

THE DOCTRINE OF INTELLECTUAL INTUITIONS IN DESCARTES' *REGULAE AD DIRECTIONEM INGENII*¹

Sergei Talanker
Gordon College, Israel
sanft12@yahoo.com

RESUMEN

El presente artículo es un intento de reconsiderar uno de los textos filosóficos más tempranos de Descartes: *Las Reglas para la dirección del entendimiento*. Debido a circunstancias históricas este escrito no recibió la atención que se adjudicaron algunas de sus obras más tardías, y aparentemente, no tuvo gran impacto en el desarrollo de la filosofía moderna. Pero dado que muchas de las concepciones presentes en los textos más clásicos de Descartes fueron de hecho desarrolladas en las Reglas, es fundamental que ellas sean comprendidas en el contexto en que aparecieron originalmente, el único lugar en el que se discute explícitamente su significado completo. El autor intentará demostrar cómo al comprender las 'intuiciones intelectuales', el concepto clave de dicho escrito, se puede penetrar en el método de Descartes y sus elaboraciones más enigmáticas, incluyendo el argumento del cogito. Y se demostrará que para Descartes tener una intuición de un concepto significa intuir de manera inmediata todo los enunciados implícitos del concepto. De esta forma, dado que las intuiciones intelectuales son innatas, no hay un orden cronológico o lógico en que ellas sean intuitas.

Palabras Clave: *Descartes, reglas, intelectual, intuiciones, método.*

ABSTRACT

The following article is an attempt to reappraise one of Descartes' earliest philosophical texts: *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*. Due to historical circumstances it did not receive as much attention as some of his later works, and, seemingly, did not have as much impact on the development of modern philosophy. Since multiple conceptions, appearing in Descartes' more classic texts, were in fact developed in *Reguale*, it is important that they are understood within the context where they originally appeared, the only place, where their full meaning is explicitly discussed. The author will attempt to demonstrate how through understanding 'intellectual intuitions', the key

¹ I would like to thank Ivor Ludlam and the referees from *Methodus* for their suggestions and help.

concept of the text, one may get insight into Descartes' method, and his more enigmatic formations, including the *cogito* argument. The author will demonstrate that according to Descartes, having an intuition of a concept means immediately intuiting all the implicit statements about the concept. Thus, since intellectual intuitions are innate, there is no chronological or logical order in which they are intuited.

Key words: *Descartes, rules, intellectual, intuitions, method.*

I

IN THIS PAPER I investigate the conception of 'intellectual intuitions' in Descartes' early *Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii* as the conceptual cornerstone of his rationalist universal philosophy. According to Descartes, intellectual intuitions are present both in perceptions and judgments as their essential elements. Analysis of perceptions leads to its non-sensible elements or intellectual intuitions; and every judgment is only true if it is deduced from intellectual intuition through intellectually intuited laws of inference. Thus, intuitions condition both experience as its non-sensible elements and judgments as their most basic premises and rules of inference. Also, without intellectual intuitions there is no method to Cartesian philosophy; and there is no Cartesian philosophy without method.

I will attempt to reconstruct Descartes' conception of intellectual intuitions in a manner that will be consistent with Descartes' other core conceptions present in the *Regulae*. In order to do so, I investigate Descartes' entire doctrine of *Rules of the Direction of the Mind*, where this conception is elaborated upon more than in any other representation of his system, assuming that one may indeed speak of a singular system of Descartes. Elsewhere (Talanker, 2010) I demonstrate how this doctrine of intellectual intuitions integrates into Descartes' method expressed in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, and *Principles of Philosophy*. I shall not attempt to prove this assumption in the present paper. Reasons for adopting this premise were also given in literature².

² See Beyssade, 1996, Curley, 1978.

The doctrine that Descartes presents in *Regulae* is perhaps less sophisticated than those presented in his later texts. It is raw, and, thus, more upfront. The loose ends are out in the open. There is a great value to studying the conceptual basis of Descartes' doctrine directly in *Regulae* as there it is presented in its purest form. Clear understanding of Descartes' most basic conceptions provides us with clues for resolving some of the ambiguities of his philosophy. Purely for circumstantial reasons, both *Regulae* and the conception of intellectual intuitions elaborated in them are not as well studied as Descartes' other texts and conceptions, yet they are an integral part of Descartes' philosophy. The classical commentaries on the text by Beck and Marion do not give a satisfactory account of intellectual intuitions and the few relatively more recent articles on intellectual intuitions in Descartes are not consistent with the rest of the text of *Regulae*. The present article offers a fresh insight into one of Descartes' more important, and, yet, less studied concepts, and presents it as the core of a doctrine, shown to be central to the *Regulae*. I presume that if accepted to be held by Descartes at certain time, this doctrine, as reconstructed in this paper, will help better understand some of the more difficult issues with Cartesian philosophy beyond the text of *Regulae*, as the doctrine of intellectual intuitions, though never abandoned by Descartes, was made fully explicit in no other text.

