The Cartesian Split

The Cartesian Split examines the phenomenon of Cartesian influence as a psychological complex in the Jungian tradition. It explores the full legacy of Cartesian rationality in its emphasis on abstract thinking and masculinisation of thought, often perceived in a negative light, despite the developments of modernity.

The book argues that the Cartesian creation of the Modern Age, as accompanied by a radical dualism, is better understood as a myth while acknowledging the psychological reality of the myth. The Cartesian myth is a collective dream, and the urgency of its rhetoric suggests that an important message is being left unheeded. This message may lead us to answers in the most unexpected place of all. The book brings forth the Cartesian myth in a new context and shows it to have potential meaning for us today.

The book will be of great interest for academics, researchers, and post-graduate students in the fields of analytical psychology, mental health, comparative mythology, and Jungian studies.

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The Cartesian Split

A Hidden Myth

Brandon D. Short

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Preface

The Western academy has a father complex. This complex is deep and tumultuous, rife with emotion and resentment, while also compulsive and irrational. For sure, the academy has a long and respectable tradition, venerated and sophisticated, featuring some of the best minds doing some of the best research. But in this one respect, it is like a child that is overly fixated on its father, too obsessed with escaping his long shadow. This father is none other than René Descartes, the 17th-century philosopher now known as the “father of modern philosophy.” In a postmodern age, he is the icon of modernity most commonly rejected, oftentimes with glee.

The father complex itself is perhaps best known as one half of the Oedipus complex. This was given to us from another father, Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis. In Freud’s writings, the Oedipus complex looms ominously, present to some degree in nearly every case study. Deep down, says Freud, we all harbor deep resentment and antipathy toward our fathers. This idea is perhaps not so well accepted anymore, but it does offer a useful perspective on our collective attitude toward Descartes. In nearly every academic field, it is common to find an urgent exhortation, in some form or another, for a complete emancipation from Cartesian influence. It is presumed that such influence is widespread, pernicious in its effects, and must be singled out and rejected before any further progress can be made. In other words, this collective child of the Academy feels compelled to kill its father.

Although this complex is multi-faceted, one particular aspect of it is surely the infamous doctrine of Cartesian dualism. Of all the Cartesian ideas to reject, this is the one that seems to be the most urgent. Why? Often, it is assumed that this idea is not just a present problem but marks an unusually tragic event in Western history. It is believed that in previous epochs, the mind, or one’s own inner self, was considered to be harmonious and contiguous with all other levels of existence. However, it is said, Descartes drove a stake through the heart of this original wholeness and divided it into two. This was not just substance dualism but a *radical* dualism. Mind was now *separate* from body, subject was now *separate* from object, and

inner was now *separate* from outer. The soul itself, once the most privileged mode of existence, suddenly found itself split off and separated from nearly everything else. Contemporary critiques go to great lengths to show that this division into two was invalid and illegitimate. The child must kill the father by healing the split.

Some readers may object to me referring to this behavior as a complex, on several levels. For one, the commonplace usage of the term is usually reserved for individuals and not groups. Another, perhaps larger, objection might be toward the overall sense of validity. Often, the word “complex” is invoked to discredit an opinion, to reduce its claim of objectivity. But surely, such a rejection of dualism is “objectively” true? After all, there is a long line of highly respected figures who have made this critique, as I will show. They cannot all be acting out of some kind of a psychological error. Or can they? I will address these concerns and others throughout the book. For now, it is enough to state that, in spite of all the excellent work by these figures, there is yet something else.

What is missing is a full recognition that these critiques, however well argued, are based on a gross mischaracterization of Descartes’ original philosophical arguments. It is not so much a distortion, however, as an additional story, overlaid on top of the historical facts. It is a subliminal, compulsive story, running throughout many such critiques, and has seemingly taken on a life of its own. It is like an internet meme gone viral, such that it has completely transcended its humble origins. Others have noticed this problem, and critiqued it, but it seems to live on, unperturbed. It is in this respect that I consider it to be a complex.

However, I wish to emphasize that I have no intention of denigrating these critiques. On the contrary, I consider them all to be highly valuable, precisely *because* it is a complex. I am suggesting that this complex is not so much bad philosophy as misunderstood fantasy, a hidden myth, hiding in plain sight. I will contend that it contains within it, at least potentially, a meaningful message. To recognize this, uncover it, and understand it better is the aim of this book.

Notably, this book is a work in psychology, but I do not intend it to be limited to a psychological audience. It is intended for all academic fields that have claimed an intellectual tradition that has been somehow influenced by Descartes. This range is far beyond just philosophy, extending as far as art history and religious studies. For such a wide audience, I will limit the use of specialized terminology specific to psychology. Instead, I intend to liberally employ metaphor and an intentional personifying of the contents of the study. In other words, I will attempt to tell a story, with subjects as much as concepts.

