



SECTION: EPISTEMOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

Descartes' Faith

A fé de Descartes

La fe de Descartes

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Abstract: An extremely popular view among faithless persons is that persons of faith are not legitimate philosophical opponents. After all, one would be so if and only if one met a strong condition in: avoiding appeal to emotions or Scriptures, suspending judgment or seeking to convince others without using propositions of faith and respecting Pyrrhonist epistemic standards. The essay challenges this condition; it supports a weak condition according to which one is a legitimate philosophical opponent if and only if one recognizes one's difficulty of distinguishing emotions and reasons for taking propositions to be true, is aware of some of one's propositions of faith and acknowledges one's argumentative limits. While criticizing the strong condition and backing up the weak one, the essay tackles two philosophical personas: Faithless Descartes who purports but disrespects the strong condition; and Faithful Descartes who illustrates a person of faith who meets the weak condition. That is not yet an exegetical essay on Descartes. Hence, though based on his works, the stated personas are not exactly identical to Descartes' own stance.

Keywords: Faith; Metaphilosophy; Religion; Skepticism.

Resumo: Uma visão extremamente popular entre pessoas sem fé é que pessoas de fé não são oponentes filosóficos legítimos. Afinal, alguém assim o seria se e somente se essa pessoa respeitasse a condição forte ao: evitar apelo a emoções e a Escrituras, suspender o juízo ou procurar convencer outros sem se valer de proposições de fé e respeitar os parâmetros epistêmicos pirrônicos. O artigo problematiza essa condição; ele defende uma condição fraca segundo a qual alguém é um oponente filosófico legítimo se e somente se essa pessoa reconhece suas dificuldades de distinguir emoções e razões ao tomar uma proposição como verdadeira, possui consciência de algumas das suas proposições de fé e reconhece seus limites argumentativos. Ao criticar a condição forte e defender a fraca, o artigo aborda duas personas filosóficas: o Descartes sem Fé que defende mas desrespeita a condição forte; e o Descartes com Fé que ilustra uma pessoa de fé que satisfaz a condição fraca. Esse não é um artigo exegético acerca de Descartes. Logo, embora baseados nos seus trabalhos, as mencionadas personas não são exatamente idênticas à perspectiva do próprio Descartes.

Palavras-chave: fé; metafilosofia; religião; ceticismo.

Resumen: Una opinión extremadamente popular entre las personas sin fe es que las personas de fe no son oponentes filosóficos legítimos. Al fin y al cabo, alguien sería así si y sólo si respetase la condición fuerte: evitando apelar a las emociones y a las Escrituras, suspendiendo el juicio o buscando convencer a los demás sin utilizar proposiciones de fe y respetando los parámetros epistémicos pirrónicos. El artículo problematiza esta condición; Defiende una condición débil según la cual alguien es un oponente filosófico legítimo si y solo si esa persona reconoce sus dificultades para distinguir emociones y razones al tomar una proposición como verdadera, es consciente de algunas de sus proposiciones de fe y reconoce sus límites argumentativos. Al criticar la condición fuerte y defender la débil, el artículo aborda dos personajes filosóficos: el infiel Descartes que defiende, pero no respeta la condición fuerte; y Descartes con Fe, que ilustra a una persona de fe que satisface la condición débil. Este no es un artículo exegético sobre Descartes. Por lo tanto, aunque se basan en sus obras, los personajes antes mencionados no son exacta-



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mente idénticos a la propia perspectiva de Descartes.

Palabras clave: fe; metafilosofía; religión; escepticismo.

1 Introduction

Let me begin by proposing an imaginative exercise.

Step 1 Faithful Person and Faithless Person have an attribution dispute on whether the property T of being true is attributable to a proposition p .

Step 2 In appealing to emotions (say, in nervously raising one's voice) Faithful Person states that this is the case due to a criterion: accordance with Scriptures.

Step 3 "But why", Faithless Person asks, "do you embrace this criterion?"

Step 4 Faithful Person starts to reply by resorting to propositions of faith; those to which one attributes T without having a justification for doing that but merely due to faith. By faith, let us understand a sort of feeling or hope that compels one to attribute T to p , even if one lacks evidence for doing that². Eventually, Faithful Person states: "I embrace the stated criterion because of a faithful starting point". That is a proposition of faith that more or less directly justifies all other propositions endorsed by this person: namely,

(D) God exists.

Step 5 Faithless Person gives to Faithful Person what David Lewis (1986, p. 133) calls an "incredulous stare", after asking: "Why do you adopt (D) as a faithful starting point?". Faithless Person claims that if not compelled to suspend judgment on whether T is attributable to p , Faithful Person has five options of reply based on Pyrrhonist modes³. *Hypothesis*: "I assume so". *Dispute*: "Regardless of disagreements, I am compelled to do so". *Regress*: "Because of another reason that leads to another reason and so on". *Relativity*: "Because it is culturally appealing to do so". *Circle*: "Because T is attributable to p "

Billions of believers from all sorts of religions have adopted attitudes that resemble Faithful Person's. The faithless reaction to this fact has been often endorsed by those whose procedures are similar to Faithless Person'. This reaction is to claim that insofar as attribution disputes are at stake, one is to ignore persons of faith, dissuade them from being persons of faith or address them as objects of study in developing theories that aim to explain their behaviors. The present essay aims to challenge this reaction by addressing one reason that has been often given on its behalf. Let us call it the legitimacy reason; that persons of faith are not legitimate philosophical opponents insofar as they fail to meet the strong condition for being so. This condition is characterized by three individually necessary and conjunctly sufficient requirements. (a) When confronted with an attribution dispute (e.g., that of Step 1), one appeals neither to emotions nor to Scriptures in not taking Step 2. (b) Distinct from Faithful Person who reacts to Step 3 by taking Step 4, one suspends judgment or seeks to convince others without using propositions of faith. And (c) one respects Pyrrhonist epistemic standards in not adopting the replies of Step 5.

