Descartes on himself and his body.

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DESCARTES ON HIMSELF AND HIS BODY

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INTRODUCTION

Among the important philosophical theses that Descartes advanced, probably none is regarded as more influential in the development of Western thought than his views about the nature of mind and body and the relation of persons to each. It is surprising, then, that there is so little consensus with respect to exactly what those views were, and more surprising still that there has been little attention paid by commentators to Descartes' arguments for his views. It is my purpose here to examine his arguments for one of those views, Descartes' claim that he is not identical with his body. In so doing I shall also have occasion to discuss Descartes' arguments for the claim that his essence is to think.

To provide a background for our investigation, we should distinguish among the following claims:

1) Mind and body are distinct.
2) Minds are thinking things.
3) Bodies are extended things.
4) Minds are essentially thinking things.
5) Bodies are essentially extended things.
6) Persons think.
7) Persons are essentially thinking things.
8) Persons are not essentially extended things.
9) Persons are not bodies.
10) Persons are minds.
11) Persons are extended.
12) Persons have bodies.
13) Persons are the union of a mind and a body.

There is a divergence of opinion among philosophical commentators regarding which of the above claims Descartes would embrace and what he means by them. Generally it is agreed that he held (1) - (9), but there is disagreement over his commitment to (10) - (13). He could not have held them all. (10) is not compatible with (13), and for Descartes, it is not compatible with (11).

The commentators on Descartes, at least the interesting ones, fall into two groups. One consists of those who think that Descartes held (10) but not (13). The other consists of those who think he held (13) but not (10). Within these two groups commentators differ on the question of Descartes' commitment to (11) and (12).

Historically, the two groups have been about equally represented, despite the fact that Descartes is widely reputed as being philosophy's most explicit proponent of (13). That so many have chosen to disregard his pronouncements in favor of (13) probably owes in large part to the notorious difficulties inherent in the view and to Descartes' often apparent disingenuousness in dealing with them. I shall refrain from taking a position on Descartes' commitment to (10) and (13), since my aim is to focus on (9) and (7). For that effort, we need not settle on which of (10) and (13) Descartes embraced.

In what follows, Chapter I is devoted to discussing Descartes'
technical notions and some difficulties that arise for his use of them. Chapters II and III then examine Descartes' arguments for the distinctness of himself and his body. The last half of Chapter III is taken up by a discussion of Descartes' arguments for the claim that his essence is to think.
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CHAPTER I

The primary aim of this work is to discover and to examine Descartes' arguments for the claim that he is not identical with his body. That effort will involve, inter alia, a fairly detailed examination of Descartes' claims that mind and body are distinct substances and that he is a substance whose whole essence is to think. As groundwork for what comes later, we should first investigate those of Descartes' technical notions that play a primary role in his pronouncements on himself and his body.

Substance

Problems relating to the concept of substance were apparently of no particular interest to Descartes. In his writings he does not give attention to such problems for their own sake. His concern is rather to use the concept of substance in the solution of other problems and to spend no more time treating the concept than he deems necessary for the discussion of other problems.

For the scholastics, a substance was an individual, concrete thing. Since Descartes' training was scholastic and since he adopted the terminology of the scholastics, it is tempting to assume that by 'res' he too intends an individual, e.g., Socrates or Fido. Unfortunately, the texts do not easily support such an interpretation. Neither does it help much when Descartes defines the notion. In the Principles, he says:
By substance, we can understand nothing else than a thing which so exists that it needs no other thing in order to exist.¹

Elsewhere we find a similar definition:

Really the notion of substance is just this - that which can exist by itself without the aid of any other substance.²

If Descartes means that a substance is something that needs no other substance in order to exist, as the second definition seems to indicate, then his definition is hopelessly circular. But even if we ignore the apparent circularity of the latter definition, it is still not much help to be told that substances are things that can exist by themselves. To be charitable, we can suppose that Descartes' intent is to draw the distinction between substance and attributes, the latter being thought to require the former for their existence. But, for example, suppose we grant that we cannot conceive of wisdom existing without its being an attribute of something, e.g., Socrates. Still it is not clear that we can think of Socrates stripped of all his properties. If Socrates is a substance, it seems that substances too cannot exist without attributes. In particular, we would expect an essentialist like Descartes to recognize that every substance is such that there is at least one property, that which constitutes its essence, that is essential to it.

To be sure, Descartes might have recognized this fact. In reply to Objections IV, he says:
But yet substance cannot be first discovered merely from the fact that it is a thing that exists, for that fact alone is not observed by us. We may, however, easily discover it by means of any one of its attributes because it is a common notion that nothing is possessed of no attributes, properties, or qualities. For this reason, when we perceive any attribute, we therefore conclude that some existing thing or substance to which it may be attributed, is necessarily present.

Now there are three ways of reading the principle that nothing is possessed of no attributes. We can regard it as stating either necessary or sufficient or necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence of an individual substance. In defending the *Cogito* passages and in his *Arguments Demonstrating the Existence of God* Descartes appeals to the principle as providing a sufficient condition for the existence of something. But we can allow that in the present passage it is intended to be read in the stronger fashion.

Certainly it is at least to be read as providing a sufficient condition for the existence of a substance. And if the principle is so read, then the passage containing it tends to support a scholastic view of individual substance. Wherever we find a property instantiated, there we find also an individual substance that has that property. Further support for such a view comes from an alternative definition of substance given by Descartes in the reply to *Objections II*. He says there that:

> Everything in which there resides immediately, as in a subject, or by means of which there exists anything that we perceive, i.e., any property, quality, or attribute, of which we have a real idea, is called a Substance.
Again it seems that substances are the ordinary objects of our everyday world. However, there is a grave difficulty in attributing this scholastic view to Descartes. He repeatedly refers, throughout his philosophical writings to the claimed fact that there are just three substances: God, mind, and body. Indeed, only God properly fits the definition according to which substances have independent existence. However, Descartes claimed that substances other than God, which he termed created substances, need only the concurrence of God in order to exist.

Principle LIII supports both the view that Descartes thought substances to require at least one property and the view that there are only two substances. He says:

But although any one attribute is sufficient to give us a knowledge of substance, there is always one principal property of substance which constitutes its nature and essence, and on which all the others depend. Thus extension in length, breadth, and depth, constitutes the nature of corporeal substance; and thought constitutes the nature of thinking substance.

Descartes held that there are only two essential properties that belong to created substance: thought and extension. Given that fact there seems to be only two substances, mind and body, since every created substance has only one essential property and that property is either thought or extension. But that view conflicts with Descartes' claim that he himself is a substance whose essence is thought. Descartes did not think himself identical with mind, though possibly he thought he was a mind.

There is an easy resolution to this difficulty, whose acceptance
I propose, and that is to read Descartes as equivocating on substance. In some cases when he speaks of a substance Descartes intends kind of substance, as when he says that there are two created substances, one thinking and the other corporeal. In other cases when Descartes speaks of a substance he intends individual substance, as when he says that he is a substance whose nature is to think. In this case he intends a substance to be understood as being a single instance of a kind. When Descartes says, "Created substances, however, whether corporeal or thinking...need only the concurrence of God in order to exist" we understand him to be talking about kinds of substance and to allow that there are possibly many different individual substances, though all are either of a kind that think or a kind that are extended.

There is one small hitch to my interpretation. When Descartes says that there are three substances, God, mind, and body, if we understand him as saying that there are three kinds of substance, then we must allow that God is a kind of substance, whereas he would seem to be an individual substance. But that is no problem if we allow that God is sui generis. He is both a kind of substance, a kind whose members are characterized by infinite perfection, and the only individual substance that is a member of that kind. A view like this was espoused by St. Thomas with respect to angels. He held that an angel was both individual and a separate species.

Essence

Just as he did with regard to the notion of substance, Descartes
adopts and employs the notions of essential property and essence without bothering to first introduce the notions to his readers and to explain the peculiarities of his use of them. We should attempt to fill in the gap Descartes has left in his discussion, but the task will not be an easy one and success is far from certain.

Essentialism, broadly speaking, is the view that there are individuals and properties that are such that the individuals have those properties necessarily. If an individual has a property essentially, we say, then that individual could not exist without having that property. In the idiom of modal logic semantics, if an individual has a property essentially, then that individual has that property in every possible world containing that individual. Some philosophers, of course, deny that any properties are essential to a thing, but even they grant this general account of what would be the case if an object did have a property essentially. Since our concern will be to assess Descartes' claims about his own essence, we will not need to adjudicate the general debate. It may turn out, for example, that some form of essentialism can be made defensible, but that Descartes' cannot. Alternatively, it may turn out that Descartes' essentialism is acceptable contingent upon the acceptability of essentialism in general.

There would seem to be two broad stages to an adequate evaluation of Descartes' arguments for his essence being to think. First, as groundwork, we ought to tease out a sort of Cartesian analysis of 'x has F essentially'. Then we can evaluate the
analysis and see whether Descartes' claims about his own essence can be established in light of that analysis. The first stage I shall attempt below; the second, I save for Chapter III.

As a step toward understanding Descartes' essentialism we can examine several varieties that have appeared in the tradition to see how Descartes' compares. Among those offered we can distinguish four that are instructive for our purpose.¹⁰

A. Spurious Essentialism: For every individual, x, there is a description, D, and a property, F, such that, under D, it is necessarily true that x is F.

Or, what comes to much the same thing:

For every individual, x, x has some properties, F and G, such that necessarily, for every x, if x has F, then x has G.

Roderick Chisholm has labeled this variety of essentialism spurious, since it tells us not that some individual has some property necessarily, but that every individual is such that there are pairs of properties such that necessarily if an individual has one, then he has the other. If anything, this doctrine concerns a relationship among properties, rather than a relationship between individuals and the properties that they possess.

It is surely not Descartes' essentialism, since his concerns, as we might put it, the manner in which individuals possess some of their properties. Spurious Essentialism, however, does go part of the way toward capturing one of Descartes' intuitions about the relationships that obtain among properties. In Principle III he says:
But although any one attribute is sufficient to give us a knowledge of substance, there is always one principal property of substance which constitutes its nature and essence, and on which all the others depend. Thus extension in length, breadth and depth, constitutes the nature of corporeal substance: and thought constitutes the nature of thinking substance.\(^2\)

When he says that the modes a thing has depend upon its essential attribute, Descartes means to affirm a principle like:

\[
P. \quad (x) \ (F) \ (\text{if } F \text{ is a mode of thinking, then necessarily if } x \text{ has } F, \text{ then } x \text{ thinks})
\]

Here, and in other passages, Descartes seems to embrace a nomenclature according to which there are two primary (essential) properties of created substances, thinking and extension, and all other properties that a thing may possess are simply modes of one of these two primary properties. Thus he holds that the various ways in which one can be said to think, e.g., to believe, to hope, to fear, to wish, etc., are each of them modes of the more general property, thinking. The same holds with extension and its modes, length, breadth, etc. Given any attribute of a thing, we can infer its essence. For example, if we are told that a particular substance has the property of wishing for rain, we can infer that its essence is thinking.

We can see, then, the sense in which this part of Descartes' view is captured by Spurious Essentialism. Descartes seems to have held that everything is such that necessarily if it has an attribute that is a mode of thinking or extension, then it also has the property of being a thinking thing or of being an extended thing.\(^2\)
Descartes' view is in one respect stronger, and in another more restricted, than Spurious Essentialism. The latter holds only that some properties are such that necessarily whatever has the one has the other, i.e., pairs of properties are such as to be, by necessity, jointly exemplified. Descartes' view is more restricted in that for him the jointly exemplified pairs are ordered. It is not necessarily the case that whatever thinks also hopes, but it is necessarily the case that whatever hopes also thinks. Descartes' view is stronger in that it, unlike Spurious Essentialism, holds not only that attributes are necessarily jointly exemplified, but also that things necessarily have at least one of the properties that they have.

This is a good place to bring up what might be thought to be a problem for Descartes' view that substances have only one essential property. It would seem that God, who is an individual substance, is privileged to possess not just one essential property, as is the case with created substances, but rather a rich array of them. Descartes does not speak to the problem, but it is easy to see that it can be circumvented. We simply regard infinite perfection as being God's one essential property. Then infinite perfection, like the primary attributes of corporeal and mental substances, can be viewed as supporting all of the other of God's attributes, which are its modes. Being infinitely perfect, then, entails being necessarily existent, omniscient, omnipotent, etc. This account does not achieve exact symmetry with the case of created substances,
since God, unlike the latter, cannot fail to have any of the modes of his essential attribute. But the account seems close enough to enable Descartes to claim that all substances have one essential property on which all their others depend.

This is also a good point at which to mention that most of Descartes' pronouncements on substance, essence, and mode are just that, pronouncements. There is very little argumentation for any of the claims made with respect to Descartes' technical notions. It is, of course, part of the nature of one kind of system building that the foundation is left unchallenged. There the interesting question is whether the foundation supports the superstructure it is claimed to support. And, to be fair, Descartes does provide argumentation when he builds on top of his basic principles. But we will later have occasion to lament, as some of his objectors did, Descartes' lack of support for his basic claims. This will be especially true when we return to Descartes' discussion of his essence and the essence of mind and body in Chapter III.

Spurious Essentialism is perhaps most interesting from the point of view of contemporary discussion, because it seems to be involved in the notion of essentialism to which Quine so vigorously objects. The now famous passage in which Quine sets out his objection is from *Word and Object*, p. 199:

Perhaps I can evoke the appropriate sense of bewilderment as follows. Mathematicians may conceivably be said to be necessarily rational and not necessarily two-legged; and cyclists necessarily two-legged and not necessarily
rational. But what of an individual who counts among his eccentricities both mathematics and cycling? Is this concrete individual necessarily rational and contingently two-legged or vice versa? Just insofar as we are talking referentially of the object, with no special bias toward a background grouping of mathematicians as against cyclists or vice versa, there is no semblance of sense in rating some of his attributes as necessary and others as contingent. Some of his attributes count as important and others as unimportant, yes; some as enduring and others as fleeting; but none as necessary or contingent.

It seems that Quine here has in mind the principles:

1) Necessarily (x) (if x is a cyclist, x is two-legged)

and

2) Necessarily (x) (if x is a mathematician, x is rational)

These principles, it should be noted, provide an instantiation of Spuricus Essentialism. They hold that the properties being a cyclist and being two-legged, as well as the properties being a mathematician and being rational, are such that necessarily whatever has the former also has the latter. However, these are innocuous principles. To experience Quine's sense of bewilderment we must confuse them with their de re counterpart principles:

3) (x) (if x is a cyclist, x is necessarily two-legged)

and

4) (x) (if x is a mathematician, x is necessarily rational)

But whereas (1) and (2) have a solid claim to truth, (3) and (4) are clearly false. It is only by employing (3) and (4) in conjunction with:
5) (x) \(\text{if } x \text{ is a cyclist, } x \text{ is not necessarily rational}\)
and
6) (x) \(\text{if } x \text{ is a mathematician, } x \text{ is not necessarily two-legged}\)

that Quine's objection strikes us as worthy. But again, if (5) and (6) look at all attractive to an essentialist, it is only because we confuse them with their de dicto counterparts that instantiate Spurious Essentialism, i.e.:

7) - necessarily (x) \(\text{if } x \text{ is a cyclist, } x \text{ is rational}\)
and
8) - necessarily (x) \(\text{if } x \text{ is a mathematician, } x \text{ is two-legged}\)

While Spurious Essentialism may serve the useful purpose of enabling us to understand Quine's objection to essentialism and to avoid his bewilderment, we have seen that it is not rich enough to capture Descartes' essentialist doctrine.\footnote{14} We should move on, then, to our survey of the available varieties. Next we consider:

B. Trivial Essentialism: For every individual, \(x\), there is some property, \(F\), such that \(x \text{ necessarily has } F\).

This variety of essentialism is trivial in that there are certain uninteresting, but universally instantiated, properties that everything can be said to have necessarily. For example, nothing could lack the property of being self-identical or of being either red or non-red. Descartes' essentialism clearly fits this variety, though not in virtue of his countenancing such universally instantiated properties as essential to their possessors. Rather, Descartes
held that all substances in fact have one essential property, but one such property only. Thinking belongs to mental substances, extension to corporeal substances, and infinite perfection to God. It is perhaps because he thought substances to possess one essential property only that Descartes conflates the notions of essence and essential property, speaking at times of his essence being thinking and at others of thinking being essential to him. If he had regarded universal properties as essential to their owners, then Descartes would have been saddled with an infinite number of essential properties and a very inflated essence (if we regard a thing's essence as being the sum of its essential properties).

It might be supposed that Descartes failed to regard universal properties as essential, because he failed to recognize such properties at all. But while it isn't clear what Descartes would have thought of such putative properties as being such that \(1+1=2\), he at least recognized some properties that all things have and have necessarily. Duration is an example. He says:

> Finally the distinction of reason is between substance and some one of its attributes without which it is not possible that we should have a distinct knowledge of it, or between two such attributes of the same substance. This distinction is made manifest from the fact that we cannot have a clear and distinct idea of such a substance if we exclude from it such an attribute; or we cannot have a clear idea of the one of the two attributes if we separate from it the other. For example, because there is no substance which does not cease to exist when it ceases to endure, duration is only distinct from substance by thought...\(^{15}\)

This suggests that duration is an inseparable property of things.
If something ceases to have it, it ceases to exist. But Descartes does not recognize duration to be an essential property of things. Elsewhere he treats existence similarly. It is a property every-thing must have if it exists, but it is not an essential property of anything (though necessary existence is a property of God).16

So we cannot attribute to Descartes the principle:

9) If $x$ has $F$ necessarily, then $x$ has $F$ essentially

That is, we cannot conclude from a thing's having a property in every world in which it exists that it has it essentially in Descartes' sense. But we can attribute to Descartes the principle:

10) If $x$ has $F$ essentially, then $x$ cannot exist without having $F$.

That is, if something is essentially $F$ in Descartes' sense, then it is necessarily $F$. Descartes supports this view in *Notes Directed Against a Certain Programme* when he replies to Regius' claim that the mind may be a mode of corporeal substance. He says:

This assertion involves a contradiction, no less than if he had said, 'The laws of nature allow that a mountain can exist with or without a valley.' For a distinction must be drawn between things which from their nature can change, like the facts that I am at present either writing or not writing, that one man is prudent, another imprudent; and things which never change, such as are all the things that pertain to the essence of anything, as is generally acknowledged by philosophers. Of course there is no doubt that it can be said of contingent things that the laws of nature permit these things to be either one way or another--for instance, the fact that I am at present either writing or not writing. But when the point at issue is the essence of something, it is manifestly foolish and
contradictory to say that the laws of nature allow that it may be after any fashion save the fashion after which it really is.\textsuperscript{17}

Descartes fails to distinguish here between the properties that a thing has without which it could not exist and those that just happen never to change for as long as the thing exists. At any rate, the passage does support the view that a thing can't lose its essential properties while it continues to exist. Descartes affirms (10) explicitly in reply to Arnauld when he says, "For in my opinion nothing without which a thing can still exist is comprised in its essence..."\textsuperscript{18}

Descartes' essentialism, of course, is less general than Trivial Essentialism. He holds not only that everything has some property necessarily, but also that everything is such that there is some property that it has necessarily and there is something else that fails to have it. That is, he holds the principle:

\textbf{11) } (x) (\exists P) (x \text{ necessarily has } P \& (\exists y)-(y \text{ has } P))

Doubtless, Descartes thought the world such that the second conjunct of (11) holds accidentally. God could have made the world devoid of bodies, for example, in which case the conjunct would be false. So we should not consider it part of Descartes' notion of the essence of a thing that everything is such that its essential property is lacked by something else.

C. \textbf{Arnauldic Essentialism:} For every individual, \(x\), there is a proper subset, \(F\), of its non-universal properties which is such that (i) \(x\) has \(F\) necessarily, and (ii) for every individual, \(y\), \(y\) necessarily has the property of being either non-\(F\) or identical with \(x\).
Chisholm has offered a variant of Arnauldic Essentialism as being required for identification of individuals across possible worlds. He offers:

For every entity, \( x \), there are certain properties \( N \) and \( E \) such that: \( x \) has \( N \) in some possible worlds and \( x \) has non-\( N \) in others; but \( x \) has \( E \) in every possible world in which \( x \) exists; and moreover, for every entity, \( y \), if \( y \) has \( E \) in any possible world, then \( y \) is identical with \( x \).

Arnauldic Essentialism has come to be popular among present-day essentialists. Something very much akin to it has been espoused by Alvin Plantinga. The subset \( F \) above (and \( E \) in Chisholm's version) seems to capture Scotus' notion of a haecceitas, and the associated property of having the properties in \( F \) has come to be called a haecceitous property or individual essence. It is a view according to which if two things share the same essence, then they are identical.

The distinguishing feature of Arnauldic Essentialism is that it enables us to individuate things uniquely according to their essence or haecceitous property. For that reason, Arnauldic Essentialism cannot be Descartes'. We have seen that for the latter not everything shares the same essence, but still many things do. Created substances divide up into two categories, thinking things and corporeal things, each group with its own associated essential property. This suggests that Descartes is interested in those properties in virtue of which a thing is the kind of thing it is. Everything, of course, fits into many different kind categories, so
it is not alone sufficient to explicate Descartes' notion of essence by saying that it is related to kind properties, but it is a step in the right direction. For Descartes' intellectual predecessors, the scholastics, to ask for a thing's essence was to ask what kind of thing it is, what properties it must have in order to exist as that kind of thing. This too was Descartes' concern. For him, as well as for the scholastics, a thing could not become a thing of a kind different from what it is in fact. For that reason, we are not talking about a version of Spurious Essentialism according to which pairs of properties are necessarily co-instantiated, but which allows the possibility of a thing's ceasing to have both members of a given pair. Rather, Cartesian essentialism begins to look like what we can label 'Aristotelian Essentialism'.

D. Aristotelian Essentialism: For every individual, \( x \), there is a proper subset, \( F \), of its non-universal properties which is such that \( x \) necessarily has \( F \).

Descartes' essentialism seems to be a variant of Aristotelian Essentialism. For Descartes every individual substance has a subset, one that is in fact a unit set, of its non-universal properties, which it has essentially. But what subset? How do we specify which of a thing's non-universal properties is its essential property? Descartes does not say. We know only that created substances divide into those that are essentially thinking and those that are essentially extended. But why divide them that way?

To answer our question it may be instructive to look at a passage from C.D. Broad's *The Mind and its Place in Nature*. In his
introductory chapter Broad sets out a view of substance and essence that is very close to Descartes' own view. Broad introduces the notion of a "differentiating attribute" that comes quite close to Descartes' notion of an essential property. He says:

There are certain attributes which anything must have if it is to be a substance at all. I should say that anything that is a substance must have some duration and must be capable of standing in causal relations. Or, since some people deny the reality of time and of causation, let us say that anything that is a substance must have those characteristics, whatever they may be, which appear to human minds as duration and causation. I will call these "Substantial Attributes." There are other attributes which a thing need not have in order to be a substance. It need not be extended and it need not even appear to be so. Again, it need not have the power of feeling or cognising, and it need not even seem to have this. ... Now it must be admitted that every actual substance must have some special attribute or other beside the substantial attributes which are essential to all substances. This special attribute will make it a substance of such and such a kind, e.g., a material or a mental substance. Let us call such attributes "Differentiating Attributes." It will be necessary to describe the nature of a differentiating attribute a little more fully. (1) It must not be essential to substance as such, even if in fact it be possessed by all substances. E.g., if materialism be true, extension is an attribute which is in fact possessed by all substances. But it is a differentiating attribute for all that, since it is not essential for a substance as such to be extended. (2) It is a determinable which is not itself a determinate under any higher determinable. This condition is needed for the following reason. Suppose that the properties of being gold, being silver, and so on, are ultimate and irreducible. We do not want to count these as differentiating attributes; but, if we did not add the present
condition, it is difficult to see why we should not have to do so. But these properties would be determinates under the higher determinable "matter," and so they will not have to be counted as differentiating attributes if we add the condition that such attributes must be determinables of the highest order.\textsuperscript{22}

There are several important features of Broad's analysis that should be noticed. First, he is concerned to distinguish, as Descartes' view apparently does, between those attributes that are had universally by all substances (following common usage of the notion, Broad regards these "substantial attributes" as essential to substances) and the kind attributes that are not necessarily had by all substances. In the former category he places duration, as Descartes does, and in the latter category he puts extension and thought. Broad's first condition on differentiating attributes, that they are not essential to substances as such, supports my claim that while Descartes thinks that the essential attribute of a particular substance is not shared by all substances, this is a result of the way God has made the world. He might have made it differently. Broad's point here is that it is in virtue of being the kind of substance it is that a particular substance has the differentiating attributes that it has. Differentiating attributes are not essential to substances \textit{qua} substances, but \textit{qua} the kind of substance that they are.