So, imagine if you will, a person named “Ash” who has decided to go into therapy. Ash is having trouble at work and in relationships, specifically with authority figures. Whenever a problem is encountered, in any life situation,

it always seems to revolve around some leader or historical founder. When asked for more detail, Ash consistently recalls events from early childhood, especially those involving Ash's father, Rand. At these moments of the conversation, emotions are raised, and Ash's face becomes contorted and bitter. The therapist recognizes at once a textbook father complex. Yet the situation is also quite delicate, and so the first task is, crucially, to listen.

In this book, Ash is the Western academy, Rand is Descartes, and I hope to be the therapist. So now, I invite Ash to lie back, relax, and please, "tell me about your Father."

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Epigraph

I had this dream, a big dream...

I am walking down the streets of my old neighborhood, until I come to my childhood house. But it was different. In the front yard, there were these two large stone hands coming out of the ground, cold and pale, one on the left and one on the right. Then, the sky darkened, a terrible wind gathered, and I was afraid. A huge Captain Hook figure rose up slowly from behind the house. He let out a maniacal, evil laugh, and a thunderbolt came crashing down, splitting the house into two. I think my mother was still in there. I was terrified, and tried to close my eyes, but something held my gaze. Nothing happened for a very long time. Then, something rises from beneath the rubble, right in the middle. It is a unicorn, untouched and unharmed. It levitates and floats gently in the breeze, staring right at me the whole time. I feel a sense of peace, but I do not know what to do. Then, I woke up.

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Introduction

The allure of the error

I remember the day well. I was strolling the aisles of my favorite bookstore, a very large bookstore, but one that still has a small bookshop feel. Noteworthy books will often get hand-written notes from the staff, placed under the stacks, guiding the shopper with useful commentary. On this day, one such note really caught my eye. It was underneath a popular book on modern neuroscience, titled *Descartes' Error*, by Antonio Damasio. The book had merited the title of “Staff’s Picks,” a glowing recommendation. But beyond this, the reviewer felt compelled to spend a little extra time on the note, to add a somewhat comical drawing of Descartes, looking something like this:

Figure 1.1 Author's impression of bookstore drawing.

At the time, the book was already a bestseller, but this hand-drawn image could have probably sold many more all by itself. The “OOPS!” says it all. How very tantalizing! Provocative! A relatively unknown neuroscientist had managed to expose the father of modern philosophy as fraudulent, foolish even. A legendary figure, required reading in every college philosophy class, was forced to humble himself before the miraculous discoveries of modern science, and sheepishly admit he got it all wrong.

Upon opening the book, in the very first pages, similar recommendations are found from professional reviewers. In particular, Damasio is celebrated for triumphantly overcoming the legendary influence of Cartesian thought. One reviewer states, “Damasio boldly challenges the dualisms that have dogged Western thought” (as cited in Damasio, 2006, p. i). In another edition, we learn that Damasio “cogently rejects simplistic divisions.” The opportunity presented by this rejection is quite exciting. This “astonishing book. . . reveals the invisible world within us.” It is a “revolutionary portrait,” which “challenges the dogma.” A call is issued to a wide range of scholars: “By all means, read this book” (as cited in Damasio, 1995, pp. i–iii).

The overall message is clear: Cartesian influence is widespread but is now recognized to be seriously flawed. While it may have helped contribute to modern science, with all of its accompanying benefits to humanity, now it is seen to be deeply harmful. Future progress depends on transcending this influence, to find a more holistic, natural, and reasonable conception of the human being. Who could possibly turn away from such a rich and promising proposition? It just *feels* like the right thing to do.

This basic feeling is at the core of my investigation. I have no interest in critiquing Damasio’s neuroscientific findings, which are surely with merit. However, I do wish to investigate this feeling, the general tone of “anti-Cartesianism,” that clearly accompanies the book, both on the cover and on the shelf.

It is fair to ask why a feeling, especially one with such broad acceptance, should become a research subject in its own right. One reason is that, for all its supposed importance, it is surprisingly ephemeral, and difficult to locate precisely. For example, upon opening the book, there is a conspicuous lack of anything related to Descartes. The infamous philosopher does not even show up until the final five pages. Even Damasio (1995) himself acknowledges that the formative stuff of the book “was neither about Descartes nor about philosophy” (p. xix). But for some reason, he felt compelled to name it after him and his egregious error. Why? I suspect it is for the same reason that the bookstore artist felt compelled to draw an amusing caricature of the intended target.

Whether Damasio was aware of it or not, this general tone of anti-Cartesianism is very popular, and naming the book along these lines probably helped to secure a warm reception to the book, and among a very broad audience. For one particular example of this, the book has been

enthusiastically endorsed by Daniel Dennett (1995), a philosopher of mind and a prominent voice in modern consciousness studies. Dennett's own view is heavily materialistic, famously stating that consciousness is an illusion, and this is quite harmonious with Damasio's rejection of Descartes' *cogito*. Meanwhile, in a corner of the academy very far removed from Dennett, there is Coppin and Nelson's (2005) *The Art of Inquiry*. This small book, focused on qualitative research methodology, also advocates for Damasio, although for a very different reason. Coppin and Nelson are concerned that qualitative research has become too dry and technical, emulating the hard sciences too much, and as such, has lost its soul. Damasio's book is celebrated, because it confirms a holistic conception of the human psyche, "the bodymind," where soul is not separate from body (pp. 154–155). With this view, qualitative research can become more like the arts, more aesthetic and romantic, welcoming the soul back in.

