

No New Cartesian Circle

XUANPU ZHUANG

Department of Philosophy, Bowling Green State University,
Shatzel Hall 305, Bowling Green, OH 43403, USA
xzhuang@bgsu.edu

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ABSTRACT: Michael Della Rocca states a new reading of Descartes' Fourth Meditation, in which he claims that the reasoning for the veracity of clear and distinct ideas is circular. I argue that Della Rocca conflates two different kinds of necessity: ontic necessity and explanatory necessity. A is ontically necessary for B when B is *true* only when A is true. A is explanatorily necessary for B when B can be *understood* only when A is true. The claim that we should only assent to clear and distinct ideas is necessary for *explaining* the compatibility among this truth rule, a perfect God, and our fallibility, but not necessary for making the compatibility (and thus the truth rule) *true*. After distinguishing between two different kinds of necessity, we can see there is no such New Cartesian Circle.

KEY WORDS: Cartesian Circle, explanatory necessity, the Fourth Meditation, New Cartesian Circle, ontic necessity.

Introduction

In two recent articles, Michael Della Rocca states a new reading of Descartes' Fourth Meditation, in which he claims that the reasoning for the veracity of clear and distinct ideas provided by Descartes is circular (Della Rocca 2006; 2011). This circle is different from the traditional version of the Cartesian Circle in the Third Meditation. According to Della Rocca, this new circle goes as follows: the truth rule of clear and distinct ideas, i.e., ideas that are clearly and distinctly perceived are true, cannot be accepted without establishing the compatibility among this truth rule, a perfect God, and our fallibility; and for the compatibility, we need to accept the claim that we should only assent to clear and distinct ideas; however, before we accept this claim, we must recognize the

truth rule as a crucial premise. Della Rocca's reading has attracted some attention and faces at least two main objections (e.g., Carriero 2009: 462–463; Naaman-Zauderer 2010: 98–100; Fulmer and Ragland 2017; Clark 2019; Ragland and Fulmer 2020). The first objection holds that the correct interpretation of Descartes is that we cannot but give assent to clear and distinct ideas. Therefore, we do not need the truth rule to establish compatibility. The second objection holds that Descartes only needs to show that our mistakes in judgments can exist with a perfect God and the truth rule of clear and distinct ideas. Therefore, the claim that we should only assent to clear and distinct ideas does not follow from compatibility.

I assume that the interpretation of Descartes provided by Della Rocca is right for this paper. However, following the second kind of objection, I argue that Della Rocca conflates two different kinds of necessity in arguments: ontic necessity and explanatory necessity.¹ In Section 1, I first outline the traditional problem of the Cartesian Circle and then introduce the New Cartesian Circle claimed by Della Rocca. Next, I explain the two circles in a more detailed way and show how the New Cartesian Circle is different from the traditional one. After that, in Section 2, I summarize two main objections to Della Rocca and provide some replies for Della Rocca. In Section 3, I provide my own objection to the New Cartesian Circle. I distinguish between ontic necessity, i.e., being necessary for something to be true, and explanatory necessity, i.e., being necessary for something to be explained or understood. A is ontically necessary for B when B is *true* only when A is true. A is explanatorily necessary for B when B can be *understood* only when A is true. I argue that Della Rocca conflates these two kinds of necessity and thus mistakenly argues for the New Cartesian Circle. In other words, the claim that we should only assent to clear and distinct ideas is necessary for *explaining* the compatibility among this truth rule, a perfect God, and our fallibility, but not necessary for making the compatibility *true*. Finally, I respond to a possible objection. In summary, there is no such vicious New Cartesian Circle in the Fourth Meditation.

¹ I thank one reviewer for suggesting the term “ontic.”

1. The Cartesian Circle and the New Cartesian Circle

1.1. *The Traditional Problem of the Cartesian Circle*

Before stepping into the New Cartesian Circle, i.e., Della Rocca's reading of Descartes' Fourth Meditation, it would be better for us to look back on the traditional problem of the Cartesian Circle first and show how the new circle is different from the traditional one.

