

## The Role of Experience in Descartes' Metaphysics

### Analyzing the Difference Between *Intuitus*, *Intelligentia*, and *Experientia*\*

In *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*,<sup>1</sup> Descartes defined intuition (*intuitio*) as “the conception of a clear and attentive mind, which is so easy and distinct that there can be no room for doubt about what we are understanding” (*Reg.*, AT-X, 368), and deduction (*deductio*) as “the inference of something as following necessarily from some other propositions which are known with certainty” (*ibid.*, 369). However, in addition to intuition, experience (*experientia*) is also presented as the opposite of deduction. Descartes states the following in Rule II:

[...] we should bear in mind that there are two ways of arriving at a knowledge of things – through experience and through deduction. (*ibid.*, AT-X, 365.)

In this, experience and deduction are juxtaposed to arrive at a knowledge of things, but there is a difference in the credibility of cognition obtained by the two: “[W]hile our experiences of things are often deceptive, the deduction or pure inference of one thing from another can never be performed wrongly by an intellect which is in the least degree rational” (*ibid.*). However, this does not mean that one should completely abandon experience as a means of cognizing things. Although experience can often be wrong, it does not mean that it never gives any definite knowledge. It still depends on the type of experience. Descartes argues in Rule VIII that “it is possible to have experiential knowledge which is certain only of things which are entirely simple and absolute” (*ibid.*, 394).

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<sup>1</sup> For quotations from and references to Descartes, see René Descartes, *Œuvres de Descartes*, eds. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, 11 vols. (Paris, Vrin 1964–1974), abbreviated as AT and shown in the order of conventional abbreviations, volume numbers (Roman numerals), and page numbers (Arabic numerals). I refer to the following translations: Descartes 1985a; Descartes 1985b. I make changes to them as necessary. All emphases in the quotations are by the author.

As is well known, the *Rules* citing experience, intuition, and deduction to arrive at a knowledge of things is an unfinished work written before Descartes develops the systematic idea of metaphysics. However, it is not difficult to assume that experience has an essential function in his philosophical scheme from the fact that experience is continuously used in the *Meditations*, the *Principles*, the *Conversation with Burman*, and the *Search for Truth*,<sup>2</sup> even though deduction and intuition are no longer thematically treated after the *Rules*.<sup>3</sup> Some researchers have thematically discussed what Descartes meant by “experience”. For example, Clarke (1976) is the first to comprehensively treat the Cartesian experience in his study where he divided the concept broadly into two. The first is an experience as “a kind of common sense wisdom”. This pertains to the ability to deal with a wide variety of environments and customs and not something purely intellectual or sensory. The second type is an experience that concerns various processes of cognition such as thought, intuition, sensation, observation, and verification. The reason for the distinction is that although it is possible for some people not to have the experience of the former (i.e., common sense wisdom), it is impossible for any human not to have the experience of the latter (i.e., thought, intuition, sensation, observation, etc.).

Clarke’s study has some significance as basic research on the issue. Although the Cartesian experience can be classified this way, however, scholars must create more rigorous discussions on how the latter kind of experience relates to similar concepts such as intuition and understanding (*intelligentia*). Since this study, most other research in English-speaking countries has focused on Descartes’ experience in natural science or “experiment”.<sup>4</sup> In French-speaking countries, in contrast, Grimaldi, many years ago, and Guenancia and Kambouchner, in recent years, mentioned experience in Descartes’ metaphysics. However, there are still many points that scholars must investigate, as mentioned in the next section.

In this paper, I intend to explore what Descartes meant by the term “experience” in the context of metaphysics. To be concrete, I first compare Descartes with earlier philosophers and clarify that Descartes’ use of the term “experience” has characteristics that were not recognized earlier (Section 1). I then

<sup>2</sup> Experience is used in the themes of the *cogito*, God, and free will that underlie his metaphysics (*Med.*, AT-VII, 49; *ibid.*, 56; *2ae Resp.*, AT-VII, 140; *5ae Resp.*, AT-VII, 358; *6ae Resp.*, AT-VII, 427; *P.Ph.*, AT-VIII, 19–20; *ibid.*, 33; *Ent. Burm.*, AT-V, 147; *ibid.*, AT-V, 163; *R.V.*, AT-X, 524).

<sup>3</sup> See Garber 1992, 56–57.

<sup>4</sup> There is a section for “experiment” but none for “experience” in *The Cambridge Descartes Lexicon* (Nolan 2016), which introduces the latest findings of research. This term is described together with experiment as “experience (experiment)” in the *Historical Dictionary of Descartes and Cartesian Philosophy* (Ariew 2015). Alanen (2003, 266–267 [n. 21]) briefly mentions Descartes’ notion of experience, but she does not go beyond the framework of Clarke’s research.

clarify what the role of experience in Descartes is, while examining the validity of previous studies that equate Descartes' experience with intuition or understanding (sections 2 and 3).