I should not have to state that the audiences of these two books are quite different. Among the audience of the latter book, Dennett's rigorous materialism is usually met with a certain hostility. On the other hand, Dennett would probably not be too moved by the critique that anything scientific has lost its soul. Although there are surely some things in Damasio's book that are agreeable to both audiences, I suspect that the title of the book has significantly increased the chances of a positive evaluation, regardless of the audience and their background. In this case, as it is often the case with Descartes, the enemy of my enemy is my (unacknowledged) friend.

This feeling of anti-Cartesianism is broad, extending into many other fields, and interestingly, it has remarkable staying power. Damasio's "revolutionary" book came out in 1994, became a best-seller, and gained broad approval. It has also reached far beyond academic confines; you can even buy t-shirts online featuring the book's title ("Descartes Error—Mixed Mental Arts—T-Shirt | TeePublic," 2019). Once an idea has reached this kind of mass penetration, it would seem safe to say that the victory has been won. Ostensibly, Cartesian influence should have been eliminated by now, or at least, clearly sequestered.

And yet, the revolution goes on; 24 years after Damasio's book was published, an article appeared in the online *Psychology Today*, which seems to call for a similar pointed rejection, all over again. In this article, McCann and Bechsgaard (2018) generally recapitulate the overall feeling of Damasio's book, or at least the front cover, as I have summarized above. They call for a wholesale rejection of Cartesian influence, almost as if Damasio's book was never written. The article ends with a nice summation, and a poignant image, and so is worth restating it in whole:

The call for the rejection of this limited view is coming from a variety of quarters.... We urgently need to replace the machine metaphor which has re-shaped how we see both the human body and the human mind.

We need to break up with Rene Descartes. The letter might go something like this:

Dear Rene,

It has been an eventful 500 years and we have been through a lot together. As exhilarating as it has been it is time for us to go our separate ways.

Sincerely, the Western World (para. 7)

And yet, given the ongoing nature of this rejection, it is perhaps easier said than done. Perhaps we have solemnly realized that we are in an abusive relationship, but we are too far in it to be willing to undergo a difficult break-up. According to a book titled *Goodbye, Descartes*, we learn that Cartesian influence is so deeply “ingrained in the psyche of twentieth-century Western man that any theory that challenges that view is bound to have a hard time of it” (Devlin, 1998, p. 279). This, of course, does not dissuade Devlin, and others, from valiantly trying. Perhaps all of these authors are simply doing what they can, chipping away at the old harmful edifice, one brick at a time, taking the long view of faith that one fine day will bring the final emancipation. Regardless, it seems the feeling of anti-Cartesianism can draw a powerful, long-lasting interest.

The split in the middle

The scope of my investigation must be focused further. Simply “anti-Cartesianism,” in all its varied forms, is much too broad. For whatever reason, Descartes has always been an unusually big target, from times long before Damasio. He has been “attacked, reviled, and condemned like no other thinker for most of the last 350 years” (Bracken, 2002, p. 1). To make things more difficult, he has also been a moving target. Gaukroger (1998) states, “more than any other modern philosopher, he has been fashioned according to the philosophies of the time and interpreted accordingly” (p. 3). For example, Descartes drew the ire of many of his contemporaries, including both Voltaire and Pascal, but for different reasons from each other, and for very different reasons than we have today. Even if I were to restrict my study to only current sources, I could not possibly account for all the unusually harsh critiques levied at Descartes.

However, there is one modern critique in particular that can be defined and recognized precisely. It is the usual argument against Cartesian dualism, but with much more colorful rhetoric, and strikingly more dramatic claims. It is in fact no longer an argument, but a vehement rejection; no longer a debate in philosophy, but an existential crisis. It is the urgent call to transcend the radical Cartesian *Split*.

This new target is perhaps exemplified by Walker Percy (1999), in his novel *Love in the Ruins*. In it, the protagonist feels he has finally realized

the solution to this age-old problem, as he scribbles feverishly in his notebook:

Hear the triumphant news. . . the first hope of bridging the dread chasm that has rent the soul of Western man ever since the famous philosopher Descartes ripped body loose from mind and turned the very soul into a ghost that haunts its own house.

(p. 191)

As I will show later, there are many variants of this notion, but this image of disastrous and tragic separation, or specifically, a “split,” can be seen as a convenient common thread. Perhaps all the other critiques are related to this, but the split serves as a highly useful focal point. For example, Damasio (1995) himself nicely echoes this sentiment when he finally defines Descartes’ error as “the *abyssal* separation between body and mind” [italics added] (p. 249). And so, there is a widespread and urgent interest in overcoming Cartesian influence, and now there is a specific target of that rejection, the legendary Cartesian Split. The split must be transcended, or healed, if we are to go on. Ironically, if we were to go through with the break-up with Descartes, this would amount to healing the split by splitting up.

