or *objective being*.⁸ The objective reality that ideas have or contain contrasts with the *formal reality* or *being* possessed by things that actually exist. Descartes' terminology is of scholastic origin, yet departs significantly from all pre-existing usages of the terms; there is no agreement how to interpret it among scholars (see Brown 2016). The important point for our purposes is that the reality that exists objectively in an idea of, say, the sun, is the reality of the sun existing formally outside the mind.

In his reply to Catusus, an Aristotelian critic struggling to make sense of Descartes' idiosyncratic use of the term objective reality or being, Descartes explains his divergence from the Aristotelian view. Aristotelians, such as Suárez, thought that the objective being in the mind requires no other causes besides the mind in which it is contained—for not needing causes, they are non-entities.⁹ Descartes opposes this view, explaining that even an idea of an intricate machine, which does not exist outside the mind imagining it, has ordinary causes in the sense of being composed of ideas acquired on a previous occasion, and in the combinatorial powers and intellectual skill used in creating the novel complex idea (CSM2 75–76, AT7 103–104). It is this divergence from the more traditional view about objective reality, according to which also ideas and the objective reality they contain require causes that gives troubles to Descartes. (I discuss this “causal realism” about ideas later below and ignore these details for a moment.)

Descartes explains:

‘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 normally are in the intellect. Now this mode of being is of course much less perfect than that possessed by things which exist outside the intellect;

but, as I did explain, it is not therefore simply nothing. (CSM2 75; AT7 102–103.)

Notice, first, how Descartes here distinguishes his position from Suárez's view by pointing out that for him, objective reality is not merely a “nothing”, that is, it requires ordinary causes. This claim is made already in the 3rd Meditation, along with the point that “just as the objective mode of being belongs to ideas by their very nature, so the formal mode of being belongs to the causes of ideas” (CSM2 29, AT7 42).¹⁰ However, this view about ideas requiring causes makes troubles for the subsequent claim that the idea of the sun “is the sun itself existing in the intellect”.

For good reason, this passage from *Replies to First Objections to Meditations* is famous for its obscurity. Some commentators have declared the view Descartes expresses here is, at least if taken literally, ‘wildly impossible’ (Yolton 1984, 38) or claimed that ‘it doesn't make much philosophical sense’ (Kaufman 2000, 390). The reason for such negative assessments is rather clear: In the act of thinking that is described, Descartes claims there is but one object involved, namely the sun. However, he clearly admits that there is a difference at play, for the sun in the heavens is the cause of the idea of the sun in the mind, and in the passage above he admits that there are two distinct sets of properties involved (i.e., that the objective mode of being is much less perfect than the formal mode of being). By Leibniz's law, this entails that there is more than one thing involved, after all.¹¹ Therefore, Descartes' view seems inconsistent.

To unpack what Descartes is trying to convey here, we should note that most scholars at least agree on the point that Descartes is making: that when a subject is thinking of the sun, in some important sense there is but one thing (the sun), albeit there are two different kinds of existence. The-sun-as-it-exists-inside-the-intellect (in short, *the sun objectively*) is less perfect than the-sun-as-it-exists-outside-the-intellect

⁸ Descartes' terminology makes it clear that the relation between an idea and the objective reality is one of containment (*continere*) or possession (*habere*). Objects are said to transfer or ‘pour’ (*transfundere*) their own reality into the ideas causally. (E.g., AT7 40–42, CSM2 28–29.) Ideas also exhibit the objective reality they contain, and this ‘objective mode of being belongs to ideas by their very nature’ (CSM2 29, AT7 42). I interpret this as the claim that objective reality is an essential (necessary) feature of all ideas.

⁹ See *Metaphysical Disputations*, Disputation 30, Sect. 11, § 46 (translated in Ariew, Cottingham, and Sorell 1998, 33–34). For Suárez, fictive beings differ from *entia rationis* (beings of reason) in having “an aptitude to exist”. *Entia rationis* are mere conceptual things that cannot exist on their own. Both differ from actual things in that the former have only objective being, while actual things have also formal being.

¹⁰ Descartes adds in the passage a caveat that the objective being belongs to “at least the first and most important” of ideas. This caveat is clearly added because of Descartes' operating under the methodical doubt, and for his specific aim with regard God's idea that is discussed. In my view, it should not be read to mean that some ideas lack objective being or reality. After all, as pointed out above in the text, in 2nd Replies Descartes states that even the idea of imagined intricate machine has objective reality (albeit a composite reality gotten from several sources).

¹¹ *Leibniz's Law*, or the *Law of Identity*, is a fundamental principle (specifically, a necessary condition) of sameness or (numerical) identity. It states that for any objects x and y , if x and y are the same object, then x has all the properties that y does, and vice versa. The specific point of the law is the congruence of all the properties of a thing. If there really is a relation of sameness or identity, then there is but one thing, and not two distinct things, designated by the different names or variables. And if only one thing is designated, then there can be no difference in the properties under different designations, for that would be absurd.