## I. THE PECULIARITY OF DESCARTES' USE OF EXPERIENCE

### 1. *Before Descartes*

The concept of experience has been an important part of philosophy since the ancient times. We can look at Aristotle as an example. Setting aside the validity of Heinemann's view (1941. 562) that Aristotle is the first philosopher who defined experience,<sup>5</sup> it is at least clear that he was one of the earliest philosophers who emphasized on the method of experience in academic knowledge. Aristotle argued on experience as follows: “[F]rom memory experience is produced in men; for the several memories of the same thing produce finally the capacity for a single experience. And [...] science and art come to men through experience [...]” (Aristotle 2007. 2205). In other words, the perceptions given by the senses accumulate as memories and are appropriately categorized and sublimated into one experience of the same thing. Knowledge and skills arise from the experience thereafter. In the words of Gregorić and Grgić, the Aristotelian experience can be described as something that “fills a wide gap between the non-rational cognitive capacities of perception and memory on the one side, and the rational cognitive dispositions of art and science on the other side” (Gregorić 2006. 2).

Medieval philosophy was strongly influenced by him – “experience” was Aristotelian. According to Albert the Great (Albert 1960. 13), experience is the cognition about the individual things received from repeated memories (“*experientia est cognitio singularium ex multiplicatis accepta memoriis*”), and in order to have knowledge through experience, there must be three separate mental events: (1) an impression of something, (2) an impression of another thing similar to it, and (3) an act of taking the two preceding impressions, at least one of which is recalled from memory (King 2003. 8). Thomas Aquinas also states that “we ourselves have experience when we know singular things through sensation” (Aquinas 2018. Prima Pars, q. 54, art. 5) and that “[one] has memory and experience of [the particulars] through the sensory power” (Aquinas 2018. Prima Pars, I, q. 117, art. 1).<sup>6</sup> For Aquinas, experience/to experience is *something that arises from multiple memories/to cognize individual things through the senses*, which is based

<sup>5</sup> According to Gregorić and Grgić (2006. 1–30), Aristotle did not define “experience.”

<sup>6</sup> The original word here is *experimentum*, but it was used synonymously with *experientia* at least until the late Middle Ages (Park 2011. 38 [n. 4]).

on Aristotle's view. As "experience" originated in the senses, it was never the chief method in metaphysics in the medieval era. This point is evident in Duns Scotus' *Ordinatio*. He writes thus:

It must be noted, further, that sometimes experience concerns [not a principle itself, as was the case in the preceding paragraph, but rather a] conclusion, as, for example, that the moon is at times eclipsed. Then one assumes that the conclusion holds and investigates the cause of such a conclusion by means of an analysis. And sometimes an empirical conclusion (*conclusionem experta*) leads to principles that are known from their terms. In that case, one can on the basis of such principles known through their terms get more certain knowledge of the conclusion that was initially only known empirically (*secundum experientiam*). This is an instance of the first category of certain knowledge, for it is deduced from a principle known per se. For example, it is known per se that "when something opaque is put between a light source and a clearly visible body, it prevents the propagation of light to the body." If, then, it is found out by analysis that the earth is such a body put between the sun and the moon, knowledge [of the eclipse] will be had with maximal certainty based on a demonstration giving the reason or the cause. The conclusion will not just rest on experience, as was the case before the [explanatory] principle was found. (Scotus 2016. 125)

According to Scotus, if a proposition placed in the position of the conclusion of a syllogism is known in advance by experience, it can be considered a sound argument as a whole by exploring its principle retroactively from the conclusion. That is, on the one hand, the presupposed self-evident principle is obtained by returning from the empirical proposition as a conclusion. On the other hand, the self-evident principle obtained *a posteriori* guarantees the certainty of the empirical proposition. It follows from this that there was a difference in the certainty between what is known by an experience and by [the deduction from] the principle even if the two pertain to the same thing.<sup>7</sup> That is, empirical knowledge is considered inferior to deductive knowledge that is derived from principle.

The understanding that experience arises from the senses and memories is also recognized in Michel de Montaigne's *Essays*, which Descartes loved to read. In Chapter 13, titled *Of Experience* in the third volume, Montaigne writes thus:

<sup>7</sup> According to Descartes, such a method is useless for discovering the truth. "But on further examination I observed with regard to logic that syllogisms and most of its other techniques are of less use for learning things than for explaining to others the things one already knows or even, as in the art of Lully, for speaking without judgement about matters of which one is ignorant." (*D.M.*, AT-VI. 17; cf. *Principes*, AT-IX. 13)

There is no desire more natural than the desire for knowledge. We try all the ways that can lead us to it. When reason fails us, we use experience –

Experience, by example led,  
By varied trials art has bred

MANILIUS

– which is a weaker and less dignified means. But truth is so great a thing that we must not disdain any medium that will lead us to it. (Montaigne 1965. 815)

Here, Montaigne obviously inherited from Aristotle the idea that experience arises from memories, and inherited from medieval philosophers such as Scotus, the idea that experience is inferior to reason. For him, experience is most useful in medicine. He writes that “Experience is really on its own dunghill in the subject of medicine, where reason yields it the whole field” (*ibid.* 826). He also claims that “[M]edicine professes always to have experience as the touchstone for its workings” (*ibid.* 827). However, Montaigne did not rely on the method of experience while discussing metaphysical matters.