The second condition, I think, is at the heart of Descartes' notion of an essential property. For him essential properties are the defining properties of natural kinds of the highest level of
belong to each of its parts. The other is that differentiating attributes must be simple in that they cannot be analyzed into a conjunction or disjunction of other properties. Descartes certainly held the first of the above conditions to apply to corporeal substances. His view with respect to mental substances was that they are not divisible into simpler or smaller parts. With regard to the condition that differential attributes be simple, it is not clear that Descartes was in agreement, at least as pertains to thought. We shall discuss the question in the following section.

After explicating the notion of a differentiating attribute, Broad goes on to discuss how the notion can be used. He says:

A "Differentiating-Attribute Monist" holds that there is in fact only one differentiating attribute. Materialists, like Hobbes, and Mentalists, like Leibniz, are monists of this kind. A "Differentiating-Attribute Pluralist" holds that there are two or more differentiating attributes. Pluralists of this kind can be further subdivided according to two different principles. (1) We may take the trivial principle of dividing them according to the number of differentiating attributes they accept. E.g., Descartes was a dualist and accepted two only: ... (2) A Much more important principle of division is the following. Some people who accept a plurality of differentiating attributes hold that one and the same substance can have several or all of these attributes. Thus Spinoza held that God has all the infinite number of differentiating attributes. Others consider the various differentiating attributes to be incompatible with each other. This view was held by Descartes of the two differentiating attributes which he accepted. The first kind of differentiating-attribute pluralist can (though he need not) believe that there is only one substance, as Spinoza did. The second kind of differentiating-attribute
generality into which individual substances can be divided. Broad uses the determinable-determinate distinction to capture this notion, and he expresses it by saying that there is no higher determinable over a differentiating attribute. Broad should have pointed out that there is one higher determinable over particular differentiating attributes and that is the determinable "differentiating attribute;" however, there are no others.

Unfortunately Broad's account does not mesh entirely with Descartes', since the latter does recognize a higher determinable, viz., "created substance." Had Descartes given thought to the matter, he might have regarded the property having been created by God as essential to created substances. But we can alternatively view him as giving an account of the essence of created substance only. If so, we can dismiss the property of having been created by God and say that there are no determinables higher than thought and extension. The property having been created by God would fail the first condition of differentiating attributes, since relative to created substances it would be a universal property. Adoption of this strategy also enables us to dismiss our previous worry about how many of God's properties are essential. If Descartes' account is intended to apply to created substances only, then there is no inconsistency between his claim that every substance has one essential property only and the view that God has many.

Parenthetically, I should point out that Broad offers two additional conditions to characterize differentiating attributes. One is that a differentiating attribute of a complex substance must
I have introduced this passage from Broad so that we may keep in mind his interpretation of Descartes' view as we proceed in the following chapter to Descartes' arguments for the distinctness of himself and his body and for the claim that his essence is thought. We shouldn't at this juncture uncritically accept Broad's interpretation, but it is a strong candidate to consider. One of the consequences of Broad's view is that if Descartes can prove either his claim that his essence is thought or his claim that he and his body are distinct, then the other claim follows with the use of the doctrine that differentiating attributes are incompatible with each other. A difficulty for Descartes' adopting such a strategy to establish his claims is that he seems not to have given argued support to the view, if he in fact held it, that thought and extension are incompatible attributes. But more of this in later chapters.

Thinking

Descartes gave 'cogitatio' and 'pensée' a sense that extended far beyond the sense that one ordinarily associates with the English word 'thought.' When he gives lists of particular kinds of thought (he calls them 'modi cogitandi') Descartes lists many that we would not normally include under the notion of thought. In Meditation II he says:
What is a thing which thinks? It is a thing which doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, which also imagines and feels.24

In a letter to Mersenne, who had objected that man has no will if his nature consists only of thought, Descartes reminded him that "willing, understanding, imagining and feeling are simply different modes of thinking, which all belong to the soul."25

When he defines thought, Descartes appears to add a new dimension to the notion. He seems to claim that we are always conscious of all of our thoughts. In Arguments Drawn up in Geometrical Fashion he says:

Thought is a word that covers everything that exists in us in such a way that we are immediately conscious of it. Thus all the operations of the will, intellect, imagination, and of the senses are thoughts.26

It may appear here that Descartes is referring to the objects of thought as that of which we are conscious, and not to our thoughts themselves. However, the same definition appears in Principle IX, which also clarifies the sense in which sensation is an activity of the mind:

By the word thought I understand all that of which we are conscious as operating in us. And that is why not alone understanding, but also feeling, are here the same thing as thought. For if I say I see, or I walk, I therefore am, and if by seeing and walking I mean the action of my eyes or my legs, which is the work of my body, my conclusion is not absolutely certain; because it may be that, as often happens in sleep, I think I see or I walk, although I never open my eyes or move from my place, and the same thing perhaps might occur if I had not a body at all. But if
I mean only to talk of my sensation, or my consciously seeming to see or to walk, it becomes quite true because my assertion now refers only to my mind, which alone is concerned with my feeling or thinking that I see and I walk.27

When Descartes says that thought is that of which we are conscious as operating in us, he seems to be referring not to what we would call the object of a thought, but rather to what we would regard as the activity of thinking. It is the activity, not the object, of which Descartes seems to hold that we are conscious. Kenny seems to share this interpretation of Descartes when he says:

...Doubting is one kind of thought; and thought is defined precisely as "whatever takes place within ourselves so that we are conscious of it, in so far as it is an object of our consciousness." Therefore, "if I doubt I know that I doubt" follows, for Descartes, from the definition he has given of thought, of which doubting is a species or mode. We might say that according to Descartes' definition, if we wish to find whether a given verb φ, which is applied to human beings, signifies a kind of thought or not, we must ask "is it true that when I φ I know that I φ?" Descartes therefore makes it true by definition that if I think, I know that I think.28

Arnauld objected to Descartes' definition by drawing attention to the fact that there may be much in the mind of which we are not conscious. For example, the fetus possesses the faculty of thought but is not conscious of it. Descartes replied by pointing out that when he says there is nothing in the mind of which he is not conscious he is referring not to the faculties but to active thoughts. He says:
There can exist in us no thought of which, at the very moment that it is present in us, we are not conscious. Wherefore I have no doubt that the mind begins to think at the same time it is infused into the body of an infant, and is at the same time conscious of its thoughts, though afterwards it does not remember that, because specific forms of these thoughts do not live in the memory.29

The claim that we are conscious of all our thoughts has been a source of difficulty for Descartes since it was first advanced. Commentators seem to have regarded Descartes' primary definition as having been given ostensively, or by example, thus opening to objection his contention that we are always conscious of our thoughts. The problem is that consciousness itself, being a mental activity, would surely fall under Descartes' broad notion of thought. But if my consciousness of some thought that I have is itself a thought, then Descartes would seem bound to hold that I am in turn conscious of my consciousness of my thought, and so on, ad infinitum.

The objection was first put by Hobbes. In Objections III he says:

Moreover it is not by another thought that I infer that I think; for though anyone may think that he has thought (to think so is precisely the same as remembering), yet we cannot think that we are thinking, nor similarly know that we know. For this would entail the repetition of the question an infinite number of times; whence do you know, that you know, that you know, that you know?30

It is not clear exactly how Hobbes intends his objection to be read. He may intend a sort of epistemic regress that would seem to follow
if one answers the question "How do you know that you are thinking?" with the claim "I am conscious of my thinking." That answer would itself be open to query, and so on. An alternative interpretation of Hobbes' intent is to see him as offering the objection I adumbrated above. The objection is that Descartes' thesis gives rise to an infinite regress:

a) We are aware of all of our thoughts.  
b) An awareness of a thought is itself a separate thought.  
c) Assume: we are aware of some thought, T1.  
d) We are aware of T1 through a separate thought T2.  
e) T1 ≠ T2.  
f) Our awareness of T2 (call it 'T3') is distinct from T2.  
g) And so on...  

To avoid being committed to the regress Descartes would have to deny (a) or (b). To deny (a) would be to give up his definition of thought, so Descartes should deny (b). This seems to be his strategy in his reply to Hobbes. He says:

Again it is irrelevant to say, as this philosopher here does, that one thought cannot be the subject of another thought. Who, except my antagonist himself, ever imagined that it could?\textsuperscript{31}

But to deny (b) while at the same time retaining (a), though Descartes does not admit as much, seems to require one to hold that a thinker's thought and his awareness of that thought are one and the same act or event. There is some evidence that Descartes thought this to be the case. For example, he says that we are immediately conscious of the thoughts that we have.\textsuperscript{32} If he means that we are simultaneously aware of our thoughts when we have them, then it seems
that our awareness of a given thought might be part of that thought itself. One ordinarily thinks of the judgement that one has a particular thought as being consequent upon and occurring after the thought one judges oneself to have. But if such judgement occurs simultaneously with the thought one has, then there would seem to be a case for claiming them to consist in one and the same act.

Further, in a letter to Reneri, Descartes seems to either confuse or intentionally identify the sensation of breathing with the judgement that one is breathing. He says to Reneri:

> When someone says 'I am breathing, therefore I am' if he wants to prove he exists from the fact that there cannot be breathing without existence, he proves nothing, because he would have to prove first that it is true that he is breathing, which is impossible unless he has also proved that he exists. But if he wants to prove his existence from the feeling or opinion that he has that he is breathing, so that he judges that even if the opinion was untrue he could not have it if he did not exist, then his proof is sound. For in such a case the thought of breathing is present to our mind before the thought of our existing, and we cannot doubt that we have it while we have it.33

It is the judgement that occurs, consequent upon his having the sensation of breathing, that would provide the premise for Descartes' proof of his existence. But Descartes seems to suggest that the feeling, or the strict sensation, could provide such a premise. It is possible to interpret the passage as showing that Descartes thus identified the feeling and the concommitant judgement. So it may be that Descartes does consider a thought and the awareness of it to be one and the same act or event.
Anthony Kenny sees this as being a grave difficulty for Descartes' view of mental activity. He says:

Unless he had missed the point of the objection, he must have meant that a thought such as seeming to see was identical with the awareness of seeming to see. But if this is so, then the consciousness of a thought is no different from the thought itself and cannot be used by Descartes as the mark that distinguishes cogitave activities of human beings from their corporeal activities.\(^34\)

Kenny here appears to think that Descartes regarded consciousness as a mark or criterion of the mental. We saw above that he thought such a view to follow from Descartes' definition of thought. That is, if I am immediately conscious of \(\phi\), then \(\phi\) is a thought or mental event. Now it might appear, at first glance, that such a putative criterion would be unreliable, given that I can be conscious of my corporeal activities as well as my thoughts. But that is to overlook the importance of the distinction Descartes provides between corporeal activities and the sensations of them. Of the latter we are immediately conscious. With respect to the former, if we are conscious of them at all, it is only derivatively by inference from our thoughts. So Kenny may be correct that consciousness could be such a criterion.

However, if Descartes identifies a thought with his awareness of that thought, then, Kenny thinks, he loses the criterial feature of consciousness. For his objection to carry weight, Kenny must also hold that criteria are independent features of the things for which they are criteria, features that are common to all and
only those things. So if our thoughts and our awarenesses of them are identical, then awareness is not an independent feature that accompanies all mental events and no physical events. So, Kenny would say, Descartes cannot use consciousness as a criterion of the mental.

At first glance it strikes one that Descartes did not introduce his consciousness doctrine to provide a criterion for distinguishing between mental and non-mental acts or events, and so Kenny's objection is not a worthy one. But there is some evidence that Descartes might have had such an intent. Or at least it seems that he might have regarded as one value of his consciousness doctrine its ability to provide such a criterion. After indicating that thought covers everything in us of which we are immediately conscious, Descartes says:

But I have added immediately, for the purpose of excluding that which is a consequence of our thought, for example, voluntary movement, which, though indeed depending on thought as on a causal principle, is yet itself not thought.35

And even if it is not Descartes' intent to provide a criterion for distinguishing between the mental and the non-mental, it is not unreasonable to request such a criterion from him. His consciousness doctrine, if it is successful, would possibly provide such a criterion. We should, then, look for some way of salvaging Descartes' thesis that we are always aware of all of our thoughts.

It might be thought that asserting the identity of a thought (e.g., A) with our awareness of it (here, B) is too radical a step
to take in avoiding Hobbes' regress. Rather we can perhaps hold that there is a necessary conjunction between A and the awareness of it, B, so that the latter still serves as a mark of the presence of the former, but is not identical with it. Also, in addition to whatever else it is, A is also an awareness of B. That is, there is a reciprocal relationship of awareness that holds between A and B; each is an awareness of the other. Thus, all of our thoughts would have a concomitant thought that would be an act of awareness of that thought, but no thought would require, in virtue of Descartes' consciousness doctrine, the existence of more than one other thought. By this strategy we could retain our criterion of the mental and avoid Hobbes' regress.

Unfortunately, employment of this strategy is precluded by Descartes' insistence, in reply to Hobbes, that one thought cannot be the subject of another. What is worse, even if Descartes were to retract his claim, the suggested strategy would still fail. To see why consider, for example, a sensation of pain, and suppose, following Descartes, that I am aware of that sensation. The object of my awareness is a certain painful sensation. But the object of my sensation, if it can be said to have an object at all, is certainly not an awareness of a sensation of pain. It is, if anything, a pain. So, having different objects, my sensation of pain and my awareness of my awareness of my sensation of pain are distinct entities. The strategy offered to save Descartes' criterion has failed.

It does not seem to me that Descartes can hold the view,
However important it might be to his ontological enterprise, that consciousness is a criterion of the mental and at the same time retain the view that we are aware of all our thoughts. But, what is worse for him, neither does it seem that he can keep the latter view and avoid Hobbes' regress by claiming the identity of our thoughts with our awareness of them, even if he is willing to give up the criterion of the mental. As I pointed out above, Descartes' reply to Hobbes requires that every thought have as its object either a thought that is an awareness or a thought that is an awareness of an awareness. But while some thoughts may have such objects, surely not all do.

It seems, moreover, that the kind of awareness that Descartes speaks of is a relational property. It is a relation between me and my thoughts. But surely not all of my thoughts are relations between me and others of my thoughts. Surely some of them enable me to make contact with the real world (hopefully), or at worst, they connect me with a realm of Meinongian entities. But it does not seem, contra the consequences of Descartes' view, that I am trapped in the circle of my own thoughts.

Now it may be that Descartes' view is not really damaged by the objections that I, Hobbes, and others have raised against it. Two considerations can be offered in defense of Descartes. In the first place, it might be objected that I have stated the case against Descartes misleadingly. It may seem that at least some of our thoughts can have dual objects and that, for that very reason, Descartes' view does not at all trap us in the circle of our thoughts.
It may be argued that if I am thinking of Christmas, for example, then my thought has as one of its objects, Christmas (or the idea of Christmas, if you prefer), and it has as the other of its objects, my awareness of my thought of Christmas.

I am inclined to believe, however, that the dual-objects view is an implausible one. On the view suggested for Descartes, every thought would be at least an awareness of a thought. But it seems that some thoughts have properties not had by awarenesses of thoughts. Zeno Vendler has objected to the identification of thinking with the judgement that one is thinking by claiming that whereas the sensation of breathing can be painful, the judgement that one is breathing cannot. This points up, I think, one difference between some thoughts, in Descartes' sense, and awarenesses of thoughts. For example, the thought of a personal misfortune can be painful, but it is not clear that awarenesses of thoughts can be painful. It is the thought of misfortune, not the awareness or consciousness of that thought, that causes pain. Still less would we be inclined to say that the awareness of the awareness of the thought of misfortune is painful.

Similarly, as Descartes recognized, thoughts are sometimes clear and distinct, and other times confused. But I can think of no reason why he should have regarded the awareness of a thought as confused. Certainly our memory of past thoughts is often confused, but not present awarenesses. It seems, then, that at least some thoughts have properties not had by awarenesses of thoughts. I can be vividly aware of a very confused thought, but there is no reason
to suppose that my awareness of my vivid awareness is also confused. So it seems that my awareness of my awareness of a thought of Christmas, for example, is not identical with my thought of Christmas. The latter brings me pleasure; the former, when it exists, leaves me unmoved. So, I am led to believe that the dual-objects strategy for avoiding Hobbes' regress is unsuccessful. But even if all such strategies fail, Descartes can fall back on a second line of defense.

That defense lies in claiming that if his view does lead to a Hobbesian regress, it is none the worse for doing so. A distinction is sometimes made in philosophical discussions between vicious and non-vicious regresses, the former being pernicious and the latter benign. Descartes' regress would fall into the non-vicious category. No damaging consequence would accrue to Descartes' theories as a result of allowing such a regress. I take it that Descartes' commitment to the Hobbesian regress is objectionable only in that we are not aware of there being an infinite chain of awarenesses that is associated with each thought we have. And that is taken as evidence of there being no such regress. But nothing Descartes has said requires that we be aware of such regresses if they in fact occur. It does not follow from our being aware of each thought we have that we are also aware of having the sum total of thoughts that we have.

In addition, if Descartes' defense against the Hobbesian regress lies in his claim that one thought cannot be the object of another, then even if the need for a criterion of the mental didn't exist, Descartes would do well to retract his reply to Hobbes. He
clearly elsewhere held its denial. For example, under some interpretations, the Cojito passages require that Descartes be able to think about others of his thoughts. And under all interpretations known to me, the causal argument for the existence of God requires that Descartes be able to entertain thoughts about his thought of God. 37

There are two other problems that arise for Descartes' remarks about thinking. Neither is insurmountable. One stems from passages in which Descartes seems to claim that the mind is identical with its thoughts. The other stems from passages in which Descartes apparently affirms a claim that is counter to our experience, at least when taken in conjunction with Descartes' claim that we are always aware of our thoughts. Descartes seems to hold that the mind is always thinking something. Thus, when Descartes says that he is essentially a thing that thinks, some have taken him to have meant that he is essentially a thing that thinks all the time. I shall deal with the former claim first.

Earlier in this chapter we characterized a Cartesian substance as something that is over and above, or exists in addition to, the properties that it instantiates. Thus, minds are something in addition to their thoughts and bodies something in addition to their physical properties. Unfortunately, some of Descartes' remarks seem not to square with such a view of the mind. He says:

We may consider thought and extension as constituting the natures of intelligent and corporeal substance; and then they must not be considered otherwise than as
the very substances that think and are extended, i.e., as mind and body.\textsuperscript{38}

It certainly seems that Descartes is here advocating a view of substance that is at variance with the one I have previously attributed to him. Kenny attempts to save my view (and his) by pointing out that the nature of a substance, which Descartes says is constituted by thought or extension, is different from substance itself.\textsuperscript{39} That is certainly the view we have been advocating, but it just does not mesh with the remainder of Descartes' above remark. Nor is it compatible with a remark from the Interview with Burman where Descartes says, "All the attributes taken together are in truth the same thing as substance; but not the attributes taken singly apart from the others."\textsuperscript{40}

Descartes here seems to be offering something like a Humean bundle theory of the mind. But there are insuperable difficulties with his offering such a view. For example, Descartes held that the identity of the body changed as it gained or lost parts. It would seem, then, that if the mind is nothing in addition to its thoughts, then as one's thoughts come and go, the identity of the person changes. But there is nothing in his writings to suggest that Descartes held such a view or that he would accept such a view. Indeed, in Principle LXIV, which immediately follows the troublesome one, Descartes explicitly denies that the identity of a mental substance changes with its thoughts. He says:

\[\text{We may likewise consider thought and extension as the modes which are found in substance; that is, in as far as we consider that one and the same mind may have many different thoughts...} \textsuperscript{41}\]
Also, Descartes' definition of substance (given in reply to Objections II) as something in which properties reside would seem to require that mental substances be something in addition to Hume's "congeries of perceptions." There is little doubt that Descartes thought of himself as something that has thoughts rather than as something that is identical, entirely or in part, with a collection of thoughts.

In his Synopsis of the Meditations Descartes gives additional support to the view that the mind is a substance underlying its thoughts and is not composed of them. He says:

...the human body, inasmuch as it differs from other bodies, is composed only of a certain configuration of members and of other similar accidents, while the human mind is not similarly composed of any accidents, but is a pure substance.\footnote{42}

Further, in reply to Hobbes Descartes says:

Where I have said, this is the mind, the spirit, the intellect, or the reason, I understood by these names not merely faculties, but rather what is endowed with the faculty of thinking...\footnote{43}

Again I do not assert that that which understands and the activity of understanding are the same thing...\footnote{44}

Somewhat later he says, "I do not deny that I, the thinker, am distinct from my own thought, in the way in which a thing is distinct from its mode."\footnote{45} For those who regard Descartes as having believed himself to be identical with his mind, this reply serves to provide yet more evidence that Descartes thought the mind distinct from its thoughts. In general, I think we are safe in
concluding that the passage from *Principle LXIII*, however unable to account for it we may be, does not represent Descartes' considered view on the nature of mental substance.

The other difficulty I want to discuss concerns the question of how we are to interpret Descartes' claim that he is essentially a thinking thing. That is, what does Descartes mean when he says that something is a thing that thinks? The more natural way to view Descartes' pronouncement about himself would be to regard him as holding that he has the capacity or power to think. However, apparently most commentators have interpreted him as asserting that he is always in the process of thinking. Anthony Kenny, for example, purports to be speaking for Descartes when he says, "Thought is the essence of mind in the sense that each mind must always be thinking some thought or other, but particular thoughts come and go and none of them is essential."45 And again, "As long as I exist, Descartes believed, the proposition 'cogito' is true of me; the particular cogitationes that make it true vary from moment to moment, from dim prenatal pleasures to metaphysical meditations."47

That Descartes held the view attributed to him is supported by a letter to Gibieuf. He says:

I believe that the soul is always thinking for the same reason I believe that light is always shining, even though there are not always eyes looking at it, and that heat is always warm though no one is being warmed by it, and that body or extended substance always has extension, and in general that whatever constitutes the nature
of a thing always belongs to it as long as it exists. So it would be easier for me to believe that the soul ceased to exist at the times when it is supposed to cease to think than to conceive that it could exist without thought.\textsuperscript{48}

And in reply to Gassendi he says:

You have a difficulty, however, you say, as to whether I think that the soul always thinks. But why should it not always think, when it is a thinking substance?\textsuperscript{49}

A good hypothesis to account for Descartes' having held such a counter-intuitive view, if he did, would be that he either confused, or failed to recognize, the distinction between occurrent and dispositional properties.\textsuperscript{50} Since he held the view that substances must have their essential property if they are to exist at all, then if he failed to distinguish between the property of actively thinking particular thoughts and the property of having the capacity to think, we can see why Descartes might have believed that minds are constantly in the process of entertaining thoughts.

It seems that if Descartes had recognized the dispositional property of having the capacity to think, he would not have had reason to claim that he is always thinking. Apparently, though, when Descartes says "I am essentially a thinking thing" he means not that he is a being who has the capacity to think, but that he is a being who is always thinking. He even moves, in a letter to Gibieuf, to defend his view against the obvious objection that it doesn't seem to us that we are always thinking. He says:

And I do not see any difficulty here, except that people think it superfluous to believe
that it \(\text{the soul}\) thinks at times when no memory of the thought remains with us afterwards. But consider that every night we have a thousand thoughts, and even while awake we had a thousand thoughts within the hour of which no trace remains in our memory, and which seem no more use than thoughts we may have had before we were born. Then you will find it easier to be convinced of my theory than to judge that a substance whose nature is to think can exist while not thinking at all.\textsuperscript{51}

Descartes is here guilty of the fallacy of false alternatives. He seems to think that if something is essentially a thinking thing, then it either thinks all the time or ceases to exist while not thinking. But that is to overlook the alternative according to which the existence of essentially thinking things is sustained by their property of having the capacity to think. In addition to committing the fallacy of false alternatives, Descartes has failed to answer adequately the objection he set himself to answer. It just seems plainly false to claim that the person who has been unconscious, or the person who has been awakened from deep sleep, instantaneously forgets what he was thinking, but that he was nonetheless thinking and that he was at the time conscious of his thoughts. Admittedly, there is nothing inconsistent in Descartes' view, but it is painfully counter-intuitive, at variance with what we take to be the case, and to be avoided if at all possible.