II

In *Regulae* Descartes pronounced that the aim of his studies was discovering the rules of the method of «forming true and sound judgments». In *Regulae* Descartes applies to «method» the same strict, indubitable, universal standard that was made famous in his later texts:

By 'a method' I mean reliable rules which are easy to apply, and such that if one follows them exactly, one will never take what is false to be true[...] till one arrives at a true understanding of everything within one's capacity (AT, X: 371-372 CSM, I: 16).

Descartes' vision of a method includes two main elements: the indubitable premises and the indubitable rules for deducing «true and sound judgments» from them. We shall see that both such premises and the rules of deduction can only be intuited.

Descartes believed that the indubitable premises are available to us in our immediate experience. We can clearly and distinctly *intuit* them. Intuiting is characterized in the following manner:

By ‘intuition’ I do not mean the fluctuating testimony of the senses or the deceptive judgment of the imagination as it botches things together, but the conception of the clear and attentive mind, which is so easy and distinct that there can be no room for doubt about what we are understanding. Alternatively, and this comes to the same thing, intuition is the indubitable conception of a clear and attentive mind which proceeds solely from the light of reason. Because it is simpler, it is more certain than deduction, though deduction, as we noted above, is not something a man can perform wrongly. Thus everyone can mentally intuit that he exists, that he is thinking, that a triangle is bounded by just three lines, and a sphere by a single surface, and the like. Perceptions such as these are more numerous than most people realize, disdaining as they do to turn their minds to such simple matters (AT, X: 368 CSM, I: 14).

There are two aspects of intuition that I would like to stress: it is performed through reason alone, distinctly from the senses and the imagination, and it is simple. Descartes’ critics have challenged the doctrine of intuitions either by trivializing it altogether, like Natorp (Natorp, 2009), or by challenging these two aspects, or their compatibility, like a few of the relatively more recent critics, with whom I argue in the present article. In this paper I intend to show that the concept of intellectual intuition is coherent and indispensable to Descartes’ doctrine in the *Regulae*; that is, if the rules of Descartes’ method are to be taken seriously, the doctrine of intellectual intuitions must be viewed as a significant philosophical endeavor. My current task is to present it as such.

Intuition and deduction cannot be said to stem from the method. On the contrary, the method presupposes the intellect’s ability to intuit and deduce in the first place. If intuition and deduction were not available to our mind, Descartes’ method (or any other) would not be feasible:

The method cannot go so far as to teach us how to perform the actual operations of intuition and deduction, since these are the simplest and quite basic. If our intellect were not already able to perform them, it would not comprehend any of the rules of the method, however easy they might be (AT, X: 372 CSM, I: 16).

Descartes did not see his method as an arbitrary invention of his imaginative consciousness. He believed that the basic principles of his method were innate, and that to some extent the method has been implicitly known, for example, by the mathematicians.

The method as a whole is given in Rule V. Descartes' method can be said to consist of analyzing experience to render its simplest elements, out of which the certain knowledge would be synthesized. We are first to analyze the totality of our judgments about the world, reducing them to the simplest propositions, then, starting with the simplest intuitive propositions to ascend through creative deduction back to the most complicated propositions, which, unlike the original judgments will be certain, as the intuited premises and the methods of deduction are certain:

...we first reduce complicated and obscure propositions step by step to simpler ones, and then, starting with the intuition of the simplest ones of all, try to ascend through the same steps to a knowledge of the rest (AT, X: 379 CSM, I: 20).

Thus we can recognize three stages of the method: the analysis, the establishment of the premises and the synthesis through what Descartes calls 'deduction'.

In *Descartes' Philosophy of Science*, Desmond Clarke shows that Descartes' theoretical conception of his method matches the method that he actually implemented in his scientific research (Clarke, 1982). Whether he investigates the universe, or light, the human body, or soul, the method remains essentially the same. Clarke's argument is grounded by a claim that Descartes' method of gaining *a priori* knowledge agrees with investigation of experience³. One of the key words in this context is 'analysis': Descartes is said to *analyze* that which is grossly given to him in experience in order to discover the pure and simple elements of it. As these elements are compatible with the notions given by intellectual intuition, Descartes believes he can successfully *synthesize* chains of inferences encompassing the entire scope of human knowledge.

