

Perceiving Ideas

Descartes claims that sensing, imagining, and purely understanding are all modes of perceiving,¹ and that what is immediately perceived is an idea.² It is clear from these claims that the perceiving of ideas occupies a central place in his theory of cognition. But what exactly is an idea according to Descartes? What is it to perceive an idea, and how does it contribute to the formation of cognition according to his view? The key to answering these questions lies in Descartes's distinction between ways of considering an idea. According to Descartes, an idea can be considered either as an *operation of the intellect*, which is a *perception*,³ or as *the thing represented* by that operation.⁴ In addition, an idea can be considered as *representing something*.⁵ Each provides a view into the nature of an idea as conceived by Descartes. However, it remains unclear how an idea can lend itself to such different ways of being considered.

My goal in this paper is to provide an account of perceiving ideas that both clarifies Descartes's notion of an idea and explains how perceiving ideas contributes to the formation of cognition under his view. Section I examines the three ways that Descartes considers an idea—materially, objectively, and formally—and explains what these ways reveal about its nature. Section II addresses the question of what perceiving ideas amounts to according to Descartes. I explain the relationship between the *act* of perceiving and the *ideas* that are perceived, and also how *representation* figures into the perceiving of ideas. In addition, I explain how according to Descartes the perceiving of ideas contributes to the formation of cognition. Section III addresses a particular issue concerning the unity of mind and the objective reality of ideas. Section IV concludes the paper with a brief overview.

I. Considering Ideas

*I am deeply grateful to the following people for their feedback and support: Allie Bogle, John Carriero, and Calvin Normore; everyone that attended and participated in the Seoul Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy held at Seoul National University (financially supported by Foundation Academia Platonica) in 2014, especially Lisa Downing, Richard Glauser, Dai Heide, Desmond Hogan, Cecelia Lim, Benjamin Thompson, and Sukjae Lee, who organized the event; and Yonsei University Underwood International College and my colleagues there, especially Ben Burgis, Manuel 'Mandel' Cabrera, Colin Caret, Timothy Fuller, Michaelakis Michael, and Nikolaj J. L. L. Pedersen. I am also indebted to the two anonymous referees who reviewed the first submitted draft of this paper. Their insightful questions and comments helped tremendously to improve its quality.

¹ AT VIII A 17, CSM I 204.

² AT VII 181, CSM II 127.

³ AT VIII A 17, CSM I 204.

⁴ AT VII 8, CSM II 7.

⁵ AT VII 232, CSM II 162-163.

Descartes distinguishes three ways of considering, or *taking*⁶ an idea. The first two ways—*materially* and *objectively*—are distinguished in the *Preface to the Reader*⁷ in response to the objection that “an idea of a thing more perfect than myself” does not entail “that the idea is more perfect than me, still less that what is represented by the idea exists <quod per istam ideam repraesentatur existere>”.⁸ The third way of taking an idea—taking it *formally*—is given in the Fourth Set of Replies in response to an objection raised by Antoine Arnauld regarding the possibility of an idea’s being false in any sense.⁹ Let us begin with the first two ways.

To take an idea *materially* is to consider an idea as “an operation of the intellect”. In the *Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes refers to this operation as a *perception* <perceptio>, which is a *mode of thinking* <modus cogitandi>.¹⁰ Since thinking, or simply *thought*, is the principle attribute of mind, perceptions are *modes of mind*.¹¹ To take an idea materially, then, is to consider an idea simply as a perceiving, an operation of the intellect, or a mode of thinking (mind).¹² Descartes states that in considering ideas materially, they “cannot be said to be more perfect than me.”¹³ In the Third Meditation, he also states that when taken this way, he “does not recognize any

⁶ The Latin is *sumo/sumere* (AT VII 8; AT VII 231-232). *Taking ideas* in a certain way is explained as ‘*considering them insofar as*’ <considerantur quatenus> or ‘*observing them as*’ <spectare prout> (AT VII 232).

⁷ Descartes makes the distinction in order to clarify “an equivocation in the expression of idea” <aequivocationem in voce ideae> (AT VII 8).

⁸ AT VII 8, CSM II 7. The objection is aimed at Descartes’s argument for the existence of God from the *Discourse on the Method*, where he searches for the source from which he learned <appris> to think of *a being more perfect than him*, and seems to switch from talking about the perfection of the *thing thought about* to the perfection of the *thought itself* (AT VI 33-34, CSM I 128). There, Descartes uses “thought <cogitatio>” and “idea <idea>” interchangeably.

⁹ AT VII 206-207, CSM II 145-146. Arnauld argues roughly as follows. Suppose that cold is in fact an absence of reality, namely, heat. Either the idea of cold is a negative idea or a positive idea. If it is the former, then it exhibits the absence of some reality. In that case, the idea of cold would then be true. If the idea is a positive idea, it is positive not in virtue of its being a mode of thinking, since that would make all ideas positive, but rather because of the “objective being that it contains and exhibits to our mind <esse objectivo quod continent et menti nostrae exhibet>” (AT VII 207, CSM II 145). In that case, the idea is not the idea of cold, since cold is, by assumption, the absence of reality and thus cannot be objectively in the intellect. Hence, ideas cannot be false in any sense, but since judgments can, Descartes must be confusing an idea with a judgment.

¹⁰ AT VIII A 17, CSM I 204.

¹¹ AT VIII A 25, CSM I 210-211. Strictly speaking, to consider an idea materially is to consider it as a mode of thinking *with respect to intellect*, since volition is also a mode of thinking, viz. an operation of the will.

¹² See Hwang 2011. Chappell 1986 interprets ideas taken materially similarly.

¹³ AT VII 8, CSM II 7.

inequality between them, and all appear to proceed from me in the same way”.¹⁴ To understand these claims and why Descartes makes them, a basic overview of his notions of being and reality will be helpful.

Descartes distinguishes different *modes of being* <modus essendi>¹⁵ that a thing can have.¹⁶ One is *formal being*, which is to exist actually. The other is *objective being*, which is to be *in the intellect* as an intentional object of thought. It is a special mode of being that the thing thought has in the mind.¹⁷ To have objective being, there must be an actually existing intellect (mind) in which to be objectively.¹⁸ Reality is similarly distinguished by Descartes. *Formal reality* is the reality of something as it is formally, i.e. as it actually exists, whereas *objective reality* is the reality of something as it is objectively in the intellect. Descartes describes formal reality and objective reality as *being in* <inesse/in esse>,¹⁹ *contained in* <continere>,²⁰ or *had by* <habere>²¹ something.²² Objective reality is the reality that is in,²³ contained in,²⁴ or had (objectively) by an *idea*.²⁵ At times, Descartes describes objective reality as the *entity* of a thing that is represented.²⁶

¹⁴ AT VII 40, CSM II 27-28. This claim is made in the context of discussing ideas “in so far as they are modes of thought”. I take Descartes to be considering ideas *materially*.

¹⁵ AT VII 41-42; AT VII 03.

¹⁶ Descartes sometimes uses *existence* in place of *being*, but usually in the context of talking about a *thing* <res>, e.g. AT VII 102-103, and sometimes about a *skill* <artificium>, e.g. AT VII 105, CSM II 76.

¹⁷ See AT IV 350, CSMK 281; AT VII 41, CSM II 29; AT VII 102-103, CSM II 74-75; AT VII 233, CSM II 163.

¹⁸ Descartes also distinguishes the *eminent* mode of being, which, roughly, is to have being in a higher, more perfect way. See AT VII 161, CSM II 114. Anything that has eminent being must be eminently in something that has formal being (AT VII 42, CSM II 29). For an example of eminent being, see AT VII 103-104, CSM II 75-76. See also Normore 1986, 239-240.

¹⁹ See AT VII 78-80 CSM II 54; AT VII 103-105, CSM II 75-76; AT VII 164-166, CSM II 116-117.