(*the sun formally*). The sun formally is an immensely big radiating ball of plasma, around which the Earth and the other planets of the solar system revolve. In contrast, the sun objectively is something in the intellect of someone thinking about the sun. The question is whether there is any philosophically reasonable, non-metaphorical sense in which the formal and objective modes of being of the sun can be considered non-distinct.¹²

I use the label *objective identity* to refer to the problematic claim Descartes makes: that the sun in the intellect (sun objectively) is just the sun itself (sun formally). According to Descartes, thinking of an object proceeds by way of having an idea in the mind. The idea is a modification of the mind of the thinker, yet it is also the extramental object of thought in this other, objective, mode of existence. The tension here has a lot to do with the fact that the idea, as a modification of the mind, is ontologically dependent on the mind (under no circumstances can it exist without that mind, see, e.g., CSM1 201–212, AT8A 25–27). The sun’s objective being purportedly contained by the idea, however, is at least causally dependent on the actual object: Objects are even said to transfer or “pour” (*transfundere*) their own reality into their ideas (e.g., AT7 40–42, CSM2 28–29).¹³ In what follows, it is my task to argue my way through these apparent inconsistencies to provide a reading of objective identity that makes philosophical sense.

3 Direct and Indirect Realism

According to Aristotle and his scholastic followers, sensory cognition involves an assimilation of the known by the knower, resulting from the knower’s acquiring the *form* of the thing cognized. For them, cognizing a thing was a

matter of identity between the form that informs the external thing (and is responsible for its identity) and that same form coming to exist in the soul. Because of this *formal identity*, the Aristotelian picture of sensory perception is often classified as a form of direct realism: It is the form of the thing itself that is perceived, directly. Authors like Carriero (2013; 2009) have emphasized the similarities between Descartes’ view and that of the Aristotelians. The view I defend in this paper continues on this path. It is my view that in certain ways Descartes’ doctrine of objective identity is designed to salvage as much of the Aristotelian identity-account of cognition as possible while still rejecting the hylomorphic metaphysics accompanying it.¹⁴

Although there is room to debate whether identity-views like those held by the Aristotelians or those attributed to Descartes (in this paper or elsewhere) amount to direct realism or not, the claim that such views must be counted among the direct realist views is quite understandable.¹⁵ For the Aristotelians, it was the form that was responsible for the sun’s identity that was in the mind; for Descartes, it is the reality of the sun that is in the mind. In both cases, it is the form/reality itself that exists in the object that is perceived, or of which the thinker is aware of—no intermediaries are involved.

However, there is a distinction to be made between the sun formally out there and the sun objectively in the intellect for Descartes (just as there is a similar distinction to be made between the form as it informs the thing and as it exists in the soul¹⁶). Inside this distinction for Descartes, arguably, we are aware of the objective reality but not of the formal reality of the sun. This distinction seems to imply that we have no direct awareness of the sun as it exists formally, of the sun as it exists external to the mind, but only of the sun as it exists in the mind. This is naturally understood as meaning that the sun in the objective mode of being *represents* the formal (actual) sun, and such a view is naturally viewed as a form of indirect realism given that we are

¹² Michael Ayers describes the problem in Cartesian terms: “The question could be put as follows. Which is the mere distinction of reason, and which the real distinction (1) the distinction between the idea as mode of thought and the idea as intentional object of thought or (2) the distinction between the latter (i.e., the thing as it exists in the mind) and the real object (the thing as it exists in reality)? It seems clear that, at least on ordinary realist assumptions, there cannot be one thing, the idea, which is really identical both to the mode of thought and to the real object”. (Ayers 1998, 1068).

¹³ This point might seem to contradict Descartes’ views about true and immutable natures. However, as Nolan (1997; 1998) has argued, Descartes is a conceptualist about universals and abstracta. Thus, they are much like so-called *entia rationis* in that they can exist only in the mind, and as universals, they lack the aptitude to exist outside the mind (see footnote 9 above). However, even these things having only the objective mode of being are caused, namely by God, for they belong intrinsically to the nature of all thought. I will not address here the issue of true and immutable natures further, for it would take me too far from the issue at hand, which concerns thinking of actual (singular) objects. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the need to add this clarification.

¹⁴ Also Carriero (2013) argues for strong affinities between the views of Descartes and his (Thomist) Aristotelian predecessors in this respect.

¹⁵ For an argument according to which Thomas Aquinas, a paradigmatic Aristotelian, is in fact a representationalist (along with Descartes and his follower Arnauld), see Hoffman (2002b).

¹⁶ As an anonymous reviewer pointed out to me, this should not be taken to mean that for Aristotelians one is aware of the form in the intellect. Aquinas, for one, denied precisely this stating that the form in the intellect is “by which we understand”, not what is thereby understood (i.e., the external thing). Though Huemer does not refer to Aquinas, his defense of direct realism hinges on this very issue (see footnote 1 above). In contrast, Paul Hoffman states as his view that “it seems to me overwhelmingly the case that Descartes [believed] that our awareness of objects is mediated by our awareness of the objective being of our ideas” (Hoffman 2002b, 175). Notice, that Hoffman seems to think that the same argument applies to Aquinas’ view as well.

strictly speaking aware only of the representation, not what is represented (for an argument for this view, see Hoffman 2002b).

It should be pointed out that even if we accept that the Aristotelian formal identity view amounts to direct realism, there is a further problem for Descartes' view. Namely, it is not clear that Descartes can help himself to this kind of identity-explanation without the metaphysics of forms. A form is precisely the kind of thing that can *inform* many distinct things while retaining its identity. Descartes' metaphysics seems to lack ingredients that could reasonably act as surrogates for the forms, to function as a "bearer of identity" that exists in different modes outside and inside the intellect. Therefore, the direct realist interpreters of Descartes face a formidable task.