This irony should give us pause. Before we split up with Descartes, we should first understand what exactly he split up. There are many ways to approach this, but perhaps it is best, again, to begin with the focal point, these images of dread chasms and abysses. To put it simply, such images have very little to do with actual Cartesian philosophy. In spite of these author’s good scholarship in other areas, the idea that Descartes argued for such a profound and radical separation, is just that, an idea. This interpretation, if it can be called that, is drastically out of step with most of the dedicated commentary on the subject.

Among philosophers, for example, there is widespread agreement that Descartes argued for a *distinction* between mind and body, rather than a *separation*. There is also wide agreement that, in addition to this distinction, he also argued for a rather intimate, two-way causal interaction between body and mind. The usual critique in this community is not so much against dualism *per se*, but that Descartes failed to convince on the manner of the interaction, or made some fatal logical error, such as the Cartesian circle. Third, the common interpretation of Descartes’ “mind,” the *cogito*, is quite different than in most of the above sources. For Damasio, for example, *cogito* means abstract, intellectual thinking, or the kind of thinking opposed to the emotions. Whereas, for most philosophers, *cogito* includes the emotions.

While even this interpretation is problematic, which I will address later, it is important to note at this point that the notion of a radical split, is simply not found in the source texts. On the contrary, in the 6th meditation, Descartes (1984) details how the mind and body are united.

To illustrate this, he uses a metaphor of a sailor on a ship, representing mind on a body. This is perhaps a metaphor that could be used by many today. In this metaphor, the mind and body are connected, but it turns out that the manner of connection does not suit Descartes. Interestingly, he argues for an even more intimate union than this would allow. He states, “I am not merely present in my body as a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am very closely joined and, as it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit” (p. 56). Further, the activity of such an “I” implies more than just the intellect. Descartes defines “thinking” as the activity of that which “doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions” (p. 19).

So, is all this misunderstanding simply poor scholarship on behalf of those like Damasio? I do not think this is the appropriate judgment. Such a judgment might be sound if it was an isolated instance, but in one form or another, this kind of “poor scholarship” seems to prevail much too mightily. It occurs too frequently, and among too many distinguished academics. While others have recognized this problem, it is usually given little attention, or attributed to “nothing but” poor scholarship. I believe that the overall phenomenon deserves to be a research topic all on its own and that some other explanation for it is required. My basic point of departure is this: Regardless of the truth of these claims, *people seem to want it to be true*. It is this general desire that is perhaps fueling Damasio’s raucous approval. It is the allure of finding and following a new, brave pioneer, one who has managed to bridge a 400-year-old unbridgeable chasm. This feeling, this desire, is the entry point to the Cartesian Split complex, and this needs its own framing, understanding, and interpretation.

Approaching the split

At this point, my imaginary consulting room may be invoked again, to help clarify my unique approach to this issue. The therapist believes Ash has a father complex, and fittingly, most of the stories Ash tells of Rand are simply incredulous. Ash tells stories of Rand’s extreme violence, in some cases, of an almost inhuman nature. Ash also believes that Rand is responsible for pitting one half of the family against the other, such that neither side ever interacts with the other anymore. Rand is told to be very powerful, having influenced every decision made in the entire city. This is also very curious, for, according to Ash, he was also quite idiotic, easily confused, and unable to win any argument with anyone.

The therapist knows enough about human nature to know that no one human could possibly amount to that much terrible influence. Patients in therapy are often known to exaggerate their memories and personal stories. But the therapist is also skilled enough to know that it is not helpful at all to simply say, “oh come now, surely your father is not so bad. You are

simply exaggerating, imagining it, and projecting your own problems onto the memories of your real father. The real problem is not with him, *but with you.*”

No, such a cold and unsympathetic statement would drive Ash straight out of the consulting room and onto the next personal disaster. The statement may be essentially true, but the therapist also knows that, in spite of all these unbelievable claims, the stories *feel real enough to Ash at the time*. In other words, it is probably not true that Rand did those things, but, regardless, *it is true* that Ash remembers things that way, and so the therapist has to play along for a bit. Perhaps there is a dark part of Ash’s psyche, something long forgotten and repressed, but at the same time, important for Ash’s future development. Perhaps such a thing is demanding attention to itself by creating a false story out of Rand memories, disclosing itself as real by precisely not being real. The therapist must not belittle the fantasy, but rather, see where it leads.

It is the same way with our collective fantasy about Descartes. I believe in order to fully unpack the Cartesian Split complex, you have to be incredulous and trusting at the same time. In other words, it is not true that Descartes made an “abyssal separation.” And yet, it is true that people uncritically believe it. In order to understand the true meaning, you have to temporarily accept this false belief. This is a very subtle position to take, and I hope this therapeutic example can be continuously recalled, in order to keep this position in mind.