²⁰ See AT VIIIA 11, CSM I 198; AT VII 134-5 CSM II 96; AT VII 165 CSM II 116; AT VII 167 CSM II 118.

²¹ See AT VII 165-6 CSM II 117; AT VII 232-3, CSM II 163.

²² To my knowledge, reality is never described as *existing* in a thing or an idea.

²³ See AT VII 42, CSM II 29; AT VII 79, CSM II 55; AT VII 135, CSM II 97; AT VII 165-166, CSM II 117.

²⁴ See AT VII 41, CSM II 28; AT VII 42, CSM II 29; AT VII 46, CSM II 31; AT VII 79, CSM II 55; AT VII 103, CSM II 76; AT VII 134-135, CSM II 97.

²⁵ Vere Chappell states that objective reality is not *had* by an idea but is rather *contained* in an idea (see Chappell 1986, 190). However, Descartes states otherwise in the *Synopsis* to the *Meditations* (AT VII 14, CSM II 10). See also AT VII 40, CSM II 27-28. To be fair, I think that Chappell is cautiously noting, in regards to a specific passage in the Third Meditation, that an idea does not have objective reality in the way that it has formal reality as a mode.

While objective reality is the reality that is objectively in an *idea*, the objective being of a *thing*²⁷ is the thing as it is objectively in the *intellect*.²⁸ In addition to having objective reality, ideas possess formal reality since they have formal being as modes of mind.²⁹ Since modes derive their reality from the substance of which they are modes, the formal reality of ideas is derived from the formal reality of the mind.³⁰

According to Descartes, reality can vary in grade: one thing may have a greater or lesser grade of reality or being than another thing <diversi gradus realitatis, sive entitatis>.³¹ Substances have greater reality than any mode, and God has greater reality than any creature.³² An actually existing substance has greater formal reality than any one of its actually existing modes, and an idea of a substance contains greater objective reality than an idea of a mode.³³ Variance in the grade of reality is positively correlated with both the overall *perfection* of a thing and its grade of *thing-hood*. The more or less reality that a thing has, the more or less perfect that thing is,³⁴ and the more or less of a thing it is <magis/minus res>, respectively.³⁵

Let us return to ideas taken materially. Since ideas derive their formal reality from the mind of which they are modes, they cannot have more formal reality than me, viz., my mind. Hence, insofar as perfection is a measure of reality, ideas “cannot be said to be more perfect than me” when they are considered materially. Furthermore, to consider ideas materially is to consider them simply as modes of thinking (as operations of the intellect). As such, they always proceed as acts of the mind, viz. intellect,³⁶ and always have the mind (through the intellect) as their cause.³⁷ Hence, when taken materially, no inequality is recognized between ideas, and they all appear to proceed from the mind in the same way.

²⁶ AT VII 161. Descartes talks about *perfections* being objectively in ideas. I take him to mean *attributes*, which constitute the essence of a thing (AT VII 45, CSM II 31).

²⁷ Descartes refers to substances as things <res>, and distinguishes them from their *affections*, which include modes (AT VIIIA 23, CSM I 208-209).

²⁸ To my knowledge, Descartes never describes the *reality* of something as being objectively in the *intellect*, nor does he describe a *thing* as being objectively in an *idea*.

²⁹ AT VII 41, CSM II 28.

³⁰ See AT III 429, CSM I 193–94; AT VIIIA 25–26, CSM I 210–11; AT VIIIB 348.

³¹ AT VII 165.

³² See AT VII 45, CSM II 31 and AT VII 165-166, CSM II 117.

³³ AT VII 165, CSM II 117.

³⁴ See AT VII 40-41, CSM II 28-29; AT VI 32-33, CSM I 127; and AT VIIIA 11, CSM I 198.

³⁵ AT VII 185, CSM II 132.

³⁶ See AT VIIIA 11, CSM I 198 and AT III 566, CSM I 214.

³⁷ See AT VII 40, CSM II 27-28; AT VII 103, CSM II 75; and AT VII 134, CSM II 97.

When an idea is taken *objectively*, it is being considered as “the thing represented by that operation [of the intellect] <pro re per istam operationem repraesentata>”.³⁸ In other words, to consider the idea objectively is to consider it as the very thing represented by a perceiving. Descartes states that “even if [this thing] is not regarded as existing outside the intellect, [it] can still, in virtue of its essence, be more perfect than myself”.³⁹ Since the thing identified with an idea taken objectively might lack formal being *outside the intellect*, an idea taken objectively must be the thing in the objective, not formal, mode of being.⁴⁰ Hence, a thing is represented by an operation of the intellect, and to consider an idea *objectively* is to consider the represented thing in its objective mode of being.⁴¹ Since the grade of thing-hood positively co-varies with the grade of reality, ideas taken objectively also vary: one idea (taken objectively) can be more or less of a thing depending on the grade of reality that that thing has. Furthermore, an idea taken objectively could have its origin or cause from something *other* than the mind. An idea taken objectively is the thing as it is objectively in the intellect, and the reality of this thing as it is objectively in the intellect is objective reality. All reality, including objective reality, must be caused by something that possesses at least the same grade of reality as in the effect.⁴² In certain cases (e.g., the idea of God), the reality of the mind may be insufficient to account for the reality of the thing that is objectively in the mind. Hence, given the positive correlation between reality and thing-hood, the cause of an idea taken objectively could be something outside the mind.⁴³

To take an idea *formally* is to consider them insofar as they represent something <quatenus aliquid repraesentant>, or as “representing this or that <hoc vel illud repraesentant>”.⁴⁴ To consider them this way is *not* to take them *materially*,⁴⁵ which is to consider them *only* as operations of the intellect <tantummodo prout sunt operationes

³⁸ AT VII 8, CSM II 7. Descartes also explicitly refers to *thoughts* as being taken *objectively* <cogitationes objective sumptae> (AT IV 350, CSMK 280). Note that he is *not* saying that the *idea taken objectively* is represented by an *idea taken materially*.

³⁹ AT VII 8, CSM II 7.

⁴⁰ Although Paul Newman does not actually exist, I nevertheless have an idea of him. Hence, that idea, taken objectively, must be identified with Mr. Newman *qua objectively being in my intellect* and not with him *qua formally being outside the intellect*.

⁴¹ However, what is represented is not the thing in its objective mode of being. I argue for this later.

⁴² See AT VII 40-42, CSM II 28-29.

⁴³ See AT VII 40-45, CSM II 27-31.

⁴⁴ AT VII 232, CSM II 162-163.

⁴⁵ AT VII 232, CSM II 163. I take it to be clear that here Descartes is talking about the material way of taking ideas introduced in the *Preface*.

intellectus> and *not* as representing something.⁴⁶ In the Third Meditation, Descartes considers ideas formally and states that they cannot be false in any way. This is because an idea taken formally is an idea considered simply as representing something. Taken this way, it *always* represents whatever it represents: “for whether it is a goat or a chimera that I am imagining, it is just as true that I imagine the former as the latter.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Scholars remain divided on this issue. Shapiro 2012 interprets an idea taken materially as being of something in the *propositional sense*, which is the operation of the intellect by which we have propositional thoughts about that thing. The idea of God, taken materially, is of God in that it is what I use to have propositional thoughts about God, i.e. that God exists; that God does not exist; that God is omnibenevolent; etc. It seems that for Shapiro, then, my idea of God and my idea of Elvis Presley, both taken materially, are different. Although carefully given, I find his account difficult to reconcile with certain passages. Regarding ideas taken materially, Descartes states that he “does not recognize any inequality between them, and all seem to proceed from me in the same way <non agnosco ullam inter ipsas inaequalitatem, et omnes a me eodem modo procedure videntur>” (AT VII 40). In the *Principles of Philosophy*, he states similarly: “When we reflect further on the ideas that we have within us, we see that some of them, *in so far as they are merely modes of thinking, do not differ much one from another*, but in so far as one idea represents one thing and another represents another, *they differ widely*” (AT VIII A 11, CSM I 198; emphasis added). To be fair, Shapiro does provide an account of such claims, but I remain unconvinced (most likely because my understanding of Descartes’s response to Arnauld’s objection differs from his). Vere Chappell holds that an idea *taken materially* represents something, and interprets the distinction between an idea taken formally and an idea taken materially as a distinction between the *function* and the *nature* of an idea (see Chappell 1986, 183-184). Steven Nadler also holds that an idea taken materially represents something, and interprets an idea taken objectively as a hybrid of what I understand to be an idea taken objectively and an idea taken formally (see Nadler 1989, 159). Although Nadler also refers to the operation of the intellect as an idea taken *formally*, he interprets the second distinction (between material and formal) to mean “that it is the operation of the mind which does the representing here, not some mental object towards which the act of mind is directed” (see Nadler 1989, 129). Kurt Smith takes an idea taken materially to be an operation through which representation occurs (what he calls the “representational medium or operation”) (see Smith 2005, 218). However, it is not clear to me whether Chappell, Nadler, and Smith mean that *an operation of the intellect* represents something, or that *an idea taken materially* is an idea *considered as an operation of the intellect representing something*. I agree with the former but disagree with the latter: to take an idea materially is to consider it *only* as an operation of the intellect, *not* as an operation of the intellect being of or representing something.