While discussing the aforementioned tensions, Lilli Alanen follows Calvin Normore's (1986) lead, and states that the relation 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" (1994, 233). Alanen admits that there is a difference between the sun as it exists independently of any mind and the sun as it is thought of (by a mind), but the latter is still just the sun itself. As Descartes himself points out: "If 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" (CSM2 74, AT7 102). As this suggestion points to the fact that in perceiving the sun, we are aware of the sun itself, it is tempting to view Descartes as developing a direct realist position here (which is how Alanen aligns her view). However, while this view is compatible with what Descartes says about objective identity, it falls short of explaining how the thesis of objective identity is supposed to work. That is, even if we accept that there is only one and the same thing, the sun, that is in the heavens and also thought of by the thinker, what are we to make of the claim that the objective reality is something contained or had by an idea and causally originates in (or even is something transferred into the mind from) the object?

Steven Nadler has argued that we should understand Descartes' views about objective reality along the lines of so-called *content view of intentionality*.¹⁷ The content view contrasts with *object-view of intentionality*, according to which the objective reality contained by an idea would be considered a mind-dependent object of awareness. In the object view, our "cognitive reach" terminates at our ideas. Everything else belonging to our thinking or knowing about the external things is not part of our cognitive reach proper, but inference (or computation), which makes our relation

to the external things *indirect*. The traditional veil-of-ideas reading of Descartes' ideas as mental representatives of the objects proceeds precisely on the lines of the object view.¹⁸ However, according to the content view of intentionality which Nadler draws upon, the objective reality is not an object of awareness, but something that *directs* our awareness to an object. As Paul Hoffman (2012, 175) has pointed out, the content view is somewhat of a misnomer, for the objective reality is supposed to work more like a *pointer*: "We are supposed to think of the idea's content as something like a metaphysical fiber optic telescope that directs our attention to a particular external object but not by means of our being aware of [that content]" (Hoffman 2012, 175). Here we have a plausible mechanism that explains how the objective identity might work: The objective reality is a property of an idea which directs our awareness to an object (without our being aware of the content *per se*).

However, there is an obvious problem for Nadler's content reading of objective reality: Descartes arguably thinks that we are aware precisely of the objective mode of being of sun, not the formal sun (e.g., CSM2 74–75; AT7 102–103). Evidence of this can easily be found by looking at how Descartes devises his Third Meditation argument for God's existence. This argument is a matter of the meditator coming to understand "how the idea of a supremely perfect being, which is in us, possesses so much objective reality that it can come only from a cause which is supremely perfect" (CSM2 10, AT7 14). The argument proceeds from the objective reality to the formal existence of the thing (i.e., God). Such an argument would make little sense if Descartes thought about the objective reality in the same way as the content view: something of which we are not aware of by itself—a mere unconscious pointer. Thus, as Hoffman also argues, the objective reality should not be viewed as a content, but as an object—leading to the conclusion that Descartes is an indirect realist.¹⁹

While arguing against Nadler's direct realist reading and defending his own indirect realist position, Hoffman suggests an analogy to ease the tension in Descartes' position:

There is no contradiction in asserting both that the same sun has two modes of existence and that the sun in one mode of existence is not identical to itself in the other mode of existence, any more than there is in asserting that we are the same human being we were at birth even though it cannot be truly predicated of us as adults that we are under thirty inches tall. (Hoffman 2002, 168.)

¹⁸ See, e.g., Kenny (1968, 116), who claims that an "extra entity has been spirited into existence" by Descartes' doctrine of objective being.

¹⁹ Hoffman's (2002b) argument shares this conclusion, but he does not consider the argument for God's existence.

¹⁷ The terms are introduced by Smith and McIntyre (1982).

Hoffman points to a case where a thing—a human being—has distinct sets of properties at different times. He points out that a thing can have different temporal phases, which are not identical—no child is an adult, strictly speaking. Despite this, the child can be the same human being as the adult is. Hoffman thinks the example offers an analogy to the relation between the sun objectively and the sun formally, which in his view is not one of identity, after all:

To say that it is the same sun that has these two modes of existence does not imply that the sun as it exists objectively in the mind is identical to the sun as it exists formally in the heavens, at least in our contemporary sense of identity, according to which whatever is truly predicated of one is truly predicable of the other (Hoffman 2002b, 168–69).

Hoffman connects his understanding of (what I have called) objective identity as a case of *non-identity* to the issue about direct realism, pointing to the conclusion that Descartes is an indirect realist. He continues:

Given the non-identity claim, it does not follow from the fact that we are directly aware of the sun as it exists objectively in the mind that we are directly aware of the sun as it exists formally in the heavens. By my way of thinking, this strongly suggests that Descartes is not a direct realist. To be a direct realist about physical objects, he would have to hold that we are directly aware of the sun insofar as it exists formally in the heavens. (Hoffman 2002b, 168)

These considerations at least make understandable how the disagreement about Descartes' commitment to direct or indirect realism emerges. In one sense, the reality of the sun that is in the mind is just the reality of the sun outside the mind—there is but one reality involved. It is this identity aspect that motivates direct realist readings of Descartes' objective reality. However, in another sense, Descartes is also committed to viewing the objective reality as a mental object—we are precisely aware of the objective reality of the sun, not its formal reality.²⁰ The disagreement is about

²⁰ As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, the issue here hinges on the term “awareness” – a term Descartes does not use himself. I refer the reader to Hoffman's detailed discussion about the matter (2002b), where the argument for the claim is devised on the basis of implausibility of attributing “a pointer view” of intentionality to Descartes, given his views about representationality of ideas. Of course, many standard indirect realist readings assume that this is how Descartes should be read. For instance, Anthony Kenny says of Descartes' view that sun's having objective being in me “means that when I think of the sun, I think of an idea of the sun ... An extra entity has been spirited into existence” (Kenny 1968, 116).

which of these viewpoints to the objective reality we should treat as Descartes' considered position.

