



Skepticism in al-Ghazālī and Descartes: A Reply to Sami M. Najm*

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Abstract

This paper examines Sami M. Najm's claim that Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's (1058-1111) and Descartes' (1596-1650) skeptical arguments are similar in the following respect: (1) the process of doubt that depends on the distrust of sense perception and reason, (2) the motivation to arrive at certainty, (3) the nature of doubt being methodological and philosophical at the same time, and (4) their solution to doubt. I argue that while Najm's first and second claim are to the point, Najm's third and fourth points are not correct. This is because while al-Ghazālī's skepticism was philosophical, Descartes's doubt was methodological. It is true that their solution to doubt depends on intuition, but the character of their intuition is different because for al-Ghazālī it is a divine intuition whereas for Descartes it has a mental character. Although Descartes as a theist might ground the intuition on God, this does not change its mental character.

Keywords: al-Ghazālī, Descartes, Skepticism, Methodological Skepticism, Philosophical Skepticism.

el-Ġazālī ve Descartes'ta Şüphencilik: Sami M. Najm'e Bir Cevap

Öz

Bu makalede Sami M. Najm'in Ebū Ḥāmid el-Ġazālī'nin (1058-1111) ve Descartes'ın şüpheli argümanlarının şu açılardan aynı olduğu iddiası tartışılmıştır: (1) Her iki filozofun şüphe süreçlerinin duyu ve akıl bilgisine olan güvensizlik üzerine temellendirilmeleri, (2) kesinliğe varma konusundaki motivasyonları, (3) şüphelerinin hem metodik hem felsefi bir niteliğe sahip olduğu, (4) şüphencilik çözümleri. Ben burada Najm'in birinci ve ikinci iddiasının haklı olduğunu ancak üçüncü ve dördüncü iddiasının doğru olmadığını savunuyorum. Üçüncü iddiasının doğru olmama sebebi, el-Ġazālī'nin şüphenciliklerinin felsefi, Descartes'ın şüphenciliklerinin ise yöntemsel olmasıdır. Dördüncü iddiasının doğru olmama sebebi ise iki filozofun çözümlerinin sezgi temelli olmasına rağmen sezgiden kasıtlarının farklı olmasıdır. el-Ġazālī'ye göre bu sezgi ilahî bir nitelik taşıırken, Descartes'ta zihinsel bir karakter taşımaktadır. Descartes'ın bir teist olarak nihai manada bu sezgiyi Tanrı'ya dayandırması, onun zihinsel bir karaktere sahip olduğu gerçeğini değiştirmemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: el-Ġazālī, Descartes, Şüphencilik, Yöntem Şüphencilik, Felsefi Şüphencilik.

Introduction

al-Ghazālī in his *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl (Deliverance from Error)* and Descartes in his *Meditations* criticized the reliability of senses and reason by adopting skeptical arguments. In this respect, their skeptical argumentation stimulated many thinkers to compare their ideas on skepticism.¹ For example, in his article “The Place and Function of Doubt in the Philosophies of Descartes and al-Ghazālī”, Sami M. Najm argues that the skeptical arguments of al-Ghazālī and Descartes are similar to each other in the following respects: (1) Both used the process of doubt because of a distrust of the evidence of sense perception as a means to necessary truth (2) Both were motivated to discover a firm foundation for certainty in knowledge. (3) Both saw the nature of doubt as on the one hand artificial or methodological, on the other hand personal or existential experience. (4) Both solved to doubt are essentially the same, since they solved doubt by the help of “intuition.”²

In this paper, I argue that although Najm is right in his first and second claims, his third and fourth claims are not plausible. In so doing, in section 1, I argue that Najm’s first claim is obviously true since al-Ghazālī and Descartes constitute their skeptical arguments similarly, and that his second claim is also true in the sense that al-Ghazālī and Descartes aim to arrive at certainty and indubitability in knowledge. In addition to their pursuit of the truth, al-Ghazālī’s goal was more personal, whereas Descartes’ aim is to find indubitable principles as a ground for metaphysics, physics, and morality. In section 2, I argue against Najm’s third and fourth points. Against Najm, I argue that his third and fourth claims are not plausible since al-Ghazālī’s doubt is philosophical whereas Cartesian doubt is methodological. The

