

BRÉHIER AND THE CARTESIAN CIRCLE

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The primary purpose of this paper is to remove the main philosophical obstacle to Bréhier's elegant solution of the problem of the Cartesian Circle. Despite his voluntarism, Descartes can legitimately exclude present clear and distinct perceptions from the wiles of the malicious demon. His project of rational scepticism affords him certain rights and duties. His primary right is to have the minimal resources needed to argue at all. On his account of reasoning, these must include present clear and distinct perceptions. His primary duty is to press reasoned scepticism to its limit. Given his voluntarism, Descartes should, as Bréhier claims he does, doubt whether what is clearly and distinctly perceived will remain true. The paper ends with a cursory look at some of the serious textual problems Bréhier's view faces.

I have one further worry, namely how the author avoids reasoning in a circle when he says that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true only because God exists.

But we can be sure that God exists only because we clearly and distinctly perceive this. Hence, before we can be sure that God exists, we ought to be able to be sure that whatever we perceive clearly and evidently is true.¹

¹ Antoine Arnauld, "Fourth Set of Objections", Descartes (1984), Vol. II, p. 150.

I

There is a natural interpretation of the Third Meditation which ensures that Arnauld is right.² At the beginning of the Meditation, Descartes reviews his progress in the face of the sceptical doubts of the First Meditation. He knows that he exists and is a thinking thing. The only basis for this first knowledge is his clear and distinct perception that he exists and is a thinking thing. So, he proposes as a general principle that whatever can be clearly and distinctly perceived is true. Following the method of doubt, he asks whether what he clearly and distinctly perceives could be false: might the malicious demon introduced in the First Meditation bring it about that what he clearly and distinctly perceives is false in a way he cannot detect? In the First Meditation, he thought this was possible with respect to such clear and distinct perceptions as '2 + 3 = 5' and 'Squares have four sides'. So, he has to show that there is no malicious demon deceiving him about what he clearly and distinctly perceives. Descartes does this by showing that there is an all-perfect being. Because he is all-perfect, God would not deceive nor would he tolerate the machinations of a malicious demon. The sole obstacle to the acceptance of all clear and distinct perception as true is removed.³ If this is what Descartes intends, he must be guilty of Arnauld's charge. The circularity is purely structural; it has nothing special to do with clear and distinct perception or the malicious demon. If Descartes thinks there is just one way to determine that a proposition is true and seeks, for whatever reason, a proof that propositions that fit that bill are true, the proof is bound to be circular. There is no way

² The theologians and philosophers, including Mersenne, who wrote the Second Set of Objections (Descartes (1984), Vol. II, pp. 87-92) also read Descartes this way. Like Arnauld, they charged him with circularity. Another original reader of *Meditations*, Pierre Gassendi, leveled the same charge, not in the Fifth Set of Objections he authored, but in an immediately following work, *Disquisitio Metaphysica sive Dubitationes et Instantiae (Metaphysical Enquiry: Doubts and Counter-Objections)*, Amsterdam, 1644. An English translation can be found in Craig Bush (1972). Descartes's response is in Descartes (1984), Vol. II, p. 274.

³ Descartes, *Meditations*, Descartes (1984), Vol. II, pp. 24-25.

out. Any attempt to absolve Descartes of the charge of circularity must deny one or more of the assumptions on which it is based. Either he thinks he has some other way of ascertaining the truth than clear and distinct perception, or he is not doubting whether all clear and distinct perceptions are true, or he is not seeking a proof that all clear and distinct perceptions are true.

In 1937, Bréhier proposed a radical, and philosophically satisfying, solution to the problem of the Cartesian Circle.⁴ The primary purpose of this paper is to answer the major philosophical objection it faces. According to Bréhier, Descartes never doubts that what is presently clearly and distinctly perceived is true. Rather, his doubt is whether what he now clearly and distinctly perceives will remain true; and its resolution is a proof, based on present clear and distinct perceptions, that there is an all-perfect being. The strange doubt attributed to Descartes is made possible by his voluntarism.

II

Voluntarism is Descartes's doctrine that necessary truths are the free creations of God⁵. God could have ordained that $2 + 3 \neq$

⁴ Émile Bréhier (1937), translated and reprinted in Willis Doney (1967), pp. 192-208. Bréhier's view is elaborated and defended in John Etchemendy (1981), pp. 5-42.