While it is natural to think that these positions on objective reality exclude each other, I will next argue that this is not necessarily the case. To see how this seemingly inconsistent view is possible, we must turn our attention to how Descartes viewed the logics of the identity relation. Hoffman was, no doubt, affected by Descartes' *sortalist* account of identity (to be elaborated shortly below), for he wrote significantly on themes related to the matter (see Hoffman 1986, 1999, 2002a). While I think Hoffman got much of Descartes' view correctly, especially with his analogy of objective vs. formal reality to child vs. adult, I believe he didn't quite come to see how well all the pieces fit together.

4 Cartesian Sortalism

My solution to the problem of objective identity discussed above is based on the observation that Descartes is committed to a metaphysical view about of identity and persistence of objects known as *sortalism*. According to sortalism, the *criteria* of identity and persistence of objects depend necessarily on what *kind* or *sort* of objects they are.²¹ This means, among other things, that it is not possible to meaningfully ask whether objects *a* and *b* are the same without specifying (at least implicitly) under what sortal concept the question is asked.

Before proceeding, we need to clarify what sortalism is and what it is not. Sortalism, or the *sortal* (or *Kind*) *dependency view*, should be distinguished from a relativist position with a similar appearance, defended for example by Geach (1962). To put it simply, the relative identity view holds that, in some cases, *a* can be the same *F* as *b* while *a* being a distinct *G* from *b*. An often-cited example of this relative view is that the same piece of clay can be now (identical to) one statue and now another. Sortalism, however, denies that there are such relative identities; it is committed to absolute identity instead.²² Sortalism holds that though criteria of identity by which we assess the sameness of things depend on what kind or sort of things we are

²¹ This view has been elaborated and defended most notably by David Wiggins (see Wiggins 2001; 2012). See also Lowe (see e.g., Lowe 2013, pt. 2). For critical evaluations of the Sortal Dependency view, see Snowdon (Snowdon 2009); Goodman (2012).

²² Sortalism is often confused with relative identity view. This mistake is quite understandable, for it is natural to speak of the view as a mode of relativizing identity to some kind or sort (sortalism is also known as the kind-dependency view). Indeed, even some of those defending the view problematically label it as relative identity theory (see e.g., Griffin 1976, 579). However, as Wiggins (2001, 22 ff) argues, sortalism is not a relativistic, but an *absolute* position on identity. (For authors who have defended what is properly a relative identity view, see Wiggins 2001, 23 footnote 2).

dealing with, the identity relation itself will in all instances satisfy the formal properties that are traditionally seen as characteristic of identity.²³ I will elaborate on this point in a moment; for the time being, we can think of sortalism as foremost a conceptual framework for investigating questions of identity and a plea for conceptual hygiene when making or assessing identity statements. According to sortalism, no piece of clay can be identical to a statue and vice versa, simply because they are of different sorts. Of course, in some cases the piece of clay that first was a statue can be molded into another statue, leading to a case where a statue₁ is the same piece of clay as the statue₂. But according to sortalism, to claim as the relative identity theorists do, that a thing belonging to one kind (e.g., the kind *piece of clay*) is identical to a thing belonging to another kind (e.g., the kind *statue*) is to commit a plain category mistake.

Another point we need to clarify is the difference between metaphysics of identity relation and the metaphysics of the “identity bearers”. The demand for conceptual hygiene regarding identity relation, in the sense just discussed, is compatible with different metaphysical accounts about persisting things. Though sortalism is originally an Aristotelian view, and many recent supporters of the view are professed Aristotelians as well, commitment to sortalism does not entail commitment to substantial forms nor neo-Aristotelian conception of substances (called proper continuants). The forms and neo-Aristotelian substances are but two possibilities to understand the fundamental nature of identity bearing things. As I will later argue, Descartes’ causal notion of reality is yet another. However, here it suffices to keep in mind that commitment to sortalism per se does not entail commitment to any specific substantive metaphysical view—sortalism in the relevant sense is a view about identity relation, not of things standing in that relation.

Hoffman, more than anyone else, has emphasized how integral a certain “strategy of relativization” is for Descartes’ view of metaphysical composition (see Hoffman 1999). This relativization of a concept to a kind of thing in question is especially clear regarding his central ontological notions, such as “true and immutable natures”, “substance”, and “*ens per se*”.²⁴ It is precisely this ‘strategy’ elaborated by Hoffman that I have called here *sortalism*.

²³ According to sortalism, there is but one kind of identity relation, one that has all the familiar properties of identity relation (i.e., it is an equivalence relation that is reflexive, symmetrical, and transitive). Importantly, Leibniz’ Law correctly describes the identity relation: If the relation between a and b is one of identity, then there is but one set of properties that can be truly predicated of either one.

²⁴ It is also evident in contexts where Descartes seems to be committed to certain contradictory views. For instance, that a triangle inscribed in a square both does and does not have a true and immutable nature (CSM2 83–84; AT7 117–118).

