

time, causality and character in descartes' *meditations*

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René Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641)¹ is a work steeped in temporality. The text is divided into six 'meditations' that are purported to occur over six 'days'. While Descartes' theory of temporality was not a major aspect of his thought,² it appears in various works, most significantly in the *Meditations*, as well as in the *Replies to the Objections* (CSM, II: 66-397), and the *Principles of Philosophy* (CSM, I: 177-291). This article will explore the notions of temporality found within these texts, particularly the *Meditations*. I suggest that a reflection on Descartes' concept of temporality is of particular interest when considered in the light of the manner in which the text itself *is* temporal. The temporality of the *Meditations* is a fictional temporality; the 'days' of the *Meditations* do not, I would suggest, represent the real historical days in which Descartes was writing this text. These fictive and stylistic elements can influence the way the text is read. Consequently, I will be drawing on theories of narrative to frame the discussion, particularly concepts of experientiality and narrativity proposed by Monika Fludernik.

Two brief preliminaries are in order before beginning this discussion of the *Meditations*. First, the reading given in this article emphasizes the importance of the fact that the narrator of the *Meditations* ('I') is not Descartes himself (i.e., the historical figure, who was born in 1596 and died in 1650), but is instead a fictional character.³ In order to keep this distinction clearly in view, the narrator will be referred to throughout as 'the Cartesian Meditator' rather than as 'Descartes'.⁴

The fictionality of the Cartesian Meditator is uncontentious, but its importance for understanding Descartes' philosophical project in the *Meditations* has not received the attention it deserves.⁵

Secondly, the *Meditations* as a whole has the hallmark of a fictional narrative, as it is represented as a series of thoughts occurring over a number of days. The Cartesian Meditator begins the first day as “the man who is only just beginning to philosophize” (CSMK, 332), and ends the final day in a state of properly philosophical knowledge. The arguments of Descartes' text are thus embedded within a fictional temporal framework. That is, each argument is represented as occurring at a particular temporal point in the epistemological journey of the Cartesian Meditator, and each argument's position in this fictional temporal sequence is crucial to understanding its role in the overall project of the *Meditations*. These two considerations thus suggest—as will be argued in more detail below—that the *Meditations* is a text that demands a reading which takes seriously not just its discursive arguments but also the fact that those arguments are embedded in a narrative form.⁶

In order to better lead into this discussion I will provide a brief refresher of the text itself. The plot of the *Meditations* sees the Cartesian Meditator carefully examining his beliefs in turn, and if he can find any cause to doubt them, he will throw them out. He is hoping to cleanse himself of his former errors in order to gain a firm base of knowledge: a stable foundation of beliefs that are unquestionable. These beliefs will act as the framework for a whole belief system through which the Cartesian Meditator can understand himself and the world around him. The activity is presented as occurring over six days. On the first day, The Cartesian Meditator throws all his beliefs into question, including his very existence. On the second, he postulates that he does in fact exist, and that he is a thinking thing. On the third day he casts around to see if he can discover anything beyond himself, which leads him to the idea of God. On the fourth day, Descartes considers the concept of clear and distinct ideas, and how they can keep him from falling into error henceforth. The fifth day includes further consideration of God (and a second proof of God's existence). Finally, the sixth day of meditation is devoted to further consideration of the distinction between the body and the mind. The passage that forms the basis of Descartes' concept of temporality is found in the third day of meditation, and will be considered in some detail below.

DESCARTES' NON-ENDURANCE DOCTRINE

The central passage that will be explored in this article can be found within the third day of the Cartesian Meditator's reflections. The passage in question, which Jonathan Bennett calls Descartes' *non-endurance doctrine*,⁷ appears towards the end of the Third Meditation:

A lifespan [*omne tempus vitae*] can be divided into countless parts, each completely independent of the others, so that it does not follow from the fact that I existed a little while ago that I must exist now, unless there is some cause which as it were creates me afresh at this moment - that is, which preserves me.⁸ (CSM, II: 33)

There is an unusual conflation here between creation and preservation, one that many of Descartes' commentators have discussed.⁹ While it goes beyond the scope of this article to explore the distinction between creation and preservation, minor reference will appear throughout. The significant element I will draw on is "lifespan" [*omne tempus vitae*]. Elizabeth Anscombe and Peter Geach translate this as "the whole duration of life."¹⁰ The passage demands consideration of the entire span, from birth until death, and yet immediately following this passage we are told that life is divided into numerous parts that are completely independent of each other. The text gives a strange impression here. The contrast between the whole span of a unified life, and the discontinuous atoms of events that may add up to a unified existence will be explored below. Also of particular interest will be how Descartes' notion of time emerges from within these themes.

While in the above quoted passage Descartes is discussing a 'lifespan', he alters his language in other works to make it more explicitly about time. *In the First Set of Replies*, Descartes says:

For I regard the *divisions of time* as being separable from each other, so that the fact that I now exist does not imply that I shall continue to exist in a little while unless there is a cause which, as it were, creates me afresh at each moment of time. (CSM, II: 78-79, *emphasis added*)

In this passage Descartes is speaking of the "divisions of time," rather than of a "lifespan." An implication of this is that Descartes sees no differentiation between the span of a life and the span of time itself. As Geoffrey Gorham has stated, "it

seems to be one thing for the *parts of time* itself to be mutually independent, and another for the temporal stages of *things that exist in time* to be independent.”¹¹ Gassendi questioned Descartes on this in the *Fifth Set of Objections* (CSM, II: 209). Descartes’ somewhat peeved reply to Gassendi suggests that he sees no real distinction worth discussing (CSM, II: 255). It is, I hope, enough for our purposes at this stage to simply be aware that Descartes views the nature of time and the lifespan within it as one and the same. Below I will return to this concept, as it has significant implications once we begin to consider the text as a narrative.