⁴⁷ AT VII 37, CSM II 26. Here, in the Third Meditation, I take Descartes to be considering ideas formally, especially in the fifth through the seventh paragraphs. He distinguishes his thoughts into various kinds <genera>, one of which is an as-if image of a thing <tanquam rerum imagines>, “for which the name ‘idea’ is properly fit <quibus solis proprie convenit ideae nomen>” (AT VII 37). An idea in this proper sense is *as-if* of something, which I interpret to mean that it *represents as-if a thing*. Descartes states that “provided [ideas] are considered solely in themselves and I do not refer them to anything else <solae in

Contrary to my account, some have thought that taking an idea objectively is the same as taking an idea formally.⁴⁸ This identification is problematic for at least two reasons. One is that Descartes explicitly states that to take an idea formally is to consider it as *representing something*, whereas to take it objectively is to consider it as *the thing represented* by an operation of the intellect. Although I agree that an idea is an operation of the intellect that represents something *and* is the thing represented,⁴⁹ it would be a mistake to say that *considering* an idea as representing something is the same as *considering* it as the thing represented.⁵⁰ Another reason

se spectentur, nec ad aliud quid illas referam>, they cannot strictly speaking be false <falsae proprie esse non possunt>” (AT VII 37, CSM II 26). This is stated *within* the context of considering ideas as *tanquam rerum imagines*. I take the “tanquam” as doing either of two things: guarding against the suggestions that ideas wholly resemble their objects, or leaving open the possibility of the represented thing being a *real* thing or a *non-thing* (e.g. chimerae). An idea (taken formally) may be an *as-if image* of a thing since Descartes rejects *whole resemblance* between ideas and their objects. (For more on this rejection, see Hwang 2011). It may be an image of an *as-if thing* in that it might represent a *non-thing*, e.g. a chimera. The condition that the ideas not be *referred* to anything else <ad aliud quid illas referam> is meant to exclude not the consideration of an idea as being of something, but rather the referral of the idea to anything beyond its simply being a *tanquam rerum imagines*. Descartes inherits this view from the scholastic Aristotelian tradition, according to which no falsity can occur in sense and intellect so long as they are being considered only as simple apprehensions and not referred to anything else. See Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima*, Book III, Chapter 6, sections 762-763, and *Disputed Questions on Truth*, Volume 1, Question 1, Articles 11 and 12. (Smith also argues that to take an idea formally is to consider what the idea is *of* (see Smith 2005). Although I agree, Smith further states that an idea taken this way is being considered in relation to the *formal reality* of what it represents. My concern with this is that sometimes what is represented is only eminently in its cause).

⁴⁸ Those who seem to endorse identification of these two ways of considering ideas include Grene 1983, 177; Shapiro 2012, 10; and Alanen 2001, 240 (see also Alanen 2003, 131). Nicholas Jolley also endorses identification, but notes that an idea is *ambiguously* called a “representation” to mean the thing represented and the thing that represents (see Jolley 1990, 12-31). However, this ambiguity suggests that they are *distinct* ways of taking an idea. Steven Nadler also seems to endorse identification in describing ideas taken objectively as *representing* (see Nadler 1989, 129).

⁴⁹ I argue for this in the next section.

⁵⁰ Descartes’s distinction between the formal and objective ways of taking ideas closely follows the late scholastic distinction between a *formal concept* and an *objective concept*. Eustachius a Sancto Paulo describes a formal concept as “actualis similitudo rei quae intelligitur ab intellectu ad eam exprimendam producto” and an objective concept as “res quae per conceptum formalem intellectui repraesentatur” (Eustachius, Part IV, First Part, Discourse One, Question 2, Page 10). Francisco Suárez states that a concept <conceptus> is called ‘formal’ “vel quia est ultima forma mentis, vel quia formaliter repraesentat menti rem cognitam, vel quia revera est intrinsecus et formalis terminus conceptionis mentalis, in quo differt a conceptu objetivo, ut ita dicam”. He describes an objective concept as “res illa, vel ratio, quae proprie et

that identifying the formal and objective ways of taking an idea is problematic is that it obfuscates the exchange between Arnauld and Descartes. In the Fourth Set of Objections, Arnauld describes the idea of cold as cold itself being objectively in the intellect, and states that what makes an idea positive is “the objective being that it contains and exhibits to our mind <esse objectivo quod continent et menti nostrae exhibet>”.⁵¹ Since a positive idea of cold is an idea that represents cold as a positive thing, he concludes that there cannot be a positive idea of cold if in fact cold is an absence. However, Arnauld clearly grants the possibility of negative ideas, which he takes to be *lacking* objective being. If taking an idea formally is the same as taking it objectively, then Arnauld would have to conclude that *no* idea can be a negative idea, since in that case representing would require the objective being of something in the intellect. However, this is clearly not what Arnauld believes. One might think that Descartes *mistook* Arnauld to be concentrating on ideas in their formal sense. However, in that case, if there is no difference between an idea taken formally and an idea taken objectively, then Arnauld would have to be understood either as talking about an idea in the material sense, or as talking about an idea in some other sense. Both are unacceptable.⁵²

II. Perceiving Ideas

Taking an idea materially, objectively, and formally are three different ways of considering one and the same idea. An idea taken materially is an idea considered simply as a mode of thinking, that is, a *perception*, or an *operation of the intellect*. To take an idea *objectively* is to consider it simply as the *thing represented* by an operation of the intellect. To take it *formally* is to consider it simply as *representing something*. Hence, an idea is all three at once: a *mode of mind*, i.e. a *perceiving*, or an *operation of the intellect*, that represents something and is the thing that is represented. In this

immediate per conceptum formalem cognoscitur seu repraesentatur” (Suárez, *Metaphysical Disputations*, Disputation 2, Section I, 1). Clemenson 2007 argues that Eustachius and Suárez did not directly influence Descartes’s own views. Nevertheless, I believe that this distinction was common close to and during Descartes’s time, and that he also adopted the distinction in his own way. I take it to be highly implausible that while Descartes’s discussion of the formal and objective ways of taking an idea significantly tracks Eustachius’s and Suárez’s own discussion of formal and objective concepts, Descartes did not distinguish between those two ways of taking an idea. For more on Descartes’s adoption of these terms, see Cronin 1966. See also Wee 2006 and Wells 1990, 45-46, both of whom associate Descartes’s notion of an idea *taken materially* with Suárez’s notion of a formal concept, which is different from the way I draw the connection.

⁵¹ AT VII 207, CSM II 145.

