

Seven

POETICS OF PHILOSOPHICAL
SOMNAMBULISM: A CASE OF DESCARTES
THE OLYMPIAN DREAMER

Kyoo E. Lee

Far, far below the chariot's stormy path
Calm as a slumbering babe,
Tremendous ocean lay. . . .

And the grey light of morn
Tinging those fleecy clouds
That cradled in their folds the infant dawn
The chariot seemed to fly
Through the abyss of an immense concave.

—Percy Shelley, *The Demon of the World* (1815)

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1. **The Infant Dawn Cradled in the Folds of Clouds:**
Descartes, the Philosophical Somnambulist

An Appetite for Life: This may explain why we dream. By "dream" here, I mean both the projective, futural kind as in "my dream is to become a millionaire," and the retrospective, nocturnal kind as in "I was a Kafkaesque insect in my dream last night." Dream is an excess and a necessary excess that shapes desire. It knows neither bounds nor depths; when fulfilled, it immediately generates a higher level of *telos* from within (now, I want to be a billionaire); interpreted, it leads the dreamer into a deeper level of ignorance (how come my lovely father is also a patriarchal oppressor?).

A life devoid of dreams is a life deprived of a hunger for being, in the same way that dreamless sleep is a temporary death in life. Indeed, a brotherly resemblance exists between Somnos, god of sleep, and Thanatos, god of death: sleep, as has already been observed by the ancient Greeks, is a mini-simulation of death, and death, an eternal slumber. We can desire to die, but no desire exists after death. Life, taken as a given excess, as a given trouble, is in this sense a hunger for something; and this hunger remains irreducible as long as we have things to consume. According to Ernst Bloch,

Dreaming always outlived the brief and private day. So this is the beginning of something other than the desire to dress up, to see ourselves

as our masters wish to see us. . . . It will aim at something more, and everything that it attains tastes of this something more. So that it seeks to live not merely beyond its own means, but beyond the poorly available means of conditions as a whole. Longing holds strong and true, especially when it is deceived, even when it is racing aimlessly now in one direction, now in another. All the more so, when the path leads unerringly and caringly forwards.¹

This "taste of something more" we will call dream; dreaming, as Bloch describes it, is the "beginning of something other than the desire to dress up." It is an insatiable appetite for life. The Bachelardian proposition, "the beginning of life is the beginning of a dream," can be understood in this vein.² That is, dream inaugurates life, and more specifically, thinking life: it is a push, a life-force behind life. Life, in this sense we might say, is a series of chosen dreams; we mortal dreamers are all eternal sleepwalkers, led forward "unerringly and caringly."³

The philosophical life of René Descartes (1596–1650) is an archetypal example. For him, the beginning of a new philosophy meant the beginning of a new life, which meant the beginning of a new dream: not the trivialization of dream or even the expulsion of it from the philosophical realm of thinking, but the replacement of an old, fragile dream with a new, hard one—hence, Descartes "the philosophical somnambulist." What follows is a long, messy footnote to this dreamy thought.

In chasing around our somnambulist, we will be careful not to harass him out of his meditative repose; we will try hard to understand the passivity of his passion, instead of the virility of his action about which we have already heard too much, too well; the passions "always receive the things that are represented by the acts out of volitions in the soul."⁴ We will be ready; active in remaining passive. After all, as we will see, this appears to be how Descartes the somnambulist is.

With this in mind, I propose to look closely at the dialectical interplay between *mythos* and *logos* in Descartes, that is, between Descartes the dreamer and Descartes the philosopher; I propose to look into symbiotic continuities, topological or tropological, between the poetic dimension and the formal dimension of his thoughts. If philosophy, as Jacques Derrida quips, "is the invention of prose," if, that is, "philosophy speaks prose," then, the material resources for that "logocentric" invention of philosophy are to be found in that on which the invention draws, that is, the excess of the imagination, an excess yet to be pronounced by the grammar of thinking.⁵ In this fashionably "anti-Cartesian" era, when the word "Cartesianism" immediately and misleadingly evokes the fossilized image of "dry" scientism or "reductive" theoreticism, the question of how Descartes the "rationalist" follows his threefold dream—his logico-poetic vision that is fantastically absurd and private as well as rigorously

disciplined and sharable—should interest any wisdom-lovers, Cartesian or non-Cartesian, insomniacs or sleepy-heads.

True, Descartes made the mistake of hastily identifying the "I" of "I think" with "substance," with a substance that reflects. And yet, it is an inaugural, as well as interesting, confusion of the mind whose reflexive deviation itself remains, as the Husserlian Martin Heidegger observes it likewise, a derivative truth about cogitation—namely, that thinking takes place. The seminal insight contained in Descartes's philosophy of the I is this: by pointing, with the *cogito*, to the reflective mirror within the mind (which David Hume later breaks into a "bundle of impressions," and Immanuel Kant, deduces as a formal perspective of the noumenal self), Descartes allows the dream of modernity to unfold: "Is modern philosophy anything other than the dream of a new century?"⁶ What intrigues me is this, germinal, still contemporary Descartes, of whom Gaston Bachelard speaks: Descartes as the dream of substance, of the thinking matter.⁷ Recalling Friedrich Nietzsche, who observes that philosophy is the confession of the philosopher, I advance the thought that philosophy is the dream of the philosopher. "Either we have," says Nietzsche, "no dreams or our dreams are interesting. We should learn to arrange our waking life the same way: nothing or interesting."⁸ I follow the interesting path of reading, into which we have, in a sense, moved already.