TIME AND THE COGITO

Genevieve Lloyd states that the *Meditations* is “suffused with a sense of the tenuousness of the self’s capacity either to integrate itself into the world or to maintain a secure relationship with its past.”¹² In the First Meditation, the Cartesian Meditator outlines that he seeks to begin again from the foundations [*a primis fundamentis*]¹³ (CSM, II: 17), in order to remove the shackles of the past that are binding him to a particular way of thinking. Once the foundations have been removed through his three stages of skeptical enquiry,¹⁴ he no longer has a firm footing, either in the temporal or physical spheres (given he has at this point found no evidence that he actually exists). By the start of the Second Meditation, then, the Cartesian Meditator is untethered and anxious: his skeptical program has been so successful that he has been left in complete turmoil. He says “I feel as if I have fallen unexpectedly into a deep whirlpool which tumbles me around so that I can neither stand on the bottom nor swim up to the top” (CSM, II: 16). The primary purpose of the Second Meditation, then, is to discover “one firm and immovable point” (CSM, II: 16) which will be the new foundation on which he can base his new philosophy. The point that he reaches is that “if I convinced myself of something, then I certainly existed” (CSM, II: 17). From here he is able to “finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind” (CSM, II: 17, *emphasis in text*). The Cogito provides a foundational truth. Despite this, though, it will be a long road to greater certainty.

While the Cogito helps to assure the Cartesian Meditator that he himself exists, it provides no assurance about anything beyond him. Quoting Lloyd again, “Time poses a challenge even to the narrator’s capacity to extract from the indubitable Cogito anything more than a momentary existence.”¹⁵ The performance¹⁶ of the Cogito—reciting, “*I am, I exist*”—assures the Cartesian Meditator that he exists;

however, it does not provide him any further certainty, since it is the performance itself that provides the assurance. Additionally, the Cartesian Meditator knows that he did not bring about his own existence. He makes this clear in the Third Meditation. The Cartesian Meditator here argues that he could not have derived his existence from himself. If he had the power to bring himself into existence, then he would certainly not have created himself with any flaws or imperfections. Since, though, he is an imperfect being, able to identify that he is limited in knowledge and ability, he must lack the power to have created himself (CSM, II: 33). He then takes this argument further. If he has no power to bring himself into existence, then he certainly does not contain the power to preserve himself from one moment to the next. There must, therefore be some other cause other than himself by which he is preserved. John Carriero refers to this cause as a “metaphysical sustainer,”¹⁷ a device by which to explain one’s continued existence from one moment to the next when one is “metaphysically dependent.” So the Cartesian Meditator relies on a cause outside of himself, namely God. God is the means through which the Cartesian Meditator can be assured of his existence from the past into the present, and from the present into the future.

DEVELOPING A STYLISTIC FRAMEWORK

The Cartesian Meditator’s temporal instability and his causal reliance on a higher power are central themes of the *Meditations*. As well as this, they are dramatised within the structure of the text itself. The fictional days of the *Meditations* provide distinct temporal breaks. At the end of the First Meditation, Descartes does not have any assurance that he exists. The next day, then, takes on a tentative, critical, importance. The days form narrative edges upon which we can delineate the sections of time in the lifespan of the Cartesian Meditator. In order to consider the text as a narrative, though, it is crucial to develop a working definition through which we can read the ‘narrativity’ of the text. At the beginning of this article I proposed that the Cartesian Meditator, and the ‘days’ of the text, are fictional elements within a narrative. I will now return to this notion, and spend the remainder of the article exploring some avenues (provided by narrative theory) through which to come to terms with this fictional temporality. Since the historical context into which the *Meditations* was written will inevitably inform discussions of style, I will first provide a brief historical overview.

Historical Context

An investigation into the style of the *Meditations* is certainly not without precedent.¹⁸ In 1983 Amélie Oksenberg Rorty considered the genre of the text, placing it within a form of religious meditation. She began to explore the implications she believed followed on from this genre placement.¹⁹ Rorty also considered the importance of form and style to the philosopher's ability to intrigue and convince. "Conviction is often carried by a charismatic, authoritative style: its clarity and condensation, the rhythms of its sentences, and its explosive imagery [...] often the form of the work assures its legitimation."²⁰ Style will inevitably influence how the text should be read. But more significantly for Rorty, the personality and power of the author are crucial to the overall success of a philosophical work.

Bradley Rubidge considers this observation by Rorty to be helpful, however he suggests that Rorty needed to more clearly define her understanding of 'genre'. He reads Rorty as tending to "speak of genre in an ahistorical way, as if a genre were constituted by a group of texts that resemble each other."²¹ For Rubidge, while this conception will help to "reveal certain characteristics" shared in common between texts, it will ultimately reveal nothing about an author's intentions: something that Rubidge believes Rorty has set out to do.²² In attempting to mitigate these issues in his article, "Descartes's *Meditations* and Devotional Meditations," Rubidge presents a more significant analysis of the kind of 'devotional manual' that Descartes is perhaps drawing on. This more detailed reading allows him to more precisely test comparisons between Descartes' text and the wider genre. It thus presents a more historicised²³ reading, that allows for a more accurate consideration of the place of Descartes' text within the broad genre of devotional literature.