⁵ Descartes first announced this dark and mysterious doctrine in a series of letters to Mersenne in 1630 (Descartes (1984), Vol. III, pp. 23-26) and held it the rest of his life, as is evident from his letter to Mesland in 1644 (Descartes (1984), Vol. III, p. 235) and his letter to Arnauld in 1648 (Descartes (1984), Vol. III, pp. 358-359). It is not explicit in the text of the *Meditations*, but makes a clear appearance in Descartes's Replies to the Second, Fifth, and Sixth Sets of Objections. The doctrine is hard to grasp. Its most straightforward interpretation is that there are no necessary truths, or a bit less straightforward, that necessary truths are only contingently necessary (Curley (1984)). Descartes's philosophy needs a robust notion of necessary and possibility. The complete or partial modal collapses of either of these interpretations could not be tolerated. The most promising interpretation in print is Jonathan Bennett's (1994), pp. 639-667. Bennett ties Descartes's notion of necessity with human conceivability and denies that there are necessary truths for God. On Bennett's interpretation divine assurance is needed to assure that necessary truths are true. Fortunately, for this paper, all that is needed is

5, that squares do not have four sides, that equals added to equals are not equal, that what has been done has never been done, and so on. Descartes's reason for holding the doctrine is theological: he thought it was blasphemous to maintain that there could be truths which didn't depend upon God.

Rather than helping to resolve the problem of the Cartesian Circle, Descartes's voluntarism seems to exacerbate it. In the First Meditation, general doubt about sense perception is achieved by the possibility that God (or a malicious demon) has brought it about that there is no physical world and yet made it seem in every way that there was one. If God (or a malicious demon) in fact did this, none of our perceptual beliefs are knowledge. Since we can't rule out the possibility of such a God (or malicious demon), none of our perceptual beliefs are knowledge, even such a general one as that there is a physical world. In a parallel argument, the deceiving God or malicious demon is invoked to show that we cannot know simple and obvious truths of geometry and arithmetic, such as 'Squares have four sides' and ' $2 + 3 = 5$.' Modern sensibilities balk at this use of the deceiving God or malicious demon. A deceiving God or malicious demon might destroy the physical world, but neither can bring it about that it is false that squares have four sides and that $2 + 3 = 5$. At best, they may cause undetectable errors in calculation or conceptual confusion; and it is not clear that error or confusion is possible or could lead to persistent undetectable mistakes about arithmetical or geometrical propositions as simple as these.

If Descartes's doctrine of voluntarism is true, sense perceptual and intellectual (clear and distinct) perception can be brought into exact parallel. In the case of the material world, the deceiving God or malicious demon manipulates the world so that Descartes's mental contents do not match it. In the case of the simple arithmetical and geometrical beliefs, there is now the same possibility: they can change the world so that $2 + 3 \neq 5$ and squares

that Descartes held, and attached great importance to, the doctrine that God had alternatives to making $2 + 3 = 5$, squares have four sides, and so on.

don't have four sides. So, if sense perception is legitimately subjected to doubt by the possibility of a deceiving God or malicious demon in the First Meditation, there is no way of exempting clear and distinct perception from what, once the doctrine of voluntarism is assumed, is the same doubt. The belief that there is an external world and the belief that $2 + 3 = 5$ run the same risk.

III

Even without the power to create or alter necessary truths, a deceiving God or malicious demon is a lot to conjure with. In the First Meditation, Descartes uses dreams and a deceiving God or malicious demon in arguments of the same form. A certain sceptical hypothesis is possibly true (I'm always dreaming; there is a deceiving God or malicious demon who undetectably destroys the physical world and makes me undetectably err in my mathematical beliefs). If the sceptical hypothesis is true, then a certain range of my beliefs don't count as knowledge (in the case of dreams, beliefs about the external world; in the case of a deceiving God, beliefs about the external world and mathematical beliefs). The sceptical hypothesis can't be ruled out. So the beliefs within its scope can't be items of knowledge.⁶ These arguments provide the "mature and well thought out reasons"⁷ for the sceptical conclusions which Descartes thinks will only be refuted by proving that there is a God who is not a deceiver. Besides the two sceptical hypotheses chosen in the First Meditation, a number of others readily suggest themselves: that I am completely mad and unable to tell that I cannot reason accurately; that I do not understand the relevant concepts involved in my reasoning and cannot tell that I do not; that my memory of my previous conclusions is inaccurate but it always seems to me to be correct no matter what I do; and even that I wrongly think I clearly and dis-

⁶ I have taken Descartes's First Meditation doubts as attempts to show we don't have the knowledge we think we have; others would prefer to take them as showing that our beliefs lack the certainty we think they have. For present purposes, this issue doesn't matter.