We can fully surmise that experience did not play a major role in metaphysics by referring to various Latin dictionaries compiled in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to Micraelius’ *Lexicon philosophicum*, published shortly after Descartes died,

“Experience is the general knowledge constructed of a number of individual and [mutually] similar things (*Experientia est ex pluribus singularibus cognatis scientia universalis extracta*)” (Micraelius 1653. 417). In *Lexicon philologicum*, Martini writes that “[Experience] is, first, a sense, second, an observation, third, an experience and fourth, an induction. Therefore, it is also the general rule [derived by an induction] (*Primo est sensus, secundo observatio, tertio experientia, quarto inductio, hinc generalis regula*)” (Martini 1655. art. *Experientia*). According to Chauvin’s *Lexicon rationales*, which was compiled in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, “Experience is a kind of cognition which is not taught by anyone but arises from a practice or a habit. Only in natural science each person has experience, and he or she necessarily has experience. This is because reason without experience is equal to a swaying ship without a person steering (*Experientia est quaedam cognitio nullo docente, per usum contingens. In Physicis tantum obtinet, sed & necessario obtinet; est enim ratio sine experientia velut navis sine rectore fluctuans.*)” (Chauvin 1692. art. *Experientia*).

These dictionaries have a description from the perspective of natural science but not metaphysics, and Goelenius’ *Lexicon philosophicum* (1590), which was compiled in the latter half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, does not have a section on experience in the first place. We can say that these dictionaries represent aspects of experience as a philosophical concept that continued for a hundred years that centers on Descartes’ death (1650).

## 2. Descartes: *Introducing Experience into Metaphysics*

Descartes used the term “experience” heavily in the field of metaphysics. The usage is very different from that of the pre-Descartes tradition identified in the previous section. Its most prominent characteristic is that the objects of experience include external things perceived through the senses and internal things that appear in the mind. These include thought, free will, the union of mind and body, and so on. I summarize some of the main examples in a table.

<i>Experientia/experimentum/expérience (including the verb experiri/expérimenter)</i>		
<i>Experience concerning the mind</i>		<i>Experience concerning the union of mind and body</i>
<i>Metaphysical</i>	<i>Others</i>	/
<p><b>Med., AT-VII:</b>  <b>38:</b> “I know by experience that these ideas do not depend on my will, and hence that they do not depend simply on me.”  <b>53:</b> “I know by experience that there is in me a faculty of judgement [...]”  <b>55:</b> “[T]here is no call to doubt his existence if I happen to experience that there are other instances where I do not grasp why or how certain things were made by him.”  <b>57:</b> “It is only the will, or freedom of choice, which I experience within me to be so great that the idea of any greater faculty is beyond my grasp [...]”</p> <p><b>Resp., AT-VII:</b>  <b>140:</b> “[Someone who says, ‘I am thinking, therefore I am’] learns it from experiencing in his own case that it is impossible that he should think without existing.”  <b>191:</b> “On the question of our freedom, I made no assumptions beyond what we all experience within ourselves.”  <b>358:</b> “[T]he mind, when engaged in private meditation, can experience its own thinking but cannot have any experience to establish whether the brutes think or not [...]”</p>	<p><b>Med., AT-VII:</b>  <b>47:</b> “I am now experiencing a gradual increase in my knowledge [...]”  <b>52:</b> “[E]xperience tells us that this same contemplation, albeit much less perfect, enables us to know the greatest joy of which we are capable in this life.”  <b>54:</b> “But when I turn back to myself, I know by experience that I am prone to countless errors.”  <b>59:</b> “My experience in the last few days confirms this: the mere fact that I found that all my previous beliefs were in some sense open to doubt was enough to turn my absolutely confident belief in their truth into the supposition that they were wholly false.”  <b>62:</b> “Admittedly, I [experience] a certain weakness in me, in that I am unable to keep my attention fixed on one and the same item of knowledge at all times [...]”  <b>71:</b> “The conclusion that material things exist is also suggested by the faculty of imagination, which I [experience] that I use when I turn my mind to material things.”</p>	<p><b>Resp., AT-VII:</b>  <b>228:</b> “[T]he fact that the mind is closely conjoined with the body, which we experience constantly through our senses [...]”</p> <p><b>P.Ph., AT-VIII:</b>  <b>23:</b> “But we also experience within ourselves certain other things which must not be referred either to the mind alone or to the body alone.”</p> <p><b>Ent. Burm., AT-V:</b>  <b>163:</b> “[How the soul can be affected by the body and vice versa, when their natures are completely different] is very difficult to explain; but here our experience is sufficient, since it is so clear on this point that it just cannot be gainsaid. This is evident in the case of the passions, and so on.”</p>