III

In Rule VI, which, according to him, is the most important one of all, Descartes speaks of methods to distinguish the simplest things from

³ There is no dispute that Kant's *a priori* notions are compatible with experience, so why should those of Descartes not be?

those which are more complicated. Descartes supposes that all things are either known on the basis of other things or immediately. In the latter case, they would be simple. The novelty of Descartes' method is in ordering things not according to their ontological genus, but according to the way they are known to the human mind:

Although the message of this Rule may not seem very novel, it contains nevertheless the main secret of my method; and there is no more useful Rule in the whole treatise. For it instructs us that all things can be arranged serially in various groups, not in so far as they can be referred to some ontological genus (such as the categories into which philosophers divide things), but in so far as some things can be known on the basis of others (AT, X: 381 CSM, I: 21).

Descartes' method is primarily epistemological, as opposed to the ontological. Thus, the basic elements in his philosophy are the simplest with regard to the way they are known, not the way they just are. Descartes mentally inquires, which things are known on the basis of other things, and which are derived from no other thing at all.

Most things are known on the basis of other things which are in their turn based on other things and so on. The preliminary method for ordering things from the most complex to their simplest basis is to correlate different things as absolute and relative. Descartes method does not presume to determine, which things are «absolute» by nature, but only vis-à-vis their correlatives, according to the order in which they are known: «...our project being, not to inspect the isolated natures of things, but to compare them with each other so that some may be known on the basis of others» (AT, X: 381 CSM, I: 21).

Descartes gives ad hoc examples of the 'absolute' and 'relative' correlatives:

I call 'absolute' whatever has within it the pure and simple nature in question; that is, whatever is viewed as being independent, a cause, simple, universal, single, equal, similar, straight, and other qualities of the sort.

The 'relative', on the other hand, is what shares the same nature[...] in virtue of which we can relate it to the absolute and deduce it from the absolute in a definite series of steps. The concept of the 'relative' involves other terms besides, which I call

‘relations’: these include whatever is said to be dependent, an effect, composite, particular, many, unequal, dissimilar, oblique, etc. (AT, X: 381-382 CSM, I: 21)

As the method is supposed to be universal, anything could be correlated as absolute and relative, though Descartes suggests that one should not start with the difficult matters. The terms ‘absolute’ and ‘relative’ are themselves relative in the context of this method. For that reason the list given in Rule VI could not be exhaustive as these are just a few examples of things that might be considered absolute only in a certain context.

The preliminary stage itself cannot give us the correct order of things from the most simple elements to the complex. Descartes needs additional means to establish the most basic elements, otherwise ordering things into relatively more absolute and less absolute would be an unending process.

Descartes supposes that there are «very few pure and simple natures which we can intuit straight off and *per se* (independently of any others) either in our sensory experience or by means of a light innate within us» (AT, X: 383 CSM, I: 22). By correlating these few natures which are simple in the highest degree with the relative absolutes, one can obtain chains of inferences running from the simplest natures to the most complex matters.

It should be noted that Descartes says «in our sensory experience» and not «through our senses», otherwise one might be inclined to think that Descartes contradicts himself. The simple natures are conceptual constituents of experience, perceived through intellect. In the words of L.J. Beck, «They are not fictitious creations of the mind itself; they are not mere figments of mind inserted in or imposed upon an alien reality» (Beck, 1952, p. 73). They are not inventions, but rather that which is encountered in «inner» or «outer» experience through unique acts of intellectual intuition. What makes them objects of intuiting is the particular clarity of their conception. Simplicity is not a quality of material things, but rather a category of perception. Descartes understands that his method depends on the way our mind operates because simple things are simple cognitions: their simplicity stems from the way they are conceived and not the way they are in reality, whatever that means.

The first and the second stages are interdependent. Just like the first stage would have been unending if there were no things perceived absolutely simply, the second stage would not be possible without analysis of the given experience. *Intuitions are not given separately from other perceptions*, it is analysis that tells us which things among those present in our mind are not based on other things.

The objects of intellectual intuition are immediately given and should not be viewed as given through the process of analysis. Analysis itself yields nothing new, it only takes apart the whole and distinguishes the elements implicitly included in that whole. Analysis can only confirm the simplicity of a part of a given whole. Descartes is a firm believer in the processing of the given. He is critical of «those philosophers who take no account of experience and think that the truth will spring from their brains like Minerva from the head of Jupiter» (AT, X: 380 CSM, I: 21).