There is, of course, a respectable alternative view. That is to regard man as having the capacity to think or as having the faculty of thought. Now it may have been that Descartes was led to his view by epistemological or metaphysical considerations that
he thought persuasive. For example, if persons fail to have the property of corporeality, or fail to have it essentially, then they can be known only by their thoughts. They are possibly without any other properties, except existence and duration. But knowing only that a thing has existence and duration seems not sufficient to guarantee our epistemological access to that thing. We know a substance by its properties, Descartes tells us, and it might have seemed to him that if a substance didn't manifest some non-universal properties, then there is nothing we could know about it. For better or worse, that is the epistemological consideration that might have motivated Descartes. He might also have been moved by the metaphysical consideration that universal properties alone are not sufficient to sustain the existence of a thing. That, we know from our previous discussion, he believed. And it might have seemed to him that the active exemplification of "differentiating attributes" was required for the existence of a thing.

It seems to me, however, that these considerations, if they did in fact motivate Descartes, should not have. They are not compelling. Regarding the metaphysical consideration first, even if we accept the view that a substance must have some non-universal properties in order to exist, there is no reason that we should require them to be non-dispositional properties. The property of having the capacity to think, or the faculty of thought, should serve equally well to sustain individual mental substances. There is no reason to fear the possibility of such a substance passing out of existence when it ceases to have occurrent properties. If it
makes sense to think of a non-material substance at all, then there is no reason why one non-material, non-universal property rather than another shouldn't characterize it.

With regard to the epistemological consideration that might have motivated Descartes' view, there again seems to be nothing that compels Descartes to require that constant occurrent properties characterize mental substance. To the extent that we have any access to the mental properties of a substance distinct from ourselves, there is no reason to suppose that we have better access in the case of occurrent properties over dispositional properties. In our own case it may be thought that Descartes required an unbroken chain of consciousness to guarantee our beliefs about self-identity. He may have thought that if there were moments when we ceased to think, and so ceased to be conscious of ourselves thinking, then we could not be sure after we had resumed thinking that we were the same mental substance that had existed a few moments before.

However, that is a problem about the reliability of memory and the truth of clear and distinct perceptions. It is well known that Descartes thought himself capable of solving that problem. Further, the problem is no greater when there are momentary lapses of consciousness than when there is an unbroken chain of consciousness. In both cases we must rely upon the accuracy of our memory of there being prior acts of consciousness.

I think, then, that there is no reason for Descartes to have required that mental substances be constantly in the process of
thinking some thought or other. And it is not entirely clear that he in fact imposed that requirement. To Hobbes he said:

...walking is usually held to refer only to that action itself, while thinking applies now to the action, now to the faculty of thinking, and again to that in which the faculty exists. 52

Descartes several places speaks of the faculty of understanding and distinguishes between it and the mind.53 It is tantalizing to suppose that when he says "I am essentially a thinking thing" Descartes intends "I am essentially a thing that has the faculty (or capacity) of thought." There is insufficient evidence to ascribe that view to Descartes, but I hope I have shown that there is no reason why he shouldn't have held it.

Having armed ourselves now with a passable understanding of Descartes' technical notions, we are ready to wade into his arguments for the non-identity of himself and his body and for his essence being thought.
NOTES

CHAPTER I

1. Principle LI (HR-I, 239).
2. Reply to Objections IV (HR-II, 101).
4. Cf., Principle X (HR-I, 222); Principle XI (HR-I, 223); and definition V, HR-II, 53.
5. This assumes that we are limiting ourselves to first order (or, type one) properties. Otherwise, if we consider properties of properties, we would have to worry ourselves with the possibility of properties themselves instantiating other properties. It seems clear that the sort of property Descartes has in mind here is a first order property only, the sort that we could perceive with the use of our senses.
6. HR-II, 53.
7. At least one passage supports the view that Descartes thought of mind and body as kinds of substance. In reply to Hobbes he says, "...all men are wont to say that substances are of two kinds, spiritual and corporeal." (HR-II, 63).
8. This solution of the difficulty that I have outlined is adopted without much discussion of it by Anthony Kenny (Descartes, p. 66). Setting out a complete account of Descartes' view of substance would require us to deal with those passages in which he suggests that there is only one material substance, of which all individual physical objects are only modes. However, since our interest is primarily with mental substances, which are individual and separate from each other, we can leave our account of Descartes' view incomplete.
9. It may be that in order to avoid something like Russell's Paradox we will have to refrain from regarding God as both a kind of substance and the only instance of that kind. But an acceptable alternative would be to keep the two, i.e., kind and instance, separate and to regard talk about God as ambiguous between talk about a certain individual substance and talk about a certain kind of substance.
10. I owe this catalogue of essentialism to Roderick Chisholm.
11. HR-I, 240.
12. I will use 'thinking' and 'being a thinking thing' to denote the property that minds have essentially. I think that for Descartes' purposes the properties are identical.

13. Descartes' essentialism is more restricted than only one of the above two versions of Spurious Essentialism. The first statement, but not the second, suggests that properties it recognizes as being jointly exemplified are also ordered. For example, Jones, under the description "cyclist" would be said to be essentially two-legged, but the converse would not hold. The second version is not so characterized, and so would not recognize all of the same properties as being essential that the first does. The properties being rational and being human presumably would be essential to, and jointly exemplified by, their owners under both versions of Spurious Essentialism.

14. To be fair to Quine, it should be pointed out that he certainly knew the difference between de re and de dicto modal statements (cf. "Three Grades of Modal Involvement" in The Ways of Paradox). Possibly, then, his purpose in the above passage is merely to evoke bewilderment, and not to raise a serious objection to essentialism. Richard Cartwright (J.P., Oct. 24, 1968) and Alvin Plantinga (Nous, Sept., 1969) have both interpreted Quine much as I do, though they refrain from saying that he was confused in the passage in question.


16. It is important to distinguish between existence and necessary existence. Among more common essentialist doctrines, everything has existence essentially, since existence is a property a thing has in every world in which it exists. But necessary existence is had by few things, God and numbers perhaps being two, though it is had essentially by what has it at all, since what is such that necessarily it exists, has necessary existence in every possible world in which it exists. Descartes held that God had the property of necessary existence (cf., Principle XV).

17. HR-I, 435.

18. HR-II, 97.


21. For Plantinga the property of being Descartes would be such a property.
22. pp. 22-23.
24. HR-I, 153.
25. Letters, p. 32.
26. HR-II, 52.
27. HR-I, 222.
29. HR-II, 115.
30. HR-II, 62.
31. HR-II, 64.
32. HR-II, 52.
33. Letters, p. 52.
34. Descartes, p. 76.
35. HR-II, 52.
37. I have benefitted from long discussions with Jeffrey Tlumak on the problem that Hobbes poses for Descartes.
38. HR-I, 245.
40. AT V, 154, translated by Kenny (Descartes, p. 67).
41. HR-I, 246.
42. HR-I, 141.
43. HR-II, 62.
44. HR-II, 63.
45. HR-II, 65.

47. *Descartes*, p. 55.


49. HR-II, 210.

50. Since Descartes' training was scholastic, it would seem reasonable to suppose that he grew up on such distinctions, so perhaps our hypothesis should be rather that he failed to apply the distinction in this case.


52. HR-II, 62.

53. *E.g.*, at HR-II, 63.
CHAPTER II

After establishing the certainty of his existence, Descartes proceeds to investigate the nature of the thing whose existence is certain. That investigation results in the issuance of two claims by Descartes: one, that his essence is thinking; the other, that he is not identical with his body. Our concern is to discover Descartes' arguments for the latter conclusion, though in doing so we will need to investigate his attempt to establish the former claim.

The Argument from Doubt

We can begin by looking first at an argument often derided by Descartes' commentators and generally taken to be his primary argument for the distinctness of himself and his body. The argument is suggested in the following passage from Part IV of the Discourse:

I considered attentively what I was; and I saw that while I could feign that I had no body, that there was no world, and no place for me to be in, I could not feign that I was not; on the contrary from the mere fact that I thought of doubting about other truths it evidently and certainly followed that I existed. ...From this I recognized that I was a substance whose whole essence or nature is to be conscious and whose being requires no place and depends on no material thing. 1

The argument I have in mind (call it the 'Argument from Doubt') gets a clearer statement in The Search After Truth when Polyander says that he is not a body, for otherwise, doubting of his body he should at the same time doubt of himself, and this he cannot do. 2
Arnauld, probably wrongly, thought that the Argument from Doubt was present in the second Meditation. He summarizes it as follows:

I am able to doubt whether I have a body, nay, whether any body exists at all; yet I have no right to doubt whether I am, or exist, so long as I doubt or think.

Hence I, who doubt and think, am not a body; otherwise in entertaining doubt concerning body, I should doubt about myself.3

We can reconstruct the argument as follows:

1) I can doubt that my body exists.
2) I cannot doubt that I exist.
3) I am not identical with my body.

In the Discourse Descartes spoke not of doubting his body to exist, but rather of his being able to feign that it does not exist. That suggests an alternative version of the argument that we can reconstruct as follows:

1\') I can feign that my body does not exist.
2\') I cannot feign that I do not exist.
3\') I am not identical with my body.

The two arguments are closely similar in form, so we shall concentrate on the former, more popular version. Reconstructed either way, the Argument from Doubt has its faults, and the commentators purport to have exposed them.

Norman Malcolm, for example, proposes to demonstrate the argument's invalidity by constructing "arguments of parallel form that are plainly invalid." He offers three. Unfortunately, none has the same form as the Argument from Doubt and so cannot demonstrate the latter's invalidity.4 Malcolm's first counter-argument is:
A. a) I can doubt that I am a Grand Master of Elks.
b) I cannot doubt that I exist.
c) I am not a Grand Master of Elks.

(A) has roughly the form:

\[ \begin{align*}
&\text{a')} \quad \text{I can doubt that } F_a, \\
&\text{b')} \quad \text{I cannot doubt that } G_a, \\
&\text{c')} \quad -F_a
\end{align*} \]

or possibly:

\[ \begin{align*}
&\text{a'')} \quad F_a \\
&\text{b'')} \quad -G_a \\
&\text{c'')} \quad -H_a
\end{align*} \]

whereas the Argument from Doubt has the form:

\[ \begin{align*}
&\text{1'')} \quad \text{I can doubt that } F_a, \\
&\text{2'')} \quad \text{I cannot doubt that } F_b, \\
&\text{3'')} \quad a \neq b
\end{align*} \]

or possibly:

\[ \begin{align*}
&\text{1''')} \quad F_a \\
&\text{2''')} \quad -F_b \\
&\text{3''')} \quad a \neq b
\end{align*} \]

Clearly, the form of Malcolm's first putative counter-argument fails to parallel that of the Argument from Doubt. It can be brought closer into line by changing Malcolm's argument to:

A'. a) I can doubt that the Grand Master of Elks exists.
b) I cannot doubt that I exist.
c) I \neq the Grand Master of Elks.

This same form is exhibited by Malcolm's second argument:

B. a) I cannot doubt that Bertrand Russell exists.
b) I can doubt that the author of "Why I Am Not a Christian" exists.
c) Bertrand Russell \neq the author of "Why I Am Not a Christian."

Both (A') and (B) approximate the form of the Argument from Doubt. They differ in that they, unlike the latter, contain a definite
description, which, if given a Russellian treatment, precludes the desired parallelism. It might be thought that there is no real difference between the Argument from Doubt and Malcolm's (A') and (B), since 'my body' in the former must be understood as short for 'the body that is mine' or some such description. That being so, it would be objected, there is an exact parallel between the arguments. However, the objection is mistaken.

We have at least two versions of the Argument from Doubt under consideration. One has as its first premise 'I can doubt that my body exists,' and the other has 'I can feign that my body doesn't exist.' Also we have two alternative ways of treating 'my body.' We can regard it as a proper name, one whose referent gets specified in the context in which it appears. Or, we can regard it as short for a definite description. Whichever treatment of 'my body' we elect to employ, it should work in both versions of the Argument from Doubt. Only one does.

If we regard the expression as short for a definite description, then there is no problem with the sentence 'I can doubt that my body exists' if we read it as 'I can doubt that there exists something, x, such that x is a body of mine and anything that is a body of mine is identical with x.' However, the sentence 'I can feign that my body doesn't exist,' under the definite description treatment, becomes 'I can feign that there exists something, x, such that x is a body of mine and anything that is a body of mine is identical with x and x doesn't exist. The sentence
whose truth I am said to be able to feign is a contradiction, but it seems doubtful that I could in fact feign the truth of a contradiction. Thus, the locution 'my body' in the Argument from Doubt must be regarded as being like an individual constant, not like a definite description. Malcolm's counter-argument then, fails to exhibit the needed form.5

To produce an argument that parallels the Argument from Doubt, Malcolm should have used an argument like:

d) I can doubt that Mark Twain exists.

e) I cannot doubt that Samuel Clemens exists.

f) Mark Twain ≠ Samuel Clemens

There are imaginable circumstances under which someone could doubt the truth of the proposition that Mark Twain exists, but not the proposition that Samuel Clemens exists. Thus, Descartes' argument is invalid, and the possible truth of the premises and falsity of the conclusion in the above argument demonstrates that fact.

Malcolm also attempts to persuade us of the failure of Descartes' argument by producing a similar argument with a conclusion unacceptable to Descartes. He offers:

g) I can doubt that there exists a being whose essential nature is to think.

h) I cannot doubt that I exist.

i) I am not a being whose essential nature is to think.

This too lacks the form of the Argument from Doubt. But even if it had the correct form, it is not clear that the argument would be troublesome to Descartes, since there is some reason to suppose that he would reject the first premise.
On more than one occasion Descartes claims that he clearly and distinctly perceives that his essence is to think. He holds too that clear and distinct perceptions, while being attended to, are not capable of being doubted. In assessing the truth of (g) Descartes might be drawn to consider the argument:

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{j)} & \quad \text{I am a being whose essential nature is to think.} \\
\text{k)} & \quad \text{I exist.} \\
\text{l)} & \quad \text{There exists a being whose essential nature is to think.}
\end{align*} \]

Further, Descartes would probably have held that he clearly and distinctly perceives the conclusion, since he clearly and distinctly perceived the premises and the inference from the premises to the conclusion. That being so, Descartes, when attending to (g), may refuse to grant that he can doubt the existence of such a being, since he clearly and distinctly perceives (l). It is not sufficient for Malcolm's purpose to show that an argument is constructible that both has the form of the Argument from Doubt and would be troublesome to Descartes if he accepted the premises. He must find one whose premises Descartes would in fact accept.

Even if Malcolm's strategy of counter-argument can be made successful, as it appears that it can, we would still like to know exactly where the Argument from Doubt goes wrong. Anthony Kenny has attempted to expose its weakness. He notes that the move from (l) and (2) to (3) in our version depends upon the Principle of the Indiscernibility of Identicals. If that is correct, the argument's formal structure looks like this:
Kenny's objection is that the principle here used (i.e., (6), call it 'Leibniz' Law') has a restricted range of application. In particular we are enjoined by the existence of counter-examples from applying it in modal and intentional contexts. What makes its use not available to Descartes is that (1) and (2) provide a context that is both modal and intentional. So, Kenny says, the argument is to be rejected as needing a principle not applicable to its premises; or, as some would say, a false principle.

Many philosophers remain unconvinced that modal and intentional contexts yield counter-examples to Leibniz' Law. For them, Kenny's objection to the Argument from Doubt is neither welcome nor convincing. But we should find Kenny's objection unconvincing irrespective of our feeling about the range of applicability of Leibniz' Law. It is unconvincing, because in the argument we have constructed the principle is not applied to contexts bound by so-called opacity inducing operators. Filled out, the Argument from Doubt goes as follows:

1) I can doubt that my body exists.
2) I cannot doubt that I exist.
10) My body has the property of being possibly doubted by me to exist.
11) I do not have the property of being possibly doubted by me to exist.
12) (x) (y) ((x=y)⇒(Fx≡Fy))
13) If I am identical with my body, then my body has
the property of being possibly doubted by me to
exist if and only if I have that property.
14) My body, but not me, has the property of being
possibly doubted by me to exist.
15) I am not identical with my body.

We can see that Leibniz' Law is applied not to (1) and (2), as
Kenny's objection suggests, but rather to (10) and (11), contexts
that are purely extensional. Kenny's objection does not hold;
he has failed to show us what is wrong with the Argument from Doubt.

Fortunately, we need not look far to see where the real fault
lies. To see where the argument goes wrong, it is helpful to
suppose for a moment that Descartes offered a truncated version of
the Argument from Doubt, one like our version except with premises
(1) and (2) omitted. How should we assess such an argument:
It is valid, but we must question the truth of its first two
premises ((10) and (11) in our version). What is Descartes'
justification for offering them? If he is entertaining the
possibility at this juncture that he is identical with his body,
then he is not warranted in merely asserting, without proof, that
something is true of the one but not the other. That claim requires
argued support, and what Descartes has available is the fact,
represented by (1) and (2), that he is able to conceive the truth
of the proposition that his body does not exist but unable to con-
ceive the truth of the proposition that he does not exist. That,
however, is not sufficient. The fact that Descartes doubts that
his body exists and the fact that he does not doubt that he exists
do not yield the de re truth that his body has a property not had
by him, that of being doubted to exist.

If I have correctly represented his reasoning, Descartes' error lies in the move from (1) and (2), his only stated premises, to (10) and (11), premises required to get the desired conclusion by application of Leibniz' Law. The inference from (1) and (2) to (10) and (11), from de dicto propositions to their de re counterparts (call this inference 'exportation'), is not warranted. To see that it is not, suppose that I am attempting to discover whether John is Tom's father. I reason as follows. I can doubt that John has ever been fertile, so John has the property of being possibly doubted by me to have ever been fertile. I cannot doubt that Tom's father has ever been fertile, so Tom's father does not have the property of being possibly doubted by me to have ever been fertile. Since John has a property not had by Tom's father, the two are distinct. Obviously, the argument is invalid. Leibniz' Law is not suspect, so the fault must lie in the move from a de dicto proposition to a de re proposition. Descartes' procedure is similar to the above. He infers from its being possible for him to doubt that his body exists and its not being possible for him to doubt that he exists that his body has a property he does not have, that of being possibly doubted to exist. But, as we have seen, that is not a warranted inference. The Argument from Doubt does not work.

Now it may be thought that there are circumstances under which exportation is allowable. It can be argued that all I have shown
with my counter-example is that exportation as a principle of inference is not universally applicable, but that there are cases, Descartes' possibly being one, in which exportation is permissible. For example, my believing true the proposition the tallest spy is a spy does not by itself warrant the claim that I believe of Jones, who happens to be the tallest spy, that he is a spy. But, one might argue, I am sufficiently well acquainted with my body and with myself to be warranted in claiming that I have de re beliefs with respect to them that I have inferred from my de dicto beliefs in which they play a role. For example, I can infer from:

16) I believe that I am writing.

the de re proposition:

17) I believe of myself that I am writing.

In general, one may argue, where the de re belief is about the believer (let us call such a belief a 'first person belief'), it is one that can be inferred with warrant from a de dicto proposition.

In reply to the objection, I must admit that I am sympathetic to the claim that first person beliefs are such as to be inferable from de dicto propositions, though, I should add, only where the de dicto proposition has a certain indexical feature, that is, only where the believer's statement of the believed proposition contains an indexical expression that refers to himself. For example, whereas it is permissible for me to infer (17) from (16), it is not permissible for me to infer:

18) I believe of the youngest resident of Oak Street that he is writing.
(where I happen to be that person) from:

19) I believe that the youngest resident of Oak Street is writing.

In the latter case we must at least add the requirement that I know that I am the youngest resident of Oak Street.

Descartes' case, of course, is an inference of the former sort, and it would appear to be sanctionable. But I think it is not. At least, not entirely. Someone might object to the inference in Descartes' case with the claim that his is a special case. It is special in that the very issue he is trying to settle, i.e., the nature of his relation to his body, is one about which he ought to be clear before he can be said to have an adequate acquaintance with the objects of which he is said in (10) and (11) to have beliefs. That is, if he is trying to determine, and doesn't yet know, whether he is identical with his body, then he cannot be sure that in doubting that his body exists he does not also doubt, in an oblique fashion (or under a different description of himself) that he exists. So, the argument goes, Descartes is not warranted in exporting from (1) and (2) to (10) and (11); he does not have the requisite acquaintance with himself and his body to make the inference in this case.

The argument is appealing, but I think it is only half right. I want to claim that Descartes would be warranted in inferring (10) from (1), but not (11) from (2). Indeed, it seems dubious that it is ever the case than an inference of:

20) It is not the case that I believe of \( x \) that it is \( F \).
21) It is not the case that I believe that \( x \) is \( F \). is permissible. That is, I deny the allowability of exportation from the denial of a _de dicto_ belief statement to the denial of a _de re_ belief. Certainly such inferences, conjoined with inferences from such statements as:

22) I believe that \( x \) is \( F \).

to:

23) I believe of \( x \) that it is \( F \).

lead to trouble. For example, suppose that I am witness to a bank robbery by the Masked Bandit. I'm in the bank, I watch him empty the cash drawers, hear him order the customers and tellers about, etc. In such a case, I would be warranted in inferring:

24) I believe of the Masked Bandit that he is a bank robber.

from:

25) I believe that the Masked Bandit is a bank robber. And suppose further that my neighbor, unbeknownst to me, is in fact the Masked Bandit, though I regard him as a paragon of virtue and the last person I would suspect of wrongdoing. In this case it would be acceptable to infer:

26) I believe of my neighbor that he is not a bank robber.

from:

27) I believe that my neighbor is not a bank robber.

Given the truth of:
28) My neighbor = the Masked Bandit

and the fact that (24) provides a context in which 'the Masked Bandit' occurs extensionally, we can infer from (24) and (28):

29) I believe of my neighbor that he is a bank robber.

And we could conjoin (27) and (29) to get:

30) I believe of my neighbor that he is a bank robber and that he is not a bank robber.

(30) is not inconsistent. It is, in fact, true, though it arises from my believing propositions that are inconsistent with each other. Notice that (30) is to be distinguished from:

31) I believe that my neighbor is a bank robber and not a bank robber.

(31) is an inconsistent belief. Presumably rational agents do not hold beliefs like (31), though they do, unfortunately, often hold beliefs that are mutually inconsistent (in this case, (25) and (27)). But notice that both (30) and (31) are to be distinguished from:

32) It is the case that I believe of my neighbor that he is a bank robber and it is not the case that I believe of my neighbor that he is a bank robber.

(32) is a straightforward contradiction; unlike (30), there are no circumstances under which it is true. But we will be saddled with statements like (32) if we allow exportation both from belief statements and from the denials of belief statements (i.e., from statements like (2) in the Argument from Doubt). For example, if in the above situation I infer:

33) It is not the case that I believe of my neighbor that he is a bank robber.
from the true statement:

34) It is not the case that I believe that my neighbor is a bank robber.

then (33) will be inconsistent with (29), which is also a true statement. In short, allowing exportation in the case of both affirmations and denials of de dicto belief statements opens the way to a plethora of contradictions.

It seems apparent, then, that if we are going to allow exportation in belief contexts, we ought not to allow it with respect to both the affirmation and the denial of belief statements. It seems, moreover, that we do hold de re beliefs and that there are occasions on which it may be useful or desirable to export from de dicto to de re beliefs. So it seems that since we cannot allow exportation in both cases, we should allow its use in the appropriate affirmative cases and proscribe its use in all cases of the denial of a de dicto belief.