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<i>Experience concerning the mind</i>		<i>Experience concerning the union of mind and body</i>
<i>Metaphysical</i>	<i>Others</i>	/
<p><b>427:</b> “We cannot fail constantly to experience within ourselves that we are thinking.”</p> <p><b><i>P.Ph., AT-VIII:</i></b>  <b>6:</b> “But whoever turns out to have created us, and however powerful and however deceitful he may be, in the meantime we nonetheless experience within us the kind of freedom which enables us always to refrain from believing things which are not completely certain and thoroughly examined.”  <b>17:</b> “All the modes of thinking that we experience within ourselves can be brought under two general headings [...]”</p> <p><b><i>Ent. Burm., AT-V:</i></b>  <b>147:</b> “[...] I am attending only to what I experience within myself – for example ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’. I do not pay attention in the same way to the general notion ‘whatever thinks exists.’”  <b>159:</b> “Let everyone just go down deep into himself and find out [by experience] whether or not he has a perfect and absolute will, and whether he can conceive of anything which surpasses him in freedom of the will. I am sure everyone will find [by experience] that it is as I say.”</p> <p><b><i>R.V., AT-X:</i></b>  <b>524:</b> “[W]hat convinces us of [thought, existence and certainty] is simply our own experience or awareness – that awareness or internal testimony which everyone experiences within himself when he ponders on such matters.”</p>	<p><b>75:</b> “For my experience was that these ideas came to me quite without my consent, so that I could not have sensory awareness of any object, even if I wanted to, unless it was present to my sense organs; and I could not avoid having sensory awareness of it when it was present.”</p> <p><b><i>Resp., AT-VII:</i></b>  <b>230:</b> “[O]ur own experience reliably informs us that [the sight of the impending fall reaches the brain and sends the animal spirits into the nerves in the manner necessary to produce this movement even without any mental volition, just as it would be produced in a machine] [...]”  <b>358:</b> “But when the imagination is less intense, we often have the experience of understanding something quite apart from the imagination.”  <b>365:</b> “[E]ach of us knows by his own experience quite well that he has this sort of understanding of the infinite [...]”  <b>429:</b> “I [do not experience] so much divine grace within me that I feel a vocation for such sacred studies.”</p> <p><b><i>P.Ph., AT-VIII:</i></b>  <b>16:</b> “[...] the cause of the errors to which we know by experience that we are prone.”</p> <p><b><i>Ent. Burm., AT-V:</i></b>  <b>148:</b> “I have nothing to say on the subject of memory. Everyone should [know by experience] whether he is good at remembering.”</p>	

From these examples, we see that experience is crucial to Descartes in establishing the certainty of metaphysical knowledge. We can infer by referring to the French versions of the *Meditations* and the *Principles* compiled by third parties that his use of such “experience” was peculiar for his time. The word “experience” in the original Latin text is replaced by a completely different word in the French versions of the *Meditations* and the *Principles* as it was deemed appropriate: (1) “*Itaque debeo nunc interrogare me ipsum, an habeam aliquam vim per quam possim efficere ut ego ille, qui jam sum, paulo post etiam sim futurus [...]. Sed & nullam esse experior [...]*” (*Med.*, AT-VII. 49) was changed to “Il faut donc seulement ici que je m’interoge moi-même, pour savoir si je possède quelque pouvoir et quelque vertu, qui soit capable de faire en sorte que moi, qui suis maintenant, sois encore à l’avenir: [...]; mais je n’en *ressens* aucune dans moi [...]” (AT-IX-1. 39); (2) “[...] *apud se experiat, fieri non posse ut cogitet, nisi existat*” (*2ae Resp.*, AT-VII, 140) was changed to “[...] il *sent* en lui-même qu’il ne se peut pas faire qu’il pense, s’il n’existe” (AT-IX-1. 110-111); (3) “[...] *omnes modi cogitandi, quos in nobis experimur, ad duos generales referri possunt [...]*” (*P.Ph.*, AT-VIII, 17) was changed to “[...] toutes les façons de penser que nous *remarquons* en nous, peuvent être rapportées à deux générales [...]” (AT-IX-2. 39); (4) “[...] *hanc in nobis libertatem esse experiebamur [...]*” (*P.Ph.*, AT-VIII, 20) was changed to “[...] nous *apercevions* en nous une liberté [...]” (AT-IX-2. 41); (5) “[...] *nec ullam similitudinem intelligere possimus, inter colorem quem supponimus esse in objectis, & illum quem experimur esse in sensu [...]*” (*P.Ph.*, AT-VIII, 34) was changed to “[...] notre raison ne nous fasse apercevoir aucune ressemblance entre la couleur que nous supposons être en cet objet & celle qui *est* en notre sens [...]” (AT-IX-2. 58). We can say that such changes suggest that during that period, the Cartesian use of “*experientia*” seemed alien to the French translators.