Earlier, I framed this subject through the lens of Freud, via the father complex. However, I should be more clear about the full range of my influences, and my own usage of them for this study. It is better to say that my approach is not so much psychoanalytical but depth psychological. With this term, I am incorporating not just Freud but also Carl Gustav Jung, the Swiss psychologist who followed Freud. Despite their differences, both theorists employ an overall conception of the human psyche in which various unconscious forces operate independently of the conscious process, and can interfere with it, in problematic ways. This is manifested in various irrational behaviors, which can operate at both the individual and cultural levels. Such behavior is characterized by distorted perceptions of reality and preferred versions of history, even if recognized to be harmful or incomplete. Further, such behavior is unusually persistent, even after having been challenged by others. It is in these common respects that the problematic cultural interpretation of Descartes can be fruitfully understood.

My specific approach, however, is more informed by Jung than Freud. Jung distinguished his approach from Freud by minimizing the focus on frustrated biological drives, occurring only in early childhood. Although he agreed on the importance of such activity, he ultimately regarded it as a secondary influence. For Jung, the unconscious is not created from frustrated adolescence, but is pre-existing, and can also act constructively for further

development. As part of this new model, Jung emphasized his notion of archetypes and the collective unconscious. Jung conceived of archetypes as innate structuring principles, operating at the deepest level of the psyche, and common to all humanity. They are also closely connected to the expression of human instincts. It is from this deeper, more powerful layer of the psyche, that gives the complex its power.

My approach is also influenced by James Hillman, the American psychologist who was active in the late 20th century. Hillman began his career in the Jungian school, but later played a prominent role in forming a distinct branch, named archetypal psychology. One of the distinguishing features of this approach is an increased level of attention toward the precise details of the psychological phenomenon under study. The keyword for this focus is *image*. Hillman (1992) warns that abstract, technical interpretations tend to become literalized and dogmatic, which can obscure important information contained in the original image (pp. 144–145).

This particular approach may be best demonstrated by example. Perhaps Ash comes to the first therapy session after having a big dream the night before. In this dream, Ash was in front of a house from the distant past, but recognizable, perhaps from childhood. Ash then looks up at the house in terror, seeing a huge, distorted image of Rand, who splits the house right down the middle. Ash's mother is feared to be inside.

In the initial session, Ash is understandably distraught recounting the details of this terrible dream. It would be a grave mistake for the therapist to say, "the splitting is merely your own father complex, reflecting your own internal dissociation." Rather, the archetypal psychologist would gently say, "tell me more about Rand's face," or, "what does the house look like now?" With this approach, the specific choices of words used by the dreamer are focused on, and not so hastily bypassed for theory. The words are understood as being pregnant with potential meaning, and studied closely. I intend to follow this approach in this book.

The approach of archetypal psychology also implies a different scope for what typically comes under the term "therapy." Hillman was trained as a personal therapist, but later was more interested in the "therapy of ideas," and his later writings reflect this. This approach would seem natural, for if archetypes are innate and universal, then they are necessarily active in all human activity, and not just in the moments of psychotherapy. In other words, anything involving human thinking is open to archetypal influence. Interestingly, this approach is contained in Jung, but not the Jung that most people are familiar with. Shamdasani (2003) argues that Jung himself intended for his ideas to be applied outside of personal therapy. Indeed, it appears he even hoped for founding of a general psychology that could be applied to any discipline whatsoever. He even appeared to have chosen a unique term for it, that of "complex psychology," within which personal therapy is only one part (pp. 13–15). From this perspective, a widespread

cultural phenomenon of mistaken philosophical interpretation can indeed be seen as a collective activity of complexes, and also approached with a methodology particular to complexes.

The complexity of complexes

It may prove to be regrettable that Jung's offered moniker was not chosen, for there is a wealth of insight available within the term "complex." The full range of potential meanings, and their implications, is itself, well, complex. For one, the term can be taken as value-neutral, especially in Jung's formulation. Contrary to popular understanding, having a complex does not necessarily imply that something has gone wrong. In Jung's usage of the term, complexes are the basic structural units of the psyche, inherent to all its processes. Indeed, the ego is itself a complex. "A complex becomes pathological only when we think we have not got it" (Jung, 1943/1985, p. 79).

A complex can also be regarded positively, as an expression of undeveloped potential. For example, it may very well be that Rand was a bad father, but perhaps Ash's other siblings do not feel the need to blame everything on him. Perhaps in Ash's unique personal life, there is a need for some reason to develop more authoritative skills, and the potential to do so has formed a father complex around the figure of Rand, in Ash's own imagination. The complex can then be seen as a positive development, a sign that further maturation is on the way, and the pathological behavior is simply a way to ensure appropriate attention is given to the development of these latent skills.

Complexes also tend to be bipolar, able to hold a pair of conflicting ideas somehow in unison. Recall that Ash believed Rand to be almost superhumanly powerful, holding entire communities under his influence. But at the same time, Ash refers to Rand as being foolish, illogical, and incompetent, at even the most basic tasks. One wonders how such a person could actually exist, but it seems to have no problem existing in Ash's psyche. This kind of behavior alone hints at a range of unexplored meanings and potential behind the image.