At any rate, it is certain that if exportation is ever allowable in the case of the denial of a belief, it is at least not so allowable in Descartes' case, i.e., in the move from (2) to (11). In the context in which the Argument from Doubt appears, Descartes must grant that it may turn out that he does indeed doubt of himself that he exists when he doubts of his body that it exists. It would turn out that way if, unbeknownst to him but conceded by him to be possible, he was identical with his body. I conclude, then, that the Argument from Doubt is invalid; it relies upon a rule of inference whose application is not warranted in the context in which
it is applied. If Descartes offered the Argument from Doubt, he shouldn't have.

There are reasons, however, to question the imputation to Descartes of the Argument from Doubt. There are two reasons, a good one and a bad one. The bad one, which is based on a principle of charity, goes as follows. While exportation is sometimes permissible in affirmative belief contexts, there are some such contexts that never allow it. Two of them are 'believe that \( x \) does not exist' and 'doubt that \( x \) exists.' That is, one can never export from statements like:

35) \( S \) doubts that \( x \) exists.

and

36) \( S \) believes that \( x \) doesn't exist.

to statements like:

37) \( S \) doubts of \( x \) that it exists.

and

38) \( S \) believes of \( x \) that it doesn't exist.

(35) and (36) do not allow exportation, since if \( S \)'s doubt is justified, then he has no reason to believe that there exists anything of which he can doubt that it exists or believe that it doesn't, and if his belief is true, then there is in fact nothing of which he doubts and believes. Further, if he has reason to believe that there is something of which he can doubt and believe, then his doubt and belief are unjustified. It seems that there is at best a sort of pragmatic inconsistency in the de re versions of (35) and (36).
If there is something for $x$ to believe and doubt about, and if he is sufficiently well acquainted with it to allow exportation, then he shouldn't hold the beliefs and doubts that he does. But if there is nothing to believe and doubt about, then exportation fails. So it seems that contexts provided by the locutions 'believe that $x$ doesn't exist' and 'doubt that $x$ exists' are contexts that never allow exportation. The Argument from Doubt, the reasoning goes, since it involves the latter construction, obviously fails to get off the ground. So, on charity alone, it should not be imputed to Descartes.

I think it true that there is something odd about the constructions in question, and I am inclined to agree that exportation should not be allowed in contexts created by them. However, that is not a difficulty for the Argument from Doubt, since it employs neither construction. In one of our two versions Descartes says that he is able to doubt that his body exists, not that he does in fact so doubt (though for other purposes he does so doubt). In the other version he says that he feigns that his body does not exist. There seems little doubt that the locution 'feign that $x$ does not exist' provides a context that is not closed to exportation on threat of something like pragmatic inconsistency. It is a common occurrence for us to feign, in a counter-factual frame of mind, that something with which we are familiar does not exist. We imagine what the world would be like without it.

Admittedly, it is more open to question whether the context
provided by the locution 'able to doubt that \( x \) exists' is one from which we can export. The locution in question seems to have two interpretations. On one, 'able to doubt that \( x \) exists' can be explicated as saying that there is a possible world, or imaginable counter-factual situation, in which it would not be pragmatically inconsistent to doubt that \( x \) exists. On this interpretation exportation is permissible. It would not, of course, be permissible in the imagined counter-factual situation, but we are not in that situation. We are in one in which \( x \) does in fact exist. On the other interpretation the locution says that the present situation or actual world is such that it is not pragmatically inconsistent to doubt that \( x \) exists. This interpretation would not accommodate exportation. I have no strong opinion regarding the correct interpretation, but it is open to a proponent of the Argument from Doubt to opt for the former. On it, it is true that I can doubt that my body exists but not that I exist. We can see, then, that neither version of the Argument from Doubt is open to the present objection. It is a bad one.

The other reason for withholding ascription of the argument to Descartes is a good one. It stems from the context in which Descartes is purported to have offered the argument. As we saw above, if we are to export from (1), then 'my body' must be referential; it must refer to something that exists. But when Descartes is investigating the nature of himself, he does not yet know whether he has a body, or even that there are any material objects at all.
A fortiori, he does not know that 'my body' refers to anything. The Argument from doubt, expressed as it is, has as a consequence:

39) \((\exists x)(x = \text{Descartes' body})\)

But at the juncture at which he is thought to have offered the argument, Descartes would not recognize (39) as true. And so, we suppose, he would not have offered an argument with (39) as a consequence. This, I think, is a good reason for withholding ascription of the Argument from Doubt to Descartes. But then we must seek an alternative interpretation for the passages from which the argument is derived. We should look for an interpretation that has no consequences that go beyond what Descartes knew at the juncture at which the passages occur.

One minor revision of the argument comes to mind. We could attempt to express the first premise hypothetically so as not to commit ourselves to the existence of Descartes' body. We could use:

40) If I have a body, it is such that I can doubt that it exists.

However, (40) won't give us:

41) My body is such that if I have it, I can doubt that it exists.

and something like (41) is what we would need to employ Leibniz' Law, which is necessary to get the conclusion that we desire. To derive (41) we would need an existential quantifier in front of (40), but that would reintroduce the difficulty that led us to abandon the Argument from Doubt. I am in general inclined to doubt that any non-question-begging version of Descartes' argument can be constructed
unless it is one that does not make use of Leibniz' Law.

The Argument from Conceivability

It would seem best to give up the attempt to construct an argument that relies on Leibniz' Law. If we go back to the texts, we can find evidence that Descartes had a different argument in mind. In the fourth set of objections, when Arnauld summarizes Descartes' argument from Meditation II, he expresses the first premise by saying that he is able to doubt whether he has a body. There is an important difference between the statement 'I can doubt that my body exists' and 'I can doubt whether I have a body.' The former tends to suggest that I have a body; the latter is neutral on the question. Descartes most often expresses himself in the fashion of the latter. Moreover, he often grants that while he is sure that he exists, he finds no difficulty in supposing the world to be devoid of objects. From that he is led to conclude that he is not a body. The evidence suggests that Descartes has in mind an argument like:

42) I can conceive of myself existing and no bodies existing.

43) I am not a body.

As it stands, the argument is shamefully enthymematic; we should attempt to make it respectable by adding some premises. Descartes gives no hint as to how it is to be filled out, but if it is his argument, we should be careful to supply only premises that would be acceptable to him.

As an initial step toward lending respectability, we can appeal
to the Humean doctrine that what is not possible is not conceivable, that is:

\[ (p) \text{(if } p \text{ is conceivable, } p \text{ is possible)} \]

44) \( (p) \) (if \( p \) is conceivable, \( p \) is possible)

Applied to our first premise, the principle allows us to conclude:

45) It is possible that I exist and no bodies exist.

Now the problem is to get from its being possible that Descartes is not a body to the conclusion that he is in fact not one. Obviously the move would be an easy one if we had available a principle to the effect that if something is a body then it is not possibly not one. We could then construct the following argument:

42) I can conceive of myself existing and no bodies existing.
44) \( (p) \) (if \( p \) is conceivable, then \( p \) is possible)
45) It is possible that I exist and no bodies exist.
46) It is possible that I am not a body.
47) \( (x) \) (if \( x \) is a body, then necessarily \( x \) is a body)
48) If I am a body, then necessarily I am a body.
49) I am not a body.

Douglas Long has recently suggested for Descartes a principle like (47). He offers:

**Long's Principle:** \( (x) \) (if \( x \) is corporeal, then necessarily \( x \) is corporeal)

For Long's Principle to be acceptable to Descartes, '\( x \) is corporeal' must be understood as '\( x \) is a body.' Otherwise, if we allow as corporeal things that have bodies but are not identical with bodies, then Descartes would be troubled by the consequence that God, whom he supposed to have incarnated himself, could not have done otherwise. Also Descartes would want to hold that he, being in fact in possession
of a body, could as well have been only a disembodied mind. But even if we understand Long’s Principle as asserting that what is a body is such that it is necessarily true that it is a body, the principle as worded is still unacceptable. It leads to a reductio.

Supposing our quantifiers to range over only actual entities, we can adopt the principle:

P) (x) (Necessarily, if x is corporeal, x exists)

The principle, of course, is false if we consider merely possible entities. However, there is justification in so restricting our range of quantification, since the principle, so restricted, is one to which Descartes gave his tacit assent in the *Cogito* argument. He seems there, and elsewhere, to have held that if something has properties, it exists. And our principle is just an instantiation of that principle, which would be false if understood to range over possible but non-actual entities.

We can now see the difficulty to which Long’s Principle leads. It, in conjunction with the principle that what is corporeal exists, enables us to generate the following undesirable argument:

50) Descartes’ desk is corporeal.
51) (x) (if x is corporeal, x exists)
52) (x) (if x is corporeal, then necessarily x is corporeal)
53) If (PoQ) and QP, then Q.
54) O (Descartes’ desk is corporeal)
55) E (if Descartes’ desk is corporeal, Descartes’ desk exists.)
56) E (Descartes’ desk exists)

Descartes, of course, held that only God necessarily exists, so we can suppose that he would reject the argument by rejecting Long’s Principle.
What is needed, then, is a principle that, while it allows Descartes to get from his conceiving that he is not a body to his in fact not being one, does not sanction the conclusion that there are things other than God that exist necessarily. Alvin Plantinga has proposed such a principle. He suggests that we use:

60) (x)(if x is a body, x is essentially a body)

Since 'x is essentially F' does not entail 'Necessarily, x is F,' our employing the notion of an essential property, a notion comfortable to Descartes if not to others, enables us to block the use of the modal principle (53), and so block the troublesome conclusion that Descartes' desk exists necessarily. It is not clear whether Plantinga thinks that Descartes held (60), but it is clear that he thinks that it, in conjunction with (45), yields the conclusion that Descartes is not identical with his body. Obviously, though (45) and (60) are not alone sufficient for the conclusion; the argument is still enthymematic. Plantinga fails to tell us how it is to be filled out, but I think we can see how to do it. If we understand essential properties to be those without which a thing cannot exist, as Descartes seems to do, then if Descartes were essentially a body, it would not be possible for him to exist in a world devoid of bodies. But we already have established that it is possible that Descartes exists and no bodies exist (given the truth of the thesis that what is conceivable is possible). Hence, Descartes is not essentially a body, and, by (60), he is not a body at all.
Let us examine the fruit of our labor. We have constructed the following argument:

57) I can conceive of myself existing and no bodies existing.
58) (p)(if p is conceivable, p is possible)
59) It is possible that I exist and no bodies exist.
60) (x)(if x is a body, x is essentially a body)
61) If I am a body, I am essentially a body.
62) If I am essentially a body, it is not possible that I exist and no bodies exist.
63) I am not essentially a body.
64) I am not a body.

We now have a valid argument (call it the 'Argument from Conceivability') with the conclusion that Descartes desires. We ought, then, to consider whether Descartes might have offered the argument. If we can agree that the premises are ones that Descartes would accept, we ought to ask whether they compel our assent. The argument has four independent premises, (57), (58), (60), and (62).

I have suggested that (57) is a plausible interpretation of part of the quoted passage from Meditation II. The evidence is strong that Descartes accepted it. To justify introducing (58) I have appealed to Hume; however, I think that while Descartes never advanced it explicitly, it is an assumption that underlies many of his arguments. (60) is never explicitly stated by Descartes, but there is evidence that he would accept it. He seems to hold, for example, that if something has properties that are modes of thinking or extension, then that thing is essentially thinking or extended. Since bodies have corporeal properties, Descartes would seem bound to conclude that they have them essentially, and so are essentially bodies. Finally, (62) is a straightforward
consequence of Descartes' notion of an essential property as he explains it. So I think we are justified in attributing the premises of our argument to Descartes. Let us examine them more closely to see whether Descartes ought to have embraced them.

My strongest reservations have to do with the first premise, so I should like to suspend discussion of it for the moment. With respect to the second premise, the claim that what is conceivable is possible, the view is, I have suggested, a well-rooted tradition in modern philosophy. To quote Hume:

> It is an established maxim in metaphysics, that whatever the mind clearly conceives includes the idea of possible existence, or in other words, that nothing we imagine is absolutely impossible. We can form the idea of a golden mountain, and from there conclude that such a mountain may actually exist. We can form no idea of a mountain without a valley, and therefore regard it as impossible.17

I am willing to give tentative acceptance to the principle on the basis of its historical patronage, but not without first discussing the possible existence of counter-examples to the principle and the problems raised by those examples.

One of the uses Hume made of (58) was in the attempted refutation of the view that laws of nature are necessary truths. He argues:

> We can at least conceive a change in the course of nature; which sufficiently proves, that such a change is not absolutely impossible. To form a clear idea of anything, is an undeniable argument for its possibility, and is alone a refutation of any pretended demonstration against it.19
Kneale, noting the dependence of Hume’s putative refutation on (58) argues against the latter. He says:

In any sense of the word ‘conceive’ which is relevant to the argument, an ability to conceive the contradictory of a supposed law of nature does not disprove the suggestion that the supposed law is a principle of necessity. This can be seen from consideration of a mathematical analogy. In 1742 Goldbach, an otherwise unknown correspondent of the Swiss mathematician Euler, suggested that every even number greater than two is the sum of two primes. This conjecture has been confirmed for all the even numbers for which it has been tested, but during the past two centuries no one has succeeded in demonstrating its truth. The attitude of mathematicians towards it can, therefore, be expressed by the statement ‘Goldbach’s conjecture looks like a theorem, but it may conceivably be false.’

Kneale’s argument seems to be that unproved and unrefuted mathematical propositions are conceivably true (and, we suppose, conceivably false). But, of course, being mathematical propositions they are necessarily true, if true at all, and hence, not possibly false. Similarly, if they are false, they are necessarily so, and thus not possibly false. So we cannot argue from the conceivability of their truth or falsity to the possibility of their truth or falsity.

I am inclined to think that Kneale has not made his case strong enough, though I think it can be so made. As he states it, his view seems to allow us to assert the conceivability of any proposition not known to have been shown false. But I think that is to confuse conceivability with epistemic possibility. Surely there are some constraints on the conceivability of a proposition beyond not knowing it to have been shown false. A person, on being told
only that a mathematician named 'Goldbach' once issued a conjecture that has not been shown false, would not be sufficiently informed to conceive its being true. He could perhaps conceive that the conjecture he had been told about was true, but that is different from conceiving Goldbach's conjecture to be true. At least some more acquaintance with the content of the conjecture seems required for the latter state of affairs.

However, I think that a sufficiently informed person is in a position to conceive the truth or falsity of the conjecture. I think that I, for example, can conceive of, or imagine, Goldbach's conjecture being false. Certainly I can imagine the discovery by computer of a counter-example to the conjecture, the attendant discussion of it, the subsequent revision of philosophical examples, etc. Similarly, I think that there was a time when I could quite clearly conceive of trisecting an angle with compass and straight-edge. During my youth I spent the better part of a school year trying it before discovering its impossibility. Certainly at that time I could conceive of succeeding at what I was trying to do. But, as Kneale has pointed out, it does not follow from my conceiving those states of affairs that they are possible. We do have what seems to be at least two counter-examples to the second premise of the Argument from Conceivability.

Now it might be objected that I have not really succeeded in conceiving what I claim to have conceived. For example, with respect to the case of Goldbach's conjecture, it might be conceded
that I can imagine something that results in discussion among mathematicians, revision of philosophical examples, etc., but still it can be objected that what I have imagined is not clearly the discovery of a counter-example to the conjecture. What I have imagined, it may be argued, differs in no particular respects from what would happen if a computer discovered something that was universally, but falsely, believed by mathematicians and philosophers to be a counter-example to the conjecture. While I can imagine a mathematician reading something on a computer printout as a result of which he comes to believe that the conjecture is false, that would not differ from my imagining a mathematician reading a counter-example on a printout, as a result of which he comes to believe truly that the conjecture is false. Since the two cases do not differ in respect to the content of the image, the argument goes, I have no evidence to support my claim that I have in fact succeeded in imagining what I claim to have imagined. With regard to my second example, the trisection of an angle, it can be objected that I have not really imagined trisecting an angle, since if I were able to describe the appropriate steps in the imagined situation, they could be applied to an actual trisection. I have not succeeded in imagining the trisection, because my image is not complete.

I think that the foregoing objection fails, but it serves a useful purpose in so doing. In particular, it reminds us that we should be careful not to conflate the notions of conceivability
and imaginability. There is no doubt that in many, perhaps most, cases of one's conceiving a certain proposition, there is an element of imagination involved. But being able to produce imagery is not necessary to conceiving the truth of a proposition. For example, we can conceive, but not produce associated images, of their being forms of life on Mars unlike anything that we can imagine. Similarly, we can conceive of their being sounds beyond the humanly audible range, but we cannot imagine what such sounds sound like. I think that the conflation of conceiving and imagining was begun and fostered by Hume as a result of his psychological and epistemological views. But we should not be limited by Hume's view. We can conceive propositions, the associated states of affairs of which we cannot imagine.

Descartes, too, refused to identify conceivability and imaginability. He held that:

I clearly recognize that I have need of a particular effort of mind in order to effect the act of imagination, such as I do not require in order to understand, and this particular effort of mind clearly manifests the difference which exists between imagination and pure intellection.

Descartes' view was that the imagination somehow depended on his being accidentally joined with a body and that the understanding could just as well function without it.

So, it is no objection to my claim to be able to conceive the falsity of Goldbach's conjecture that the images I associate with the discovery of a counter-example are compatible with its
not being the genuine discovery of a counter-example. Neither is it an objection to my claim to be able to conceive of trisecting an angle with compass and straightedge that I cannot imagine all of the requisite steps involved. I am inclined to believe, then, that my putative counter-examples to (58) are genuine.

I want to allow, though, the possibility that an acceptable analysis of 'p is conceivable' can be found under which the foregoing objection fails. Also, I do not deny that I still may be persuaded that I have not really met the conditions, whatever they are, for actually conceiving what I claim to have conceived. The importance of the principle we are examining as a philosophical bedrock cannot be over-estimated. So, we should allow the possibility of its salvage and proceed now with an examination of the other premises in the Argument from Conceivability.

With respect to (62), it should be accepted for the purposes of our discussion. We may be inclined to reject the notion of essential properties altogether, but since we have provisionally accepted the notion, we must allow (62) to stand.

With regard to (60) I am in much the same position I am in with respect to (58). Plantinga seems to think its truth obvious, but I know of nothing that can be said about it sufficient to compel acceptance or rejection. A proponent might argue in its favor by asking us to try to imagine some material body's losing its corporeal attributes. I can imagine my desk, for example, without its actual color, but not without some color or other. Or possibly
I can imagine it becoming colorless, but certainly I cannot imagine its losing the property of extension without ceasing to exist altogether. The argument has a persuasive ring, and I think it a decent argument for one claim, albeit not the one it purports to support. I think it is rather an argument to the effect that a material body cannot lose all its corporeal properties and continue to exist. But that is consistent with an object's never having had corporeal properties to begin with. Especially when we turn our attention to persons, the important objects for our purposes, the argument loses some of its appeal. It is difficult for me to imagine myself losing all of my corporeal properties and continuing to exist, but I can imagine myself to have been instantiated in a world devoid of material objects. It may well be that, being in fact a material object, I cannot lose my corporeal properties and continue to exist. But I might have existed without ever having had corporeal properties to begin with. While I don't mean to suggest that my intuitions are persuasive in the matter, they at least lead me to suspend judgment with respect to (60). It is, however, an important principle and more needs to be said before the question of its truth is settled, but for the purposes of assessing the argument under examination, we can pass on to the first premise and a more glaring difficulty.

Some would think it odd to challenge the truth of the first premise. As we have constructed it, (57) seems to report a psychological fact about Descartes. Presumably he knows whether he can
conceive of himself existing and no bodies existing. However, I think it can be shown that another premise, like the first in form, can be used in the Argument from Conceivability to yield a conclusion unacceptable to Descartes and incompatible with the claim that Descartes is not a body. Further, it is a premise the truth of which Descartes must grant. If that is so, then the use of the Argument from Conceivability is not available to Descartes.

Recall that at the juncture at which Descartes offers the Argument from Conceivability, he has established that he exists and that he thinks, but he does not yet know what he is. That question remains to be decided. He is able to doubt that he is a body, but he still allows that it is possible that he is a body. He says:

I am not that set of limbs called the human body; I am not some rarefied gas infused into those limbs...all these things I am supposing to be nonentities. But I still have the assertion 'nevertheless I am something.' But perhaps it is the case that these very things which I suppose to be nonentities, and which are not properly known to me, are in reality not different from the "I" of which I am aware?25

Now it may seem that this passage is incompatible with Descartes' remark in Meditation II to the effect that "I am" precisely taken refers only to a conscious being; that is a mind, a soul, an intellect, a reason..." It may be objected that for Descartes it is analytic that a mind is a thing that thinks and that what thinks is a mind. But compatibility between Descartes' claims that he is a mind and that he does not know whether he is a body can be obtained if we allow that mind and body may not be distinct substances. There
is evidence that Descartes was allowing this possibility in the second Meditation. He says to Hobbes:

...it is very reasonable, and prescribed by usage, to use different names for substances that we recognize as the subjects of quite different acts or accidents; we may then examine later on whether these different names stand for different things, or for one and the same thing.26

Descartes here seems willing to grant that, while he knows himself to be a mind, he may also be identical with his body. This attitude is expressed again in a passage from Meditation IV (HR-I, 176):

...I not only know that I exist, inasmuch as I am a thinking thing, but a certain representation of corporeal nature is also presented to my mind; and it comes to pass that I doubt whether this thinking nature which is in me, or rather by which I am what I am, differs from this corporeal nature, or whether both are not simply the same thing; and I here suppose that I do not yet know any reason to persuade me to adopt the one belief rather than the other.

Here, however, lies the problem for Descartes. If he is entertaining the possibility that he is a mind that is identical with a body and since he does not know at this point in his inquiry that there are any disembodied minds, then he is bound to grant the truth of:

65) I can conceive of myself existing and no minds not identical with a body existing.

(65) is consistent with Descartes' being a mind that is identical with a body, and it is not ruled out by any proposition known to Descartes. If Descartes could not conceive of himself being a corporeal substance with mental attributes, then he would not have
grown to doubt, as he tells us he did, whether he was non-corporeal. Surely if one can doubt that \( p \), then the truth of non-\( p \) is at least conceivable to one. So, Descartes should accept (65).

However, (65) has consequences unacceptable to Descartes. In conjunction with (58) it yields:

66) Possibly I exist and no minds not identical with a body exist.

In turn, from (66) and Descartes' notion of an essential property we get:

67) I am not essentially not a body.

So far there is no difficulty. But if we are going to attribute (60) to Descartes, then we should also attribute:

68) \((x)(\text{if } x \text{ is not a body, } x \text{ is essentially not a body})\)

There is compelling reason to suppose that Descartes would have regarded (68) as true.

Given the semantics on which we have tacitly been relying, (60) says that if something is a body in this world, then in no possible world relative to this one does it have the property of not being a body. Now there is no reason to suppose this world special among possible worlds in regard to the property of being a body. In general there is no reason to suppose that what is necessarily true of things in this world is not necessarily true of things in other worlds possible relative to this one. Holding the contrary would be to advocate a metaphysical principle, no defense for which I can see and certainly none for which Descartes provided.

So, if we think (60) true, we ought to allow that what is a body
in any world is a body essentially. 27 But if that is true, then so is (68). To see why, let us suppose (68) false. If (68) is false, then there is something, label it 'Bruce,' that has the property of not being a body in this world but does have the property of being a body in some world possible relative to that one does it have the property of not being a body. But that conflicts with our assumption that Bruce has such a property in this world. By reductio, we see that (68) is true.

Now we can see the difficulty to which Descartes is led by (65). It leads, via (66), to (67), which, conjoined with (68), entails that Descartes is a body. That is a consequence that Descartes would not accept and one that is the denial of the conclusion of the Argument from Conceivability.

Something has gone wrong. Let us recapitulate to see where. We have given provisional acceptance to all the premises of the Argument from Conceivability. The first premise seemed least suspect of all. But if we allow it, then given Descartes' own remarks, we ought to allow as a possible alternative first premise (65). The argument we get using (65), though, when we add a premise we seem bound to accept if we accept (60), yields the denial of the conclusion of the Argument from Conceivability.

