THE IMAGINARY AND DESCARTES' PARADOXICAL RATIONALITY

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ABSTRACT

The imaginary plays a distinctive role in Descartes' writings. While its place is often articulated in negative terms (as that which is illusory or deceptive), it nonetheless serves as an important ground for the Cartesian project to unfold. Descartes' search for clear and distinct ideas takes place through reason's interplay with the imaginary. While its reliability as a source of knowledge is ultimately dismissed, the imaginary is that which is never truly mastered or overcome. It is a source of dread and anxiety; which reason seeks to mitigate. This essay explores such interplay between the real and the imaginary, between reason and "unreason" in Descartes' Meditations *as well as his* Olympica, *which contains some precursor themes and tropes to* The Meditations*. While the Cartesian project seeks to separate the real from the imaginary and reason from unreason, I argue that the manner in which his discourse unfolds reveals their inextricable tie.*

Keywords: *The imaginary, Descartes, rationality, Olympica, the body*

HAYALİ OLAN VE DESCARTES'IN PARADOKSAL RASYONELLİĞİ

ÖZ

Hayali olanın Descartes'ın yazınındaki rolü oldukça kendine özgüdür. "Asılsız," "yanıltıcı" gibi olumsuz terimler üzerinden düşünülüyor olsa da, hayali olan, Kartezyen projenin serimlenmesinde önemli bir zemin görevi üstlenir. Descartes'ın açık-seçiklik ve kesinlik arayışı aklın hayali olanla karşılıklı etkileşimi üzerinden kurulur. Epistemolojik güvenilirliği bulunmamakla beraber, hayali olan asla tamamıyla hükmedilemez ve üstesinden nihai olarak gelinemez olandır; akıl ile yatıştırılmaya çalışılan bir korku ve endişe kaynağıdır. Bu makale, Descartes'ın Meditasyonlar*'ında ve* Olympica*'sında gerçek olan ile hayali olan ve akıl ile akıldışı arasındaki paslaşmaları incelemektedir. Kartezyen proje bu iki şeyi birbirinden ayırmayı hedeflese de, bu metinlerde ortaya koyulan diskurun kurgusu itibariyle aralarında karmaşık ve ayrıştırılamaz bir bağın bulunduğunu ileri sürüyorum.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Hayali olan, Descartes, akılcılık, Olympica, beden*

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* ODTÜ Felsefe Bölümü öğretim üyesi.

FLSF (Felsefe ve Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi), http://flsfdergisi.com/
2018 Bahar/Spring, sayı/issue: 25, s./pp.: 37-50
ISSN 2618-5784

Makalenin geliş tarihi: 28.02.2018
Makalenin kabul tarihi: 17.04.2018

"I am like a prisoner who is enjoying an imaginary freedom while asleep; as he begins to suspect that he is asleep, he dreads being woken up, and goes along with the pleasant illusion as long as he can."[1]

The imaginary plays a very peculiar role in Descartes' writings. It is at once deceiving, illusory, and thus epistemically irrelevant, as well as elusive, mysterious, and uncanny. It introduces ambivalence and fear, yet the Cartesian project rests on it insofar as it involves a need of annexing the imaginary in order to lay the ground for certainty. Hence, in a way, one aim of the Cartesian project is to mitigate the dreadfulness of the imaginary and to resolve its ambiguity.

According to David McCallam's reading of Descartes' *Meditations*, the famous examples Descartes uses inasmuch as they make a gesture to the imaginary denote primarily an encounter with *the Uncanny*, that is, the return of what had once been familiar – yet repressed – in an alien form. The unsettling effect of the uncanny experience corresponds to the anxiety-inducing ambiguity of sensual and imaginary experience, an ambiguity that must be overcome for the sake of perfect clarity. In its overcoming, the uncanny dies into the mundane, the contours of the real are secured, and reason prevails. Yet, as Dennis Sepper puts it in his analysis of the role of imagination in Cartesian thought, "there is no thinking without phantasms."[2] Descartes' quest for certainty is much haunted by those phantasms that render thinking possible.

The purpose at hand for this essay, then, is twofold: First, McCallam's interpretation of the uncanny in *The Meditations* shall be extended to Descartes' dreams – and his own interpretation of them – in *Olympica*. Secondly, by paying attention to certain stylistic concerns as well as the narrative of rational mastery itself, I will argue that the imaginary is not disavowed altogether in Descartes' philosophy, but rather lies at the very heart of Cartesian thought.