Complexes tend to magnify otherwise small events into something much larger, becoming blown all out of proportion. Perhaps Ash painfully recalls a particular memory of Rand as a bad father, perhaps losing his patience one day and throwing away Ash's favorite toy. Now this event may turn out to be historically true, but most parents have regrettable moments such as this. The curious question is then: Why should Ash feel so traumatized, today, by such a commonplace event, that happened so many years ago?

Although complexes can reflect a true event, it is usually the departure from historical reality that offers the most amount of insight. Complexes often exaggerate and distort the facts to such a degree that the link to the original historical event can be very difficult to comprehend. It is more

likely that Rand took away a small plastic toy for one day, because Ash was simply misbehaving. But perhaps the story has mutated over the years into something much more malevolent, such as Rand burning Ash's most treasured possession, and having Ash watch him do it, laughing the whole time, while Ash cried. Suddenly, an otherwise normal human being in the past has become a supervillain, something more likely to be found in a fairy tale featuring an evil sorcerer.

Another curious aspect of such a story might be Ash's insistence on its historical truth. Perhaps Ash would insist on the memory being exactly as it happened, expressing no doubts, especially when doubt in this case would be very reasonable. Most adults cannot remember events perfectly from only the prior month, much less from early childhood. But in this case, Ash may insist loudly that the events transpired exactly as recalled in memory, and any attempt to cast doubt on the veracity of the story is met with scorn and derision. Ash has suddenly become a memory expert, even if not otherwise justified, and to this we can all relate.

Complexes are not only personal but can extend easily into the collective sphere. This should seem natural, as a collection of individuals is also a collection of individual psyches, and collective events such as discussions and arguments are also psychic events. But for whatever reason, even within many Jungian scholars, complexes tend to be understood and discussed at only the personal level. This is probably related to the fact that Jungian thought has been more prolific at the therapeutic level instead of at the general academic. However, in recent years, several Jungian scholars have been exploring the notion of "cultural complexes," most prominently Singer and Kimbles, who also coined the term (Kirsch, 2004, p. 185). Although the range of application of these complexes is obviously different, the overall dynamic is remarkably similar to personal complexes, and most of the prior examples I have given with Ash also apply to groups. This is of course fitting, as I introduced the figure of Ash explicitly as a representative of Western academia.

Complexes also tend to be somewhat difficult to work with, requiring alternate modes of engagement. Often, if a complex is approached within its original frames of reference, various defense mechanisms may be activated, which prevent any real productive developments. This is one reason why dreams and other activities of the imagination are valuable in therapy. Such expressions can provide an alternate outlet for the underlying issue, such that old problems may be confronted in a new way. This is another reason for working with the Ash metaphor.

Finally, complexes tend to thrive in places where you least expect to find them. Psychotherapists themselves are certainly not immune to them. Kirsch (2004) understands the bitter 100-year feud between the Jungian and Freudian communities as a cultural complex itself. Of course, this feud resulted from a past trauma, the conveniently titled "split," between these

two great thinkers. Also, Hillman (1978), in his *Myth of Analysis*, marked out early territory for his archetypal psychology by arguing that psychotherapy itself was suffering, and in need of therapy. In other words, the very language that was supposed to be able to decipher unconscious content was itself pregnant with unconscious meaning. Only, perhaps to prove his point, Hillman did not even trust the term “unconscious.” If professional psychologists are unaware of their own hidden stories, even existing within their very own language, then certainly philosophers can be too.

In summary, complexes, in the Jungian sense, are certainly more than what they seem. One never has “just a father complex,” but instead is invoking with those words a very wide range of potential understanding. Complexes are both pathological and promising, both true and fanciful. They can hold conflicting ideas within a single reference, and can do so both personally and collectively, and are omnipresent. All such dynamics are at play with the Cartesian Split complex, and the examples provided with Ash and Rand were written specifically to bring these dynamics to life. The connections between the Cartesian Split complex and the metaphorical story will be drawn out in more detail throughout the book. The reader may benefit from reviewing the examples above after having completed the exposition in the book.

Cogito ergo non sum

My own history with this subject extends long before my stroll through the bookstore. As an early student, I was thoroughly enamored with math and science, and for me, Descartes was a hero. I loved the precision of mathematics, and for quite some time, I was of the opinion that truth was only to be found in exact calculations. In English class, we might have read a poem, and spent the rest of the day speculating on what the author meant. Although this was interesting, I was troubled by the thought that all such opinions were inherently untrustworthy. How can anyone, including my teacher, claim to have the “right” interpretation? Could such an interpretation ever be proved to be right? And if so, what were the criteria? Worse, if it turned out that there was no such thing as a right interpretation, how were we all not just wasting our time?