As Descartes states at the beginning of the First Meditation, he attempts to find the foundation of knowledge in his meditations, without which we cannot know anything.² What Descartes finds in the Third Meditation is called the "truth rule": ideas that are clearly and distinctly perceived are true.³ According to Descartes, however, if there is an all-powerful deceiver who deceives us even in these simple ideas which seem clear and distinct, we are still unable to know anything. To solve this problem, Descartes argues that a perfect God must exist given our nature, i.e., there must be a God who possesses all the perfections that we do not possess.⁴ This idea of God could reach into our thought. As God is perfect and cannot be a deceiver, our clear and distinct ideas must be true.⁵ However, as the idea of God is also one of the clear and distinct ideas, it seems we have already relied on the truth rule to show that God exists.⁶ In sum, Descartes attempts to prove the truth rule by

² In the First Meditation, Descartes writes: "I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last." (AT 7:17; CSM 2:12)

³ In the Third Meditation, Descartes writes: "Whatever is revealed to me by the natural light—for example that from the fact that I am doubting it follows that I exist, and so on—cannot in any way be open to doubt." (AT 7:38; CSM 2:27)

⁴ In the Fourth Meditation, Descartes writes: "I recognize that it is impossible that God should ever deceive me. For in every case of trickery or deception some imperfection is to be found; and although the ability to deceive appears to be an indication of cleverness or power, the will to deceive is undoubtedly evidence of malice or weakness, and so cannot apply to God." (AT 7:53; CSM 2:37)

⁵ In the Fourth Meditation, Descartes writes: "And since God does not wish to deceive me, he surely did not give me the kind of faculty which would ever enable me to go wrong while using it correctly." (AT 7:54; CSM 2:37-38)

⁶ Antoine Arnauld objects to Descartes and writes: "I have one further worry, namely how the author avoids reasoning in a circle when he says that we are sure that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true only because God exists. But we can be sure that God exists only because we clearly and distinctly perceive this. Hence, before we can be sure that God exists, we ought to be able to be sure that whatever we perceive clearly and evidently is true." (AT 7:214; CSM 2:150)

appealing to the existence of a perfect God, the truth of which seems to rely upon the truth rule itself. This looks like a vicious circle.

This traditional Cartesian Circle consists of two propositions: clear and distinct ideas are true, i.e., the general veracity of clear and distinct ideas is accepted only when an all-perfect God who is not a deceiver exists; nevertheless, the conclusion that an all-perfect God exists is true is derived from the premise that clear and distinct ideas are true (e.g., Van Cleve 1979; Carriero 2008). In this sense, it seems that Descartes is presupposing that clear and distinct ideas are true when he wants to argue that clear and distinct ideas are true. If so, Descartes' arguments for the general veracity of clear and distinct ideas, i.e., clear and distinct ideas are true, are in a circle that seems vicious.

There are at least two ways to avoid such a vicious circle. First, some think that the doubt of the deceiver does not apply to some special cases like the premises in proving the existence of a perfect God (Kenny 1968: 192–195). If so, accepting the existence of a perfect God does not depend on the veracity of clear and distinct ideas. Second, some think that we cannot but assent to those clear and distinct ideas like the premises in proving the existence of a perfect God (Van Cleve 1979; Carriero 2008). If so, we accept the existence of a perfect God not because of the veracity of clear and distinct ideas but because we cannot withhold assent to them.

1.2. *The New Cartesian Circle*

Nevertheless, this circle is not what I am going to discuss. It is time to turn to the central issue in this paper, i.e., the New Cartesian Circle. Different from the traditional Cartesian Circle, the New Cartesian Circle arises in a new interpretation of Descartes' Fourth Meditation provided by Della Rocca. For Della Rocca, this New Cartesian Circle may serve as a steppingstone toward a new reading of Descartes as holding a coherence theory of truth (Della Rocca 2011: 93–94).

When Descartes attempts to claim that there is a perfect God who cannot possibly deceive us and that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true, he also finds that we sometimes make wrong judgments.⁷ As God cannot be responsible for those mistakes, Descartes needs a solution to make our fallibility in judgments, a perfect God, and the truth rule compatible. The solution Descartes provides is that we have the *ability*

⁷ In the Fourth Meditation, Descartes writes: "But when I turn back to myself, I know by experience that I am prone to countless errors." (AT 7:54; CSM 2:37-38)

to give or withhold assent to certain ideas.⁸ Given this condition, we are assenting to ideas that are not completely clear and distinct when making mistakes.⁹ And to avoid mistakes, we should assent to clear and distinct ideas and not assent to ideas that are not clear and distinct. As we are responsible for our mistakes when assenting to ideas that are not clear and distinct, the compatibility among our fallibility in judgments, a perfect God, and the truth rule becomes possible. According to Della Rocca, in the arguments provided here, the claim that we should assent only to clear and distinct ideas, by which we behave responsibly, could hold only when clear and distinct ideas are guaranteed to be true. On the other hand, the compatibility above, which seems to be necessary for accepting the truth rule, cannot be constructed unless we accept the claim that we should assent to clear and distinct ideas. So, Della Rocca thinks there is a circle here.