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¹ Osman Bakr, *The History and Philosophy of Islamic Science*; Cemil Akdogan, “Ghazālī, Descartes, and Hume: The Genealogy of Some Philosophical Ideas,” 487-502; Götz, “The Quest for Certainty: Al-Ghazālī and Descartes,”; Tamara Albertini, “Crisis and Certainty of Knowledge in al-Ghazālī (1058-1111) and Descartes,”; Omar Edward Moad, “Comparing Phases of Skepticism in Al-Ghazālī and Descartes: Some First Meditations on Deliverance from Error,”; Sami M. Najm, “The Place and Function of Doubt in the Philosophies of Descartes and al-Ghazālī,”; Syed Rizwan Zamir “Descartes and al-Ghazālī: Doubt, Certitude and Light,”; Mohammad Alwahaib, “Al-Ghazali and Descartes from Doubt to Certainty,”; Saja Parvzian, “Al-Ghazālī and Descartes on Defeating Skepticism.”

² Najm, “The Place and Function of Doubt,” 137-138. Najm points out more analogies between the ideas of al-Ghazālī and Descartes on doubt. I will restrict myself only with the ideas listed above since they are sufficient to outline the main character of al-Ghazālī’s and Descartes’s skepticism and their solutions.

difference in the nature of doubt is one of the reasons that caused al-Ghazālī and Descartes to solve the problem of doubt in an essentially different manner. Moreover, although they both used the term “intuition”, for al-Ghazālī it signifies divine intuition whereas for Descartes it has a “mental” character. Despite the similarities in motivation and skeptical argumentation, the forms of doubt (philosophical vs. methodological) and their respective solutions to doubt (divine intuition vs. mental intuition) set their philosophies apart in fundamental ways.

1. al-Ghazali and Descartes: Skepticism

al-Ghazālī has been considered as one of the greatest scholars in the Islamic tradition. He wrote on philosophy, theology, jurisprudence, logic, and Sufism. *Deliverance* is an autobiography of al-Ghazālī in which he describes his education and his pursuit of certain knowledge. His intention in *Deliverance* is to explain how his “thirst for grasping the real meaning of things” induced him to eliminate conformism, inherited beliefs, uncritical and unexamined beliefs of his youth, and to seek certain knowledge.³

al-Ghazālī’s desire for certain knowledge foreshadows closely the spirit later expressed by Descartes. In his *Discourse*, Descartes who has been regarded as the founder of the modern philosophy narrates that he was eager to gain clear and certain knowledge.⁴ Descartes, similar to al-Ghazālī, expected to cast off false beliefs and to examine anew which beliefs were true.⁵ The search for truth caused them to examine their beliefs, and to arrive at a skeptical argument.

However, in addition to his pursuit of certain knowledge, Descartes has a grander project in mind in his *Meditations*. He dedicated his *Meditations* to the Fathers of the Sorbonne. In his *Dedicatory Letter to the Sorbonne*, he explains that he wants to show the existence of God, and the existence of mind by natural reason and demonstrative proofs.⁶ So, unlike al-Ghazālī, he has a project beyond resolving personal doubt at the outset of his investigation. al-Ghazālī does not have such a project; rather he only seeks the resolution of doubt through the attainment of certainty.

Last but not least, Descartes wanted to establish the foundation of the physical sciences by appealing to metaphysics. In showing the existence of

³ al-Ghazālī, “Deliverance from Error,” 18-20.

⁴ René Descartes, “Discourse and Essays,” 113.

⁵ Descartes, “Discourse and Essays,” 117.

⁶ Descartes, “Meditations on First Philosophy,” 3.

mind and God by demonstrative proofs, he was hoping to show the existence and reality of the physical realm as he describes:

Thus the whole philosophy is like a tree. The roots are metaphysics the trunk is physics, and the branches emerging from the trunk are all the other sciences which may be reduced to three principles ones, namely medicine, mechanics and morals.⁷

Descartes' project was to offer a method for the sciences while demonstrating the existence of mind and God. This contrasts with al-Ghazālī's narrower and more personal aim—to arrive at a *sense* of certainty regarding his beliefs about the self and the world.