The legitimacy reason has two characteristics usually found in extremely popular views, such as what Gilbert Ryle (2009, p. 1) labels "Descartes' Myth", which, arguably, is not attributable to the flesh and blood René Descartes. The first characteristic is that this reason has been broadly suggested by all sorts of distinct authors whose works were developed in different historical contexts. For instance, Baruch Spinoza (2007), Daniel Dennett (2006), David Hume (2007), Friedrich Nietzsche (2001), Karl Marx (1970), Richard Dawkins (1993), Rudolf Carnap (2004), Sigmund Freud (2017), etc. The second characteristic is that it is hard finding an explicit defense of the legitimacy reason, say, in these authors' works. Indeed, to actually attribute this reason to these authors, numerous qualifications would have to

² As John Bishop (2016) indicates, there have been other concepts of faith. This essay does not aim to discuss them. For my purposes, it suffices to assume that the stated concept of faith is a plausible one. Besides, it is quite close to Paul's definition of faith as the "assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).

³ See Diogenes Laertius (2018, Book IX, Chapter 11, § 88, p. 505) and Sextus Empiricus (2000, Book I, § 164, p. 40).

be done. That would lead us far away from the legitimacy reason and of a critique of it as well as into an exegetical inquiry into these authors.

Given this situation, what I propose to do is to attribute the legitimacy reason to Faithless Descartes. By the latter, let us not understand the flesh and blood René Descartes but, instead, a plausible representation of a philosophical persona; that of the 1637 *Discourse on Method*, the 1641 *Meditations* and the posthumously published in 1684, *The Search for Truth by means of the Natural Light*, where this persona appears under the name "Eudoxus" (AT X 499 / CSM II 401)⁴. Now, it is important to highlight that this is not an exegetical essay; I do not aim to make a detailed reading of these works that purports to solve or at least add something to exegetical issues that go as far back as to the 17th century⁵. In fact, I would like to grant (*e.g.*, a specialist on these works) that Faithless Descartes may not exactly be the Descartes of these texts; that, indeed, to determine whether this is the case a more detailed reading would have to be developed. It is not this essay's aim to do that. What I, instead, propose to do is a move similar to Ryle's (2009); that of articulating in light of the stated works authored by Descartes a plausible opponent, that is, Faithless Descartes who deserves to be taken seriously because he endorses the legitimacy reason in a fashion that resembles and may as well appeal to countless faithless persons inclined toward this reason.

Faithless Descartes, the dedicatory letter to "the Dean and Doctors of the sacred Faculty of Theology of Paris" that prefaces the *Meditations* indicates, adopts (a). While indicating that one is not to rely on Scriptures or emotions, Faithless Descartes claims that one is, rather, to use "natural reason" when disputing whether *T* is attributable to the propositions that "God exists" and that "the human soul does not die with the body" (AT VII 1–2 / CSM II 3). In underlining that "unbelievers" can only be persuaded by "demonstrative proofs",

Faithless Descartes also points to (b) (AT VII 1–2 / CSM II 3). He suggests that insofar as attribution disputes are concerned, there is no role for "faith"; a term that in the second set of objections compiled by Marin Mersenne is applied in the sense of a body of propositions contained in Scriptures (AT VII 147 / CSM II 105). Though the "subject-matter" of such propositions would be "obscure", "natural light" or "divine grace" would allow one to rationally assent to "clear judgments" on such subject-matters (AT VII 147–148 / CSM II 105). Faithless Descartes also problematizes the "circular" arguments of persons of faith (AT VII 2 / CSM II 3). This is why (c) is also attributable to him, even if he does not consider all replies mentioned in Step 5. Accordingly, let us assume that though the flesh and blood Descartes may have been a "believer", Faithless Descartes adopts the rhetorical device of proceeding in a faithless way that aims to satisfy (a) to (c) (AT VII 1 / CSM II 3)⁶.

Curiously, I claim, Faithless Descartes violates the strong condition. Indeed, he proceeds like a person of faith who is unaware of one's own propositions of faith. That motivates this essay's main thesis: that the strong condition is less pertinent than a weak condition that can be met by another philosophical persona. This is someone who represents a person of faith who is aware of the propositions of faith Faithless Descartes presupposes and who, consequently, may be called Faithful Descartes. The weak condition is that one is a legitimate philosophical opponent if and only if one satisfies three other less demanding individually necessary and conjunctly sufficient requirements for being such an opponent. (a') To recognize one's difficulty of distinguishing one's emotions from one's reasons for attributing *T* to *p*. (b') To be aware of some of one's propositions of faith. And (c') to acknowledge one's argumentative limits *vis-à-vis* opponents.

The essay proceeds by spelling out why Faithless Descartes violates the strong condition in

⁴ "AT", "CSM" and "CSMK" stand for Descartes (1964–76), Descartes (1985) and Descartes (1991), respectively. The Roman numbers stand for volumes and the Arabic numbers for page numbers.

⁵ For authors interested in doing so, consider, for instance, Martial Gueroult (1953) or, more recently, Harry Frankfurt (2007), Elliot Samuel Paul (2022), etc.

⁶ For a biographical inquiry into the life of the flesh and blood Descartes, consider Stephen Gaukroger (1995).

section 2. Then, in section 3, a case for the weak condition is made in light of Faithful Descartes.