This New Cartesian Circle may consist of two propositions as well. One necessary step to accept the truth rule of clear and distinct ideas is to ensure compatibility among our fallibility, a perfect God, and the truth rule. However, this step can be accepted only when we can accept the claim that we should only assent to clear and distinct ideas. On the other hand, the conclusion that we should assent only to clear and distinct ideas can be accepted only when we accept the truth rule that clear and distinct ideas are true. If so, Descartes' argument for the truth rule here is in a circle.

Though both two circles are about the truth rule of clear and distinct ideas, this New Cartesian Circle is different from the traditional one in several ways. For one thing, the traditional circle is between the truth rule and the existence of a perfect God, but the new circle is between the truth rule and the claim that we should assent to clear and distinct ideas. For another thing, according to the traditional circle, to accept the existence of a perfect God is *directly* necessary for accepting the truth rule of clear and distinct ideas; on the contrary, in the new circle,

⁸ Descartes thinks we have "the faculty of choice or freedom of the will" (AT 7:56; CSM 2:39) and writes that "[...] the will simply consists in our ability to do or not do something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid); or rather, it consists simply in the fact that when the intellect puts something forward for affirmation or denial or for pursuit or avoidance, our inclinations are such that we do not feel we are determined by any external force." (AT 7:57; CSM 2:40)

⁹ Descartes writes: "It must be simply this: the scope of the will is wider than that of the intellect; but instead of restricting it within the same limits, I extend its use to matters which I do not understand. Since the will is indifferent in such cases, it easily turns aside from what is true and good, and this is the source of my error and sin." (AT 7:58; CSM 2:40-41)

the claim that we should assent to clear and distinct ideas seems to be only one of the necessary conditions to make the truth rule compatible with our fallibility and a perfect God, and thus *indirectly* necessary for accepting the truth rule.

2. Potential Objections to Della Rocca

Like the reactions to the traditional problem of the Cartesian Circle, people provide some replies to Della Rocca's new reading of the Fourth Meditation. There are mainly two different kinds of objections to this reading, both of which claim that there is no circle here (e.g., Fulmer and Ragland 2017; Newman 2019).

The first objection claims that the texts in the Meditations support a different reading of Descartes from Della Rocca's. According to Della Rocca, to make our fallibility compatible with a perfect God and the truth rule, Descartes asserts that we have the ability to give or withhold assent to any ideas reaching into our thoughts. Nevertheless, although Descartes admits that we could withhold assent to ideas that are "not completely certain and indubitable" (AT 7:18, CSM 2:12), it seems that clear and distinct ideas are assent-compelling, i.e., we cannot but assent to those ideas that are clear and distinct. For example, Descartes said in the Third Meditation,

[y]et when I turn to the things themselves which I think I perceive very clearly, I am so convinced by them that I spontaneously declare [...] (AT 7:36, CSM 2:25).

In this sense, this feature of clear and distinct ideas, i.e., assent-compelling, may be part of the answer to the proof of the truth rule rather than depend upon the truth rule. Now that Descartes does not need to establish that we should assent to clear and distinct ideas, we do not need the truth rule to support this claim. If so, there is no circle here.

The second kind of objection claims that the arguments in the New Cartesian Circle constructed by Della Rocca are invalid and thus cannot be a circle. According to Della Rocca, to accept the compatibility among our fallibility, a perfect God, and the truth rule, Descartes has to offer an account of our ability to give or withhold assent to ideas. In this account, the reason why we should assent to clear and distinct ideas is that clear and distinct ideas are guaranteed to be true. Nevertheless, opponents hold that this conclusion does not follow from the premise of accepting compatibility. To accept the compatibility among our fallibil-

ity, a perfect God, and the truth rule, Descartes only needs to show that we sometimes make mistakes by accepting ideas that are not clear and distinct (Fulmer and Ragland 2017: 69–71; Ragland and Fulmer 2020: 129–136). He does not need to make a judgment about *how* to avoid making mistakes, i.e., we should only assent to clear and distinct ideas. If such a reply works, Descartes does not need to claim that we should assent to clear and distinct ideas when attempting to prove compatibility. If so, Della Rocca makes a mistake in the sense of logical invalidity, and thus there is no circle here.