Others, like Normore and Brown, point out that Descartes subscribes to “different criteria of identity for bodies depending upon the context and which sortal is operative” (C. Normore and Brown 2014, 41). For example, in a letter to Mesland from 9 to 1645, Descartes points out that the word “body” is ambiguous. When taken in a general sense, it stands for “a determinate part of matter” which cannot remain numerically the same “if any particle of matter were changed” (CSMK 242–243, AT4 166). However, when talking of a human body, “it is still the same body, numerically the same body, so long as it remains joined and substantially united with the same soul” (CSMK 242–243, AT4 166).

The issue Descartes discusses concerning the identity of a human body (as opposed to mere aggregate of matter) is, in fact, one of the most important motivations for the conceptual hygiene sortalism encourages. References to ordinary physical things—extended things that take up space—are usually ambiguous in the sense Descartes describes. In any location where a physical thing is, there are also several other physical things (or so one can argue). For example, on this chair that currently supports my weight, there is arguably a human being, a temporal phase of a human being, (i.e., an adult), a human body, an organism, a collection of matter, an embodied person, and also perhaps such things as a human shaped region of space and a visible surface of a human body, and so on. Even ignoring certain standard mereological worries and tough questions about human beings and personal identity, it is perfectly reasonable to ask any of the things on the chair whether they are the same as some other thing on that chair. According to sortalism, because of this possibility, an answer to any such question requires disambiguation, necessarily—to ask a meaningful question, one must specify to which kind of thing (of all the different things plausibly on the chair) one is referring when asking the question about sameness. Only in cases where the things fall into same kind or category, a positive answer is possible, according to sortalism. (It is easy to see that some well-known puzzles about identity arise precisely for ignoring this demand that is intuitively quite plausible²⁵.) This matters because the criteria of identity can be, and often are, different for different kinds of things. For instance, because of my metabolism, the collection of matter on the chair does not remain numerically the same from one instance to the next, yet the human being in that region of space arguably remains the same. Descartes also agrees with this difference between my body understood as a collection of matter vs. a human body:

I believe that nutrition takes place by a continual expulsion of parts of our body, which are driven from

²⁵ Geach’s (1962, 215) discussion of the cat Tibbles and its proper parts is an example.

their place by the arrival of others. Consequently I do not think that there is any particle of our bodies which remains numerically the same for a single moment, although our body, *qua* human body, remains always numerically the same so long as it is united with the same soul. (CSMK 243, AT4 167.)

In this connection, it is worth emphasizing that though sortalism amounts to a commitment to a plurality of criteria of identity, it does not necessarily amount to commitment to there being a plurality of equally real distinct objects on my chair, and so on.²⁶ Rather, sortalism is more like a tool that can clarify the different points-of-view we might take towards what is on the chair. To explain this, let me take one more example to showcase Cartesian sortalism in action, the famous puzzle of *Theseus' ship*.

According to Plutarch, in order to commemorate the founder of their city, Theseus, the Athenians conserved the ship he sailed with as a relic. The unavoidable repairs involved changing some of the more run-down planks now and then. Eventually, none of the original planks of the ship remained in place. This was already a bone of contention for philosophers, according to Plutarch (1914 § 23), with “some declaring that it remained the same, others that it was not the same vessel”. Thomas Hobbes famously adds another element by asking what happens if we assume that some man had collected all the original planks of the ship as they were replaced, stored them carefully, and finally, after getting hold of all the original planks, he had reassembled the planks to make a ship out of those original planks. Hobbes' argument is against an Aristotelian view about identity not too different from Wiggins' neo-Aristotelian sortalism, as Wiggins himself (2001, 93) observes. It follows from the Aristotelian view that there would be two distinct ships existing at the same time—the one continuing its existence through gradual replacement of planks, the other reassembled from the pieces removed from the first—both of which would be *numerically identical* to the original ship of Theseus. According to Hobbes, this is absurd.

The Cartesian sortalism grounded in the notion of reality states that the problem arises because Theseus' ship has such a reality that it allows for competing criteria of identity (cf. the reality on my chair). However, this does not mean that the case of ship-identity is itself somehow indeterminate or that the predicates involved in formulating the case are vague. Rather, depending on what criteria we use to inquire about ship-identity, we will get different answers, just like we get different answers to questions of sameness

by applying different criteria of identity to the thing that is on my chair now.

The ship evidently is an artefact. On the one hand, the reality of a ship is such that the thing can undergo repairs and dismantling like other similar artefacts. On the other hand, the ship is also a functional unity with a causal history, like human bodies and other things that do not seem to survive dismantling and reassembling. Therefore, we have at hand two distinct criteria of identity, one relating to the precise material composition of the ship, other to the causal-historical functional unity of the ship. A problematic case like that envisaged by Hobbes is possible because the reality of a ship is such that the two criteria of identity are both legitimate in this case, yet incompatible with each other.