The third stage is the stage of deduction of complex propositions from the intuited propositions. It should be noted that the initial stages of the process of deduction are themselves intuitive. According to Descartes, the immediate inferences from the basic intuitions are both simple and intuited. Only the more remote consequences are deduced through what Descartes calls ‘induction’ or ‘enumeration’:

...deduction is made through intuition when it is simple and transparent, but not when it is complex and involved. When the latter is the case, we call it ‘enumeration’ or ‘induction’, since the intellect cannot simultaneously grasp it as a whole... (AT, X: 408 CSM, I: 37).

The method cannot tell us which things we intuit and which things we can deduce. This is established prior to the method. Descartes believed that his method itself was dictated by our innate intuitions and that which could be deduced from them, the method only helps to uncover those in a precise, systematic manner. That is why the third stage is deduction from *arbitrary* sets of truths: there can be no a priori method of obtaining the truth.

The third stage is performed through deduction from random sets of truth intuited or deduced, taking the performer to the limits of human knowledge. Descartes is aware that what we may know is limited by the way that we know. Descartes’ deepest insight is now

manifested: in order to know, one must examine *how* he knows. The search for knowledge now turns inwards.

IV

In Rule XII Descartes speaks of *rerum cognitionem*, of which two are to be observed: us, the knowing subjects, and the known things themselves. Investigating these, Descartes is finally ready to demonstrate with examples how one can distinctly intuit simple things and deduce the chains of inferences running from them to the most complicated matters, thus gaining the «true and sound judgments» he was searching for.

A unique class of *rerum cognitionem*, ‘simple’ things are perceived by the intellect, and are not things-in-themselves. According to the method of Descartes, he only considers things as they appear to the intellect, which is different from «speaking of them in accordance with how they exist in reality». Simplicity in this context means indivisibility of the *concept in the mind*, a simple thing is a thing which, in one’s mind, cannot be divided.

That is why, since we are concerned here with things only in so far as they are perceived by the intellect, we term ‘simple’ only those things which we know so clearly and distinctly that they cannot be divided by the mind into others which are more distinctly known (AT, X: 418, CSM, I: 44).

Simple things are perceived clearly and distinctly because they do not leave any room for confusion in their perceptions.

Some researchers tend to over-analyze Descartes, beyond the point where analyzing is useful. It must also become clear that simple notions do not allow definitions to be given to them in a strict sense, and, in fact, it is one of their distinctions as *simple*. The following serves as a clue to our understanding of Descartes, yet is also a warning:

...we need take no great pains to discover these simple natures, because they are self-evident enough [...] There is good reason for our urging this point here, because the learned are often inclined to be so clever that they find ways of blinding themselves even to facts which are self-evident and which every peasant knows. This is what happens whenever they try and explain things which are self-evident in terms of something even more evident: what they do is to explain something else or nothing at

all [...] It must be said then, that we should never explain things of this sort by definitions, in case we take hold of composite things instead of simple ones. (AT, X: 425-426 CSM, I: 48-49)

In different sections of *Regulae*, Descartes provides lists of simple things, each of them familiar to the reader of Descartes' more popular texts. The lists go on and expand, both in other works by Descartes and in the works of his followers⁴. Even within the limits of the *Regulae* it should not be taken as definitive or exhaustive, as in order for it to be such, all the possible spheres of existence would have to be exhausted⁵.

Jean-Marie Beyssade in «La Theorie Cartésienne de la Substance» pays special attention to the development of the 'simple things' or 'prime notions' in Descartes' different works (Beyssade, 1996). It appears that Descartes never abandoned this doctrine throughout his philosophical career, yet the list was always changing. Curley argues that the doctrine of intuitions is implied in the *Discourse* although it is not even mentioned in its text, though the text of *Regulae* does not always represent the method characteristic of the later texts of Descartes (Curley, 1978, p. 24).

Among the simple things, Descartes distinguishes between purely intellectual things, purely material things, and things common to both realms, the latter item including notions used in making links between other simple natures, serving as rules for making inferences.

...those things which are said to be simple with respect to our intellect are, on our view, either purely intellectual or purely material, or common to both. Those simple natures which the intellect recognizes by means of a sort of innate light, without the aid of any corporeal image, are purely intellectual. That there is a number of such things is certain: it is impossible to form any corporeal idea which represents for us what knowledge or doubt or ignorance is, or the action of the will, which may be called 'volition', and the like; and yet we have real knowledge of all of these, knowledge so easy that in order to possess it all we need is some degree of rationality. Those simple natures, on the other hand, which are recognized to be present only in bodies – such

⁴ By Descartes' followers I mean most of the philosophers of modern era, including Spinoza, Locke, Leibniz and Kant.