We seem to be at an impasse, Given that the argument is unacceptable to Descartes, he must reject one of its premises. It is open to him, of course, to reject the claim that what is a body is essentially a body. Indeed, he may never have held it; the evidence that he did is conjectural. But to reject it is to reject the
present line of argumentation altogether. I am led to suspect the
second premise, the principle that allows us to infer possibility
from conceivability, especially in the present context where we are
playing freely with the notion of essential properties. It is
clear, however, that Descartes would not reject the principle.
That leaves only the generating premise, the claim that Descartes
can conceive himself to exist bodiless.

The Argument from Epistemic Possibility

There is a way of re-reading the first premise that holds
some promise of avoiding the difficulties of the Argument from
Conceivability and, I think, has the virtue of better representing
Descartes' intent in the second Meditation. It is tempting to
say that Descartes there never intended an argument with the claim
"Conceivably I exist and no bodies exist" as one of its premises.
Instead, we might argue, his claim is rather what we would express
by saying that it is epistemically possible for Descartes that he
exists and no bodies exist. The text contains evidence that
points in that direction. For example, in reply to the objection
that in the Discourse he assumes without warrant that nothing
corporeal pertains to him, Descartes said that he did not there
claim that he had no corporeal properties, but rather his claim was
that he did not, so far as he was aware, possess any. In reply to
critics of Meditation II, Descartes often drew attention to the
passage quoted above to deny that he was asserting that he was not
corporeal. Rather, he said, he was not known to be corporeal.
When he says in Meditation II, "...it might possibly be the case if I ceased entirely to think, that I should likewise cease altogether to exist" we can see him as saying that it is possible, for all he knows, that if he did not have the property of thinking, he would not exist. So, instead of (57) as a first premise, Descartes might have used:

69) It is epistemically possible that I exist and no bodies exist.

Now the problem is to get from (69) to "Possibly I exist and no bodies exist" where the possibility in question is logical. It has been suggested that the epistemically possible is a subset of the logically possible. If that is so, then it appears that Descartes can omit the troublesome first and second premises of the Argument from Conceivability and still have the conclusion he desires.

Unfortunately, the epistemic possibility interpretation has two flaws, both fatal. In the first place, it is not true that the set of propositions that are epistemically possible for someone is a subset of the propositions that are logically possible. For me, it is epistemically possible that Goldbach's Conjecture is false. We agreed earlier, though, that if it is true, it is necessarily so, and hence, not possibly false. So, we cannot conclude from something's being epistemically possible for someone that it is also logically possible.

The other fatal difficulty for the epistemic possibility interpretation is that Descartes is here in the same position that he was in with respect to the Argument from Conceivability. Given
the evidence available to him, it should be epistemically possible for him both that he exists without a body and that he exists and no mind not identical with a body exists. Descartes simply does not know what he is. The proposition that he is bodiless as well as the proposition that he is identical with a body are both epistemically possible for him. That being the case, Descartes is not warranted in asserting (69) to the exclusion of:

70) It is epistemically possible that I exist and no mind not identical with a body exists.

But if we allow (70), then all of the difficulties of the Argument from Conceivability return.

I conclude, then, that the Argument from Epistemic Possibility, while perhaps closer to Descartes' intent, is akin to the Argument from Conceivability in being unavailable to Descartes, and worse still in being clearly unsound. The problem, again, is with the first premise. For Descartes to be able to use it, at the juncture at which he does, he must also grant the truth of (65) and (70), statements that generate arguments whose conclusions are the denial of the claim that Descartes seeks to establish. It would be nice if Descartes could find some other method of establishing (59), the claim that it is possible that he exists and no bodies exist.

The Revised Argument from Doubt

Such a method has been proposed by George Roberts.32 He argues that the interpretation that Malcolm and Kenny (and I) have given to the Argument from Doubt is mistaken. Roberts offers as a better interpretation the following:
71) For me to doubt that I have a body is logically possible.
72) For me to doubt that I exist is not logically possible.
73) It is not logically necessary that I am a body.

It is not clear to me what Roberts thinks the Malcolm-Kenny interpretation to be, nor how he thinks their premises to differ from his. But it is clear that Roberts' argument has a different conclusion. It is not that Descartes is distinct from his body in fact, but that he is possibly distinct from his body. Roberts' conclusion, then, is the one that we have been trying to establish without using the first two steps in our Argument from Conceivability. We ought to look at it closely to see whether the Revised Argument from Doubt suits our purpose.

On the face of it, the argument looks invalid. Broadly construed, it has the form:

a) \( \Diamond p \)

b) \( \Diamond q \)

c) \( \Diamond r \)

And so interpreted, the argument is obviously not valid. But surely Roberts means something deeper. He probably has in mind an argument with the form:

da) \( \Diamond p \)

db) \( \neg \Diamond b \)

c) \( \neg (a \neq b) \)

Interpreted in this fashion, Roberts would be saying that there is a possible world in which Descartes' body has the property of being doubted by him to exist, but that there is no world in which he has that property. So, there is a world in which Descartes' body
has a property not had by him, hence a world in which they are distinct. Given our semantics, that is what is meant by saying that it is possible that Descartes is not identical with his body.

If I have correctly conveyed his intent, then it is surprising that Roberts did not go on to say that Descartes' body has a property not had by Descartes, that of being possibly doubted by him to exist, and hence that they are not just possibly distinct, but are so in fact. That the move from Roberts' argument to the original Argument from Doubt is so easy leads one to suspect the former. I do. The difficulty with the Revised Argument from Doubt lies in the claim that there is no possible world in which Descartes has the property of being doubted by himself to exist. Descartes would simply not be warranted in holding that claim. It might be true that there is no possible world in which Descartes regards:

74) I doubt that I exist.

as being true of himself; however, as we saw in arguing against exportation in the case of denials of belief, there might well be a situation in which:

75) I doubt of myself that I exist.

would be true of Descartes. Presumably, in that situation he would not be in a position to affirm (75), but it might be true nonetheless. It would be true, for example, if Descartes were in fact identical with his body, albeit unknown to him, and:

77) I doubt of my body that it exists.

were true of him.

Roberts is not warranted in asserting one of the premises of
his argument, so the Revised Argument from Doubt cannot be used by us to repair the Argument from Conceivability. We must look elsewhere.

The Argument from Incorrigibility

George Nakhnikian apparently thinks that the notion of incorrigibility can be used to establish the claim that possibly Descartes exists bodiless. He says:

At a time when I am still withholding assent from the proposition that I am or have a body, the proposition that I am thinking is incorrigible for me. Even if it turned out that I had no body, it would still be incorrigible for me that I am thinking. Hence, the following three things are possible at the same time: I exist, I am not a body, I do not have a body. In other words, it is possible that I am nothing but a mind existing without a body. I find this conclusion to be wholly justified.

At first glance, Nakhnikian seems to have confused logical possibility with epistemic possibility. He seems to be saying, for Descartes, that as far as he knows he is not a body, but that he knows himself to exist and to be thinking; therefore, it is possible that he exists and is not a body. But for that argument to be good, the possibility in question would have to be epistemic. Clearly, Nakhnikian intends logical possibility, so, one might suppose, his confusing the two has led him to a bad argument. But I think that that confusion is not Nakhnikian's. He seems to be saying something different, and his confusion goes deeper.

After interpreting Descartes' argument from Meditation VI in such a
way that it argues for the conclusion:

78) I can exist without my body.

Nakhnikian says:

I think that (78) has already been proved
by the fact that "I think" is incorrigible
for me, and that that fact would not change
even if it turned out that there were no
material objects. Hence, it is possible
that I am nothing but a mind existing
without a body.35

It is not clear to me how the fact that "I think" is incorrigible
is supposed to be relevant to Nakhnikian's defense of (78).

Earlier he has defined the notion of incorrigibility as follows:

79) p is incorrigible for S =df (i) It is
possible that S believes that p, and (ii)
'S believes attentively that p" entails
'S knows that p."36

The notion of attentive belief is designed to capture Descartes' notion of clear and distinct perception. For our purposes we can ignore the notion and read the definition as referring to belief simpliciter. I think, however, that one feature of the definition is important for interpreting Nakhnikian's remarks about (78).

Notice that if someone believes an incorrigible proposition, then he knows that proposition, and hence, it is true.

I suggest that we can find here a clue to Nakhnikian's confusion. He regards 'I think' and 'I exist' as incorrigible, but not 'I have a body.' So, he is led to say, even if I had no body, my believing that I exist and that I think would guarantee the truth of those statements. Thus, he would say, it is possible that I exist and think, but have no body. It is not difficult to see that
the reasoning is specious. It is true that if I had no body, 'I exist' and 'I think' would still be incorrigible for me. But that is an epistemic fact about those statements, one that is quite independent of the question whether I am identical with my body.

It might even be that I am necessarily identical with my body, and hence, cannot exist without it, but still that 'I think' is incorrigible for me and 'I have a body' is not. If so, 'I exist' and 'I think,' despite being incorrigible for me, would not be true if I had no body. In particular, their truth would not be guaranteed by the second condition of Nakhnikian's analysis, since the left hand side of that condition would not be true. That is, having no body, I would not exist, and so could entertain no beliefs. I believe that Nakhnikian is guilty of the confusion I have outlined, so I think that he has given us no successful argument for the conclusion we seek, i.e., that Descartes is possibly distinct from his body.

Nakhnikian's argument, however, suggests another that might hold promise. Indeed, it may even be the argument that Nakhnikian had in mind. Incorrugible statements are sometimes said to be those whose truth follows from their being believed. In like manner, epistemologically indubitable statements are sometimes said to be those whose truth follows from their being doubted. For example, both:

80) I believe that I exist.

and

81) I doubt that I exist.
entail:

82) I exist.
Likewise, both:

83) I believe that I think.
and

84) I doubt that I think.
entail:

85) I think.
Thus 'I exist' and 'I think' are both incorrigible and epistemologically indubitable. They are so, because my believing and my doubting anything at all entail that I exist and that I think. A fortiori, my believing or doubting that I exist or think entails that I exist and that I think.

We saw that 'I have a body' (and, 'I am a body') is not incorrigible under Nakhnikian's definition. Similarly, it may be argued, it is neither incorrigible nor indubitable under the above definitions. That is, it does not follow from my believing that I have a body or my doubting that I have a body that I do in fact have a body. Or, what amounts to the same thing, neither:

86) I believe that I have a body.
nor

87) I doubt that I have a body.
entails:

88) I have a body.
However, (86) and (87) do entail (82). We agreed that it follows
from my believing or doubting anything that I exist. Further, since \((85)\) and \((87)\) entail \((82)\) but not \((88)\), neither does \((82)\) entail \((88)\), for if it did, then so would \((86)\) and \((87)\). That is, it does not follow from the fact that I exist that I have a body. Or, put differently, it is possible that I exist and do not have a body.

We seem, then, to have the argument for which we have been searching. In fact, at least one philosopher thinks that the argument is Descartes'. Robert Jaeger has argued that when Descartes says that he can doubt that his body exists but not that he exists, he intends the following argument:

\[
\begin{align*}
89) & \quad 'I \text{ doubt that I exist}' \Rightarrow 'I \text{ exist}' \\
90) & \quad 'I \text{ doubt that I exist}' \Rightarrow '\text{My body exists}' \\
91) & \quad 'I \text{ exist}' \Rightarrow '\text{My body exists}' \\
92) & \quad \text{Possibly I exist and my body doesn't.}
\end{align*}
\]

Jaeger does not think the argument successful, and neither do I. The problem with it, in my opinion, is that any defense of \((90)\) either begs the question or relies on the previously maligned principle that allows us to derive possibility from conceivability, the principle that the argument is designed to circumvent. It is true that 'My body exists' is not incorrigible under Nakhnikian's definition, but whether it is so under the revised definition, i.e., whether 'I believe that my body exists' entails 'my body exists,' is unsettled. Any argument to the effect that the entailment relationship does not hold amounts to claiming that I can exist and entertain doubt without being embodied. But, to assert that is just to assert the conclusion of the argument, and in so
doing, to beg the question.

A Revised Argument from Conceivability

There is one last possibility for avoiding the objection I have raised against the Argument from Conceivability. Roderick Chisholm has suggested that Descartes can construct a respectable version of the argument and avoid my objection by providing an emended account of essential properties. 38

Recall that I have attributed to Descartes the following principle regarding essential properties:

93) (x)(F)(if x has F essentially, then x cannot exist without having F)

It is Chisholm's suggestion that Descartes should replace (93) with:

94) (x)(F)(x has F essentially if, and only if, x cannot be conceived except as having F)

It is easy to see how Chisholm's suggested principle blocks my objection to the Argument from Conceivability. I have pointed out that some of Descartes' remarks commit him to:

65) I can conceive of myself existing and no minds not identical with a body existing.

And I remind Descartes that (65) along with:

58) (p)(if p is conceivable, p is possible)

yields:

66) Possibly I exist and no minds not identical with a body exist.

Then from (66) and (93), a principle given by Descartes' notion of an essential property, we get:
I am not essentially not a body.

I then point out the disastrous consequences that ensue from the assumption that in some possible world Descartes is a body. But with Chisholm's help Descartes could now reply: "My account of essential properties is given in (94) above. Although I accept (58), your derivation of (67) from (66) is invalid, since it requires (93), which I do not accept."^59

At first glance it may seem that Chisholm's strategy is not successful unless Descartes also denies Hume's thesis (i.e., (58)), since (94), in conjunction with Hume's thesis is equivalent to (93). The objection, however, is shortsighted. Although Hume doubtless held that the conceivability of a proposition is both necessary and sufficient for its possibility, I have not attributed the biconditional to Descartes. He held that some states of affairs that are actual, e.g., God's infinite perfection and the theological "mysteries," are in fact beyond human comprehension, and so, presumably, they would not be conceivable. I don't think, then, that Descartes accepted:

95) (p)(if p is possible, p is conceivable)

But (95), in addition to (58), is needed to get (94) from (93).

One further putative objection to Chisholm's principle seems possible. An essentialist would probably hold that the property being such that when added to 84 it yields 121 is essential to the number 37. But, it might be objected, the student who does poorly in arithmetic may conceive that 37 does not have that
property. Thus, by Chisholm's principle and contrary to the pronouncement of the essentialist, it does not have that property essentially. I think Chisholm could parry the objection and thereby save his principle by pointing out that it is worded so as to require de re conceivability and by claiming that the student's limited intellectual resources have confined him to de dicto conceivability with respect to numbers. If he had an adequate level of acquaintance with the objects of his inquiry to achieve de re conceivability with respect to 37, then the student would not be able to conceive that 37 lacks the property in question.

Having successfully blocked my objection to the Argument from Conceivability by providing an alternative treatment of essential properties, Chisholm suggests that we replace the argument with one formulated this way:

96) My body cannot be conceived to be incorporeal.
97) I can be conceived to be incorporeal.
98) I ≠ my body

It should be obvious, though, that this argument is open to the same objections that led to the fall of the Argument from Doubt. If asked to defend (96) Descartes would have to appeal to its de dicto counterpart:

99) I cannot conceive that my body is incorporeal.

But we have seen that while statements like (97) can be got from statements like:

100) I can conceive that I am incorporeal.

by exportation, it is not the case that exportation is allowable
with respect to denials of belief statements like (99). We want to allow that Descartes' body can in fact be conceived to be incorporeal, and would be so if, unbeknownst to Descartes, he was identical with his body and if he conceived himself to be incorporeal. Since Chisholm's suggested argument relies upon unwarranted exportation in defense of one of its premises, it must be rejected.

However, there is another argument, one not requiring exportation, that Chisholm might try in place of the rejected argument. Appealing to (94) and the principle that what is a body is essentially a body, Chisholm has suggested the principle:

101) No purely corporeal thing can be conceived as being incorporeal.

Using that principle we can get the following Revised Argument from Conceivability:

102) (x)(if x can be conceived as being incorporeal, x is not a purely corporeal thing)
103) (x)(if x is a body, x is a purely corporeal thing)
104) I can be conceived as being incorporeal.
105) I am not a purely corporeal thing.
106) I am not a body.

The first premise of the argument is the contrapositive of (101) when the latter is put into quantificational form. If Descartes accepted Chisholm's suggested principle, (101), then he would no doubt accept the argument, since its only other independent premise, (104), is certainly one which Descartes embraced, especially in the passages that deal with the nature of minds, bodies, and himself. Further, this argument is not open to the objection directed against Chisholm's first argument, so it looks as though it might be a better one. But I think it is not.
It will turn out that the Revised Argument from Conceivability is at best open to the same type of objection that destroyed the original Argument from Conceivability. But it may even be that the present argument fails to get off the ground in virtue of the fact that the principle on which it is founded, Chisholm’s analysis of essential properties, is false. It seems to allow a counter-example. Surely Chisholm, and Descartes if he goes along with the argument, will grant that, with respect to people whom we see on the street, we can conceive them to be incorporeal. But if that is so, it seems that I could mistake a cleverly designed and constructed robot for a person. We can suppose it to possess whatever degree of perfection that is required to mislead me into thinking it to be a fellow traveler. There seems no doubt that I could have de re beliefs with respect to it while thinking it to be a person. In addition, it is such that, thinking it to be a person, I could conceive of it being incorporeal. It is, of course, a purely corporeal thing, and we have what seems to be a counter-example to Chisholm’s principle.

We can suppose, though, that Chisholm would have a rejoinder to the claimed counter-example, so we should show that the revised argument is open to a much more telling objection. As we saw in discussing the Argument from Conceivability, in the passages we have considered where Descartes examines the nature of himself, and prior to attempting to demonstrate the distinctness of himself and his body, he allows that he may be identical with his body. He
knows himself to be a mind, but he allows that he may be a mind that is identical with a body. Given that allowance, Descartes should grant the truth of:

107) I can be conceived to be corporeal.

Further, if he accepts Chisholm's principle, (101), then the same considerations that led to the establishment of it will lead also to:

108) No purely incorporeal thing can be conceived to be corporeal.

which Descartes would be obliged to accept. But (107), conjoined with (108), entails:

109) I am not a purely incorporeal thing.

Now those commentators who regard Descartes as having thought himself to be identical with his mind and as only concomitantly being in possession of a body will find (109) a disquieting result, certainly sufficient to justify abandonment of the Revised Argument from Conceivability. However, those who regard Descartes as having thought himself to be identical with a mind-body union will not be disturbed by (109). It takes another result to disturb them.

Given Descartes' allowance that he may be a mind that is identical with a body, he should grant the truth not only of (107) but also:

110) I can be conceived to have the property of being identical with my body.

The mind-body unionists will regard the conceived state of affairs in (110) as having been ultimately shown to be false, but they will
at least grant its conceivability. However, from (110) and (94) we can infer:

(111) The property of not being identical with my body is not essential to me.

I think that (111) is a conclusion that Descartes would deny outright. But if not, he would at least accept:

(68) (x)(if x is not identical with a body, x is essentially not identical with a body)

He would be bound to accept (68) in the present circumstance since he has given tacit approval to:

(60) (x)(if x is a body, x is essentially a body)

from which, in conjunction with (94), (101) was derived, and we have seen earlier that a commitment to (60) obliges one to accept (68). Further, (68), conjoined with (111) entails that Descartes is identical with a body. That, both the unionists and their adversaries will agree, is a result that Descartes would not accept. I conclude, then, that we must reject the Revised Argument from Conceivability as being no better off than its predecessor and of no use to Descartes.
Principle XLIX (HR-I, 230), and Principle LII (HR-I, 240). Descartes calls such principles "common notions" and "eternal truths." They are truths of reason, and he ascribes to them the status of being necessary truths.


13. I take it to be a desideratum of an analysis of 'x has F essentially' that it does not entail 'necessarily, x has F.'


15. Compare Principle LIXI. Descartes is often accused of holding that his essence is thinking solely on the basis of his possessing mental attributes.

16. The view I have attributed to Descartes is a strong one, and in fact, in conjunction with two other views often attributed to him, it would give the conclusion that he is not a body. The other views are (a) that substances have only one essential property and (b) that any two things with different essential properties are distinct substances. Since he knows that he has the property of thinking, Descartes could conclude from the principle I have attributed to him that he is not identical with his body. This argument is not one that Descartes ever offered, and it is not one that we should offer for him. In the first place, the principle I attributed to him needs more argued support, but more importantly, (b) above is a claim that Descartes seems to repudiate (Haldane and Ross, Vol. II, pp. 52-53). In addition, the argument would be inconsistent with Descartes' claim in reply to the second and third sets of objections that he does not conclude from his having the property of thinking that he is not identical with his body.


20. Epistemic possibility, so called, was first discussed by Moore ("Certainty" in Philosophical Papers) and more recently it has been discussed by Wilfrid Sellars ("Phenomenalism" in Science, Perception, and Reality) and Paul Teller ("Epistemic Possibility," Philosophica, Oct., 1972). Without so calling it, Hintikka discusses epistemic possibility at length in Knowledge and Belief.

21. It has been so objected in private correspondence by Jay
NOTES

CHAPTER II

1. AG, 32. At least two arguments are suggested in this passage. I have quoted only what pertains to the one I am examining.

2. HR-I, 319. Descartes also suggests the argument in Notes Against a Programme, HR-I, 440.

3. HR-II, 80.


5. Malcolm's third argument is like his second.


7. Exportation with respect to belief statements is discussed by Ernest Sosa in "Propositional Attitudes De Dicto and De Re," J.P., Vol. 67, No. 21, pp. 883-896.

8. I don't mean here to imply that all of our de re beliefs are arrived at by exportation from de dicto beliefs. I simply mean to claim that the inference is warranted in this case. Replace 'I' in (24) and (25) with 'Hooker,' and (24) becomes a proposition that you would be warranted in inferring from (25), if you knew the latter and the additional facts about me given above.

I speak loosely here of our being warranted in inferring one proposition from another in some cases and not in others. Strictly speaking, I suppose, I should rather say that we are warranted in exporting from some proposition, p, to a proposition, q, when, and only when, we know the truth of some other proposition, r, such that it, in conjunction with p, entails q. It is the proposition, r, that embodies the collateral information necessary to justify exportation.


11. Compare Principle X (HR-I, 222), Principle XI (HR-I, 223),
Rosenberg, and the succeeding argument is, for the most part, his.

22. This same caveat is one of the themes of Bernard Williams' "Imagination and the Self" in Strawson's Studies in the Philosophy of Thought and Action.

23. HR-I, 186.

24. I should point out that my proponent of (60) relies for the persuasiveness of his argument on the truth of (58). The argument could be stated, albeit with less appeal, without relying on (58).

25. Meditation II (Anscombe and Geach, p. 69).


27. Plantinga holds the stronger principle and apparently thinks its truth obvious ("World and Essence," p. 485). I do not think its truth obvious, but I do believe that a commitment to (60) obligates one to hold the stronger principle.

28. See Note No. 20.

29. HR-I, 137.

30. HR-II, 133, 211, and 30.

31. By Lennart Aqvist in a paper on subjunctive conditionals read at the University of Massachusetts in the spring of 1970.


33. An Introduction to Philosophy, pp. 146-147.

34. p. 146.

35. p. 147.

36. pp. 70-75.

37. Jaeger offers this interpretation in "Doubt, My Body, and I" and "The World, Perception, and the Self," both yet to be published. I have benefitted from correspondence with him on this and related issues.

38. Chisholm's argument was conveyed in private correspondence. I am grateful to him for helping me come to grips with the matters discussed in this dissertation.
39. Though Descartes never advanced Chisholm's principle, some evidence that he would regard it favorably is given by the fact that his follower Regis in his *Cours Entier* defined essence as "everything without which a thing can neither be nor be conceived."
CHAPTER III

Up to this point we have been considering arguments for the distinctness of Descartes and his body that can be supported by textual material contained in Meditation II and Discourse IV. But to be fair to him, it should be noted that Descartes denied having proved distinctness until the sixth Meditation. In reply to Hobbes' objection that the thing that thinks may be corporeal, Descartes tells his reader:

A thing that thinks, he says, may be something corporeal; and the opposite of this has been assumed, not proved. But really I did not assume the opposite, neither did I use it as a basis for my argument; I left it wholly undetermined until Meditation VI, in which its proof is given."