2. The Threefold Dream of Descartes: Private, Theoretical, and Theological

But why somnambulism?, you may ask. What is so interesting about this "abnormal condition of sleep in which motor acts (as walking) are performed"?⁹ And what has it got to do with Descartes the philosopher?

Who is not interested in scandals? What interests us is the disturbingly "abnormal" structure of somnambulism, that is, the indeterminacy of its ontological status. Being neither asleep nor awake, neither in repose nor in action, a somnambulist is, strangely enough, both passive and active. Such an abnormality is a structural challenge to the binary mode of thinking in which inaction (*stasis*) establishes its self-identity by antagonizing its opposite, namely, action (*dynamis*). Sleepwalking, being an *interplay* (or intersection) between the horizontality of sleep and the verticality of walking, defies such analytic binarism: simply, it is unsettling. In this way, not only does the binary confusion remain unavoidable in the world of somnambulist, but it becomes *the* enabling condition for its viability. Put more simply, sleepwalking exists as a confused state, as an ambiguous event. This is a case of a (con)fusion becoming a twofold, enabling condition for recognition. Is this not interesting? But perhaps I have been carried away too far, far too quickly; I will pause here and try to make sense of this nonsense. I will, that is, continue my reverie, if only in a more lucid manner.

The background out of which the question of somnambulism has arisen is this: an inseparable link exists, as we will see shortly, between Descartes the dreamer and Descartes the philosopher, between the nocturnal *sleep* and the daytime *walker*. This continuity is what makes Descartes an interesting case. The continuity at issue makes Descartes not only a dreamer who dreams an interesting dream, but more specifically, a performative dreamer who realizes or enacts his dreams in a specific way.

The dream of Descartes is threefold: private, theoretical, and theological—all at once. The specification of the meanings of the “dream of Descartes,” although certainly required at this point, may not necessarily resolve the problem of referential complexity; what the semantic clarification can do, however, is to locate the origin of that (confusion, those “folds” of the threefold dream of Descartes.

First then, we have the literal dream Descartes had on the night of 10 November 1619, often dubbed “the Olympian dream.”¹⁰ This is the nocturnal, unintentional dream of Descartes, which he later recorded carefully in his private diary, “the little notebook bound in parchment” labeled *Olympica*; this book of secrets allegedly accompanied him all the time, wherever and whenever he went off in search of a hideaway. According to Adrien Baillet, an authoritative Descartes biographer, who had seen the original manuscript and subsequently lost it, the significance of the Olympian dream is cosmic: on that night in question, Descartes, most likely before retiring to bed, noted in his diary that he had “discovered the foundations of a marvelous science.”¹¹ Such private enthusiasm had been famously transformed into three consecutive visionary dreams he had that same night.

(1) First, Descartes was assailed by phantoms and a whirlwind (Dream 1: The School/Church), subsequently undergoing a bodily pain he believed to have been caused by an “evil demon.”

(2) Then, he heard an unbearable noise like a thunderclap (Dream 2: The Thunder); terrified, he awoke at once, only to see many sparks of fire scattered around the room. He tried to calm himself with despectralizing reasoning, and shortly after, his terrors faded away; then, he fell asleep again.

(3) Subsequently, the dreamer came across a dictionary on the table, next to which was an anthology of poems, which aroused his curiosity (Dream 3: The Books). The Descartes in dream opened the curious book and chanced upon a verse, later identified as the Seventh Ode of Ausonius: “what road in life shall I follow? [*Quod vitae sectabor iter?*]”

(4) Next day, upon waking, Descartes wrote: “It was the Spirit of Truth (God) that had wanted to open unto him the treasures of all the sciences by this dream. . . . November 11th, 1620. I began to understand the foundation of the wonderful discovery.” Having confirmed his philosophical “mission” this way, Descartes the philosopher promises himself the following: “Before the end of November, I shall head for Loretto. I intend to go there on foot from Venice, if this is feasible and is the custom. I will make the pilgrimage with all the devotion that anyone could normally be expected to show. At all events I will complete my treatise before Easter, and if I can find publishers. . . .”