2 Faithless Descartes' Violation of the Strong Condition

Now, allow me to articulate a second imaginative exercise; it begins as follows:

Step 1' Like Faithless Person and Faithful Person described in Step 1, Faithless Descartes and another philosophical persona who may be called Opponent have an attribution dispute on whether *T* is attributable to Cartesian foundationalism.

Cartesian foundationalism is the thesis that at least one out of three propositions is a faithless starting point or a "*first principle*": a proposition to which the attribution of *T* is immediately justified and, so, more or less directly justifies the attribution of *T* to varied other propositions (AT IV 444 / CSMK III 290 and AT VII 140 / CMS II 100). The three propositions at stake are:

Cogito-i "*I am thinking, therefore I exist [cogito, ergo sum]*" (AT VI 32 / CMS I 127).

Cogito-ii "*I am, I exist [ego sum, ego existo]*" (AT VII 26 / CMS II 17).

Cogito-iii "*I am doubting, therefore I exist [dubito, ergo sum]*" (AT X 523 / CSM II 417).

Faithless Descartes attributes *T* to Cartesian foundationalism⁷. Also, he takes that there is a Cartesian intuition, while assuming the following:

I-i A Cartesian intuition is a cognitive "means" to apprehend the apparently "given" (to put it in Wilfrid Sellars' terms (1997)) that is

distinct and more trustworthy than the senses, the imagination and, arguably, even the understanding which — as the 1st *Meditation* indicates — sometimes deceive us or can deceive us in case a "malicious demon" exists (AT VII 23 / CSM II 15). A Cartesian intuition is a sort of intellectual cognitive means.

I-ii A Cartesian intuition that *p* is an immediate justification for attributing to *p*, not only *T*, but also the property *C&U* of being "certain and unshakeable", that is, this intuition is a psychological experience that irresistibly compels one to do that (AT VII 24 / CMS II 16).

I-iii Examples of objects of a Cartesian intuition are Cogito-i, Cogito-ii or Cogito-iii⁸.

Faithless Descartes takes that a Cartesian intuition immediately justifies the attribution of *T* and *C&U* to Cogito-i, Cogito-ii or Cogito-iii⁹. Imagine then:

Step 2' In apparently proceeding differently from Faithful Person in Step 2, Faithless Descartes does not appeal to Scriptures. He also does not seem to resort to emotions. After all, he calmly states that *T* is attributable to the cartesian foundationalism due to a criterion: accordance with Cartesian intuition¹⁰.

As indicated above, Faithless Person reacts to Faithful Person's procedure in Step 2 by taking Step 3. Similarly, imagine that Opponent reacts to Step 2' by proceeding as follows:

Step 3' "But why", Opponent asks Faithless Descartes, "do you embrace accordance with Cartesian intuition as a criterion to tackle our attribution dispute?"

Now, consider one champion of the faithless reaction: Carnap (2003). He indicates that ac-

⁷ Readings that point to this direction include Martial Gueroult (1953, p. 54), Jaakko Hintikka (1962, p. 21), Charles Larmore (2006, p. 23), Lex Newman (2019, p. 5) etc. Yet, others, such as John Carriero (2009, p. 354), have pointed to distinct readings that cannot be addressed here.

⁸ In this sense, consider a passage from a letter from March or April of 1648 authored by the flesh and blood Descartes to Jean Silhon: "You will surely admit that you are less certain of the presence of the objects you see than of the truth of the proposition 'I am thinking, therefore I exist'. Now this knowledge is not the work of your reasoning or information passed on to you by teachers; it is something that your mind sees, feels and handles; and although your imagination insistently mixes itself up with your thoughts and lessens the clarity of this knowledge by trying to clothe it with shapes, it is nevertheless a proof of the capacity of our soul for receiving intuitive knowledge from God" (AT V 137-138 / CSMK III 331).

⁹ This reading is allied with what Edwin Curley calls a "popular interpretation of Descartes" according to which propositions are "properly basic when they are either *self-evident* or *incorrigible reports of the contents of our consciousness*" (Curley, 2006, p. 31). For an alternative reading that cannot be debated here, consider Curley (2006) himself.

¹⁰ Let us underline that once one (e.g., an interpreter of Descartes) attributes to Descartes any other criterion to deal with the attribution dispute at stake, steps similar to those considered in what follows can be taken.

cordance with Cartesian intuition is a debatable criterion. While alluding to another champion of the faithless reaction — that is, Nietzsche — Carnap states: “the *sum* [in Cogito-i] does not follow from the *cogito*; it does not follow from ‘I experience’ that ‘I am’, but only that an experience is” (Carnap, 2003, p. 261). Likewise, one could doubt that Cogito-iii is a faithless starting point by arguing that “*sum*” also does not follow from “*dubito*”. Thus, while suggesting that accordance with Cartesian intuition may not be an appropriate criterion to deal with the attribution dispute over Cartesian foundationalism, Opponent could argue as follows: “suppose that there is a Cartesian intuition in the sense of I-i. Even in that case, contrary to I-iii, Cogito-i and Cogito-iii do not seem to be this intuition’s objects. Despite of I-ii, I do not have a psychological experience that irresistibly compels me to attribute *T* and *C&U* to these propositions”.