Rubidge argues that Descartes is drawing generally on a type of devotional manual that flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By calling his text 'Meditations' Descartes was harnessing a genre that his readers would have immediately recognised and been very familiar with. Rubidge points out that seventeenth century works of philosophy were not commonly associated with the term 'meditations' and so "the title of Descartes's book would predictably have made readers associate it with the tradition of devotional exercises."²⁴ Thanks to the popularity of a number of texts such as St Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* and St Francis of Sales' *Introduction to the Devout Life*, the genre of devotional meditations flourished during this period.²⁵ Descartes is in some

ways tapping into the zeitgeist through appropriating this genre.

Rubidge provides a helpful analysis of the key features of the genre of devotional meditations, which I will briefly summarise here.²⁶ According to Rubidge, *reflection* was the basic component of this kind of devotional meditation. The subject of reflection was usually very specific, frequently drawn from passages of the bible. The primary purpose of the meditations was to “encourage pious beliefs and sentiments that conform to Church Doctrine.”²⁷ Reflection was intended to be ‘active’ and these meditations were often called ‘exercises’. As a means of training one’s soul, the meditator seeks definite outcomes in terms of their movement towards the divine. As per Saint Francis of Sales in *A Treatise of the Love of God* (1630): “meditation is an attentive thought iterated, or voluntarily entertained in the mind, to excite the will to holy affections and resolutions.”²⁸ According to Louis Martz, meditation:

cultivates the basic, lower levels of the spiritual life; it is not, properly speaking, a mystical activity, but a part of the duties of every man in daily life. It is not performed under the operations of special grace, but is available to every man through the workings of ordinary grace.²⁹

This demonstrates in part why the genre was popular: it was a spiritual method available to all.

Rubidge highlights a number of points in the *Meditations* that link it to the tradition of devotional meditations. Some of these include the need for solitude to undertake the meditations (CSM, II: 12), contemplation of God (CSM, II: 36), and purging of past ‘sins’ (CSM, II: 12). Rubidge concludes that these features, among others, are not enough to allow us to call the text a work of meditation itself. It utilises features of the genre without itself becoming a work within that genre. He also believes that these links to the meditational genre “should not alter our reading of the text, for the *Meditations* allude to the tradition without adopting its conventions in a way that makes the text distinctly meditational.”³⁰ Rubidge argues that Descartes himself provides no indication that he is drawing specifically on this genre of devotional exercises, however the title itself intends to subtly alert readers to consider it in that light. While many commentators have attempted to draw connections to particular devotional texts, such as the *Spiritual Exercises*, Rubidge contends that Descartes is rather drawing generally on the genre of devotional meditation. He sees a strategic motivation in Descartes’ use of the genre.

“By linking his text to such a tradition, Descartes signals his adherence to orthodox positions and advertises his desire to conform to, even to support, some of the Church’s fundamental doctrines.”³¹

I take no issue with Rubidge on this conclusion, and in any case the degree to which the *Meditations* could conceivably be called ‘meditational’ is not the subject of this article. What emerges from Rubidge and Rorty’s discussions of the genre of the text, though, is that Descartes has appropriated stylistic and thematic components of devotional meditations into his text, though to what extent and how successfully he achieved it may be debated. In opposition to Rubidge I contend that the stylistic ‘choice’ on the part of Descartes will inevitably alter our reading of the text. I do not intend to develop an argument about the extent to which Descartes himself was considering other aspects of style. Arguing for authorial intention moves too far into murky hypothetical ground. Descartes’ initial stylistic choice is simply providing the launching point to discover what the application of contemporary narrative theories may glean from the text, when considered from a stylistic perspective. ‘Choice’, then, as applied to Descartes’ method of writing, is used here broadly. The degree to which this choice may alter our reading of the text will be tested.

Defining Narrative

Descartes has chosen to present the *Meditations* as a series of events, rather than simply as a series of arguments. This crucial choice provides an ideal point of entry into our reading of the text. Porter Abbott defines narrative as “The representation of an event or a series of events.”³² This broad definition allows considerable scope to view Descartes’ text *as a narrative*. As with Abbott, Mieke Bal understands narrative to be a succession of events, however she qualifies that “it is only in a *series* that events become meaningful.”³³ There must be a causal relationship between events³⁴ if any significant value can be found in the interpretation of a narrative. In the case of the *Meditations*, each new day follows on from the day before, and it is this that allows the *Meditations* to be viewed as a narrative, if we are to take Bal’s distinctions into account. The particularly ‘narrative’ passages, such as that quoted above of the Cartesian Meditator feeling as though he has fallen into a whirlpool, make no real sense in isolation. The events of the text build from each other in a chain of succession. This chain of succession provides a satisfactory starting point; however, as Fludernik reveals, thinking beyond simple causality allows for more vast points of discussion.