By contrast, there was no such doubt with math. Two plus three was five, exactly five, and that was the right answer. This process, for me, was the epitome of elegance. I also remember well the first time I learned the Cartesian coordinate system, and how you could use it to model the behavior of natural motion. I remember going outside and throwing objects in the air, and with only a stopwatch, I could calculate how high it went, as well as the speed at which it left my hand. I could do all this with one simple equation. The realization that I could understand such a relationship, between calculations and measurement, was thrilling to me. This fascination was

present in me as a small child and extended through most of my adult life. I graduated from college with a degree in mechanical engineering, and have been employed as an engineer ever since.

On the other hand, throughout my early life, I sometimes displayed tendencies that were opposed to these rational ideals. Throughout engineering school, I harbored a doubt that even the mathematical process, however powerful, did not lead to the ultimate truth. On the contrary, I suspected that math and science may actually inhibit the search for it. I suspected that the really big questions of life, including even the meaning of life, were far beyond what could be calculated. Out of sight from my engineering peers, I secretly read books on religion and philosophy. I even flirted with Eastern mysticism, which emphasized the profound truth of “not-knowing.” One of my favorite engineering classes was on the philosophy of science, in which we briefly touched upon the parable of Plato’s cave, and that the mind was more real than things. This was a profound realization for me. What if, all of those previous moments of certainty were nothing but shadows dancing on the wall?

In spite of those doubts on the side, my identity as an engineer was firmly in place, until a period of time in my early thirties. I ended up in a very dark place. Many of my life goals, that of relationships, career, and hobbies, had all ended in failure. Worse, I felt trapped in these failures, and I fell into a deep depression. I questioned many things, but in particular, I became deeply disenchanted toward my chosen career path. I believed that an exclusive emphasis on rationality had led me to a fractured state of being, where I had lost something vitally important. Worse, I felt traumatized by it, feeling as if I had little to no access to the richer, deeper aspects of personhood, such as the arts. I read more and more books on alternative subjects, and many of these identified Descartes as the singular fountainhead of a Western paradigm that had led us all astray. I fell into this narrative. One particular morning, I felt particularly incensed toward this figure of Descartes, who surely had influenced the whole of Western culture, and therefore, the whole trajectory of my life. I believed on that day that Cartesian philosophy had a fundamental flaw in it, which has troubled us, and me, ever since. The essence of the human could not possibly be thinking. Rather, the opposite must be true; the mystics and artists had it right. I scribbled in my notebook my mantra for the week: *Cogito ergo non sum*.

Fortunately, I was able to make it out of that depression, and I now have a much more nuanced opinion of my interests and life choices. Although continuing as an engineer, I was able to make space for the so-called “non-rational” inclinations of my being. I was very excited when I first stumbled upon Jung, for this was a discipline that appeared to offer a path for both of my interests. Jung claimed emphatically that he was a scientist, doing empirical research, but incredibly, his research topics were dreams and myths! I was completely enthralled. Within a year, I charted out a course to go to graduate school and study depth psychology, without any

concrete vocational goals. The experience was highly educational, but also, very healing. I felt I had finally found a path that could unify two seemingly disparate parts of my personality.

It did not take long during my new coursework to encounter once again a familiar face to me, the nefarious villain Descartes. Depth psychology is considered by many to have a strong kinship to postmodernism, and most postmodern inventories into the past locate Descartes' work as a singularly tragic turn. Although I was clearly sympathetic to the overall postmodern, psychological movement, I now felt some strong reservations to this specific account. Even though I had that original mantra moment, I felt that I had since embraced a larger perspective. From this new stance, I could now sense that there was a *disproportionate* amount of criticism and bitterness directed toward Descartes, over and above all the other "modern" sources. This time, I was able to remember my childhood Descartes, who was not a villain, but a hero, *in addition* to my mantra of the week. Although I was never trained in actual Cartesian philosophy, I began to doubt Descartes could be the source of so much gone wrong. But at the same time, I fully appreciated the need for a "post-Cartesian" worldview.

After several years of pondering this, I allowed myself to ask a simple question: Was Descartes really a Cartesian? This question felt dangerous and heretical to me at the time. I felt that doubting this assertion was placing me in singular opposition against the entire Western academy. I tentatively and hesitantly did research on this question, entering it exactly as phrased above, into an internet search engine. I did not really know what I was looking for. But what I found changed everything, and led me down the path to writing this book.

A complex offering

And now, dear reader, I trust you know enough about me and my story, but I do not know enough about you. Perhaps you have also raised doubts on this popular but questionable narrative? Or perhaps you are still doubting my hypothesis? After all, as I can attest, questioning one of the Western academy's most foundational narratives is a lot to ask.

But perhaps you also know enough about psychology yourself to suspect that this is nothing but my own personal complex, being projected onto the topic. I intentionally included all the messy details of my personal story, even though they might specifically invite such a suspicion. I fully admit to having a complex, it did require therapy, and it clearly revolved around "Cartesian" topics. Although I cannot claim to be fully healed from my complex, I do feel that my experiences with the subject allow me to have a unique, more nuanced perspective on the matter, perhaps one that is needed. But what is this need? What can my own psychological musings, spurred on from my own personal difficulties and haphazard web searches,

contribute to centuries of philosophical criticism on one of the most widely read figures of the modern era?