The story, in short, is this: here is a man who has been devoting all his waking time to “dreaming of” inventing a new philosophy; then, while asleep, he is dreaming another dream. Note the pivotal centrality of the following question, with which this man’s dream concludes and also, in a sense, unfolds: “what road in life shall I follow?” Now, our question is: who is this “I”? The “I” appearing in this sentence refers to a threefold figure: Descartes the modern philosopher, Descartes the lucid dreamer, and Descartes the Ausonian poet; all three of them have amalgamated into one obscure entity. In his waking hours, Descartes “walks” to the shrine of Wisdom, both literally and metaphorically: “after I had spent some years pursuing these studies in the book of the world and trying to gain some experience, I resolved one day to undertake studies within myself too and to use all the powers of my mind in choosing *the paths I should follow*.”¹²

The metaphorical or symbolic dimension of “the Olympian dream,” inseparable from the literal event, is so powerful that, not only Sigmund Freud but more importantly Descartes regards it as a “dream from above.”¹³ This appears to be indeed the only way to make sense of the extraordinary force of the event; the difference between Freud and Descartes, though, is that the first demystifies it by offering a psychological explanation of it, whereas the second glorifies it by attaching a theological significance to it. From this point on, Descartes “walks with the confidence of a sleepwalker.”¹⁴ He is like a butterfly even.¹⁵ The dream of Descartes that is “abstract, poetic, and symbolic” all at the same time, as Freud puts it, is truly a “strange mixture of rationalism, religion, and mysticism!”¹⁶

Why should this esoteric mixture interest us? Well, then, think about this: in Descartes’s waking judgment, what could have been simply a dreamy nonsense was treated as a visionary truth. Descartes chose *this* dream, *this* nonsense, as his guiding light, amongst other countless, equally ridiculous dreams he might have possibly had up to that point in his life. Have I said earlier that life might be a series of chosen dreams, or am I merely dreaming? If so, let me carry on.

In sum, then, the Olympian dream is an event, an event of pivotal importance to Descartes’s philosophical life. His literal dream, self-interpreted

as such, was translated into the final justification for the necessity to realize his other, metaphorical "Cartesian dream," the dream of inventing a whole new science that is infallible; this dream, translated again in theological terms, is that of a reunion with God, the infinite, perfect, and benevolent being. The point to note is that, in Descartes's case, despite his overt "rationalism," theoretical vision is not separated from, but supplemented or even completed by, dreamlike poetic vision.¹⁷ In the dream of Descartes, a desert meets waters, and a philosopher, a poet:

It may seem surprising to find weighty judgments in the writings of the poets rather than the philosophers. The reason is that the poets were driven to write by enthusiasm and the force of imagination. We have within us the sparks of knowledge, as in a flint; philosophers extract them through reason, but poets force them through the sharp blows of the imagination, so that they shine more brightly.¹⁸

What a brilliant note! Yet we must ask: who is speaking here, Descartes the poet or Descartes the philosopher, Descartes the seductive writer or Descartes the judicious thinker, the one who sees "the sparks of fire" (Dream 2: The Thunder) or the one who declares, "I shall head for Loretto"? The answer should be, perhaps: *all of them*.

Eureka!: thinkers, dreamers, writers do this all the time. As in the case of Descartes, *mythos* and *logos* are often united in the holy bathos of thinking. This is the *raison d'être* of bathub escapism. A retreat to the bathroom, at times of cogitational difficulties, is a well-known remedy, esoteric yet apparently effective. The threefold dream of Descartes functions just like that mind-hugging bathub in which a solid thought "extracted through reason" opens itself up to the world of the fluid; the fact that Descartes's desiderata include not only the clock and the eyeglasses but the artificial fountain is noteworthy in this regard—the fountain being a perfect example of geometry becoming fluid.¹⁹ Descartes's Olympian dream, to push the analogy further, is a threefold womb of cogitation, something like Plato's *chora*, the receptacle.

3. I Think, Therefore I May Be Dreaming: This Is How I Am

A brilliant piece of reasoning! As if I were not a man who sleeps at night, and regularly has all the same experiences while asleep as madmen do when awake—indeed sometimes even more improbable ones. How 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! . . . Indeed! As if I did not remember other occasions when I have been tricked by exactly similar thoughts while asleep! As I think about this more carefully, I see plainly that there are never any sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being

asleep. The result is that I begin to feel dazed, and this very feeling only reinforces the notion that I may be asleep.²⁰

I am interested in old questions; but I am *not* interested in repeating them. I am not concerned with the question of whether the asleep-awake distinction can be established or maintained in Descartes's system of thinking. This is partly because my mind is not clear enough to deal with such a polemical issue head-on; also, partly because Descartes, as we will see shortly, became weary of that brain teaser which, when parroted aimlessly and excessively, is likely to induce more of boredom and less of enthusiasm. What I wish to follow, instead, is the movement of Descartes's exclamation mark; I would like to see where it is heading, not where it stops. The question that concerns us is not that of yes or no, but that of how: how the puzzling—specifically somnambulistic—ambiguity at stake plays a formative role both in Descartes's narration of the dream event and in his subsequent production of genre-bending, philosophico-literary texts such as *Discourse on the Method*, the autobiography, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, the six-day diary, and *The Search for Truth*, the Socratic dialogue far more didactic than Plato's, yet equally engaging, rich in rhetoric and brimming with irony.²¹ The question I am asking is how the excess of *poiesis* supplements the lack of imagination often detected in theoretical philosophies: how, in a word, dream becomes a necessary excess in reflective life.