⁵² Identifying the objective and formal ways of taking an idea also makes it difficult to understand how an idea of God can be innate (AT VII 37-38, CSM II 26 and AT VII 51, CSM II 35), since the objective reality contained in that idea is supposed to be caused by something that has formal being *outside* the mind, namely, by God (AT VII 40-46, CSM II 27-32). See also AT III 64, CSMK 147.

section, I explain how an idea is all three at once.

First, I will show that perceiving ideas is the act of forming thought according to the form of something. This will reveal how perceiving ideas is the act of representing things. Second, I will show that *representing something*, and, hence, perceiving an idea of that thing, is *becoming that thing* in a certain way. This will reveal how an idea can be both the thing represented and that which represents that thing.⁵³

A. *Perceiving ideas is representing*

That an operation of the intellect is not something separate in its being from the mind itself is clear from its being a mode of it. Since all operations of the intellect, i.e. perceptions, are modes of thinking, i.e. modes of mind, they are *ways* for the mind to be thinking.⁵⁴ In what sense, then, does this mode of thinking, or operation of the intellect, represent something? The answer follows from three theses.

First, the immediate perceiving of an idea is the active *forming* or *structuring* of thought (mind).⁵⁵ In *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet*, Descartes states that he has “never written or judged that the mind requires innate ideas, which are something different from its faculty of thinking” but has instead observed that certain thoughts “proceed from *only the faculty of thinking which is in me*”, using the term ‘innate’ to refer only to those “ideas or notions which are the *forms of these thoughts*, so as to distinguish them from others called ‘adventitious’ or ‘made up’.”⁵⁶ Descartes then goes on to discuss the formation of ideas in sensory cognition. Taking issue with the claim that the faculty of thinking can achieve nothing by itself, and thus cannot perceive or think anything except for what is received through the senses,⁵⁷ Descartes points out that *none* of the ideas of things exhibited to us by the senses are *like* the ideas that *we form of*

⁵³ Some scholars interpret Descartes’s idea to be primarily the *act* of perceiving, and then proceed to explain the idea that is immediately perceived in a way that tries to avoid committing him to representational intermediaries that render cognition of mind-independent reality indirect, e.g. Cook 1987 and Nadler 1989. Others argue that Descartes’s commitment to such intermediaries is unavoidable, and thus take the immediate perception of ideas to be itself a form of cognition that necessarily precedes any cognition of that mind-independent reality, e.g. Chappell 1986; Newman 2009; McRae 1965; and Wilson 1999a. Clemenson 2007 and Hoffman 2002 also argue for a version of this position. Some even hold Descartes’s ultimate position to be inconsistent, e.g. Kenny 1968. My account shows how an idea for Descartes is both an act and an object. I have already argued in Hwang 2011 that this does not commit Descartes to representationalism.

⁵⁴ AT VIII A 17, CSM II 204. See Hwang 2011.

⁵⁵ For more on ideas as structures, see Carriero 2009, 19.

⁵⁶ AT VIII B 357-358; emphasis added.

⁵⁷ AT VIII B 358, CSM I 304.

them in thought <quales eas cogitatione formamus>.⁵⁸ These ideas, which are *modes of thought*, are not like those things exhibited by the senses because the only things that approach <accedit> the mind through the sense organs are “certain corporeal motions”,⁵⁹ which are *modes of extension*.⁶⁰ Hence, it cannot be that sensory ideas are *sent into* <immiserunt> our minds by external objects via those organs. Instead, they must proceed from *within the mind*. Since ideas are forms of thought,⁶¹ not different from the innate faculty of thinking that forms them, “it follows that the very ideas of the motions themselves and of the figures are innate in us”.⁶²

It is clear from this discussion that all thoughts, including sensory cognitions, are innate in that the forms of all of these thoughts are ideas that are actively *formed* by, but *not different from*, the innate faculty of thinking. In this way, “there is nothing in our ideas which is not innate to the mind or the faculty of thinking, with the sole exception of those circumstances which relate to *experience*”.⁶³ In the latter case, *something* is sent by sensory objects that “gives the mind *occasion to form* <dedit occasionem...efformandas> these ideas by means of the faculty innate to it”.⁶⁴ Hence, *all* ideas, including sensory ones, proceed from the innate faculty of thinking in that they are *formed* by it.⁶⁵ Since the intellect is the faculty of *perceiving ideas*, and since ideas are not only the *forms of thought or perception*, but are themselves *formed by the mind*,

⁵⁸ AT VIIIIB 358, CSM I 304.

⁵⁹ AT VIIIIB 359, CSM I 304.

⁶⁰ Hence, I interpret Descartes to be making a point about metaphysical likeness, not representational likeness. A similar point is made in a letter to Mersenne: “Altogether, I think that all those [ideas] which involve no affirmation or negation are innate in us; for the sense-organs do not bring us anything which is like <qui soit tel que> the idea which arises in us on the occasion of their stimulus, and so this idea must have been in us before” (AT III 418, CSMK 187). Anthony Kenny interprets the innateness point to be about the *capacity* to think (see Kenny 1968, 104-105), and Marleen Rozemond interprets it to be about the *representational content* of the idea (see Rozemond 1999, 457-458). There is the further issue of whether or not the innateness of all ideas leaves room for sensory ideas being *caused* by external objects in any sense. I think it does, but will not pursue the topic here. For an excellent discussion of this issue and a defense of the non-causal view, see Gorham 2002.

⁶¹ For a more detailed discussion of ideas as forms in Descartes, see Hwang 2011.

⁶² AT VIIIIB 359, CSM I 304.

⁶³ AT VIIIIB 358, CSM I 304; emphasis added.

⁶⁴ AT VIIIIB 359, CSM I 304.

⁶⁵ However, they do not proceed from *only* that faculty of thinking since their formation is *occasioned* by the senses receiving something from an external object. Nevertheless, *all* ideas are *formed by our innate faculty of thinking*. Hence, in *Conversations with Burman*, when Descartes is recorded as *denying* that all ideas are innate (AT V 165, CSMK 347), I take him to be denying that the formation of all ideas proceeds from *only* the faculty of thinking.

ideas are formed in the intellect through our innate faculty of thinking.⁶⁶ To perceive ideas, then, is to perceive forms, which is to *form* thought.^{67, 68}

Second, the perceiving of an idea on Descartes's view occupies the same role that the reception of species does on the scholastic Aristotelian account. Briefly, the latter takes cognition of something to occur in virtue of receiving its form (called a 'species'). Sensing of some quality occurs in virtue of receiving a sensible species of that quality, and understanding the universal essence of something occurs in virtue of receiving (abstracting) the intelligible species of that essence. In another paper, I argued that Descartes adopts exactly this model in the sensory case:⁶⁹ the immediate object of *sensing* is always a sensible quality in an object existing outside the mind, the immediate object of *perceiving* is always of ideas in the mind, and *sensing of qualities* occurs in virtue of *perceiving sensory ideas of those qualities*. Hence, on my view, perceiving is not the same as sensing: what we sense are qualities *in external objects*, but what we perceive are *ideas in the mind*. These ideas in the mind occupy the same role that species do under the scholastic Aristotelian account. The argument I gave for the sensory case can be extended to cover all the basic forms of cognition: sensing, imagining, and purely understanding. Descartes's reference to ideas as forms is not specific to sensory ideas, but extends to ideas generally.⁷⁰ Moreover, in addition to sensing, both imagining and purely

⁶⁶ See AT VII 160, CSM II 113; AT VII 181, CSM II 127; and AT VII 188, CSM II 132. Also, Descartes states that the faculties of sensing and imagining both include an *act of the intellect in their formal concept* (AT VII 78), which I take to mean that in sensing and imagining, there is always the act of *forming thought by the intellect*, which is the perception of an idea. (See footnote 50 in this paper).

