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Cartesian Privations, or Regis' Cartesian Material Causation

In *Principles* I, sections 23 and 31, Descartes appeals to privations to explain how it is that God is innocent of sin. However it is not clear how privations can be made sense of within the reductionistic metaphysics of the Cartesian system. Descartes writes that God is not responsible for sins because (1) God is only responsible for real things, (2) sins are privations, and (3) privations are not real things. One common interpretation of Descartes here reads him as suggesting that only real things are caused, but, as Descartes' contemporaries and near-contemporaries (including Hobbes and Leibniz) pointed out, this premise removes guilt from humans as well as from God. Another way to read Descartes is as suggesting that privations are themselves not real but are the result of real things. Descartes' contemporaries also objected that since God is the cause of the real things, he is also responsible for the privations which depend on them. As it happens, Descartes has not sufficiently explained how privations can be usefully incorporated into his system without falling into one of these positions. I consider the possibility that Descartes did not go into enough detail here because he assumed his appeal to privations was of the same kind as those common in his day and that the solutions the others had provided would be sufficient. I examine some scholastics, most notably Francisco Suarez, and show that there is no obvious way scholastic resources can be incorporated into Descartes' system to avoid these problems. This is not to say that it cannot be done, but given the radical differences between Cartesianism and Scholasticism, Descartes silence should not be taken as indicating that the old answers so obviously apply that it would be redundant for him to fill this in for the readers. It could be, then, that Descartes recognizes that his appeal to privations is different and either has not worked out a solution to these problems or he has and has not shared it. This leaves a job to Descartes' followers. Among the Cartesians, Pierre Sylvain Regis's explanation of privations is the most interesting. He explains Descartes' use of privations by claiming that privations are not caused *efficiently*, but then adds that sins are caused *materially*. There is good evidence that Descartes did not see any role for material causation in his system, but even so, Regis' use of material causation has a decidedly Cartesian character—also being used in his explanation of ideas being modifications of the soul—and makes good sense out of the appeal to privations.