In her book *An Introduction to Narratology* (2009) Monika Fludernik speaks of the way we use story-telling to reconstruct our lives. “We like to emphasise how particular occurrences have brought about and influenced subsequent events. Life is described as a goal-directed chain of events which, despite numerous obstacles and thanks to certain opportunities, has led to the present state of affairs.”³⁵ We base narratives, then, on the cause and effect connections provided by a series of events. However, “the primary concern in narratives is not actually chains of events but the fictional worlds in which the characters in the story live, act, think and feel.”³⁶ It is not the actions, but the actors within a fictional world themselves with which narrative is ultimately concerned. For Fludernik, it is the experience of the actors within a story-world (experientiality) that produces ‘narrativity’. Thus, the presence of a character is sufficient to produce narrativity: the storyteller figure and plot are not essential.³⁷ By dispensing with plot and causality, the definitions provided above by Bal and (in notes) Forster are limited. “Experientiality,” Fludernik says, “is at its lowest in the presentation of merely a succession of events and their causal independence” (TNN, 328). Fludernik considers Forster’s example of a plot, “*The king died and then the queen died of grief*,”³⁸ as classifiable as plot not because of the chain of events, but rather the inclusion, ‘of grief’, which contains an *indication* of experientiality (TNN, 328). Fludernik’s definition of narrative runs thus:

A narrative is a representation of a possible world in a linguistic and /or visual medium, at whose centre there are one or several protagonists of an anthropomorphic nature, who are existentially anchored in a temporal and spatial sense and who (mostly) perform goal-directed actions (action and plot structure). It is the experience of these protagonists that narratives focus on, allowing readers to immerse themselves in a different world and in the life of the protagonists.³⁹

In light of Descartes’ notion of time, particularly, Fludernik’s conception of narrative provides an appropriate framework with which to consider the narrativity of the *Meditations*. As highlighted above, the Cartesian Meditator is intimately bound within Descartes’ notion of time. To return to the discussion above, commentators have questioned Descartes’ conflation of a *lifespan* and *the nature of time*.⁴⁰ Interestingly, it is within the text of the *Meditations* that Descartes refers to a lifetime, and it is elsewhere that Descartes refers more generally to the divisions of time.⁴¹ The stylistic elements of the *Meditations* require a different reading; one that, I contend, is amplified in the light of Fludernik’s experiential

model. The experience of the Cartesian Meditator (whom we are considering to be the central character of the *Meditations*) is so embedded as to be essential to the expression of the philosophical ideas within the text. Fludernik's character-centric theory will allow for wider consideration than a theory of narrative based solely on 'causal' links.⁴² One cannot remove the 'character' of the text from the thoughts presented.

EXPERIENTIALITY, NARRATIVISATION

The experiential model that Fludernik develops in her book *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* contains four levels. As discussed above, experientiality is central to Fludernik's method. The first level of Fludernik's method is therefore concerned with "agency, goals, intellection, emotions, motivation, and so on" (TNN, 43). In other words, the "parameters of real life experience" (TNN, 43). In Level II Fludernik considers "four basic viewpoints which are available as explanatory schemas of *access* to the story" (TNN, 43). These are *Telling*; *Viewing* ("the real-world schema of perception"); *Experiencing* ("access to one's own narrativisable experience"); and *Action* or *Acting* (TNN, 43-44). Level III "comprises well-known naturally recurring story-telling situations," (TNN, 44) taking into account generic and cultural considerations. In Level IV, "readers utilize conceptual categories from levels I to III in order to grasp, and usually transform, textual irregularities and oddities" (TNN, 45). This process, termed by Fludernik as narrativisation, draws on her reading of Jonathan Culler's concept of *naturalisation*:⁴³ "Readers, faced with initially inconsistent or incomprehensible texts, attempt to find a frame that can naturalise the inconsistencies or oddities in a meaningful way" (TNN, 45). Fludernik's narrativisation differs from Culler's naturalisation by concerning itself exclusively with *narrative* parameters. "It circumscribes readers' attempts at making sense of texts," enabling readers to "re-cognize as narrative those kinds of texts that appear to be non-narrative according to either the natural parameters of levels I and II or the cultural parameters of level III" (TNN, 46). Space delimits any significant application of these four levels of analysis to the *Meditations*. I will concentrate then, on an informal application of only the first level: parameters of experience. Due to the nature of the *Meditations* (and recalling the historical context outlined above) this discussion will inevitably also dip into level III, bringing in considerations of genre. In many ways, this entire project ties into Fludernik's concept of *narrativisation*: level IV of her model. The following will provide a semi-structured reading of some key areas of interest that arise once one begins to consider the *Meditations* in the light of Fludernik's

experiential model.

In the *Meditations*' Preface to the Reader, Descartes says: "I would not urge anyone to read this book except those who are able and willing to meditate seriously with me, and to withdraw their minds from the sense and from all preconceived opinions" (CSM, II: 8). Descartes did not merely want people to read his text; he wanted them to become actively involved in it. Despite Rubidge's claims to the contrary, outlined above, there are a number of particular precedents for the *Meditations* that are worth consideration. Two in particular, Augustine's *Confessions*, and Saint Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, will be considered here briefly⁴⁴ in the light of Descartes' Preface to the Reader. The relevance of Fludernik's model will emerge in this discussion, as will the centrality of time to this reading of Descartes' text. I will then conclude this article by considering the central character of the *Meditations*.