A little later, in speaking of mind and body, he says:

But after we have formed two distinct concepts of those two substances, it is easy, from what has been said in the sixth Meditation, to determine whether they are one and the same or distinct.2

When we turn to the sixth Meditation, where distinctness is supposedly proved, we find a lengthy passage treating of the mind and the body, but not a very clear argument. Descartes says:

And first of all, because I know that all things which I apprehend clearly and distinctly can be created by God as I apprehend them, it suffices that I am able to apprehend one thing apart from another clearly and distinctly in order to be certain that the one is different from the other, since they may be made to exist in separation at least by the omnipotence of God; and it does
not signify by what power this separation
is made in order to compel me to judge them
to be different; and, therefore, just because
I know certainly that I exist, and that mean-
while I do not remark that any other thing
necessarily pertains to my nature or essence,
excepting that I am a thinking thing, I rightly
conclude that my essence consists solely in
the fact that I am a thinking thing. And al-
though possibly (or rather certainly, as I
shall say in a moment) I possess a body with
which I am very intimately conjoined, yet
because, on the one side, I have a clear and
distinct idea of myself inasmuch as I am only
a thinking and unextended thing, and as, on
the other, I possess a distinct idea of body,
inasmuch as it is only an extended and un-
thinking thing, it is certain that this I is
entirely and absolutely distinct from my body,
and can exist without it.*

This passage can be variously interpreted to get out a number of
different arguments.

When we try to tease out the most promising argument, we come
up with two candidates. The first is fairly brief and comes not so
much from what Descartes says in the passage as from what he claims
elsewhere to have said in the passage. Stripped of its trappings,
the argument goes as follows:

1) I clearly and distinctly conceive that I
   am separate from my body.
2) Whatever I clearly and distinctly conceive
   is true.
3) I am separate from my body.

Since the worth of this argument clearly turns on Descartes' defense
of (2), and since discussing his defense of (2) requires coming to
grips with the Cartesian Circle, I should like to suspend discussion
of it for the moment. Let us look first at the other argument.

Before doing so, however, I should point out at this juncture
a problem for interpreting Descartes' arguments. It is often not clear in a particular passage whether Descartes is arguing for the distinctness of himself and his body or for the distinctness of mind and body. He often, as in the above passage, seems to switch back and forth between the two. Many philosophers, of course, will regard Descartes as having thought himself to be a mind, so it is not important to them whether Descartes refers to himself or to mind in proving distinctness. While I don't want to commit myself regarding the question of what Descartes thought himself to be, I do think that much the same considerations apply to proofs of the distinctness of Descartes and his body as apply to proofs of the distinctness of mind and body. I shall often take the liberty of viewing Descartes as attempting to prove the non-identity of himself and his body when he more properly appears to be concerned to prove the non-identity of mind and body. I am not aware of any problems created as a result of my taking that liberty, though I shall often caution the reader as to my intent.

The Argument from Distinct Conception

It is not easy to see exactly what argument Descartes intends when he speaks of apprehending (conceiving, we will say) one thing apart from another. A fairly simple argument first suggests itself:

A. 4) I can conceive of myself without conceiving of my body.
       5) I am distinct from my body.

This argument seems ambiguous between:
B. 6) I can conceive that I exist and have no body.

7) I am distinct from my body.

and

C. 8) I can be conceived by me without my body being conceived by me.

9) I am distinct from my body.

Argument (B), to the extent that it can be made deductively respectable, is simply a restatement of the Argument from Conceivability. We would conclude from (6) that Descartes is possibly distinct from his body, and then employ a premise to the effect that if something is identical with a body, then it is necessarily identical with a body. But the faults of that argument are well known.

Argument (C), on the other hand, has not before been introduced, but its faults have. Filled out, it would look something like the following:

C'. 10) I have the property of being possibly conceived by me without my body at the same time being conceived by me.

11) My body does not have the property of being possibly conceived by me without my body at the same time being conceived by me.

12) \((x)(\mathcal{F})(x=y)\supset (\mathcal{P}x\equiv \mathcal{P}y)\)

13) \(I \neq \text{my body}\)

The trouble with (C') should be clear from our discussion of the Argument from Doubt. To get (10) Descartes would presumably have to infer it from something like:

14) I can conceive of myself at \(t-1\) without conceiving of my body at \(t-1\).

From (14) he exports to:

15) I have the property of being conceived by me at \(t-1\).
16) My body does not have the property of being conceived by me at t-1.

Then from (15) and (16) Descartes constructs (10). Premise (11) we can suppose to be a truth of reason.

The argument would seem to be successful if the moves from (14) to (15) and from (14) to (16) are acceptable. But while we may want to allow exportation from (14) to (15), it should be clear from our earlier discussion that we do not want to allow it from (14) to (16). We want to allow for the possibility that Descartes, in conceiving himself, also, albeit unknown to him, conceives his body. If he does conceive of his body in that situation, then, of course, he conceives of it under a description that does not permit him to recognize that his body is in fact being conceived by him. For example, if Descartes is in fact, though unbeknownst to him, identical with his body, then in conceiving of himself he is also conceiving of his body.

In the same way, if I am ignorant of the fact that Richard Nixon is President of the United States, but I know something about his political past, then I might conceive of Richard Nixon as being an unscrupulous person. But I may further hold that I could not conceive of the President of the United States as being anything but a person of highest scruples. We may want to claim in such a case that Richard Nixon has the property of being conceived by me to be unscrupulous, but we would not be warranted in inferring also that the President of the United States does not have that
property. In fact he would have the property in question, given that Nixon is President.

The problem, of course, is with exportation in the case of denials of the holding of some propositional attitude. It is a matter of fact about human cognition that we claim to have de re beliefs and that we claim to be sometimes warranted in inferring them from de dicto propositions. But if that is so, then it is unsafe ever to infer the denial of a de re attitude from the denial of the corresponding de dicto attitude. Since that is a move that is required for Descartes to get the first premise in (C'), I conclude that (C') is not an acceptable argument.

If a respectable argument can be constructed from the passage in Meditation VI, it is not one that is as simple as (B) and (C). It must, as the text suggests, at least have something to do with what is within God's power. George Nakhnikian has reconstructed what he believes to be the argument that Descartes intended in the passage we are examining. He offers:

D. 17) If I know that all things that I conceive clearly and distinctly can be produced by God exactly as I conceive them, and I can clearly and distinctly conceive x apart from y and y apart from x, then I am certain that x and y are distinct (different) from each other and can exist apart from each other.

18) I know that all things I conceive clearly and distinctly can be produced by God exactly as I conceive them.

19) If I clearly and distinctly conceive x apart from y and y apart from x, then I am certain that x and y are different from each other, and can exist apart from each other.
I find that thinking and thinking only is of the essence of the I of "I think, I exist."

21) I am only a thinking thing, or a substance whose entire essence is to think.

22) I have a distinct idea of body, whose essence is to be extended and unthinking.

23) I have a clear and distinct idea that I and my body are apart from each other.

24) I am distinct from my body.

Nakhnikian's argument certainly has the complexity one would expect of a reconstruction of Descartes' argument. But if Descartes actually intended the argument Nakhnikian offers, he shouldn't have.

The argument has a number of faults, not the least of which is its disjointedness. As it stands, premises (21) and (22), which Nakhnikian apparently sees as supporting (23), although they do not entail it, are alone sufficient for the conclusion. Restating them somewhat, we get the argument:

E. 25) My essence is to think.

26) It is not the case that the essence of my body is to think.

27) I ≠ my body

where the inference from (25) and (26) to (27) is justified by what we have called 'Leibniz' Law.' A somewhat different argument suggested by (21) and (22) is:

F. 28) My essence is to think.

29) The essence of bodies is extension.

30) If two substances (things) have different essences, they are distinct.

31) I ≠ my body

So it is not clear why Descartes would have offered all of argument (D) when only a part would have been sufficient.

He should not be faulted too severely, though, if either (E) or (F) can be successfully defended. Unfortunately, neither can.
Both depend upon Descartes' claim that his essence is to think, and in the argument at hand, that claim is not adequately defended. As Nakhnikian has it, and as the passage seems to, Descartes' sole defense of the claim that his essence is to think lies in (20), the assertion that he does not know of any other properties that pertain to his essence.

It seems that Descartes has failed to establish not only that thinking is his only essential property, and hence his entire essence, but also he seems not to have shown even that thinking is essential to him. It should be granted perhaps that Descartes knows himself to think, but it does not follow from his possessing the property of thinking, that he has that property essentially. It may be that Descartes is tacitly appealing, or could appeal, to the principle:

\[ 32) \ (x)(if \ x \text{ thinks, then } x \text{ is essentially a thinking thing}) \]

to establish that thinking is essential to him. But while we may be inclined to grant (32), we should balk at an unquestioned acceptance of:

\[ 33) \ (x)(if \ x \text{ thinks, then thinking is the only essential property had by } x) \]

That is a claim that surely requires substantial support, and the present argument gives it none. Admittedly, Cartesian essentialism recognizes only two properties as being essential to created substances, viz., thinking and extension, but it is still an open question how those properties distribute among created substances. In particular, (33) would require much support.
We will examine the extent to which Descartes was elsewhere successful in establishing (32) and (33) somewhat later, but for the moment we can leave that investigation and return to Nakhnikian's argument. It does not need (20), (21), and (22) since they were offered only in support of (23). Even if we give Descartes that premise, the argument is still clearly not successful.

In the first place, the argument, as it is stated, is invalid. If it establishes anything, it establishes:

25) I am certain that I and my body are distinct. not (24). And (25) seems to refer to psychological certainty, not to the epistemological certainty of a particular proposition. At least the argument, as it stands, is inadequate to establish (25) where the certainty there expressed is epistemic. It does not follow from my being certain that \( p \) that the proposition \( p \) is itself certain, or even that \( p \) is true. Nakhnikian has faithfully rendered the text when he refers in (17), and again in (19), to the possibility of his certainty. But he must not eliminate reference to his certainty in the conclusion; it should be (25) not (24).

Of course, (25) is not the conclusion Descartes is looking for. Descartes' actual conclusion is even less well established than (24). He concludes:

26) It is certain that I am distinct from my body.

It would be better to drop all references to certainty, whether psychological or epistemological, in (D). The argument is surely
no worse off without it, and is probably easier to defend.

One other difficulty besets the formal structure of the argument. (24) should come from (19) and (23) by application of modus ponens. But (23) is clearly not the antecedent of (19). The difference between them is important. It is the difference between de re and de dicto constructions, and we are aware by now that much turns on which of those two constructions we employ. The text seems to favor a de re reading of its premises, but it is not altogether clear that it does. We should restate the argument by providing two versions of (D), adhering throughout the one to de re locutions and throughout the other to de dicto locutions.

Our restatement can be simplified by reducing the number of premises in the argument. For example, we can reserve reference to God's power for a defense of the truth of our first premise. Similarly, we can reserve (20), (21), and (22) for our defense of (23). Bared of their non-essentials, then, we get the following candidates for Descartes' argument:

**G.**

34) If I can conceive x without conceiving y, then x is distinct from y.
35) If I can conceive myself without conceiving my body, then I am distinct from my body.
36) I can conceive myself without conceiving my body.
37) I am distinct from my body.

**H.**

38) If I can conceive that x and y are distinct from each other, then x is distinct from y.
39) If I can conceive that I am distinct from my body, then I am distinct from my body.
40) I can conceive that I am distinct from my body.
41) I ≠ my body.
How should we assess (G) and (H)? Let us begin with (G). There is some evidence that Descartes intended an argument like (G). In defending his argument for the distinctness of the mind and the body against Regius' manifesto, Descartes writes:

...whence I deduced and demonstrated that mind was clearly perceived by us as an existence, or substance, even supposing we had no concept whatever of the body, and denied that any material things had existence; and accordingly, that the concept of mind did not involve any concept of body...Our friend, however, admits that mind can sometimes be cognized apart from body, to wit, when there are doubts about the body; whence it assuredly follows that mind cannot be termed a mode of body.\(^8\)

The argument Descartes here suggests admittedly can be read _de dicto_, but it also accommodates an interpretation according to which Descartes is claiming that the mind can be conceived without the body at the same time being conceived.

A troublesome fact about (G) is that we have in it an argument no premise of which needs to be, or can be defended by an appeal to God's power. What is worse, while (34) and (35) seem unobjectionable, it is not clear how Descartes can defend (36). The problem confronting him here is the same as that which confronted him in defending the first premise of (C'). Given that Descartes does not know yet whether he is distinct from his body, he is not warranted in claiming that in conceiving himself he does not also, unknown to him, conceive his body.

It seems perhaps that part of the purpose of the appeal to essence is in defense of (35). Descartes seems to be saying that
because his essence is different from the essence of body, then he can conceive of himself without conceiving of his body. But, as we have seen, Descartes hasn't adequately established the claim about his essence, and if he had established it, he wouldn't need an argument like (G) to prove distinctness. We should dismiss (G) and hope for something better in (H).

I take Descartes to have appealed to God's power in an attempt to establish the truth of (38). He seems at first to have been relying upon the principles:

42) \((p)(\text{if I can conceive that } p, \text{ then God makes it possible that } p)\)

and

43) \((p)(\text{if God makes it possible that } p, \text{ then } p \text{ is true})\)

That is, he claims that from his conceiving that his mind and body are distinct, we can conclude that God can make them distinct. And if God can make them distinct, then they are distinct. However, Descartes surely only appears to hold (42) and (43); we must suppose that he didn't in fact think them true. Together they lead to a host of contradictions. I have argued earlier that Descartes can also conceive that his mind and body are non-distinct. So from (42) and (43), he should be able to conclude:

44) \(I \text{ am identical with my body.}\)

but that is the denial of the claim they are meant to establish.

What is worse, given (42) and (43) we must conclude that whatever is possible for God is actual. But since every contingent state of affairs is such that it is within God's power to bring
that state of affairs about, then by (43) every possible state of affairs is actual. So then, every contingent state of affairs, \( p \), and its contrary, \(-p\), will both be actual. But that is a contradiction. Since Descartes held that even God could not bring about a contradiction, we must refuse to hold (42) and (43) together. At least one must be rejected.

Now it may seem that I have misrepresented Descartes. One might be inclined to object that Descartes was concerned not about the conceivability of propositions simpliciter but, rather, about the possibility of conceiving that one thing is distinct from another. In particular, to represent Descartes' concern, it might be claimed, we ought to replace (42) with:

\[
44) \quad (x)(y)(\text{if I can conceive that } x \text{ and } y \text{ are distinct, then God can make it possible that } x \text{ and } y \text{ are distinct})
\]

and we ought to replace (43) with:

\[
45) \quad (x)(y)(\text{if God can make } x \text{ and } y \text{ possibly distinct, then } x \text{ and } y \text{ are distinct})
\]

But if we accept (44), we do so at a price. To accept it requires that we countenance quantification into intentional contexts. While it may be possible to construct a theory that will allow such quantification without the familiar difficulties, it is beyond the scope of this work to do so, and such a theory was clearly not part of Descartes' technical apparatus. Without such a theory, the conjunction of (44) and (45) seems to admit of counter-examples. For instance, I can conceive that Washington, D.C. and the Capital of the United States are distinct, but they are not so
in fact.

In addition, (44) seems to admit of counter-examples by itself. Someone may conceive that Mark Twain and Samuel Clemens are distinct, though not even God can make them so. Their distinctness could be conceived, for example, by one who knew Samuel Clemens as an affable boyhood friend and was familiar with the writings of Mark Twain, but didn't know that Clemens wrote those works pseudonymously. It is important to note that, given the peculiar character of (44), such a person is not conceiving that Mark Twain is distinct from himself. That is a proposition that, presumably, could not be conceived. Rather, what is being conceived above is precisely that Mark Twain is distinct from Samuel Clemens.

We cannot escape the difficulties of (42) and (43) by supplanting them with (44) and (45). However, there may yet be a way out. In Principle LX Descartes suggests an argument like the one from Meditation VI. He says:

...we can conclude that two substances are really distinct one from the other from the sole fact that we can conceive the one clearly and distinctly without the other. For in accordance with the knowledge which we have of God, we are certain that He can carry into effect all that of which we have a distinct idea...Similarly because each one of us is conscious that he thinks, and that in thinking he can shut off from himself all other substance, either thinking or extended, we may conclude that each of us, similarly regarded, is really distinct from every other thinking substance and from every corporeal substance. And even if we suppose that God had united a body to a soul so closely that it was impossible to bring them together more closely, and made a
single thing out of the two, they would yet remain really distinct one from the other notwithstanding the union; because however closely God connected them He could not set aside the power which He possessed of separating them, or conserving them one apart from the other, and those things which God can separate, or conceive in separation, are really distinct.9

An even clearer variation of the argument from Meditation VI appears in the reply to the second set of objections, in Proposition IV of Arguments Drawn up in Geometrical Fashion. Descartes says:

God can effect whatever we clearly perceive just as we perceive it (preceding Corollary). But we clearly perceive the mind, i.e., a thinking substance, apart from the body, i.e., apart from any extended substance (Post. II); and vice versa we can (as all admit) perceive body apart from mind. Hence, at least through the instrumentality of the Divine power, mind can exist apart from body, and body apart from mind.

But now, substances that can exist apart from each other, are really distinct (Def. X). But mind and body are substances (Def. V, VI, and VII), that can exist apart from each other (just proved). Hence there is a real distinction between mind and body 10

When he says that we clearly perceive the mind apart from the body, I take it that Descartes can be interpreted as saying "We conceive that the mind and body are distinct."11 And that proposition is one whose possibility God guarantees. Now what is different about this argument, and what gives us a clue for repairing (H), is its explicit reference to substances as conceived to be distinct, and as being possibly distinct. Further, when Descartes says "substances that can exist apart from each other, are really distinct," he again speaks only of substances, not of things in
general. Were we using (44) and (45) to reconstruct the above argument, we would have to limit the range of our quantifiers to substances only.

However, we need not appeal to those troublesome principles. I think we can see a way of altering (42) and (43) to get a respectable version of (H). Since Descartes has limited his interest in the above argument to identity relationships between substances, and since that is in fact his only concern in (H), let us replace (42) and (43) with principles that reflect that fact. We can use:

46) If I can conceive that two substances are distinct, then they are possibly distinct.

and

47) If two substances are possibly distinct, then they are actually distinct.

(46), it will be noted, is an analogue of Hume's Thesis (discussed in Chapter II) for the distinctness of substances. It is guaranteed by God's power. If I can conceive of two substances as being distinct, then God brings it about that they are possibly distinct. (47), it will also be noticed, is an analogue of Plantinga's principle (and possibly Long's principle, both discussed in Chapter II). It says in effect that if two substances are identical, they are necessarily identical. So the present argument, (H), has begun to look very much like the Argument from Conceivability.

However, our rejection of the latter should not be taken as sufficient reason for rejection of the former. The similarity is not that close. For example, our objection to Hume's Thesis, the claim
that what is conceivable is possible, in the Argument from Conceivability was an objection to the effect that we can conceive of the falsity of mathematical conjectures, which are necessarily true if true at all, and so are not possibly false. But that objection will not work against (46). We must examine our version of (H) and assess it on its own merits.

The reconstructed version of (H), then, goes as follows:

\[ \begin{align*}
H'1) & \text{ I am a substance.} \\
2) & \text{ My body is a substance.} \\
3) & \text{ I can conceive that I and my body are distinct.} \\
4) & \text{ If I can conceive that two substances are distinct, they are possibly distinct.} \\
5) & \text{ I and my body are substances that are possibly distinct.} \\
6) & \text{ If two substances are possibly distinct, then they are actually distinct.} \\
7) & \text{ I \neq my body} \\
\end{align*} \]

At first glance it may seem that (H’) is a faithful rendering of neither the argument from Meditation VI nor the arguments from Principle LX and Proposition IV, since the first premise of (H’) is contained in none of those arguments. While that is strictly true, I don’t think it poses any difficulties. Those who view Descartes as having thought himself to be identical with his mind should not object, since Descartes does say in Proposition IV that minds are substances. (48) would follow from Descartes’ being a mind and the fact that minds are substances. Those who hold that Descartes saw himself as a mind-body union usually hold that he was a substantial union, so they should allow (48). If there are any who hold that Descartes thought himself to be a union
of two substances that was not itself a third substance, then it is not clear to me how they can interpret Descartes as having proved, with the use of an argument like the present one, that he is distinct from his body.

At any rate, the text from Meditation VI supports the view that in claiming to be able to conceive that the mind and body are separate, Descartes took himself to be involved in producing a proof to the effect that he and his body are distinct. That is his conclusion, and the French version of the Meditations, which was revised by Descartes, supports the view that he thought himself to be identical with his mind. It reads:

...it is certain that this I, that is to say, my soul by which I am what I am, is entirely and absolutely distinct from my body.\(^{12}\)

There is no such clue to Descartes' intent in Proposition IV, since there his purpose is to prove the distinctness of mind and body. But since he elsewhere proclaimed that he is a mind or thinking substance (e.g., in Meditation II and above in Principle LX), the argument in Proposition IV easily lends itself to the adaptation I have made of it.

I think, then, that \((H')\) is acceptable as an attribution to Descartes. We should assess its worth as an argument. It may appear that Descartes could not convince a materialist with his argument, for the latter would refuse to grant the conjunction of (48) and (49). Once we allow those premises, he would claim, then given Descartes' definition of substance as something that can exist
by itself without the aid of anything else, we have given up the
ship to dualism. But I don't think Descartes is guilty of such a
simple pet; tio. I think he would grant at the start of the argu-
ment that for all we know I and my body are identical. We know
only that they are substances, not that they are separate sub-
stances of the same kind, or, what is more to the point, that they
are separate substances of different kinds.

Giving different names to my body and me does not mark them
as different substances. Descartes affirms as much in reply to
Hobbes when he says:

Moreover, since we do not apprehend the sub-
stance itself immediately through itself, but
by means only of the fact that it is the sub-
ject of certain activities, it is highly
rational, and a requirement forced on us by
custom, to give diverse names to those sub-
stances that we recognize to be the subjects
of clearly diverse activities or accidents,
and afterwards to inquire whether these diverse
names refer to one and the same or to diverse
things. But there are certain activities,
which we call corporeal,...and the substance
in which they exist is called body...Further,
there are certain other activities, which we
call thinking activities,...The substance in
which they reside we call a thinking thing or
the mind...

But after we have formed two distinct concepts
of those two substances, it is easy, from what
has been said in the sixth Meditation, to
determine whether they are one and same or
distinct.13

No doubt, it is partly because corporeal and mental attributes are
such diverse properties that Descartes is able to conceive the mind
and body existing separately, but it would be unfair to accuse him
of having assumed at the outset that corporeal and mental properties
belong to different kinds of substance.

While \((H')\) is not a \textit{petitio}, I think it does have insurmountable difficulties. They are not unfamiliar ones. Hobbes' objection, to which Descartes' reply was quoted above, was to the effect that Descartes has assumed, rather than proved, that the thing that thinks is incorporeal. Descartes protested that he rather left the matter undetermined but gave different names to mind (or, himself) and body, and only afterwards did he prove them distinct. Before his proof he allowed the possibility that they were identical.

But to follow a now familiar route, if Descartes seriously countenanced the possibility that he and his body were identical, then presumably he would accept:

55) I can conceive that I and my body are identical.

If (55) was a proposition whose truth Descartes would refuse to grant, then he was at best being disingenuous in his reply to Hobbes when he said that he did not assume himself to be incorporeal prior to its proof in \textit{Meditation VI}. If (55) was not true, that is, if Descartes could not conceive himself to be identical with his body, then he shouldn't have held that as far as he knew, he and his body were identical. Of course, given that the only property Descartes knew himself to possess, that of thinking, did not seem to him to require a corporeal substance for its instantiation, it no doubt seemed to him more likely that he was distinct from his body than that he was identical with it. But though it did not seem to him that mental attributes required an extended substance for their instantiation, it did seem so to Hobbes, and to
accommodate the latter, Descartes allowed that, so far as he knew prior to Meditation VI, Hobbes was right.

But in accepting (55), Descartes has put his foot on a familiar slippery slope. (51) is defended by appeal to the claim that God's power is sufficient to effect what I can conceive. God makes the conceivable possible. To protect Descartes against difficulties involved with Hume's Thesis, we limited our claim that God makes the conceivable possible by restricting ourselves to identity relationships among substances. But even given that restriction, Descartes would seem bound to accept:

56) If I can conceive that two substances are identical, then they are possibly identical.

since God makes possible all conceivable states of affairs with respect to identity relations among substances. Then, given (48), (49), (55), and (56), we can get:

57) I and my body are substances that are possibly identical.