The first objection may provide a plausible reading of Descartes. Nevertheless, as there is also evidence in texts which support Della Rocca's reading, I accept the interpretation provided by Della Rocca in this paper.¹⁰ I believe the second objection provides a convincing direction. In other words, we do not need the claim that we should not assent to clear and distinct ideas to accept the compatibility or consistency between the truth rule, a perfect God, and our fallibility. However, Della Rocca also claims that the point here is “[h]ow does Descartes show this consistency” (Della Rocca 2011: 99). That is to say, Della Rocca seems to believe that, without showing how this compatibility works, Descartes cannot establish the compatibility and thus cannot justify the truth rule of clear and distinct ideas, which seems to be accepted only when this compatibility is showed.¹¹ I believe Della Rocca is conflating two different kinds of necessity here, which mistakenly leads to this New Cartesian Circle. In Section 3, I offer my objection to Della Rocca's argument from this point of view.

¹⁰ For example, Descartes also states that “[...] it is always open to us to hold back from pursuing a clearly known good, or from admitting a clearly perceived truth, provided we consider it a good thing to demonstrate the freedom of our will by so doing” in his correspondence (9 Feb 1645, AT 4: 173, CSMK 245).

¹¹ A reconstruction of what Della Rocca says is as follows: (1) If we attempt to accept the truth rule of clear and distinct ideas, we have to think that the truth rule, a perfect God, and our fallibility are compatible; (2) If they are compatible, we should admit that we have the ability to give or withhold assent to any idea that the intellect presents to the mind; (3) If (2) is true, it entails that we ought to assent only to clear and distinct ideas, by which we are behaving responsibly; (4) However, we ought to assent to clear and distinct ideas only when clear and distinct ideas are guaranteed to be true beforehand.

3. My Objection to Della Rocca's Argument for the New Cartesian Circle

3.1. *Ontic Necessity and Explanatory Necessity*

Before moving into the central issues in rejecting this New Cartesian Circle, we need to distinguish between two different kinds of necessity first.

When saying that Proposition A is necessary for Proposition B, usually we are asserting such a conditional proposition: B is true only when A is true. In this sense, we may use symbols to stand for this proposition like this: If B, then A (or " $B > A$ "). In other words, A is the logical implication of B, i.e., A is implied in B. For example, assume that all human beings are mortal. The proposition "Socrates is mortal" (A) is necessary for the proposition "Socrates is a human being" (B). That is to say, the proposition "Socrates is mortal" is implied in the proposition "Socrates is a human being": If Socrates is a human being, then Socrates is mortal. Such a necessity could be called ontic necessity: without A, B is impossible to be true.

Nevertheless, sometimes we may use the concept of necessity in another sense in our daily life. We may think that Proposition A is necessary for Proposition B when we are asserting another kind of conditional proposition: B is sensible or understandable only when A is true. In this sense, we may use symbols to stand for this proposition like this: If s(B), then A. The symbols "s(B)" means that Proposition B is understood or sensible. That is, A is the logical implication of s(B), i.e., A is implied in s(B). It means that A is necessary to explain B. Assume that the proposition "The cost of producing a laptop is high" (A) is necessary to explain another proposition "A laptop is expensive" (B). In other words, to explain that "A laptop is expensive," we usually need to accept that "The cost of producing a laptop is high." After all, if we do not spend much in producing a laptop, why should we accept the high price of the laptop? And if so, we may accept such a conditional proposition: If a laptop is expensive, then the cost of producing a laptop is high. Such a necessity could be called explanatory necessity: Without A, B is impossible to explain.

So far so good. Nevertheless, problems appear when people do not distinguish these two kinds of necessities in our life. And the reason, I believe, is that sometimes people may use the word "accept" when constructing arguments in both cases above. In other words, when discussing

the necessity, some people may only adopt one description: Without A, B is impossible to be accepted. As we stated above, however, there are two kinds of necessity in accepting: accepting something as true and accepting something as sensible or understandable.