As is illustrated in *Discourse on the Method*, the first published writing of Descartes (1637), as well as in the first part of *Meditations* (1641), Descartes's vocational decision to invent a philosophy that is "firm" enough to serve as the foundations of all sciences grew out of a rather personal need, a need to know the "right method of conducting reason" (the subtitle of *Discourse*), a need to "follow the right path": a need to be right. A need for absolute stability prompts Descartes to examine his life in the past, and this radical self-reflection leads him further to a realization that he might have been leading a deluded life. The problem he poses here, allegorically speaking, is that his life might have been nothing but a long, elaborate dream from which he now awakens. This dream-hypothesis, staged as such, is a metaphysical threat to the naive assurance of an unexamined life; and Descartes's philosophical odyssey starts to unfold, when he sets out to deal with this threat, this crisis, this abyssal problem (First and Second *Meditations*), the metaphysical intensity of which the hypothesis of the evil genius, for being more hyperbolic than the dream hypothesis, reinforces rather than alleviates.

Viewed in this regard, Descartes the philosopher is an anti-dreamer *par excellence* who antagonizes nocturnal dream, as Catherine Clément says: "Sleep is dangerous to thought; this is a constant. One of the first threats from which Descartes protected himself when he shut himself up to arrive at the idea of the *cogito* was sleep, and the illusion of dreams that is its outcome.

Philosophy stands watch and stays awake.²² This is true, yet only partly so. Descartes's distrust of dream is only epistemological and theoretical in the strictly policed senses of the words. In fact, Descartes's philosophy of the *cogito*, seen from a more comprehensive, generic point of view, is dream-friendly; and the passive-aggressiveness of a somnambulist with which he incorporates the abyssal trope of dreaming into his system of thinking is quite astonishing. The philosophical power of Cartesianism lies not so much in the extent to which reflective consciousness guards itself against the fading-out of consciousness (namely, sleep), as in that to which reflective consciousness submits itself to the force of *mise en abyme*, to the force of hyper-reflective imagination—yes, the poetic “force and blows of imagination,” as Descartes puts it.²³

A good illustrative case in point is *the* Cartesian question Descartes keeps asking himself throughout his writings: what would remain true, even if I am dreaming? Armed with the boldness of “a rebellious youth,” Descartes explores *this* edge of thinking: what would remain true, *even if* I am dreaming?²⁴ Let me paraphrase the question, given that, strictly speaking, we find “no marks by means of which we can with certainty distinguish being asleep from being awake.”²⁵ We find no marks apart from memory, that is.²⁶ Unlike waking thought, dream is hardly linked to memory in any coherent manner, so what would *then* remain true, “whether I am awake or asleep”?²⁷ Interestingly enough, Jacques Derrida highlights the productive aspects of metaphysical madness.²⁸ As a way of defending Descartes against Michel Foucault's accusation that Cartesian “rationalism” is based on the systematic *exclusion* of madness, one of the key Cartesian questions Derrida highlights is precisely: “what would remain true, *even if* I am mad?”²⁹ This is a question that does not preclude, but opens itself up to the possibility of a radical dreaming, of a radical madness: it is not resistant to, but receptive of, a touch of hyperbolism. To generalize this point: the “imaginative force” of Cartesian reflection is such that the serialized allegories of danger—the hypotheses of madness, of dream, of evil genius—are not excluded from, but embraced within, the system of thinking.

What would remain true, even if I am dreaming or being mad or being duped or *whatever*? The undeniable truth is: I am, I am that which exists in the form of dreaming, being mad, being duped, or *whatever*. What if, as Heinrich Heine once thought, God the guardian angel of my radical dream, suddenly, “awakens from His dreams and rubs his sleepy eyes and smiles”? Well, none of my business: God's irony is God's business! What, then, “if God himself should prove to be our most enduring lie?”³⁰ Well, again, in that case, the liar is God, not I, René Descartes, God's fabrication!—but the benevolent being, by definition, does not lie; besides, sleeping is not a crime but only a weakness which again is not an attribute of divinity.

The inaugural modernity of Cartesian philosophy lies in the clarity of the force of this series of questions to which Descartes the questioner subjects

himself (“Meditations” 1–3), if not necessarily the clarity of newly discovered truths themselves, “clear and distinct ideas” which, allegedly, God the perfect being has planted in the human mind.³¹ Therefore, again, if Descartes is seen as an anti-dreamer, that is because he is a “relentless” dreamer, the demanding and persistent kind of dreamer operating on a more global scale.³² The point, stated more boldly, is: Descartes dreams of becoming *like* his God.