Moreover, the considerations that led Descartes to accept (53) should also compel acceptance of:

58) If two substances are possibly identical, then they are actually identical.

(53) came from the claim that if God can make two things distinct, then they are in fact distinct. That claim seems to rest on a metaphysical principle like:

59) \((x)(y)(\text{if } x \text{ and } y \text{ are substances and } x \text{ is identical with } y, \text{ then } x \text{ is necessarily identical with } y)\)

But if we accept (59), we should also accept:
60) $(x)(y)(\text{if } x \text{ and } y \text{ are substances and } x \text{ is distinct from } y, \text{ then } x \text{ is necessarily distinct from } y)$

By parity of reasoning with respect to the move from (60) to (68) in Chapter II, to accept (59) while denying (60) requires that we hold the dubious metaphysical principle that there exists a metaphysical principle (viz., (59)) that holds for actual objects but not for non-actual possible objects, or that it holds for things that exist in this possible world but not for the denizens of other possible worlds. As I said in Chapter II, I know of no reason for holding the metaphysical principle in question, and certainly none can be found in Descartes' writings.

So if Descartes accepts (H'), then the same considerations that led him to it should also force him to countenance the following argument:

I. a) I am a substance.
   b) My body is a substance.
   c) I can conceive that I and my body are identical.
   d) If I can conceive that two substances are identical, then they are possibly identical.
   e) I and my body are substances that are possibly identical.
   f) If two substances are possibly identical, they are actually identical.
   g) $I = \text{my body}$

But Descartes would not accept (I). I conclude, then, that he can accept (H') only if he refuses to allow that he can conceive himself to be identical with his body. Since he seems to be committed to the latter claim, he must reject (H').

At this juncture I should point out that it is possible to interpret the passage from Meditation VI in a slightly different
fashion from what I have done. The alternative interpretation is suggested by Descartes in Proposition IV, quoted above. He seems there to be offering the following argument:

\[ H'' \]

48') I am a substance.
49') My body is a substance.
50') I can conceive of my body and me existing separately.
51') If I can conceive of two substances existing separately, then they are possibly distinct.
52') I and my body are substances that are possibly distinct.
53') If two substances are possibly distinct, they are actually distinct.
54') I \neq \text{my body}

This argument, as an interpretation of the passage from Meditation VI, would have avoided a number of difficulties that beset the interpretation we settled on; however, it is ultimately no more successful. The considerations, previously adduced, that led us to regard Descartes as being committed to (55) are still in effect, and so would preclude the use of (H''') as well as (H').

Now it may be thought that the Argument from Distinct Conception, which we have rendered finally with (H') (but which may be rendered as (H''')) is unlike the Argument from Conceivability in that, contrary to my contention, Descartes would deny that he can conceive himself to be identical with his body (or inseparable from it). It may be objected that when the Argument from Conceivability was advanced in Meditation II (if it was in fact there offered), Descartes was more ignorant of his nature than he is at the point at which he offers the Argument from Distinct Conception in Meditation VI. For example, he claims to know after the investigation of the
second Meditation that his entire essence is to think. And if he knows further that the entire essence of body is extension, then presumably he could, with adequate justification, deny that he can conceive himself to be identical with his body.

That objection is a strong one, to be sure. However, it is so strong that if it holds, then the facts on which it is based are alone sufficient to prove that Descartes is distinct from his body. He could argue as follows:

a) I have the property of being essentially a thinking thing.
b) My body does not have the property of being essentially a thinking thing.
c) I ≠ my body

It appears, then, that an adequate defense of the first premise of the Argument from Distinct Conception against its contrary can also obviate whatever other difficulties the argument might have by affording one whose premises would be entirely unobjectionable.

We should turn, then, to an assessment of the extent to which Descartes was successful in establishing the claim that his entire essence is to think. But before we do, there is another argument that is clearly stated in Meditation VI, one which may make an appeal to Descartes' essence unnecessary. We should digress briefly for a look at that argument.

The Argument from Divisibility

In his Synopsis of the Meditations, Descartes informs us that the sixth Meditation contains an argument for distinctness that is different from the one we have been examining. After outlining the
Argument from Distinct Conception, Descartes says of its conclusion:

This is further confirmed in this same Meditation by the fact that we cannot conceive of body excepting in so far as it is divisible, while the mind cannot be conceived of excepting as indivisible.\(^4\)

The argument he is referring to appears some few pages after the Argument from Distinct Conception. It is given in the following passage:

In order to begin this examination, then I here say, in the first place, that there is a great difference between mind and body, inasmuch as body is by nature always divisible, and the mind is entirely indivisible. For, as a matter of fact, when I consider the mind, that is to say, myself inasmuch as I am only a thinking thing, I cannot distinguish in myself any parts, but apprehend myself to be clearly one and entire; and although the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body, yet if a foot, or an arm, or some other part, is separated from my body, I am aware that nothing has been taken away from my mind. And the faculties of willing, feeling, conceiving, etc. cannot be properly speaking said to be its parts, for it is one and the same mind which employs itself in willing and in feeling and understanding. But it is quite otherwise with corporeal or extended objects, for there is not one of these imaginable by me which my mind cannot easily divide into parts, and which consequently I do not recognise as being divisible; this would be sufficient to teach me that the mind or soul of man is entirely different from the body, if I had not already learned it from other sources.\(^5\)

The passage can be construed as providing an argument for the non-identity of Descartes and his body, or for the non-identity of mind and body. We can represent the two arguments as follows:

A. \begin{alignat}{2}
61) \text{My body is divisible}. \\
62) \text{I am not divisible}. \\
63) \text{I} \neq \text{my body}\end{alignat}
B. 64) Body is divisible.
   65) Mind is not divisible.
   66) Mind ≠ body

In each case the premises yield the conclusion by application of
Leibniz' Law. If Descartes is construed as offering (B), and not
(A), then to get the conclusion that he is not identical with his
body, he would have to further demonstrate that he is a mind. Then
he could use (66) to establish the desired conclusion.

The worth of both (A) and (B) seems to turn on the truth of
their second premises. To evaluate his arguments, we can grant
Descartes the first premise in each case and proceed to an
assessment of the adequacy of his defense of the second premises.
To support (62) Descartes appeals to (i) his inability to distinguish
any parts in himself, and (ii) the fact that when he is aware of
the loss of a part of his body, he is also aware that nothing has
been lost from himself.16

Descartes' first appeal is obviously unpersuasive. It does
not follow from his being unable to distinguish any parts in himself
that he in fact has none. It may even be false that he is unable to
distinguish parts in himself. It may be, for example, that his foot
and arm, which parts of his body he has distinguished, are also
parts of himself, though he remains ignorant of that fact. Nor can
Descartes here argue as follows:

67) My body has the property of having parts
    that are distinguished by me.
68) I do not have the property of having
    parts that are distinguished by me.
69) I ≠ my body

since Descartes' only defense of (68) would be an appeal to the claim
that he is not aware of being able to distinguish any parts of himself.

Descartes' second line of defense in support of (A) is no stronger than his first. His claim is that when he is aware of the loss of a part of his body, e.g., an arm or a leg, he is also aware that he has not lost any parts. But surely Descartes is not entitled to that claim. What he is entitled to, rather, is:

70) I am not aware of myself losing any parts.

But (70) does not entail:

71) I am aware that I have lost no parts.

It is the latter claim that Descartes needs to support the claim that he is not identical with his body. But all he has available is the former.

It may be that while (A) is unsuccessful, (B) isn't, and that Descartes can appeal to the latter in establishing his conclusion. In defense of (B) Descartes might appeal to the claim that when his body loses a part its function is impaired, but the function of his mind isn't. Or, he may simply appeal to our intuitions, which cannot be further supported, that when the body loses a part, the mind doesn't also lose a part. I think that something like those claims is adequate to support the claim that a person's mind is not identical with his whole body. But that leaves open the possibility that the mind is identical with a part of the body.

There are parts of the body, parts of the brain to be exact, such that if they are lost, the function of the mind does seem to be impaired. Descartes was not impressed by the fact that a loss
of a limb, for example, might change the sensations present in the mind, since he drew a distinction between purely cognitive activities and activities of the mind that resulted in part from its being joined to and affected by the body. But Descartes should have been disturbed by something like a prefrontal lobotomy, which would seem to affect only the purely cognitive functions of the mind. Such a change in the body would seem to effect a change in the mind and would tend to weaken any argument to the effect that the mind is not identical with any part of the body. At least it would weaken the sort of argument under discussion. Such a fact does not, of course, prove identity, but it does disarm Descartes' argument.

We should give up on the Argument from Divisibility and turn to Descartes' claim that his essence is thinking, in hopes of there finding material for a better argument for distinctness.

Unfortunately, it is not an easy task to find arguments in Descartes' writings for the claim that his essence is thinking. In discussing Nakhnikian's version of the Argument from Distinct Conception, we found that Descartes asserts the claim in Meditation VI, but no argument for it is there given. Descartes appears to simply appeal to his ignorance of any other properties being essential to him. But as we saw, it is not clear why he thought thinking was essential to him, nor does it follow from his not knowing himself to have any other essential properties that he in fact has none. We should look in the earlier writings for some more substantial argument.
The first discussion of his essence that we find in Descartes' writings comes from Part IV of the Discourse when he says:

I next considered attentively what I was; and I saw that while I could pretend that I had no body, that there was no world, and no place existed for me to be in, I could not pretend that I was not; on the contrary, from the mere fact that I thought of doubting the truth of other things it evidently and certainly followed that I existed. On the other hand, if I had merely ceased to think, even if everything else that I had ever imagined had been true, I had no reason to believe that I should have existed. From this I recognized that I was a substance whose whole essence or nature is to think and whose being requires no place and depends on no material thing.17

In Chapter II we interpreted this passage as providing the raw materials of the Argument from Doubt. It is probably more correct to interpret the passage as providing considerations in support of the claim that Descartes' essence is thinking. But what are those considerations? There seem to be two: (i) Descartes says that from his doubting (or thinking) it follows that he exists, and (ii) if he had ceased to think, he would have had no reason to suppose that he existed. Somehow these two facts are supposed to lead to the conclusion that Descartes' whole essence is to think.

The Argument from Proof-Dependence

Anthony Kenny suggests, and rejects, the hypothesis that Descartes is here relying upon the unexpressed principle that:

1) The existence of A depends upon B if, and only if, the proof of the existence of A depends upon B.18

Presumably Kenny sees (i) and (ii) as somehow establishing that
the existence of Descartes depends upon thinking. Also he must hold that a thing's essence consists in those properties its existence depends upon. With respect to his principle, Kenny does not specify what the permissible substitutes of 'A' and 'B' are, but he does say that the principle, however we are to understand it, is one that Descartes cannot accept.

Its unacceptability, according to Kenny, stems from the fact that Descartes gave a proof for the existence of God that depends upon Descartes' having an idea of God. But since Descartes' existence, and hence the existence of his idea, is contingent, we would not want to say that God's existence depends upon Descartes' having an idea of God. Still less would we want to say that Descartes' having an idea of God is in some fashion a part of the essence of God. But Kenny apparently thinks that (1) would commit us to such a view.

This objection to (1), though, does not seem entirely compelling. Admittedly, it is Kenny's principle and he should know what is to count against it; however, it should not go unnoticed that proofs for the existence of God have offered that do not depend upon anyone's having an idea of God. The difference I am pointing to, of course, is between ontological arguments, which depend upon the idea of God, and cosmological arguments, which depend upon some person's idea of God. Descartes offers both.

Had Kenny expressed his principle as:

2) The existence of A depends upon B if, and only if, there exists a proof of A that depends upon B.
then his objection would have succeeded. But, as it stands, the principle is ambiguous between (2) and:

3) The existence of A depends upon B if, and only if, all proofs of the existence of A depend upon B.

if we ignore a third possible reading that recognizes only one proof for the existence of anything.

If we read (1) as (3), which reading would seem more natural, then Kenny's objection surely fails. Since there is at least one proof that does not depend upon some contingent being's having an idea of God, (1) is not ruled out by Kenny's objection. It will, of course, require that the idea or concept of God is essential to God, but to the extent that we can understand that result at all, it seems unobjectionable. However, I think (1) is open to an objection, beyond the obvious one that it is too vague to be easily applicable. That objection, which takes advantage of the principle's unperspicuousness, is that it makes the laws of logic, upon which any proof depends, a part of the essence of everything. Again, it is difficult to understand what such a notion comes to, but while the laws of logic may in some sense be said to be a necessary part of my nature, they are clearly not a part of my essence in Descartes' sense.

Another objection can possibly be made to the principle, one that again plays on its un perspicuousness. Descartes' proof of the existence of matter depends, in addition to the goodness of God, upon his having a clear and distinct understanding of matter and a strong belief that it exists. So at least one proof of the
existence of matter depends upon someone's thinking, and it seems further that anyone's producing such a proof will depend in some sense upon his engaging in thought. So it may be said that the proof, or every proof, of the existence of matter depends upon there being someone who thinks the proof through. The same would hold, of course, for the proof of the existence of anything. But there being someone who thinks is not essential to matter or to anything that exists.

To be fair, it should be noted that (3) can be distinguished from:

3') The existence of A depends upon B if, and only if, anyone's giving a proof of the existence of A depends upon B.

It may be that the above objection applies to (3'), but not to (3). Also, if the present objection does succeed as an objection to (3), then Kenny's objection was correct, but not for the reason he thought. At any rate, Kenny was right in rejecting (1); we should too.

Kenny's Argument

In rejecting (1) we are confronted again with the need to explain how the passage from the Discourse supports the claim that Descartes' essence is thinking. Kenny has provided another interpretation, which presumably he thinks is the correct one. Kenny invites us to consider the following propositions that come from the passage in question:

4) I am thinking.
5) I have a body.
6) I am in a world.
7) I am in a place.
8) I exist.

In regard to these propositions Kenny says:

Descartes draws our attention to the following facts about these propositions and their relations to each other. First, (5), (6), and (7) are uncertain, while (8) is certain. If (4) is true, and (5), (6), and (7) are doubtful, (8) is certain... If (4) is false, and (5), (6), and (7) are true, (8) is not certain...

From all this it follows that (4) is a premise whose truth is both necessary and sufficient to establish the certainty of (8); whereas (5), (6), and (7) are premises none of which is necessary, and which together are insufficient, to establish the certainty of (8).

Kenny tells us that while (5), (6), and (7) all entail (8), they do not establish it as certain, because they are themselves not certain. For one proposition, \( p \), to establish another proposition, \( q \), as certain, Kenny says, \( p \) must entail \( q \), and \( p \) must itself be certain.

Descartes' conclusion is that his whole essence is to think and that his existence is not dependent upon the existence of any material thing, so simply pointing out the relationships that hold among the above propositions is not adequate to explain how Descartes got his conclusion. Kenny goes on to suggest a principle that Descartes might have used to get his conclusion. He says:

One principle that would enable Descartes to derive his conclusion from his premises might run as follows. Those properties constitute the essence of a thing that are severally necessary and jointly sufficient to establish the existence of that thing with certainty. This principle coupled with the premise that the single property of thinking is both necessary and sufficient to establish with certainty
my own existence, will yield the conclusion
that my essence is constituted by thought.20

The backbone of Kenny's interpretation, then, is the principle:

\[ (x)(\text{the essence of } x \text{ consists of that set of properties, } S, \text{ such that the members of } S \]
\[ \text{are severally necessary and jointly sufficient to establish the existence of } x \text{ with certainty}) \]

It would seem that if Kenny's principle is acceptable, and if he
is right that the property of thinking is alone necessary and
sufficient to establish Descartes' existence with certainty, then
thinking is in fact Descartes' whole essence. Unfortunately, it
is difficult to evaluate Kenny's principle owing to its unperspicuous
wording, his failure to define the notion of certainty he is using,
and his failure to say what it means for a property or set of
properties to be necessary and sufficient to establish the existence
of something with certainty.

Fortunately, we may not need to evaluate the principle, since
Kenny himself thinks it false. He undertakes to demonstrate its
falsity as follows:

These considerations notwithstanding the prin-
ciple is in fact false, as is easily shown.
For let us suppose that it is true, but not
indubitable, that it is impossible to think
without having a body. Then all Descartes'
premises will remain true. Proposition (4)
alone will be necessary and sufficient to
establish the certainty of (8); for (5),
though it follows from (4) in conjunction with
the hypothesis that it is impossible to think
without having a body, is not certain since
that hypothesis is itself doubtful. But
Descartes' conclusion will be false. For if
it is in fact impossible to think without
having a body, then it cannot be true both
that my essence is thinking and that my
existence does not depend at all on the existence of any body. The suggested principle, therefore, since it would permit the drawing of a false conclusion from true premises, must be rejected.\textsuperscript{21}

The false conclusion Kenny has in mind is:

10) My entire essence is to think.

which comes from (9) and:

11) Thinking is the only property that is necessary and sufficient to establish my existence with certainty.

Kenny's strategy is to show that there is a possible situation in which (11) is true and (10) false. That situation is one in which:

12) It is impossible to think without having a body.

is true but not indubitable, i.e., not certain. If (12) is true and thinking is essential to me, then, by the principle:

13) \((x)(F)(G)(\text{if } F \text{ is essential to } x \text{ and it is impossible for something to have } F \text{ without having } G, \text{ then } G \text{ is essential to } x)\)

having a body is also essential to me. Kenny does not explicitly affirm (13), the principle that establishes that corporeality is essential to Descartes, but he must hold it if his argument is to succeed. Also, it is important that (12) be not indubitable, since if it were, then (11) would be false. It would be so, because (12), being certain, in conjunction with (4), would suffice to establish (5) with certainty. (5) could then be used to establish (8) with certainty.

Kenny's argument, then, goes as follows. Since (10) is entailed by the conjunction of (11) and (9), and since (11) is true in the
imagined situation in which (12) is also true, then either (11) or (9) must be false. But given that (12) is dubitable, (11) remains true. Therefore, (9) is false in our hypothetical situation. That is, there is a possible state of affairs in which (9) is false. But since it is a metaphysical principle, it is necessarily true, if true at all. Not being necessarily true, it is false.

How should we assess Kenny's objection? We must ask ourselves whether he has made good on his claim to have shown (9) false. I have suggested that he showed (9) false by showing it to be possibly false, the latter being so when a particular imagined situation obtains. Now there seems to be something suspect about that procedure. It seems that Kenny is trying to show a principle to be possibly false, so he tells us to imagine a situation in which a certain proposition is true, a proposition which, if true, renders the principle he is examining false. Admittedly, he is not asking us to imagine the falsity of the principle under examination, but what he does ask is no less illicit. When he asks us to suppose (12) true, Kenny seems in effect to be claiming it to be possibly true. That he must do in order to show his principle, (9), to be false. But (12) is a modalized statement of the form "Nec p." If it is possibly true, then it is true in fact.22

We can now see the problem with Kenny's approach. In holding (12), in conjunction with the claim that Descartes is essentially thinking, Kenny has in effect embraced the position that Descartes is also essentially corporeal. His objection to the principle, then, amounts to claiming it false on the ground that it renders as
Descartes' only essential property that of thinking, while Descartes is in fact also essentially corporeal. But that is to beg the question. Kenny's argument against (9) is a petitio, so his attempt to show it false has failed.

It may possibly be objected that I have misread the passage in which Kenny tries to show (9) false. It may not have been Kenny's intent to affirm that (12) is possibly true. He may instead have intended to affirm merely that (12) is epistemically possible for him. When he asks us to suppose (12) true, it may appear that Kenny there merely desires to point out what follows if it is true, as in fact for all we know it is. Then, my objector says, Kenny shows us that if Descartes is essentially corporeal, the principle fails to reflect that fact, so it is false.

However, Descartes, or someone committed to (9), could reply to Kenny by pointing out that of course the principle fails to establish thinking as essential to Descartes, since it isn't essential to him. It is not sufficient to show the principle false merely by showing that there is an epistemically possible situation in which it gives a wrong answer to the question "what is Descartes' essence." What has to be shown is that there is a logically possible situation in which the principle gives a wrong answer. It does not follow from the principle's being epistemically possibly false that it is logically possibly false. If the strategy Kenny really employed was the one we are examining, then he certainly has not succeeded in showing the principle false.

Kenny seems caught between a question-begging objection and no
objection at all. If he offers the objection I have attributed to him, then his objection is question-begging. If he rather intends to show what follows from a particular epistemically possible situation, then he has no objection at all.

Despite the failure of his objection to it, I think Kenny's principle is indeed not acceptable. In the first place, it should be viewed as unacceptable simply on the basis of its being not sufficiently clear to be properly evaluated. But aside from that difficulty, to the extent that we can understand the principle intuitively, there seems no reason why it should be accepted as a principle for Descartes. Before raising objections to the principle, Kenny attempts to defend it as follows:

Two considerations make this principle plausible. First, it seems reasonable to say that those properties constitute the essence of a thing that are severally necessary and jointly sufficient for the thing to exist. Second, if the holding of a given property makes "I exist" certain, then a fortiori it seems to establish it as true.23

It should be obvious that Kenny's notion of essence does not match Descartes'. The latter seemed to recognize only two candidates for the essential properties of a created thing, viz., corporeality and thought. An essence-finder principle for Descartes should be one that tells us whether a thing has one, or the other, or both of those two properties. But other properties, in addition to these, will be necessary for a thing to exist. Descartes, for example, recognized duration as being such a property. Presumably he would also have countenanced other universal properties, such as
self-identity, as being necessary to the existence of a thing. So Kenny's notion of an essential property does not match Descartes'.

Kenny's having regarded necessary properties as essential leads us to wonder whether, contrary to his view, it might not be the case that universal properties do fit Kenny's essence-finder principle, (9). Again, it is not clear what Kenny means by a proposition's being certain, but it seems that:

14) I am self-identical.

is certain if anything is, and it seems further that (14), if true, entails that I exist. But the characteristics of being certain and entailing that I exist are just the characteristics that led Kenny to say that (4) establishes (8) as certain. It would seem, then, that the property of self-identity is sufficient to establish my existence with certainty. But if that is so, then it is not clear how (4), or any other proposition could be said to be necessary to establishing my existence with certainty. Admittedly, if I prove that I exist, then I have to think in order to do it, but I don't need to use (4) as a premise in such a proof. So it appears that thinking, contra Kenny, is not necessary to establish my existence with certainty.

It seems, then, that there may not be any property that fits Kenny's principle, since no property seems necessary to establish my existence with certainty. Thinking is not necessary, since we can appeal to the former. It may be that when Kenny's principle is made sufficiently clear it will be seen that my objection does not apply, but until the principle is made clearer, we should reject it
and look elsewhere.  

Malcolm's Principle

Norman Malcolm has offered an essence-finder principle that he thinks Descartes might have been relying upon in the Discourse and second Meditation. He suggests the general principle:

15) If there is an existing thing \( O \) and if there is something \( E \), such that if one perceives \( E \), necessarily one perceives \( O \) and if one perceives \( O \), necessarily one perceives \( E \), then \( E \) is the essence of \( O \).

From this general principle Malcolm derives a principle for Descartes to apply in his own case:

16) \( x \) is my essence if it is the case that if I am aware of \( x \) then (necessarily) I am aware of myself and if I am aware of myself then (necessarily) I am aware of \( x \).

Malcolm further suggests that thinking is the only property that fits (16), thus we should conclude that thinking is Descartes' essence.

Two points should be made here. First, (15) is defective in that, as it is stated, if \( E \) is the essence of \( O \), then \( O \) is likewise the essence of \( E \). It may be that thinking is Descartes' essence, but it surely is not true that Descartes is thinking's essence. This defect of (15) is repaired in (16); however, (15) and (16) share a different defect. Malcolm has misplaced the necessity operator in each. As he has constructed the principles, the scope of their necessity operators is limited to the consequent of each conditional in which they appear; they should carry the whole
conditional within their scope.

We needn't spend much time evaluating (16), since Malcolm himself rightly rejects it with the claim that there is no apparent reason why it should be regarded as providing Descartes' essence. Malcolm claims that the first conditional in (16) holds trivially for every property and the second holds for thinking, not because it is essential to Descartes, but because of the fact that Descartes held that awareness was a kind of thinking and that we are aware of all of our thoughts. Thus, by the second conditional, if I am aware of anything at all, then I am aware of thinking.