As Jaakko Hintikka (1962) indicates, it is charitable to read that despite of what the term “*ergo*” may seem to suggest, one is not to read Cogito-i or Cogito-iii as inferences or syllogisms but as immediate self-verifiable insights which may be more accurately formulated in terms of Cogito-ii. The latter, Hintikka (1962, p. 17) argues, may be interpreted as a “performance”, that is, “an act of thinking”, whose truth can be self-verified by the one who utters it¹¹. Indeed, the second set of objections compiled by Mersenne points to this direction: “When someone says ‘I am thinking, therefore I am, or I exist’, he does not deduce existence from thought by means of a syllogism, but recognizes it as something self-evident by a simple [Cartesian] intuition of the mind” (AT VII 140 / CSM II 100). This is why it may be replied on behalf of Faithless Descartes that a Cartesian intuition (in the sense of I-i) that Cogito-i, Cogito-ii and/or Cogito-iii is an immediate justification; a justification based on a psychological experience that compels one to attribute *T* and *C&U* to these propositions. Therefore, such propositions would be objects of a Cartesian intuition.

This reply can yet be resisted. Consider “*Epistemon*”, an interlocutor of Faithless Descartes in *The Search for the Truth*. *Epistemon* argues that: “you say that you exist and you know you exist, and you know this because you are doubting and because you are thinking. But do you really know what doubting or what thinking is?” (AT X 522 / CSM II 416). This remark suggests that if there is a Cartesian intuition, its objects have to be propositions that only rely on what may be called minimally normative concepts. The latter are concepts that have been applied in the same sense by practically all persons or at least throughout the sciences and, hence, do not usually raise or are unlike to raise a practical dispute on how one is to employ them. *Epistemon* suggests that the concepts employed in Cogito-i, Cogito-ii and Cogito-iii are not minimally normative ones.

Imagine that Opponent was raised in a context in which a community does not use “I” as an indexical but, rather, in unorthodox way, say, “I” means a deep self whose full development is only achieved after one’s material life. Likewise, suppose that this community also applies “am” or “exist” in an unorthodox fashion, say, in the sense of a more authentic way of being that only this deep self can achieve. So, while interpreting the concepts used in Cogito-i, Cogito-ii and Cogito-iii along these lines or in any other unorthodox fashion, Opponent is unable to self-verify the truth of these propositions, even when uttering them. Opponent insists that: “I do not have a psychological experience that irresistibly compels me to attribute *T* and *C&U* to Cogito-i, ii and iii”.

This last move may give rise to a practical dispute on how one is to employ the concepts used in Cogito-i, Cogito-ii and Cogito-iii¹². *Epistemon* points to this direction. He claims that “first of all”, Faithless Descartes should have spelled out “what doubt is, what thought is, what existence is” (AT X 522 / CSM II 416). “I dare not hope that *Epistemon* will give in to my arguments”, Faithless Descartes replies (AT X 522 / CSM II 416). “Someone who, like him, is stuffed full of propositions and taken

¹¹ For a more detail discussion of this reading, see Bernard Williams (2005, p. 60-61).

¹² Carnap (1956) suggests that all disputes in philosophy or at least in metaphysics lead to this practical issue.

up with any number of preconceptions", he proceeds, "finds it difficult to submit himself exclusively to the natural light, for he has long been in the habit of yielding to authority rather than lending his ear to the dictates of his own reason" (AT X 522–523 / CSM II 416). Indeed, Faithless Descartes claims that there are "some things which are made more obscure by our attempts to define them: since they are very simple and clear, they are perceived and known just on their own" (AT X 523 / CSM II 417)¹³. So he concludes: "I would never have believed that there has ever existed anyone so dull [*stupidum*, in the original] that he had to be told what existence is before being able to conclude and assert that he exists" (AT X 524 / CSM II 417).

The harshness of the term, "*stupidum*", must be highlighted. In resorting to this expression, Faithless Descartes seems to resort to emotions while criticizing *Epistemon's* stance. That is a first reason for claiming that though Faithless Descartes does not appeal to Scriptures, he seems to fail to meet the strong condition in violating requirement (a), while having an emotional reaction when confronted with an opponent. In fact, it is plausible to imagine that Faithless Descartes, like Faithful Person in Step 2, nervously raised his voice at this moment while adopting a problematic attitude that runs into tension with two of his claims.

The first claim is "that those with views quite contrary to ours are not on that account barbarians or savages, but that many of them make use of reason as much or more than we do" (AT VI 16 / CSM I 119). The second claim by Faithless Descartes at stake is that his aim "is not to teach the method which everyone must follow in order to direct his reason correctly, but only to reveal how I have tried to direct my own" (AT VI 4 / CSM I 112). The problematic attitude runs in tension with these claims because it suggests that in not adhering to Faithless Descartes' method, his opponents — "that is, those with views quite contrary to ours", such as *Epistemon* or Opponent

— fall short of *logos*. This is to accidentally not properly use "good sense", the "power of judging well and of distinguishing the true from the false" (AT VI 2 / CSM I 111). It is then plausible to imagine:

Step 4' "Accordance with Cartesian intuition", Faithless Descartes replies to Opponent while nervously raising his voice in an emotional fashion, "is the only rational criterion that can be adopted when what is at stake is the attribution dispute on Cartesian foundationalism. Ultimately, the one who disagrees or does not have a Cartesian intuition that Cogito-i, Cogito-ii or Cogito-iii falls short of *logos* in being a '*stupidum*', a 'barbarian' or a 'savage'".

This reaction does not seem particularly appealing. Though disputable, Opponent' points do not seem to justify one to emotionally attribute to this conceptual persona stupidity or to rely on the rhetorical device of suggesting that only a barbarian or a savage could proceed along the lines outlined by Opponent or *Epistemon*. Besides, varied objections could and have been articulated against Cartesian foundationalism. For example, that even if Cogito-ii is an object of a Cartesian intuition, further points would have to be established to back up the thesis that this proposition is the simplest. Another objection is that though "some things [may be] made more obscure by our attempts to define them", Faithless Descartes had to precisely spell out conditions for taking a term to be primitive; he never does that (AT X 523–24 / CSM II 417). A third objection is that given that there have been practical disputes on how "existence" and "thought" are to be used, these notions do not seem to be "very simple notions" (AT VIII 8 / CSM I 196), etc.

