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0521811341 - Radical Cartesianism: The French Reception of Descartes

Tad M. Schmaltz

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Radical Cartesianism

This is the first book-length study of the highly original form of Cartesianism in the work of two of Descartes's French successors, Robert Desgabets (1610–78) and Pierre-Sylvain Regis (1632–1707). The book focuses on radical doctrines in these Cartesians concerning the creation of the eternal truths, the intentionality of ideas, and the soul–body union, three issues that Descartes broached but did not fully explore. In addition to relating their discussion of these issues to the views of Descartes and of Cartesians such as Malebranche and Arnauld, the book establishes that Desgabets and Regis played an important, though neglected, role in the theologically and politically charged reception of Descartes in early modern France.

A major contribution to the history of Cartesianism, this study will be of special interest to historians of early modern philosophy and historians of ideas.

Tad M. Schmaltz is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Duke University.

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Le problème n'est plus de la tradition et de la trace, mais de la découpe et de la limite; ce n'est plus celui du fondement qui se perpétue, c'est celui des transformations qui valent comme fondation et renouvellement des fondations.

The problem is no longer one of tradition and trace, but of division and limit; it is no longer that of a lasting foundation, it is of transformations that serve as a foundation and the rebuilding of foundations.

– Michel Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir*

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>A Note on Citation and Translation</i>	xii
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xiii
Introduction: Radical Cartesianism in Context	1
1.1 Desgabets and Regis	3
1.2 French Cartesianisms	9
1.3 A Map of Radical Cartesianism	19
PART I. ROBERT DESGABETS	
1 Desgabets’s <i>Considérations</i> , Arnauld, and Cartesianism	27
1.1 The 1671 Decree and the <i>Considérations</i>	29
1.2 Descartes and Desgabets on the Eucharist	34
1.3 Desgabets’s <i>Considérations</i> : Three Philosophical Assumptions	47
1.4 Arnauld on the Eucharist and Cartesianism	53
1.5 La Ville on Cartesianism and Desgabets	68
PART II. THREE RADICAL DOCTRINES	
2 The Creation Doctrine: Indefectible Material Substance and God	77
2.1 Three Problems from Descartes	80
2.2 Desgabets’s <i>Critique</i> : Necessary Truths and God’s Essence	88
2.3 The Indefectibility of Substance	94
2.4 Metaphysical Foundations for Physics	97
2.5 Quasi-Spinozistic Indivisibility	102
2.6 Regis’s <i>Usage</i> : Creation and Indefectible Motion	107
2.7 Quasi-Spinozistic Causal Dissimilarity	113

viii	<i>Contents</i>	
	2.8 Malebranche, Spinozism, and God’s Supersubstantiality	121
	2.9 Radical Solutions to Descartes’s Problems	127
3	The Intentionality Doctrine: Ideas and Extra-mental Objects	130
	3.1 Desgabets’s <i>Critique</i> : Ideas, Essences, and Extension	132
	3.2 The Intentionality Principle	137
	3.3 Objective Reality and the Object Argument	140
	3.4 Pure Possibilities and the Essence Argument	147
	3.5 Quasi-Spinozistic Connections to the Creation Doctrine	150
	3.6 “The First Fault of Descartes”	156
	3.7 Cartesian Realism: The First Step	162
4	The Union Doctrine: Temporal Human Thought and Motion	167
	4.1 Desgabets’s <i>Critique</i> : Pure Intellect and Memory	169
	4.2 “The Second Fault of Descartes”	174
	4.3 <i>Nihil est in Intellectu</i>	179
	4.4 Continuous Time and the Union with Motion	182
	4.5 Angelic Intellect and Human Thought	186
	4.6 A Cartesian Refutation of Idealism	194
	4.7 Cartesian Realism: The Second Step	206
	PART III. PIERRE-SYLVAIN REGIS	
5	Huet’s <i>Censura</i> , Malebranche, and Platonism	215
	5.1 The 1691 Formulary and the <i>Censura</i>	217
	5.2 Huet–Regis–Du Hamel: Cartesian Themes	223
	5.3 Regis’s <i>Usage</i> : Faith and Reason	237
	5.4 Regis–Malebranche–Lelevel: Platonic Themes	241
	5.5 Platonism in Genest’s “Lettre à Regis”	256
	Conclusion: “A Forgotten Branch of Cartesianism”	261
	<i>Works Cited</i>	267
	<i>Index</i>	280