### 3. From Montaigne to Descartes

Unlike earlier philosophers, what led Descartes to use the word “experience” heavily in metaphysics? One possible interpretation is that Descartes attempted to apply the natural scientific method of experience (experiment) to metaphysics. Montaigne placed utmost importance on experience in the field of medicine. He writes thus:

It is reasonable that [a doctor] should catch the pox if he wants to know how to treat it. Truly I should trust such a man. For the others guide us like the man who paints seas, reefs and ports while sitting at his table, and sails the model of a ship there in complete safety. (Montaigne 1965. 827)



It is necessary to know what illness X is first to be able to know the cure for it. However, Montaigne explains that to know what X is, it is not enough to observe a person suffering from X *from the outside*. The doctor must observe the situation caused by X *within himself*. Otherwise, there will only be theoretical arguments about X. Descartes' metaphysics also reflected such an argument. He writes thus:

[T]he only way we can learn such things (= doubt and thought) is by ourselves: what convinces us of them is simply our own experience or awareness – that awareness or internal testimony which everyone experiences within himself when he ponders on such matters. Thus it would be pointless trying to define, for someone totally blind, what it is to be white: in order to know what that is, all that is needed is to have one's eyes open and to see white. In the same way, in order to know what doubt and thought are, all one need do is to doubt or to think. That tells us all it is possible to know about them, and explains more about them than even the most precise definitions. (*R.V., AT-X, 524*)

Here, Descartes seems to have kept in mind Montaigne's claim. As one needs to actually get syphilis to learn how to cure it, and to open his or her eyes and actually see what is white to know the color, one must actually think and doubt to know what thought and doubt are. Otherwise, one may end up just playing with theoretical arguments on thought and doubt. Descartes writes, "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; the result is that they only make matters more obscure" (*P.Ph., AT-VIII, 8*). In other words, Descartes sought to emphasize experience not only in the fields of natural science and medicine, but also in metaphysics. Therefore, Descartes' metaphysics is different from that of earlier philosophers and seems to be regarded *experiential metaphysics*.<sup>8</sup>

Based on the above-mentioned considerations, we can see that to understand Descartes' metaphysics, it is essential to clarify his concept of experience. How then has previous research treated this concept? Scholars have tended to identify experience with other intellectual acts such as "intuition (*intuitus*)" and "understanding (*intelligentia*)." Hamelin (1921, 75) argues that there is a well-defined experience that covers distinct notions in the Cartesian system, and such an experience is "a kind of intuition." Grimaldi (1978, 101) also claims that intuition is an experience of simple nature by intelligence, therefore, absolute certainty

<sup>8</sup> The connection between Montaigne's *Of Experience* (in the *Essays*) with Descartes' *Search for Truth* is unverifiable because there is no direct evidence showing that Descartes kept Montaigne in mind while writing the *Search for Truth*. However, my interpretation does not seem invalid considering that Descartes was hugely influenced by the writings of Montaigne.

is possible only in that intuition and one may define it as the “metaphysical experience of the truth” (*l’expérience métaphysique de la vérité*). Guenancia (2009. 64) argues that the experience of a clearly present object is nothing more than a certain perception of a thing, and its certainty is an epistemological expression of a direct experience that the mind obtains with things through intuition. Kambouchner (2015. 128) argues that every piece of evidence and intellectual intuition as provided in the *Rules* is the full experience of an object. This is an experience of the necessity that things are a certain way, or an experience of the impossibility that things cannot be any other way. Therefore, *intelligere* and *experiri* are synonymous.

On my reading, however, equating experience with intuition or understanding seems to be impossible considering Descartes’ meditative transition from his early *Rules* to the *Meditations* and beyond. It would only overlook the unique role included in experience. In the next section, I examine the unique function by comparing and contrasting experience with both intuition and understanding while critically examining previous research.

## II. INTUITUS AND EXPERIENTIA

In this section, I examine the relationship between experience and intuition. At first glance, it seems possible to interpret that, for Descartes, experience is synonymous with intuition or the latter is a subdivision of the former, because these concepts are presented in a paired relationship of *deduction-experience* and *deduction-intuition*. This being so, it follows that experience and intuition have the same function and degree of certainty in metaphysics. On my reading, however, such an interpretation cannot be established unless we restrict the discussion to the *Rules*.<sup>9</sup> This is because what was claimed to be definitely known by intuition in the *Rules* is doubted in the *Meditations*: “that [one] exists, that [one] is thinking, that a triangle is bounded by just three lines, and a sphere by a single surface, and the like” (*Reg.*, AT-X, 368) are considered known by intuition in the *Rules*, but among them, the certainty of mathematical and geometrical knowledge is rejected by the methodological doubt in the *Meditations*: he states, “[...] since I sometimes believe that others go astray in cases where they think they have the most perfect knowledge, may I not similarly go wrong every time I add two and three or count the sides of a square, or in some even simpler matter, if

<sup>9</sup> The eight notes Grimaldi adds to the section where this issue is discussed in his book all refer to the *Rules* (Grimaldi 1978. 100–101). Hamelin’s argument that “*experientia*” and “*intuitus*” are used as synonyms concerns the *Rules* and not the *Meditations* or the *Search for Truth* (Hamelin 1921. 75). Guenancia, on the contrary, seems to identify the metaphysical experience that can guarantee the truth of the *cogito* as the intuition in the *Rules* (Guenancia 2009. 65).

that is imaginable?" (*Med.*, AT-VII, 21). In the Second Reply, the *Search for Truth* and the *Conversation with Burman*, Descartes claims that one needs "to experience" one's own thoughts and existence rather than "have an intuition" of them.