According to Stephen Gaukroger, "The *Meditationes* read like an account of a spiritual journey in which the truth is only to be discovered by a purging, followed by a kind of rebirth."⁴⁵ Descartes' text can be read as inviting the reader to follow him through this same process. Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, a first person narrative that details Augustine's conversion to Christianity, contains similar ideas of rebirth and transformation. Patrick Riley regards the *Confessions* as "one of the first narratives of the self through time."⁴⁶ According to V. Bailey Gillespie, "From the Christian perspective religious conversion is an alternation, a turning around."⁴⁷ The concept of a conversion, a *turning away*, connects Descartes' and Augustine's texts.⁴⁸ Conversion in Augustine's *Confessions* acts as a pivot of temporality. At one point in the text, Augustine says, (speaking to God) "I am scattered in times whose order I do not understand. The storms of incoherent events tear to pieces my thoughts, the inmost entrails of my soul, until that day when, purified and molten by the fire of your love, I flow together and merge into you."⁴⁹ For Augustine, resting in God enables him to go beyond time, to escape from the disarray and incoherence of temporality by melting into the eternal a-temporality of the divine. Conversion produces a change in the temporal construct. The divided parts that make up 'Augustine' pre-conversion are scattered and disparate. Upon conversion, these disparate parts are able to transcend time to be with the creator who is beyond time. Salvation is, in this sense, being rescued from time.⁵⁰ Beyond simply an interesting read, Augustine provides his text to bring about conversion in his readers.

The Cogito of the *Meditations* can be seen as a *turning away* from uncertainty towards certainty; and in a sense is a moment of intellectual conversion. The Cartesian Meditator's temporal instability up until the moment of the Cogito has been discussed above. Edwin Starbuck presents an exploration of conversion that identifies with what is occurring in the *Meditations*. According to Starbuck, conversion is "a process of struggling away from sin rather than of striving toward righteousness."⁵¹ The Cartesian Meditator at first acknowledges that he is in error (CSM, II: 12). He then grapples with his errors and his doubts until finally, in the Cogito, he reaches a moment of certainty that will form the basis of his life from that point onwards. In this sense, the *Meditations* certainly aligns with Starbuck's conception. It is Descartes' attempt to overcome his errors that leads him towards conversion, and a true discovery—and concretisation—of 'self'. Harry Frankfurt considers that: "Descartes's aim is to guide the reader to intellectual salvation by recounting his own discovery of reason and his escape thereby from the benighted reliance on his senses, which had formerly entrapped him in uncertainty and error."⁵² Descartes, like Augustine before him, provides his own journey as an exemplar with which the reader can identify.

This identification is much more immediate in the case of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. As discussed above, there is a distance between the Cartesian Meditator (the 'I' of the text) and the historical Descartes. The 'I' of Saint Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, similarly, is removed from the author. In many passages, it is intended that the reader will inhabit the 'I'. For example: "Again, reflecting on myself, to ask what have I done for Christ, what I am doing for Christ, what ought I to do for Christ; and then seeing Him in such a condition, and thus hanging upon the Cross, to make the reflections which may present themselves."⁵³

The text acts in a sense as a script for the reader to follow; the 'I' here is in fact the reader *performing* these exercises, rather than Ignatius, the author of the work. The *Spiritual Exercises* are designed for the reader to go through the process of reflection and meditation over about four weeks. The text is temporally divided, much like the 'days of meditation' found in the *Meditations*. Central to the *Spiritual Exercises* is the process of calling to mind particular events on which one will meditate. In the case of the extract above, for example, the meditator is being asked to reflect on Christ dying on the cross. The text asks readers to interpose themselves into the place of the 'I'. The *Spiritual Exercises* are written as a guide—a form of spiritual direction. The *Meditations* can be read in the same way. As Bernard Williams says: "The 'I' of the writer is not so much the historical

Descartes as it is any reflective person working their way through this series of arguments.”⁵⁴ Martial Gueroult says of Descartes’s *Meditations* that it is “not, in effect, mere dry geometry, but the initiation of one soul by another soul acting as its guide.”⁵⁵ The ‘I’ of both these texts act as both initiator and guide. Consider the following, from the *Meditations*:

I propose to concentrate on what came into my thoughts spontaneously and quite naturally whenever I used to consider what I was. Well, the first thought to come to mind was that I had a face, hands, arms and the whole mechanical structure of limbs which can be seen in a corpse, and which I called the body. The next thought was that I was nourished, that I moved about, and that I engaged in sense-perception and thinking; and these actions I attributed to the soul. (CSM, II: 17)

The reader does not merely observe the Cartesian Meditator’s process, but (as per Descartes’ instruction in his preface) will participate in this journey themselves. The readers will thus *experience* the meditations, becoming fully immersed in the action of the text. Descartes’ stylistic motivation (as discussed above) is difficult to fully apprehend. However, he outlines his *reading* intention quite explicitly.

The engagement on the part of the reader is highlighted through Descartes’ discussion of his method in the *Objections and Replies*. Asked why he did not demonstrate his arguments in a geometric fashion, starting with definitions and axioms,⁵⁶ Descartes responds by discussing two forms of demonstration, Synthesis and Analysis.⁵⁷ Synthesis, Descartes says, “employs a long series of definitions, postulates, axioms, theorems and problems, so that if anyone denies one of the conclusions it can be shown at once that it is contained in what has gone before” (CSM, II: 110). The advantage of this method is that even the most argumentative reader must agree with the conclusion, so long as the series of steps that come before are sound. He does not consider this to be a very satisfying method, though, as it fails to “engage the minds of those who are eager to learn, since it does not show how the thing in question was discovered” (CSM, II: 110). Analysis, on the other hand is “the best and truest method of instruction” (CSM, II: 111). Descartes describes analysis as showing the truth “by means of which the thing in question was discovered methodically and as it were *a priori*, so that if the reader is willing to follow it and give sufficient attention at all points, he will *make the thing his own* and understand it just as perfectly *as if he had discovered it for himself*” (CSM, II: 110, *emphasis added*). However, he qualifies that an argumentative or inattentive

reader will find no cause to follow such an argument.