⁶⁷ For other passages where ideas and thoughts are described as being *formed*, see AT X 407, CSM I 37; AT VI 86, CSM I 154; AT VIIIA 27, CSM I 212; AT VII 12, CSM II 9; AT VII 57-58, CSM II 39-40; AT III 64, CSMK 147. As I understand it, an idea taken materially is an idea considered as an operation of the intellect in *forming thought*. However, an idea taken formally is an idea considered as an operation of forming thought *according to something*, which is to consider it as representing something. i.e. *this or that*. This is discussed in more detail below.

⁶⁸ Norman J. Wells holds that the late scholastic notion of a formal concept refers to a form that represents, where this form is not to be distinguished from the act of the intellect (Wells 1993). This is similar to the way I am interpreting Descartes: the idea that is immediately perceived is a form, and this form is not something separate from the perceiving, i.e. the operation of the intellect. I part ways with Wells when he connects Descartes's idea *taken materially* to the late scholastic notion of a *formal concept* (as developed by Francisco Suárez and Pedro Fonseca).

⁶⁹ Hwang 2011.

⁷⁰ See Hwang 2011. Anthony Kenny holds the opposite view (see Kenny 1968, 110). Steven Nadler seems to make a stronger division than I would between Seventeenth Century and Scholastic Aristotelian theories of cognition (see Nadler 1989, 3-4).

understanding are also *modes* of perceiving.⁷¹ Hence, all cognition – sensing, imagining, and purely understanding – depends on perceiving, i.e. occurs in virtue of perceiving. Since perceiving is immediately of an idea, sensing, imagining, and purely understanding occur *in virtue of* immediately perceiving an idea, where the idea perceived is a form.⁷² On my view, then, perceiving (*percipere* and *percevoir*) for Descartes is *not* the same as sensing, imagining, or purely understanding, and what is immediately perceived is *not* the same as what is sensed, imagined, or purely understood. This places Descartes’s view squarely within the general scholastic Aristotelian framework of cognition.

Third, ideas *represent* something in that they *make that thing present in the mind in a manner appropriate for cognition*. On the scholastic Aristotelian view, the form of something is its principle of actualization, and by inhering in some matter, it actualizes that thing (e.g., the quality of redness is actualized in something in virtue of the form of that quality inhering in that thing). Cognition of something also occurs in virtue of receiving the form of that thing. However, receiving the form of a thing with its original matter would not amount to cognition of the thing, but the actual (formal) being of the thing itself within the recipient. So the form must be present without its original matter if cognition is to be had.⁷³ Since the form is the principle of actualization, the reception of the species of something *actualizes, or makes present, that very thing in its recipient*. Since the form is received *without* its original matter, the thing is made present in the recipient *in a manner appropriate for cognition*. Hence, to represent something is to make that very thing present in its recipient.⁷⁴ This is precisely what we find in Descartes’s view. In his response to Arnauld, Descartes states that *since* ideas are *forms of a kind* and *not composed of any matter* <formae quaedam, nec ex materia ulla componantur>, when they are considered as representing something, they are being taken not materially but *formally*.⁷⁵ In other words, ideas

⁷¹ AT VIII A 17.

⁷² Monte Cook interprets the immediate perception of ideas to be the “inner awareness that the mind has of all its thoughts”, and takes Descartes to be comparing this with cognition of “things like voluntary movements”, *not* with cognition of external objects (see Cook 1987, 186). However, Descartes states that the immediate perception of an idea *makes me conscious of the thought* (AT VII 160, CSM II 113), which suggests, contrary to Cook, that the immediate perception of an idea is *not* the consciousness of thought, but *that by which* consciousness of thought occurs.

⁷³ The reception of a sensible species was often illustrated by scholastic thinker through the analogy of a wax and seal. The wax receives the form of a seal, and both thereby come to share the same form or structure *without* sharing the same matter. Reception of a sensible species occurs along similar lines. For the wax-seal analogy in regards to sensing, see Thomas Aquinas’s *Commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima*, Book II, §554; in regards to memory, see his *Commentary on Memory and Recollection*, Lesson 3, §328.

⁷⁴ See Clemenson 2007, 48-49.

⁷⁵ AT VII 232, CSM II 163.

are forms, the reception of which serves to *make present*, i.e., *represent*, in the mind something in a manner appropriate for cognition.⁷⁶

These three theses explain how an operation of the intellect represents something. To perceive the idea of something is to perceive the form of that thing, and this form is *immediately perceived* in that it is the mind's activity in forming or structuring thought in accordance with the form or structure of that thing.⁷⁷ To perceive the form of something is to have that thing present in the mind in a manner appropriate for cognition. In other words, forming or structuring thought according to the form of something makes present that very thing in such a way that I cognize it. Hence, perceiving an idea of something is the act of *forming thought* according to the form of that thing,⁷⁸ and this operation itself, by having that form or structure, thereby makes present, i.e. *represents*, that thing.^{79, 80}

⁷⁶ I reject the view that Descartes wholly jettisons the scholastic theory of species. See Hwang 2011.

⁷⁷ Norman J. Wells argues that Descartes follows certain Jesuit thinkers (e.g. Francisco Suárez) in taking true ideas to be ideas that *conform* to a *reale aliquid* (see Wells 1984, 28-35). However, Wells does not explain what it means for the idea to *conform* to an object. On my view, an idea is formed according to the form of the object in that the idea is structured in the form of that object. Furthermore, Wells is specifically talking about cases involving *true* ideas. My view here is more general.

⁷⁸ It might be objected that for Descartes, only volitions, not perceptions, are acts of the mind. Indeed, Descartes often talks about the intellect as the *passive* faculty when it comes to sensory perception, suggesting that *no* act of the mind occurs in such a case. (See, for instance, AT III 372, CSMK 182; AT III 428, CSMK 193; AT III 454-455, CSMK 199; AT IV 113-114, CSMK 232-233; AT IV 310-311, CSMK 270-271; and AT VII 79, CSM II 55). This objection, however, assumes that an idea *as the act of forming an idea* is wholly incompatible with a perception as something passive. As I understand it, an idea is an act in the sense of being an *operation of the intellect*, while at the same time something passive with respect to some agent. For instance, the formation of characters on a word processor is an active operation of the computer, but they are passive in that they are initiated by a human user. See AT XI 327-328, CSM I 328 and Hoffman 1990. Steven Nadler notes a similar issue arising in Arnauld's view between his conception of mind as absolutely active and his adoption of divine occasionalism with respect to sensory perception, according to which sensory ideas are produced in the mind by God (see Nadler 1989, 46, 57-59, especially footnote 50).

⁷⁹ Note that on my view, perceiving ideas *is* representing something, but strictly speaking *what* is perceived (ideas) is *not* what is represented, i.e. ideas are not represented. Perceiving an idea is perceiving a form, which is the mind's *forming* or *structuring thought* through its power of thinking. Since thought is the principle attribute of mind, to form thought is to form the mind, viz. to give form or structure to the mind. I discuss this in more detail below. See also Lennon 1974, 46-47.

⁸⁰ Steven Nadler argues for a similar view in the case of Arnauld's theory of perception (see Nadler 1989, 121, 127-128, 143-178). According to Nadler, Arnauld holds to an *act theory* of ideas and a *content theory* of intentionality. The former takes ideas to be acts of the mind, not direct objects separate from the mind's act. The latter takes intentionality to be determined by the *structure* or *form* of the act-idea, not by a

B. *To perceive an idea is to be the thing represented.*

The next question is how an idea itself can be the very thing that it represents. The answer lies in understanding the relation between the idea as the *form* of something, as the *essence* of that thing, and as the thing itself.