If we, ignoring these points, equate the intuitions that include the mathematical knowledge mentioned in the *Rules* with the experience mentioned in Descartes' later works that discuss metaphysics, it follows that the level of the certainty of things that are said to be known by experience in metaphysics (especially the certainty of the *cogito*) is equal to that of the mathematical knowledge that will be rejected by the methodological doubt. Therefore, it was impossible for Descartes to maintain the certainty of experience *at a metaphysical level* when he said that "the mind [...] can experience its own thinking" (*5ae Resp.*, AT-VII, 358) and that "[one] learns it from experiencing in [one's] own case that it is impossible that [one] should think without existing" (*2ae Resp.*, AT-VII, 140–141).<sup>10</sup> After the *Rules*, he rarely used intuition as a specialized philosophical concept<sup>11</sup>: there are seven examples of "intuition" in the *Meditations*, two of which are used in the quite ordinary sense of "staring;" the other five examples are used as those that can be compared to sight and are closely related to imaginations: "When I imagine a triangle, for example, I do not merely understand that it is a figure bounded by three lines, but I also see the three lines with my mind's eye as if they were present before me. This is what I call imagining" (*Med.*, AT-VII, 72).

Let us also consider the following points in the Second Reply:

And when we become aware that we are thinking things, this is a primary notion that is not derived by means of any syllogism. 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 intuition of the mind. This is clear from the fact that if he were deducing it by means of a syllogism, he would have to have had previous knowledge of the major premiss 'Everything which thinks is, or exists'; yet in fact he learns it from experiencing in his own case that it is impossible that he should think without existing. It is in the nature of our mind to construct general propositions on the basis of our knowledge of particular ones. (*2ae Resp.*, AT-VII, 140–141)

The first impression is that Descartes adopted intuition as one of the valid methods in metaphysics. He does write that "I am thinking, therefore I am" is known "by a simple intuition of the mind." On my reading, however, the "intuition" mentioned here does not have any academically special meaning.

<sup>10</sup> The object of intuition in the *Rules* is not "I think, therefore I am," but "I think" and "I exist," separately. Descartes made no mention of the connection between thought and existence in the *Rules* and did not argue for the existence of "I" as an entity distinguished from the body.

<sup>11</sup> Marion (1977, 295–302) argued that "*intuitus*" should be translated as "regard."

The phrase “recognizes it as something self-evident by a simple intuition of the mind” does not mean more than recognizing without the mediation of a major premise. Rather, the emphasis in this section is on the explanation that “he learns it (=existence) from experiencing in his own case that it is impossible that he should think without existing.” In other words, Descartes acknowledged that in order to cognize one’s own existence “by a simple intuition of the mind,” the major premise “Everything which thinks is” is not necessary, but “experiencing in [one’s] own case that it is impossible that [one] should think without existing” is necessary. The intuition here is different from the intuition in the *Rules*, in that the latter is just “tak[ing] in at one glance” (*Reg.*, AT-X, 370) propositions and the link with plural propositions and the former is recognizing particular things<sup>12</sup> through the practice where one achieves cognition within oneself<sup>13</sup> (*2ae Resp.*, AT-VII, 141). Whereas Descartes presented arguments in the *Meditations* and the *Replies*, he realized that the intuition he mentioned in the *Rules* could no longer serve as a method for his metaphysical investigation.<sup>14</sup> Thus, he began to use the method of experience instead of intuition when he discussed metaphysical subjects, such as the *cogito* and free will.

### III. INTELLIGENTIA AND EXPERIENTIA

Next, I examine the relationship between experience and understanding. As mentioned earlier, Kambouchner asserted that experience and understanding are the same thing. However, is such an interpretation appropriate? Stating from the conclusion, there is a difference between both concepts in terms of the object’s actual *presence*, and this presence is the most distinctive attribute of experience.

The presence of an object of perception has a compelling force on the subject in this sentence: “I could not have sensory awareness of any object, even if I wanted to, unless it was present to my sense organs; and I could not avoid having sensory awareness of it when it was present” (*Med.*, AT-VII, 75). Understanding

<sup>12</sup> According to Rosenthal (1986. 422), “understanding some propositional content does not typically pin down the reference of whatever token-reflexive components are involved. Understanding ‘Theaetetus is sitting’ does not determine the time that the present tense refers to; understanding ‘He gives it to her’ does not suffice to pick out any particular person or gift. To pin down reference in such cases, one typically needs more than an act of understanding.” We may assume that because Descartes was aware of this point, he abandoned the intuition defined in the *Rules*. It was no more than simply grasping the content of a proposition.