Descartes' discussion of analysis demonstrates how significantly Fludernik's theory of experientiality ties into the *Meditations*. The communication method employed by Descartes for this text is wholly about the conveying of a personal experience, with which the reader can identify (to such an extent that they will subsume themselves into the text). The advantages of employing a method such as Fludernik's in reading the *Meditations* are numerous. Descartes' *Meditations* can certainly be considered a narrative text, then; it goes beyond the actantial and causal to draw the reader in to the experience of the Cartesian Meditator. As we are dealing with a narrative centered on personal experience, it is appropriate to close with a brief discussion of the Cartesian Meditator, the central character of the *Meditations*.

THE CARTESIAN MEDITATOR AS CHARACTER

As stated above, Descartes' notions of time were not a major aspect of his thought, nor have they been granted significant attention in secondary literature. The concept of time and its relationship to the *Meditations* overall takes on a much greater importance, though, once we begin to explore these notions of narrativity, fictionality, and character. I suggest that closer attention to these elements may provide a useful way of understanding the themes of the text, particularly Genevieve Lloyd's notion of the Cartesian Meditator's tenuous relationship with his past. Indeed, viewed as the protagonist and the narrator, the Cartesian Meditator takes on an even greater sense of the tenuous relationship with the past. This can be highlighted through Teresa Bridgeman's understanding of the relationship between fictional characters and time. Bridgeman says:

According to the standard protocols of realist narrative, for example, a narrator looking back on her past life cannot step back in time to intervene in events, any more than a protagonist can know what the author does outside the pages of the text. In each case, access from one 'world' to another is blocked by their separation in time and space.⁵⁸

Descartes has effectively dramatised the temporal fragility of the Cartesian Meditator through the simple act of making the narrator of the text a fictional character, rather than himself. As mentioned above, in the *Meditations* Descartes is presenting a man at the *beginning* of a philosophical journey, who *over a number*

of days of meditation, emerges with a stronger understanding of himself and his beliefs. The narrator of the *Meditations* is thus a character on a dramatised journey of discovery: a conduit for Descartes ideas, but necessarily different from Descartes himself.

The 'lifespan' of the Cartesian Meditator is divided into discontinuous 'parts'. Some of these parts (i.e. the six days of meditation) are discernible to the reader. However, the Cartesian Meditator only 'exists' within these meditations. Uri Margolin discusses that characters are "usually temporally limited [...] and discontinuous, in that not every minute or even year of their lives is presented in the text."⁵⁹ In the same way, the Cartesian Meditator's existence is discontinuous. While we can only see the meditator through the glimpses we are given, we are left with the impression of a character that exists beyond the boundaries of each meditation. For example, at the beginning of the Second Meditation, the narrator tells us: "So serious were the doubts into which I have been thrown as a result of yesterday's meditation that I can neither put them out of my mind nor see any way of resolving them" (CSM, II: 16). While the reader is not privy to the events between the First and Second Meditation, the turmoil that the narrator has been suffering in between these two events is implied. The implication fleshes out the character beyond the glimpses that are provided, giving the reader a sense of a unified life that is greater than the discontinuous parts that are shown.

CONCLUSION

The lifespan of a fictitious character, as with the Cartesian lifespan, is divided into parts. These parts are indicated by textual breaks into chapter, scene, page, and so on. We are only given glimpses of the character through particular revealed events. The reader fills the gaps to flesh out the whole. Recalling Mieke Bal, it is the causal link between events that give a sense of a narrative, and in consequence, the form of the character within it. The experience of character, which for Fludernik forms the basis of narrativity, can be far more deeply mined. The Cartesian Meditator has no preserving influence over his existence. It is the higher power, the same power that created him, which preserves him. The relationship between the Cartesian Meditator and God is thus analogous to the relationship between character and author. Furthermore, it is also analogous to the relationship between character and reader. Over the six days of meditation, the author Descartes creates anew the Cartesian Meditator, which echoes perhaps the six days of creation in Genesis. Descartes is here effectively dramatising his idea of

continuous creation by using a narrative form. I submit that, beyond simply a dramatisation of ideas, the narrative form is central to Descartes' philosophy in the *Meditations*. Narrative provides a medium in which readers will enter more deeply into the text, recreating themselves in the same way that Descartes recreates his own 'other self,' the Cartesian Meditator.