The Real, the Imaginary, and the Uncanny

"[H]ow could it be denied that these hands or this whole body are mine?" Descartes asks,[3] pointing to the absurdity in doubting one's own corporeal presence, yet performing the very doubt at once in formulating the question. This is a question with a "strange grammar," Judith Butler notes, a

1 Réne Descartes, "Meditations," in Philosophical Writings of Descartes Volume 2 ed. Cottingham et al. UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 15.
2 Dennis Sepper, *Descartes's Imagination: Proportion, Images, and the Activity of Thinking*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, 7.
3 Descartes, *The Meditations*, 13.

grammar "that *affirms the separability* of what it seeks to establish as necessarily joined,"[4] a grammar that makes up "a set of questions that perform what they claim cannot be performed."[5] The question is meaningful in what it performs only insofar as "these hands or this whole body" are indeed separable from me, at least on the level of grammar. Even if the answer "it could not be denied" followed the question, posing the question as such already opens up the possibility of separability.

As Descartes follows this thought, the undeniable body ends up being denied certainty, as "[h]ow often, asleep at night, am I convinced of just such familiar events – that I am here in my dressing-gown, sitting by the fire – when in fact I am lying undressed in bed!"[6] After all, "there are never any sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep,"[7] for the imaginary has insidious ways of creeping into the reality. The undeniable body is denied certainty precisely because of its indivisible tie to the imaginary, a tie that is explicated later on in *The Meditations*, but present from the outset nonetheless.

In fact, the link between the imperfect senses, the finite imagination, and the doubtful bodies are explored early on in *The Meditations*, not through conceptual explication, but by way of performing the link through the trope of the wax:

> Let us consider the things which people commonly think they understand most distinctly of all; that is, the bodies which we touch and see…Let us take, for example, this piece of wax…I put the wax by the fire, and look: the residual taste is eliminated, the smell goes away, the colour changes, the shape is lost, the size increases; it becomes liquid and hot; you can hardly touch it, and if you strike it, it no longer makes a sound. But does the same wax remain?[8]

"Is it the same wax?," Descartes inquires, "first to discredit the reliability of the senses, then that of the imagination, before concluding that the reasoning mind alone comprehends the essence of the wax,"[9] McCallam writes. The *cogito* is reaffirmed in demonstrating the truth about the wax that

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[4] Judith Butler, "'How Can I Deny That These Hands and This Body Are Mine?'," *Qui Parle* 1997:11-1, 8. Emphasis in the original.
[5] Descartes, *The Meditations*, 9.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Descartes, *The Meditations*, 20.
[9] David McCallam, "Encountering and Countering the 'Uncanny' in Descartes's Meditations," *French Studies* 2003: LVII-2, 139.

only the mind is able to grasp, despite the illusions that are elicited by the senses and imagination.

Yet, as McCallam suggests, this is not merely "an exercise in comprehension, but in 'apprehension'."[10] Apprehension, here, marks the presentiments, "unease and dread," as the melting wax "disturbs or unsettles the Cartesian philosopher."[11] This is a strange kind of transformation where the object is "at once the same and other,"[12] and at once familiar and unfamiliar. The melting of the wax, in this sense, realizes "the very ambivalence of the Freudian term 'heimlich', and produces as a consequence 'unheimlich' or uncanny presentiments in the Cartesian observer."[13] In a word, the wax, which is paradoxically familiar yet foreign in its melting, is ultimately a strange object for which neither the senses nor the imagination could fully account. McCallam suggests that the uncanny experience of observing the melting wax as an object that exceeds the senses and imagination is not only disturbing and unsettling, but is also tied to unease and dread.

As indicators of these presentiments, McCallam offers two points. The first is Descartes' reiteration of the question "Is it the same wax?" in different forms in the rest of the Second Meditation, which, for McCallam, points to a "metaphysical urgency."[14] That is to say, Descartes' insistent doubting denoted by the repetition of the same question over and over again carries with it feelings of unease and dread in the presence of the uncanny wax. The constant questioning, then, performs these presentiments in the text.