According to Cartesian sortalism, the puzzle at hand is essentially the demand that we must choose between the two distinct criteria of identity and to affirm one over the other as the legitimate criterion of ship-identity. However, if in fact both criteria are legitimate and neither criterion has a more serious claim than the other as to being the appropriate criterion, given the kind of reality we are dealing with—as indeed seems to be the case—choosing one criterion over the other would be arbitrary and unwarranted. Importantly, and contrary to what Hobbes thought, according to Cartesian sortalism there is no absurdity in holding that both ships have an equally valid claim to being numerically identical to the original ship of Theseus given that there are two distinct, equally legitimate criteria of identity at play equally applicable to the reality at hand.²⁷ The absurdity Hobbes perceives here would follow only if we thought that there are two things that both have an equally valid claim to being numerically identical to the original ship of Theseus *by the same criterion* of identity. The essential gist of this Cartesian sortalism is, thus, that while there is only one kind of identity relation (i.e., the kind obeying Leibniz's Law and contrary to what supporters of relative identity hold), the transitivity of identity cannot hold if different criteria of identity are at play. Hobbes' puzzle arises, because the kind “ship” is indeterminate in allowing the application of many distinct criteria of identity and in not determining, nor even suggesting, that one set of criteria is somehow privileged over the other competing criteria. Once we make explicit

²⁶ Usually, and Descartes is no exception to this, sortalism is connected to an endurantist view, according to which there are things that persist through changes as numerically identical (like the human being despite it going through different temporal phases like childhood).

²⁷ Note how we can easily tweak the case so that we end up favoring one criterion over the other. For instance, a group of Athenians might worship the ship-relic because they think the ship was originally made from special wood with magical powers; stuff that is no more available to be used in the repairs, however. Such Athenians would quite evidently think that the reassembled ship is the one and only Theseus' ship because it is constituted by the right material. Others might disagree, and think that the half-decayed, barely seaworthy “Frankenstein's ship” can have nothing to do with Theseus' original magnificent ship—especially if they think what makes the ship special is not its constitution but, say, its being the best fastest vessel of its size ever build or some such functional property.

our preferred set of criteria determining whether we are referring to functional unities or aggregates of same matter (or whatnot) the problem no longer arises. This, of course, does little to prevent philosophers from engaging in heated debates over which criteria we should prefer in case of a ship; this, however, is a metaphysical question about the nature of ship-artefacts, not about identity relation.

5 Cartesian Causal Realism

With the help of sortalism we can return to the question whether there is any philosophically reasonable, non-metaphorical sense in which the sun formally and sun objectively can be considered non-distinct, as Descartes' account of objective identity seems to demand.

First, Hoffman's child vs. adult analogy discussed above is correct to the extent that it rightly points out that in both cases, human stages and the idea of the sun, there is but one thing involved: a human being or "a reality" (I'll return in a moment to what this "reality" more precisely is). Also, in both cases there are two distinct "modes" of that single thing: a human being as a child vs. the same human being as an adult, and formal reality of the sun vs. objective reality of the sun.²⁸ However, in another respect, Hoffman is mistaken. Recall how Hoffman thought that objective identity is a case of non-identity. That contention was based on the view that the sun formally and the sun objectively have different properties, so that the relation between them cannot be one of identity. We can now see that in the light of Descartes' sortalism, the right way to understand the analogy is as pointing out that the case is one of identity, after all. According to sortalism, the child is *the same human being* as the adult, and the sun objectively is *the same reality* as the sun formally.

Descartes thinks that the sun formally is the cause of the sun objectively in the sense that it is the formal, actual thing that transmits (*transfundat*) its reality to the intellect: "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" (CSM2 28–29; AT7 41). The relevant distinction (which was discussed above in terms of two kinds of modes-of-being) is one between two modes of reality (*realitas*). Therefore, that which is at stake in objective identity is the *sameness of reality*, instead of, say, sameness of substance or sameness of *res*. This might sound

²⁸ Obviously, there are many other respects in which the analogy does not apply. For instance, the formal reality of the sun is the cause of its the objective reality being in the mind while the child hardly is the cause of the adult, but rather something that develops into being the adult. Such disanalogous features are not a problem.

odd at first, for admittedly Descartes is better known for his ontology of substances and modes than his views on reality. However, there is a case to be made that Descartes is also "a reality ontologist", and that *realitas* is a technical term with a special use in his metaphysics. It is especially in 3rd Meditation, where Descartes presents his general account of causation, that this aspect of his metaphysics comes to the front. The reason why Descartes ventures to this area of metaphysics at all is that his theory of objective reality is thoroughly a causal theory.²⁹ And Descartes' theory of causation is arguably a transference (or a communication) account of causation.³⁰ In such an account, something must be transferred or communicated. That something Descartes calls *reality*.

What follows is admittedly somewhat speculative, for Descartes is mostly silent about what he precisely means when uses the term "reality". It seems likely that for Descartes, "reality" is one of such basic notions that requires no explanation. In my view, reality is akin to, if not synonymous with, "being" or "existence". It seems to denote just the causally transmissible quantity of existence Descartes' transference account of causation presupposes. In this sense, reality is much like *energy* in contemporary physics; something that can be transmitted and take diverse forms (such as thermal, kinetic, and gravitational energy).³¹ For our purposes, we could view the reality of the sun as something that pre-dates the formation of the star itself and spans farther than sun *qua* a heavenly body (whether an extended particular qualifies as a substance for Descartes or should be considered merely a *re* is not clear; see e.g., (Brown and

²⁹ The puzzlement of Descartes' scholastic commentator, Caterus, mentioned earlier, pertains specifically to Caterus' inability to understand why objective reality must be caused, as Descartes demands.