First, something that has objective being in the intellect is also the thing represented by an operation of the intellect, but what is represented is not that thing in its objective mode of being. In the *Preface* to the *Meditations*, Descartes states that an idea taken objectively is the thing represented by an operation of the intellect <pro re per istam operationem repraesentata>.⁸¹ Since perceiving the idea of something is the act of representing that thing (making it present), an idea taken objectively is the thing that is represented by perceiving an idea of that thing. But an idea taken objectively *is* the objective being of something in the intellect.⁸² Hence, the thing represented by an operation of the intellect is also objectively in the intellect. However, *what* is represented is not the thing in its objective mode of being. In the *Preface*, Descartes states that an idea can be taken “objectively, for the thing represented by that operation [of the intellect], *which thing, even if it is not supposed to exist outside the intellect*, can still be more perfect than me by reason of its essence.”⁸³ Descartes is suggesting that what is represented *may* not exist outside the intellect. If, however, the thing represented was the *thing-as-it-is-objectively-in-the-intellect*, the relative clause would be redundant, since, strictly speaking, things in their objective mode of being are *never* outside the intellect.⁸⁴ Moreover, what is represented by an operation of the

relation to some object. Nadler recognizes Arnauld’s expressed indebtedness to Descartes, noting that the definition of an idea given in the Second Set of Replies (AT VII 188, CSM II 132) is at least *open* to an interpretation that aligns it with Arnauld’s own definition of idea as act (see Nadler 1989, 127). However, Nadler ultimately concludes that “ambiguities remain in Descartes’s use of the term ‘idea’” that cause problems and confusions in his overall theory, making it difficult to reconcile fully with an act-theory (see Nadler 1989, 130). This is where I differ from Nadler.

⁸¹ AT VII 8, CSM II 7.

⁸² This is clear from Descartes’s discussion of the idea of the sun in the First Set of Replies (AT VII 102, CSM II 75). Descartes identifies the *idea* of the sun with the *sun itself*, and explicitly states that the latter is *not* the formal, but the *objective* being of the sun. See also AT VII 102, CSM II 75. Note also that in the *Meditations*, an idea is *always* in the mind (see AT VII 160, CSM II 113; and AT VII 181, CSM II 127).

⁸³ “[S]umi enim potest[...]objective, pro re per istam operationem repraesentata, quae res, etsi non supponatur extra intellectum existere, potest tamen me esse perfectior ratione suae essentiae” (AT VII 8; emphasis added in the translation).

⁸⁴ The counter-part account of the relation between ideas and their objects as developed in Kaufman 2000 might be invoked in response to my criticism. It might be thought that the objective being of something in the intellect can be what is represented, and Descartes’s claim is not redundant in the way that I charge, for Descartes would be talking about the possibility of the idea (taken objectively) having or not having a formally existing *counter-part*. I do not accept the counter-part reading, but rather opt for

intellect is what is made present by that operation. Since to take an idea objectively is to consider the same thing that is considered when taking the idea materially or formally, what is made present in the intellect by an operation of the intellect would be *the operation of the intellect itself* if what was represented was the thing in its objective mode of being. This is tantamount to saying that the operation makes itself present, which certainly cannot be what Descartes means.

As I understand it, something that has formal being outside the intellect and also objective being in the intellect is *one* and *the same* thing having two different modes of being.⁸⁵ Similarly, the reality that is objectively in an idea is the *same* reality that is to be found in its cause, *either formally or eminently*.⁸⁶ Hence, objective reality and formal reality are not different kinds of reality, but the same reality having two different modes of being, where the modes of being are distinct from what has these modes of being.⁸⁷ The objective being of something in the intellect is the *objective mode of being* of what is represented. What is represented is the thing, and the way this thing is represented—made present in the mind—is through an operation of the intellect. This operation represents the thing in that it makes *that thing present in the intellect objectively*. *Where* the thing is made present is *in the intellect*, and *how* it is present therein is *objectively*. Therefore, there is just one thing that is both represented and objectively in the intellect, but what is represented is not the thing in its objective mode of being.

Second, when the form of thought is the form of a thing, the form of thought is the *essence* of that thing, and this essence qua form of thought *just is* the *objective being of that thing in the intellect*. The form of something is what determines *what that thing is*, i.e., its *essence*. Indeed,

the view that objective and formal being are two different modes of being of *one and the same thing*. I discuss this in the next paragraph. (See the next footnote).

⁸⁵ Hence, the sun as it is objectively in my mind and the sun as it is formally in the heavens are not two different suns, but one and the same sun with different modes of being. See AT VII 102, CSM II 74; AT VII 161, CSM II 113-114; and AT IV 358, CSMK 280-281. Dan Kaufman holds that there is no clear support for such an identification, and also that the identification would have difficulty dealing with ideas of non-actual possibles (see Kaufman 2000). Both problems can be avoided by taking objective and formal being to be two, really distinct modes of being that one and the same thing can have.

⁸⁶ In the Second Set of Replies, Descartes states that “the objective reality of our ideas requires a cause, in which the *same reality itself* <in qua eadem ipsa realitas>, is not only objectively, but formally or eminently, contained” (AT VII 165; emphasis added). This is repeated in AT VII 167. See also AT VII 41-42, CSM II 29 and AT VII 79, CSM II 55. This point is also recognized by Clemenson 2007 and Brown 2008. Lilli Alanen also seems to hold such a view in Alanen 2003, 130, but in Alanen 2001, 233, she distinguishes between objective being and reality, on the one hand, and the “formal or actual reality of the thing represented”, on the other. See also Carriero 2009, 138-139, 157-158.

⁸⁷ David Clemenson also makes the same distinction (see Clemenson 2007, 20-21).

Descartes refers to the essence or nature of something as its *form*.⁸⁸ When the mind, through its power of thinking, forms thought according to the form of something, it thereby forms thought according to *the essence of that thing*.⁸⁹ But since the form of thought *is* the form of the thing, and this form is the essence of that thing, the form of thought *is the essence of that thing*.⁹⁰ Hence, the operation of the intellect that has this form is the objective being of that thing in the intellect since the former *is representing that thing*, which is just *making that thing present objectively in the intellect*.

In light of the previous discussion, these two theses show how the perceiving of an idea is itself the thing represented. Perceiving an idea of something is the operation of the intellect in forming thought according to the form of that thing. This form, however, is the essence of the thing, and this essence *is* the thing as it is objectively in the intellect. Hence, the operation of the intellect takes on the *essence* of the thing, and so *becomes* the thing: to represent something is to become it. Perceiving an idea represents something in that the perception itself *is* the objective being of that thing.⁹¹ In this way, the operation of the intellect *represents* something *and* is the very thing represented.⁹² It represents in that it forms itself according to the form of the thing, thereby making the thing present, and it *is* the thing represented in that it

⁸⁸ AT VII 64, CSM II 44; AT VII 115-116, CSM II 82-83; and AT XI 35-36, CSM I 92. In fact, in late scholastic thought, the essence, form, and nature of something are only conceptually distinct. See Suárez, *Metaphysical Disputations*, Disputation 15, Section 11, §§3-4.

⁸⁹ Descartes himself states that ideas represent *the essences* of things <Idea enim repraesentat rei essentiam> (AT VII 371, CSM II 256).

⁹⁰ In a letter written to an unknown recipient (dated 1645 or 1646), Descartes states: “if by *essence* we understand *a thing as it is objectively in the intellect* <rem, prout est objective in intellectu>, and by existence the same thing <vero rem eandem> in so far as it is outside the intellect, it is manifest that the two are really distinct” (AT IV 350, CSMK 281; emphasis added).

⁹¹ For example, to have the sun objectively in my intellect *just is* to represent the sun, i.e. to make the sun present. However, the objective being of the sun in my intellect is not what is represented. In this way, my view differs from what I understand to be that of Chappell 1986, 192; Clemenson 2007, 80; Kenny 1968; Wee 2006, 42-44; and Wells 1990. Shapiro 2012 presents a similar view, but distinguishes the *of-ness* of an idea between the theoretical and pre-theoretical senses, and identifies only the former with the objective being of a thing in the intellect (see footnote 46 above).