Descartes the somnambulist is a utopian dreamer:

Should we identify a point . . . in Descartes' dream? That moment is already overdetermined, but no matter: not only irony that the master of reason, of clarity and distinctness, discovers his method by way of a dream touches us, but, the fact that he becomes master *in* the dream. He thus challenges the long-standing subordination of the dreamer to external source: for Joseph and his brothers; for Socrates, appealing on his last morning to a dream, in order to call his disciples beyond the incapacity which a lifetime of teaching has failed to cure. This dream is traditionally a form of commentary, a subordination—but then, in Descartes, we find the dream asserting itself, *asking for* [emphasis added] rather than given in deference *a reality* [emphasis added] on which the waking experience turns out to be commentary, not the other way around. “I dream, therefore, I am,” Descartes could have argued—since, his thinking, too, might have been dreamt.³³

Pierre Bourdieu (1595–1653), from whom Descartes was eager to gain intellectual support (ultimately failing to do so), was a Jesuit Father for a reason: he knew it all, suspected it all, already. He perceived this insoluble dilemma of infinite regress—potentially subversive—with an exemplary acuity. The thoroughness of his philosophical inquiry resembles that of the Spanish inquisition:

What if dreaming is a *single* operation which enables you sometimes to dream that you are dreaming, and at other times to dream that you are thinking while awake? What will you do now? Since you are silent, are you prepared to listen to me?³⁴

To this, Descartes replies or rather, does not reply:

When I said that I was thinking, I did *not* inquire *whether* I was awake or asleep while I was thinking. I am surprised that he dubs my method “the method of dreaming,” when it seems, to say the least, to have jolted him out of his slumbers. . . . But it may be that beginners will be led astray here into thinking that if someone doubts whether he is awake or dreaming, then nothing can be certain and evident to him, but things can only seem or appear so. To prevent this, I would like people to

remember . . . that if something is clearly perceived, then *no matter who* the perceiver is, it is true, and does not merely seem or appear to be true.³⁵

Thus, Descartes is avoiding the following question:

"Am I awake or asleep?" How can you be certain that your life is not a continuous dream, and that everything you think you learn through your senses is not false now, just as much as when you are asleep?³⁶

Indeed, nobody, but Descartes introduced the suspicion; and yet, the reflective turn of his mind is such that the suspicion itself has already undergone an internal transformation. Descartes is no longer interested in how this question can be answered; he is now interested in how it can be overcome. The poser of the question appears to know, already, that it is "evidence-transcendent" and to this extent remains unanswerable.³⁷ In sum, Descartes braves, implicitly, the possibility that he may, in fact, be dreaming—hence, his interest in the other question, "what would remain true, *even if I am dreaming?*" This is a brave new question heralding a brave new world. And Descartes's answer is "clear and distinct ideas"—hence, the possibility, on our part, of reading Descartes as a lucid somnambulist.

4. I Dream, Therefore I Am Touched: Some Cartesian Thoughts on the Necessity of Dreaming

Affection, thy intention stabs the center.

—William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*

I was not necessarily in bad faith when I said earlier that God's irony is God's business. The idea, stated less bluntly, is that Descartes is part of a greater scheme of God, the real schemer being, strictly speaking, God the perfect designer of being, not Descartes the imperfect product. For Descartes, "God is pure intelligence" instead of, say, pure love or intimacy.³⁸ For Descartes, God is a definition, a concept: it is what "sees" him or what he sees, not what or who speaks to him or that to which or to whom he prays. St. Augustine, for instance, speaks "to" God, but Descartes, "about" Him.³⁹ For Descartes, God is an object of inspection and speculation, not of fear. Although Descartes "rationalizes" the Christian God this way, abstracting—"extracting"—the essence of Him "through reason," the structure of gifting itself resists a logical abstraction. Descartes remains, always already, weaker than that which is by definition powerful, namely, God. On the part of Descartes the thinker, the irreducible need exists for a forceful absorption of divine power: the need to receive, first.⁴⁰

Here, I cannot and do not wish to discuss extensively the relationship between (what Descartes defines as) God and Descartes, a relationship that remains unbreakable, deeply intricate. Demanding some explication at this point, however, is the exchange economy of reciprocity underlying that intriguing relationship between the two parties in question. I thus conclude the present essay with some ruminations about the affective—as opposed to discursive—economy of receptivity exemplified in the Cartesian poetics of somnambulism.

"A touch of imagination": this cliché is not necessarily a dead metaphor. This expression does appear to capture an eternal truth about the imagination. As Edmund Husserl (and Kant, similarly) observes it, we do appear to "push" the boundaries of ordinary understanding in order to reach this extraordinary realm of thinking called the "imagination."⁴¹ The idea I am advancing here is that imagination is tactile instead of visual.

Surprisingly enough, Descartes, to whom the Enlightenment owes much of its innate "ocularcentrism," relies heavily on the sensation of touch for the construction of a "firm" and "solid" philosophical system; heavily to such an extent that touch becomes, in a sense, more primordial than sight.⁴² If, by "the Cartesian objectification of the world" we understand the visual mapping or control of matter, our understanding appears to be lacking something substantial: substance. The fixative energy of ideation or idealization becomes gaseous, unless it originates from, and remains supported by, something material that resists such speculative objectification (including self-objectification—the brain, for instance). Descartes appears to have a first-hand knowledge of that fundamental restlessness of motility, which he supplements by the introduction of tactility into his texts (through, for instance, a quirky explanation of how the brain functions).