³⁰ For Descartes' own explication of his metaphysics of causation, see CSM2 29ff, AT7 42 ff. See also CSM2 97, AT7 135; CSM2 116, AT7 165; CSM2 252, AT7 366; CSM1 242, AT8A 64; CSMK 339–340, AT5 156. For comprehensive overviews of the discussion concerning Descartes' causal principles, see Clatterbaugh (1999, Chap. 2) and Schmaltz (2008). Notably Radner (1985) has attributed a "transference account" of causation to Descartes, though criticizing it for leading to the problem of cross-category interaction. I think the account of thinking emerging from my discussion makes some headway in alleviating this worry while being a "transference account", though this is not the place to discuss the matter further.

³¹ Not all together unrelated to this point is Descartes' account of motion as a conserved quantity. Famously, Descartes does not allow "migrating modes", and as motion is a mode of a body, it cannot be transferred from one body to another. Yet Descartes clearly thinks that in another, non-modal sense, that motion must be transferred. This is due to God's preserving the overall quantity of motion in the world and "his operating in a manner that is always utterly constant and immutable" (CSM1 240; AT8A 61). In my view Descartes comes close to saying that motion is just one instance of the more general reality, when he appeals to "the immutability and simplicity of the operation by which God preserves motion in matter" (CSMK 242; AT8A 63–64), but this is not the place to discuss the matter further.

Normore 2019, Chap. 2)). Sun emits its reality to surrounding space as radiation, warming up stones on the ground and sometimes causing tanning or sunburns as well. In some cases, where the receiving thing is a mind, the reality of the sun enters the mind. In these cases, the sun comes to have another, objective mode of existence in the thinker's mind. Combine this with Descartes' sortalism, discussed above, and you get the result that the transmitted reality in the mind is sun's own reality, making the case one involving proper identity. The reality found in both cases, in the heavens and in the mind, is the same, because the reality of the sun itself has been transmitted from the sun to the mind. Here we have finally a way to look at objective identity in a way that makes it coherent. With the causal transference of reality as the proper identity bearer (in the sense demanded by sortalism) it makes sense to say, as Descartes does, that there is one and the same reality in two different modes-of-being.

Now the being or existence a thing has in the mind is very peculiar indeed. For one, the transmitted reality clearly is not a conserved quantity. The sun does not seem to lose any of its original reality when being thought of (see also CSM2 74, AT7 102). This is clearly different from a case of sun heating the pavement, where some energy is lost by the sun and received by the pavement. However, this peculiarity does not lead to the sun being a non-entity, for the obvious reason that it still has the ability to cause effects. The point is more visible in the case of, say, Aristotle, whose being—ideas and thoughts—still continues to have effects, although the philosopher himself is long gone. The effects here and now are arguably caused by our thoughts, which, if about Aristotle, must contain his being objectively. Though this is not the place to discuss the matter further, I think that some (though definitely not all) serious problems about the relationship between the two essentially distinct Cartesian substances can be lessened by the observation that it is especially via his theory of objective reality, Descartes might be able to secure a viable causal connection between extended (singular) things and thinking.

Obviously, also the scholarly argument for thinking that the above-sketched robustly realist view of objective reality reflects Descartes' actual views is well beyond this paper.³² Instead, I want to look at the reasons Descartes would

³² Such a view is not unheard of, though. Descartes' follower Robert Desgabets argued for a reading of ideas and their objective reality according to which all ideas require external causes. The reason for this was Desgabets' conviction that unless all ideas (as opposed to merely the special idea of God Descartes' uses to infer the existence of its object) are grounded in their objects, even the certainty of cogito is under the threat of 1st Meditation skeptical challenges. Desgabets, however, didn't attribute this view to Descartes, but criticized him for not seeing that Descartes' own principles demand such a robustly realist account of ideas. My reading amounts to the suggestion that actually Descartes would have agreed with Desgabets' view of objective reality. For Desgabets' view, see Schmaltz (2002, Chap. 3).

have wanted to commit himself to a view like this. First, if we look at Descartes' account of objective reality in this robustly realist sense, we can see the similarities between his explanation of cognition and the Aristotelian one. As I have interpreted it, Descartes' thesis of objective identity appears to be a variation of the Aristotelian doctrine of cognition—a version of *formal identity without the forms*.³³

The main reason Descartes might have wanted to stick to the formal identity despite his rejection of the Aristotelian forms is the general explanatory framework it provides. Namely, the dispute between direct and indirect realism is about whether the external object of cognition is needed for cognizing it. Aristotelians and direct realists, and according to my reading Descartes as well, would agree with Russell when he insisted that propositions we think about and assert must involve the things, like Mont Blanc itself: "If we do not admit this, then we get the conclusion that we know nothing at all about Mont Blanc" (In Frege 1980, 169). The epistemic issue raised by Russell is about a divorce between our epistemic states and their objects. The worry is that if the object of knowledge, like Mont Blanc or the sun, is not itself "involved" in the epistemic state in the right way (ignoring what this locution precisely means) the state is not *about* it at all. Obviously, this is a question about intentionality (see Sect. 2 above), and one over which direct and indirect realists specifically disagree. I will come back to this issue in the next section, and here point out that giving up forms does not mean giving up the "identity framework" in which the Aristotelians theorized about cognition. The motivation for adopting that framework need not have anything to do with Aristotelianism per se (ask most contemporary direct realists), though the fact that Descartes operated in an Aristotelian intellectual landscape, of course, explains why he likely found the identity framework very natural.