Cambridge University Press

0521811341 - Radical Cartesianism: The French Reception of Descartes

Tad M. Schmaltz

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

This volume is a companion to my book on Malebranche insofar as it draws attention to the variety of Cartesianisms that emerged after the death of Descartes. Indeed, the two main protagonists here – Desgabets and Regis – were mentioned in the earlier text, which cited their discussion of the cogito and the nature of mind to illustrate what is by contrast the more orthodox Cartesian perspective on these issues in Malebranche. Upon reflection, however, I was not completely satisfied with what I said there about Desgabets and Regis, particularly with respect to their development of Descartes's doctrine of the creation of the eternal truths. I also was puzzled by their serene confidence in their seemingly implausible thesis, which I all but ignored in the Malebranche book, that the mere fact that we have ideas of extra-mental objects suffices to show that such objects exist.

For these reasons, I decided to return to Desgabets and Regis and, starting from the beginning, to attempt to better understand their unusual and intriguing form of Cartesianism. The result is this study, which retains the emphasis in the Malebranche book on the “radical” nature of their philosophical psychology. Yet there is the additional claim that their views in this area have a significant Cartesian basis. Moreover, this study includes the thesis that the account of the eternal truths in Desgabets and Regis indicates an important sense in which their system is closer to Descartes's than is that of Malebranche. Finally, there is the attempt here to show that this same account provides considerable support for their realism concerning the external objects of our ideas.

Naturally, there is some risk involved in devoting a study to historical figures as unfamiliar as Desgabets and Regis are. However, any doubts that I had about my project were outweighed by my sense that these Cartesians have something philosophically profound to say that no one else in the early modern period had said. My work on this project also has been motivated by the belief that Desgabets and Regis both played a crucial role in the French reception of Descartes. Neither the historical nor the philosophical

Cambridge University Press

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Tad M. Schmaltz

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

Preface

aspects of Desgabets's system have escaped notice in France. There are, for instance, highly accomplished studies of these aspects of his Cartesianism by scholars such as Jean-Robert Armogathe and Geneviève Rodis-Lewis (with some of Mme Rodis-Lewis's early, though remarkably still current, work dating from the 1950s). However, this topic has for the most part been neglected by Anglo-American scholars.

For the most part neglected, I say, since Thomas Lennon is a notable exception here. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, he was a member of the editorial board of *Studia cartesiana* and pushed (successfully) for its sponsorship of an edition containing the hitherto unpublished writings of Desgabets. Moreover, his subsequent work on Cartesianism has emphasized the value of a consideration of the perspective on Descartes provided by Desgabets and Regis. In this volume, I tend to emphasize points of difference with Lennon to distinguish his interpretation of these Cartesians from my own. The differences are genuine, but any suggestion of a fundamental opposition is misleading, since there is a very real sense in which this book is a fruit of his labors.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Work on this book started during 1997–98, at the National Humanities Center. The Center and its wonderful staff and other fellows provided an ideal environment for such work. My stay there as a Benjamin N. Duke Fellow was made possible by a grant from the Triangle Foundation and by a sabbatical leave from Duke University. I am grateful for this support, which also enabled me to travel to the valuable collection of early modern texts at the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris (at the grand old Richelieu site). During the same trip, I visited the Bibliothèque municipale in Epinal, which houses the most important collection of Desgabets's manuscripts. My thanks to the staff at both institutions for their skillful assistance.

I was able to devote concentrated effort to my typescript during the fall of 2000 due to a "Dean's leave" from Duke University. This leave also afforded me the opportunity to make another trip to the Bibliothèque nationale (this time at its new Mitterrand-Tolbiac site), and the staff there again served my needs efficiently. I thank William Chafe, the Dean of Arts and Sciences at Duke, for sponsoring the research leave, which was especially opportune since I had worked on a preliminary draft of the book while serving during the summer of 2000 as a member of an NEH Summer Seminar on Descartes's context and reception. My thanks here to Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, who ran this most pleasant and stimulating seminar.