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NOTES

1. René Descartes, “Meditations on First Philosophy” *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. II. Trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text thus: (CSM, volume: page number). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Volume III: The Correspondence*. Trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch, A. Kenny. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text thus: (CSMK, page number).
2. Nicholas Jolley, *Causality and Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 3.
3. See Harry Frankfurt: “In reading the First Meditation it is essential to understand that while Descartes speaks in the first person, the identity he adopts as he addresses the reader is not quite his own.” Harry Frankfurt, *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1970, 4.
4. John Carriero ensures this distinction by referring to the narrator of the text by the feminine pronoun ‘she’ in order to better differentiate from the author, Descartes. See John Carriero, *Between Two Worlds*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, 28.
5. Surprisingly little work has been done on the ‘narrative’ and ‘fictional’ aspects of the *Meditations*. See: L. Aryeh Kosman, “The Naïve Narrator: Meditation in Descartes’ *Meditations*” *Essays on Descartes’ Meditations*. Ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, 27-33; Frankfurt, *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen*, 4; Juan Carlos Donado, “Chiasms in Meditation: or Towards the Notion of Cartesian Fiction” *Telos* 162 (2013, 113-130).
6. It goes beyond the scope of this article to fully explore the interplay between argument and narrative in the *Meditations*. Some of the ways these two areas interact will inevitably emerge through the discussion, but there is certainly scope for further research in this area. An early, provocative discussion of the “double reading” that the *Meditations* demands can be found in Michel Foucault, “My Body, This Paper, This Fire” *History of Madness*. Trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa. London: Routledge, 2006, 550-574. This essay was originally published in 1972 as an appendix to the new edition of *Histoire de la Folie*.
7. Jonathan Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume*, Vol. 1. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001, 96.
8. The Latin is taken from René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: A Latin-English Edition*. Ed. and Trans. John Cottingham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 68.
9. E.g. Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers*, 96; Ken Levy, “Is Descartes a temporal atomist?” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 13:4 (2005, 641-643); Richard Arthur, “Continuous Creation, Continuous Time: A Refutation of the Alleged Discontinuity of Cartesian Time” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 26:3 (1988, 357); Geoffrey Gorham, “Cartesian Temporal Atomism: A New Defence, A New Refutation” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 16:3 (2008, 632).
10. René Descartes, “Meditations on First Philosophy” *Descartes: Philosophical Writings*. Ed. and Trans. Elizabeth Anscombe and Peter Thomas Geach. London: Nelson, 1964, 88.
11. Geoffrey Gorham, “Cartesian Causation: Continuous, Instantaneous, Overdetermined” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42:4 (2004, 393). (*Emphasis in text.*)
12. Genevieve Lloyd, *Being in Time*. London: Routledge, 1993, 46.
13. Descartes, *Meditations: Latin-English Edition*, 22.
14. The three stages of skepticism are the argument from the senses (CSM, II: 12), the dreaming doubt (CSM, II: 13), and the evil demon (CSM, II: 14).

15. Lloyd, *Being in Time*, 46.
16. Jaakko Hintikka argues that the Cogito is a performance, rather than an inference. See Jaakko Hintikka, "Cogito, Ergo Sum: Inference or Performance?" *The Philosophical Review* 71:1 (1962, 3-32). See also John Cottingham, *Descartes*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986, 36.
17. Carriero, *Between Two Worlds*, 213.
18. See, for example, L. J. Beck, *The Metaphysics of Descartes*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965, 28-38; Walter John Stohrer, "Descartes and Ignatius Loyola: La Flèche and Manresa Revisited" *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 17:1 (1979, 11-27); Zeno Vendler, "Descartes' Exercises" *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 19:2 (1989, 193-224); Dennis L. Sepper, "The Texture of Thought: Why Descartes' *Meditationes* is Meditational, and Why it Matters" *Descartes' Natural Philosophy*. Eds. John Schuster, John Sutton & Stephen Gaukroger. London: Routledge, 2000, 736-750; Matthew L. Jones, "Descartes's Geometry as Spiritual Exercise" *Critical Inquiry* 28:1 (2001, 40-71); Jorge Secada, "God and Meditation in Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*" *Descartes' Meditations: A Critical Guide*. Ed. Karen Detlefsen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 200-225; Christia Mercer, "The Methodology of the *Meditations*: Tradition and Innovation" *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes' Meditations*. Ed. David Cunnig. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 23-47.
19. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, "Experiments in Philosophic Genre: Descartes' *Meditations*" *Critical Inquiry* 9:3 (1983, 545-64). This article was later revised under another title. See Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, "The Structure of Descartes' *Meditations*" *Essays on Descartes' Meditations*. Ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, 1-20.
20. Rorty, "Philosophic Genre", 546.
21. Bradley Rubidge, "Descartes's *Meditations* and Devotional Meditations" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 51:1 (1990, 38).
22. Rubidge, "Devotional Meditations", 38.
23. See also Elizabeth Belfiore, who makes an argument for literary theorists' tendency to make broad claims about texts, failing to place them appropriately within their historical context: "Literary theorists of our age, even while paying lip-service to [the historically conditioned biases of the critic] are often too ready to assume the universality of their own biases." See Elizabeth Belfiore, "Narratological Plots and Aristotle's Mythos" *Arethusa* 33:1 (2000, 37).
24. Rubidge, "Devotional Meditations", 44. See also Harry Frankfurt: "Moral and religious meditations were published before the seventeenth century, but Descartes was the first to use the form in an exclusively metaphysical work." Frankfurt, *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen*, 3.
25. Rubidge, "Devotional Meditations", 28-33.
26. The proceeding draws heavily on Rubidge, "Devotional Meditations", 28-33. Rubidge provides a far more detailed depiction of the genre of devotional meditations, which goes beyond the scope of this article.
27. Rubidge, "Devotional Meditations", 29.
28. Francis of Sales, *A Treatise of the Love of God*, Douay: Gerard Pinchon, 1630, 325, quoted in Louis Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954, 15. Martz has followed the English language translation of 1630 by Miles Car throughout his text, as his study relates to English poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I have modernised the spelling here.
29. Martz, *Poetry of Meditation*, 16.
30. Rubidge, "Devotional Meditations", 48.
31. Rubidge, "Devotional Meditations", 48.
32. H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 12.

33. Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009, 191; See also Abbott, *Narrative*, 12.
34. Bal, *Narratology*, 197; see also E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978, 87. Forster defines plot as based on causal connection: “The King died *and then* the Queen died of grief”. (*Emphasis added*).
35. Monika Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2009, 1.
36. Fludernik, *Introduction to Narratology*, 6.
37. Monika Fludernik, *Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology*. London: Routledge, 1996, 311. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text thus: (TNN, page number).
38. See note 34, above.
39. Fludernik, *Introduction to Narratology*, 6.
40. See note 9, above.
41. Compare: “A *lifespan* can be divided into countless parts, each completely independent of the others” (*Meditations*, CSM, II: 33, *emphasis added*); “For I regard the *divisions of time* as being separable from each other” (*First Set of Replies*, CSM, II: 78, *emphasis added*); “For the *nature of time* is such that its parts are not mutually dependent” (*Principles*, CSM, I: 200, *emphasis added*).
42. It also allows for more legitimate discussion of a text not traditionally considered through a narrative framework. As Fludernik says, “The proposed reconstitution of narrativity on the lines of experiential rather than actantial parameters allows nothing less than the reintegration of some 80 to 90 percent of hitherto marginalized literature from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century”. See Fludernik, ‘*Natural’ Narratology*, 329.
43. See Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975, 131-160. “To study writing, and especially literary modes of writing, one must concentrate on the conventions which guide the play of differences and the process of constructing meanings” See Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, 133.
44. There is a significant body of literature detailing Descartes’ links to both Augustine and Ignatius. In this article I am focusing almost exclusively on some relevant stylistic links, however discussion of connections of thought, philosophy and theology can be found elsewhere. For Descartes and Augustine, see Stephen Menn, *Descartes and Augustine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. It presents a sustained discussion on the links between the thought of the two authors. Michael Hanby presents a theological case for the fundamental differences. See Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*. London: Routledge, 2003. See also Matt Hettche, “Descartes and the Augustinian Tradition of Devotional Meditation: Tracing a Minim Connection” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 48:3 (2010, 283-311). Rubidge, “Devotional Meditations”, 31-37, gives a good analysis of connections between Descartes and Ignatius, as well as a good review of contemporary scholarship that links the two authors. A detailed summary of meditation drawing on the *Spiritual Exercises* and the Jesuit tradition that flows out of it can be found in Martz, *Poetry of Meditation*, 25-39. Connections are also drawn between Descartes and Ignatius in Beck, *Metaphysics*, 28-38; Stohrer, “Descartes and Ignatius”, 11-27; and Vendler, “Descartes’ Exercises”, 193-224.
45. Stephen Gaukroger, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 336.
46. Patrick Riley, *Character and Conversion: Augustine, Montaigne, Descartes, Rousseau, and Sartre*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004, 241.
47. V. Bailey Gillespie, *The Dynamics of Religious Conversion: Identity and Transformation*. Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1991, 19.
48. Descartes’ *Correspondence* provides further links between the two authors. Reference to August-

tine can be found in letters to Colvius on 14 November 1640 (CSMK, 159), Mersenne in December 1640 (CSMK, 160-161) and Mersenne on 21 January 1641 (CSMK, 168) around the time Descartes was drafting the *Meditations* and receiving initial objections.

49. Augustine, *The Confessions*. Trans. Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, 244.

50. Augustine, *The Confessions*, 244.

51. Edwin Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion*, 2nd ed. London: Walter Scott, 1901, 64.

52. Frankfurt, *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen*, 4.

53. Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*. Trans. Aloysius Ambruzzi. Bangalore: St Joseph's College, 1939, 49.

54. Bernard Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry*. Middlesex: Penguin, 1979, 19-20. See also Elizabeth Anscombe, who has said: "The first-person character of Descartes' argument means that each person must administer it to himself in the first person." See Elizabeth Anscombe, "The First Person" *The Collected Philosophical Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe, Volume Two: Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981, 21.

55. Martial Gueroult, *Descartes' Philosophy Interpreted According to the Order of Reasons*, Vol. 1. Trans. Roger Ariew. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, 9.

56. See *Second Set of Objections* (CSM, II: 92).

57. For further discussion on Descartes' arguments for Synthesis versus Analysis see L. J. Beck, "The Rules of Analysis and Synthesis" *The Method of Descartes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952, 155-167; E. M. Curley, "Analysis in the *Meditations*" *Essays on Descartes' Meditations*. Ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, 153-176; Richard McKeon, "Philosophy and the Development of Scientific Methods" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27:1 (1966, 3-22).

58. Teresa Bridgeman, "Time and Space" *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. Ed. David Herman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 52.

59. Uri Margolin, "Character" *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. Ed. David Herman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 68. Michael Chabon explores the excision required in writing fiction in his novel: "I had too much to write: too many fine and miserable buildings to construct and streets to name and clock towers to set chiming, too many characters to raise up from the dirt like flowers whose petals I peeled down to the intricate frail organs within, too many terrible genetic and fiduciary secrets to dig up and bury and dig up again". See Michael Chabon, *The Wonder Boys*. London: Fourth Estate, 2008, 12.