Yet, we must not lose sight of the fact that Descartes' tone of writing here does not explicitly convey any sort of unease or dread; on the contrary, Descartes' voice is marked by outstanding serenity and a remarkable absence of anguish – even in the face of the most unsettling, uncanny instances that he follows. Markus notes that ultimately there are two different Descartes in *The Meditations*, one meditating and one directing the meditation, and "the meditating 'I' of *The Meditations* is not really Descartes, but the representative of the ideal reader."[15] As "the commentator-director" of these meditations, Descartes' voice "is so self-assured, his arranging hand is so unerring in guiding a seamless flow of thought that we cannot but accept: he knows all the answers, for him there are no ambiguities."[16] If we are lost, if we fail to

[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid, 140.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] George Markus, "Do Ideas Have Bodies? Philosophical 'Content' and Literary 'Form' in Descartes," *Literature and Aesthetics* 2004: 14-1, 44.
[16] Ibid.

solve the problems as they present themselves, then we have failed to follow Descartes' guidance, we are "unable to 'meditate seriously' together with him."[17] There is a certain tension, then, between Descartes who knows all the answers, and the meditating subject who undergoes confusion, mystery, dread, and unease, all symptomatic of the encounter with the Uncanny. McCallam's analysis, in this sense, is not applicable to the "real" Descartes who conceals himself, who is withdrawn from the text, who transcends the strange peculiarities of the text without which its conclusions cannot be drawn. This analysis, rather, pertains to the meditating subject, in distance from "the commentator-director" of these meditations.

The second point that McCallam offers is only more compelling: as Descartes restates the cogito by demonstrating that "however deceptive external objects may prove to the senses or the imagination, they necessarily reaffirm the existence of the subject, in so far as they are objects of that subject's thinking,"[18] McCallam claims that the cogito acts as "a force summoned to keep the Uncanny in abeyance."[19] In this sense, "[the cogito] is not so much argued as *invoked*; it is not reasoned, but *pronounced*,"[20] thus its significance does not lie only within "reason or existence, but also with[in] language or utterance."[21] Insofar as the cogito functions to dispel the ambivalence elicited by the Uncanny, it is, as it were, a spell, an invocation: "As long as the *cogito* is uttered the Cartesian subject not only thinks and therefore exists, but is also safe from those irrational forces which besiege its subjectivity and threaten its identity, in the shape of malign spirits and mad visions."[22] Thus, the cogito is at least partially performative, it is uttered and invoked to "counteract the disturbing melting of the wax."[23]

Yet, we must, again, not lose sight of the fact that Descartes as the "commentator-director" deliberately picks these examples to follow and to draw conclusions from. This certainly is not an improvisational piece of writing, but a carefully devised discourse that follows a certain order. The meditations, then, are directed through these examples, which prove indispensable in the end. Perhaps, then, the Uncanny or the imaginary is not completely warded off, but instead occupies a special place in the flow of the text.[24]

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[17] Ibid.
[18] McCallam, "Encountering and Countering the 'Uncanny' in Descartes's Meditations," 142-3.
[19] Ibid, 144.
[20] Ibid. Emphasis added.
[21] Ibid, 145.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid, 146.
[24] We will come back to this point at the end of the paper.

Descartes' Uncanny Dreams: *Olympica*

These presentiments that McCallam attributes to the Second Meditation, and specifically, the melting wax example, are also very much present in the narrative of *Olympica*, the name Descartes gave to the piece of writing comprised of his three consecutive dreams and his reflections on them. These are the dreams that he had on the night of the day that he found "the foundations of the miraculous science,"[25] whose nature is not revealed in this text. The access to this interesting text that is full of encounters with the Uncanny is provided by Baillet, who paraphrased Descartes' words.

We shall now see that the experience of the Uncanny in this text sheds some light on the experience of the Uncanny in *Meditations*, regardless of the unresolved questions whether Baillet stayed truthful to the original writing, or whether these were really Descartes' dreams or merely fiction. This text is a better source for an analysis of the Uncanny for at least two reasons: first, here, unlike *The Meditations*, there seems to be no significant split between the wise Descartes who knows all the answers and a novice endlessly trying to disentangle the tensions and ambiguities as they present themselves. Instead there is a young philosopher, who is very much like the meditating subject in *The Meditations*, encountering (and countering) the Uncanny on his own, relying on his interpretive judgment, without the comforting presence of predetermined scheme of answers.