Some might argue that Descartes' commitment to this explanatory framework is one thing, and his resources for sticking to it are another. Especially one could argue against my suggestion by pointing out that it is incompatible with Descartes' substance-mode ontology. However, I think this argument is too quick. In fact, the substance-mode ontology presupposes something like the metaphysics of the reality transmission. Recall that for Descartes the modes are modifications or states of the substance. It follows that the mode of a substance can only be the mode of that substance and no other. If causal interaction is transference or communication, as Descartes in the 3rd Meditation states it is, and modes cannot be that what is transferred, then Descartes must think that the transference takes place on some more

³³ As noted earlier, especially Carriero (2013; 2009) has argued for a similar position. My robust realist reading is one possible version by which to fill in the details in this general picture about Descartes' (anti-hylomorphic) version of formal identity.

fundamental level than that of modes.³⁴ In the face of problems related to Descartes' general account of substances and modes the reality view sketched in this paper is definitely worth more serious attention.

6 Direct or Indirect Realism?

I have given reasons above to think that Descartes is committed to a robust realism in terms of causal metaphysics of reality transfer. With the help of Descartes' commitment to the sortalism, understood foremost as a conceptual framework for discussing matters related to identity, I offered a reading of Descartes' objective identity. Arguably that reading could make sense of the seemingly inconsistent claim according to which the idea of the sun is the sun itself existing in the intellect, though in an objective mode of existence. Such considerations make the disagreement about Descartes' commitment to direct or indirect realism more understandable.

In the previous section, I offered Descartes' desire to retain the explanatory framework of Aristotelian formal identity while rejecting the metaphysics of forms as evidence for my reading. A metaphysically ambitious reading of the transmission of reality made this possible, according to which the things literally transfer or "pour" their own reality into their ideas (e.g., AT7 40–42, CSM2 28–29). It is this robustly realist understanding of reality that is needed to fill in the place of the Aristotelian forms as the "bearer of identity". If this is correct, and Descartes' objective identity is much like formal identity but without forms, then this reading offers a nice way to support the direct realist interpretations of Descartes that were initially found wanting.

However, to conclude that Descartes should be considered a direct realist would be too quick. Paul Hoffman has argued that as Descartes clearly thinks that we are aware of the sun as it exists objectively, as opposed to the formal sun out there in the heavens, he must be considered an indirect realist—our awareness of the external sun is mediated by the objective being of the sun. Hoffman extends this argument to Aristotelian theory of sensory cognition as well and claims that, by the same token, we should view also the Aristotelians as indirect realists. The form in the intellect is distinct from the form informing the object cognized, and we are aware only of the former. (Hoffman 2002b, 168–69)

The sortalist account sketched earlier helps us analyze this disagreement. As with Theseus' ship discussed earlier, focus on objective reality allows to see that ideas can be viewed as two different kinds of things: a mental representation (of an object) or the object itself thought of. This seems to be

what Descartes tries to convey to us in widely discussed distinction he brings up already in the Preface to *Meditations*: "there is an ambiguity here in the word 'idea'. 'Idea' can be taken materially, as an operation of the intellect, [and] it can be taken objectively, as the thing represented by that operation" (CSM2 7, AT7 9).³⁵ This distinction makes much sense if we read him as claiming, as I have suggested, that ideas in these two senses have distinct criteria of identity. That is, that the ideas in these two different senses belong to different kinds but are nevertheless merely two different ways of looking at one and the same thing.³⁶

Because of the possibility of looking at ideas in different senses as belonging to different kinds, we can see how, in one sense, the objective reality of the sun in the mind is just the reality of the sun outside the mind—there is but one reality involved. It is this aspect that motivates the direct realist readings. In this light, what we are aware of by entertaining the idea of the sun is just the sun itself (i.e., the reality of the sun). However, and as Hoffman insists, in the other sense, Descartes is also committed to viewing the objective reality as a mental object—we must be aware of the representation of the sun so as to explain how perceptual mistakes, illusions, and hallucinations (like the ones induced by a hypothetical cunning demon) are possible in the first place. As discussed above, Descartes' argument for God's existence, proceeding from the objective reality to the formal existence of God, seems to evince this as well. That argument clearly presupposes that what we are aware of is the objective reality of God, from which we also deduce his formal reality. Even if all ideas of actual things similarly do contain the reality of their objects, they are nevertheless different from God's idea in not allowing similar deductions about the existence of their objects.

Descartes' view, as I have discussed it, bears earmarks of both direct and indirect realist views. While there certainly is room for a debate over his desire to prioritize one over the other, the result is philosophically quite interesting. After all, traditionally the views are defined as logical complements. A theory of perception is considered indirect when it holds that awareness of objects is mediated by awareness of some mental object and direct if (and only if) it denies that perception is indirect in this way. I have here argued that Descartes' theory of ideas can be read as an original attempt to take into account the distinct motivations behind the indirect and direct realist views, thus falling somewhere in between the two opposing views. The analysis presented in this paper, among other things, serves to underline how the conflict between direct and indirect realism might, in

³⁴ Similar issue pertains to Cartesian physics; see footnote 31 above.

³⁵ I am indebted to an anonymous referee for pointing out that bringing this passage up might be helpful.

³⁶ See also footnote 12 above, where Ayer's formulation of the original problem is quoted.

the end, be less real than many defenders of either position have assumed.³⁷

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