⁷ Descartes, *Meditations*, Descartes (1984), Vol. II, p. 15.

tinctly perceive various propositions and can't discover my error. It would not tax the powers of a deceiving God or malicious demon to make any of these skeptical hypotheses true nor would it even require the resources of conventional omnipotence to do so. Compared to destroying the physical world and making Descartes unable to notice, the manipulation of Descartes's mind involved in any of these hypotheses should be child's play. If the form of sceptical argument Descartes uses in the First Meditation is valid, the consideration of any of sceptical hypotheses I've listed would bring the Meditations to a grinding halt.⁸

Yet Descartes does not invoke the possibilities of a deceiving God or malicious demon making him undetectable mad, irretrievable and undetectable conceptually confused, and so on. Why not? Each of them is as much a logical possibility as that of a deceiving God destroying the physical world and making it seem to him in every way as though it still existed. They would surely occur to a malicious demon nor could they have failed to occur to Descartes. Descartes simply ignores them.⁹ Can he *legitimately* ignore them? The use of such sceptical hypotheses is incompatible with Descartes's project of reasoned scepticism. Descartes's aim in the *Meditations* is to press rational scepticism to its limits in the hope that the enterprise will be a step toward establishing something firm and stable in the sciences. In order to do that, he can accept no procedures or premises which are incompatible with his having a minimal capacity to reason accurately. The sceptical doubt that informs Descartes's project, as well as its resolution, depend upon it. If the sceptical possibilities I've introduced were used in arguments like those of the First Meditation, Descartes would be bereft of any capacity to reason at all. Both the sceptical argument itself and any subsequent resolution would be suspect. So Descartes never considers them.

⁸ How could Descartes hope to answer these doubts about his ability to reason by reasoning?

⁹ In the First Meditation, he does flirt with the possibility that he is mad but summarily dismisses it.

Descartes's project of rational scepticism affords him certain rights and duties. His primary right is to be allowed the minimal resources to argue. Spelling out his consequent rights in detail is an intricate and interesting task; but they surely include assuming that he is not irretrievably conceptually confused, that his memory is not undetectably faulty, that not all his inferences are faulty in ways he cannot discover, and so on. As far as the problem of the Cartesian Circle goes, the detail won't matter. His primary duty, as a rational sceptic, is to press sceptical argument as far as it can go without losing his basic right. At a minimum, he is obliged to try any sceptical possibility, that doesn't violate his basic right, as a premise in sceptical arguments like those in the First Meditation.

IV

Clear and distinct perception is deeply involved in Descartes's account of reasoning and proof.¹⁰ It enters into mathematical proof in three ways: first as a guarantee of the truth of the premises, then as a guarantee of the link between the premises and conclusion, and finally as a product of the proof. No further guarantee of either is possible. The conclusion of a proof is itself clearly and distinctly perceived. By rehearsing a proof, even an

¹⁰ The most extensive discussion of Descartes's views on inference and proof is Stephen Gaukroger (1989). The general claims I make for the involvement of clear and distinct perception in Descartes's account of reasoning and proof are uncontroversial and all that are needed for the present paper.

The Cartesian notion of clear and distinct perception still awaits a full, lucid exposition. Not only eternal truths like ' $2 + 3 = 5$ ' are clearly and distinctly perceived, but also quite ephemeral ones like 'I exist' and 'I seem to see a fire before me'. In the *Principles* (Descartes (1984), Vol. I, p. 290), the list expands to 'Material things exist'. Concepts, as well as propositions, are clearly and distinctly perceived; and their clear and distinct perception yields possibilities of existence except in the case of the concept of God which yields necessary existence. One's judgment that something is clearly and distinctly perceived is fallible. I think the way to make sense of clear and distinct perception is to realize that it is the output of a psychological faculty, the understanding, and the input to another, the will. Before raising general epistemic and metaphysical questions on how clear and distinct perception could have any purchase on possibility and truth, one must understand Cartesian psychology in some detail. I attempt to do so in a paper in preparation.

extended one, Descartes thought that it could be compressed into a single moment; the link between premises and conclusion, the truth of the premises, and that of the conclusion could be simultaneously clearly and distinctly perceived. As in mathematical argument and proof, so, too, in philosophical argument. To give up the idea that what is presently clearly and distinctly perceived is true is to give up any possibility of being able to reason at all. Without the clear and distinct perception of the link between premises and conclusion, inference is impossible; without the clear and distinct perception of the truth of the premises, proof is impossible; and, without the clear and distinct perception of a conclusion, proof lacks its proper force.