While I think Malcolm is right in rejecting (16), I think he has not given all the reasons sufficient for doing so. For example, it is not clear to me that thinking does in fact fit the first condition in (16). Malcolm argues that, for Descartes, whenever I think, I am aware that I exist, and in being aware that I exist, I am aware of myself. He cites as evidence for his claim the familiar passage in Meditatio II in which Descartes says that the proposition that he exists is certain only for as long as he thinks. But since it does not follow from that fact that at every moment at which I think, I am aware that I exist or I am aware of myself, Malcolm has not persuasively established the claim that thinking fits the first condition of (16).

Even if Malcolm could successfully establish the claim that he is aware of himself whenever he is aware of thinking, then the principle would be open to a counter-example. Given that Malcolm,
in order to make the principle work, needs to subscribe to the view that Descartes thought of himself as being aware of all of the thoughts that he has, then it would turn out that being aware of his thinking was essential to Descartes. That is, whenever Descartes was aware of himself, he would be thinking and aware of his thinking. And whenever he was aware of his being aware of his thinking, he would be aware of himself (given the success of Malcolm's argument that Descartes is aware of himself whenever he is thinking). But whereas Descartes may have held that he was necessarily aware of his thinking, he did not hold that being aware of his thinking was a part of his essence.

Failing the efforts of Kenny and Malcolm to provide a successful essence-finder principle, we should go to the texts and attempt to tease out the arguments Descartes saw as proving his essence to be thought.

The Argument from Systematic Elimination by Doubt

Finding Descartes' arguments for his essence is a source of considerable consternation, to be sure; however, there is a claim in Descartes' writings that has provided far more perplexity to commentators. I am referring, of course, to the Cogito, the claim "I think, therefore I am." There is one interpretation of Descartes' effort to establish the claim that he exists that may shed some light on his effort to discover his essence.

The search that terminated in the Cogito was a search for a proposition that is certain, or indubitable. Descartes seems to
equate certainty with indubitability, at least when he is attempting to discover that most fundamental proposition that is to be the bedrock for his reconstruction of knowledge. An obvious strategy, then, for finding a certain, or indubitable, proposition is to engage in a systematic attempt to divest oneself of every belief that can for any reason be doubted. If one finds a proposition that cannot be doubted, then the search has ended. That proposition is of the sort that Descartes is seeking.

It is reasonable, then, to interpret Descartes as having proceeded in this fashion in the Cogito passages. He systematically throws out every proposition or class of propositions for which he can find any reason at all to doubt. Descartes admits that he may, in the process, throw away some true propositions, but his search is not for what is merely true, but for what is certain. He arrives after a while at the proposition "I exist." It is one that cannot be doubted, since any attempt to doubt it guarantees that it is true. For Descartes, any attempt to doubt a proposition is an activity of thinking, and no such activity exists without a thinker; hence, any attempt on Descartes' part to doubt that he exists requires that he be thinking, and his thinking in turn guarantees that he exists. Thus Descartes has found a proposition that is certain for him, one that cannot be doubted, by systematically doubting all of the propositions that he formerly believed until he found one that could not be doubted, i.e., one for which there was no possible reason to doubt.
The foregoing is one way in which the Cogito passages can be interpreted. I don't claim that it is the best interpretation that is available. Nor even do I believe that it is sufficiently clear, without being more thoroughly detailed, to be seriously evaluated. We would first have to say at least something about the notions of certainty and indubitability that Descartes was relying upon. But it is the general strategy that is important for our purposes here, and a view of that strategy can be garnered and appreciated without our attempting to make the interpretation clearer.

Now there is some evidence that Descartes intended such a strategy to establish that his essence was thinking. It is possible to interpret Descartes as having attempted to discover his essence by systematically doubting himself to possess each of the properties he formerly took himself to have until he arrived at one that he could not doubt himself to have. In the second Meditation, immediately after establishing that he exists, Descartes says:

But I do not yet know clearly enough what I am; and hence I must be careful to see that I do not imprudently take some other object in place of myself, and thus that I do not go astray in respect of this knowledge that I hold to be the most certain and most evident of all that I have formerly learned. That is why I shall now consider anew what I believed myself to be before I embarked upon these last reflections; and of my former opinions I shall withdraw all that might even in a small degree be invalidated by the reasons which I have just brought forward, in order that there may be nothing at all left beyond what is absolutely certain and indubitable.30

Descartes then discovers that he can doubt himself to have all of the corporeal properties that he formerly took himself to
have. He can doubt that he has a face, hands, arms, bones, flesh, etc. But he cannot doubt that he thinks:

...What of thinking? I find here that thought is an attribute that belongs to me; it alone cannot be separated from me. I am, I exist, that is certain. But how often? Just when I think; for it might possibly be the case if I ceased entirely to think, that I should likewise cease altogether to exist. I do not now admit anything which is not necessarily true; to speak accurately I am not more than a thing which thinks, that is to say a mind or a soul, or an understanding, or a reason, which are terms whose significance was formerly unknown to me. I am, however, a real thing and really exist; but what thing? I have answered: a thing which thinks.31

When he says that thought alone cannot be separated from him, we understand Descartes as saying that thought is the only one of his properties that resists Cartesian doubt. He cannot, with consistency, imagine himself to be without that property. Since it is the only property he has found that he cannot doubt himself to have, Descartes concludes that his essence is to think.

The same strategy appears again in The Search After Truth, when Polyander, after claiming that he can doubt himself to have any corporeal properties, says:

Of all the attributes which I bestowed upon myself, only one remains for me to examine and that is thought; and I see that it is the only one that I cannot separate from myself. For if it is true that I doubt just because I cannot doubt that I do so, it is also equally true that I think; for what is doubting but thinking in a certain way? And in fact if I did not think, I could not know whether I doubt or exist. Yet I am, and I know it because I doubt, that is to say because I think. And better, it might be that if I
ceased for an instant to think I should cease at the same time to be. Likewise the sole thing I cannot separate from me, that I know certainly to be me and that I can now affirm without fear of deception—that one thing, I repeat, is that I am a thinking thing.

It seems clear, then, that at least one strategy Descartes employed to establish thinking as his essence was that of eliminating any property he could doubt himself to have. Descartes does not say explicitly here what makes his possession of a given property indubitable, but it is possible to hazard a guess. He cannot doubt that he thinks, because his doubting that he thinks, since doubting is a species of thinking, entails that he thinks.

So, we might offer the following principles to apply to the present investigation of Descartes' essence:

21) a cannot doubt that he has F =df a knows that his doubting that he has F entails that he has F.

22) F is essential to a if, and only if, a cannot doubt that he has F.

Certainly Descartes did not appeal explicitly to these principles, but I think that something like them may have underlain his thinking. We should add a caveat, however. As it stands, (22) is incomplete. In the first place, we should add a conjunct to the effect that F is not a universal property. But even given that restriction, (22) would still make essential to Descartes other properties that he did not recognize as essential. For example, according to (22), the property of doubting would be essential to Descartes.

However, we saw in Chapter I that Descartes wants essential
properties to be of a higher level of generality than that. Descartes would hold that while he essentially thinks, he does not have as part of his essence any of the specific activities that fall under the genus "thinking." We have expressed this point earlier by referring to Broad's differentiating attributes, which make use of the determinable-determinate distinction. I don't think we can adequately express that distinction by adding another conjunct in (22); however, it should be kept in mind that admissible substituends of \( \Phi \) are limited to names of those attributes that Descartes would countenance as being proper candidates for his essence.

Principle (22) is beset by one other difficulty that merits mention. That difficulty is that the principle, as worded, works only for persons, if it works at all. Now this is also a difficulty shared by Malcolm's principle, and possibly by Kenny's. At any rate, bodies do not turn out to be essentially extended on Kenny's principle. It would be nice to find in Descartes' writings the suggestion of an essence-finder principle that would be purely general in application to all substances, or even just to all created substances. Unfortunately, I find no such suggestion.

Now that we are reasonably clear about the suggested strategy Descartes might have been employing, we should assess its worth. Recall that I suggested that the strategy of systematic doubt might underlie Descartes' effort in the Cogito passages. There he was looking for an indubitable proposition, and it seems reasonable to set about finding one by systematically throwing out all of the
possible candidates that can be doubted. Once one is found that cannot be doubted, the search is over. As Descartes admitted, there may have been truths that were passed over in the search, but that is acceptable as long as one is found about which he can have no doubt. The strategy of systematic elimination by doubt seems respectable in the Cogito sections.

However, it is not clear why we should expect the strategy to be successful in the search for Descartes' essence. There is an important difference between the enterprise of searching for a foundation for knowledge and that of searching for a thing's essential properties. We might characterize the difference as that that holds between the search for an epistemic fact and the search for a metaphysical fact. Indubitability is an epistemic notion. It makes sense to look for a proposition that cannot be doubted when one is searching for an epistemic foundation block. However, it is not clear why one should seek those properties a person cannot doubt himself to possess when one is trying to discover that person's essential properties. The latter is a metaphysical search, not an epistemic one.

Two problems present themselves here. First it is not clear what reasons there are for thinking that the appropriate non-universal properties that fit (21) are essential to their possessors. Second, it is not clear what reasons there are for thinking that the appropriate non-universal properties that fail to fit (21) are not essential to their possessors. On the face of it, there does not seem to
be any connection between the properties I can or cannot doubt myself to have and those that I have essentially.

Thinking seems to fit (21) simply because in order to employ the principle I have to doubt, and since doubting is a species of thinking, my employing the principle assures that I will manifest the property I attempt to doubt myself to have. But it is not clear why that fact should lead us to believe that thinking is essential to me. Further, it seems that corporeality might be essential to me, so that my doubting entails my being corporeal. But since I don't know myself to be essentially corporeal, I don't know that the entailment relationship holds. Hence, I can doubt that I am corporeal. My being able to doubt that I am corporeal seems consistent with my being essentially corporeal. It simply is not clear why (21) should be taken as showing me not to be essentially corporeal.

Now there is one possible link that I can see between properties I cannot doubt myself to have and properties that are essential to me. It might be said that if I can doubt myself to have a certain property, then I can conceive of myself existing without it. Similarly, if I cannot doubt that I have a certain property, then I cannot conceive of myself lacking it. If we now introduce, as a replacement for (22), a variation of the essence-finder principle that Chisholm has suggested for Descartes (cf. Ch.II):

23) \((x)(F)(x \text{ has } F \text{ essentially if, and only if, } x \text{ cannot conceive himself except as having } F)\)
remembering to restrict the range of our property variable to admissible candidates for Cartesian essencehood, then we may be able to make the present strategy respectable.

The principle (23) can now be conjoined with the following principles:

24) \((F)\) (if I cannot doubt that I have \(F\), then I cannot conceive myself except as having \(F\))

25) \((F)\) (if I can doubt that I have \(F\), then I can conceive myself as lacking \(F\))

26) a can doubt that he has \(F\) =df it is not the case that a cannot doubt that he has \(F\)

to yield the conclusion that thinking is essential to Descartes. Since thinking is the only admissible property that Descartes cannot doubt himself to have, it is the only property that he cannot conceive himself except as having, and hence, the only property that is essential to him.

Unfortunately, I think the suggested revisions fall short of making respectable Descartes' strategy of systematic elimination by doubt. First of all, it is not clear why we should accept (24). Again, the tension is between an epistemological fact and a metaphysical one. My inability to doubt that I have some particular property derives from an epistemic fact, whereas my being unable to conceive myself lacking some property is metaphysical in character. Now it may be that if I can doubt that I have a certain property, then I can conceive myself lacking it. But it does not seem that my inability to doubt (as defined in (21)) that I have some property is grounds for holding that I am unable to conceive that I lack that property. It may in fact be that I am both unable
to doubt that I have the universal properties I have and cannot conceive myself except as having them. But the same does not seem to hold with regard to thinking. At least there does not seem to be the connection between ability to doubt and conceive that is requisite to the truth of (24).

I think we can provide an argument to show the unacceptability of the conjunction of (21), (23), (24), (25), and (26). If that conjunction is unacceptabile, the principles in it cannot be employed by Descartes to establish his essence. To begin we must make the philosophically sound assumption that statements attributing essential properties to a thing are necessarily true if true at all. That assumption is surely a reasonable one, since if something, a, has some property, F, essentially, then it would seem that no possible world is such that 'a has F essentially' is false in that world.\(^{33}\)

But if such statements as 'a has F essentially' are necessarily true if true at all, then if a has F essentially, it would follow by strict implication from a's doubting that he has F essentially, that he does in fact have F essentially. For example:

27) Jones has the property of being essentially a thinking thing.

follows from:

28) Jones doubts that he has the property of being essentially a thinking thing.

where (27) is necessarily true. However, Jones may be ignorant of the entailment relationship between (27) and (28), in which case:

29) Jones is able to doubt (27).
would also be true. So by (29), (25), and (23), Jones does not have the property of being essentially a thinking thing essentially. Now it might be supposed that an essentialist would hold the following principle:

30) \( (x) (F)(\text{if } x \text{ has } F \text{ essentially, then } x \text{ essentially has the property of having } F \text{ essentially}) \)

If Descartes held (30), then there would be a conflict for him among (27), (30), and:

31) Jones does not have the property of being essentially a thinking thing essentially.

However, we must remember that Descartes held that persons have one essential property only, so I think he would be undisturbed by (31), since he would not accept (30).

Something like the above strategy, however, can be used to show the unacceptability of the proffered principles that we have suggested for Descartes. We have earlier distinguished between those properties a thing has necessarily and those that are essential to it in the Cartesian sense. A thing has a property necessarily if, and only if, it has that property in every possible world in which it exists. But not all properties that a thing has necessarily are properties that are essential to it. For example, the property of being self-identical is, for Descartes, we can suppose, had necessarily by everything, though nothing has it essentially. Descartes would, however, hold the following principle:

32) \( (x)(F)(\text{if } x \text{ has } F \text{ essentially, then } x \text{ has } F \text{ necessarily}) \)

since a thing has its essential properties in every world in which
it exists, and that is just what is meant by saying that something has a property necessarily.

In addition, whatever considerations give rise to Chisholm's principle, (23), should also lead to an acceptance of:

33) \((x)(F)(x \text{ has } F \text{ necessarily if, and only if, } x \text{ cannot conceive himself except as having } F)\)

where the property variable in the latter takes as values all properties. The only difference between (32) and (33) lies in the range of their respective quantifiers and the fact that one treats of necessary properties where the other treats of essential properties. We saw above that someone might doubt that he has the property of thinking essentially, and so could conceive himself to lack that property. By the same consideration, a person may be able to doubt that he has the property of thinking necessarily. Jones, for example, may be able to doubt:

34) I have the property of being necessarily a thinking thing.

and so would hold:

35) I can conceive myself lacking the property of being necessarily a thinking thing.

By (33), then, Jones could derive:

36) I do not have the property of being necessarily a thinking thing necessarily.

However, given that we have been using S5 semantics, we seem bound to accept:

37) \((x)(\text{if } x \text{ is necessarily } F, \text{ then } x \text{ is necessarily necessarily } F)\)

So if Jones is not necessarily necessarily a thinking thing, then
by (37) he is not necessarily a thinking thing. Hence, by (32) he is not essentially a thinking thing either. But that is a result Descartes would not accept and it is inconsistent with the claim that Jones is essentially a thinking thing, which can be demonstrated by use of the principles ((21) and (23)-(26)) that were adduced to prove that Descartes' essence is thinking.

The problem, I think, again lies in taking (21) to yield truths relevant to the search for a thing's essence. There is no reason to accept it in conjunction with (22), nor is there any reason to accept it in conjunction with (24). And there is good reason for not accepting the conjunction of (21), (23), (24), (25), and (26). They, together with other principles they seem to commit us to, lead to contradictions. I know of no way that we can salvage the Argument from Systematic Elimination by Doubt to get a successful proof for the claim that Descartes' essence is to think.

The Cartesian Circle Argument for Essence and Distinctness

I can see one last argument for his essence that Descartes might be interpreted as having offered. That is the following:

A. 38) I clearly and distinctly perceive that my essence is to think.
39) Whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive is true.
40) My essence is to think.

This is an argument similar to one that I earlier suggested as an interpretation of the passage in Meditation VI that deals with the distinctness of Descartes and his body. We have heretofore been supposing that Descartes' conclusion that his essence is to think
could be used by him to prove distinctness. But if the above argument for his essence is successful, then Descartes could also have used a similar argument to prove that he is distinct from his body. He would not need to reason from his essence.

I said earlier that there is some evidence that Descartes intended such an argument to prove distinctness; possibly he also intended it to prove that his essence is thinking. That evidence comes not from a careful reading of the sixth Meditation, but from what Descartes claimed to have been the function of his argument there. In reply to Arnauld, Descartes claimed that the considerations adduced in Meditation II were sufficient to adequately prove that mind and body are distinct. The purpose of considering the topic again in Meditation VI was rather to allay metaphysical doubt. He says:

Consequently, if I had not been in search of a certitude greater than the vulgar, I should have been satisfied with showing in the Second Meditation that Mind was apprehended as a thing that subsists, although nothing belonging to the body be ascribed to it, and conversely that Body was understood to be something subsistent without anything being attributed to it that pertains to the mind. And I should have added nothing more in order to prove that there was a real distinction between mind and body: because commonly we judge that all things stand to each other in respect to their actual relations in the same way as they are related in our consciousness. But, since one of those hyperbolical doubts adduced in the First Meditation went so far as to prevent me from being sure of this very fact (viz. that things are in their true nature exactly as we perceive them to be), so long as I supposed that I had no knowledge of the author of my being, all that I have said about God and about truth in the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Meditations serves
to further the conclusion as to the real distinction between mind and body, which is finally completed in Meditation VI.²⁴

I take this passage to support an interpretation of the sixth Meditation according to which Descartes intended the following argument for distinctness:

B. 41) I clearly and distinctly perceive that I am distinct from my body.
42) Whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive is true.
43) I am distinct from my body.

In his reply Descartes speaks of proving the distinctness of mind from body, but since he identifies himself as a mind in Meditation II and since he claimed to have proved the distinctness of himself and body in VI, we are justified in offering (B) as an interpretation of his intent.

As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, the worth of argument (B), to which we can now add (A), clearly turns on the extent to which Descartes was successful in defending the second premise of his argument. Descartes' defense of the principle:

44) \((p)(\text{if I clearly and distinctly perceive } p, \text{ then } p \text{ is true})\)

occurs in the fourth Meditation. However, that defense rests on the goodness of God, and so it requires the existence of God. In Meditation III Descartes presents a number of arguments for the claim that God exists, but it seems that each has at least one premise in whose defense Descartes appeals to his clear and distinct perceptions. Many critics have claimed to find a kind of circularity in Descartes' arguments that God exists and that his clear and
distinct perceptions are true. Arnauld was the first such critic.\textsuperscript{35}

Clearly, then, the success of (A) and (B) depends upon the extent to which the criticism of Arnauld was justified and the extent to which Descartes was successful in answering it. There exists, of course, a whole tradition of Cartesian scholarship devoted to assessing the worth of Arnauld's criticism and Descartes' reply. Certainly it is still an unsettled question whether Descartes is guilty of the charge of circularity.\textsuperscript{36} And since it is beyond the scope of this work to add significantly to that controversy, we must leave open the possibility that the Cartesian Circle Argument for Distinctness is ultimately successful.

For that reason, we must close this essay still unsatisfied whether Descartes was in fact successful in proving himself to be distinct from his body. We have examined a fair number of arguments for that conclusion, some of them explicitly offered by Descartes, others merely suggested by him, and a few with little more to recommend them than the fact that Descartes could have offered them had he been so inclined. But all that we have examined share the common fault of failure.

The argument most often attributed to Descartes, the Argument from Doubt, we saw to be invalid. We have seen also that a few common threads of difficulty run through most of the other arguments. The strongest of those threads was spun by Descartes' concern to avoid a \textit{petitio} by allowing that, prior to his attempt to prove distinctness, he was, so far as he was aware, a material substance
with the property of thinking. That position was one adopted by some of Descartes' critics, notably Hobbes, against whom Descartes was concerned to protect himself. But in allowing the reasonableness of the view he was opposing, Descartes seems to have disarmed many of his own arguments. Those are the arguments that are generated by the claim that Descartes can conceive that he is distinct from his body.

To assure the success of those arguments, Descartes should have given considerations to the effect that he cannot conceive of himself being identical with his body. But, quite the opposite, he made concessions that can only be construed as committing him to the claim that he can conceive that he is identical with his body. But that commitment precludes the use of arguments from conceivability. One consideration that Descartes might have advanced to plead the non-conceivability of his identity with his body is his claim that his essence, but not his body's essence, is to think. However, we have seen reason to think that he was not successful in establishing that claim either.

We leave Descartes, then, with only one unexamined possibility for proving distinctness, the Cartesian Circle Argument. So while we haven't shown that he successfully proved himself to be distinct from his body, neither have we shown that he failed.
NOTES

CHAPTER III

1. HR-II, 63.

2. HR-II, 64. See also HR-II, 30; HR-II, 133; and HR-II, 211.

3. HR-I, 190.

4. Cf. my discussion of exportation in Chapter II.

5. An Introduction to Philosophy, p. 147.

6. Descartes possibly means to defend the claim that thinking is his only essential property by appeal to the claim that it is the only property he knows himself to possess, since he can doubt his possession of any other property. We will discuss that defense later in the chapter.

7. An alternative reading of the first premise of (H) is suggested by Descartes in Replies to Objections II according to which we should replace (38) with:

\[ 38' \] If I can conceive that \( x \) and \( y \) exist separately, then \( x \) is distinct from \( y \).

We will consider the argument that so results somewhat later.

8. HR-I, 440.


10. HR-II, 59.

11. Descartes can also be interpreted as having claimed that what he clearly perceives is that the mind and body can exist separately, the possibility of which state of affairs would be guaranteed by God. That suggests a different argument for distinctness, one that will be considered below.

12. HR-I, 190.

13. HR-II, 64.

14. HR-I, 141.

15. HR-I, 196.
16. Descartes does not actually assert (ii) with respect to himself, but rather with respect to his mind. However, we must assume that the same considerations apply in both cases, since Descartes here seems to switch back and forth between talk of himself and talk of his mind.

17. HR-I, 101.

18. Descartes, p. 81.

19. Ibid., pp. 81-82.

20. Ibid., p. 83.


22. Again, I take us to be speaking Sg-ishly.

23. Descartes, p. 83.

24. I am grateful to Fred Feldman and Richard Feldman for helping me come to grips with Kenny's discussion.

25. "Descartes's Proof that His Essence is Thinking," Doney, pp. 312-337.

26. Ibid., p. 315.

27. Idem.

28. An attempt to provide a Cartesian analysis of 'x has P essentially' has recently come to my attention. It might be possible to construct an essence-finder principle from such an analysis. Peter J. Loptson (Cartesian Essentialism, Ph.D. Dissertation, Univ. of Pittsburgh, 1972) has attempted to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for a thing's having a property essentially in Descartes's sense. Loptson also refers to Broad's concept of a differentiating attribute as capturing Descartes' notion of an essential property, and he tries to give formal expression to the conditions Broad placed on differentiating attributes. Unfortunately, Loptson's work has come to me too late to be treated here; however, it appears that Loptson has not found in Descartes any arguments defending his views about essence. Further, Loptson's analysis seems defective in that it has the consequence that a thing can have the property of thinking without having it essentially. That is a consequence that I believe Descartes would not accept. I am inclined to think that a thorough reading of Loptson will uncover many other points of dispute with my own interpretation of Descartes.
33. Formal, but not philosophical, problems might be created by our assumption. In particular, we may need to use modal free logic to express it formally, since under some semantic interpretations *Nec Fa* is true only if a exists in all possible worlds. The problem lies solely in giving formal expression to our philosophical intuitions.

34. HR-II, 101.

35. HR-II, 92.

36. A worthy, and very promising, effort has recently been made by Fred Feldman to finally settle the question in Descartes' favor. See his "Epistemic Appraisal and the Cartesian Circle," yet to appear at this writing.