

What is in the picture? Descartes and some Scholastics on Thought and Representation.

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Abstract:

As is well known Descartes claims that ideas, machines and paintings differ in degree along a scale that enables one also to rank those responsible for their making. The argument for the existence of God he provides in Meditation III depends on just this feature of ideas. In an earlier work (Normore 1984), I claimed that ideas, at least, are for him transparent in the sense that their rank is a simple function of a more basic ranking of the items they are about. Some issues raised by Joe Hwang in conversation have led me to consider how this claim fares when applied to machines and paintings and to reconsider it for ideas. This paper takes up these issues, situating Descartes' account of what he variously terms 'objective reality' and 'objective perfection' against some late scholastic accounts, attempting a unified account of what he has to say about ranking objects and (perhaps!) drawing some morals for contemporary accounts of representation.