My editor at Cambridge, Terence Moore, arranged for reports from three readers on an unfinished version of my manuscript that prompted a major restructuring of the text. I thank him for arranging for these reports. I also am grateful to Sara Black for her work in copyediting the final version of the manuscript.

Cambridge University Press

0521811341 - Radical Cartesianism: The French Reception of Descartes

Tad M. Schmaltz

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

xi

The discussion in this book has been shaped by conversation and correspondence over the years with various teachers and colleagues, friends all. This group includes Karl Ameriks, Roger Ariew, Monte Cook, Patricia Easton, Daniel Garber, Thomas Lennon, Paul Lodge, Eric Watkins, and the late Margaret Wilson. Monte Cook, Thomas Lennon, and Eric Watkins took the time to comment on various chapter parts or chapters, while Paul Lodge was kind enough to read and comment on the entire penultimate draft. My thanks to all for the help.

I presented earlier versions of portions of my book in seminars at the National Humanities Center, the Sorbonne, the University of Toronto, the University of Western Ontario, and the University of California at Irvine. I learned a great deal from audiences on all of these occasions. In addition to individuals already mentioned, I recall having received helpful questions and comments from Giulia Belgioioso, Vincent Carraud, Güven Güzeldere, Paul Hoffman, Zbigniew Janowski, Nicholas Jolley, Elmar Kremer, Alan Nelson, and Lawrence Nolan. No doubt there are others, here and elsewhere, whom I have forgotten to mention. My apologies to those who have failed to receive the credit they deserve.

I gratefully acknowledge permission from publishers to use material from the following publications.

- Chapter 1: "What Has Cartesianism to Do with Jansenism?," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60 (1999):37–56.
- Chapter 2: "The Disappearance of Analogy in Descartes, Spinoza, and Regis," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 30 (2000):85–114 (published by the University of Calgary Press).
- Chapter 4: "The Cartesian Refutation of Idealism," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 10 (2002).
- Chapter 5: "A Tale of Two Condemnations: Two Cartesian Condemnations in 17th-Century France," in *Studi Cartesiani II. Atti del Seminario, "Descartes et ses adversaires," Parigi, 12–13 dicembre, 2000*. Ed. G. Belgioioso (Lecce: Conte, in press).

In closing, I can only mention, without adequately expressing, my gratitude to my wife, Louise, for her unwavering support through thick and thin. In addition, there is the tremendous pride that both of us feel for our children – for Johanna and Sam – who have worked so hard in overcoming daunting obstacles. As a small token of my appreciation for all my wife and children have contributed, I dedicate this book to them. It is especially appropriate that I do so since they have shared with me in its labor pains. I look forward to sharing with them in the joy of its arrival.

Durham, North Carolina
August 2001

T.M.S.

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0521811341 - Radical Cartesianism: The French Reception of Descartes

Tad M. Schmaltz

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

A Note on Citation and Translation

In cases where I do not use the abbreviations listed here, citations in this work are by author and date. Complete bibliographical information is provided in the Works Cited section, which also includes what information is known about the biographical dates of the early modern authors that I cite.

As a rule, I translate titles of the early modern texts I discuss only if there is a standard and readily available translation. Thus, I refer to Descartes's *Meditations*, Spinoza's *Ethics*, and Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, but also to Suárez's *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, Huet's *Censura philosophiae cartesianae*, and Lelevel's *La vraye et la fausse métaphysique*. One notable exception here is Malebranche's *Recherche de la vérité*. Even though there is a fine translation of this text, I leave the title in French, since I also leave untranslated the titles of two responses to it, namely, Foucher's *Critique de la Recherche de la vérité* and Desgabets's *Critique de la Critique de la recherche de la vérité*.