<sup>13</sup> The experience that *fieri non posse ut cogitet, nisi existat/il ne se peut pas faire qu’il pense, s’il n’existe* (AT-VII, 140/AT-IX. 111) is differentiated from the impersonal general proposition “In order to think it is necessary to exist (*pour penser, il faut être*)”. The former has a personal noun (third person singular, i.e., the one who says, “I think, therefore I am”).

<sup>14</sup> See Curley 1978. 38; Garber 1992. 56–57.

does not imply the presence of the object from this sentence: "When I imagine a triangle, for example, I do not merely understand that it is a figure bounded by three lines, but at the same time I also see the three lines with my mind's eye as if they were present before me" (*Med.*, AT-VII, 72). In other words, understanding alone cannot lead one to grasp the object as a *thing that is present*. For example, a geometrically perfect triangle can be understood through analytical geometry (i.e., by converting it into a mathematical formula), but it will no longer be the triangle itself (as a shape). The object of understanding is no longer present as it was.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, the object of experience is things that are present. Experience is the act of *making an object present*. To clarify this, let us consider the concept of thought, which Descartes most emphasized as what can be known by experience.<sup>16</sup> According to the *Search for Truth*, we do not have to "rack our brains trying to find the 'proximate genus' and the 'essential differentia' which go to make up their true definition" (*R.V.*, AT-X, 523); rather, we can know it by "our own experience" (*ibid.*, 524). Descartes compared this as follows: "[I]t would be pointless trying to define, for someone totally blind, what it is to be white: in order to know what that is, all that is needed is to have one's eyes open and to see white" (*ibid.*). Just as one needs to actually see something white to know what white is, one also needs to actually think to know what thought is. "The mind [...] can experience its own thinking" (*5ae Resp.*, AT-VII, 358) means that the mind "is actually thinking" (*2ae Resp.*, AT-VII, 151), and for the mind to actually think is nothing but for the mind to make a thought about something present in itself. Descartes considered thought "what [one] *cannot fail to experience* within [oneself]" (*6ae Resp.*, AT-VII, 427) precisely because it is present to the mind. The mind cannot resist the compelling force of the presence of thought and cannot help but accept that the thought is in the mind, as long as it is present. Descartes also argued the following: "I know by experience that there is in me a faculty of judgement" (*Med.*, AT-VII, 53) and "I know by experience that [the

<sup>15</sup> Let us compare the following texts:

1. "[W]e understand [the mind] to exist without the body" (*4ae Resp.*, AT-VII, 227).
2. "We know by experience that our minds are so closely joined to our bodies" (*À X\*\*\**, AT-III, 423–424).

Descartes claims that "we can understand that the mind exists without the body" and explains that "I know that everything which I clearly and distinctly understand is capable of being created by God so as to correspond exactly with my understanding of it. Hence the fact that I can clearly and distinctly understand one thing apart from another is enough to make me certain that the two things are distinct, since they are capable of being separated, at least by God" (*Med.*, AT-VII, 78). The mind cannot experience that the mind and body are separate entities and not interdependent even though the mind can understand it by the intellect. Descartes says that the mind can understand that it exists without the body. However, he does not say that the mind can experience it. What the mind experiences is that it is given various sensations and emotions by the body and that the will of the mind causes physical movements (such as walking and bending/stretching of arms).

<sup>16</sup> "[T]he mind, when engaged in private meditation, can experience its own thinking" (*5ae Resp.*, AT-VII, 358; cf. *6ae Resp.*, AT-VII, 427; *Ent. Burm.*, AT-V, 147; *R.V.*, AT-X, 524).

will] is not restricted in any way. Indeed, I think it is very noteworthy that there is nothing else in me which is so perfect and so great that the possibility of a further increase in its perfection or greatness is beyond my understanding” (*ibid.*, 56). The experience mentioned here has a role to make present the situation where “the ability to make a judgement exists within oneself.” Such is done by actually carrying out the act of judgment. Free will is presented in a way that it is not restricted by any limitations by actually making a decision. Even with the methodological doubt that denies everything, the presence of thought, a faculty of judgment, and free will can never be denied.

In addition, experience in this sense has an extremely close relationship with consciousness in modern language. When we experience that we are thinking, that there is in us a faculty of judgment, and that our own will is not restricted in any way, it is impossible for us not to be self-aware of actually carrying out such acts by ourselves in that situation. Although we are often unaware of physical acts even if they are actually being carried out (e.g., turning over during sleep), it is impossible for us not to be aware of purely non-physical acts such as thought, judgment, and decision making. Descartes uses the words *experientia* and *conscientia* interchangeably, as the following texts show:

*Itaque debeo nunc interrogare me ipsum, an habeam aliquam vim per quam possim efficere ut ego ille, qui jam sum, paulo post etiam sim futurus : nam, cum nihil aliud sim quam res cogitans, vel saltem cum de ea tantum mei parte praecise nunc agam quae est res cogitans, si quae talis vis in me esset, ejus proculdubio **consci**us essem. Sed & nullam esse **experior**, & ex hoc ipso evidentissime cognosco me ab aliquo ente a me diverso pendere. (Med., AT-VII, 49)*