⁹² It might be objected that the view that I take fails to make room for non-resemblance, since, on my view, an idea represents something in virtue of having its form. It is not at all obvious to me that sameness in form necessarily implies perfect resemblance. For example, the computer code for an image file and the image itself could be said to have the same structure in some important sense, while nevertheless failing to resemble each other perfectly. As I understand it, the ideas of heat and cold are ideas of modes of extension, namely, motion, where the forms of these modes are somehow captured in their corresponding ideas. I discuss this in more detail in Hwang 2011.

is that thing in its objective mode of being *in virtue of* having its form or essence.⁹³

We are now in a position to understand what role perceiving ideas occupies within Descartes's general cognitive system, and how it fulfills that role. Cognition of something occurs *in virtue of* perceiving an *idea* of that thing, in just the way that the standard, scholastic Aristotelian framework takes cognition to occur in virtue of receiving species. Hence, for Descartes, 'perceive' is a technical term. Strictly speaking, we *perceive ideas* but *cognize things, affections of things, etc.* The act of perceiving is immediately of an idea, which is something in the mind. The perceived idea is the form or structure of the operation of the intellect. The act of perceiving cannot be separated from the idea that is its immediate object, any more than the act of dancing the Tango can be separated from the form of the Tango that structures the body's movements in dancing it. Moreover, the objective being of something in the intellect is *neither* the object of perception, nor the object of representation, nor the object of cognition. What is perceived is an idea, which is a form; what is represented is a thing, an affection of a thing, etc.; and what is cognized is what is represented. What is cognized is not this act, nor the form of the act, but the thing that comes to have objective being in the intellect *through* this act.⁹⁴ The objective being of something in the intellect is the *perception of an idea of that thing*. Since perceiving ideas is that in virtue of which cognition occurs, the objective being of something in the intellect is that *by which* I cognize that thing.⁹⁵ I do not cognize something in its objective

⁹³ Hence, unlike Wilson 1999b, who attributes to Descartes a hybrid view of representation, I take representation to be univocal. According to Wilson, an idea represents in two ways: *referentially*, which is the object that the idea actually represents, and *presentationally*, which is the object that the idea *appears* to represent. On my view, for a thing to be represented is for it to be objectively in the intellect. This occurs through the forming of thought, which may be sufficient for representing the thing but insufficient for doing so clearly and distinctly. For more on resemblance, see Hwang 2011.

⁹⁴ Newman 2009 argues for an act-object theory of ideas, according to which an idea for Descartes is a perceptual act, which itself is an object of perception that mediates cognition of the world, thus making Descartes a representationalist. However, Newman overlooks the technical sense of 'perceiving', and so takes the perception of the idea as *cognition* of the idea. Monte Cook, on the other hand, holds that these acts are objects of immediate perception, but argues that this need not be taken to imply that our cognition of things external to the mind is *mediated* representationally (see Cook 1987, 186). However, Cook also seems to overlook the technical sense of 'perceive'.

⁹⁵ Steven Nadler argues that the perception of an idea for Arnauld is also an operation of the intellect formed according to the form of an object. However, his account of how this gives rise to cognition differs from mine. For Nadler, the operation of the intellect, by being formed according to the form of something, serves to *direct the mind* to that thing (see Nadler 1989, 169-170). His usage of 'direct' (and 'directedness') is not entirely clear to me.

mode of being, but *in virtue* of its objective mode of being.⁹⁶

III. Objective Reality

My account reveals how an idea can be both an operation of the intellect that represents something and the thing that is represented by that operation. One question that arises is how the objective reality of an idea coherently fits with this picture, especially in light of Descartes's conception of mind as indivisible, one, and whole, lacking any distinguishable parts.⁹⁷ This issue is especially poignant with respect to the idea of God. The formal reality of that idea is derived from the mind of which it is a mode, but the reality that is objectively contained in it is the *same* reality that is formally in God. How can my mind possess the formal reality that it has as a thinking substance, while at the same time objectively contain the reality of God?⁹⁸

The answer lies in two examples that Descartes often uses to illustrate what he means by the objective reality of an idea, and to explain why he thinks that this reality must have a cause that contains the same reality either formally or eminently.⁹⁹ The first example involves

⁹⁶ Hence, this should no more be considered a representationalist view than the standard account of the scholastic Aristotelian framework on cognition. Nevertheless, some scholars have argued that the standard scholastic Aristotelian framework is a representationalist framework. See, for example, Hoffman 2002; Pasnau, 1997; and Pasnau 2008.

⁹⁷ AT VII 85-86 and AT III 124, CSMK 149.

⁹⁸ Following David Clemenson's treatment of the objective being of the sun, we might take the objective being of God in the intellect (or, God *qua represented*) to be both really and numerically identical to the intentional representation of God (which he calls a "thought qua representing"), and God's formal being (God in *real esse*) to be numerically distinct from a thought, and hence, really distinct from the objective being of God (see Clemenson 2007, 50-60). Even so, our issue still remains. In what sense can my thought be really and numerically identical to the objective being of God if the latter has reality that far exceeds in grade the reality of my mind, while my mind remains wholly one and without parts? Steven Nadler has rightly pointed out that the objective being of something in the intellect (and, hence, the objective reality in an idea) is not a "real constituent part or property of the mind", by which he means that it is not *formally* in the mind "as the mind's operations exist in it" (see Nadler 1989, 157). However, it is not clear what he means by the objective being of something not being a "real constituent part". Certainly it is not a property that is *formally* in the mind. Nevertheless, it is part of the idea in some important respect, and is also identified with the idea itself in some way. Interpreting the relation too weakly would run the risk of falling into Caterus's view of objective being as a mere external denomination (AT VII 91-92, CSM II 66-67).

⁹⁹ I have benefited greatly from conversations with John Carriero and Calvin Normore on these two examples.

the *skill* <artificium> found in the design of some machine.¹⁰⁰ The idea of a machine that is highly skilled in its design contains this skill objectively, and this skill must be found in its cause either formally or eminently. If it is formally in its cause, then the cause is an actually existing machine with this skilled design; if eminently in it, then it is in it in some higher form, e.g., in the thinker's advanced knowledge of engineering or her keen and subtle intellect. Either way, the skill that is objectively in the idea must itself be found in its cause. The second example involves the paintings of Apelles.¹⁰¹ According to Descartes, anyone who says that he can paint as well as Apelles simply for the reason that he can arrange different colors in different ways is assuming that Apelles's paintings amount to nothing more than the mere arrangement of different colors in different ways. Descartes insists that painting pictures that realize similitudes of things¹⁰² amounts to more than such mere arrangements. In particular, it requires a *skilled* <arte/artificium> arrangement. Like the skill that is objectively in an idea of a machine, the skill in the arrangement of colors is to be found in its cause in some way, namely, in the form of the artistic knowledge possessed by the highly skilled Apelles himself.

Several things stand out in these examples. First, both emphasize the difference between a *mere* arrangement of parts and a *skilled* arrangement of parts. There is something special about the specific arrangement of parts that realizes a machine, which sets it apart from the arrangement of the parts of, say, a rock. The arrangement of rock-parts fail to realize anything more than rock-parts arranged a certain way, whereas the *skilled* arrangement of machine parts realizes something beyond the mere arrangement itself, namely a machine with a unified function. The same goes for painted similitudes of things: a skilled arrangement of colors realizes something beyond just that arrangement, namely, a similitude of something. In both cases, what Descartes is highlighting is that the *form* or *structure* of the arrangement is a *skilled* one. Second, the skillful form can vary with respect to its level of skill: some forms are more sophisticated than others by having a *higher* degree of skill. For example, a motorcycle has a more sophisticated structure than a unicycle. This difference in sophistication could be explained as a difference in skill level found in the structure of each. Similarly, Apelles's painted similitudes are more sophisticated in form than a stick-figure similitude, and this difference is

¹⁰⁰ This example is found in the First Set of Replies (AT VII 103 - 106, CSM II 75-77) and also in *Principles of Philosophy* (AT VIII A 11, CSM I 198-199).

¹⁰¹ This example is found in the Fifth Set of Replies (AT VII 372-373, CSM II 256-257) and also in Descartes's letter to Regius dated June of 1642 (AT III 566-7, CSMK 214).