In fact, Descartes the thinking writer is curiously bodily; tactile, more specifically. For instance, in *The Search for Truth*, Descartes, thinly disguised as Eudoxus, armed with sound judgment and good sense, volunteers to guide Polyander, the-you-and-me-everyman, to the gate of truth; the heuristic aim here is to help Polyander discover that he also has what Eudoxus has, namely, the "natural light of reason." Note the motif of "hand-holding" in the following, an inaugural passage in the text worth quoting in full:

Eudoxus: I confess that it would be dangerous for someone who does not know a ford to venture across it without a guide, and many have lost their lives in doing so. But you have nothing to fear if you follow me. Indeed, just such fears have prevented most men of letters from acquiring a body of knowledge which was firm and certain enough to deserve the name "science," . . . they have built upon sand instead of digging further down to find rock or clay. So we must not let the matter rest here. . . . [T]he arguments I have stated . . . have already done what I desired: their chief effect has been to [1] *touch* your imagination so as to make you fear them.

For this indicates that your knowledge is not so infallible as to prevent your fearing that these arguments will undermine its foundations by making you doubt everything. Consequently, it indicates that you already have these doubts, and so I have achieved my aim, which was to overturn all your learning by showing you its uncertainty. But in case you should now lack the courage to proceed any further, I would advise you that these doubts, which alarmed you at the start, are like phantoms and empty images which appear at night in the uncertain glimmer of a weak light: if you flee from them, your fear will follow you, but if you approach as if to [2] *touch* them, you will find nothing but air and shadow and you will be more confident the next time such an encounter may occur.⁴³

Here, Descartes introduces two different kinds of touch: by "a touch" of imagination, he means, firstly, a movement of the accidental, of the unexpected, of the startling, and secondly, a recognition of that movement. The hand that touches is therefore, as Derrida observes it likewise, "the very memory of accident"; the hand of the blind, which is at once the understanding and the imagination, is a good analogy.⁴⁴ An accidental touch is not a touch in the active sense of the word: it is a sudden attack of the object that is being touched. Dreams and illusions by which we are touched involuntarily are therefore not only visual excess but, more interestingly, tactile invasion. Nightmares, for instance, are made of pointy stuff ("sparks of fire" in the Thunder Dream, for example). *That* initial shock, initial reflex, as Descartes says above, is what the heuristic use of hyperbolic imagination aims for; the subsequent self-reflexive "solidification" of a body of knowledge through the *cogito*, as exemplified in Descartes's architectural philosophy, is then, a philosophical recuperation from that initial blow. Let us examine this twofold dimension of the Cartesian imagination in some detail.

The first touch of imagination, the "fortuitous course of the spirits," awakens the dormant mind.⁴⁵ This, Descartes calls "the passions of the soul."⁴⁶ At this stage, the soul remains (1) passive yet responsive, "lively" and alert, and (2) most intimate to our soul, unreflected as if in "sleep." Descartes explains the radical "passivity" of the passions of the soul in some neurologico-typographical terms.⁴⁷ It is at this stage that "*the imprinting* of the ideas of various qualities in the organ of the 'common' sense and the imagination, the retention or stamping of these ideas in the memory, the internal movements of the appetites and passions" take place, motivated by "the agitation by the heat of the fire burning continuously in its heart."⁴⁸ Already at this stage, Descartes's philosophical blueprint—"clear and distinct, simple ideas"—begins to emerge, if not fully formed yet. The result of such a "fiery" "touch" of imagination "affecting" the neurological "typography" of the brain is, Descartes says retrospectively and conclusively in the Sixth "Meditation": "a ghost or a vision created in my brain (like those that are formed in the brain when I sleep)."⁴⁹ In a Cartesian poetics of imagination, as with Bachelard's poetics of reverie, "only

heat penetrates; heat insinuates itself."⁵⁰ In both cases, heat is "ingrained in all the fibers of being"; Descartes's "wax" experiment, taking place in that legendary stove-heated room, is a literal example. Cartesian reflection uses these ingrained "passions" of the soul as its motor, as its productive matrix, as its cogitational bathtub—to recycle the metaphor introduced earlier in section two. Then, the original owner of this fire, of these passions, as the unfortunate case of Prometheus confirms, is traceable to God the original mover of being, the originary designer of being.

Once freshly shaken up—or heated up—in this way, *res cogitans* restages the same philosophical shock, the reflex, by miming the original "imprints" or attack of ideas: the I of "I think" *re-fleets* on it; the I "approach[es] phantoms and empty images as if to *touch* them" *again*. This is the second touch of imagination, which Descartes calls "the actions" or "volition of the soul." Its function, as his phrases suggest, is active: it is to "make the soul aware of the perceptions thus received"; the soul, at this stage, "considers its own nature."⁵¹ A reflexive touch is therefore not only a delicate gesture of imagination but a memory, "a memory of accident" that is delicate, precise, and powerful. Tactile reciprocity, that is, the reciprocity between touching and being touched, is more secure than its specular equivalent, for it involves extension (or a body): it is tightly coextensive and therefore swallows distance: "airtight," as Descartes would say.⁵²

Touch means security, as an act of hugging testifies; and one of the effective ways to secure a relation is to "impress," as exemplified in Descartes's poetics of somnambulism. This truth, Hume knows intuitively as a hardcore empiricist. As a way of problematizing "the abstruse philosophy, found on a turn of the mind" known as the "rationalist" philosophy of Cartesian kind, the impassioned empiricist says:

It is certain that the easy and obvious philosophy will always . . . have the preference above the accurate and abstruse. . . . It enters more into common life: *moulds* the heart and affections; and by *touching* those principles which actuate them, reforms their conduct, and brings them nearer to that model of perfection which it describes. On the contrary, the abstruse philosophy, found on a turn of the mind. . . .⁵³

Either Hume has not read Descartes (in detail), or his mind has irreversibly been "molded into" a prejudice. Undoubtedly, Descartes's philosophy, being a systematized series of self-reflections, is "found on a turn of the mind." Yet, such a Humean objection to Cartesian rationalism misses one important detail: the Cartesian "turn of the mind" enfolds God-memory or a memory of God which, for Descartes, is as intrusively tactile (in its dormant or incubatory state) as the Humean "bundle of impressions." The point of contention is that our abstruse rationalist, in fact, knows how to "mould the heart and affections," *albeit* in his own way; he knows how to sleep well.

Albeit in his own way? Does that imply that Descartes is not only a somnambulist but a solipsistic one—an egotistic lunatic even, “a fanatic of rightness” whose missionary sense of righteousness has no room for an ethics of self-effacement?⁵⁴ Is he a sad, unapproachable bigot? My answer will have to be a resounding “No.” As Gerald Bruns puts it incisively: “Cartesian doubt is methodical, not personal or ethical; it does not *touch* the whole man.”⁵⁵ That is Descartes’s skeptical aggression leaves something “untouched” (unviolated), and that is reflective intellect, “the natural light of reason,” which, as the first paragraph of *Discourse* stresses famously, all of us thinking animals share.⁵⁶ Accordingly, we fellow moderns are encouraged to use it wisely and creatively in our own ways: “My present aim, then, 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. . . . I hope it will be useful for some without being harmful to any. . . .”⁵⁷ Although the solitude of self-reflection is an inexplicable mystery, the intimate sense of mystery itself can be communicated; what Descartes communicates through and throughout his writings appears to be just that philosophical experience of wonder, of wonderful awakening. More importantly, he appears to need, as well as enjoy, such communication. The Descartes I am now thinking of is the fondly remembered letter writer of the following kind (who can be sharp-tongued at times, but only when necessary):

After acknowledging the goodness of God, the immortality of souls and the immensity of the universe, there is yet another truth that is, in my opinion, most useful to know. That is, that though each of us is a person distinct from others whose interests are accordingly in some way different from those of the rest of the world, we must still think that none of us could subsist alone and each one of us is really one of the many parts of the universe, and more particularly a part of the earth, the State, the society, the family to which we belong by our domicile, our oath of allegiance and our birth.⁵⁸

“I sleep, and I am the exterior that affects me”: I sleep, therefore I am “agitated,” “touched,” moved.⁵⁹ My key contention has been that Descartes’s system of thinking, of hyper-reflection, more specifically, does not preclude this move: the “movement” of Cartesian passions is primordially passive instead of active. The claim, stated in stronger terms, is that the exterior intrudes at the heart of the Cartesian landscape of thinking often characterized unfairly as self-insulated. One mode of such intrusion, which I have been exploring, is philosophical somnambulism: and the force of such intrusion, highlighted throughout the discussion, is the divine, the infinite, the mysterious. In the presence of God (who is not necessarily a “who,” the Christian God), Descartes becomes a sleeping matter, a dreaming butterfly, a malleable “subject” in the passive sense of the word:

The common feature of these states (hypnotized states) is the “stupor” or “sleep” of the individual’s soul “immersed” in the “form of feeling.” All these states have a hypnotic nature. But hypnotism, at best, lays bare. . . . a “passive state. . . .” “The diseased subject passes and remains under the power of another subject, the magnetizer.” In this state, the diseased subject is “selfless”; . . . this state is not its own.⁶⁰

Yet, the selfless slumber is a powerful sleep, powerful insofar as the sleeper is capable of dreaming, of being “magnetized.” This way, the selflessness of slumber can be transformed into a promiscuous procreativity. “Narcissus satisfies himself in the dreams of the slumbering soul! But sleep is run through by a trembling. . . . Trembling is not an image; it is the rhythm of the affected soul.”⁶¹

Descartes is contagious, and I have been “happily and lazily” led by this somnambulist. Like Descartes, who concludes his *Meditations* by saying, “we must acknowledge the weakness of our nature,” I must acknowledge that I am now tired of following him around.⁶² Now, I must go to bed.

NOTES

1. Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice et al., vol. 2 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 451.
2. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie*, trans. Daniel Russell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 154.
3. Bloch, *Principle of Hope*, p. 451.
4. René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, vol. 1 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 335 (emphasis added).
5. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 287.
6. Harvie Ferguson, *The Lure of Dreams: Sigmund Freud and the Construction of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 7.
7. See Bachelard, *Poetics of Reverie*, and Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, trans. Edith R. Farrell (Dallas: The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1994).
8. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), § 232, p. 212.
9. *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass.: G & C Merriam Co., 1981).
10. Cf. John Cole, *The Olympian Dreams and Youthful Rebellion of René Descartes* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), Part I, pp. 19–48. See also René Descartes, “Olympian Matters,” from *Early Writings*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, vol. 1 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 4–5.
11. See Cole, *The Olympian Dreams*, p. 3.