Essentially, what I found on that one particular web search was that I was certainly not alone. Regardless of how they came to it, I found several others who have also come to the same suspicion. Somehow, somewhere along the line, a gross mischaracterization of Descartes was generated in the academy, then accepted in the academy, and has persisted ever since. I also learned that the problem is not limited to those outside of philosophy. There are several prominent voices in academic philosophy who, according to their colleagues, have constructed and solidified a partial and highly problematic interpretation of the original writings.

Perhaps the most prominent of these arguments is *Descartes' Dualism*, written by Gordon Baker and Katherine Morris (2002), professors of philosophy at Oxford. This book, along with others, is what I found on my tentative internet search. Although I will expand on this work and others like it in later sections, it is worth now summarizing some of their most salient observations. Simply stated, they answered my question in the negative. "Close textual analysis does not directly support. . . that Descartes held the main tenets of so-called 'Cartesian Dualism.'" Additionally, they suggest that a quasi-psychological force, a phenomenon they refer to as "the Cartesian Legend," seems to be acting somewhat autonomously, perpetuating this false interpretation (pp. 1–2). Incredibly, they found that many of the quotes often used to support this interpretation often contain within them elements that contradict it (p. 23). The "real" Descartes, if such a thing can even be conceived, may actually be farther away than ever.

At the same time, from a psychological perspective, the "unreal" Descartes is as real as ever. If there is a consistently flawed interpretation, with persistence and irony, even among the professionals, then there is very likely to be some kind of psychological mechanism involved. I will eventually leave it up to the philosophers to discover the "real" Descartes, but before such an effort can be made, I consider it fruitful to understand all possible mechanisms that have precluded the discovery in the first place. Baker and Morris's book is a work in philosophy, but the "Legend" clearly invites a psychological lens, particularly a depth psychological lens. Although they do a masterful job of describing the phenomenon from within their own framework, they are necessarily limited in fully exploring it, on its own terms. Essentially, this book is an attempt to do just that, and this is my hopeful contribution toward the ongoing discussion. My own complex has led me to such an investigation. Whatever has led you to me, let us now investigate together.

Outline of chapters

In the second and third chapters, I present the most prominent source material of the Cartesian Split cultural complex. This consists of all the various distortions, inaccuracies, and problematic interpretations. Thus far, I have

provided brief justifications as to why such material can be considered as a complex. This overall justification will be further developed throughout the book, but the primary goal of these chapters is to simply document the material, at face value. In other words, it is best at this time to simply inventory and summarize the prominent commentary on the subject, regardless of whether or not the claims are factually true. This is the listening stage of the therapy. Occasionally, however, I will present some challenges to the claims, in order to demonstrate how it is part of a complex. Hopefully, throughout these chapters, the complex will progressively resemble more of a myth, something being uncovered from underneath the claims.

The fourth chapter summarizes the commentary of those who have recognized the overall misunderstanding but have left certain gaps in developing it. These sources are mostly from dedicated scholars of philosophy. Generally, past commentators either do not see it as much of a problem, or do not fully appreciate the psychological nuances, and this is what I hope to supplement. I will also show that the matter is gaining attention, and as part of this, some have even employed a certain psychological approach, if without all the professional accoutrements, and without the necessary next steps. The remaining gaps and connections will be filled in as needed, in order to set up the remaining work.

In the fifth chapter, I delve into comparable activities of our collective imagination, specifically that of myth, in order to gain perspective on this new cultural product, the Cartesian myth. The human mind, for all its complexities, often demonstrates remarkable similarities, or patterns, in its various products. This can be shown to be the case between cultures separated from each other, in both time and space. Naturally, this draws heavily on archetypal theory, which I will also introduce in more detail, before such an inventory. I also analyze the Cartesian myth in terms of its essential features and present it as a composite of two different mythical strands.

The sixth chapter is the most psychological, in which I investigate the core meaning of the Cartesian Split cultural complex. In other words, the mythic strands are translated and interpreted into modern-day psychological terminology, specifically psychodynamic terminology used by Freud and Jung. While this move may be controversial, or perhaps somewhat arcane to outside audiences, I will demonstrate how it nonetheless offers a necessary additional perspective.

The seventh chapter attempts to locate the particular instance of this complex against a particular cultural context. It will be shown that the complex is more restrictive than is commonly assumed, and that these restrictions can be focused on in order to understand the subject more fully. In the process, however, various cultural and historical complexities are introduced, which perhaps complicate the study. As such, this chapter is highly speculative but suffices as at least a starting point for further investigation.

The eighth and final chapter serves two purposes. The first is to review and summarize the primary material and conclusions drawn throughout

the book. The second is to revisit the original subject matter, the original words put on paper, concerning the now infamous substance dualism. My hope is that through the process of re-evaluation, a new perspective on an old topic yields fresh insight, perhaps toward our relevant needs today.

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