To reach their goal, namely, to distinguish true beliefs from false ones, and thereby to obtain certain knowledge, al-Ghazālī and Descartes start out on a similar path—the first stage of their skepticism. They both establish a principle, which defines certain knowledge, and then they evaluate their knowledge against this principle. al-Ghazālī defines certain knowledge as follows:

Then it became clear to me that sure and certain knowledge is that in which the thing known is made so manifest that no doubt clings to it, nor is it accompanied by the possibility of error and deception, nor can the mind even suppose such a possibility.⁸

So, according to al-Ghazālī, certain knowledge does not allow any doubts, errors or deception, or even the very possibility of them. Likewise, Descartes intends not to accept any beliefs as true unless they are impervious to doubt:

The first was never to accept anything as true if I did not have evident knowledge of its truth: that is, carefully to avoid precipitate conclusions and preconceptions, and to include nothing more in my judgments than what is presented itself to my mind so clearly and distinctly that I had no occasion to doubt.⁹

Descartes' principle is to accept only evident knowledge, which is conceived of as so clear and distinct that it does not cause any doubt. Both al-Ghazālī's and Descartes' goal of skeptical argument is to seek certain knowledge. To obtain certain knowledge, and to determine the truthiness of the beliefs they held, both of them evaluated the reliability of the two sources of knowledge, i.e., sense data and rational data against their principles.

al-Ghazālī starts to examine sense data in order to determine their reliability and that examination causes him to doubt them. He states:

⁷ Descartes, "Principles of Philosophy," 186.

⁸ al-Ghazālī, "Deliverance from Error," 20.

⁹ Descartes, "Discourse and Essays," 120.

Whence comes your reliance on sense-data? The strongest of the senses is the sense of sight. Now this looks at a shadow and sees it standing still and motionless and judges that motion must be denied. Then, due to experience and observation, an hour later it knows that the shadow is moving, and that it did not move in a sudden spurt, but so gradually and imperceptibly that it was never completely at rest. Sight also looks at a star and sees it as something small, the size of a dinar: then geometrical proofs demonstrate that it surpasses the earth in size. In the case of this and of similar instances of sense-data the sense-judge makes its judgments, but the reason-judge refutes it and repeatedly gives it the lie in an incontrovertible fashion.¹⁰

al-Ghazālī brings the reliability of sense data into question since reason as judge could refute its reliability.

Descartes also states that sense data are not reliable since they sometimes deceive us. So, we cannot completely rely on sense data in order to obtain true beliefs:

Whatever I have up till now accepted as most true I have acquired either from senses or through the senses. But from time to time I have found that the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once.¹¹

Further, Descartes claims that sense data can be easily refuted when we think about our dreams. In our dreams we see ourselves in some state of affairs, and we believe that we are exactly in those state of affairs while we are in fact sleeping. When we wake up, we understand that we were sleeping and those state of affairs were only dreams. Our beliefs, though derived from sense data that seem indubitable, could be doubted, and therefore, cannot be reliable¹². al-Ghazālī's and Descartes' skeptical arguments about sense data similarly focus on their being possibly deceptive. After examining sense data, they move on to question the reliability of rational data, such as "ten is more than three," "one and the same thing cannot be simultaneously affirmed and denied," "one and the same thing cannot be incipient and eternal, existent and nonexistent, necessary and impossible."¹³

al-Ghazālī at first claims that rational data seem reliable since their truth depends on necessity. However, since we can falsify sense data by appealing to rational data, there could also be a third perception faculty that could falsify rational data. In this case, our third perception faculty or supra-

¹⁰ al-Ghazālī, "Deliverance from Error," 21.

¹¹ Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy," 12.

¹² Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy," 13.