Actually, it is not easy finding contemporary philosophers who embrace Cartesian foundationalism. As indicated above, regardless of their upfront differences, Nietzsche and Carnap also do not embrace this view. The same is the case regarding countless other champions of the faithless reaction. What follows, more importantly, is that there is a second reason for arguing that

¹³ In the 1644 *Principles of Philosophy*, a similar passage can be found: "I have often noticed that philosophers make the mistake of employing logical definitions in an attempt to explain what was already very simple and self-evident" (AT VIII 8 / CSM I 196).

Faithless Descartes does not respect the strong condition for one to be a legitimate philosophical opponent; a condition that this very philosophical persona suggests. The reason is that even if Faithless Descartes could be read as meeting (a) — *e.g.*, insofar as he indeed avoids any appeal to emotions or Scriptures — he violates (b). After all, in light of the stated objections, it seems that he should suspend judgement. However, he does not do that.

Instead, Faithless Descartes seems to proceed as a person of faith who is not aware one's own propositions of faith. That happens because, before claiming that *T* and *C&U* are attributable to Cartesian foundationalism, Faithless Descartes faithfully presupposes that *T* (if not also *C&U*) is attributable to at least three other propositions:

Modal Proposition I can be more cognitively and practically perfect than at least some others, say, the likes of *Epistemon* or Opponent.

Normative Proposition I should be so.

(D)_{Alternative} There is a highest degree and a criterion for perfect cognition and practice.

Faithless Descartes indicates that *x* is more cognitively perfect than *y* if and only if *x*'s take is more pertinent than *y*'s on attribution disputes, that is, on the "investigation of the truth" (AT VII 350 / CMS II 243). Moreover, *x* is more practically perfect than *y* when *x*'s "actions of life" — insofar as the investigation for the truth is at stake — are also more pertinent than *y*'s (AT VII 350 / CMS II 243). "Pertinent" should be understood as a primitive term. Furthermore, note that (D)_{Alternative} deserves this name because it seems the faithful starting point of Faithless Descartes. This is to read that (D)_{Alternative} plays for him a role similar to that of (D) for Faithful Person. Accordingly, the highest degree and criterion for perfect cognition and practice may as well stand — to put it in John

Bishop's (1998, p. 174) terms — for an "alternative concept of God". This concept is alternative with regards to that of "a supreme God, eternal infinite, immutable, omniscient, omnipotent and the creator of all things that exist apart from him" whose existence Faithless Descartes aims to prove in the 3rd *Meditation* (AT VII 40 / CMS II 28).

Part One of the *Discourse on Method* provides evidence of Faithless Descartes' implicit attribution of *T* (if not also *C&U*) to the modal proposition. "I follow", he states, "the common proposition of the philosophers who say there are differences of degree only between the *accidents*, and not between the *forms* (or natures) of *individuals* of the same *species* (AT VI 3 / CSM I 112). So, though all persons have "good sense", some accidentally use reason more perfectly than others, *e.g.*, in better cognitively addressing attribution disputes while practically directing their "thoughts along different paths" (AT VI 2 / CSM I 111). Faithless Descartes suggests that he is one of those. In his words: "I can increase my knowledge gradually and raise it little by little to the highest point allowed by the mediocrity of my mind and the short duration of my life" (AT VI 2 / CSM I 112).

Further evidence that Faithless Descartes implicitly attributes *T* (if not also *C&U*) to the modal proposition is provided by the 1st *Meditation*, where he makes a distinction between his past and current self. The past self is the cognitively and practically less perfect one from Faithless Descartes' "childhood" who in accepting a "large number of falsehoods", erected a "whole edifice" of a "highly doubtful nature" (AT VII 17 / CMS II 12). The current self is a more cognitively and practically perfect self who reached a "mature enough age" and in being "quite alone" can devote oneself "sincerely and without reservation to the general demolition of [his] propositions" (AT VII 17–18 / CMS II 12). Further down, Faithless Descartes draws a distinction between him and "madmen, whose brains are so damaged by the persistent vapours of melancholia that they firmly maintain that they are kings when they are paupers" (AT VII 19 / CMS II 13)¹⁴. This is to suggest

¹⁴ For a detailed reading of this passage, see Carriero (2009, p. 39).

that his current self can be more cognitively and practically perfect than madmen.

In the beginning of *The Search for Truth*, Faithless Descartes points to a similar direction while replying to *Epistemon's* remark that the "desire for knowledge [...] is an illness which cannot be cured" (AT X 499 / CSM II 402). Faithless Descartes suggests that there is a "remedy" to this illness that he found for himself and, arguably, for others (AT X 500 / CSM II 402). "I venture to hope", he states, "not only that you will admit that I have some reason for being content with my knowledge, but, in addition, that you for your part will be fully satisfied with the things you have learned" (AT X 502 / CSM II 403). That is also evidence that Faithless Descartes seems to take for granted that *T* (if not also *C&U*) is attributable to the modal proposition. This is why, throughout the *Discourse on Method*, the *Meditation* and *The Search for Truth*, Faithless Descartes practically proceeds by implicitly showing how he is more cognitively and practically perfect than some others, e.g., in not being "vain" or "lacking in curiosity" (AT X 502 / CSM II 403). Given so, it is plausible to attribute to him an unconscious commitment to the normative proposition. Given so, he also seems to be unconsciously committed to (D)_{Alternative'}. This is because this proposition seems to be a ground for the normative and the modal one.