Descartes never thought that the two main sceptical arguments of the First Meditation, the one based on the possibility of dreaming and the other on the possibility of deception by a malicious demon, were proofs. They couldn't be proofs because their conclusions are false. But they provide powerful reasons for their sceptical conclusions because they mimic proofs. I think Descartes believes that both of these sceptical arguments are valid, clear and distinct perceptions assuring the link between their premises and conclusion. The possibility of the sceptical hypotheses used, as well as their consequences if true, is guaranteed by clear and distinct perception. Their common failing is the premise that says that the sceptical hypotheses can't be ruled out. Of course, to one immersed in the senses, this will seem like a clear and distinct perception since the sceptical hypotheses are compatible with all one's experience. That common premise can only be shown to be false by the clear and distinct perception that God exists and is not a deceiver. So the power of the sceptical arguments depends upon their mimicking real proofs with the link between their premises being clearly and distinctly perceived and the premises either clearly and distinctly perceived or thought to be so.

For Descartes, the ability to reason and the ability to produce powerful sceptical argument require accepting that what one clearly and distinctly perceives is true. It is his right as a rational

sceptic to have the minimal resources necessary to reason at all; and, so, he is exempted from considering the possibility that what he clearly and distinctly perceives is false even if voluntarism makes this a real possibility. The acceptance of present clear and distinct perception is built into his project of rational scepticism. The major philosophical obstacle to Bréhier's resolution of the Circle is removed. The considerations I have provided have wider applications. Any solution to the problem of the Cartesian Circle can legitimately exempt, as Descartes does, present clear and distinct perception from doubt. The reason is Descartes's project of rational scepticism and not the psychological irresistibility of present clear and distinct perception.

V

The duty of a rational sceptic, when it is joined to voluntarism, provides philosophical support for Bréhier's resolution of the Circle. It is the primary duty of a rational sceptic to press sceptical argument to its limits. Descartes's doctrine of voluntarism provides an unthought of possibility: that the malicious demon brings it about that what Descartes clearly and distinctly perceived is no longer true while making it seem to him as though it is. Descartes's duty as a rational sceptic forces this doubt on him since it mirrors his First Meditation doubts and is compatible with his retaining a minimal capacity to reason.

If the object of Descartes's Third Meditation doubt is whether what is presently clearly and distinctly perceived will remain true, the problem of the Cartesian Circle is resolved. Since he, rightly, never doubts whether present clear and distinct perceptions are true, he can remove this doubt by a proof based on them that there is no malicious demon. In the Third Meditation, Descartes offers two proofs that there is a non-deceiving God. With practice, Descartes believed, the Third Meditation proofs that God exists and is not a deceiver can be taken in at a moment, resulting in a present clear and distinct perception of a benevolent omnipotent being. The proofs need only be done once. If one

remembers having proved the existence of an all-perfect being, one is assured that his will for the eternal truths is immutable either because a change of mind would itself be an imperfection or because a change of mind without a corresponding change in our clear and distinct perceptions would be a sign of deceit. This would be a philosophically satisfying resolution of the Circle since it is rooted in Descartes's project of rational scepticism, his views on reasoning, and his account of God's power.

VI

The correctness of Bréhier's solution to the Circle turns on the plausibility of Descartes's Third Meditation doubt being whether what is now clearly and distinctly perceived will remain true. What is philosophically satisfying, unfortunately, needn't be textually satisfying. Bréhier offered next to no textual support for his interpretation; Etchemendy's defense of Bréhier's view offers a considerable amount and I have little to add to it.¹¹ There can be no textual doubt that Descartes held all the doctrines necessary to make the object of his Third Meditation doubt the possibility that what was once clearly and distinctly perceived is no longer true.¹² Nor can be there be any serious textual doubt that Descartes's explicit replies to charges of circularity are, at least, compatible with Bréhier's account.

What is missing is clear, direct textual evidence in the *Meditations* itself that the object of the Third Meditation doubt is as Bréhier claimed.¹³ As far as the *Meditations* itself is concerned, his interpretation is an argument to the best explanation. What else could Descartes be doubting and why else could he be so *blasé* about the charge of circularity? On the other hand, Descartes certainly could have been explicit that his doubt in the Third Medita-

¹¹ Etchemendy (1981).

¹² Even a severe critic of Bréhier's view, Jonathan Bennett, admits this ((1994), p. 666).