¹³ al-Ghazālī, "Deliverance from Error," 22.

rational faculty might show the deceivability of rational data.¹⁴ For al-Ghazālī, while the mere possibility of such supra-rational faculty is enough to show the deceivability of rational data, its actual existence is not necessary. He appeals to his own dreaming argument to show the possibility of the existence of the supra-rational faculty. So far, while Descartes used dream argument to refute beliefs based on the sensory imagination, al-Ghazālī's version is directed to the rational data. al-Ghazālī claims that when we are dreaming, we feel that our imaginings and beliefs are real. However, when we wake up, we find out that our imaginings and beliefs are "groundless and unsubstantial." There are two states concerning our dreams: dreaming state and waking state. We discover that the dream state is groundless and unsubstantial in comparison to the waking state. In a similar way, we can also experience another state, which will show that the state we are in is unsubstantial and groundless. al-Ghazālī concludes "if you found yourself in such a state, you would be sure that all your rational beliefs were unsubstantial fancies"¹⁵.

Descartes also moves to examine the reliability of rational data after showing that sense data may be deceptive. He already admits that if there is a God, then He will not allow him to be deceived by rational data. However, for the sake of his argument, he supposes that God could be a fiction. If there is no God, there could be a deceiver, for instance an evil demon, which could deceive him consistently: "I will suppose therefore that no God, who is supremely good and the source of truth, but rather some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me."¹⁶

If there is such an evil demon, which always deceives him, he could also deceive him about rational data. Thus, Descartes proposes the evil demon argument to ground his doubt on rational data. His evil demon argument functions exactly the same way as al-Ghazālī's dream argument.

I think this analysis allows me to agree with two points of Najm's interpretation of al-Ghazālī and Descartes. First, they both used the process of doubt because of a distrust of the evidence of sense perception as a means to necessary truth. Second, both were motivated to discover a firm foundation for certainty in knowledge. In what follows, I attempt to show

¹⁴ al-Ghazālī, "Deliverance from Error," 22.

¹⁵ al-Ghazālī, "Deliverance from Error," 22.

¹⁶ Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy," 14.

that Najm's third and fourth points do not correctly characterize the nature of doubt and the solution of al-Ghazālī and Descartes.

2. The Nature of Doubt and Their Solution

Najm's third point is that claims that the nature of doubt in al-Ghazālī and Descartes is similar as he states:

Moreover, in Descartes as in al-Ghazālī, the process seems to be ambivalent in character. It is once artificial or methodological, an instrument of investigation, as well as intimate, personal, existential experience.¹⁷

His fourth claim is that al-Ghazālī's and Descartes' solution to doubt is essentially the same because both of the solutions are intuitive. This is how he interprets al-Ghazālī's solution to doubt:

In al-Ghazālī we found that the only solid and sound foundation of truth is knowledge of the existence of God arrived by means of a mystical vision or intuition after a carefully and critical scrutiny of what we ordinarily call "knowledge."¹⁸

Najm's ideas concerning Descartes' intuition are as follows:

Now, it is clear that we do not apprehend the existence of the self by sense perception. For this would be subject to doubt. It is also clear that we cannot know the self by logical deduction or inference. For this, too, would be subject to doubt. In short, knowledge of the self is neither a matter of empirical generalization, nor a matter of logical deduction. The assertion, *cogito ergo sum*, refers to a unique form of cognition.

What, then, is the manner in which the existence of the self is recognized as indubitable? The answer is that the awareness of the existence of the self is an immediate awareness, a direct experience or intuition. Strictly speaking, the existence of the self is not proven, in any ordinary sense of proof; it is the fundamental illumination on which all further knowledge by deduction or empirical inference depends.¹⁹

He concludes that since the intuition helped al-Ghazālī and Descartes to eliminate their skeptical arguments, their solutions are essentially the same.

In contrast to Najm, I think that the nature of their doubt is entirely different, and this difference is one of the reasons that caused al-Ghazālī and Descartes to solve the problem of doubt in an essentially different manner. While intuition is the solution of doubt for al-Ghazālī and Descartes, I think that their solutions are still importantly different from each other because of

¹⁷ Najm, "The Place and Function of Doubt," 137.

¹⁸ Najm, "The Place and Function of Doubt," 138.

¹⁹ Najm, "The Place and Function of Doubt," 139.

(I) the nature of their doubt and (II) of the different use of “intuition.” For al-Ghazālī “intuition” signifies a divine intuition whereas for Descartes it is more like a mental intuition. To show (I) and (II), I separately examine the nature of their doubt and their solutions.