The second reason why this text is more suitable for an analysis of the Uncanny is because the presentiments suggested by McCallam's reading, most notably unease and dread, are very much salient here in the encounter of the Uncanny, without the presence of a serene Cartesian voice. Of course, there is no first person voice at all, granted that the access to the narrative is provided by Baillet, but still, the sentiments associated with the Uncanny are expressed, rather than masked as in *The Meditations*. Further, McCallam's suggestion that Descartes counteracts the Uncanny by invoking the cogito is more applicable to this case, as the Uncanny presents itself through these dreams, rather than being a part of Descartes' carefully chosen examples. That is to say, Descartes here does not *choose* how the Uncanny is to play out,[26] but is chosen himself, as it were, to not only give an account of the Uncanny, but also to develop a response to it.

Let us now explore the experience of the Uncanny in Descartes' dreams in light of these two points presented. This text has significance for Descartes' later philosophy, even though it is not a text that is studied widely. Kennington notes that we find here the initial references to certain notions that later took on important roles in Descartes' philosophy, such as

[25] Richard Kennington, "Descartes' 'Olympica'," *Social Research* 1961: 28, 176.
[26] Given, of course, that Descartes did not make up these dreams, but they were actually his dreams.

"revelation and enthusiasm;" "the evil spirit," God, and the relation between them; and perhaps most interestingly, "a eulogy of poetry and imagination as superior to philosophy and reason."[27] The three dreams come together structurally in Descartes' interpretation to present a certain narrative, one that is not immediately available within the dreams themselves, but brought upon them through Descartes' understanding. Thus, these three dreams, which are not inherently connected, are brought together to bear an intelligible structure: "Two frightful ("terrifying") dreams or nightmares, a long then a short, were followed by a culminating, peaceful third: the final prophetic dream contained nothing not 'most sweet' and 'most agreeable'."[28]

Kennington suggests that there is a character of *ascent* to this structure, and from this we may further suggest that this is bound up with encountering and countering the Uncanny. In fact, this strong resemblance enables one to draw interesting parallels between *Olympica* and *The Meditations*, perhaps the two most important of which are how unease and dread arise and how they are overcome.[29]

We have seen in *The Meditations* that the unease came from the melting wax's ambiguous state as being both the same and the other, both familiar and unfamiliar, undergoing a strange, unpredictable transformation. We have further seen that the Uncanny in this experience *threatens* the subject, to which the Cartesian subject responds by invoking the cogito. Thus, through the cogito, "what threatens the subject is externalized as a means of controlling it as well as offering a potential domination of the irrational natural world from which it sprang," thereby "the foundations for a 'rational' mastery of the external world"[30] are established. In taking up these three dreams as a whole, we may observe the exact same move of "'rational' mastery" that follows shattering sentiments of terror that comes from the unknown, that which exceeds understanding, the Uncanny. In the same manner, we observe a shift from the corporeal to the intelligible, from the imaginative to the rational, and finally, from God to cogito, all of which may be read as linked to this "rational mastery."

In the beginning, Descartes articulates the terror with which the first dream is imbued as his imagination being struck by the representation of some phantoms. The imagination, then, is the site that the dreams take place, and sensation (i.e. sensing the phantoms as opposed to conceiving them) plays a critical role for Descartes' soul to be annexed by terror. Waking up

[27] Ibid, 172.
[28] Ibid, 175.
[29] The reader may find my summary of these three dreams in the Appendix. From then on, the references to the dreams will be brief.
[30] McCallam, "Encountering and Countering the 'Uncanny' in Descartes's Meditations," 142.

terrified from this first dream, Descartes feels an actual pain, underscoring the bearing that the imaginary has on the sensible, as well as the intimate connection between imagination and sensation. Although there are no supernatural powers in the dream itself, he attributes the pain and terror to an "evil spirit," making what Kennington calls "a leap in inference."[31] Descartes superstitiously turns over to his right side (since he had the dream lying on his left side). He initially offers no interpretation for this dream, instead feels the physical pain that it elicited and prays for redemption. God, who is not present in any of the dreams, is summoned here as a protection from the uncanny effect of the dream. If we take all of these elements into account, we may infer that this first dream points to a very bodily (painful) experience of the Uncanny, as well as a reliance on an external source (attributing the terror to the evil spirit, praying to God, turning to the other side) for both its mitigation and its cause, as opposed to committing to one's own power of reason, a commitment we see in the dreams that follow.