¹³ Etchemendy ((1981), pp. 35-36) teases out of the Third Meditation use of temporal qualifiers some indirect evidence for the claim that the present truth of past clear and distinct perceptions is the object of doubt.

tion was about whether past clear and distinct perceptions remained true. The claim that he was not because of the unorthodox nature of his voluntarism is suspect. His voluntarism emerges readily in the Objections and Replies and was obviously no secret to the authors of the Objections. Even after it is in open view, there is no clear and direct indication that the object of Third Meditation doubt is as Bréhier claims. Perhaps, this historical puzzle is tolerable if no better answer can be given to the question of what Descartes's Third Meditation doubt was, one that doesn't simply assume that he failed to notice an obvious circularity twice pointed out to him.

Direct textual considerations, drawn from the *Meditations*, against the proposed interpretation would be far more troubling, and there are some plausible candidates. First, there is Descartes's general, and hyperbolic, exuberance in expressing his scepticism e.g. "I have no answer to these arguments, but am finally compelled to admit that there is not one of my former beliefs about which a doubt may not be properly raised...". So, present clear and distinct perception should be subject to doubt. As we have seen, his scepticism has to be more muted; and Descartes explicitly mutes it in his Replies and elsewhere.¹⁴

Second, and less easily disposed of, is the First Meditation itself. Here Descartes clearly uses the possibility of a deceiving God to call into doubt simple arithmetical and geometrical beliefs, e.g. '2 + 3 = 5' and 'Squares have four sides.'¹⁵ '2 + 3 = 5' and 'Squares have four sides', are paradigms of the sort of simple necessary truths which cannot be thought of without being clearly and distinctly perceived and, so, are immune to doubt when thought of. But here, it seems, self-evident current clear and distinct perceptions are subject to doubt. This is a general problem: whatever view is taken on the Cartesian Circle, present clear and distinct perceptions are supposed to be psychologically immune from

¹⁴ See, for example, "Objections and Replies", Descartes (1984), Vol. II, pp. 100, 146, 271, 285, 299, and *Principles*, Descartes (1984), Vol. I, p. 197.

¹⁵ Descartes, *Meditations*, Descartes (1984), Vol. II, pp. 14-15.

doubt, and these simple mathematical propositions are clear examples of propositions that can't be attended to without being clearly and distinctly perceived. Yet the meditator of the First Meditation doubts them. Fortunately, this problem, which admits of only baroque conceptual solutions, has a simple textual one. Something like this problem was pointed out to Descartes by the insufferable Bourdin in the Seventh Set of Objections. Descartes reply was that, in the First Meditation, "...I was supposing that I was not attending to anything I clearly and distinctly perceived..."¹⁶ I have no idea what his feat of inattention could have been; the important point is that it was necessary.¹⁷

Finally, in the Fifth Meditation, Descartes considers the case of a non-believing geometer who has proved that the sum of the angles of a triangle is 180 degrees.¹⁸ His proof is correct and, as its result, he clearly and distinctly perceived that the theorem was true. Unlike that of the Cartesian meditator, who has achieved knowledge of God, the geometer's belief in the theorem can be called into doubt. When the non-believer merely recalls that he has proved the theorem, but not the proof itself, his belief that the theorem is true is unstable in a way that the meditator's identical belief is not. The non-believer has only a "shifting and changeable opinion" and not "true and certain knowledge".¹⁹ He can be rescued from this plight only by acquiring a knowledge of God. Bréhier's account is tailor-made to explain why. The non-believer's conviction that the sum of the angles of a triangle is 180

¹⁶ Descartes, "Seventh Set of Objections with the Author's Replies", Descartes (1984), Vol. II, p. 309.

¹⁷ A more charitable response would be to have Descartes, as the meditator of the First Meditation, feigning doubt because he not yet freed from the senses.

¹⁸ Descartes, *Meditations*, Descartes (1984), Vol. II, pp. 48-49. Similar passages can be found in the *Principles* (Descartes (1984), Vol. I, p. 197), "Second Set of Replies" (Descartes (1984), Vol. II, pp. 102-105), and elsewhere. Descartes treats the issue similarly in all of them, usually referring the reader back to the Fifth Meditation.