⁵ For a detailed account of the different lists of simple things in *Regulae*, see Robinet, 1999.

as shape, extension and motion, etc. – are purely material. Lastly, those simples are to be termed ‘common’ which are ascribed indifferently, now to corporeal things, now to spirits – for instance, existence, unity, duration and the like. To this class we must also refer those common notions which are, as it were, links which connect other simple natures together, and whose self-evidence is the basis for all the rational inferences we make. Examples of these are: ‘Things that are the same as a third thing are the same as each other’; ‘Things that cannot be related in the same way to a third thing are different in some respect.’ These common notions can be known either by the pure intellect or by the intellect as it intuits the images of material things.

Moreover, it is as well to count among the simple natures the corresponding privations and negations, in so far as we understand these (AT, X: 419-420 CSM, I: 44-45).

As one can see, this list is different from the one given in Rule VI. The list of Rule XII, unlike the list of relative absolutes of Rule VI, only includes simple natures of the three kinds (intellectual, material and mixed) and common notions which connect other simple natures together in rational inferences that properly belong to the third class, examples of which are given in the passage quoted above, and their privations and negations.

Thus, we should note that ‘simple natures’ or ‘simple things’ are ‘simple notions’ as they are interchangeable in the text. Descartes only uses one word instead of another in order to underline a specific aspect of simplicity in a certain context.

The simple natures form the basis of Cartesian philosophy in a sense that the composite ones are composed of them, and that the knowledge of them is both immediately available and contains no *possible* falsity.

... these simple natures are all self-evident and never contain any falsity. This can easily be shown if we distinguish between the faculty by which our intellect intuits and knows things and the faculty by which it makes affirmative or negative judgements[...] it is evident that we are mistaken if we ever judge that we lack complete knowledge of any of these complete natures. For if we have even the slightest grasp of it in our mind – which we surely must have, on the assumption that we are making a judgement about it – it must follow that we have complete knowledge of it. Otherwise it could not be said to be simple... (AT, X: 420 CSM, I: 45).

Descartes distinguishes between simple notions or natures and simple propositions, and emphasizes the importance of the passage from the ones to the others. Having even the slightest grasp of a single nature means never being wrong when making a judgment about it. This judgment made about a simple nature is a simple proposition, if the proposition is necessarily implied by the very nature of the simple nature which is the subject of this judgment. Simple propositions are said to be intuited, yet they are also judgments and they are necessarily true. These are the true and sound judgments that Descartes was seeking all along. They serve as a link between intuitions and deductions.

This is easily comprehensible, especially considering that some of the intuitions are given in the form of principles:

It follows that those propositions which are immediately inferred from first principles can be said to be known in one respect through intuition, and in another respect through deduction. But the first principles themselves are known only through intuition, and the remote conclusions only through deduction (AT, X: 370, CSM, I: 15).

The technical differences between intuitions and deductions are given in Rule XI. According to Descartes, «a simple deduction of one fact from another is performed through intuition» (AT, X: 407, CSM, I: 37).

Van De Pitte in «Intuition and Judgment in Descartes' Theory of Truth» has contrasted two approaches to the origins of the foundations of truth in Descartes, presenting Beck as a champion of the approach stating that intuitions are the sources of truth for Descartes, and Clarke as the champion of judgments as the source of truth, stating that intuitions do not have truth values. He himself believes that «...no direct opposition between intuition and judgment is possible with respect to the attainment of truth –since these two elements belong to entirely different levels of Descartes' thought» (Van der Pitte, 1988, p. 489).

The closer analysis of the text suggests, however, that the first part of the sentence quoted is true, while the second part, the explanation, is false. We have seen that although these faculties can be distinguished in reflection, «simple propositions» are *both* intuitions and judgments. They do not have «truth values» in the contemporary sense, as they

are not contingent, but they serve as the source of truth for Descartes, nonetheless. If we are to choose to speak of simple propositions in contemporary terms, we should compare them to axioms, as their truth value cannot be questioned, and everything which follows from them, according to the accepted rules of inference, is also true⁶.

With the knowledge of simple natures and simple propositions, the work of building the chains of inferences is supposed to be technical for Descartes. All that is left for Descartes to show is how to make conjectures between simple things.