*Nam sane fieri non potest quin semper apud nosmetipsos **experiamur** nos cogitare ; nec proinde ex eo quod ostendatur bruta animantia omnibus suis operationibus absque ulla cogitatione fungi posse, quisquam concludet seipsum ergo etiam non aliter operari quam bruta, propter hoc scilicet quod illis cogitationem tribuerit, adeo pertinaciter adhaerebit istis verbis, homines & bruta eodem modo operantur, ut, cum illi ostendetur bruta non cogitare, malit se etiam illa sua, cujus non potest non esse sibi **consci**us, cogitatione exuere, quam mutare opinioionem quod ipse eodem modo ac bruta operetur. (6ae Resp., AT-VII, 427)*

*[...] libertatis autem & indifferentiae, quae in nobis est, nos ita **consci**os esse, ut nihil sit quod evidentius & perfectius comprehendamus. Absurdum enim esset, propterea quod non comprehendimus unam rem, quam scimus ex natura sua nobis esse debere incomprehensibilem, de alia dubitare, quam intime comprehendimus, atque apud nosmet ipsos **experimur**. (P.Ph., AT-VIII, 20)*

*[...] hocque propter aptam corporis configurationem, quam mens potest ignorare, ac etiam propter mentis cum corpore unionem, cuius sane mens **consci**a est ; alioquin enim ad membra movenda voluntatem suam non inclinaret. (New line) Quod autem mens, quae incorporea*

*est, corpus possit impellere, nulla quidem ratiocinatio vel comparatio ab aliis rebus petita, sed certissima & evidentissima experientia quotidie nobis ostendit [...]. (À Arnauld [29 juillet 1648], AT-V, 222)*

*Verum his adjungo, fieri non posse, ut alia quis ratione, ac per se ipsum, ea addiscat, neque ut de iis alio modo persuasus sit, quam propria experientia, eaque conscientia, vel interno testimonio, quod in se ipso unusquisque, cum res perpendit, experitur. (R.V., AT-X, 524)*

It is still disputed among scholars whether it is possible to translate Descartes' *conscientia* as "consciousness". However, we do not have to address this here. We should be cautious about considering the Cartesian *conscientia* as the philosophical term "consciousness", but it is true that this Latin word traditionally means not only conscience, as in ethical valuation, but also an awareness unrelated to ethical valuation, such as witness and testimony. According to Hennig (2007. 455–484), *consciis* means "witness" when used as a noun. The word implies that a person knows about a crime or an event because he or she was involved in it. *Conscientia* was considered a witness to an event one was involved in (Seneca writes, "When one has one's own *conscientia*, what is the problem of not having a witness?" and Quintilianus writes, "*Conscientia* is equivalent to a thousand witnesses"). It is important to note that Descartes used the word *conscientia*, which had traditionally meant witness and testimony, interchangeably with *experientia*. For Descartes, experience not only meant that the mind actually carried out purely non-physical acts such as thinking and judging. It also meant that the mind witnesses and testifies to what arises within itself from those acts. The mind may not be able to witness or testify to some physical acts (e.g., turning over during sleep). However, in the case of non-physical (i.e., purely mental) acts, such as thinking and judging, it is never possible for the mind to not be able to witness or testify to them, as the mind carries them out within itself.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and above-mentioned considerations, experience has unique attributes that differ from those of intuition and understanding in Descartes' philosophical system. For Descartes, experience refers to actually carrying out purely non-physical acts such as thinking and judging. It also means to witness and testify to (i.e., be conscious of) what arises in the mind from those acts.

It seems that the replacement of *intuitus* in the *Rules* with *experientia*, which connotes consciousness is inevitable from the transition of Descartes' thought. According to the *Rules*, intuition is "the conception of a clear and attentive mind, which is so easy and *distinct*" (*Reg.*, AT-X, 368). However, not everything that

arises within oneself is clear and distinct: pain and pleasure are clear but not distinct.<sup>17</sup> Thus, if we use intuition (and understanding) alone consistently, we will not be able to capture these things; therefore, we will not be able to reach the Sixth Meditation, which discusses the relationship between the mind and body. Descartes used experience as a means to capture our thought and existence as well as our internal senses such as clear but indistinct pain and pleasure. The mind experiences its own thoughts, existence, free will, and pain and pleasure. The mind *is conscious of* them.

#### Abbreviations for the Works of Descartes

*Ent. Burm.* = *Entretien avec Burman*

*Med.* = *Meditationes de prima philosophia*

*P.Ph.* = *Principia philosophiae*

*Reg.* = *Regulae ad directionem ingenii*

*Resp.* = *Responsiones*

*R.V.* = *Recherche de la vérité*

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<sup>17</sup> “For example, when someone feels an intense pain, the perception he has of it is indeed very clear, but is not always distinct” (*P.Ph.*, AT-VIII, 22).



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