Therefore, it is imaginable that instead of taking Step 4', Faithless Descartes could have taken a distinct route more similar to the one adopted by Faithful Person in Step 4:

Step 4'' Faithless Descartes begins to reply to Opponent by becoming self-aware and stating his propositions of faith: the modal and the normative one. He then argues that he endorses accordance with the Cartesian intuition as a criterion to deal with the attribution dispute at stake because of (D)_{Alternative'} his faithful starting point.

This step avoids the problematic attitude. This is a first reason for preferring it over Step 4'. Step 4'' would yet not likely end the attribution dispute at stake. What is easily imaginable is:

Step 5' Similar to Faithless Person in Step 5, Opponent gives to Faithless Descartes an incredulous stare, regardless of whether the latter takes Step 4' or Step 4''. Opponent does that, after asking the following: "Why do you adopt (D)_{Alternative'} as a faithful starting point?". Opponent underlines that if not compelled to suspend judgment on whether *T* is attributable to Cartesian foundationalism, Faithless Descartes has five options of reply similar to those stated in Step 5, that is, *Hypothesis*, *Dispute*, *Regress*, *Relativity* and *Circle*.

What follows is that there is a third reason for claiming that Faithless Descartes violates the strong condition, while proceeding like a person of faith who is unaware of one's own implicit attribution of *T* (if not also *C&U*) to the modal proposition, the normative proposition and (D)

_{Alternative'} The reason is that like Faithful Person in Step 5, Faithless Descartes seems forced to violate (c) while disrespecting Pyrrhonist epistemic standards in adopting one of the stated replies.

More precisely, this is to state that Faithless Descartes, to begin with, seems forced to adhere to *Hypothesis'*. To do that is to explicitly acknowledge that he faithfully takes for granted that *T* (if not also *C&U*) are attributable to the modal proposition, the normative proposition and (D)_{Alternative'} propositions that more or less directly justify Faithless Descartes' attitude of embracing accordance with the Cartesian intuition as a criterion to handle the attribution dispute he has with Opponent. If unwilling to adopt *Hypothesis'*, Faithless Descartes could adopt *Dispute'*. To embrace this reply is to acknowledge that regardless of his disagreements with the likes of *Epistemon* or Opponent, he is faithfully compelled toward either one out of two attitudes. The first is to attribute *T* (if not also *C&U*) to the modal proposition, the normative proposition and (D)_{Alternative'} regardless of the fact that others have disagreed with this move, say, in having faith in distinct propositions. The second attitude is to assume accordance with the Cartesian intuition as a criterion to handle the attribution dispute Faithless Descartes has with Opponent, regardless of whether others (e.g., Opponent or *Epistemon*) reject this criterion in endorsing distinct criteria.

If unwilling to adopt *Dispute'*, Faithless Descartes

tes could adhere to *Regress'*. That is to faithfully reject dropping accordance with the Cartesian intuition, the modal proposition, the normative proposition or (D)_{Alternative} under the basis that these propositions are justified by another proposition. The latter, by its turn, is justified by another proposition and so on *ad infinitum*. If unwilling to adopt *Regress'*, Faithless Descartes could embrace *Relativity'*. To do that is to faithfully acknowledge that it is culturally appealing to him to embrace accordance with the Cartesian intuition as a criterion, the modal proposition, the normative proposition or (D)_{Alternative}. If unwilling to adopt *Relativity'*, Faithless Descartes could endorse *Circle'*. To do that is to faithfully claim that *T* and *C&U* are attributable to Cartesian foundationalism because *T* and *C&U* are attributable to this thesis.

In short, regardless of whether Faithless Descartes adopts *Circle'*, *Relativity'*, *Regress'*, *Dispute'* or *Hypothesis'*, it seems plausible to follow Edwin Curley (2006, p. 47) in taking that Faithless Descartes does not seem to "achieve [...] a victory [...] over the Pyrrhonian skeptic".

3 Faithful Descartes and the Weak Condition

The upshot of the last section is not that one should become a Pyrrhonian skeptic¹⁵. What I would like to defend is something else. That is this essay's main thesis: that the strong condition for one to be a legitimate philosophical opponent is trumped by the weak one. The latter condition can be met by an imaginable person of faith, that is, Faithful Descartes who distinct from Faithless Descartes, is aware and explicitly acknowledges that his attribution of *T* (if not also *C&U*) to the modal proposition, the normative proposition or (D)_{Alternative} is ultimately grounded by faith, say, insofar as he cannot avoid embracing *Hypothesis'*, *Dispute'*, *Regress'*, *Relativity'* or *Circle'*.

The first reason for preferring the weak condition over the strong one is that whereas the latter leads, the former avoids an unwelcome consequence. The consequence is that varied (if

not all) philosophers would or even could not be legitimate philosophical opponents. Consider, in this vein, Carnap (2004), Karl Leonhard Reinhold (2013), Nietzsche (2001), Peter Klein (2014), Richard Rorty (1999), and Willard van Orman Quine (1953). Even if it is granted that these philosophers meet (a) and (b), they openly propose the violation of (c).

Consider Reinhold (2013). As Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (2010) and, more recently, Manfred Frank (2004) indicates, he seems to endorse *Hypothesis*. "Philosophy", Hegel interprets to be Reinhold's view, "can begin only with something which is *hypothetically* and *problematically* true" (Hegel, 2010, p. 48). According to a reading that I developed elsewhere (Moreira (2022)), Nietzsche and Carnap point to similar directions. Respectively, their hypotheses are that one should: act in accordance with one's libertarian tendencies of expressing one's uniqueness while criticizing communitarian restraints; and act in accordance with one's egalitarian tendencies of contributing to the creation of a universal community whose restraints serve common goals that ultimately benefit all entities or at least all persons.