I should commence with a definition of philosophical and methodological doubt. Philosophical doubt refers to a systematic doubt regarding the propositions which we typically think we know such as the existence of the external world, the presence of other minds, the truth of some or even all propositions.²⁰ The scope of philosophical skepticism has a large-scale as one might be skeptical about different areas of reality such as metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. Skepticism comes in a variety of degrees also, since one might be skeptical about all or only some propositions in a certain area. I understand by a *real* skeptic or by “skeptical in fact” who is convinced by his philosophical skepticism or skeptical arguments. On the other hand, methodological skepticism is more about questioning the claims of truth to distinguish true beliefs from false ones. Methodological skepticism is thus a practical tool to examine one’s beliefs and aims to arrive at certainty regarding them rather than doubting them.²¹

al-Ghazālī’s description of his life in terms of his existential crises and how he defeated them in *Deliverance* clearly shows that al-Ghazālī was genuinely experiencing doubt when he started to question the reliability of sense data and rational data. He had an existential crisis, and he *was a skeptic in fact* during that time period as he already states²² and he was looking to escape his doubts. In this respect, al-Ghazālī’s doubts were real and he was convinced by skeptical arguments during his crisis. Clearly, al-Ghazālī did not adopt methodological skepticism as a tool to scrutinize his beliefs. He also likened his process of doubt to a malady from which he seeks to recover. Thus, skepticism was only a malady for al-Ghazālī that required a cure. al-Ghazālī believed that he could not overcome his skepticism by any deductive or inductive proof, as he claims:

When these thoughts occurred to me they penetrated my soul, and so I tried to deal with that objection. However, my effort was unsuccessful, since the objection could be refuted only by proof. But the only way to put together a proof was to combine primary cognitions. So if, as in my case, these were inadmissible, it was impossible to construct the proof.

²⁰ Juan Comesaña and Peter Klein, “Skepticism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

²¹ Katja Vogt, “Ancient Skepticism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

²² al-Ghazālī, “Deliverance from Error,” 23.

This malady was mysterious and it lasted for nearly two months. During that time I was a skeptic in fact, but not in utterance and doctrine. At length God Most High cured me of that sickness. My soul regained its health and equilibrium and once again I accepted the self-evident data of reason and relied on them with safety and certainty. But that was not achieved by constructing a proof or putting together an argument. On the contrary, it was the effect of a light which God Most High cast into my breast and that light is the key to most knowledge.²³

al-Ghazālī was healed from his doubts not by the help of any rational arguments. His rational arguments carried him to doubt sense data and rational data, but he could not go further with those arguments. The cure for his sickness was the help of God, who cast a light into al-Ghazālī's breast. This light so illuminated al-Ghazālī's perplexed mind that he finally started to trust sense data and rational data. Therefore, he overcame his skeptical arguments not by rational arguments but by divine light or intuition,²⁴ which is beyond any rational arguments.

What is the relationship between this intuition and the senses or reason? Intuition in al-Ghazālī might be classified as a faculty that helps to obtain knowledge just like the faculty of perception and the faculty of reasoning. It is the key to wisdom, secret knowledge and a means to perceive the unseen. It is separated from the other types of faculties in terms of how it produces knowledge. God puts intuitive knowledge to the hearts directly. The way to activate the faculty of intuition is to turn the mind to God and purify acts and thoughts, as al-Ghazālī states in his *Ihyā' Ulūm al-Dīn*:

The seventh sign of the learned man of the next world is that his main object of anxiety is to learn secret knowledge, observation of the heart, knowledge of the paths of the hereafter, to travel thereon and to have abiding faith in finding self-mortification leads to Mushahadah or contemplation and lets flow the fountain of wisdom through the intricate details of the science of heart. Reading books and learning sciences are not sufficient for it. But this wisdom appears as a result of hard labour. It opens if one sits in loneliness with God with a mind turned with humility of spirit towards God and through self-mortification, observation and watching. This is the key of Ilham or inspiration and the fountain head of Kashf or secret knowledge. Many students who have been learning for a long time could not move more than what they heard. There are many students who cut short their education and remain busy in actions and observations of the heart. God

²³ al-Ghazālī, "Deliverance from Error," 23.