The second dream begins with a thunder sound and again, terror. One might say that perhaps Descartes' prayers had failed. Yet, this time, Descartes assesses the situation that he is in, suspends fear, and takes control. Seeing sparks of fire all around, he suspects that they are not real; he is suspicious of his senses and relies on his inference: opening and closing his eyes alternately, he finds that the sparks disappear. It is only at this moment, in this "scientific" approach to the issue, that terror dissipates, and he reaches a calm state. That is to say, whereas his prayers could not ward off the Uncanny, his reasoning could. This newly found power of the mind re-emerges in the third dream as Descartes becomes lucid and begins to interpret his dream within the dream.

Thus, the structure of these dreams not only corresponds to the very move of dispelling the Uncanny that the Cartesian subject performs through invoking the cogito against the melting wax in *The Meditations*, it also involves a process of evolving from an embodied, imaginative, sensuous, and faithful mode of the self to the detached, rational mode of the self. The former fails to ward off the Uncanny, whereas the latter achieves an initial rational mastery. Thus, whereas the terror produced by the first dream could not be mitigated through prayer, with the entrance of control and reason "the second [dream] leads not to fear and to prayer but to philosophy and 'a very great calm'."[32] Philosophy, for the first time, is mentioned during sleep, and calm apparently is a result of "discovering the power of reason."[33] But the decisive question, "What way of life ought I to follow?" is asked in the third dream, and interestingly, by a poet rather than a philosopher.[34] This last dream, perhaps

[31] Kennington, "Descartes' 'Olympica'," 177.
[32] Ibid, 178.
[33] Ibid, 180.
[34] Ibid.

the most intricate of all, presents several tensions and moments of ambiguity. Poetry and the imagination are eulogized and taken to be superior to sciences and philosophy in sleep, yet upon waking they are altogether denied this superiority. Further, the structural shift that we have been tracing in these three dreams is performed within the last dream itself.

To decipher the layers of meaning at work here, Kennington identifies three phases within: dream proper, sleeping interpretation, and waking interpretation.[35] The *Dictionary*, which Descartes interprets within the dream as "all sciences gathered together,"[36] is the first book that appears in this dream and that fills Descartes with enthusiasm. Later, when poetry is introduced, the value of this book is somehow reduced, for it is seen as "no longer complete."[37] Poetry, signifying "philosophy and wisdom joined together," is superior to the *Dictionary*, the symbol of "all sciences gathered together,"[38] just as imagination is superior to reason in sleeping interpretation. The only person who is mentioned in the dream is a poet (Ausonius), but upon waking, he is superseded by a philosopher, Pythagoras, and poetry is subordinated to philosophy.[39] The disavowal of imagination/poetry and the conquest of reason/philosophy upon waking point to the tie between poetry and dreaming, and philosophy and awakeness. The Cartesian subject, within the dream, eulogizes poetry "at the expense of reason,"[40] whereas the moment where the dream turns into a lucid one, he begins doubting: Is this a dream or a vision? It is as if poetry is praised on a pre-reflective state, and once reflection enters into the picture, philosophy prevails. Here, again, we see the same shift from the imaginary to the reflective, that is corresponds to the shift from the fearful to the calm (although this dream, for Descartes, is not fearful in itself at all). The mind, in this last dream, conquers even its antithesis, the imaginary world, by reflecting onto it. That is to say, the mind eventually overcomes the anxiety induced by the uncanny imaginary.

Reinstating the Imaginary

This, at least, is the kind of reading Kennington gives to corroborate his thesis that even in these strange, ambiguous dreams Descartes is set to establish "the ego whose thinking is purified of everything 'poetic' or imaginative."[41] It is true that here Descartes narrates a process of "rational

[35] Ibid, 183.
[36] Ibid, 181.
[37] Ibid, 185.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid, 185-6.
[40] Ibid, 189.
[41] Ibid, 194.

assurance of tranquility,"[42] a gesture that is repeated in *The Meditations* with the melting wax and achieved through a suspension of the poetic and the imaginary, but one must also consider several other factors at play before concluding that this text, like the melting wax in *The Meditations*, performs nothing but a "rational mastery."