Consider, moreover, Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* §43. This work appears to endorse *Dispute* while arguing that it would be indeed valuable for a "philosopher of the future" to acknowledge the following: "my judgment is my judgment: other people don't have an obvious right to it too". Let us also consider Klein (2014); he suggests that there is nothing particularly wrong in adopting *Regress* while defending infinitism. This is the thesis that given an attribution dispute, one should indeed provide a chain of reasons that may as well be ultimately infinite.

Rorty (1999, p. xvi), by his turn, problematizes the "distinction between the way things are in themselves and the relation which they have to other things, and in particular to human needs and interests". In doing so, Rorty indicates that one may as well adopt *Relativity*. Quine (1953, p. 30) has a similar attitude regarding *Circle*; he acknowledges that his own "argument is not flatly

¹⁵ For recent defenses of such stance, consider Oswaldo Porchat (2007), Otávio Bueno (2013) or Plínio Junqueira Smith (2017). For an opposition to this stance, consider my own, Moreira (2022).

circular, but something like it. It has the form, figuratively speaking, of a closed curve in space".

In short, the problem with the strong condition is that it provokes two questions. If Quine, Rorty, Klein, Carnap, Nietzsche and Reinhold are not legitimate philosophical opponents, who, after all, deserves to be called so? Can only a Deity be a legitimate philosophical opponent? The weak condition, in contrast, does not raise these questions; it does not suggest that distinguished philosophers (if not all philosophers) are not legitimate philosophical opponents. After all, philosophers usually *can* indeed meet the weak condition's requirements (a)', (b)' and (c)'.

The term "can" was italicized because though it is not this essay's aim to provide a detailed account of it, it is important to highlight a crucial point¹⁶. The point is that to claim that one *can* do something is distinct from arguing that one *wants*, *enjoys* or *actually does* something. Whether the likes of Quine, Rorty, Klein, Carnap, Nietzsche and Reinhold *want*, *enjoy* or *actually meet* (a)', (b)' and (c)' is not a particularly pressing issue here. What matters is that it seems hardly deniable that these philosophers as well as countless others *can* indeed meet these three requirements.

That, accordingly, seems to be a reason for preferring the weak condition over the strong one. The same can be stated about the fact that whereas the latter leads, the former avoids another unwelcome consequence: that, arguably, the only legitimate philosophical opponent is the Pyrrhonian skeptic. By the latter, let us understand someone who respects Pyrrhonist epistemic standards while, to put it in Faithless Descartes' terms, taking "actions of life" but being neutral on the "investigation of the truth" (AT VII 350 / CMS II 243). The Pyrrhonian skeptic suspends judgment then on whether *T*, *C&U* or, indeed, any other property is attributable to any proposition.

For instance, imagine that the proposition being disputed by Faithful Person and Faithless Person is one addressed in *John* 8:1-11: that one should not stone an adulterous woman. Imagine then that

Faithless Person and the Pyrrhonian skeptic are inserted in the context portrayed in this passage where a woman is about to be stoned. Regardless of whether one can suspend judgment, the Pyrrhonian skeptic cannot suspend one's actions of life. So, if inserted in such a context, this skeptic would have to take a course of action, say, to help to stone the woman, dissuade others from doing so, run away from the situation, etc.

Another practical decision is imposed upon the Pyrrhonian skeptic who suspends judgment on the attribution dispute over Cartesian foundationalism but is inserted in a context in which one physically constrains the skeptic to engage oneself into a meditation similar to that of Faithless Descartes. In other words, this skeptic would have to take a course of action in meditating, refusing to do so etc. Regardless of the merits of the skeptic stance, what matters is that distinct from the strong condition, the weak one does not lead to the thesis that the only legitimate philosophical opponent is the Pyrrhonian skeptic. That is another reason for endorsing the weak condition.

Another reason for doing so is that the weak condition could actually be met by Faithless Descartes, even if, in fact, he never actually did that. Indeed, given that Step 4' is plausibly attributable to Faithless Descartes, it does not seem that he would want, enjoy or actually meet (a)' by acknowledging his difficulty of distinguishing his emotions from his reasons for attributing *T* to Cartesian foundationalism. Besides, as indicated in the last section, Faithless Descartes also does seem to meet (b)'. That is so because he does not seem self-aware of his commitment to the modal proposition, the normative one and (D)_{Alternative'}. Likewise, Faithless Descartes does not seem to want, enjoy or actually meet (c)'. Instead of acknowledging his argumentative limits *vis-à-vis* the likes of *Epistemon* or Opponent, he is engaged in rationally persuading them. Faithless Descartes did not yet have to do all that.

Were he to adopt Step 4'', he would indeed begin to satisfy the weak condition. That is ano-

¹⁶ As Almog (2002, p. 4) indicates, "today many readings offer very sophisticated senses of [...] 'can'". That is the case, for instance, with Lewis (1986).

ther reason for preferring this step over Step 4'. Another reason for rejecting Step 4' in favor of Step 4'' is that the latter runs more in agreement with an action of life that can be attributed to an imaginable person of faith; Faithful Descartes. Let me now highlight that it is not my aim to suggest that the latter is like most persons of faith; these likes have not always met the weak condition. To illustrate this, imagine that Faithful Person gets very mad with Faithless Person's Step 5. In being dominated by hatred, Faithful Person (at least momentarily) cannot satisfy (a)', (b)' and (c)'. As champions of the faithless reaction have often indicated, there have been persons of faith who have taken similar attitudes¹⁷. It is a sociological matter to determine the recurrence of such actions. This is not at stake here.