12. René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, vol. 1 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 116 (emphasis added).
13. See Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, vol. 21 (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953–74), pp. 199–204.
14. Gaston Bachelard, *The Dialectic of Duration*, trans. Mary McAllester Jones (Manchester: Cinnamen Press, 2000), pp. 8, 23.
15. See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1991), esp. p. 72.
16. Gustave Cohen, qtd. in Cole, *The Olympian Dreams*, p. 9.
17. See Charles Minahan, "The Turbulent Dream-Vision of Descartes's 'Olympian' Experience," in *Dreams in French Literature: The Persistent Voice*, ed. Tom Conroy (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), pp. 75–77.
18. Descartes, "Olympian Matters," p. 4.
19. See David Farrell Krell, *Of Memory, Reminiscence, and Writing: On the Verge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 62; Gerald L. Bruns, *Inventions: Writing, Textuality, and Understanding in Literary History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).
20. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, vol. 2 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 13.
21. See Dalia Judovitz, "Philosophy and Poetry: The Difference between Them in Plato and Descartes," in *Literature and the Question of Philosophy*, ed. Anthony Cascardi (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 24–51; *Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1988); L. Anyeth Kosman, "The Native Narrator: Meditation in Descartes's 'Meditations,' in *Essays on Descartes' Meditations*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 21–44; E. Louis Loeb, "Is There Radical Dissimulation in Descartes' Meditations?" in *Essays on Descartes' Meditations*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 243–270; and Jonathan Rée, "Descartes' Comedy," in *Philosophical Tales: An Essay on Philosophy and Literature* (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 5–30.
22. Catherine Clément, *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture*, trans. Sally O'Driscoll and Deirdre M. Mahoney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 162.
23. Descartes, "Olympian Matters," p. 4.
24. See Cole, *The Olympian Dreams*.
25. See René Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, vol. 1 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 104. See also Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, p. 195; *Discourse*, p. 127; *Meditations*, pp. 13–14, 53; "Seventh Set of Objections with Replies," in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, vol. 2 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 360.
26. Descartes, *Meditations*, pp. 61–62.
27. See Descartes, *Discourse*, pp. 130–131; *Meditations*, pp. 14, 49; "Seventh Set of Objections," pp. 347–348, 373–374.
28. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 31–63.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
30. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, § 344, p. 283.
31. See Descartes, *Discourse*, pp. 130–131.
32. See Shaun Islam, "Showing Losses, Counting Gains: 'Scenes' from Negative Autobiography," *Modern Language Notes*, 106:5 (1991), pp. 1007–1009.
33. Beryl Lang, *Philosophy and the Art of Writing: Studies in Philosophical and Literary Style* (London: Associated University Press, Bucknell University Press, 1983), p. 221.
34. Descartes, "Seventh Set of Objections," p. 335 (emphasis added).
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 347–348 (emphasis added).
36. René Descartes, *The Search for Truth*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, vol. 2 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 408.
37. See William Poundstone, *Labyrinths of Reason: Paradox, Puzzles, and the Frailty of Knowledge* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 8.
38. Descartes, "Olympian Matters," p. 5.
39. See Ann Hartle, *Death and the Disinterested Spectator: An Inquiry into the Nature of Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), pp. 144–152, esp. p. 148.
40. See Minahan, "The Turbulent Dream-Vision," p. 75.
41. See Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, in *Gesammelte Werke: Husserliana*, vol. 6 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1954), pp. 76–80, esp. p. 78; *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970), pp. 75–77, esp. p. 77.
42. See Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 21–83, esp. pp. 82–83.
43. Descartes, *Search*, pp. 408–409 (emphasis added).
44. See Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Michael Nass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 3, 13–16, 94–98.
45. Descartes, *Passions*, p. 338.
46. See *ibid.*, p. 336.
47. See Descartes, *Rules*, XII, 40; *Principles of Philosophy*, prin. 283, art. 196.
48. René Descartes, *Treatise on Man*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, vol. 1 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 108.
49. Descartes, *Meditations*, p. 62.
50. Gaston Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, trans. Alan Ross (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), pp. 40–41.
51. Descartes, *Passions*, p. 336.
52. See Descartes, *Search*, p. 512–513.
53. See David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 6–7 (emphasis added).
54. Jonathan Rée, *Descartes* (London: Allen Lane, 1974), p. 17.
55. Bruns, *Inventions*, p. 77 (emphasis added).

56. See Descartes, *Discourse*, p. 111.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
58. René Descartes, Letter to Princess Elizabeth, 15 September 1645.
59. Jean-Luc Nancy, "Identity and Trembling," in *The Birth to Presence*, translated by Brian Holmes *et al.* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 18.
60. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
62. Descartes, *Meditations*, p. 62.