...the conjunction between these simple things is either necessary or contingent. The conjunction is necessary when one of them is somehow implied (albeit confusedly) in the concept of the other so that we cannot conceive either of them distinctly if we judge them to be separate from each other. It is in this way that shape is conjoined with extension, motion with duration or time, etc., because we cannot conceive of a shape which is completely lacking in extension, or a motion wholly lacking in duration[...]. If, for example, Socrates says that he doubts everything, it necessarily follows that he understands at least that he is doubting, and hence that he knows that something can be true or false, etc.; for there is a necessary connection between these facts and the nature of doubt. The union between such things, however, is contingent when the relation conjoining them is not an inseparable one. This is the case when we say that a body is animate, that a man is dressed, etc. Again, there are many instances of things which are necessary conjoined[...] for example the proposition, 'I am therefore God exists', or 'I understand, therefore I have a mind distinct from the body' (AT, X: 421-422, CSM, I: 46).

When a simple thing is necessarily conjoined with another simple thing, or, in other words, it is implied by it, the conjecture is *intuited* although formally it looks like a deduction. Even though they seem to be known on the basis of one another, their knowledge is innate and there could be no real priority in knowing them, but only in the order of discovering them. Thus, knowing is implied in doubting, yet it cannot be said to be known on the basis of doubting, only disco-

⁶ Applying contemporary terms to the 17th century philosopher, however, should be performed very carefully. It might be useful to help the contemporary reader better understand the philosopher, yet one should always remember that he is unlikely to have thought in these terms himself.

vered on the basis of it, if one wills.

Discussing the later texts by Descartes, contemporary commentators still experience difficulties grasping how statements such as «cogito ergo sum» can be intuited if they include an inference and seem to be inferred from a more general statement such as «whoever thinks – exists». Jeangene Vilmer suggests that the more general statement is in fact deduced from the particular, while the more particular one is induced from the general (Jeangene Vilmer, 1992). Logically, he suggests, the general statement is prior to the particular, which is just an instance of it, yet chronologically, one first becomes aware of the particular, out of which its generalization is later induced. I believe that since they are intuited, both statements could not be in a relationship of either logical or chronological priority as that which is intellectually intuited is neither intuited in any particular type of order, or on the basis of another intuited thing. Intuiting the simple notion of ‘thinking’ means immediately intuiting both propositions.

V

As L. J. Beck has pointed out, the simplicity of intellectual intuitions does not mean that what it apprehends is simple, it refers only to the simplicity of an act, the apprehension of an object simultaneously, as opposed to by parts (Beck, 1952, p.75). I maintain that evidently, ‘simplicity’ in *Regulae* has different meanings, depending on the context. Simplicity of intuition stems from the indivisibility of the act, that is, it is performed as a whole, as opposed to successively, part by part; simplicity of a simple thing, nature or notion stems from its inderivability from others; simplicity of the proposition stems from it immanently following from a simple notion, which is its subject. Every intuition is necessarily simple (in the sense that it is a simple act), while its object may immanently contain a number of different concepts. The simplicity of a notion is not compromised by immanently containing other simple notions if it cannot be resolved into these notions. The notion of duration is immanently contained in the concept of motion, yet motion cannot be resolved into duration and vice versa, thus both these notions may be simple. For that very reason simple notions cannot be defined: each such definition would be circular.

Simple notions immanently contain other notions by their very

nature. Intuiting a simple notion means understanding it, that is, understanding that which is contained in it, as seen in the Socrates example: doubting necessarily implies understanding that one doubts and knowing that something can be true or false. A proposition is complex by its very nature, yet Descartes' 'simple proposition' is not an oxymoron.

It must be noted that simple propositions are intuited as there can be no separate intuition of a simple notion or nature without intuiting simple propositions immanently contained in the intuited notion. *If you intuit one simple notion, you intuit all of them!* Moreover, you intuit how they are connected among themselves as well as the rules of connecting them.

In Rule IX, Descartes compares intuiting to vision⁷ in order to stress that intuition perceives its objects non-discursively, altogether. Later, Kant would develop more clearly the distinction between intuitions and judgments on the grounds of the non-discursivity of the former. One cannot attribute such a clear-cut distinction to Descartes, however, because the Cartesian intuition is intellectual, that is, dealing with words and sentences by its very nature. Thus, the comparison is helpful when it fulfills its function to bring our attention to the fact that simple notions are intuited simultaneously and not successively or on the basis of each other.

⁷ Also, see Bourassa (1968).

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