¹⁰² Descartes states that "when we are talking about Apelles's pictures we are not considering just a pattern of colours <permixtionem colorum>, but a pattern skillfully made to produce a representation resembling reality <fit certa arte ad rerum similitudines repraesentandas>, such as can be produced only by those very practiced in this art" (AT III 567, CSMK 214). I take 'rerum similitudines repraesentandas' to be playing the same role in the example that the machine plays in the previous example.

one of skill in form. Third, this skill is not something ontologically separate from the form (structure, arrangement) that has it, but is something that determines the kind of form it is. A skilled form is a form, but a special kind of form. In this way, a skilled form is not just any arrangement of parts, but a particular sort of arrangement. In other words, the skill cannot be *reduced* to a mere arrangement of parts, but is nevertheless found in the arrangement of parts, namely, a skilled one.¹⁰³

This skill of which Descartes speaks in both examples offers a model for understanding the *reality* of a thing. A form must be a specific kind of form, namely, a *real* form, if it is to be a genuine essence and, thus, to realize a *true thing*. Descartes often talks about *things* being true or false, especially in the context of discussing things in relation to cognition of them.¹⁰⁴ A true thing is something that is real (i.e., really a thing), whereas a false thing is something that is not real (i.e., a non-thing).¹⁰⁵ Something is real if it has a determinate essence or nature (e.g. God, mind, body), and unreal if it lacks one (e.g. chimerae).¹⁰⁶ Hence, in thinking of a chimera, the form of thought is not a real form, but that in thinking of body is. A chimera, unlike body, lacks a genuine essence, and, thus, is a non-thing (false thing).¹⁰⁷ Like skill, things can have varying grades of reality: things can have a higher or lesser grade of reality than other things. This reality is not something separate from form any more than skill is, and since a (real) form realizes a true thing, variations in grades of reality *is* variation in grades of thing-hood. Hence, in addition to determining its essence, the form of a thing also determines its reality.

According to this model, then, the objective reality of an idea should be the *form of thought*, where this form *is* the form, i.e. essence, of some *real* thing. Indeed, in the Second Set of Replies, Descartes defines the objective reality of an idea as the *being* <entitatem> *of the thing represented by an idea, insofar as that being is in an idea*.¹⁰⁸ As I understand it, the *being* of the thing is the essence of the thing.¹⁰⁹ Hence, the objective reality of an idea is the essence of the thing that

¹⁰³ I owe this point about non-reduction to John Carriero.

¹⁰⁴ For instance, see AT VI 34, CSM I 128; AT VII 20, CSM II 14; AT VII 24, CSM II 16; AT VII 43-44, CSM II 30.

¹⁰⁵ In the Third Meditation, Descartes seems to equate true <verae> and false <falsae> things with simply things <rerum> and non-things <non rerum>, respectively (AT VII 43).

¹⁰⁶ Note that a non-thing <non res> is not necessarily *nothing*. See Wells 1967; Wells 1984; and Carriero 2009, 49-50, 72-80, and 223-232.

¹⁰⁷ See AT V 160, CSMK 343-344.

¹⁰⁸ “*Per realitatem objectivam ideae intelligo entitatem rei representatae per ideam, quatenus est in idea*” (AT VII 161).

¹⁰⁹ David Clemenson also reads ‘entitas’ in this way (see Clemenson 2007, 14, 20, and especially footnote 35 on 108).

is represented.¹¹⁰ Since the essence here is the thing's form, which is also the form perceived (i.e. the form of thought), the objective reality is the very form of perception itself.¹¹¹ By perceiving a real form, one perceives the essence of a thing, and so the thing itself thereby comes to be objectively in the intellect.¹¹²

This provides us with a way of understanding how the idea of God, the objective reality of which is greater than the formal reality of the mind that perceives it, can be had by a finite mind without compromising its unity. Through an operation of the intellect, the idea of God is formed according to the form of God, where the idea is the form of the operation itself. In this way, the idea is not separate in being from the operation of the intellect, any more than the form of a machine is separate in being from it, or the form of a painted similitude is separate in being from that similitude. The operation realizes the objective being of God in the intellect in virtue of its form, in just the way that a painting realizes the similitude of a thing in virtue of its form (i.e. arrangement of paints). The *reality* that is objectively contained in the idea of God is the reality in the *form* of this perception (thought), in just the way that the *skill* that is contained in the painted similitude of things is the skill in the *form* (arrangement) of paints. This objective reality is also not something separate from the form itself, any more than the skill in the arrangement of paints is something separate from that arrangement. However, while it is the intellect that forms perception according to the form of God, "this faculty of having the idea of God in itself cannot be in our intellect, if this intellect is only a finite being, as it really is, and did not have a cause of itself which is God."¹¹³ In other words, the power to form the idea

¹¹⁰ One question that arises from this is whether or not an idea of a chimera contains any objective reality. Since the way I am taking objective reality is in terms of *essence* and chimerae lack essences, it would seem that ideas of such things would have to lack objective reality. As I understand it, insofar as a chimera is a non-thing (i.e. not a real thing), an idea of a chimera lacks objective reality; but insofar as the idea of a chimera is composed out of simples that *are* real (e.g. shape, size, etc.), the idea contains objective reality (or, I should say, objective realities). The constituent realities do not make a unified reality, and, hence, fail to be a genuine essence. I do not have a determinate view on whether or not an idea *can* lack objective reality altogether, though I am inclined to think that it *cannot*. Hoffman 1996, however, thinks otherwise.

¹¹¹ Hence, the objective reality of an idea is not what is represented, but is that in virtue of which something is represented. Here, I am taking the latter *not* to be the former. In this way, my view differs from Chappell 1986 as well as Clemenson 2007, 20, 79-81. To be clear, Clemenson takes the idea in the objective sense to be numerically identical to the reality that is represented, and yet really distinct from it, taking the objective reality of an idea to be what is represented.

¹¹² For more on the relation between true and false ideas and real and non-real things, see Wells 1984. For the connection between objective being and reality and possibility, see Normore 1986, 235-238.

¹¹³ "[H]aec facultas ideam Dei in se habendi non posset esse in nostro intellectu, si hic intellectus tantum esset ens infinitum, ut revera est, nullamque haberet sui causam quae esset Deus" (AT VII 105-106).

of God cannot be solely in a finite being (intellect) due to the reality that is contained objectively in the idea. A novice, unskilled painter might arrange paints in a highly skilled way to realize a similitude of something. If the skilled arrangement is not a mere fluke, we would conclude that the skill in the arrangement was imparted to her ultimately from a source that possesses the requisite skill.

IV. Conclusion

Perceiving ideas for Descartes is at once a complex and a simple act of mind that plays a fundamental role in his cognitive theory. It is simple in that the nature of the mind is simple, and ideas are just *ways* for the mind to be *formed*. It is also complex in that it is a mode of mind with a sophisticated structure that allows it to represent something *and* be the very thing represented. To consider an idea materially is to consider just the act of forming thought as an operation of the intellect, whereas to consider it formally is to consider the particular form or structure of that act as representing something. To consider the idea objectively is to consider its structure or form as the essence of a thing, or simply the thing itself. All forms of cognition—sensing, imagining, and purely understanding—occurs *in virtue of perceiving ideas*. In this way, ideas are the fundamental building blocks, or the fundamental *acts* of building, by which cognition is actualized.

- AT** Adam, C./Tannery, P. (eds.) 1996. *Oeuvres de Descartes*, 12 vols. Paris.
- CSM** Cottingham, J./Stoothoff, R./Murdoch, D. (eds.) 1990. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. 1. 3 vols. Cambridge.
 —. 1999. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. 2. 3 vols. Cambridge.
- CSMK** Cottingham, J./Stoothoff, R./Murdoch, D./Kenny, A. (eds.) 1997. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. 3. 3 vols. Cambridge.
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