¹⁹ Both expression occur in the location cited above. They may mislead. "True and certain knowledge" requires immunity from all possible doubt. Descartes could hardly have thought that even an atheist geometer would be constantly revising the theorems he thinks he has proved.

degrees is open to doubt because, although he previously proved, and so clearly and distinctly perceived, the theorem to be true, he no longer does so. A malevolent omnipotent being could since have brought it about that the theorem is no longer true. In order to spare himself endless reiterations of the proof in the face of this metaphysical doubt, the non-believer should prove that there is a non-deceiving God. If ever there were a clear opportunity for Descartes to make it explicit that the non-believer's problem is the possibility of a deceiving God who alters truths that are not the current objects of clear and distinct perception, this is it. But Descartes does nothing of the kind. Instead, casting himself as the non-believing geometer, he says:

...I can easily fall into doubt about its truth, if I am without knowledge of God. For I can convince myself that I have a natural disposition to go wrong from time to time in matters which I think I perceive as evidently as can be. This will seem even more likely when I remember that there have been frequent cases where I have regarded things as true and certain, but have later been led by other arguments to judge them to be false.²⁰

This is hardly what Descartes should say if Bréhier was on the right track. Worse still, one natural interpretation of the passage is that what the non-believer clearly and distinctly perceived might not have been true when he perceived it.²¹ This would doom Bréhier's

²⁰ Descartes, *Meditations*, Descartes (1984), Vol. II, p. 48.

²¹ Bennett ((1994), pp. 666-67) interprets the end of the Fifth Meditation and claims that it shows the Bréhier view is a "nonstarter". Bennett writes:

Consider also the terms in which Descartes announces that the truth rule needs help from theology:

My nature is such that so long as I perceive something very clearly and distinctly I cannot but believe it to be true. But my nature is also such that I cannot fix my mental vision continually on the same thing, so as to keep perceiving it clearly; and often the memory of a previously made judgment may come back, when I am no longer attending to the arguments that led me to make it. And so other arguments can now occur to me

and any other solution to the problem of the Circle that depends upon exempting present clear and distinct perception from doubt. In effect, it would raise the problem of the Circle in full force. Of course, there are other interpretations of this passage which, if they do not favor Bréhier's view, at least don't involve Descartes's holding that the theorem might have been false when it was clearly and distinctly perceived. Perhaps, for example, Descartes only meant to raise a limited doubt that the non-believer faces; he doesn't here explicitly invoke the malicious demon. The non-believer rightly trusts present clear and distinct perceptions; they have never been known to let him down. But as a non-believer, he has to consider the possibility that, because of its non-divine origin, his faculty of clear and distinct perception might do

which might easily undermine my opinion, if I did not possess knowledge of God.

This counts decisively against the Bréhier view. If Descartes's concern were that a once true proposition might have become false, his repeated emphasis on "my nature" would be pointless, as would his highlighted contrast between two different intellectual states that I may be in. He goes on to introduce the thought that "there have been frequent cases where I have regarded things as true and certain, but have later been led by other arguments to judge them to be false". This creates the worry which a belief in a veracious God will supposedly vanquish; and it is, clearly and explicitly, the thought that on the past occasion I *was* wrong, that is, that the proposition in question *was* false. The Bréhier view is a nonstarter.

I don't find Bennett's case quite so compelling. Contrary to what he claims, both the emphasis on my nature in the passage cited and on the two different intellectual states I might be in are not pointless on, but required by, the Bréhier view. On the Bréhier view, I will only be able to doubt a previous clear and distinct perception if I can now entertain it without clearly and distinctly perceiving it; and, of course, the Bréhier view requires that present clear and distinct perceptions are indubitable and true. The introduced thought is only offered as a secondary consideration increasing the likelihood of something that Descartes thinks the non-believer can independently be convinced of (see passage quoted in the text): that he can be convinced that he has a natural disposition to go wrong from time to time even in matters he thinks he evidently perceives. The secondary consideration can be met by the non-believer's observing, as Descartes does, that no clear and distinct perception has been exposed as false. Finally, the end of the Fifth Meditation does not explicitly invoke the malicious demon. So, the worry there expressed may be different from, and more limited than, whatever provokes the need for theology to help the truth rule in the Third Meditation.

so from time to time. This limited doubt can, without circularity, be removed by a proof of the divine origin of the faculty.

In this section, I have given a sample of the textual difficulties Bréhier's view faces and a few suggestions on how some of them might be met. They are serious problems for the Bréhier view. My main purpose in the paper, however, is not to deal with them, but to remove a philosophical obstacle to Bréhier's elegant solution to problem of the Cartesian Circle.*

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* This paper was written to celebrate Oswaldo Chateaubriand's philosophical work, especially the deep historical concern he has brought to the philosophy of mathematics and logic. I hope my paper in a different area shows the same concern. The paper itself is much better than it was thanks to Cass Weller.

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