It may be helpful to consider an example of using different kinds of necessity in accepting. Assume that every citizen usually pays taxes to the government of one's state. Los Angeles (LA) is located in California, and citizens in Los Angeles need to pay taxes to the government of California each year. On the one hand, it seems that without accepting LA as a part of California, the claim that citizens in LA need to pay taxes to the government of California is impossible to accept. This seems plausible, as citizens in LA will not need to pay taxes to the government of California if LA is a part of Ohio. On the other hand, however, it seems that without accepting the claim that citizens in LA need to pay taxes to the government of California, the claim that LA is part of California is also impossible to accept. This seems plausible as well. If citizens in LA pay taxes to the government of Ohio, why do we think that LA is part of California? If so, it seems there is a "vicious circle" here.

Nevertheless, there is no vicious circle here at all. Instead, people are using two different kinds of necessities. Logically, the proposition that LA is part of California is prior to the proposition that citizens in LA pay taxes to the government of California. In the former case, the actual conditional proposition may go as follows: Without accepting LA is part of California, the claim that citizens in LA need to pay taxes to the government of California is impossible to be *true*. It is a kind of ontic necessity. In the latter case, the actual conditional proposition would go as follows: Without accepting the claim that citizens in LA need to pay taxes to the government of California, the claim that LA is part of California is impossible to be *explained*. It is a kind of explanatory necessity. If we could distinguish these two different aspects of necessity, we can make it clear that there is not any vicious circle about the status of citizens in LA.

3.2. *How to Reject the New Cartesian Circle*

The same problem, I believe, appears in the New Cartesian Circle as well. Let us review the structure of this new circle again first. According to Della Rocca, what Descartes does in the Fourth Meditation is in such a circle: one of the necessary steps, i.e., the compatibility of our fallibility, a perfect God, and the truth rule, to accept the truth rule of

clear and distinct ideas, can be accepted only when we accept the claim that we should assent only to clear and distinct ideas; nevertheless, the claim that we should assent only to clear and distinct ideas can be accepted only when we accept the truth rule that clear and distinct ideas are guaranteed to be true. Now we may see that Della Rocca seems to use different meanings of “accepting” in these two arcs of this circle and thus conflates the ontic necessity and explanatory necessity as follows.

In the first place, according to Della Rocca, Descartes is supposed to show compatibility among our fallibility, a perfect God, and the truth rule. In other words, Descartes is attempting to show the mechanism of how compatibility works, i.e., to explain how we are responsible for our mistakes. To explain how we are responsible for our mistakes is to show it is wrong for us not to assent to clear and distinct ideas, i.e., we should assent to clear and distinct ideas. If so, when we think that the claim that we should assent to clear and distinct ideas is necessary for accepting the compatibility (and thus accepting the truth rule), we are actually saying that this claim that we should assent to clear and distinct ideas is necessary for *explaining* the compatibility or making the compatibility *understood*. On the other side, according to Della Rocca, Descartes is claiming that the reason why we should only assent to clear and distinct ideas is that the clear and distinct ideas are guaranteed to be true. In other words, Descartes is attempting to provide a basis for assenting to clear and distinct ideas. If so, when we think that the truth rule of clear and distinct ideas is necessary for the claim that we should assent to clear and distinct ideas, we are actually saying that the truth rule is necessary to make the claim that we should assent to clear and distinct ideas *true*. In conclusion, the two parts of the New Cartesian Circle are applying different kinds of necessities. One of them is about explanatory necessity, i.e., being necessary for being explained, and the other of them is about ontic necessity, i.e., being necessary for being true.

If we accept such an analysis of Della Rocca’s reading of Descartes’ Fourth Mediation, there is no circle here anymore. When putting forward such a circle, Della Rocca conflates two different arguments for the compatibility of the truth rule, a perfect God, and our fallibility: the argument from the ability to give or withhold assent to ideas reaching into our thought and the argument from the mechanism of applying such an ability. An interpretation based on Della Rocca’s reading without any vicious circle may go as follows.