The first factor to consider is Descartes' generous use of a range of literary styles: from the autobiographical tone in *The Meditations*, to the narrative form in *The World* and *Treatise on Man*, Descartes is quite adventurous when it comes to styles of writing. Yet, one case stands out amongst all the different styles he employs: *The Discourse on the Method*. Descartes famously presents his *Discourse* as a fable, rather than a doctrine. Here, the imaginative becomes the medium through which the Method is explained, it is *not taught*, as Jean-Luc Nancy puts it, but is *shown*.[43] As previously explored, Descartes spends a lot of time *performing* his ideas, not just in the *Discourse*, along with arguing for them. Sometimes what is performed *exceeds* the argument itself (as in the case of the uncanny wax that produces unease and dread), yet this excess is not merely accidental, but is an integral part of the flow of the text. Descartes not only speaks to the mind, but also to the senses and imagination through these styles he adopts and the examples he follows.

While in *The Meditations*, Descartes distinguishes between imagination and pure understanding that does not rely on "images" (as in one's ability to understand a chiliagon without having encountered one), his work stylistically relies on the faculty of imagination. He claims that imagination, unlike pure understanding, is accidental to the cogito: "I consider that this power of imagining which is in me…is not a necessary constituent of my own essence, that is, of the essence of my mind. For if I lacked it, I should undoubtedly remain the same individual as I now am."[44] Put in another way, Descartes seems to be almost saying here, paradoxically, that I can imagine myself without imagination. Even as he suggests that pure understanding is essential and imagination is inessential to the cogito, one certainly needs to be able to *imagine* in order to be able to follow Descartes' thought, which unfolds through various imagery. For Nancy, as well, Descartes' choice of the fable in *Discourse* is not "for reasons of convenience, expediency or literary ornamentation,"[45] but is bound up with, and essential to, his very philosophy. If we were to overlook this point, we would be entirely missing the fecundity of thought elicited by Descartes' imaginative styles of writing.

[42] Ibid, 203.
[43] Jean-Luc Nancy, "Mundus Est Fabula," *MLN* 1978: 93-4, 643.
[44] Descartes, *The Meditations*, 51.
[45] Nancy, "Mundus Est Fabula," 635.

The second thing to keep in mind is that, even though following Kennington we have reached the conclusion that Descartes' dreams perform the very move of rational mastery he repeats in *The Meditations*, we cannot deny that certain notions within these dreams were further developed in his later writings and indeed, that they have had an immense effect on his philosophy in general. Further, we cannot overlook the significance of the fact that Descartes felt that these dreams were important enough to write down along with his interpretations of them, and he also carried them around, occasionally referring back to them.[46] These suggest that the imaginary was never suspended once and for all in Descartes' thinking. In fact, looking at the shift from the irrational to the rational, the dreadful uncanny to serenity, we may claim that the imaginary is *essential* and *necessary*, that it is a primary step, in this process of rational mastery.

Lastly, Butler notes that in making the remark that he should not follow such examples in doubting the reality of the world and himself like "a madman," he is already following them, for "the doubt he wants to overcome can only be reenacted within the treatise."[47] That is to say, Descartes already performs what he then in turn denies, but what he performs in effect becomes inseparable from the flow of the text. If we were to take this point a little further, we may suggest that Descartes' rationality is never a pure rationality like the one McCallam or Kennington attributes to him, but indeed a paradoxical one: his project of rational mastery is contingent on the reenactment of irrationality, that is, the cogito as he sets it up already has its footing in what was supposed to be its antithesis; the irrational, the sensible, the imaginative, and so on. Thus, reason is never completely purified, but is always already tied to unreason; there is always irrationality at the very heart of rationality. That is to say, the performative aspect of the text is an integral part of the process, even in the cases where there is a discrepancy between what Descartes states and what the text does. This is for the most part a fruitful tension for Descartes' philosophy, as it lays out complex layers for the intellect in the engagement of the imaginary, the sensible, the affective on the quest for reason and the rational.