I have consulted standard translations of early modern texts where available, but in all cases where I cite original-language editions, the translations of passages are my own (with thanks, however, to Thomas Lennon for providing valuable assistance in this regard). There are as yet no translations of the main writings of Desgabets and Regis. This situation may change in the future; indeed, Patricia Easton is preparing an unabridged translation of Desgabets's "Supplément à la philosophie de Monsieur Descartes." But the current absence of translations should provide no great impediment to serious scholarship on Desgabets and Regis. After all, there is an increasing expectation that those who work on early modern philosophy have the linguistic abilities required to deal with relevant foreign-language texts. In addition, not too much effort is required to decipher the French of Desgabets and Regis, which is relatively simple and direct.

Abbreviations

In the notes and text, I use the following abbreviations for editions, works containing texts, and individual texts:

A	Aristotle 1984.
AT	Descartes 1996 (Ed. C. Adam and P. Tannery).
CdC	Desgabets 1675 (<i>Critique de la Critique de la recherche de la vérité</i>).
Con.	Desgabets 1671 (<i>Considérations sur l'état présent de la controverse touchant le Très Saint-Sacrement de l'autel</i>).
Cpc	Huet 1971 (<i>Censura philosophiæ cartesianæ</i>).
CPR	Kant 1929 (<i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>); cited by edition (A or B) and page (as indicated in the translation).
Crit.	Foucher 1969 (<i>Critique de la Recherche de la vérité</i>).
"Disc."	"Discours sur la philosophie" (in the <i>Système</i> ; see abbreviation <i>Système</i>).
G	Spinoza 1925 (Ed. G. Gerhardt).
L	Lemaire 1901.
"Lettre"	"Lettre . . . à M. Regis" (Genest 1716).
OA	Arnauld 1775–83 (<i>Œuvres de Messire Antoine Arnauld</i>).
OCM	Malebranche 1958–84 (<i>Œuvres Complètes de Malebranche</i>).
Opera	Suárez 1866 (<i>Opera Omnia</i>).
R	Retz 1887.
RD	Desgabets 1983–85 (<i>Dom Robert Desgabets: Œuvres philosophiques inédites</i>).
"Réf."	"Réfutation de Spinoza" (appendix to the <i>Usage</i>).
Réf.	Du Hamel 1692 (<i>Réflexions critiques sur le système cartésien de la philosophie de Mr. Regis</i>).
Rép.	Regis 1691a (<i>Réponse au livre . . . Censura Philosophiæ Cartesianæ</i>).
Rép. Réf.	Regis 1692 (<i>Réponses aux Réflexions critiques</i>).

<i>S.Th.</i>	Aquinas 1964–81 (<i>Summa Theologiæ</i>); cited by part, article, and question (as indicated in the translation).
<i>Système</i>	Regis 1970 (<i>Cours entier de philosophie</i> , originally <i>Système de philosophie</i>).
<i>Usage</i>	Regis 1996 (<i>L’Usage de la raison et de la foy</i>).
<i>Vfm</i>	Lelevel 1694 (<i>La vraie et la fausse métaphysique</i>).

In the notes, I also use the following abbreviations for manuscript collections pertaining to Desgabets:

MS BN fds fr.	Manuscript collection, fonds français, at the Bibliothèque nationale, Paris. This collection includes manuscripts and correspondence dating from the two decades following the death of Descartes that relate to Desgabets’s involvement in French controversies concerning the Eucharist.
MS Cousin	Manuscript collection at the Bibliothèque V. Cousin, Paris. This collection includes the letter mentioning the charge among the Lorraine Benedictines of being “cartésien ou robertiste.”
MS Epinal	Manuscript collection at the Bibliothèque municipale, Epinal. This collection includes most of Desgabets’s philosophical and theological writings as well as some of his correspondence.

There is also a collection of Desgabets’s manuscripts at the Bibliothèque municipale at Chartres that was burned during Allied bombing raids in 1944. Fortunately, some of these manuscripts were previously reproduced in Lemaire 1901. For a complete list of the Chartres manuscripts, see Armogathe 1977, 127–32. A more general listing of the Desgabets manuscript collections appears in Armogathe 1977, 120–26, and RD 1:xxii–xxxiii.