What is crucial is to imagine that similar to Faithless Descartes, Faithful Descartes takes Step 1', Step 2' and Step 3'. However, distinct from Faithless Descartes, Faithful Descartes takes Step 4'', say, under the basis that as indicated above, this step has advantages over Step 4'. Besides, Faithful Descartes takes another step that could have been taken by Faithless Descartes, even if Descartes' works never pointed to this direction.

Step 6 "Arguably, there may be someone or something (e.g., a God) who can satisfy (a), (b) and (c)", Faithful Descartes stress outs to Opponent. "However, I do not take myself to be able to do that. Indeed, I adopt the modal proposition, the normative one and (D)_{Alternative} as my faithful starting points. While doing so, I meet (a)' in openly acknowledging my difficulty of distinguishing my emotions from my reasons for attributing *T* or even *C&U* to these propositions".

An example of a *prima facie* reason that Faithful Descartes can adopt for the modal proposition runs as follows. As the fifth set of replies to Pierre Gassendi indicates, insofar as actions of life are concerned, it seems "foolish not to trust the senses" even if they sometimes fool us (AT VII 350 / CMS II 243). Accordingly, one may take the senses as able to justify the attribution of *T* if not also *C&U* to a sensible proposition: "I sensibly perceive

myself as being cognitively and practically more perfect than some others, say, *Epistemon*, Opponent or those who struggle with mental disorder". As Faithless Descartes also indicates (AT VII 19 / CMS II 13), the imagination can deceive us. It also seems yet foolish to avoid using such faculty when actions of life are concerned.

Thus, one may also take the imagination as able to justify the attribution of *T* if not also *C&U* to an imaginative proposition: "I imagine myself as being cognitively and practically less perfect in the past than as of now". Given the imaginative proposition and the sensible one, it seems justifiable to endorse the modal proposition, even if this is not a rationally undisputable attitude. The conjunction of these three propositions provides a *prima facie* reason that Faithful Descartes can also endorse for the normative proposition. As stated above, a ground for the normative and modal proposition is (D)_{Alternative}. So, Faithful Descartes also has a *prima facie* reason for adopting it. An example of an emotion for adopting the modal proposition, the normative proposition and (D)_{Alternative} is the feeling of desperation that one may experience in case such propositions are false or if one doubts that *T* and *C&U* are attributable to them. Let us imagine then that another step taken by Faithful Descartes runs as follows.

Step 7 "Unlike Faithless Descartes who seems to be unaware of his faith in the modal proposition, the normative proposition and (D)_{Alternative}", Faithful Descartes underlines, "I meet (b)'. That is because I am aware that these are my propositions of faith which serve to ground an action of life: to suggest that to be maximally cognitively and practically perfect, one is to aim at a particular balance between libertarian tendencies and egalitarian tendencies".

The action of life at stake is partially endorsed by Faithless Descartes himself because the latter seems to seek to maximize libertarian tendencies. For instance, in problematizing the constraints of educational institutions while: "resolving to seek no knowledge other than that which could be found in [him]self or else in the great book of the world" (AT VI 9 / CMS I 115); isolating oneself from

¹⁷ Consider, for instance, Spinoza (2007, p. 7) and, more recently, Dawkins (1993, p. 20).

the rest of the community in meditating "quite alone" (AT VII 18 / CMS II 12); disputing the likes of *Epistemon* who has a "detailed knowledge of everything that can be learned in the Schools" (AT X 499 / CMS II 401); etc. Likewise, the stated action of life is partially endorsed by Faithless Descartes because this persona aims to maximize egalitarian tendencies by proposing a "method" that others may use (AT VI 4 / CMS I 112) in seeking to establish purported "truths equally useful to everybody", e.g., Cartesian foundationalism (AT X 498 / CMS II 401).

The action of life at stake here is, nonetheless, not fully championed by Faithless Descartes. This is because the latter does not go as far as, let us suppose, Faithful Descartes goes in proposing a new faith that may be useful to others while opposing the loneliness of Faithless Descartes' meditation to a particular kind of awareness. This awareness is shown when one problematizes Faithless Descartes' stated problematic attitude while taking another step.

Step 8 "I refuse to take the aforementioned problematic attitude or Step 4", Faithful Descartes argues. "Indeed, I tend to think that do that is an ultimately considerably violent action, even if this action is a 'subtle' kind of violence.¹⁸ To avoid being violent with others with whom I seem unable to reach consensus, I also meet (c) while making an acknowledgment: that of my argumentative limits *vis-à-vis* the likes of *Epistemon* and Opponent who, indeed, may as well force me into adopting *Hypothesis*, *Dispute*, *Regress*, *Relativity* or *Circle*. In fact, it seems inevitable to do that unless one aims to proceed like a Pyrrhonian skeptic who may be the only one who satisfies the strong condition. I simply cannot be this kind of skeptic. I prefer to be a person of faith.

Conclusion

What follows is that Faithful Descartes meets the weak condition and, hence, should be taken as a legitimate philosophical opponent. With any luck, this paper has then challenged the faithless reaction while indicating that one reason often brought up on its behalf — that is, the legitimacy reason — is of a problematic kind. After all, as

indicated in Section 1, a standard champion of this reason — that is, Faithless Descartes — violates the strong condition while proceeding as a person of faith who is unaware one's own faith. Thus, as indicated in Section 2, this condition should be dropped in favor of the weak one that may be met by a person of faith who proceeds in lines similar to those of Faithful Descartes. This is to state that persons of faith can indeed be legitimate philosophical opponents, *pace* champions of the faithless reaction who have suggested otherwise.

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¹⁸ Elsewhere, I handled this kind of violence in more detail. See Moreira (2022).

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