²⁴ Divine light refers to divine intuition. See, al-Ghazālī, *Ihya' Ulum-id-Din*, 79.

opens for them; the niceties of wisdom for which the wisdom of the wise becomes perplexed.²⁵

This text shows how knowledge is produced through the faculty of intuition. God opens the hearts of people and bestows them inspiration (*ilhām*) or secret knowledge (*kashf*) upon their hard work. *Ilhām* or *kashf* thus is a type of knowledge that occurs as a result of divine intuition. *Ilhām* or *kashf* is not obtained through senses or reasoning but it is purely God's illumination to the heart.²⁶ Thus, al-Ghazālī's resolution to doubt is divine intuition, which he believes comes only from God.

Having said that al-Ghazālī's divine intuition provides a special type of knowledge to defeat his skepticism, one could ask whether al-Ghazālī implies that *no* rational argument can defeat the skeptical arguments that he presented against the reliability of rational data. He says,

When these thoughts occurred to me they penetrated my soul, and so I tried to deal with that objection. However, my effort was unsuccessful, since the objection could be refuted only by proof. But the only way to put together a proof was to combine primary cognitions. So if, as in my case, these were inadmissible, it was impossible to construct the proof.²⁷

al-Ghazālī describes himself as helpless to overcome the skeptical challenges against rational data because he already defeated the first principles of reason which he could use to construct a proof. Although it might be nearly impossible for al-Ghazālī to construct a proof as he was in the midst of an existential crisis, al-Ghazālī's overall position may not imply that *no one* can achieve this goal, or *no* rational arguments can be found to accomplish it. The question of whether or not al-Ghazālī forbids the employment of reason against skepticism needs to be evaluated in terms of his overall epistemological commitments rather than in terms of his deliverance from personal existential crisis. Thus, while it could be assessed that al-Ghazālī's intuition provides knowledge that does not depend on reason, it is not clear that he sees it impossible to the use of reason to overcome skeptical challenges against the rational faculty at all.

As mentioned earlier, Descartes' goal was to arrive at certainty. Remember his tree metaphor above mentioned: The roots of the tree of philosophy are metaphysics, the trunk is physics, and the branches are medicine, mechanics, and morals. To do philosophy, one should first

²⁵ al-Ghazālī, *Ihya Ulum-id-Din*, 78

²⁶ In al-Ghazālī's thought, heart amounts to the invisible self or soul that also includes the faculty of reason. al-Ghazālī, *Kimyā-ı-Sa'adat*, 4.

²⁷ al-Ghazālī, "Deliverance from Error," 23.

establish a solid foundation. The new sciences such as physics, medicine and mechanics require solid first principles. His method to establish bedrock principles in philosophy and science consists of eliminating dubitable beliefs and discovering indubitable ones. He explains his method as follows:

Anything which admits of the slightest doubt I will set aside just as if I had found it to be wholly false; and I will proceed in this way until I recognize something certain, or, if nothing else, until I at least recognize for certain that there is no certainty.²⁸

Descartes used doubt as an instrument to demolish his opinions and to arrive at certainty. Doubt was the first step in his project, unlike skeptics, as he explicitly states:

In doing this I was not copying the sceptics, who doubt only for the sake of doubting and pretend to be always undecided; on the contrary, my whole aim was to reach certainty, -to cast aside the loose earth and sand so as to come upon rock or clay.²⁹

Obviously, Descartes was neither a skeptic nor doubted sense data or rational data. Thus, in contrast to Najm, I think that Descartes' skepticism was only a methodological skepticism, whereas al-Ghazālī's skepticism, which persisted during his existential crisis, was philosophical. al-Ghazālī was a genuine skeptic who was convinced by skeptical arguments. So, Najm's third claim about the nature of al-Ghazālī's and Descartes' doubt is not to the point.

After eliminating all his beliefs, Descartes sought what remains true. Cartesian doubt carried Descartes to the indubitable, Archimedean starting point of knowledge—the *cogito*. Descartes' first principle, which he founded by means of his doubt, is the fact that he exists. He claims that even if there is a deceiver who deceives him, it cannot take away the fact that so long as he is deceived, he is thinking, that is, that so long as he is thinking he must exist.