For all these reasons, the imaginary occupies a special place within Descartes' philosophy. Whenever Descartes sets out for a quest for rational mastery, he recites the same script: the imaginary ends up being conquered by reason. Yet, the imaginary always haunts, as it were, Descartes' philosophy, for it is never entirely suspended. Perhaps there is more collaboration than animosity between the real (i.e. that which is clear and distinct) and the imaginary (i.e. that which is seen to be illusory and/or deceiving) than is

[46] John R. Cole, *The Olympian Dreams and Youthful Rebellion of Réne Descartes*, USA: University of Illinois Press, 1992, 19.
[47] Butler, "How Can I Deny," 11.

allowed by his subsequent followers, for the imaginary emerges out of Descartes' writings as a force which both threatens and nourishes the intelligibility of the Cartesian project. And perhaps, if the project was less concerned with the purification of reason, poetry that was subordinated to science upon Descartes' waking interpretation could be given its rightful place.

Appendix – 1: Descartes' Three Dreams

The first dream begins with a strange sensation that Descartes expresses as his imagination being struck by "the representation of some ghosts" which led him to believe that he was walking up the street, leaning on his left side due to the great weakness he was feeling on his right side. Being ashamed of walking in this manner, he tried straightening himself, only to be hit by the wind and end up spinning several times on his left foot. Thinking he would fall at every step, he spotted a college to which he entered "in search of a refuge and a remedy for his trouble."[48] He attempted at reaching the school church in order to make prayers, yet he noticed to have passed by an acquaintance without greeting him, so "he wanted to retrace his steps to pay his respects,"[49] yet the blowing wind was holding him back. At that moment, another person standing in the courtyard told him in a kind and polite manner that if he wishes to find Monsieur N., he had something to give him. Descartes thought it was a melon brought from a foreign land. He noticed that although he was "bent over and unsteady," the people who gathered around to converse were "upright and steady" on the same ground.[50]

Descartes wakes up from this dream feeling a real pain and attributes this pain to some evil spirit "who had wanted to seduce him."[51] He turns over onto his right side, since "he had slept and dreamed on his left side,"[52] and prays God for protection and redemption from his sins. After he contemplates on the good and evil in his life for two hours, he falls asleep again only to find himself dreaming another dream.

This new dream begins with "a sudden, loud noise, which he took for thunder."[53] Feeling terrified, he woke up, and opened his eyes only to see sparks of fire around the room. Since this had happened to him before in his dreams, he approached this situation reasonably/scientifically this time by

[48] Baillet, *La Vie de monsieur Des-Cartes*, 33.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid, 34.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

opening and closing his eyes, only to find "his terrors faded away,"[54] so he fell back asleep calmly.

The third dream, perhaps the most convoluted one of all, begins by Descartes announcing that this dream was not terrifying unlike the two that preceded it. It begins by Descartes finding a book on his table, which he discovers to be the *Dictionary*. He was delighted in this discovery, thinking that this would be very useful for him. He noticed that he had another book at hand, which was a collection of poems. Opening this book, the first verse he spots is, "What way in life shall I follow?" At that moment he notices someone whom he did not know, and who gave him a poem beginning with "Yes and No." The man says he would recommend this as it is an excellent piece, and Descartes says he knew this verse from a book he already had. He looks for the poem in that book to show the man, when the man asks where he got this book, which Descartes cannot say. He notices the *Dictionary* disappeared as he was still looking for the poem, but it reappears later, except it was "no longer as complete as the one he had seen the first time."[55]

Although he couldn't find the exact poem, he says he knows another poem by the same poet, beginning with the words, "What way in life shall I follow?" The man begs him to show him this poem, and Descartes begins looking for it. He comes across several small engraved portraits, which leads to him comment that this book is very beautiful, except that it is not the same edition that he knew. At that moment, the books and the man suddenly disappear, "vanish[ing] from his imagination, although they d[o] not awaken him."[56] He decides that this is a dream, and begins interpreting this dream in the dream itself. He judges the *Dictionary* to be a symbol of sciences gathered together, and the poem anthology to be a symbol of the union of Philosophy and Wisdom, offering a eulogy to poetry:

For he did not believe that we should be too surprised to see that the poets, even the most mediocre, were full of maxims that were more serious, more sensible, and better expressed than anything in the writings of the philosophers. He attributed this marvel to the divinity of Enthusiasm and the strength of Imagination [in the poets], which brings out the seeds of wisdom that are found in all men's minds – like the sparks of fire in [flint] stones – much more easily and much more brilliantly than can the Reason of the philosophers.[57]

However, upon waking, he gives an interpretation that is quite different, to which a discussion is devoted in the main body of the paper.

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[54] Ibid, 35.
[55] Ibid, 36.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid, 37.

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