When Descartes attempts to claim that there is a perfect God who cannot deceive us and that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true,

he also finds that we are making wrong judgments sometimes. As God cannot be responsible for those mistakes, Descartes needs a solution to make our fallibility in judgments, a perfect God, and the truth rule compatible. The solution Descartes provides is that we have the ability to give or withhold assent to certain ideas. Given this condition, we are assenting to ideas that are not completely clear and distinct when making mistakes. As we are responsible for our mistakes when assenting to ideas that are not clear and distinct, the compatibility among our fallibility in judgments, a perfect God, and the truth rule becomes possible. As the truth rule, i.e., clear and distinct ideas are guaranteed to be true, could be accepted in such compatibility, and we have the ability to give or withhold assent to certain ideas, we should assent only to clear and distinct ideas, by which we behave responsibly. Therefore, Descartes has provided the possibility of compatibility and shows how such compatibility works without appealing to any vicious circle.

4. An Objection and My Response

In this section, I consider a possible objection and respond to it, which may help to clarify my objection to the arguments for the New Cartesian Circle.

Some may think that explanatory necessity is also ontically necessary. That is to say, what is necessary for explaining always seems necessary for establishing the truth. Their thought may go as follows:

In the case of explanatory necessity, given Proposition A and Proposition B,

- 1) Without A, B is impossible to be explained, i.e., A is necessary for explaining B.
- 2) If B cannot be explained, the mechanism of supporting B cannot work.
- 3) If the mechanism of supporting B cannot work, we have no reason to think B is true.
- 4) Therefore, A is necessary for B to be true even in the case of explanatory necessity.

Although such an argument seems plausible at first glance, we do not need to accept it because premise 2) does not hold. When B cannot be explained, it does not imply that the mechanism of supporting B cannot work. Instead, it only implies that the mechanism of supporting B cannot work in a way understandable to us. In other words, the claim that B cannot be explained only implies that we cannot understand how

B works. It would not result in the claim that B cannot work, or that B is not true. And that is because the truth of B may be provided in other ways, which cannot be excluded from this argument.

When we attempt to explain Proposition P, it is usually necessary for us to assume it is (at least possibly) true beforehand. It may be better to consider the example of LA again. Although the claim that citizens in LA pay taxes to the government of California is necessary to explain that LA is a part of California, we are already assuming that LA is a part of California when holding that citizens in LA pay taxes to the government of California. Even if we were told that the citizens in LA do not pay taxes to the government of California (perhaps because of some tax-cutting policies) and thus lose an explanation for the claim that LA is a part of California, there may be still other possible ways to support this claim unknown to us temporarily. In this sense, it is unreasonable to say we have no reason to think that LA is not a part of California, as we may have other ways such as maps to support it. Therefore, explanatory necessity is essentially different from ontic necessity. What is necessary for an explanation may not be necessary for establishing the truth.

Things are similar in the case of the New Cartesian Circle. The ontic reason to support the claim that clear and distinct ideas are true is already given with the possibility of compatibility. Even if the explanation of such compatibility does not work, we may still have other possible ways to construct a mechanism of compatibility. Therefore, there is no reason to think that without the explanation of the mechanism of the compatibility given, i.e., we should assent to clear and distinct ideas, we cannot accept the truth of such compatibility.

5. Conclusion

Michael Della Rocca argues for the so-called New Cartesian Circle by such an argument: (1) If we attempt to accept the truth rule of clear and distinct ideas, we have to think that the truth rule, a perfect God, and our fallibility are compatible; (2) If they are compatible, we should admit that we have the ability to give or withhold assent to any idea that the intellect presents to the mind; (3) If (2) is true, it entails that we ought to assent only to clear and distinct ideas, by which we are behaving responsibly; (4) However, we ought to assent to clear and distinct ideas only when clear and distinct ideas are guaranteed to be true beforehand. Thus, Della Rocca thinks Descartes is reasoning in a circularity: it seems that we can accept the truth rule only when we accept the claim that

we should assent to clear and distinct ideas; nevertheless, we can accept the claim that we should assent to clear and distinct ideas only when we have accepted the truth rule.

I argue that Della Rocca mistakenly uses two meanings of “accepting” and thus conflates two different kinds of necessities. The claim that we should assent to clear and distinct ideas is necessary for *explaining* the compatibility among the truth rule, a perfect God, and our fallibility. And in the meantime, the truth rule is necessary for making the claim that we should assent to clear and distinct ideas *true*. These two parts of Descartes’ arguments are not located in the same dimension (one is ontic, while the other is explanatory). It is baseless for Della Rocca to combine them in only one dimension. If so, the efforts to find a new circle of reasoning in Descartes’ Fourth Meditation fail.¹²

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