If I convinced myself of something then I certainly exist. But there is a deceiver of supreme power and cunning who is deliberately and constantly deceiving me. In that case, I too undoubtedly exist, if he is deceiving me; and let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something.³⁰

²⁸ Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy," 17.

²⁹ Descartes, "Discourse and Essays," 125.

³⁰ Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy," 17.

So, Descartes' famous *cogito* is his means to overcome his skeptical arguments. How did Descartes arrive at *cogito* since he persuaded himself by the deceivability of the senses and reason?

In his book *Rules For the Direction of Mind*, Descartes presents the components of the mind hierarchically. These are senses, deduction, and intuition, as he states:

By 'intuition' I do not mean the fluctuating testimony of the senses or the deceptive judgment of the imagination as it botches things together, but the conception of a clear and attentive mind, which is so easy and distinct that there can be no room for doubt about what we are understanding. Alternatively, and this comes to the same thing, intuition is indubitable conception of a clear and attentive mind which proceeds solely from the light of reason. Because it is simpler, it is more certain than deduction, though deduction, as we noted above, is not something a man can perform wrongly. Thus, everyone can mentally intuit that he exists, that he is thinking, that a triangle is bounded by just three lines, and a sphere by a single surface, and the like.³¹

Intuition, as Descartes states, belongs to the clear and attentive mind, not to the senses or deductive reasoning. Intuition, like senses and deductive reasoning, is a mental faculty but provides knowledge that is certain and indubitable. For instance, our knowledge that a triangle has three angles does not have any risk of deception since a triangle is an intuitive conception. We grasp the necessary connection between triangle and three angles intuitively. Descartes, by his skeptical argumentation, already eliminated the reliability of the senses and deductive reasoning. His solution to doubt, i.e., thinking thing, depend on neither senses nor deductive reasoning. Therefore, "thinking thing" is grasped by means of intuition. In other words, it follows from grasping the necessary connection between thinking thing and its existence through the clear and attentive mind.

So far, I argued against Najm's claim that al-Ghazālī's and Descartes' solutions to doubt are essentially the same. Descartes' solution to doubt lies in intuition. Unlike al-Ghazālī, "intuition" in Descartes does not have a divine but a mental character that arises from the light of reason. For al-Ghazālī, one could reach divine intuition by purifying his heart and actions whereas for Descartes mental intuition depends on purified mind from prejudices. In these respects, their solutions to doubt are importantly different.

³¹ Descartes, "Rules for the Direction of Mind," 14.

Conclusion

In this paper, I examined Najm's claims that al-Ghazālī and Descartes have similar skeptical arguments with respect to 1. the process of doubt, 2. their motivations, 3. the nature of doubt, 4. their solutions to doubt. I argued that the process of doubt and their motivations have common ground. In spite of the similarities in motivation and skeptical argumentation, the nature of doubt (philosophical vs. methodological) and their solutions to doubt (divine intuition vs. mental intuition) separated their philosophies in important ways.

Though al-Ghazālī and Descartes aimed to arrive at certainty, al-Ghazālī had a philosophical doubt whereas Descartes used such doubt as a method. The important difference between al-Ghazālī's and Descartes' skepticism, therefore, lies in the nature of their doubt. al-Ghazālī, in a short period of his life, was a genuine skeptic and he eliminated his skepticism by divine intuition. On the other hand, Descartes' pragmatic use of doubt and his method separate him from skeptics. In this respect, Descartes' methodological skepticism reflects the main features of his philosophy. He constituted the general principles of his philosophy through his skeptical argument and method. His solution is also a natural solution of his presumptions and skeptical argument. However, al-Ghazālī's skepticism does not give many clues about his entire philosophical ideas since it is a partial section in his life. His existential crises carried him to solve the doubt problem by God's help, not by deductive or inductive argumentation.

To compare al-Ghazālī's and Descartes' epistemological ideas with regard to before and after their skepticism would provide a more adequate comparison of their skepticism. However, such an examination is beyond the scope of my paper as I am more focused on Najm's interpretation of these philosophers.

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